

# **THE UNMONASTERY TESTLAB MANUAL**

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The unMonastery<sup>2</sup> aims to grow a network of resilient and experimental living spaces<sup>3</sup>.

Extrapolating from the framework of genuine monastic practice, the unMonastery seeks to channel the efforts of a generation of the overeducated and underemployed into strategically meaningful work by rekindling service-oriented communities as an honorable, viable way of personal and species survival.

The first unMonastery experiment took place in Matera, Italy in the early spring of 2014. For a period of six months, relative strangers lived and worked together on a modest per diem. The results were maddening, a gloriously massive project squeezed into a tiny framework; during the process this group experimented with ways of working and living together from morning rituals to unusual, though sometimes post-it ridden, working sessions.



The Testlab Manual is penned by several participants of this initial organ. Two years later, we find ourselves still obsessively working on the unMonastery. Though we do not have a set physical location, we have produced sprawling textual records, from the Book of Greater and Lesser Omissions chronicling the days of Matera, to the Code/un-

Code collection reflecting on contemporary monasticism and distributed group alignment.

Part of the Scriptorium, this manual is the latest addition to our ever-growing collection of works. It is an even-paced attempt to provide an introduction to unMonastery ideas to date and define suggestive guidelines for starting a collective living space within the unMonastery network.

## WHAT, EXACTLY, IS A TESTLAB?

The appearance of the Testlab neologism seems uncanny within a repertoire of un's.<sup>4</sup>

Nearly six months after the doors closed in Matera, many of those who lived and work amidst the city's caves found themselves in Athens, Greece. Not yet having established an unMonastery that represents the initiative's long-term focus and aiming to enable agency for unMonasterians to start spaces, we discussed the idea of Testlabs: smaller and iterative collective living experiments that focus on unMonastery practices and specific areas of research, which can fold into the broader unMonastery concept<sup>5</sup>.

In a simple statement on a complex<sup>6</sup> organ, the unMonastery Testlab is a collective living space in which a group of people commit to a self-defined routine, collective budgeting for shared resources, and collaborative projects. The Testlab concept aims at starting small, building stable, resilient relationships within groups and with your local community, and growing *long*.

We recognise that the impetus and practicalities of establishing such a living system are a significant undertaking.

1 The Minor Manifesto:

2 We believe that the dislocation of ethics and politics from the sphere of action to that of form of life represents the most demanding legacy of monasticism, which modernity has failed to recognize. What is at stake is life and the way of living - not the rule, but the life, not the ability to profess this or that article of faith, but the ability to live in a certain way, to practice joyfully and openly a certain form of life.

3 We hope to create a space in which life itself is presented as art, not through the aesthetization of our existence, but by redefining life as a never-ending practice.

4 By shifting the ethical problem from the level of the relation between norm and action to that of form of life, we follow the monastic tradition of refusing to accept the dichotomies of rule and life, universal and particular, necessity and liberty.

5 We acknowledge that the aporia of the unMonastery is the establishment of a sphere of the We within which the transformation of human practice can take place. There are no recipes for this unresolvable difficult question. Our only promise is that we record and share our experiments.

6 We accept that what is in question is the "political" opposition between order and disorder, governance and anarchy, stability and nomadism.

For this reason we do not prescribe a fixed inflexible step by step manual; rather within this document, we offer guidance for the conditions under which we fundamentally believe a healthy unMonastery could emerge. These can be a desire to build something with the surrounding community or with an aim to improve and adapt existing collective living spaces.

Each unMonastery Testlab is recognised as its own autonomous experiment, but we postulate the value of coordinated efforts and consider it desirable that Testlabs avoid reinventing the wheel.

## WHERE WE GATHER: TESTLAB LIVING SPACES<sup>7</sup>

“What should come first? Infrastructure or projects? - Make everything infrastructure-driven. Rooms, power, servers, connectivity, and other facilities come first. Once you have that, people will come up with the most amazing projects you didn’t think about in the first place.” Hackerspace Design Patterns: The Infrastructure Pattern

There is a tendency of groups, often when they meet on the full moon, to have Magnificent ideas and launch straight to the sky.

We suggest creating open infrastructure first. Focusing on mutually building a living environment to support the security of your fellow unMonasterians and wider community provides solid ground on which to grow and establish an appropriate launch pad.

### SUGGESTED INITIAL INFRASTRUCTURE<sup>8</sup>

- Secured Space for a 1-year Period
- Resources for 6-Months of Living Costs (Greater or less depending on the timeframe of your experiment, with contingency resources for an additional 1-Month

<sup>7</sup> The unMonastery is suspended between the desire for an “exile from the world”, which is first of all a political gesture equivalent to the constitution of a new community, and the commitment to a life of service, which we acknowledge as the only possible response to the unfolding global catastrophe of climate change.

<sup>8</sup> We strive for the monastic ideal of total mobilization of existence through time.

period)

- Designate the Kitchen as the heart of the building
- Common Room within the Living Space
- 4-7 Human Beings
- Well-Defined Decision Making Process
- Well-Defined Collective Budgeting Process
- Well-Defined Set of Shared Collaborative Tools
- Implement a Zero Waste system
- Local Infrastructure Map Using the SCIM Framework (resiliencemaps.org)

### MINIMAL VIABLE POETRY

Collectively written Declaration of Vision  
Collectively defined Routine, Practices and Evaluation Rhythms  
unMonastic Research Proposal with hypothesis and tangible experimental method

We have living archives for what feels poetically correct; some practices may only be possible through face-to-face transmission.

## HOW WE GATHER: TESTLAB LIVING RHYTHMS

// RITUAL AND THE CONSCIOUSNESS MONOCULTURE BY SARAH PERRY ON RIBBONFARM //

We pose everyday shared rhythms<sup>9</sup> as an active research question within the unMonastery proposition.

Inspired by research into monastic routine, our goal is to bring to light a viable community model where a daily practice feeds into and resuscitates a collective metabolism.

At this early stage in your proceedings, it would make for a horrendous and naive error in judgement to avoid reading *The Benedictine Rule* before setting out any intended routine; careful observation of the scripture will reveal that the monastic tradition has been sustained over 17 centuries due to its unwavering commitment to a shared

<sup>9</sup> Our goal is to establish a live habit which can become a stable and absolute constitution of mind or body.

ecstatic rhythm in community life.

In several periods of unMonastery cohabitation so far, the question of routine has bound some groups together, while disjointed others. The answer is open, but iterative; so far the collective practices that we’ve found significant are discussed in depth in the *Daily Routine* chapter of the **Design Pattern Workbook** and **Book of Greater and Lesser Omissions**. (See also **Chronicle of the unRuly, Volume one: Code/unCode** for a persuasive unravelling of any resistance to this need.)

By way of example, it may be helpful for us to share the punctuation points of the daily rhythm established during the Matera prototype. Consider these for orientation, not necessarily for replication:

Wake-up Bell, Day Closing Bell

There may be a physical bell, rung at the beginning of the day to wake everyone up, and reverberating at the end of the day as a sign for guests to leave, to ensure enough time for rest.

Shared Meals

A functional hearth is the physical foundation of a home, the kitchen occupies this vital space. The culture of shared meals, cooking and eating together are nutritious beyond body chemistry; simple tools like the kitchen rota facilitate fine tuned cooperation.

Circles

Groups meet. Borrowing from open space technology, the circle is the basic form underlining all forms of participatory process. The use of seated circles, morning and evening, serve as check-in moments for the group to share their current state and align understanding.

Morning Practice

Group communication comes at different tempos. An active collective morning practice, whether it is meditation, stretching, or yelling jubilantly into the caverns below, can help tweak the ensemble and dismantle the ethos of individualism.

The Weird Stuff

The unMoaners may yet reveal themselves as devout animists. They believe in talking stones and memory laden walls, they consider our ancestors as ‘invisible stakeholders’. We train to download our thoughts from their immediate source, not from a memory bank of rehearsed patterns or a personal library of certified theories.

HOW WE METABOLISE: EVALUATION AND DOCUMENTATION<sup>10</sup>

As part of an ongoing process we collect, refine and share practices of interest in varied fields of research and aspects of life. Our goal is to develop a comprehensive how-to library for living together, a contemporary unCivilisation survival guide, without building on commonly held assumptions about resources and entitlement.

OUR BIOS	RHYTHMS	METERS
The Book of Greater and Lesser Omissions <i>bGLO</i>	Circles <i>bGLO: Volume II, The Circles</i>	Food Analytics <a href="https://bios.unmonastery.org/templates">bios.unmonastery.org/templates</a>
Stakeholders’ Handbook <i>SHB</i>	Daily Practice <i>DPW: Daily Rituals - Routine</i>	Networked Devices <a href="https://MAZlzone.eu">MAZlzone.eu</a>
Process Map <a href="https://bios.unmonastery.org">bios.unmonastery.org</a>	Guest Protocol	Decision Making Processes <i>DPW: Decision Making Process</i>
Code/unCode	Pilgrimages	Itself
Design Pattern Workbook <i>DPW</i>	unCivilisation Readjustment Therapy <i>bGLO ##</i>	
The Testlab Manual <i>TLM</i>		Zero Waste System <i>DPW: Zero Waste</i>
The Minor Manifesto	Occupancy Calendar <a href="https://bios.unmonastery.org/templates">bios.unmonastery.org/templates</a>	Budgeting <a href="https://bios.unmonastery.org/templates">bios.unmonastery.org/templates</a>
The Game	The Almanac	Resource Sharing <a href="https://Cobudget.co">Cobudget.co</a>

HOW CAN WE BE OF SERVICE?

unMonastery Testlabs can expect support and generous evaluation from the unMonastery central organ, referred to as unMonastery Metanational or the unMonastery Deep Time Bank, depending on who you ask. This constitutes the legal and administrative wing of the unMonastery effort, ensuring individual and broader unMonastery initiatives are able to receive and distribute resources.

10 We think of life as that which is never given as property but only as a common use.

Support can be in the form of a sustained residency at an active unMonastery or a dedicated guide or a foundational workshop to help refine the Testlab's obtainable objectives and hidden assumptions.

## **PRACTICAL WAYS (AS OF NOW) THAT YOU CAN ENGAGE THE PROCESS:**

You can reach out for support in your efforts by emailing [deeptime@unmonastery.org](mailto:deeptime@unmonastery.org) or posting in public on [discourse.unmonastery.org](https://discourse.unmonastery.org).

Medium: [medium.com/unmonastery](https://medium.com/unmonastery)  
Twitter: [@unmonastery](https://twitter.com/unmonastery)  
Facebook: [facebook.com/unmonastery](https://facebook.com/unmonastery)  
Loomio: [organ.unmonastery.org](https://organ.unmonastery.org)

## **THE (IM)PLAUSIBLE FUTURES OF LIVING TOGETHER<sup>11</sup>**

"It matters what stories tell stories, it matters what thoughts think thoughts, it matters what worlds world worlds." Donna Harway, Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene: Staying with the Trouble

In the next decades, solar power will surpass fossil fuels as the cheapest energy source, a majority of the population will be online via smartphones, automation will become prevalent in the workplace and sea levels will rise globally. To promote deep consideration of these systemic changes, Testlabs offer a home for the research and development of reality-shattering projects that address needs for seven-generation sustainability and interspecies cooperation.

In light of pressing planetary transitions, your vision and tempo may be focused on the hearth, seeking a way of living differently, or foresee massively cooperative futures. No matter the scale interplanetary or nearly imperceptible of the intention you place on the living spaces you create, we advise you to take James C. Scott's planning suggestions into account:

<sup>11</sup> We research the form-of-life, that is, a human life removed from the grasp of the law, and a use of bodies and of the world that would never be substantiated into an appropriation - an ongoing critique of the operative and governmental ontology that continues, under various disguises, to determine the destiny of the human species.

*Take small steps.* In an experimental approach to social change, presume that we cannot know the consequences of interventions in advance.

*Favor reversibility.* Prefer interventions that can be easily undone if they turn out to be mistakes.

*Plan on surprises.* Choose plans that allow largest accommodation to the unforeseen.

*Plan on human inventiveness.* Always plan under the assumption that those who become involved in the project later will have or will develop the experience and insight on the design.



## **WAYPOINTS AND GUIDES<sup>12</sup>**

Each of us is shaped by the words, concepts and ideas we digest and exchange. Models and fictions can play a major role in shaping an unMonasterian, though it is an impossible task to list all inspirations. These are a series of organisations, initiatives and works that may offer greater insight and external points of reference for the companionship under which the unMonastic life takes flight.

### **LIVING SPACES AND HYBRID ORGANISATIONS**

**Calafou** is a post-capitalism, ecoindustrial living initiative. The intent is to develop a connected community based on a network of cooperatives, individual projects and housing in a collectivised area. The space hosts FairCoin and Simbiotica.

**Enspiral** is a virtual and physical network of people working together to create a thriving society. Developers of open source software like Loomio and Cobudget, Enspiral is a decentralised organisation whose blueprint for practices, protocol and resource distribution are openly published on [github.com/enspiral/guides](https://github.com/enspiral/guides).

**Robin Hood Coop** aims to use financial technologies to democratize

<sup>12</sup> End of the Minor Manifesto (REFERENCE: Each point of the Manifesto is an extraxt/mix from Giorgio Agamben's *The Highest Poverty*)

finance, expand financial inclusion, and generate new economic space. The activist, co-operative hedge fund has a growing member base of 600 participants distributed globally, who make decisions on how to allocate profit to commons projects.

**Las Indias** is the egalitarian and transnational community of people who, since 2002, have promoted the Group of Cooperatives “las Indias”. Their text, **The Book of Community**, is recommended reading for long term perspective on community growth.

**Cyberhippietotalism** is a tactical class platform, researching and building Hackbases = hacker live-in labs.

**EarthSkyLab** re-imagines how we live and work together, combining the best of modern life with the peace & joy of living in a house you own, surrounded by nature, friends and a thriving, creative, community.

## RESOURCES

**Appropedia** is a wiki site for the Appropriate Technology movement focused on collaborative solutions in sustainability, poverty reduction and international development through the use of sound principles and the sharing of wisdom.

**SCIM** Simple Critical Infrastructure Maps is a Creative Commons licenced mapping and analysis tool for evaluating personal and social resilience. It is intended to be used for planning, and is simple enough to learn during a crisis to facilitate cooperation and effective response.

**Open Source Ecology** is developing open source industrial machines that can be made for a fraction of commercial costs, and sharing our designs online for free. The goal of Open Source Ecology is to create an open source economy

**Augmented Ecology** tracks developments in an emerging branch of the anthropocene; the intertwining of data and media systems with ecosystems.

## ESSENTIAL TEXTS

### ***The Highest Poverty*, Giorgio Agamben**

A reading of Western monasticism from Pachomius to St. Francis. The book reconstructs in detail the life of the monks with their obsessive attention to temporal articulation and to the Rule. A key for gaining an understanding of daily rhythms and rituals.

### ***The Tyranny of Structurelessness*, Jo Freeman**

An essay reflecting on the experiments of second wave feminism in resisting the idea of leaders and discarding any structure or division of labor; however, “this apparent lack of structure too often disguised an informal, unacknowledged and unaccountable leadership that was all the more pernicious because its very existence was denied.”

### ***Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, James C. Scott**

Scott traces the vision and repercussions of large scale state and utopic development projects. The vision of a ‘state’ ultimately reduces complex,

living systems to measurable and reproducible increments through scientific laws, and their ability to acknowledge metis, the knowledge that can only come from practical, immediate experience.

### **The Benedictine Rule**

A highly detailed rulebook from the 9th century, describing how to run a Benedictine monastery, written in stern patriarchal tone and offering seriously out-of-date methodology to keep order. Learn from its scale and simplicity but use with extreme caution and evaluate in counsel with monks of the present day.

### **Improv, Keith Johnstone**

Offering tools to unleash the unconscious, a near-scientific approach.

### **Immediatism, Hakim Bey**

A clear, concise and operationalised manifesto for surviving the present dark age. “...something to be shared freely but never consumed passively, something which can be discussed openly but never understood by the agents of alienation, something with no commercial potential yet valuable beyond price, something occult yet woven completely into the fabric of our everyday lives.”

### **Tools for Conviviality, Ivan Illich**

An attempt to turn back the wave of industrialisation, and post-industrialised society and its effort to strip know-how and ancient knowledge from our everyday lives. Illich’s work sets the foundations for an understanding of how an expanded definition of tools can be formed through time.

### **Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space, Keller Easterling**

It’s never knowing *what* but knowing *how*. Easterling lays out a transferable framework and way of seeing infrastructure that imparts to the reader the ability to comprehend the world-shaping qualities of standards, regulations and the assemblage of forms that makes up international and extranational development.

### **Tempo, Venkatesh Rao**

An analysis of narrative decision making based on establishing different rhythms for different phases of *the process*.

### **The Companion Species Manifesto, Donna Haraway**

A way of living together amidst difference. A reevaluation of domestication and coevolution, kinship, training, obedience and the soul. An unavoidable manifestation of the dynamics that will underpin how we navigate and fare as a species throughout the next century, at least.

### **The Dispossessed, Ursula Le Guin**

An ambiguous utopia.

### **Anathem, Neal Stephenson**

Some time in the deep future - in the wake of by-gone eras in which highly evolved elite monastic orders ruled and were dispossessed in limbo - once again the controlled, subsumed, hidden but still enormous potential of the few remaining monasteries is required - to save the world.

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## OPEN QUESTIONS<sup>13</sup>

Your inscriptions on the wall.

Testlabs are independently funded research projects that implement specific elements of the unMonastery practise as a way of getting further faster. Testlabs are admittedly a strategic half-measure. A full unMonastery initiative may be daunting; it may be too soon to win the support of your community. At the same time, many a local project can benefit from the impetus of the unMonastery model in Testlab proportions.

\* What do you have?

Stakeholders:

An in-house local problem:

Material and personal resources:

A Research Proposal<sup>14</sup>:

\* What is your vision? If you have a compass, what is your shifting north pole?

\* What do you see as the most pressing questions and critical needs at individual, group and global scales?

\* How and why do these answers differ for different scales?

\* Where is there contradiction; where is there cooperative ignorance?

\* What steps do you believe can be taken to ensure a continual increase in the diversity and plurality of your work and those that come to it?

\* In what ways will your Testlab experiments extend and enhance the capabilities of unMonastery network overall? How do you see yourselves contributing to a shared vision?

<sup>13</sup> cave.unmonastery.org

<sup>14</sup> Re our age-old adage of 'Mining the Metaphor' that opens the BGLO --- It seems to me that the Research Question is central. It may be implicit in all that you write, but I'd like to see it punched up earlier that the TestLab is the home of pristine, scientific experiment and that each TestLab explores its own hypothesis. The research proposal and chosen methodology are literally the defining moments of each Testlab and our way of appraising their viability.