The Seminary

A Seed-bed for a Different Culture

Introduction: The Great Unravelling & The Seed of Hope

We're living in a time of great transformations. The systems supporting the web of life are fraying under pressure from a civilization inconsistent with the environment that nourishes it. We're polluting sea, sky, and land; species disappear at alarming rates; the climate shifts into states that may or may not support many life forms, including ours.

The hopefulness that characterized previous generations has given way to alienation and lack of confidence in the direction of our lives. Many of us find ourselves in purposeless work that does little more than ensure enough money to buy the consumer goods that don't satisfy us and the simulation of food in supermarkets that we make do with. Technologies that were supposed to enhance human experience increasingly turn us into their tools. While productivity might increase, meaningful connection to one another and the world becomes more difficult without machine mediation.

These characteristics of modern life are symptoms of an ever-increasing divergence between the culture we live in and the way the world functions. There are specific laws (we'll outline seven) that define how life works. Cultures that ignore or actively work against these laws ultimately fail, going up against an adversary they cannot defeat: nature. Cultures that respect and align with these laws thrive.

Most accept the current state of the world as the inevitable outcome of 'progress'—an ineluctable historical process that's been the same everywhere. Some are confident we'll increase Earth's carrying capacity through sheer ingenuity. Others see this as human hubris.[1]

A minority is questioning the basic premises upon which this culture is based, increasingly expressing a desire to move to its edges to experiment with different forms of living. People worldwide are rediscovering three freedoms fundamental throughout the human story: the freedoms to move, to disobey, and to create new social worlds.[2]

The Seminary (from the Latin *seminarium*, meaning 'seed-bed') is an invitation to exercise these three freedoms to sow seeds of a different culture—one consistent with the laws governing life, with potential to fulfil us, make us and the web of life more resilient, and reimagine what it might mean to be human in today's world.

This is not a political project. Politics at this stage of civilizational unravelling is not the domain where meaningful change happens. *The Seminary* is grounded in ecological realism—observing and living within the laws of nature, letting natural processes rather than human ideological frameworks be the final arbiter of what works. This is not about ideological alignment but about people willing to

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[1] See Ophuls, *Immoderate Greatness*

[2] See Graeber & Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*

test all assumptions through direct ecological engagement, maintaining an experimental attitude that takes natural processes as the final judge of ideas.

Threads: The Seven Laws

One premise of *The Seminary* is that our culture is, in many ways, inconsistent with the laws governing life. Here we're not referring to physics, but laws that most directly influence the types of social realities and relationships with the non-human world we can create. John Michael Greer outlines seven such laws.[3]

1. The Law of Wholes

> "Everything that exists is part of a whole system and depends on the health of the whole system for its own existence. It thrives only if the whole system thrives, and it cannot harm the whole system without harming itself."[4]

While our culture reduces all things to their parts, the universe functions in wholes. This is the basic difference between being *reductionist* and being *holistic*. The fundamental implication: it's not possible to truly know something without considering how it fits into its broader context. Consequently, we—alongside everything else—cannot truly thrive unless the whole context in which we live thrives. If we pollute the air to industrially produce consumer goods, or use technology reliant on polluting energy, we're ultimately shooting ourselves in the foot.

2. The Law of Flow

> "Everything that exists is created and sustained by flows of matter, energy, and information that come from the whole system to which it belongs and that return to that whole system. Participating in these flows, without interfering with them, brings health and wholeness; blocking them, in an attempt to turn flows into accumulations, causes suffering and disruption to the whole system and all its parts."[5]

The dominant culture may deny this law more than any of the others. It's been built on an endless quest for accumulation, seeing it as a good above almost any other. We're taught to accumulate money, homes, friends, partners, experiences, qualifications—for no reason beyond that doing so is 'good'. We might even be told it makes us happier, but basic observation verifies this isn't true. Comfort and wellbeing are not synonymous.

Accumulation is fundamentally about *having*, while participating in the flows of the living universe is fundamentally about *being*.[6] The problem with emphasizing having over being is that possession

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[3] Greer, *Mystery Teachings from the Living Earth*

[4] Ibid., p.21

[5] Ibid., p.29

[6] See Fromm, *Being or Having?*

is itself a fiction—at the end of our lives, can we take anything we've accumulated with us? We all know we can *be*, and can do so without effort; when we look deeply, though, can we find anything we have ever truly possessed? *The Seminary* aims to give us space to be, and for that to work, it needs to take away the space to accumulate.

3. The Law of Balance

> "Everything that exists can continue to exist only by being in balance with itself, with other things, and with the whole system of which it is part. That balance is not found by going to one extreme or the other or by remaining fixed at a static point; it is created by self-correcting movements to either side of a midpoint." [7]

In nature, if something accumulates, a correction takes place to restore flow. Such corrections are not moral (right/wrong), but *natural and neutral*. The unprecedented accumulation of matter, energy, and information in our culture over the last several thousand years will lead to re-balancing. This is because our culture and economies are themselves parts of wholes, not self-contained systems (cf. The Law of Wholes). We might pretend the human world is somehow set apart from the rest of the world, but that's self-delusion.

This law isn't about going to extremes or remaining fixed at a static point. Neither is the objective to reach a point of balance, but *to practice the art of balancing*. The former is an end-state, the latter is an action, a way of moving in the world. What does this art look like in practice?

Notice you're in an extreme; apply a corrective action (instead of simply swinging to the other extreme); pass through the midpoint, recognizing you'll inevitably swing a little toward the other extreme, and; repeat—forever: *balance* is only useful if we use it as a verb, not a noun.

4. The Law of Limits

> "Everything that exists is subject to limits arising from its own nature, the nature of the whole system of which it is a part, and the nature of existence itself. Those limits are as necessary as they are inescapable, and they provide the foundation for all the beauty and power each existing thing is capable of manifesting."[8]

While it may seem self-evident that life is characterized by limits, our culture is predicated on the notion that human ingenuity can overcome most limits, given the right resources and knowledge. Tech oligarchs spend billions researching how to overcome mortality by uploading consciousness to the cloud, or surmounting genetic programming that makes ageing inevitable. There's confidence that nuclear fusion will result in limitless, clean energy. Human beings, it seems, are made to break limits, not to recognize, respect, and appreciate them.

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[7] Greer, *Mystery Teachings from the Living Earth*, p.29

[8] Ibid., p.47

We often fail to recognize that things thrive *because of*, not *in spite of*, their limits. Wholes are defined by their limits, as are flows. The thresholds at which re-balancing occurs are also limits. Basic examples: only so much sunlight falls on Earth each day, and only a small fraction can be used for photosynthesis; only so much water falls as rain or snow. These limits in turn define how much vegetation can grow in a set place, and that defines how much animal life that vegetation can support. This list could go on endlessly, since there is no single thing in existence that does not have its limits.

John Michael Greer points out that this might be the law that most *"offends the ingrained prejudices and unquestioned assumptions of our age,"*[9] even though limits lend things both their power and their beauty. A bird cannot fly unless it accepts limits on its structure (no teeth, hollow bones); it is because of its limitations that flight is possible, and because of them that we can appreciate the beauty of a bird riding the current.

Ultimately, this law invites us to turn the prejudices of our age on their head: limits are not to be broken, but embraced as sources of beauty and power.

5. The Law of Cause & Effects

> "Everything that exists is the effect of causes at work in the whole system of which each thing is a part, and everything becomes, in turn, the cause of effects elsewhere in the whole system. In these workings of cause and effect, there must always be a similarity of kind between an effect and at least one of its causes, just as there must be a similarity of scale between an effect and the sum total of its causes."[10]

Put simply, this law states that nothing happens by chance or coincidence. Whole systems are governed by complex causal relationships, with causes and effects being similar in *kind* and in *scale*.

The principle of similarity in kind can be restated as "What you sow, you reap". If your goal is a cool drink, putting a flame to it isn't going to get you there. It's important to align methods and goals, and to gain understanding of cause-effect relationships in the systems we inhabit. For example, if we accept that accumulation is not a good to be pursued, can we identify what leads to it in our culture? If we identify those causes, can we find ways to stop them? Or put positively, if we accept that a culture enabling flows of energy, matter, and information is good, can we identify what will enable this? The same logic applies to many points: haste causes shallow understanding; control and hierarchy cause dependency and resentments, etc.

The second principle is similarity in scale, encapsulated by "Great oaks from little acorns grow". Large, complex effects require sufficient accumulation of causes of similar scale; you can't light a bonfire with a single match, but you can with a single lit match applied to sufficient kindling.

6. The Law of the Planes

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[9] Ibid., p.47

[10] Ibid., p.57

> "Everything in existence exists and functions on one of several planes of being or is composed of things from more than one plane acting together as a whole system. These planes are discrete, not continuous, and the passage of influences from one plane to another can take place only under conditions defined by the relationship of the planes involved."[11]

The way history is taught in most of the world gives primacy to the materials peoples used: stone, bronze, iron, steam. This is but one way we can see how the physical is given primacy above all else. The primacy of the material plane can also be seen in proposed solutions to challenges we face. If plastic is everywhere, the solution is developing environmentally friendly plastics or better waste management. If the issue is a brain tumour, the solution is to remove it or act on its material structure through various treatments. In both instances, the assumption is that there's a single plane which matters: the physical.

Giving such primacy to the physical world is a historical anomaly. Since time immemorial, human beings have understood that reality is composed of multiple planes that, while distinct, also operate upon one another. John Michael Greer outlines four such planes. Beyond the physical, there are also:

- ***The Etheric Plane***: this is the plane of life force or vitality.
- ***The Astral Plane***: this is the plane of thought, emotion, and culture, where the stories, images, feelings, and values that shape the stories we tell—individually and collectively—exist.
- ***The Mental Plane***: this is the world of archetypes, where it is not things, but the ideas of things that reign. Here we're not talking about *a* home, but about *the idea of Home*. Other ideas might include Community, Love, Belonging, Wholeness, Humility, Reciprocity. But these are more than just ideas in our heads; they are the potential for all things, existing at the very foundation of life and the universe.

Let's use a tree as an example. On the physical plane, it's made up of wood, cellulose, height; on the etheric, it is composed of living force that gives the tree its automatic intelligence (circulation of sap, photosynthesis, growth patterns); on the astral, the tree simultaneously experiences the world (sunlight, wind, soil chemistry, the presence of other beings), and is experienced by the world (the squirrel nesting in it, the human sitting beneath it, the fungi connected to its roots)—the tree's existence, both from its experience and that of others, is born through its intersubjectivity. Last, on the mental plane, the tree is recognizable because it corresponds to a pattern of Tree-ness; this makes not only a single tree recognizable, but all trees recognizable as trees. The key insight: problems manifesting on one plane cannot always be solved by interventions on another plane alone. The planes are interwoven, but distinct.

7. The Law of Evolution

[11] Ibid., p.66

> "Everything that exists comes into being by a process of evolution. That process starts with adaptation to changing conditions and ends with the establishment of a steady state of balance with its surroundings, following a threefold rhythm of challenge, response, and reintegration. Evolution is gradual rather than sudden, and it works by increasing diversity and accumulating possibilities, rather than following a predetermined line of development."[12]

At its core, this law means that species and systems adapt to their environment through a constant process of *challenge, response, and reintegration*. The challenge comes from the environment, and the response takes the form of incremental changes in how species and systems function. Importantly, while such changes may be physical, they may also be found across the other planes of existence. Those changes that enable not just survival, but thriving, are reintegrated into the species or system.

While this probably sounds familiar, the Law of Evolution is often mischaracterized. It is not uncommon to hear that some individuals, or human beings generally, are more evolved than other individuals or species; as Greer points out, this notion is *"quite simply nonsense…because every living thing has been shaped by evolution over exactly the same period of time since life first evolved"*.[13]

More insidious is the notion that evolution brought about modern human beings and then somehow stopped, with humans representing its apex. This perspective is thoroughly anthropocentric, shaped by religious traditions that consider humanity exalted above other life-forms. Such a teleological view—as a linear process working purposefully toward a specific goal—misses the point that while evolutionary processes eventually lead to relatively stable states, all stable states will sooner or later be challenged and rendered unstable by outside forces.

The key insight: we are not the apex of evolution, nor has evolution stopped for us. This goes for the civilization we've built as much as for us as a species. And yet, this is precisely the story this culture tells itself. It is its founding myth.[14] Maintaining this position means maintaining the hubris bringing us ever closer to the precipice, including the potential for extinction. This is not catastrophism, but simply acknowledging that any species living in a way maladapted to its environment is destined to die out, sooner or later.

Of course, this culture tells us that our technical skills enable us to adapt the environment to us, rather than the opposite. This is wishful thinking. How well is the line of thinking that says 'If the planet gets hotter, we just need more air conditioners' working out for us? If we consider the Law of Evolution seriously, we should apply a critical lens to the culture that's brought us and countless other species to the edge of disaster. We must ask whether it really is adapted to the world we live in. And if it's not, to imagine and bring to life a culture that might be.

This law invites us to actively and willingly participate in the ongoing process of challenge, response, and reintegration. This is the template for embracing change, whether in oneself, in community, or

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[12] Ibid., p.78

[13] Ibid., p.74

[14] See Quinn, *Ishmael*

in the broader world. This process takes place whether we like it or not, but if we allow ourselves to flow with it rather than resist it, we—and the culture we give birth to—will naturally adapt to surrounding circumstances, as all existing beings have done. This law also cautions that there is a price to pay for seeking constant comfort; it reminds us how important it is to expose ourselves to the world we live in, rather than to seek shelter from it. Only through direct contact can the dance of evolutionary adaptation be allowed to take place and act upon our being—physical and otherwise.

Last, the Law of Evolution invites us to be patient. It reminds us that change has its own pace, and that no such thing as an 'evolutionary leap' exists. Change is slow, but when the right kind and right scale of causes are in place, it will happen (cf. The Law of Cause & Effects).

Weaving the Threads Together

These laws are not abstract concepts; they shape how everything functions, including how *The Seminary* should function.

The ***Law of Wholeness*** demands that *The Seminary* break the cycle of thinking we and our actions exist in a vacuum. We should be as much, if not more, generalists than specialists.

The ***Law of Flow*** leads us to cultivate spaces necessary to consciously engage with and facilitate the flows of matter, energy, and information. We become conduits rather than accumulators, sharing freely and not holding onto anything too tightly.

The ***Law of Balance*** pushes us to foster a culture that can recognize when it is nearing an extreme or point of accumulation, and can apply skilful corrective actions. This law also reminds us to let go of the idea that *The Seminary* might reach a final goal or end-point; the process is cyclical, not linear.

The ***Law of Limits*** asks us to embrace limits as both unavoidable and as the source of power and beauty. Like the bird whose flight is only possible because of its physical limitations, *The Seminary* needs to embrace its limits to experience its potential.

The ***Laws of Balance and Limits***, combined with insights from Graeber and Wengrow's 'ecology of freedom,'[15] remind us that we do not want to become anything—not farmers, not primitives, not any fixed identity. We want to remain human beings with the freedom to practice agriculture without becoming agriculturalists; to grow food without surrendering excessive portions of our existence to agricultural logistics, to maintain a broad enough resource base so that cultivation never becomes a matter of life or death. When we accept that cultivation can only provide some of what we need—only certain things, only at certain times—we naturally maintain multiple modes. We forage because cultivation has limits. We hunt because the forest garden has limits. We engage in craft work and knowledge exchange because food production has limits. Just as a bird's limits enable flight, the limits of each activity enable our freedom to move between activities. We practice multiple modes simultaneously—some horticulture, some hunting and foraging, some craft work, some knowledge exchange—precisely so no single activity colonizes human existence.

[15] See Graeber & Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*

The ***Law of Cause and Effect*** reminds us that cultural change is a vast undertaking that cannot be achieved with any single grand gesture. A 'pile of kindling' made up of smaller initiatives that are similar in kind will slowly lead us there, perhaps beyond our own lifetime. This law acts as a diagnostic tool; it reminds us to ask whether we applied an action of the wrong kind to an issue (using control to try to create freedom), or if we applied causes of insufficient scale (expecting a single conversation to resolve a deep-seated cultural habit). Ultimately, this law is a mandate for patience: if we consistently apply the right kind and scale of causes, the corresponding effects *will eventually follow*.

The ***Law of Planes*** reminds us that putting up some yurts and creating a vegetable garden only acts on the physical plane. To forge a culture we must go beyond this. We need to ask on which plane the issues we're tackling—as well as those that might arise through participating—exist. If the community is using too much energy, this isn't merely a technical issue (physical plane), but also one of habits and values (astral plane). You can't fix astral plane problems with purely physical solutions.

One may think of the four planes as manifesting in *The Seminary* this way: the Mental Plane is its 'why', the principles or ideas that serve as its core; the Astral Plane is its culture, from storytelling to song, its mode of governance, and its transformative approach to learning skills; the Etheric plane is *The Seminary*'s vitality, the health of the land and the people—by working with the landscape rather than against it, we strengthen our shared life-force; the Physical Plane is the material manifestations: habitations, orchards, vegetable gardens, meals. The physical place is the anchor, but the real work—the "seed-bed"—is in the invisible world of ideas, vitality, relationships, and shared purpose.

Last, the ***Law of Evolution*** reminds us that if we are to thrive in the longer-term, we must expose ourselves to the world we live in; we must not cower in fear. Without difficulties, the ongoing, universal cycle of challenge, response, reintegration cannot take place. If this process doesn't happen, as the world around us changes—as it is indeed doing—we find ourselves increasingly maladapted to it. *The Seminary* needs to be a place that allows evolution to take place, while steering clear of any excess.

The Invitation: Exercising the Three Freedoms

We live in a time of great transformation and, most likely, collapse of the global civilization we find ourselves in. At the same time, the Seven Laws—the foundation of life itself—offer guidance for how we might respond. David Graeber and David Wengrow, in their book *The Dawn of Everything*, argue that peoples across history and the globe, prior to the rise of complex civilizations, availed themselves of three fundamental freedoms to turn away from cultures they no longer identified with, or saw as problematic. These are *the freedom to move*, *the freedom to disobey*, and *the freedom to create or transform social worlds*.

The freedom to move refers to the ability to relocate and change one's social environment without constraint. The freedom to disobey refers to the freedom to ignore commands or refuse to follow

orders from authorities. And the freedom to create or transform social worlds regards the capacity to reorganize social structures and reimagine how communities relate to one another.

These freedoms were widely present in many early human societies but have been progressively restricted or lost in complex civilizations. Their work challenges the narrative that increasing social complexity necessarily leads to greater freedom, suggesting instead that many simpler societies enjoyed forms of liberty that modern civilization has largely abandoned. *The Seminary* wants to reclaim these freedoms.

We move in the opposite direction to the bulk of humanity; while the majority moves toward the centre, we choose to move to the periphery—remote, sparsely populated places. Of course, we cannot move completely outside civilization. Nevertheless, we can move to one of its many edges—those places where the control of the state and its institutions is less insidious and oppressive.

We reclaim the freedom to disobey by saying 'no' to the expectations this culture has placed upon us, and that civilization has codified in its institutions: no to the expectation that we contribute to growing the economy in perpetuity; no to commodification of our needs and desires, our homes, our minds; no to accumulation; no to allowing invisible bureaucracy to decide what's best for us.

The freedoms to move and to disobey are fundamentally *reactive*. The third freedom, that to create or transform social worlds, is *generative*. *The Seminary* reclaims this freedom by coming into existence as a living experiment—a process of trial and error, of continuous evolution through challenge, response, and reintegration. We want to experiment with forms of relationship that balance interdependence with autonomy, rejecting both modern atomization and coercive collectivism. We want to move away from specialized hierarchy toward an apprenticeship model where knowledge flows multi-directionally and teaching-learning blur traditional distinctions. We imagine dissensus governance that honours individual sovereignty within shared ecological commitments—where stewardship roles emerge from demonstrated care rather than election, and where the health of the land becomes the final arbiter of decisions. And we want to re-enchant our world through ritual and renewed temporal consciousness: marking solstices and thresholds, honouring cycles rather than clock-time, acknowledging that reality exceeds our explanatory frameworks and that the world is more alive than modernity admits.

This isn't a finished vision but an opening—a clearing in which something can grow that we cannot fully imagine in advance. We know what we're walking away from with greater clarity than what we're walking toward. And perhaps that's appropriate: cultural solutions, as Wendell Berry reminds us, are organisms, not machines.[16] They cannot be invented deliberately or imposed by decree. They must be grown.

How Might *The Seminary* Function?

The Seminary exists, at this stage, as a proposal and an invitation. I am one person with a vision, seeking 3-5 others to build something together through experimentation and organic growth guided by clear principles. Here, I offer my own thinking on some of the possibilities. Obviously, these are but possibilities, so please don’t take these as being prescriptive.

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[16] See Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America*

The Practical Foundation: Acquire land somewhere in Europe. My personal preference is Portugal or Italy, though this remains open to what unfolds as we gather companions. We'd be looking for rural land—as large a plot as our collective resources allow, while balancing size against essential criteria: reliable water sources (spring, stream, or well rights), mixed forest and clearing areas, access to semi-wild spaces, and reasonable proximity to basic services. We need land that grants genuine freedom—space for food production, foraging, and wilderness. Not a manicured garden plot, but land where ecological processes unfold without constant human intervention.

Legal Structure: An association (associação in Portuguese, associazione di promozione sociale in Italian) could own the land and hold it in perpetual stewardship for the project's educational and cultural mission. This removes individual speculation motives while providing legal clarity and operational flexibility. Portugal requires only 2-3 founding members to establish an association (versus 7 for Italy's APS), making it easier to start small. Italy offers superior tax treatment—educational activities are fully exempt rather than subject to revenue thresholds, and small organizations can legally manage their own bookkeeping. The choice depends partly on where we find ideal land and partly on the composition of founding companions.

Who Belongs, and How: *The Seminary* includes several circles of participation, each with different relationships to the land and project.

- ***Companions*** are the core stewards living on the land most of the time, sharing collective food, shelter, tools, and daily work of tending gardens, animals, and one another. Their contribution is primarily their presence and effort—the flows of energy and care that sustain the whole system. *The Seminary* is their primary commitment. Companions may have outside work or leave for periods, but such commitments must be coherent with the ecological principles practised here. Work that contradicts what we practice—extractive industry, institutional participation in industrial destruction—would be fundamentally incompatible.
- ***Members*** are supporters who believe in the project and contribute financially even if they rarely or never visit. They could receive updates, attend general assemblies, and participate in some activities. This supporting membership could help sustain the project's legal and material foundation.
- ***Apprentices*** join for a season to learn traditional skills and contribute labour, either through modest financial contribution or through exchange of work for room and board in the traditional apprenticeship model.
- ***Journeyers*** come for knowledge exchanges and seasonal gatherings. These are not workshops with expert instructors and student participants, but genuine reciprocal exchanges—each person simultaneously teacher and student. Someone might come to learn forest foraging while teaching fermentation techniques they've practised for years. Contributions are made on a genuine donation basis—amounts varying according to capacity, with financial constraint never preventing participation.

Financial Model: Companions and founding members would contribute what they can toward land acquisition. Some may have more cash available, others less—this is natural and acceptable. What

matters is shared commitment to the project and its principles, and that collectively we can secure land without debt.

This is *not an investment*. It's a commitment to building something we want to see exist in the world. The land would be held collectively by the association—not owned for individual profit, not speculated upon, not treated as tradeable equity. How we structure the specifics of contributions, use rights, and exit terms we'd work through together as founding companions, guided by the principles of non-speculation, shared stewardship, and financial transparency.

Joining The Seminary as a companion requires true commitment—not to a perfect legal model (which we'd figure out together), but to the principles and motivations of the project itself. This means accepting genuine risk: that your financial contribution might not be recoverable, that the experiment might fail, that living this way will be harder than you imagine.

The target: purchase land outright—no loans, no debt, no growth imperative. We'd build resilience through simplicity and limits, not through expansion.

Beyond land acquisition, the association's ongoing budget would cover: collective food purchases, shelter materials, seeds and livestock, shared tools and infrastructure, professional accounting (required in Portugal; optional in Italy for small organizations), land taxes and insurance, and modest reserves.

Funding for these operational costs might come from multiple sources, reflecting the Law of Flow—resources circulating rather than accumulating in any one place. Supporting members could contribute financially. Knowledge exchanges and seasonal gatherings might generate income through genuine donation—participants able to attend regardless of payment ability. Apprentices could contribute through work or modest fees. Occasional sales of surplus produce or crafts could provide additional income.

Member contributions and knowledge exchange income, when genuinely donation-based, are not taxable in either country. This allows the project to operate with minimal tax liability while maintaining legal transparency.

Cultural Propagation: Knowledge exchanges, seasonal gatherings, and apprenticeship opportunities exist not for education provision or revenue generation, but *to create connections between people and communities, and between different forms of knowledge*. *The Seminary* becomes a node where ways of knowing outside the dominant culture can meet and cross-pollinate. People come not just to learn but to teach—sharing their knowledge and shepherding others through it. This is the apprenticeship model in practice: everyone is simultaneously teacher and student.

Another way we may propagate new cultures is by documenting and sharing the process of what we are doing so that we may inform similar initiatives, wherever they may be. It might even be possible to imagine many *seminaries* across the world, each working in its own unique way but with a common core. We must be careful not to get too far ahead of ourselves, though.

We are sowing seeds of new cultures—ones that take a humble and coherent stance with nature rather than challenging it. Some seeds take root in the people and communities who pass through,

some don't. Success isn't measured by how many people we 'educate,' but by whether new cultural patterns emerge from these connections.

Shelter and Infrastructure: We'd likely begin simply—canvas tents, perhaps Sibley-style with wood stoves—keeping initial costs minimal and our commitment to rustic living clear. This recognition that the Law of Evolution requires exposure to challenge, not retreat into climate-controlled isolation, forms part of what we call 'the pedagogical use of discomfort.'

As skills develop and resources allow, we might build more permanent structures using natural materials and traditional techniques. What matters is that we'd grow our infrastructure organically through the rhythm of challenge, response, and reintegration—learning as we go, adapting to what the land and our capacity reveal, rather than importing ready-made solutions. These structures, framed as educational demonstrations of traditional building methods, could allow us to develop our living space gradually within the grey areas of rural land regulations in both countries.

Economic Approach: We'd focus on developing *living skills*—natural building, food cultivation and preservation, hunting, foraging, traditional crafts, primitive technologies—adapted to whatever local ecology we inhabit. We are not following any single approach as 'the solution.' Not permaculture alone, not Fukuoka-style natural farming, not synergic agriculture, not any one system. We're willing to adopt methods that prove useful in our specific context—even enthusiastically—but we won't treat any approach as universal truth or permanent doctrine. What works in one season or on one piece of land might not work in another. We remain *experimentally flexible* rather than systematically rigid, even while using the Seven Laws as a lens for understanding.

We'd aim toward meeting our material needs through diverse sources—some from wild harvest, some from cultivation, some from animal tending, some from handcrafts. We might barter surplus produce or crafted goods with neighbours and local communities, or occasionally sell excess harvests or handmade items at local markets when there's genuine surplus beyond our needs. We'd build relationships of mutual aid—trading labour, sharing tools, exchanging skills—honouring the Law of Wholes: we are part of a broader ecosystem, not isolated from it. This diversity itself is ecological law in practice, honouring the Law of Balance by seeking neither deprivation nor excess, but the art of self-correcting movement between extremes.

Governance and Decision-Making: Dissensus principles might guide us: individual sovereignty within shared ecological commitments, with the Seven Laws as foundational guidance. Stewardship roles could emerge from demonstrated care rather than election or appointment—another expression of the Law of Wholes, where health flows from the relationships within the system, not from imposed hierarchy.

The association would require formal governance bodies to satisfy legal requirements—in Portugal, a General Assembly, Board of Directors, and Supervisory Board; in Italy, similar structures under APS regulations—but we'd aim to keep these minimal. We'd hold required meetings, maintain basic records, but invest our real energy in the living culture of the community rather than bureaucratic formality.

The specific forms this takes—how we make decisions, handle conflict, welcome new members, mark thresholds—would evolve through living them. Cultural solutions cannot be designed in

advance but must grow through continuous adaptation. We'd start with what we know, respond to challenges as they arise, and reintegrate what we learn into how we live.

Daily Rhythm and Culture: We might follow ecological and seasonal patterns rather than industrial time. Work when work needs doing, rest when bodies require it, mark the cycles that matter. Create ceremonies that feel authentic to us, not reproductions of traditions that don't resonate with us. Stay open to what emerges.

Residency and Participation: Companions would live on the land most of the time, though no one would be forced into year-round residency—the freedom to move applies seasonally as well as geographically. What matters is genuine commitment to the project and its principles, fair contribution according to capacity, and active participation in the community's life and work.

Those who need to leave could do so; those who need to say no to particular decisions or arrangements could do so. The freedom to create new social worlds includes the freedom to find communities that better suit you if *The Seminary* doesn't.

Risk and Legal Reality: We want trust-based relationships, not bureaucratic ones. But pooling significant resources requires legal structure. The association provides this: a container for interfacing with property law and tax requirements, not a constitution for daily life. We'd formalize only what we must, prioritizing human relationships over legal complexity.

We'd aim to mostly operate transparently and legally—paying taxes when owed (minimal or zero under either country's non-profit framework), maintaining required records, filing necessary paperwork. This is primarily to ensure that *The Seminary* is protected from potential harassment by the state. However, we could accept the small risks linked to not declaring portions of whatever money passes through our hands.

Timeline: The timeline is flexible but has rough contours: gather founding companions through 2026, form the association and scout and purchase land in early/mid 2027, begin living there by autumn 2027. This allows time for the crucial work that happens before any legal structure or land purchase: building trust, clarifying principles, and ensuring we're walking in the same direction even if we can't see the destination clearly.

Glimpses: What Might Life Look Like?

We cannot know exactly what *The Seminary* will become—living systems evolve through response to their environment, not through predetermined design. But we can glimpse some possibilities, moments that might arise when life is lived according to these principles.

Spring Morning, Early May

Dawn breaks over the ridge and mist settles in the valley hollow. In one of the canvas tents, a companion stirs at first light, adds wood to the stove, waits for the chill to lift before emerging. The fire from last night still glows in the central hearth outside. Someone has already added kindling.

By mid-morning, the group splits naturally. Two companions work in the forest garden—a clearing where they've planted hazelnuts and fruit trees among the existing oaks, where perennial herbs and wild strawberries spread beneath. Not rows or monoculture, but layers: canopy, understory, ground cover, root crops. They're planting comfrey now, dividing roots, tucking them around the young apple trees. The work is slow, attentive.

Three others move deeper into the forest. One kneels by a fallen oak, examining chicken-of-the-woods mushrooms growing from the trunk. Another gathers wild garlic, the pungent leaves filling a woven basket. The third marks trees: this one for coppicing, that one showing signs of disease, these hazels ready for harvest. They move slowly. The forest isn't something to manage or even just to use—it's a conversation, a relationship.

An apprentice trails behind, learning to see: "How do you know which mushrooms?" The answer comes as demonstration, not lecture. Touch this. Smell that. Notice where it grows, what it grows near. The Law of Wholes: everything exists in context, nothing in isolation.

At midday, they return—wild greens, mushrooms, the first nettles, plus a handful of sorrel and young kale from the small kitchen garden near the tents. Someone has been fishing the stream—two trout wait to be cleaned. There's bread, baked in the outdoor oven they built last autumn from clay and stone. The meal brings together what's wild and what's cultivated, what's hunted and what's grown. Afterward, one companion begins working a rabbit hide from last month's hunt, scraping, softening. Another plants seed potatoes in a small bed, then goes to carve spoons from green wood. The days hold both: tending and wandering, cultivation and gathering.

Summer Afternoon, Late July

The heat is dense and still. Under the shade of an old oak, a group works on a new shelter—not a tent this time, but something more permanent. Reciprocal frame, hazel poles from their own coppice, lashed with cordage they made from nettle fibres last winter. The walls will be wattle and daub, the roof thatched with reeds from the wetland edge.

Nearby, the forest garden is lush—currants hang heavy, herbs sprawl exuberantly, the fruit trees are young but thriving. Someone picks handfuls of strawberries while checking the rabbit snares along the edge. The rabbits have been getting into the young vegetables, so the snares serve double purpose: protection and provision.

A journeyer attending a knowledge exchange asks why they don't just buy materials, fence things properly. "We could," someone answers. "But what do we learn from that? Building this way, we understand the plants, the materials, the land. And the rabbits—we eat them, use their fur, learn their patterns. Everything teaches." The Law of Cause and Effect: what you put in shapes what you get out. Ease now, dependency later. Effort now, capability forever.

Later, the exchange participants help gather clay from the bank of the stream, mix it with straw and sand, pack it between the woven hazel. The work is hard, messy, satisfying. One of the apprentices shares elderflower cordial she made from the hedge, sweet and tart. Someone else brings tomatoes from the small greenhouse—just a simple frame with salvaged windows, but it extends the season. No one paid a fee—there was a suggested donation, but one participant, a carpenter, offered instead

to teach joinery techniques tomorrow. Another brought wild sourdough starter from her own kitchen and will share fermentation knowledge. The Law of Flow: resources circulate, gifts answer gifts, everyone both teaches and learns, everyone contributes what they can.

By evening, the walls are rising. Tomorrow they'll learn about roofing. Or they won't—maybe it will rain, maybe something else will need attention. Maybe it's time to check the fish traps, or the chanterelles will be ready in the oak grove. They've learned to follow what the day offers rather than force plans onto it.

Autumn Evening, October

The harvest is generous—but it comes from many sources. The forest offers hazelnuts, chestnuts, wild apples. Mushrooms appear in flushes: porcini, chanterelles, hedgehog mushrooms. The companions know the land well enough now to return to the same spots, year after year, taking some, leaving more.

But there's also the forest garden: baskets of plums, serviceberries, currants. The small vegetable beds near the tents give squash, potatoes, onions—enough for winter, not more. Someone has been hunting—a rabbit hangs in the cool shade, being processed carefully: meat for smoking and drying, hide for working, bones for tools and broth, sinew for cordage. Nothing wasted.

In the main gathering tent, lit by candles and a small fire, a tension surfaces. One companion wants to expand the cultivated areas—plant more fruit trees, establish larger garden beds. "We could be more secure," she argues. Another resists: "But then we become farmers, tied to one place, to maintenance. I came here to live more lightly. The ecology of freedom.." she says. "We don't want to be farmers any more than we want to be anything else. Just humans practising different skills." A third voice: "Maybe it's not either-or? The forest garden barely needs us. And having some stored food means more time for other things—crafts, wandering, teaching."

The disagreement is real. No one tries to smooth it over with false consensus. They sit with it. Someone reminds them of the Law of Balance—not a fixed point, but movement between extremes. Cultivation and wildness aren't opposites; they're ends of a spectrum they can move along. Another points out the Law of Limits: the land will show them where the edges are. Plant too much, they'll become slaves to maintenance. Plant too little, they'll spend all their time foraging.

They decide to observe through winter, to feel what last summer taught them, to plant modestly in spring and reassess. The decision isn't final—it's provisional, experimental. Dissensus governance: not harmony, but trust in working through disagreement, in adjusting course.

One of the apprentices asks: "What if we can't find the balance?"

"Then we'll feel the consequences," someone answers. "Too much cultivation, we'll feel trapped. Too little, we'll feel precarious. The discomfort will teach us. And we'll adjust. That's the practice."

Winter Night, February

The days are short and cold. Inside the largest shelter—the one they built with reciprocal frame and thick daub walls, the one with the good stove and smoke hole—four companions sit with tea after dinner. Dried herbs hang from the rafters: nettle, mint, linden. Jars of preserves line a shelf: wild plum jam, fermented wild greens, smoked fish in oil. Baskets hold hazelnuts, dried mushrooms, the last of the stored squash. The abundance is modest but sufficient.

One of the companions has decided to leave. Not from conflict, not from failure, but because she's been offered an apprenticeship with a traditional herbalist in the mountains. She'll go in the spring.

There's grief in the room, and also celebration. She knows the medicinal plants—which, where, when to harvest, how to prepare. She's taught others, led plant walks, made tinctures and salves that they all use. The Law of Wholes: knowledge belongs to the system, not the individual. What she knows, she's shared.

They talk about what changes when she leaves. The work she held will redistribute. Someone will need to take responsibility for the medicine garden, the small cultivated bed of herbs near the tents. The wild harvesting will continue—others know the plants now, can recognize them, gather them respectfully. There's an apprentice who might stay on, who carries different skills: leather work, tracking, an interest in wild fermentation and preserving.

No one asks her to stay. No one makes her feel guilty. The freedom to move is sacred—one of the three freedoms *The Seminary* exists to preserve. They talk instead about how to honour her departure: a ceremony at the spring equinox, gifts made by hand, a promise to visit, to stay connected.

Later, alone, she writes in the shared journal—a practice they've developed, a way of leaving traces: "The land taught me about the balance between tending and letting be. I thought I had to choose: wild or cultivated, wanderer or gardener. I learned they're not opposites but partners, each making the other richer. I'm grateful."

The Law of Flow: nothing is held too tightly. Everything circulates, returns, transforms.

A Year's Turning

Spring: the ache and promise of beginning. Companions emerge from winter with hands eager for work. Some plant in the forest garden—dividing perennials, adding fruit trees, observing what spread and what failed. Others range wider, mapping the land's gifts: where the morels emerge, where the wild asparagus grows, which streams hold fish. The small vegetable beds get seeds—potatoes, onions, kale, things that store well and need little attention. Apprentices arrive, curious and uncertain. Journeyers come for weekends—learning to identify edible plants, to build natural shelters, to make cordage, to start forest gardens. And to share their knowledge. Energy runs high.

Summer: abundance and long days. The forest offers freely: berries, greens, mushrooms, medicine. The cultivated spaces offer too: fruit from young trees, herbs both wild and planted, vegetables from the beds near the tents. Some companions hunt—rabbits, the occasional deer, always with gratitude and ceremony. Others fish, check the traps, tend the gardens lightly. Hides are worked, meat is smoked, vegetables are dried and fermented. The heat is oppressive some days. Conflicts flare about

small things—how much time for cultivation versus foraging, whether to expand the gardens or keep them small, who forgot to check the snares. They work through them, usually. Sometimes they don't. They learn that too is part of it.

Autumn: wealth from multiple sources. Nuts from the forest, fruits from the forest garden, the satisfaction of a modest harvest from cultivated beds. Mushrooms in profusion. The last wild greens before frost. Medicines harvested and prepared—elderberry from the hedge, rosehip from the brambles, comfrey from the garden. Meat preserved from hunting: smoked venison, rabbit confit in fat. The drawing inward begins. Reflection on what worked, what didn't. Someone proposes adding more perennial crops, less annual gardening. Another wants to focus on crafts through winter—baskets from willow they coppiced, tools from wood and bone, leather goods. Gratitude practices around the fire. Songs and stories. The satisfaction of having enough, from both wild and tended sources.

Winter: consolidation. The physical work changes—maintenance, craft, skill-sharing. Long hours working hides, weaving baskets, carving bowls and spoons, making tools, experimenting with natural dyes from plants they grew and gathered. More time for reading, for playing games, for the long conversations that happen less frequently in busier seasons. Planning for spring, but loosely—they know now that plans change, that the balance between wild and cultivated shifts with the seasons, with who's present, with what the land teaches. Some hard weeks when money is tight or someone is sick or the weather turns brutal. But also: the satisfaction of endurance, of stores that came from multiple sources, of being warm together around the fire, of hands that know how to both tend and hunt, to both plant and forage.

The cycle repeats. Each time, they know the land a little better—which plants, which animals, which patterns. Each time, they understand the balance better: where cultivation serves, where wildness thrives, where they meet and enrich each other. *The Seminary* isn't a destination reached but a practice maintained—the art of balancing cultivation and foraging, the discipline of limits, the patience of gradual evolution, the satisfaction of living between wild and tended, belonging fully to neither and to both.

A Call to Begin

If you've read this far, something has resonated. Perhaps it's the recognition that the dominant culture is fundamentally maladapted to the world we actually inhabit. Perhaps it's the pull toward a life lived closer to soil, seasons, and the more-than-human world. Perhaps it's simply exhaustion with the hollow promises of accumulation and the relentless pace of modern existence.

Whatever brought you here, the question now is: what comes next?

I'm not looking for followers or believers in a fixed vision. I'm looking for companions—people willing to walk into uncertainty together, guided by shared principles rather than a predetermined blueprint. People who understand that cultural solutions are organisms, not machines, and cannot be designed in advance but must be grown through living them.

What I'm offering is an invitation to begin: to move toward the edges rather than the centre; to claim the freedom to disobey the expectations this culture has placed upon us; to experiment with

creating new social worlds guided by the Seven Laws rather than by market imperatives and state bureaucracy.

This is not a progressive utopian project or conservative traditionalist retreat. It is not aligned with any political framework. It is an ecological experiment—testing what happens when humans attempt to live within the Seven Laws rather than against them. We will not validate or invalidate belief systems. Instead, we submit all assumptions to ecological testing through direct engagement with natural processes. Pedagogical discomfort applies not just to physical challenges but to ideological ones—being confronted with realities that don't align with what you thought was true.

What this requires from you: honest self-assessment about whether this direction genuinely calls to you, or whether it's an appealing idea that wouldn't survive contact with the reality of rustic living, physical labour, and genuine interdependence; willingness to contribute what you can—financially, yes, but more importantly through presence, skill-sharing, patience with uncertainty, and commitment to working through conflict rather than abandoning ship when things get difficult; recognition that joining means accepting real risk: that your contributions might not be recoverable, that the experiment might fail, that you might discover this life isn't for you after all.

What happens next: If this resonates, reach out. Tell me something of who you are, what calls you to this direction, what skills or experience you might bring, and what you're genuinely willing to risk or sacrifice to be part of building this.

I'm not promising certainty or comfort. What I can offer is honest exploration with others who share the conviction that another way of living is both necessary and possible—and the commitment to discover together what that might look like in practice.

If you're ready to begin—or even if you're uncertain but curious enough to explore further—reach out. The timeline is flexible: gathering companions through 2026, scouting land and forming the association, beginning to live this experiment by autumn 2027. But the real work begins now, in the conversations and trust-building that must precede any legal structure or land purchase.