Code/unCode

Tracing Monastic Patterns

The unMonastery BIOS 4

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The first unMonastery opened its doors February 2014 in Matera, Italy.

Drawing on a perhaps romanticised history of monasticism and the design patterns of a residential hackerspace, the unMonastery project seeks to develop the code for a new communal, protocolised approach to the development of a global community which is capable of moving in unison over the next century to challenge existing dependency chains and economic fictions.

To avoid reinventing the wheel and reliving our slowly dawning understandings and mistakes, from the documentation of the Matera prototype we have amassed a core knowledge base that painstakingly evaluates aspects of our work and turns it into a workable, reusable toolkit: the unMonastery BIOS. This book is the latest addition to this growing cultural treasure trove.

Code/unCode is the first volume of The Chronicles of the unRuly, the history and analysis of unMonastery as it has established its next hub of activity in Athens. In it, we turn to the professionals. It is based on a series of interviews with monks from the Trappist and Cistercian Orders, pairing each question and answer with a parallel testimonial in the form of fragments and dialog from the unMonastery journey.

Writing unCode

unCode defies being written. Traditionally monks contemplate and illuminate; the less-traditional unMonks send off e-posts and e-thoughts. Typing feverishly day after day, duelling over vision, daily structure, organisational and financial matters, their texts, closer to informal speech than to the written word appear unformatted, impulsive and, it seems, often unListened to.

unCode is an exercise in unHacking - a reverse engineering process of taking something apart that seems over-designed and even baroque in its basic structure; ripping out all non-essential elements, to reassemble the good bits into a refined state for optimal future use.

The composition of this book follows a double stream: interviews conducted by unMonasterians with genuine monastery superiors constituteform the left-hand column -- each question, and the response it generates, given its own microcosmos. In the right-hand column, a mosaic of clippings from various unMonastery communication channels reflect on the left-hand monastic testimonials of presumptions, conceptual scaffolding, and the patina of history, exposing them to the harsh practical problems of communal living, service, discipline and contribution in the age of exalted individualism.

A surface reading of this structure shows how the unMonastery fails to replace God and Christian faith with an appropriate shared aspiration and value system. However, the interviews also reveal the inability of the established orders to truly claim a potential contemporary relevance of their 'forma vitae'. No matter how inelegant or petty the conflicts and problems appearing on the right hand side seem, they stand witness to a raw and committed struggle to search for a 21st century form of dedication to a devout communal life, while insisting on the responsibility to carry some remainder of the belief that at this point in history there is still constructive action available, beyond an nihilistic embrace or idealistic refusal of the facts of everyday life.

unMonastery communication channels are notoriously chaotic. Partially because our organisational structure allows involvement in a widening structure of concentric circles - about a dozen people are involved making decisions on Loomio, our closed online decision making tool; around 20 people have access to Slack, our project management and team organisation platform; a yet wider circle follows our public discussions about unMonastery topics on Discourse and occasionally EdgeRyders, and we publish stories and analyses of unMonastery matters on Medium. The texts appearing here were harvested from all of the above.

If anything, it is a naked account of our daily labour of making sense of our work in the unMonastery.

The accompanying essay: Histories and Fictions (found in a far corner of our collective scriptorium) sketches a fragmented theoretical framework, both contemporary and historical, offering a mutating network of linguistic and conceptual pathways in and out of the practical problems addressed within the main text.

At varying points in the documentation other relics appear; including a series of Visitations that indicate that the examination of monastic life is not a recent phenomena.

Code

23/05/2015 Interview #1

Visited with Fr. Erik Varden at Abbey of Mount St. Bernard, Leicestershire, UK
Interview facilitated by Br. Paul Quenon
Fr. Erik would be attending mass in an hour

Ben:

So far in our research we have focused on the Benedictine Rule as a sort of protocol that governs the social interaction of people living together. Though I suspect that we may be guilty of treating it too discretely, as there exists a constellation of components in monastic life. There's the Bible, for you the Cistercian Constitution, and then I imagine there's other scripture, and so I wanted to better understand these elements, could you explain how these different parts go together formally and how they influence one another in practice?

Erik:

I can try. I mean, the Rule of Saint Benedict is nothing other than just a practical guide for trying to live a coherent Christian life. I don't know whether you know of a 17th century French bishop and theologian and great rhetorician called Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet who spoke of the Rule of Saint Benedict as [few words in French], ~a constant truth~ of the Gospel. And for Saint Benedict that was his only aspiration, to make it possible for people living in community to live coherently, The Doctrine of Christ. I mean, a monk is nothing other than that; he's someone who just wants to try and live a truthful, credible Christian life, a Christian life with integrity.

So, he wanted to codify a way of living the Gospel, and he drew on the best of lived experience from existing monks, and that has been the foun-

unCode

07/04/2015

Our internal team coordination tool: Slack
file: protocol
discussion: Why it is that we cannot yet write a protocol/code/rule?

benvickers [10:43 PM]
But perhaps more vital to our endeavour is the fact that the rule wasn't invented so that monasteries could be born, but rather this was something of a by product, that the focus was on bios, a way of life, a way of existing in the world. My first step is going to be to begin collecting and compiling a reading list!

keikreutler [10:59 PM]
Brief response while traveling - I do think the protocol can offer speculative solutions to organizing routine and living patterns but perhaps more so a common poetry that generates trust and allows a freedom of action. Saying freedom maybe for lack of a better word.

katalin [11:03 PM]
Well, they did have the bible - as preRule and poetry.

keikreutler [11:05 PM]
Haha very true

UNMONASTERY INTERNAL APPRAISAL OF JEFF ANDREONI'S PROPOSAL FOR A COLLECTIVE DAILY STRUCTURE, ATHENS:
RECORDED ON NEW ZEALAND BASED DECENTRALISED DECISION MAKING TOOL: LOOMIO

James:
'The idea that acting as if one is part of a group is optional, denies the nature of being part of a group.'

This point is a sore one with me. I am bored and frustrated with the group attempting to create some structure in itself, and having to yield to the needs of the few who don't want to be tied down to a particularly rigid structure or not get up quite so early, therefore a nice strong, constructive 'get up at 7a.m.' rule becomes watered down to a bland and spineless 'morning bell if you want to get up at 8.30 but no one has to'.

dation of monastic life in the Latin Church since Benedict's time. You asked about the constitutions. Well, they're a particular expression of our order's approach to the Rule. Again, without going into all the historical details, the Cistercian Order… Well, it's called the Cistercian Order because, as I said earlier on, Trappists have a link to La Trappe. Cistercians also have a link to a place name Cistercium, which is the Latin transcription for the place name Cîteaux in Burgundy.

Cîteaux was a site on which in 1098 a small group of monks from a Benedictine monastery ## of ## Northern France called Molesme settled in order to live a more rigorous life. They felt that the Benedictine life as it was lived at Molesme wasn't as true to the Rule as they would like to be, and that they would like to live it as literally as possible. So, ours is a literalist revival you might say.

But literalist revivals want to slip a little bit with time, so there have been serial reforms. The Trappist reform was one such, the movement of La Valsainte I mentioned earlier is almost another reform movement, and we're now in the modern world trying to find our place within this history of reforms and reforms of reforms. So, our constitutions, which came out in a new and I think a very enlightened edition only in the 1990s, provide as it were an authoritative statement, a kind of a hermeneutical framework for Benedictine living intended for our order, which is present on every continent now.

Does that answer your question?

Ben:

It does, and I wondered… That definitely describes the relationship between the Rule and its evolution and how continual reform of the Rule takes place but how does the Bible interface with that?

Erik:

There's an important distinction to be made here between the Rule, and rules. [laughs]

Because… and I'm not saying you said this, but quite often you hear people speak about Saint Benedict's rules, and they take it for granted that

@benvickers in answer to your questions, I think conformity and guilt is the wrong direction, as is the idea of consensus/agreement. The rules are 'x,y,z', if you don't like those rules, don't stay and that's ok, but please don't interfere with me trying really hard to live by 'x,y,z' because I think they're important, by diluting these rules or by needlessly flaunting them.

Are we not trying to find an 'x,y,z' that is more or less based on monasticism? Frugal living; getting up painfully early; living basically; quiet, considered contemplation; deep, piercing inter-personal respect; personal quests of deep peace and well-being; well honed skills, arts and technical proficiency for no reason other than their practice; knowledgeable, sharing community leaders?

For me these are not rules to compromise or consense on.

what we live by is a sort of a rule book.

Ben:

Oh, no – I know that's not true.

Erik:

Then you should know very well that our word "Rule" is a translation of the Latin regula, which simply means "a measuring line". So, the Regula, Benedict's Regula, is a straight path to follow to get from A to B. A is where you start off when you join the monastery, and B is the life of union with God to which you aspire. So, the Rule is... Rather than a book of rules, it's really a kind of an orienteering map; it tells you how to get to where you want to be.

And you also asked about the role of the Scriptures... The Scriptures are everywhere, because the Rule is soaked in Scripture, all of its inspirations come from Scripture. Monks are people who are soaked in Scripture. We spend I don't know how many hours everyday singing the Divine Office in church, which is all scriptural text primarily. We have our daily times of Lectio Divina when we meditate on the word of God and try to understand it, try to be transformed by it. So, the Scriptures are as it were. the ocean in which we swim, in which this little floating raft of the Rule is making its headway on, to mix metaphors slightly.

Ben:

Interesting. In the final Rule of Saint Benedict he talks about, well he essentially says "If this isn't good enough, that it's not sufficient, then you should improve it."

Erik:

Well, he doesn't quite say that. [laughs] He says "This is a Rule for beginners." So, he says "This is a good place to start, but at some point you will need to go further."

(LOOMIO DISCUSSION : UNMONASTERY ATHENS DAILY SCHEDULE)

"It is to be emphasised that structure is neither self-flagellation nor externally imposed punishment, but freedom from small decisions (such as: Do I feel egoless enough to grasp my opportunity to contribute to our collective efforts this beautiful morning?) Ben is beyond belief in his rationale for not embracing sleep deprivation: guilt is a valuable friend – his question could more easily include an appraisal of how badly he had been chemically abusing his body the previous day

(days, weeks, year, lifetime)?"...

Ben:

Yes, and that's where I'm going. When you encounter situations, or situations evolve – how you choose to confront a situation, how you get to the point in which you might suggest a reform. I wonder how that has functioned over time, and also over shorter periods of time, if there are ever these moments of despair within monastic life, that there isn't something to reach for and then on a longer term how observed changes come to be new Rules.

... I'm asked somewhere above to come with a concrete proposal. I think that at this point I am not a presence in Athens and am thereby outside of this discussion. However, I do have previous and have consistently since LOTE#2 stood for a rigorous mining of the un-Monastery metaphor.

I think this is central to our mission - the unMon travels on its allusion to monasticism. The vows of poverty, silence, obedience and chastity shall haunt us no matter which compromises we embrace. Discipline in some form will get us further: if you are up all night: you just miss one night's sleep and slide into the daily schedule no matter if you've been involved in a heavy dialog with the Gods or fucking your brains out.

I do not approve of only two morning circles per week; however, I recognise that most of the current crew are foreigners to the experience of daily practice: and that morning circle as 'demonstrated' during our recent gatherings has been a pallid version of its potential. Morning circle and practice should be our primary worship: aligning ourselves with each other and celebrating communal ecstasy. It can easily last two/three hours – if people get free of their tobacco habits.

More important is (day-) closing circle: in Matera we had some of our most powerful experiences in opening up our closing circles to guests. I would suggest that this element of cultural practice be cemented into un-Monastery life: that each time we have guests to dinner (this can quickly become each night) the gift of the giving be marked by a circular gathering that includes people in the 'abnormal' human ritual of speaking in an attentive, non-argumentative group..

Visitation I:

'There was in the Cells an old man called Apollo. If someone came to find him about doing a piece of work, he would set out joyfully, saying, 'I am going to work with Christ today, for the salvation of my soul, for that is the reward he gives.' This is a passage from the Sayings of the Desert Fathers. It is the earliest known Rule-esque text repeated by the fathers and mothers of the earliest mo-

nastic communities in the Egyptian desert as parables of experience for living a christian life. Many of their teachings, as this one exemplifies, denote a complex relation between the practical and the spiritual, work and prayer. Not so much as 'pray and work' but as if could read 'to work is to pray is to work' as a rotating ring. This is not so much aligned with a ghost of protestant future (which maybe is more 'to pray is to accumulate.') as with an embodiment of belief, like sweating the objective of belief into the substance of the subjective. The history of singing monks echo and realise contested relationship between work and prayer. Saint Basil, who in the fourth century wrote the Basilian Rule still widely used in the Eastern Orthodox Church, formalized the psalms singing/office in order to demonstrate the possibility of combining prayer and work. In the Basilica Monasteries of fifth century Italy a new class of monks developed whose sole function was the singing of the psalms and divine office. Other monasteries developing at this time discreetly opposed this with an emphasis on work as strictly manual labor.

Erik:

Okay. I think the first thing I would like to say is that… Again, as you know… The sort of microcosm envisaged by Saint Benedict, or the society that he proposes, is to a very large extent a conciliar society. You know that the chapter that follows the second chapter on the abbot is the chapter ~calling the brethren to council~. And quoting from the Scriptures, he says "Do everything with council, and you will not be sorry afterwards." [laughs]

So, it is one of the interesting facts about the Benedictine model that to the casual observer it can seem an autocratic model, because there you have the abbot with his staff and everyone else sort of following like sheep. Well, it isn't quite like that. And Saint Benedict is very clear that any important decision should take everyone's opinion into account, and he says that thing – which is pretty revolutionary for a writer of antiquity – that sometimes the youngest have the best ideas; so don't only listen to the greybeards.

And this shows from the inception of the Benedictine model an openness to novelty. Because imagine you're a young person who enters the monastery in the 6th century. I mean, his elders

KATALIN HAUSEL'S WEEKLY MEDIUM (OPEN BLOG) POST IN GROUP: STORIES FROM THE UNMONASTERY:

We do have an open process of building protocol for working together. MK (London) and I have been working on the new recruit integration process, as it seems that allowing access to Slack does not do the job in itself. How do you walk a new colleague around to meet everyone in a virtual workspace? Lauren and I had a run-in about sharing, responsibilities, blocking and over-extension, so we launched operation #unBlock—if someone cannot deliver or follow up on a project, connection or idea, they open a shared document, jot down what they have in their head, and ask for help.

Interestingly, protocols for working together face a lot less resistance than structures for living together. We all know we cannot do the unMonastery work individually. How does this translate onto unMonastery life?

Of course Athens have rules, regardless of some individual differences. Despite of the discord about what time to get up, there is the group working together elegantly and in good spirits both with each other and with the network, developing a yet unseen form of unMonastery self-sustenance (a collaborative working agency), using Loomio to discuss buying a bonsai

~wouldn't know about iPads, but he will and what is he going to do with his.~ So, hear him, and basically that's how it continues. So, in this house, when we have an important decision to make we have very regular chapter meetings anyway, sort of open forum meetings when anyone can bring up a subject for discussion, or a question or a suggestion for an improvement. And if we have specific decisions to make, either regarding a point of observance, or the management of our finances, or preeminently when it's a matter of discerning the future of a candidate the community meets together. So, that is a strong current that goes through our entire history.

There is a delicate balance in the Benedictine economy between hierarchical authority and conciliar authority. When it comes to legislation… It's not as if our new constitutions contain new rules. If anything they contain less rules than the old constitutions, because it corresponds to a different ethos almost, or certainly a different way of perceiving the ideal way of regulating the common life. Whereas at the beginning of the last century our official documents were stiflingly exact. You know, they would tell you – and this is more or less literal truth – they would tell you how to position your sandals under your bed when you went to bed in the evening. You know, what you should do, what prayers you should say while kneeling by your bed, how you should perform. Absolutely everything was legislated for, the thought being that if every act of our life is ritualised then everything becomes almost an act of service, an act of obedience and so an act of mortification – you know, the mortification of self-will – and so more pleasing to the Lord.

That model worked for a not inconsiderable number of very saintly people, but it drove other people absolutely insane. I mean, you can see why, a number of people felt that they couldn't move, they couldn't breathe, and they felt rather crushed by this over legislation, this overprovision precisely of rules. So, our present constitutions, while being very radical in their orientation, are much more contextual. They're concerned with forming motivations, informing the will, providing guidelines for decision-making, etcetera. You can find them on the Internet, and it's not a very long document; they're worth reading.

for sharpening their vision, and quickly getting to be known by the whole city. What are the operators that enable such dazzling coordination and outreach? They are in the blind spot, the aspects of life nobody talks about, so deeply agreed upon that they remain unnoticed and undebated.

My sense is that recording what makes it work despite of the disagreements may be just as important as resolving the conflicts. What we are in the process of developing is a protocol for writing protocols—a collection of processes, considerations, needs and structures, which will enable each actual unMonastery community to articulate their granular mode of operation. It is a mistake to mix up writing the protocol for Athens, with writing the meta-structure of having a protocol for unMonastery. The first one is about control, to make sure people sharing their living and working space exist together in harmony. The second is about enabling any community to make its hidden procedures and customs explicit, in order to ensure it remains open facing and open source, subject to change, from small alterations to large scale forks.

Ben:

To touch on that sense of oppression, caused by strict rules. Do you think—because obviously they did work very sufficiently for a time, is this oppressiveness a pressure that comes externally to the monastery; that increasingly monks felt that they couldn't follow that degree of strictness as a result of the freedom that was emerging in the world?

Erik:

Partly, I think, and partly I think it's a matter to do with different mindsets. Just to draw a parallel… Our current most senior monk joined the monastery in 1947. When I joined there were still two who joined in 1935. They both came in very young, and at that point it was perfectly reasonable for someone to choose their path in life at 17 and to stick with it.. Whereas now—what 17-year-old would be able to even decide what he's going to wear for the next week?

But I always get a bit impatient when people talk down about the youth of today, as if they were incapable. I think more often than not young people now have to face such a tangle of complexity so early, that they live through a lot of painful and confusing stuff that our elders didn't have to, because for better or for worse, they lived in a much more clear-cut world and for that generation it was perfectly natural to live by fairly rigid regulations, and social customs functioned that way.

And the monastic life has got to be livable, and that's something I've always appreciated very much about monastic life, that it is an idealistic way of life, but it's also a very sensible way of life, and I tend to find that monks and nuns, certainly happy

LOOMIO DEBATE ON DAILY SCHEDULE:

"I think it's quite a strict framework - and whilst I think it's really important to well being and operational efficiency, I wonder emotionally, how you manage if it's not stuck too?

e.g I used to always plague myself with guilt if I woke up late. One of the biggest life changes for me, was to tell myself "never feel guilty for waking up late, your body is telling you something"

I wonder what the mechanism or approach is to ensure that you don't end up with a split between those that stick to it and those that struggle - and you mitigate guilt, or division.
Or is the mechanism simply consensus that everyone agrees/pledges to the belief that discipline and consistency is a root to well being/stability? And it spreads by example / conformity."

UNMONASTERY WANDERINGS - A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE POST-MATERA DIASPORA BEMBO DAVIES ON DISCOURCE

As our glorious idea of the unMonastery attracts supporters; they adhere for a variety of reasons. Not surprisingly most of them are personal: the logic of joining and living in what can only be perceived externally as a self-referential cult may best appeal to souls in transition, who are struggling to model their life. We have to be all things to a growing amount of people, and the question quickly arises as to whether the unMonastery needs a faith basis. In a secular society, we cannot, nor do we wish to, deliver spiritual deliverables. It remains beyond our control if any of the participants experience anything of this dimension; at this point it doesn't seem essential.

To offer a solid definition of our belovéd unMonastery also lies in the future. Those who do so with the greatest conviction may mouth an understanding of its walls and how they get there. Despite a brave start in Matera, what these walls may house has yet to be properly explored: questions of the how we live haunt us and obscure the greater one of : what service does the unMonastery offer to its surroundings?

monks and nuns are usually very sensible human beings, yes?

Ben:

Yes, I'm increasingly finding that. Maybe more so than other areas of working and life, particularly in a moment in which the world is losing many of its anchor points, and people are increasingly finding it difficult to navigate.

I want though to move onto the rigorous routine set out within The Rule, but specifically on the distinct rhythm, and I wondered if you could reflect for me on a few aspects its effect. The first thing I'd like to ask is how it actually affects your body, your metabolism, your sleep, your states of consciousness. And then secondly, what you observe in the way in which it affects your relationship and interaction with others that are living the same routine; this is a fascinating area, as much as it may be culturally unique.

Erik:

Good question. Well, I think regarding point A… First of all, it messes you up, it's in our tradition to live by a slightly peculiar timetable; we get up early, we rise at three. When you visit the guest house for a few days that can seem quite exciting, and it's sort of a bit heroic, and you stagger into church at three and you feel as though you're having a great spiritual experience, because you don't quite know where you are. And then you enter, and you find that you're actually expected to be there at 3:30, and someone comes and rings a very loud bell outside your door 15 minutes beforehand to make sure you're awake.

Certainly my body rebelled against that. I mean, I was a bit of a night owl before I joined here, and I found myself in a state of almost permanent jet lag for the first four months, and my appetite changed. But then… Obviously I wanted to get used to this new routine and then I started getting used to it… And then I started really loving it. And now I find it marvelous. [laughs]

Because of the way in which our day is structured, we have a long period in the morning after we had our Vigils at 3:30 – which lasts about 50 minutes, 50 minutes to an hour – and then we have a space of

WANDERINGS OF THE UNMONASTERY:

Overriding the Ingrained

The cerebellum is stubborn, it is the born facilitator, but it programs all-purpose solutions. Once installed, shortcuts do just that: they cut short the meticulous process of aligning each synapse: memory dictates.

Corporal resistance is a function of culture. Per Spildra Borg once reported to me on holding his shamanist theatre workshops in Ramallah, Palestine: the young people could not jump, to leave the ground was unheard of, there was no imaginative room in their bodies from which to defy gravity.

The bodies of the free-lance geeks that provide 60% of the unMonastery workforce reflect creatures of habit. They sit, they conceptualise. They do little choral roaring, arrhythmic arm flapping or dervish whirling. Their embraces, though often heartfelt, remain the tentative sort. Re-wiring the personal history that dictates such inflexibility is a finicky procedure; the cultural conflict with those of us raised dancing with grandmothers or rolling across the floor of a myriad of self-development workshops may be a gap which the unMonastery can never resolve.

about two and a half hours for our own Lectio Divina. Are you familiar with that term?

Ben:

No…

Erik:

Well, it's one of the sort of the pillars of monastic life. It is the… Have you read The Seven Storey Mountain? it's a classic book; Thomas Merton became a monk of Gethsemani, which you will be aware of. He reflects on precisely these questions, out of his own experience. Because he's puzzled, when he comes to Gethsemani, and he wants to be a contemplative, and he wants to spend lots of time in contemplative prayer, and envisages mystical ecstasies, and he's rather disappointed when on the timetable of Gethsemani he sees the hours of the office – Vigils, –"work, work, work, work, lunch, supper" and then rather than ecstatic prayer it just says "reading". And he thinks "What is all this reading about?! If I wanted to read books—I mean, that's what I've been doing – I needn't come to a monastery for that!" But that's Lectio Divina. And it comes back to your question earlier about the place of the scriptures. That constant engagement with the scriptures, of letting them penetrate your consciousness, your intelligence, trying to break one's heart.

So, we have that long period in the mornings, which is really a wonderful privilege, because there is a quality of crispness in the morning, and one is alert, and it's quiet around you. And this leads me on to point B of your question, that obviously a lot of our life is lived in silence. It is often said by the uninformed that Cistercians or Trappists take a vow of silence. That has never been the case, there has never been a vow of silence. There were pretty strict rules about silence, and normally you could only speak to the abbot and to your confessor. But, humans being what they are, over time developed a sign language, which is very like the language that deaf people use, and it became extraordinarily sophisticated. It was actually quite possible to have long conversations about all sorts of things without saying a single word.

But still, we do spend a lot of time in silence. We have the Great Silence from Compline in

"The Protocol cannot be tabled. The unMoaners cannot be nailed down. The unMonasterians resist herding; the unMods nod amusedly as they plead innocence of tradition."

(BEMBO DAVIES SOMEPLACE, SOMETIME)

Ben Vickers:

If this is to switch to an Athen's specific discussion, I suggest we keep thrashing at this as a deeper collective discussion - I believe it's really important, because it goes to the core.

The proposal I made before, wasn't intended as any kind of block, but rather to try and identify whether we shared a baseline first principle: that adherence to a collective routine is desirable?

The mechanism I gestured towards is one that's important, because the split I suggested is manifest in this discussion. Fear of constriction of freedom vs collectivity.

We need a first principle before we can build on top, otherwise we're building on sand. And this is demonstrated in James' "spineless" comment.

The next thing I think is useful, is to read Agamben's the Highest Poverty. Because we're using monasticism as our mine/metaphor, we are actually wasting our time, when this thinking has been examined, and put into practice for *centuries*.

Fundamental thing, rules. What does everyone think a rule is? What is the difference between a law made by government/state and a verbal contract made between friends…. ? And tacit agreements dictated by habit, conditions and practicality? i.e would it be useful to discuss whether we should only use spoons, never knives?

Significant difference comes from the enforcement mechanism.

In the monasteries, it was guilt and in hierarchical iterations of the monasteries; violence.

the evening, so about 7:30 in the evening until after Mass in the morning, which is nine o'clock in the morning; that's 14 hours of the 24. I mean, obviously in some of those we're asleep so we wouldn't be talking anyway, except in our sleep; and there are no rules about talking in your sleep. But, things like the Lectio Divina in the morning… Here in this house it's not obligatory, but a lot of us do Lectio Divina together in our scriptorium, and it's a very powerful thing to do such a private and intimate thing in silence alongside other people. And that actually creates a very powerful bond. And I think you were talking about the effects of a regular life on relationships and on other people. I think what we find is that living like we do… I mean, we don't have holidays – we're together all the time. [laughs] I mean, you couldn't imagine a more unlikely combination of people than the members of our community. You know, if we hadn't actually been spending all our lives together we would never have met.

Because for most of us we would seem to have absolutely nothing in common. And yet, we live together very happily most of the time, and with a lot of good humour and a lot of appreciation. But, we get to know one another well, and we get to know one another's little ticks and little habits and little ways of doing things, but you also have a wonderful opportunity, when you live like we do, to just observe how faithful people are. And that's very impressive to see day by day, just to see people going about their duties, doing what they're supposed to be doing, being serious about their purpose, being generous, and even when they don't feel like being generous trying to be generous. That actually creates very strong bonds, bonds I would say that go a million miles deeper than many hundreds of hours of superficial chit-chat over cups of coffee.

Now, I don't want to use either of these mechanisms personally.

So what's the [replace enforcement] *enabling* mechanism?
My suggestion would be experimentation. i.e "We haven't tried this before, lets see what happens if we wake up at 5am everyday for a week?"

Then share in the analysis of the implications, pros and cons of this shared decision.

Also on monasticism, read the highest poverty, I'll buy copies for everyone if needed - the power of the rule; rules are obeyed in the eyes of god, upon the self. The self in this way is not accountable to the group, any more than they want to participate and judge this as a necessary lubricant for that participation.

Helpful?

(BEN VICKERS ON LOOMIO, DAILY SCHEDULE DISCUSSION)

Ben:

There's something that maybe follows on from that, aside from the isolation and the daily rhythm, it's perhaps to some surprisingly spoken of in a joyous way, and the word "joy" is often attached to the monastic life. I wondered if you could expand on the specific quality of that joy?

Thank you for the invitation James. This seems delicate territory – I have registered several heart-felt cries from the Athenians as regards the need of structure/discipline.

I have failed to note why this was desirable; it could be that a lack of structure was seeming to impede the WORK and/or undermining a Cultivating the WE. It may have been that a visceral need for discipline to increase the energy levels in the house was desirable.

The unMon is predicated upon the synergy of working in a coordinated, strategic manner. Getting to the point where this synergic motor powers the core of the collective requires tangible investment.

(LOOMIO DISCUSSION ON DAILY SCHEDULE)

Erik:

Before I joined here I visited a friend of a friend, who's an enclosed nun and had been 40 years by then, and I asked her the same question, and I said "Well, after all these years, are you happy?" and she said to me "If this wasn't joyful... If this weren't a joyful life it just wouldn't be worth it!" And she is someone who radiates joy.

And it is true that part of what makes it joyful I think is - as a purely human, almost a sociological observation - that we're trying to dispense with what is not necessary, because we don't heap up a lot of stuff and we try to have clear-outs fairly regularly, to make do with a minimum of stuff, which means that you do really appreciate what is given you, and the main things that are given to you aren't things that you buy.

They are things like the fact that the sunrises in the morning, and that there are budding leaves on the trees. And the fact that—I mean, that to me was quite stunning. I've never been particularly sensitive to gardens. I'm still not, but just walking through our enclosure every day... I remember the thrill that first spring I was here, of just watching day by day spring burst into this dormant apple tree, and that giving me great joy. And then you come to Joy as a function of gratitude, it's the gratuitous that makes us joyful, and I think that the monastic life, if it works, should foster a spirit of gratitude.

So, you become grateful for all those things around you, you become grateful for all the good things that you've received in your life. You become grateful for your life, and you see that even the mess in your life, you know, in retrospect that's turned into good in some way or another. You see that some of the messes you've made... you've been forgiven, and that's something to be pretty grateful for. [laughs] You're grateful for the friends you have, for the monastic community. So, there is that.

I have attached said book [Agamben: Highest Poverty] to this response.

My response is simple:
@benvickers says "Read!"
Bezdomny says "When?"

I have added this PDF to my infinite pile of PDFs that are in my to read folder.

I thought monks were supposed to read?

Ergo, monks have a lot of time.

Deontically, they manage time.

Time is a restless beast and needs sheer numbers of minds to tame it. No one person can tame time, but a group can. So they can have time to read.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ANECDOTE:
When I was living on Holistic village number 10 (of or 50 that I visited over a 2.5 year period), they managed time well so that everyone had their afternoons free after putting in SoMe time to the community.

During that period I would sit in the yurt or lie in the hammock and read!!!!

I haven't read SHIT in months and it's driving me crazy. I scan, I peruse, I even siphon texts, but I don't absorb anything. This is not monklike. A Monk should adsorb info so they can share it. I am not a conduit of information any more, I am merely an end-station.

(LOOMIO DISCUSSION ON DAILY SCHEDULE FOR UNMONASTERY ATHENS)

But obviously the essential factor of joy for us is our life with God. I mean, today is the Eve of Pentecost, and one of the hallmarks of the Holy Spirit is joy and a certain sort of freedom. I think I would say that those three things go together very carefully: gratitude, joy, and freedom.

Ben:

And would you say it's those three things that are a stabilising force in being able to exist within this life?

Erik:

Yes, and the wonderful thing is that you find that your capacity for those things… I mean, obviously one is more receptive some days than other days, that it actually increases with time. Just to give you a concrete example… A wonderful brother in our monastery, he was one of the ones who joined in 1935, he had a stroke two years ago and was fully dependent for about four weeks before he died. He was a wonderfully joyful person, an indefatigable encourager. He always had a kind word, and was full of jokes and full of songs. Obviously he… [laughs] Having joined the monastery when he did, most of his songs were a bit out of date, but he would… [laughs] He would quite spontaneously you would hear him sitting in his room singing songs from the shows of the 1920s. [laughter] And he was a profoundly good man.

So, he had a stroke, he lost the gift of speech. I've just been appointed superior, so I sort of ministered to him, both in hospital and here. The nurses didn't want to let him go in the hospital, but I said "Can't we keep him?" [laughs] But there was one thing he always struggled to say, and it was the only thing he said at the end "Thank you!" The nurses said that even when they had to shove a tube up his nose, he said "Thank you!" And I thought to myself "Good Lord, how wonderful to have come to the end of your life – he was 99 years old – and the only thing you really want to say is "Thank you!" That's not bad.

(LOOMIO DISCUSSION ON UNMONASTERY ATHENS DAILY SCHEDULE)

I just have a couple of things to say:

- I still think this should not be a loomio discussion,
- I would stop calling these "Rules",
- I would make sure that people are respectful and don't ring the bell for 30 minutes at your door, one time is enough (because sometimes people have a rough night and it is already horrible to be awakened by a bell),
- I also think everyone should cook and clean (those who would rather not cook have to put a similar amount of time into cleaning, cooking takes up a lot of time, doing the dishes doesn't. when people clean they should do a bit of an effort on doing it well)
- everyone should keep the kitchen clean and clean after themselves, there are already cockroaches in the house and leaving dirty dishes and breadcrumbs all over the table and floor is not helping
- everyone should be taking care of the house: helping with finding crates for everyone not just for themselves, helping finding and carrying pallets for everyone, helping building furniture… not leaving stuff all over the house

Ben:

[Pauses]…

Sorry, that was quite profound, so it's thrown me a little… but, maybe this is connected with respect to a

life of obedience and discipline amongst one's peers. What do you think it is that specifically fosters trust between monks beyond faith, if anything?

Erik:

What fosters trust? Well, I think… seeing people's fidelity and their reliability, and that holds for small things as well as large things. [laughs] Again, people quite often presume that we spend our days wafting on clouds of incense, but… You know, we have a large house to look after. We have meals to cook, we have toilets to clean, we have hens and cows to be fed, we have pots to be made, we have any number of guests to receive, and… And during the course of a year there's hardly any human predicament that doesn't walk through that front door.

And we have leaking roofs to fix, we have now 10 brothers over 80. Most of them are pretty fit, but some need quite intensive care. So, there's a lot to be done in the course of a day, and what you come to really appreciate is people just doing… mucking in and helping, and cleaning up when there's a mess, and doing the washing up when it's their turn, turning up to appointments on time, being prepared to lend a hand when someone else is called to do something else; little things like that. Seeing that over time you find that actually people are remarkably trustworthy. And I think that's how we sort of educate one another as well, some people find it easier than others to say "Yes" when you ask them for something, but we have one or two people in our house in particular who are really quite astonishing. Whenever you ask them anything they always say "Gladly – I'd be pleased to do that!" And I think even those of us who may be a bit more sort of slouching in our approach, we see that and we think "I would like to become like that one day by the miracle of grace!"

(BEMBO DAVIES: POST-MATERA WANDERINGS)

The Myth of Self-Code

This writer hails from the theatre - in the theatre we are dependent upon the ensemble. Actors are never late (more than once); we know in our bodies that time stolen from the work is irreplaceable, it deflates the ensemble: five minutes of unfocused waiting is a contagious minus that rots the togetherness. In a working group of twelve interdependent souls, one person five minutes late is fifty-five wasted minutes.

The standing or falling of the unMonastery seems to balance precariously upon the ability to provide inner discipline. We may embrace hard work and community service as the pillars of our mission, but subjective interpretations as to how much inner discipline should be expected have plagued every attempt thus far to form unMonastery communities.

Agreements are made in circles; individuals cannot seem to honour their own stated intentions: When exactly is the kitchen spotless?; How much do I personally need my horizontal mattress time before I am too tired to honour my commitment to cook ?; How much must I respect the sleep of others?
In a clinic for social cohesion that operates without effective programming rituals, it quickly becomes research in hopelessness..

Visitation II.

Saint Basil considered the monastic community as a body, similar to Durkheim whose used the body analogy to analysis society. The body of a monastery is both resistant and ancient as well as fragile and consistently renewing with unstable elements challenging the routined muscle memory of an insulated community. Monastic bodies can be sick or healthy, sometimes the arms are asleep,

sometimes the ears are blocked, sometimes the heart is broken. In the care and maintenance of this body the Rule can perhaps be seen as a guide to health. This can present the Rule as an oppressive force moulding and manipulating a monastic body, but it can also be seen as the tool designed to check the vitality of a life defined and inspired in common. Many rules such as the benedictine rule and the basilian rule specify the need for autonomy, such as the election of the abbot who in this analogy holds the task of evaluate what the health of the body is and how to support it. Rules in this sense also create a skin, a barrier beyond the physicality of the Abbey walls that reifies what is within and without of the body. The hermits of Mount Carmel, who later became known as the Carmelite Order, approached Saint Albert in 1206 to write their Rule so as to be recognised by Rome as a specific monastic body.

Ben:

And that in a way suggest to me that a high number of individuals willing to participate and contribute to a common effort is almost a way of quantifying the health of the community, would you agree?

Erik:

Yes, I think so. And that's something I thought of a lot since becoming superior, and I've ascertained to be true that, it is pretty exceptional to be living in a human context where you can pretty much all the time take everyone's good will for granted.

SLACK POSTING PRIOR TO GATHERING IN ATHENS MAY 2015: THE PRESUMPTIONS OF THE PRESUMMIT

1- That merely waving the notion of unMonasticism is not sufficient.
2 - That we recognise that Existence without Protocol has proven its limitations.
3 - That Cultivating the We is a major tenant of the work.
4 - That Visceral Added Value is the litmus test of all unMon efforts. If we are not feeling the fun, we are hopping over vital stages.
5 - That as an antidote to years of expressing ourselves -- we must express ourselves otherly.
6 - That by now everyone will have taken the time to go to bed with the Book of Greater and Lesser Omissions and can be prepared to lead a lesson reading based upon one of their favourite bits.
7 - That the Spine of the Circle reflects the health of the organism.
8 - That Civilisation untox work (uRT) must be explored emotionally, chemically and electromagnetically.
9 - That articulating the OOs and HAs* of life is a key step towards Purifying the Plot.
(*Obtainable Objectives and Hidden Assumptions)

Ben:

That's interesting, because St Benedict mentions that there's different types of monks with various behaviours and motivations.

Erik:

Tell me about it! [laughs]

Ben:

And some in his view are more desirable than others. Why do you think that monasticism attracts such a variety of characters?

Erik:

Sometimes people talk about vocation or they hear about vocation, and it can seem such an exalted spiritual notion, as if you get some great message. That happens for some people, but for most of us our vocation becomes manifest by a sort of a process of elimination, that little by little everything else just ceases to matter, ceases to be interesting, and this is the one thing.

THE LEAK OF THE ME,
POST-MATERA WANDERINGS - DAVIES

Here is where my frustrations arise - In my world, all such work must be accompanied by its physicalisation. Being a 'doer' implies a break with merely thinking about doing. To counter the pull of civilization, the trick is to re-address our education neurologically. The training is to viscerally breakdown the myth of individuality so that our interdependence ascends. (Knowing of course that a deeper "I" reveals itself once one reaches the bowels of ensemble). The work is to address intimacy, confession, our collective shadows; we seek to remove the mask.
Morning Practice succumbed to its foreignness - it fact it needed to be 2 1/2 hours twice a day wherein 60% was linguistic training that could be performed in a manner as a work demonstration akin to Kung Fu monks. (In Matera, I would have mobilised the texts as collected by Maria (as a phrase book) which would demonstrate that contact with 'us' was literally taken to heart.

Ben:

Purposeful, and perhaps something that potentially is lacking in other spaces

Okay, last question: in recent decades there's been a quite profound and accelerated explosion in technological innovation, and increasingly people find themselves overwhelmed and it has obviously had a very dramatic effect on daily life, and I wanted to understand in terms of the quiet life whether you've noticed any specific effects as a result of such innovation and if there are technologies that monasticism has adopted or rejected?

Erik:

It's a question that both we as a house, and our order and I think the monastic world as a whole, engages with very deeply at this moment, and it has for several years. Our order had a general chapter last year and modern technology was one of the main points on the agenda. You know, monks have always been sympathetic to innovations.

Ben:

Yes. They have been responsible for many of them.

Erik:

Exactly – often enough they have. And there are many things that are very helpful to us. I mean, email is one, when used sensibly, actually a very monk-friendly medium. I use email a lot, I hardly ever use the telephone; I may make one phone call a week or something in emergencies, or if I have no other. So, I find that I'm actually quite undisturbed, because I can manage the email, I can respond to it when it suits me. And what I'm increasingly learning to do, and that's a conscious decision on my part, is just to switch it off.

I think the risk, when you live like we do is to be swept away by a constant busyness, and there is that… Because you have things coming in more or less all the time and at unexpected intervals, there is that great temptation to think "Oh, if I deal with this now I won't have to do it tomorrow." which leaves you doing all of the time and constantly feeling a bit overwhelmed. Whereas now for me personally, I have a time in the day when I deal with correspondence, and then I flick the switch, switch off the Internet, and it's wonderful!

Visitation III:

The path from A-B perhaps represents one of the foundational paradoxes conjured and concrete in the infrastructure of cenobitic monasticism. That destination B is unreachable because humans are by Christian definition imperfect, blemished by sin. If one aim of the Rule as a guide for living in the footsteps of Christ is to attain perfection in life on earth, another characteristic of a good christian life is an understanding and a suffering of one's own sin, that humans are no angels. One of The Sayings of the Desert Father tells of Abba John the Dwarf who wishes to be angel ceaselessly offering worship to God, when he returns from his attempt his brother refuses to let him in until the next morning saying 'You are a man and you must once again work in order to eat.' Saint Pachomius, known as the father of organized monastic life, perceives the resolution of this paradox in the communal. Individual perfection cannot be realized on earth however Saint Pachomius perceived that each one can find perfection in serving others, that perfection lies in community, and hence he became the first Abbot recorded in history.

08/05/2015 Interview #2

Phone call with Br. Paul Quenon,
based at the Abbey of Gethsemani
Facilitated by Nathan Schneider

Ben:

I think that's probably one of the major differentiators between what we're trying to achieve and how the monasteries operate, or at least our perception of the Benedictine monasteries, as isolated spaces retreating from civilisation. We consider the interface with the local community to be a major part of our work but we're still at times questioning that as an absolute direction. In terms of where you're located, what kind of relationship do you have to the local area?

Br. Paul:

Well, we're out in the country, it's mostly an agricultural area. I would say... Yeah, there are farms still, but many of the neighbours have jobs in town, they'll commute, go to Bardstown or even Louisville,

BEMBO DAVIES, SOMEWHERE SOMETIME:

The unMonasterian life as a nomadic 'do-tank' is paradoxical: it resists parachuting in as a functional polished package - if we are too independent, we cannot be embraced as co-puzzlers, but if our impact is but symbolic we quickly resemble a forgotten dream. Rather, unMonasteries must be built one relationship at a time...

KATALIN HAUSEL'S WEEKLY REPORT ON THE MEDIUM PLATFORM: CULTURING THE UNMONASTERY PROTOCOL

Talking about the 'we', two days ago I woke up with a

which is an hour away. Some of them are Catholic, some of them come to early Mass on Sunday.

The monastery has been here over 150 years, so we're a permanent part of the neighbourhood so to speak. Not everybody knows us – you'd be surprised – but a lot of people do, and they might have worked for us at one time, in construction or on the farm. We don't have a farm anymore. And there are poor people in the neighbourhood. We have an outreach programme, a charity programme. Our policy is that, and this is kind of like the ideal of the Order, we live by the work of our own hands, and the surplus we have over and above our income can then go to the poor.

We serve a good number of people in the neighbourhood. There's an agency, a couple of agencies we work through – we don't do it directly anymore the way we used to. So, instead of just handing out food baskets at the front gate the way they did back in the 1950s, we fund a number of agents.

sudden vision for the second part of the BIOS Game. We developed, back in January, a second board which starts the game from the moment the unMonastery building is occupied by its residents, but we never filled it with content.

I suspect my inspiration came from the ongoing conversations around the Protocol and generally practices followed, or not followed, by the Athens group. The baseline contribution —documentation— is resolved by Slack, and there is a collection of house rules for visitors. Further definitions are not forthcoming— how it is possible to join, how to make decisions as a group if problems arise, how to coordinate so that opportunities are not missed by communicating the need for support from the larger network.

It reminds me of Matera, how slowly we developed routines around such problems as they arose one at a time. I think the second part of the game can become a good tool to play out such scenarios and record the different outcomes from specific situations, so when any fledgling unMonastery community faces those challenges, there is a recipe book full of possible solutions. Never having had the chance to prototype the unMonastery in full cycle, it is all speculation, but the cycles seem to me to be phased by

- writing a protocol (recording the mechanics of the specific unMonastery),
- writing a second book of greater and lesser omissions (creating a structure for self-evaluation),
- calling a stakeholders summit (and include the invisible stakeholders),
- holding a commons summit (looking at our contributions) and
- collecting visualised findings in the Atlas.

Ben:

Okay. There's a couple of questions that I want to ask around that. But before I do, in terms of the work… What kind of work is your order engaged in?

Br. Paul:

Yes. Well, it varies from monastery to monastery of course. Some monasteries are still into agriculture of some sort. For instance, our monastery in California has vineyards and orchards; they're very agricultural. Our monastery in South Carolina,

PRO HELVETIA APPLICATION: INTERDISCIPLINARY PROJECTS - PRODUCTION GRANTS
"UNMONASTERY BIOS" - A DESIGN FICTION GAME AND TOOLKIT FOR CIVIC INNOVATION -
500 CHARACTERS

they're growing mushrooms now, making a good income with mushroom. But a lot of the monasteries in the United States have turned towards small industries in a rural area. For instance, making candy; the nuns have been doing that, making fruit cake. So, that's our industry here at Gethsemani, making fruit cake and making bourbon fudge, and then selling it through the mail.

"unMonastery is a placemaking social innovation model for addressing the interlinked needs of empty space, unemployment and depleting social services. We embed committed, digitally skilled individuals within communities, reanimating disused properties and connecting them through European innovation initiatives.

This application is towards the development of a freely available toolkit and design fiction game that will support civic innovation; and a series of events to test and promote the work.



Ben:

This is interesting to us, since it's one of the things that I've been curious about—with respect to unMonastery. In our initial thinking, or at least one of the ways that we designed it was with government policy in mind, and that means that there's a specific funding stream in terms of almost selling it as a service to governments and small towns and cities. But, the original intention was to create a high degree of autonomy for those who had the aspiration to live in the world in a different way, and in reflection we've realised that before we move forward into the future we need to seriously think about production as a means for supporting what we do. I wonder, since production has always been a part of the monastery as I understand it…

KATALIN HAUSEL'S MEDIUM POST: STRANGERS

My first week in Athens. The day after my arrival we had an Open Dinner at the apartment. Mellow, useful conversations, good food, last guests sent away at 12.30. The next days were occupied by CommonsFest, where the unMonastery was presented by two events: Lauren led a workshop on OSCE Days; I gave a small presentation on the unMonastery, followed by a round table conversation on how to contribute to the commons as strangers.

This seems to me one of the real challenges of the unMonastery. The original idea implies bringing strangers together to build a small community, which will then work together with the local community: a group of strangers trying to be useful. How can strangers contribute to the commons? A couple of interesting points emerged: thinking about unMonastery in a local context as keeper of a "found object" that can be claimed and must be returned at any moment, without hesitation. The place we live, the projects we help with or develop, all do not belong to us and need to be ready to be given back as soon as someone local wants it.

Br. Paul:

Yes. Well, in some form or other. The ideal of the Cistercian reform of the Benedictine Order in the 12th century, 11th century, was to be independent, that we would not be dependent on the aristocracy and on donations. Of course there was some of that, that's how they got their land for the most part, but at least if you look at the constitutions, to be self-supporting has been the goal. It hasn't always happened that way, but that's what we're aiming at. So, to do that—now, there are monasteries, for instance, who derive a lot of their income from a bookstore, a gift shop, especially the European monasteries.

Ben:

So, in respect to this kind of production, historically the monasteries have played a significant role in innovation. Devising new farming techniques, medicinal, educational and I wondered: in the present moment for monasticism there's what I perceive

BEMBO DAVIES - ON EDGERYDERS WEBSITE:

What's My Edge?

When I came to Edgeryders in 2011 or was it 2012, the world, our world was reeling from the latest global economic fiasco, the streets would be soon occupied by the indignant. We were gathering under the inexplicably benign gaze of the Council of Europe to explore the tools of something so intensely profound as 'Social Cohesion.' The surroundings were a bit standard, but the community had possibilities: fresh, flexible, visionary. These were folk that knew their stuff and were literate and realistic about the global dilemma.

The themes of the first Edgeryder unConference became the reasons why I am in the unMonastery. We talked of a Treasury of Wisdom, Rebooting Democracy, Resiliency Hubs, Transparent Budgeting, Creative Extinction, a Society of Inclusive Civil Survivalists. Among our slogans were indeed Collapsenomics, State in a Box, unCivilization, The Age of Crisis. It seemed to me that someone was finally addressing the Dark Arts of confronting the ghosts that haunt us. My designated territory was clear: I would continue to 'Extract Enthusiasm' through the miracle of Human Rites.

Since then the metabookkeepers wiggled forth a further extension in their postponement of the financial collapse. The occupanti got their inevitable head bashing; los indignados refined their strategies or went home to Mamma. Several creative wars decimated traditional buffer states. Bolivia continues to get its act together; Turkey doesn't.
It feels as if it is business as usual -- only much more severe for a significant percentage of the world's population.

Meanwhile, personal survival reared its familiar head. The Edgeryders became less about the greater we, and more about economic strategies for a generation of upstarts trying to make their way as Social Capitalists. I miss the open horizon.

to be a difficult situation, in not attracting a younger generation... and this is my perception—I might be wrong. But this is creating a bottleneck for bringing in new innovative ideas, and I wanted to know: how receptive do you think the existing monasteries would be to this?

Br. Paul: Innovative ideas?

The entry point of the BIOS is the Method kit: flash card set which provide navigational signposts that indicate inevitable stations on the path of establishing an unMonastery or unMonastery-like endeavor. Created as a final appraisal tool before we left Matera, these single word or phrase cards are augmented by the Stakeholders Handbook - a short description of mission and method, and required reading should you wish to explore the unProcess Map game board (now in 3rd edition and to be built towards use as a centrepiece in a simulation workshop experience for interested communities.)

Supporting all this soars the magnum opus of The Book of Greater and Lesser Omissions (GLO; aka Book of Mistakes - BOM), an in-depth trawling of the archival records which cross-references the elements of the Method Kit with observations of the unMonastery field experience in a more laconic, literary style. Conceived as a key tool in the trajectory of our 200 year timeline even before the Matera prototype opened its doors - the Book of GLO fleshes out compelling central vocabulary with which to evaluate and orientate our efforts. Behind all this, and completing the BIOS family, lurk the twin elements of the unMonastery website and the Scriptorium which, when completed, will allow for ready access to all our accumulated documentation. A seventh BIOS element, the unAtlas is also under development.

(BEMBO DAVIES: UNMONASTERY WANDERINGS)

Ben:

Receptive... Yes.

Br. Paul:

Oh. Well, if it solves a practical problem I think people would be open to it, because every monastery... We exist in a changing situation, and so a lot of monasteries are always looking for new ways of making an income. For instance, getting back to our monastery at Mepkin in South Carolina, they

This is not a case of "Edgier than Thou" - these things have to be cyclical. Everyone brings their own individual amount of angst and imperatives. Should we wish to avoid despair and paralysis, we have to incorporate individual survival strategies and denial mechanisms. However, neither Edgeryders nor its unHoly unRepresentative on unEarth is an entertaining role play.

had been raising chickens and selling eggs for decades. That became an issue with the animal rights people, and they weren't really doing that well with the chickens so they simply sold all the chickens and started this mushroom business, and that's done quite well.

Hikmet says it all, it must be taken with great seriousness.[Nazim Hikmet's poem "On Living" was attached to this blog post.] Vinay's take on WW III is apt enough: us having been cuddled by favourable citizenship and a well-fed past, cannot be allowed inform our choices. Our mission is to locate the edge and to ryde it at its most dangerous.

This radical portrait of the core operation may not be a universally shared view of the impulse behind the unMonastery movement, people were recruited from various channels, but is there anything else that would better illuminate our operation ?

BEMBO DAVIES: MY EDGE, ON EDGERYDERS WEBSITE)

Ben:

Interesting, one of the focuses of unMonastery is technological innovation, that's kind of our specialty, do you know of monasteries within your particular order that are engaged with new forms of technology?

Br. Paul:

Oh yes, as a matter of fact. Across the desert, a monastery in New Mexico… They're not Cistercian, but they are Benedictine, and they have developed an economy based on website management and design, and they're doing quite well with that. Now, there was a monastery in Minnesota, they were Cistercians of the Common Observance, which is a branch… it's really a separate order, but it's the same tradition. They had developed a quite lucrative business of restoring inkjet cartridges and they were doing so well that the business really consumed too much of the abbot's time and effort, and they were making millions of dollars… but then the whole thing collapsed because they just could not make it… They couldn't live under so much pressure, business pressure, whilst also living the monastic life at the same time, and the abbot who was a young man who had developed this business… He just left the monastery.

An Open Source Cult --The unMonastery as an App

The opening phrase in the Stakeholders Handbook caught the collective imagination: "The unMonastery is a social clinic for the future." At an impromptu radio interview someone reproduced it word perfect at precisely the correct occasion. The only problem was that at the interviewer's other elbow sat the man who coined the sentence - what on earth did his erudite colleague mean when spouting these adopted words? It is a premise of the unMon ethos that the future shall not be as harmonic as could be desired. Islands of beauty can occur, but chances are high that they will be quickly besieged. The various unMonastery projects build upon the hope that we can get there first - that we can devise and offer up an open source impulse to create such islands; that the meeting place of our version of monastic life provides a valuable, flexible model to be adapted by many in the many parts of the world that experience imbalance.

The value of the unMonastery name is its reference to the traditions that predate us. As with our historic brethren, forks are inevitable. People and groups will wish to implement the catchy unMon name for diverse purposes. We must appreciate the value of this even as all manner of the quirky declare their efforts unMonas-

tic and commercial operators sell the idea to fashion conscious government departments.

As such the unMonastery may not be primary code; human beings have cooperated since before they were human beings. We can only imagine that unMonasteries will evolve into many different forms as different constellations of people respond to different social imperatives. In fact, it is not strictly necessary that all run the same operating system; it may be useful to examine the unMon in future as an 'app' that provides added flexibility on top of a variety of initiatives.

As open source the unMonastery brand name is our gift to humanity. All are free to declare that their enterprise adheres to the unMon movement. There are costs and benefits to such openness. However undeservedly, we shall gain respectability; particularly if we can avoid protectionist squabbles. If flying the unMonastery logo wins a band of unwashed squatters an extra seven months of dithering before the police batons descend, then this, in historic terms, demonstrates our added value.

It is of course highly likely that this self-proclaimed family connection will be abused at times. Nevertheless, the governing impulse of social cohesion research remains our goal. Experiments will be many, the banner of unMonasticism may at the very least enable assorted constellations of people responding to different social imperatives a temporary shell of respectability. The blatant association with ecclesiasticism may invite to non self-evident collaborations, while the participants bash out the first steps of establishing their own version of a social clinic. The historic core of the unMon movement (the unSecurity Council) declares its intention to be available for counsel, if only through our extensive library.

(BEMBO DAVIES: UNMONASTERY WANDERINGS)

Ben:

Really? To continue the business?

Br. Paul:

No, the whole place just collapsed, they just broke apart and each went their way.

Ben:

That's really compelling, since one of the

But somewhere in the flurry of all this work between #LOTE4, Transmediale and the scoping exercise recent-

reasons why we were driven to look at the monasteries to begin with was to try and understand them as a different way of life, a kind of insulation from the existing job markets and essentially capitalism, and it's interesting to hear that story in terms of the unsustainability of a monastic way of life in the context of creating a business. In terms of your experience… How do those forms of work fit or not fit together?

ly deployed in Athens, we've found ourselves unable to maintain our more permeable membranes, in part this has been as a result of learning to negotiate distance after Matera. Realising this we have over the past fortnight been doing significant work to develop ways in which people can join in unMonastery activity, stay up to date and generally increase the opportunities for participation, hopefully without becoming a full time reception desk.

We think staggered participation might look something like this:



Concentric Circles from Outer to Inner Read: Initial Points of Contact; Individual Projects; Individual un-Monasteries; unMonastery MetaNational—Each layer representing increased degrees of commitment.

(POST ON MEDIUM: WAYS TO COMMUNICATE)

Br. Paul:

Well, there's two aspects to that. On the one hand, let's face it: we're all tied into a capitalistic system. You can look at all the monasteries… you know, it's just… there's no way of getting away from it. And we haven't really tried to get away from it, we've just tried to take advantage of the market system that we have.

On the other hand, you don't want—as we

have touched on already—for it to take over and become a dominating situation… To meet a demand for instance, it can then be inimical to the quiet of the monastic life. A very recent example of that is right here at this monastery. We used to make cheese, we had been making cheese since the 1950s, and as of this year we have stopped selling cheese… And the reason is, for one thing, we don't have enough people to do that very labour-intensive work, and the dilemma was that if we try to keep up that production then it simply consumes all our time, and then you don't have enough time for the quiet life.

Ben:

One of the things that is striking to me is that you are able to reference the activity of other monasteries; [we are] curious to know how the different monasteries are connected to each other, how they communicate and how they might come to compare notes?

Br. Paul:

Yes. Well, that's a good question. And I remember that you were interested in that whole thing, what kind of a system we have. [laughs] and… I don't know how much you've read up on this already, but the Cistercian monasteries are on the one hand autonomous: each abbey is autonomous economically, and each one has its own superior. Now, in the time of the Cistercian reform back in the 11th/12th century Cluny was sort of like a mega corporation. Cluny was the major monastery in a whole web of monasteries, and the Abbot of Cluny was the abbot of all these different monasteries. The Cistercians rebelled against that, each monastery has its own abbot and there is no supreme abbot. Now, we have what we call the Abbot-General, but he is not really the general in the usual sense, he's more like an agent for the general chapter.

The general chapter is the supreme agent of the Cistercian Order, and the general chapter is comprised of the abbots and abbesses of all the Cistercian monasteries around the world. They all get together every other year or so and make decisions as a collective – it was one of the first parliamentary bodies in Europe. So, the legislation is determined collectively.

The third concern of the Berlin unMonastery Summit was to devise an organisational structure that would serve our purposes for the conceivable future. A proposal of concentric circles of commitment and membership was sketched and adopted on a provisional basis. As summarised in the Stakeholders Handbook (revised), it looks like this:

THE ORGANISATION

Each unMonastery is a horizontally structured autonomous unit based on self-initiative and inclusion. Above and beyond the localised units is unMonastery Metanational whose form has yet to be evolved. It is linked to but distinctly independent of Edgeryders (an early 21st Century network of social activists, hackers etc. initially recruited by the Office of Social Cohesion Research, Council of Europe, Strasbourg).

Claims upon uMM/Edgeryders from the individual unMonasteries are limited to non-monetary support, they could include access to a recruitment bank, research and development networks, strategic administration aid,etc.

Claims upon the individual unMonasteries from uMM/Edgeryders are non-material; however, it is assumed that each unMonastery make efforts to acquaint themselves with the history of the movement (through the ER archives and the various editions of the Book

So, of course, at the general chapters there is information given out about each monastery, so each monastery has to make a house report, and then there are committees set up to address certain problems. There might be some monasteries that need special help, that probably need some problem-solving so that is taken care of and advice will be given. And that's, of course, up to the monastery to apply it.

Now, there's kind of a substructure underneath this general chapter, and that would be the mother-daughter system, the mother-house daughter-house system. The mother-house is a monastery which establishes another monastery. In other words, the monks from Gethsemani Abbey went off to California and started a monastery in California. We have six daughter-houses from Gethsemani. Now, the abbot of the mother-house remains the superior of the daughter house until they're independent and solidly established enough to elect their own abbot. At that point they become independent, but there remains a connection, because every second year the abbot of the mother-house makes a visitation to the daughter-house, and that visitation is basically an advisory function. The abbot, the visitator, has to interview every monk in the monastery and see to the welfare of the house.

Now, he does not become abbot of that monastery, they already have an abbot, all he can do is make recommendations. So, it's kind of an honorary system, the monastery may or may not take it seriously, they may or may not apply the recommendations made. But hopefully the recommendations to begin with were things that arose from discussion with the monks. Nowadays most abbots will do a dialogue, a community dialogue – everybody together – perhaps read his recommendations or his house report, get feedback from the community, revise it, then draw up a final form and that's what is presented to the general chapter.

of Greater and Lesser Omissions.) It is possible that each independent unMonastery (or endeavor using the unMonastery name in some form) be assessed a negotiable budget contribution to support the unMon Metanational. This amount is expected to be recycled into each local initiative in the form of consultant emissaries holding kickstart residencies and cross-fertilisation workshops.The amount is not an absolute percentage, and of course will not be expected before significant running finances have been procured.

In addition to this economic collaboration, each local unit is tasked with distilling and rendering available its own version of The Protocol /unCode or guidelines for living.

(UNMONASTERY BIOS, STAKEHOLDERS HANDBOOK)

Visitation IV:

The charisma of the Abbot is a self-propelling question mark, a fingerprint ink stain unavoidable on every rule written. For a tradition that aspires to reject pride and gluttony as well as material riches, the designation of the Abbott's

role bears the uncomfortable traces of both the introspection of success and social capital. Twofold when it is considered that most rules were also written by an Abbott. The term abbot developed from the first cenobitic rule. Saint Pachomius recognized that administrative tasks were a distraction from monastic practice and so condensed these organization tasks as the duty of one individual. A role he assumed in his own community, leading him to be called Abba, meaning father, the etymological route of Abbot. However this places the Abbott in a liminal position, both inside and outside of the monastic body. A position that through its liminality is unstable, dangerous and powerful. The monastery of Lerins on a small island off the french riviera was known for its incredibly charismatic Abbotts. It was founded by small group of influential political and religious figures from Rome in order for them to live a quiet religious life. However if became something of a vatican satellite producing three bishops and holding an impressive Saintly alumni. Some monastic communities developing their rule at this time bare the stretch marks of retaliation against the cultivation of an abbot as charismatic personality. The Fathers of Jura actively discredited Lerins while The Rules of the Fathers created an alternative system of necessary roles, dispersing the centrifugal force of the Abbott. Bitterly for the aspirations of a horizontal structure of shared power, the Rules of the Fathers did not appear to be very successful, with little expansion or influence. Further still it seems history offers more buoyancy to the charismatic individual, there is little record of either The Fathers of Jura or the Rule of the Fathers.

Ben:

That's very interesting, because of an experience that I went through last weekend. Right now there's a group of people in Athens, that want to start another unMonastery, but in order to arrive at a clear sense of commitment to that we had to spend a very long time sat in a circle discussing this and aligning our perspective.

It took us a long time to get to those kinds of agreements, but when we were at the stage where we were thinking about the different responsibilities that people would take, that same mechanism of the mother and daughter... I took on a similar role to the one you describe, by saying "I will just be a mentor, I will just make recommendations, but you have total autonomy." and it's just super interesting to hear...

It's almost as if there's an essence that emerges through people gathering and attempting to do similar things, maybe.

Br. Paul:

It's a similar organic procedure, isn't it?

Ben:

It was a slow and painful procedure, but in a good way, in that we spent three days having day-long conversations until we arrived at a place that made sense for all of us.

One more note: as one who has experienced both forced, mechanical morning circles and ones that repeatedly transcended the familiar territory of veiled platitudes. Circles also work on synergy and inner momentum; make them a periodic, elective event and their function dissolves. Empty gestures serve very little purpose.

(LOOMIO CONVERSATION ABOUT DAILY SCHEDULE)

Br. Paul:

And so you got there without having known anything about the Cistercian system.

Ben:

No. [laughs] Which is…

Br. Paul:

So, you reinvented the wheel. [laughs]

Ben:

Well, I think we keep reinventing the wheel over and over again. It's worth saying that when we started the project we said that "unMonastery" would only replicate certain elements of monasticism, but with more time spent speaking to those who live under the Rule the more I find that we're just doing exactly the same thing in a very, very haphazard, messy way.

Point number one: our playing must not be playing. If Matera was 'unMonastery Lite', this time we embrace Disciplines with the ardor of true unMonasterians. The framework and focus is to serve the people of Transmediale by offering them the (relatively feeble, but the best we got) salvation of the unMon. I will leave it to you to extract the commitments from the team. Katalin fell upon the grenade that I wrote for you in Athens: when it appeared from a distance that things were at their silliest, I wished to threaten my withdrawal. I took your retreat from the Athens house in order to immerse yourself in your (GLO) readings as a confession that you recognised the error of your ways. Your penance is only about to begin…

BEMBO TO BEN - DIATRIBE X

Br. Paul:

Isn't that interesting? Here's a little bit of philosophy about why monasticism has survived over the centuries. To put it this way, if everything depended on the abbot… Suppose you have a one-

I was just asked about the balance in unMonastery between 'sitting in circles holding sticks', and 'doing awesome stuff', and I think it's a really productive question so posting here to collect answers.
Mine were:

legged table. Well, that's not very stable, is it? What we have is a tripod, and instead of just one leg on the tripod we have… Well, what's the second leg on the tripod? Well, the second leg on the tripod is the Holy Rule. There's a structure which is given, which seems to have defined for us the structure, and actually it has defined for us a three-legged structure.

So, the abbot has to follow the Rule, he can't just arbitrarily make up new rules. I mean, make up something that would be contradictory to the Rule. So, what's the third leg? Well, the third leg is the community. The community itself is the third leg. Then you get a stable tripod, and the abbot has to listen to the community as well as to the Rule, and the community has to listen to the abbot and follow the Rule. That seems to me to have been a great reason for why the Rule of Saint Benedict has survived so long.

1) unMonastery is a product of whoever happens to be in each space and it dictates very little but hopefully provides supporting material for however you choose to run your unMoanstery. If one unMonastery happened to be 5 business guys and 5 hackers, it would have a completely different feel from 3 reiki practitioners, 3 sculptors, and 4 homeopaths, Both are completely valid instances.
2) unMonastery has some core practices like 'circles' which are about social cohesion, conflict resolution, and putting a group of people in a highly cooperative, mutually aware, mutually supportive mode of operation. We're aiming for productive, persistent spaces that exist on a 200 years+ timeline and this won't happen unless people learn how to exist together very well.
3) The initial unMonasteries have had a good amount of what you're concerned about - probably because there's a high proportion of artists, and a wise old man who comes from a theatrical background where these practices are key, but as well as sitting in circles there has been a large amount of doing incredibly awesome stuff and the core group is by far the most mutually engaged productive group of people I've ever worked with. This probably isn't a coincidence.

(UNMONASTERY DISCOURSE CONVERSATION ON UNMONASTERY PRACTICES)

Ben:

But presumably in order to make this work effectively you need a coherent decision-making process or is it done entirely through speaking to one another?

Br. Paul:

There is a voting system and we vote for the abbot to begin with. The abbot is not appointed, he's voted by the community, by the professed members of the community.

Ben:

Why do you think this is the process?

Br. Paul:

Because the abbot should be an expression of the community. Ideally he comes up out of the community, but it doesn't always happen that way. So, it's not a monarchy that we have, it's not a democracy, it's something of a parliamentary system.

There is an executive branch, there is a judicial branch, and there is a… Well, the people have a voice. And in the Rule of Saint Benedict, as you may have come across, he says: "Everybody should be listened to, even the youngest and the newest member of the community, because sometimes the Holy Spirit can speak through that person". So, there again, it basically stems from the autonomy of our monasteries. In its maturity the abbot is not appointed unless there's some dire situation; he is voted in by the community.

Ben:

There's something in respect to the Rule, and I think one of the things that people who I'm working with find most attractive is that it proposes an entirely different idea of work and life, and that those things aren't necessarily separated. There's a book that we've been reading by an Italian philosopher, Giorgio Agamben, and there was something I wanted to quote from the book, to hear your reflection or your understanding of it.

He says in reference to the Rule: "A life that is linked so closely to its form that it proves to be inseparable from it, in which both Rule and life lose their familiar meaning in order to point in the direction of a third thing. Our ~entire~ task is precisely to bring this third thing to light."

I wonder if you could illuminate maybe what Agamben means by the third thing?

Br. Paul:

Oh. Well, I like his idea that the form and the life are very, very closely associated. There again, it's an organic union that takes place. But, of course, the form is always changing too, just like life changes. I mean, the life here does not look exactly the way it did when I entered 55 years ago. I would think the third thing, that's a good question. Maybe it's best simply to leave it as an open question, unanswered. I think it's the life of the Spirit. Since the monastery is here to serve the monks, the monks are not here to serve the monastery. "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." [Mark 2:27] So, you know, the thing that's brought to life is the intangibles.

It is written that the unMonastery shall listen to its walls. It is also written that the unMonastery is neither its people nor a building. Unless we understand this subtle negotiation we cannot become the unMonastery. In each of us lies an unMonastery - it is our obsession with doing something so diffuse as 'good'. However, this is an elusive commodity. Many of us don't do collectivism; weaned out of the cult of the individual, it is our differences that claim value, while massive areas of overlap seem profoundly less interesting. It is all too easy to identify with one's personal walls.
Our work seeks to break the rule of self-management - the proceedings necessary to generate our way forward have yet to be revealed. Faith will only get you so far; we are once again left with the option of Thinking Strategically.*

(BEMBO DAVIES: UNMONASTERY WANDERINGS)

David Ridge

Seems like a long time between bell ringing and morning circle, I'd like to make the case for the circle being more important and less 'token' than an average of six minutes each or demoted to only twice a week. After all, it's really the cornerstone of silent reflection that can share the deeper stuff that has a surprising influence on how much you can recognise each other's non-instrumental value. Otherwise you're just Corporate-But-Trendy (like ERs). It is the key to bringing your being into your doing which of course makes the doing more effective and aligned with inner purpose. It's where you are practicing to stop - which makes you free from danger and able to long endure. If it makes you feel uncomfortable and unproductive to sit in a circle for more than half an hour you might be

suffering from distraction addiction or being in denial about your inner life*, in which case you should try sitting in a circle for more than half an hour to address these things. (*Inner life doesn't mean those ceaseless thoughts in your head but rather the time and attention you can give to let your awareness dissolve those thoughts and their mythical self-importance, thus creating internal space that is anything but vacuous!) Q. What 3 things does each unMonk find most nourishing in their current and recent life? Share that for starters. And try this self-acceptance rule: All Parts Are Welcome at the Circle Meetings.

People who come into these alternative spheres of co-living and co-working are outsiders and every single progressive movement comes from outsiders. But we deserve and often need a cell to retreat into solitude and privacy. It's not difficult to allocate a bedroom into a 'do not disturb' room for anyone to book on a rota during daytime or evening. Know the outsider beast, some are energised by others but need to quell that furnace sometimes, some can't handle people all their waking hours and need an indoor retreat. Not so hard to accommodate this with flexibility and the preparedness to truly recognise basic human needs.

Late working into the late evening is as much a vice as partying until dawn, it cramps conviviality and sabotages work/life balance. Again, it's not so hard to accommodate so that the communal space is ring-fenced for recreation.

(LOOMIO CONVERSATION ABOUT DAILY SCHEDULE)

Ben:

You said an interesting thing there about how the monastery is different to the way in which it was when you first entered. I've been really curious to try and understand how within an individual monastery the culture changes or evolves over time.

Br. Paul:

[laughs] Well, of course the culture changes, and the time was when we were not talking to one another. The silence was very strict, and it was pretty much the abbot running the whole show. And, of course, that's not the Rule of Saint Benedict; if you read it carefully, the Rule recommends that if not everybody's is consulted, at least the ~senior~ parts,

To me, it's apparent that a core activity that occurs in unMonastery is individual & collective learning.
This manifests in different forms; sometimes technical, other times expressive; depending on the individual capabilities that are being sought out (which influence or are influenced by a collective capability which is being built).
So, yes it is all about sitting in circles holding sticks;

the saner people, the more sensible people will be consulted by the abbot. Well, there was a time when that wasn't happening, and so as a result it set a rigid pattern. Or, it set a way of life in which there's a bit of an autocratic style of abbot. If you read the history of Gethsemani, we've had autocratic abbots, [laughs] and the monks just kind of crouched and obeyed. Then as we became more democratic as a culture, people started coming in and saying "Hey, look—you know, let's have a little say about this."

So, we started… You know, anything we've ever voted about in the past was about admitting somebody for solemn vows, a community vote had to be taken for that. And then a vote for a certain expense, beyond a certain price; the monastery itself has to agree to making a certain expense. But now, since Vatican II, we vote on a lot of different things, and so that's been an evolution. So, part of the change, evolving change comes about through the community itself, the personnel. We are not the same group of people from when I came to the monastery, I'd say right now I'd say there's about 11, maybe 15 people in the community who were here when I came, and so everybody else is new and they come in with new ideas.

The other thing is the abbot himself is… I've had five different abbots. Each one is different, each one has different ideas. He'll come with certain tastes, he'll come with certain ideas about what's the best thing to do, and if he's a smart abbot he can bring about a change. The fact that you have an abbot to begin with allows for the genius of an individual to have some sway, and I think that's a healthy thing. I mean, there's something that should be said for an abbot who's been in office for 30 or 40 years, that creates a certain kind of stability, and then you create your own comfort zone within that. But there's something else to be said about not keeping an abbot more than six or 12 or 18 years, because a person, as Father Timothy Kelly said—he was a previous abbot—an abbot has pretty much given all he has to give within the first 10 years.

when the best way to learn a collective capability in a given context (i.e. horizontal decision making, group cohesion & stability..etc.) is to sit in circles, holding sticks.
It might be that on the same day, the individual participants of that stick holding circle have also been
- relentlessly pursuing research & leads on Sociocracy;
- building websites which reflect & make sense of participatory action;
- designing objects which encourage sustainable behaviors within a collective & facilitate consensual decisions;
- perfecting a recipe for a meal, which provokes & allows those who are sharing it to discuss horizontal decision making processes further
- finding opportunities to experiment with and implement different forms of decision making in other contexts

Which came first, the individual desire to build a certain capability or the collective desire to forge a group capability?
Perhaps that's just another Strange Loop, where a discrete answer isn't all that helpful or relevant.
However, a salient consideration might be, what does unMonastery look like when the collective capability being worked on is different?
Maybe then it certainly isn't circles & sticks.

(UNMONASTERY DISCOURSE, MK)

Ben:

And how is it decided? The abbot would step down? And do they step down into the community, or do they move to a different monastery?

Br. Paul:

Oh, it can happen either way, it depends on the abbot, some of them need to go and get—sometimes the community needs for the abbot to get away. [laughs] Sometimes the abbot needs to get away. Some abbots just gracefully step down into the community. They're not allowed to get another job in the Order though. But here the decision is your main question: "How is the decision made?". It can happen through the visitation. The abbot visitator comes, he sees there's dissatisfaction, there's restlessness, and he can make a recommendation that the abbot resign.

Now since Vatican II we've had a new system. For the Holy Rule the abbot's term is indefinite—he could just go on until he dies. But there's a clause now in the constitution that when we do have an election we can decide ahead of time whether it's going to be for a limited term, and that limited term would be six years. After the six years you can make another decision whether to have another six years, or simply elect him on an indefinite term.

So, I wouldn't exactly say that the abbot is first among equals, but some abbots I'm sure try to make it that way.

Ben:

Okay, that's interesting. One of the things that people often say to us is: "Why monasticism?" like, "Why are you interested in this?"; one of the responses that we sometimes give is that the Benedictines, but also monasticism as a whole have enabled people consistently over 15 centuries to live together, in relative harmony... And this is no small feat obviously, particularly if we look at the state of the world in this moment. With respect to this I wonder whether that's a value that the monasteries espouse, and how you would relate to that as something valuable?

Bezdomny

I think we are discovering what we can do with loomio.
I also wanted to point out that there are two conversations going on here:
First, I just put an idea for a schedule (based on schedules I have had in other communities) up here for people to pick at and modify into something workable for THE ATHENS HOUSE. I wasn't trying to come up with a universal schedule for every potential unMonastery there will ever be.
The second debate that popped up was about whether a schedule is wanted or needed at all, however those of us living in Athens have realised that for THAT house there is a need for sOmE sort of a schedule. So I invite you to click on the EDIT link at the bottom of the proposed schedule and hack it to shreds until it starts to resemble something that people can live with?
NOTE: you can see previous versions of the text by clicking the EDITED button on the top right.
Once there is something people can agree on, we vote.
At least that's how I understand how to use Loomio.

(LOOMIO CONVERSATION ABOUT DAILY SCHEDULE)

Free Radicals

As yet, our movement plods. Its steps lack coordination, Momentum is built but disperses; the brilliant soloists lack the counterpoint of the equally brilliant chorus line. The choreographer sleeps in.

In these days a massive 25 km ring of machinery is gradually warming up beneath the Swiss-French Alps. Over a six-month period it shall elevate a few select electrons to a stable flow that shall reach a few permille below the speed of light. Once it reaches this unachievable level, a small range of experiments are lined up to verify or contradict the best theories that science has produced.

The unMonastery continues to operate as a postulate. Its brilliant hypothesis is built upon a 'what if we were a coordinated WE': what added value accrues the modern individualist when they eagerly join in the electron accelerator of working together? The unMonastery shall let the sparks fly, but our observance is predicat-

ed upon opening ourselves to achieving a very critical mass.

Submission is for many an unknown - the very idea hurts. Pictures of vast totalitarian parades tighten the throat. Inner conflict occurs: the mysterious virus of 'not wanting to' suddenly becomes an option.

A major premise of both monasticism and unmonasticism is that option is not an option. The choice to enter the magnetic force field of the accelerator is done at the gates -- from that point onwards any choice is no longer individual but collective. We subject our sub-atomic particles to a process. Divergence shall occur, but hopefully at full velocity in the service of the greater experiment.

The unMonastery has yet to achieve critical mass.

(BEMBO DAVIES SOMEPLACE, SOMETIME)

Br. Paul:

Oh, yes—absolutely. You know, that's part of the School of Charity. One of The Rules of Saint Benedict which calls the monastery a School of the Lord's Service, and the Cistercians came along and called it the School of Charity. So, what we're trying to do is to generate a kind of… Well, it explains itself, doesn't it?

Ben:

Maybe it doesn't. Because I wonder what you mean specifically by charity in the context of Cistercian monasticism.

Br. Paul:

Well, I would say mutual help, mutual respect and concern for one another. A common spirit, a common aspiration to live a prayer life and a contemplative life. A sense of a common root, we all come from the same tradition, and all the monasteries are trying to develop an appreciation of the Cistercian tradition.

So, there is the common life. The common life is one of the ideals of the monastery, and there is such a thing as the common life of an order, or the common life of a region. The idea of the common life is something we've always had within the monastery, but it's

Luisa

According to my ideas living in a group means to be a kind of orchestra in which the score sets the rhythm for everyone. Even if each individual has is own rhythm, we choose consciously that make a big opera, instead of a (sad blues!) solo, would be the best for us, so why we should be afraid of rules, they will just help us to play a big piece of good music.

(LOOMIO CONVERSATION ABOUT DAILY SCHEDULE)

been expanded and broadened out to interrelationship between monasteries.

Ben:

A lot of the things that you've mentioned and we've spoken about seem to me to be things that would be invaluable for people to understand in this moment, and worth learning from, particularly a younger generation. I wonder how, without people necessarily living in the monasteries, they could learn from these concepts, and do you think there's any aspiration for the values present within monasticism to permeate outside of itself?

Br. Paul:

Oh. Well yes, there's a lot of that now actually. The monasteries around the world, and a lot of it started in this country, having developed associate groups. In other words, there's people out in the world who come to us, looking to plug into what we have here. They see something vital, they see that there is a unique kind of spirituality. They want to associate themselves, and so we call them associate groups. The Abbey of Gethsemani has the Lay Cistercians of the Abbey of Gethsemani.

Ben:

That brought up something in my mind, the people that I've been living with, with whom I share a structured routine, in which a bell is rung in the morning and there's a series of rituals, and we eat together—among other aspects.

Well, and it's probably important to say, we began drawing from monasticism because of a very basic idea of autonomy, a building where non-specific things would happen but a kind of work – these were our very early, naïve ideas. But through this process, and in practicing a routine and by sharing with others on a distributed basis this routine, you begin to notice a sense of connectedness. Particularly when that routine is the same every day for three months, it completely changes your relationship to a group, but it also completely changes your relationship to the world. This though was a short-lived experience, and obviously you've been doing this for 56 years, so it's very… I can't even begin to comprehend what that feels like.

Br. Paul:

Yeah. [laughs] Yes, I think your experience has been very significant, and also very characteristic of what happens with these people who associate with a particular monastery, because… there's a history here, and I don't know if it's typical of what other associate groups do, but it's probably not too different. A lot of people began to associate with Gethsemani because of the spirit of solitude. These would be people who have come to an appreciation of solitude as an essential in their life, and they've read Thomas Merton and they realised that this is something that we cultivate.

So, as individuals they began to read Cistercian writers, and then they would come to Gethsemani and make retreats. Now, what happened over the years was that this all became more structured as time went on, and they began to realise that if you're going to be Cistercian then you have to have a community life. It's not just a matter of being solitary and living a normal life, The Cistercian life is both solitary and is also communal, and so each town, each city has made it more of a point of having all the members of this associate group get together once a month, and have prayer together and have discussion together.

06/08/2014 Interview #3

Three unMonasterians visit Fr. Cassian Folsom in Nursia
Facilitated by Nicola Alemanno the Mayor of Nurisa and Alberto Cottica, co-founder of EdgeRyders.
We have an audience after mass.

Cassian:

If I can summarise: the first question has to do with work. The value of work… Well, let me just talk about some principles about monastic work. It's true that for the monasteries there's no specific work; they can do anything. St. Benedict doesn't care if you're working in the field or working in the office or doing something strenuous or something simple. The principle is that you need to work for your own good, not for producing something. At the same time, because for St. Benedict the monastery is a self-contained unit you have to work to support that unit. But the market—I think this is important – the market is not what people want to buy or something, the market is God. That is, the monk works for God which is gratuitous of course, you can't put a price on that. And the liturgy is the centre of the monastic work..

UNMONASTERY WANDERINGS

Rebooting the Culture of the Enterprise

It has been stated repeated times that the culture of the change we represent is the first work of the Work. The how we do what we do is the key to sustaining any 'do-ocracy.'

In the Stakeholders Handbook it is announced that we exercise uRT (uncivilisation restructuring therapy ?) upon one another and ourselves. This need to unCivilise is hardly an elective squeezed into 20 minutes 5 days a week. It is rather an endless effort requiring insightful psychological support and a good sound system. One can make the case that Morning Practice lasts 16 hours a day.

A protocol that supports 'il nostro duro lavoro', a life of service and an unCivilisation regime will have at least two sides. Part of it can be interpreted as constraints: don't annoy people. However, it is not an elaborate sleight of hand to reverse these prohibitions; to read the same directions as how to best support one another's reemergence from a life of urban subjugation as : enjoy each other inordinately (in a non-annoying manner.)
Without challenging self-sacrifice, without renegotiating of the chemistry and rhythms of civilisation, without the visceral enrichment of spiritual camaraderie our circles will remain cramped and disheveled.

Ben:

I think not having God is a real problem.

UNMONASTERY DISCOURSE: THE PRESUMMIT, THE PROTOCOL, AND THE QUEST FOR THE GREATEST COMMON FACTOR AMONG UNMONASTERIANS

As much as I see that it is a danger for unMonastery that the Athenians are incapable of framing their life into something of a respectable structure, I think it is much more dangerous, because it involves everyone and cannot be solved by setting rules, to continue to

pour 10-hours 7 days a week into the unMonastery project, without a clarity about WHY, apart this being the only way we may know how to work. I can imagine waking up one day and just being fed up, realising the work, the personal losses and sacrifices that have gone into this project, and the lack of a clear vision and achievable goals. As Cristiano observed, we have a beautiful energy - but in the past weeks it has become very clear that we are not particularly good at making this energy flow in one direction and achieve things that can be accounted for as solid steps towards a shared goal.
This is the job for the preSummit, to find the shared source of the energy that makes us all working together on the unMonastery project.

Cassian:

In fact, it is. I think it's fundamental.
The question is: what is this for?

Ben:

Yeah.

Alberto:

'Each other' is a possible… it's a possible answer.

Cassian:

Well, that could be an answer. But, we disappoint each other quite a lot; it's kind of fragile. If that's the motivation then I don't think it'll last for a long time. It's good, it's a good motivation, but it's not sufficient I would say, and it's not dependable.

Ben:

Do you think it's possible through the construction of social code to be able to create a kind of surrogate metaphysical?

Cassian:

I don't. No, I don't think it's possible. I think it will break down.

It might be interesting to you – how the monastic world relates to one another, which is not in the Rule itself by the way; it developed over time. There's a kind of tension between autonomy and communion. Most of our life is about paradoxes, and about tensions and about resolving the tensions

THE UNGENERAL ASSEMBLY

We acknowledge the conceptual impossibility of satisfying all of our aspirations equally at any time. Deeply committed to the ethos of Open Source, the unMonastery movement seeks a mechanism that can preserve vital aspects of its character while fearlessly and ego-lessly enabling and empowering any party to modify it in any way they choose. The contradiction is self-evident; however, recognising that forks will occur at many junctures, we request that all further builds

in some creative way. So, each monastery jealously guards its autonomy, but we very much want to be connected with other monasteries. And so over the centuries various structures have developed, and in the Benedictine monastic world today there are about 22 monastic groupings, called congregations, each one headed by an Abbot President. So, in this way the monasteries are all linked to one another in the network, a very elaborate network, which tries to maintain those two things: local autonomy and connection with all the rest.

upon the unMonastery history form a key connection with whatever form of central reference that the internationally recognised the unGeneral Assembly deems most appropriate at the current time.

Still evolving, the unMonastery Metanational (uMM) postulates its growth into two interlinked functional groups: the unGA -- a wide membership organ that makes its voice known partially through Vilfredo,[a distributed decision making process pioneered by Edgeryder veteran Pietro Speroni di Fenizio]; for more centralised concerns and daily developments we will establish The un(Security) Council of unMonasterians, this body is responsible to the unGeneral Assembly.

The right to voice opinion in the unGeneral Assembly is open to all those who wish to claim status as true unMonasterians as either veteran co-livers or as active behind the scenes stakeholders. The unCouncil is conceived as the guardians of the unMonastery's ideals as laid out in the unCode and illuminated in the BoGLO.

Alberto:

What sort of activities do you share?

Cassian:

What you share is… information, problem-solving… mutual support. Over the centuries we developed a system of visitations - it's a kind of a quality control system. So, there are other abbots from other monasteries who can check out your monastery, and the congregation –that is this monastic family – organises those kinds of things.

Among the key developments of the two-week Berlin Summit was the liaison forged with Biohacker movement which strikes us as an area of core unMonastery research. In addition, the group was introduced to the process management tools of OOs and HAs; in preparation for the summit, a matrix of goals and activities for focussing our efforts was drawn up and presented at our last weekly group video conference before gathering. Printed up in Large in was hung on a wall in the substantial flat that 12-14 people shared a half hours walk from the Transmediale location. The key concepts extracted from this work were a concentration upon 'Obtainable Objectives', and an acknowledgement of 'Hidden Assumptions'. Both seem on their way to become pillars of the unMonastery work process. The use of the OO tool, and the ingenious rescue of the gaming scenario as a one-on-one recruitment interface using the card set are described at length in a particularly grumpy chronicle no doubt written under the influence of precious little sleep.

(UNMONASTERY DISCOURSE: THE OO TOOL)

Visitation V:

Each other is a monastic answer feverish with human failings. Although failing each other's expectation can be fruitful and productive, many monastic communities such as the Cistercians, the Franciscans, The Fathers of Jura emerged through disappointment with their predecessors, it can also unveil Saint Pachomius's paradox afresh and alone, abandoned in the desert. However I think that the 'each other' has many apparitions. Although the Rule as a document exists as an expression indirectly or directly of a relationship between an individual and God, it is also an expression of an ongoing transmission of knowledge between each other, through the texts and though a synchronized routine. The Sayings of the Desert Fathers were orally transmitted in an inhabitable environment by solitary hermit monks for centuries.

Alberto:

Let me go back to the example that you made earlier on. So, you now produce beer in your monastery. Is there somewhere where this is documented? So, "We in the monastery of Norcia have a problem of producing beer. This is how we did it, and this is what you need to watch out for if you do want to produce beer of that kind." We all do this in Wikies and stuff like that.

Cassian:

No, we haven't done that… There is a source in the monastery, we keep a chronicle. So every day there's a little indication of what happened that day. There may be entries in the chronicle about the beer producing, but that wouldn't give you much information. To answer a question like yours I would send you to another monastery with more experience.

Alberto:

Would there be anything wrong if you started like a shared… documentation on breweries in which the Belgian monks would write a chapter …

Cassian:

No, there's nothing wrong with that at all, except that takes time. We are so pressed with the immediate needs that we don't have the luxury to write a document about it. We're just working on the experience; we don't have time to write a document about it. [laughs]

Alberto:
Well, that's luxury for you. [laughter]

Cassian:
There's a human contact there in handing things on.

Alberto:
So you input the knowledge not in documents but in people?

Cassian:
In networks, yes. And some documentation too …

Alberto:
But there is a way that the drive to documentation emerged in the hacker movement is that they saw that is more efficient in terms of time. So, the same problem only gets solved once, and then it's written down somewhere and that document is accessible online. That saves you more time than actually going to Belgium and finding Brother William who…

Cassian:
But that's more fun.

unHackathon, a reverse engineering jam to strip out the gumpf from over-complex solutions & learn how they're put together.
It is a proposition to use the strategies behind the hackathon model of developing new things on existing aspects of existing organisations.
Candidates for an unHackathon might include systems, a product that's got a bit of feature creep, an organisation or service.
I've started this topic to see if others might be interested in prototyping this and defining some useful strategies / methods for its application.

**(UNMONASTERY DISCOURSE:
UNHACKATHONS - A REVERSE ENGINEERING JAM FOR SIMPLIFYING SOLUTIONS)**

Maria:
I have a question about the Rule: what do you think the Rule makes possible?

Squatting the unMon
Immediately after Berlin, a good proportion of the crew absconded to Athens for the second round of a 'scoping mission.' Given that during a vital period of BIOS production, the previous gathering of forces in Athens had not resulted in fantabulously disciplined hard work, it seemed for some a questionable idea that we would

divide our energies just when we had defined our next push as to build the uMM organisation. (Several scarcely civil Letters to the Athenians had been penned inquiring as to among other things why the lack of official unCommuniqués. Among the residual sins of omissions was that few (read as almost none) had responded to the request to contribute their perspectives to the central unMonastery reference book, BGLO; several deadlines had been silently ignored, while reports of over-exposure to ouzo reached the ears of the editorial committee.)

Among the projects pending on the unMon horizon was one based upon a hidden assumption voiced in the OO matrix designed for Berlin: that to avoid making a Protocol any longer is dangerous. It is clear that not everyone puts the same imperative in the concept. However, whether we call it unCode, unRule, unProtocol, it seems to haunt our work of the past year that the disciplines of our Benedictine predecessors are not mirrored in our daily work:
Has our endless generosity and understanding nature allowed the idea of the unMonastery to be squatted by homeless ne'er-do-wells? Do we do a disservice to future generations by not imposing upon ourselves a regime of collective focus?

The Athenians cry out: it seems they hold meetings that declare that an 0800 out-of-bedtime is more urbane than a 0700 one, yet they fail to appoint one of their number to the post of bell-ringer. How will this fare? In the Stakeholders Handbook the unMonastery acknowledges the presence of our Invisible Stakeholders: among them are The Walls we claim to listen to...

(BEMBO DAVIES: UNMONASTERY WANDERINGS)

Cassian:

The Rule makes it possible for a community of men to live together for a long time in relative peace. That's not—I mean, that's a lot, and without a Rule that would not be possible.

Alberto:

When you say the Rule works... what do you mean by that?

Cassian:

You can observe harmony and order, uni-

(Another Day, late afternoon sun at hackerspace.gr)

I write now as though it's morning, though evening

ty of life, things not being compartmentalised but united. And that's not a small thing either. Most of our lives in general are terribly fragmented. You know, we do this and then we do this and then we do this, and it's hard to see the unity of it. But in the monastery that's pretty obvious, the unity of it. Now, you pay a price for that. The price is that you can't do whatever you want, you know. There's—what the community does and then you conform yourself to that. So individualism is a bad word in the monastery. That doesn't mean neglect of individual talents and capacities and gifts and so on, but at the service of the community. To elaborate on the relationship of the monastery and to the rest of the world. Our monastery… in business language they call this stakeholders: who are the people who are interested in your activity? Well, we have to have relations with the town, with the diocese, with the Roman Curia, with the Benedictine Headquarters in Rome, with our benefactors. We have benefactors all over the world, and so development is part of the activity at the monastery too, cultivating the benefactors. And that's all in addition to running the monastery, the internal life of the monastery. So, it's very hard to maintain a balance there. The superior, his primary task is to set the tone, but to relate with the outside. Then the second person in charge actually runs the day-to-day operations.

light will soon be dying out.

How did we manage to crawl into our beds at 630am? Where did the hours between midnight and 400am go? The strongest desire for monk-like living yet, matched only by this crisis of diametrically opposed decision making.

Yiannis and Nikki are well: the elections brought 24 hour visitors to their home, the last of the visiting journalists finally cleared out by this week. It's odd returning to a degree of normality, they say, but also, firmly, "If you're asking if it's slowed down, it hasn't."

Yesterday us at the apartment had our first meeting since arriving, I think I've developed a personal allergy to such discussions even when they're pleasant, it's unfortunate. At least we reached a decision that we need to clean and should set a time to do so. Notes are here.

We set our sights on an afternoon wall-clean, but I crawled into bed for a beautiful 15 minutes to fight the cold in the apartment, and this somehow lost our momentum. We still only have paltry kitchen equipment: one breadknife, one pot, and some vegetables that are slowly going bad.

What did the night hold? I'm tiring of this narrative voice. A Veganese Valentine – we spoke with Sven, Caroline (eco bike tours) – we moved to Embryos for Commoning the Love – met two gentlemen very interested in the Project, they said we'll see you again, I said awkwardly, "It's true" – we drank some raki, some beer, crawled back to Exarcheia and took a cab home. I wore many layers to sleep, didn't dream, and woke up to James' arrival.

Found a new cafe – Strange Fruit – and sitting comfortably now in hackerspace.gr. 'Til tomorrow, this needs another way.

(UNANONYMOUS SCRIBE OF THE ATHENS UNMONASTERY, FEBRUARY 15, 2015)

Ben:

Within the unMonastery my role was to be the unAbbot. And just from my personal experience I just wondered: when you were talking about juggling and stakeholders – we say stakeholders as well all

The Invisible Stakeholders

The Masons: unMonasteries require homes. Moving into a building with previous history will demand that we study this history: someone has been here before. We must honour their labour, hopes and absence.

the time. I found that in my personal experience that I wasn't able to really represent my own view. I had to always be a representative of different stakeholders in discussion.
Is that the typical role of the Abbot, of this kind of more orbital view, and in order to ensure that the situation you have to be conscious of disagreements between individuals in the group, outside funders or developers, the groups that you're working with that you're trying to achieve certain objectives. So, when you try to resolve conflict or you try to instigate a new decision that the group's going to make rather than being like "I, as an individual, think this thing." you are like "How do I represent all of these views and then impress upon the group that they should take that direction. Is that the kind of skill and what qualifies somebody to take the role of Abbot?

The Watertable: Both upstream and downstream from the life of an unMonastery we will make an impact. Through among other processes as unMonastery Analytics we seek to maintain a radical stance in regard to our consumptive patterns.

The Future: Among those with a major stake in our success are the unborn. Whatever forms unMoansteries might take in the future it is certain that groups gathering to serve the common good from disused buildings will form a positive force in any renegotiation of civilisation.

The Smitten: Our pilot attempt to test the unMonastery idea in Matera produced one major surprise. We received truly global attention. The latent force in the imagery of revitalising a lifestyle of monastic service caused us to receive a flurry of inquiries wishing to study, visit, emulate. An open letter from a prominent Roman Catholic activist based in Ecuador to the newly elected Pope mentioned us by name. We, humbly aware that our first child-like tottering was not providing us reliable balance, were aghast but took the enthusiasm generated to reflect the pure contagious power in the idea of rebuilding an intuitively very human institution upon the foundation of a contemporary reality.

UNMONASTERY BIOS: THE STAKEHOLDERS HANDBOOK, BERLIN, 2015

Cassian:

Oftentimes there are different points of view and people don't agree with one another. We just had a council meeting yesterday, and of the four people two felt strongly this way and two felt strongly that way. Well, it's hard to make a decision that way. In any case, that's part of the Abbot's role, to create unity out of this plurality, but then when you represent the monastery to the outside you have to speak with one voice – you can't have different voices, right? So, the Abbot is the… he communicates the charism and the spirit of the monastery to the outside in these various contexts that I've described. In terms of who's qualified to do that, the trouble is: how do you learn to do those things? You can't learn from a book. The best way to learn is if you're one of the minor superiors and then with experience you learn all the different complexities, and then if the

community elects you as Abbot then you would have a certain experience behind you. There are some skills you can learn, but much of it just comes from experience. In fact, in these various congregations as I was mentioning to you: there's a meeting once a year of the Abbots. So, they get together and they talk about their problem cases and, you know, all that sort of thing. They share their experience and ask for input and advice. Or in my case: we've had several difficult situations that I didn't know how to resolve myself. So I consulted with certain Abbots – whom I've known for a long time – with much experience, even going to the United States to speak with them about certain things because it was worth the trip just so I could speak with them. So that's why this network is very helpful because we can't solve everything by ourselves.

Ben:

You're in the structure of being the Abbot. How do you deal with isolation?

Cassian:

Well, that can be a problem too, certainly. Fortunately we have a lot of collaboration in the monastery, but there are times, there are plenty of times when I feel that I just have to… I have to accept that I'm alone. But, that's why this contact with other Abbots and other monasteries is helpful because you're not completely alone.

Ben:

Can I ask a question a little bit outside of the Rule? You talk about the ideal monastery not being open to the world but to be inherently countercultural in this moment, and I wondered: what do the monasteries and the orders in this moment think about the state of the world in respect to specifically global warming?

Cassian:

I think the – this is my personal opinion – that the… The whole ecological movement, while having many valid concerns, has become a new religion, and I think it's a bit excessive. But there's not a monastic response to that, except that monks try to take care… Here's the monastic approach: for the monks there's a—because we make a vow of stability, that is we're not usually sent to other places but we

***LOCAL SURVIVAL INSTITUTE**

to renew people's belief in the inherent values of their own community.

Defining the unMon

No one will go near it. Our whole-hearted, impulsive embrace of an age-old form, would occur without being precise as to its content. At our most ingenious, we were an un-Something; the very shell of the idea was brilliant enough that we'd automatically get off to a glowing start…

In retrospect some vestigial stabs at a definition make

stay in one community… there's a love of the place. And because we love the place we want to take care of the place. And so there's a long tradition of beautifying the place or taking care of the land or taking care of the buildings – you could say taking care of the environment – because we love the place. But there isn't a monastic point of view about environmental issues per se.

one creep at their naivety: if the unMon is an alignment of empty public buildings, soaring youth under-deployment and assorted pressing needs, we could perhaps happily be a mere receptive space. However, hidden from view was the massive assumption that a gathering of alert youthful souls automatically generate good; the question of their energy efficiency possibly requiring some refinement of focus, would only arrive a bit further down the path of general enthusiasm.

The veterans in the monastic business inquired about our God: we would devoutly hop over this detail and declare ourselves 'a social clinic for the future.' Here was our greatest asset: everyone has a stake in the future, everyone could become our most gung-ho allies.

Our naivety as a community of 'Edgeryders' was also informative - riding the edge seemed noble and visionary, therefore all manner of compassionate projects belonged under this umbrella. (Including the key Edgeryders unifying thread of Social Cohesion.) However, promoting widespread social cohesion required the cultivation of internal cohesion. This took very human-sized quantities of time. We could decide to 'trust the process', but this was predicated upon having one. Painstaking work was still to be done.

If we were indeed 'a social clinic for the future' - it might be wise to articulate which future we were aligning ourselves with. At this point, a focussed clinic for social cohesion that provides services for the local community may initially impress. However, asking for specifics would not be amiss…

The Lore of the unMonastery is actually clear on this point: Civilisation is in retreat; the pressures that have flattened the political, ecological and social economies of a vast number of nations have sent hundreds of millions of people into flight. Life shall not be getting more harmonic for any of us in a hurry.

The unMonasteries are conceived as a node of potential survival, a gathering space for forces that will provide a beacon of healthy influence to both its immediate environs and an increasingly international network. They are not an exclusive members club of the digital literate, nor for the next generation of entrepreneurial whiz-kids. They wish to supply a knowledge and strat-

egy exchange, while they are reliant upon a short tangible chain to the primary producers of the food they consume and a vibrant, visceral role in the community that harbours them.

Let the work begin. A polished 'talking stone' from the ravine of Matera has been circled in Athens...

(BEMBO DAVIES, NOTES)

Somehow monastic rule as form-of-life provides a potential infrastructure for civil un-cooperation.

"Approximate duration: 3 hours," read the packaging for the tea lights we placed in the inlets of the cave's walls. As we sat on cushions in the electrically heated living room of a building carved out of porous stone, the twenty candles dimmed, leaving us in the dark after a sudden flicker. Three hours had passed, and we went to our bedrooms upstairs in Matera, Italy.

Three stories that are too big but also perhaps not big enough: anthropocene, capitalocene, and my favorite, the chthulucene, the chtonic ones, the not yet finished, ongoing, abyssal and dreadful ones, that are generative and destructive and make Gaia look like a junior kindergarten daughter.

The chthulucene might be a way to collect up the questions for naming the epic, for naming what is happening in the airs, water, and places and the rocks and oceans and atmospheres, perhaps needing both the anthropocene and the capitalocene but perhaps authoring something else [1].

The Endeavours

As monastic form-of-life can create spaces which emerge and catch the eye as extrajudicial enclaves, the theme of exile runs throughout Orders' texts: the term phygē, returns to its original meaning likening assimilation in a monastic community and thereby assimilation with God, "virtually an exile *[2]*."

Outside of exile as a punitive measure imposed upon political subjects, self-exile in the case of wanderers who have chosen an ulterior vocation need not be geographically distant but, perhaps, buried on the surface of one's local landscape.

Notes from the margin: unMonastery's virtual chambers echo with circling online communication and discussions on a future with a constantly shifting centre of gravity.

The monastic orders originate as self-styled fugitives,

un-cooperative within dominant paradigms: choosing a forma vitae teetering on the uncontrollable they commits to a firm, extra-state regimen. In this flight from an individual sphere to the establishment of a new public sphere, writes Agamben, "the fugitive appears as a true minister of the community *[3]*."

As Father Erik says in an interview to follow in this volume, his gradual turn towards monasticism, and his final taking of the vows was a process in which "vocation becomes manifest by a sort of a process of elimination, that little by little everything else just ceases to matter, ceases to be interesting, and this is the one thing."

Notes from the margin:
Exclusion of women
Fugitives in self-exile head for the most interesting point: the chthonic
Compost not posthuman, micro-chimera as ontology

Somehow monastic rule as form-of-life provides a potential infrastructure for civil un-cooperation.

Time

The posited separation of theory and practice appears heretical in the monastic tradition.

Notes from the margin:
Old enough philosophy to appear new. Create forms imperceptibly outside. The necessity of 'conceptual' as a disclaimer

These are difficult and impossible contemporary questions, but they have followed us for thousands of years. Given safe spaces to be able to continue to ask them, we must stay with the trouble.

Notes inside the margin:
Monastic form as marking, internalizing time, and introducing temporal scansion
Yes, biopolitical, but -
Trappist monks: owning means of production
What is produced in the biopolitical realm is a subjectivity only individual in its self-reparation?
But, the coincidence of word and performance, incessant prayer and liturgy, the people's work or public

Histories and Fictions

Early Christian monastic institutions took great care to document their daily habits: a time of rising, times for meals, times of solitude, prayer, and service. Their texts record

service; challenging to the form of the Church
Chthulucene as moving into a new realm of perceived global scale, SpaceVR views from the International Space Station
Spaces for interspecies cooperation
Combating learnt scarcity and precarity
Austerity imposed to make cooperation outside of time
What about reclaiming the extraterrestrial commons?
Remystification of what was in several histories of the world formerly known as property
Exit strategies of mutual aid, language and space-making
Mostly a call to not let criticality be the serpent eating its tail: microchimeras of an ambiguous idea

a strict framework upon which the cohesion of the community depended, to align individuals' habits, states and rhythms and to coordinate tasks of caring.

The monastic communities' infrastructure of commitment - from menial labor to incessant prayer - has a peculiarly shifting and tenuous nature. Any delineation between life, labour, consumption, production, service, solitude, prayer, rest, and the various manifestations of living become ruptured categories, so that some permeate others as scaffolding of desire and qualities of focus. In itself, the textual work that documents, reproduces, and translates these forms of living comprises a vital aspect of daily service. Evaluation is not a separate institutional department.

With practices of meditation on prayer interwoven and incessant in every action, permeating the raw marrow of the Order, the community, and the individual, Monastic Rule acts upon various scales of being and organisation: they are both microcosm and embodied metonym for God. A practice turns to Rule and returns again to practice, always slightly, nearly imperceptibly altered.
The knights of faith all dress in habit here.

The syncedochic and administrative hand of the Abbott lightly guides the self-governed formae vitae. As a chimera of being and organisation, monasteries' apparent dissolving of an external governing and punitive body provoked anxiety in the world outside: the enclaves became a mirage of an extrajudicial and economically sufficient space, and their continuous liturgy upset the Church's monopoly on ceremony and salvation. Monasticism appeared as non-cooperation.

Formae Vitae

Monasticism has temporal thresholds of use: what begins as documentation of practice becomes a guiding Rule for monastic orders. The momentary enunciation of vows pledges one to a continuous awareness of the Word of God. A regimented form of daily liturgy uses precise and ordered time to construct a situation for the dissolution of a concept – a presence – into every moment of living. A practice turns to Rule and returns again to practice, always slightly, nearly imperceptibly altered.

With such practices interwoven and incessant in every action, permeating the raw marrow of the Order, the community, and the individual, Monastic Rule acts upon various scales of being and organisation: they are both microcosm and embodied metonym for God. The shared liturgy as that peculiar form of practice and production shifting internal and external boundaries, the spiritualization of one's labor, one's hands' work – these movements presage the imminent popular reform movement of the church, and almost mirror today's discourse of institutional biopolitical control.

Yet throughout Giorgio Agamben's work on Christian monasticism, The Highest Poverty, a certain historical and semantic analysis produces the Monastic Rule as an unusual formal system, explicit in its aims and resisting obvious ideological classification. The evolution of monastic texts, from the rules of the Desert Mothers to Pachomius, St. Benedict to St. Francis, display and revolve around the consistent tension of rule and life. The Rule often treats the terms as interchangeable and at other moments, in precarious juxtaposition. What emerges is a form-of-life, forma vitae, in which the Rule corresponds so closely with living itself they nearly coincide.

The form-of-life dictated by a rule so close to its enactment – enunciated and validated only through its practice – as to be coinciding with vivere or vitae appears as a totality, or Way. The inherent orality of the Rule presupposes its reading aloud, and its speaker always acts as a conduit. The Rule is producing and produced by a way of life: a form of subjectivity that evades

Notes on the margin:
Battle partially lost as poverty tried to be translated into legal terminology
Some of today's linguistic multipliers: coworking, startup, platform, network; how these words tacked onto VC flows and created spaces
Precarity remodeled as indecision

the classically empiricist notion of selfhood, pointing to a third thing through its coinciding and dissolving dichotomy of rule and life.

One could dangerously claim the morality situates itself between text-practice and form-life without exterior juridical imposition. Where, then, does the law carry itself out? Records quote Saint Francis of Assisi as an abbott refusing to chastise his brothers.

Rituals of Labour

The coincidence of practice and text, in part, enabled the proliferation of established monastic enclaves throughout the late Christian era. The Bible provided a foundation upon which the Rule carved axioms to facilitate the growth of a network of autonomous spaces. The Bible, the Rule, and their practice stood as the commonality among Orders, established and nomadic.

Proximities of language and practice bolster contemporary trends of precarious labor: work spaces for freelancers, startups and the occasional community become a dominant theme in urban environments. Hubs, coworking spaces, maker spaces, open labs, and the like offer new, sanctioned and assemblage-driven offices. The bricolage of projects and their workers often gather monthly in circles to beg decisions by consensus or consent: "Do we want more plants?" These precarious, sometimes privileged, workers seek new enclaves to practice labor: the language of collaboration and community multiplies their ideas, as part of a dominant ideology, and the language works to initiate new spaces. Hackerspace design patterns supplement their ideal of infinite scalability, the most seductive fractal blueprint of late capitalism.

To what do we work in service? The language of collaboration latches onto flows of desire carrot-sticked by venture capital and seed funding. These

new forms allow the promise of the next, better thing and, simultaneously and seamlessly, the horizontal, networked plateau: attainment and decentralisation. The incessant prayer of progress for its own sake, to make things slightly better - the only metaphysical foundation, perhaps - is not always conscious.

This enables some learning, but to what do we work in service? Architect-academic Keller Easterling writes in Extrastatecraft of multipliers and switches: forms of infrastructure that influence and propagate circuits of information at varying scales. The elevator acted as a multiplier for the skyscraper. Language, too, acts as a technology of multiplication. "Managementese," the language of corporate certification and quality is both produced by organisations like the International Organization for Standardization and continues producing offspring organisations in its wake, as well as the set of corporate practices eager for their validation *[4]*. The forms of language we use, as transmutations of our and others' desire, act as multipliers when they attach to capital, infrastructure, and identity.

For what, or how, do we desire? Christopher Alexander's design pattern framework knew this tendency well, delineating situations in two columns: question, situation or problem elucidated on the left and a prototyped solution on the right. Suggestive axioms combined with formal frameworks scale in development endeavours. As unMonastery had an unexpected birth, several initiators of the project fell in love with the Benedictine Rule, a poetry of design pattern and protocol meant to make explicit the internal workings of an institution and to guide its reproduction.

There is no separation between theory and practice: we've simply allowed too many institutional and academic enclaves with Rules that stipulate only the reading of the Rule, whilst sidelining the culture and the moments outside of explicit enunciation. From here, instead, we can look to strengthen continual movements to make languages for spaces for languages of common practices. It can be forms uninitiated.

What are the phrase-practices we can document, the desires we can give nomenclature while keeping their open secrets, as space-making cover, lines in the sand, the Temporary Temples, meeting ground for desert hermits and Pope Joans? There are vital fragments of communities spread across platforms and discussions, but I don't believe we've yet reached that temporal threshold in which they become explicit, networked options. Are these forms made to hold?

Somehow monastic rule as form-of-life provides a potential infrastructure for civil un-cooperation.

[1] **Donna Harraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble" (presentation, Anthropocene: Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet, Santa Cruz, California, May 9, 2014).**

[2] **Giorgio Agamben, The Highest Poverty, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013), 51.**

[3] **Ibid, 50.**

[4] **Keller Easterling, Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space (London, United Kingdom: Verso 2014).**