STRUCTURE AND ANTI-STRUCTURE: COMMUNITAS IN DAMANHUR, FEDERATION OF COMMUNITIES

Kara M. Salter
20177489

B.A. (Hons) The University of Western Australia, 2007
B.Soc.Sci Curtin University of Technology, 2005

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Western Australia

School of Social Science
(Anthropology)

2015
ABSTRACT

Having celebrated its 40th anniversary, Damanhur, Federation of Communities, is one of the longer-lived examples of contemporary intentional eco-communities. Damanhur is located in the foothills of the Swiss Italian Alps in northern Italy. Drawing on ethnographic data from twelve months of fieldwork in 2009-10, I investigate how the members of Damanhur have used certain social mechanisms to facilitate the achievement of some social, spiritual and ecological goals.

Focusing on concepts developed extensively by Victor and Edith Turner, I argue that the members of Damanhur cultivate and sanction liminal/liminoid activity (occurring outside of structure) with the intention of fostering communitas (the epitome of anti-structure). In particular, I draw on Victor Turner’s argument that awareness and experience of communitas facilitate a social structure that serves communitarian ends. In large measure, Damanhurians are seeking Turner’s (1969) ideological communitas, a blueprint for a utopian society, where cultural activity is instrumental to attaining communitas; in the Damanhurian case such activity is oriented to achieving a ‘communitas of nature’. Edith Turner (2012) uses the phrase ‘communitas of nature’ to refer to an ideal experience, one of interconnectedness among humans, human-made environments, fauna, flora, and the very landscape itself.

While social structure creates essential order and organisation, it also differentiates human relationships, and can lead to experiences of ‘alienation’, ‘difference’, ‘inequality’, and ‘exploitation’, whereas communitas as anti-structure is egalitarian. Where structure is sustainable and definable, communitas is momentary and inexplicable. A social structure without communitas is likely to succumb to its fundamental weaknesses. Using O’Dea and Yinger’s (1961) ‘dilemmas of
institutionalization’, I demonstrate how the Damanhurian approach has overcome some common institutional challenges. I argue that regular instances of communitas, as facilitated by the Damanhurian social structure, serve to inoculate this social structure against some of what O’Dea and Yinger (1961) identify as institutionalisation’s potential pitfalls.

All communities face tensions between communitas as a binding force and structure as a functional tool, a tension observed in Damanhur. These two complementary elements must be balanced in order to provide a sustainable foundation and an ability to adjust social mechanisms in accordance with community members’ intended and evolving aims. A positive view of change, realised through autonomous sub-communities, a focus on individual change (self-improvement), and the free movement of members between sub-communities facilitate continual adaptation of and within Damanhurian frameworks. The acceptance of change in Damanhur can also be seen as acknowledging the likelihood of fractionalisation, whose management I discuss within the framework of Jonathan Andelson’s (2002) interpretation of Bateson’s (1936) conceptualisation of schismogenesis.

Damanhurians have developed their social structure creatively, and, in turn, this has allowed them to approach some of the challenges of institutionalisation from new angles. Damanhurians demonstrate that their actions accord with their spiritual and ecological ideals. Collective action provides opportunities for experiences of what Edith Turner (2012) calls a ‘communitas of work’. The successful completion of projects, in turn, also motivates further activity. As much of this activity serves their stated aims, including those deemed to be ecologically responsible, my analysis provides insights into what motivates social and behaviour change in such communities.
Declaration

This thesis does not contain work that I have published, nor work under review for publication:

Student Signature: ..............................................................
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I would like to thank the participants in my research, gracious hosts and lasting friends: the citizens of Damanhur, Federation of Communities. In particular, I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to those who were residents of the sub-community Dendera during 2009-2010. Their willingness to accept my presence within their midst, put up with my fumbling Italian and make time to speak at length with me, when they had so much else to do, is what made this research possible.

Many of the residents of the Valchiusella, including some international visitors, were all so welcoming. Those who I was lucky enough to spend some time with accommodated many of my research questions, prepared beautiful Italian food and shared with me their homes and lives. Thank you to all those who welcomed me into their homes, showed me the valley, explained certain customs and participated in interviews.

I would like to acknowledge the academic staff of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at The University of Western Australia for providing a supportive scholarly environment. My supervisors, Dr. Gregory Acciaioli, and Dr. Katie Glaskin were timely, insightful and professional throughout my candidature and even outside of it when personal hurdles invaded the thesis space.

I was lucky to be sharing this journey with some delightfully insightful and supportive peers. It would have been incredibly difficult to have done this without them. In particular, Dr. Lara McKensie proofed a number of chapters and was always available to talk me through my writing dilemmas. Gemma Bothe and Crystal Abidin provided ‘post-it note’ support and encouragement along with valuable WIP feedback. Jocelyn Cleghorn has always been available for a coffee; sometimes she was the only person I saw for weeks at a time.

Some thesis content was presented at conferences, in particular, the ICSA conference in 2013 where I presented a joint paper with Damanhurian, Quaglia Cocco. This opportunity, made
possible through a grant provided by Findhorn (the conference organisers), opened my eyes to the vast array of international communal scholarship. Quaglia was a valuable collaborator and has always been ready to answer my never-ending questions about Damanhur.

Funding from the School of Social Sciences, the Graduate Research School, and the Australian Postgraduate Award provided the time and resources to envision and conduct the research for this thesis. The Australian Network of Student Anthropologists and the Australian Anthropology Society provided a travel grant to attend an annual Anthropology conference.

Close friends (you know who you are!) have always been reassuring me from the sidelines, putting up with absent-mindedness and providing a refreshing blast of communitas just when I needed it. So too were my parents-in-law, sisters-and brother-in-law quietly supportive and ready with encouraging words. Sue Salter helped me to look after my son so I could get the first full draft together and Phil Salter read through and edited some final chapters.

Mum, Jane Holt, you cleaned my house, you cared for James, you made my dinner, you remembered what I forgot and you still had time to help me edit. The second full draft of this thesis was possible because you were there. More than a mum, you became a colleague as you navigated your own university education. Nothing could have made me more joyful than when you graduated, you inspired me to keep going, and that is all I needed.

Jonathan Salter, you were a single dad for a lot of this seven-year journey. You worked full-time and essentially had two children, James and me, and yet you were always available for us. Your support, smile and attention meant everything. You happily read the entire final draft looking for typos. There is nothing more exciting than the idea of more (thesis free!) time with you and James; there was no greater motivator to get this thing done. Thank you.

Finally and simply, my sweet boy, James Alexander Salter, and my eternal inspiration, James (Poppy) Gragg, this is for you.
Author’s Note:

I use pseudonyms for all participants unless I am citing published work, in which case I cite them as per other reference material. I have replaced the animal names of Damanhurian participants with more general animal names, e.g. Bird, or names from the natural world, e.g. Ocean or Branch. In each case the Italian version of the word is used.

I have been unable to provide dates with some ‘pers.comm’ references, as it would identify the participant. In these cases I have put (pers.comm n.d).

Italian terms are italicised unless they are a proper noun.

All photos are the property of Damanhur or myself unless otherwise stated. I was permitted to use photographs kept in the Damanhurian online Flickr account. Individual photographers are not cited.

I have remained in contact with research participants via email since completing fieldwork in 2010. I have shared work in progress with community members and received feedback on matters of accuracy.
Contents

ABSTRACT

DECLARATION

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AUTHOR’S NOTE:

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1

DAMANHUR, LIMINALITY AND COMMUNITAS

INTRODUCTION

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ex-citizens: Members who have left the community

WHAT IS AN INTENTIONAL COMMUNITY

DAMANHUR AS A SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY

DAMANHUR AS AN ECOVILLAGE

THEORISING INTENTIONAL COMMUNITIES

Ritual liminality and the post-industrial liminoid space

Intentional communities as liminal and liminoid spaces

Communitas

CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

CHAPTER 2

DAMANHUR

INTRODUCTION

LOCATING DAMANHUR IN NORTHERN ITALY
List of Figures

Image 1 – Map of the Piedmont (Google Maps 2015) 48
Image 2 – Map of the Valchiusella (Google Maps 2015) 62
Image 3 – Map of the Synchronic Lines 63
Photo 1 – Stone spiral in woods 85
Photo 2 – Gate with sacred language symbols 86
Figure 1 – An areal perspective of the Lamb Ritual layout. 184
Photo 3 – Selfica displayed for sale. 205
Photo 4 – High-complexity Selfica (Spheroself) 206
Photo 5 – A selfic painting. 207
Photo 6 – Collective art project 221
Photo 7 – Mural on the wall of a Damanhurian nucleo 244
Photo 8 – Mural on the wall of a Damanhurian nucleo 244
Photo 9 – Mural on the wall of a Damanhurian nucleo 245
CHAPTER 1
Damanhur, Liminality and Communitas

Introduction

Damanhur, Federation of Communities, is an intentional community located in northern Italy. Damanhur is populated by a diverse membership originating from a number of Italian provinces, of which approximately 20 per cent are of international origin.1 Damanhur was founded in 1975 when the first community project was started and then became inhabited residentially in 1979. Originally an intentional community with a single community dwelling, it has since grown in size to include almost 600 full-time residents, who call themselves citizens. I follow Timothy Miller (2010, pp.6-8) in loosely defining an intentional community as a 'critical mass' of persons who gather with a sense of purpose and distinctiveness to deliberately form a community where there is some kind of shared living space and some shared resources.2

Today, Damanhurian citizens reside in numerous smaller sub-communities located throughout the region known as Valchiusella, at the foothills of the Swiss-Italian Alps. The intention of the community members is to create a socially, spiritually and

1 Data current as of 2013 sourced from Damanhurian archives and sent to me via email.
2 Critical mass in this instance refers to more than five adults, where some or all are unrelated by blood or marriage.
ecologically sustainable society following their own esoteric pathway involving initiation towards what they see as the 'next stage in human evolution'. They believe that many humans, on their current (mainstream western capitalist) path, are heading to self-destruction and permanent loss of a human-nature-spirit connection. To avoid this possible future, Damanhurians envisage evolution towards living in a way that achieves harmony between what they see as the human, natural and spiritual dimensions of planet Earth. This aim is founded on a syncretic metaphysical philosophy developed by the community's founder, Oberto Airaudi (aka Falco Tarassaco [Falcon Dandelion]). Damanhurians see themselves as researchers and experiment with various aspects of how they live and their governance. They conduct metaphysical investigations in order to find ways for humans to live more socially, spiritually and environmentally just lives.

As Damanhur has existed for 40 years, the beliefs and practices of community members warrant attention in comparison to those of many other intentional communities that have not lasted as long. Damanhurians have also managed to achieve seemingly ambitious goals. Both relative longevity and the realisation of goals are indicators that the members of this community are achieving their intentions. Damanhurians have developed ways of motivating individual and group cooperation and behaviour that aligns with their community-held ideals. I demonstrate some of the ways members of Damanhur have gone about achieving their social, spiritual and ecological ideals as

---

3 Alternative names used by citizens are discussed in Chapter 6.

4 The terms ‘experiment’ and ‘research’ as I use them in this thesis are how Damanhurians use these terms in reference to their activities. Damanhurians refer to this work as experiments, although they were different from experiments and research as understood within the scholarly world. Notwithstanding this, their research was systematic; they kept personal records and allowed the results of their experiments and research to lead them to new conclusions.
evidence of what seems to be a sustainable social structure. My primary focus is the socio-structural elements that support Damanhurian ideals, and so my discussions of spiritual, ecological and, to a very small extent, economic considerations in this thesis are secondary to my overarching aim.\(^5\) Arising from this analysis I argue that the members of Damanhur cultivate and sanction liminal/liminoid activity with the intention of fostering communitas. Liminal/liminoid activity (occurring outside of structure) and communitas (the epitome of anti-structure) are concepts developed extensively by the scholars Victor and Edith Turner. E.Turner (2012) based her explication of communitas on that of V.Turner’s (1969) and other prior collaborative explorations (Turner & Turner 1978). In her most recent work E.Turner (2012) has built on prior understandings of communitas through applying the concept to a number of different scenarios. The categorisation of different types of communitas (two of which I discuss at length in this thesis) could be seen as an evolution of the concept.

I build on the Turners’ work by applying liminal (ritual), liminoid (art, games, research) and communitas frameworks to the context of Damanhur. In particular, I draw on Victor Turner's argument that awareness and experience of communitas facilitates a social structure that serves communitarian ends (Turner 1969; 1982; Alexander 1991, p.31). Victor and Edith Turner (1978, p.252) define structure as ‘the patterned arrangements of role sets, status sets, and status sequences consciously recognized and

\(^5\) It is common among communitarians, in my experience, to discuss the ‘triple bottom line’ or, as is becoming more prevalent, a ‘quadruple’ bottom line. The first relates to sustainability of the social, ecological and economic elements and the second adds spiritual considerations (See Litfin 2014, for example). I focus on an aspect of the social-structure in Damanhur that I believe allows/motivates members. This motivation could assist them to work towards meeting the requirements of the four dimensions of community that allow sustainability. How Damanhur approaches each of these considerations specifically would be a valuable further research focus.
regularly operative in a given society, and closely bound up with legal and political norms and sanctions.’ Central features of social structure are roles, statuses and institutions; in other words, social structure differentiates humans from each other. In this sense structure is a necessary tool for creating a sense of order and organisation. Yet, while social structure is necessary, differentiating human relationships has the potential to generate ‘alienation’, ‘difference and inequality’, and ‘exploitation’ (Turner 1974, pp.260; 272; Alexander 1991, p.27). Communitas is anti-structure in that it is egalitarian; it ‘warms people to their fellow human beings,’ where ‘they experience a full merging of action and awareness’ (Turner 2012, p.3). Where structure is sustainable and definable, communitas is momentary and inexplicable. Communitas offers opportunities for participants to relate to each other apart from their everyday roles, statuses and institutions. A social structure without communitas can succumb to fundamental weaknesses; regular instances of communitas (through a social structure that facilitates communitas) serves to help inoculate social structure against these flaws (or dilemmas, discussed further in Chapter 5). In turn, Turner (1969, pp.134-140) notes that communitas will inevitably become structured over time; the requirements of the human condition must be met, and so roles and statuses arise in order to manage day-to-day needs and wants. So it is that communitas and structure exist inseparably, ‘communitas is nature in dialogue with structure, married to it […] [t]ogether they make up one stream of life, the one affluent supplying power, the other alluvial fertility’ (Turner 1969, p.140).

I argue that Damanhurians have implemented a social structure that institutionalises conditions conducive to communitas, in particular, through an experimental ethos that
leads to frequent liminal and liminoid type activity where communitas is likely to arise. In addition to liminal and liminoid conditions, Damanhurians also promote frequent collective activity in order to be Damanhurian, which often led to what Edith Turner (2012) refers to as 'communitas of work'. Communitas of work is communitas that arises between participants engaging in tasks together towards a common aim. While not using these terms, Damanhurians refer to elements that bear remarkable similarities to the attributes Victor and Edith Turner applied to communitas. Drawing on two key repetitively used Damanhurian phrases, 'the flame of a group' and 'we are a community of individualists', I argue Damanhurians' awareness of communitas is described as the intensity with which each member feels connected, or 'in love', with another. Damanhurians have also discovered that the 'flame' of a group is most likely to be encouraged in structure-less environments, such as experiment, play or ritual. Damanhurians are conscious of the bonding and creative potential of experiment, play or ritual (liminal/liminoid) and communal 'flame' (communitas) and so intentionally experiment with how to achieve both on a regular basis.

In this introductory chapter I outline some of the key concepts used throughout this thesis. In particular, I expand on what an intentional community is and how Damanhur fits into some current and historical conceptions of intentional community building. I address some of the core principles that underlie Damanhurians' metaphysical investigations and, in particular, how these provide a foundation for building collective receptivity to communitas through the incorporation of liminal/liminoid phases as part of community members' everyday lives. I also provide an introduction to communitas as conceived by Victor and Edith Turner and describe how I expand on their
conceptualisations of liminality, the liminoid and communitas by applying them to the
Damanhurian context. I then present an overview of the thesis through a summary of
how each chapter contributes to the argument that Damanhurians are cultivating
receptivity to communitas. Initially, though, I will present some of the methods, and
limitations to those methods, that informed my research.

Methodological Considerations

I conducted fieldwork in Damanhur between May 2009 and May 2010. As well as
having an apparent social stability and growth, this community is also relatively large
and is populated by people of predominantly Western cultural backgrounds. My
motivating interest lay in observing how those from the developed 'West' adapted to
communal living and the demands of environmentally responsible lifestyles. However,
this research does not provide an analysis of the ecological footprint of the community
under observation, nor can it advocate that the methods used in this community would
motivate ecologically responsible behaviour in more conventional communities.

The primary methods I used to conduct this research were a combination of
participant-observation and open-ended interviews. I was able to participate as a guest
in the community for the most part and on more familiar terms with one particular sub-
community, known as Dendera. I decided early on that my approach to gaining an
understanding of the community would be to associate, mainly, with one of the sub-
communities that make up the larger Federation. My association with Dendera was
through regular visits (up to six times a week), where I would participate in daily chores in the communal areas of the main dwelling. The majority of my time was spent with English-speaking (second or third language) women in this context. Over time, the members of this sub-community became more comfortable with my presence, which facilitated conditions where almost every one of the nineteen adults (men and women) were willing to participate in an interview, at least once. I began this form of participation in October 2009 and continued until I left in May the following year.

I also conducted interviews with Damanhurians outside of the sub-community in which I spent most of my time. These were also open-ended and included: new-members; interested persons from other sub-communities within Damanhur; individuals who had left the community; persons living on the margins of the community who were involved with the community, but not members; and those living in the local areas who were not associated. In total, I conducted forty interviews made up of 17 of the adults living in the sub-community and the various others discussed here. Some of the interviews were with the same person multiple times. For example, I interviewed two new members, one five times and the other seven times each over the course of twelve months as they went through the process of joining. Most participants in interviews spoke English fluently, although in some cases a translator was required. For Damanhurian interviewees I employed a native English-speaking translator (professional) who was fluent in Italian and trusted by the participant. For those interviewees who were not Damanhurian I employed either a native English-speaking translator (professional), who lived locally (not associated with Damanhur) or an Italian-as-a-second-language translator (non-professional) who was casually associated with Damanhur and lived abroad. In each
context I approached translators identified by the interviewee as neutral or trusted. In some instances interviewees chose their own translator or insisted on speaking English without translation despite a lack of fluency.

There was a text-based element to my fieldwork and subsequent research as I read the community's daily newspaper, community produced publications, histories of Valchiusella, locally produced newspapers, and observed (and continue to observe) the online presence of the community and those opposed to it. Except for some of the online elements, most text-based material was originally in Italian. I was able to obtain some translated versions, but otherwise translated the material myself or with the help of an Italian friend. I lived for the majority of the time with my husband in a small apartment near one of the Damanhur community centres, known as Crea. The apartment block we lived in was owned by Damanhurians and was occupied by three other families, two of whom were part-time citizens of Damanhur. My husband and I would do most of our grocery shopping at the Damanhurian store, Tentaty, and were regular visitors to the Damanhurian-run-and-owned cafes. I attended most of the weekly community gatherings at Crea and every community ritual or event that was open to me.

In addition to the rituals and other events. I also attended several different courses available for guests at a cost. I attended a three-day course, Come Fondare una Comunità di Successo (How to Build a Successful Community), a two-day course, Ricerca delle Vite (Past Lives Research), and I was able to exchange work for a basic lesson in Fisica Spirituale (Spiritual Physics). I also participated in several non-Damanhurian courses in the local area, which were a valuable method of networking with local villagers and residents of
the wider Valchiusella area. All of these activities were a central component of my participant-observation methodology. Each event facilitated a new contact or opportunity to ask questions and allowed Damanhurians or local non-Damanhurians to become familiar with my presence. Over time this familiarity led to participants contacting me and asking questions about why I was in Damanhur, which in turn allowed more in-depth conversations and opportunities to engage in Damanhurian or non-Damanhurian activities than I would otherwise have accessed.

The sub-community (referred to by Damanhurians as a nucleo, discussed in more detail later) Dendera was the nucleo that first received me as a work exchange visitor. Some of the members who lived in this particular nucleo were also those with whom I had already had contact before I departed Australia. Two of the members of this nucleo worked in a recognised PR role for the community. They also had responsibility for filtering information into and out of the Federation; they were there to protect the community and promote a positive image. They were also able to help those with a genuine interest to understand the community with more in-depth knowledge and experiences. Damanhurians had prior experiences with journalists, researchers and other local media representatives who had taken advantage of their hospitality only to write negative and unsupported articles or produce damaging television programs. One such program was known as Mistero, an Italian TV show that looks at mysteries around the world. Cielo, a resident of the nucleo I worked in, told me about the episode concerning Damanhur the morning after it had first aired:
Cielo told me about a show on television last night that spoke about Damanhur. Unfortunately, it is, according to Cielo, a very sensationalist look at mysteries and does not use intelligent ways to investigate them. Saying things like, ‘Is it a spiritual community? Or a sect?’ or ‘Only select initiates are permitted to enter the temples’.

I asked how a show like this makes her feel. She said it is upsetting because these people didn't even try to understand Damanhur. They just come here looking for a story. It will give Damanhur publicity but, it leaves people hanging without the information needed to make up their minds one way or another (Field Diary 2010).

Because of experiences like this and others discussed later, my position as a researcher meant that I was perceived as a potential threat to the community. Therefore, building a positive relationship with the two gatekeepers referred to above was particularly important. It also meant that I had to be aware that participants might censor themselves so as to give the best view of Damanhur possible. Despite these concerns, Barker (2011, p.2) notes that the methodology of the 'social sciences is demonstrably superior to that of most of the media and even to that of personal experience if one wants to acquire reliable, balanced and objective information'. In particular, one of Barker's (2011, p.6) primary concerns was the 'unnecessary suffering resulting from ignorance or misinformation that had emanated from the movements, their opponents and/or the media'. Barker (2011, p.6) sees a primary role for social scientists to improve general public understandings of groups of people who hold beliefs counter to prevailing social norms. A lack of understanding of such groups can have devastating effects (Barker 2011, p.6). Examples include, the tragedy of the Waco siege and ongoing issues
for individuals who are kidnapped by relatives and 'deprogrammed' (Barker 2011, p.6). There is extensive literature on what has been called the 'cult wars' from various perspectives. I go into some detail of how the 'cult' controversy influenced my research in the next section, but for the most part I refer readers to the expertise of other scholars, including, but not limited to: Eileen Barker (2011), James Beckford (1985), Massimo Introvigne (1998), Timothy Miller (1991; 1995), Thomas Robbins (2001; 1988), and Benjamin Zablocki (2001).

My initial process of immersion was to assist with some of the daily household chores in Dendera. At first I helped just one person during her shift, but soon I was welcome to help many people during most of the available shifts. Due to the location of the nucleo I was usually limited to working in the morning (from about 8 am until 2 pm), as I was then able to get a lift back to my apartment in the afternoon. This limitation was mainly due to the fact that I did not have access to a reliable car. As my presence became more acceptable, I was able to stay the night several times and to experience the afternoon and evening activities in the nucleo. My participation in the daily household chores of the nucleo helped me to develop friendships that facilitated further involvement with nucleo-based activities. I was invited to meals, some meetings and household rituals, along with being able to 'catch-up' with members of the nucleo in more informal settings, such as when they watched movies, went for walks and had lunch or dinner out. I was even able to attend the work place of one member in Turin on a weekly basis.

---

6 A traumatising experience that was, in any case, unlikely to achieve what relatives wanted.
Dendera often received special guests and provided tours for them. Many of the people residing in this nucleo could speak English well, which led to my ongoing association with mainly English-speaking members of the Federation. I continued to learn Italian, hiring a private tutor with whom I met on a regular basis, but was unable to immerse myself in Italian enough to develop fluency. This state of language proficiency served to maintain my position on the periphery of the Federation. Nevertheless, I was still able to become familiar with the members of Dendera due to their knowledge of English. Ultimately, my lack of Italian, and the skilled way that Damanhurians manage outsiders in their midst, led to my reliance on observable behaviour. Interviews were valuable for getting a sense of the trajectory that led citizens to join Damanhur and what their lives were before joining, particularly in relation to their pre-Damanhurian ecological behaviour. Citizens were comfortable to discuss aspects of communal living and the socioecology of the Damanhur project, but when it came to discussing spiritual elements there was hesitation and uncertainty about what could and could not be said. Ability to access these elements of Damanhur required (at the time) a life-long commitment, and it was quite obvious that I could not fulfil that requirement and, therefore, could not meet the criteria for full immersion.

A very informative aspect of my research was gleaned through interviews with new members of the community. There were no recent members (those who had been there for a year or less) at Dendera, and so I had to interact with them on an appointment basis. Interviews were a valuable and justifiable reason to get together with someone for

---

People who were well known in association with sustainable building, political or grassroots activism, scientific research and/or community building.
a reasonable amount of time (an hour or more), and again these interviews facilitated further friendships and interactive possibilities. As stated earlier, there were two new members in particular whom I interviewed five to seven times each over the course of the twelve months of fieldwork. These sets of interviews provided valuable insights into the journey of each of these two new members as they went through the process of joining the community. I also interviewed four other new members and interacted regularly with many others at regular expatriate gatherings and parties. Many of the new members spoke English very well as a first, second or third language.

Despite reservations about gaining full access to the spiritual foundation of Damanhur, I was able to talk with more experienced citizens about the fine edges between what was secret and what was not. 'Older' Damanhurians, those citizens who had been there a number of years, were able to adeptly discuss how their spiritual path intersected with the more secular structural elements of the community. As trust was built during my time in the community, I was able to gain a more in-depth understanding of the spiritual foundation. In the end, though, my level of knowledge of the Damanhurian spiritual pathway remains limited.

**Ex-citizens: Members who have left the community**

Just as joining a community is a long and sometimes challenging process, so too is the process of leaving. The process of separation is painful not only for individuals who leave, but also for those who remain; '[p]eople who leave the community, particularly those who have been with it for many years, affect both the physical and emotional well-being of those who stay' (Siegler 2002, p.59). Siegler's (2002, p.59) participants from the
community known as In Search of Truth (ISOT) described the breaking of commitment to a community as having the same emotional impact as a divorce. In Chapter 3 I describe the socialisation of community members in Damanhur and outline some of the processes of developing and deepening a relationship with the community. When an individual leaves a community, there is a similar process as the individual learns to live back in mainstream society.

Leaving an intentional community can be more difficult than that of joining the community because there is often no one to support the process. In addition, there are no mechanisms similar to what the community provides in the 'outside' world. Because of this, ex-members can feel abandoned and alone, leading to resentment, particularly as the members still within the community carry on with the mission that the ex-member has now left behind. In addition to this, there is the potential that a community can or will take advantage of its members and/or make it very difficult for members to leave should they choose to. Yet, a majority of intentional communities are well intentioned as there are very few that are purposefully misleading or dangerous (Miller 2005). The more common danger is that individuals are not of the 'right' fit within a particular community and find they have dedicated time and energy to something they do not wholeheartedly believe in. This is why effective socialisation methods are so important, helping people to identify as early as possible if a community is right for them.

---

8 There have been some notorious exceptions.
I arrived in Damanhur somewhat naïve about the lived experience of community members who choose to leave such groups. I was also completely unaware of the intense feelings among members of the community who have been 'left behind'. My first exposure to such feelings was when I approached two long-term citizens about my research intentions. The conversation went smoothly until I mentioned that it might be useful to discuss Damanhur with some people who have left the community. The response from one of the women was immediate and intense. There was no tolerance for the perspectives of some of the ex-Damanhurians because of the nature of the stance they had taken. From this Damanhurian's perspective these people no longer held valuable or even accurate opinions when it came to Damanhur.

On reflection this perspective is understandable given the severity of some accusations made about Damanhur by disaffected ex-citizens. Some had taken up anti-Damanhurian campaigns, writing negative comments in forums throughout online communities and even developing a specifically anti-Damanhur blog. These ex-citizens had also taken legal action against the community. This was not the approach of all those who had chosen to leave Damanhur. However, those who have taken very vocal and active approaches to discrediting the community have presented a surprising challenge to those who remain. Damanhurians have been required to protect themselves from damaging accusations about their homes and personal lives. These accusations have come not only from mainstream Italian religious organisations and

---

9 This response was not the case for all ex-Damanhurians, only those who had attacked or were attacking the community.

10 I was told by various sources that the action taken was to claim monetary compensation for years of service in the community.
governments, but also from the large and powerful Italian anti-cult movement supported by people to whom they previously related as friends and family.

The most striking example is that of a disaffected member who threatened the Federation through legal channels and exposed communally held confidences. In particular, the ex-member revealed the then secret construction of Damanhurians' most prized achievement to date, The Temples of Humankind. The Temples are a 'huge underground ... complex that [now] attracts thousands of visitors every year (Meijerink 2003, pp.155-156)', but at the time were being constructed in secret with no building permit, which led the authorities to threaten to destroy them. In response to the threat of destruction Damanhurians began a 'worldwide publicity campaign [where] the commune gained support from journalists, scientists, art-lovers, and many others' (Meijerink 2003, p.156). As a result community members were permitted to continue construction of their beloved Temples and received international recognition for their artistic achievements (Introvigne 2012, p.189; Meijerink 2003, p.156). The ex-member eventually lost his case against Damanhur, but the impact of his actions were lasting. Ex-members have the potential to put a great strain on the existing community and in some instances it has been ex-members, and those who rally to their call, who have been the downfall of such groups.

Barker (2011) has written extensively on communal groups, particularly those who have drawn widespread negative media attention. Barker (2011, pp.5-6) notes that 'while members would stress the “good” points of their movements and keep quiet about any skeletons in the cupboard, the so-called “anti-cultists” would select what they considered
to be the “bad” features and ignore any positive attributes'. This can seem a quandary for scholars given the overarching obligation towards 'objective' research. Zablocki (2001, p.199) notes that a '[t]riangulation of the data source is essential' and that 'ex-member accounts have been shown to have reliability and validity roughly equivalent to accounts given by current [...] members'. Yet, following Barker (2011), I see value in understanding communards on their own terms. I took a community centred approach and focussed on those who found Damanhur was a suitable choice. Any indication that I was taking the particularly hostile opinions of some ex-members into account would have severely hampered my ongoing relationship with current Damanhurians. It was my opinion that I needed to build a trusting relationship with Damanhurians rather than approaching the intricacies and polemics of disaffection. For these reasons, although I had opportunities to talk with and interview particularly disaffected ex-citizens, I did not take these up. I did speak with some ex-citizens who had a less negative experience of leaving and who were still on reasonable terms with Damanhurians.

Due to my willingness to focus solely on the community, I was able to see how disaffection and negative media deeply upset Damanhurians. I also saw that Damanhurians were trying to do more to allow for a smoother transition out of the community. Institutionalising leaving seemed to me to be a natural response to the strong negative reaction some people might experience when they leave intentional communities. Potential and new members to intentional communities would do well to remember the difficulty they might face should they choose to leave and the communities themselves, it seems, would be best served by having a clear exit strategy.
for participants. The issue of ex-members becomes common among most if not all intentional communities that survive beyond the first few years, and so there are existing examples of how the process might work. For example, Damanhurians were, at the time of fieldwork, investigating how Kibbutzim approached members leaving. While socialisation into Damanhur has become an acknowledged necessity, exiting the community is yet to receive a similar level of attention.

Part of the barrier in Damanhur to approaching ‘leaving’ as a process that could be managed, is the idea that members are committing for life. Various communal scholars have looked at commitment mechanisms in intentional communities, one of the most well known of whom is Rosabeth Moss Kanter. Kanter (1972, p.81) considered ‘irreversibility’: where any initial investment was not retrievable when leaving the community, as a mechanism prevalent in what she deemed ‘successful’ communities. While Kanter’s (1972) mechanisms for commitment in community and her criteria for success have been widely critiqued and in some instances dismissed (Andelson 2002, pp.132-133; Jones 2011, pp.26-27, Carspecken 2012, p.156), ‘irreversibility’ is still considered a primary commitment mechanism in some communities. It is this that becomes a barrier for some communities, as in the example of Damanhur, to institutionalising the process of leaving.

11 There was evidence of some casual processes in place for Damanhurian’s choosing to leave. Any processes that might have existed varied from person to person. There was no clear channel for members to leave the community, short of an insistence that it was possible. Emphasis was still on commitment for a lifetime.
What is an Intentional Community

As previously stated, the minimum number of people for an intentional community is five, as indicated by several other scholars (Metcalf 1986; Miller 2010). Other scholars choose not to define intentional communities explicitly and so do not designate a minimum number of members. In most instances, whether or not a group of people describe themselves as an intentional community depends on community members’ own perception of themselves. Intentional communities will also change over time and define themselves differently according to the dominant categories of the day. The term 'intentional community' itself only came into widespread usage among scholars and communitarians in the mid-1980s (see, for example, Gorni, Oved & Paz 1985; Munro-Clark 1986). More common terms, prior to the 1980s, were communal societies, alternative societies, utopian communities, communes and so on (see, for example, Rayman 1981; Borowski 1984). Damanhur has been referred to as a New Religious Movement (NRM) by renowned alternative religions scholar Massimo Introvigne (1999). However, even Introvigne (2012, p.192) states that 'the notion of 'Movement', or 'New Religious Movement', fails to capture Damanhur exactly. Damanhur is, in fact, a 'community' and the members resist being labelled a movement or a religion.12 Given that I focus on some of the practical elements of community building, particularly those elements done with intent in order to build stronger interconnections among members of the community, I find 'intentional community' to be the most relevant when distinguishing the object of analysis for this thesis.

12 Damanhurians have emphasised this point on their website, www.Damanhur.org/en where they refer to ‘secular spirituality’.
Use of the word community to describe an object for analysis is problematic. Humans, for the most part, seek out collectivity in order to experience face-to-face social interaction (Brown 2002, p.6). Because of the ambiguity surrounding the term, when identifying a community as an object of study, the problem then becomes one of demarcation. In the context of this thesis I use the term intentional community to indicate groups that 'are almost always demarcated by boundaries in space and time that are clearly understood by members as well as those outside the community' (Brown 2002, p.3). The identifying members, rather than beginning organically (or without intention), have formally constructed their community. As these groups are generally self-defined, there are potentially as many definitions for intentional communities as there are communities. As a result, there are arguments justifying the application of the label, intentional community, to groups that lie outside the general definition described here (Metcalf & Christian 2003, p.675). Although the Damanhurian Federation is made up of what can be seen as semi-autonomous smaller communities,\(^\text{13}\) there is still a strong emphasis on a shared purpose and distinctiveness uniting them. Due to this shared identity, I still refer to Damanhur as a single community and I make it clear when I am referring to a smaller sub-community specifically.


---

\(^{13}\) Hence their use of the terms 'federation' and 'communities'
from intentional communities, where there is a conscious choice to belong or not to belong for the majority of those who are members. Brown (2002, p.9) and other authors in her edited volume also use Victor Turner's theory of communitas, as outlined in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969) and his other works (see, for example, 1975; 1978; 1982; 1983), as a foundation for exploring processes of community building (Brown 2002, p.9). Relevant to providing a definition of intentional community is Victor Turner's (1969) elaboration of van Gennep's (1960 [1909]) concept of liminality. Kamau (2002, p.20) posits that intentional communities are almost always liminal (Kamau 2002, p.20). In addition to the general definition provided by Miller (2010) earlier in this chapter, I follow Brown's (2002) definition of intentional communities as clearly identifiable, geographically locatable, liminal spaces that have been created for a specific purpose. In addition, I offer a slight amendment to this definition by including Victor Turner’s conceptualisation of the liminoid, on which I elaborate later in this chapter.

Brown (2002, p.3) also distinguishes between two forms of communitarianism in the United States: 'it can be seen both as ideology and as action (praxis) in the form of community building'. As intentional communities are, for the most part, identifiable within a geographic location with a practical building element, they also hold to a specific ideology or purpose. Forming a part of that ideology, in many cases, is some version of communitarianism as an ideology in and of itself. This is not true of all

---

14 There are some arguments for considering online communities as intentional communities.
15 Communitarianism is a philosophy that emphasises the connection between the individual and the community.
intentional communities and some scholars assert that this trend has declined over the past thirty years (Metcalf 2004, p.52). It is certainly not the case among some of the more recent ecologically oriented intentional community groups, commonly known as ecovillages.\textsuperscript{16} Members of Damanhur also subscribe to a communitarian ideology: Damanhurians live communally. This living practice is seen by Damanhurians as a key to achieving their communally inspired goals, as well as being a method for accelerated self-discovery. While communal living is not uncommon in Italy, the extent to which Damanhurians live communally, often ten or more unrelated adults living in one shared residence, is unusual and sets them apart, contributing to their position on the margins of Italian society. Damanhurian communal living, its challenges, rewards and purpose, will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Damanhur as a spiritual community

Along with identifying themselves as an eco-society and intentional community, Damanhurians also define their community as inherently spiritual. One of the primary attractors of new citizens to Damanhur is what they call \textit{La Scuola di Meditazione} (The School of Meditation: one of the four sub-sections of Damanhurian governance, discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 and Chapter 5). By all outward appearances, Damanhurian spirituality is a metaphysical investigation; a philosophical enquiry into humanity's being and existence. The result of this metaphysical approach is a range of

\textsuperscript{16} As Damanhur is also considered an ecovillage, I discuss this intentional community type in this chapter.
concepts about humanity and the earth that Damanhurians are willing to share with outsiders and some that they deem esoteric. For example, Damanhurians conceive of a spirit, an immaterial soul-like essence, which they often refer to as the energy or the energetic property of all things, living and non-living. Damanhurians propose humans as a 'bridge species' capable of experiencing not only the physical realm on earth, but also other realities in space and time. Due to this belief that humans have the capacity to act as a bridge to the spiritual world, humans are perfect instruments for investigating that world; humans can explore this immaterial, spiritual essence. They hold the view that it is possible to research how humans operate as spiritual beings and how they can delve deeper into their spiritual nature.

Understanding the full breadth of what Damanhurians call spiritual physics requires many hours of study and tutelage by more experienced initiates in their School of Meditation or by taking courses through Damanhur Welcome and University. Damanhur has monastic overtones; as initiates on their spiritual pathway, they have disciplined, spiritually and scholarly focused routines where every aspect of daily activity can be seen as an act of devotion. The Damanhurian focus on spiritual growth or enlightenment means that Damanhur fits many of the elements of a definition of an alternative religion. New Religious Movements (NRMs) generally refer to alternative religions that were founded from the mid-1960s on (Hunt 2003, p.260). There is significant overlap between intentional community building and alternative religions. 'Alternative religions' seem to relate to a 'vast range of religions that do not constitute mainstream Christianity' (Hunt 2003, p.257). Many alternative religions have utilised communal living as a way to separate themselves from 'the outside world in order to
preserve their distinctiveness' (Hunt 2003, p.36). For example, The Family is a NRM that has communities or homes where their most committed members live communally and the Unification Church once practiced 'living in community', though has moved away from this in recent years (Hunt 2003, p.124). Not all intentional communities fall within the NRM category—although depending on the definition of 'religion' being used, many can—particularly with regards to some contemporary, secular eco-communities found in urban centres of the global North, for example, the community with which I was involved in Chidlow, Western Australia.

In Damanhur, several members with whom I spoke insisted that their spiritual path is a practice of spiritual research—a school in metaphysical philosophy and experimentation where humans are the instruments and the subjects of the research. This ideological 'openness' has led to Damanhurians considering a wide variety of different beliefs and practices. For example, one can find evidence of religiosity associated with the New Age movement, various Neo-Paganisms, esoteric spirituality, human potential and healing movements, along with elements of more popular forms, including: astrology, divination and oriental occultism (Hunt 2003; Introvigne 2012). As such, Damanhur provides a valuable site for research on how humans relate to a concept of spirit in what is arguably a post-Christian world (Hunt 2003, pp.7-8). Damanhur is particularly interesting due to its location within the Catholic milieu of Italy with many of the membership who previously identified as Italian, finding their theological origins in Catholicism. Notwithstanding the spiritual orientation of its members, I do not analyse Damanhur in terms of theological frameworks. Rather, my focus throughout this thesis is on
Damanhurians’ experimental ideology and how this relates to liminality and communitas.

Damanhur as an Ecovillage

Damanhurians are focused on living with ecological responsibility. Living in this way was not a primary focus of individuals, nor was it an attractor to commit to the community for many new citizens, but it is certainly a strong community-wide value (see Pesco & Ananas 2009, for example). Damanhurians describe themselves as an eco-society (i.e. an ecovillage) and have many of the elements that fit with that self-identification (as can be seen in Tamerice 2012). Ecovillages are one of the most recent types of intentional community to have evolved during contemporary times, mostly in response to perceived worldwide ecological crises.17 The Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) states that an 'ecovillage is an intentional or traditional community using local participatory processes to holistically integrate ecological, economic, social and cultural dimensions of sustainability in order to regenerate social and natural environments' (Global Ecovillage Network n.d.).

Some groups have established themselves as ecovillages from the outset, seeking to design and build villages that meet strict ecologically responsible criteria, while

---

17 Metcalf (2012, p.28) notes that ‘a strong environmental ethic is held by most members of most intentional communities, and that is why some are called ecovillages.’
developing social governance processes that support sustainable living goals. Other contemporary intentional eco-community groups seem to have started more organically, adapting their ideals and practices of community building towards more ecologically sustainable models over the course of their development (for example, Auroville in India, Findhorn in Scotland and Damanhur). Damanhur fits the latter category and has made significant progress towards more ecologically responsible practices. By 2009 there were solar panels for domestic hot water installed in almost every home, rainwater collection facilities, photovoltaic cells generated 30 per cent of the electricity consumed and over 90 per cent of heating was produced using firewood obtained from a vast community reforestation and forest management program (Ananas & Pesco 2009). The Federation's eco-endeavours are also supported by attitudes that favour conservative consumption within Damanhurian homes.

The ecovillage project is an ideal, ecotopian prospect. A frequently cited ecovillage definition is that given by communitarian Robert Gilman (1991, p.10) and included holistic conditions, such as: 'human-scale, full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future'. Robert Gilman (1991) is one of the better-known scholars to write about ecovillages and there have since been variations on the definition he gave. On the ground, ecovillages attempt to get as close to the ideals as possible, but the result is more along the lines of working towards full-featured settlements and integrating their projects 18 See, for example: Crystal Waters, Australia; Ecovillage at Ithaca, US; Sieben Linden, Germany; and Konohana, Japan.
as harmlessly as possible into the natural environment while always aiming for continuity and longevity. Despite not realising ecotopia, it is commonly accepted among communitarians and scholars (see, for example, Lockyer 2007) that an ecovillage is a group of people working together towards realising the elements that make up Gilman's and others' ecotopian ideals. Gilman (1991) elaborates on his definition by distinguishing between an ecovillage and a sustainable community. For Gilman (1991, p.10), a sustainable community can include ecovillages, but can also include networks of ecovillages and 'non-geographically based "communities" (such as businesses) that are nevertheless human-scale in their components, diverse, and harmoniously integrated into the natural world'. It follows then that an ecovillage is a 'distinct place' (Gilman 1991, p.10), and this aligns with my prior considerations of intentional communities, including Damanhur, as occupying distinct geographical locations. Ecovillages are, for the most part, intentional communities, whereas sustainable communities can exist outside this category.

Theorising Intentional Communities

Intentional community building has existed throughout human history and it is very likely that many endeavours (long-lived or otherwise) have been left unrecorded than are available to us today (Metcalf 2003; Hayden 1976). A more detailed history of intentional communities is provided in Chapter 2. In this section I outline some of the most relevant scholarship and situate my research within the field.
By applying Turner's (1969) theories of liminality and communitas to an intentional community I am following the scholarly footsteps of Lucy Jayne Kamau (2002), Gretchen Siegler (1992; 2002), Lucinda Carspecken (2012) and, of course, Victor Turner himself (1969). Many other anthropologists have visited Turner's theory, particularly viewing intentional communities as a liminal phenomenon (for example, see Foster 2002; Benfro-Sargent 2002), but have not applied communitas or have only paid cursory attention to either liminality or communitas (for example, see Meijerink 2003; Chitewere 2006; Lynnes 2010; Rivera 2012). The anthropologist Eva Meijerink conducted fieldwork in Damanhur during the late 1990s for her masters thesis. Meijerink's thesis was unavailable to me during the course of my research, but I was able to refer to an article written by Meijerink (2003) on Damanhur. Meijerink (2003) paid particular attention to the play elements observable in Damanhur during her fieldwork. During 2009-10, play was still a significant aspect of Damanhurian lives and I consider this element, play, as evidence of the intentional creation of liminoid phases. I discuss play in Damanhur in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Other scholars, particularly sociologists of religion, have looked at aspects of Damanhur including the spiritual school element (Introvigne 2012; Cardano 1997; Poggi 1992), the history of the community (Berzano 1998; Cardano 1997) and how children are raised and educated (Introvigne 2012).

Recently, Karen Litfin (2014) investigated Damanhur as part of her research looking at fourteen ecovillages worldwide. Litfin (2014) saw Damanhur as a spiritually based

---

19 Meijerink’s thesis was written in Dutch, I did not have the resources to have this translated.
ecovillage and incorporated aspects of Damanhurian initiatives as part of a broader comparative analysis of the fourteen ecovillages. Litfin (2014) provides a valuable perspective of Damanhur and other ecovillages from the field of environmental politics. Of relevance is Litfin's (2014, p.30) concept of 'four windows into sustainability', or E2C2. Ecology, economics, community and consciousness (E2C2) are a step away from the previously popular 'three-legged stool' approach to sustainability: ecology, economy and society (Litfin 2014, p.30). Litfin (2014, p.30) notes that the 'three-legged stool' approach is problematic because it 'ignores the inner dimension of sustainability, the deeper questions of meaning and cosmological belonging that have informed human existence for ages'. Litfin (2014, p.31) chooses to call this inner dimension of sustainability, 'consciousness', which moves practitioners towards the ideal that 'how I live outwardly will express who I am inwardly'. I look at Damanhur through the window of sustainability Litfin (2014) identifies as 'community' and how socio-structural elements influence participant's ability to live with 'consciousness'. Victor and Edith Turner's theories of liminality and communitas help us to understand how 'community' might evolve and change. The development of a community's social structure in service to communitas allows community members to realise some of what Litfin (2014) identifies as 'consciousness'.

Ecovillages have allowed participants to see the 'four windows into sustainability' and, as such, are part of what Pitzer (1989) identifies as developmental communalism or alternatively 'developmental utopianism' (Lockyer 2007, p.82) or 'transformative utopianism' (Lockyer 2009). Each of these concepts identify the impact intentional communities have on wider society along with providing a valuable insight into the
importance of flexibility within intentional communities themselves. As such, Pitzer's (1989) concept of developmental communalism requires further elaboration as a basis for understanding how Damanhur has achieved structural flexibility. I elaborate on Pitzer's (1989) concept of developmental communalism in Chapter 2.

Ritual liminality and the post-industrial liminoid space

Categories like intentional community, spiritual community or ecovillage applied to Damanhur are all definitions that identify this community as having liminal qualities. Liminality, according to Victor Turner (1967, p.93), is an 'interstructural situation', an ambiguous stage where actors are 'betwixt and between' a past and future version of themselves (Turner 1987). Liminality as an analytical concept, was originally identified by van Gennep (1960 [1908]) in his investigation of *rites de passage*, as the threshold (or limen) between the processes of separation and re-aggregation of a ritual subject. Liminality was seen by van Gennep and then Victor Turner to be common in almost all the rituals considered in their analyses. In each ritual, subjects were seen to go through a stage of separation followed by a threshold or liminal stage and finalised with a stage of re-aggregation or reincorporation. It was the middle liminal stage that was particularly important to Victor Turner's ongoing research, and it is the stage within which some scholars (Kamau 2002, p.20; Turner 1969) place intentional communities. Intentional communities can be seen as liminal, as they easily 'elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space' (Turner 1969, p.95).
Turner (1969, p.95) continues his explication of the liminal phase, noting that ‘[L]iminal entities, such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites, may be represented as possessing nothing. They may be disguised as monsters, wear only a strip of clothing, or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system—in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiands.’ In Damanhur new initiates all wear white robes during rituals, and in many other intentional communities (including the Amana Society among others) members all wore similar clothes to mask outward individual differences (Andelson 2015, pers. comm). This can be seen as one of the tools to achieve liminality; uniform clothing (or lack of it) assists in removing or homogenising secular distinctions of rank and status (Turner 1969, p.95). However, this is relative to the perspective one takes upon the ritual or community in question. The experience of the initiates or the intentional community members is one of egalitarianism, but not necessarily of indistinctness; it ‘is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated comitatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders’ [emphasis in original] (Turner 1969, p.96).

From an etic (outsider) perspective, intentional communities are continually liminal, but it is important to note that an ongoing or sustained liminality is only evident from this perspective. Intentional communities occupy liminal spaces, as the physical location of the community no longer conforms to societal norms of land use and habitation (Andelson 2002, p.134). Re-aggregation or reincorporation, in this instance, is when those spaces are reintegrated into dominant societal use or where mainstream society
and the intentional community find common ground leading to a normalisation of the activities of the group using that space (Turner 1969, p.112). However, for as long as the intentional community operates outside the structural norms of the dominant society in the surrounding area then the space they occupy remains liminal. Individuals who inhabit or visit this space, therefore, occupy a liminal space. Individuals who join and leave these groups go through the three stages identified by van Gennep (1960) above; with the liminal stage being the period of time they live in the intentional community. This conceptualisation of liminality is, of course, predominantly from the perspective of those who do not live in the community. Once one enters an intentional community and fully commits, then, the everyday experience of the individual is not consistently liminal, which is particularly true for those members who never leave. This demarcation is important because I am looking at the liminality created within the liminal space that is the intentional community of Damanhur. As I demonstrate, the experience of members of the community is not consistently liminal; rather, citizens come in and out of purposefully created liminal phases.

While we can understand what liminality is, such understanding provides little knowledge of what can be achieved within this liminal stage. The liminal stage according to Turner is 'essentially creative, a realm concerned with the re-investigation and re-creation of meaning' (Beavitt 2012, p.37). Such a phase seems optimal for facilitating cultural critique, and provides an opportunity to experiment or play with new ways of constructing culture in response to these critiques (Brown 2002; Lockyer 2007). For Turner (1977, p.68), the essence of liminality is found 'in its release from normal constraints, making possible the deconstruction of the "uninteresting"
constructions of common sense'. The liminal phase is a place where actors can play, or experiment, with elements of the familiar, defamiliarise them, and allow novelty to emerge from 'unprecedented combinations of familiar elements' (Turner 1982, p.27). These functions of liminality are possible through what Beavitt (2012, p.37) sees as two transformative elements of liminality: reflexivity and communitas. It is communitas that I focus on, although reflexivity was certainly evident and can be seen as equally important to the social adaptability currently evident in Damanhur. Victor Turner (1982, p.75) understood social reflexivity to be ‘the ways in which a group tries to scrutinize, portray, understand and then act on itself’. Communitas will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

This community's approach to 'spiritual research', as they call it, is fundamental to the integration of liminality into their daily lives. Damanhur's spiritual practice, the members' founding ideology, is what brought the community together in the first place, and it is what attracted the majority of new members with whom I spoke. The Damanhurian ideology fosters experiment, play, philosophy and creativity, all elements heightened by or used to create a liminal/liminoid phase (Turner 1983). The spiritual focus also motivates and informs a number of daily, monthly, seasonal and yearly rituals in which I was able to participate, either directly or as a member of a separate, although still participatory, audience. Through participation in the formal rituals, I observed instances of status reversal; as there are multiple structural positions for Damanhurians to assume, they can easily hold a leadership role in one context, for example, the household, and have that status reversed during rituals where their initiate level is lower than persons over whom they might normally have authority. By initiate level I am
referring to ranks or levels of mastery, as indicated by different coloured robes and belts, attainable within the spiritual arm of the community. The Damanhurian spiritual pathway is deemed esoteric (much of it is not revealed to the un-initiated) and therefore, requires initiation for participation. The initiate process itself is likely to have rituals of status elevation, although I was never able to witness them. As initiates gain higher levels in their spiritual hierarchy, one can safely assume that a ritual of some kind accompanies promotion. As noted earlier, different coloured robes and belts worn during their public rituals indicate an initiate’s level; citizens stand in order of their level with the most advanced initiates usually conducting the ritual. Beyond community rituals, the focus on the individual and the communal group (conceived of as a distinct entity) as a research subject has allowed experimentation with what it means to be human. For example, Damanhurians use communal living as a method of learning about themselves and each other; they see communal living as a way of facilitating the social and spiritual experiments that they each participate in and conduct.

Intentional communities as liminal and liminoid spaces

Liminoid, or liminal-like, is the term Victor Turner (1983) used to investigate the limen as experienced by members of larger and more complex post-modern societies. Victor Turner (1983, p.136) insisted that a liminoid phase, like ritual liminality, was inter-structural, a period of anti-structure, 'an independent and critical source', a source for generating and storing 'a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programs, which are capable of influencing the behaviour of those in mainstream social and political roles in the direction of radical change'. Where liminal (ritual) events are
seen as obligatory, liminoid phases, for those living in complex post-industrial societies, are elective (Turner 1982, p.42). As Damanhur is a product of, and inextricably enmeshed within, the larger complex societal structures of the Piedmont, Italy and Western Europe, it could be argued that Damanhur is more liminoid than truly liminal. People join intentional communities for a variety of reasons, but for the most part members have initially made a conscious choice to be there. Many of the Damanhurians to whom I spoke mentioned how they consciously chose to join the community, and that remaining committed to the project was a 'daily choice'. From this perspective an intentional community is liminoid but, once I entered Damanhur and observed the lived experiences of those who have chosen to join, I saw the distinctions between what could be considered liminoid and true liminality become blurred.

The assertion that membership is a daily choice was contradicted by a strong emphasis on life-long commitment. For example, I could not participate in the spiritual school because it required a longer commitment than twelve months of fieldwork would allow. The process of committing to Damanhur is one of committing to liminality. Once one is a member of Damanhur, in order to remain a committed member, participation in intentionally created liminal phases is almost unavoidable. While there is the freedom to choose to leave the community, or to refrain from participation in a given ritual, the more committed one becomes, the more difficult it becomes to choose not to participate (Kanter 1971, pp.129-136). Participation in the ritual and play elements of Damanhur is obligatory for ongoing commitment. Further, there is little distinction between work and play. In post-industrial societies there is a clear delineation between work and free time (Turner 1982, p.39). In Damanhur there is an emphasis on activity (from some
perspectives a form of work) at most times that bears similarities with pre-industrial societies. The project of Damanhur is the collective work of the citizens and that activity is ongoing and difficult to disengage from once a citizen has fully committed to the project. Therefore, the ritual experiences within the liminoid space of Damanhur are often more akin to the 'true' liminality Victor Turner (1967) described when first conceptualising the term. Damanhur is arguably a liminoid space within the complex post industrial society of northern Italy, but the community has been able to create both liminoid and truly liminal experiences for committed citizens.

Communitas

Victor Turner (1969, p.95) describes communitas as a strong bond or 'intense comradeship' between people. Edith Turner (2012, p.1) notes that '[t]he characteristics of communitas show it to be almost beyond strict definition, with almost endless variations'. It occurs when people are ready (sometimes from necessity) 'to rid themselves of their concern for status and dependence on structures, and see their fellows as they are' (Turner 2012, pp.1-2). Communitas is also seen as the ultimate culmination of individuality and collectivity. Individual distinctiveness is preserved and allows 'quick understanding, easy mutual help, and long-term ties with others' (Turner 2012, p.3; Turner 1982, p.45).

Victor Turner (1969) identified three different types of communitas: spontaneous, normative and ideological. Spontaneous communitas, the most ideal type, occurs in situations where often unplanned, everyday roles and concerns are put aside and a period of deep liminality, a state almost or completely devoid of structural elements, is

Normative communitas is hard to maintain, as the attempt to find a balance between the initial communitas and structure can lead to fractionalisation within the community (Turner 1974, p.169; Siegler 2002, p.43). Fractionalisation can be seen as schismogenesis and is a fundamental dilemma of social structure (Bateson 1936; Andelson 2002). Normative communitas is problematic as the structural norms that are imposed over time are not intentional. Akin to Weber’s theory of the routinisation of charisma, normative communitas speaks to the inadvertent loss of communitas due to the necessities of daily life (Turner 1974, p.169; Siegler 2002, p.43). Groups succumb to structure and an unwanted institutionalisation of the initial existential experience.

Ideological communitas can result when a complete ideology is created that allows liminality to exist with the central social process, intentionally creating social conditions that are amenable to a continuation of communitas (Siegler 2002, p.43; Turner 1969, pp.177-78). Victor Turner (1974, p.169) used ideological communitas to describe ‘utopian models or blueprints of societies believed by their authors to exemplify or supply the optimal conditions for existential communitas.’ Siegler (1992; 2002, p.43)

---

20 Schismogenesis is a progressive differentiation between social groups or individuals within a group.
21 I discuss management of schismogenesis by Damanhurians in Chapter 4 and further dilemmas of institutionalisation in Chapter 5.
argues that ‘successful religious movements’ exhibit ideological communitas. Siegler (1992; 2002) presents the intentional community In Search of Truth (ISOT) as an example of what she posits is ideological communitas in praxis. Siegler (2002, p.43) argues that the members of ISOT have created a ‘complete ideology […] that allows the liminal to continue with the central social process, promoting communitas’.

Communitas is structure-less, yet inseparable from it; 'communitas cannot stand alone if the material and organisational needs of human beings are to be adequately met' (Turner 1969, p.129). Communitas also serves as a kind of oil for the structural machine, providing a phase of revival and refreshment from the rigours of the structural norm (Turner 1969, p.185). Spontaneous communitas, something that Victor Turner (1969, p.132) refers to, as perhaps the 'purest' form of communitas, exists outside of structure, while normative and ideological communitas exist, in some way, within structured society. Victor Turner (1969, p.129) holds structure and communitas (of each type) as inherently linked in a cycle of revival in communitas to return to structure, and 'what is certain is no society can function adequately without this dialectic'.

Similar to the members of ISOT, Damanhurians have moved from what I argue was spontaneous communitas. During the first years when they built the initial structures and developed the first cultural materials that would come to represent them, was a time when sacrifices were made and risks taken to build the community.22 Citizen’s accounts tell of numerous instances of ‘charged energy’, surprising accomplishments and intense excitement. Over the years the community has moved towards normalising those early

---

22 Living conditions were rough and there was little of the infrastructure that now supports their efforts.
experiences and embedding them in an ideology supportive of communitas. Damanhur is a valuable site for researching the intersection between structure and communitas, as the community has developed a very ordered hierarchical governance system in combination with institutionalised elements that are responsible for providing unstructured moments. Often, in instances where structure is purposely removed by the Damanhurian leadership, participants report conditions similar to what Turner describes as communitas. There are a large variety of rituals performed in Damanhur, but there is also emphasis placed on spontaneous activities, radical play events and intense group activities that create liminoid spaces where communitas is said to arise. The rituals in Damanhur are also described as experiments, and so have a changeable quality which may serve to counter the rigidity of other structurally imposed rituals.

Conclusion and Summary

As seen in this introductory chapter one of the primary tensions faced by communitarian builders is that between a well-developed governance structure and communitas. All communities face tensions between communitas as a binding force and structure as a functional tool, a tension observed in Damanhur. These two complementary elements must be balanced in order to provide a sustainable foundation and an ability to adjust social mechanisms in accordance with community members’ intended and evolving aims (Turner 1969; 1974; Alexander 1991). In Damanhur, these aims are the creation of a new culture that promotes spiritual as well as socio-ecological
justice. Members move towards their aims by employing an ideology that promotes activity and collective work towards completing concrete projects.

I analyse some of the ways in which Damanhurians have created a culture where liminal or liminoid phases are accepted. In Chapter 2 I discuss the origins of the community, demonstrating its liminoid nature within the historically rich region of northern Italy. I then outline some of the highly structured environments that allow Damanhur to function and flourish. I use my description of Damanhurian structural elements as a way of expanding on my methodological process. Structure, according to Victor Turner, is just as important as anti-structure, which is his focus. Neither exists without the other, and in Damanhur one finds structure and opportunities for anti-structure in almost equal degrees. It is easy to be distracted by the concrete and tangible rules and regulations that make up the structure of a society, and it is because of this that I primarily focus on the limen of structure—the liminal and liminoid phases that Damanhurians consciously create in order to foster transformative communitas (the ultimate realisation of a moment completely void of structure).

While in Chapter 2 I provide a general overview of Damanhur's formal structural elements, in Chapter 3 I analyse how this community integrates new citizens. Socialisation has become a conscious and purposeful effort in most long-lived intentional communities, although participants do not usually refer it to as socialisation. For the most part intentional communities will refer to this process as something akin to a probationary phase. At the time of fieldwork, Damanhurians referred to their form of socialisation as the New Citizens program. During this process, new, potential citizens
go through a period of learning to be Damanhurian. This learning process introduces joining members to multiple liminal and liminoid activities; along with the process, the learning phase itself is inherently liminoid. Becoming Damanhurian is a process of becoming communal; however, the tension between the communal self and the individual self is ongoing. This tension is similar to the ongoing and larger dilemma of balancing structure and communitas.

Once new citizens have completed their probationary phase and committed to the Damanhurian project, they will lose the title of 'new citizens'. If they have chosen to be resident citizens, they move into an established residence with other citizens, called a nucleo. In Chapter 4 I explore what are essentially the mundane aspects of life in a nucleo. The nucleo or Damanhurian home is a place where for recently established citizens the strange becomes familiar normalising communal life. In the nucleo we see what makes Damanhur work, how individuals confront their individual and communal considerations or responsibilities. In the nucleo familiarity is built and conflict is managed. It is the site of peer support and communal pressure, where vulnerabilities and strengths are revealed. Most importantly, nucleos are a home, a base for members of the community to share their lives as they confront the challenges of a Damanhurian lifestyle. Here I focus on how Damanhurians not only create liminal ritual and liminoid play phases, but also how they see themselves as experimental beings. A focus on self-improvement is facilitated and supported by communal living. Hand in hand with the idea that the self is flexible is also the acknowledgement of schism. Gregory Bateson's

23 There are four categories of citizenship
(1936) schismogenesis, as applied by Andelson (2002) to intentional communities, is applied here to Damanhur. Damanhurians limit schismogenesis through work on the communal self, but also by allowing controlled schism through acceptance of change. For example, individuals can change nucleos, nucleos can change purpose, and citizenship status can change.

In Chapter 5 I give a larger snapshot of the Federation of Damanhur. I adopt a more holistic viewpoint in order to see how Damanhurians create liminal and liminoid spaces that integrate and bond the entire community. Using O'Dea and Yinger’s (1961) analysis of five dilemmas of institutionalisation, I show how Damanhur approaches the tensions inherent in their own evolving structure. The variety of pathways is necessarily complicated and can seem overbearing or overly bureaucratic. This seems to be part of attempts to allow for individual expressions and opportunities for growth. Ongoing experimentation and openness to change have given rise to what can be perceived as an overly complex bureaucracy; as communitas inevitably becomes structured, thus arguably requiring liberation through further or different communitas, so the structure/communitas dyad becomes more intricate, more complex (Turner 1969, p.140). Acceptance of change is evident in almost all aspects of Damanhurian lives. I analyse, what I argue is, a governance structure that permits change and adaptation to changing conditions. Liminality and schism are structurally permitted in response to the inherent tensions of maintaining a structure in service to communitas. Supporting this argument I present community-wide projects, events and rituals that facilitate liminal and liminoid activities and correspondingly foster communitas.
Edith Turner (2012) provides a framework that identifies multiple types of communitas. In Chapter 6 I concentrate on two types, 'communitas of work' and 'communitas of nature'. I demonstrate how liminality, the liminoid and communitas have been used to motivate citizens towards ecologically responsible behaviour throughout the Federation. Cohesive and productive communal activity was observable and made possible in Damanhur through harnessing the potential that liminality and communitas provide. By working together Damanhurians foster the communitas of work, which in turn motivates further action, demonstrating the ‘circular relationship between structure and anti-structure’ (Whitehead 2004, p.8). The infrastructure that makes up Damanhur's physical reality reflects their goals to live more socially, spiritually and environmentally meaningful lives. Damanhurians are working towards an ideal, an ideological communitas made possible by an evolved humanity. Edith Turner explicates the ideological communitas to which the Damanhurians aspire as a communitas of nature, taking her own inspiration from these lines by Wordsworth:

There is an active principle alive
In all things, in all natures, in the flowers
And in the trees, in every pebbly stone
That paves the brooks, the stationary rocks.
The moving waters, and the invisible air.
All beings have their properties which spread
Beyond themselves, a power by which they make
Some other being conscious of their life,
Spirit that knows no insulated spot,
No chasm, no solitude; from link to link
It circulates, the Soul of all the worlds
Wordsworth, Edith Turner (2012, p.144) notes, ‘was pointing to the truth, step by step—to the distinct form of the communitas of nature.’

Overall, I argue that the lived experience of citizens is both structured, on the one hand, and liminoid or liminal, on the other. Liminality in Damanhur is a way of life, an accepted condition of commitment that as a consequence allows for various forms of bonding communitas to frequently emerge. Damanhur demonstrates means of incorporating liminoid activity, how to foster and hold communitas and then how to allow these elements to assist them. Communitas has led Damanhurians to employ unique ways of motivating group action with tangible results. Members foster the communitas of work and direct it towards achieving the community's ideals in concrete ways. Damanhurians seek what Victor Turner termed ideological communitas in the form of Edith Turner’s communitas of nature. Damanhurian spirituality speaks to this concept and Damanhurians enact it in their daily lives.

Communitas—what it is? Trying to answer is like trying to locate and hold down an electron. It cannot be done. Communitas is activity, not an object or state. Therefore, the only way to catch these ‘electrons’ in the middle of their elusive activity, in process, is to go along with them in the very rush of their impossible energy, ‘kissing the winged joy as it flies’ (Turner 2012, p.220).
CHAPTER 2

Damanhur

Introduction

Damanhur is a complex and multifaceted community, and it is not possible to elaborate on all aspects of the community. It is important, though, to provide an overview so as to provide context for the remainder of the thesis. In this chapter, I discuss Damanhur’s origins, which serve to demonstrate its liminal nature within the historically rich region of northern Italy. While Damanhur today has a large international citizenship, it began as a majority Italian community. During fieldwork it was still important that new citizens were advanced in learning the Italian language prior to committing to full membership. Because of the largely Italian influence on the development of the community, some scholars (Introville 2012; Meijerink 2003) have indicated that the history of the northern Italian region influenced Damanhur’s particular spiritual ideology.

I then look at the structured social environment that allows Damanhur to function and grow. Damanhur is a highly ordered society that lies on the margins of post-industrial Northern Italy. Both physically and ideologically marginal, it is also an intentional community, and so arguably poised between the societal norms of intentional
communities and the practices emerging in wider post-industrial landscapes. Damanhur is also a product of the cultural and socio-economic milieu in which it was founded, a context built on a history of marginal endeavours that manifested some liminal characteristics, as I will relate in regard to the activities of the Waldensians and such figures as Olivetti. In this chapter I present a condensed account of the historical legacy on which the community is built, in order to understand its current status in the physical and cultural location of the Valchiusella. 24 From this perspective I provide an overview of the community's founding and outline some of the peculiarly Damanhurian concepts that are relevant.

Damanhur, Federation of Communities, is an intentional spiritual and eco-community located in the Piedmont Province, north-western Italy. A small group founded Damanhur in 1975. It has since grown in size to include almost 600 full-time resident citizens, who reside in numerous smaller sub-communities called nucleos. The majority of Damanhurian nucleos are located throughout a subalpine geographical and historical area known as Canavese; a majority of them are concentrated in the Valchiusella. Damanhurians here continued to develop their philosophical ideas over time in response to their daily experiences of living communally. They actively choose to engage in new experimental ways of living and working together that aim to enhance the solidarity of the group and further their spiritual, social and ecologically sustainable aims.

---

24 Translates as ‘Closed Valley’.
Damanhurians see their Federation as a project with the oft-stated aim of evolving a new humanity. This aim is founded on a syncretic spiritual philosophy developed by the founder Oberto Airaudi. Other scholars have indicated similarities between Damanhurian philosophy and Egyptian, Christian, Celtic, New Age, and occult-theosophical traditions. The sociologist Massimo Introvigne (2012, p.183) describes Damanhur as 'the largest communal group in the ancient wisdom-magical tradition'.

Locating Damanhur in Northern Italy

Northern Italy is an affluent region, home to the fashion capital of Milan and the extravagant luxury industries producing the likes of Ferrari and Maserati. The Piedmont contains many industrial centres, notably Turin, Italy's fourth largest city, where the FIAT automobile works were originally housed. The city of Biella produces tissues and silks, while Cuneo is home to Ferrero's chocolate factories and to important mechanical industries. Turin was host to the 2006 Winter Olympics when the city transformed its industrial image into one of a vibrant metropolis. It has also been a very contested region throughout history, seeing persecution, revolutionary religious freedoms and unprecedented industrial development. Northern Italy in recent years has seen more stability and wealth than southern Italy, which is beneficial to groups like Damanhur, for which relative local calm during the early and precarious years of formation is ideal.
The Province of Piedmont contains 315 small separate *comuni*. Of those 315 *comuni*, 132 are found in the North-West Canavese region along with the main town of Ivrea. Damanhurian nucleos were scattered across several *comuni* with the two main centres, Crea and Damjl, located in Vidracco and Baldissero Canavese respectively. The first inhabitants of the region were thought to be the Salassi, of Celtic-Ligurian roots. I was shown historic sites that were considered to be of Celtic origin by both Damanhurians and Valchiusella locals. Romans arrived in the area during 22BCE followed by the Byzantines, Lombards and then the Franks. The Counts of Canavese shared control of the region once the Marquise of Ivrea, Arduino, died in 1015. During the 14th Century the Counts became subjects of the House of Savoy, a royal family originating in Savoy, now a region of south-eastern France. The Piedmont was then occupied by the French, followed by the Spanish and then the French again in the 16th Century. Finally, in 1814 the region was returned to the House of Savoy until 1946 during the Italian
Constitutional Referendum, when King Umberto II transferred powers to the Prime Minister of the new republic.

During the upheavals of these periods in European history, there were many instances of persecution of intentional community groups, including those forming a part of a New Religious Movement (NRM). One particularly poignant example pertinent to the Piedmont region was the April 1655 massacre of the Waldensians. Waldenses were members of a Christian movement that originated in 12th-century France. Many Waldensians and other minority religious groups fled to the New World in North America in order to continue their NRM and, as was often the case, build new intentional communities. Some groups stayed in Italy and eventually found religious freedom in an increasingly liberated Europe. During 1848, specifically, the Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia was granted a constitution, the Statuto Albertino, which provided liberating reforms, including religious freedom to Waldensians.

Perhaps due to constitutions like the Statuto Albertino, the Piedmont region acquired a reputation of being 'extremely tolerant—for the standards of their time—towards alternative spirituality' (Introvigne 2012, p.184). Between 1850-80 Turin became one of the main occult and spiritual centres of Europe. The tolerance in Turin regarding the activities of occult and magical groups provided a safe haven for practitioners of religiously and spiritually alternative modalities (Introvigne 2012). However, Introvigne (2012, p.184) notes that even during this time 'statutes against magic and witchcraft remained on the books'. In 1890, once the Italian army had conquered Rome, moving

---

25 Waldensians are now a part of the Italian Methodist Church.
the capital of unified Italy from Turin to Rome, there was a trial that saw a number of spiritualists prosecuted (Introvigne 2012, p.184). Introvigne (2012, p.184) highlights the fact that the reason Turin became known as a home for the occult and alternatively spiritual was due to the conflict between the 'governments of Piedmont and the Catholic Church during the process that eventually led to the unification of Italy'. Alternative religious and spiritual practices were 'allowed' as a demonstration of the Piedmont government's opposition to the dominance of the Catholic Church in Italy.

The historical period during which Italy was unified also saw the practice and production of propaganda—mostly from Rome and Naples—labelling alternative spiritual groups (particularly those in Piedmont) as Satan worshippers (Introvigne 2012, p.185). To this day labels like 'City of the Devil' or 'The Gates of Hell' appear in popular discourse about Turin, including the treatment of Turin as part of a 'black [energetically evil] triangle' (the other two points to this triangle being formed by London and San Francisco). As I witnessed in touristic promotions for the city, there is also a belief that the city of Turin forms a 'white magic triangle' of mystical energies, along with Lyon and Prague. In addition Turin sits at the confluence of two large rivers, the Po and the Dora, believed to represent the male and female powers of the sun and the moon. Although the number of occult and spiritualist groups in Turin is not as high as can now be found in other Italian and European towns, there is a legacy of the occult from the 1850-90 period (Introvigne 2012). It is this legacy that has provided fertile ground for many Theosophical and other groups to be founded in Turin (Introvigne 2012, p.185). Occult organisations have also been attracted to, and inspired by, the largest Egyptian museum in the world, which is also found there.
A long lineage – Historical context of intentional communities

Previous intentional community scholarship provides valuable insights into the basic functional elements of social and communal sustainability. Numerous scholars worldwide have investigated intentional community building, be it as a part of an established religion, a NRM or as an individual secular phenomenon. Sociologist Howard Becker coined the term ‘cult’ in the 1930s (Swatos 1981, p.17), but it was not until the 1970s, predominantly in response to the secular anti-cult movement, that scholars began to distinguish between 'culs' and NRMs. The 1960s and 70s also saw a burst of interest by scholars, particularly sociologists, in alternative living arrangements as a result of the countercultures developing during that time. The term 'intentional community' seems to have come into more widespread use during the 1980s as a way to distinguish the practical community-building element from broader religious or alternative faith based endeavours.

Rivera (2012) notes that intentional communities have been seen as a place to study social phenomena (as seen in Kanter 1972), as cultural critiques (for example, Brown 2002; Lockyer 2007), as social experiments (Pitzer 1989; Lynes 2010; Zablocki 1980), utopian undertakings (Lockyer 2007) and/or as part of a historical analysis (see for example, Miller 1998; Metcalf 2003). Research has focused on various viewpoints including, but not limited to: formation (Kanter 1972; Andelson 2002), commitment (Kanter 1972), collective decision making (Zablocki 1980), as part of a new social movement (Schehr 1997), lasting impact on the wider society (Boal, Watts & Winslow
2004; Lynes 2011), challenging notions of success, failure and/or survival (Pitzer 1989; Lockyer 2007; Jones 2011; Metcalf 2003), environmentalism and sustainability (Dawson 2006; Lockyer 2007; LeVasseur 2013; Dawson 2013; Baker 2013), eco-consumption critiques (Chitewere 2006; Rivera 2012; Scheurer 2001), redefining utopianism and moving towards post-utopianism (Lockyer 2007; Near 2010; Metcalf 2003; Jones 2011), education (Greenberg 2013) and dissolution (Andelson 2002).

There are many elements that make for a long-lived community. How long that community remains an intentional community (including how long that community remains liminal) depends on the society at large. The Hutterites originated in the 16th century and despite severe persecution during the 18th and 19th centuries a population of approximately 500 managed to relocate to North America in 1874 and today enjoy a population of more than forty-two thousand (Evans & Peller 2015). They still use the mechanism of intentional community building and identify themselves as intentional communities. The Waldenses, an NRM originating in the 12th century France, formed intentional communities for safety from persecution. They are now an accepted element of the Italian Methodist Church and live throughout European urban and rural areas, including a remaining diaspora in north-western Piedmont. As one can see from this example whether or not the members of an intentional community achieve their aims does not necessarily depend on longevity, as the most important indicator for the Waldensians was achieving religious freedom, despite the dispersal of their intentional communities. Therefore, it is important to understand some of the history of intentional communities and the theories that have informed how scholars have articulated their impact on human society.
In the Western tradition the commonly accepted, first-known historical intentional communes are the Essene communities of c. 200 BCE to c. 100 CE (Lockyer 2007, p.29; Metcalf 1986, p.92). The Essenes were a group of approximately 4000 eschatological Jews who lived at Khirbat Omran on the Dead Sea in intentional communities (Lockyer 2007, p.29; Metcalf and Christian 2003). However, Metcalf (2012) identifies the Homakoeion commune, founded by Pythagoras, in what is now southern Italy, as having existed around 525 BCE. Other historians point to even earlier communities in India (Lockyer 2007, p.29), and it is likely that intentional communities existed prior to these recorded cases. Many intentional communities will have gone undocumented in their attempts to remain isolated and hidden. As such, the full extent of intentional communal history will never be known.

Post-100 CE, intentional communities have been prevalent in the form of monastic orders, primarily found in two religious traditions: Buddhism and Christianity. The Essenes have been described by some as the first order of monks in the Middle East, in which the Christian monastic tradition finds its origins (Lockyer 2007, p.29; Metcalf 1986, p.93). The extent of western monastic communalism has varied since the 4th century. Generally, monastic lives have existed in eremitic mode (living as hermits or religious recluses), with perhaps only weekly communal gatherings, or a more wholly communal, cenobitic mode, as represented by the Benedictine monastic order from the 6th century. Benedictine rule became central to a monastic life, directed by the motto ‘Ora et Labora’ (pray and work), in Europe at this time, which included prayer, work and

---

26 For privacy and safety.
lectio divina (meditative reading of the scriptures). Benedict believed that prayer and work were partners, not dissimilar to the Damanhurian notion that the spiritual and material elements of their lives are fundamentally linked. And, more than two hundred years ago, another intentional community known as the Shakers very actively strived for this same goal (Garrett 1987). Monastic lifestyles have continued in various stages of decline and reformation, and monastic orders of various types still exist today.

Many communal scholars present a history of intentional community building through periods of intensity and decline since about the 12th century (Lockyer 2007; Robbins 1988; Hostetler 1974; Armytage 1961). Records show that concentrated periods of community building occurred during the 12th and 13th centuries and again in the 16th and 17th centuries in Europe, the 17th through to the 19th century in the Americas, and from the 19th century, continuing up to this day, in Australia and New Zealand (Lockyer 2007). The Kibbutzim became a fundamental component of Israel's nation-building project in the early part of the 20th century and they have survived to this day in an altered less strictly communal form (Lockyer 2007). There have also been distinct histories of intentional community building in Canada, Japan, India and many nations in Europe and Latin America (Lockyer 2007).

Discussing American and Australian histories respectively, Joshua Lockyer (2007) and Bill Metcalf (1995) identify eras when intentional communities have proliferated, suggesting that this occurred during periods of major social or cultural change. Periods associated with intentional community building include: the post-Reformation period, when groups of people escaped Europe so as to practise their religions without fear of
persecution; industrialisation; times of mass immigration; the Great Depression; and, of course, the well known 'hippie' movement, following the disillusionment of members of the baby-boomer generation with mainstream society (Brown 2002; Metcalf 1995; Lockyer 2007). During each of these eras, and others like them, groups of people have drawn together, stepping outside mainstream social arrangements in order to participate in an alternative lifestyle. What follows is a brief theoretical discussion in order to show how some scholars have emphasised the relevance of research within intentional communities. Each of the two theoretical frames discussed below help to place intentional communities within the larger socio-historical context that is the focus of this chapter. While my approach in this thesis is an emic, participant based exploration, theoretical frames like ‘developmental communalism’ and ‘cultural critique’, among others, emphasise the etic consequences of their formation, existence and decline.

**Developmental Communalism**

Pitzer (1989) presented an approach to understanding and analysing communal living as one factor within a concept of 'developmental communalism'. Previously, many of the evaluations had been of the 'fail/succeed' variety, but such a polarised perspective on intentional community building prevents a more in-depth understanding of what these groups, long or short lived, have to offer. The 'fail/succeed' approach to the history of intentional communities has been based on a number of different criteria (Wagner 1985). Wagner (1985) criticises the arbitrariness of criteria for judging the ‘success’ of an intentional community, from longevity (see, for example, Kanter 1973) to personal growth and any number of other variations. Wagner’s (1985, p.100) conclusion is that
scholars ‘should eschew the term “success” altogether in favor of more specific and informative substitutes’. Pitzer’s developmental approach sees intentional community building as a set of successive steps in a process of achieving collectively held goals. Seen through the lens of developmental communalism, communal living, or even intentional community building itself, can be seen as one of the elements of a movement or ideology (Pitzer 1989, p.73).

Each intentional community, no matter how long or short its duration, contributes to larger collective knowledge of how to begin, sustain and even let go of communal ideals as a mechanism for achieving group goals. Pitzer (1989) demonstrates this by applying his theory of developmental communalism to intentional communities. Pitzer’s (1989, p.74) primary aim was to direct scholarly attention towards seeing communal living as a ‘generic social mechanism available to peoples, governments and movements, past, present and future’. As such the insights gained through investigating communalism in intentional communities can be applied to, or build upon, insights from other arenas where communalism is evident or might be a useful tool. Communal living in Damanhur was, at the time of my fieldwork, understood as a key element that members used to achieve certain levels of spiritual enlightenment. Communal living was seen as a method for speeding up the process of human evolution. Communal living was also experimental and has changed in form over the years since the community was founded. How Damanhurians have developed their practice of communal living is discussed further in Chapter 4.
Damanhur's communalism stands out as rare among communities of a similar age, and in comparison to many of the intentional communities being developed today.\textsuperscript{27} Intentional communities that begin with or develop communal living will often move away from communal structures (Pitzer 1989; Lockyer 2007, p.79). Developmental communalism is an adaptive process that acknowledges that members of a community may continue on towards their goals in an 'altered, less communal form or perhaps it dissolves altogether and its goals and achievements take effect as part of broader social movements that the community itself has contributed to' (Lockyer 2007, p.79). While Damanhurians have adapted their conceptions of what communal living means and how it is practiced over time their primary style of living is still distinctly communal. While developmental communalism was originally tasked to finding 'success' among the 'unsuccessful'—finding new ways of assessing the trajectory and impact of a movement that used the social mechanism of communal living—the concept could also be applied to changing and maintaining practices of communal living.

One of the most obvious adaptations Damanhurians have made over the course of their forty-year history is transitioning from being a spiritual communal community to a spiritual communal ecovillage. Developmental communalism takes on new meaning when looking at the more secular ecovillage movement. Ecovillages are often the result of strategic planning through research into other communities prior to construction. Ecovillages have also developed during the Internet age, where research into previous intentional communities can be done easily and relatively quickly. Damanhur, while

\textsuperscript{27} Members of ecovillages often use cohousing models instead of communal living from the outset.
being an ecovillage, has had a more organic (ad-hoc and unplanned) approach to community building than some of the newer ecovillages built during the early 2000s. Damanhurians began building their community in the mid-1970s and have worked towards improved sustainability principles over time. Thus when considering how to describe Damanhur, it would be more accurate to think of it in terms of Lockyer's (2007) developmental utopianism (a concept adapted from developmental communalism). Developmental utopianism provides a frame, similar to developmental communalism, but where the element being developed or adapted is the utopian visions held by the community.

Pitzer's theory of developmental communalism is valuable to highlight that Damanhurs' longevity does not limit or enhance the value of what has worked to sustain their communal society. Lockyer's (2007) developmental utopianism is similarly valuable for analysing the evolution of a community or movement's ideology over time. Damanhurians insist that there is no one model for building and sustaining an intentional community, each group of intentional community builders will have to face and adapt to their own set of unique challenges. Acknowledging that the biggest challenges are those that are unpredictable has helped Damanhurians develop the approach they take to sustaining not only their communal living strategy, but also their entire community project. Developmental utopianism allows scholars to frame Damanhur’s ideological adaptability in a way that acknowledges the role it has played in the evolution of the community.
Cultural Critique

Another valuable theoretical framework that helps us to understand how intentional communities are situated within a larger social movement or society in general is Marcus and Fischer's (1986) concept of 'cultural critique'. Numerous scholars (Bouvard 1975; Brown 2002; Lockyer 2007; Metcalf 1995; Pitzer 1997) have noted that communitarian endeavours often peak during periods 'when people in mass society face difficulties in making the human connections necessary to sustain them' (Brown 2002, p.6). For the most part there is agreement that these small subcultures come out of and indicate dissatisfaction with mainstream society. Certainly, not just a single factor is responsible, but there is some general accord that alienation and the effects it exercises on social relations, as experienced by members of mass society, are factors that motivate some people to form intentional communities (see, for example, Brown 2002, p.5).

Brown's (2002) essay 'Community as Cultural Critique' applies Marcus and Fischer's (1986) articulation of cultural critique to the intentional community context. This anthropological analysis of intentional communities echoes the idea that intentional communities arise out of a critical dissatisfaction with the prevailing cultural forms of the societies in which they exist. Brown (2002) ties together concepts of cultural critique and Anthony F.C. Wallace's (1956) concept of revitalisation as arising in periods of cultural distortion, showing that cultural critique is inherent to the revitalisation process. Brown (2002) holds that revitalisation movements are essentially cultural critiques because, according to Wallace (1956, p.265, cited in Lockyer 2007, p.120), they are
unique kinds of cultural phenomena characterised by 'a deliberate, organised, conscious effort by members of a society to construct a more satisfying culture'.

Lockyer (2007, p.120) disagrees that identifying intentional communities as revitalisation movements is necessary in order to demonstrate that they constitute important forms of cultural critique. Brown's (2002) work provides some of the foundation for Joshua Lockyer's thesis (2007), *Sustainability and Utopianism: An Ethnography of Cultural Critique in Contemporary Intentional Communities*. Here the concept of intentional communities as cultural critique is investigated in more detail. Lockyer (2007, p.120) argues that a distinct problem arises when identifying intentional communities as revitalisation movements, particularly in the contemporary ecovillage context. Brown draws on Wallace's (1956) concept of revitalisation, arguing that revitalisation movements most often involve a prophet or charismatic leader. While many intentional communities have charismatic leaders, as is the case with Brown's example of Ananda Cooperative Village, many, particularly ecovillages, do not. Lockyer (2007, p.120) argues that it is in fact the very 'lack of charismatic leadership and a commitment to egalitarian governance that makes so many contemporary, sustainability-oriented intentional communities both intriguing and potentially emancipatory'.

It is a lack of charismatic leadership that is a root assumption underlying Lockyer's (2007, p.121) research question: 'Is cultural critique a main motivating factor in people's decisions to join intentional communities?' Damanhur did not originate as an ecovillage, but has developed into one due to its citizens' concerns about the need to be self-sufficient and nurture their nature-spirit connection (the communitas of nature, as
discussed below and further in chapter six) resulting in care for their local environment. Damanhur also began with a charismatic leader, something that distances it from Lockyer's conception of egalitarian ecovillages. Lockyer's question, however, draws attention to the complicating factors that inform the decisions of Damanhurians to join the community. A comparison between the decision-making processes of people joining Damanhur and those joining Lockyer's ecovillages would be valuable in understanding people's motivations, and, in particular, whether or not cultural critique is their primary motivating factor. During the course of fieldwork I discussed with participants some of their reasons for joining Damanhur, primarily to discover if participants were joining due to a concern for their natural environment. What I found was that, in many cases, an individual's initial motivation was a search for 'meaning'; meaning was found through deepening one's spiritual awareness. This search for meaning was fuelled by a critical perspective upon the 'outside' society as 'meaningless'. Clearly, Damanhurians are participating in practices of cultural critique.

Identifying intentional communities as forms of cultural critique helps us understand their larger potential. This approach supports the aim 'to understand the way in which people in state societies not only respond to change, but through those responses critique their own societies and sometimes change them' (Brown 2002, p.158). Investigating the way in which human beings define their place in the world and seek to create change according to the values that they employ to orient their lives 'centers attention on the tension between the real and the ideal and on utopian striving and intentional community building as attempts to confront this tension' (Lockyer 2007, p.121). I argue that the 'real' for Damanhurians is social structure, and the ideal is a
sustained or mature communitas, specifically a communitas of nature. Their approach has been to step outside their respective dominant social structures (into the limen) in order to create an alternative structure in service to communitas – a social structure that values and prioritises conditions conducive to communitas.

The Closed Valley (Valchiusella) - Pinpointing the field site

The Valchiusella is home to the two main Centres of Damanhur and is populated, along with Damanhurians, by traditional farmers, domestic Italian migrants and some international residents (both connected and unconnected to Damanhur). The traditional farmers in this region speak Piemontese—a regional dialect that even many Italians in the valley have difficulty understanding—while the international migrants usually spoke Italian as a second, third or even fourth language. Although located amidst the affluence of northern Italy, the Valchiusella has experienced more prosperous days. Surrounded on three sides by mountains, the valley is quite literally closed, as it does not provide access to any other destinations. Many non-Damanhurian local residents reported a
sense of isolation and reminisced about times when the area had a higher population and more employment.

Damanhurians spoke about a magical quality in the Valchiusella due to a confluence of energetic lines known by Damanhurians as synchronic lines. The synchronic lines are believed by Damanhurians to be vertical and horizontal lines that cross the globe in a loose grid pattern, often converging at sites of notable geographic formations (e.g. mountains, valleys and so on). They do not lie across the earth in the sense of longitude and latitude on a two-dimensional map, but exist in three-dimensional space, lying closer to the surface or even above land in some places and plunging deep into the earth in others. Damanhurian initiates are the only ones with an ability to detect the lines, and it was Falco (the founder of Damanhur) who discovered or rediscovered their existence, knowledge of which is believed to have been lost over time. How they are detected by Damanhurians is unknown to me (as a non-initiate). The Valchiusella lies at the confluence of four of these lines; it was for this reason, as they told me, that early Damanhurians chose to settle there.
The Synchronic lines are important to Damanhurians, as they are believed to transport thoughts, knowledge and dreams around our planet and into the universe (Meijerink 2003, p.155). The Valchiusella, while being a centre of synchronic energy (due to the convergence of synchronic lines), is also the topic of local Piedmont folk tales concerning magical beings and particular energetic properties unique to the area.

**Industrial innovation in the Valchiusella before Damanhur**

Damanhur was not the first visionary project to have been established in the Valchiusella. Prior to the arrival of Damanhurians the valley had at one point been a productive industrial region predominantly due to the efforts of Adriano Olivetti (1901-1960). Brilliant (1993, p.95) describes Olivetti as an industrialist, engineer, planner and social reformer. While his focus was on the region of the town in which he lived, Ivrea and the Canavese area, the 'ultimate object for change was Italian society and possibly even more' (Brilliant 1993, p.95). Olivetti's 'instrument to induce change was to be Comunità—the Community Movement—which would move from Ivrea to Rome' (Brilliant 1993, p.95). In his relations with his employees Olivetti, it has been argued, was 'extraordinarily enlightened' (Brilliant 1993, p.100). Between the years of 1945, until his death in 1960, Olivetti reduced work hours without reducing wages and passed profit increases on to his workers. In addition, Olivetti introduced what Brilliant (1993, p.100) describes as an 'expanding array of social services and cultural facilities'.

Olivetti envisioned a new political order with a federated structure based on what he saw as the essential building blocks of the community and the region. He believed the factory was critical to the unity of the community and that workers should have an
increased role in decision/policy making. Olivetti's new political order is described in detail in a 350-page manuscript he wrote in 1945 titled *L'Ordine Politico della Comunità.* Fundamentally, his interest lay in the socialisation of Italy, including culture and economy, but not in national control by the state, *Socializzare senza Statizzare* (Olivetti 1949, p.1, in Brilliant 1993, p.104). Olivetti began to develop community centres as a part of his Community Movement and by 1956-57, seventy-six centres spread out from Ivrea throughout Canavese and elsewhere, even Rome. The Community Movement was now a listed political party and Olivetti himself was elected mayor of Ivrea. However, during the late 1950s, the last years, of Olivetti's life, money was of increasing concern. Costs associated with the conversion of the Community Movement into a national party led to increasing debt and strain on the Olivetti family and company. In 1960 Adriano Olivetti died of heart failure, and so did the Community Movement with him.

Olivetti's idea of a community was inherently linked with industry or work. His vision was for employees to have increasing control over the companies in which they worked and that the factory was vital to community unity. Damanhur finds a link here in more than just location. Damanhur also finds community glue through members working together. Similar, also, is Olivetti's concept of:

A community, neither too large or too small, geographically well defined, armed with authority, which would provide in all its activities the indispensable co-operation, efficiency, respect for human personality, culture and art, that by choice been achieved in a past of a given region, in a single

In fact, one can see there are many similarities between Olivetti's conceptions of a new political order—based predominantly on a network of linked yet autonomous federated regions—and Damanhur, Federation of Communities. Damanhurians recognise this and pay tribute to Olivetti in the main foyer of the entrance to Crea, the entrepreneurial and industrial centre of their Federation. During the mid-1950s Olivetti helped support at least five community development projects, including a rural-industrial development project in the Canavese. All these projects were intended to revitalise communities from the grassroots up; in this case he brought the factory to the workers. The building in which Crea has been built was an abandoned Olivetti factory, a remainder of the Canavese rural-industrial development project.

Damanhur 1975 to the Present

Oberto Airaudi founded the intentional community Damanhur in Valchiusella with the help of twelve friends in 1975. Airaudi's personal history is clouded by the usual discrepancies typical of unauthorised biographies. Through several sources (Berzano 1998; Meijerink 2003; Merrifield 2006; Ananas & Pesco 2009), including the Damanhurian website, a brief glimpse can be gained into the short life of Oberto Airaudi prior to founding Damanhur. Oberto was born in 1950 in Balangero, near Turin, and at an early age is reported to have demonstrated unusual talent to heal, receive information psychically and to travel out of body. Oberto, at about the age of
ten, is said to have visualised Damanhur as a 'highly evolved community who [sic]

enjoyed a meaningful existence in which all the people worked for the common good'

(Ananas & Pesco 2009, p.5). The community of his visions was centred around 'amazing
temples'. Later, once he had married and had two children, Oberto started a centre for

esoteric research in Turin. Here he was able to meet like-minded people who could

relate to his interest in experimentation with parapsychology, esoterica (esoteric) and the

supernatural. Between 1975 and 1977 Oberto and his friends found a site in the

Valchiusella that was suitable to start construction of the Temples from his childhood
visions. An old house on a hillside was purchased and restored, and by 1979

Damanhurians were living in the Valchiusella.

The name, Damanhur, is drawn from the ancient Egyptian city of Damanhur. It is

understood by the Italian Damanhurians that the city in Egypt was dedicated to the god
Horus, and the name Damanhur (Dmi en Hor) translates as 'city of the god Hor'

(Horus). Damanhurians provide several more associated meanings for the term, though,

including that the name originates from ‘ancient Atlantean’, the presumed language of
the lost continent of Atlantis, and means 'city of light'. The Damanhurians of Italy also
discuss the ancient Egyptian Damanhur as an underground city and centre for learning,
and both elements can be seen in modern day Italian Damanhur. The original founders
of the Italian Damanhur also drew their spiritual inspiration from Egypt. There is
evidence of this original influence throughout Damanhur and in the Temples. I was told
of times when Falco and others would travel to Egypt in order to 'collectively reconnect
with memories from there'. Since an important element in Damanhurian spiritual
awareness is a form of past-life research, I assume this refers to memories of past lives.
There is a general understanding among Italian Damanhurians that the ancient Egyptian city of Damanhur was an inspiration for their modern project. Oberto Airaudi was named or named himself Falco (Falcon), which has a direct link to the god Horus (the falcon-headed god) after which the Egyptian Damanhur was named. While the early efforts of this intentional community were influenced by Egyptian religiosity, and although Egyptian-like statues and artwork remain, new cultural material has largely taken its place.

Starting with about a dozen people in 1975, Damanhur has grown to include nearly 600 full-time residents and thousands of associated members and friends. I concur with Meijerink (2003), who follows Cardano (1997), in distinguishing three phases in Damanhur's young history. During the first phase, 1975-1983, 'the Damanhurians formed their own identity by choosing a government, designing a flag, and shaping their living-space, while dedicating themselves to the construction of the Temple[s]' (Meijerink 2003, p.155). In 1983 the next phase began with the introduction of a new element to the governance structure known as the 'Game of Life'. Meijerink refers to the period, particularly during its first year, as akin to a cultural revolution. The community grew to number one hundred members that year. This period of renewal and expansion exposed the community to further challenges, particularly the challenge of incorporating new members with old.

It was one member, unhappy with the changes he was seeing, who almost single-handedly brought about the next phase of Damanhurian development. Up until this point in 1992 the Temples had been kept secret. Unfortunately, the unhappy member
did know about the Temples construction and so used this information to his advantage when trying to sue Damanhur once he had left the community. Once the authorities became aware of the Temples, they came en masse to inspect and close it down, threatening its destruction. What followed was a true opening up of Damanhur to the world. Due to the threat to their most precious project and achievement, Damanhurians realised they had to appeal to a much larger audience for support. Through an extensive publicity campaign they were able to gain enough worldwide support and recognition that seemed to have facilitated permission to continue their work. The Temples and Damanhur were now well known in artistic and alternative/new age circles, leading to a significant increase in visitors and tourists to the Valchiusella.

Meijerink identifies the years following 1992 as the beginning of the third phase in Damanhur's development. Members slowly developed facilities to receive the thousands of visitors and developed outreach programs and centres in other areas of Italy and the world. During Meijerink's fieldwork in Damanhur in the late 1990s, she saw efforts to integrate into the local Valchiusella community, a community that had been hostile to Damanhurians due to a sense of invasion. Ongoing efforts were not as evident during my fieldwork, although they did hold a weekly public market and the Mayor of Vidracco was a Damanhurian.

While many locals were neutral on the subject of Damanhur, shopping at the Federation’s store or receiving healing treatment from Damanhurians, there were many residents still hostile to Damanhur's presence, particularly politically. Among residents in the local area there was a perspective that Damanhurians moved from nucleo to
nucleo in line with *comuni* elections. The purpose of such movement would be to group votes in accordance with ideological preferences. Allegations had escalated to the point that some locals were accusing the Damanhurian community of trying to 'take over' the valley, although there was no consensus as to why. Certainly it is likely that the high number of Damanhurians in Vidracco contributed to the election of a Mayor who was also a citizen of Damanhur. From my perspective the situation was less malicious and more a natural result of a community with a large resident membership. Damanhurians move very frequently because it is a part of their structural norm, but it is unlikely that they move enough people at one time in order to rig elections. Such a movement would be a significant drain on resources, particularly time. It is likely that Damanhurians do vote in common; there would be general advice given as to which representative might best serve the community's interests. This could, of course, have less than desirable consequences for the local population if the community's interests do not align with their own. I have seen action like this before when I lived in an intentional community in Chidlow, Western Australia. The local election for that area occurred during a stage in the development of the community where council approval was required to move forward. As such, it was suggested to community members who lived in the local area that they vote for the most sympathetic council member.

According to figures from 1996 the educational level of the Damanhurians was above the regional and national average (Berzano 1998, p.21). Based on 1996 data the average age of members was 35, and was predominantly of Christian background (Meijerink 2003, p.156). At the time of Meijerink's fieldwork there were approximately 500 members, of which 97 per cent were Italian. Despite no longer being in the field I still
remain in contact with Damanhurians and they have been able to provide me with some recent demographic data. These data indicate that some fairly significant demographic changes have also occurred since figures cited from 1996. There has been an increase in numbers of Damanhurians from outside of Italy; whereas in 1996, 97 per cent were Italian, in August 2013 there are reported to be only 83 per cent Italians. The average age of the population has increased from 35 in 1996 to 42 for males and 44 for females in 2013. Of the Damanhurian population, 63 per cent are between 30 and 54 years old, only 2 per cent are between 19 and 29, while more than 34 per cent are over 55.\footnote{These data come from Damanhurian sources and not my own records. I presume the missing 1 per cent here is due to a rounding error.} The community has continued to grow and fourth and fifth phases of development can now be argued.

During 2001 a new element was introduced to the Damanhurian governance structure, initiating a new phase. Named 'Tecnarcato', this fourth element was to institutionalise the process of self-improvement, focusing on the individual. The introduction of the Tecnarcato occurred in alignment with a renewal of the constitution during that same year. Damanhur was now a community with a complex governance structure comprising four pillars and a well-established system for electing leaders at various levels—household, region and community-wide. The fifth possible phase of Damanhur's development was in formation at the time of writing. During 2013 Alberto Airaudi died of terminal cancer. Although he had been out of formal office for quite some time, Airaudi had maintained a constant presence among community members and often was the instigator of new ideas and changes in community direction. As my fieldwork was
completed prior to 2013, I have not seen the changes that will have started to occur since his passing.

Damanhur Today

The essential element of Damanhur that aids its members’ receptivity to communitas—and makes it almost impossible to accurately describe in such a static medium as the written word—is its adaptability. A social structure that incorporates communitas also accepts constant changes. Such an approach means that static descriptions of their current structure would impede the approach they aim to maintain. This is why their focus is directed towards more subtle forms of expression mostly approached in a creative way through artistic demonstrations in the form of dance, sculpture, painting and fictional writing. Theoretical debates and writing are common, but there is no handbook that says that 'this' is what Damanhur is and 'this' is what they believe—all aspects are seemingly open to challenge, and seem to be challenged regularly by participants in the community, evidence of which is provided throughout this thesis.29

Although their shifting approach to a community structure is difficult to pin down—meaning that Damanhurians themselves have indicated conflicting understandings of the current status quo—there are some elements that warrant explanation. The descriptions below are by no means a complete understanding of the community

---

29 Since I left Damanhur they have developed their website and blog, which includes descriptions and explanatory stories about Damanhurian governance and values. The 'changeability' of an online medium is perhaps better suited to their approach.
structure at that time. Indeed, my inability to obtain a clear picture of exactly how all elements of the community worked aided the insights I achieved into the importance of ambiguity (a quality of liminality) as an element that leaves more room for change.

There are four of what Damanhurians refer to as structural pillars that provide a foundation for their governance structure. Each pillar is associated with a particular aspect of the community. They are referred to as: La Scuola di Meditazione (The School of Meditation), La Vita Sociale (Social Life), Il Gioco della Vita (The Game of Life) and Tecnarcato. These represent (in order): the spiritual, and ritual traditions; the daily social (and political) practice; play, or the dynamic aspect in everything; and self improvement, refinement, or evolution of the individual. Meijerink (2003) notes how social life in the Damanhurian community is very democratic and changeable, relying on a fine balance between the four pillars 'that maintain equilibrium between (individual) spirituality and active social involvement, with the constant possibility of adjustment' (Meijerink 2003, pp.156-7).

As individuals go through the processes of becoming Damanhurian citizens, they will also go through processes that allow their involvement in each of the four bodies. Usually, most citizens have joined and are active participants in the School of Meditation (spiritual pillar) by the time they become full citizens. Participation in the Social Life is a natural by-product of active involvement within the community. The Game of Life and Tecnarcato (the pillar relating to the self) are, for the most part, 30 The Italian term used is *corpi*, which translates as 'bodies'. However, when writing in English Damanhurians use the term 'pillars'.

---

30 The Italian term used is *corpi*, which translates as 'bodies'. However, when writing in English Damanhurians use the term 'pillars'.

73
voluntary elements of citizenship. Damanhur citizens of different kinds and initiates in
the School of Meditation may participate in the Game of Life. The Tecnarcato requires
that persons have A citizen status, or are in a trial period to become A citizens, before
they participate. In this chapter I focus on describing the Social Pillar, as it is through
participation in the social life of Damanhur that many of the elements of the community
reveal themselves. The remaining three pillars are discussed in later chapters.

La Vita Sociale (Social Pillar)

The Social Pillar relates to the extent to which a Damanhurian citizen engages with and
within the community. This is mainly to do with social gatherings, meals, Serata
(evenings with the Founder), and so on. There is an element of surveillance of
participation; formal and informal mechanisms monitor the involvement of citizens
within the community. At some events there is a register of attendees, at others absences
are noted through informal talk. Because this community is based on spiritual growth
and a means to obtain that growth is through living communally, then it is through
participation in that community that growth will happen. It is also an important factor
of community solidarity that members participate fully. It is only by showing up that
things get done, and it is only by sharing and spending time with others that community
is formed.

I was able to attend many of the social events, meetings, festivals and rituals in which I
participated actively or observed. Many community-wide events were simultaneously
translated into many different languages, including English, so no matter the language
of the speaker I could gain access to translation. There were biweekly or weekly
meetings with the founder of Damanhur, Falco. Falco would sit up at the front of the conference hall (or appear via Skype if he was away) and be asked questions by Damanhurians (and occasionally guests, although I never asked a question in this public setting). During the warmer months, there were also weekly-organised gatherings that allowed guests to meet with Falco. This allowed for visitors to Damanhur to ask questions of the founder in a more informal and comfortable setting. I asked some questions in these meetings over the course of 12 months, but mostly listened and observed the exchange between Falco, the guests, the translators and other Damanhurians assisting in the management of these small-scale events. Social life, for the most part, seemed to revolve around the many rituals performed by Damanhurians. However, there were also community-wide concerts, birthday celebrations (e.g. Falco’s birthday), markets, conferences, theatre productions and multitudes of smaller-scale events in nucleos or regions (more than one nucleo) held spontaneously or as an organised celebration. I attended as many events as were available to me.

Citizenship types

Within Damanhur there are also levels of membership. One’s commitment can be identified through the level of citizenship that person has chosen. ‘Citizen A’ was the highest level of commitment possible at the time of my fieldwork. Citizen As all live full-time in the community and usually participate in the four community pillars (certainly, the School of Meditation), contribute the full amount of community and devotional hours, and are completely financially integrated—they contribute the majority of their income to the community and have given up personal ownership outside some personal
items (e.g. bedroom furniture, toiletries, car). Following the category of Citizen A, there are B, C and D citizens, all with different levels of expectations and involvement required. The first element that is different is residency: B citizens may not live in a nucleo (or only live in one part-time), but otherwise participate in all other aspects of the community similar to that of an A citizen. C citizens generally do not live in a nucleo and are less involved than B citizens, while D citizens are the least involved and may only visit the community several times a year. An individual's level of citizenship delineates where they live, how much they contribute financially, and how many hours of work they dedicate to the community, along with how much they are involved in the inner workings of the community and their inclusion in specifically community-oriented events. The nature of involvement at each level of citizenship can vary depending on the individual and the commitments they are willing to make.

**Communal living in Nucleos**

Rather than being a single contained community, the Federation of Damanhur is more like a collection of homes or smaller communities scattered around the valley. The reason for the layout of the community is mostly due to a limited ability to purchase large pieces of land in this part of Italy. The land in the Valchiusella is made up of multiple titles and some have been held by single families for generations. When trying to purchase land (often having to purchase several pieces and then combining them under a single title), a person may have to track down the family that owns each title of interest, which can be quite difficult considering the wide distribution of owners. Slowly, in this way Damanhurians have managed to acquire larger pieces of land for their
communities. However, it has meant that the distribution of land has been necessarily haphazard and perhaps not ideal. At the time of fieldwork, each home or sub-community consists of between ten to thirty adults and children.\textsuperscript{31} The smaller sub-communities making up the Federation are singularly known as a nucleo or nucleo \textit{communitá}. 'Nucleo' in English translates as core, nucleus or unit/group/team, although I think it is more accurate to describe the 'nucleo' in Damanhur as a kind of (extended) family. A nucleo \textit{communitá} is a more established, or more mature version of a nucleo.

It was through my connections within my primary nucleo that I was then able to meet a wider variety of Damanhurians from other nucleos. Members of my primary nucleo would introduce me to others by inviting me to engage in activities with them. It was also through members of the locus of the 'nucleo' as an important structural component of the larger Federation that I was able to engage with, observe or at least glimpse the many other structural components that make up the larger community of Damanhur. As each member of my nucleo were themselves completely immersed, in a variety of different ways, with different groups, clubs, occupations and events I was able to speak to each person about their unique perspectives and to see how individuals each engaged with the larger community.

Each nucleo is contributing towards the larger Federation goal of self-sufficiency: self-sufficient for the provision of as many human needs as possible, including, but not limited to, food, power, water, shelter, and income. There is an emphasis on the autonomy of the nucleos; each nucleo needs to attend to its own needs for achieving self-

\textsuperscript{31} During 2009-10 there were approximately twenty-five sub-communities.
sufficiency as much as possible, but this aspect is balanced with what each nucleo is currently capable of achieving. Aspects like vegetable and herb gardens are standard and photovoltaic cells and sustainable water sources are also common. All nucleos recycle, although the extent to which they can do this depends on the Italian State’s provisions for recycling, and compost organic waste. Kitchens regularly have containers that separate metal, plastic, paper, general rubbish, compost and pig food. If they could not provide their own food, then most of the households' produce is bought from the Damanhur food store (Tentaty). This is an organic food store that sells fresh and dry produce grown by the Damanhurian agricultural nucleo, excesses from other nucleos or sourced from other organic suppliers. The nucleo in which I spent considerable time made its own vinegar and provided some home-grown vegetables to Tentaty to be sold to other nucleos and the surrounding local community.

At the time of my fieldwork Damanhurians were experimenting with a distinction between, what they termed, nucleo 'function' and nucleo 'activity'. Citizens would refer to the common focus of their nucleo as its function and the economic endeavour as its activity. The objective was to increase the importance of the nucleos, having them assume precise responsibilities for the Federation, and to enable citizens to move between community life and work life with more ease. A function might be, for example, to develop (research and experiment with) new sustainable technology or to communicate with other communities internationally. An activity could be managing an oven for baking bread or a cafe—an enterprise that generates income. The idea behind this experimentation was to offer work and income to some members of the nucleo—as well as people from other nucleos—allowing citizens to stay within the community for
more extended time periods. The overarching aim was one of conciliating personal employment needs with group objectives, so they would not need to find work in further away places like Castellamonte, Ivrea, Torino or other cities.

Since I left the field in 2010 the experimentation with nucleo activity and function has been transformed. It has evolved that some nucleos operate businesses (activities)—for example, a Bed and Breakfast or a restaurant—while others have kept on developing more informal, cooperative, projects. The reasons explicated by Damanhurians for the changes were that ‘the nucleo activities were problematic for both the activities and the nucleos, because the activities were tied to the needs of individuals, while the nucleos found that all their energies were absorbed by the activities, which often did not have anything to do with the nucleo function’ (pers.comm n.d.). The changes were made after ‘the heads of the nucleos had a long discussion’ the conclusions of which were shared with the regional Captains (who head regions consisting of more than one nucleo – see below), who then consulted with the King Guides (the elected leaders of the Federation). The King Guides then ‘sanctioned the end of nucleo businesses as a characteristic of every nucleo’ (pers.comm. n.d.).

Most of the business and formal activities undertaken by Damanhurians now take place in the main business centres of Crea or Damjl. Informal projects in nucleos include activities more like bartering—for example, speciality items like figs or hazelnuts—at the community marketplace. However, this is informal community trade and not licensed food distribution and is unlikely to become so due to a number of factors: manpower, seasonal variation, quantity etc. Damanhurians can and do choose to do volunteer work
in service to these 'businesses' too. For example, the agricultural nucleo has formalised its farming activity as a business and so members of that nucleo can contribute to the nucleo by volunteering to work on the farm. Some nucleos have subsequently decided to start formal businesses—particularly nucleos whose function included hospitality—suitable to their lands and their resources.

The instances where an activity blurred with the nucleo function have led to a new attempt at grouping nucleos based on regions and projects. The Temples of Humankind are an example of this, as there are several nucleos and businesses that are involved in Temples' activity. The Temples are managed by what Damanhurians termed a ‘cultural association’, which oversees a variety of tasks delegated to Damanhurian businesses (for example, Temples maintenance or tours), generating income. The Temples also require constant management and an efficient level of communication in order to provide the diverse range of services they do—the most important being access for ritual and private prayer or meditation for Damanhurians. Each of the nucleos associated to a particular project, for example the the nucleos that service the Temples of Humankind or the Sacred Woods Temple, elect a coordinator known as the regional Capitano (Captain).

**Serata con Falco – Evening with the Founder**

*Serata con Falco* for the whole community occurred on Wednesday and Thursday evenings (although part way through my stay guests were no longer invited to the Serata on a Wednesday). Wednesday's Serata were generally concerned with more practical communal living concepts, and Thursdays were for discussions around current spiritual research, conducted in Damanhur or from other sources, but mostly that being done by
Damanhurians themselves. For the most part discussion concerned spiritual physics, a topic to whose fuller explanation I did not have access due to the cost of courses or the esoteric nature of the investigations. Despite translation, the questions and answers were often hard to follow or out of context for those not immersed in Damanhur, and on Thursdays this was accentuated. Questions from Damanhurians were often based on current research, research that was built on over the years since Damanhur began; there was no background given or context in which to understand the concepts being discussed.

Over the course of the year I was able to grasp more of the content, particularly on the Wednesday evening, but right up until I left Damanhur I struggled. Some research was restricted or reserved for Damanhurians only and so even ongoing interest on my part was not enough to learn all the details. In late 2009 one of the evening Serata became closed to non-citizens, unfortunately for me it was the Wednesday. A note from my field diary demonstrates how this change was beneficial to the community:

I’ve asked two people about this new Serata style (closed to non-citizens), and they both find it much more interesting. I am told that a lot more people attend, and it is more comfortable. There have also been changes in Thursday’s Serata. The heads of the Game of Life have asked everyone to come up with a key question for Damanhur. Then the people get randomly called on to prepare their question for the next Serata. This has made the question asking more dynamic and people are called to ask questions in Serata that would not normally do so. Oceano’s question was: Why is it so that people find it so difficult to match ideals with action? (Field Diary 2009)
Despite this hurdle, Serata was a weekly occurrence for me and often presented insights and new ideas as Damanhurians raised possibilities with their spiritual guide and founder. Sometimes concepts discussed during Serata were soon evident in the community, although, on other occasions Falco would lament that he was not being listened to.

Serata was not only a valuable place for information, but was also an opportunity to meet others, have an *aperitivo* with friends beforehand or dinner with others later. Damanhurians made use of the Jungian term synchronicity, although without reference to him, for those moments when one would meet the exact person one needed coincidentally. These meaningful coincidences were said to occur frequently in the Valchiusella due to the convergence of the four Synchronic lines. Serata was an occasion where people would ‘synchronistically’ meet up with those they needed to see, and plans and appointments were made. More than once I was able to book interviews with interested participants, as they would often wait to see me in person in order to make an appointment rather than contacting me through other means. It was a social opportunity as much as anything else and was organised weekly without fail—only once it had to be cancelled due to technical difficulties—throughout the entirety of my stay. Many citizens regularly attended, although certainly not all. While there were some fixed faces, for the most part the mix of individuals present changed with each session.

---

32 This kind of meeting meant more than a coincidence, closer to an idea of fate.
Serata was also the main environment where interaction with Falco would occur, outside of meetings for the School of Meditation where I was not permitted. Serata is an opportunity for social engagement, a place where spiritual research discussion takes place, new ideas would come up and prompt spontaneous action or excited discussion for weeks to come. Falco was seen as a repository of almost unending knowledge to which people could get access if they asked the right question, in the right way, at the right time.

There was also a Serata made available exclusively for guests to ask questions on a Friday evening. When Falco was away on *viaggio* or if there were too few guests, these Serata did not continue. For example, during the winter months these sessions were cancelled. It became increasingly difficult to know if it was going to be held or not the longer I stayed, as I was no longer seen as a 'guest'. Towards the end of fieldwork I missed more of these guest Serata than I attended. While these sessions were valuable for hearing more basic explanations of some Damanhurian concepts, the questions could become repetitive over the course of weeks, although sometimes a new question would be asked and some interesting information would emerge.

**Damanhurians are different**

Even without all the extra characteristics unique to Damanhurians, an individual living in this way can be identified as living quite differently from other Italians in the valley. For associated with these living arrangements are many 'scheduled' responsibilities not

---

33 The citizens’ Serata did continue, via Skype.
included in the average person's weekly commitments. This means that it is much harder to find a Damanhurian with spare time available. It is necessary to 'book' with them in advance so that they can make time available in their busy schedules. This can make it difficult for those who do not live the Damanhurian lifestyle to understand why it is that a Damanhurian never has any time available. It is also challenging for Damanhurians themselves to form strong friendships outside of the community, both because of this lack of understanding concerning their life choices and because the time and desire to network outside the community are limited. This could be seen as a way of maintaining social boundaries (Kanter 1972), similar to the physical boundaries discussed in the following section.

For Damanhurians, their social priorities, above their own family of origin, lie with the nucleo family and the community. For a Damanhurian trying to make enough time to meet all their commitments, it is essential to become expert at time management. Once something is scheduled, trying to change just one aspect of a Damanhurian's day will necessarily also involve many others who have also scheduled time with that individual. Due to the number of different factors playing a role in any individual Damanhurian's day there may be multiple reasons that require schedules to change. As a result Damanhurians become expert negotiators. Damanhurians are used to negotiation and re-negotiation, and are often themselves the cause of the reshuffle. When dealing with a Damanhurian, an 'outsider' has to negotiate this environment with little knowledge of all the factors involved and, therefore, can have little understanding and tolerance for the constant changes to their own plans. This shared understanding among Damanhurians
of their own particular circumstances is another context in which they become united together and separated from others.

**Physical boundaries**

Along with the symbolic boundaries created by Damanhurians and those who live near them, there are also physically constructed barriers between Damanhurian territory and non-Damanhurian territory. This is unusual for the Valchiusella, as outside of the townships, land is not normally fenced. The impact that these fences have in terms of marking Damanhurian territory is exemplified in one man's (non-Damanhurian) comment to me that one can always tell when they have reached Damanhurian land, because it is marked in some way, by a fence or stones.

![Photo 1 – Stone spiral in woods](image)

This is not true of all Damanhurian land, but it would be true of most of it, particularly land that has been owned for a long period of time or is considered sacred. Because citizens spend a lot of time clearing and caring for the land, even in unmarked and
unfenced land, there are signs that one has entered Damanhurian territory. In the valley most land is overrun by blackberries and other weeds. Damanhurian territory has often been cleared of most of these weeds and allowed to grow in a more native state. So, one will find a very different environment if entering Damanhurian territory.

Photo 2 – Gate with sacred language symbols

Not only is the mere presence of a fence an indication that one has reached Damanhurian territory, there is also often a particular design in the fencing that indicates without a doubt its Damanhurian origins. Damanhur has created a language that they call the 'sacred language' and the symbols of this language can be found almost everywhere in Damanhur. All the Damanhurian gates have a sacred symbol incorporated into the design, and their buildings will often have sacred symbols visible somewhere on their outer surface.

One of the reasons for such fencing and boundary marking is because of the Damanhurian belief in the energetic integrity of a territory. Damanhurians work to
cleanse their land not only physically of weeds and debris, but also on an energetic level. They clear the spaces and then fence them so that the energetic integrity of the space can be maintained and in their control. Simply smoking on Damanhurian land is considered to be able to cause a hole in the energetic bubble created around the land. Inscribed fences are understood to protect the territory and Damanhurians themselves from any negative energetic intrusion. Ucello, an A citizen of more than 5 years, explained Damanhurian sacred space and energetic containment in this way:

A practical level is order and cleanliness. The more orderly and clean lands and houses are, the more synchronicity, positive energies and events can flow. (You may have noticed there is particular attention to this aspect at Solstice and Equinox times, in preparation for the great rituals.)

Also, we pay attention to the kinds of thinking and words expressed in sacred spaces. Our intention is to bring forth the best of ourselves in terms of language, thoughts, and communication with others. In this way, a sacred space increases in energy ever more. A sacred space is something that becomes more and more sacred every day, not just a level of quality that is permanently reached and unchanging.

In the Sacred Woods, trees are selectively cut to maintain a healthy tree density (too many clustered together can cause issues or death for trees).

Fencing in an area helps to define and create a container for the land.

We have a ritual for purification for our indoor spaces that is periodically repeated, and this clears and neutralizes past energies in a space that may not be harmonious.

Many of our lands, like Damjl, have altars to the elements. Building Temples, altars, spirals and labyrinths increase the sacred energies.

We have our policy of no smoking not even outdoors, which maintains a certain energy.

In the Sacred Woods Temple, we have done a ritual with the trees to bring them into a particular spiritual frequency (pers.comm 2012).
There was a sense of order to Damanhurian spaces, whereas other areas had more of a wild, untamed quality. The differences were not due to human presence as there was evidence of habitation throughout the valley. Rather, it was related to the kind of presence. Damanhurians were active on their lands and paid attention to all the various aspects described in Ucello’s account above. Otherwise one might run into ruins or abandoned properties and even the inhabited residences were distinctly different in land use. Damanhurians practice their spiritual discipline in all aspects of their lives. Karen Litfin’s (2013) notion of consciousness is aptly applied here as Damanhurians attempt consciousness of thought and action.

Other territories also have added security measures. Not only is the main Damanhur centre, Damjl, surrounded by a high fence and electronic gate, there was also a small house, functioning like a guard house, at the entry way, so that all traffic into the centre is monitored by whomever is on duty. This serves as an added form of protection, but also ensures that those who enter, if unknown to the person on duty, have a legitimate reason for entry and know the rules of entry onto Damanhurian territory, for example, no smoking, knowledge of reserved territory, and a reason for being there. During the night Damjl is also patrolled by citizens who guard the territory both physically and in terms of the 'energetic' level.
Conclusion

The Valchiusella has a long history, resulting in a diverse mix of lifestyles in the rugged subalpine environment of the Canavese. The recent history of tolerance in the Piedmont for religious minorities has made it fertile ground for new religious movements and other countercultural activities. While the arrivals of Adriano Olivetti and Oberto Airaudi in the Valchiusella were unrelated, it is safe to say that Damanhurians have found some inspiration in the efforts of Olivetti to bring about political and labour reform across Italy. Damanhurians do not identify as a religion or a movement and do not wish to be so identified by others. They wish to inspire others to live in ways that bring them closer to nature and their divine origins, but seem open to how others might achieve that. Their openness to alternative pathways is apparent in the diverse options they provide to citizens of Damanhur. Each facet of their involvement is open to interpretation and experimentation. The trajectory of their community building has been necessarily influenced by outside factors including, disaffected members. These are common challenges faced by intentional communities and, as Damanhurians are discovering, something that needs to be managed.

In this chapter I have shown that Damanhurians not only operate with an alternative social structure, but that their physical surroundings reflect their alternative ideas. Damanhurians are trying to be different; they are trying to occupy the spaces between or on the margin of dominant societal norms. The result is a way of life that is distinctly liminal, an alternative world that, as I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, provides fertile ground for aspirations of communitas. To the external observer the community
has an appearance of sustained or ongoing liminality, but from the perspective of the insider the aspects that make the community appear liminal are normalised. In subsequent chapters I demonstrate how citizens of Damanhur move from being new, liminal people, to established citizens who deal with everyday issues like dishes or too many leftovers.
CHAPTER 3
Socialisation

Introduction

An alternative lifestyle group, as exemplified by an intentional community, requires in many cases a continual input of new members to allow for growth, keep ideas fresh, expand the community's future goals and fill gaps left when members leave for such reasons as: old age, disaffection, illness\textsuperscript{34} (Metcalf 1986). New members can come from recruitment, as is mostly the case in Damanhur, or from procreation by present members. Although I gathered no data on procreation among Damanhurians, it was my understanding that while some children did join the community once adult, it was not the majority. Damanhur is also seeking demographic growth, not simply to fill gaps when members leave, as it is through their membership that they see the realisation of their goals, among which is collective spiritual research for a more just and sustainable world. However, while new members are needed, there is a delicate balance between the benefits of gaining new members and the potential for disruption. New members must not hamper the survival of the group as a whole. Individuals want to join, but may have convictions and behaviours at odds with those of the group. Metcalf (1986, p.249) describes socialisation as "the mechanism by which these differences are resolved in a

\textsuperscript{34} There are exceptions in the case of well-established communities, including, among others the Hutterites, Amish, Amana Society, Harmony Society, and Icaria.
complex process of implicit negotiation'. Metcalf (1986, p.249) also characterises
socialisation as a process 'whereby compromises can be reached which allow potentially
disruptive individuals, as new members, to be integrated into the group, without
disrupting the group's ongoing behaviour or its arcane ideology'. Damanhurians
recognise the importance of the socialisation process. While not calling it 'socialisation',
they understand that there is a period of negotiation and compromise necessary when
incorporating new people (and their new ideas) into the established order. Their set-up
is such that anyone wanting to gain a better understanding of the community must go
through a certain level of the socialisation process. As a researcher I had to negotiate
some of the barriers in place in order to spend significant time with Damanhurians. In
this chapter I discuss my own process of socialisation and how my experiences ran
parallel, to some extent, to those in the process of joining the community.

By seeking to be involved in the community as a researcher, I was also taking some of
the same steps new members take towards becoming Damanhurian. While I did not fit
the structures in place for new Damanhurians (I was not committing for a long period),
there were aspects of how to be Damanhurian I had to learn in order to participate with
community members. In other words, it was only through my methodology of
participation that I was able to come to a more complete understanding of the
Damanhurian socialisation process. While this community does have a probationary
joining period and elements of formal teaching that could have been relayed through
interviews or surveys, it would have missed the most important elements of what it
means to be Damanhurian. We were all learning not only how to operate as communal
citizens, but also how to think and feel communally as well. In order to think and feel
communally, I had to act communally, which in this case meant actively contributing/participating in their lives.

Socialising the researcher

The process of establishing myself among the communities of the Federation happened in a way similar to that of any person interested in Damanhur. An initial and general interest would often turn into a desire to get involved in the project of Damanhur and from there could lead to a desire to become a citizen. I wanted to get to know the community like a citizen without actually becoming a citizen and so faced hurdles associated with trying to become a part of a community that did not seem to take seriously anyone who had not committed to citizenship.

Such an attitude, I was to find, was just like that directed towards the visitor who indicated an interest in taking part in the community. These visitors often suggested that they could contribute in some way or start a project that involved Damanhur. Damanhurians paid only cursory attention to such statements of future intent. Although I had stated that my intent was to spend a year immersing myself in the daily life of their community, Damanhurians were not going to give any of their time and energy towards my research without first seeing my intentions play out in a tangible and visible way.

What I was to learn over the course of fieldwork was that Damanhurians were protecting themselves from those who would take advantage of the culture of voluntarism and reciprocity that they had built. The philosophy was that action was the

35 Hundreds if not thousands of people visited Damanhur every year according to what Damanhurian told me and what they declared on their website.
only medium that conveyed true intent; words were nice, but essentially useless without actions to back them up.

For the first five weeks, my husband, Jonathan, and I were inserted into a visiting/working/guest role and were able to stay on Damanhurian land, although separate from the main dwelling. We were able to work in exchange for our accommodation and food. Other than being given jobs to complete, we were left to our own devices. Because all our work was outside, separate from the main dwelling and those who lived there, our opportunities for interaction with nucleo residents were limited.36 We only had opportunities to socialise over the dining table or during the occasional car rides to and from our residence and the main Damanhurian centres. These circumstances left us feeling isolated, feelings that were unexpected, as my prior experiences with intentional communities had been one of integration and inclusivity. Later, when I was able to reflect on this, I realised that this feeling of isolation should not have come as a surprise. My experiences of intentional community groups in Australia were from the perspective of an insider. However, I had been told that new people could often feel excluded by the familiarity experienced among established members. In the case of Damanhur, however, the feeling of exclusion was accentuated due to the high volume of new and international visitors they received; we were two of many, and they were limited in the amount of time they had available for us.

36 Over the course of my stay the approach taken with visitors in this nucleo changed, so that they were being asked to do work that could make them feel more included, often inside the house.
I was naturally drawn, in these early days, towards people who were also experiencing Damanhur and Italy for the first time. I found a shared sense of camaraderie among those whose experiences and frustrations mirrored my own. The first people who fit these criteria were visitors who were guests on the same land where Jonathan and I were staying. We were the 'experienced' ones in this setting, and it was interesting to note our own early frustrations reflected in their recounted experiences. They felt similarly isolated from the community about which they had come to learn.

Guests were sceptical about the amount of money charged to do almost anything they wanted that did not involve working. A tour of the Temples cost €66, attending an evening-with-the-founder cost €10, workshops and courses cost anywhere from €60 to €500, and so on. There was a sense among the guests and between Jonathan and myself that what was expected from us in the form of physical labour and what was returned did not seem commensurate. We felt taken advantage of. Such feelings of frustration and being 'used' were to last until I was able to understand the thought process behind the Damanhurian treatment of guests and why everything 'cost' something. Over time, as I increased my participation in the community, I noted my attitude shift. While guests still complained to me about similar issues again and again, I no longer felt the same way. Towards the end of my fieldwork I would distance myself from guests, at certain times, because of fatigue with answering hundreds of similar questions.

It was during my first few weeks of fieldwork that I started to develop the proactive approach required to achieve my research goals. It seemed to me that learning to 'get things done' was a process that anyone who wanted to join the community and stay for
any great length of time would need to go through. Out of necessity I sought out a community member who could help us find an apartment in the town of Vidracco, which was also the site for one of the two Damanhurian centres. This process brought Jonathan and me into direct involvement with not only Damanhurian time frames, but also the complexity of Italian bureaucracy. I quickly realised, and was also helpfully told (usually by a Damanhurian), that we were unlikely to get much done if we were not 'pushy'. That is, we needed to ring people several times or, better yet, go to them in person and assert our agenda. Such advice proved useful. Eventually, after many hurdles and several months, we found an apartment, bought furniture, and connected a telephone. These initial obstacles of settling were valuable, as it was also during this time that I realised I was not being proactive enough in order to achieve my own goals as a researcher. Damanhurians were reasonably supportive of my presence, but didn't know how to involve me any further. If I wanted to increase my immersion with this community, I had to take charge of my own involvement and insert myself in a way that would provide tangible benefits to them. During these early experiences I also found that my own trajectory was reflected by a group of hopeful Damanhurians, also known as 'new citizens'.

Socialising New Citizens

New citizens were a collection of people who had all been through the guest phase and/or had done a number of courses and workshops on the philosophy of
Damanhur—from 'Past Lives Research' to 'How to Build a Successful Community'.37

The new citizens' knowledge of Damanhur was similar to mine and we were all adjusting to the Damanhurian lifestyle and philosophies. I found that those of us in the process of joining Damanhur needed to find ways to contribute that suited our capacities and that were also valuable to the community. New citizens, like me, needed to be seen as contributing, which in turn demonstrated a commitment to Damanhur. This process was Damanhurian socialisation in action; we were learning by doing.

There were a variety of opportunities for a new citizen to contribute. From my own experience, demonstrating one's usefulness in a number of different ways was the most beneficial for building a reputation as communitarian. Physical labour was particularly valued, as it was the way a lot of the 'older' (longer citizenship) community members initially contributed. This type of labour enables new citizens to prove they are worthy by doing what we did which, during the early formation of the community, was predominantly the very strenuous manual labour of digging the underground Temples that are now a focal point of Damanhurian spiritual expression. It was while building the Temples that many of the attitudes about work formed among the established citizens; this has influenced the ongoing practice of contributing to the community through voluntary manual labour. Many of the new citizens with whom I spoke all participated in regular volunteer work in the Temples, as there is still much to be done.

37 Each course is focused on the topic for which they are named and involve a practical two to five day workshop. For the sessions that I attended there were about ten to twelve other people (non Damanhurian guests) and involved learning theory around each topic as well as participating in practical exercises designed to facilitate group bonding or self awareness.
The portion of underground Temples that are considered complete are estimated to be only 10 per cent of what Damanhurians dream to achieve.

The goal of continuing the expansion of the Temples serves as a motivator for new citizens; they can contribute, as much as older citizens have, to the future of Damanhur. There is enough for everyone, including the very new, to contribute. The availability of multiple opportunities to visibly participate in community activities allows room for most people to find a way to contribute that is best suited to them and, therefore, move towards acceptance. So while it is difficult to assure Damanhurians that you are committed to the cause using words, it is very easy to start demonstrating your commitment through action. Below is an example of a very simple activity in which Jonathan and I engaged during the early weeks:

After breakfast we [Jonathan and I] went back to the caravan and "psyched" ourselves up to head over and start our work hours [8 in a day]. The weather was very nice, clear blue sky, pleasant temperature, though once we really got started—pulling up the blackberry vines—we began to warm up and got a little uncomfortable. Occasionally, we would walk back up to the house to get some water, but return quickly to work so as to finish as early as possible. The area requiring our attention was a slope and reasonably steep, but not too much so. It is hard to believe that this vine, that produces such delicious fruit, is considered such a pest. We began a game, to pass the time, where the goal was to dig up the most impressive root system—Jonathan won due to his superior strength. Surrounded by views of distant mountains there were times I found myself lost gazing out at these unfamiliar and beautiful scenes. Our hands got very dirty, despite gloves, and I was eventually physically tired enough that I was unable to pull another weed. By the end of the day we were what Jonathan termed, ‘pleasantly exhausted’ (Field Diary 2009).
Repetitive visible action, such as the above example of weeding blackberries, is met with a warm reciprocity and a feeling of sharing in the rewards that come from being part of a community. Many of the new citizens to whom I spoke mentioned similar periods of working in exchange for accommodation when they first came to Damanhur. More importantly our weeding and the work of others in the community were vocally recognised during dinner conversations or when referring to that person in other contexts. For example, I was introduced to a new citizen with his name and how he was one of the best working guests they had ever had before he became a new citizen. This particular new citizen was still engaged with the nucleo with which he had completed work exchange and eventually came to live there full-time, once his probationary phase was over. Those who did not enjoy the requirement to contribute in the early days were unlikely to join. Just as Jonathan and I weeded the blackberries, in this way the Damanhurians protect themselves by metaphorically weeding out those who are unwilling to consistently and physically contribute early on.

New citizens needed to demonstrate their ability to manage their new (and increasing) communal responsibilities, which again further demonstrated their ongoing commitment to the community. New citizens also had to be able to balance this communal work with their own personal needs and commitments. By the time a new citizen has become an established Damanhurian citizen, they have already dedicated much time and energy for the benefit of the community and arguably themselves. New citizens also discussed how this process had, in turn, demonstrated to them that they were committed to becoming a Damanhurian. The process of becoming a citizen of Damanhur was made challenging not only because it proved to the community that one
was worthy, but also so that individuals were as prepared as possible for the realities of communal life.

**Communalism**

I refer to Damanhurians as communal. I intend this to be literal in that they share living spaces, own property together, and work together. Becoming communal involves learning how to negotiate communal living. However, being communal can also be linked with a concept known as communitarianism. I have referred to this concept when distinguishing between community as an ideology and community building as praxis. Intentional communities are the practical manifestation of attempts to live in accordance with a communitarian ideology. This ideology, particularly in Damanhur where members are referred to as citizens, bears a resemblance to notions of civic citizenship. Brown (2002, p.4) follows Etzioni (1995, p.iii) by stating that 'above all [communitarians seek to] re-establish in communities the moral voice that leads people to encourage one another to behave more virtuously than they would otherwise. Communities need to foster civility—a sense of social order and mutual consideration'. Dobson (2003), when arguing for a 'post-cosmopolitan' or 'ecological citizenship' in political discourse, outlines prior conceptions of citizenship. To be communal can have practical and ideological connotations, so too citizenship suggests more than the status of being a subject or national of a particular country. Damanhurian citizenship means one identifies as Damanhurian and not Italian; it also carries with it a communitarian identity and further expectations and obligations of what one might call 'active citizenship' (Dobson 2003, p.6).
New Citizenship Program - Intentional Socialisation

At the time of my fieldwork Damanhur had purposefully developed a 'new citizenship' program, a model of socialisation that intentionally aimed to allow for the kind of experiences that would prepare individuals for the communal life. Gwyn Williams (2008) describes a similar process as 'consciousness raising'. Williams (2008), who worked with alter-globalisation activists on the Larzac plateau in southern France, noted that residents of the Larzac 'conceive that a person is a being that constantly evolves' (Williams 2008, p.72). Such a statement is also true for Damanhurians, who were aware of the disparity between the skills and abilities of communitarians and non-communitarians to live communally. Because of this understanding Damanhurians had chosen to facilitate—through the new citizenship program—a certain level of 'evolution' prior to full immersion into the community. Such an approach is based on the Damanhurian idea that participating in a community, and particularly in communal living, assists in the ongoing evolution of the individual. It stands to reason, then, that individuals who have already participated in communal living, such as full-time residents of Damanhur, would have achieved a certain level of 'evolution' beyond individuals who have not yet shared that experience. From a certain perspective, it is like new citizens are playing catch-up.

There was an oft quoted saying from the founder of Damanhur likening the individuals in a community to stones in a river: initially stones are rough with sharp edges, but over time they bump together, eventually developing smooth edges and causing less friction.
Damanhurians have learned from experience that the 'rough edges' of a person without any significant prior community experience can cause a great deal of contention within an already smooth riverbed (in this case the riverbed is not only the entire community of Damanhur, but also the nucleos). In response to some prior challenges in the process of integrating new members, Damanhurians developed an approach asking interested persons to 'bump against each other' for a while before trying to integrate completely into the community (i.e. living full-time in a nucleo just for new citizens). In this way people were directly exposed to the complexities and confrontations of communal life, learning first-hand some of the unexpected difficulties that come from living with previously unrelated and unknown persons. During my time in Damanhur I observed that this approach was very effective at isolating some of the inevitable friction new people experienced with other individuals and some of the tensions they experienced within themselves in response to the challenges of adapting to communal living.

I followed several new citizens as they went through the new citizenship program and the concurrent process of being socialised into the Damanhurian lifestyle. For each of them this was a unique process, despite participating in the same program at the same time, and all were faced with a variety of very difficult personal challenges. I was primarily involved with new citizens of international origin of which, over the course of twelve months, there were two groups of roughly twelve individuals (this number changed from time to time and the second group—which started approximately halfway through my stay—did have some Italians among them). From these two major groups I developed ongoing relationships with two women from the first group, both of whom transferred from the isolated households of new citizens into established nucleos during
my stay. This transfer was significant, as it was not long after their moves that the official status of 'A' (full-time resident) citizen was achieved. These two women had successfully traversed the many hurdles associated with the initial process of becoming Damanhurian. One of these now full-time resident citizens described her experience of joining Damanhur as 'embracing constant evolution in a structured way'. She went on to assert that this was helpful for her to integrate as a new citizen:

One of the main points of focus in Damanhur is to grow beyond our limitations and character flaws and develop and express our talents. I engaged in this practice as a New Citizen. The process includes practical points to pay attention to and actualise and receiving regular feedback from a chosen person within the community. The points may focus on containing extremes of behaviour and personality that prevent me from being at my best and from integrating harmoniously with others. They may also exalt the potential excellences I have. For instance, one of my first points of attention was to give space to my artistic and creative expression, which is often overshadowed by the part of me that loves working and accomplishing everyday tasks. The result was that I started doing creative writing and sharing it with the community. I have also given space to painting, singing and dancing in various creative contexts within Damanhur. This process has given me new tools to approach intimidating situations in different ways; to courageously embrace an opportunity for growth.

Timo, also a new citizen, described the process of socialisation or 'constant evolution' in this way: 'it's like living communally peels away the layers [of yourself, and] slowly you get deeper, although it can be painful'. In this conversation the concept discussed is that

38 I have learned that one of these women has since left the community.
39 The 'chosen person' is the verificatore (verifier), a Damanhur citizen who participates in Tecnarcato, and who can act as a confidant during the process, through regular meetings, sharing, and feedback.
living communally reveals aspects of a person's personality that were not, previously, consciously realised. By living with other individuals one is confronted by personal habits that may have otherwise gone unnoticed—this can be as basic as not cleaning the toilet properly to more fundamental personal conditions like talking 'too much' when anxious or nervous. These aspects of oneself that become 'realised' by the individual are made apparent because it is not just one or two other people alerting them to their condition; rather, it might easily be more than ten persons and could indeed be more than a hundred people telling one the same thing. Such realisations did not necessarily have to be negative, although it was usually the more challenging aspects of oneself that were the hardest with which to come to terms. Such a process, particularly when one was new to it, created a huge amount of stress and pressure on individuals, which often led those individuals to attempt to change/adapt their perceived negative characteristics in the interests of the communal life they were choosing to live.

New Citizen's Homes—building comfort between participants

The pressure to adapt to communal living was almost palpable in the homes of the new citizens I visited. In established nucleos people would often choose to have interviews, with others, or me, out in public areas of the house (dining room, kitchen or lounge/TV area). In the temporary nucleos of new citizens I would be directed to conduct the interview in private, behind closed doors. A new citizen commented on how being at an established nucleo—usually one in which they had spent significant prior time—was like a 'breath of fresh air, a place of comfort to come to as opposed to being at home [in their own nucleo of new citizens]'. When participating or conducting interviews in an
established nucleo, I would spend all my time in the communal areas, where I would see people attending to their own needs and chatting with others in a very casual and seemingly comfortable fashion. This was rarely the case at the nucleos of new citizens. When I would visit the established nucleos, it was like I was visiting the entire group rather than just one individual, and I was often welcomed to stay for lunch or dinner and join in the general conversation around the communal areas of the house. For me it was similar to the difference between visiting family where you are effectively visiting all members of a household at once and visiting a friend, when you have no relationship with their family. It was my experience that in the home of the new citizens I was visiting an individual. Rarely was it appropriate for me to extend my visit nor did the new citizen seem comfortable to extend an invitation to me, despite developing friendships over time.

Achieving a level of what Damanhurians referred to as 'homeliness' in a nucleo, a level of comfort and belonging—creating a sense that the members of one's nucleo are like a 'family'—was something that was discussed by several new citizens as the goal in their own nucleo and something they perceived to be a reality in the more established nucleos. They perceived the difference between their own nucleo and the more established ones and were made aware, by other Damanhurians, that there were things they could try in order to achieve this comfort level (separate to the comfort achieved after an extended period of living together). Ramo, a longer-term citizen of Damanhur, mentioned that in the earlier days nucleos were similar to dormitories where people slept and ate, but otherwise had no other attachments. The community realised this and did not want it to stay that way, so steps were taken to change how the nucleo was seen
and lived in (see excerpt and discussion below for more details). Ramo also told me how this aspect of Damanhurian life can now be taken for granted and that Damanhurians often forget that a lot of the 'harmony' they experience, in nucleos and outside of them, has been ‘intentionally’ engineered.

Nucleos have also changed in accordance with the evolution of the community as a whole. A new citizen, having recently participated in Damanhurian-run history lessons, for those in the joining phase, was able to shed some light on why nucleos have changed over time:

The changes that have occurred over the years in the Damanhur nucleos, from a more dormitory setting to the warmth of home life, has run parallel to the needs of the community in its different stages. At first, what was needed was physically building the community structures and Temples from the ground up, which required many personal sacrifices. Now, although physical work and building continues and continues to be valued, there is more space and emphasis on strengthening interpersonal bonds, kindness, unity, friendship and connection. As such, our nucleos are currently one of the most emphasised contexts for all levels of communication in the social context, building relationships and families as much as the practical aspects.

The elements that make the nucleos 'homes' vary over time. There are practical considerations, such as how the roster for household duties will be distributed, and there are also more ritualistic elements, serving (among other purposes) as bonding mechanisms, that were incorporated into the daily routine. Each nucleo was able to act with a certain amount of autonomy according to the needs and wants of the members. For example, the way financial contributions were made in the nucleos differed. Some
would vary the contribution depending on the number of meals eaten at home by each individual. The nucleo in which I spent a lot of time asked that everyone contribute the same amount; however, this meant people paid for all the meals even if they were unable to always attend. This helped encourage people to be home to eat and, therefore, increased the likelihood that meals would more regularly be communal affairs. It also necessitated daily communication between the person who cooked and the other participants in the meal that day. The process of arriving at a collective decision on how to arrange cost distribution for food also required skills in negotiation, something that many new citizens had yet to develop. For example, Ucello described shifting from one system to another among more experienced community members:

At one nucleo I lived in, we shifted from the meal-counting system for contributing to food costs to the everyone-contribute-the-same-amount system. For those who had proposed this change, always dividing the food expenses equally amongst the adults, despite variations in number of meals eaten from one month to another or from one person to another, was a sign of living as a family and in solidarity. Others felt it was a not equitable, as some people hardly ever ate lunch at home due to their work schedules and distances. In their eyes, the counting was a way of creating a just distribution of the responsibility for food expenses. Even though there was this difference of opinion, everyone accepted the group's decision and adjusted their personal views to align with the collective direction.

The individuals in a new citizen's nucleo would not only need to learn all the possibilities that contribute to the creation of a 'home-like' communal environment, including how to finance meals, they would also need to experiment with each of them in order to find the combination of elements that worked for the people living there at
that time. Below is an example of a common experience I had when entering the nucleo Dendera, where I spent the majority of my fieldwork. I believe it exemplifies the homeliness of this particular nucleo and also served as a contrast to the absence of homeliness I was observing in the new citizens' nucleos:  

As soon as I opened the door, I was met with a rush of warmth and the sounds of several voices around a kitchen table: babies, children and adults all eating and getting ready to head off for the day. 'Buon Giorno' I call and hear a cacophony of responses welcoming me into their home. I put down my bag and take off my coat, delicately balancing it on top of the already overloaded coat hooks beside the door. Then I walk into the kitchen where someone immediately offers me something to eat and drink. Croissants with Nutella, chocolate cookies, organic muesli and yogurt are the usual breakfast choices along with a constant flow of caffè [espresso coffee].

A caffè with some chocolate biscuits always tempts me and I sit down to listen to the day's plans and the usual organisation needed for a house of nineteen adults and five children: what is to be bought while grocery shopping, who is available for a job swap, what's up with this or that child and what are everyone's plans for the day. Some are going to work in the community or in a nearby town like Ivrea, others have further to go, perhaps to Torino. There are various other commitments for Damanhurians, including rostered turns to look after the house or the children when they are home, there are jobs to drop kids off at school and pick them up, there are particular spiritual commitments they each have to attend to and other more broad community jobs to be done. What could seem overwhelming, though, is managed with relative ease as everyone lives in the same house and so many things can be organised over breakfast (Field Diary 2010).

Dendera was described by citizens as being one of the most 'home-like' of the nucleos in Damanhur.
The 'seeming ease' I witnessed in the negotiation of communal responsibilities in this
established nucleo was not reflected in the homes of new citizens. In fact those new
citizens with whom I spoke reported high levels of discord among members in their
nucleo as they tried to negotiate the distribution of communal tasks. Some
Damanhurian citizens argued that the way new citizens were then housed was not
necessary. Damanhur did not need to group new citizens together in a nucleo to fend
for themselves. In other words, new citizens were inexperienced at living communally,
which presented further challenges on top of what was already a radical lifestyle and
cultural change for most. For new citizens to go through such an experience served
several purposes, some of which are discussed in this chapter. There were
Damanhurians at the time of my fieldwork who suggested alternative living
arrangements and, therefore, that a more gentle form of socialisation could be found.41

Nucleo Ritual

In addition to the logistical tasks of organising a residence with multiple unrelated adult
occupants is the incentive to incorporate some of the ritual elements evident in other
more established Damanhurian nucleos. For example, at the nucleo in which I lived for
three weeks during the early months of fieldwork, there was a candle lit at every meal
time with a special lighter used to 'symbolically light and capture' the flame at the end of
the meal. This ritual ensured that the experiences of that gathering were held within the
everlasting essence that was the 'captured' flame, symbolically held within the lighter.

41Since my fieldwork, a new approach has evolved called the New Life program, which allows short,
intense and temporary periods of learning and exchange as a Damanhur citizen.
The same lighter would be used to light the candle at the next gathering in a way that symbolically, and energetically, linked the essence of many of the moments that occurred in that nucleo.42

Cielo, a resident A citizen in her thirties, described some of the philosophy surrounding fire in this way:

There are many fires at Damanhur. Each one is considered to be a living element with it's [sic] own memory. There is the Sacred Fire, which is present in [the] Temples and the most important rituals. Then there are group fires. For instance, my nucleo... has a fire that we light at every house meeting and special occasion. This is probably the kind of fire you saw being 'collected'... Back in the day, to have the Sacred Fire or another specific fire present at a ritual in a different place, you lit a candle and transported the candle, hoping it wouldn't blow out on the way over. Then, the lighter method was introduced to simplify things. Each fire can be 'collected' in a lighter specific to that fire before it is blown out. It's simply putting the flame of the lighter in contact with that of the fire/candle. Then, the next time, the group lights their [fire/candle] always using that same lighter. It is collected again at the end of the meeting, etc. The emotions, thoughts, interactions and growth experiences of the group and its individuals are recorded in the fire when it is present, and so lighting the same fire at each meeting or Meditation lesson, etc. allows for continuity of memory. It's a being that grows as the group grows. Then, if there are two groups becoming one, they can 'unite' their fires as well.

42‘Energetic’ refers to subtle spiritual energies, invisible to the uninitiated, philosophised by Damanhurians to exist around and within all things.
This element of mealtime made the occasion more significant: the conversations and connections happening then were symbolically linked. Through the ritual of lighting and capturing this sacred flame Damanhurians believed that all the moments that had happened before and all those to come were connected. On par with ritually setting the table, the flame capturing also served to identify the moment of eating together as more than just a meal, acknowledging it as a significant and important moment in the life of that nucleo community.

Similarly, reference to fire or flames, for Damanhurians, also represent the bond between community members. The intensity of the flame reflects the perceived intensity of the communal bond between members in a set context (i.e. the notion of 'flame of the group' can apply to sub-communities or groups, as well as to the Damanhurian Federation as a whole). As noted, there are similarities between the Damanhurian notion of the 'flame of a group' and the Turnerian concept of communitas. Like a flame, communitas is erratic, uncontrollable and easily intensified or reduced depending on the circumstances. If the right kind of fuel is added to a fire, it burns more brightly; the hotter the flame the more likely it will burn out. So too, communitas can reach peaks of intensity and also decline very quickly in unconducive conditions. To further this analogy, the use of the term 'recorded' by Cielo in regards to the action of the fire, which conceptualises an unseen essence between people at the dinner table as witnessed or absorbed by the flame. While a more in-depth understanding of how this process works was not available to me (for example, where does the flame go when the flame is not actually lit?), the ritual does serve to highlight the Damanhurian idea of the bond
between people as something potentially discernible, even if it is unseen, intangible and ephemeral.

**Negotiating communal life—replacing ideals with reality**

One of the biggest challenges faced by new citizens was the process of replacing their imagined view of living in community with the reality that was Damanhur. The gap between the ideal and the real was something Damanhur attempted to close through its mechanisms of socialisation. 'Damanhur is far from paradise' was a phrase I heard many times, emphasised mostly for the benefit of those who had expressed an interest in joining. When I first arrived, Ramo told me that the reason she had been hesitant to agree to my stay in Damanhur was that the first twelve months are the most difficult. As I was going to leave after twelve months, she did not want me to leave without having realised the positives inherent in communal life, only apparent through some hard work on the part of the individual. Ramo said that while the community as a whole is 'enlightened' and has achieved some enlightened projects, the individuals that make up the community are far from having achieved the same level of enlightenment.

Another citizen, Ucello, aptly pointed out that 'living communally involves a precarious balance between the individual and the communal elements of self.' It is a challenging process where one must prioritise the need to contribute to the community along with the other equally important elements of an individual's daily life. Although some of the demands of life are lessened through sharing with others (i.e., you do not have to go food shopping every week, as it is likely someone else will have this role), there are, at least at first, many new elements that need to be negotiated. Individual citizens not only
have specific commitments to their nucleo in particular (chores, child-care), but also to the larger Federation. For example, they sometimes need to do volunteer work in the underground Temples, and hours are also dedicated to keeping the common Damanhurian centres clean. Slowly, over the course of the year Ucello and Anica, two new citizens I interviewed multiple times, changed the language they used to describe this process. At first there was a sense of being overwhelmed with the amount of work to be done and how to juggle all the different elements of their new lives. Later, as they moved into more established nucleos and settled into many of the roles in which they were now taking part, they expressed a sense of satisfaction. Descriptions of their days went from 'so busy' and 'tiring' to 'energised' or 'fast paced'. They were referencing the same conditions, but with different connotations due to the words chosen, so that even their expressions of frustration were tinged with a 'can do' attitude. Through the process of being socialised into Damanhur, Anica and Ucello were learning new ways to process their experiences, in particular to look at the world with a positive perspective.

Due to the complex organisation of their daily lives, Damanhurians often had no time to stop and talk. Part of the reason I was able to connect more with new citizens is that they had more 'spare' time. Although even new citizens felt 'very busy' relative to their prior lifestyles, established citizens seemed to have much fuller schedules. So, the challenge, in order to speak with older citizens who had lived in Damanhur for a longer period, became how to talk while 'doing'. Below is an example of how I would fit into the routine of some of the Damanhurians' cleaning schedule.
There were a variety of brooms and mops to choose from. [When completing a task initiated by another person.] I would often use the one preferred by the person I was working with at the time, as I didn't want to interrupt the flow of their routine; I wanted to be a valid assistant. Each person had their own style and the tools that they believed did the best job. There was one lady who particularly loved new cleaning devices that she perceived would make the job easier, another who preferred those implements she was used to, and still another who preferred more traditional methods [traditional Italian mop and broom] (Field Diary 2009).

The field excerpt above is also valuable as one of many examples of the small things someone has to negotiate when living communally: different cleaning styles. It seemed to me that it was less about having the same cleaning method or achieving the same results, but rather an acceptance of different results by each person. While there were standard jobs to which each individual attended, each job was approached differently. Some individuals would clean under the couches, others would sweep out the adjoining bathroom and laundry, and still others would sweep the stairs. Sweeping and mopping the floors were jobs to which everyone seemed to attend, but the completeness of the jobs differed. Elements of this were unknown to others in the house; in-fact, my presence and assumption of a cleaning role would alert them, normally working alone, to things I would do that they usually would not. For example, I might tidy the lounge room with a person who would not normally attend to that area, which then made the person realise that others do clean the lounge room. It was not as much about what each person did as that each person, consistently in my experience, assumed their turn with many different thoughtful contributions to the household.
This experience of treating the nucleo like one's own home, with regard to chores to be done, is another example of how an established nucleo differed from the new citizen nucleos. There was a difference in approach: in new citizen's nucleo there was a period where they assigned hours to different jobs. This might be two hours for food shopping or four hours for cooking lunch. It was initially not about the job per-se, it was about the amount of time assigned so that all the residents in that nucleo had an equal number of hours. In theory this made sense and sounded fair. However, residents could not just stop doing a job because they had reached the end of their allotted hours; residents could not just start shopping and then leave the trolley at the store because the time limit had been reached—an example outlined to me during a discussion with a new citizen. The new citizens with whom I spoke relayed their realisation that it was about satisfactorily completing the job—no matter how long it took—rather than paying particular attention to the number of hours spent. It was the opinion of some of the new citizens that the mindset of the participants had to change.

Because jobs were for the entire nucleo, for others as well as the individual, there seemed to be a sense among new citizens that they needed to ensure that any labour was divided and accounted for equally, analogous to how one is treated in paid employment. The challenge lay in the balance between this perspective and one that insisted that all participants needed to treat household chores like chores in one's home of origin: they needed to be done and there was no accounting. There needed to be some kind of accountability, but there could not be too much emphasis placed on strict quantifiable distribution of labour. A trust that each would contribute equitably had to be built among the participants, and the approach to chores needed to become one of wanting
to contribute’ rather than there being a singular focus on equitable labour allotment. In 'my' established nucleo each individual with whom I worked made a unique contribution to the household: something they particularly liked to do or were particularly good at. This could be anything from baking a cake for dessert that night to making sure all the leftovers in the fridge were used. Some individuals were very skilled at cooking and so spent energy preparing grand feasts, while others put their energy into giving the house a very thorough and thoughtful cleaning. Most importantly, each individual seemed, for the most part, to be sure that each other person was contributing in a similar way. This point was demonstrated to me very early when I was being introduced to some work I was to do in exchange for lodging:

‘Weed-whacking’ said Montagne

‘Do you mean, whipper snipping?’ I ask

‘Whipper-snipping?’ [laughs] ‘I’ll show you’

We walk towards the shed, and sure enough Montagne extracts a whipper-sniper from the numerous garden tools to be found there. She then proceeds to point out the areas that need to be ‘weed-whacked’, and I diligently follow trying to memorise all her instructions. At one point I notice that all the clipped grass from a previous weed-whacking episode had been left where it had been clipped leading me to ask:

‘Do I need to leave the grass where I cut it?’

Montagne answers, ‘No it would be good if you could rake it up for the compost’

‘Oh, okay, because I see that it has been left here?’ I query

‘Oh, that is probably because the person didn’t have time to clear it up.’

---

43Whipper snipping is the Australian term for clearing long grass with a long handled, motorised tool.
The response to my final question was quick and without thought; there was no sense of dissatisfaction with the incomplete job performed by the previous whipper snipper (i.e. weed whacker). The assumption gave the person benefit of the doubt. At the time this response demonstrated to me a sense of understanding among the participants in this nucleo regarding the time constraints of others. The response given was exceptional when compared to the absence of such solidarity among new citizens in their own nucleos.

It became obvious to me that building a community of individuals who felt and contributed to a feeling of *esprit de corps* was a learned process. The new citizens were learning how to consider others—even if they were not biologically related—and treat them in accordance with how Damanhurians treat their communal family. The learning involved in becoming Damanhurian was extensive and collective. Individuals needed to understand not only the current structure and philosophy lived by Damanhurians, but also had to adapt their attitudes and behaviour directly in accordance with the other people with whom they were living. This observation was supported by a citizen's insistence that:

> Trust is built over time in communities by demonstrating continuity and constancy to one another despite the ups and downs of life and consequent level of community participation. The strength of a community group as a collective whole can contain and balance the individual highs and lows that fluctuate over time.

Learning to do this involved a process of living through mistakes made by one, but also mistakes made by others and by the collective. Negotiating communal living and various
other communally driven responsibilities proved challenging for many citizens, particularly in the case of new citizen nucleos. However, it was through this uncomfortable and confronting period that a great deal of learning occurred. Damanhurians posit that it is through others that we can learn about ourselves. Confrontation with others leads to learning opportunities and new citizens were presented with many opportunities to learn from others. In turn, communal living facilitated rapid change among those persons who stayed the course and became full-time citizens. A more established citizen presented an example of how the cycle of communal belonging might be experienced by Damanhurians, should they remain committed:

For example, if a Damanhurian citizen goes through a period of pregnancy, debilitating illness or unemployment, they receive support and help from their nucleo community and the wider community. This kind of support is built into the system of community solidarity, acknowledging that each one of us, at some point, might be moving through some situation of need before becoming fully active and contributing again. New Citizens will eventually cycle through both the giving and receiving role of this solidarity, for example, playing the role of caregiver to others who are bedridden, as well as being the person lying in bed sick, assisted by others for our needs.

Again, it is apparent that the most important aspect of building trust is a balance. There is a 'system of community solidarity', which suggests an institutional accounting of contribution, but then a trust that all citizens will eventually 'cycle through both the giving and the receiving role'. The balance is between personal interests and the ideals of the wider community. Citizens, mostly, must trust that each member is achieving the
balance between contribution and self-service. In Damanhur it seemed that at least some, if not most, citizens were aware of the importance of this balance. For example, Ucello, in an email, wrote about the tension between individual and communal obligations:

This is often referred to as the difference between being motivated by 'ideals' and 'personal interests.' It's a question we all ask ourselves, if our dedication to the core spiritual ideals and goals of the community are being diluted by personal life concerns, whether it is family, work, relationships, possessions, vacations. These areas of life are of course important for everyone to cultivate and serve, though it is a question of equilibrium in priorities. The intention of building a community like Damanhur is creating a context where large-scale collective missions and dreams can be realized in tandem with individual missions and dreams. If the personal desires and comforts gain priority over the community ideals and visions, then there is risk of the community not being distinguishable from everyday society and not being sustainable [Emphasis added].

The tension between the individual and the communal responsibilities is evident here. A social structure in service to communitas recognises the necessity of an ‘equilibrium in priorities’. Communitas requires the individual to be wholly present even within the communal milieu.

**New citizens and meaningful work**

Several new citizens reported that they found some difficulty attempting to adapt to the Damanhurian ideals and philosophy as they relate to the concept of work. Work is obviously a subjective term, as some will see tasks as less or more work-like than others.
In Damanhur there is a sense of busyness or constant activity, which includes anything from basic manual labour to meetings, strategic or administrative. Damanhurians see the collective activities in which they engage, including the manual labour they expect work exchange guests to do, as part of what they term a process of 'evolution'; towards a better humanity. For Damanhurians an evolved humanity is an active humanity. Therefore, the ideal Damanhurian proactively seeks to achieve their goals, adapt to change and contribute to the community in whatever way they can. Visitors seeking an experience of what it is like to be Damanhurian should also expect to be active, as it is not through words or idleness that one can learn to become Damanhurian—or achieve what Damanhurians are seeking to achieve.

To assist with this approach Damanhurians ascribed activity, or work, with meaning outside of the conventional 'means to an end'. A citizen described the Damanhurian philosophy around action in this way:

The spiritual philosophy of Damanhur is based on action. We are here as human beings with a divine spark in order to make matter divine, which is bringing the spiritual into the material. Our evolution moves forward by making a mark in the material world creating things with our hands—whether it is tending a garden or painting a mural in the Temples or cooking Sunday lunch. It is through this active process of co-creation that we create the strongest bonds between people. Sometimes the things that need to be done are just an 'excuse' for us to be together as community groups. Sometimes this thread of connectedness is quite visible, like passing firewood from hand to hand. Collective art making is highly valued for this reason, more than the individual artist doing his or her own work and being recognized for it. Community art is an opportunity to strengthen the
connections amongst us all in the social alchemy of creating things together (pers.comm n.d.).

Such a philosophy resonates with Leard's (1993) description of Auroville, a large intentional community in India. Leard describes how Aurovillians saw all matter as imbued with meaning; therefore, meaning was expressed in every aspect of Aurovillian life. There are stark differences between Auroville and Damanhur, but the idea that spirituality is inherent in all things and all actions is very similar. The important symbols of Aurovillian culture, and similarly Damanhurian culture, are embedded in the day-to-day activities of members' lives, political and economic—for Damanhur I would add creative and spiritual elements, as both are also a daily presence. Spirituality must be quotidian/embedded in the everyday. Because of this, any deviation from the 'integrity of the experiment' is more easily identified and reacted to than if the symbols were only evident in a ritual conducted in a particular place on a particular day (Leard 1993, p.103). Meaning is expressed in every aspect of Aurovillian and Damanhurian life, so members of the community do not seek communion removed from their activity. Such an approach to an individual's expression of their spirituality can be a significant change from how that individual has experienced and expressed spirituality in the past.

Becoming Damanhurian

Some longer-term citizens, when discussing the difficulties faced by new citizens at the time of my fieldwork, would respond by reminiscing about their own challenges while first joining or even first establishing the community. This reminiscence seemed to me to
justify the need for new citizens to go through similarly difficult processes in order to successfully integrate into the community—the idea here is that one needs to appreciate the elements that had made Damanhur what it was in order to fully understand it and be a part of it. A new citizen described to me how she felt that there was 'this intention that we go through some similar challenges and hardships that older citizens have gone through' in order to:

…have a visceral and experiential understanding of Damanhur's history. Despite the discomfort of these situations, I value this approach, as it strengthened me in my presence and resilience as a new Damanhurian. I learned some things by having direct experience that I wouldn't have culled in the same way through storytelling and history lessons.

For instance, one of our first experiences as new citizens was an intensive community-building experiment in the Sacred Woods, living in a log cabin without heating and electricity for eleven days. When we finally came down from the woods, I felt so grateful for everything: hot water, modern bathrooms and kitchens, level floors. I can appreciate all the comforts that we have here now, that they were acquired and built through the hard work and investment of older community members, with tremendous effort and dedication. Those eleven days were a sampling of earlier pioneer conditions in Damanhur. It brought Damanhur into our hearts even more and us into the hearts of Damanhurians, almost like a physical resonance that naturally exists between people with common histories.

Paralleling this new citizen's reflection on her own experience, a well-established citizen of more than sixteen years adamantly stated that 'you have to be Damanhurian in order to understand Damanhurians.' This statement was in response to my requests to research
Damanhur, but I also heard similar sentiments expressed several more times in reference to new citizens.

There are strong similarities between the notion of 'becoming Damanhurian' and what Gwyn Williams (2008, p.72) describes as 'becoming an activist'. In his article treating Larzac activists, Williams describes a process of 'becoming aware' and then acting 'coherently' in accordance with that new awareness. This is very much the process of becoming a Damanhurian and, arguably, of joining any intentional community or indeed any primary group. Damanhurian philosophy encompasses a wide array of alternative philosophies regarding lifestyle, the self, relationships and spirituality. New citizens must 'become aware', be educated about these philosophies before they are able to 'act coherently' and integrate within the fabric of a community of people who are attempting to live—consciously act out—their philosophies in their everyday lives. An essential part of this learning process, indeed an approach taken towards all new initiatives during my stay, was that of 'learn while doing'. First-hand experience or action now was the fastest way to achieve not only a complete socialisation within the community, but also a way to 'get things done' and achieve the most profound learning.

The process of socialisation performs the important task of facilitating a new member's initiation into becoming Damanhurian. Being Damanhurian is a concept that the modern individualised consumer and potential new member needs to learn, to understand and embody as a new way of being in the world. This process is achieved through communal living (sacrifice of the self for the benefit of the group) and through an emphasis on 'doing'. New members become Damanhurian by doing Damanhurian
things, by building, eating, cooking and cleaning in ways that serve Damanhur. This means negotiating, compromising, being assertive, discovering the self and building a trust for others. These goals include establishing an eco-society that is self-sufficient and sustainable. The process of socialisation highlights incoherence between new members' ideology and behaviour and the life they are choosing. Existing citizens ask new members to adapt to living in accordance with what the community has deemed the appropriate and responsible way to live with each other, among humanity as a whole and on the planet.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates through the perspective of new citizens what it is to learn to be communal and how communality is integral to facilitating the realisation of the community's goals. Building a community of individuals who feel and contribute to a feeling of esprit de corps in Damanhur is a learned process. The new citizens were learning how to consider others—even if they were not biologically related—and treat them in accordance with how Damanhurians treat what they see as communal family. Individuals needed to understand not only the current structure and philosophy lived by Damanhurians, but also had to adapt their attitudes directly in accordance with the other people with whom they were living.

By the time a new citizen commits to full Damanhurian citizenship, they have already begun a socialisation process of becoming communitarian. In particular for Damanhur,
they learn the importance of translating spiritual ideals into action. New citizens also commit to a process of personal evolution, often overcoming the discomfort of seeing their own points of growth mirrored back to them by a myriad of other citizens. Balancing one's individual perspectives, needs and desires with the communal structures, goals and projects is a delicate process of learning. New citizens found that if they were able to do so, they could then receive the benefit of the solidarity and trust of communal living.
CHAPTER 4

Nucleo

Introduction

The house, our nucleo, has a wonderful 'vibe' and everyone seems very comfortable, from first impressions. The people who live here are very busy all the time, even during lunch people were still occupied in various tasks and new people would arrive as others left. It makes for an atmosphere of productivity and also allows opportunities for time to yourself, or at least to your own thoughts, as the others around you are caught up in their own activities (Field Diary 2009).

Damanhurians describe their larger community as a federation of communities. Each smaller sub-community within the Federation is known as a nucleo or nucleo comunità (community). Either type usually consists of one main residence where a number of non-biologically related adults live together, communally, full-time. In this chapter I provide an outline of how nucleos function as sub-communities within the Federation. In particular, I focus on the daily lives of the members of the nucleo with whom I spent the most time. This will demonstrate some of the challenges and benefits of living communally and how the associated learning influences the receptivity of participants to communitas and their capacity to harness it when it does arise. Participants see the

---

44 During the time of my fieldwork citizens could also choose to live part-time in a nucleo.
nucleo as the foundation of Damanhur's social life. The ideal is that these residences provide a home for Damanhurian citizens and allow them to live communally (an important element of their spiritual practice), which in turn provides peer support for maintaining the discipline required for their way of life. In the following ethnographic accounts of Dendera I focus on those elements of nucleo living that facilitate liminal/liminoid experiences which, following Victor Turner (1982), I see as crucial to fostering communitas.

Conditions conducive to communitas are supported by structural and sacred elements. Gretchen Siegler (1992; 2002) studied a long-lived intentional community called In Search of Truth (ISOT), located in California, where she identified mechanisms that are amenable to a continuation of the values of communitas. ISOT maintained practices and viewpoints that inspired loyalty and allowed its members to pass their commitment onto their children. For instance, members of ISOT were expected to have a total commitment to the practice of their religion, integrating it in to their daily activities (Siegler 2002). It is through their religion that ISOT members continually remind each other to 'transcend mundane affairs and remember their lifelong commitment to an ultimate objective provided by a higher authority' (Siegler 2002, p.64). Although not subscribing to a ‘single higher authority’ Damanhurians were encouraged to transcend the mundane and always bring attention to their ultimate objective. 45 How Damanhurians approached maintaining attention on their higher objectives was evident in the nucleo, Dendera.

45 Awareness and attention are cultivated through Damanhurian spiritual practice, which allows citizens to tune their own guidance and the guidance of the community as a whole.
The structure of a nucleo—the physical construction, internal layout, and internal governance (schedules, rosters and so on.)—are developed via the experimental approach Damanhurians take with most aspects of their lives. This means that each nucleo is different, based on the approach taken by the members living there. Each nucleo is granted a certain degree of autonomy within the larger community's governance. There are some elements that are similar among nucleos, for example, most citizens spoke of rostered chores and nucleo meetings. However, the internal characteristics might alter depending on nucleo members, type and size. I can only speak from direct experience of some of the practices in the nucleo Dendera, but have drawn on accounts from citizens living in other nucleos to demonstrate nucleo autonomy. The nucleo is also the primary site for individuals to realise personal growth – the place where the most intimate of interpersonal interactions occur and, therefore, the place where the most confrontation, conflict and resolution take place. Living together in the nucleo is another facet that assists in building the capacity of citizens to live communally, accept liminal/liminoid phases and harness communitas. One of the four overarching governance 'Pillars' of the Federation, called Tecnarcato, supports the philosophy that all human beings are evolving individuals who can work to better themselves. It is in the nucleo where the individual is possibly the most tested, at least in the first years of residence. Finally, there is further evidence of ritual and sacred work among citizens in the nucleo, serving to tie members of the nucleo (in a spiritual sense) to each other, the rest of the Federation and to their spiritually derived philosophies.
Daily Life in Nucleo

Damanhur is a multi-layered institution with complex interconnections between levels of leadership and participation. While one could attempt to break down the different community concepts into easily conceivable and ordered categories, the result would not reflect the reality of Damanhurians' daily lives. While the first year of socialisation was contained within the new citizen nucleos, to a certain extent, so too were new citizens active in the more established nucleos. New citizens were also involved in the School of Meditation, Game of Life and social life, where their socialisation was extended with a deeper understanding of the totality of Damanhur. Similarly, in a nucleo the daily lives of individuals are not only occupied with the practical realities of communal living. Nucleo members are also engaged in their spiritual pathway, the embodiment of the federation's philosophies and ongoing research into new ways of living. The nucleo is the site where individuals learn how to negotiate differences and live in alignment with their spiritual aspirations; this continues once new citizens move into the more established nucleos. Living communally compels resident citizens to examine their own responses to different challenges, while ideally increasing their levels of participation in the community. The learning and development of an individual within a nucleo is transferred into other areas of their communal lives. These other areas also provide opportunities for learning and experience that are, in turn, processed and applied in the nucleo.

The nucleo is the site where interpersonal relationships are the most challenged. While adjusting to communal living participants learn to sacrifice control of many elements
that would be well guarded in the more isolated residences of mainstream society. Despite this communality, individuals are still responsible, but for different elements than would be the case in an individually or minimally occupied home. In particular, all members must learn to effectively communicate their needs and wants while also knowing when to compromise, or to stand their ground. These new skills not only serve participants well when moving to other nucleos, which can happen frequently, but are also valuable for wider community participation. The period of learning how to live communally, can also be seen as a liminal experience where citizens are constantly 'betwixt and between' a prior and future self. For example, a new citizen will change from a past self who may have had direct control over the majority of his or her living space to a future self who is regularly reminded that she or he share the decision making in the home environment. Due to numerous people living together, there could be something new happening in ones' home with regularity. Nucleo members must learn to accept change and difference—different people, different communication methods, different approaches to cooking and cleaning—if they are to remain living communally for any length of time.

Along with inner-growth, a concept I expand upon later in this chapter, the experience of learning to be communal can be seen as an experience in status elevation, where a citizen goes from communally unskilled to skilled over time. This is evident through the Damanhurian approach to new citizens, where a probationary period is used so that potential Damanhurians not only ensure that joining is the right choice for them, but also allow them to learn some of the ways to be communal. This process of learning is continued, presumably indefinitely, where more established citizens (those who have
been in the community for longer) are seen as wiser and more knowledgeable about how to be Damanhurian. As a researcher I went through a transition from inexperienced to experienced and so too did new citizens. When I explained my experience via email to a citizen of three years, she responded with her own account of this process:

I have noticed how the dynamic shifts when I take on the role of the 'experienced' citizen, how I can find myself in a position of 'seniority' after a relatively short period of time at Damanhur. I felt this very strongly when I was on 'viaggio' [spontaneous travel that forms a part of the Game of Life—to be defined in Chapter 5] with new citizens who were all newer than me. I felt space to be a voice in the group meetings and even during informal conversations, to guide, direct, share stories and knowledge, to be a strong influence, to be heard. This was in contrast with day-to-day life at Damanhur, where I am often the 'youngest' and the space feels already filled by 'older' citizens.

One example of this dynamic in 'viaggio' was on the car ride back to Damanhur. One of my traveling companions was studying for the Damanhur citizenship exam, which covers all aspects of Damanhur from historical events and the Constitution to spiritual ideals and the arts. Pulling facts from memory of my own citizenship exam almost two years ago, I grilled him with one question after another, confirming correct responses, filling in the unknowns and inaccurate answers. This went on for hours, it seemed, and while sharing and cataloguing my understandings in this way, I sensed the quantity and depth of experience and knowledge that I have integrated into my being in these years as a citizen, and how this role of guide/teacher is natural and valuable for newer citizens, even if the difference is just a few years (pers.comm 2012).
As one can see from this account, the role reversal was beneficial for this participant in that she was able to see how her own understanding had grown over time. Not only did she get to experience what it might be like for citizens older than her, she was also able to feel like she was giving something similar to what she had received over the years. This reciprocity builds trust among participants, similar to the roles of giving and receiving over time. Communal living allows multiple opportunities for acts of giving and receiving, as there is always the potential to learn a new skill and then pass that skill on to another. Each new citizen likely comes with some skill or ability that can be taught to others, so while they may not have communal skills, yet, they can quickly find arenas where they have experience to offer.

In addition to the natural variation that would occur in a residence with more than ten adults living together, there are also further disruptions instigated by the larger institution that is the Federation. As I discuss further in Chapter 5, the entity known as The Game of Life can, at any moment, intervene in the operations of a particular nucleo or the community as a whole. This disruption may be temporary or it may ask Damanhurians to re-assess where they are living and whether they would be better suited elsewhere. As noted, each nucleo has a purpose or function. Dendera’s inhabitants consisted of individuals who had an interest in working with Damanhurian visitors, whether they were researchers (like myself), guests, journalists or other communitarians. This meant that many of them spoke several languages, worked in Damanhur as public relations specialists, guides or at the Welcome Office greeting new guests, and that collectively they worked on projects that would link Damanhur with other communities and institutions that they found operated with values similar to their
own. As each nucleo has a different purpose, individuals might find that they are better suited to one over another, and this can also change over time. This means that citizens are constantly in learning and teaching roles. One may be new to a particular nucleo, but old in Damanhurian years; one may be learning new skills by participating in a different nucleo's purpose, but might find that knowledge from her previous experience applies in the new context as well. Status elevation through an increase in experience and role reversal through alternating teaching and learning roles both have elements of Victor Turner's liminal phases. While not ritualistic, the ongoing periods of change in role and status have very liminoid qualities.

Critical Numbers

Nucleos are populated by a number of citizens dependent on a variety of factors, including the individual preferences and the skill base demanded by a nucleo function. One of the overarching factors governing the number of nucleo members, and whether or not a nucleo had room for a new member, is a concept referred to by Damanhurians as 'critical numbers'. Critical numbers represent thresholds, or minimum and maximum recommendations, before communal living becomes more difficult than it otherwise needs to be. For example, too many people living together in one residence increases the prevalence of miscommunication. As with most other aspects of social life and governance at Damanhur, population numbers are experimental and have been revised a number of times. Beyond a certain number of adult residents in a nucleo Damanhurians have found that:
Intimacy and personal contact drops, complications and miscommunications rise, and it just becomes unsustainable in terms of feeling overcrowded, overstimulated, meetings lasting too long, [and a] lack of deep and meaningful connection (pers.comm 2012).

I heard different numbers cited as the threshold of the critical limit, from fifteen adults per nucleo, to eighteen or even twenty as recommended maximums. As usual Damanhurians do not operate with definitive rules, as there was mention of twenty-five, or more, adults living in a nucleo several years prior to fieldwork.

There are many creative solutions to keep up a sense of intimacy while nucleo numbers grow. For instance, some of the larger nucleos are split between two houses, one of which serves as the central space for eating and meeting, and then some people live in the other house. This is seen as a kind of satellite system that lets people live with fewer housemates, while still enjoying the benefit of a larger group with more resources. Some people build their own smaller individual residences, but are also still connected to a nucleo. This was described as a helpful option for people who had lived in Damanhur for a long time and needed some breathing space and a smaller group situation. The Damjl nucleo has become two nucleos, splitting up a larger building into two distinct nucleo spaces.46 Smaller nucleos of eight to ten people had been forming as of late 2012. It is my understanding that five is the absolute minimum for a nucleo, which is, interestingly, also the number of persons generally agreed by many scholars to be the minimum requirement for consideration as an intentional community (Miller 2010).

---

46 Damjl was the first nucleo occupied residentially by Damanhurians.
In addition to thresholds for nucleos, there is also a maximum number for Damanhurian community regions. Regions are spaces in one geographical location with more than one nucleo. The maximum population for a community region in Damanhur was described to me as approximately 220, after which, it should split up into more than one region. The numbers that citizens refer to have been theorised based on the experience of the community over time. It was reported that in the beginning a nucleo could number fewer people than the numbers they believed were suitable during the time of my fieldwork. Such considerations suggest parallels with other studies on population thresholds, including the well-known Dunbar (1993) number of 150 as a posited limit to the number of people with whom one can maintain stable social relationships. Intentional communities provide valuable sites for investigation into a minimum/maximum population concept. Hutterite communities informed Dunbar's (1993) research, where he noted that Hutterites limit the size of their communities to 150 persons.

Damanhurian theorising on 'critical numbers' is a further demonstration of the community forming what they call a 'human laboratory'. Damanhurians experiment with living arrangements, including population density, and work to understand what problems mean for the organisation of their human society. While interesting in and of itself as a research agenda, what is valuable in the context of this thesis is the experimental approach. As I have discussed in previous chapters, and as I expand upon further in Chapter 5, the attitude that their lives are experimental serves to foster an acceptance of ambiguous, unknown, liminoid situations. Framing life as an experiment, for Damanhurians, means it is acceptable to make mistakes, which makes risk taking less
daunting. It also means that Damanhurians are more likely to start projects and 'see what happens', leading to what can be argued is a higher likelihood of achieving ideals than an approach that is more risk averse. For example, the approach to building the Temples was experimental: they started and figured out what to do as they progressed. Building of the Temples coincided with community building, and was the focus for the community in the beginning. One could argue that if there were no Temples there would be no community. Having an experimental approach means that the unknown is okay, that it is better to do something than nothing. If planning approval had been sought for the Temples, then it is likely they would have never begun. This example demonstrates that this approach has been what drove Damanhurians from the very beginning and, from my perspective, continues to do so.

Responding to Schismogenesis

Damanhurians through their experiments with nucleo population limits are responding to experienced, and inevitable, conflict between members. An intentional community that does not acknowledge conflict and plan various ways of dealing with it will often experience schism that results in the disintegration of the community over time. Schismogenesis is a concept, developed by Gregory Bateson in 1936 that Andelson (2002) applies to intentional communities. Essentially, schismogenesis is the cumulative process that results from a pre-existing weakness within a group where a crack is likely to appear and if left unchecked can lead to a complete breakdown (Bateson 1936, p.174). In opposition to schismogenesis, Andelson (2002, p.136) has developed
sociogenesis, a concept that indicates a coming together of the community in one of three ‘primary sociogenic processes’: charismatic, ideological or pragmatic. Charismatic sociogenesis is due to an allegiance felt by the group to a charismatic leader (Andelson 2002, p.135). Ideological sociogenesis is due to a shared commitment or interest among members in a particular ideology or lifestyle (Andelson 2002, p.136). Pragmatic sociogenesis, or what Andelson (2002, pp.139-140) terms ‘intensifying sociogenesis’, results from pre-existing non-communitarian connections among individuals who then develop a desire to deepen or intensify their relationships by living together communally.

Contemporary intentional communities, particularly those identifying as ecovillages, are usually formed under the influence of ideological sociogenesis (Andelson 2002). Damanhur began with a charismatic leader, suggesting charismatic sociogenesis. However, there is evidence that the other two sociogenic processes were taking place in conjunction with a charismatic following. Those who founded Damanhur were already practising their spiritual research together in a school located in Torino, and the move to live communally was pragmatic in order to intensify their research efforts. This move is also arguably ideological, as the founders were beginning to develop and share an interest in living in different ways. In 2013 Damanhur's founder, Falco Terrasaco (aka Oberto Airaudi) passed away due to a terminal illness. Following his death the

---


leadership structure has changed and one could argue that new forms of sociogenesis might be taking place.

Unlike communitas, sociogenesis is a process 'by which individuals move from a condition of mutual unawareness or at most casual acquaintance to one of having an ongoing relationship with one another that entails mutual interests, concerns, and efforts' (Andelson 2002, p.135). Where communitas is temporary and can facilitate sociogenesis, sociogenesis is occurring over time as the nature of relationships change and develop, becoming more complex, multi-faceted or deeper (Andelson 2002, p.135).

Andelson (2002, p.136) distinguishes between primary sociogenesis: initial bonding during the formation of the community; and a secondary sociogenesis that occurs once the community has formed. Secondary sociogenesis can include the recruitment of new members or the socialisation of the next generation (Andelson 2002, p.136).

Schismogenesis exists as a pattern of interaction that causes the bonds that unites people to weaken and break (Andelson 2002, p.141). Andelson (2002, p.142) follows Gregory Bateson (1936) when identifying two forms of schismogenesis: complementary or symmetrical. Complementary schismogenesis is a relationship where one character trait results in an opposite character trait in the second party, i.e. an assertive group elicits a submissive response that continues to escalate resulting in resentment and hostility (Bateson 1936, p.175). In an intentional community situation this could be the leading/ruling group asserting authority over the membership to the point that

---

48 Not all intentional communities decline due to schismogenesis; some simply fade out of existence (Andelson 2002). Other communities may transform via developmental communalism (Pitzer 1989).
members begin to feel uncomfortable with the authority, resisting it (creating conflict) or leaving. Symmetrical schismogenesis is a relationship where one party exhibits a certain type of behaviour, for example boasting, and the second party responds in a similar way, resulting in competitive boasting. Again, this can escalate to the point of exceeding normal tolerance levels, resulting in mutual hostility (Bateson 1936, p.175). In an intentional community where there are two leaders, one leader may try to win more friendship or support, and so the other leader attempts to do the same, leading to fractionalisation within the community.

It is possible, and it was Bateson's (1936, cited in Andelson 2002, p.141) suggestion, that solutions to schismogenesis be found by researchers prior to a realised disruption within the community. Bateson suggested several ways in which schismogenesis might be held in check, and one way that it might be reversed. The control or restraint of schismogenesis can occur in a number of different ways. Mostly, these 'limitations' are put into effect a matter of unreflective habit, given people's long-term exposure to and familiarisation with cultural norms inhibiting conflict that have evolved over time, but there are instances where overt methods are used because those concerned are aware of the negative potential of schismogenesis. Cultural tolerance is one of the first lines of defence against escalating schismogenesis; what is considered normally accepted behaviour serves to limit extreme behaviours. Bateson (1936, p.192) provides the example of Iatmul harshness; Iatmul culture values harshness, but if a man 'goes too far in violence, his wives will run away from his house, his brothers-in-law will turn against him, and he will live under a threat of perhaps violent death, but certainly sorcery'. The Iatmul have channels where their ethos of harshness, often resulting in a form of
symmetrical schismogenesis, is allowed legitimate expression; if a man goes beyond those boundaries there are negative consequences.

Schismogenesis can also be neutralised by introducing the alternate kind of schismogenesis into a situation where one kind is dominant: an experience of complementary schismogenesis in a symmetrical relationship or vice versa (Bateson 1936, p.193). Bateson (1936, p.193) provides the example of a Squire, who is in a predominantly complementary relationship with 'his' villagers, choosing to play a game of cricket (symmetrical rivalry) with them. The introduction, even briefly, of an alternate type of relationship serves to alleviate the strain of the predominant schismogenesis type (Bateson 1936, p.193). This example bears similarities to the liminal phases that Victor Turner (1969) discusses. In fact, it could certainly be described as such. The cricket game provides an experience of liminality for both villagers and Squire and provides the opportunity for ‘refreshing’ communitas, as communitas may be revivified due to the camaraderie felt during the status-neutralising cricket match. If schismogenesis is identified, this particular technique for alleviating the tension created could be used, consciously, as a tool for maintaining collective groups. This method also suggests that achieving a balance between complementary and symmetrical schismogenesis would be an ideal response to their seemingly inevitable existence.

Further controls of schismogenesis occur in complementary relationships where there is a sudden (unplanned) role reversal, for example, when a submissive/assertive relationship changes, due to injury, into carer/cared-for (Bateson 1936, pp. 193-4). Similarly, a sudden shift in the terms of a symmetrical relationship can relieve
schismogenic strain; for example, heightened states of harshness among the Iatmul can suddenly switch to 'buffoonery' (Bateson 1936, p.194). Schismogenesis can also be kept in check if there is an outside actor to whom both members in a schismogenetic relationship feel commonly opposed; in this instance schismogenesis might also begin between the outside agent and the initial group (Bateson 1936, p.194). Outside influences can also serve to highlight the existence of schismogenesis within the original group, which may cause a reaction to, rather than a continuation of their schismogenetic patterns (Bateson 1936, p.194). Complementary schismogenesis may also turn into a relationship of mutual dependence rather than ultimately 'ending' in some way or another. Where group A provides a service to group B, group B may become dependent on receiving that service and group A dependent on the compensation for the service. Over time one cannot foresee how to live without the other (Bateson 1936, pp. 196-7).

Finally, Bateson (1936, p.197) briefly touches on the idea of counteracting schismogenesis through 'inverse progressive changes in the relationship between the groups concerned'. The 'inverse processes' to which Bateson (1936, p.197) refers are, like schismogenesis, 'cumulative results of each individual's reactions to the reactions of members of the other group'. The 'inverse process' differs from schismogenesis in the direction of the change. Where schismogenesis leads to mutual hostility, 'the inverse process leads rather in the direction of mutual love' (Bateson 1936, p.197). Bateson provides no examples for what an 'inverse progressive change' might be. He theorises that such a process, uninterrupted, would increase exponentially or at least maintain the experience of 'love'. Is the 'love' to which Bateson (1936, p.197) refers similar to
communitas? Unfortunately, he does not elaborate further on this point so that it might be relatable to Victor Turner's (1969) theory. Nevertheless, ‘inverse progressive change’ was evident in Damanhurians’ accounts of how experiences of schism, that is, conflict leading to separation, had led to resolution efforts that resulted in a deepening of relationships. The act of allowing for separation also provided emotional space and the opportunity to seek avenues that lead to potential resolution.

Andelson (2002) explores schismogenesis in a number of intentional communities in America. He describes the Hutterite intentional communities as an example of how schismogenesis can be dealt with effectively by a communal group. The Hutterites acknowledge schismogenesis, normalising it by a process of segmentation or branching out, allowing the opposing/differing groups to establish separate communities from the original, while still maintaining a connection with the intentional communal ideal (Andelson 2002, pp. 145-6). Damanhur deals with this particular issue by having many locations where members can choose to live. The community seeks to keep 'options open', so to speak, by consistently searching for new property when economically viable.

According to Andelson's (2002, pp. 146-7) view, a key difference between intentional communities and traditional communities is that they usually have a clear beginning and ending, providing for the possibility of a study of the life cycle of an intentional community. An awareness of the susceptibility of intentional communities to schismogenesis, gained through studying the life cycles of other intentional communities, can serve to make such communities stronger. By identifying the potential for weakness, steps can be taken to prevent undue conflict within a community. An important element
of Andelson's (2002) application of Bateson's theory of schismogenesis, and his own model of sociogenesis, to intentional communities is the link that the effective management of schism has with a well defined governance structure. As I demonstrate in Chapter 5, while there are benefits and even a necessity to structurally frame the activities of a community, there are still many challenges to overcome.

Dendera

Today is Sunday and my husband and I are scheduled to leave the guesthouse of our arrival and move to a nucleo for our first week of work exchange. A young German lady and her son greet us and help to load up her small car with our belongings. Then we begin our journey higher up into the mountains. To me the journey to this nucleo seems perilous. The roads are so narrow our driver must slow around corners and beep her horn vigorously to warn oncoming traffic of our presence. There is a steep slope rising to the left of the single lane road and another falling away to our right. This is a forested area, and many trees cling to the mountainside and hide numerous homes, other dwellings, and ruins. Occasionally we see an extraordinary driveway leading to an unseen home somewhere above us. [Little did I know at the time that I would be making this journey almost daily for the majority of my fieldwork.]

Inevitably, and thankfully, our journey comes to an end, and we descend down a rocky driveway to a large mechanically operated gate that slowly swings open, allowing us entry. We have arrived at a nucleo. We park and remove our belongings from Oceano's car. We had introduced ourselves during the drive. Oceano has been in Damanhur for a number of years and speaks English quite well. She then directs us into a large three-storey house.
Inside there is a spacious open area with large windows looking out to the valley and mountains beyond. Snow-capped this time of year, I am told that in summer they will be completely bare.

Beyond the entry way to the right is a large kitchen and to the left stretching away from the kitchen, parallel to the windows, is a long table surrounded by at least twenty chairs and laden with food and drink. Whoever is in charge of organising our movements has timed our entry into this nucleo for their Sunday lunch. Directly to our left are coat racks and a space for shoes and to our right is a buffet with a number of different choices for lunch. We are invited to sit down and Oceano introduces us to the people there. I recognise some from previous days, and others I meet for the first time (Field Diary 2009).

I spent most of my time in a nucleo comunità known as Dendera, accommodating nineteen adults and five children. The majority of the residents of this nucleo lived in the main dwelling; a large renovated and ecologically retrofitted building designed around existing ruins. There were three smaller buildings, housing a couple or one person, located near the house. Two of these smaller homes were experiments in alternative building; one was a straw bale building, the other was built above ground in the branches of two trees. The other smaller dwelling served as both an overflow (when the main house was full) for nucleo residents and at other times as a guesthouse. There are thirteen rooms within the main dwelling housing fifteen to sixteen of the nucleo members and the five children at any one time. Four to five people shared a bathroom between them and there is a bathroom on every level of the three-floor home. The ground floor is where the only laundry was located and contained three industrial grade
washing machines and two dryers. There was also a washing machine in a bathroom on one of the higher levels.

**Nucleo Turno**

At Damanhur, we have the idea that living in our nucleo communities is like a ritual, and ideally, we move through all our moments at home with Attention. Presence. Enchantment. It's true, there is a palpable everyday magic in the simple tasks and encounters of living in a Damanhrurian nucleo. Things that may seem like normal household chores, with this intention, become dense and significant, living acts of magic (Cocco 2013).

During the last six months of my fieldwork I worked between four and six days a week doing household tasks with various members of Dendera. The household tasks were conducted during rostered periods assigned to different members throughout the week. These periods of time were known as a *turno* and were understood by all members of the larger federation to refer to an individual's turn at looking after their home nucleo. In Dendera every person had set *turni* that were rostered in negotiation with the capo nucleo (the person elected to represent the nucleo within the Federation). Days were broken up into shifts (*turni*), and each individual would have two or so rostered *turni* throughout the week. Such shifts could include morning clean up and preparation of lunch, school pick-up and after school care, or dinner preparation. There were also shifts that consisted of work in the garden or other maintenance tasks and slightly different responsibilities on the weekends. For example, there could be one person in charge of preparing dinner and another for caring for the children and cleaning up after the evening meal is completed. There is always someone at home, and this is rostered...
also. I asked a citizen, of only a few years, to describe an example of one of her turni in writing. Now known as Quaglia Cocco, she titled this piece: The ritual of a nucleo community ‘turn’.49 50

It's 9 o'clock and time to start my 'turno.' For one half-day every week, each one of us in the nucleo has our turn to watch over things, take care of cleaning and cooking, and additional projects like gardening, building or fixing things, deep cleaning, and attending to the land.

I begin. I unlock the front door, put on my work coat, lightly dusted with wood shavings, and a pair of water resistant work gloves, maybe the 8th pair I have worn down and sometimes lost in my years at Damanhur. I go outside, feeling the clear, pure chill of Valchiusella winter air on my face. I twist open the metal handle of the wood burning heater. I heft and throw in one log after another, taking them from a pile of logs meticulously stacked according to size, circumference and length. I attempt to vary their shape, as I learned that stacking alternating round and triangular pieces is most effective and energy efficient. This is one of many new pieces of practical information I have accumulated over the years here, ones I never would have known otherwise and that now have become automatic. There is a certain visceral satisfaction in hefting wood, a feeling of really using the muscles of the body in this primal functionality. Wood, fire, heat. It is a symbol, it is the warmth of family, closeness, care. Life force. Camaraderie. Living consciousness in the heart of a community home.

I walk along the former greenhouses turned tool shed, bike shed and storage space. I let the chickens out of their coop as today is a sunny day, with no ice or snow on the grass, warm enough for them to go out despite the winter chill.

49 I have included only a truncated version of the original.
50 Quaglia Cocco (2013) has since posted this story online in her blog, and on the Damanhurian website.
I pull the string system my housemate [...] devised to open a little hatch door from outside the coop [...] The chickens dash out to graze in an enclosed grassy lawn. [...] 

Across the fields and back into the house. I pick a tarot card from the deck of cards always spread out on a dedicated table for each of us to receive a daily indication. Today is "Il Diavolo." The Devil. Disorder, passion, lust, egoism. Mars and Venus conjunct. Hm. Wild energies at work, despite my current task of making things tidy and being of humble service. I use it to proceed in my work with immediacy and verve. [...] 

What's for lunch? I pull out bowls and trays of leftovers from the main refrigerator (we have three) and go into the canteen to survey the grains and legumes. I choose between brown rice and quinoa. Red lentils and green. Saute some chickpeas, and heat up a vegetable soup from last night's dinner. I almost always prepare vegan foods, with raw or macrobiotic recipes because I prefer to eat this way, though most Damanhurians, eat some meat, dairy, eggs and animal products as well, always with preference for organic foods, especially those produced in our communities.

I set the table. Tablecloths, plates. Counting the number of people who responded that they would be present for lunch. [...] Housemates begin to arrive as I run the dishes and pots through the dishwasher and clean up scraps from the counters.

We do a collective food purification ritual to get ourselves in a harmonious frequency with the food, eating with presence and appreciation, spiritual nourishment and gratitude. The conversation is often jovial, permeated with laughter as wine cups are filled and people go back for second and third servings. [...] Even this is a ritual. [...] Conversation topics can range from Damanhur current events and nucleo concerns to politics and films. I am the last one to sit down at the table... I exhale deeply before beginning my meal
with a spoonful of lentils, grateful to have a reprise of stillness and social connection after the efforts and busyness of the morning 'turno' ritual.

The ritual of the community turno is repeated in some form within each nucleo. The elements described by Quaglia touch on many of aspects covered in this chapter. One gets a sense of the ritual or sacred nature of the work, despite there mostly being mundane tasks to perform. There are some more obvious elements of ritual such as the Tarot card and the meal ritual. These moments serve as a pause in between all the other activities. The ending is telling, in that, while most of the work was done individually, there were elements of other community members throughout, a consciousness of the tasks being done for the whole group, and then a final point where her turn is finished and she shares that moment with others. Woven throughout are indicators that what she does during this account have built up over time; she has learned how to do each thing and how to judge that each action is the right one. From picking the right pieces of wood for the fire or knowing to let the chickens out, the seamlessness of the account speaks to her familiarity with the tasks. There are also elements of her own individual ways, like that of vegan cooking and wearing a work coat, whereas in Dendera members rarely wore one. The confidence to be oneself is an ongoing development in a community like this, through the tension between individual desires and communal expectations.

Moving Nucleo - Nucleo differences

Each nucleo is unique and changes depending on the needs of the individuals who live in it. There is no set schedule, and even during the year I spent in Damanhur rosters
and shifts changed within the nucleo in which I spent my time. Oceano, a young mother, had a set shift on a Sunday afternoon. This was because she worked full-time through the week in Torino and had larger community commitments over the weekend. I would often catch a lift after Damanhur Get with Oceano and spend the afternoon helping her with her household turn.\textsuperscript{51} Montagne, another mother with a young daughter, found that swapping an afternoon turn with another member enabled her to get all her turns (a morning and afternoon shift) done in one day. She commented to me on how this was much easier to manage and allowed her to plan more in the day and get larger jobs done.

Nucleo differences were very apparent during the first weeks of fieldwork when I was on work exchange at Dendera and then Magilla (the neighbouring nucleo). When moving from Dendera to Magilla I found that comparison of the two came naturally, as they were similar and yet different in a number of ways. Here is my reflection from the first day in the new, to us, nucleo Magilla:

We leave our first host nucleo with very little fanfare. We are only moving next door. We pack up our caravan and tumble down the dirt driveway and are met by our host. We are given a much more extensive tour that wasn't provided at Dendera. There is a bathroom that can be accessed from the outside of the house. This makes sense, as there are several external accommodations that house members of the nucleo. These are of various types, from permanent looking wooden chalets to temporary demountables that remind me of the steel boxes used for accommodation on the mines in Western Australia. … I am told that these external dwellings are add-ons

\textsuperscript{51} A Sunday morning ritual held in the Temples.
when the nucleo becomes over-full and the community must come up with ways to accommodate new citizens. These extra little dwellings give the feel of living in a little village, and in the centre is a large vegetable garden surrounded by raspberry bushes. The raspberries are ripe for picking. We are encouraged to eat them, but only after a particular ritual has been performed—basically when we see others eating them we can eat them too.

We are now staying in a demountable [a transportable building the size and shape of a shipping container] with two rooms. Both have a single bed and there is space for our suitcases and some cupboards and drawers for our belongings. The setting is beautiful and peaceful, directly out our front door is a view of the valley. This nucleo is situated down slope from Dendera and the external dwelling village is in between the two main houses. Between our front door and the valley view is a large solar collector constructed like a satellite dish that moves with the direction of the sun. Covered in many mirrors, the collector is always a striking feature, and I still find myself stopping to look at it for periods of time. The main house is similarly sized to Dendera with three levels, although it is facing a different direction; where Dendera is south-facing (the most ideal passive solar orientation), Magilla is west-facing (Field Diary 2009).

Magilla had some other similarities with Dendera: a weekly meeting, shifts for chores and child minding, separate quarters for guests, and they keep the personal living quarters of the house off limits to guests. There are also some differences. They have a Magilla fire that they light at every gathering to capture the spirit/memories of that event. They use the same lighter throughout and capture the flame again when it is time to move on. Their pre-meal prayer was shorter at our first meal, and that brevity continued to be the norm for the duration of our stay. Similar to Dendera there is a large dining table located in the main living area and off to one side is a large kitchen.
The lounge area is separate and can be cut off by closing doors. Entry can be gained from within the house or from an outside door. It is darker and cooler in the lounge/television area, and during the heat of the day it can be a good place to escape to. We find ourselves alone much more at this nucleo and watch some television to pass time and was the only time I watched television during my twelve months of fieldwork. We see many more members of this nucleo using the electronic entertainment. Whereas in Dendera the television was hardly turned on, in Magilla it is on most nights.\textsuperscript{52} As we settle into Magilla, there are more and more differences to be noted between the two nucleos.

The members of Magilla have more small rituals they carry out. At a certain time every evening they blow a horn three times, which is known as the conch shell ritual. There is a standing stone similar to the ones found in the Damjl nucleo that they individually approach at certain times. They also have a tarot deck out each morning from which each member takes a card, or two, as they arrive in the dining room, similar to the nucleo described in the \textit{turno} ritual. My partner and I found it difficult to settle in here, as can be seen in this field note:

\begin{quote}
It is harder to feel comfortable here because routine is not as ordered. Dinner can be anywhere between 7:30 and 9:30 pm and lunch between 1 and 2 pm. At Dendera these times were more strict and seemed clearer, although this also might be because of a larger language barrier here than in Dendera. This lead to time spent hanging around the dining area wondering if we should wait longer or go and find something else to do. There are also less people at
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{52} The members of Dendera did not use the television in the communal area of the house, although some individuals may have had private televisions in their rooms.
the dinner table than Dendera, with more people eating at erratic times, often a lot later in the evening. This week there have certainly been less collective gatherings than I experienced at Dendera. I also find myself questioning where everyone is (Field Diary 2009).

Later in the week we attended a theatre production in the Open Temple. This was a comedy, and the acting was engaging and the costumes well designed in striking colours. Although spoken in Italian, we found we were able to keep up with the story. Many people attended, as the evening was delightfully warm and beautiful under the stars. Roughly the same number of people attended from Magilla as from Dendera. Where Dendera had organised a picnic together before the theatre, those from Magilla did not eat until they got home at 11.30 pm. This exemplified the different approaches in each nucleo: where Magilla seemed to require a more independent mindset, members of Dendera were more focussed on regular collective activity.

We left Magilla shortly after the night of the theatre, never having really found a connection there. To me this highlights how diverse personality types would be able to find a place and people that suit them among the many different nucleos in Damanhur. It made sense to me even at this early stage that I would find myself fitting in with the nucleo, Dendera, that had the function of connecting with international communities—not only because I had formerly lived in an international community located in Chidlow, Australia, but also because I was personally interested in this kind of function and so my skills would prove most useful there.
Nucleo Meeting

At the beginning of my stay, Dendera had two meetings a week to discuss household issues. By the time I left they had only one on a Wednesday evening after Serata. It was more than six months of fieldwork before I was invited to a household meeting. I had originally asked to attend one when I first arrived, but members of the nucleo did not feel comfortable with this at the time. The household meeting is a place where sometimes contentious or personal issues can be discussed, and it makes sense that the people invited are known to all those in attendance. With this in mind, and knowing that members of Dendera understood my purpose and my desire for inclusion, I waited for an invitation to their more personal processes. In the end I was rewarded with more inclusion and special efforts to ensure I saw as much of Damanhur as possible before I left. The night that I was invited to the house meeting seemed spontaneous. It seemed like most of my involvement happened in this way, once barriers of distrust were mitigated. I had difficulty physically accessing Dendera, particularly during the colder months (there was also only a short time when accommodation was available); it was rare that I was able to stay the night in the nucleo. It so happened that I was able to do so one Wednesday evening:

We sat in the lounge room. A spacious enough room, although it would be crowded if the entire nucleo were in attendance, with blanket-covered couches lining the walls. There was a bookshelf with some toys stored at the bottom and a plant to the right of the entry. The entry was two sliding glass panelled doors that served as a divide between this room and the larger dining room beyond. It was late, members had already attended Serata in Crea, and when we arrived home had also eaten before attending the meeting - it had
been dark since fairly early due to short winter days. Despite the cold outside, the inside of Dendera was warm, and our gathering, lounging on comfortable well-worn lounge chairs, made the atmosphere cozy.

The conversation was recorded on a computer. The previous minutes were read out by Terra who was asked to sit next to Cielo, who was the minute taker. Also, Stagno watched for who wanted to speak next to keep a mental list. Cielo in particular was very frustrated at having to repeat herself when telling people not to interrupt others and to wait for a turn to speak. She made sure to tell me she was frustrated with this in English at the end of the meeting. There was laughter about the restrictions; although it was obvious that this could be frustrating and lengthy. Two participants had something to do with their hands—knitting and sewing. There was someone who was completing the evening turno who was busy cleaning, but who tried to listen from the kitchen (Field Diary 2010).

From my previous experience in community meetings in Australia I was not surprised by how this nucleo meeting progressed. Concern over the length of time the meeting was taking is common in most meetings in which I have participated, even outside of communal environments. The laughter and playfulness is also common, despite the irritation to those trying to run the meeting. While meetings of this kind seem to be necessary for logistical reasons, they can have many failings. Participants fall into traps of trying to fill a meeting with too many topics without taking into consideration the amount of time required in order to ensure each participant feels heard and each topic is dealt with adequately.

My own experiences in meetings both in intentional community settings and in other more conventional settings (universities, clubs, housing strata AGMs, business and so
on.) has revealed that meetings that involved experienced communards are often quicker and less prone to some of the common downfalls, primarily because of an understanding that some topics must be isolated to their own meeting. For example, Dendera would also have what it called a 'bubble' every month or so where as many nucleo members would be home for a half or full day of discussions and brainstorming. These dedicated time periods are seen differently than weekly meetings. I was never able to attend a 'bubble', a space with an imaginary film that contains it, but from descriptions it would seem that these meeting had a different intention. The intention was that each person would be heard, that there was time, and that everyone was there for the other. These bubble meetings and the weekly meetings were also built on the general self-awareness being cultivated among citizens of Damanhur. There is a structural pillar dedicated to self-reflection, known as Tecnarcato, and is elaborated further in this chapter. At the time of fieldwork citizens would discuss their Tecnarcato goals in different settings, including what kind of setting was dependant on nucleo and other commitments. Ramo wrote to me about nucleo differences and group sharing relating to Tecnarcato. The excerpt from Ramo below exemplifies the flexibility towards Tecnarcato meetings among Damanhurians:

In terms of group sharing [of Tecnarcato related topics], every nucleo is different. Some may take time in the weekly house meeting to check in about Tecnarcato: sometimes one or two people talk about their lives in the context of their Tec. goals. Often there is not adequate time or attention in busy house meetings to do so, so there may be special extra meetings where people doing Tec. gather formally or informally in pairs or small groups to share their work (pers.comm n.d.).
Nucleo Rituals

Victor Turner (1969, p.6) draws attention to Monica Wilson’s (1954, p.241) outline of the importance of a study of ritual:

Rituals reveal values at their deepest level... men express in ritual what moves them most, and since the form of expression is conventionalised and obligatory, it is the values of the groups that are revealed. I see in the studies of rituals the key to an understanding of the essential constitution of human societies.

In Damanhur there are formal rituals, but, as seen in the account of a citizen's morning turno, even what is seen as mundane is given ritual status. Turner went on to widen his understanding of liminality to include, in addition to ritual, games, play, theatre and marginal activity like political activism. In this section I present two examples of formal rituals Damanhurians perform in nucleo. These nucleo-level rituals are in contrast to the larger, community wide rituals that I discuss in Chapter 5.

Both rituals presented here, a food ritual and an evening prayer, are short moments outside of the normal frenzy of nucleo activity. Each ritual involves physical contact with others and a presence of mind towards the task at hand. In both instances my interest lies in applying Turner's theory of liminality and ritual. I did not experience what could be called communitas during these rituals, but there was a centring, calming element to both, and the physical contact, which could be seen as the foundation to deeper connections between persons. Rituals that I observed in the nucleo were usually small, less than twenty participants, and quick, less than ten minutes. I was told that
these rituals served several functions, including esoteric ones. Importantly, from my perspective, they broke up the mundane everyday of nucleo life with liminal moments. Some rituals explicitly include consciousness of a connection between (via thoughts and what Damanhurians perceive as an energetic element) a participant's home nucleo with other nucleos, while other rituals were focussed solely on participants performing the ritual at that time.

The first ritual I discuss is known as purificazione del cibo (food purification). Before every meal a Damanhurian will conduct a purification ritual for the food, similar to a prayer or saying grace. The purpose of the ritual is to cleanse the food energetically and bring people into connection with what they are doing and eating. Everyone at the table will stay seated, keeping their arms by their sides and one or all the people will say the words that accompany the ritual. In Dendera the whole ritual is spoken out loud by all people present who know it. When Damanhurians are alone among others who do not know the ritual, they will either ask to speak it for everyone or conduct their own private ritual before eating. This ritual is relatively short and involves a verse (possibly followed by an additional prayer) spoken in Italian and one person will have her or his hand hovering over the food being eaten. If there is bread, then the bread will be the target, but otherwise any item or plate of food is used. Once in a while at a dinner of pizza where Falco was also in attendance, he was served first and completed this ritual. Some time later, I sought to clarify who was responsible for conducting the ritual; Ucello's response was:
The food purification ritual is both about removing un-harmonious frequencies from the food and about establishing a subtle connection with it. The most senior initiate usually does the food purification, though he or she can also delegate to someone else, so everyone gets a turn.

This ritual, like others I observed, differs slightly depending on who is conducting the ritual and where the meal is taking place. There are obvious reasons for these differences. For example, when Damanhurians are in a crowded space where others do not follow this practice, they might do so under their breath in a private way. Other differences were not discussed with me directly, but from other experiences throughout the community they were observable. For example, there is an added prayer included at the end of the purification verse that is used by some and not by others. In Dendera this ritual always seemed to be conducted using the additional prayer. There was one time when this difference was brought to my attention quite starkly before lunch one Saturday:

Lunch is ready, and we stand in preparation for the purification. Cielo searches for the two boys; they are playing upstairs and are late to lunch. They stay briefly and sit at a different table seemingly eager to get back to their enjoyment upstairs (confirmed by their quick disappearance at the end of their meals). The guest leads the purification. However, his version is very short—similar to some other nucleos I have been to—before he stops and says ‘buonapetito’. Everyone else (members of Dendera) continue with the usual longer purification verse. There was nothing said about this [later I was informed that the longer version of the ritual was an additional prayer, not technically a part of the ritual] (Field Diary 2009).
In both excerpts above there is a demonstration of flexibility, an assertion of authority and in the second, an assertion of this nucleo’s autonomy. The senior initiate is in charge of performing the ritual, but does not have to as he or she may delegate the task at his or her discretion. Similarly, there are different versions of the ritual as the situation calls. In the second instance there is the politeness of allowing the guest (also an initiate) to perform the ritual, but then asserting their own decision to complete the additional prayer despite his tendency to opt for the standard version.

The second ritual that occurred on a regular basis in the nucleo is known as the evening prayer:

Tonight Dove was home and asked if we wanted to participate in an evening prayer. We of course said yes and were led into the lounge room. There were three other members plus Jonathan and I in the lounge room together. We were instructed to hold hands in a circle, and then those who knew the words would speak the prayer together, followed by a moment of silence, which is then ended with a particular hand movement and the final words of the prayer. I am informed afterwards that every nucleo participates in an evening ritual prayer. The intention is that it is done at roughly the same time by all the nucleos so that there is a shared moment of thinking of each other and the quest.53 They achieve this by having a designated time period where it can be conducted, for example, between 19:30 and bedtime. The reason I had always observed two people in the past is because it must be at least two initiates of the School of Meditation who complete the prayer. Dove mentions to me that sometimes people forget to do the prayer, although the intention is that it is done every night (Field Diary 2009).

53 This refers to the Quesiti (loosely translatable as Quests) that is made of eight quesiti (individually quesito), seen by Damanhurians as a set of eight guiding principles for the road to enlightenment.
The frequency of these events is likely to serve as a constant reminder of their spiritual beliefs/connections, but also serves to create a moment of connection between the two or more people involved. It is likely that the invitation of guests depends on the people participating. One member, Oceano, had already shown herself to be more desirous of privacy than others. In contrast, on the night we were invited to participate in what is known as 'evening prayer', the people involved were much more willing to share their thoughts and ideas with me.

Self-Development (Tecnarcato)

Tecnarcato is a Damanhurian-created word and has no literal translation. When Damanhurians mention activity they are doing within the frame of the Tecnarcato, they are referring to a sense of individual inner growth or refinement. Tecnarcato is a Federation-wide initiative. Yet, it takes place on an individual level, it was only through the development of personal relationships (usually those I developed while working in the nucleo) that I began to understand how Tecnarcato impacted citizens' lives. A personal discovery made through Tecnarcato was shared with me over coffee one day. A lady who had been in Damanhur for more than fifteen years shared with me how she used to constantly play with a strand of hair, folding it and twisting it through her fingers. Through a process of discussion with other citizens, she came to realise this unconscious habit was something many others had noticed and after further investigation (discussion and contemplation) she came to realise it was a response to anxiety. This citizen used to (it is a habit she has now, mostly, overcome) respond to her
own anxiety through the action of fiddling with her hair; by dealing with the underlying anxiety, she told me, she was able to stop this habit. She explained that what seemed like a harmless habit was able to alert her to an underlying issue that would benefit her to resolve.

A Damanhurian helpfully explained Tecnarcato to me:

The Tecnarcato is one of the four pillars, and it is 'optional' for ... citizens... So, that means those who want to participate in Tec. do so, those who choose not to are not penalised in any way in terms of their citizenship status. Most citizens do participate. Participation is individual... [Tecnarcato occurs in three-month trimesters: once one block is completed, then a citizen must sign up for the next block, and so on.]\(^5\)

If I decide to participate, I choose a 'verifier' who will be my point person on my pathway of Tec. Usually, it is a person who lives in my same nucleo, though sometimes it is not the case. I write a trimester program, in conversation with my verifier, about points I want to work on, points of growth, things to overcome, talents to develop, habits to make or break. They can be very practical points like exercising regularly, studying a foreign language, taking a painting class, ... or they can be more abstract like developing self-love, containing anger, being more assertive in communication.

Within these 3 months, I can meet with my verifier as often as we choose, so he or she can support me in my progress. At the end of the trimester, to continue participation in Tecnarcato, I write a review of the 3 months, sharing it with my verifier, writing about what I learned and how things

\(^5\) Trimester is the term used by Damanhurians. Tecnarcato programs occur three times a year and run for three months.
evolved. Then I write a 'new' program, which can be related to or even the same points as before, or it can change. The verifier signs these papers and they get turned into the Tecnarcato coordinators.

...there are two main 'rules' for Tecnarcato:

1. Write a planned schedule for your day, every day. So not only a to-do list, also including things that will help me move forward with my Tec. program. This is helpful for time-management as well, in order to reach set goals.

2. Write in a journal every day. This is a space to reflect on events and lessons learned. It can be short, factual, poetic, whatever works. Every day though.

From the above account one can see that Tecnarcato is an institutional element of Damanhurians' lives (it is the most recent of the four governing Pillars), with guiding principles and obligations associated with participation. I asked a relatively new citizen if it was common for people to take breaks from what, to me, seemed a rigorous level of self-reflection. The answer, from her perspective, was that breaks were not encouraged, as continuity was important for making the program effective, although people might be late in submitting a new trimester program, and so a period of inactivity was possible. As with many of the other elements that make up Damanhur, there is a level of commitment required and expected once individuals choose to participate. There is also a hierarchy to the program with Tecnarcato leaders found at the Federation and nucleo levels:

In the Tecnarcato pillar, there are two overall coordinators for all of Damanhur called 'vertici' in Italian. It's like vertex, so on the top of things. These people oversee the program, keep everyone's trimester program on file, monitor the due dates for new programs being turned in, and other creative
ways of encouraging participation. Citizens in Tecnarcato are encouraged to meet with the coordinators every once in a while to share how things are going.

Tecnarcato spokespeople:[ ] Every nucleo has a Tecnarcato 'spokesperson' who meets bi-weekly with the Tec. coordinators and all the other spokespeople. The spokesperson is responsible for communicating things about Tec. in the nucleo, guiding people so they are participating and active in Tec. and helping to be a resource in resolving interpersonal tensions or personal difficulties in the nucleo.

Those responsible for the leadership roles change regularly, providing opportunities for citizens to experience leading as well as participating in Tecnarcato over time. Ramo tells me that in addition to participation in the trimester programs, there is also an opportunity to 'initiate' as someone proficient in Tecnarcato:

After participating in at least three trimester programs in a row, though sometimes after many years of participation, a person can request Tecnarcato 'initiation', which is a ritual that gives a bit of extra energy to the person and their pathway. It is an acknowledgement of growth accomplished through Tecnarcato.

The acknowledgement of growth in Damanhur is further evidence of the individual as an evolving being who can change status from non-Damanhurian to Damanhurian over time. Citizens of this community see themselves as individuals. On the Damanhurian website a quote from the founder is displayed prominently, describing Damanhur as a 'community of individualists'. The ideal for Damanhurians is a balance between their individual and collective lives. Bradley (1999) equates a concept of communion with Turner’s (1969) communitas and applies it to the context of communes. Bradley's (1999,
p.169) communion suggests a complete submission to the will of the group, whereas there is a deep sense among Damanhurians that this is not the ideal. I argue that Turner's communitas fits what is the ideal mix of individual and collective and is supported by his reference to communion: 'this is not the same as... [the] notion of "communion" ...communitas preserves individual distinctiveness' (1982, p.45). Tecnarcarto is key to preserving the individual in Damanhur and I now discuss some specific examples of how attention to one's own responses can aid in the effort to live communally.

The individual is responsible

Each member of Damanhur takes part in the physical labour required for the maintenance of the community buildings, ritual spaces and grounds. In the nucleo the majority of the work is done individually. Yet, they are all contributing to a collective goal. They can see the evidence of the work of others, and so there is a sense that they are working together, for example, the evening prayer discussed earlier in this chapter. As with collective work, the individual work provides areas of discussion over the dinner table and an opportunity to share a sense of group satisfaction and celebration when a particularly large job is completed. There also seems to be a tendency for individuals to move towards tasks that suit them, or that they like better than others. There is the potential to try and develop new skills to complete a different role if that becomes a desire.

The nucleo becomes the site where what would normally be the individual or private aspects of someone’s life are open to communal scrutiny. The chores to be completed
are individually done, but are obviously a collective service. In other words, individuals have to act, doing jobs they may not enjoy, for the benefit of the group. This action is very visible to the rest of the group, as cleaning, not done, is noticed and the preparation of food (tasty or otherwise) is obvious. The nucleo is the place where the less attractive side of communal living takes places. Jobs like washing dishes, cleaning toilets, removing hair from plug holes and unblocking drains are almost never ending in a residence of nineteen adults. There are a number of mundane tasks required of nucleo members, in combination with jobs that provide an income. In addition, there are demanding extracurricular activities as part of being Damanhurian. Due to the diverse demands on individual's time it can be difficult to integrate and maintain regular rituals.

Another time-consuming issue is that most aspects of communal living are up for negotiation. Nineteen different adults can bring nineteen different viewpoints on how things should be done. Whether or not to have a set time for dinner, whether people pay for all the food despite their attendance, and how the roster functions can all be different from one nucleo to the next. A washing machine broke during my stay at Dendera, and the conversation around this event served to highlight the importance (therefore, requiring careful decision making) of such appliances in such intensely shared accommodation. A certain size and quality of machine was required, but this also needed to meet self-imposed requirements regarding energy ratings and water use. Despite careful consideration of machines in the past, they were still only lasting three years due to almost constant use. Anyone with a child will testify to the increase in washing requirements when an extra member enters the home. So, one must consider
the five children (one teenager, two young boys, a toddler and a baby) as well as the nineteen adults using those machines—it was a considerable amount of washing.

The nucleo is where the most basic of discussions about living together takes place: too much hair in the shower/bath plughole, small unusable portions left in the fridge, poor communication, conflicts of schedules around household chores, parenting, differing tastes (dietary and aesthetic), and many other elements of personal daily life. These aspects all add to the challenge of community living.

At the moment I am sitting at the long table at Dendera listening to Montagne and Ursula chatting idly in the kitchen. Ursula is cooking dinner tonight and Montagne is repairing a gingerbread house for Christmas. The other German lady in the house tried to create it, and it did not work out. So even though Montagne has quite a lot to do at present, she has still taken the time to make a birthday cake and repair the gingerbread house for the kids.

She described herself as a blanket that is being stretched over a wide area and is really only a short blanket (Field Diary 2009).

The excerpt above highlights some of the challenges when catering to many people. In line with Montagne’s characterisation, one might call it the ‘stretched blanket’ effect. I heard many times over the course of my stay the saying, 'it depends on the people', in other words, people need to act so as to make the most of a given situation. For example, the nucleo of Dendera in comparison to others had what I would describe as a nurturing, even maternal, order. Whether it was because it was predominantly female members or because the young (from a few months to early teens) children to be catered to, there was a structure around food and rosters that fit well with Western ideas of care
for the young (i.e regular meal and bed time). Where some nucleos might have meals later in the evening, the people of Dendera chose an early and set mealtime. Meals were collective in all ways, they were made for everyone by many different hands, and all members of the nucleo paid for all the food. Almost all members of this nucleo had turns at cooking, and almost all members (whether because they had paid for it or because they wanted to) would try to be home regularly throughout the week to share a meal with others. This way of doing things was described to me as 'trying to be like a normal family' whereas I am sure that other nucleos with people at different stages of their lives would want a different kind of flexibility.

The nucleo can also be the place where a person is most vulnerable. While living with others deepens familiarity, it was not reported as the place where the deepest communal connections are made, as deeper relationships are formed in other spaces and times. Vulnerability is heightened, as the nucleo is the environment where learning is the most constant and mistakes and confrontation are inevitable. All this occurs in a space where one lives, a space where one might normally go to escape confrontations with the outside world. 'I could live with anyone now,' said Ramo. 'At first I thought there were certain types of people that I could live with, but now after sixteen years I realise it's not about personality'. Ramo, a long time resident of Damanhur, was trying to explain that it is not so much about the type of person, their peculiarities, rather it is about you. Everyone at some point will present a challenge to overcome in order to live with him or her well. It is the individual's ability to accept a diverse range of 'other ways of living' that brings a certain measure of calm to communal experience. Ramo believed that, at the time of my fieldwork, she had grown her level of tolerance to such an extent that she
would be surprised to find someone with whom she really struggled to live. The nucleo is the place where 'living with' happens. The most communal element of Damanhur is sharing a bathroom, kitchen and laundry with a number of other individuals.

**Miscommunication**

The importance of Tecnarcato becomes apparent when dealing with the variety of interpersonal issues evident when living communally. In particular, there are regular challenges to achieving effective communication between members of nucleos and between all the citizens of the community. My prior experience of living communally prepared me for issues with communication. Similar to other interpersonal experiences in a community, being misunderstood, or misunderstanding another, becomes a fairly frequent occurrence. Here I provide two instances as they occurred in Dendera:

The very top level of the nucleo, Dendera, has several private rooms and a hallway that leads onto a rooftop courtyard paved in ceramic ochre tiles giving the building a Tuscan feel. Here members of the nucleo will often hang their washing on lines to take advantage of sunlight for drying. This area also offers far-ranging views of the valley below the house and of mountains visible in the distance. It is here that one member of the nucleo offered to us the opportunity to hang out our own washing to dry. One bright sunny afternoon we (my husband and I) were out hanging up our laundry, admiring the view and soaking the warm early summer sun. Also looking down on the car park we waved as Oceano arrived. Oceano waved back and was soon up on the verandah with us. Immediately she asked why we were up there, we responded that we were hanging out washing as told by another member. She then informed us that we (guests) are not allowed in that part of the house. The living quarters are private and we are not to go there. We felt very
uncomfortable and quickly apologised, taking our clothing and returning downstairs and to our caravan. Oceano's blunt response to our presence in the private part of the house was not really directed at us. It was clear that she was frustrated at the different guidelines or rules that had been communicated to us by different members. It was very important to Oceano that the privacy of the house was maintained, yet it was clear that this was not a feeling shared by all members (Field Diary 2009).

Such instances of communication breakdown were common, and certainly have been common in my experiences of community living in Australia. It is understandable that guests (as they have so many) would be denied access to private areas of the home. More traditional or mainstream homes do not have to contend with unknown guests on a regular basis and so do not need to communicate rules of privacy or restricted areas. Communicating a shared sense of what is private is just one of many things members of a nucleo must negotiate. Each nucleo differed on this, and even the guidelines within Dendera differed for each guest and were adapted for longer-term guests as time progressed. I was given more free access to the nucleo as I spent more time among the people living there. Just as in any relationship trust is built over time. Miscommunication is one of the more difficult aspects of community life, although the ambiguity of misunderstood moments creates an opportunity, similar to a liminal phase, where new improved understandings can arise. While miscommunication can be limited, and a clearly defined structure assists, it will always exist and if left unchecked can be cause for schism.

In Damanhur there is an awareness of the inevitability of miscommunication, that each person will be misunderstood or misunderstand another at some point. Acceptance
leads more quickly to resolution, and while anger is still possible and did occur, it is possible to bypass irrational behaviour in favour of more positive approaches. In particular, a sense of humour was seen as important for dealing with minor concerns associated with communal living, as the following example demonstrates.

Arriving home to Dendera I greet Dove, who is making the meal for tonight. She is busy creating all kinds of lovely delights, large salads, home made bread, a pasta dish that starts the mouth watering. The table is set for twenty people; this seems a larger number than usually home for dinner. I am relieved to be here after a long day. The comfort level is improving, and I look forward to seeing everyone and conversing about our different day’s activities. Tonight we discuss the ritual that I attended, an outdoor one that took almost four hours. Although soon after sitting down, and purificazione, it is obvious that nearly half the people would not be home for dinner. Dove is exasperated about the potentially wasted food and the time she spent making enough food for so many. They were supposed to be home for dinner, but have not called to even apologise for being late. There is humour in the exasperation, though, and we move past it easily enough and on to other things. Slowly over the course of the meal some others start trickling in, not without comment from Dove, and are apologetic that they had been caught up with other things (Field Diary 2009).

A scenario such as this, where courtesy has been forgotten, was not a regular occurrence over the course of my stay. More often than not, in Dendera, a majority of those who said they would be home were home in time to eat. Latecomers would be welcomed and ushered into a seat. Sometimes someone will get them a plate and something to start eating and they will perform their own purificazione before beginning their meal. There was no stress around this part of the day, and most days’ meals were a casual affair in
this nucleo. For me it was comforting to have people rushing in offering apologies, to have others laugh and welcome them home. Similar to my own family home or others I have stayed in, there is an underlying expectation that everyone will let the cook know of their attendance and try to make it home by the allotted time. Should they notify the cook that they are running late then food will be kept aside for them. It could easily have been different. As I saw in the new citizen nucleo, there can become an air of accountability, where others keep tabs and are unforgiving of lateness and errors of judgement. It is easy to see how small things can easily build up among those who live communally. Tecnarcato becomes very important here, the ability to look within for the answers to feelings of frustration with others. In addition to self-work, communitas or similar experiences of bonding help build a love for others. The nucleo is a testing ground; like all experiments, mistakes are made and failures experienced. As Damanhur has an approach to schism that allows the reinvention of parts of the community, the potential schismogenesis resulting from protracted, unresolved issues with communal living can be dispersed.

Conclusion

The nucleo forms an integral part of the Damanhurian puzzle and is an important site for processing experiences and learning how to be communal. In this chapter I have focussed on the day-to-day lives and elements of the mundane that are sacralised. Nucleos are a semi-autonomous entity, which allows them to self-organise according to the unique individuals that make up that nucleo at that time. Damanhurians
acknowledge that group size can be too large or too small leading to conflict or stagnation. Critical thresholds are employed as a line of defence against potential schisms and so, nucleo numbers are ideally kept between five and twenty. Critical number theory was developed due to experience gained by Damanhurians over time in response to difficulties experienced when numbers were too low or too high. Critical number limits can be seen to pre-empt potential schismogenesis that might arise from overly full homes and lack of personal space, on the one hand, and the ability of the group to achieve some levels of self-sufficiency, on the other. Institutionalised self-reflection, as facilitated by the Tecnarcato Pillar, could also be seen to help provide a stronger foundation from which citizens might better negotiate schismogenic circumstances. Communal living in Damanhur fosters an environment of reflection on self and others, which in turn supports the ideology informing Tecnarcato.

The everyday lives of Damanhurians who live in nucleos are both flexible and ritualised. There are formalised structured rituals, such as the evening prayer, in addition to a consciousness of ritual thought in other tasks, for example, the turno. Changeability and ritual are both elements that have liminal like qualities. Responses to schismogenesis can lead to the creation of liminal moments where communitas might arise, for example, the bubble meeting. Liminality has become a way of life for Damanhurians, as outlined in the Introduction, and so they are arguably more accepting of it because it is so prevalent. It is obvious from my community-centred perspective inside the nucleo that while experiences of liminality are pervasive they are still intermittent; Damanhurians

55 Critical numbers can change over time. The thresholds identified during fieldwork may be altered in the future.
do not always feel liminal. The nucleo is a structural element that is the result of social structure in service to communitas; the 'flame of the group' as they call it. As a result the nucleo has elements of liminality, as does the Federation as a whole. For Damanhurians change is good, it is a necessity, and so they allow it because change leads them towards their goals of a 'new' humanity.

Smells of the cooking waft over me and the air feels a little cool. The furnace has been stoked, although Montagne thinks she might check it again. The crackle of the fry pan becomes dominant as the chatter stops. I can also hear the whirring of the water machine—*Gas, Naturale, Freddo*. Lunch is still laid out on the table and the kitchen workers just operate around it. The water machine stops. It seems silent, but I can hear alternate sounds from different mechanical objects continuing their constant work, perhaps the fridge or maybe the freezer. Something new has been added to the fry pan with a crackle and some dogs bark in the background. The ginger bread house has been repaired, and Montagne has disappeared upstairs to get changed. She will take me home soon. The light is grey and there is an overcast sky visible through leafless trees beyond large windows. Ursula walks past and makes comment to me about the ginger bread house—laughing at its sorry condition. Twinkle lights silently sparkle as more evidence of the oncoming Christmas season. The clock on the wall says 3pm and I hear footsteps on the stairs. It is time to go. Montagne is ready. We will drive out into the world beyond Dendera glad that the snow has not yet started (Field Diary 2009).
CHAPTER 5

Federation

Introduction

Damanhur community members identify as a Federation of sub-communities. I analyse those elements of the governance system that I saw create liminal/liminoid space and potentially fostered communitas on a community-wide scale. Some of the key skills and approaches taken in the nucleo and as taught in the socialisation process are seen on a larger scale when considering whole community events. Each nucleo is part of the larger Federation; these smaller sub-communities, and the individuals who inhabit them, are linked through the overarching governance structure. There are four sub-sections of Damanhurian governance known as the four corpi, or pillars when discussed in English. Each pillar is identified with a title, including: La Scuola di Meditazione (The School of Meditation), La Vita Sociale (Social Life), Il Gioco della Vita (The Game of Life) and Tecnarcato. The pillar relating to social life (primarily concerned with participation) has been an element throughout the thesis, and I discussed Tecnarcato in Chapter 4. In this chapter I focus on The School of Meditation and The Game of Life in order to provide an analysis of how ritual and play are used to create liminal, and what Turner (1982) termed liminoid phases, as well as how each potentially facilitates communitas.
In interviews with participants I asked the question, 'When have you felt, or do you feel, the most connected with others in the community?' I used a form of the word 'connection' because it was a term that Damanhurians used to describe the intensity of their relationships with others. Particularly when describing their concept of the 'flame of a group', participants used the word 'connection' to describe what they meant by 'flame'. This question often began a discussion about what connection meant to them and in what circumstances they felt this sense of connection with others to be most profound. Connection, or flame, was seen as having different levels: the deeper their sense of connection the stronger the intensity of the 'flame of the group'. In the majority of the interviews where I asked this question participants described moments of play or work as being the time where they felt most connected with others. I have translated the 'flame of a group' or the levels of connections between people within the context of Victor and Edith Turner's framework of communitas.

The Game of Life not only instigates liminoid play (as discussed in Chapter 1) within the community, but it also contributes to the unpredictability of Damanhurian life. As I discussed previously, and as citizens often commented, the only constant in Damanhur, is change, at least the underlying intention is that all things should be changeable. It is likely that certain values have remained fundamentally the same over time, although it is my impression that even these could be changed should circumstance call for it. This change is facilitated by an experimental philosophy or approach towards projects and new ideas. The experimental approach builds capacity within citizens to accept the

56 Mealtimes were not mentioned as a time of deep connection, they perhaps were (particularly as they collect the flame there in some nucleos), but it wasn’t a part of our discussions.
liminal and liminoid aspects of their lives. Primary instigators of these activities are the Pillars relating to ritual and play. Stemming from these governance pillars, Damanhurians have established many more processes leading to liminal and liminoid moments during their daily lives. In the previous chapter I analysed nucleo-scale rituals that can serve this purpose, particularly when completed outside of the community (for example, when the food purification ritual is performed by citizens among non-Damanhurians).

Damanhurians practice larger whole community rituals conducted during specially identified events, such as the full-moon, the summer solstice, the new year, and so on, where further liminal spaces are created within an already liminoid community (as discussed in detail in Chapter 1). However, in this chapter I do not go into an in depth analysis of Damanhurian ritual specifically. I discuss how the rituals I was able to observe contributed to ritual liminality, in the sense that Victor Turner (1969) described. In addition I discuss how The Game of Life offers further and spontaneous liminoid moments through regular 'games' in which members choose to participate. In order to frame each of these Pillars, and link them with schismogenesis and social-structural sustainability, I present them here as a response to what O'Dea and Yinger (1961) term 'dilemmas of institutionalisation'.
Social Structure and the Dilemmas of Institutionalisation

Victor Turner (1969) also discussed the necessity of structure for communitas (anti-structure) to occur. In Damanhur the community has gone through a routinisation of its early charismatic undertaking; the pioneering days for Damanhurians are very different from how the community now operates. Based on those early experiences, they have intentionally created mechanisms within their structure that allow for liminality/liminoid moments and, therefore, allow for creative communitas to occur. This helps to ensure a revitalisation of the community on a regular basis. The day-to-day structural responsibilities of the community are mundane for Damanhurians, but then they have institutionalised tools, or triggers, that allow them to activate or call on regular moments of change-making communitas.

In the intentional community context, Leard (1993, p.64) discusses O'Dea and Yinger's (1961) five dilemmas of the institutionalisation of religion: The Dilemma of Mixed Motivation; The Symbolic Dilemma: Objectification versus Alienation; The Dilemma of Administrative Order: Elaboration versus Effectiveness; The Dilemma of Delimitation; and The Dilemma of Power: Conversion versus Coercion. Leard (1993, p.35) sees dilemmas as 'inescapable paradoxes which must be lived with and handled in some way, but which cannot be eliminated'. This description of a dilemma bears some resemblance to the nature of schismogenetic relationships as described by Andelson (2002) and Bateson (1936): a tension that exists, but cannot be 'cured', only managed. Achieving the 'necessary' stability within a religious institution 'involves a price', a 'certain loss of spontaneity and creativity' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.32), and results in
the tension between communitas and structure to which Victor Turner (1969) refers. Existing religions display this tension, or what O'Dea and Yinger (1961, p.32) term a 'dilemma', in their histories: 'they begin in "charismatic moments" and proceed in a direction of relative "routinization".' Following Weber (1947), O'Dea and Yinger (1961) argue that routinisation is an unavoidable social process and thus represents a fundamental dilemma for religious institutions. This is also a fundamental dilemma for the continuation of communitas—in a sustained or punctuated form—within communitarian endeavours.

Institutional structures serve as the means by which 'the deep engagement of the person involved with a "beyond" which is sacred' is embodied, making it continuously present and available (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.32). Yet, by bringing together two 'radically heterogeneous elements, ultimacy and concrete social institutions, the sacred and the profane,' communitas and structure, this necessary institutionalisation involves a fundamental tension in which 'five functional dilemmas take their origin' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.32). They (ibid.) describe ultimacy as 'those points in human experience that go beyond the everyday attitude toward life'. Religion provides the answers to questions that arise at these points. O'Dea and Yinger (1961) see the experience of ultimacy as a kind of 'breaking point' of routine experience where people are cognitively capable of going to the 'limit-situation,' of proceeding through and transcending the conventional answers to the problem of meaning and of raising fundamental existential questions in terms of their human relevance. Victor Turner's (1969) communitas bears similarities to the description of the sacred that O'Dea and Yinger (1961, p.32) provides as 'the subtle, the unusual and the charismatic'. As Victor Turner (1969) argues,
communitas also requires structure or institutionalisation (if only so there can be an absence of structure) in order to be realised. Intentional communities and religious practice are demonstrably linked throughout history. Even in situations where a particular religious practice is not the unifying ideology, there are often still religious-like ideologies that are subtle, unusual, or charismatic, and must be given expression in tangible, ordinary, and empirical social forms (Litfin 2014 refers to it as 'consciousness'). O'Dea and Yinger's (1961) theory of the five dilemmas of institutionalisation is likely to be applicable to most intentional community contexts, even if they are not particularly 'religious' in nature. In fact, Damanhurians themselves rebel against being referred to as a religion. Yet, the tension I observed between individual and communal selves, as well as between communitas (or intense connection; 'flame') and social structure, present dilemmas similar to those faced by religious institutions. Damanhur is an institutionally ‘complete ongoing social form’ (Andelson 2002, p.131) similar to those more explicitly linked to organised religion, for example, monasteries. What is interesting is the process Damanhurians use to confront the inherent dilemmas of their project. Through seeking to build a social structure in service to communitas I argue that this particular community has come up with some innovative responses to some age-old structural challenges.

The first dilemma, 'The Dilemma of Mixed Motivation', is usually apparent when a particular group, of charismatic origin, continues for a long period of time (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.33). Initially, the particular movement, religious or otherwise, has a leader and a group of followers, each choosing to follow the leader motivated by a shared ideology. As the group grows, routinisation occurs, and 'there arises a structure
of offices—of statuses and roles—capable of eliciting another kind of motivation' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.33). This secondary motivation involves needs for prestige, expression of teaching and leadership abilities, drives for power, aesthetic needs, and wishes for the security of a respectable position in the professional structure of the society (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.33). Individual self-interested motivation can begin to dominate the institution, indicative of symmetrical schismogenesis: self-interest of one member reacted to by more self-interest by another member. An institution dominated by self-interest can lead to a slow transformation of the original institutional aims, 'in many cases amounting to their corruption' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.33). When an institution, so transformed, is revealed, such developments give rise to movements of protest and reform, a revitalisation movement in the sense that Wallace (1956) described. O'Dea and Yinger (1961, p.33) provide the Cluniac reform of the Middle Ages and the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century as striking examples.

O'Dea and Yinger (1961) link mixed motivation to generational change within the institution. Where the initial process is one of voluntary conversion, in later stages the institution can be made up mostly of those who are born into it. Where initial selection processes often elicited converts who shared the founding ideological motivation, growing up in the organisation, being born a member, meant there was no such filter. Damanhur is yet to reach a stage where the majority of its members were born there; yet, they have instigated protocols whereby children are not automatically citizens. The children of Damanhurians must choose to join when they come of an age—from about sixteen onwards—and are encouraged to experience life outside of the community in their later childhood years, before joining. Some children of current citizens have
chosen to leave the community, some have stayed and become citizens, while others are yet to decide. Children attend a local high school that is not Damanhurian and often go on exchange to live with 'normal' families, usually in other countries, for six months to a year at a time. Damanhur has not been in existence long enough to see many children born and raised to adulthood. Therefore, it is difficult to apply this particular dilemma in this context. I would argue, though, that this is a dilemma faced by Damanhurians to some degree already.

Damanhurians may join with a particular intention—to be communal, to contribute—but it is the nature of motivations to change over time. While there are multiple opportunities to experience leadership in Damanhur, perhaps satisfying some cravings for status, there will always be those who seek more power. The other mechanisms, for example: Tecnarcato (Chapter 4), majority decision-making processes (Chapter 3), communal living (Chapter 4), and multiple experiences of bonding communitas are all elements that attempt to mitigate the 'Mixed Motivations' dilemma. Damanhur has experienced schism due to this dilemma before, as members have left due to growing ideological differences, and it is likely to occur again. Each member who leaves, or conflict that arises, is met with the response conducive to an experimental approach: learn from mistakes, and make changes accordingly. When a group left several years prior to my fieldwork, during the difficulty leading up to the schism Damanhurians discussed splitting citizenship level A (currently the highest level of commitment) in to A

---

57 Damanhurian children need only attend (if they choose, by Italian law children need only attend the first two years of high school) the last two years of an external high school. Primary and middle school are catered for at the Damanhurian run school.
and a higher AA. This was an attempt to limit the impact of those citizens with motivations at odds with what were seen as the ideal motivations for Damanhurians at that time. This process did not diffuse the situation; as the opposing group left, and some have since taken legal action against the community. In response to the disruption caused by this schism and subsequent legal complications, I was asked to assist with investigating how other communities regulate the leaving process. In particular we were researching how the Israeli kibbutzim manage compensation for those who leave, based on the number of years spent in the community.

'The Symbolic Dilemma: Objectification versus Alienation' results as the process of objectification—where worship is stabilised in established forms and procedures—proceeds so far that 'symbolic and ritual elements become cut off from the subjective experience of participants' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.34). In such a case the forms of worship become alienated from 'personal religiosity', and the symbol—word, gesture, act, or painting, music and sculpture—becomes a barrier, where previously it had provided a structured pathway. The symbol then becomes the object of aggression during religious protest, as seen during the Reformation, when reformers concentrated so much of their 'fire upon the Mass, the priest as the celebrant of the Mass, the destruction of altars, stained glass, statues, etc.' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.35).

Leard's (1993) observation concerning Auroville provides an example of how an intentional community might mitigate the effect of this dilemma. Unlike Damanhur, Auroville avoids institutionalising ritual as Leard (1993) observed resistance in Auroville toward the development of regular rituals. Leard (1993, pp. 100-101) notes that 'the
need for ritual to keep an extraordinary experience alive erodes the original significance when that significance becomes lost in the mundane form developed as ritual’. From Leard's (1993) account, The Mother warns against regularly performed rituals, as they in themselves can lead to structure; once the original meaning of the ritual is lost to those involved, then the true value of performing the ritual can be lost as well. Instead, value is placed on spontaneous celebration and continual contemplation on one's higher purpose through everyday activities; in essence, this could make normally mundane activities ritualised. This is another instance where Damanhur is too young (i.e. the instigators of the rituals are still present to discuss a given ritual’s original meaning) to have seen this dilemma come to light. Due to the number of regular rituals performed by Damanhurians they would arguably be at risk of succumbing to this dilemma. Although, again, Damanhurians seem to have an approach that may help to mitigate it.

I see this dilemma as further evidence of the broader dilemma inherent in structure versus communitas. In this instance it is one that arises from liminal ritual. This kind of liminality is one most likely to reinforce the status quo rather than be a cause for social change (Turner 1969; Alexander 1991). Yet, Victor Turner asserts that ritual, in preindustrial society, ‘also challenges the existing social order and contributes to social change’ (Alexander 1991, p.27). In Damanhur there is an experimental approach taken towards their rituals, although the extent to which this is enacted would only be discernible over a long period of time—longer than twelve months of fieldwork would allow. Yet, there were indications that rituals are experimental. During a divination ritual in which the founder, Falco, had a central role, I asked a participating Damanhurian what they would do should Falco not be available. She replied, 'Oh, we
haven't experimented with that yet’. Here is an overview of the ritual from my field notes:

Today was a ritual involving a goat. Guests were permitted to attend, but not to participate until after something was confirmed. All participants dressed in either red or green and were grouped into quarters around a large circle (see Figure 1).

Citizens line the circumference of this circle in their respective colours. The goat was situated in the middle. There was shouting, laughing and animal noises. The ritual was/is an experiment in divination and becomes a source of conversation between Damanhurians for weeks and months to come. The results are published in their daily newspaper, so those who do not attend are able to go over and discuss the findings. The ritual not only has a higher purpose, but also is fun and engaging for all ages at the time. Taking about an hour this year, previously it has taken almost two hours and sometimes a lot less. It is all dependant on the animal.

Falco seems key to the ritual. As he is the one who takes the goat into the centre and follows it around the circle. I was told that they have never 'experimented' without him before. Also, masters (spiritual) will whisper to the
goat following the ritual. Those who have not achieved their level do not know what is said (Field Diary 2009).

In addition to the potential experimental nature of the rituals, allowing for their adaptation and change over time in accordance with what O'Dea and Yinger (1961, p.35) call 'interior religiosity and deep understanding', there is also evidence of change in their symbols and material culture. In the nucleo Dendera there was the Hindu 'Om' symbol. This used to be a symbol Damanhurians found relevant to their spiritual practice. I was assured it was no longer relevant, although still a nice concept, hence it was still hanging on the wall of the nucleo common area. In addition to symbol adaptations, there was also evidence of change in the artwork that covered the walls of the buildings and the interior of the Temples. This artwork needs maintenance on an ongoing basis, but also gets updated and redesigned. The faces on the images of people on the Temples’ walls are all those of community members and so change as the community changes. The artwork in one of the halls in the Temples changed completely during the twelve months of my fieldwork. The symbols of Damanhurian spirituality are obviously changeable, at least to a certain extent. How this plays out in particularly sacred spaces or rituals that are closed to the public, including me, remains unknown.

'The Dilemma of Administrative Order: Elaboration versus Effectiveness' is a result of the tendency of bureaucratic structure to complicate itself as it elaborates new offices and new networks of communication and command in the face of new problems (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.35). This 'complication' evolves in order to cope with new situations and new problems effectively. Yet 'such self-complication can overextend itself and
produce an unwieldy organization' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.35). O'Dea and Yinger (1961, p.36) cite Weber (1947) as noting that bureaucracy of the rational-legal type was the most effective means for rational, purposeful management of affairs. Yet, the tendency of organisation to complicate itself often transforms it into an awkward and confusing mechanism within 'whose context it is difficult to accomplish anything' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.36). This dilemma is also complicated by the addition of the first, 'Mixed Motivations', for 'bureaucratic vested interests complicated this third dilemma considerably' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.36).

This third dilemma is particularly relevant, as with higher levels of transformational communitas comes more structural mechanisms to harness (or control) it (Turner 1969, p.129). Damanhur certainly has a complex and complicating social structure (as described in the previous paragraph: a tendency of an organisation to institute more structural elements in response to changing needs). Damanhurians' constant changes and new experiments have led to multiple avenues for self-expression and participation, but also multiple structural mechanisms to manage them. Frustration with the bureaucratic milieu was evident. I had to negotiate this bureaucracy in order to gain access. Being an outside entity seeking 'insider' experiences meant I was a minority and there were no institutionalised allowances for that. For example, I could not get a subscription to the daily newspaper, the Qdq. It was not that I was not permitted to read it, but I could not get a copy of my own. This was despite the fact that other Damanhurians lived at the same address as I did, and that I had Damanhurians able to vouch for me. Again I was able to get around this barrier, with the help of Damanhurians, by going to the local café every day and reading their copy. I was also
given Damanhurian printed material, including several copies of the daily newspaper, over the course of my stay. The reason for this restriction (on the daily newspaper) was a response to a problem: people had used the Qdq against Damanhur and so now only citizens could have a subscription. It is not to say that this is not a valid restriction, but it does provide an example of this dilemma: something that results from the exclusivity of structure and is not an aspect of communitas (characterised, as it is, by total inclusivity). Citizenship in this context leads to mechanical solidarity, as outlined by Durkheim (2014), rather than communitas. It closes the community off.

Despite examples of the occasionally restrictive nature of Damanhurian structure, there is evidence that the community is opening up over time, rather than becoming more structured and closed. During the founding years of the community there was secrecy around the building of the Temples of Humankind and what were, described to me as, 'military style' rules and regulations. This was not the case during the time that I was doing my research. As noted previously, the community is now accepting 'outsiders' (non-citizens) into their nucleos, as live-in residents, for several months as part of the 'new life' program.\textsuperscript{58} This would be simplifying the burden on new citizens. Whereas in 2009-10 there were separate nucleos for groups of new citizens, now these potential members are integrated into the existing infrastructure. New or empty buildings do not need to be found and the various aspects of 'hand holding' can be catered to in the nucleo where they are residing. Damanhurians also spoke of how they have reduced the length of their constitution since the community's beginning, from 130 articles in 1981

\textsuperscript{58} The new life program is an addition to the new citizenship program, described in more detail in Chapter 3.
to 15 articles today. Damanhurians regularly review and change the constitution. Only
time will tell if these methods will help to avoid some of the worst aspects of O'Dea and
Yinger's (1961) third dilemma. However, the approaches Damanhurians employed
during my fieldwork and since come from a willingness to change, to revise, to throw
out old ways and bring in new ones. Such are the characteristics of a liminoid
experimental ethos (Turner 1982).

The fourth dilemma, 'The Dilemma of Delimitation: Concrete Definition versus
Substitution of Letter for Spirit', concerns the need to translate the import of a religious
message into terms that have relevance with respect to everyday life. The attempt to
translate the real complexities and render a profound and many-sided concept tangible
and concrete can transform the original message into 'petty conformity to rules' (O'Dea
through which work, everyday chores and other community tasks, acquire relevance as
a collective activity that can lead to the communitas of work.

There are similarities between Damanhur, ISOT and Auroville (an intentional
community in India)\(^{59}\), as these groups are concerned with inscribing everyday
mundane activities with meaning (Siegler 1992; 2002; Leard 1993). By ensuring that
work is not just a 'means to an end,' all three groups seem to be able to maintain a sense
of higher purpose in their daily activities and social interactions. It is when there are
requirements to work for the provision of needs, like heat or food, that groups will often

\(^{59}\) Along with a number of other intentional communities throughout history, including Benedictine
monasteries and the Shakers, as discussed in Chapter 2.
be forced to develop a social structure (Turner 1969). If the structurally imposed rules become too rigid, the creativity or 'soul' of the community can be lost (Leard 1993). In ISOT, Auroville and Damanhur there is a need to work, yet, work is made meaningful and therefore, presumably can be made enjoyable. Damanhur fosters the idea of spiritual and collective work. Damanhurians spoke about gaining energy through work, so that they were left energised rather than depleted by their activity. By having a devotional or higher purpose for mundane tasks, volunteering for the tasks rather than having to do them and working collectively on each task, these groups and others like them have been able to maintain a sense of collective motivation through work. Such collective activity can have liminal qualities and is amenable to fostering communitas, Edith Turner’s 'communitas of work' (Turner 2012, p.55).

This fourth dilemma can also be compounded by the third dilemma, so that the over-elaboration of the rational-legal structure is accompanied by a 'deadening legalism' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.36). A Damanhurian refers to this as the 'impossibility of reconciling the idea of an "absolute" god with that of a "partial" doctrine and liturgy' (Pesco 2012, p.41). 'Absolute god' is as elusive as communitas. Here Damanhur has a different audience and its ideology does not need to be concretised in order to be within 'the grasp of ordinary man' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.36). Damanhurians are socialised towards understanding that they are allowed to experience spirit, communitas, each other, and given time to process those experiences for 'enlightenment'. There are publications written by Damanhurians, including those that touch on their spiritual

---

Labour is considered akin to devotional work, a service to yourself, your community and a spiritual essence, be that a deity or otherwise.
understandings but, for the most part, I found no written document that does so in laymen's terms. Again Pesco (2012, pp. 41-42) articulates this Damanhurian notion well when he describes:

[In] books [and during] the activities that I participated in at the [Damanhurian] Centre in my city, I found that there were never prefabricated answers that lifted the weight off me assuming my own responsibilities. In response to various life questions, Damanhur has always responded by proposing a hypothesis, a potential choice, then it is up to the individual to find his own answers with his own thoughts, emotions and decisions.

Damanhurians do not face the same cause for dilemma as described by O'Dea and Yinger (1961), but it is common for groups to attempt to write down what they mean: their rules and regulations. Individuals have attempted to do so, but there is no singular Damanhurian doctrine or official manifesto, only individual versions of understanding.

The fifth and final of O'Dea and Yinger's (1961) dilemmas concerns Conversion versus Coercion. Classically, an individual's religious life will begin with an 'interior turning or conversion' towards that which seems 'uniquely attractive and fascinating' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.37). As the religious movement institutionalises, conversion may be replaced by the socialisation of children so that a slow process of education substitutes for the more dramatic conversion process (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.37). O'Dea and Yinger (1961, p.37) argue here that even this slower socialisation is still a form of conversion (rather than coercion), and that the act of acceptance is still voluntary, 'involving such interior turning.' The fifth dilemma eventuates as a result of the institutionalised religion becoming a 'repository of many of the values from which much
of the life of the society derives its legitimation' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.37). This leads to the integration of religious beliefs and 'even the maintenance of the religious organization' in order to deal with societal problems of public order (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.37). Yet, the confusion of the two soon tends to be detrimental to both. 'It weakens the bonds of the religious community by weakening the religious ethos and substituting external pressures for interior conviction' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.37). O'Dea and Yinger (1961) argue that some relation between the values of society and religious sanctions is necessary and 'necessarily involves a relation between religious institutions and power and authority structures' (O'Dea & Yinger 1961, p.38). It is possible that some intentional communities—particularly ecovillages—could be seen as attempting to address this dilemma by allowing freedom of religious choice (for example, the intentional community in Western Australia of which I was a part61, or others including Crystal Waters in Queensland). This is not the case in Damanhur. While Damanhurians do not seem to insist on conversion to a singular deity, or a set liturgy, it is not customary for Damanhurians to relate to a particular faith, for example Buddhism or Christianity. Damanhurians profess acceptance of all 'good deities' and experience 'a living connection to the divine forces of the spiritual ecosystem through ritual and devotion' (pers.comm 2013) and so do not exclude any divinities.

---

61 The intentional community I participated in prior to 2009 was known as Somerville, but is no longer operational.
Structure in service to communitas

Victor Turner did not discuss a concept of intentional communitas. For him communitas had to occur spontaneously or it was not really communitas in all its essence. I agree: I do not think communitas can be planned or controlled, but I do think the conditions for communitas can be instigated. Throughout this thesis I have outlined how liminal, liminoid and other conditions conducive to communitas can be planned. Communal living is difficult. The choice to live communally is an aspect that contributes to making the group liminoid in the first place and can be very difficult to adapt to. It is hard work to live with eighteen other adults in one house. Interpersonal challenges and the liminal often go hand-in-hand: Turner (1969, p.95), for example, describes the difficulties experienced by neophytes in initiation or puberty rites. Turner (1969, pp.95-96) explains that the levelling experience of the liminal phase also serves to bring the initiates together as ‘equal individuals’ and likely to have communitas arise among them. Such is it that the communards of Damanhur relate to each other’s challenges and feel elated during moments where there is ease and connection, moments of communitas.

Damanhur arguably began as a charismatic community. The Federation has a compelling attractiveness or charm that can inspire devotion in others. While initially the founder Falco may have held the charisma, during fieldwork it was evident throughout the community. There was a mysticism and magic held by participants. This was fostered by the esoteric, the secrecy, of their spiritual practice, but also by the symbology and ritual pervading almost every part of their lives. The buildings were
painted with grand, perspective-altering murals, their gates and fences were designed with sacred language, and, ultimately, perhaps most inspiring to those who visited Damanhur were the expansive underground Temples.\(^{62}\) Listed as the 'eighth wonder of the world' on many websites describing this structure, the feat of engineering and artistry is quite astounding.

Bradley (1999) presents research of fifty-seven communes. Bradley uses 'communion' in place of Turner's communitas.\(^{63}\) Bradley (1999, p.169) argues that in a charismatic community (an intentional community exhibiting charisma) there will be 'highly interlocking bonds of communion' that 'coexist with a strong power structure'. Bradley asserts that while communion 'mobilizes the extraordinary levels of collective energy needed to achieve radical social change, power will act to control this volatile energy, thereby stabilizing the charismatic group.' Bradley's (1999) argument bears a striking resemblance to Turner's communitas/structure dynamic. Communitas (communion) and structure (power) must coexist in order to exist, but also for the stability of the society at large (Bradley 1999). Damanhur is an example that fulfils Bradley's (1999, p.170) criteria, having both the 'heterarchy of communion and a hierarchy of power.' Damanhur has also managed to make communion 'more predictable and also reduce the likelihood of its destructive consequences' (Bradley 1999, pp.169-170), by institutionalising the 'conditions and activities that trigger' it. Bradley goes on to draw on Zablocki's (1971, pp.164-192) argument that a group must meet a number of conditions

\(^{62}\) Sacred language is a language that has been, in their own words, 'rediscovered and researched' by Damanhurians.

\(^{63}\) Victor Turner (1982) disputes this analogy as noted in Chapter 4.
in order to achieve the institutionalisation of the conditions of communion. Here I make a point that it is not, as Bradley states, that it is possible 'to successfully institutionalize communion', but more accurately, as he had previously said, that it was the conditions that trigger communion. Communion, or communitas, itself cannot be institutionalised; the act of trying to create it and control it will almost certainly destroy it (Turner, 2012). This distinction aside, Bradley goes on to present several of Zablocki's (1971) conditions for institutionalising activities where communion might arise, or as I have argued, the institutionalisation of liminal moments:

First, it [the group] must have some ability to trigger the experience [of communion] with a consistently high degree of regularity and intensity for communion to be useful. This is achieved by ritualizing those activities with the greatest potential for triggering communion, and by fostering the individual's ability for full participation as well (Bradley 1999, p.170).

While I agree with the first statement here, that the ability to regularly trigger (or foster) communitas is important to the group's ongoing sustainability, I disagree that its 'usefulness' is predicated by that regularity. Nor do I agree that ritualising 'activities with the greatest potential' is the only way to institutionalise liminal conditions, nor is it arguably the most effective way. In Damanhur, reports of the most intensely felt moments of connection were during conditions other than their many rituals. In fact, I assert that ritual alone would not be enough, as it is the elements of play, collective activity and communal living that facilitate the strongest and most useful (by useful, I mean actionable or change-making) forms of communion. Zablocki's (1971) last point, on full participation, is supported in the Damanhurian context. Bradley (1999, p.170)
goes on to point out that to ensure participation the group must perceive communion 'as an intense, positive experience that can be transformed into an enthusiastic, unconditional commitment for the group'. This awareness of communion and its potential must then be founded on a 'collective receptivity' to it and a 'capacity to use it whenever it occurs' (Bradley 1999, p.170). I have argued that Damanhurians facilitate an acceptance of ambiguity and change, which can be translated as conditions for 'collective receptivity' to communion.

Bradley (1999, p.170) goes on to highlight the argument that the 'institutionalisation of communion' (see reservations made regarding this wording above) necessitates particular kinds of social organisation:

Some differentiation among individuals must be present, with those who are seen as "knowing" most about it (the charismatic leader and/or the lieutenants) acting as facilitators guiding, monitoring and regulating the experience. This is crystallized as a hierarchical alignment within the group. It provides the means for controlling the experience by increasing the likelihood that communion does not get out of hand, resulting in negative rather than positive consequences for the group (Bradley 1999, p.170).

Damanhur meets this description of the requirements for institutionalising conditions conducive to communitas. The other option Bradley (1999, p.170) describes is Weber's routinisation of charisma, where the charismatic leader's teachings are packaged into 'ready-made rituals', although he warns, as did Weber, that this will reduce the intensity of communion. Damanhurians have not taken this approach. They avoid articulating

---

64 Communion can result in increased pressure towards instability, which is dangerous to durable structures (Bradley 1999, p.169).
an all-encompassing dogma, instead preferring terminology that allows for future change. Damanhurians conduct regular rituals, but they can be adjusted, through an experimental approach. Damanhurians espouse philosophical ideas, but they are ideas, not doctrines, as they can be adjusted with new information. The most telling element of Damanhurians resisting routinisation is their denial of the label religion. They refuse to be categorised or boxed into a definition of what they are that is not easily changed. The Damanhurian blog has numerous instances where they pointedly deny religion as a label for who and what they are. When referring to their spiritual investigations they use a term like 'school', where they research and experiment with their perceptions of what spirit means to them.

Bradley's (1999) account of how social structure serves a charismatic community supports many of the arguments I make about how the Damanhurian structure serves communitas. Key differences seem to lie in the intention underlying most of Bradley's account. As already stated, it is not communion or communitas, that can be institutionalised, nor can it be controlled when it does arise. This is an important distinction, as the act of forcing it to occur or trying to control it when it does, will almost certainly lead to failure (Turner 2012). There is no control, no list of ingredients that lead to ready-made communitas. One can only hope to put together elements that might foster communitas and then get out of its way. Along with these points of difference in what I see as an accurate understanding of Victor and Edith Turner's concept of communitas, Bradley (1999) also places emphasis throughout his account on

65 www.damanhurblog.com
66 If we maintain that communion can be substituted for communitas.
stability. For example, 'yet even when communion occurs in a more durable structure, there is no guarantee that group stability can be maintained' (Bradley 1999, p.169). My observations in Damanhur showed that citizens allowed for instability. In order to 'handle ... [communions] basic unpredictability' (Bradley 1999, p.170) there is a required acceptance of inevitable changes that come from it, or with it. Damanhurians not only allowed for change, they facilitated change on a regular basis.

**Structured Spirit (The School of Meditation)**

The School of Meditation is the oldest aspect of Damanhur, although neither Damanhur nor the name of what is now an 'initiate pathway' was in existence in its beginning. The term meditation as used by Damanhurians does not carry the same meaning as that understood in a more mainstream setting (i.e. it does not necessarily mean sitting or standing in a meditative state common among practitioners of Yoga or Buddhism). Meditation in Damanhur refers to the entire spiritual pathway members commit to, it may include aspects of ‘Buddhist like’ meditation, but that is not the only practice included within the School of Meditation’s purview. In the early 1970s the soon to-be founder of Damanhur, Oberto Airaudi, began teaching a particular philosophy entitled 'meditation'. Today this philosophy has been developed extensively and is continually elaborated through research conducted by Damanhurians in the School of Meditation. The very basic tenets of this philosophy are that every human has a divine origin; we are all manifestations of 'God' in the world of matter. Our responsibility, according to this school of thought, is to remember and re-awaken our (humanity's) inner divinity, bringing it forth into the material world and, therefore, making matter
itself divine. Underlying this process of re-awakening is an understanding that it is, as stated by a citizen of Damanhur, ‘an individual endeavour, although it is achieved in connection with others’. Not only does the process need to be collective, but it also needs to be realised through collective action—to 'bring about spiritual transformation through practical action in a material world' (Merrifield 2006, p.22). Damanhurian spiritual understandings form the foundation on which the community rests. Evidence of their spiritual research and experiments pervades almost every aspect of community member's lives. Each individual can be seen (and they see themselves) as a cell making up the larger 'divine' body that is the entire community. In fact, the processes and structures of the community are chaotic in an almost organic way—the community seems messy and ambiguous, but contains a hidden order. So, while the School of Meditation is itself a secret initiate pathway, the attempts of citizens to live their spiritual lives in a material way means that many of the elements of their spiritual lives are visible to the outside world.

The Ways are paths relating to this spiritual practice. There are several different Ways: La Via dell’Arte e Parola (The Way of Art and Word), La Vi dell’Oracolo (The Way of the Oracle), La Via del Monocato e delle Coppie Esoteriche (The Way of the Monk), La Via della Pubblica Istruzione (The Way of Public Education)67, La Via dell'Arte e Lavoro (The Way of Art and Work), La Via dei Cavalieri (The Way of the Knights) and La Via della Salute (The Way of Health). A citizen can belong to any number of Ways, although many choose just one, or possibly two, because they each carry with them a number of weekly

---

67 This particular Way no longer exists.
commitments. Each Way may also have some sub-Ways to which citizens specifically belong. For example, someone may find that music is his or her preferred form of spiritual expression. As this is a form of Art, instead of belonging generally to the Way of Art and Word (a fairly large Way), one instead belongs to a subsection of Music. Each individual chooses his or her Way based on his or her own interests and passions. Therefore, each individual can find his or her own particular form of spiritual expression within the broader School of Meditation framework. An individual usually has his or her weekly School of Meditation meeting and then one or two other commitments for his or her Way/s.

There were many rituals that guests could attend. Equinox and Solstice rituals were open to guests, along with the full-moon oracle ritual every month. Every Sunday morning there was Damanhur Get, a ritual for members of the Spiritual People, which I joined during the first few months of fieldwork.68 There were also other less regular rituals that involved the whole or only part of the community. I attended as many of these rituals as was possible during my stay. I made a particular effort to attend those rituals that occurred less frequently, like the annual solstice ritual or the Lamb Ritual. Many of these rituals would have opportunities for guests to attend explanatory sessions and to ask questions. I would attend these sessions and take the opportunity to ask questions when time allowed.

68 The Spiritual People (Popolo Spirituale) is an extension of the ideological communitas to which Damanhurians aspire. Participation is open to anyone who wishes to contribute ‘to the spiritual and material growth of the planet through solidarity, mutual respect and love for the environment’ (http://www.damanhur.org/en/spiritual-vision/popolo-spirituale)
Falco, the founder of Damanhur, was physically visible throughout Damanhur. He was personally present two to three times a week at the various Serata, at any large social gatherings, whole community rituals, and visibly around the community carrying out his healing practice, teaching courses or just having un cafe' at Somachandra in Damjl. There were also pictures of him in people's homes and in many of the nucleos I visited and considerable conversation was concerned with what he had said at the last Serata on a particular topic or an interview he had just had with a journalist.

There have been several instances where Falco was present over the past three days. The first impression I had was from his selfica paintings [discussed later in this chapter]. One very large room is dedicated to this artwork, I am told, which is his primary income. The exhibition is on every afternoon and requires someone to look after it. I'm not sure if Falco pays rent and wages for this, but it would make sense considering the structural setup I have observed so far.

Other situations have been when there is a meeting. On Wednesday and Thursday evenings there is a Serata con Falco (Evening with Falco) where he is available for questions from the Damanhurians. These evenings are recorded and put on the Internet [for members who were absent to access]. Also there is a Serata specifically for guests on a Friday where guests are permitted to ask questions (none of them spiritual, as it would take too long, and no questions about Falco's personal life).

At these Serata Falco sits at the front of the room usually on a dais or stage (I think this is mainly for practical reasons). He is asked anything, from predictions for the future globally to the direction of Damanhur.

When he is talked about, it is usually in a casual and positive way. He is described as someone who knows the answers if you ask the right questions. I
have been told that he is no longer a leader (structurally), and is only really involved in research regarding selfica (Field Diary 2009).

There was one period of time during 2009-10 where he had an interview that caused a great stir throughout the community. During the interview Falco had said that he would like to see a council of the 'people', by which he meant indigenous and minority peoples from throughout the world. He wanted the new section of the Temples that Damanhurians planned to build to be a great centre for learning, a library of esoteric and cultural works from across the globe, along with spaces for the peoples' research and art. There was urgency in his request, and that urgency was transferred to the Damanhurians to whom I spoke about it. This became their focus for many weeks, prompting planning sessions and meetings to discuss a way to realise this idea. Since then and since I returned home from fieldwork, the idea of a council of peoples has been realised to some extent. There were leaders from minority and indigenous populations brought to Damanhur, where they met with others or representatives of other like groups. A conference was held and plans for further conferences of a similar nature made for the future. The physical 'Temple of the Peoples' will take longer to realise.

These ideas and others like them would often come from Falco. The history of this community contains several examples of similar, seemingly spontaneous action, resulting in the realisation of huge goals. The first and most striking example is the Temples of Humankind. The story, as told by Damanhurians, is that the beginning of the Temples (in secret) occurred on the night of a shooting star. This star prompted members of a group of Damanhurians, then consisting of fifteen people, to start digging into the side of the mountain. Two started, and by morning they had dug a metre in,
and two others came to take over. So this went with a rotation of shifts, spanning four hours at a time (after the first marathon night), day and night, until fifteen days later the pace began to slow. It did not stop, and they never gave up. Today the Temples of Humankind are an enormous and impressive feat of architecture and artistry, all underground and for the first fifteen years constructed in secret. Detailed and lively stories around the construction of the Temples and the battle to save them can be found on the Damanhurian website and in some Damanhurian printed materials. Ultimately, the Temples of Humankind exist today because of the initial motivation engendered by Falco and also the ongoing encouragement of concrete achievement experienced by those doing the work. Now their existence serves as one of the most powerful reminders of what the community is capable of and an ongoing site of collective action and motivation to achieve future goals.

Falco obviously had a particular charisma that engendered trust, excitement and motivation among those who surrounded him. There was a deep respect among Damanhurians for him, but this was tempered by a familiarity with him on a day-to-day level. There were still those who were less comfortable or familiar, but they were generally newer citizens or longer-term guests who lived in the area. The larger the community becomes the more people were distant from him, and it was more likely that different perspectives developed on who he is and what he does. He was still considered the most senior master of the Damanhurian spiritual pathway in 2010. Because of this his words carried a great deal of weight, and his courses and projects received substantial attention. It is evident, though that many other courses, rituals and research may have at some point started with him or were inspired by him, although he was no
longer central in them. It is clear from these that he was attempting to step back from the more integral role he had originally played in the governance of Damanhur. Even the selfic research that was clearly of particular interest and originated from him had begun to be passed on to others who had shown an aptitude and interest in this area.

Falco had served as glue for the community, strong at the beginning and continuing until his passing in 2013. He was central to the formation of the community and its ideology. He was obviously charismatic enough to encourage dramatic actions by individuals and groups, although at the time of my fieldwork he was seen to be stepping back. He was and is put on a pedestal, but this seemed to be tempered by his familiarity and consistent presence. That a central figure or group has been important in the formation and maintenance of this community is not unusual, although there are well-documented dangers in charismatic leadership (Lindholm 2002, p.93). In this case, though, it seems as though the attempt had been to pass on his knowledge so others can achieve mastery. As since his death the community has continued, one could assume that he was successful at passing responsibility over to the next generation of leaders.

Falco provided the key encouragement for change, ongoing learning and research among Damanhirians. The central tenet of Damanhur that change and movement is imperative, a vital element in the community's resiliency, came from Falco. Yet, it was also he who insisted on privacy for much of the Damanhirians' work, including the closely guarded initiate pathway that is central to The School of Meditation and the community as a whole.
Experimentation as a liminoid activity

Experiment: to do a scientific test in which you perform a series of actions and carefully observe their effects; to try a new activity or a new way of doing or thinking about something (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2015).

Damanhurians take an experimental approach to their way of life. I have alluded to an experimental approach as being inherently liminoid (see Chapter 1). This kind of experiment is more akin to play than that of a controlled experiment in a laboratory setting, although Damanhur has both. In this section I present examples of how a positive attitude towards experiment has led to innovative structural elements as well as the production of creative cultural material. I argue that Damanhurians' experimental play and research approach to their lifestyle is fundamental to facilitating a social structure in service to communitas. Damanhurians purposefully create and use the creativity inherent in the experimental liminoid moment. While some of the innovative materials and philosophies to arise from such moments are telling, they also create further instances where communitas is given the opportunity to arise. Following this I explain the peculiar research project known to Damanhurians as selfica and then analyse the similarly uncommon structural pillar, The Game of Life.

Research/Experiment (Selfica)

Selfica is the product of an area of research in Damanhur that is described by members as originating from 'long lost human traditions'. From the website where selfic devices are described and available for purchase, selfica (similar to jewellery) is seen as originating from 'Egyptian, Etruscan, Celtic and Minoan cultures' (www.sel-
et.com/en/iformazioni-eng/selfica [4.2.14]). There were also references and links made by Damanhurians between the mythical city of Atlantis and selfica. The belief underlying the construction of selfica is that there are ‘Selfs’; intelligent energies that exist on the borders between different planes of existence. Selfica is essentially a structure that acts as a host or body for the intelligent energies, ‘Selfs’, to use. The devices are constructed in spiral forms and made from metals, colours, special inks and minerals that provide a hospitable environment for the ‘Selfs’.

The Selfs are then believed to be able to interact with humans while the selfic structure 'selects, harmonizes and amplifies the most useful energetic frequencies to carry out the functions for which it was built' (SeLet n.d.). Selfica comes in many different forms and for a variety of purposes: some are constructed to help with health related problems,

---

69 ‘Selfs’ are entities, non-biological, that are only referred to in the plural form. Damanhurians never mentioned a single ‘Self’ and there is no relationship between this term and term self as used to refer to an individual human.

70 SeLet is the Damanhurian online store that sells selfica and other related merchandise. The SeLet website also provides information on selfica.
others for the purpose of helping the environment, and so on. Damanhurians state that intelligent ‘Selfs’ will only interact with an individual if it is of reciprocal advantage: of benefit to both the human and the ‘Selfs’ inhabiting the selfic structure. ‘Selfs’ are considered by Damanhurians to be ‘specialised symbionts’ (SeLet n.d.).

There is a widespread belief among Damanhurians in the concept of ‘Selfs’ and, therefore, selfica. Selfica is considered a useful technology for connection with divine forces and is used extensively in the construction of the Temples of Humankind. There are larger selfica in most nucleos, explained as having a higher degree of complexity.

At the time of fieldwork it was a condition for categorisation as a nucleo comunità that such a ‘high-complexity’ selfica was purchased. Individuals also bought personal ‘Selfs’ (for example, a selfic structure that could be worn on a necklace), which were worn on their person at all times. Falco's selfic paintings were also a common purchase among citizens and were evident in nucleos across the Federation. Selfic paintings were

---

71 A symbiont is an organism that lives in symbiosis (beneficial ‘win/win’ relationship) with another.
72 The larger ‘high-complexity’ selfic structure is known as a spheroself.
particular to Falco at the time and would use shapes and colours in a variety of media in a similar way to the selfica described above.

Paintings could be viewed in a variety of coloured light for different effects. Damanhurians also posited that the subtle energy of the paintings could also change when hung near other selfic paintings. Black light would reveal a different dimension to the paintings and a tour of the selfic gallery would include viewings of all the paintings (easily hundreds) in a variety of different lights—red, yellow, green, black light, and white. The titles for the paintings were in a poetic form stimulating many people to spend an afternoon in the gallery deciphering the meaning of these titles and viewing the paintings under the different lights. Selfica and selfic paintings were visible
everywhere in innumerable forms of which the number and variety were constantly growing and changing.

Selfica was seen by Damanhurians as a science, much like the conversion of solar particles into energy. Selfic structures converted selfic energy (energy produced by the ‘Selfs’) into useful forms for the physical world. Use and belief in this technology can serve as a form of community 'glue', a form of income, a form of expression, including self-expression, and a form of specialised skill and knowledge. Selfica is also, arguably, the result of the freedom to experiment as it is likely that it was in a liminoid experimental state that Damanhurians could develop this particular form of material culture.

Play/Experiment (Game of Life)

The Game of Life began in 1983 when Oberto Airaudi saw that the community was stagnating: things were going well, but the initial energy and motivation were waning. Oberto decided it was time for a change, and so he created the Game of Life to 'change people's habits and renew Damanhur'. One of the 'games' during that first year was a surprise journey where he took whoever was with him at the time and gave no warning. A group of twenty Damanhurians undertook an educational journey for an unspecified period of time to unknown destinations, guided by Oberto (Meijerink 2002, p.156). During this initial trip the group invited new people to become members of their community, and so it was through this journey that Damanhur grew to one hundred

---

73 Eight years after those who would become Damanhurians began to work together.
members in 1983. This surprise voyage was the beginning of many such journeys in the lives of Damanhurians and continued to occur regularly during my fieldwork. It was on one of these initial voyages that Damanhurian travellers spontaneously decided to play a game with their names: they decided to change their names to those of animals. Afterward, Oberto also changed his name to Falco, by which he was commonly known during my fieldwork in 2009-2010 and until his passing.

The 'Game of Life' is the title given to the institutionalised play element of Damanhur's social structure. When members first commit to the Damanhurian project, choosing to become full-time residents of the Federation, they may also (and usually do) become 'players' in the Game of Life. Damanhurians state that life can be seen as one big game, and when one is a committed player there are multiple opportunities to participate in different types of 'games'. Changing names is one of the 'games' that this pillar facilitates and monitors. The Game of Life could also be said to manage the creation of liminoid moments where Turnerian communitas has to the potential to arise. The ‘Sages’, a group of senior leaders in the community, appoint the leaders of the Game of Life. In 2010 there were two members in such leadership positions.

The Damanhurians believed that the introduction of the Game of Life presented a new way to attain Enlightenment—re-awakening the human divinity (Meijerink 2002, p.156). The Game of Life has included over the years a number of different projects or play battles that members voluntarily join. These projects include anything from surprise (for the participants) travel invitations (known as viaggio) for small groups, to

---

74. Name changes will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.
'wars' in the woods that last for several days. Particular game projects usually have some purpose. For example, the first game was a battle between the newcomers to the community and the 'old' members so that bonds might be formed. Other projects have involved small groups living in the woods for weeks at a time, completely self-sufficient so that members could transfer what they learned to their everyday lives. The leaders of the Game of Life are responsible for the projects or games, for taking suggestions, organising involvement and the logistics of each succeeding event.

At the time of my fieldwork, the Game of Life was integrated into the daily lives of citizens. Not only were sudden travel, games and animal or plant names the norm, individuals were mindful of play and spontaneity in their daily actions. As people joined the community, the Game of Life was evident in their lives—like a joker who might play tricks on you at any turn. The Game of Life is professed to be voluntary. A citizen does not have to participate (e.g. choose an animal name) in the Game of Life, but this element of the community would be very difficult to avoid. For example, an individual might choose not to go on *viaggio*, by not being a part of the Game of Life, but other citizens suddenly disappearing on *viaggio* at any given moment would still affect this person.

The Game of Life is the community element that is perhaps unique among intentional communities. This body is at its most fundamental level responsible for maintaining the communality, the connections, of the federation and the smaller communities within it. Damanhurians refer to this as the 'flame of group'. How strong a flame is perceived to

---

75 Play battles.
be represents how strong the community glue is. So as a part of this 'flame' management, the Game of Life (the people who represent it) monitor the movement of people from one nucleo to another and the introduction of new citizens into nucleos once they have completed their introductory phase of citizenship. I liken the flame that Damanhurians describe to Victor Turner's communitas, as I believe they both essentially describe the same phenomenon: the bond of love between otherwise unrelated individuals. The Game of Life in this sense is responsible for fostering communitas in the community and has many different ways of achieving that.

There are two striking examples of the influence of the Game of Life involving the whole Federation. These are described in some written accounts (Merrifield) and recounted by some of the 'older' citizens in the community when explaining the Game of Life to visitors. The first example is the 'Battle of the Arts'. The Battle of the Arts was an activity that lasted a set number of weeks, where teams of citizens worked to create the most dramatic pieces of art. The idea was to encourage, 'big wild imaginations', while constructing large art installations collectively (pers.comms 2010). The teams would work together, and the people from the Game of Life would judge the final products. It was a competition (also between old and new citizens) in which teams worked to outdo each other. The results of this battle are still evident today in the territory of Damlj.76 Damlj is one of the main centres of Damanhur where the Welcome Centre is located in the town of Baldissero Canavese. The most visible installation in Damlj is a large circle of stones outlining a ritual circle where Solstice rituals are

---

76 Damanhurians often referred to Damanhurian owned land as a 'territory'.

211
conducted. These standing stones are metres tall and must be extremely heavy. When I asked how it was achieved, there was an air of mysticism: no one would ever know except the group that managed to accomplish this feat. I was told that everyone had asked that question, as they were so amazed at their achievement. Other examples included a large surreal sculpture of metal and an altar dedicated to the water elements.

Another historical example and now an ongoing aspect of the Game of Life is *viaggio*, in which citizens who are players frequently engage. One example of this was the 'journey into the woods'. In this instance, groups of fifteen people were sent into the woods together. They constructed a place to live in, using only the materials that were found in the woods, and bringing in the foods that they needed, cooking meals in the rustic conditions. For the initial group this was very difficult, but slowly, over a succession of groups, the task would become easier: the efforts of the preceding group would be of benefit to the group to follow. Many people with whom I spoke would mention this particular experience as the moment where they felt the most 'connected' with others. Essentially, citizens described feeling 'in love' with other community members during this experience. Citizen's would reference the 'flame' of the group in these contexts and describe a feeling of oneness among the participants involved. I argue that Damanhurians are referring to communitas, which Victor Turner (1969, p.96) described as a 'communion of equal individuals'. During the journey to the woods participants would stay until it was perceived by those designated by the leaders of the Game of Life that their flame was strong enough.
A citizen, Ramo, described this time to me using the metaphor of the 'flame'. This answer was a response to my question about when she felt most connected with other members of the community. She spoke about how when she was in the woods, by the end of their time together they all 'loved each other'. She said she met her husband during that time, but did not realise it because the feelings she felt for the entire group were so strong that she felt the same for all the participants as she did for the man she would eventually marry. However, at the beginning of the 'game' it was not this way: when they first went out into the woods, they did not feel so comfortable with each other. It was difficult. They had to work together, and familiarity grew slowly. Then they would achieve certain bigger tasks, for example, building an extra shelter in addition to what was now a wooden shack, built by prior groups in the woods. She said the achievement felt 'so good' because they were out of their comfort zone and sharing the intensity of the experience together.

Ramo said that at a point there was one person with whom they were all having trouble, as he was just not fitting in. When representatives of the Game of Life suggested that he leave and come again with another group, a 'funny thing happened'. Ramo said that they suddenly all did not want him to go. They did not want him to have to start again with another group. They realised that he 'really was a part of their group' and that they wanted him to stay. It was after this point when she felt they really understood the point of the project. For Ramo this experience was central to being Damanhurian; it was about accepting each other for what they each bring—a true inclusivity. What was of central importance in this story about communitas, to me was the distinction between the conformity of individuals to the group and the adaptation of group identity to the
individuals. In this I want to draw your attention back to prior distinctions between communition and communitas, the former referring to an unconditional subjection to a group, while the latter asserted by Turner (1982; Turner 2012) to maintain the individual qualities of the participants, a ‘free relationships between individuals’ (Turner 1969, p.132). Further to this distinction is the meta dilemma I have discussed throughout, that of 'communitas versus structure'. I see social structure as the ultimate individualising mechanism, a separation of individuals through roles and statuses. Communitas is the unsurpassable realisation of anti-structure, not as a loss of individuality in communion, but as the pinnacle realisation of individual capacity through others (Turner 2012).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at Damanhur as a Federation of sub-communities. By applying the liminality/liminoid and communitas frameworks at the Federation level, I identified how Damanhur’s social structure can be seen to serve communitas. By applying O’Dea and Yinger’s (1961) five dilemmas of institutionalisation I was able to demonstrate the benefits of a social structure that facilitates regular liminal or liminoid moments. Such a structure is able to limit the impact of some of the institutional dilemmas identified. A structure in service to communitas has led to complexity, and dilemmas, but has also led to flexibility. Traditional rituals prone to dilemma are balanced by play: something more akin to the light-hearted spontaneous nature of true communitas.
Further, the experimental approach employed by Damanhurians in almost all aspects of their lives has facilitated liminoid creativity. The results of this are particularly innovative artefacts and structural elements. Play, experiment, structured ritual and sacralised daily experiences are each a result of, and contribute to, a necessarily ambiguous (changeable, possibly indefinable, exhibiting liminal qualities) social structure that serves (prioritises) communitas. Damanhurians are aiming for an ideal social condition, something akin to a sustained manifestation of communitas, what Turner (1969) referred to as ideological communitas. In order to reach their desired goal, Damanhurians acknowledge the need to step into the limen, to rid themselves of prior conceptions and understandings, to cast off their old lives and move into a new unknown future human condition. As such, Damanhurians, because of their focus on the liminal/liminoid moment and their respect for communitas, have built a social structure that seems to be flexible enough to allow charisma (i.e. it has yet to lead to potential stagnation evident post-routinisation) to remain alive.

In order to achieve the liminal state and facilitate communitas Damanhurians insist that they build a completely 'alternative' community. In Chapter 6 I present a deeper analysis of the types of communitas, Damanhurians seem to engender on a regular basis. Following Edith Turner (2012) I build on Victor Turner's conception of communitas and explore some of the variety of ways in which it manifests in Damanhur.
CHAPTER 6

A New Culture

Introduction

I have described and analysed the elements of Damanhur that contribute to what I see as their ultimate aim, phrased in my words, of a social structure in service to communitas. Damanhurians’ stated aim is to create a completely ‘new culture’, a culture that supports an evolved humanity. This ‘new culture’ is supported by an evolving and changeable social structure through which they aim to create conditions that encourage and harness what I see as communitas. Damanhurians describe their federation as a 'community of individualists' despite a central focus on building the collective flame: a communal element where the interests of the individuals are sometimes sacrificed for the good of the whole. This contradiction, one of aiming for both individualism and communalism, can be seen as inherent in the dilemmas of institutionalisation, some of which I outlined in Chapter 5, but is particularly relevant in an exploration of communitas. Communitas is communion that maintains, even enhances, individual distinctiveness (Turner 1982); 'it was one fire with many tongues' (Turner 2012, p.156). The individual versus the common is a dichotomy particularly relevant to the current sustainability challenge, one that is being addressed in multiple collective sustainability efforts across the globe (see, for example, the Transition Town
Damanhurians are facing the socioecological sustainability challenge and, as such, provide an opportunity to see communitas being harnessed for ecologically responsible objectives.

In this chapter I demonstrate how this community is attempting to cross the artificially constructed culture/nature divide by engaging in activities that purposefully meld these 'two' dynamics. Damanhurians are seeking what Edith Turner refers to as the 'communitas of nature' (2012, p.163). The communitas of nature is not just a communion between humans and nature, where the latter is differentiated as the non-human natural world, for it does not acknowledge this dyad (Turner 2012). As Edith Turner (2012, p.164) declares:

> Along with what we call nature, I see the entire range of human culture as natural, allied to spirits more or less consciously, in an affinity with spirits as in a [chemical] compound—and within the natural world.

Similarly, Damanhurians philosophise an interconnected world of 'humans, nature and spirit', an ecosystem in which each element plays a vital part. And, if the communitas of nature is the ideal then it is through the 'communitas of work' that that ideal is achieved. The communitas of work gives the workers’ pleasure; and 'people find communitas in the comradeship and fellowship of work' (Turner 2012, p.55). The

---


78 This Damanhurian perspective and that of E.Turner on a 'communitas of nature', raises a larger, although tangential, line of enquiry concerning the 'naturalness' of human’s destructive capacity. It is my understanding that Damanhurians see human activity, even the destructive elements, as 'within the natural world' but that in some circumstances it can be out of balance (even to an extreme degree) with what could be sustainable practice. The argument is for a consciousness around human activity rather than assertions for or against human activity as being 'natural'.

---
communitas of work occurs when workers enter a flow-like state, where concerns of status no longer apply and nobody bothers about rank (Turner 2012). The job to be done takes on a liminal quality as participants become focussed on the task at hand. Similar to spontaneous collective activity, and moments of experiment or play, flow is one of the ways structure will be transformed or ‘liquefied’ into communitas again (Turner 1983, p.162). From this flow-like liminal state communitas can arise. The work becomes joyful and participants move together with ease and attention. Edith Turner (2012, p.18) provides several examples of the communitas of work, such as in her account of Courtney, a bank teller:

Courtney found that the opportunity for communitas did arise ... in the lunch-hour rush. When the tellers were working the drive-through and they could see cars in long lines, they had to work at a run inside the bank and concentrate on avoiding collisions with each other. Courtney's fellow bank tellers were quite competent. Most days when the drive-through got "slammed", that is, speeded up, they maintained quick and good service without screwing up any transactions or making any customers angry. Their speed of work was made possible by the communitas between them, which spread to all their customers. They handled each other's transactions, yelled advice across the room, and never failed to do anything that could help another person... After they finished up with the last car and pushed the send button on the tube, they all shared a sigh of relief. They were grateful to each other for so much assistance. Here, in the rush with the tellers, was where Courtney felt truly "recognized": she became an organic part of the bank system [emphasis added] (Turner 2012, p.18).

What is of interest to me in this account is that not only the speed, but the seamless quality of the rush-period, the avoidance of errors and the sense of achievement were all
made possible or enhanced by the communitas between the workers. Damnahurians know this quality; they respect and honour it, and aim to achieve it. Unless one is a part of communitas then one cannot know that it occurred, but the results of the communitas of work may be evident even if one was not present for it. In Damanhur I saw evidence of communitas in the growth of the community, in tangible results of completed projects and the ongoing adaptability of the community throughout its history. I spoke with many visitors, journalists and scholars who marvelled at Damanhurian achievements, causing them to ask how the community has managed such accomplishments. Through analysis of accounts of Damnahurians, and a heightened awareness of the possibility of communitas due to my own experiences, I was able to 'see' the communitas of work 'behind the scenes' in the production of Damanhur. I argue that Damnahurians not only foster communitas through institutionalised ritual liminal or liminoid play phases, but also facilitate liminality through collective work.

A Parallel or Alternative Community?

Recent elections of King Guides resulted in one change, as one person was re-elected and a new King Guide replaced another. The election has prompted discussions about a number of different issues, but there is a general opinion (from people I have spoken with over the last day or two) that the community is still stagnant - that they are not moving enough, and more change is needed. This leads into debates about whether this community is an

---

79 In the case of Courtney and the other bank tellers, communitas could have been evident in the day's figures, the absence of complaints, the satisfaction and reliability of workers. Superiors looking at the paperwork for this branch might ask themselves, "how do they do it?"
'alternative' or 'parallel' community. An explanation, given to me by Becco, is that by parallel they mean similar to others and by alternative they mean completely new. The impression I get from a few fractured conversations is that people feel that Damanhur is becoming more of a parallel community and what they really desire or are aiming for is a completely new, alternative, way of living (Field Diary 2009).

The question of stagnation in Damanhur, or the idea that they were becoming more of a 'parallel' community rather than a truly alternative one, demonstrates a consciousness of some of the dilemmas of institutionalisation. This concern is well placed as intentional communities can become indistinguishable from the mainstream society over the course of several years (the previously discussed Christian Waldenses are an example). It is the aim of staying on the margin of dominant societal norms that propels Damanhurians to seek out and harness communitas (the ultimate liminal state). Seeking to remain truly 'alternative', the idea that they are enacting a completely ‘new culture’, can also be seen as a desire to remain liminal (or more accurately, liminoid). The idea, or belief, that underlies this goal is that in order to ‘evolve a new humanity’ a new culture is required; we (humans) cannot evolve under current conditions. From a Turnerian (1969, p.133) perspective, and as discussed previously, the liminal phase and particularly communitas is ‘speculative and generates imagery and philosophical ideas’, an ideal condition, one could argue, for seeking a ‘new culture’.

Through their experiments, Damanhurians have discovered the power of collective work, the rush of pride and sense of achievement from completed projects (particularly large and difficult projects like the Temples of Humankind). The communitas of work helps Damanhurians achieve their tasks and, importantly, they know this. Citizens state
that action is the only way to know Damanhur; in fact it is the only way to know the communitas that connects and propels them. Guests along with new citizens are introduced to this philosophy through work exchange. If a guest is not on work exchange then they are introduced to it in workshops or courses where there was usually a practical experiential element.

In the course 'How to Build a Successful Community', the group I was in were asked to build a collective structure from mouldable clay. There was to be no talking, no planning and guidelines, we were to silently work on a clay model of a structure together.

As you can see there is no reason for the structure, the results are an impossible array of elements merging into a fantastical formation. However, the feeling associated with doing this was electric. We were one in the moment of creating and yet each of us could contribute our own unique element. We formed bridges and tunnels where one person
would start at one end and another person at the other and still the passages and pathways would meet in the middle. Afterwards we felt joyous and connected. If I met any of these people again, each one from a different part of the world, I would know them and greet them like an old friend. The communitas of work brought us together like no previous activity in the five-day course. Damanhurians have realised the 'magic' of working together and try to engender it in order to achieve projects that meet their collectively inspired goals.

**Authentic Ecovillage**

There are different philosophical platforms that support the goals fostered by Damanhurians (some I discuss in this chapter), most of which seem to be underpinned by a desire to create what they describe as a completely ‘new culture’. Such a desire implies a need to operate independently from the nation-state and, therefore, necessitates strong emphasis on projects that result in increased self-sufficiency in all aspects: social interaction, food provision, water collection, energy production, and so on. This focus, coupled with their socioecological concerns, has meant that the goal of self-sufficiency goes hand in hand with ecologically sustainable practice. For example, self-sufficiency necessarily entails a local focus, either sourcing or growing and producing food close to home. Local production means less embodied energy and can arguably be seen as more ecologically responsible. Control over the source of one's food in conjunction with an ecological mindset has meant that, in Damanhur, food is grown organically and alternative farming practices are used. Additionally, self-sufficiency
requires off-the-grid power production. Although this could come from petrochemical sources, Damanhurians chose the ecologically responsible route by installing photovoltaic solar panels and solar thermal panels.

Because eco-living is not the primary motivation for this community—unlike some other intentional communities that identify as ecovillages—guests (including myself) may arrive with expectations different from the reality they encounter. Living what they see as ecologically responsible lives has been implemented over the course of the community’s development, but was not a founding focus, although self-sufficiency seems to have been important to Damanhurians since the beginning. The primary motivation for the Damanhurian project is spiritual, so a large part of their material culture is in deference to this primary focus. For example, the Temples form a large subterranean complex that require a considerable amount of power to keep dry, warm and ventilated, and Damanhurians are cognizant of this. Efforts have been made to ensure the energy production for the Temples is more sustainable and as a result have also likely reduced their carbon footprint. As of 2010 one-third of the energy required to power the Temples was being supplied via photovoltaic panels, as was the case in many of the nucleos. As the Temples are a subterranean complex they also require constant air conditioning. The heater that provides the majority of the air temperature regulation is wood powered. The majority of the wood sourced for the wood heater is from sustainably managed Damanhurian forests, although the Temples rely on a diesel electricity generator for the majority of the energy requirements. In addition to these requirements is the energy needed for construction.
It seems unlikely that a community with a purely ecological focus would commit to such a large undertaking that increases the challenge of reducing their overall carbon footprint. However, it is worth noting that the process of construction itself is arguably central to the cohesiveness of the community. The communitas of work arises when citizens take care of the Temples together, and there is always someone doing some activity in them; maintenance of the Temples of Humankind requires ten volunteers to tend to them all day, every day to work on mechanics, lighting, cleaning and art restoration. Access to the synchronic lines is believed by Damanhurians to provide a link from 'the earth to the cosmos' and that it is also a source (occurring unconsciously or sought through Damanhurian spiritual practices) of inspiration for citizens and guests alike. It is activity towards the construction of the Temples that forms a central focus and is arguably a primary motivator for Damanhurians to continue their community project, as it tangibly supports their spiritual aspirations. Of relevance in this chapter, Damanhurian spiritual understandings now support aims of constructing an eco-society, or more accurately supports/motivates activity that enhances their spirit-human-nature connection, a communitas of nature.

Humans as a part of the ecosystem

The people of Damanhur have a complex set of philosophies, not all of which have been covered here. It is very likely that I remained unaware of many of the intricate threads

---

80 www.thetemples.org/en
that make up the larger overarching ideas that motivate this community. However, at the time of my fieldwork there was an idea that had existed in various stages of articulation throughout Damanhur's history that was particularly influential in fostering an ecological mindset. Many Damanhurians with whom I spoke saw themselves (and humans in general) as part of an ecosystem: as much a part of the earth system as any other species. Certainly, they did not discuss this as having been achieved, and there was a belief that humans are caretakers, which suggests a consciousness about humans having a stewardship role rather than being integrated into normal ecosystem functions. Some other species also have similar abilities (in that they can act as 'bridge species') to humans, including whales, dolphins and elephants, which they also suggest have a caretaking role. Damanhurians attempt to see humans as part of a natural world order where every species, animal or plant, has the same rights as humans. This philosophy has led to projects that seek to exemplify this idea—an idea that is also seen as an experimental perspective.

This kind of thinking is perhaps best exemplified through consideration of the Damanhurian diet. For ecological, health or spiritual reasons alternative groups will advocate particular dietary choices, for example, not eating meat because killing living beings is perceived as unjust. Damanhurians argue that 'the expansion of knowledge and experience ... passes through the physical dimension ... therefore also through food', which means that humans can be nurtured by all sources: vegetables, minerals and animals (D Team 2012, para. 2). Damanhurians also advocate that both plants and animals are sentient beings and neither can be seen as superior to the other. Therefore, the argument that killing animals is wrong and that we have a choice not to do so is
moot given the argument that plants are also deserving of similar respect. The way forward according to Damanhurians is to treat all life forms with respect:

We [Damanhurians] don't think that we are respecting life more if we only eat plants instead of plants and animals; the important thing is that you eat with awareness and respect. Better yet, if you can raise your own food with that same level of awareness and respect, therefore creating a relationship with plants and animals that is beyond just physical nourishment (D Team 2012, comm. 4).

Damanhurians show respect to plants and animals in myriad ways. Some rituals and practices have been described in earlier chapters, but also influence an ecological mindset, including: the Summer and Winter Solstices, Autumnal and Vernal Equinox rituals and the Rite of the Oracle (taking place on nights of a full-moon). These broader whole-community practices bring attention to the passing of the seasons and the rotation of the earth, serving to lift perspectives above that of the day-to-day. Other rituals are smaller and happen on a more regular basis. Some of these, again, have already been discussed, for example, the purification ritual before a meal or the evening prayer done in the nucleo every night. There are also many elements that I have missed due to diversity among nucleos, the size of the community (physical size and numbers of people) and other practices that were unavailable to me, as they were reserved for initiates of the School of Meditation.

There are two particular rituals that occurred during fieldwork that are good examples of how Damanhurians maintain a connection with the natural world. Although I do not have direct experience of my first example, I was told about it during work exchange.
When a new type of fruit ripens enough for harvest, there is a ritual performed that offers the first fruit or vegetable in gratitude for the crop (to what or whom this offer is made is unclear, although I assume that it is offered to the plant world or nature spirits). This ritual is done every year on all Damanhurian properties for each new ripe fruit or vegetable. When I asked why this was done the answer I received was that 'it's part of the "Olio Caldo" ethos of growing our own foods in connection and harmony with nature, the plant world and nature spirits' (2014, pers. comm. 14 Jan). Olio Caldo is discussed in further detail later in this chapter, but has essentially to do with practices that promote self-sufficiency within Damanhur.

The second ritual that exemplifies the ongoing relationship between Damanhurians and the natural world is that of the Salutation Tree. I first encountered this individual and personal ritual when attending the ritual of Damanhur Get.

Entry to the Temples is gained through a nucleo that is surrounded by a large fence on the side of a mountain. Entry is gained through a large gate, and when attending for a ritual one is often waiting on the driveway in front of the entry with a group of other people. Today I am attending the ritual of Damanhur Get (Get is a word from the Damanhur sacred language) that is held on a Sunday morning. As we enter the compound of the nucleo, there is little vegetation actually within the fence line, as most of the area surrounding the house is paved and used for personal parking and equipment used for building the Temples. There is a small area of garden directly inside the gate directly before the entry of the nucleo. There is a tree that stands out, and many of those I was waiting with move directly to the tree, place their hands on it and briefly touch their foreheads to the tree with eyes closed. Those in
robes do not do this, presumably because they were already here (Field Diary 2010).

As I left the ritual this day I saw people doing the same practice on the way out. This ritual of greeting and saying goodbye to a tree was common. The explanation I was given was this:

Every Damanhur nucleo has a salutation tree. The ritual is to greet it when entering and exiting the land, by connecting to the tree as a symbol of the subtle energies, plant and nature spirits of the land. This can be done by touching the tree and placing the forehead against it (pers.comm. 2014).

The very individual ritual of the Salutation Tree functions to tie the individual to the natural world in contrast to the more overtly communal orientation of rituals discussed in earlier chapters (for example, the evening prayer). The emphasis on the individual in this ritual helps balance the tensions observable between individualism and communalism. Damanhurians are building relationships with the plant world through rituals that treat seen and unseen elements of plant life as one would treat a human. Greeting trees and displaying gratitude for harvests are just two of the many rituals that in some way connect humans with the non-human world. I sometimes glimpsed what seemed to me to be a deep communion between a Damanhurian and a salutation tree; a moment where a citizen would rest their forehead against the tree and pause there for a couple of minutes in silence. As Edith Turner (2012, p.144) discusses in the chapter concerning the communitas of nature, there are 'certain affinities out there [in nature] ... [i]t [communitas] is in the universe'. 'In the universe' to my understanding means everywhere communitas is (to Edith and Victor Turner) transcendental, timeless, in and
of the world. Victor Turner provides evidence of communitas ‘from sources far removed from one another in space and time’ (1969, p.134) and describes it as a ‘generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be’ (1969, p.96). Damanhurians actively seek to bond with the natural world, to be a part of that world, to end the 'impaired Western attitudes of mind' that 'confront an obdurate nature that ought to be subdued' (Turner 2012, p.143) and simultaneously be ‘of the world’ in a new and beneficial way.

Alternative Names

When citizens choose to become 'players' in the Game of Life they may seek to participate in the ‘game’ of changing their name to an animal, for example, Koala, Bear, Kangaroo, or Monkey. Changing names is one of the 'games' that this structural entity facilitates and monitors. It was during one of the first viaggio (discussed in Chapter 5) that Damanhurian travellers decided to play this name changing game. Afterward, Oberto Airaudi also changed his name to Falco (Falcon), by which he was commonly known during my fieldwork in 2009-2010 and until his passing in 2013. Changing citizens' names to those of animals began as a game, but this practice has continued to form an integral part of Damanhurian culture. Those members who changed their names during the first journey kept them, and slowly the rest of the community also changed their names. Damanhurians are able to choose an animal name once they have spent a certain amount of time as citizens. While this is a choice—not all Damanhurians have to do this—most Damanhurians who are 'A citizens' will do so. It is through such a name that one can immediately (if one speaks Italian) tell that this person is from
Damanhur, or at least it raises the question. It is also a statement in that a person is able to carry that name outside of the community context into circumstances where they might need to explain their 'strange' name. It is a marker/badge of difference of a very personal nature.

Over time the idea of a second plant name was conceived: Coriander, Thyme, Frangipani and so on. Today it is common to find citizens with both animal and plant names. This process of name changing still has an element of frivolity and fun to it; it is still, in the minds of Damanhurstrians, all part of a game they play with themselves and each other. However, there are now some more serious undertones to the name change; it is a game with real consequences for the spiritual evolution of each individual who chooses to play. One long-term community member explained the serious and playful elements of Damanhurian name changes in this way:

Actually taking an animal and then plant name is part of the Game of Life. It started, on the one hand to express our closeness to nature, as the human, the animal and the plant world all have the same origin; on the other hand, it is a game. [...] It looks like changing your name, [makes it] easier to get rid of useless over-structures [habits or perspectives] and strengthens other characteristics, and for this reason it helps to transform parts of yourself (pers.comm. 2012).

Calling each other Monkey or Ant serves to remind them not to take life too seriously, to laugh and play with their existence. A Damanhurian might take the name of an endangered species (Platypus and Koala were both resident in Damanhur), but for the most part people chose names to which they felt a connection or through which they could learn something. It was very different for every individual, and the other members
of the community assist the process. Name changes are not usually legal. Citizens can use their original name and their Damanhurian (animal or plant) name interchangeably (particularly if they work outside of Damanhur). The anthropologist, Eva Meijerink, who spent time in Damanhur in the early 2000s, described this as a 'double identity' (2003, p.167). Each Damanhurian has a different name, although if a member leaves the Federation, then they are usually asked to relinquish their name and it becomes available for new members to choose. At the time of fieldwork an ex-citizen, with who I spoke, had kept his animal name despite leaving the community. Usually Damanhurians would stop referring to the ex-member by their animal name, even if the ex-member chose to continue using it, but in one case the name was still used by the ex-member and was still regarded as 'in-use' by Damanhurians (in other words, no new citizens could then use the name).

After a longer period of time, usually more than 2 years with an animal name, citizens of Damanhur may also choose a plant name. The attainment of a plant name can act as an indication of the length of time that a person has been a member and, therefore, is a demonstration of commitment to the community. Again, choosing a plant name is voluntary, and the timing of when it is chosen is also dependent on each individual. It is unusual, though, to meet a Damanhurian with an animal name who is not yet a full-time citizen, and it is not possible to meet a Damanhurian with both an animal and plant name who is only in the first few years of citizenship. This is not necessarily a set 'rule', as such, but is rather something that occurs when individuals reach a point where they feel a second name is warranted. Below a new citizen describes her own thoughts about choosing a plant name in the future:
I do not have a plant name yet. There are some prerequisites to getting one. Having an animal name at least two years is one of them... Most people tend to wait about eight to ten years after their animal name before getting a plant name, to densify [increase] their experience with the animal name and build a certain density [understanding] of history and experience at Damanhur too. A few Damanhurians have been here more than fifteen to twenty years and still don't have a plant name! Falco did not have a plant name either, though some say he wanted Tarassaco81 (Dandelion) as his plant name. I have some ideas about what plant name I would like...

Two of the original founders of Damanhur, Condor Girasole and Gau Erba were the first ones to receive plant names. A plant name is a successive phase after the animal name. It signifies a deeper entry and integration into Damanhur, an ulterior phase of personal change and transformation too. It also is synchronic [occurring at the right time, in the right place, but more than a coincidence, similar to 'fated'] to receive when a citizen has a demonstrated level of taking on responsibility and being active in the community (pers.comm n.d.).

From this example one can see that using an alternative name is not just about the level of immersion and participation a member has attained in the community. There is an element where it is important to build a relationship with the animal name that is sufficiently 'dense'. This density can be developed over time by using the animal name in different contexts and getting to know the animal with which you are now identified. Getting to know this animal can occur in a number of ways: through researching the animal, meditating on the animal and, if possible, spending time with the animal. It is

---

81 Tarassaco (also the floral emblem of Damanhur) is now used as Falco's plant name in the Damanhurian literature, online.
an experimental game where players ask, 'What does changing my name do to me?' and then observe and discuss the answers they perceive.

The process of choosing a new name (animal or plant) occurred in stages and involved many members of the whole community. Both plant and animal names required the period of 'contribution gathering' prior to the moment of actually asking a large assembly of Damanhurians to approve it. Each individual's process fostered discussion and debate about the most appropriate animal or plant until finally a decision was made. Similar to processes that lead to consensus voting, but without a formal count of any kind, approval of a name was decided based on a perceived amount of affirmative applause. In order to formally request a name one must go through the process of gathering donations, similar to how individuals might gather support for a fun-run or similar activity in for a charity; one must gather pledges of money or volunteer work. Another long-term citizen described the moment when a citizen asks for their new name:

Every name becomes, in a way, a conquest for the whole people, because you go to many, many Damanhurians explaining to them why you want to take the name you want to take and ask them if they are willing to support and, in this case, what they are available [sic] to offer. These offerings can be different, you can offer, for example, hours of free work for a Damanhurian project, or money for the Temples of Humankind, or a piece of art, or something else. What matters is that what is offered adds to Damanhur.

Then you really put yourself into the Game, because once you have a big number of offerings, during one of our common evenings you will ask for your
name [in a public setting with many members of the community in attendance] (pers.comm n.d.).

You can see in this example that even prior to changing one's name there is a process that elicits contributions by all supporters for the benefit of the Federation. This process promotes solidarity between the individual changing their name and their supporters as well as with the Federation as a whole. Ramo continues her explanation of the process here:

Usually there is a person to "facilitate" the process. This person will ask you all the reasons why you want to take this name, often not making it easy for you, in order to test your conviction. At a certain point the person will ask the public what they think, and the choir starts.

Here we have a mixture of collective wisdom and old Roman amphitheater, sometimes the choir shouts all together 'YES', sometimes some voices of the choir may suggest a different name, which is either picked up or not. [...] At some point [...] the public [the Damanhurian audience] is asked to raise their hands for the name they find suitable.

The majority wins.

If the name chosen by the public is different from the one you wanted, you are asked whether you'd accept the name [...] or whether you want to come back in another moment to ask again [...] . Usually people accept the name of the public, and this is part of the Game of Life, you use the others as a mirror. [...] 

The whole event strengthens the belonging to the People, in either way. (pers.comm n.d.)
I was present for an individual's request for a name. The 'choir' referred to in the description above is an assembly of almost two-hundred citizens. This particular request was during one of the weekly Serata; there was a lot of shouting and laughing as people suggested alternatives to the name the person on stage had chosen. In the end she chose a name suggested by the people in the assembly. Loud applause followed the decision, and from that point on the individual had a new name. This process differs according to the individual making the request, and the people in the crowd. Another citizen describes how her friend's original choice was changed when she requested her plant name:

A good friend of mine wanted '[plant1]' as a plant name, but that name was not felt by the people, so they suggested many different names. This day she had on a long orange dress and looked very nice. There were many different suggestions, but until '[plant2]' came up, no name convinced. But the moment someone said '[plant2]', the whole audience shouted '[plant2, plant2].....' The voice of the people was clear. Now my friend was asked whether she would accept '[plant2]', and she was obviously in difficulty, as she identified very much with the name she'd asked for. At the end she decided to accept '[plant2]', at first not so happily, but she wanted to follow the people, as they were so happy with '[plant2]'. After some days she liked the name more and more, becoming a very happy '[plant2]'. Today she uses her plant name more than her animal name (pers.comm n.d.).

Another, relatively new citizen, describes how she chose her animal name and then the resounding affirmation from the people that it was the right choice for her:

For [my animal name], I had searched for animal names, liked a few birds, though didn't find THE one. New Year's Day, 2009 I went into the Sacred
Woods to do a meditation to set the energy for my year, and my housemate... suggested I go into a spiral labyrinth and sit by an oak tree in the center to do my meditation. I did, and I asked to receive intuition about my perfect animal name. I had a vision [revealing a distinctive looking animal]... I thought, it's either [1st animal] or a [2nd animal], though there is already a '[1st animal]' so it must be a [2nd animal]. I hadn't considered [2nd animal] before, though I sat with it and researched [this animal] and it seemed to really fit. So, once I got enough community support, it was the moment to go on stage to ask the name, ... I told the story about the oak tree meditation, didn't even get through my list of reasons that [chosen animal] is my perfect name before I got unanimous applause (pers.comm n.d.).

There are many social benefits and challenges to name changes of this kind, including obvious tensions between individual and collective will. This process of name changing could, at the very least, catalyse an individual's commitment to Damanhur through contributions and submitting oneself to the will of the group during the assembly. The process of formally asking for a name at the assembly has ritual-liminal qualities. The participant begins with one name that they identify with and at the end of the ritual they have a new name and identity. The period in which a participant is on-stage is identified by Damanhurians as jovial and full of humour, certainly there is a lot of laughter and raucous ‘all in fun’ behaviour. However, there are also the peer pressure elements of what I see as ridicule or shame, particularly when the crowd does not acknowledge the original name chosen. This levelling phase is very similar to the liminality experienced by initiates during rites of passage. There is a back and forth process where the individual on stage and individuals within the crowd might disagree with each other and amongst themselves. However, at some point, quickly or slowly, the individual voices
become a unanimous voice and a final decision has to be made. Ideally, the individuals in the room sway the decision of the participant on stage or vice-versa. In the end, should a new name be chosen, there is the potential that communitas may arise. As the individual descends from the stage into the waiting community, neither the individual nor the community will be the same. ‘Betwixt and between’ new and old versions of themselves they have a moment to celebrate the new individual and those individuals who have already gone through the process before them.

Damanhurians also wear their name, like a costume, or ritual attire that distinguishes them as liminal personae. Again, this liminal-like experience would only be perceived when in contact with persons not of Damanhur. I would see this occur during expatriate events held in the valley. Occasionally an event would cater to both Valchiusella locals and Damanhurians, for example a Damanhurian friend could be invited to a local person’s birthday party. At this event the Damanhurian might introduce themselves by their animal name: 'Hello, my name is Goat'. In that moment they are identified as different, someone who sits outside of contemporary norms. Their liminoid phase lasts as long as the event and then they're reintegrated into community fold when they return home. I neither saw nor heard of a sense of communitas in the moments when Damanhurians socialise with non-Damanhurians. Yet, it is an opportunity for a Damanhurian to question their own contexts and beliefs and it is possible that such events might lead a Damanhurian to leave the Federation.

For the purpose of this chapter it is also valuable that individuals attempt to learn about the animal species after which they wish to be named. This process is another reminder
and catalyst for attempting to change one's perspective away from an anthropocentric worldview and towards an ideal communitas of nature. Ucello described her relationship with her animal name in this way:

In addition to this sense of scale [level of involvement and participation in the community], there is also a direct identification with the animal or plant. It's not that I am LIKE a [animal], I AM a [animal], on some level. So treating animals well means treating myself well... there is a mystical and transcendent sense of oneness that is reinforced in this kind of identification, so hearing my name and saying the names of others is a constant reminder of this truth. We are one with animals, plants, with each other (pers.comm n.d.).

These name changes have a clear impact on the way Damanhurians conceptualise the world around them. Statements such as 'I am an animal' raise obvious larger questions about animist, perspectivist and even totemistic epistemologies within the Federation. For example, there is a strong link with concepts discussed in Smith's (1972), I am a *parrot*, where he analyses what was seen as the Bororo's understanding of themselves *as parrots* rather than just identifying with them. Where the Bororo state they are parrots, though, Ucello here acknowledges that she is only an animal *on some level*. This final concession could simply be an indication that Ucello's 'contextually determined criteria for truth' bears more resemblance to my own than that of the Bororo (Smith 1972, pp. 411-412). However, Ucello goes on to say that a 'sense of oneness' is reinforced through the use of animal and plant names. Care for the 'other', animal or plant, is therefore, also caring for one-self; care for the outside world is also care for the individual's inner-world. As such this process of naming leads citizens to treat their natural environment with consciousness, similar to Litfin's 'consciousness' as discussed in the Chapter 1. One
can also see here the qualities of communitas inherent in even such individualised concepts as a person's name. Not only has the process of naming been given to the community, so that separation between individual and communal has become less distinct, so too have distinctions between human and non-human been blurred.

This section has shown some of the roles that Damanhurian name changing has and how this supports commitment to the overarching eco-goals of the Federation. However, as you can see and particularly in this final example, there are still many more dimensions to this process. Damanhurians are aiming for their version of ecotopia, and name changing is just one of the novel approaches they take to achieving that goal.

Music of the Plants

A philosophy that conceives of humans as integrated with the earth system, as an integral part of ecosystems and not a separate and superior element, paves the way for alternative perspectives on previously held beliefs about plants and animals. This conception is arguably liminal, or derived from liminal experiences, as Damanhurians stepped outside of the structures and norms of mainstream society they were able to conceive of the world in different ways. As a result Damanhurians found that they were not superior to the natural world and started to investigate alternative ways of living and communicating with that world. This has led to innovative approaches and experiments from totemic renaming, as discussed above, to constructing and living in elaborate tree villages (homes built using trees as supports and linked by an interconnected series of
Another fascinating example is an experiment where Damanhurians attempt to communicate with plants through music. It is what Damanhurians call *Musica delle Piante* (Music of the Plants) and involves connecting a Damanhurian-made device, known as *Music of the Plants U1*, to a plant and converting the plant's vibrations into sound.

This is not something I investigated with any scientific rigour, but the social outcome of the attempt is not impacted by the verifiability of the experiment (at this point). However, further research reveals an increased interest in alternative forms of plant communication in the fields of plant science, ecology, chemistry, acoustical ecology, auditory mechanics and plant physiology (Gagliano, Mancuso & Robert 2012, p.3). Gagliano et al. (2012, p.2) discuss the possibility that 'acoustic waves may be generated as a result of mechanical vibrations of charged cell membranes and walls through alteration of their potentials and/or through the activity of mechanochemical enzymes such as myosins, which use chemical energy derived from the hydrolysis of ATP in actin filaments to generate mechanical vibrations within cells'. From all appearances the research being conducted into plant bioacoustics in Damanhur has potential to be on the frontier of studies concerning communications among plants.

According to Damanhurians the vibrations turned to sound, that plants emit change over time, becoming more harmonious to the human ear. It would seem, through this experiment, that plants 'learn' to control the kinds of sounds created by their vibrations. Damanhurians demonstrate this ongoing experiment to visitors and even sell the

---

82 Feedback provided since I left the field has noted that 'this experience has been concluded'.

---
technology so that one can hear the music of plants in one's own home. The results of this kind of experiment raise questions concerning the consciousness of plants. What is the perspective of a plant? Further experiments on the ability of plants to transfer knowledge to other plants near to them suggests some kind of potential to communicate that further challenges the majority perspective on Kingdom Plantae. Gagliano et al. (2012, p.3) also have something to say on the potential of interspecies communication among plants, 'ultimately, if such magnetic fields and mechanical vibrations can extend over large distances within the organism and also outside the organism, then there is a real possibility that plants may indeed use these means to communicate with other plants or organisms'.

Damanhurian success in the experiment with Music of the Plants has resulted in considerable interest within the community and from visitors. Damanhurians have regular demonstrations of plants that play music for guests and are willing to discuss, at length, the implications of plant sentience. Ongoing experimentation in this area is discussed on the Damanhurian Community Blog, where the effect of certain people or attitudes can be seen to have an influence on plant behaviour:

Once I was presenting plant research to a group of English high school students visiting Damanhur, accompanied by their professors. I had set up a specific space in a greenhouse, and a plant was singing as usual. At a certain point, this group of teenagers came in all dressed in black with a completely disinterested attitude about what was going on around them. After a few moments, the plant stopped playing music. [...] At a certain point, I gave up and apologized to the teachers and students because the experiment hadn't worked. The teenagers started to leave the room and when the last one was
outside, the plant started playing music again. I was really surprised, as well as [sic] the teacher who had stayed inside. She said, "I would say that the experiment was a success. Those teenagers had expressed so much disinterest and irritation that it must have had a negative influence on the plant."

So, even the wave of our thoughts come to influence these beings. And from that episode, a whole series of other experiments began... (Oleandro 2012, para. 1)

The idea that human attitudes could exercise an adverse impact on the behaviour of plants reaffirms the Damanhurian concept of positive thought and intention being very important to the well-being of not only individuals and their surrounds, but also the planet as a whole. Damanhurians discuss and conduct research ‘with’ the Plant Kingdom and give particular attention to trees and the potential role they might have in repairing a balance among humans, nature, nature spirits and the planet (in other words, towards realising the communitas of nature described by Edith Turner (2012)).

Ultimately, Damanhurians seek to create connections and bonds between all the elements that make up the Earth ecosystem, a planetary-wide concept:

    Human presence and intention are indispensable to re-establish the spiritual connection with the tree world, an alliance our species broke, forgetting that we are all part of the same living and spiritual eco-system (Ananas 2012, para. 1).

Edith Turner (2012, p.146), in her elaboration of a communitas of nature, describes her first, unknowing, encounter with it when she 'would walk past ...[an] ash tree and then come back and stand and look at it again. It had a presence that spoke to ...[her].' Edith Turner (2012, p.146) provides examples in other cultures where the 'presences are real',

242
*kami* in Japan, *inua* in the Arctic or the *akishi* in Africa, each representing a spiritual essence in many things, 'a huge rock, or a great hero or artist, or ... the sea', the ancestors or even 'all of nature'. Damanhurians are seeking to create or step into the communitas of nature: they are being, living and doing activities that bring this ideal concept into their everyday lives.

**Eco-Art**

Considerable emphasis is placed on aesthetics in Damanhur, which also has ecological benefits when used to express ecological ideals. As an example, some of the Damanhurian buildings have been painted with extensive murals of larger-than-life-sized plants and animals. The most visible of these murals is located in one of the main centres known as Damjl. The artwork is bold and colourful and covers the outside walls of buildings located there. There are murals of similar scale throughout Damjl and on many other buildings in the larger community. Below are some photographs of murals in Damjl and on another nucleo located elsewhere in the community.
The purpose of these larger-than-life murals is not only to improve the aesthetic value of the Damanhurian buildings, but also as a demonstration of experimental perspectives. The experiment here is to show human observers what the world might look like should they be as small as an insect, or should insects and flowers be as big as humans. This is
another way that Damanhurians are challenging themselves and their visitors to see the world differently: to not lose sight of the natural world because parts of it are small and easily ignored. By painting the walls of their homes with pictorial representations of these concepts they are reminded daily of their perspective-altering attempts.

Below is another mural on a wall in Damjl. This mural does not depict larger-than-life images, but instead attempts to bring a different world into the human world. This underwater scene, normally limited to those humans who have the opportunity to dive or snorkel, is now brought into the daily lives of Damanhurians and their visitors.

![Photo 9 – Mural on the wall of a Damanharian nucleo](image)

This attention to a normally unseen habitat does, arguably, focus human awareness on elements of the environment that are not always accessible to humans. From an outsiders’ perspective, these murals identify Damanhur as a liminal space, but which I expect residents of Damanhur are likely to become used to the imagery over time. Damanhurians do update the murals and change their composition at times and this may help to revitalise the effect they have on citizens’ perspectives. They view this
attempt as important, particularly in an ecological sense, as it is often those ecosystems and habitats that are unseen that become sad victims of human waste and pollution. Art is also seen as a way to investigate the unknown (liminoid) and to find communitas:

We have possibilities in art that we haven’t explored yet: through the transformation of concepts and forms, we stimulate in others trains of thought that were unthinkable before (Damanhurian saying).

Self-sufficiency

I found an article that raises the question, Is your olive oil lying about it's virginity? and I really did feel the sting of betrayal reading that "independent tests at the University of California found that 69% of all store-bought extra virgin olive oils in the US are probably fake," and seeing the names of brands that I've bought in the past. Knowing that I've eaten these diluted and artificially-colored oils is dismaying and disheartening. How can we really know that food is pure and real?

I feel grateful because now that I live in Damanhur, I can relax in trusting that the food on our community dinner tables and in our natural foods coop Tentaty in Damanhur Crea are clean and organic. We are often the ones who source the foods directly, growing and harvesting them with attention and care. We use extra virgin olive oil that comes from our community olive groves in Tuscany.

This is one of the reasons I love living at Damanhur. Knowing that the food I eat is more than just physical sustenance, that it is subtle and spiritual nourishment, that it can raise my energy and consciousness or weigh it down, I'm grateful that I can trust what I am eating, know exactly where our products come from and who grew and made them with love, intention and
positive energy. It's a way of life that nourishes body, heart and spirit (D Team 2013, para. 1).

The goal of self-sufficiency was evident throughout the residences that make up the larger community. Many of the homes have been retrofitted with ecologically responsible adaptations, including rainwater collection (Ananas & Pesco 2009). Ecological endeavours are also supported through attitudes that favour conservative consumption within Damanhurian homes. For example, I saw residents favour low-package products, reduce waste produced, reuse clothing and other materials, fix broken equipment if possible, recycle packaging where possible, compost organic waste and raise consciousness around water use.

Projects of larger scale than the everyday personal responsibilities already listed are also informed by self-sufficiency goals and ecologically beneficial intentions. Many of these projects were evident throughout the territory in which I spent the majority of my time. The nucleo next door had the function to work towards alternative power generation and so had the results of some experimentation visible around its territory. The most obvious and striking of these is a large dish (very much like a satellite dish) covered in panels that shine like mirrors in the sun. This dish is constructed in this way so that it can rotate according to the direction of the sun. The rotation ensures that the panels are always in the best position to collect the most sunlight so that photons are more effectively converted into electricity. In a similar vein this nucleo has also constructed a rotating house. The house is a one-bedroom studio built on a rotating base that moves in a similar way to the solar dish. In this instance, though, as well as trying to get the most solar collection, the house rotates so as to maximise the benefits of a passive solar
home design that takes advantage of summer and winter sun to reduce energy expenditure for heating and cooling. The question of ‘what direction should I have my house facing?’ is moot when you can move the house at any time so that the most comfortable orientation can be obtained at any time of day or night, whatever the season.83

Both the solar dish and the rotating house were then being used (with the experimental Damanhurian ethos) as sources of alternative energy production and to investigate what designs might effectively incorporate them. Some of the ideas and knowledge gained from these ongoing experiments will be improved and built on throughout the community. Some of the concepts might be patented and sold to people in the valley or elsewhere. Each project and others like these were collectively built, and the benefits of that collective knowledge creation have spread throughout the community either via first-hand experience or through stories told and retold. Further, these experimental structures are also points of interest for visitors to the area. Tours often include these elements of nucleo living and can inspire others to create their own experiments in alternative living. Experts in ecologically responsible housing design or researchers in sustainable lifestyles can also visit and explore ideas with the creators of these experiments.

Back in Dendera there were more examples of attempts to explore new ways to live sustainably. A straw bale home is situated directly outside the main dwelling, and one of

---

83 The ecological impact of these sustainable building attempts has not been ascertained and nor was this (as has been stated previously) the focus of this research. Damanhurians believe they are moving in the direction of sustainable living and it is that behavior, in accordance with their values, that is of interest here.
the tree houses rests among the branches of two large trees that grow between the two nucleo properties. There are large tracts of cultivated land, compost heaps and a large greenhouse in which vegetables are grown. The neighbouring nucleo cultivates seedlings for distribution among the territories, and there are also animals, including chickens and pigs, kept for eggs and meat. Resources are shared, so scraps from both kitchens make their way into the pig's pen. When the animals are slaughtered, excess meat is distributed among nucleos via direct exchange. All of these initiatives have been collectively thought of and realised. Not only does sharing such projects increase their value and their knowledge distribution, but it also increases the pace at which they are realised. Because the work is shared, these projects do not seem to take up a huge amount of individual time. Citizens still have time to engage in all the many other activities going on within the community on a daily basis. Indeed, while a project is coming to fruition in their own nucleo, members might also be assisting in the realisation of a different project in another nucleo.

The collective realisation of these projects and others like them is a result of Damanhurian ideology around communal action, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, and firmly rooted in the ecosystem philosophy discussed earlier in this chapter. It is because of the foundation of communal support for new Damanhurian projects and the impetus behind projects that lead to self-sufficiency and harmony with nature that projects like these discussed here are possible. Not only does collective action speed up the realisation
of such projects, as 'many hands make light work', but it also motivates and inspires innovation and further related projects.

One of the first encounters I had with the collective realisation of an ecologically minded project was during work exchange. At the dinner table one evening Montagne described the idea she had for a group work exchange where the nucleo would host several people at once (normally only hosting one or two guests at a time) and they would all work together on a group project. The project on which the nucleo had decided was the construction of a compost toilet. There were essentially two ideas that needed to be realised: that of the group work exchange and that of the construction. Damanhur's Welcome Office would be instrumental in assisting the nucleo, and Montagne would be point person for identifying a number of willing work exchangers. Cielo, a member of this nucleo, also worked at the Welcome Office and so was able to communicate directly about their intentions. Montagne and Cielo could communicate about their progress in the evenings over the dinner table. Within a matter of days guests were booked for the project and would arrive soon afterwards. It was in this way that the project continued to develop. As things began to happen, Montagne would organise or find someone to help with the next step. Such a process is not efficient in a corporate sense, and it can seem like there is wasted time - wood arriving late, workers not being given tasks, time running out as work exchangers only had a limited time, and so on. However, the result was the construction of a compost toilet. The nucleo made some income, shared knowledge of Damanhur with outsiders, and the work exchangers

---

84 A phrase I have heard many times during my own experiences in an intentional community.
seemed to enjoy their time. From beginning to end, from idea to reality, this project took no more than five or six weeks. Montagne and many of the nucleo members involved in the project did not have prior knowledge of how to build a compost toilet, nor did they have the necessary building skills, but others within the community did. These others participated at moments where their skills were important, Cielo through the Welcome Office or a builder from the neighbouring nucleo. Material had to be bought for the project, but this was sustainably sourced timber, and no outside labour was hired.

Decisions about the construction of the compost toilet had been made in the nucleo. There were no clear objectives for the use of the toilet; some people discussed the idea that it would be for guests, but really there was no designated plan for its use. The point was to experiment with the work camp idea as a way of allowing guests to experience working together (and hopefully the communitas of work would arise) and with nucleo members. The construction created awareness about this alternative toilet option, and I am sure that over time the nucleo members will find options for the toilet built during the work camp. The other element this project achieved was bringing together outsiders to work on a collective project. Not only did the guests build bonds with their fellow workers, but they also learned about construction, material choice, and alternative waste management. Isolated, such an effect is limited, but I was to see this kind of project realisation throughout my stay. Everyone in Damanhur is encouraged and does work towards a particular goal. Because much of the focus is on practical outcomes, what is achieved has visible results and tangible benefits. Because the philosophy is one where Damanhurians 'see our planet as a living being to be respected and protected', all of the
nucleos aim at the development of community within the philosophical ideals (including ecological ideals). This development is realised through collective action as seen in the construction of the compost toilet.

On a grander scale Damanhurians have constructed much larger projects, including their homes and most obviously the Temples of Humankind. An example that speaks directly to the ecological argument is that of the new building at the nucleo Aval, an example of a cross-collective (inter-nucleo) activity that led to the construction of a state-of-the-art eco-home in under six months. 'Aval is situated in Cuceglio and comprises two connected houses, the original Aval and the new building completed in summer 2007' (Ananas & Pesco 2009, p.45). Built in accordance with the most modern eco-building criteria, the home was given an award for environmental sustainability by the Foundation for Environmental Education (FEE) Green Home program in 2007. The project of building the new eco-home was identified by Damanhurians as a cross-collective enterprise among and for all the nucleos of Damanhur. The construction of this home was brought to fruition by Damanhurians and had the involvement of many hands from across the Federation. Certainly, such a construction would have required more organisation than the compost toilet, but the learning involved was similar. Because Damanhurians have such a large base of labour, knowledge, skills, ideas and creativity to draw on, dreams can quickly become reality.

As with the Temples, though, Aval required considerable energy for its construction, and ironically, the building with all its eco-gadgets used to monitor and regulate temperature could be seen to distance Damanhurians from the communitas with nature.
they seem to desire. As such, Aval represents some of the ongoing tensions between innovation and the communitas of nature Damanhurians seek. Damanhurian stories told of a communitas of work that arose during the construction of Aval. Yet, it was in my experience the most removed from the natural world of all the nucleos I had a chance to visit, and it had little of the spiritual elements that pervade the Temples.\(^{85}\) Damanhurians posit that the world’s ecological crises are a result of a deep disconnection ‘between human sensitivity and the living, natural intelligence of our environment’. Technology is seen as important to Damanhurians and can serve to help connect humans to their spiritual sensitivity; for example, selfic instruments can serve this purpose. Yet, there seemed to me to be a dissonance between Damanhurian true ideals and the construction of Aval. The building is impressive, but it lacked some of the sacred elements evident in many other endeavours (for example, The Temples of Humankind), while still carrying considerable embodied energy.\(^{86}\) This example could be indicative of the Damanhurian tendency to focus on self-sufficiency for the purpose of realising a new culture, than on an intention to reduce consumption.

**Olio Caldo - Hot Oil**

This morning I was working with Montagne and she mentioned *Olio Caldo* was being reinvigorated at the moment. This time she said the discussion was around economic self-sufficiency, whereas in the past Olio Caldo had come to represent self-sufficiency on the practical day-to-day level. I had read about

---

\(^{85}\) From my perspective there was less of the sacred/spiritual focus as was evident elsewhere; however, this may have been because I was not a citizen, or because the nucleo was relatively new.

\(^{86}\) Embodied energy is all the energy consumed by all the processes associated with the construction of a building.
Olio Caldo before, but this is the first time I had discussed it with someone. Because of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) and the impact it was having on Damanhurians, Montagne believed the moment was right to start coming up with unique ways of generating income. She exclaimed that many people, more than one hundred, had attended the first meeting of Olio Caldo Tre (3). She perceived this as an encouraging sign, worthy of further effort and attention (Field Diary 2009).

Olio Caldo translates as 'Hot Oil' and is so named because of a scene found in the Myth of the Sapphire Masks (1983) written by Falco, where the characters are able to 'fight off the cold by spreading the magic of "Hot Oil" over their skin' (D Team 2012, para. 6). In 1985 Damanhurians experimented with the idea of sustainable self-sufficiency through a project they called Olio Caldo: the ‘Hot Oil’ seemed to represent self-sufficiency, a human body that was self-sufficient without the need for clothing. During this project citizens in groups of five people at a time over the course of twelve months would live separately from the community in complete self-sufficiency:

Eating what they could produce on their own, with the ability to trade items with the Damanhur market... Even the clothes were all Damanhurian produced! Electricity was produced by a bicycle connected to a generator and they traveled on foot, by bike or with rides, when they could find them (D Team 2012, para. 3).

From this time Olio Caldo has come to mean sustainable self-sufficiency in Damanhur and all the related aspects including: self-made products, home grown produce, ecologically responsible innovations, and so on. Olio Caldo is an umbrella term and the

---

87 I had heard about the impact of the GFC previously. As a result of the GFC unemployment in the Valchiusella was a growing challenge.
numbers, ‘Tre’ and ‘Quattro’ for example, represent phases of increased interest in the concept. The phases seem to occur spontaneously among the citizenry when one or a group of citizens are inspired to reinvigorate interest in self-sufficiency values. Damanhurians get together and inspire each other to improve their own and the community’s self-sufficiency through discussion and individual and collective activities. This account from an early phase of my fieldwork demonstrates the individual nature of self-sufficiency in Damanhur:

We were out clearing blackberries when Oceano came down to make herself a hanger for her clothes from wood that had previously been cut down. This is the second activity I have seen in as many days of someone making an item of furniture from raw natural materials found on the property. Both of these were personal activities. One wanted to learn how to construct furniture and so was starting with something basic, and the other was making something small for her room.

There have been a few instances of making something from scratch. The members of this nucleo grow their own vegetables and herbs and they make their own wine, vinegar and yoghurt. These examples of attempts towards self-sufficiency are enhanced by the ecological design of their home, and their recycling and compost systems. The Reduce part of the three Rs is evident; for example, the house is powered by photovoltaic cells, and there is still a consciousness about how much power they use (Field Diary 2009).

While Olio Caldo is frequently a part of Damanhurian thinking, with daily attempts at sustainable living practices being visible throughout the community, sometimes there are moments where new Olio Caldo projects are discussed with increased enthusiasm. During my stay there were some involved in Olio Caldo Tre, but since then there has
been a fourth reincarnation of the movement, Olio Caldo \textit{Quattro} (four). Where Olio Caldo \textit{Tre} placed attention on more sustainable economic practices, Olio Caldo \textit{Quattro} is being documented online as a reinvigorated attempt at the complete self-sufficiency goal. One nucleo has become the focus for this, but, as was the case for specific nucleo projects during my time in Damanhur, the benefits and learning are spread throughout the community. The final statement on the blog page about Olio Caldo \textit{Quattro} sums up Damanhurian attitudes around sustainability well:

Self-reliance is a historic objective of Damanhur: environmental sustainability, the quality of the final product, to discover talent and create opportunities for people to express themselves, to save money and find new resources. In two words, "Olio Caldo" (D Team 2012, para. 8).

Olio Caldo in its various forms has the qualities of a liminal phase within the day-to-day running of the Damanhurian Federation. Particularly in the initial stages of a new phase of Olio Caldo, participants are able to think big about how they are going to achieve the latest ideal. Damanhurians are asking themselves, how can we live in greater alignment with our objectives? Then they act on their insights and, because the Damanhurian structure allows it, create change. During Olio Caldo \textit{Quattro}, Damanhurians have occupied the agricultural nucleo, Prima Stalla, and are steadily working to live with total autonomy, requiring self-sufficiency. Their first goal is to achieve food self-sufficiency for 500 people in the community within one year. One can imagine that the communitas of work is pervading this new endeavour. Emails sent to me during the period of Olio Caldo \textit{Quattro}'s initial phase were full of excitement, ‘all is well here, much acceleration challenging the limits in all senses’, and ‘I feel like several lifetimes have passed since you
were here … [r]eally so much, I don't even know where to start'. Olio Caldo, another manifestation of the liminal, is not institutionally instigated, rather inspiration arises among the citizenry and they take it from there.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that Damanhurians are engaging in what Edith Turner (2012) described as the communitas of nature. Damanhurians strive to see and live a worldview that is all-inclusive; nature, spirit, humanity are each intimately and intricately connected in a dynamic whole. The majority of Damanhurians are coming from typically Western post-industrial backgrounds where they regard human life as sterile, separate from nature and separate from God or spirit (Turner 2012). By trying to change this viewpoint, Damanhurians have and are developing an approach to social structure that not only serves communitas between people, but also communitas of nature. The ecologically beneficial activity present in Damanhur is a direct result of the foundation and maintenance of their social structure.

As Damanhurians want to develop a completely alternative way of life,\textsuperscript{88} it is not in their interests to just be another example of a sustainable or spiritual intentional community; they want to be unique. In previous chapters I have shown some of the methods

\textsuperscript{88} Damanhurian aims for autonomy and self-sufficiency, their ideal of a ‘new culture’ have not seen them cut themselves off from outside influence. In fact, there is evidence of regular engagement with other intentional communities in the Italian network of communities and internationally with communities in the Global Ecovillage Network. Damanhurians regularly travel and present courses in diverse locations, including as far away as North America or Australia among many other activities where they engage with the ‘outside’ world.
employed by this community to try and stay on the margins of not only dominant social practices, but also the intentional community networks. The reason this approach is so important is because the primary aim of the Damanhurian project is to evolve a new humanity, a humanity that operates within a framework of socially, spiritually and ecologically just values. This framework prioritises spirituality and hence the focus of this community has been the development of their spiritual research and the physical structure that is the heart of this community: The Temples of Humankind. From what they have learned through their spiritual research and the wish to operate with self-sufficiency has evolved an ecological mindset resulting in projects and activities that promote ecologically responsible behaviour. This is a philosophy that sees humans as part of a holistic ecosystem: the communitas of nature.

Through research including, music of the plants; art projects (e.g. larger-than-life murals) and games (e.g. alternative name play), Damanhurians imbue their daily lives with elements that remind them that they are part of an ecosystem with not just humans, but animals, plants and matter as well. The results of Damanhurians challenging dominant Western worldviews (particularly those that underlie normally accepted human relationships with the spiritual and/or natural world) means that less has been taken for granted; every relationship or perspective is up for review or experiment. The Damanhurian approach thus far has been to attempt to implant the natural world on the human psyche, making it harder to ignore. It was my experience that humans were beginning to act like representatives of other species and so speak on their behalf in the human decision-making processes. This does not mean that destructive actions are never undertaken, but it does mitigate some human impact
through more careful assessment and forethought. The ideal is a communitas of nature, but in reality, as with the dilemmas of institutionalisation, communion with nature presents ongoing challenges. As humans, we are inclined to separate, or at least differentiate, ourselves from each other through social structures that emphasise statuses and roles, so too we can separate ourselves from the natural world in service to that structure.
CHAPTER 7
Conclusion

Let it remain inefficient, wasteful, edgy, marginal, in the basement, down
town, in the ‘burbs’, in the hotel ballroom, on the fringe, out back … [and] when it happens, honor and protect it (Turner 2012, p.20).

This exhortation by Edith Turner refers to communitas, emphasising where it is found in the multiple liminal phases of social structure. Damanhurians have become artisans of the liminal moment. They can mould and shape liminality to take a myriad of forms. They play with the liminal, use it in their artistic practices, enter it in ritual and allow it to sweep over them in the natural world. Not only do Damanhurians value and create liminal moments, they also know how to hold and protect the arising communitas. Liminality has become a way of life for Damanhurians and ‘[i]t is the fact of liminality, its aside-ness, its below-ness, that produces and protects communitas' (Turner 2012, p.184). Communitas has allowed citizens to more creatively engage with the world. The development of a social structure that prioritises communitas has led to the development of unique structural elements, for example, The Game of Life. This approach has also served Damanhurians well when seeking to achieve large projects, for example, The Temples of Humankind and other architecturally innovative buildings.

Damanhur, Federation of Communities, marks its 40th anniversary in 2015, putting it among some of the longer-lived examples of contemporary intentional eco-communities. In this thesis I have investigated how the members of this community
have used social mechanisms to sustain their project up to and through the time of fieldwork in 2009-10. I have drawn on ethnographic material collected during fieldwork. I lived and worked with Damanhurians on an almost daily basis. I have argued that the members of Damanhur cultivate and sanction liminal/liminoid activity with the intention of fostering communitas. Liminal/liminoid activity (occurring outside of structure) and communitas (the epitome of anti-structure) are concepts developed extensively by the scholars Victor and Edith Turner. Building on the Turners' work I have applied liminal, liminoid and communitas frameworks to the context of Damanhur. In particular, I have drawn on parallels between Damanhurian practice and Victor Turner's (1969) argument that awareness and experience of communitas facilitates a social structure that promotes community, or as Bradley (1999) states, a structure that serves communion (communitas).

How do Damanahurians instigate and motivate social change or changes in behaviour so that they move towards acting in accordance with their ideology? By living and acting in alignment with their spiritual-socioecological ideals, ecologically responsible behaviour becomes a matter of course. Structure facilitates behaviour that is in alignment with their collectively held goals. A social structure that promotes collective living provides mutual support to live within the boundaries of socially constructed structural elements and changes as they occur. For example, a nucleo might have someone whose role it is to remind other members about the rituals they can attend. Mutual surveillance, a by-product of communal living, in addition to some structurally administered checks and balances, motivates behaviour that aligns with structurally
imposed requirements and so normally separate private and public spheres become less distinct.

Structure can become burdensome and communal living stressful. Alienation and separation can start to erode ideally motivated structural intentions. A balance must be reached between the separating elements of structure and sociogenic communitas. There is an ongoing tension between ideals and reality, and structure is essential to closing that gap, but can also widen it. Regular instances of communitas help to prevent the negative aspects of structure from eventually fractionalising the community beyond repair. Communitas not only bonds community, it also inspires individuals to be more of themselves, as 'it involves total cognizance of another's human total' (Turner 1969, p.188). Communitas is creative, allows experiment and motivates participants. A social structure in service to communitas honours and protects it when it occurs (Bradley 1999). I saw in Damanhur how a genuine structural acceptance of change allows the inspirational influence of communitas to be acted on. Before the excitement and energy of communitas has time to disperse, a dynamic social structure can take advantage and implement change. The dynamic is cyclical. Structure and communitas are partners in a dance, a public performance made beautiful by the give and take between them (Turner 1969; Turner 2012).

A social structure can give space to communitas through allowing multiple liminal and liminoid phases or spaces. In Damanhur I saw and heard evidence of ritual liminality, liminal and liminoid play and unstructured liminoid social activity. Regular occurrences of liminal or liminal-like phases prompted moments of communitas. Work, particularly collective work, provides an opportunity to engage in a flow-like state. As discussed
earlier, a flow-like state fosters a liminal/liminoid phase that allowed for what Edith Turner (2012) identified as a communitas of work.

Through my research I have built on recent anthropological studies in the field of ecologically oriented intentional communities by investigating a well-established ecovillage previously unstudied at length by anthropologists. Focusing on a European ecovillage complements other studies already completed in America, India and New Zealand (Chitewere 2006; Jouhki 2006; Lockyer 2007; Jones 2011; Leard 1993; Lynes 2010; Carspecken 2012; Rivera 2012). Recent work by anthropologists in contemporary intentional eco-communities include, but are not limited to, Carspecken’s (2012) book-length treatment of Lothlorien community in North America and PhD theses on Auroville in southern India (Jouhki 2006), Ecovillage at Ithaca in New York (Chitewere 2006), Ceder River community in the US (Lynes 2010), two intentional communities in Seattle (Rivera 2012) and Celo and Earthaven ecovillages in the US (Lockyer 2007). These anthropologists spent five months to fourteen months at their chosen field sites. Most of the anthropologists lived in their chosen community, or near to them, with a host family for the majority of their stay, indicating the viability of participant observation in such contexts. Leard (1993) and Jones (2012) used sociological approaches for their research: Leard spent time in Auroville, India and Jones compared four intentional communities in New Zealand. Although I have drawn from all of this prior research, Lockyer’s (2007) PhD dissertation and Leard’s (1993) Masters dissertation were valuable starting points for the questions that informed my research.

Of the studies cited above, Carspecken is the only author to have applied a more expansive unpacking of Victor Turner’s communitas. Chitewere (2006), Lynes (2010)
and Rivera (2012) refer only briefly to Turner's notion of communitas. Chitewere (2006, p.51) recognises the ability of intentional communities to allow an 'extension of liminality' in the Ecovillage at Ithaca. There are limitations to Chitewere's (2006) analysis, as a consequence of her application of the concept of communitas, which does not proceed from the same basis that Victor Turner (1969) articulated. Chitewere (2006, p.51) says that 'communitas then are [sic] the new ideal communities that form as a way to pursue the vision in a de-structured manner'. Chitewere does not elaborate on her conceptualisation of Turner's theory so that we might better understand the thought process informing such a statement. Lynes (2010, p.87) comes closer to my understanding of Victor Turner's (1969) communitas, where in the absence of structure a 'certain quality of interrelatedness becomes the defining feature of sociality'. However, in Cedar River, where Lynes (2010, p.88) conducted fieldwork there was little 'discernible' social structure, and the focus of the community was on intimate relationships between members. Comparatively, as I have noted, Damanhur is highly structured, which seems to result in different manifestations of liminality and the potential communitas than that found at Cedar River. Finally, the anthropologist Rebecca Rivera (2012, p.31) found that collective work gave her a 'high', something she attributed to communitas. Rivera writes little more on the topic, but of course one can draw a direct parallel here between Edith Turner's concept of a 'communitas of work' and Riveras' collective work 'high'.
Short of these works mentioning Turner's work, none of the prior literature at my disposal analysed links between intentional community experiments with the structure/anti-structure dialectic and the eco aspect commonly under investigation today. In 1992 Gretchen Siegler applied Victor Turner's theories of liminality and communitas to the intentional community known as In Search of Truth (ISOT). Siegler's 1992 thesis, and her later work in 2002, provided another valuable starting point for my own research. I have referred to Siegler (1992; 2002) throughout and built on her work by applying Edith Turner's (2012) elaboration of the concept of communitas. Edith Turner's (2012) extensive elaboration of the communitas concept reveals the important role anthropology can play in revealing communitas. Turner's (2012, p.143) insights also demonstrate the role that communitas has played in anthropology's understanding that 'nature not only comprises humanity, living things, and objects but also the way human beings act in producing the richness of their culture'. Communitas helps us all, including anthropologists, to view the world differently, to alter our perspectives and hopefully find new ways of investigating, living in and on our planet.

I have drawn on the prior work of anthropologists on intentional communities, including: Andelson (1980; 2002), Susan Love Brown (2002), Siegler (1992; 2002), Lockyer (2007) and various others. However, as stated on the back cover of *Intentional Community: An Anthropological Perspective* by Brown (2002), '[a]lthough anthropologists have studied intentional communities in the past, they have seldom exerted a concerted effort

---

89 There is literature pertaining to Damanhur and intentional communities written in a multitude of languages, for example, French, Italian and Dutch.
to evaluate the intentional community in terms of the anthropological language of
cultural change'. While Brown’s assertion could be argued, I find it to be true regarding
the evaluation of intentional community in terms of Victor and Edith Turner’s
liminality, liminoid and communitas, particularly with regards to an anthropological
evaluation of contemporary ecovillage-like communities. My intention with this research
was to contribute, along with the other anthropologists cited above, to fill this gap. I
believe I have done so by bringing the anthropological insights of Victor and Edith
Turner and applying them to the contemporary intentional eco-community,
Damanhur. As such, I have looked in-depth at how Victor Turner’s and, particularly,
Edith Turner’s theories apply to an intentional community in a way not done before.
My research has highlighted how, in an era where behavioural change is seen as integral
to mitigating climate change, Damanhur uses liminal phases and the arising
communitas to motivate action in alignment with values: closing the gap between reality
and idealism. Through this process I have also drawn attention to how actively building
a social structure in service to communitas allows for an adaptable governance system in
Damanhur. Their social structures are demonstrably flexible to changing needs and able
to confront new and unknown future challenges through innovation and creativity.

Part of my contribution, then, is to have applied anthropological methods to the study of
ecovillages in an area previously unstudied in this detail. My investigation of how an
ecovillage links its strategies for social sustainability through liminality and communitas
with the tangible achievement of shared ecological ideals, contributes to an
understanding of both environmental and communal sustainability in all types of small
communities. What I have not attempted here is to produce an understanding of how
environmentally sustainable Damanhur really is. I lacked the skills and facilities to complete such an investigation, although by my own identification of what I deemed to be ecologically responsible behaviour, this behaviour was in evidence. It is likely that there are many actions Damanhurians could take to further reduce their carbon footprint, but it was not the purview of my research to investigate what these could be. What was important to me was that Damanhurians were acting in accordance with a belief that their actions were the right ones. Should Damanhurians be given information that suggests alternative modes of 'green' living then, if possible, they would almost certainly act on them, using the same mechanism they use now. Damanhurians are also aware of actions that do not meet their ideals, and I discussed some of these in Chapter 6. It is likely that in most eco-communities there is a gap between what is deemed ecotopia and what is happening in reality. Lockyer (2007) and Chietewere (2006) both discuss this disparity in the communities they participated. It also seems that in many cases, as in the case of Damanhur, eco-communities are aware of the disparity and work to close the gap.

Communitas and Structure

Damanhur is a complex structural entity, as is common among communities that have routinised following charismatic and spontaneous beginnings (Turner 1969). What is interesting is that this complex structure is shifting and changing frequently and, in addition, allows multiple opportunities for liminality in structural interstices. As a result one finds structure and opportunities for anti-structure (communitas) in almost equal
degrees. As discussed previously, while social structure is necessary, it can be seen to differentiate human relationships (Turner 1974, pp.260, 272; Alexander 1991, p.27). Communitas is anti-structure in that it is egalitarian. A social structure without communitas or communitas without social structure will succumb to fundamental weaknesses as discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 5. Social structure can fragment or stagnate in response to the flaw inherent in (or dilemmas of) institutionalisation and communitas will eventually become structured in order to meet the practical needs of people (Turner 1969).

All communities face tensions between communitas as a binding force and structure as a functional tool, a tension observed in Damanhur throughout my thesis. A sustainable foundation on which the community can achieve its intended aims is an important element in closing the gap between ideals and reality. A key part of achieving that balance in Damanhur is a structural framework that allows flexibility, spontaneity, experimentation, play and innovation. The possibility of adjustment has to be genuine in order for communitas to arise freely and authentically; it cannot be forced (Turner 2012). As such, when members join Damanhur they must learn to be Damanhurian. One cannot just act like a Damanhurian; citizens must learn to think and feel like one too. Authentic commitment leads to authentic experiences and an ability to accept the challenges that a liminal way of life demands. Not only must the social structure of the community be adjustable, so too must the individual accept the internal changes associated with experiences of communitas. Socialisation in Damanhur is a long process, but it is necessary in order to know if Damanhur is a place one can truly, authentically commit to. During this process new Damanhurians learn what it is to live communally,
and whether they can accept liminality and constant change. New citizens are rewarded with moments of communitas, which give them a window onto some of what they could experience more of if they chose to stay. New citizens learn that the tension between the communal self and the individual self is ongoing and is a reflection of the larger community-wide dilemma of balancing structure and communitas.

Damanhurian frameworks are adaptable due to a positive view of change. Citizens discussed change as a beneficial element that must be welcomed and embraced by the individual and collective. The acceptance of change in Damanhur can also be seen as acknowledgement of the likelihood of fractionalisation. I have discussed fractionalisation within the framework of Andelson's (2002) interpretation of schismogenesis. As schismogenesis is seen as inevitable within social groups over the long term, community longevity is dependent on their ability to manage it. The individual change required during socialisation into the community is ongoing once new citizens move into an established nucleo. Damanhurians see themselves as experimental beings and their communal homes as sites for research into self-improvement or the evolution of the individual to a higher consciousness. The idea that the self and society are an experiment and changeable can be seen to go hand-in-hand with an acknowledgement of potential schism. The assumption is that 'we' (the community) can overcome challenges (potential schism between 'you' and 'me') if 'we' work to evolve our understandings of our own flaws and enhance our strengths. Individual accountability can serve to mitigate interpersonal challenges by putting the onus for change on the self. The inevitability of change is also acknowledged through mechanisms such as
autonomous sub-communities and the movement of members between sub-communities.

Self-improvement and flexible living arrangements are all managed through the Damanhurian social structure in various forms. The Tecnarcato, a structural element developed for this purpose, monitors work on the self. Living arrangements are monitored and managed by The Game of Life. Using just these two examples one can see how quickly structure can become overbearing or burdensome. I drew on O'Dea and Yinger's (1961) dilemmas of institutionalisation to demonstrate how the Damanhurian approach has overcome some inherent institutional challenges. I follow Victor Turner (1969) when arguing that regular instances of communitas (through a social structure that facilitates communitas) serve to help inoculate social structure, institutionalisation, against its inherent flaws. The flaws of human institutions are numerous. I have only addressed five, of which the dilemma presented by the routinisation of charisma is relevant. Routinisation results in the institution of a social structure that can also lead to the loss of the initial bonding communitas Damanhur has come up with ways that mitigate this dilemma. Specifically, the Damanhurian social structure permits liminality and differentiation as responses to institutional challenges, including potential schism, resulting in a structure that serves communitas.

Damanhurian approaches to building their sociopolitical structures have allowed creative solutions to some of the fundamental challenges of institutionalisation. In addition to a stable and growing membership, Damanhurians are closing the gap between ideals and reality. Members are achieving tangible goals in line with their guiding philosophy. Not only does the Damanhurian approach provide opportunities
for collective experiences of communitas and what Edith Turner (2012) calls a 'communitas of work', but the successful completion of projects also motivates further activity. One can see results of innovative projects all over Damanhurian territory. Damanhurians respect communitas and allow it to change them, which in turn facilitates a flexibility that permits liminality and, therefore, more opportunities for communitas. Communitas inspires creative approaches to the completion of projects and allows innovative responses to challenges as they arise. Harnessing the 'communitas of work' leads to high levels of productivity where projects are started and finished at a relatively fast pace.

Community-held ideals are put into practice through social structure. Communitas is allowed to arise through the intentional permission of multiple liminal/liminoid phases and spaces. Communitas mitigates some of the negative influences of social structure, allowing the community to work effectively at achieving its ideals. Behaviours change in accordance with structural regulation and beneficial behaviour is maintained and rewarded through moments of communitas. Part of this formula suggests that structural changes are necessary to change behaviour towards actions that are beneficial to society, for example, ecologically responsible behaviour. In Damanhur, behaviour changes are maintained through a communal structure that cycles between structure and anti-structure on a regular basis. This second element suggests that behaviour change is facilitated through peer support; by living together Damanhurians help each other to behave in accordance with their overarching ideals. Overall, what the Damanhurian process seems to indicate is that ideal behaviour change in a population can be facilitated through a structurally supported community where the community members
experience, and can act on, inspiration arrived at during moments of rewarding communitas.

Social sustainability and ecological goals

My primary (original pre-fieldwork) motivation for conducting fieldwork in Damanhur was to investigate how this eco-community had achieved its current level of social sustainability. I was interested in social sustainability, as I knew it was one of the main challenges faced by communitarians seeking to sustain their communities over the long-term. A socially sustainable community is also fundamental to achieving the ideals of the global ecovillage movement. It seemed to me that persons behaving with ecological responsibility are often supported by a group of like-minded peers: it is much easier to change behaviour, or behave differently to those in the dominant society, when surrounded by others seeking to do the same thing. To me social sustainability and ecologically considerate behaviour were, and are, inextricably linked. However, while ecotopia might depend on socially sustainable groups of people, the reverse (that social sustainability relies on ecotopia) is less apparent within the current sociopolitical timeframes experienced in the West (there may be a future period where social life is seen to be directly reliant on responsible use of resources). Therefore, investigating how groups of people seeking ecotopia achieve social sustainability in order to achieve socioecological justice seemed like an important step towards a deeper understanding of human-environment relations and how they might be improved. As a result of my participation in Damanhur I came to realise that, in this case, ecologically responsible
behaviour was a by-product of a chosen way of life based on a spiritual philosophy that supported and encouraged human-nature connections.

By focusing on a community with an ideology supportive of social and ecological justice, this research has generated further understandings of how people can respond to socioecological problems. The community's practices have been used to motivate group action for the benefit of the natural environment for a sustained period of time. Members of intentional communities and ecovillages are attempting to answer the question: How can we live our lives in accordance with our values and beliefs? Demonstrations of values aligned with practical reality like those observed in Damanhur are valuable for understanding how behaviour change might be achieved among mainstream populations.

At this juncture it is important to caution against the idea that the Damanhurian approach provides a model for all others to follow. I have not, for example, investigated where Damanhurians have failed to contain secession or schism; in other words, I had very little to do with ex-members of the community and, in particular, I did not pursue participants who were particularly disgruntled with their Damanhurian experience. A valuable future direction would be to delve into failed projects, incorporating people who have left as a result of a gap between their ideas and reality. As a whole, though, the Federation has been able to move past such difficulties, and now, it seems, is strong enough to adapt to all but the most disastrous of crises.

Nor would I say that the intentional eco-community approach is necessarily the answer in the face of the world ecological crises. Damanhur does not have all the answers, and
even the Damanhurians themselves say that their approaches are not replicable or condensable into a model. Such an approach would be a mistake. To try and replicate Damanhur or another ecovillage may succeed in some contexts, but certainly not in others. The approaches that improve human-environment relationships in each suburb, town, city or regional area will certainly be locationally, culturally, and historically appropriate.

Subsequent to the year I spent there, Damanhur's founder and spiritual guide has passed away. From all appearances the community is still progressing and it would be of interest now to revisit the community for further research in order to investigate changes in direction since his passing. A return visit could focus on a number of different aspects, including: evidence of structural change since Falco's death, the stability of the membership as compared to fieldwork levels, and growth of the community not only in general numbers, but also demographic variability. In other words, whether the numbers of younger people have increased relative to existing members who have aged.

The results of my research in Damanhur can only form a small piece of the larger complex puzzle of how human social structures can move towards more dynamic and adaptable systems in the face of a changing climate. In Damanhur, members demonstrate what they believe to be ecologically responsible behaviour relative to a Western context. I argue that Damanhurians behave the way they do because their spiritual practice compels them to and because a desire for independent self-sufficiency requires it. Yet, it is their social structure that allows flexibility and the prioritisation of communitas that have allowed citizens to successfully negotiate the challenges inherent in 'walking-their-talk': acting in accordance with communally-derived values.
Even in the modern secular world, where religion is often an empty shell or is narrow and unconcerned with environment, ecological and environmental concerns are passionately held and deeply felt. [...] Getting a really large number of people to internalize a values system is difficult, especially if it is a system that privileges the future over the present. [...] Prioritizing long-term and wide-flung considerations over short-term and narrow ones is the heart and soul of conservation and sustainability, but it requires religion or some equivalently passionate personal commitment to a moral program. Religion also gives people the excuse to feel the awe, reverence, and devotion that most people feel toward wild and semi-wild nature (however defined!); in our society, many people feel compelled to think of worries and work unless directed to ‘higher things’ (Anderson 2013, p. xiv).
EPILOGUE

Ecological considerations

It is not a matter of if we can learn from communes, it is that we must (Gorni, Oved & Paz 1985, p.153).

Humans have changed the world. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as the 'most authoritative international body on climate change science and impacts', has concluded that 'climate change is occurring as a result of human activities'.90 The global population is increasing rapidly—the seven billionth baby was born during 2011—and the UN (2013) predict that the population will reach 9.6 billion people by 2050. Global temperature rises due to the chemical and biological effects of human activity will have far-reaching consequences. As climate changes, where possible, species will migrate to more climatically suitable areas. This will be most pronounced in the oceans: changes in, for example, larval hatching times will have 'cascade-like changes in entire ecosystems' (Zalasiewicz et al. 2010, p.2228). The ultimate effect on the biosphere of climate change and other human stressors (habitat fragmentation, invasive species, predation and so on) is a 'sharp increase in the rate of extinctions' (Zalasiewicz et al. 2010, p.2228). This current wave of extinctions, estimated at 100-1000 times the background level, is predicted to be the Earth's sixth great extinction event. Increased atmospheric CO2 in the oceans is already increasing their acidity with predicted oceanic pH decreases likely to stress calcifying organisms like coral reefs.

Zalasiewicz et al. 2010, p.2229). This final factor alone may substantially change marine ecosystems over the coming decade.

It is now widely acknowledged that humanity's use of the biosphere is not sustainable. Knowledge that humanity could not continue on the current course was evident in international discourse by 1987 (Brundtland 1987). Twenty-eight years later, time is running out for many of Earth's species and their habitats, and the window of opportunity to amend human behaviour and avert catastrophic social and environmental upheaval is closing. Viable alternatives are required to mitigate the negative effects of the large number of social and environmental crises facing humanity today. In 2013 Joshua Lockyer and James Veteto (2013, p.1) called for anthropologists 'to find ways to engage with such existing possibilities [e.g. Ecovillages]'. Intentional communities have always provided, at the very least, a moment posing social alternatives to the status quo. Contemporary intentional communities, in the form of ecovillages, provide living examples of humans engaging with the utopian quest for a more just and sustainable world.

Damanhur and other communities like Damanhur show us the results of experiments of living more sustainably. These intentional communities are, as Damanhurians say, living laboratories where scholars can observe some of the possible answers to pressing human questions. Ultimately, the many ecological crises that the world is facing require multiple approaches from across the disciplines. Some of these approaches will require the human population to change their current behaviours. Understanding how intentional communities are using alternative mechanisms for social organisation may help the worldwide community to understand a little more of what motivates people to
behave in particular ways and, more importantly, what sustains that motivation. Creative ways of adapting what others are doing to more urban and mainstream contexts could help facilitate groups towards more healthy and sustainable living practices.

Currently, climate change scientists and experts in related fields are finding a disparity between knowledge of what action needs to be taken, and actual behaviour change (Heberlein 2012). In order to mitigate and adapt to the pressures of global ecological crises, human populations, particularly the developed West, must begin to devise new ways of living and operating in the world. At the very least, human societies must be prepared for unpredictable future conditions due to the precarious nature of global ecological change. Intentional communities have been facing unpredictability for millennia. The precarious and volatile nature of intentional communities, particularly in their early stages of formation, requires adaptability and innovation to survive. Intentional communities that have survived those first precarious years are valuable as sites to investigate social alternatives to the current status quo.

Today there are numerous intentional communities not only surviving the first years of formation, but also flourishing and doing so with reduced impact on their fragile local ecosystems. Intentional communities like Damanhur are building new cultures of reduced consumption based on an ideology that values community and connection between people and nature. Criticisms of some contemporary ecovillages warn about buying into the green consumption lie (Chitewere 2006). Replacing one kind of consumerism with another is a dangerous path, considering the already increased vulnerability of most ecosystems across the globe. Chitewere (2006) calls for criticisms of
consumption, even green consumption, in Ecovillage at Ithaca. I believe that intentional eco-communities are the perfect site for challenging accepted consumption patterns. For as Victor Turner (1969, p.167) states, 'if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs'. Researchers like Chitewere can call attention to those cultural norms that a community has yet to escape.

Ecological considerations and how to address them can be seen as the most pressing issues of our time. However, as I found during my research, a direct focus on how to behave with ecological responsibility is not necessary to achieve behaviour change towards that end. I see this as an invitation to look at communities, traditional and intentional, that are moderating impact on their environment rather than those that simply express it as a value. Anthropology is a valuable discipline through which to undertake such a project and I believe it is through those achieving behaviour change and reducing their negative impacts that answers for wider society could be found.

'Although the specific content of the new order that each group was trying to achieve differed greatly, the process, the issues and personal experiences during the intermediary period transcended such surface differences' (Foster 2002, p.71).

Humanity is arguably in a transitional period and we each need to find a way to live in a new, precarious world, sustainably. We may find this through investigating similarities in the processes of how different groups are achieving that sustainability.
References


Cardano, M 1997, Lo specchio, la rosa e il loto: Uno studio sulla sacralizzazione della natura, SEAM, Italy.


Cocco, Q 2013, ‘Tarot cards and chicken coop doors: the ritual of nucleo community ‘turno’, 19 November, viewed 24 August 2015,


Heberlein, T 2012 A. Navigating environmental attitudes. Oxford University Press, US.


Joukki, J 2006, Imagining the Other: Orientalism and Occidentalism in Tamil-European relations in South India, PhD Thesis, University of Jyväskylä

Kanter, RM 1972, Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective, USA, Harvard University Press


Lindholm, C 2002, Charisma, ebook, PDF version.

Litfin, KT 2014, Ecovillages: lessons for sustainable community, Polity Press, US.


Metcalf, WJ 1986, Dropping Out and Staying In: Recruitment, Socialisation and Commitment Engendered within Contemporary Alternative Lifestyles, doctoral thesis, Griffith University, Queensland, viewed 15 July 2013, https://www120.secure.griffith.edu.au/rch/items/18ca0c0a-7869-7094-f738-3987d768550b/1/

------------- 1995, From Utopian Dreaming to Communal Reality, Sydney, University of New South Wales Press


------------- 2012, ‘Utopian Struggle: Preconceptions and Realities of Intentional Communities’, in M Andreas and F Wagner (eds.), Realizing Utopia: Ecovillage Endeavors and Academic Approaches, Rachel Carson Center, Germany.


Merrifield, J 2006, Damanhur: The Story of the Extraordinary Italian Artistic and Spiritual Community, Thorsons, UK.


Rivera, RF 2012, Living our Values, Living our Hope: Building Sustainable Lifestyles in Seattle Intentional Communities, PhD Thesis, University of Washington, US.


Schehr, R 1997, Dynamic Utopia: Establishing Intentional Communities as a New Social Movement, Bergin & Garvey, UK.


Smith, JZ 1972, I am a Parrot (Red), History of Religions, vol. 11, no. 4, pp. 391-413.


UN 2013, World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision, DESA.

Van Gennep, A 1960 [1909], The Rites of Passage, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., London.


Whitehead, C 2004, Religious experience and the theory of anti-structure, invited presentation for the MA Programme in Religious Experience, University of Wales, UK.


