



# REPURPOSING THE UNIVERSITY IN TIMES OF SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL BREAKDOWN



Stein, S., & de Oliveira Andreotti, V. (2025). **Repurposing the University in Times of Social and Ecological Breakdown: From the Ivory Tower to the Nurse Log.** *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation*, 48(1), 120-144.

Stein, S., Andreotti, V., Restoule, J. P., Vukovic, R., McGregor, C., Pelton, L. F., & Mohajeri, A. (2025). **Deepening relational capacity to confront the polycrisis in higher education and beyond.** *Higher Education Research & Development*, 44(6), 1572-1587.

# HOW DO WE LEARN TO FACE HYPER-COMPLEXITY?



WHEN ARE WE?



# WHEN ARE WE?

**planetary** climate change, biodiversity collapse

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**international** escalation of armed conflict, rise of fascism

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**national** mental health and education sector crisis

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**provincial** wild fires, water and food security threats

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**local** housing crisis, rising cost of living

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**families/  
communities** escalating emotional dysregulation and conflicts

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**personal** stress/burnout

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# WHEN ARE WE?

UNCERTAIN FINANCES, AFFORDABILITY CRISES

INTERGENERATIONAL DISSONANCE

CRISIS OF PUBLIC (I)RELEVANCE, AMBIVALENT AI

COMPLEXITIES OF EDID, HYPER POLARIZATION

ESCALATING MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS & COSTS

ECOLOGICAL DESTABILIZATION

LACK OF CAPACITY FOR  
COORDINATION



# CHANGE: WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE LAST 32 YEARS?

1993: Commercial internet becomes available

1998: Google founded

2000: Mass adoption of cellphones

2003: Skype launch; 2004: Facebook launch

2005: YouTube launch

2007: Introduction of iPhones, mass adoption of smart phones, Netflix streaming

2010: Instagram launch

2020: Zoom's rapid growth/ Hybrid learning (r)evolution

2021: TikTok becomes most visited website globally (surpassing Google)

2022: ChatGPT and other LLM AI made publicly available

2023: Twitter rebrands to X under Elon Musk

2025: ...

changes in access to information, knowledge production,  
social relations, identity building, sense of belonging, use  
of time, attention span, jobs, health and wellbeing...

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**for higher education:** loss of monopoly over value creation and selection; exponential increase in publishing; traditional hierarchies (of authority, prestige, influence) and disciplinary boundaries challenged



# CHANGE: WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN THE LAST 17 YEARS?

2008: Global Financial Crisis

2013: Idle No More and Black Lives Matter Movements

2015: Rhodes Must Fall Movement and launch of TRC report in CA

2017: Me Too Movement, World's richest 1% own 50.1% of world's wealth

2019: School Strikes for Climate Movement, Greta Thunberg's global impact

2020: COVID-19 Pandemic, public awareness about unmarked graves

2022: Russia's invasion of Ukraine marks the end of post–Cold War stability in EU

2023: Hamas attack on Israel marks intensification of regional and global tensions

2024: Horrific escalation of violence in Palestine, DRC, Sudan, Bangladesh, rise in global protest and polarization, hottest day ever recorded

2025: Trump returns to power: criminalization of DEI, dismantling of liberal institutional powers, backlash on reproductive rights and climate action; rising tariff wars and annexation rhetoric escalate global tensions

calls for decolonization, reconciliation, racial justice, equity, end of gun violence, awareness of sexual violence, gender and sexual rights, mental health, climate action and climate justice

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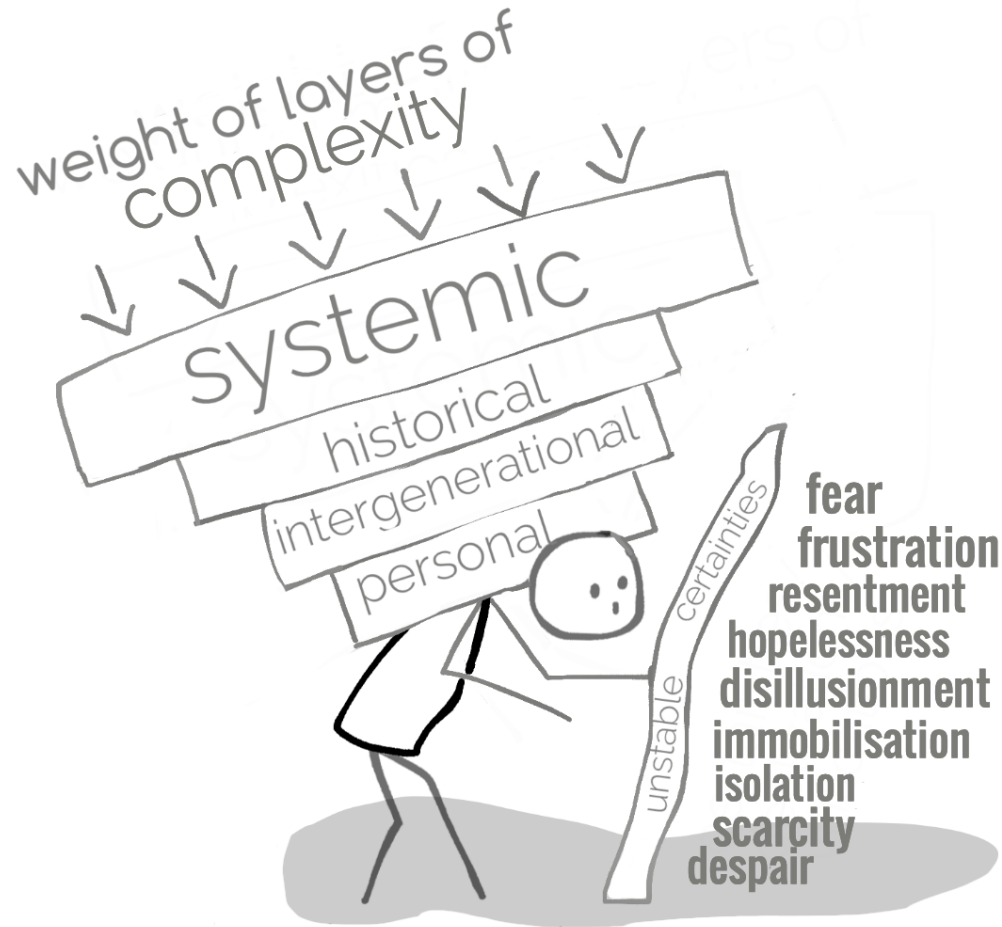
**in higher education:** reduced/targeted government investment; economic rationalization; shift in student identity and perceived entitlements; mental health crises

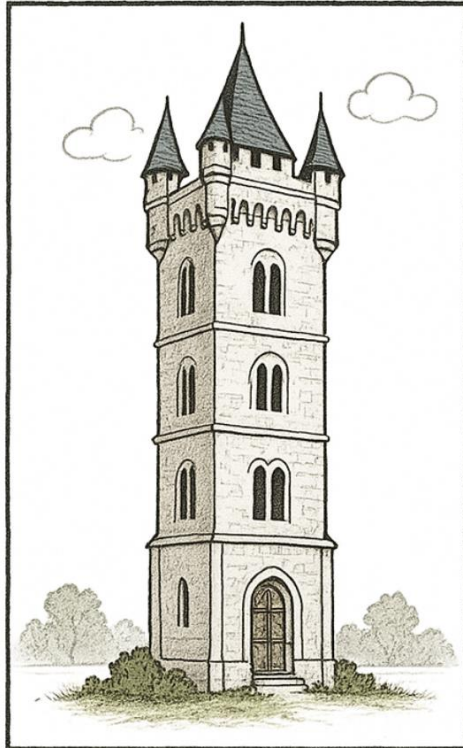
# “LIQUID MODERNITY”

## WHAT IS DIFFERENT?

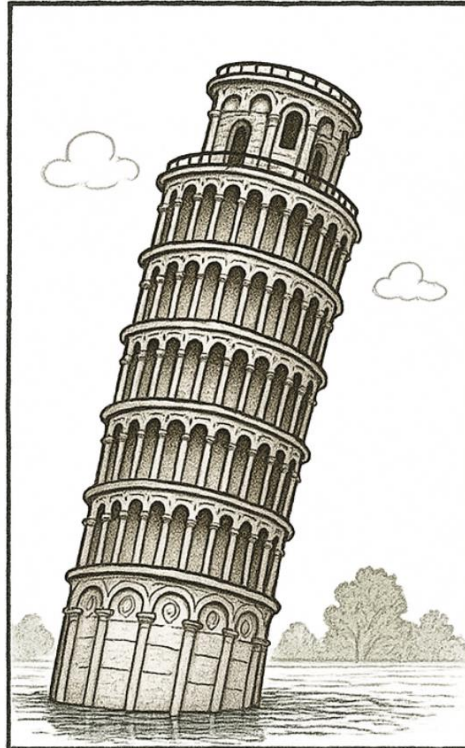
1. Chaotic cacophony of perspectives
2. Reactive polarization
3. Discursive transgression, policing and confusion
4. Multiple moving layers of complexity
5. Unprocessed hyper-consumption
6. General lack of capacity to process contradictory emotions
7. Excess of distractions
8. Echo-chambers, post-truth
9. Wider intergenerational gaps, change of intergenerational social contract
10. Stacked existential threats: war and (cyber)terrorism, climate destabilization, ecological collapse, unhinged AI

# HOW DOES IT FEEL?





IVORY TOWER



LEANING TOWER

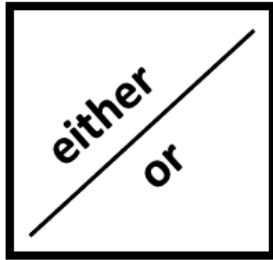


NURSE LOG

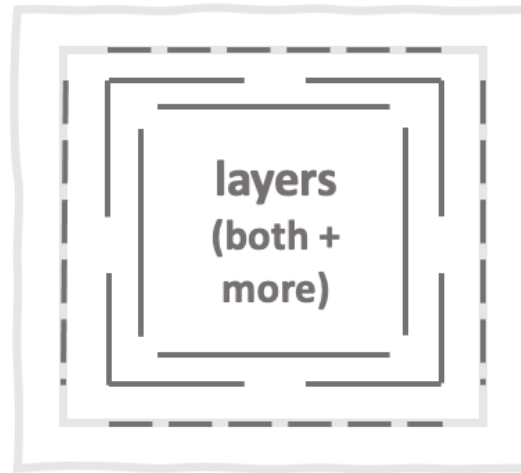
# UNIVERSITY

# “WHERE DO WE GO NOW”?

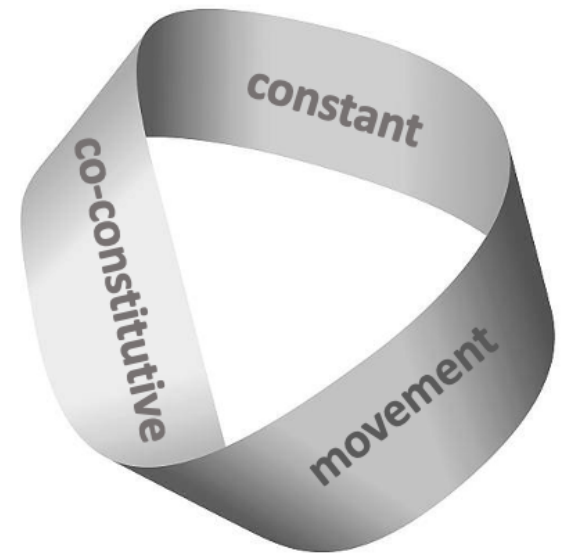
**narrow-boundary  
intelligence**



**wide-boundary  
intelligence**



**relational/entanglement  
wisdom**





# “WHERE DO WE GO NOW”?



<https://www.uvic.ca/education/stories/current/education-generational-bowl-story.php>