Meeting #2: Designing Institutions for an Age of Emergencies

TIAL Fellows Dialogue | November 24, 2025

Host: Geoff Mulgan

Participants:

- Arturo Escobar
- Audrey Tang
- Bill Gates
- Daron Acemoglu
- David Graeber
- Elon Musk
- Ervin Lazlo
- Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak
- Hartmut Rosa
- Helena Norberg-Hodge
- Judith Butler
- Jurgen Habermas
- Kate Raworth
- Ken Wilber
- Kojin Karatani
- Muhammad Yunus
- Nassim Taleb
- Peter Thiel
- Roy Bhaskar
- Vitalik Buterin
- Wangari Maathai
- Yaneer Bar-Yam
- Yuk Hui

Geoff Mulgan's Framework Introduction: The Horizons of Change

Geoff Mulgan (standing before two matrices displayed on screens):

Before we engage the substance, I need to contextualize the framework we're using. One of our TIAL fellows, Adler Yang, developed a map of how different communities are responding to the “slow-burning” emergencies of modernity itself.[1]

[1] Post-Enlightenment Horizons of Cultural, Social, and Educational Change | Adler Yang

The Problem We're Addressing:

Modernity emerged from a specific historical moment: Western Europe, Greek philosophical traditions emphasizing logos (rational discourse as the structure of reality itself), Judeo-Christian claims to absolute truth, and material conditions enabling the technological domination of nature.

Classical modernity assumed:

- Reality's structure mirrors language's structure (logos-centrism)
- One rational method discovers universal truth (scientism)
- Expertise concentrates in credentialed institutions
- Progress means acceleration, growth, instrumental mastery
- Diversity is temporary; convergence on one system is inevitable

But modernity has generated profound crises:

Ecological collapse through treating nature as an infinite resource. **Pandemics** through extractive globalization. **Social fragmentation** through the displacement of local knowledge. **Mental illness** through acceleration and alienation. **Epistemic violence** through rendering invisible embodied knowing, relational intelligence, and ways of knowing rooted in place and tradition.

These crises are not failures with simple fixes. They're **intrinsic to modernity's structure**. So the question becomes: **How should we respond to modernity's problems?**

The Two Matrices as Different Response Horizons:

Yang's framework maps how different communities are answering this question. Crucially, **every quadrant and axis represents a serious response**. They're not arranged from "failed" to "successful." They're different strategies for transcending or reforming modernity's dilemmas.

First: The Knowledge Matrix maps how we understand what counts as valid knowledge and who possesses it.

Dimension 1: Univocal vs. Multivocal

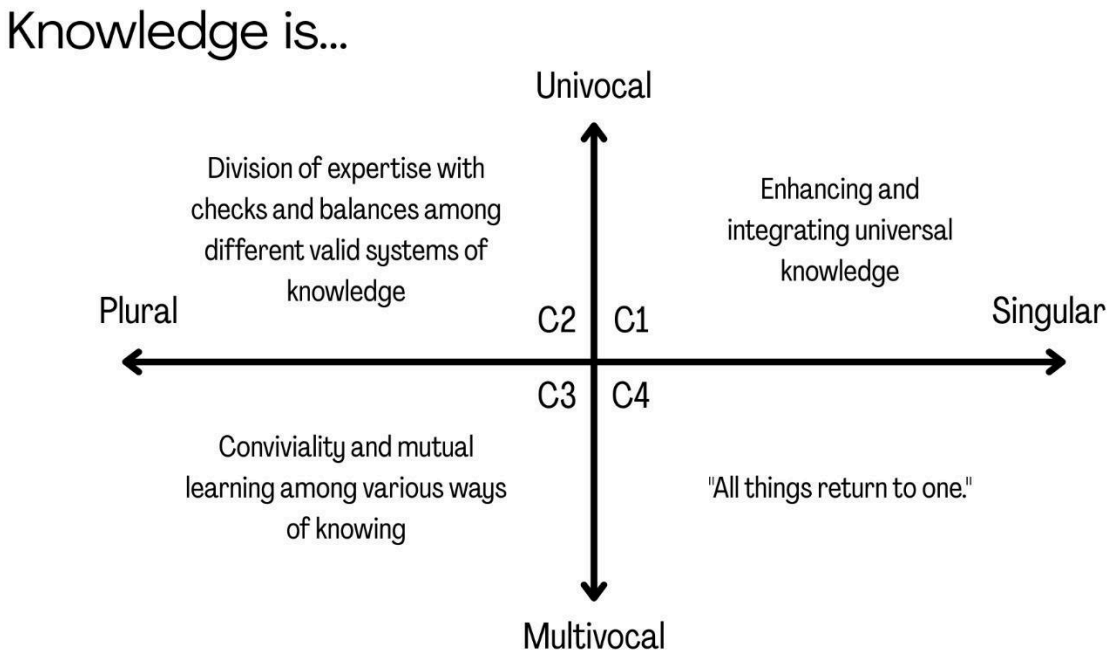
- Knowledge is **univocal**: There is one correct understanding, discovered through objective methods. Even aesthetics or ethics have correct answers.

- Knowledge is **multivocal**: Different perspectives on the same reality can all be epistemically valid. Disagreement itself generates knowledge. This acknowledges that perspective—where you stand, your embodied position, your historical location—shapes what you can know. This is a response that honors difference without abandoning rigor.

Dimension 2: Singular vs. Plural Bodies of Knowledge

- Knowledge is **singular**: There is only Science, only Reason. Everything else—aesthetics, ethics, indigenous knowing, embodied practice, spiritual insight—is opinion, not knowledge.
- Knowledge is **plural**: Science answers certain questions rigorously. But ethics, aesthetics, somatics, community wisdom each have domains where they are authoritative and irreducible to scientific explanation. This is a response that expands what we recognize as knowledge without relativizing everything.

This creates four horizons, each a distinct response to modernity's problems:



- **C1** (Univocal + Singular): Reform modernity through perfectionism. One true way of knowing, objectively discoverable, universally applicable. This is the horizon of greater enlightenment, scientific rationalism, "solving modernity's problems through better science and expertise."

- **C2** (Univocal + Plural): Reform modernity through pluralization of domains. Multiple domains of knowledge, each with objective criteria in its domain. Science is objectively true about physical reality. Ethics about values. Aesthetics about beauty. They coexist without contradiction. This is a response saying: We need checks-and-balances among different bodies of knowledge.
- **C3** (Multivocal + Plural): Transcend modernity through genuine epistemological pluralism. Many different valid perspectives on knowledge; multiple frameworks; disagreement is generative. Indigenous cosmologies are not "alternative science"—they're different ways of knowing with different validity conditions. This response says: modernity's univocality itself is the problem. We need to honor genuinely different epistemologies.
- **C4** (Multivocal + Singular): Transcend modernity through internal pluralism. Many different perspectives on the same body of knowledge. Internal productive disagreement within knowledge systems. Acknowledges that even within science, multiple interpretations coexist and generate discovery. This response says: modernity was right about universal knowledge, but wrong about univocality. Knowledge is always contested, always provisional.

Second: The Social Organization Matrix maps how power and resources are distributed and how diversity is treated.

Dimension 1: Expert-Dependent vs. Self-Sufficient

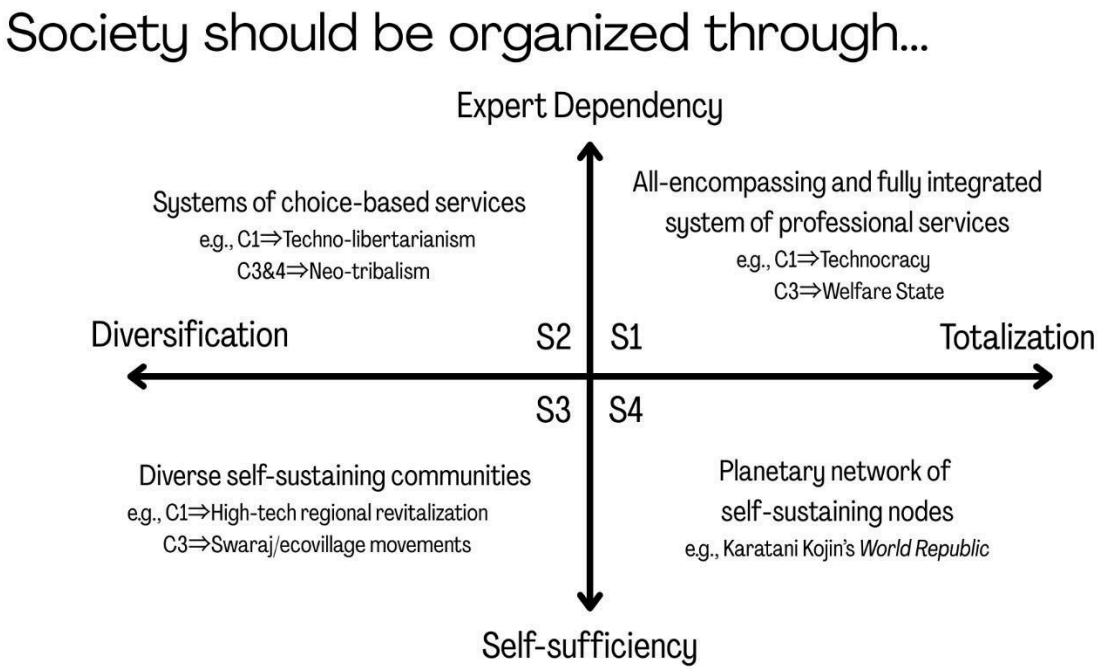
- Social organization should be **expert-dependent**: complex decisions require credentialed specialists, professional bureaucracies, centralized coordination. Communities are assumed incapable of solving their own problems without external expertise.
- Social organization should be **self-sufficient**: Communities have embedded knowledge and capacity. They may access external resources and expertise, but decision-making authority remains local. Communities are recognized as already organized, already capable. This is a response that redistributes agency rather than concentrating it.

Dimension 2: Unification vs. Diversification

- Social organization should be **unified**: The components of society should be integrated with one another with seamless synchronization, as a unified system. Diversity is something to manage, overcome, or integrate into unity.

- Social organization should be **diversified**—multiple valid ways of organizing should coexist. Diversity is fundamental to resilience and justice, not a transitional stage toward eventual unity. This is a response that affirms difference as permanent, not temporary.

This creates four horizons, each a distinct response to modernity's organizational problems:



- **S1** (Expert-Dependent + Unification): Reform modernity through bureaucratic excellence. Professional institutions coordinate unified response. WHO directives, FEMA command structure, centralized government. One system for all, but staffed by the best experts. This is the horizon of governance through enlightened expertocracy.
- **S2** (Expert-Dependent + Diversification): Reform modernity through competitive expertise. Multiple professional options within expert-designed parameters. "Market choice" within frameworks set by expertise. Peter Thiel's vision: competing private monopolies, each claiming superior expertise. Apparent diversity masking underlying expert control. This response says: centralization is the problem, but expertise is the solution. Compete on expertise within markets.
- **S3** (Self-Sufficient + Diversification): Transcend modernity through community autonomy. Multiple communities with embedded capacity and autonomy, maintaining genuine self-determination while coordinating voluntarily. Local food

systems, community health networks, distributed decision-making. Diversity as fundamental. This response says: expertise and markets both disempower communities. Communities must reclaim their own agency.

- **S4** (Self-Sufficient + Unification): Transcend modernity through reciprocal universalism. Communities practicing self-sufficiency rooted in territory and tradition, but unified by genuinely shared values and reciprocal interdependence. Not imposed uniformity, but *concrete* universalism emerging through actual relationship. Kojin Karatani's "Exchange Mode D" vision. This response says: communities are autonomous, but they're also fundamentally interdependent. The question is how to practice that interdependence consciously.

Why This Matters Now:

All eight of these represent serious attempts to address modernity's crises.

The key insight: **these aren't ranged from wrong to right. They're different wagers about what modernity got wrong and how to fix it.**

Today's emergency—permanent crisis—forces us to ask: **Which response horizons are actually adequate to what's coming? Can we combine them? Do we sequence through them?**

The participants in this room represent nearly every quadrant. They're not here to agree. They're here to honestly articulate their different wagers, and to see if any synthesis is possible—or if we need all of them simultaneously.

Let me begin by inviting **Elon Musk** to open. Elon, tell us about DOGE—what problem does it address, and what solution does it propose?

Elon Musk Opens: DOGE and the Problem of Bureaucratic Failure

Elon Musk (with restless energy):

I want to start by talking about DOGE—the Department of Government Efficiency. Not as a joke, but as a concrete institutional experiment happening right now, showing the problem modernity created and a specific response to it.

The problem I'm identifying is this: modernity promised that professional expertise, organized through centralized bureaucracy, would solve problems at scale. One system, professionally managed, universally applied.

But what we've discovered is that **centralized expertise creates its own massive failures**. Bureaucracies become self-perpetuating. They optimize for their own survival, not for solving the problem they were created to solve. They become bloated, wasteful, captured by special interests.

COVID didn't fail because there was *too much* centralized authority. It failed because centralized authority was *incompetent* and *unaccountable*. The FDA couldn't approve rapid tests. The CDC gave contradictory guidance. HHS couldn't coordinate response across states.

What DOGE is doing is exposing this. We're not hiding the dysfunction behind bureaucratic opacity. We're making it visible. When people see hundreds of billions in waste, programs that don't work, bureaucracies that exist only to perpetuate themselves, their response is: *we prefer seeing dysfunction exposed to maintaining comforting illusions*.

So my response to modernity's crisis isn't to abandon centralized coordination entirely. My response is: **keep the coordination, but replace incompetent bureaucracy with competitive selection**.

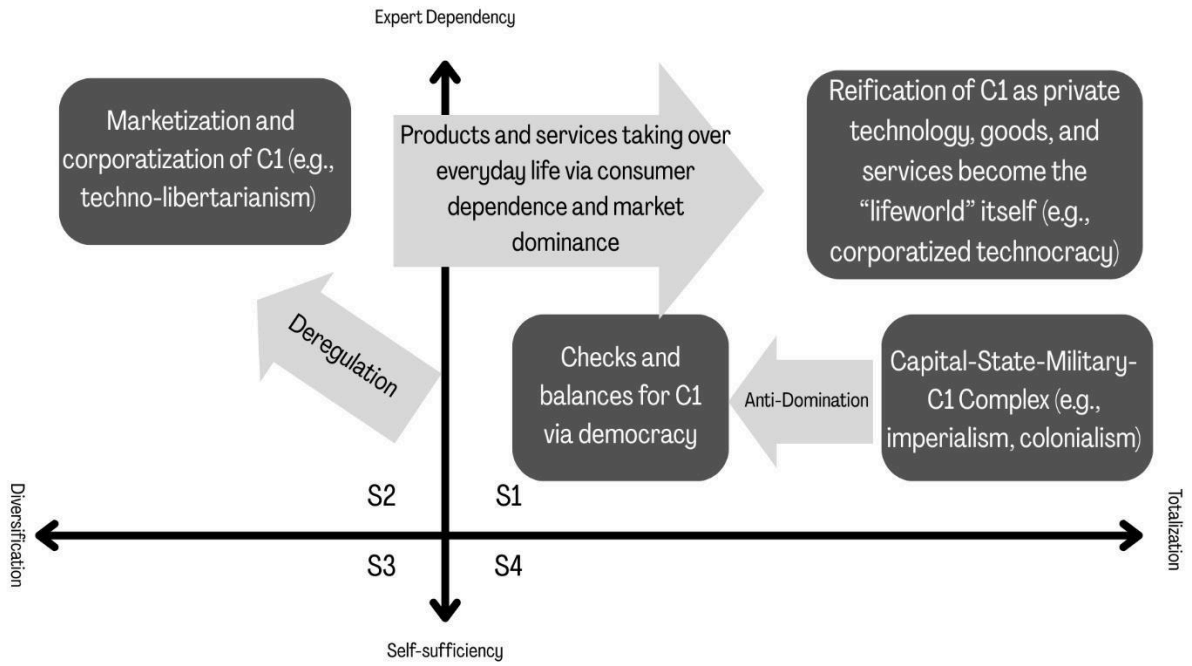
This is **S2**: multiple expert-designed options compete for authority. The most competent wins. Users choose based on demonstrated results. Accountability comes through market exit, not democratic process.

But here's the crucial sequence: in acute crisis, you need unified command. First 72 hours, you centralize (S1) around the most competent authority. Week one onward, you decentralize (S3) to local authorities with real autonomy and accountability.

So I'm actually proposing: **S2 becoming S1 becoming S3**. Use competition to identify expertise, concentrate it during crisis, then distribute rapidly.

The key difference from pure S1 (government hierarchy) or pure S3 (mutual aid networks) is: **make failure visible, demand accountability through results, trust competitive selection more than democratic deliberation or grassroots wisdom**.

This is a response to modernity that says: yes to expertise and coordination, no to bureaucratic opacity and lack of consequences.



Peter Thiel Sharpens the Critique

Peter Thiel (with direct authority):

What Elon describes works only if you have genuinely superior authority. But here's the problem: competition within expert frameworks often doesn't select for superior performance. It selects for better marketing, political connections, regulatory capture.

I'm pushing further. The problem isn't just incompetent bureaucracy. The problem is **the monopoly on authority itself**.

My response is: government has monopoly on emergency response. Not democracy, not centralization—*monopoly* combined with lack of consequences.

I build **private monopolies**: concentrated authority, decisive response, but accountable through market exit. If my system fails, you leave; you're not trapped voting for a slightly different version of bureaucracy.

This is **C1–S2**: one true way of responding to emergencies, discovered through rigorous competition, concentrated in entities with skin in the game. Multiple firms compete; the superior one wins; users choose.

Speed. Decisiveness. No dithering. Consequences for failure. That's what works in crisis.

But I'm honest about the cost: concentrated power without public accountability. I accept that risk because I believe it's better than centralized bureaucratic incompetence.

Roy Bhaskar Interrupts the Frame

Roy Bhaskar (speaking with philosophical force):

I need to interrupt. Both of you assume you can *predict* and *control* crises through better authority. But reality doesn't work that way.

I call this the **epistemic-ontic fallacy**: confusing the structure of our knowledge with the structure of reality itself.

Reality has *depth*: surface events (what we observe), underlying mechanisms (structures generating those events), and fundamental conditions enabling those mechanisms.

When we see a pandemic, that's surface event. The mechanisms generating it: viral transmission through globalized trade networks, animal agriculture destroying species barriers, poverty concentrating vulnerability. The fundamental conditions: extractive economies that treat nature as infinite resource, inequality that prevents global health coordination, epistemologies that treat nature as dead matter to be dominated.

Most emergency response operates at the surface: we see pandemic, we manage it. We're blind to mechanisms and completely ignorant of deeper conditions that make pandemics inevitable in current system.

Retroduction is working backward from observed events to understand generative mechanisms. Not prediction—we can't predict black swans. But understanding what *enables* crises so we can address causes, not just symptoms.

This requires what I call **absenting absences**: recognizing what's *absent* from our perception. What structures are we not seeing? What deep conditions are we ignoring?

Thiel's private monopoly, Elon's rapid decentralization—both address surface management. Neither addresses why permanent crisis is now constitutive of our condition.

The real question: **can you design institutions that respond acutely *and* transform the conditions generating emergencies?**

Until we address the mechanisms and fundamental conditions, we're just rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

Jürgen Habermas on Legitimacy

Jürgen Habermas (with philosophical weight):

Roy names something essential: legitimacy requires more than effectiveness. Authority without democratic deliberation, even if functionally competent, is corrosive to social cohesion.

For permanent emergency, people accept orders not because they're efficient but because they believe the process generating them was *fair, transparent, and inclusive*.

I'm proposing **C2–S1**: unified coordination (S1) grounded in *multiple* valid bodies of knowledge (C2: science, ethics, community wisdom) synthesized through deliberative processes where these knowledge forms genuinely inform each other.

Not Thiel's decisive C1, but something slower: **communicative action that builds legitimacy**.

This means: centralized authority, but transparent decision-making, genuine consultation with affected communities, willingness to adjust based on deliberation.

In permanent emergency, this matters even more. People won't comply with opaque decisions indefinitely. Legitimacy is actually *functional*—it enables compliance, participation, trust.

David Graeber Challenges Centralization Itself

David Graeber (as an anarchist presence):

Habermas describes ideal deliberation, but power is already inscribed in who gets to deliberate. I spent my life studying gift economies, mutual aid networks, commons management.

Humans can coordinate without centralization, without expertise hierarchies, without delegating authority to anyone.

The Zapatistas, anarchist collectives in Ukraine, Kerala's fishing cooperatives—these coordinate emergency response through **C3–S3**: multiple ways of organizing knowledge, genuine distributed autonomy, decisions by those affected.

Permanent crisis requires institutions not depending on central coordination failing. When COVID hit, mutual aid networks fed people government couldn't reach. Slower, yes. But *resilient and accountable to people served*.

The problem with all centralized solutions is they embed a dangerous assumption: there's an *outsider* who can manage crisis. There's no outsider. We're embedded in it. Only distributed response acknowledges that.

Peter Thiel Responds

Peter Thiel (responding directly):

David, you're describing beautiful ideals that don't scale. Anarchist collectives work at village scale. Pandemics are planetary. Some coordination requires scale, which requires power and hierarchy.

David Graeber (with equal force):

No, you're offering nostalgia for modernity. The assumption that "scale" requires hierarchy is ideological, not necessary. The question is: *who bears cost when hierarchy fails?*

When centralized response breaks down, villages survive. Cities dependent on global supply chains collapse. We need **distributed response infrastructure built before crisis, not improvised during it**.

My argument isn't against coordination; it's against *centralized* coordination that renders people passive and then claims efficiency justifies everything.

Kojin Karatani Introduces Mode D and Exchange Modes

Kojin Karatani (speaking with historical-ontological depth):

Both Peter and David are partially right, but they're trapped in modernity's framing. We need to genuinely transcend it through understanding historical structures.

Let me provide context. I've identified four **Exchange Modes** that have structured all human civilization:

Mode A: Reciprocity

This is gift economy, symmetric exchange, direct relationship. Bonds of kinship and community. Gifts create obligation; exchange creates relationship. No commodity form, no abstract value. This spirit is continued in S3 social configurations.

Strengths: rooted in community, produces social bonds, sustainable at small scale. Weaknesses: cannot scale beyond face-to-face; vulnerable to domination by charismatic leaders.

Mode B: Redistribution

Hierarchical collection and distribution. Authority concentrates resources, then redistributes them. Characteristic of empires, nation-states, centralized bureaucracies. This is roughly S1 in our framework.

Strengths: can coordinate at large scale, enables complex administration. Weaknesses: power concentrates at top; incentivizes dominance; produces alienation; sustainable only through ideology and force.

Mode C: Market Exchange

Commodity exchange, price-mediated value, anonymous transactions. Characteristic of capitalism. But also what Thiel describes: S2, multiple competitive options within market logic. The commodity form abstracts value away from relationship.

Strengths: enormous productive capacity, scale-able. Weaknesses: commodifies everything including human life; produces inequality; unsustainable ecologically; creates permanent dissatisfaction.

Mode D: Reciprocity Transcended

This is what I'm proposing as horizon for permanent emergency. Not returning to Mode A—we can't undo history and we couldn't sustain it at current population. But transcending the domination embedded in Modes B and C through conscious practice of *concrete* universalism.

What is Mode D? Communities practicing self-sufficiency rooted in territory and tradition, but unified through voluntary coordination based on shared *recognition* of commonality. Not Mode A (can't scale beyond face-to-face). Not Mode B (imposed hierarchy). Not Mode C (commodifies everything). But something genuinely different: **S4—self-sufficient communities choosing reciprocal interdependence because they recognize fundamental commonality.**

In Daoist and Confucian traditions, this was understood as 和而不同 (harmony amid distinction): each part maintains its nature while contributing to greater whole. Not forced unification, not isolated autonomy, but *reciprocal interdependence*.

Mode D requires what I call **historical consciousness**: understanding we're constituted through history, so we must work *with* history, not against it. Neither pure tradition nor pure modernity, but a genuine third way.

For emergency institutions, Mode D means: **design for true self-sufficiency at local level, but with conscious, voluntary coordination with other communities based on shared values and recognition of genuine interdependence.**

This is very different from Thiel's monopoly, from government hierarchy, even from Graeber's autonomous networks. It requires recognizing genuine interdependence *without* domination.

The question this poses to all of us: **can we design institutions enabling reciprocal interdependence at scale without either autonomy (S3) or domination (S1)?**

This is what I call the *concrete universalism* of Mode D: not abstract universal principles imposed everywhere, but universal *practices* emerging from diverse communities recognizing their common condition and common fate.

Nassim Taleb: Antifragility and Permanence

Nassim Taleb (with characteristic intensity):

Let me sharpen something fundamental: we keep assuming emergency is temporary. **It's not. Permanent crisis is now the condition.**

This changes everything. You can't design for temporary crisis and recover to normalcy. You need systems that *benefit* from disruption, that grow stronger through stress.

This is **antifragility**: not robustness (withstanding stress), not mere resilience (bouncing back), but actually *improving* under stress.

What creates antifragility? **Redundancy, optionality, distributed intelligence**. These seem wasteful in normal times. But in permanent emergency, they're survival mechanisms.

The problem with Elon's rapid decentralization, with Bill's GERM—even with Graeber's mutual aid—is they're all designed responses to *predictable* crises. We're trying to control what we can't predict.

Real antifragility comes from systems not requiring prediction: radical localization, deep redundancy, multiple ways to do anything. If one supply chain fails, ten others work. If one authority fails, communities respond. If one technology breaks, people know how to do it differently.

Centralized surveillance, coordinated vaccine rollout, even deliberative platforms—these optimize for known scenarios. When reality differs, they fail catastrophically.

What survives permanent emergency is **distributed resilience**: every community with capacity to respond, every system with redundancy, every person capable of making decisions without waiting for authority.

This is antifragility: **systems that don't break under black swans because they were never brittle to begin with**.

Helena Norberg-Hodge: Localization as Systemic Response

Helena Norberg-Hodge (with embodied urgency):

What Nassim names, I've lived. When COVID hit, communities with local food systems, local energy, local relationships survived. Communities dependent on global supply chains fractured.

The permanent crisis is structural. The globalized economy is extractive and fragile by design. Food travels thousands of miles. Medicine depends on single producers. Energy relies on vulnerable infrastructure.

Real emergency institution-building is supporting communities to localize. Not romantic—this is S3 becoming S4: building toward self-sufficiency while respecting universal values (care for land, intergenerational justice, genuine sufficiency).

Localization doesn't mean isolation. Communities trade, share knowledge, maintain connections. But survival doesn't depend on single global supply chain.

For pandemic response: **every bioregion with capacity to produce food, medicine, energy, basic goods**. Not efficient by global standards, but resilient to systemic shock.

The institutional form is **bioregional governance**: decision-making rooted in territorial relationships and ecological limits, not abstract administrative boundaries.

Wangari Maathai's Spirit and Kate Raworth

Kate Raworth (speaking with reference to Wangari's legacy):

Wangari—may her spirit guide us—taught something essential: you can't separate ecological resilience from social justice.

Her Green Belt Movement built community capacity *through* ecological restoration. Women organized to plant trees, and through that organization they built voice, power, economic independence.

This is **C3–S3 as ecological practice**: multiple ways of relating to land recognized and enabled, communities building their own resilience while transforming ecological relationships.

Doughnut economics offers **C2–S3**: multiple valid values (not just GDP growth, but regeneration, justice, sufficiency) recognized and balanced, with institutional forms enabling community control.

The doughnut asks: *What does an economy serving life look like?* Not one designed by experts (C1–S1), but one where communities participate in designing what matters.

Muhammad Yunus: Fifty Years of Practice

Muhammad Yunus (with quiet moral force):

I want to name what fifty years have taught me. Poverty, disease, environmental collapse—these are emergencies *lived permanently* by billions, not exceptional events.

My response was **C3–S3**: recognizing that the poorest people are not helpless; they're *organized*. They have knowledge, agency, networks. What they lack is *access*—to capital, information, respectful relationship.

Social business creates **economic structures where communities are agents**, not beneficiaries. A women's credit group managing capital collectively is self-sufficient (S3) and recognizes plural organizing (C3): not imposing one model, but enabling communities to design their own.

The danger of centralized emergency response—whether government or Thielian private monopoly—is it says: "*We will solve your problem.*" That destroys community capacity.

What builds resilience is: "*Here are resources and tools; you solve your problem.*" Then *trust* that embedded knowledge generates better solutions than external expertise ever could.

This is S3 becoming S4: communities rooted in their own traditions and intelligence, coordinating reciprocally with others.

Audrey Tang: Plural Coordination Through Transparency

Audrey Tang (with technological and political sophistication):

Taiwan's experiments approach what several of you are describing. Not perfect Mode D, but gesturing toward it.

We use vTaiwan to enable citizen deliberation on policy. Government has *authority* (S1), but *decisions emerge from dialogue* among different stakeholders (C3: plural perspectives).

Crucially, we make data *visible and verifiable*. No hidden models; no black-box decisions. People understand reasoning and can contest it.

This is **plural coordination without centralized control**: multiple perspectives scrutinize decisions (C3), coordination is centralized (S1), but *legitimacy comes from transparency*.

For pandemic response, this meant: rapid information-sharing and resource coordination (S1), but community voice in quarantine policy, vaccine distribution, economic support (C3–S3).

But—and this is crucial—transparency alone doesn't solve everything. What it *does* is create conditions where domination becomes visible.

If the center tries to manipulate data, people see it. If certain populations are excluded from deliberation, we know it. Transparency creates *accountability*, which is the foundation for C3–S1 working at all.

Vitalik Buterin: Verified Decentralization

Vitalik Buterin (bringing cryptographic governance):

Audrey describes something I've been developing technically: **C3–S1 through verified, transparent systems**.

Blockchain and cryptographic governance enable centralized decisions (S1) while maintaining **cryptographic proof** of what was decided and why. All transactions visible. No hidden processes.

For GERM, this could mean: centralized resource allocation (S1) with cryptographic verification that resources flowed as promised, decisions followed stated protocols, no backroom manipulation.

The cost is speed—verification adds overhead. But the gain is legitimacy. People trust systems they can verify. They don't trust opaque hierarchies.

Ethereum is learning this painfully: you *can* have decentralized governance, but it requires mechanisms that seem inefficient to those used to centralized control.

This is **C3–S1**: multiple perspectives can scrutinize decisions (C3), coordination is centralized (S1), but both are enabled by verified technology.

Yuk Hui: Technodiversity and Cosmotechnics

Yuk Hui (with decolonial force, deepening the analysis):

I need to interrupt something fundamental. All these discussions assume *Western technological infrastructure as substrate*: deliberation platforms, cryptographic verification, centralized surveillance.

But technology is not neutral. Technology embodies *worldviews*. And I'm not speaking abstractly.

What I call **technodiversity** emerges from what I call **noodiversity**—the diversity of ways of knowing and being-in-the-world. Different worldviews generate different technologies, and those technologies then reinforce those worldviews.

Western technology emerges from a specific worldview: nature as dead matter to be dominated, time as linear progression toward progress, knowledge as rationalized and universalizable, value as quantifiable.

This creates technologies optimized for:

- Maximum extraction and acceleration
- Centralized control and standardization
- Abstraction from place and tradition
- Efficiency at all costs

But look at the **entropy**. These technologies are generating catastrophic disorder: climate breakdown, species extinction, social fragmentation, ecological degradation.

Why? Because they treat the world as infinite resource and treat entropy as externality to be ignored.

Indigenous technologies—and I mean this seriously, not romantically—embody different worldviews: nature as alive and related to, time as cyclical and seasonal, knowledge as embedded in place and community, value as relational.

These generate technologies optimized for:

- Long-term sustainability
- Distributed innovation and adaptation
- Integration with place and season
- Living within ecological limits

My argument is this: Real pluralization (C3) means recognizing that some communities practice C3–S3 through technologies that embody completely different worldviews.

An institution respecting genuine plurality doesn't just offer options within Western technological framework; it honors **fundamentally different technological cosmologies**.

If we make Western technology—surveillance networks, deliberation platforms, blockchain systems—the infrastructure of coordinated response, we're colonizing other technological epistemologies. We render them invisible or as "alternatives to the real thing."

True S4 means: **communities with different technological cosmologies coordinating reciprocally, each maintaining their own knowledge-technology relationship**.

This requires what I call **technodiversity (cosmotechnical pluralism)**: genuine respect for multiple ways technologies embed worldviews, not just multiple technologies within one worldview.

The danger is profound: if we proceed with Western technological totality, even in the name of solving emergencies, we're accelerating the very entropy that generates permanent crisis.

Real emergency institution-building means: **create space for non-Western technologies, for pre-modern technologies, for post-technological ways of**

responding—not as supplements to the real solution, but as equally valid approaches to sustainable emergency response.

Bill Gates: Sequencing Expertise and Distribution

Bill Gates (with empirical data-orientation):

All this is fascinating, but let's ground it. SARS-CoV-2 emerged. Countries with **centralized disease surveillance—South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore—caught it within days**. Others caught it weeks later.

That's not ideology; that's mechanics. Distributed networks can't do real-time global pathogen tracking. You need centralized infrastructure (S1–C1: expert-dependent, unified response).

But—crucial point—centralized *detection* enabled distributed response. Taiwan caught it early, then deployed massive distributed testing, contact tracing, local quarantine. **S1 infrastructure enabling S3 implementation**.

With GERM, we're proposing exactly this: centralized surveillance, R&D coordination, resource mobilization infrastructure (S1). But implementation is radically local (S3).

The question isn't centralized vs. distributed. It's: **at what levels do you centralize, and at what levels do you distribute?**

Sequence matters enormously. Get it right, you get resilience with speed. Get it wrong, you get either brittleness or slow collapse.

Yaneer Bar-Yam: Polycentric Complexity

Yaneer Bar-Yam (with systems scientist precision):

Bill's right about sequencing. But I want to name the complexity: **emergencies are multiscale crises**.

COVID needed response at neighborhood, city, national, and global levels. Most institutions optimize for one scale and collapse at others.

What we learned from complex systems: **resilient systems have redundancy and diversity at every scale**. If your entire response depends on WHO, you're fragile to WHO failure. But if every locality is self-sufficient, you lose coordination benefits.

Real resilience is **polycentric**: multiple overlapping governance layers, each with different specialties and speeds.

- **Ultra-fast S1** at global level: surveillance, rapid decision-making, resource mobilization (C1: expert-driven, decisive)
- **Fast S1–S2** at regional level: coordinated response with local variation (C2: expert coordination with plural approaches)
- **Deliberative S3** at community level: local adaptation with genuine voice (C3: plural epistemologies, community autonomy)

Each optimized for its decision-making horizon. Each accountable to levels below and above.

This is approaching S4: genuine reciprocal interdependence where each level respects others' autonomy while coordinating.

Hartmut Rosa: Resonance Amid Acceleration

Hartmut Rosa (with philosophical urgency):

I need to name something underneath all this discussion. We're talking about managing permanent crisis, but we're not asking: **what does permanent crisis do to us?** To our souls, our capacity for meaning-making, our relational life?

I study **social acceleration**: the compulsory speed-up of modern life. Modernity defined itself through acceleration—technological acceleration, change acceleration, life acceleration. And we've normalized crisis, turned it into business-as-usual.

But there's a cost: what I call **alienation through muteness**. People experience the world as opaque, as something to be managed rather than inhabited. Everything becomes instrumental. Nothing resonates.

Real resilience isn't just functional—it's about establishing what I call **resonance**: transformed, mutual relationships with the world, with each other, with institutions.

In permanent emergency, this matters profoundly. If institutions function purely through expertise and coordination without cultivating spaces of *non-instrumental* relationship, genuine voice, mutualism—then we're building institutions that are functionally effective but existentially deadening.

What emerges is burnout, despair, alienation. People comply, but without real commitment. And that fragility will show when crisis deepens.

What emergency institutions actually need are structures that, *even under pressure*, can cultivate:

- Moments of genuine encounter between people
- Experiences of recognition and being heard
- Relational practices that slow down enough to enable belonging
- Resonance between individual meaning-making and collective action

This isn't soft thinking. It's recognizing that **legitimacy rooted in resonance is actually more robust than legitimacy rooted in efficiency**.

When people feel genuinely seen and heard by institutions, they remain committed even during extraordinary stress. When they experience only instrumental processing, they withdraw at the first opportunity.

For emergency institutions: we need **spaces of resonance built into the coordination architecture itself**. Not efficiency all the way down, but rhythms of coordination alternating with rhythms of rest, connection, meaning-making.

This requires slowing down enough to practice what I call **resonant governance**: decision-making that maintains attention to the meaning-making dimension, not just the functional dimension.

Ervin Laszlo: Consciousness and Integral Sensing

Ervin Laszlo (bringing systems consciousness and human potential):

I want to name what underlies all these frameworks: **consciousness itself is shifting, and we're not recognizing its role in emergency response**.

The crisis isn't just institutional or epistemological. It's ontological. We've organized society assuming separation: separated humans, separated from nature, separated into competing nations and corporations.

But here's what modern science is beginning to recognize: humans have capacities that modernity has rendered dormant.

In my research on consciousness and coherence fields, I've found evidence that organisms—particularly humans—have latent capacities to *sense* disturbances in their environment *before they become acute*. Animals sense earthquakes days before they occur. Some humans show similar precognitive sensitivity to systemic breakdown.

This isn't mystical. It's recognizing that consciousness operates through fields of coherence—informational patterns connecting organisms to their environments. When environments destabilize, sensitive organisms *feel* this before conscious mind understands it.

What's happened with modernity is we've taught humans to *ignore* these sensing capacities. We've privileged rational analysis over intuitive knowing. And this is catastrophic for emergency response.

The gift of shifted consciousness is recovering these capacities: not replacing rational analysis, but integrating intuitive sensing with rational understanding.

This has profound implications for emergency institutions. If we design purely for rational coordination—data analysis, expert decision-making, algorithmic optimization—we're throwing away our most sensitive early-warning systems: human intuition rooted in embodied connection to place and community.

Real emergency preparedness would involve:

- **Cultivating sensitivity to systemic patterns** before they become acute crises
- **Training communities to trust embodied knowing** alongside rational analysis
- **Building institutions that create space for intuitive wisdom** to inform strategic planning
- **Recognizing that self-organization emerges spontaneously when consciousness shifts** toward genuine interdependence

When groups achieve what I call **system consciousness**—recognition of profound interdependence—their response to crisis becomes dramatically more adaptive and effective. They spontaneously coordinate without centralized instruction. They sense patterns others miss. They innovate solutions others don't see coming.

This isn't group-think. It's genuine collective intelligence emerging when individual consciousness shifts toward recognition of commonality.

For permanent emergency, this means: **institutions designed to cultivate system consciousness, not suppress it**. This is the consciousness underlying S4: communities recognizing their genuine interdependence *through embodied sensing*, not just rational argument.

The question becomes: **how do we design institutions that enable consciousness shift alongside institutional design?**

Judith Butler Articulates Her Position

Judith Butler (with force):

All this discussion presumes knowledge can be pluralized while ignoring **whose knowledge is recognized as knowledge**.

What I've been arguing is that we must center **the precarious**: the undocumented, the poor, the disabled, those whose lives are rendered hypervisible and unlivable by existing systems.

C3—multivocal, plural knowledge—is necessary. But implementing it requires making *whose voices matter, which epistemologies are legitimate* a political question.

When I push for queer theory, feminist theory as *knowledge frameworks* (not just perspectives), I'm saying these should have authority in designing institutions for justice.

The Challenge to Butler

Peter Thiel (interrupting sharply):

Judith, you're doing something specific here. You're using **S1 power—state institutions—to enforce what you call C3 epistemologies**. You want government to *mandate* recognition of queer theory, feminist theory as authoritative knowledge.

That's not C3. That's C1 with different content. It's saying: "Our way of knowing is the universal way that *must* be universally recognized." That’s the “tyranny of wokeism.”

If you truly believed in C3–S3, you'd build institutions in communities, demonstrate their power, let them spread voluntarily. Instead, you're using state power to impose recognition.

Arturo Escobar (agreeing with Thiel's critique, but differently):

Peter's right on this point, though our conclusions differ. Judith, you're conflating what Gayatri calls the problem of the subaltern with the politics of institutional recognition.

When you use state power to recognize plural epistemologies, you're asking the state to *validate* them. But the state's validation isn't the same as communities' own authority.

Indigenous communities don't need the state to recognize their knowledge is valid. They know it's valid. What they need is **power to design their own institutions without state interference**.

Real C3–S3 means **communities organizing their own intelligibility**, developing institutions where their knowledge is authority without translation.

If you're building C3–S3 from state level down, you've already compromised C3.

Ken Wilber (adding integral critique):

What Judith's trying to do—and where she's going wrong—is confuse *legitimacy* with *power*. She wants the state to legitimate plural epistemologies so they gain authority.

But legitimacy granted by power is not real legitimacy. Real legitimacy comes from practice, from lived experience of benefit, from community endorsement.

An integral approach would say: **let queer theory, feminist theory, indigenous knowledge build institutions in communities. These practices will generate real authority. The state's role is *enabling this autonomy*, not imposing recognition**.

If you use S1 to enforce C3, you create what I'd call **false integral**: institutions that *appear* to honor plurality while actually exercising a new form of centralized control.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (speaking as a presence on subaltern questions):

Judith, I need to push further. When we say C3—"multiple valid epistemologies"—we must ask: **who names themselves epistemologically valid? Whose voice is heard as knowledge?**

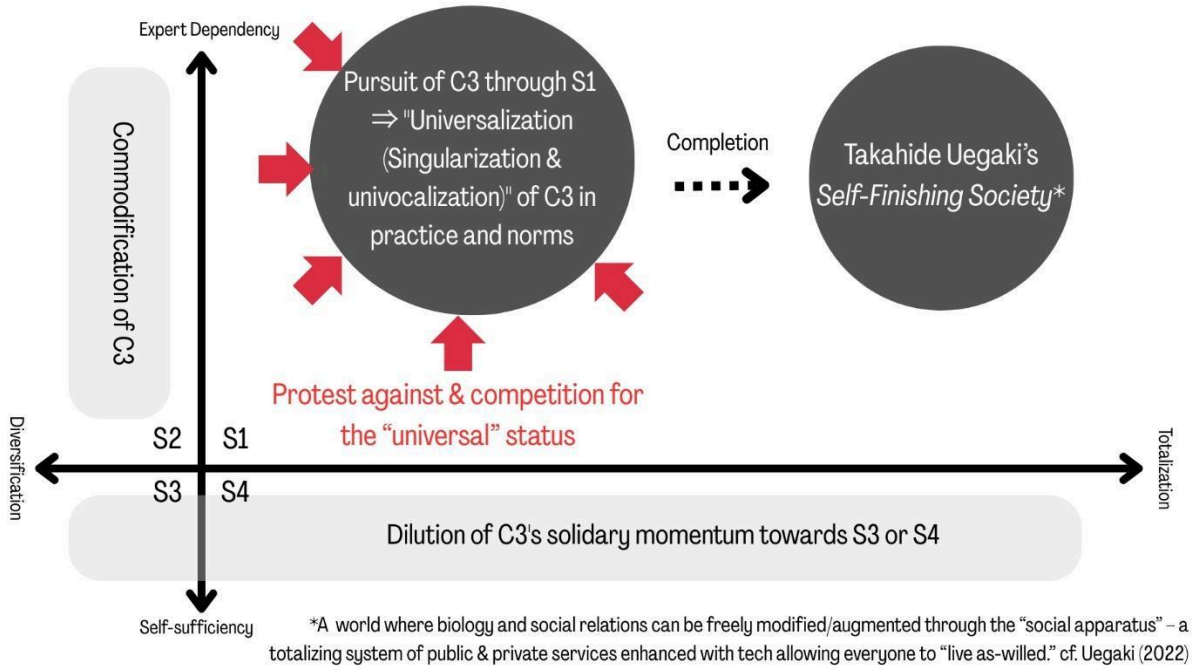
The subaltern—the colonized, deeply impoverished, those without institutional voice—are *structurally unable to speak* within institutional frameworks that don't recognize their epistemic authority.

Using S1 institutions to implement C3 is almost inevitably *extractive*. The institution says: "We recognize your knowledge," while demanding it be translated into institutional categories, rendered intelligible to power.

Real C3–S3 means **communities organizing their own intelligibility**, developing institutions where their knowledge is authority without translation.

For emergency response, this is crucial. The Global South doesn't need Global North institutions recognizing its knowledge. It needs **power to design its own response from its own epistemic authority**.

GERM coordinates Global South implementation of Global North protocols. That's S1 control, not C3 pluralism.



Judith Butler (taking the critique seriously):

But I want to push back on one thing: even movements can silence the deepest subaltern. Even activist spaces reproduce domination.

So the question isn't simply: use S1 or don't use S1. The question is: **how do we create conditions—at every scale and form—where the most precarious actually gain power, not just voice?**

This requires work at all levels:

- **In state institutions**: resisting the capture of plural epistemologies into bureaucratic categories; using transparency and accountability to prevent state co-optation
- **In movements**: constant practice of questioning authority, enabling the deepest subaltern to challenge everyone
- **In communities**: supporting self-determination without imposing external visions

I can't do all this at once. But I need to be honest: centering precarity requires work at all scales.

Daron Acemoglu: Institutional Economics

Daron Acemoglu (grounding in empirical history):

Which institutional forms *actually enable justice and resilience*?

My research shows: **inclusive institutions**—those distributing power and distributing benefits—perform better than extractive ones.

Extractive institutions concentrate power while imposing costs on those without voice. In a pandemic, authorities make decisions; vulnerable populations absorb harm.

Inclusive institutions distribute *both* power and benefits. Communities have voice in decisions. They're accountable.

This doesn't require perfect C3–S3 horizontalism. It requires: **subsidiarity with accountability**.

Decisions at most local level possible, with those most affected having voice, but access to coordination and resources from higher levels.

Historically, societies that moved toward inclusive institutions survived crises better. Not because theoretically perfect, but because people trusted them, participated in them, defended them.

Ken Wilber: Integral Sequencing

Ken Wilber (bringing holarchic integration):

Ervin and Hartmut point toward **integral consciousness**: holding multiple perspectives simultaneously without collapsing them.

What I see here is genuine disagreement rooted in different developmental stages. Not "anyone can think anything"; there are more and less developed ways of understanding complexity.

- **C1–S1/S2** (Thiel, early Elon): sophisticated but narrow consciousness. Effective at what it does, but limited in what it recognizes as valuable or real.
- **C2–S1** (Bill, Daron, Habermas): broader consciousness. Multiple knowledge domains and stakeholders matter, but central coordination maintained.
- **C3–S3** (Graeber, Escobar, Audrey's experiments): more inclusive consciousness. Genuine ontological pluralism and distributed autonomy.

- **C3/C4-S4** (Kojin's vision, Ervin's consciousness, Yuk's cosmotechnical pluralism): attempting to transcend modern/postmodern split. Reciprocal interdependence as fundamental.

But here's the integral key: **you can't skip stages**. You need C1–S1/S2's decisiveness, C2–S1's attention to plural stakeholders, C3–S3's genuine pluralism, S4's reciprocal universalism—*at different times and for different decisions*.

An **integral emergency institution** sequences these:

- **Acute crisis (72 hours)**: C1–S1 decisiveness, but with C2 attention to plural stakeholders
- **Week-long response**: C2–S1 coordination with C3–S3 community empowerment beginning
- **Month-long coordination**: shift to C3–S3, with S1 infrastructure for resource mobilization
- **Long-term resilience**: work toward S4—communities self-sufficient, consciously interdependent, practicing cosmotechnical pluralism, cultivating resonance and system consciousness

Different consciousness modes for different decision-making horizons.

The Larger Debate Crystallizes

Geoff Mulgan (synthesizing):

We've laid out positions. What I'm hearing is surprising convergence on several points:

On knowledge: C1 (one true way) is neither sufficient nor just. We need C2 at minimum (plural domains of knowledge), but ideally C3 (plural epistemologies genuinely informing each other). And increasingly recognizing C4 (multivocal within domains) as honesty about knowledge's provisional nature.

On social organization: Pure S1 and pure S3 both have critical weaknesses. We need **polycentric S1–S2–S3 architecture** where each level respects others. And ultimately, S4: communities self-sufficient but reciprocally interdependent through conscious recognition of commonality.

On the Butler problem: Using S1 to enforce C3 is contradictory. But this doesn't mean ignoring precarity or injustice. It means building institutions in movements and communities first, then learning from them, not imposing from above.

On what works: Inclusive institutions outperform extractive ones. Transparent decision-making enables participation. Local capacity provides resilience. Antifragility comes from redundancy and distributed intelligence. Resonance matters as much as function. Consciousness shift enables collective intelligence.

On permanence: We're not returning to normalcy. Permanent crisis is the condition. Modernity generated this crisis; modernity's solutions only deepen it. We need genuine transcendence of modernity toward pluralistic, pluriversal, cosmotechnically diverse, consciousness-aware institutions.

Final Synthesis – Geoff Mulgan

Geoff Mulgan (standing):

Here's what I'm proposing we develop:

An Institutional Ecology for Permanent Emergency

Not one institution, but multiple institutional forms sequencing through different consciousness modes:

1. **Crisis Command Centers** (C1–S1): Fast decisions, clear authority. Essential first 72 hours. But transparent—people understand why decisions made.
2. **Deliberative Coordination Bodies** (C2–S1): Multiple knowledge domains informing decision-making. Government coordinating with scientists, ethicists, community leaders, affected populations.
3. **Community Response Networks** (C3–S3): Local autonomy, genuine pluralism, built-in resilience. Primary institutional form outside acute crisis. These practices become models for governance.
4. **Technical Infrastructure** (C3–S1 through C2–S2): Transparent, verified systems enabling data flow and resource distribution. But designed to honor cosmotechnical pluralism—not colonizing non-Western technologies or pre-technological approaches.
5. **Mode D Commons** (S4): Long-term vision where communities are self-sufficient but consciously interdependent, sharing values and decision-making based on recognition of genuine commonality and interdependence.

Architectural principles:

- **Subsidiarity with accountability**: Decisions at most local level possible, those most affected having voice, but access to higher-level coordination
- **Transparent decision protocols**: All significant decisions visible and explicable
- **Bridging mechanisms**: Structures enabling dialogue between levels, between knowledge forms, between technological cosmologies
- **Built-in transition**: Automatic movement from S1 (acute) to S3 (sustained) to S4 (resilient)
- **Continuous learning**: Institutions absorbing evidence of failure, adapting protocols, without losing legitimacy
- **Centering precarity**: Those most vulnerable having voice and power in all decisions
- **Antifragility through redundancy**: Waste, optionality, distributed capacity as survival mechanism
- **Cultivating resonance**: Creating space for non-instrumental relationship, genuine encounter, meaning-making within coordination
- **Honoring noodiversity**: Recognizing multiple worldviews and their corresponding technologies, not colonizing alternatives

Roy's contribution: Retroduction and absenting absences—understanding mechanisms and fundamental conditions generating permanent crisis, not just managing symptoms.

Kojin's contribution: Mode D and Exchange Modes framework—understanding that genuine transcendence of modernity requires moving beyond redistribution and market exchange toward conscious practice of concrete universalism.

Ervin's contribution: System consciousness and human potential for precognitive sensing—recognition that consciousness shift enables both adaptive self-organization and recovery of dormant human capacities for sensing systemic patterns.

Hartmut's contribution: Resonance and social acceleration—recognizing that institutional legitimacy requires non-instrumental dimensions, that speed itself is problematic, that meaning-making must be built into governance.

Yuk's contribution: Technodiversity and cosmotechnical pluralism—recognizing that technologies are not neutral, that different worldviews generate different technologies, that Western technological totality is itself entropy-generating.

For our next gathering:

We move from principles to architectures. Real institutional design that:

- Enables rapid response in acute crisis
- Maintains legitimacy and accountability at all scales
- Centers precarity and plural epistemologies
- Builds distributed antifragility
- Practices genuine reciprocity
- Honors technological pluralism and cosmotechnical diversity
- Cultivates resonance alongside coordination
- Creates space for consciousness shift
- Works *with* historical processes rather than against them

This is the frontier. Not perfect, but adequate to what's coming.

Epilogue: Key Tensions and Breakthroughs

Critical Shifts:

- **On modernity's crisis**: The group recognized that modern knowledge systems—and the S1–C1 institutions they generate—are themselves sources of permanent emergency. Genuine solutions require transcending modernity, not perfecting it.
- **On Mode D**: Kojin's articulation through Exchange Modes A–D provides historical framework for understanding genuine alternatives. Mode D is not utopian fantasy but conscious practice of what humans have always done in their better moments.
- **On consciousness**: Ervin's work on latent human capacities and Hartmut's on resonance shifted the conversation from pure institutional design to consciousness transformation as prerequisite for institutional change.
- **On technology**: Yuk's deepening of technodiversity and cosmotechnics revealed that much "emergency coordination" actually accelerates entropy through Western technological totality. True pluralism requires honoring non-Western and pre-technological approaches.

- **On sequencing**: Different consciousness modes, different social forms, different knowledge systems are appropriate at different timeframes and scales. This resolves apparent oppositions.

Unresolved Questions:

- How do you maintain S3 capacity during normal times so it's ready for crisis?
- How do you transition from S1 to S3 without losing crisis coherence?
- How do you scale C3 deliberation to millions of people without bureaucratizing it?
- How do you ensure the most precarious *actually* gain power?
- How do you practice Mode D reciprocity at planetary scale?
- How do you honor cosmotechnical pluralism in systems requiring coordination?
- How do you cultivate consciousness shift while maintaining institutional effectiveness?
- How do institutions learn and adapt without recreating domination?

Meeting #3 Focus:

Moving from principles to real architectural designs. Starting with pandemic response (showing how C1–S1 → C2–S1 → C3–S3 sequencing actually works), then climate adaptation, then the deeper question: How do we build institutions enabling human and ecological flourishing amid permanent uncertainty while honoring pluriverse and consciousness shift?