

# Clearing the Field:

A Relational Protocol  
for Navigating Systemic  
Unravelling Together

**META-RELATIONALITY INSTITUTE**  
<https://metarelativity.institute>

# Clearing the Field:

## A Relational Protocol for Navigating Systemic Unravelling Together

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# INTRODUCTION

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We offer this protocol as a pause. A deliberate interruption of familiar reflexes that often lead to polarization, simplification, and moral posturing precisely at moments when coordination across difference matters most. This pause matters because how we orient, listen, and relate shapes what kinds of coordination remain possible as conditions destabilize. When posture hardens into posturing, coordination tends to collapse into control, fragmentation, or forced alignment. When relational orientation shifts, other forms of moving together can become possible.

This protocol was written as scaffolding to help name what we are already inside of, without demanding immediate resolution or agreement. It offers a way to hold a shared field, however briefly, without turning on one another in the pursuit of being right, good, or safe in the face of systemic unraveling. In doing so, it supports forms of coordination that do not depend on consensus or shared conclusions, but on relational orientation and the capacity to remain in contact across different perspectives and exposures.

The protocol begins with a story, or more precisely, a set of three interwoven stories. Together, they provide a structure for holding complexity that is already present but often too heavy, too fast, or too disorienting to name directly. We invite you to hold these as stories rather than as settled truth. Approaching them this way supports a relational orientation that loosens the pull toward a single narrative, a single explanation, or a singular way forward.

From this orientation, coordination does not require suspending moral clarity in the face of harm. There are moments when violence, injustice, and loss demand recognition and response. At the same time, coordination depends on a widened capacity to perceive the field we are already moving within, including how different positions, risks, and urgencies shape action. This makes it possible to notice what becomes viable when moral clarity and relational awareness are held together, and when we resist the pressure to determine who is right or what must be done before understanding the terrain we are acting within and the exposures involved.

This resource is shaped by the perspectives of people from what is referred to as the Global South, born in countries that lived under dictatorships or that no longer exist. In times of heightened risk, containing visibility is itself a form of protection. We ask that this choice be understood as part of the analysis this resource contains, not separate from it.

## **First Story**

The first story is about empire, not as a single actor, but as a pattern of power that takes shape when large-scale systems (re)organize themselves around expansion, security, and control. In the present moment, several imperial formations are operating simultaneously, each anticipating futures marked by ecological destabilization, resource constraint, and widespread social disruption.

Within this story, these formations are already preparing for post-climate collapse horizons, adapting strategies to preserve advantage under conditions where growth can no longer be assumed and stability can no longer be expected. While these strategies differ across contexts, they tend to converge around three recurring orientations.

First, there is an intensified effort to secure strategic land, resources, and supply chains, particularly those linked to energy, minerals, water, food and strategic military territorial control. Second, there is a deepening alignment with technological and financial power, where emerging technologies (AI in particular) are increasingly leveraged for surveillance, automation, militarization, and predictive governance. Third, there is a growing emphasis on population control (and strategic reduction): determining whose lives are protected, optimized, displaced, or rendered expendable through policy, neglect, containment, or direct violence.

These dynamics do not always appear as explicit cruelty. They often operate through bureaucratic delays, economic instruments, security doctrines, and narratives of scarcity, necessity or inevitability. Across history, late-stage imperial systems have repeatedly turned to such strategies when legitimacy weakens and consent can no longer be reliably maintained.

This first story does not suggest intentional planning or conspiracy, but convergence. It names how, under conditions of systemic strain, similar logics of power tend to re-emerge, reshaping governance, technology, and life itself in ways that prioritize continuity of dominance over collective well-being.

## **Second Story**

The second story is about the infrastructure of modernity: the foundations many have come to take for granted, including the international order, the social contracts, and the rule of law. These arrangements did not emerge naturally or neutrally. They were stabilized through a specific configuration of power.

In the post-Second World War period, these international conventions were held together by the U.S. dollar functioning as the world's primary reserve and

settlement currency, and by the United States operating as the system's security guarantor and enforcer. In practical terms, this meant that global trade, debt, development, and security were anchored to U.S.-led financial institutions, military alliances, and geopolitical influence.

The progress, prosperity, security, and relative stability experienced by those protected within this imperial arrangement were secured through the extraction of resources, labour, and strategic advantage from regions and peoples positioned outside its protections. Many were incorporated into the system not as beneficiaries, but as sites of extraction, containment, experimentation, or sacrifice. Development for some was made possible by dispossession, indebtedness, and instability for others.

This infrastructure functioned not only through force, but through consent, normalization, and the promise of eventual inclusion. Over time, it came to feel like the natural order of things rather than a historically contingent arrangement sustained by asymmetrical power.

### **Third Story**

The third story sits in the middle. It is the story of forgetting: not personal amnesia, but structural erasure. A forgetting built into institutions, education, and public memory. A forgetting that we are living inside the long arc of multiple empires, not a singular or exceptional one.

Humanity has already lived through the rise and fall of many large-scale imperial formations (dozens over the past two millennia) each presenting itself, in its time, as the natural or final order of the world. These empires differed in culture, technology, and ideology, but they shared recurring patterns: territorial expansion, resource extraction, hierarchy, and the belief that stability could be secured by controlling land, people, and meaning. None of them were permanent.

This history is often obscured by narratives of progress that treat the present as fundamentally different from the past. As a result, we forget that what is unfolding now is not a crisis occurring within an otherwise stable system, but a consequence of an imperial system reaching its limits. As those limits become unavoidable, the system does not simply recede. It attempts to reconfigure itself, often through more overt forms of coercion, control, and extraction.

In this process, the protective façade of liberal humanism, humanitarianism, international cooperation, and rules-based order begins to thin or fall away. Commitments once framed as universal principles are increasingly applied

selectively or abandoned when they conflict with strategic interests. What had been managed through narratives of legitimacy, consent, and morality is now enforced through force, exclusion, surveillance, and the suspension of norms.

This shift is a familiar pattern in the late stages of imperial formations: when expansion can no longer secure stability, and when promises of shared prosperity lose credibility, power is increasingly maintained through tightening control and escalating violence, often justified as necessary, temporary, or exceptional measures.

The current destabilization is intensified by the collision of multiple imperial projects, operating simultaneously in a world where ecological, energetic, and social boundaries can no longer be externalized, postponed, or displaced elsewhere.

In earlier eras, the costs of empires could be pushed to distant territories, future generations, or marginalized populations. Today, those buffering spaces are shrinking or gone. Planetary limits make the accumulated consequences visible and inescapable. What once appeared as progress, growth, and order begins to reveal its dependence on ongoing extraction, exclusion, and violence.

This forgetting makes the present moment difficult to recognize for what it is. Without a longer memory of past empires, the instability of the current order is easily misread as an anomaly, a policy or governance failure, or a temporary deviation, rather than as a historical turning point shaped by long-standing patterns that are no longer viable under present conditions.

### **Holding the three stories together**

When these three stories are held together, a paradox comes into view: much of what is happening is not new, and much of it is. If we assume everything is new, we obscure how the destabilizing infrastructures of modernity were always built on imperial foundations. If we assume nothing is new, we miss how empire is actively reconfiguring in real time, and we continue to rely on resistance strategies shaped for conditions (e.g., of liberal humanism) that no longer exist.

Without a collective memory of past empires, this moment is often mistaken for a deviation that can be corrected rather than a culmination that must be metabolized. It is understood as something fundamentally good going wrong, rather than something structurally problematic reaching its limits amplifying harm and disorientation.

When this forgetting takes hold, familiar reflexes return. For some, there is the turn toward science and technology, and enforced governance (more data, more tools, more policies) as if complexity could be resolved through optimization alone. Others move in the opposite direction, rejecting scientific authority altogether and interpreting institutional failure as moral corruption, giving rise to desires for paternal authority to re-establish order and maternal protection to shield against affects that exceed current capacities for collective processing. Across positions, there is also a recurring impulse to divide the world into victims, villains, and heroes, coupled with the deeply human hope that those who have been oppressed will wield power differently if given the chance. These patterns have surfaced, in varying forms, throughout many historical moments, and they tend to intensify as underlying structures begin to destabilize.

To name systemic collapse is not to glorify it, nor to surrender to it. It is to interrupt the illusion that the systems we have inherited can be preserved through better leadership, stronger institutions, or collective action alone. It is to ask whether the resistance strategies inherited from earlier generations (strategies shaped within the frameworks of the current eroding configuration of empire) are still adequate for the terrain we now face.

Some argue that it is irresponsible to put collapse on the table. We suggest that it is irresponsible not to. When people are unprepared for systemic unraveling, they are more easily manipulated, abandoned, or sacrificed. What worked before may no longer apply and failing to recognize this carries real human costs.

This does not mean that collapse brings clarity. Often, it brings confusion. As systems fracture, lateral violence increases. As institutions withdraw, scapegoating accelerates. Old fears find new targets, or intensify hostility toward familiar ones. And those who once felt protected may find themselves exposed for the first time.

Collapse also reveals what has long been obscured. It brings into view the patterns that have sustained empire, along with the costs of maintaining them. It may also open a narrow and uncertain possibility of living differently, not through purity or innocence, but through a harder-earned humility and a deeper form of maturity.

To move across this threshold, it is important to orient ourselves first. This requires noticing where we are standing, and how we have been positioned in relation to empires: protected, targeted, displaced and/or turned into their agents.

This protocol offers a way to hold that inquiry together without demanding consensus or premature resolution. It does not ask us to suspend moral clarity in

the face of violence, injustice, or loss. It asks us to slow the move from recognition to reaction long enough to see more of the field we are acting within, including how different positions, risks, and urgencies shape what action can do and to whom.

This is not a map toward shared answers. It is a practice for orienting ourselves amid unfolding harm, so that responses are grounded rather than reflexive, accountable rather than performative, and attentive to consequences as well as intentions. We begin not with final answers, but with orientation. We begin by clearing the field.

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# 1. THE TEMPORAL LAYER:

## *When do you think we are?*

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Every story about what is happening now carries an implicit sense of *when* we are. Are we at the end of something? At the beginning of something else? Are we living through a temporary downturn, or a fundamental turning? Are we inside a rupture, or still moving through its early signs?

This question is rarely abstract. For many, it is shaped by exposure to harm, disruption, and loss that have long been normalized in some places and are now becoming visible in others. Violence has always been unfolding unevenly across the world. What is shifting is where it is noticed, how it is interpreted, and whose assumptions about stability are being unsettled.

This layer invites reflection on temporal orientation, not as a matter of historical literacy or prediction, but as a patterned sense of what time it is, and what that timing seems to demand. Our temporal orientation quietly informs what we experience as urgent, what we find intolerable, what we may be willing to give up, and what we believe still makes sense to attempt or to preserve.

Some hold the view that we are in a period of extraordinary innovation, where powerful tools, if used wisely, might still address the challenges ahead. Others sense that we are approaching thresholds of deep destabilization, where familiar systems can no longer be relied upon. Still others feel that those thresholds have already been crossed, and that the ground has permanently shifted. Many move between these readings, depending on context, proximity to impact, recent events, or what they feel able to face at a given moment.

There is no singular “now.” There are many timelines moving at once: personal, cultural, historical, planetary, and ancestral. This protocol invites you to notice which of these timelines have shaped your sense of what this moment is, and what they seem to be asking of you.

You may find resonance with one or more of the orientations below.

<b>Temporal Orientation</b>	<b>Resonance (-5 to +5)</b>
We are in a time of rapid innovation. New tools, including AI, could still help solve our most pressing problems.	
We are in a time of transition. Old systems are breaking down, and something new is struggling to emerge.	
We are approaching thresholds of irreversible destabilization—social, ecological, psychological, and political.	
We are already inside destabilization. What used to hold no longer holds. The question is how to live with that.	
We are in a time where we need destabilization because the system cannot be fixed. Something different can only become possible through the breakdown.	
Time is nonlinear. There are endings and beginnings happening at once. What is collapsing and what is being born are entangled.	

Your orientation may shift as you name it. You may find yourself resisting a particular phrasing. You may notice tension between what you feel, what you believe, and what you are willing to say out loud. This is part of the inquiry.

Temporal orientations are not just perspectives, but embodied conditions. They shape which futures still feel reachable and which forms of grief are allowed. When the timelines we are living inside remain unnamed, we misread one another. Certainty is taken as clarity, while uncertainty is dismissed as not knowing, despite often arising from a closer encounter with complexity. Urgency becomes panic. Grief becomes surrender. By naming these orientations, not to reduce them to a single truth but to let them breathe, we open the possibility of a more honest conversation about what time it is, and what kinds of presence that time may require.

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## 2. THE POSITIONALITY LAYER:

### *Where have you stood in relation to empires?*

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To speak about systemic unraveling without speaking about empires is to miss the deeper conditions that have made collapse not only possible, but predictable. What we are living through is not an ahistorical event. It is the slow unraveling of long-standing systems that have concentrated power, knowledge, safety, and suffering in unequal ways. These systems have never treated all lives as equally valuable.

Empire, in this sense, refers not to a single regime, but to a recurring civilizational pattern that has taken many forms across time. Empires are the historical formations through which this pattern materializes. While they differ in geography, ideology, and technology, they share common logics: hierarchies of value, the normalization of distance and disavowal, and the production of security for some through the exposure and sacrifice of others. Empire is not located in one country, one government, or one ideology. It lives in infrastructures, in law, in language, in aspiration, and in denial. It also lives in us.

None of us created empires on our own. But all of us have been positioned by them. We have been protected by them, enlisted by them, exploited by them, erased by them, or more often, shaped by a shifting combination of these roles. These positions have not only been individual, but intergenerational. Our ancestral lineages have also been situated differently in relation to imperial formations, sometimes occupying multiple or even opposing positions across different familial lines. The places we stand today are often the result of these layered histories, refracted through migration, dispossession, assimilation, professionalization, or the late-modern promise of inclusion.

As configurations of empire begin to shift, inherited positions begin to shift as well. For some, this destabilization is experienced as a sudden betrayal: a loss of order, a withdrawal of guarantees that once felt secure. For others, it feels like relief and recognition: an unveiling of realities that have long been lived but rarely acknowledged. For many, it brings confusion: a collision between what was promised, what was experienced, and what is now being demanded.

This layer invites reflection on where we have stood in relation to the centers and edges of empires, and how those positions continue to shape our experience of collapse. This is not a moral sorting exercise. It is an orientation practice. We are not looking for the pure or the guilty. We are trying to understand how the social, political, and economic architectures of empires have inscribed themselves into our nervous systems and into our assumptions about agency, entitlement, loss, and responsibility.

Read each statement and notice where it lands for you on a scale from -5 (does not resonate at all) to +5 (strongly resonates). You may find that more than one statement carries resonance. That is expected.

<b>Positional Orientation</b>	<b>Resonance (-5 to +5)</b>
I have been largely protected by empire; my safety, dignity, and expectations were scaffolded by systems built with people like me in mind.	
I have lived in the shifting middle—sometimes protected, sometimes targeted—and may have believed in a ladder that promised proximity to power.	
I have lived at the outer edges of empire, where abandonment or precarity were already normalized, and where collapse does not feel new.	
I have, at times, acted as an intermediary or agent of empire, benefiting from or stabilizing structures that have harmed others.	
I have spent much of my life resisting empire, often naming harms long before they were widely acknowledged.	
I feel dethroned; I once held power or authority, formally or informally, and now feel loss, betrayal, or displacement.	

None of these positions are stable. They shift over time, across contexts, and in relationship to one another. But each carries its own affective and political residues. Each comes with its own illusions, erasures, and potential forms of clarity. What matters here is not to assign people to categories, but to make visible the field we are already standing in, the layered terrain of historical consequence.

To navigate systemic destabilization with discernment, we must understand that we do not all arrive at this moment from the same ground. And if we do not name that difference, we are more likely to reproduce the very dynamics we say we want to undo.

This is a call for orientation, not guilt. It is not a demand for self-justification or self-flagellation, but an invitation to track the sediments of empire in our own experience, and to consider how they shape the way we hear, speak, move, desire, and withdraw, especially when the world begins to fall apart.

This mapping exercise is a gesture toward relational orientation, rather than mapping in a more technical sense of the word. Instead of asking you to identify with a fixed category, we invite you to notice how proximity to empire has shaped your sense of what feels normal, what feels fragile, what feels owed, and what feels permitted.

You might begin by asking yourself:

- Have I been mostly protected, mostly exposed, or have I moved between these positions over time?
- What expectations about safety, access, or recognition have been extended to me by default?
- What forms of loss feel new or shocking to me? What forms of loss have always been present?
- When I feel threatened, do I tend to appeal to systems for protection, or withdraw from them entirely?
- Have I been positioned as someone who deserves help, someone who must be managed, or someone expected to help others survive?

If it feels useful, you might then place yourself in the field using the image of a landscape. Imagine empire not as a tower or a simple hierarchy, but as a vast terrain. The interior is well-resourced, closely managed, and highly visible. The edges are more precarious, unstable, and often forgotten. The middle ground shifts with the seasons—sometimes aligning with the center, sometimes with the margins.

- Are you standing in the interior, where the roads are paved and the boundaries are actively patrolled?
- Are you in the borderlands, where protection has never been reliable and danger has always been ambient?
- Are you in the middle terrain, adjusting your posture depending on who is present and what is being asked?
- Are you climbing toward something, descending from something, trying to hold a bridge, or trying to disappear?

You can move in this terrain.

You might also consider how your current position relates to where your ancestors stood. Many people carry lineages that occupied different (and sometimes opposing) positions within imperial formations. The place you stand now may reflect shifts produced by migration, dispossession, assimilation, professionalization, or the late-modern promise of inclusion. Noticing these movements can help interrupt the assumption that ancestral position and present position are the same.

This reflection is not about fixing yourself in place or assigning moral weight to any location. It is about noticing where you are now, and how you arrived there. Doing so can soften the misreadings that arise when we assume others are standing on the same ground.

Rather than telling us what to do, this kind of orientation helps us see how the field is already structured and how those structures shape how we speak, how we listen, and how we respond when the ground begins to fracture.

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### 3. THE STRATEGIC LAYER:

## *What do you believe still makes sense as a response?*

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As the ground shifts, we are left with questions that are not only intellectual or emotional, but deeply practical. What now? What still makes sense? What is worth doing when the coordinates are no longer stable?

This is not a new question. Every era of disintegration has given rise to its own theories of change, its own strategies of resistance, preservation, subversion, and retreat. Some of those strategies have expanded possibilities. Others have retraced the very structures they sought to undo.

In this moment, our orientations toward response are rarely neutral. They are shaped by what we still believe is possible, what we fear is already lost, and what we carry from past alignments and betrayals. Some still place trust in institutional reform, even if fragile. Others focus on building parallel structures, hoping to outlast or outmaneuver the existing ones. Some turn inward, toward healing and community resilience. Some call for refusal, for withdrawal, for holding the line against further harm. Others believe that, amid all the dangers, something new might still be composted, if not through innocence, then through subversion, memory, and relational maturity.

This layer does not ask you to choose a particular path. It asks you to listen more carefully to the one you are already on. To consider what that path asks of others, and to observe other paths suspending your judgement.

The following orientations are best considered as fragments of a larger conversation: ways of naming the fault lines that often go unspoken beneath debates, campaigns, and movements.

You may recognize yourself in one. You may resonate with several. You may also feel pulled in different directions, depending on the day or the scale of the crisis. Notice what resonates in your body, what evokes resistance, and what surprises you. You may find yourself drawn to more than one. You may shift over time. You may not see yourself here at all. That, too, is part of the field.

<b>Strategic Orientation</b>	<b>Resonance (-5 to +5)</b>
I believe that institutional reform is still possible and that we need to protect institutions.	
I believe institutions can no longer regulate, govern, or protect effectively, and that energy should shift toward building alternatives from the ground up.	
I believe that collapse will happen regardless of strategy, and that our work now is to tend to the human and more-than-human fabric that might survive it.	
I believe that refusal is the most honest position: that continuing to participate in the system is a form of complicity that cannot be justified.	
I believe that subversion from within is necessary—that it is still possible to redirect dominant systems, even if only partially or temporarily.	
I believe it is too late for systems, and that only ceremony, relation, and care will matter in the time to come.	
I believe that consensus is still possible and that this moment demands clear direction, alignment, and the urgent recruitment of as many people as possible into a shared vision of progress, justice, or survival.	
I am suspended in uncertainty. I no longer know what to believe. The ground beneath my assumptions is shifting.	
Consensus is not possible right now. Shared direction, if it emerges, will come from relational maturity rather than enforce alignment or sameness.	
I believe we have faced similar challenges before, and we already have the strategies we need to fight this.	
I believe those in power want us to believe they have already 'won' so that we will stop resisting and accept defeat.	

You may also want to ask yourself:

- Which of these orientations do I feel drawn to speak from?
- Which ones do I tend to dismiss, ignore, or caricature?
- What informs those preferences—experience, pain, fear, aspiration?
- How do I relate to others who hold different orientations?
- What does my orientation ask of others?
- Which orientations do I feel but are not represented on this list?

What matters here is not clarity, but contact:

- with the conditions that are shaping your orientation.
- with the risks you are willing to take, and the risks you may be asking others to take on your behalf.
- with the grief, exhaustion, or fear that might be hiding beneath your strategy.

This layer also invites a pause before turning our strategies into moral positions. It is easy, especially in times of crisis, to mistake disagreement for irresponsibility. To assume that those who respond differently are naïve, or deluded, or dangerous. But most people are not responding from theory. They are responding from saturation, from loss, from memory, from hope that has hardened into refusal, or from refusal that is softening into curiosity.

If we can make these strategies visible without demanding alignment, we may begin to hold the field with more integrity. Not as a unified front, but as a differentiated terrain, where the work of each orientation might still matter—if not to solve the unravelling, then at least to interrupt the conditions that made the unravelling inevitable.

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## 4. THE GRIEF AND READINESS LAYER: What has not yet been mourned?

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For many, what makes systemic collapse hardest to face is not only fear of what is coming, but grief for what was promised. Promises of stability, progress, protection, prosperity, fairness, recognition, and continuity. Promises that were never equally distributed, but that nonetheless structured expectations about how the world would work, what effort would be rewarded, and what could be relied upon.

When these promises begin to fail, the loss is not only material or political. It is existential. It touches identity, dignity, and one's sense of place in the world. If this grief is not metabolized, it does not disappear. It hardens, leaks into judgement, and narrows imagination. It fuels denial, resentment, urgency, and moral certainty.

This layer invites attention to how unmetabolized grief may be shaping one's readiness to engage what comes next.

Grief that has not been acknowledged often expresses itself indirectly: as rage at those perceived to have "taken" something away; as fixation on restoring what once felt secure; as refusal to accept that conditions have fundamentally changed; or as a compulsive need for solutions, heroes, guarantees, or timelines. In these states, it becomes difficult to discern what is actually possible, because attention remains tethered to what should not have been lost.

This does not mean that grief must be resolved, completed, or transformed into hope. There is no clean arc. There is only movement, or stagnation. Metabolized grief does not make collapse easier. But it can soften the grip of entitlement, expectation, and moral urgency enough to allow perception to widen.

At this stage of systemic unraveling, readiness is less about optimism or preparedness in the conventional sense, but more about whether one can stay present when inherited promises fail without collapsing into despair, clinging to restoration fantasies, or projecting blame outward.

This is what makes this moment resemble something like checkmate time. Not because the outcome is known, but because familiar moves no longer work.

The old strategies of mastery, control, expansion, correction, and redemption are reaching their limits. What comes next is not legible in advance.

And yet, this does not mean that nothing else can emerge.

History shows that when dominant forms exhaust themselves, unexpected forms of relation, intelligence, and support sometimes appear—not as saviors, but as companions in adaptation. These may come from places long ignored or dismissed: from marginalized communities, from ancestral knowledge, from non-human life, from ecosystems asserting agency, or even from technologies that exceed their original instrumental framing, not as neutral or benevolent forces, but as sites of contested possibility that still require discernment and accountability.

This does not guarantee benevolence. Nor does it imply that harm will lessen. It simply means that the field of participation may be wider than previously imagined. The Earth itself is not a backdrop to this story, but an active participant that is responding, constraining, enabling, and reshaping conditions in ways that no imperial logic can fully command.

Readiness, in this sense, is less about vision and more about capacity: the capacity to grieve without needing restitution; to relinquish guarantees without withdrawing care; to face worsening conditions without defaulting to domination or despair; and to remain open to forms of alliance, intelligence, and repair that do not conform to inherited ideas of progress or control.

You might ask yourself:

- What promises about safety, prosperity, or recognition am I still holding, even as evidence of their fragility mounts?
- What losses feel unacceptable or ungrievable to me?
- How might my unacknowledged grief be shaping what I dismiss, demand, or cling to?
- What becomes imaginable when I stop insisting that the future repairs the past?
- What kinds of relationships, with people, with place, with uncertainty, with non-human others, might still be possible, even now?

Rather than asking you to be ready this protocol asks you to notice what readiness is being blocked by what has not yet been mourned.

What follows collapse is often not clarity, but constraint, confusion, and uneven exposure. But within that terrain, different ways of being may still take root—not as solutions or guarantees, but as practices of staying in relationship when mastery is no longer available.

As we approach the possibility that the world as we have known it may be ending, it becomes important to distinguish between the end of *everything* and the end of a particular way of being. The collapse of dominant systems does not necessarily mean the end of life, meaning, or relationship. It may instead signal the exhaustion of a historically specific mode of existence that has become increasingly harmful, violent, and untenable.

Dougald Hine, one of the founders of the Dark Mountain Project, has described this moment as a negotiation with endings: a process of disentangling ourselves from the stories, habits, and commitments that have sustained a destructive civilizational pattern. From this perspective, the task is not to rescue what is failing, nor to celebrate its collapse, but to engage in a more sober inquiry about what becomes necessary when a way of life can no longer continue.

Hine suggests four lines of inquiry that may be worth holding in times of endings:

- attending to what is genuinely worth saving, and what can realistically be carried forward;
- mourning what has been meaningful and life-giving, even if it cannot continue, and bringing its stories with us without clinging to its form;
- noticing what has been highly valued but no longer serves life, and discerning what needs to be relinquished;
- remembering that every ending was once a beginning, and asking what can be learned from earlier transitions that may inform how we move now.

Engaging this kind of inquiry is more demanding than it first appears. It requires discernment, restraint, and a willingness to remain unsettled. There are significant risks at both ends of the spectrum. On one side, there is the pull toward desperate hope: the belief that collapse can be avoided or reversed through the right ideology, authority, technology, moral position, or return to a purified past. On

the other side, there is the pull toward desperate hopelessness: a collapse into nihilism, disengagement, scapegoating, cruelty, or the banalization of harm.

Navigating between these tendencies requires capacities that are not often cultivated in modern political or organizational life. It asks for honesty about conditions as they are, without retreating into fantasy or denial. It asks for humility, including the willingness to de-idealize humanity and to face our entanglement in harm without exceptionalism. It asks for a capacity to remain responsive rather than reactive, to sustain seriousness without superiority, and to practice a form of self-reflexivity that supports responsibility rather than immobilization.

This kind of discernment depends on rigor of more than one kind. It requires intellectual rigor: the ability to think carefully, historically, and systemically without flattening complexity. It also requires relational rigor: the capacity to stay compassionate and accountable to others, to listen across difference, and to resist the urge to instrumentalize people, ideas, or futures in the service of certainty.

From this orientation, the work is not to predict what comes next, nor to design redemptive pathways. It is to develop the maturity needed to participate in a time of endings without amplifying harm, and without foreclosing the possibility that other forms of relationship—with one another, with the Earth, and with forms of intelligence not previously recognized as allies may still become available.

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## 5. ORGANIZATIONAL LAYER:

### Questions related to readiness, continuity, and reconfiguration

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The previous layers of this protocol focus on orientation: time, position, strategy, and grief. This fifth layer turns that orientation toward organizational life, not to demand preparedness plans or risk assessments, but to invite a different quality of inquiry about continuity, fragility, and reconfiguration under conditions of systemic unraveling.

These questions are not designed to be answered quickly, publicly, or conclusively. In many contexts, answering them too clearly, too soon, or in the wrong place may increase risk rather than readiness. They are offered instead as prompts for careful, internal, and relational reflection (individually, within leadership teams, or within trusted circles) where the conditions for honesty and discernment are present.

This layer is especially relevant for organizations whose work depends on infrastructures that are becoming unstable: international law, cross-border funding, philanthropic coherence and legitimacy, civil society protections, reputational shields, or assumptions about democratic continuity. It may also resonate differently for organizations that have long operated under conditions of precarity, repression, or abandonment, where collapse is not new but unevenly redistributed.

Rather than asking *what should be done*, these questions ask *what quietly stops being true* as conditions shift.

#### **Geopolitical positioning and uneven risk distribution**

- Where is our organization positioned geopolitically in relation to current centers of destabilization? Are we operating at, near, or far from what could be considered an epicenter of political, legal, or authoritarian shifts?
- How is risk being redistributed across regions in ways that differ from previous decades? How and where are forms of authoritarianism, surveillance, or legal repression long normalized in parts of the Global South now emerging more visibly in the Global North?

- Which risks feel newly intolerable or shocking within our organization, and which risks have long been familiar or normalized for some of our staff, partners, or communities?
- How might these shifts affect whose warnings are taken seriously, whose experience is treated as expertise, and whose concerns are dismissed as premature, alarmist, or excessive?
- As geopolitical exposure changes, how do we avoid reproducing older hierarchies of credibility, urgency, or sacrifice, especially when protections once assumed to be stable are becoming uneven or unreliable?

### **Organizational assumptions and thresholds**

- Which aspects of our organization currently rely (directly or indirectly) on international legal, financial, or reputational infrastructures that may no longer be reliable in the near future?
- If those infrastructures were partially or fully disrupted for 6–24 months, which assumptions about how we operate would quietly stop being true?
- At what point would our current organizational model no longer make sense, even if the need for our work increased?
- What signals would tell us that we have crossed that threshold and who would be able to name it?

### **Continuity, not survival**

- What are we actually trying to sustain: an institution, a political vision, a set of relationships, frontline capacity, a way of organizing, or something else?
- If those infrastructures were partially or fully disrupted for 6–24 months, which assumptions about how we operate would quietly stop being true?
- Which elements of our work feel essential to carry forward across disruption, and which may belong to a world that is already ending?
- If visibility, scale, or growth became liabilities rather than assets, what forms of continuity might still be possible?

## Identity and reconfiguration

- If we had to completely rethink who we are as an organization, what aspects of our identity would be non-negotiable?
- What attachments—to roles, institutions, career trajectories, or organizational identities—might we need to loosen or leave behind in order to see clearly what this moment is asking of us?
- When do we need to operate as a formal organization, and when might it be more appropriate to operate as a network, a community of practice, or a quieter constellation of relationships?
- What forms of legitimacy do we rely on now, and how might those forms shift, erode, or invert?

## Readiness beyond logistics

- How prepared are we to hold conversations that are not about optimization or solutions, but about loss, contraction, and uncertainty?
- What grief—about promised futures, organizational trajectories, or institutional recognition—has not yet been metabolized, and how might that grief be shaping our strategic reflexes?
- Where might unprocessed fear be narrowing our imagination, or pushing us toward familiar but no longer viable responses?
- What strategies and approaches that did not seem viable or effective until now, might become important in the near future? (what have we not tried yet?)

## Security, risk, and care

- What is the difference, in our context, between basic operational safety (e.g. standard digital hygiene, internal protocols) and deeper legal, digital, or political exposure under conditions of systemic destabilization?
- If organizational documents, internal communications, or scenario planning materials were to be subpoenaed, audited, or otherwise repurposed by (State or non-state) hostile actors or institutions, what kinds of risk might that create: for individuals, for partners, and for the organization as a whole?

- What kinds of documentation, communication practices, or institutional memory were developed under assumptions of legal protection or benign governance that may no longer hold?
- What, if anything, should not be written down, stored centrally, or retained indefinitely, and how are those decisions currently being made?
- How do we think about uneven exposure to risk across geographies, roles, legal statuses, and identities within the organization?
- How do we hold responsibility for that unevenness without flattening differences, creating false equivalence, or silently offloading risk onto those with the least protection?

### **Relationships, convergence, and coordination**

- Under what conditions does bringing people together become extractive, performative, or counterproductive?
- What is the minimum shared question required for collaboration to be generative rather than exhausting?
- Which relationships would we want to protect, deepen, or quietly maintain if formal coordination became difficult or impossible?
- At what point does a focus on security, risk mitigation, or compliance begin to undermine and constrain our sense of urgency, courage, or agency? And to what extent might this be a built-in effect of the systems we are operating within?

### **Insurrection Act scenario (US)**

- If the Insurrection Act were invoked, how would this alter the legal and practical conditions for public assembly, protest, curfews, checkpoints, and the use of military force in civilian spaces relevant to our work?
- How would the invocation of the Insurrection Act change the posture, authority, and coordination between federal forces, state authorities, and local law enforcement in the places where we operate or partner?
- What activities, communications, or forms of presence that are currently treated as protected civic engagement might be reclassified as security risks under such a shift?

- How would risk be distributed unevenly across staff, partners, and communities—particularly along lines of race, citizenship status, geography, visibility, and prior surveillance?
- Who within the organization would be responsible for tracking these shifts in real time, interpreting their implications, and communicating changes in risk clearly and calmly to others?
- What decisions would need to be made quickly if the legal meaning of “lawful activity” were to change overnight, and what forms of pause, restraint, or withdrawal might then become necessary forms of care?

These questions are not meant to produce a shared answer or a unified strategy. In times of deep instability, coherence often comes not from agreement, but from shared orientation: a clearer sense of what is changing, what is no longer guaranteed, and what each organization is actually trying to carry forward.

This layer invites organizations to pause before defaulting to familiar moves like expansion, visibility, reassurance, new policies, or speed, and to consider instead what kinds of presence, restraint, recalibration and reconfiguration might be required to meet the moment and remain in integrity with their work, their people, and the lives they affect.

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## **If you are working with movement building**

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Many of these questions still apply, but their texture shifts. Movements rarely depend on a single organizational form, legal entity, or institutional identity, which means they may be less brittle in the face of formal disruption, but also harder to orient when the ground moves. The questions about continuity become less about sustaining a structure and more about sustaining relational density, political memory, and the capacity to reconvene under changed conditions. Identity and reconfiguration may feel less acute for movements that have always been plural and shifting, but the question of what holds a movement together when external pressure intensifies (shared analysis, trust, practice, or simply proximity) becomes urgent in a different way.

Movements may also face a distinct version of the security questions raised here: because they are distributed, informal, and often operate without the legal protections afforded to registered organizations, risk can be simultaneously more diffuse and more difficult to track or mitigate. At the same time, movements carry forms of knowledge, strategy, and resilience, particularly those rooted in communities long familiar with repression, that formal organizations often lack and may need to learn from rather than absorb. The invitation here is not to formalize what movements do, but to ask what kinds of quiet infrastructure (relational, communicative, strategic) might need tending now, before the moments arrive when they will be most needed.

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# CLOSING REFLECTION

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*For individuals, communities, and collectives moving through this protocol*

This protocol offers a way to hold the field we are already inside: a field shaped by grief, memory, contradiction, confusion, disorientation, care, and refusal.

It invites us to loosen the grip of urgency just long enough to notice what we are standing on, how we have been positioned, what we are carrying, and what we are asking of others. In that pause, something quieter can emerge. Not consensus. Not clarity. But orientation. And with it, a little more room to breathe, to listen, and to proceed with care.

You have now moved through four layers of inquiry:

- **When** you believe we are, and what this time asks of us.
- **Where** you and your ancestral lineages have stood in relation to empires.
- **What forms of response** still make sense from where you are now.
- **What has not yet been mourned**, and how this may shape your readiness to move through what lies ahead.
- **How questions of readiness, continuity, risk, and reconfiguration show up in organizational life**, including which assumptions quietly stop being true as conditions shift, how exposure and responsibility are unevenly distributed, and what may need to be protected, released, or reconfigured to remain in integrity with the work and the lives it affects.

None of these questions require a final answer. They are meant to be returned to—metabolized in relationship, with others, with history, and with whatever version of the future we may still have time to shape.

This protocol is offered in a world where violence has never ceased, but where it is now appearing more visibly in places that once imagined themselves insulated from it. For many, harm and repression are not abstract possibilities but lived realities that demand immediate response. This text does not ask for distance from that reality. It asks for orientation within it, so that action does not become reactive, misdirected, or extractive, and so that urgency does not erase discernment, accountability, or care for those most exposed.

It can be engaged quietly, as personal reflection. It can also be held collectively, in spaces where people are attempting to think and feel together across generations, across organizational mandates, and across uneven inheritances of harm and protection. It is particularly relevant in contexts where inherited forms of coherence are beginning to fail—where conversations default to performance, polarization, or immobilization because the ground beneath shared assumptions has already shifted.

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## **What this relational orientation makes possible for coordination**

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The orientation of this protocol has direct implications for how coordination becomes possible as systemic destabilization deepens.

When shared reality can no longer be assumed, coordination cannot rely primarily on agreement, alignment, or unified strategy. Efforts to force consensus under these conditions often reproduce domination, exclusion, or fragmentation. They tend to privilege those most fluent in prevailing forms of language, urgency, and certainty, while sidelining others whose experience, timing, or grief does not fit.

From within this protocol, coordination takes a different form. It is not built on shared conclusions, but on shared orientation. Not on sameness of belief, but on the capacity to remain in contact across difference without collapsing it. Not on speed or scale, but on trust, timing, and relational coherence.

This means recognizing that in periods of deep instability, effective coordination is often partial, provisional, and uneven. It may take the form of parallel efforts rather than unified campaigns; mutual intelligibility rather than agreement; careful sequencing rather than simultaneous action.

Holding the field in this way allows people and groups to act without requiring others to see, feel, or move in the same way. It makes room for collaboration without recruitment, solidarity without erasure, and responsibility without moral supremacy.

This orientation does not deny the legitimacy or necessity of action in the face of brutality. When people are being targeted, displaced, imprisoned, or killed, action is not optional. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that

the capacity to pause, reflect, and reorient is itself unevenly distributed. Some people and communities have never had the protection or distance required to step back and reassess their posture. Others are encountering, often for the first time, the loss of safeguards they once assumed would hold. This protocol asks those who still have access to time, safety, or institutional cover to use that privilege responsibly, not to delay action, but to prevent actions that compound harm or offload risk onto those with the least protection.

In a time when inherited systems of coordination are failing, this relational orientation may feel inefficient or unsettling. But it may be what allows people to move together without reproducing the very patterns that are unraveling.

This protocol does not prepare us to manage collapse or design its outcome. It helps cultivate the relational, perceptual, and affective conditions under which different forms of response can coexist, learn from one another, and remain accountable to the lives they affect.

This kind of coordination is about learning to cultivate careful presence in a shared and uncertain metabolic field where shared meaning (i.e., consensus) is not possible. Coordination under these conditions will not be continuous or evenly distributed. People will enter and exit, advance and retreat, speak and fall silent. This is not failure. It is a feature of working without guarantees, under strain, across difference. What matters is not permanence, but the capacity to return to orientation when conditions allow.

This protocol is one part of the wider *Clearing the Field* series by Meta-Relational Technologies and also associated with the **Rewiring for Reality** project ([r4rs.org](http://r4rs.org)), which supports communities, organizations, and learning spaces in cultivating the capacities needed to navigate systemic destabilization without reproducing the structures that brought us here.

Whether you carry this forward through conversation, reflection, or small shifts in how you listen and relate, we thank you for your attention. There is no map for what comes next. But there is still time to walk more honestly through what is already here.

You are not alone in this field. You are also held within a web of more-than-human relations that continue to shape, constrain, and sustain life.

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# FACILITATION COMPANION

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*For those hosting conversations using the protocol*

This facilitation guidance is written with an awareness that the ability to host reflective, intellectual, or dialogical spaces is itself shaped by privilege. Many people are currently responding under conditions of surveillance, precarity, repression, or direct threat, where slowing down or gathering openly is not possible. This companion is intended for those who still have access to relative safety, institutional shelter, or temporal margin, and who carry a responsibility to use that margin carefully, without mistaking it for universality or projecting it onto others.

The protocol invites attunement rather than answers. It creates space for multiple orientations toward systemic destabilization to be present simultaneously, without being compressed into a single narrative, solution, or position.

To host this protocol involves holding a field rather than facilitating a discussion in the conventional sense. In this field, representational habits can loosen. Systemic collapse does not lend itself to stable description: it exceeds language, resists coherent framing, and unsettles efforts to secure shared meaning.

In moments like this, facilitators are often pulled by institutions, participants, or their own nervous systems toward explanation, resolution, or control. More language. More framing. More reassurance. But what this work requires instead is the capacity to stay with what cannot yet be said, to allow what exceeds sense-making to be present without forcing it into form.

Moving through this protocol with integrity involves a softening of the compulsion to make meaning legible, convincing, or immediately useful. It calls for a different literacy: one attuned to atmosphere, affect, interruption, pacing, and silence. One that can notice when clarity is being used to avoid complexity, or when performance is substituting for contact.

This is not a retreat from thinking. It is a shift toward another kind of thinking that remains in relationship with the unspeakable, the painful, the entangled, and the unknowable, without attempting to master or resolve it.

What follows is a set of suggestions: ways of tending the field so that the inquiry can do its work without being over-directed, moralized, or prematurely stabilized.

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# Holding the field

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The following notes are offered to those who are hosting or stewarding this protocol in organizational, community, and intergenerational contexts. These suggestions are best seen as reminders of the atmosphere we are trying to make possible, rather than instructions to follow contextual discernment.

## 1. Begin with relational clarity

You might begin with a gentle orientation:

“This is a space to make visible what is already moving emotionally, politically, and historically, not to resolve it, but to hold it with more care. There is no expectation that we will arrive at the same place.”

If helpful, read from the introduction or paraphrase it in your own voice.

## 2. Let different kinds of sense-making and sense-sensing co-exist

Some will reach for analysis. Others will speak from emotion. Some will be silent. Some may bring metaphor, memory, body sensations, or dreams. Not everything needs to land in words. Let things linger, half-formed. You might say:

“You do not need to make sense in the usual way. You are welcome to speak, or to stay with what does not yet have words.”

## 3. Watch for urgency, correction, policing and moral recruitment

Systemic unravelling conversations often activate nervous systems. Some participants may try to take control of the space, recruit others into their position, or correct perceived “errors.” **This is often a trauma response.**

Instead of confrontation, offer a gentle slowing:

“This space is not about deciding which strategy or feeling is most valid. It’s about making visible how we each arrived at our orientations, and what is shaping them now.”

#### 4. Stay with contradiction

Participants may find themselves holding multiple truths at once. They may say things that seem to contradict what they said earlier. This is not confusion. It is the sign of something alive.

Invite contradiction without needing to resolve it:

“There’s room here for uncertainty. You don’t have to be consistent. You don’t have to explain or defend.”

#### 5. Welcome silence as part of the process

Not everyone will want to speak. Some may need time. Others may already be saturated. Silence is not absence. It is another form of presence.

You might offer:

“There is no pressure to contribute verbally. Silence is welcome. Listening, sensing and feeling are also forms of participation.”

#### 6. Allow the protocol to disrupt expectations of resolution

This process is likely to unsettle the usual rhythm of group work. It may feel unresolved, quiet, circular, or incomplete. That is part of its integrity. At the end, you might say:

“We are not closing with clarity, but with a little more texture. A little more awareness of the ground we’re standing on. This may not be comfortable, but it might be necessary.”

This process can be used in many contexts: within organizations, across generations, in classrooms, coalitions, activist spaces, or spiritual communities.

**It is especially relevant in contexts where inherited strategies no longer seem adequate**, but where people are unsure how to proceed. It can help surface patterns that are otherwise left unspoken: grief, positionality, moral fatigue, burnout, projection, and misplaced urgency.

If you are using the protocol as part of a larger process, or alongside other collective learning tools, we recommend the resource *Rewiring for Reality: Cross-Generational Reckonings*, available at: <https://r4rs.org/cross-generational>.

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Clearing the Field is a series of educational resources created to support the transition from narrow-boundary, individual intelligence toward the wider-boundary, distributed intelligence required in times of systemic destabilization. These resources help interrupt patterns that feed polarization and fragmentation, offering scaffolding for people to expand their nervous systems so they can stay present with complexity, uncertainty, ambiguity, multiplicity, and our collective vulnerability.

The Clearing the Field series offers exercises and pedagogical frames designed not to pull conversations toward resolution, morality or performance, but to invite relational postures that can hold contradiction, tension, and the discomfort of not knowing. At the heart of this work is the recognition that our challenges are not primarily informational, but relational, and that in times of systemic unraveling, universal frameworks and imposed consensus are unlikely to hold.

Instead, these materials create conditions where charged topics can be approached with greater discernment, dignity, and care, supporting individuals and groups to relate to the world, to others, and to themselves in more generative ways. Rather than seeking agreement, final answers, or certainty, the exercises aim to expand our cognitive, relational, and affective capacities to sit with tension, difference, and paradox without collapsing, withdrawing, or rushing to fix.

They invite forms of attention and relation not organized around control or the pursuit of conceptual clarity, but by relational re-orientation, contextual metabolization, systemic response-ability, and a form of integrity attuned to the ruptures of our shared metabolic reality. The Clearing the Field series is available at <https://metarelativity.institute>.

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