

Dancing with paradigms



Could systemic
wisdom emerge?

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An invitation to resonate for Earth-Humanity reconciliation

The inferno of the living is not something that will be; there is one, that is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant attention and learning: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, and then make them endure, and give them space.

MARCO POLO TO KUBLAI KHAN,
IN INVISIBLE CITIES (BY ITALO CALVINO, 1972)

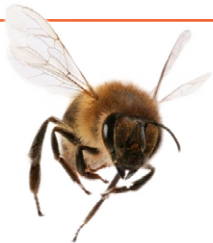
When a complex system is far from equilibrium, small islands of coherence in a sea of chaos have the capacity to shift the entire system to a higher order.

ILYA PRIGOGINE
(NOBEL PRIZE IN CHEMISTRY 1977 AND MEMBER OF THE CLUB OF ROME IN THE 1970s)

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The world at war: Between denial and helplessness

The wake-up call by Italo Calvino, in an imaginary dialogue between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, was written the same year of the publication of *The Limits to Growth*, the first report to The Club of Rome. While different in nature, both the literary imagination of Calvino and the simulation of future scenarios by the MIT team led by Donella and Dennis Meadows were signalling our deliberate oversight, how easy it is for humans (individually and collectively) to select what we pay attention to, and to ignore what we don't like to see, in order to keep a mental truce with the world around us and go on with our lives.

Both Calvino and Aurelio Peccei, the founder of The Club of Rome, were Italian and had lived through some similar experiences, such as participating in the resistance against fascism in Italy and Europe. Maybe that common background fed their preoccupations about the future, or more precisely about how our decision not to face reality feeds the tragedies to come.

Whether we ignore it or not, and whatever the way we deal with it, in 2025 the world is at war, in multiple manners and places. At the time this is being written, the possibility of a fully-fledged Third World War is no longer an absurd fantasy only in the minds of doomsdayers. For hundreds of millions of people, war is indeed an everyday reality, and it is fed by the direct participation of big powers, especially in promoting the militarisation of minds and the escalation and expansion of war. Alleged "leaders of the world" have been again captured by the madness of war, the insane belief that it can be the solution to our problems, and that their power entitles them to decide who is allowed to enjoy the benefits of civilisation, and who must die ("them") for the preservation of the privileges of the chosen few ("us").

As terrible as they could be, the military actions do not create the inferno we live in. It is how we frame our relationships with others, humans or not, that creates the inferno. It is by drifting from distinction ("I am different from you and other living beings") to separation ("I am an independent individual") and to the fantasy of exclusion ("I don't need to care about what happens to you and others") that we create a dysfunctional way of being in the world, against evidences, ancient and modern, that all manifestations of life are interdependent. Then our solipsistic disconnection from others and our separation from "nature" create on our side a sense of superiority and entitlement, also moral. This leads to ways of being and doing which are terribly effective in their achievements, their capacity to transform our environment, but also in their destruction of the delicate entanglements that are essential to life as a whole.

The sophistication in technologies used to kill our "enemies" is the most extreme demonstration of exclusion, the old supremacist prejudice that power needs to be used against fellow humans in order to protect our welfare. But, more generally, in the distinction between "us" and "them" that structures the inferno, "them" also means the planet, that artificially separated entity that we call "nature". As UN Secretary General António Guterres rightly said, "*humanity is waging war on nature, and this is suicidal*". To the point that it is too late to come back from the fractures of today to a supposedly rational state of affairs along what the Western establishment was calling the "liberal order", an arrangement based more on the hierarchy of power than on considering all countries as equal in rights and sovereignty. In the light of current developments, not only the world has escaped from Western dominance, but the West itself has broken all its discourse and

rules of universality, and it is increasingly obvious that the Pandoras of climate change, ecological disruptions, geopolitical conflicts, and societal fragmentations cannot be put back in the box without a major civilisational shift, way more ambitious than what was proposed in the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Moreover, the current fractures are revealing our deeper oversight and the capacity we have developed to live with what Naomi Klein calls our "Shadow Lands".¹

And indeed, the multiple manifestations of fractures that are becoming more difficult to ignore, whether ecological, social or political within and among countries, are by no means isolated events. They exist as symptoms within a system under strain. They are signals of a world out of balance, revealing a deeper fracture in how we live, how we govern, and how we relate to the planet and each other.

Many of the very systems that shaped our modern world (economic, political, technological) are now revealing their fault lines, not only as inadequate responses to today's emergencies, but as root contributors to them. Built on logics of extraction, domination, and division, these structures have too often privileged short-term growth over long-term resilience, isolating us from each other and from the natural systems that sustain life.

Realising all of this is not a recipe for peace of mind. There is a huge amount of direct suffering, and there is as well the permanent oscillation between denial and helplessness to which we are obliged, within the limited and narcissistic framing of modern culture, if we intend to keep a fragile state of mental equilibrium in the midst of so much turmoil.

What are we to do? And what theory of change?

The question "What are we to do?" was raised by The Club of Rome co-president Paul Shrivastava in January 2025 to all members of the organisation. It led to several ongoing conversations on different topics and to the mobilisation of many members willing to engage and commit to collective work in crafting relevant questions and responses.

That higher level of awareness, preoccupation and activity by members of The Club of Rome requires a self-reflective framing addressing the always present, often underlying question of "**what is our theory to ensure that systemic change happens?**". It would be comforting to have a clear and effective response to that question, but how would we recognise it before we have indeed changed? Let's start by accepting the difficulty of the challenge in all its dimension.

All of these operations (...) sit on top of more hidden parts of the supply chain, zones of hyper-exploitation, human containment, and ecosystem poisoning that are not glitches in the system but have always been integral parts of what makes our world run.

NAOMI KLEIN

¹ Klein, Naomi. *Doppelganger: A Trip into the Mirror World*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023





The present we live in is not the unfolding of a carefully designed plan but the complex outcome of the evolution of societies, shaped by convergent or contradictory sources of both momentum and continuity, such as:

- ♦ the determination of political and economic power elites, willing to expand their influence or preserve the status quo, at national and international levels,
- ♦ the mental, legal and cultural frameworks that shape what is allowed to think and do, socially, politically and economically,
- ♦ the processes of scientific research and technological innovation,
- ♦ the industrialisation of persuasion and build-up of new or revived meanings,
- ♦ the strong dynamic of a self-reinforcing and oversized financial sector,
- ♦ the imagination and energy of new generations of talent aspiring to make a difference,
- ♦ and the somewhat autonomous social movements, sometimes rebellious in their aspirations to change.

The entanglement of most of these sources and their dynamics is part of what makes “business as usual” so strong and with so much resistance to deep, systemic change.

Through growing sophistication in the social division of work, modern societies have created bubbles within which we develop our activities, that are highly fragmented and separated from each other. Academia, politics, business, finance, social activism, international relations and so on, all work under different logics that make sense when considered within each bubble and do not make sense at all when considered together, since we are walking fast to the suicide of humanity. The fragmentation of these logics and their disconnection from biophysical realities create the inertias in which we are trapped.

Against that background, the potential for transformation is still hampered by the gap in our understanding of “systems change”. Does transformative change happen as:

- ♦ an exercise in enlightened design and execution of a global vision by a small elite of privileged observers acting from a top-down position (as it is assumed that the Mont Pelerin Society created the success of so-called “neo-liberalism”), or
- ♦ the consequence of decisive action by political power implementing transformative policies in fiscal, trade, social, industrial, scientific, technological domains, at the national and international levels, or
- ♦ the build-up of social movements developing enough determination and strength to create moments of revolutionary change at whatever level,
- ♦ the result of market mechanisms, with bold entrepreneurs, investors and ultimately corporations contributing to the cascading and scaling up of new solutions, or



- ♦ the curation of conditions propitious for the emergence of new patterns and their systems-wide resonance and dissemination across an infinite network of local contexts, or
- ♦ as a combination of all these possibilities and even others?

It might not be so relevant to select one “theory of change”, but to recognise that there are different approaches, based on substantially different epistemologies, and to explore how they could resonate with each other and be combined for a higher transformative potential. The coherence might only happen at the meta-level, by holding the complexity of multiple worldviews, the non-linearity of transformative processes and the need for an integrative approach, in resonance with what was already proposed by No Limits to Learning a Report to The Club of Rome published in 1979.

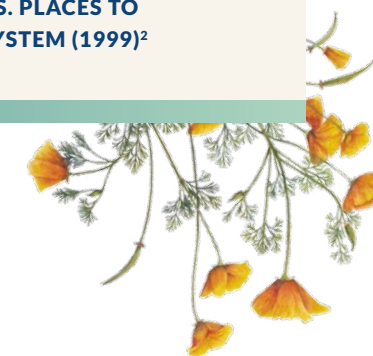
Building on the heritage of The Club of Rome, the meta-level of coherence might happen beyond the top of the pyramid of “leverage points” explored by Donella Meadows, with a capacity that she called “the power to transcend paradigms”.

This meta-level is not necessarily the most comfortable place to be, anxious as we are about certainties, but we feel that it is where The Club of Rome owes to itself to be. It reflects the genuine pluriversity of worldviews, indispensable to contribute to systemic transitions and cultural regenerations, at the same time. The very last publication by Donella Meadows was invitingly titled *Dancing with Systems*,³ and now we might have to **declare our intention of *Dancing with Paradigms***. This is the spirit and the approach that The Fifth Element programme has been envisioning since its inception.



There is yet one leverage point that is even higher than changing a paradigm. That is to keep oneself unattached in the arena of paradigms, to stay flexible, to realise that no paradigm is “true”, that everyone, including the one that sweetly shapes your own worldview, is a tremendously limited understanding of an immense and amazing universe that is far beyond human comprehension.”

LEVERAGE POINTS. PLACES TO INTERVENE IN A SYSTEM (1999)²



² Meadows, Donella H. *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System*. Hartland, VT: Sustainability Institute, 1999

³ Meadows, Donella H. “Dancing with Systems.” The Donella Meadows Project, 2001. <https://donellameadows.org/archives/dancing-with-systems/>

The Fifth Element approach: Building on *No Limits to Learning*

As institutions falter and progress narratives disintegrate, a deeper sense of disorientation is taking hold. One that cannot be addressed by innovation alone. Beneath the collapse of climate systems and social contracts lies a more elusive crisis: the erosion of meaning, the breakdown of connection, and the fading memory of how to live in right relationship with the Earth and each other.

In a world grappling with the simultaneous crises of climate collapse, geopolitical fragmentation, cultural alienation, and the erosion of meaning, the search for a deeper, more integrated approach to wellbeing for all has never been more urgent. Modern systems, whether economic, scientific, or political, have made remarkable advances, yet they often operate in silos, detached from the lived realities of communities and the wisdom of ancient traditions. At the same time, a growing wave of divide and disillusionment reveals the limits of hyper-rational, metrics-driven solutions to the complex challenges of our time.

The Fifth Element programme, created in 2022, emerged precisely within the fundamental contradiction already outlined by the report *No Limits to Learning* in 1979. Seven years earlier, *The Limits to Growth* had produced a massively heard warning: “progress”, as it was conceived then and still today, could lead to the collapse of human civilisations due to the combined effects of the exhaustion of natural resources and the accumulation of waste and pollution. That created a shock, to which we have not yet been able to respond. In 1979 The Club of Rome reformulated the civilisational challenge: **No Limits to Learning advocated for realising the full learning potential of humans in order to “bridge the human gap”**, i.e. the difference between our capacity to act and transform the reality we live in, and our capacity to understand and deal with the consequences of our actions.

The “human gap” is a descriptive manner of invoking something terrible and scary, which was already outlined in *The Limits to Growth*: not only progress could lead to collapse, but the way we usually interpret the world, i.e. human intelligence itself, could be guilty for the suicide of the species. For all the incredible capacities that we have demonstrated, are we so stupid that the history of life on Earth could only continue without us?

Many years later, this question still applies, and we are at a crossroad, where data and analysis alone are not enough, and where **learning and healing from self-inflicted threats requires the reconnection of mind and matter, spirit and system**. As polycrises multiply and planetary boundaries are pushed, what is needed is not another blueprint, but a new way of seeing, sensing, and relating. The Fifth Element offers just that: **an open invitation to reimagine progress through a lens of interconnectedness, humility, and hope**.

The name of the programme is a deliberate opening to weave together all threads of knowledge, ancient wisdom together with modern science. In ancient traditions all over the world the four elements of matter (air, water, earth, and fire) are combined to create life, but only if the quintessential element is also present: the life force, also called “aether”, “spirit” or “prana”. This in turn resonates with the Chinese concept of Qi.

The Fifth Element is not a conventional programme with pre-established goals and deliverables, a clear roadmap, and key process indicators. As life itself, it is more of an exploration, with an open invitation to whoever would like to be fellow voyagers. The aim might be abstract, but it is clear and ambitious enough: the reconciliation among humans, with all living beings and with time, as a process to co-create and live desirable futures of wellbeing for all on a healthy planet.

The Fifth Element is also a holistic attitude, taking for granted that no one in isolation (either individual, culture, or country) holds the absolute truth, nor the whole is just an assembly of disconnected parts and silos. The Club of Rome started in 1968 its own singular journey by adopting a perspective that is still unusual (at least in Western contexts): that everything on Earth is interconnected and interdependent within the web of something greater than us that we can call Life (and which is also given many other names). And hence the evolution of one part without caring for the whole is a dangerous illusion: whether we like it or not, the consequences of our actions will come back to us.

The Fifth Element bets on the humanity and capacity of everybody, and on weaving with all threads of knowledge of whatever origins. The wisdom coming from originary cultures and ancient civilisations from all over the world is still alive, and its combination with the latest systems thinking and evolutionary science, is what can better inform our understanding of how Life works, and hence how we could learn and change.

Modes and levels of learning

No Limits to Learning explicitly criticised educational institutions, where a big part of the learning is supposed to happen, for being only able to provide “maintenance learning”, i.e. the transmission of previously validated knowledge to the next generation of students. While necessary, this is by far not sufficient. Maintenance learning cannot sense in advance what is needed due to the evolution of society within its ecosystem. Hence, it cannot prevent the catastrophes that modern fractures incubate. We would then be condemned to cycles of gradual evolution punctuated by moments of tragic crises, potentially of existential calibre, which we could have prevented had we been using our capacities and wisdom better.

At the same time, *No Limits to Learning* was immensely hopeful, as the title indicated a humanistic contrast with *The Limits to Growth*. It bet on the human capacity to **develop new learning modes, which could be anticipatory, participatory, integrative and innovative**. This was in 1979, a big promise that is not fulfilled. Though, many initiatives worldwide are trying to surpass the limitations of existing learning processes. Even if we have not (yet?) escaped from the vicious circle by which conventional “development” leads to self-destruction, we cannot ignore the attempts to do otherwise, at whatever level they have been happening, from local to global.

How could we learn what we already know? How could we use all we know about how life works to effectively change our patterns of relationship with all living beings and with time? **The “human gap” creates an incapacity for systemic change**, a dissonance between our comprehension of the self-inflicted existential challenges of humanity and our reluctance to learn and change at the depth required to overcome those challenges. This gap has many manifestations, including the dissonance between, on one side, the combined capacities, insights, and motivations of so many positive initiatives, and on the other, the insufficient resonance between them to move the lines of the status quo.

We do not have a response in the form of easy recipes that can be applied at any time and everywhere. But thanks to the hard work of thousands of practitioners, researchers, thinkers, and citizens at large, including those dedicated to preserving pearls of traditional knowledge against all odds, we have much better questions to ask. Our questions are never neutral, they reveal a particular framework of interpretation. For instance, if we address human wellbeing by asking about individual needs, we are assuming that a good life should be determined by our individual characteristics and appetites. This is taken for granted in modern Western culture, which is consumerist to the point that nothing is ever enough, but it is perceived differently in many other worldviews. And it makes it more difficult to question and conceive wellbeing from the relational nature of humans (and all living beings). **If we want to propose something relevant to unlock our existential situation, we must recognise our hidden assumptions.** And even if, by definition, we are unable to identify all of them, we must do our best to elevate our questions. We need to navigate the uncomfortable space at the intersection of leading-edge knowledge on the relational nature of life and real-life critical situations, particularly those experienced by the most vulnerable communities.

Some fundamental assumptions, explicit or not, are always present in how we make sense of our perceptions. In the context of The Fifth Element, two of them are essential. First, building on the vision of pedagogical schools initiated more than a century ago and reconnecting with much older schools of wisdom from Indigenous cultures, we bet on the humanity and capacity of everybody to liberate their potential to learn by themselves, provided the appropriate conditions exist. This was the grounding for *No Limits to Learning*, which is still valid. We do not take it as a scientific fact, although there is a lot of research to sustain the view, but as a hypothesis without which our hope in humanity and its learning potential cannot be fully realised.

Second, we assume that life itself can be a source of inspiration in many ways. Life is more than “nature”, this having been associated with the idea that we (humans) are separate from it. Life is a mystery greater than us, and at the same time, we have accumulated a vast amount of knowledge and wisdom to deal with it that we are mostly not using for our societal arrangements. We bet there is a space for generative inquiry at the point of junction between some parts of modern science (such as evolutionary biology, thermodynamics, ecology, cybernetics, complexity theory, and others) and substantial knowledge and wisdom coming from traditional cultures, which are actually being rediscovered and validated by today’s scientific research.

In that space, we expect to learn how living beings and ecosystems can learn and change in a process of transformation that is always mutual and never works in isolation. In general, we humans have our ways of designing and planning intentional change, with a rationalistic and linear mindset, which is helpful for many purposes. But those ways are laden with the “human gap”, they are not fit for change of a systemic nature, when we are an active part of the system we intend to change. Most often, trying to force change in a specific direction is ineffective or even counter-effective, while what is required is to create the conditions for learning and change to happen organically. This is, of course, a paradigm shift in how we conceive learning.



Learning at a deeper level is required.

If we think of climate, the identification of the massive emissions of greenhouse gases coming from fossil fuels as the source of its destabilisation led to framing the issue in a simple cause-effect logic: by shifting to renewable energies, the issue would be solved! Then the solution becomes a matter of combining regulation with resources to develop the right technologies and promoting the investments to deploy them. There is no questioning of what kind or how much energy do we need, nor of the huge imbalance in patterns of consumption between low-income and high-income countries. It is assumed that the trajectory leading to human wellbeing requires an ever-growing amount of energy per capita, particularly for the largest part of world’s population to “catch up”. It is assumed that outrageously high levels of energy consumption are legitimate, provided there is money to pay for them.

With this framing, the idea that equitable human wellbeing could be compatible with a dramatic reduction in the total consumption of energy is simply unthinkable. But for all the merits of renewables energies, they do not allow either for infinite growth on a finite planet. Though, for now we keep the formulation of the issue in the same terms, hoping that we will be lucky and have time to implement some other artificial sources of energy without such restrictions. At most we try to explore how the rise in GDP per capita could be “decoupled” from the consumption of energy and other resources, without much success. And we tie our future to the rigid association of wellbeing with high levels of energy consumption. In this conception, humanity is reduced to its metabolism: rather than a function, energy consumption becomes a role, in which maximisation is given a positive meaning. This is not how nature works.

Other formulations could be tried for this fundamental challenge. The modern drive to maximise production and consumption made us ignore that our health and sense of a meaningful life are not driven by consumerism. Science has rediscovered what we know since the beginning of times: the quality of our relationships with others, humans and non-humans, is the secret of a good life. This crucial point could lead to other ways of innovating and learning, in which relationships would play the dominant role. But it is close to impossible to explore these ways from existing institutional frameworks. The appropriate questions cannot be asked from existing disciplines of research also because too many stakes (financial, industrial, geopolitical) would be at risk in any scenario of dramatic reduction of energy consumption.

This example shows that different approaches to the existential matter of energy can coexist, but they require different levels of learning. Overall, we have not moved too much from learning what fossil fuels could do for us. Switching to renewable energies without questioning our lifestyles is not particularly disruptive and it is questionable that this could be sufficient. Learning how to make economic processes more circular and independent from energy and resource consumption is already a leap in the depth of learning. And changing completely our mind on what a good life could be to reduce dramatically the imbalance in our ecological footprints is yet a more ambitious leap into deeper learning.





In our view there is no way to address our existential crises without addressing the erosion of meaning and the breakdown in connection from which we suffer. The Fifth Element invites to use new lenses for an endless quest coming from the dawn of humanity: the two-sided search for the meaning of our presence on Earth and what makes a good life. The means we use now in this quest are different and more powerful from those of millennia or centuries ago, and the context of the questions has changed tremendously and yet, not only do the questions remain, but the conventional responses are more confusing than ever.

A second ambition of The Fifth Element is to make sense of what could happen, inspired by the lights of so much knowledge we have about how life works and what has shaped the history of evolution on Earth. The ultimate intention is to open the space of possibilities to experiment with unconventional responses, potentially contributing to new ecological civilisations where humans are reconciled with themselves, with life at large and with the inevitable condition of time.

We might not have all the responses for that ambitious vision, but we try to show why our existence does not make sense and will indeed come to an end if we are not able to honour our resonance with the infinite web of life. And then, a good life is one in which our individuality is but one face of our deep connection with others and with the history of life on Earth.

Unexplored questions and generative assumptions

A central pillar of our approach is the willingness to examine our own blind spots, not with the illusion that we can eliminate them entirely, but with the humility to recognise they exist. This awareness alone can shift how we relate to the world and to one another. We believe that genuine transformation begins not with rushing toward answers, but by learning to ask better, more generative questions. Yet even this is not enough. In a world shaped by a fixation on problems and solutions, we must resist the urge to reduce every question into something solvable, measurable, or manageable. Some questions are meant to be lived, not resolved.

Following the poet Rilke,⁴ loving and living the questions, rather than detaching from them, is what could drive us to start living into the answers. And, those answers will lead to new questions, in the endless flow of life.

After decades of analysis on the existential risks humanity faces like climate collapse, economic inequality, technological disruption, and an equally long list of proposed solutions that often fall short in practice, it has become clear that some of the most vital questions remain unasked. These are not questions with easy phrasing or tidy boundaries. They touch on the invisible architectures of how we think, feel, relate, and imagine. They require a kind of inner and collective excavation, rather than expert diagnosis.

And so, this journey begins not with a map, but with a mindset. One that embraces curiosity over certainty, depth over speed, and interconnectedness over control. The questions that follow are neither final nor exhaustive. As all memorable journeys, this one starts with what we imagine about the territory we are going to explore, and we actually do not know what we will find out. The anxiety for certainties is not part of the equipment required.



⁴ Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet, trans. M.D. Herter Norton (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1934), Letter 4, 16 July 1903

Us and them

Our imaginations are captured by dominant frameworks. Most people are not engaged in a paradigm shift. The imperialism of the present hijacks so much our time, minds, and energies, that we do not dare to think there could be other ways to be in the world and relate with each other and with nature. By necessity, the minority exploring these other ways needs to ask how to promote a shift that so many people would not endorse. Should we go forward without having “them” in mind?

This is just one instance of a process which is all over the place. And in all cases, the binary framing of “us versus them” leads to a sense of moral superiority and hence, very easily, to a supremacist stance, whether explicit or not, whether intentional or not. Indeed, it is often psychologically reassuring to frame our reflections and actions within that framing. The narrative offers a sense of clarity and control, yet it is ultimately a trap, one rooted in the process of “otherisation”, whereby certain groups or individuals are cast as fundamentally different or inferior in order to reinforce a stable sense of identity, belonging, or moral superiority. As scholars such as Edward Said⁵ and Michel-Rolph Trouillot⁶ have noted, otherisation is not only a cultural mechanism, but also a political one, used to justify exclusion, dominance, and the denial of shared responsibility.

The illusion that “we” can separate ourselves from “them”, whether referring to other humans, institutions, or even nature itself, is deeply embedded in the very structures that have created today’s crises. In truth, “we” are also “them”. Even from a supposedly progressive point of view, we can find plenty of reasons to blame “them”: their voluntary blindness, vested interests, power privileges, outdated values, strangeness of aspect or habits, sheer ignorance (in our view), or the simple fact that they are not from “here” (whatever that means). We can also think that the issue lies with the elites in power, and we aspire to get to power to transform everything from there. But we have learned that without deeper changes, acquiring power might compromise the essence of the shift we intend to promote. In a way the fantasy of exclusion is renewed and prolonged through co-optation. This calls for some humility in our approach.

Exclusion is particularly at work when facing crises. Most often we identify those we consider guilty for the tensions and crises as an obstacle for a better world, and we blame and fight them. This follows a circular logic, in which both sides of any confrontation are reinforcing each other into a double bind leading to escalation. The trends we see in many countries and in geopolitics today are a terrible example of that. We keep thinking that war might be the proper way to address the issues we face, including war itself. This is obscene. Except for the technological sophistication of our weapons, it seems we have not learned anything from history, even the most recent.

The way we make sense of the crises is what makes the difference in what we could learn from them. As Terence⁷ put it two millennia ago, “nothing human is alien to me”, and this should inform our approach. But then, some difficult questions arise:



How could we understand that the actions by “us” and “them” are expressions of joint collective patterns requiring other lenses than confrontation?

How do we shift from practices of confrontation and punishment to collective emergence and reconciliation across divides?

⁵ Said, Edward W. Orientalism. Pantheon Books, 1978.

⁶ Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press, 1995.

⁷ This line appears in Roman playwright Publius Terentius Afer’s play *Heauton Timorumenos* (*The Self-Tormentor*), written in 165 BCE.



The unreasonable effectiveness of modernity

Our understanding of what is our place in the world is mostly driven by the extraordinary effectiveness of Western modernity,⁸ that has been mobilising for several centuries peoples, resources and knowledge to increase the metabolism and the material outputs of human societies up to scales never experienced before. That accelerated expansion of humanity was achieved on principles of exclusion, exploitation and relentless control, and through the colonisation of peoples, ecosystems, and (most importantly) imaginations to ensure the feasibility of industrialised dissemination at a global scale while producing at the same time the concentration of most of the new wealth in the hands of a minority.

On many occasions, the extractive frameworks of modernity have issued in such accumulation of unresolved tensions and fractures that major crises happened. Furthermore, current fractures show that the world system cannot indefinitely pursue metabolic growth and simultaneously support extractive control and concentration. Short-termist exploitation has severely destabilised the ecosystems on which we depend. Growth created new possibilities for self-affirmation that oppose existing controls. The emergence of more actors at whatever level, from local to global, increases the complexity of the overall system, and then control cannot be maintained, other than by using means of violent destruction to “simplify” the system, or by further disconnection from biophysical realities to pursue control in increasingly virtual worlds. Both are attempts at escaping from an inevitable reality: **the vitality of complex ecosystems is not based on extractive control** and the unlimited growth in energy flows leads either to collapse or to the emergence of new forms of organisation.

Though, Western modernity has shown a surprising capacity not only to change the world but also to “*change everything for everything to remain the same*”, as Tomasi di Lampedusa⁹ put it. Its persistence through multiple crises might come from a capacity to learn whatever needs to be learned without questioning its core foundations, and hence without addressing its own suicidal nature. And then new questions arise:



What could we learn from how modernity reasserts itself in crises?

What do our responses to crisis reveal about the deeper assumptions we refuse to let go of?

How would that help to emerge from them in a different direction?

⁸ Needless to say, the label of “Western modernity” is reductionistic, it does not represent the whole of what happened in Europe and North America since the 17th century, which has been complex, contradictory and also full of promises for humanity. We are speaking here of the dominant traits nurturing our current suicidal path.

⁹ Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1958), 28. The phrase «*Se vogliamo che tutto rimanga com'è, bisogna che tutto cambi*» originates from Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* (*Il Gattopardo*), first published in 1958. Set against the backdrop of 19th-century Italy's political transformation, the novel delves into the tension between change and continuity, highlighting how shifts in power often serve to preserve the existing order beneath a surface of reform.



From capital to heritage

A key mechanism for the effectiveness of modernity is the way it can change at certain levels to evacuate tensions, without changing its substance. In recent decades this has taken the form of a growing disconnection from biophysical and social realities while capital has become the touchstone of our civilisation. Our relationship with time has been reduced to the centrality of capital, which is now the totem on which we place all our expectations. Every other richness of our human and natural heritage can be ignored and discarded as obsolete. Accumulating capital has become the sign of success in life. At the same time, it has been decontextualised and made free from any human or ecological circumstance: capital is now abstract, intangible, and infinitely mobile, completely “hors sol” (out of the ground), as Bruno Latour¹⁰ would put it.

Capital was born from living processes: land and animals can constantly give resources useful to humans, and hence future returns can be expected. But those are not the product of capital itself: they require human work and propitious conditions for the sun, water, wind, and soil materials to contribute (the Four Elements). Today, elements with no direct relation to living processes, such as AI algorithms which could be openly shared, are being legally enforced and protected as capital. In an over-financialised economy, it is very difficult to see how this growing disconnection of capital from Life could contribute to the conditions favouring equitable wellbeing for all on a healthy planet.

As Robin Wall Kimmerer¹¹ reflects in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, the natural world offers its gifts freely, but only within a framework of reciprocity. The modern economy, by severing the ties between capital and the living sources that sustain it, violates this principle of mutual exchange. When resources are commodified without gratitude, stewardship, or relationship, we lose more than balance, we lose the possibility of true abundance. The shift away from seeing land, water, and knowledge as communal gifts toward treating them as proprietary assets reflects a profound cultural amnesia. Reweaving capital back into the fabric of life would require recovering that memory and re-establishing economies of care, generosity, and reciprocity.

And then, this leads to more questions:



Could we morph “capital” into “heritage” to reconnect with life and make it more holistic, aware of the need of taking care of all contributors (humans and nature)?

In a world dominated by abstract financialisation, what kind of transformation of meanings is needed to achieve that shift?

Criticality and emergence

Deep changes only happen when living systems face situations where many tensions accumulate simultaneously to the point of creating large fractures. We obviously live in such a situation. Confusing and overwhelming as critical points might be, they also open the space of possibilities: from them, small changes can lead to a complete reconfiguration, and new patterns can emerge, which would have been unconceivable beforehand.

¹⁰ Latour, Bruno. *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*. Translated by Catherine Porter, Polity Press, 2018. In *Down to Earth*, Latour discusses how the elites have become “deterritorialised,” acting without regard to the terrestrial constraints that bind most of humanity. This detachment is emblematic of a broader issue where political and economic systems function independently of ecological realities, exacerbating the climate crisis.

¹¹ Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Milkweed Editions, 2013.



But the quality of the outcome is not guaranteed: criticality is always a crossroad, and some of the branches lead to gridlocks or to self-destruction, as we see every day. Shifting to new patterns cannot be engineered as the construction of a bridge or an airplane. To a very large extent it is a spontaneously emergent process, which cannot be controlled from positions of power or expertise. The focus of transformative action itself must shift to endless learning by “living the questions”. But then new questions arise:

Which factors influence the emergence of new patterns?

Could we improve the chances of emerging into a better attunement to life?

Mutual evolution and metamorphosis

Humanity is now at the edge of nothing less than a civilisational shift. Changing towards a reconciliation of our wellbeing with a healthy biosphere is not a technical adaptation, nor a transition to a variant of our existing systems. It is a whole reconfiguration of our cultural, economic, political, and social practices, which would take different shapes at different levels and in different contexts. In other words, it is a metamorphosis, or rather a multitude of them. At the same time, overcoming the “us versus them” trap implies engaging into multiple processes of mutual learning across the existing chasms, of social status, geography, worldviews, knowledge disciplines and sectors, generations, and so on.

The Fifth Element has also a singular approach to the tensions and confrontations associated to the current existential crises of humanity. We believe that the many chasms created by separation, misunderstandings, and exclusion, can be bridged through a process that we call *mutual metamorphosis*. We think that new relationships among ourselves, with nature and with time, can emerge from processes of mutual learning across the chasms. We bet here on the most improbable option since all probable ones lead to dead ends. And we get inspired by the bold perspectives on biological evolution developed by Lynn Margulis and others,¹² making clear that (1) collaboration and symbiosis are key mechanisms of evolution, even more important than competition, and (2) in extraordinary circumstances they can lead to “symbiogenesis”, meaning by that the emergence of a new species out of the merger of two different ones working in symbiosis.

Using that biological background as a metaphor, we imagine the possibility of mutuality, learning and metamorphosis becoming characteristics of processes happening across the chasms, as mentioned above. This sounds of course utopian. The increasingly unequal distribution of power and wealth makes the elites not suffer directly from our existential threats, while those suffering from them feel helpless to change anything. But when utopia is on the side of “realism”, which is unable to imagine anything else than tragic conflicts, a good dose of hopeful utopia is exactly what we need. To be clear, this vision of

¹² Margulis, Lynn. Symbiosis in Cell Evolution: Microbial Communities in the Archean and Proterozoic Eons. 2nd ed., W.H. Freeman, 1993. This book lays out her groundbreaking theory that symbiosis, rather than competition alone, is a fundamental mechanism in the evolution of complex life, including the origin of eukaryotic cells through the merging of prokaryotic organisms, a process she termed symbiogenesis.

mutual metamorphosis does not need to imply the convergence towards one “universal” set of values and practices whatever the context. On the contrary, **our approach builds on the humble recognition of pluriversality**, and that there are a multitude of context-dependent pathways towards wellbeing within healthy ecosystems, and that they can nurture one another.

Then, again, this vision brings with it some difficult questions:

What conditions are required for mutuality when the sides of the chasms are so distant from each other?

What is required to invert the massive processes of dispossession, and ultimately to transform the nature of power?

Resonance and pollination

Many organisations and individuals are already working for the emergence and consolidation of other ways of relating to ourselves and nature. Across continents, diverse regenerative practices are already taking root. In Brazil¹³ and India,¹⁴ agroecology movements are reshaping how food is grown by centering soil health, biodiversity, and community autonomy. In Kenya,¹⁵ community-led water restoration efforts, such as sand dams, are revitalising arid landscapes and strengthening local resilience. In the Andes,¹⁶ circular economy models grounded in Indigenous knowledge are turning waste into resources while reinforcing cultural and ecological continuity. These initiatives emerge from distinct cultural, ecological, and epistemological contexts, yet they share a common thread: they do not impose uniform solutions but follow patterns that align with the principles of living systems. Each is shaped by the rhythms, needs, and capacities of its place, rooted in coherence rather than conformity.

The diffusion of such examples is badly needed but the process must be different from the conventional “scaling up” of some recipes having been successful in one place. Life has its own dissemination practices, that we could designate collectively as “pollination”, a multitude of mechanisms adapted to local contexts. As such, no responses are universal, and it is from the recognition of pluriversality that experiences can be shared and lead to fruitful resonance across contexts, and from there to widespread pollination. While all conditions (material and psychological) are important, in human systems the dissemination of new meanings is often the catalyst for change. And then, of course, new questions arise:

What prevents so many organisations sharing common values and visions from being more actively collaborative and creating more widespread change?

What would be the most effective pathways for resonance?

What would be the mechanisms for self-reinforcement of regenerative practices?

¹³ <https://mst.org.br/2022/09/16/viable-just-necessary-agroecology-is-a-movement-in-brazil/>

¹⁴ <https://www.cgiar.org/news-events/news/learning-from-with-and-in-india-a-study-tour-of-the-agroecology-initiative>

¹⁵ <https://apnews.com/article/kenya-sand-dam-makueni-kitui-machakos-climate-5c40665cc199f3ea2ec2d9594ef9cf9a>

¹⁶ <https://www.vogue.com/article/inside-ecocitex-yarn-factory>

An approach to systems change

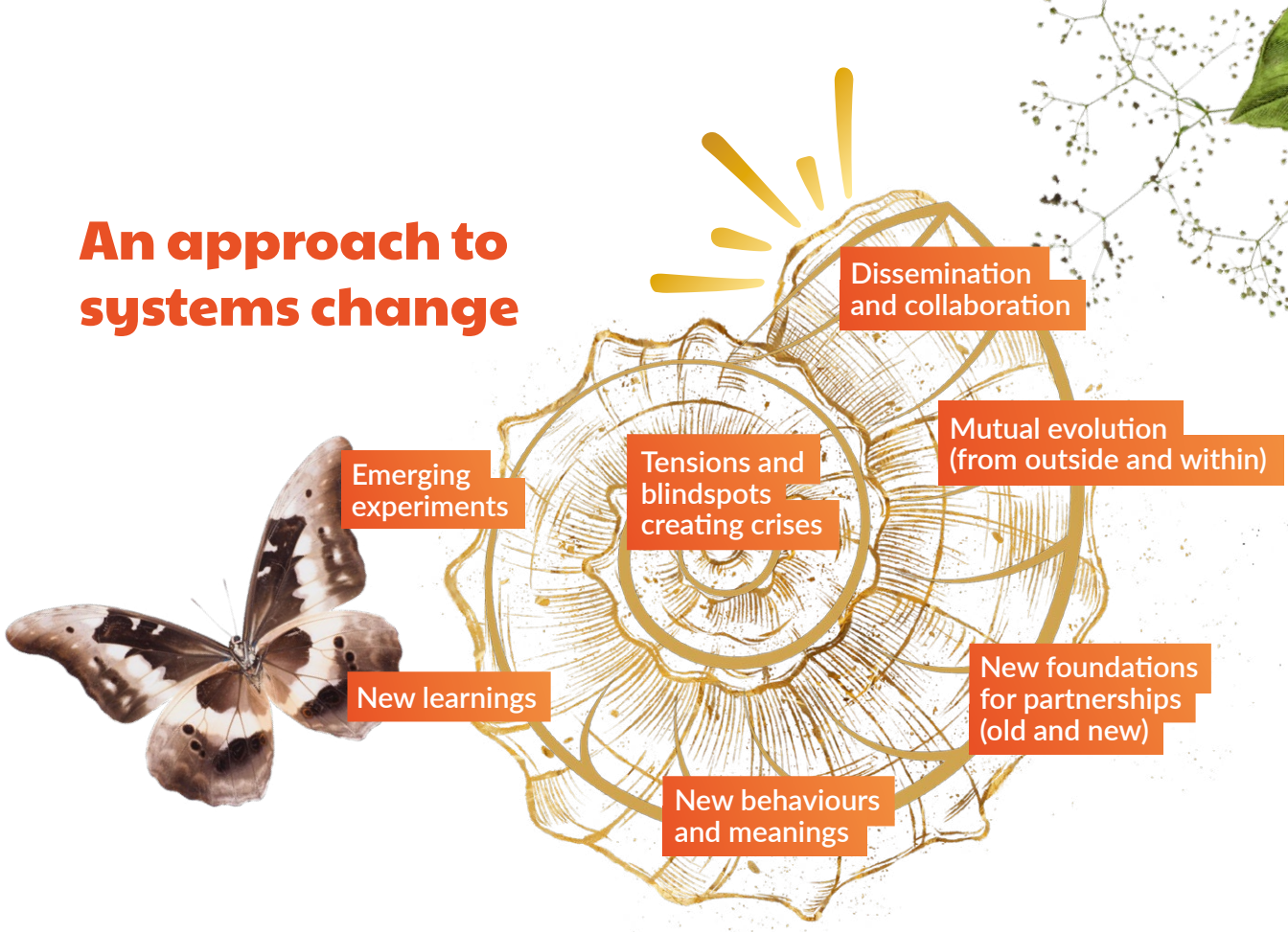


Figure 1: An approach to systems change

Dancing with paradigms: A lab for sense-making practices

As discussed, more than 45 years after the publication of the report to The Club of Rome *No Limits to Learning*, the capacity of humanity to learn its way out of socio-ecological collapse is still being neglected. Here, “learning” is not limited to a conscious process, it is the enactment of change. We cannot say that we have learned until we have changed. The book contained valuable insights for a learning revolution which is now more needed than ever: beyond the state-of-the-art of educational mainstream, it was promoting **learning to be participatory, anticipatory, innovative, and integrative**, all at the same time.

How could The Fifth Element facilitate deeper learning in The Club of Rome and beyond? How could it contribute to better equip The Club of Rome for the navigation of complexity and uncertainty that is required, in a way providing more practical than theoretical responses? How to best put The Fifth Element at the service of The Club of Rome in the process of dancing with paradigms to create systemic change?

To start with, The Fifth Element practices the deliberate and systematic **quest for hidden assumptions, unaddressed questions and opportunities to open existing bubbles**. Also, the programme is determined to **overcome “us and them” traps**, with the necessary integrity to host and support safe spaces of dialogue without co-opting.

This leads to the **across-the-chasms approach**, that of facilitating mutual engagement, learning and metamorphosis across the multiple chasms of modern societies, as reflected in Figure 2.

In building new learning partnerships, The Fifth Element works across different chasms



Figure 2: The Fifth Element working across chasms

Furthermore, The Fifth Element develops the flexibility and the attention required to inject or create new sources of momentum and **new alliances across the whole spectrum of societal actors** and through unexpected, out-of-bubble connections. This is in response to the inertia of current societal logics and dynamics working in isolation, as previously discussed. We identify six potential sources of momentum, as shown in Figure 3.

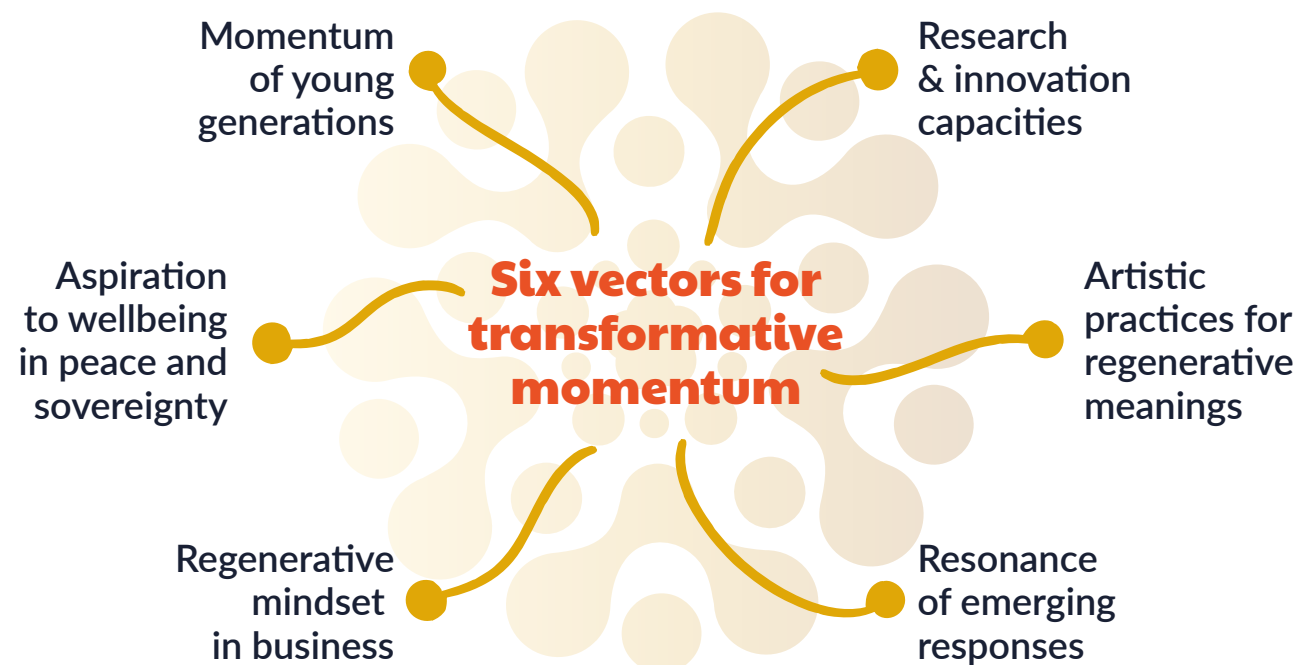


Figure 3: Vectors for transformative momentum

Additionally, The Fifth Element is starting to develop a platform-oriented model to **put leading-edge capacities at the service of resonance and pollination**. The combination of all these ingredients is the approach of The Fifth Element to **explore learning at the deeper levels required** to reconnect with the Earth and our own humanity, and to reconcile them.

Interestingly, there is resonance between the current threads of The Fifth Element, that are briefly described below and correspond to the sources of momentum mentioned above, and other activities being developed or proposed by members of The Club of Rome. We interpret this coincidence as both a confirmation of value and an opportunity for The Fifth Element to support complementary visions and activities. We mention these synergies in the description of threads that follows.

Intergenerational leadership

Can intergenerational collaboration foster systems transformation? The Fifth Element seeks to promote fairness, reciprocity, and mutual support and learning across generations. The programme has been supporting the work of [The 50 Percent](#) platform for youth engagement and also developing since 2022, together with the [St Gallen Symposium](#), a set of activities for a [New Generational Contract](#), a metaphor to signal what could be the joint commitments of older and younger generations.

We aim to understand better how different generations influence sustainability strategies and outcomes, and how their collaboration might be the key to unlocking long-term, regenerative shifts in both private and public sectors, in both business and policy-making. This collaboration has expanded to include also the [UN Youth Office](#), recently created.

A related aspect is the formation of new generations of “leaders” in universities and business schools. The transmission to the next generation of the same knowledge and practices that are at the origin of our challenges has become problematic and with it the concept of leadership itself becomes questionable, as it implies the existence of a small minority of people who know what the responses to our challenges are and feel ready to “take the lead”. Since generations currently in positions of authority do not have the responses to our existential challenges, it is time to **bet on generations learning together**, also to mobilise and motivate talented people in a different manner, allowing for the flourishing of personalities grounded in trust, humility, and shared purpose towards sustainability and regeneration.

Reframing research and innovation

Today, the dominant agendas shaping public and private research and innovation remain largely tethered to goals of control, profit, and securitisation, whether in military, commercial, or surveillance contexts. Far less attention and investment are devoted to research aimed at regenerating our societies, healing ecosystems, or fostering long-term planetary wellbeing. Transforming these priorities could have profound implications. It would require a shift from fragmented, siloed disciplines toward a more integrative approach, one that brings together the natural sciences, social sciences, humanities, the arts, and indigenous sciences to serve the real, situated challenges of people and communities.

This vision echoes what the International Science Council has described as “[flipping the science model](#),” reorienting research not around abstract outputs or competitive metrics, but around relevance, relationality, and responsibility. The Fifth Element programme engages directly with this challenge by posing some critical and timely questions: **How do we reframe the role of research to better serve society?** How can we reimagine global research funding architectures to better support transdisciplinary and inclusive practices? What would it take for research to be truly in service of life, rather than instrumentalised for control?

Addressing these questions is not just a matter of policy reform, it requires a cultural and epistemic shift. One that values complexity, invites collaboration across knowledge traditions, and centres the wellbeing of both people and planet. With this spirit in mind and together with other partners we managed to get approved by the UN General Assembly the declaration of the **International Decade of Sciences for Sustainable Development 2024-2033 (IDSSD)**. This led us to co-create the [Earth-Humanity Coalition \(EHC\)](#), an open network initiated with several dozens of institutions worldwide to mobilise all sciences and sectors together for sustainable futures, and achieve the most ambitious goals for the IDSSD.

This approach builds on making more visible and connecting a multitude of initiatives that have been emerging since long, often from the combination of research capacities and communities facing the challenges on the ground, such as the [Critical Zones Africa](#) programme led by Club of Rome member Lesley Green, that foreshadows the possibilities of African science by Africans and for Africans. The Fifth Element also looks into frontier concepts, at the intersection of all disciplines and particularly where modern and ancient sciences meet, which is from where new frameworks could emerge to embody the Earth-Humanity reconciliation for regeneration.

Together with partners, we have been working since 2023 on the development of the [Montpellier Process](#), a methodology to engage stakeholders from different sectors (academia, policymaking, business, finance,

multilateral organisations, civil society) to address specific challenges jointly. The approach starts from the acknowledgment of disagreements and controversies to explore pathways towards constructive outcomes. The process was put to the test at Biodiversity COP16 in Cali and showed the possibility to unstuck COP processes, where all actors are present but keep working in separate silos.

A pluriversal world

A large fraction of the elites around the world are engaged nowadays at best in the opposite of mutuality, and at worst in accelerating the conditions for what Gregory Bateson called “schismogenesis”,¹⁷ i.e. the deepening of confrontation and polarisation leading to all kinds of tragedies. It is more than time to try something else. While direct attempts with political elites might prove ineffective for the time being, we feel a space needs to be created to bridge across worldviews, geographies, sectors and generations, and promote mutual learning from mutual respect.

It is urgent to explore how individuals from diverse regions and generations, those who, regardless of their background, carry the capacity to inspire and influence, could be meaningfully engaged in a process of reconciliation, among humans and with the planet. Their involvement could and should go beyond symbolic presence or solemn declarations, focusing instead on cultivating tangible, grounded actions rooted in the kind of attitude for mutual learning. Bringing together such voices could help foster a shift in strategic agendas, moving away from cycles of supremacy and fragmentation toward a vision of peaceful pluriversality, where difference is not a threat, but a source of strength and renewal.

One world		Multipolar world	Pluriversal world
One recipe fits all		Few centres of power	Diversity of pathways
IMF, WB, experts, standards		Competing institutions and standards	Learning together, liberation from helplessness
“End of history”		“Us and them”	“The web of life”
Policies & technologies for control Top down & scaling up		Decentralised pathways to wellbeing in the biosphere	
Separation, competition, scarcity		Relationships, infinite richness of life	
Financial capital	Military power		Vitality, heritage, creativity
Greed	Fear		Trust, curiosity
“People are problematic”		“Trust the humanity of everybody” “Allow life to be again”	
“For things to remain the same, everything has to change” (Lampedusa)		“Nothing has changed, but everything has changed” (Tamkeen)	

Table 1: Different world paradigms

¹⁷ Gregory Bateson, Steps to an Ecology of Mind (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 61–72. The term schismogenesis is introduced in the essay “Culture Contact and Schismogenesis,” originally published in 1935



Table 1 summarises elements of different paradigms for international relations. The conception of pluriversality is work in progress and a necessary step to avoid the trap of world-scale fight for hegemony, at a time when existential challenges affect everyone at once and cannot be addressed without higher levels of collaboration. Abundant conversations with Club of Rome members Mamphela Ramphele, Nadja Skaljic, Chandran Nair, Julia Kim and Yi Heng Cheng, among others, have inspired this approach.



Regenerative enterprise

What would make regenerative organisations viable and become the option by default? If we are serious about achieving “sustainable development,” regeneration must move from the margins to the mainstream. It has to become the core of strategy, both for businesses and investors. Right now, while many companies work to become more purpose-oriented than just profit-driven, the core of the economic and financial machine has been captured by fully abstract, self-referential processes to make money out of money without any connection with real life. This is the opposite of what we need since there is urgency in distinguishing those economic processes that can contribute to the renewal of natural and social heritages from those who are merely extractive and hence destructive, ignoring negative externalities.

This is particularly challenging since it is at that core where the capacity to “*change everything for everything to remain the same*” is more effective. New ideas, as transformative as they could look like, are rapidly absorbed, emptied of their substance, or converted into new business opportunities within the same conventional framework. The vision and opportunity of regeneration require a fundamental reimagining of how organisations, particularly businesses, operate. This is the essence of the “*new nature of business*”, concept actively promoted by thought and action leader André Hoffmann, member of The Club of Rome and supporter of The Fifth Element, through [InTent](#) and many other initiatives, including a book of the same name. Another case is that of Mostafa Terrab, also a member of The Club of Rome, who has played a key role in transforming phosphate mining in Morocco into the stewardship of a key mineral resource, for the sake of global food security and sustainability.

Through different partnerships, The Fifth Element is exploring ways to build further the case for the strategic value of regeneration in different contexts around the world, since most businesses remain locked into outdated models that prioritise short-term profits, constant competition and unchecked growth, often at the expense of people and the planet. Breaking free from these constraints is essential to create systems that are life-enhancing, future-facing and truly sustainable.





Shifting to regenerative meanings

The Fifth Element aims at producing new ways of making sense of our presence in the world by reconnecting with our capacities to learn and change mindsets and behaviours, out of the bubbles in which we are trapped. This cannot happen in ways prescribed as universal recipes. Learning is a social process mobilising all capacities, including those beyond rational consciousness, but in very different contexts. Depending on geographic, cultural, historical, political, economic, spiritual conditions, learning will take different paths.

In their documentary “*Regenerar*” (“*Regenerate*”, 2022), the Brazilian artists Maria Clara Parente and Anna de Nardin¹⁸ made the point that for humanity to come back to life from our deadly pathway, we must recover first our capacity to dream. **The shift in our conscious practices will prove challenging, if not impossible, without a shift in meanings.** Invoking our rational consciousness is not enough, since considering ourselves as rational is actually a way of reducing our capacities. Initiatives aiming at restoring our whole humanity and our relationship with the ineffable – what is too big and beautiful to be expressed in words – seem a step forward to explore how new meanings could emerge and flourish. Those layers of reality where words are useless might be the space where beauty and truth could reconcile, and where love makes possible a second chance for humanity on Earth.

All this calls for an important role of artistic practices in facilitating processes of deeper learning, beyond the present role to which art has been relegated, as decoration and entertainment. The Fifth Element has been experimenting some ideas in collaboration with the [Future of Work Foundation](#) and the [Pari Centre](#), and there is still a long journey ahead to understand how art can be reclaimed as a key element in the process towards regeneration, and to mobilise artistic talents in the way forward.

Resonating mycelium

The seeds of new patterns often come from places where pain is big enough to move seemingly powerless people to learn and act by themselves. And they are everywhere: in their own contexts they are no longer seeds, they have been blossoming, often for a long time. As for life itself, there is no obvious hierarchy here: **the transformative experiments are built by people liberating themselves from existing scripts, learning new patterns, and practicing a high degree of self-organisation**, often catalysed by humble conveners. What is missing though is the connecting tissue enabling so many initiatives to resonate with each other, so much so that they could lead to widespread change in meanings and behaviours. This is badly needed when the current framing of socio-ecological transformations usually brings anxiety and a sense of loss and fear. The emphasis put on anticipating coming catastrophes is probably not the best way to create the conditions for learning, if it is not accompanied by a strong bet on the humanity and capacity of everybody to contribute and a sense of liberation from helplessness.



¹⁸ The documentary “*Regenerar: Possible Paths on a Damaged Planet*” (2022), directed by Brazilian artists **Maria Clara Parente** and **Anna de Nardin**, delves into the themes of death, dream, and life. It emphasises that for humanity to rejuvenate from its destructive trajectory, rekindling our capacity to dream is essential. The film was presented at The Club of Rome Annual Conference 2022 in Costa Rica, highlighting its significance in discussions about global sustainability and regeneration, published in 1935

The ways to ensure resonance across a vast (and largely not visible) network of on-the-ground initiatives, together with a myriad of NGOs, are not trivial. The sector of civil society organisations is not exempt from the general framework of cutthroat competition that we generally apply to human organisations, not to talk about today’s dominant culture of narcissism. This is just to add to the barriers of distance, culture, language, accessibility, that naturally appear if we take seriously the role of communities, beyond those already connected to the multilateral bubble. The Fifth Element is exploring ways to address this challenge by bridging leading edge techniques of digital platforms with the imperative to be useful for communities all around the world.

Ongoing resonances

The six threads of work described in this paper resonate with countless activities being developed by other organisations and individuals. This, hopefully, provides the grounding for a *resonating mycelium*. Interestingly, among these activities, many were proposed by members of The Club of Rome, initially outside the context of The Fifth Element, but with quite obvious resonances, such as the following:

- ♦ the new initiative **Transforming Business Education**, launched in 2024 by the Club of Rome members Michael Pirson and Hunter Lovins, and now developing with the support of Otto Scharmer and Paul Shrivastava, aspires to bring systems change to one of the key pieces by which societies are kept on the wrong path of extractive and self-delusive economic models.
- ♦ the framework of the **Unitive Perspective**, being developed by the Club of Rome member Jude Curri van and colleagues, aims to give birth to a [Whole-World View](#) based on scientific evidence and able to host materialistic and consciousness approaches to knowledge, at the same time.
- ♦ the **Planetary Peace** initiative, created in 2024 under the leadership of the Club of Rome co-president Paul Shrivastava, has produced among others [Enduring Peace in the Anthropocene](#), a Report to The Club of Rome and the paper [Planetary Peace for Human Security: Responses to Existential Risks in the Anthropocene](#). The pluriversality concept is a proposal to frame the search for planetary peace, among humans and with the planet.
- ♦ **Regenerative living and regenerative economies** is one of the discussion groups of Club of Rome members initiated in 2025, building on the knowledge and practical experiences of members such as Hunter Lovins (e.g. [Natural Capitalism Solutions](#)), John Fullerton (e.g. [nRythm](#)), Charly Kleissner (e.g. [Toniic](#)), and others. All these approaches also connect with the Transforming Business Education initiative.
- ♦ the [COPx platform](#), an initiative launched by the Club of Rome members Hunter Lovins and Martin Frick, aims to create “a global movement enabling people everywhere to solve the climate crisis by implementing known solutions in their own communities in their own way”.

All these examples provide inspiring opportunities for synergies with The Fifth Element programme.





Next steps: *No Limits to Hope*

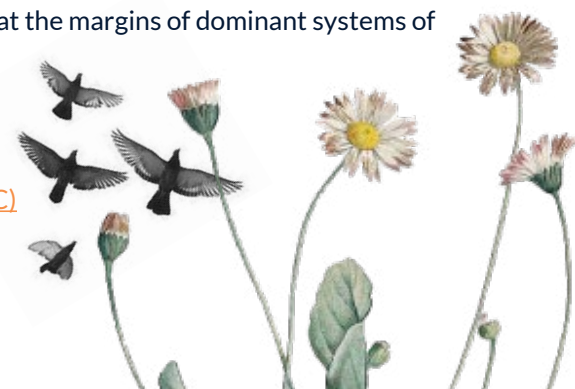
The six vectors of momentum described in the previous section may appear distinct, yet they are deeply interconnected. Each invites a different angle of reflection, but together they are designed to foster deeper learning, beyond what conventional frameworks allow. They also resist simple definitions, and that is precisely the point. This is not a search for fixed answers, but an invitation to ask more generative questions and begin living into them. In doing so, we may gradually find ourselves inhabiting the responses.

The Fifth Element is an ecosystem of questions, ideas, initiatives and practices that aspires to address the “human gap”, i.e. the difference between two characteristics: our effectiveness in acting and transforming the world around us, and our weakness in understanding and dealing with the consequences of our actions. This is the great disconnection from which our blind trajectory of self-inflicted existential threats has emerged.

Overcoming the human gap requires the deeper learning we have been mentioning. In the discussions of the group on “New Humanism and Systems Change” promoted by Club of Rome co-president Silvia Zimmermann del Castillo, some characteristics of a new conception of what it means to be human in the 21st century are already emerging: embedment in nature (as it was and should always have been), acceptance of the plurality of worldviews and equal respect for all cultures, acceptance that we are much more than rational consciousness, and emphasis on the value of deep insights beyond conventional hierarchies of knowledge (f.i. accepting that children might have better intuitions of the future than adults).

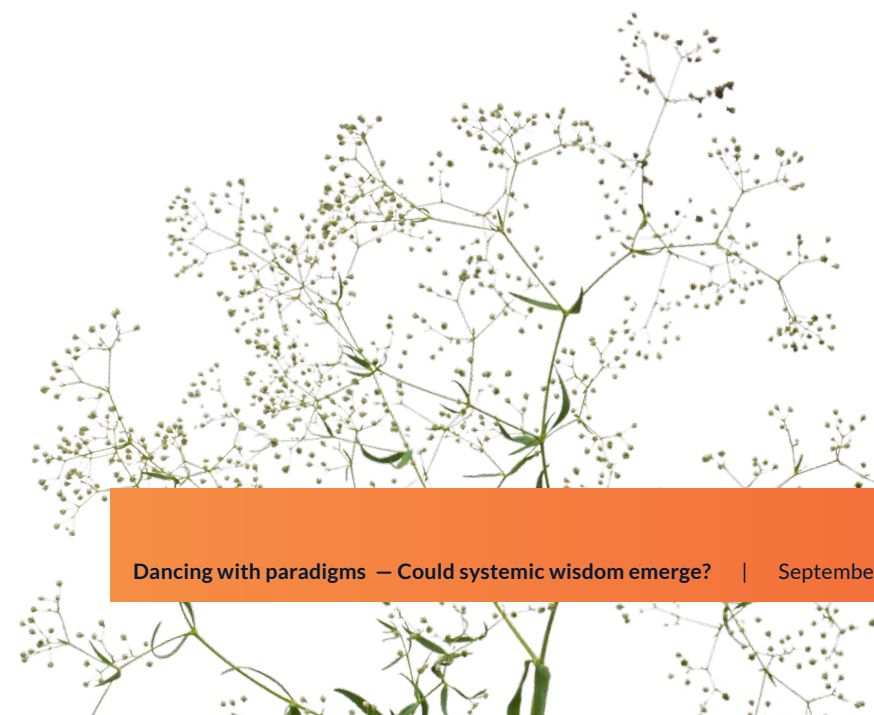
The path forward in this process of deeper learning is not the straightforward execution of a linear plan. It is a journey, an **exploration of new sense-making practices in collaboration with partners**. It requires the creation of appropriate spaces, in the widest sense of the term, meaning a combination of virtual facilities and physical locations around the world where The Fifth Element itself has already some footing or easy access (e.g. in Switzerland, South Africa, Morocco, Canada, Italy, China, and more). Spaces where listening is more important than telling and where the capacity to host and catalyse conversations, with the appropriate tone and manners for people to feel allowed to be humans again, is an essential asset for the continuation of our joint efforts. All this is not very different from what Club of Rome member Karima Kadaoui, co-founder of the [Tamkeen Community Foundation](#), has been experiencing for almost two decades. The Fifth Element builds on her experience and many others, often to be found at the margins of dominant systems of education and inquiry.

In 2024, on occasion of the 45th anniversary of *No Limits to Learning*, The Fifth Element partnered with the [World Environmental Education Congress \(WEEC\)](#) to explore how much has been achieved in what was proposed decades ago to bridge the human gap.



The outcome for now is an ongoing project that we decided to call [No Limits to Hope](#), and that will produce several publications in years to come. Invoking hope is not a blind bet on optimism. It is indeed a bet on humanity (but what else could make sense?) and at the same time it is a decision to reject both denial and helplessness and to choose reflective action for a reconciliation within us, with one another and with life in all its forms.

This paper is also an invitation to continue the conversations that initiated it. It provides the intellectual foundation of a pluri-annual programme of inquiry and action to address our challenges in ways which, to the best of our knowledge, have never been experimented before with such a systemic approach. How to do it is not yet clear, this programme for Earth-Humanity reconciliation is also an exploration of what the programme itself should be. The high ambition is to create an **effective strategy combining self-organised seeds of change at multiple levels with resonance processes ensuring mutual learning, reinforcing loops and a global, systemic scope**. Could some kind of systemic wisdom emerge from all of this, for the sake of generations to come?





The Fifth Element is a platform for systems transformation. It creates the conditions for people, initiatives, and institutions to converge, learn, and act together toward global equity on a healthy planet. Rather than leading with a fixed agenda, it nurtures collaboration, supports shared sensemaking, and helps connect diverse efforts into a larger, more coherent field of change.

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