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Studying Rome While It Burns

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Abstract: The call for papers for this Special Issue Iidentifies contemporary humanity as experiencing a global "biogeochemical . . . political, economic, technological, ethical, and therefore, biocultural" crisis and asks scholars to consider how "religion may function as an adaptive or maladaptive presence" in response. Unasked is the adaptive capacity of scholarship as a crisis response. When buildings fall in earthquakes, or cities burn in wildfires, or second stories flood, few people just keep on doing what they were doing, "with a change of focus". This is "studying Rome while it burns". It's time to put out the fire if we can and survive it if we cannot. We scholar/teachers can't go on doing the same things and expecting different results. Unprecedented circumstances call for unprecedented actions in response. What would actual crisis responses on our part look like? What steps do we need to take as human beings in response to this crisis? How will that affect us as professionals? Seeking an ecology, rather than unanimity, of action and thought, and guided by Brian Walker's resilience theory and a number of Indigenous scholars, I suggest a process of reintegration, analogous to regenerative agriculture, which is at once both socio-cultural and ecological. This process, necessarily rooted in place, progressively situates us experientially in a dynamic, creative, and relational world characterized by connection, collaboration, and relation. As scholars, we will find forms of discovery, discussion, and dissemination that share these qualities. As teachers, we will model this world to our students and embody it in our classrooms and curricula.

Keywords: reintegration; disintegration; regeneration; climate change; academy; higher education; religion; resilience; relationality; ecology

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This article was written on ancestral, unceded lands of the central Kalapuya (Santiam, Lukamiute, and others), currently adjacent to the Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde. (Lewis (Grande Ronde) 2023).

I have used the phrase "studying Rome while it burns" several times in conference presentations and private conversations over the past few years and received a tremendous resonance, especially among junior scholars. They tell me that in order to make a living in the Academy[1], they are forced to hide their genuine convictions and actual understandings in order to conform to an Academic normalcy, which is the only path to sufficient employment. They are separated, dominated, and controlled by the Academy, forced to pretend that their "studies" are powerful responses to climate crisis and/or social injustice, lest they fade into the obscurity of unemployment. This process begins early, at least in high school, and earlier for others. It's a project to earn a Ph.D., an appointment, and possibly tenure. There's a lot of pain there. Since separation, domination, and control characterize the forces driving a crisis, it's unlikely an institution that requires its participants to submit to them can help us overcome that crisis. I don't think I could have written this paper and submitted it for publication while I was still employed in (rather than retired from) the Academy. It's an initial step on my part to put down my fiddle and notice the fire. So, while "Studying Rome While It Burns" was written in response to the call for papers for a Special Issue of *Religions*, it is not in conformity with that call.[2]

Despite the journal's name, I do not address "religion" or associated concepts in this text, which presents a meta-critique of the Academy. Why submit it here? Most simply, because I have spent a career a career studying, writing, and teaching about religion, and, increasingly, about ecology and religion.[3] In writing to scholars of religion, I am addressing colleagues, many of whom I know, many more whose publications I have read. We attend the same conferences, peer review each other's work, and collaborate to shape the field. When I call for "us" to have conversations, I am thinking specifically of these colleagues, as well as the broader Academic community. The call for papers for this Special Issue begins by asserting that we live in the midst of a "biogeochemical ... political, economic, technological, ethical, and therefore, biocultural" crisis, with which I wholeheartedly agree.[4] It goes on to claim that the urgency of the crisis calls for an equally urgent response by humanities scholars. Again, I agree completely: we need all hands on deck. Then, though, it begins to wander off course, insisting that "the field of religious studies/theology (sic)" must do the same, without considering whether those fields could be more part of the problem than of its solution.

Continuing in this vein, the call goes on to describe arenas in which investigations might be pertinent (theology, sociology of religion, whether climate change and its associated discourses are affecting religion, and vice versa). Becoming more specific, it asks religion scholars to continue our customary scholarly activities while pivoting our focus to climate-crisis-related materials. We are invited to engage in a 25-year retrospective of a key figure, to analyze an important scientific text in the light of theoretical material in ecology and religion and/or post-colonialism, to critique religious studies for not considering how climate change affects religion, to consider how climate change affects religion (as apocalyptic imagination or (non)adaptive response), to consider energy as a formative factor in the development of religion, as well as the religious and religious-adjacent motivations of climate activists, or maybe provide a biography of a "climate activist" (Levasseur 2023).

All in all, it reads like any of dozens of calls for papers I've read, focused on a wide variety of special topics.[5] It's hard to understand how this constitutes crisis response. When buildings fall in earthquakes, or cities burn in wildfires, or second stories flood in hurricanes, few people just keep on doing what they were doing "with a change of focus". What would an actual crisis response on our part look like?

While the call for papers asks how "religion may function as an adaptive or maladaptive presence" in response to the crisis, it fails to consider whether "humanities scholars", "religious studies and theology", or "the Academy" function or can function adaptively or maladaptively. When it insists that humanities scholars must "urgently address" the climate crisis in scholarship and teaching, it assumes that humanities scholarship and teaching will be, or at least can be, adaptive, and that it could constitute part of an adequate crisis response. I am not so sure; I would like us to pause to consider the question.

In light of the crisis announced by the call for papers, human beings, whatever our professional practices and identities, must urgently respond to our common crisis, especially those of us with prestige, power, position, and privilege.[6] What steps do we need to take as human beings? How will that affect us as professionals?

In *A Natural History of the Future*, Rob Dunn[7] wrote about the gap between what climate change professionals say in public and what they plan for in their own lives. "Most people who study climate change" support "the best possible outcomes" in their public and professional roles, but their private and personal plans show that they expect much worse. They look at properties in "say Sweden or Canada", and ask questions about year-round flowing water and the likelihood that malaria will move into the neighborhood. "With insider information and disposable income, they are preparing in advance to flee" (Dunn 2021, pp. 96–97). I wonder how many of us are among their number?

Earth's life pattern is near or may already have passed tipping points whose cascading effects are likely to create new ecological conditions that are substantially less hospitable to humans than those we now experience. Our species is at some risk, and civilization ("city-based culture") is likely in for a very rough ride. Yet I believe in our capacity to respond adaptively, creatively, compassionately, realistically, and successfully to the crisis. In so doing, and in order to do so, we will have to address the domination of the many by the few as well as the ecological behaviors that engender climate change, not least because they are so intertwined. We have no choice but to rely on one another. Solidarity and compassion are prerequisites. On the other hand, our ancestors lived through ice ages. So let's get on with it!

The complexity and intensity of the crisis suggest that rather than finding "solutions", we likely need to learn and practice adaptive creativity for the foreseeable future. We know what we're trying to accomplish. We want our lifeways to enhance the complexity, bio-diversity, abundance, and resilience of the places we inhabit in support of our own thriving.[8] We know it's possible for humans to do so: the Amazon rainforest, the great North American forest and plains, the North California coastal mountains and hills, and boreal Europe are all examples (Curry 2021; Berkes 2018, pp. 47–50; Paschall 2022; Meyer 2017). Unfortunately, the lifeways that dominate today lead instead to ecological degradation and social injustice.

Responding to this crisis calls for an ongoing creativity that has not been scholarship's stock-in-trade. Despite the hopes expressed in the call for papers, it is not clear whether the Academy can contribute to adaptive responses or if Academics can use our Academic training and institutional and public roles to do so.[9] After all, education, including higher education and the Academy, is fully implicated in developing and maintaining these dominant and degrading lifeways. Currently, working in the Academy requires scholar/teachers to act in ways that exacerbate the crisis and our teaching encourages and prepares students to do likewise.

In "Is Decolonizing Education Possible?", Darlene Lane Santa Cruz (Chicanx/Tarajumara/Eudeve/Opata) described education in the United States as one of four primary institutional contexts of the dominating culture, along with economics, politics, and medicine (Santa Cruz 2020b, pp. 125–26). Taken for granted, these institutional contexts inescapably structure everyday life and experience; their existence and assumptions are part of our almost unconscious background. The Academy, or some Academics, may fancy higher education as a special place of resistance, liberation, or transformation, as I once hoped, but it is not. There are, of course, individuals and groups in the Academy who are resistant, liberatory, and transformative, and we might note that economics, politics, and medicine can tell liberatory and transformative tales of themselves as well. But the Academy is no more likely than they are to lead us to social and ecological wellbeing. As Gregory Cajete (Tewa) puts it, "the only real opportunity for deep holistic learning is when one exits the system intentionally, or by accident or through failure" (Cajete 2020b, p. 197).[10]

It is also true, in my experience, that the most "resistant, liberatory, and transformative" people working in the Academy are deeply aware of and distressed by the ways in which their work is distorted and restricted by its inherence in the Academy. We seldom talk of these things openly, but early in the morning at conferences, when we share late-night snacks and thoughts before retiring, or sometimes when walking in relative solitude in a forest or at a beach, we talk with one another. Few indeed would claim they are doing the work they most believe in, or which they would do "if they could". This has been as true of agroecologists, appropriate technologists, biologists, and chemists as of social scientists and humanists, and as true of professionals in student success and academic support as of faculty members.

Returning to Dunn, we can get a sense of the magnitude of the disconnect between the call for papers (and Academic normalcy in general) and the reality of crisis. Suppose we give up on the "best possible outcome" mentioned above. Simply to stop increasing the rate at which we are making things worse "requires radical change . . . If you are living a lifestyle even remotely similar to the life you were living ten years ago, with regard to diet, travel, daily transportation or heating and cooling, you are unlikely to be on this trajectory" (Dunn 2021, p. 96). What lifestyles are we living? What lifestyles do our institutions prepare graduates to inhabit? To aspire to? Are we responding to crisis? Are we teaching our students to live amidst and respond to crisis?

It might seem best simply to leave the Academy and go elsewhere to seek solutions to social–ecological crisis. But where? We all need to make a living, and there are few opportunities to do so that do not contribute to crisis. Flooding the streets with unemployed Academics doesn't seem effective. To the extent that we have to replicate crisis-producing habits in order to get and stay employed, so be it. I did so, and I am free to write as I do because I'm retired. But let's recognize and admit to our subjugation. Let's not succumb to cognitive dissonance and believe we're being rewarded by the dominating culture for challenging or transforming it. Then, we can collaborate to find the opportunities we do have to respond to crisis and help our students do so as well.

If Academics are to contribute to adaptive responses to climate crisis, we must simultaneously address human (personal) as well as Academic (professional) issues in their complex interrelationship with (or non-distinction from) one another. We'll have to do this individually, with one another (collegially), and with our students (pedagogically). This isn't too surprising, since separation and division are hallmarks of maladaptation, while relationship and participation lie at the root of adaptation.

I come to these conclusions in part on the basis of works by some Indigenous scholars of Indigeny, as well as the resilience theory of Brian Walker (Walker and Salt 2006, 2012).[11] With, e.g., Geoffrey Benjamin, I use Indigeny to refer to a place-based, community-of-beings experience of the world and to the cultures and individuals who inhabit those communities. This contrasts with "Indigeneity", which is a legal term defining participation in politically recognized groups for purposes of legal action and land claims (Benjamin 2017).[12]

There's space here for one example. Some years ago, I was in Orayvi (Oraibi), on Third Mesa in Hopi. A young man, obviously coming from working in a field, climbed the footpath to the mesa and hailed me and JC, with whom I was travelling. In our conversation, we learned his mother was Hopi and his father from another Indigenous group. He had been raised mostly in Oakland, California. In fact, he had recently been sent "to the res" by the Oakland penal system as an alternative to jail. He said he had, just the previous night, participated in his first dance, and that he was attending to his uncle's instructions and trying to learn Hopi ways. Then, he committed a grave violation of those ways by offering to show us the interior of his Grandmother's house, which he had inherited upon her recent death, for a fee. We declined. Later, he somehow found our room at the Hopi Cultural Center and asked for marijuana, which we were both unable (having none) and unwilling to provide. Then, he panhandled us.

This young man was clearly Indigenous. He had immediate native ancestry, was accepted as Hopi, and inherited a house. He was fully entitled to that legal condition. But he was not an Indigene: he knew nothing of the community-of-beings into which he had moved, of the protocols governing inter-species relationships there, or of his obligations or opportunities in relation to his human and other relatives there. It is Indigeny, and not Indigeneity, which interests me, and Indigeny is the focus of some, but by no means all, Indigenous scholars.[13]

The generally submissive and constrained condition of junior faculty that I noted above may be especially difficult for some emerging Indigenous scholars because Academic success often requires either giving up Indigeny or hiding it underneath Academic knowledge (see, e.g., Sam (Ktunxa ʔaqlsmaknik) 2020; also, Santa Cruz 2020a, p. 74). I recall one young Indigenous scholar I met a few years ago at an international, resilience-focused conference. They were presenting on water in the region to which they were Indigenous. The presentation focused on "science-based" evaluations but incorporated some Indigenous knowledge about local water that was not entirely aligned with what "science" had to say. At the end, they asked the audience if they were "allowed" to incorporate this traditional knowledge in the Academic context. While we were happy to say "yes" and to accept it at the conference, we had to admit that only their dissertation advisor and committee (and eventual potential employers) could answer that question. Perhaps their doctoral program valued their Indigeneity more than their Indigeny.

In any case, the Indigenous scholars of Indigeny to whom I refer insist it is necessary for experience and understanding to flow in the other direction, from Indigeny to Academia. They call on Academics, as well as others, to (re)integrate into the socio-cultural and ecological communities whose interrelated well-being is necessary for our own, not just conceptually, but experientially and practically, with a special focus on our inherence in a particular place (Berkes 2018, *passim*; Cajete 2015, p. 217). They ask us to distinguish between "dominion over nature", characterized by prediction and control, and participation in the "community of beings", characterized by "'relational values' that are inherent not in things, but in relationships, and in responsibilities to relationships" (Berkes 2018, p. 296). It is the former that is generating our crisis and the latter which may allow us to respond adaptively to it.

Brian Walker's resilience theory echoes this, though he comes from an entirely different background (Walker and Salt 2006, 2012). A resource manager with a Ph.D. in Ecology, Walker applies chaos theory and its key concept of complex adaptive (or self-organizing) patterns to articulate the pattern that characterizes human existence. Coining the term "social-ecological", Walker demonstrates that the socio-cultural and ecological worlds form a single self-organizing pattern, itself composed of self-organizing patterns, including our selves. There is no "out" side from which humans can understand or act on "the rest". There is a single, complex, interactive, and dynamic pattern, which is inherently creative and in which surprise is inevitable. Such a pattern is intrinsically uncontrollable; our attempts to control it undercut the foundations of our existence. Walker insists that a thriving human future requires fundamental transformations not only in our ideas about the world but in our experience of it.

The crisis is not primarily a knowledge problem; it's a conduct problem, a way-of-life concern (see, e.g., Merz et al. 2023). No existing or newly developed bodies of knowledge, methods, techniques, literatures, disciplines, interdisciplines, or integrations thereof, can lead Academics to the intuitions we need to respond adaptively.[14] We are not plagued by fragmented or incomplete knowledge that we need to complete or connect. We ourselves are fragmented and require (re)integration through a process (analogous to regenerative agriculture) which is at once socio-cultural and ecological.[15] Reintegration requires us simultaneously to engage personally/professionally, theoretically/practically, and mentally/bodily in ways that are uncommon in the Academy. I address this essay to you more as a person than as a professional, and from me more as a person than as a professional, though both are in play.[16]

The sources to which I have referred describe the world (including ourselves) as relational, dynamic and creative, intrinsically filled with surprise, and calling for continuous adaptive response in return. In this relational world, domination, separation, and control are momentary and destructive illusions, while collaboration, relationship, and connection support the long-term thriving of entwined human and ecological aspects. These sources direct us to attend closely to place, especially the place where we live, in order to become intimately familiar with the community-of-beings that comprises it (see, e.g., Long et al. 2020).

In *God is Red*, Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock) described place as the primary locus of sacred experience for natives in what came to be called North America (Deloria 1973; see also Deloria 1979). Cajete wrote of a "natural democracy" of each particular place, in which "plants, animals and other entities in the natural world have rights of their own" (Cajete 1994, p. 89). This natural democracy "is what social justice looks like for Indigenous people where rights are inherent to all people and the natural world and their existence denotes a participatory and cooperative relationship" (Santa Cruz 2020a, p. 74). Participating in such a community requires us to establish intimate and longstanding relations with the places we inhabit and the communities-of-beings with whom we share inhabitance (Cajete 2000, pp. 93–95, 176–213; Berkes 2018, p. 296).[17]

When humans have such relations, we enhance our social–ecological communities and increase their ability to survive disruption and restore well-being (their resilience). Without these relations, humans disrupt and degrade social ecologies and eventually endanger our own existence. Unfortunately, "normalcy" in the United States is characterized by separation rather than relationship, and emphasizes control over collaboration and competition over cooperation. Unless we live our way out of these structures of experience, we will simply replicate them in our attempts to overcome their effects (see e.g., Santa Cruz 2020a, p. 57). As a first response to crisis, we will have to stop generating it.

Getting to that point requires us to transform the structures of our experience so that we intuitively and habitually inhabit the dynamic, creative, and relational world described above, becoming, in the process, less separative, dominating, and controlling, and more connected, collaborative, and relational. We do so in part by establishing long-term, multi-generational, social–ecological relations (Cárdenas 2020, p. 90; Forbes (Rappahanock) 1974, p. 16; Rosales (Ndéh) 2020, pp. 56–59). As scholars, we will find forms of discovery and reporting appropriate to this relational world and which incorporate the virtues of connection, collaboration, relationship, and place. As teachers, we will, of course, model this to our students and embody it in our classrooms and curricula.

It's all well and good to read about relational being and write about living among multiple non-human agents, but to respond to crisis, we need to live in that world and in relationship with those agents. It's not just a matter of thinking, but of experience and practice. What would (does) it feel like to live as a self-organizing pattern in dynamic mutual self-formation with other self-organizing patterns at multiple scales? Making this transition is no easy matter; it takes discipline, patience, and practice to change habits of separation and domination into habits of relationship and participation. The former manifest in what I call "disintegration", a condition which separates us from the actually existing relationships upon which we in fact depend, whether or not we acknowledge them. They continue to exist, but we do not experience them and consequently cannot participate in them skillfully or gracefully. Therefore, we live amidst crisis. By reintegrating into conscious participation in these constitutive relationships, we can begin to live (and therefore think) more relationally, dynamically, cooperatively, and creatively.

Practicing relationship, deference, and participation allows us to experience the social–ecological relationships upon which our well-being depends and to participate in them intentionally and effectively. I imagine this process of reintegration to be analogous to that of regenerative agriculture (The Carbon Underground and Regenerative Agriculture Initiative 2017).

We need to (re)establish intimate relationships among mind/body, theory/practice, and experience/idea. As one way to move in this direction, I suggest some "reintegrative praxes" whose goal is to engage us in the conscious practice of ongoing creative social–ecological processes. Reintegrative praxes assume the relational world described above and they attend to relationship and cooperation, inviting dynamic transformation and creativity. They insist on the importance of place and encourage us to be aware of our emplacement and of the places we inhabit and pass through.

Most reintegrative praxes are simple and accessible to anyone, requiring neither special training or remarkable aptitude, subverting the usual separation that elevates "Academic" practices.[18] They can be carried out individually or in groups and can easily be adapted to classrooms and other pedagogical venues. If reintegrative praxes are successful, they will quickly change as the forms of their practitioners' experience changes. Then, too, they are sensitive to place and will differentiate according to the places in which they are practiced.[19] So these praxes will change over time and differ from place to place, even as they help establish patterns of social–ecological relationships that can endure and adapt. They are not propositions, but prompts, and they are neither universal nor eternal.[20]

This is not an appropriate venue to explore reintegrative praxes in depth (but see notes 16 and 18). "Studying Rome" aims to initiate a conversation which would be derailed at its outset if it focused too intensely on any one voice. I'm sure there are many ways for us to move toward relational experience so that we enhance social–ecological resilience. We should suggest as many as we can think of, try them, and find out what works and where and when. To present only reintegrative praxes invites them to become the focus of attention, shortcutting the collaborative creativity we so badly need and devolving into a critique and defense of the praxes.

Is there time? Can we change before the crisis turns into a catastrophe? Who knows? At the very least, the alterations we've already made to the atmosphere, soil, oceans, and fresh water mean that we are now experiencing the early stages of major social–ecological transformations that are no longer avoidable. These include keystone-species-level alterations in the ecologies of most, if not all, bioregions, as well as the largest human migration in history. Under the best of circumstances, we're going to experience some difficulties and need creative adaptation. One virtue of learning to experience the world as dynamic, relational, and creative is that it enables us to enhance social–ecological resilience no matter the circumstances. Reintegration will help us make it through the crisis without collapse if we can, to cope if we can't and things fall apart, and to form viable lifeways afterwards, if it comes to that.

If we're going to respond to crisis effectively, all of us, scholars and non-scholars alike, will have to engage in open-ended, iterative, exploratory, and embodied processes of discovery. We can begin with the processes and practices that accompany and support existing forms of collaborative, or group creativity, such as, for example, some performing ensembles and athletic teams, such as those Keith Sawyer studied in *Group Creativity* (Sawyer 2004).[21] Learning how to form and join creative, collaborative groups is itself reintegrative, and it is likely to be a useful adaptive skill. Let's help our students develop this and give them plenty of practice.

Collaborative creativity arises in the midst of difference as the members of the ensemble manifest and adapt to their differences. The ensemble does not subsume individual players into a larger whole; it manifests the wholeness of relationships among the individuals, a wholeness which exists because of the quality of attention they give to one another. As in ecologies, creative collaboratives require a sustained relationship across differences among multiple creative sources; establishing creative cooperative ensembles not only supports individuality, it is necessary to full individuation, a lifelong and developmental process of growing in one's identity and capacity in relationship (see, e.g., Cajete 2015, pp. 36–42, 108–9, 151; Cajete 2020a, p. ix).

However, the experience of self as a contingent, dynamic, and relational pattern does conflict with contemporary norms of individualism, which are deeply embedded not only in students' experience of self but also in our own. Both we and our students may feel uneasy, even threatened, by giving up the individualized identities with which we identify in order to explore open-ended and relational processes of self-discovery. It's important not only to know how to put this difference in front of students but also how to address their individual and collective anxiety about letting go of the one to discover the other.

Just as relational experience supports and requires individuation, it necessitates multiple forms and ways of understanding. As we respond to the crisis, we'll be best served, I believe, by an ecology of thought. We need lots of voices and many ways to proceed. I look forward to sustained, generative difference, not increasing unanimity. I'm looking for conversation partners, not acolytes.

It does seem to me, though, that we need to stop studying Rome while it burns. It's time to put the fire out if we can and survive it if we cannot. There really is a social–ecological crisis and the Academic institutions in which we make a living are deeply complicit in it. We can't just go on "being Academics". Instead, we need to devise crisis responses, to find ways of life, modes of conduct, forms of experience, and processes of education adequate to the task. If we think capitalism is a problem, we'll need to become less subject to it and to help our students do so as well. If we think the world is relation-like and we are outcomes of patterns of relationship, we need to act like that is true.[22]

Until and unless we can transform the Academy itself, we'll still need to "look like Academics", or we won't be able to get enough contingent work to survive, much less earn and retain tenure. We'll have to work in guerilla fashion: piecemeal; covertly; fugitively. But, as the call for papers notes, we are living in a "biogeochemical . . . political, economic, technological, ethical, and therefore, biocultural" crisis to which we must urgently respond. Our students don't just need a critique of capitalism, they need strategies to be less subject to it. They don't just need a description of relational and place-based experience, they need the experience. Our students need us to share with them the ways of life, modes of conduct, and forms of experience we develop in response to crisis, and to participate with us creatively in developing them.

We can't go on doing the same things and expecting different results. Whether we adopt reintegrative praxes or follow some other path, we will have to take unprecedented actions in response to our unprecedented circumstances. It's a feel-our-way, find-our-way process, requiring close attention and continuous adjustment, learning to do something none of us knows how to do while developing an understanding in new and unfamiliar ways, like artists facing empty stages, blank canvasses, unmarked paper, or silence.

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Notes

1 "The Academy" includes not only colleges and universities but also the related professional venues by which post-secondary education is supported and which it supports. "Academics" include the faculty, staff, students, and alumnae of American community colleges, colleges, and universities; their counterparts in research institutes, museums, and research libraries; and workers in professional academic organizations (including the American Academy of Religion), publishing houses, and academic journals such as this one. "The Academy as an institution" extends even beyond these venues to elements of government, business, and philanthropy which provide or withhold funding and make use of both research outcomes and persons with degrees. Together, they create an ecology of knowledge production and authentication within the larger cultural landscape, and each component of that ecology is shaped by every other.It's a landscape with which I am familiar. I earned tenure at four institutions, including full Professorship at three. I served as department chair, academic dean, and vice-provost. I have taught in and overseen undergraduate, graduate, and terminal degree programs, and provided senior leadership for units in student support services and student academic support, as well as study abroad and community engagement. I have sat on President's Councils. So I know the ins and outs of a good number of corners of the Academy.

2 You'll notice that I violate a number of conventions of academic writing, including using first person and contractions. They emerged out of, and continue to create and enforce, distinctions of class and culture class, not to further clarity of thought. They function to make academic writing unnecessarily opaque and distasteful to non-academic readers, to divide us into status groups according to the formality of our language, and to subordinate non-academic to academic thought. Enforcing Academic writing conventions, a practice that often beginning in grade school, is one way the Academy participates in social domination and control.

3 I co-founded the "Body and Religion" unit of the American Academy of Religion and the "Ecology and Religion" unit of the AAR's Southeast Region. I edit a book series called "Studies in Body and Religion." I wrote the chapter on material culture in the *Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in the Study of Religion* (R. M. Carp 2011). I attended the inaugural meeting of the International Society for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture, as well as its meetings in Morelia and Amsterdam. I am "in" the Academic Study of Religion and it makes sense to me to address these comments to you, my colleagues.

4 If you doubt we're in a crisis, see, e.g., Ripple et al. (2023) and Lee and Romero (2023). While the call for papers recognizes social justice concerns, it identifies the crisis as primarily geo-chemical. Working with the concept of social–ecological, drawn from Walker and Salt (2006), I maintain there is a single global crisis encompassing social justice and ecology.

5 A few papers are already posted online. Looking at the "recent publication" on *Religions* website, I was unable to distinguish them from a variety of papers in other special publications with quite different foci.

6 That pretty much includes everyone with an advanced academic degree and income derived from college teaching or scholarship. We tend to belong to the 25% of humanity "responsible for 74% of excess energy and material use" (Merz et al. 2023).

7 Dunn is Neal Reynolds Distinguished Professor in the Department of Applied Ecology at North Carolina State University and in the Center for Evolutionary Hologenomics at the University of Copenhagen. He lives in Raleigh, North Carolina, so, according to his own account, he's wondering where to move. Maybe Copenhagen?

8 We'll need to do this to avoid collapse, and if collapse occurs, we'll need to do it to thrive in the places we find ourselves.

9 Following Gregory Bateson, who wrote that meaning is a "difference that makes a difference", (Bateson 1980, p. 110 and *passim*), and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi, who defined Creativity as transformation of domains of meaning (Csikszentmihalyi 1996, p. 7), effective climate responses will be meaningfully creative, making differences that transform domains of meaning. For Csikszentmihalyi, Creativity is socio-cultural, and the scarce resource is "gatekeeping", the process by which possibly creative proposals

are winnowed until some are accepted into a field. It's not so much that individuals don't innovate and more that gatekeepers fail to perceive, or are threatened by, individual creativity, and he recommends that educational policy and corporate practice aimed at enhancing Creativity focus on improving gatekeeping rather than enhancing individual creativity (see e.g., pp. 37–45). He capitalizes "Creativity" to distinguish it from the individual and collaborative innovations, some of which are recognized by gatekeepers and integrated into fields and most of which are lost. Greater Academy Creativity would require better and different gatekeeping, affecting admissions (especially to graduate programs), peer review and journal and book editing, and tenure and promotion. It would, I suspect, be quite a change!

10 The Academy, and education in general, have been at the forefront of two processes, both of which are destructive to social justice and ecological well-being. The first is a historical mission to remove immigrant and Native children from their birth cultures in order to resocialize them into the dominant culture and suit them for roles in the economy. The second is a historic mission to extend economic growth indefinitely by inducing previously non-existent desires and intensifying the experience of desire to mimic that of need by means of a marriage of social science, design, and business, creating induced insatiable desire. There isn't space here to demonstrate these phenomena, but Santa Cruz (2020a) provides a good primer on the first. McKnight and Block (2012) offer a brief introduction to the origins of latter, culminating in Hoover's Committee on Recent Economic Changes of 1929. For more on induced insatiable desire, see Forbes (2008) and Kimmerer (Potowatomi) (2015).

11 The word "Indigeny" in my initial submission provoked an irate and disdainful response from a peer reviewer, who cited its archaic use to refer to penury and accused me of fraudulent scholarship.

12 Benjamin takes social scientists to task for using the "recently coined term indigeneity" to obscure important facts on the ground, of which indigeny is one (p. 363). In note 4, he remarks that "indigeneity" did not appear in the 2005 editions of either the Oxford or the Shorter Oxford dictionaries.

13 I am not suggesting that urbanized Indigenous peoples cannot be Indigenes, or that people who live "on the res" necessarily are. The situation is far more complex than that. This is just an exemplary story about a single individual.

14 We have known since the 1980s that the global population could sustainably live at material levels approximating those of Eastern Europe, manifest in various cultural forms. We know what could be done, but we have no idea how to implement it. Achieving resilience is much less a technical problem than a socio-political one. See, e.g., Merz et al. (2023).

15 "Regenerative Agriculture is a holistic land management practice that leverages the power of photosynthesis in plants to close the carbon cycle, and build soil health, crop resilience and nutrient density. Regenerative agriculture improves soil health, primarily through the practices that increase soil organic matter. This not only aids in increasing soil biota diversity and health, but increases biodiversity both above and below the soil surface, while increasing both water holding capacity and sequestering carbon at greater depths, thus drawing down climate-damaging levels of atmospheric CO_2, and improving soil structure to reverse civilization-threatening human-caused soil loss. Research continues to reveal the damaging effects to soil from tillage, applications of agricultural chemicals and salt based fertilizers, and carbon mining. Regenerative Agriculture reverses this paradigm to build for the future". (The Carbon Underground and Regenerative Agriculture Initiative 2017, p. 1)

16 A colleague noted the irony that I reveal little about myself as a person in this text. There are several reasons, among them that I do not hold myself up either as an exemplar or a cautionary tale. In such a short piece, it's hard to tell personal stories without adopting one or another of these stances. Another is the impersonal abstraction of writing itself. I'm a fan of face-to-face and my preferred larger scale medium is theatre, in which artists and audience necessarily share space and time. I can, of course, provide demographics: 74 years old, white, male, CIS, married (blissfully, 39 years), two sons, one daughter-in-law, two grandsons (4 and 4 months), residing in Salem, Oregon, retired, Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Studies, early career in experimental theatre, later, Academic career teaching and administrating in art schools and interdisciplinary studies departments, and ending with a stint leading the undergraduate college at a small West coast Catholic liberal arts oriented university. Born in Wisconsin, raised in San Antonio, TX, graduated high school Bethesda, MD, arrived in San Francisco to go to Stanford in 1967 (Summer of Love!), lived in the Haight from 1971–1973 with a theatre collective of seven houses and sixty-three people (give or take), worked in private colleges of art and design, regional State Universities, and a private liberal arts college while living in California, Missouri, Illinois, and North Carolina.

17 My own process toward inherence in place has been slow, and somewhat peripatetic. Learning to waymake, hunt, and fish as a child in Texas engendered a habit of close attention to the living world around me and to the creatures living there with me, as well as a reverential sense of the integrity of a place. It also led me, through "conservationism," into ecology. In a dozen years in the San Francisco Bay Area I fell in love with fog, redwood trees, live oaks, ravens, red tailed hawks, and so much more. We would have stayed, but economics and family drove us away, first to Kansas City, then Geneva, IL and Boone, NC, before a final few years back in the Bay Area. Each place has shaped and taught me, but there's no space here to articulate that. In Illinois, though, at my wife's instigation, we began a small native planting project. In time, that interest grew into the restoration of a small stream and just under 3 acres of land in the North Carolina mountains, and our current project "restoring to native" our lot in Salem, Oregon, where we have lived for the past six years. So we have learned over time a good bit about how to begin to meet, collaborate with, and learn from our co-inhabitants. But we moved a lot, mostly for economic and partly for cultural reasons. If I had it to do over again, I'd try hard to find a way to stay put.

18 There is one praxis with special relevance for Academics and our students. It involves making experientially true for ourselves as individuals general propositions we hold true of "humans" and "the human species", what you might call an Academic,

taken-for-granted, philosophical anthropology. The story goes like this: homo sapiens is an animal species whose evolution can be traced over millions of years in a variety of successive ecological contexts. Hominin evolution is marked by the development of complex practical and symbolic cultures and homo sapiens is evolved to be a socio-cultural animal. Culture plays a significant role in shaping not only shared but also individual experience and understanding. In addition, each specific person is deeply formed by associations, especially through direct relationships with living persons. The most powerful associates are primary caregivers in infancy and early childhood. A human individual, then, is the outcome of a dynamic pattern of relations among evolution, ecology, culture, and association. All of us in general and each of us individually depends on this pattern; we are not independent. It seems to me most Academics agree that this account is true, and that most general education programs teach some version of it. But I don't think most of us experience the world and ourselves as if it was true. That's at least intellectually dishonest. So, for Academics especially, one important reintegrative praxis is to integrate into our experience, as a matter of course, the evolutionary, ecological, cultural, and associational relationships that constitute our being and upon which we depend to exist.

19 Places differentiate but they do not necessarily establish conflict. Ecological transitions such as those between valleys and mountains or seacoasts and inlands suggest the ways in which places both border and blend with one another.

20 The first reintegrative praxis is to slow down and go outside, wherever you are and especially where you live. Slow down; go outside (J. E. Carp 2006). It may seem counterintuitive to slow in response to crisis, but this crisis is born out of speed, and succumbing to speed is submitting to disintegration (J. E. Carp 2011). Slowing gives us the perceptions and relationships that we need and which are impossible at speed. No matter how urgent it is to respond to crisis, going fast is a recipe for failure. The great UCLA basketball coach John Wooden used to tell his players, "Be quick, but don't hurry".

21 I have worked as a theatrical actor, director, and playwright and taught in professional colleges of art and design.

22 We would, for example, help students inoculate themselves from induced, insatiable desire, which would probably involve helping them excavate how the Academy generates and participates in this. It's worth noting that "changing people's minds" generates less change than altering our behavior (Primavesi 2007). It might be better to barter with our students and help them establish barter relationships than to teach them to critique capitalism only to be subject to it after graduation. Kitchen gardening, mending and repair, and participating in communities where skills are routinely and fairly bartered all help to buffer capitalism and develop relationship. If your students already engage in all of this, help them respect it, enjoy it, and bring ceremony to it. The point is that practicing and teaching non-capitalist economic behavior is likely more important than teaching "anti-capitalist theory", just as behaving relationally is more powerful than espousing relationship. It's better to incorporate slowing down and going outside into our pedagogy than our ideology.

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