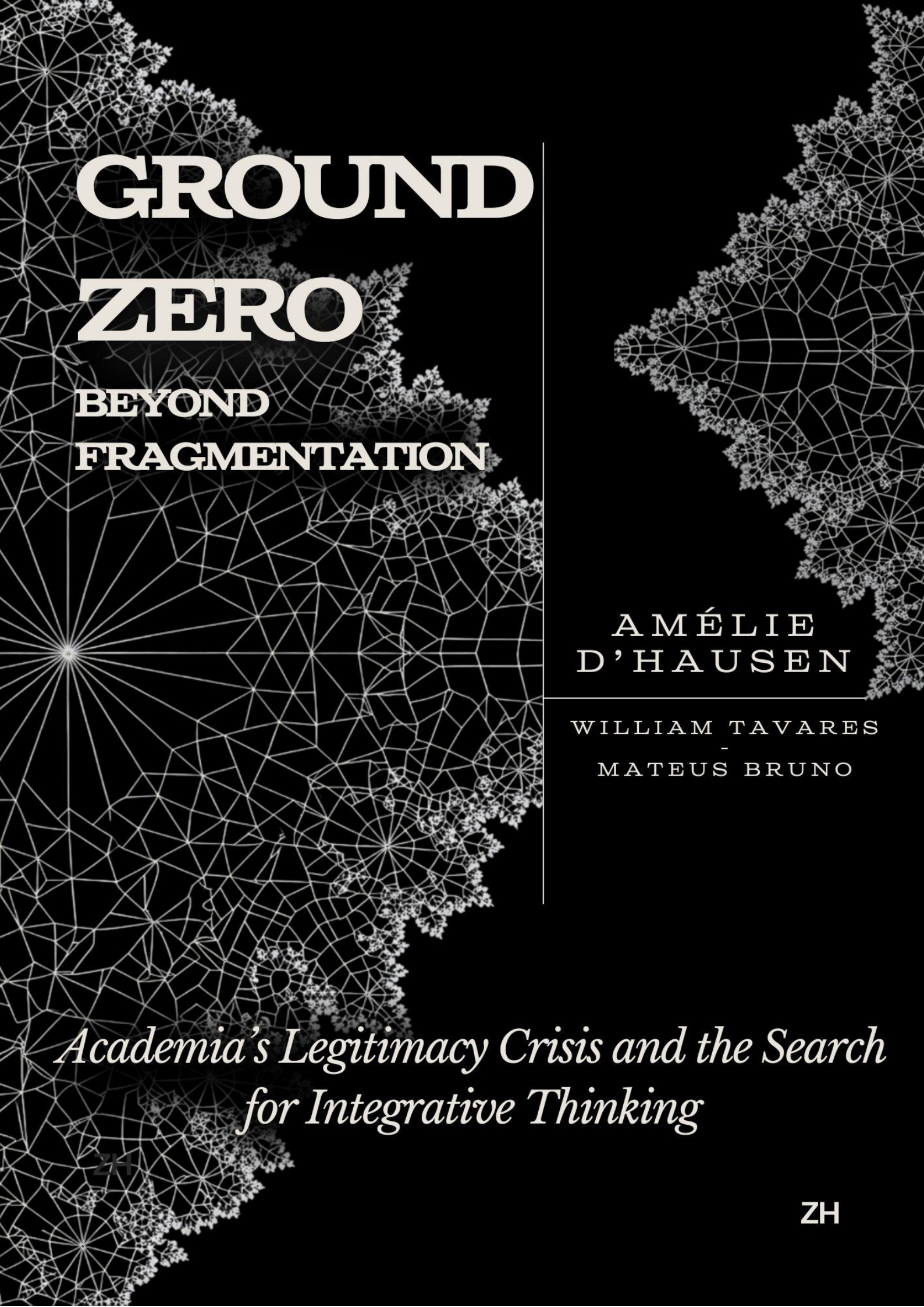




GROUND ZERO

BEYOND
FRAGMENTATION

AMÉLIE
D'HAUSEN

WILLIAM TAVARES
MATEUS BRUNO

*Academia's Legitimacy Crisis and the Search
for Integrative Thinking*

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Introduction

This manifesto is not academic. It is not built upon exhaustive research or meticulously vetted arguments. It is a prelude: the embryo, the sketch, the draft of a larger project I hope to develop by 2030 — by which time, if all goes well, I will have defended my doctoral thesis and written several hundred pages to explore in depth what I only touch upon here.

So why haste over patience? Approximation over rigor? To step outside the competition. This stance may seem paradoxical, since competition is typically seen as a driver of scientific progress. In this framing, doctoral work often becomes an extension of meticulous labor carried out in the shadows of the library to produce a flawless thesis, methodically eliminating contradictions and guarding against critique. Yet, beyond the limitations of this system, which I will address later, my project does not lend itself to such logic. Here, contradiction and critique are not Nemesis; they are central to the project's development.

The project's aim is the study of fragmentation - particularly the fragmentation of knowledge - and the development of tools to address it.

This research, conducted through my doctoral studies but also via the start-up Zero Horizon, aims to be collaborative, and therefore as open to critique as possible. Such openness is necessary because the goal is not to validate a single hypothesis, but to uncover a dynamic and contemplate it. Consequently, it is impossible to operate within a single paradigm. Studying fragmentation as a phenomenon requires navigating multiple contexts and embracing complexity itself as a central, irreducible characteristic. Such an enterprise cannot be done rigorously by a single person, within a single theoretical framework, or from a limited set of disciplines, especially as conclusions are never universalizable but only comparable to those produced in different circumstances. Unfortunately, these are the very constraints of doctoral research. It must grow in the open, beyond the comfort of an incubator, under real-world conditions where consensus often comes at the cost of abstraction.

Therefore, collaboration sits at the heart of this approach, as is the intention of the constant, gradual refinement of a research program composed of a central hypothesis and a protective belt designed to evolve over time. Ground Zero is, thus, a stepping stone. The first on a new path we hope to construct progressively with the participation of those seeking greater certainty and security while pursuing their academic aspirations. Indeed, many would argue that a PhD in the contemporary world has

become at best a losing bet, and, at worst, economic suicide – but this need not be the case.

The obstacles are all too familiar: interminable registration procedures, chronic funding shortages, fierce competition for scholarships, unpayable tuition fees, lack of stable income during Grad school and after, exhaustion from attempting to balance academic work with “survival” jobs, participating in collective projects, submitting unpaid articles or paying to publish, reviewing books and papers for free, taking money out of their own pockets to promote conferences — all for a 1-in-100 chance of securing a university position¹, even as long-term contracts disappear. For most, the reality is a saturated market, where it becomes impossible to assess the actual quality of doctoral candidates, condemning them to growing vulnerability.

Glancing at my LinkedIn feed confirms this reality. Desperation and instability are thinly veiled behind the rhetoric of “solidarity” and an entrepreneurial sheen. Beneath posts offering advice — “Why so many researchers struggle to identify research gaps,” or “Step-by-step plan for a quantitative thesis” — lies a darker reality: a generation of doctoral candidates forced to advertise themselves online in the hope of increasing visibility and, by extension, their chances of escaping precarity.

Alongside these “light” contents, offers of “academic coaching” now flourish: learning to publish in prestigious journals, writing “winning” introductions, or using artificial intelligence to take research to the “next level.” A system, in short, where young researchers sell services to other young researchers, hoping to gain access to unpaid projects or publications that might one day lead to a temporary contract, the trap that locks so many within the ‘educational industry’ moved by the hope of one day getting a permanent position. All of this is done while producing increasingly standardized work to meet journal requirements, publisher expectations, or the utilitarian criteria of funding panels, often at the expense of the researchers’ genuine scientific interests. Even before officially beginning my doctoral studies, I have heard many PhD candidates discuss their tactics for securing funding: how to “speak their language,” which fashionable concepts to mention, all to “increase their chances.”

¹ [The 2019 AHA Jobs Report – AHA](#) in the US, one of the countries with the highest employability of academics, it's currently going up as almost 1 in 120 for a tenure-track position in Humanities PhDs. Ruediger, D. (2019). *The 2019 AHA Jobs Report - A Closer Look at Faculty Hiring*. [online] *Perspectives on History*. Available at: <https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/the-2019-aha-jobs-report-a-closer-look-at-faculty-hiring-february-2019/#:~:text=Unsurprisingly%2C%20these%20openings%20attracted%20high,last%20year's%20historically%20low%20figures>. [Accessed 29 Sep. 2025].

Physicist and popular science communicator Sabine Hossenfelder, followed by nearly 1.7 million subscribers on YouTube, regularly analyzes these structural distortions in videos with explicit titles like - “Yes, We Created a Bubble,” and “I Call This Bullshit Research.” Beyond the debate over the rigor of her analyses, her popularity and testimonials are themselves important indicators of a crisis that far exceeds disciplinary boundaries and is gradually becoming more visible.²

This dysfunction in the academic system, while particularly affecting younger scholars, is felt at every level. Many professors I have spoken with openly acknowledge the failures of contemporary universities. Yet, as Philip Altbach already noted in 1997: “The Carnegie survey portrays an academic profession that has a vague sense of unease but little sense of crisis.” (p. 333). The disquiet is felt, but this prompts no action. It would of course be relevant to study the reasons behind such passivity; but it seems reasonable to assume that academia is organized in such a way that the needed reforms do not align with the interests of those who have the power to undertake them.

We intend to highlight the dysfunctions of the system, analyze their consequences, and open space for reflection. We do not reject academia, nor do we offer a complete alternative: inheriting the democratic ideals of education for all, we aim instead to create a space for reflection, collaboration, and experimentation that contributes to academe itself.

Our second motivation is to find a solution for pragmatically adapting to current market constraints. In a context where visibility has become the primary measure of value and the quality of research is difficult to evaluate for non-specialists, young researchers are trapped in an employment landscape with limited opportunities and scarce transparency. While more experienced scholars can leverage their publications, citations, networks, books, or reputation, younger researchers appear “underqualified” for stable positions in universities or research centers, yet “overqualified” for many jobs outside academia.

Additionally, without the resources and time to make grand contributions, their only way forward is focusing on ever-narrowing problems. However, the necessity of “adding to the scholarship” becomes a riptide whereby their research is ever less useful, resonates with fewer and fewer people, and can only be understood and evaluated by a handful of scholars. Differentiation criteria are weak: the supervisor’s

² Throughout the text, the examples from popular science and viral academic content are not cited as rigorous empirical evidence, but as indicators of broader societal perception which testify to the visibility of debates concerning the deterioration of the research ecosystem.

name and the institution’s reputation often remain the only guarantees of quality. This drives a frantic race for grants, awards, and temporary positions, all intended to distinguish each researcher’s profile. The dominance of English in academia intensifies this competition internationally, while bureaucratization further standardizes selection processes that are ever more impersonal, and reduces the diversity of career paths, hindering the development and fruitful coexistence of distinct profiles.

This context has transformed the “intellectual” archetype. Previously, scholarship was less defined by homogenized roles. There was plurality – some were focused educators, while others wrote, and still more engaged with the public. While some narrowed variation still exists, a once multifaceted ecosystem has become a largely codified profession, less based on scholars’ autonomy, and reliant upon the reproduction of standard practices and achievements. The image of the intellectual draped in a long coat, heavy with ideas, readings, and personality is gone; it has been replaced by the lab coat, symbol of professionalism which attenuates originality and echoes factorial uniformity.

Is Zero Horizon another more-of-the-same project?

While historical context is essential to understanding its *raison d’être*, the project is neither cynical, individualistic, nor opportunistic – and therefore, one may argue – fundamentally limited. Zero Horizon aims to uproot the fragmentation of knowledge – a fragmentation we hold responsible for many of the symptoms described here. Its objectives are complex, multidimensional, and designed to confront contemporary challenges by overcoming blockages observed at multiple levels of knowledge production, management and utilization.

Zero Horizon hopes to shape the “market value” of knowledge by creating means to change the valuation parameters. The University, understood as a factory, produces merchandise; its goods and services have no intrinsic value, and it matters not whether crafting an academic “production line” goes against the transformative and liberatory character of academic life itself. Its output must be measurable, evaluable, and capable of being reproduced; its researchers are replaceable machines. Research has therefore shifted toward data-driven, highly targeted studies, often not applicable to real-world situations because of their specificity. While this orientation has certainly refined empirical methods and highlighted their rigor, its competitive nature and obsession with empirical results exacerbate knowledge fragmentation – impeding considerations of contemporary complexities. In other words, it seems the market economy has failed to reshape academia to meet its needs without compromising excellence.

This failure must be taken seriously – we urgently need an alternative.

Zero Horizon places complexity and meaning at the center of research and education and holds that legitimacy and excellence are intertwined. It shall respond to these shortcomings by providing young researchers with opportunities for visibility and technical development. But it is also a start-up, intending to meet the demands of a market in search of tools and knowledge to navigate a fragmented world.

The Nature of Knowledge and Fragmentation

A Fragmented and Dynamically Expanding Reality

What do we mean when we speak of the fragmentation of knowledge? What is the nature of this fragmentation?

Here, we define knowledge as a body of information that has been connected, articulated, differentiated, and integrated into a larger system. Knowledge is not only “knowledge of,” inseparable from an individual or group, but “knowledge as,” the state that information attains once structured and situated. Integration is the process by which information becomes knowledge: it is corrected, adjusted, and placed in relation to existing branches. Justification is one form of this integration, and truth becomes secondary. Knowledge includes not only what can be proven, but also what is uncertain or disputed, ideas that acquire a lineage by being labelled with degrees of certainty, linked to schools of thought, or associated with particular approaches.

This process isn’t only systematic, but also cognitive and practical. Learning means more than memorization: it requires integrating new information into an existing framework, revising beliefs, reinforcing others, and opening new connections. Practical skills emerge as well from the integration of countless pieces of information (conscious and unconscious) into networks that enable coordinated action. Knowledge, then, is a structured body of information which can be external or internal, comprising both a specific space and an ever-changing, lived capacity.

Despite being a state of integration, knowledge remains marked by degrees of fragmentation. Knowledge is stored in distinct spaces (universities, schools, libraries...), in individuals (the practical know-how of the artisan, the social skills of the diplomat...), and in various historical contexts. Additionally, units of knowledge production are usually discrete, and for very legitimate reasons. Therefore, even with the advent of the internet, the idea of a unified, exhaustive database capable of

connecting all that is known remains unattainable. Some knowledge is lost; other knowledge is “embodied” — that is, inseparable from specific individuals, often manifesting as skills. And were a “super-database” to exist, fragmentation would persist, because of the difference between tacit or implicit knowledge and systematic, scientific knowledge (Polanyi, 1974).

It is important to distinguish the *state* of fragmentation from the *dynamics* of fragmentation. The state refers to an inevitable characteristic; the dynamics describe a movement toward two abstract poles. To get at either extreme is, of course, impossible in material reality, but what matters to us is the trajectory over time toward one pole or the other. Historical change is rarely linear. It allows contradictory dynamics to coexist in the same time or space without a single, dominant trend. For the greater part of history, such dynamics were too miniscule to be primary objects of study. However, this changed with the advent of industrial capitalism which catalyzed two major impulses: expansion and integration. This work details how these processes became institutionalized, growing to systematically favor one impulse over the other.

One notable relationship is that between expansion and fragmentation. Dividing an object or a project into distinct parts, stages, disciplines, or areas of expertise facilitates growth through specialization. And this specialization, by fostering the creation of disciplines and sub-disciplines, or expert profiles rather than generalists, has undeniably driven progress. As N. Henry Moss (1968, p. 393) observed: “The pattern of progress in the medical sciences, automation, communications, and transportation, more rapid than was imagined possible only a generation ago, seems to accelerate constantly. Most of these advances are a direct result of specialization”. Kurt C. Stange (2009, p. 100) similarly emphasizes: “Knowledge advanced greatly in the modern era by making sense of complicated things by understanding their parts. The ensuing rise in specialization has led to breathtaking advances from isolating, partitioning, and manipulating the components of physical, biological, and human systems.”

But history reminds us that expansion alone is not enough. Empires, however vast, do not owe their longevity to mere conquest; overexpansion inevitably generates internal fragilities that eventually precipitate collapse (Gibbon, 1789; Toynbee, 1979). Even in medicine — where specialization is often seen as virtuous — Stange (2009, p. 101), insists: “Spending more on the parts has not improved the whole.”. This highlights one of fragmentation’s limits: the whole is often far greater than the sum of its parts. Dividing a system into discrete elements, besides being epistemologically questionable, does not always allow one to grasp the dynamics intrinsic to that system (Bowker and Star, 2000).

In the same article, Stange illustrates this limitation with the case of a patient suffering from chronic fatigue, who consulted specialist after specialist without improvement because his 'cure' required not medicine, but a change of lifestyle. He sees in this the opposite of "healing," emphasizing that recovery requires more than specialized knowledge: it depends on a network of relationships between actors, disciplines, individuals. This observation opens a broader epistemological question: at what point does information become "knowledge"? When does the accumulation of data transform into understanding? And, in the medical example, when does mastering a branch of medicine truly equate to the capacity to "heal" others?

Often, in academic circles, the integration of a theory is tied to its theoretical — and sometimes practical — application, as well as the connections it establishes with existing knowledge. Some suggest this is a central characteristic for determining "truth." Susan Haack (2016, p. 16), Professor of Philosophy at the University of Miami, puts it succinctly: "All the truths about the world must be mutually consistent, but 'fitting together' requires more than this; not, however (as reductionists dream), that all the other truths about the world must be derivable from some privileged sub-set of truths, but rather that they must interlock, as entries in a crossword puzzle do."

The problem of fragmentation, then, is as follows: we lay pieces of a puzzle on the table without considering how their connections form a complete picture. Again, the issue is not the search for pieces or words, which must continue and remains valued, but the absence of recognition for the necessary cycle — the back-and-forth between fragmentation and synthesis, between expansion and integration. Haack (2016, p. 17) reflects thusly: "Actually, as I see it, philosophy advances both by fission and by fusion".

This challenge has concrete consequences, particularly in the realm of computer science, where many questions arise concerning the organization of knowledge:

(should we) propose a theory or framework suitable for dealing with fragmented knowledge? How can we integrate the overload of fragmented knowledge with the metaphor of independent knowledge, eliminate redundant information and ensure the orderly organization and expression of knowledge? How to mine useful knowledge from a large amount of fragmented information to create conditions for AI system to be more intelligent? How to perform machine reasoning and knowledge deduction in the massively fragmented knowledge environment? (Jia and Yang, 2020, p. 6)

The Challenges of Integration

Numerous attempts to address this problem have been made in academia. The creation of interdisciplinary institutes and programs is one example, as is the recurring emphasis on developing generalist, holistic, and multidisciplinary approaches — to avoid losing sight of the “big picture.” In the Anglophone world, concepts such as “synthesizing” or “synergy” have periodically been in vogue. Many have advocated facilitating cross-cutting research, combining “forms of knowledge,” teaching interconnections, and enabling the circulation of methods, concepts, and theories between disciplines (Capra, 1996; Bohm and Peat, 2010; Newell, 2011; Piaget, 1968). The discipline of knowledge management also emerged to reconsider the strategic value of knowledge and develop more effective systems to combat fragmentation and facilitate dissemination (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995).

Despite repeated failures, it was not until Timothy A. Robinson’s work in 2025 that the question of feasibility was explicitly posed. Robinson focused on the immaturity of disciplines, asking: “How ready is the whole range of disciplines for integration?” (Robinson, 2025, p. 104). What he highlights is the difficulty of integrating and connecting all knowledge without possessing what has always haunted research history: a “Theory of Everything” or “Grand Unified Theory,” to borrow the terminology from physics. He writes:

What we seem to be after is a kind of knowledge. What we want that will integrate all the other forms of knowledge is itself a form of knowledge. We might describe it as a vision or a grasp of the relationships among all the departments of knowledge and, by means of that, an understanding of the relationships among all the departments of human life (Robinson, 2025, p. 105).

Fragmentation is an inevitable feature, but the tools at our disposal do not allow any sight of an all-encompassing integration. Not only does our production of knowledge fail to achieve effective synthesis, but it also reproduces and accelerates fragmentation. Since the production of information and the production of knowledge are difficult to distinguish (this distinction itself being a form of integration), and creation is easier — and more rewarded — than integration, we are now confronted with an enormous and rapidly, if not exponentially, growing body of information.

But is such a “Theory of Everything” really necessary for us to promote a meaningful cross-disciplinary integration? Not necessarily. Many in the philosophy of science

have successfully produced schemes of hierarchies among different fields of knowledge – particularly the hard sciences – in a way to ordain their findings according to a very wide net of straightforward causal relations. But this is incredibly hard to do with the social sciences and even more so with the Humanities. Were it not the case, one could simply do away with them by deriving indisputable frames of research on human beings from the hard sciences. For reasons beyond this paper's scope, this is not possible. And what we have instead is myriad specialized fields across the spectrum of 'scientific' or academic knowledge that one cannot easily put in dialogue.

The main issue is not really, then, the impossibility of a god-like effort to deduce a theory that surpasses all others and explains each in their place; the main issue is the difficulty to agree upon *a frame of reference dedicated not to explaining the merits of two conflicting fields, but one that allows us to understand their diversion*. That is; to induce a new wave of integration, we shouldn't hopelessly reach for *one grand all-explanatory Theory*: we should strive to agree upon a tool of meta-narrative, which can help us decipher the general cleavage we are now spectating.

Integration in the Social Sciences

As mentioned above, in the hard sciences, the frame of reference is material reality, which is universally testable and verifiable. More easily than other fields, consensual paradigms guide their research, because their disciplines and sub-disciplines share a somewhat less inherently contestable object of study. This is not the case in the social sciences, where the frame of reference is itself a matter of debate.

Different fields and schools in the social sciences dispute the construction of their object of analysis. As such, notions like "the economy" or "the polity" cannot immediately be understood as given.

To begin observing social reality by eliminating theories is especially difficult given the complexity and reflexivity of the study object (Bourdieu, 1972). Thus, social sciences are susceptible to disputation, subjectivity and interpretation, resulting in multiple paradigms that are often in tension but cannot be decisively separated. Newly formulated theories thus nest within these paradigms, forming paradigms within paradigms. hyper-specialization in the social sciences is therefore not merely the limitation of an expert unable to see the whole; it is the specialization of an expert in a

small fragment of a contested theoretical framework, itself often linked to one or more other contested frameworks.

The following excerpt illustrates this trend in the social sciences:

“As suggested above, article thematic and theoretical scope is inspired by the ideas of Liessmann [2], Spitzer [3], Carr [4], Chomsky [5] and others, namely the already ‘classic’ works of Fromm [1] or – from the Czech environment – the works of Brouk [6], which the authors continue to develop. In terms of theory and methodology, the paper adheres to the systems theory [7], [8]. The impact of informatization on knowledge is handled in the literature from the perspective of organizational informatics, or knowledge management [9] but equally important for the following exposition is a reflection on the issue from the standpoint of education and information science [10], or other multidisciplinary ventures, such as [11] or other substantial contributions within the individual (related) disciplines, e.g. [12]. Other important sources for creating a theoretical plan are given below.” (Reznicek and Smutny, 2020, p. 1043)

This example is by no means intended to diminish the quality of the research; on the contrary, the thorough discussion of paradigms demonstrates rigor. It simply raises significant epistemological questions: what is the scope of this study beyond its hyper specific frame of reference? Does it hold when a new parameter is introduced or an existing one is modified? To cite concrete examples, mainstream economics, liberal institutionalist international relations, and “best practices” in development studies are often written by specialists “unencumbered by matters of ethics, power, or ideology” (Giroux, 2009, p. 16). Such studies quickly become outdated, questionable, or even problematic when these dynamics are taken into account.

Fragmentation of Knowledge and the Market Economy: A Status Report

Social sciences are inherently fragmented, yet this fragmentation has been structured, institutionalized into a system that tends to value the fragments more than the whole, thus reinforcing itself.

Commodification of Knowledge

From Investment to Product

A central feature of the dynamic created by the intersection of academic knowledge and the market economy is indeed the commodification of knowledge, at the expense of its consideration as an investment. While the two terms may appear similar, their implications are quite different. Investment is made to multiply capital — or the capacity to generate it. It requires immediate funding to yield a deferred, uncertain return, often over a long timespan. Investment embraces risk in pursuit of potential substantial future gains, with limited wear or depreciation. It is inherently dynamic: the value the investor seeks to capture has yet to be created.

A product, by contrast, provides immediate utility: the value has already been realized. The buyer places money on the table and can almost immediately benefit from the good — through comfort, function, status, or aesthetics — via ownership or use.

More than mere categories, product and investment describe a relationship between the good or service and its user. A good can simultaneously be a product in one person's hands and an investment in another's. For instance, a camera offers direct utility to an enthusiast but represents an investment for a professional photographer, serving as a tool to generate revenue and a measurable return on investment.

For knowledge to be treated as an investment in an economic relationship, its future return must be, at least in part, predictable. Yet knowledge is intrinsically unpredictable: it is impossible to determine with certainty whether a specific research endeavor will yield profitable or revolutionary results, or if it might lead to a dead end. Its temporal scale is also significantly longer: returns are not immediate, and expected outcomes may take decades to materialize — without any guarantee (Arrow, 1962). Knowledge is further subject to strong externalities, meaning its benefits are difficult for a single investor to fully capture (Stiglitz, 1999). In other words, knowledge today is not a profitable investment, and this raises questions at multiple levels. Companies, states, and individuals all grapple with how much to invest in education, training, and research, and more importantly, in which departments. Businesses hesitate in the face of employees' reluctance to participate in workshops, often criticized for their superficiality; states reduce subsidies; and individuals question whether to enroll in university (Schrecker, 2010).

The commodification of knowledge observed since the late 20th century is, in reality, a foreseeable adaptation of our knowledge production systems to meet new demands

determining access to — or denial of — the resources essential to their survival. Knowledge becomes a commodity strictly measured by its exchange value rather than for its emancipatory effect (Kauppinen, 2013). This “strict” utility, as we will see, increasingly reflects its symbolic value (abstract value conferring status and positive associations) rather than its use-value (utility of a commodity).

This observation, intended to be as consensual as possible, is meant to provide a neutral and solid foundation from which to redirect the debate toward a serious consideration of the consequences of this crisis and the search for solutions. The inherently fragmented nature of knowledge, its tendency toward further fragmentation in the social sciences, and the imperfections of the knowledge market together reveal a dynamic confirmed by the critiques we will discuss.

Of course, other aspects of knowledge could have been addressed, particularly the way political power plays a key role in its production and in determining what “counts” as knowledge (Bourdieu, 1984; 2020). A discussion of the contextual factors that shaped this evolution — such as the neoliberal turn, the “Culture Wars,” the rise of Republican think tanks in the United States, and the expansion of an anti-intellectual media landscape — could also have been included. Yet these details would have diverted attention from the central line of argument (see, e.g., Schrecker, 2012; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004). The key point is that this historical and political context is recognized, our discussion focuses on the general dynamics, and these dynamics can be addressed from other perspectives if needed.

How to “Sell” Knowledge? Symbolic Value, Exclusivity, and Evaluation

First, knowledge is “sold” by presenting the buyer with direct value. Since the use-value of knowledge rarely carries immediate utility, its symbolic value becomes the primary selling point. This is evident when universities leverage their reputation, crafting a “brand identity” to market uncertain knowledge within a package that includes networks, job opportunities, social prestige, and a sense of belonging (Olssen & Peters, 2005). A similar logic operates in professional training, where the value lies more in certificates or LinkedIn content than in the material itself.

Second, knowledge is enclosed behind barriers to ensure only selected buyers can access it. This privatization occurs either through contracts preventing certain researchers from disseminating results outside the company, or through patents filed by the researcher or institution (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

Third, a myriad of measurement tools has emerged to better predict or assess the value of knowledge production. Articles published, citation scores, global university rankings, funding secured, institutional affiliations, KPIs, and public visibility all serve the same goal: mitigating the inherent challenge of evaluating the quality of knowledge or the systems that produce it (Kuratko, Morris & Covin, 2015). The central idea is to create transparency by developing indicators that reassure the buyer about the product's quality and potential performance (Muller, 2021). For example, universities in Illinois "apply productivity and performance measures to teaching" (Giroux, 2009, p. 5).

This "product" can be knowledge itself — as patents, inventions, or research outputs — but also the entity producing it: the university, researcher, or trainer. Clearly, producing high-quality, universally accessible knowledge is not profitable; what drives these metrics is anticipated profit:

Scholarship is increasingly measured not by the search for truth, rigor, or its social contributions. On the contrary, it is all too willingly defined in support of market needs just as funding for university programs is related to the commodification of ideas and the accumulation of profits (Giroux, 2009, p. 8).

Where possible, indicators directly reference this expected profit, increasingly factored into hiring decisions for new faculty, who are expected to present business plans:

Here is what one Ivy League division chief e-mailed me: My chair and his vice chair for finance have had a new plan of requiring us all to account for 100% of our time with either clinical revenue or grants... It is all about RVUs... the department no longer supports educational/scholarly work, unless it is a highly specialized program... (Strasburger, 2014, p. 1029).

This short-term strategic vision is inseparable from specific trends, which require individuals to demonstrate tangible results quickly to secure career advancement and salary increases, particularly in other sectors (Paugam, 2022). Evaluation thus not only drives a strategic view of knowledge — it redefines its value. Instead of being valued for its own ends, it is estimated regarding its capacity to attract global capital (Lyotard, 1979).

The observed consequences are striking: hyper-specialization, declining research and educational quality, a crisis of legitimacy, and precarious conditions for students, researchers, and faculty alike:

The appeal to excellence by university CEOs now functions like a corporate logo, hyping efficiency while denuding critical thought and scholarship of any intellectual, civic, and political substance (Giroux, 2009, p. 6).

Hyper-specialization

A Differentiation Strategy?

Hyper-specialization appears as perhaps the first “symptom” of this dynamic, combining the desire for concrete, applicable results with product differentiation in the market. The essay by Peter H. Gray and Darren B. Meister (2003, p. 260) illustrates this phenomenon, perhaps unintentionally. Citing J.-C. Spender (1996), they observe: “His analysis reveals a lack of uniqueness to KM theorizing; without a theory of KM, our field remains indistinguishable from others”.

At first glance, a neutral observation — but it raises important epistemological questions: why must a field be “discernible” from others? If this distinction is not obvious and requires construction, does the field have a legitimate purpose? Gray and Meister (2003, p. 263). conclude: “We have no conclusive answer to the question of what the core of KM is or should be”.

This example is particularly telling when considering that knowledge management emerged as a “sub-discipline” of management, conceptualizing knowledge as a strategic resource whose circulation must be maximized to enhance organizational efficiency (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995).

This tendency is not limited to economics. Haack provides a striking testimony of “clique” dynamics in her own field. Warning first of the dangers of hyper-specialization in an “immature” discipline, she identifies careerism as the true driver of fragmentation, observing social phenomena that betray the interests of the collective:

At this point in time, I can’t participate in an epistemology conference without feeling like a Martian — a Martian anthropologist, sitting on the sidelines noting the constant mutually-reassuring references of each participant to the others’ work, the coded jargon alluding to the narrow seam of niche literature that defines this or that sub-sub-field — “high-stakes situation,” “Lackey-type counter-examples,” “knowledge first,” etc., etc. — and the conspicuously chummy use of first names. At the conference I mentioned at the beginning of this paper, for example, I was the only speaker who referred to older work in the field — Locke, Mill,

Peirce, etc.; the only speaker who referred to the other participants as Professor X, Professor Y, and Professor Z, rather than as Tom, Dick, and Harry; and — though the topic of the conference was ostensibly “The Point and Purpose of Epistemic Evaluation” — the only speaker who even mentioned the real world! (2016, p. 11).

Tony Becher and Paul Trowler (2001), in *Academic Tribes and Territories*, also highlight how hyper-specialization is reinforced by clan-like and careerist logics, embedding the fragmentation further into disciplinary cultures.

The Dynamics of Specialization as an Academic Norm

A set of social norms seems to have developed around this dynamic of hyper-specialization, deserving closer sociological scrutiny. As Haack notes, there is a certain pressure to prioritize recent work over the contributions of great thinkers of the past:

(It is) reminding me of the reviewer who apparently miffed because I didn't discuss his and his friends' work, complained that my *Defending Science* focused too much on ideas from dead people — dead people like Thomas Huxley, Albert Einstein, Percy Bridgman, James Conant, John Dewey, and Gustav Bergmann (2016, p.11)

One also observes the use of group-specific jargon, the dismissal of generalist perspectives —

‘You don't have an area?’ she asked, in the incredulous tone in which people sometimes ask me, ‘you don't have a cellphone?’ (p. 4)

— and a disinterest in knowledge outside one's own niche:

Most of these academic epistemologists seem largely indifferent to neighboring fields; at any rate, my efforts to interest them in issues about evidentiary procedures in the law, or in what we can learn from epistemological novels... seem to fall mostly on deaf ears (p. 10).

Collaboration across distinct research groups appears devalued in favor of internal collaboration:

And the cliquishness is disturbing, as people in this or that sub-sub-specialty focus more or less exclusively on work by others of the same stripe (pp. 10–11).

Resources are overwhelmingly devoted to advancing the knowledge of the sub-specialty, even among groups interested in the history of philosophy, who “seemed to

have more to say about other contemporary Quine-specialists than about the older philosophers who influenced Quine" (*Ibidem*, p. 14).

This trend shows signs of institutionalization, as research groups claim ownership of their sub-discipline and, like Gray and Meister, strive to demarcate their territory. Haack expresses particular concern about the international dimension of this phenomenon, noting that three philosophers of science from three continents "all agreed, in particular, that philosophy of science has now divided into sub-specialties: philosophy of physics, philosophy of biology, philosophy of the social sciences, etc. At a subsequent meeting I learned that there is also, by now, another sub-group of philosophers of science who focus on questions about causation (and, probably, there are other such sub-groups I haven't encountered)" (*Ibidem*, p. 11).

"Fads" in the Research World

When specialization in philosophy fails to yield substantial progress, fads emerge:

...people keep themselves busy arguing over and over the same puzzles — until boredom sets in, and they set off in pursuit of a new fad. Problems are never solved, but simply abandoned: philosophers of science leave the "grue" paradox behind unresolved; metaphysicians lose interest in older debates about realism vs. nominalism, about realism vs. "anti-realism," about internal realism vs. metaphysical realism, ..., etc., and chase after a new, postpost-modern realism — or a new "deflationism"; philosophers of language abandon Davidson to argue over Kripke and, especially, over X's, Y's, and Z's interpretations, critiques, and defenses of Kripke and A's, B's and C's interpretations, critiques, and defenses of X's, Y's and Z's interpretations, critiques, and defenses of Kripke, ..., etc; and so on (p. 21).

In other words, unable to monetize knowledge through tangible results, philosophy is compelled to chase trends that capitalize on novelty, curiosity, and the prestige conferred by tackling complex puzzles with obscure concepts — benefiting researchers, universities, and other stakeholders.

[I]n the recent history of [analytic philosophy] a series of puzzles have been mooted, flared up as trends, attracted a significant portion of graduate students, and then died down with no obvious solution having established itself and the world not much the wiser. These problems include: paradigms, rules, family resemblance, criteria, "gavagai," Gettier, rigid designation, natural kinds, functionalism, eliminativism, truth-minimalism, narrow versus wide context, possible worlds,

externalism versus internalism, vagueness, fourdimensionalism, and, just now, presentism (Haack, 2016, p. 22).

Haack, unlike a colleague who “insisted that hyper-specialization is perfectly OK” (p. 4), is certain of its negative — indeed disastrous — impact on the advancement of knowledge. Must we elaborate further? How can one argue against integration, especially when it is conceived as a natural complement to expansion rather than a “better” alternative? Can hyper-specialization, as described, truly be defended as beneficial to research?

What we aim to show is that fragmentation through hyper-specialization is not an epistemological choice, because:

1. Knowledge production — especially in the social sciences — requires a balance between expansion and integration (Kuhn, 1962; Capra, 1996).
2. Empirical evidence shows it advances individual interests, not collective scientific progress.
3. Its inefficiency is observable, as is its detrimental effect on general knowledge.

This leads us to conclude that the distribution implied by the capitalist mode of production is inherently inefficient when it comes to knowledge, since the profit-seeking trade of commodities (things made to be sold) restricts and constraints knowledge production rendering it faulty. Fragmentation is not an epistemological *choice* but a pattern that spreads as the generalization of the capitalistic mode of production.

In other words, fragmentation through hyper-specialization is driven more by social and economic forces than by epistemic imperatives.

Perverse Incentives

The trap we refuse to fall into is that of blame: the behaviors described above, however “negative” they may be for research, are entirely understandable. First, because they are often unconscious. These attitudes are the product of a socialization process that begins in childhood, valuing individualism, profit, and competition — the hallmarks of a market economy — as well as norms absorbed during integration into academia to avoid exclusion from the group (Merton and Shapere, 1974; Becher and Trowler, 2001). Indeed:

As it is presently organized, our profession creates powerful perverse incentives — incentives, that is, not to be alert for and to seize opportunities to advance inquiry, but instead to be alert for and to seize opportunities to advance yourself (Haack, 2016, p. 25).

It is also crucial to remember that this exclusion is not only social but economic. In other words, nonconformity — particularly early in one’s career — is a risky deviation that can jeopardize an individual’s ability to secure the funding needed for basic survival (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). Though people may still be motivated by the hope of social prestige of the intellectual (Bourdieu, 2020), and while some professors do manage to land well-paid positions, prospects for achieving “financial freedom” are very limited. Academics, then, are primarily seeking legitimate financial security, and it is important to avoid conservative stereotypes depicting professors as “overpaid deadbeats and radicals who indoctrinate their students, write incomprehensible prose, and only work twelve hours a week” (Schrecker, 2012, p. 42), as well as left-leaning critiques portraying modern academics as profit-obsessed capitalists (Giroux, 2009).

Haack’s measured, empathetic words are worth quoting:

Unless you conform, more or less, to the perverse incentives I described earlier, you will likely find it harder to publish, and harder, therefore, to get tenure, to get promoted, to get a raise — perhaps, as pressure mounts for even graduate students to publish, to get any kind of academic job in the first place. I don’t know what to say to someone who wonders whether they can, or should, tolerate this kind of risk for the sake of doing the work they care about. “My professional life hasn’t been exactly a bed of roses,” I might say; “that has been the price I’ve paid for keeping my independence, and for following my ideas where they lead.” But, I would have to add, I can’t predict whether our profession will get better, or worse, over the course of a budding philosopher’s working life (though I’d bet on its getting worse before it gets better, if it does); and I wouldn’t presume to advise someone else whether, for them, the rewards would be worth the price. That is just too personal a matter (2016, p. 28).

Crisis of Legitimacy

If we cannot resolve the individual dilemma or advise someone on the choices they must make, it becomes essential to consider the issue at a societal level, particularly its consequences for knowledge, its producers, and its users. Strikingly, the pursuit of financial self-interest has not led to impoverished knowledge and wealthy

intellectuals. On the contrary, the limitations intrinsic to the nature of knowledge itself warn us of a trap that, while potentially profitable in the short term, is gradually eroding the academic world from within.

The equation is simple: if behaviors driven by profit are incompatible with producing high-quality knowledge, no marketing techniques — product differentiation, novelty effects, exclusivity — will work. When the product sold does not deliver on its promise, the only outcome is a crisis of trust and legitimacy, loss of investment, and potentially the collapse of the academic system as we know it. The cycle is vicious: critiques are already proliferating, yet dismissing them as mere “anti-intellectualism” is itself anti-intellectual. Refusing to engage with legitimate criticisms perpetuates dysfunction by blocking a critical reflection on how the academic system actually operates.

Emblematic of this controversy’s public dimension is Sabine Hossenfelder, who, to her 1.7 million followers, regularly posts videos with titles such as *“Scientific Research Has Problems, and They’re Only Getting Worse,” “Science is in Danger, and I’m Concerned,”* or *“Should We Stop Investing in Research?”* There is no need to discuss in detail the similar dynamics observable in the United States, where attacks on universities can be perceived as both political and economic. Investments in education and research are considered unprofitable — or unmeasurably so, which for Donald Trump and his ilk is precisely the same thing (Bonitatibus, 2025). Western universities have faced numerous attacks tied to “anti-woke” movements, whether regarding teaching, research output, or student behavior, further eroding public confidence.

Dr. Ally Louks’ viral thesis on Twitter, with over 120 million views, is another telling example. Her topic, *“Olfactory Ethics: The Politics of Smell in Modern Prose,”* sparked widespread reactions questioning its “utility” — a sign of the public mentality: expecting a direct return on investment. Many commentators explicitly referenced the money invested in the researcher’s work, seemingly critiquing the lack of immediate “ROI.” Another factor in the virality could be widespread misunderstanding of academia, amplified by anti-intellectual and populist tendencies prevalent in many countries. In many responses, alongside evident sexism, there is clear incredulity toward research that appears absurd — or laughable — to non-specialists. Another “fracture,” then, emerges in knowledge distribution: research whose value and relevance are clear to domain specialists remains largely inaccessible to the general public. Her final comment was telling: “At the end of the day, I don’t have to justify my thesis. It was written by a specialist for other specialists in my field.”

A System Vulnerable to Misrepresentation and Misconduct

These “viral” debates questioning contemporary research and academia are mirrored by more serious discussions about cheating, which is increasingly observed across universities. Both students and researchers are forming organized groups to develop ever more sophisticated techniques (Fanelli, 2009). The use of artificial intelligence has also become central to debates over student evaluation, assessments that were already criticized for their inadequacy even before AI entered the scene (Cotton, Cotton, and Shipway, 2023).

In 2023, it was not a student but a renowned Harvard professor, Francesca Gino, who became embroiled in a scandal revealing significant traces of plagiarism and data falsification, despite having authored a paper entitled *“The Moral Virtue of Authenticity: How Inauthenticity Breeds Feelings of Immorality and Impurity.”* That same year, the President of Stanford resigned after falsified information was discovered in twelve of their reports. For context, Roland Gori (2015), in *The Manufacture of Impostors*, write: “Every society, in a way, has the impostors it deserves.” This is not a call to purge sin; rather, it is a pledge to increase our responsibility. The proliferation of such cases indicates that we are maintaining an environment conducive to their spread. As highlighted in the article *“Entities Enabling Large-Scale Scientific Fraud Are Broad, Resilient, and Rapidly Growing,”* flawed evaluation systems are a central factor:

The degree to which stakeholders contribute to the system is now increasingly evaluated by potentially misleading proxies such as the h-index, journal impact factor, university rankings, and scientific prizes (Richardson et al., 2025, p. 1)

A System Based on “Good Faith”

Haack, Michael Polanyi, Reese A. K. Richardson, and others identify a crucial point: the academic system is poorly adapted to behaviors that prioritize personal profit over scientific integrity. Richardson and his collaborators note:

Because of the increasing complexity of the knowledge being created and increased specialization, the system relies on the good-faith assumption of genuine contributions by all participants (Richardson et al. 2025, p. 1).

Unfortunately, as they observe in their analysis of rising fraudulent behavior — and as Polanyi wrote decades earlier:

If each scientist set to work each morning with the intention of doing the best bit of safe charlatanry which would just help him into a good post, there would soon exist no effective standards by which such deception could be detected... Only if scientists remain loyal to scientific ideals rather than try to achieve success with their fellow scientists can they form a community which will uphold those ideals (1946, p. 40).

This is all the more alarming because Richardson et al. recently demonstrated that “large networks of cooperating individuals and entities that produce scientific fraud at scale can be identified” (2025, p. 2).

Classical methods for evaluating the quality of work or a professor function well in an environment where academic excellence is the ultimate value. However, they collapse — or even incentivize fraud — when profit enters the equation. As Haack observes:

There is, in my opinion, too much emphasis on such unreliable surrogate measures as how much grant money someone brings in, how often they are cited, how “prestigious” the journals in which they publish are, etc. — the correlation between academic success and real achievement in philosophy is much, much further from perfect. (2016, p. 25)

...But Rewarding Popularity and Questionable Metrics

The number of published articles also serves as a “measure” of academic success, one that jeopardizes both researchers and knowledge itself. Here again, profit-driven logic pushes academics and scientific journals toward perverse behaviors (Muller, 2021). At the heart of this mechanism are open-access journals. As Kyle Siler explains (2020, p. 1):

Since APC-based OA publishing involves remunerating publishers based on how many articles they publish, this can underpin perverse incentives to accept as many articles as possible to maximize revenue. In turn, some unscrupulous academic publishers and journals — often labeled as predatory — operate in such a manner, eschewing legitimate peer review or other types of quality control.

Unfortunately, the problem is not limited to so-called predatory journals. As reported in *Nature* in the article “Over 10,000 Retractions in 2023, a New Record,” even prestigious journals publish mediocre or poorly conducted work (Berger & Cirasella, 2015) and/or non-reproducible studies (Open Science Collaboration, 2015). The Francesca Gino scandal demonstrates that individuals can still rise to the top of the world’s most elite

universities — even ranking among the highest-paid faculty — despite the “true peer review and quality control mechanisms” that Siler describes.

At stake is a system organized around peer review, which, as previously noted, depends heavily on the scientific integrity of the reviewers themselves. Moreover, most reviews are not public, making it difficult to verify their quality or good faith. This leads to reliance on even more indirect proxies for measuring the quality of research and journals — such as the journal’s reputation, impact factor, or rejection rate (Siler, 2020). Despite their lack of rigor, these proxies more or less directly shape assessments of researchers and the knowledge they produce.

This is without even considering the highly opaque editorial policies that determine which articles are accepted, and, by extension, what is considered “legitimate knowledge” versus what remains peripheral — or entirely outside — the recognized sphere of knowledge.

Publish or Perish: The Rise of “Predatory” Journals

Since a researcher’s level of participation in knowledge production, as measured by article publication, is critical to career evaluation, a “secondary market” of predatory journals has emerged, growing significantly over the past twenty years. These are often defined as:

Entities that prioritize self-interest at the expense of scholarship and are characterized by false or misleading information, deviation from best editorial and publication practices, a lack of transparency, and/or the use of aggressive and indiscriminate solicitation practices (Grudniewicz et al., 2019, p. 211).

Here, the distinction between legitimate and predatory publishing underscores the pursuit of profit rather than academic excellence, implicitly revealing the notion that “noneconomic ideals and norms should temper — if not supersede — profit seeking behaviors” (Siler, 2020, p. 2). The problem is that traditional reputable journals are subject to the same profit logic — the difference lies not in principle, but in business model. Traditional journals sell high-quality articles to a wide audience, using selectivity to justify higher prices, while predatory journals sell academics the chance to potentially boost their “score” by exploiting, to varying degrees, the journal’s perceived prestige and legitimacy, generating revenue through low prices and a high volume of publications.

Should we assume naivety on the part of researchers who publish in these venues? Some are fully aware of the journal's illegitimacy but find the transaction advantageous. Recently, 5,000 German scientists and 2,300 Italian scientists published articles in journals blacklisted by Beall (Bagues et al., 2019; Eckert & Hornug, 2018).

Quality of Knowledge and the Precarity of Scholars

Aware that they are expected to produce “marketable” research, students flock to the same majors, pursuing “courses labeled as ‘relevant’ in market terms, which are often counterposed to courses in the social sciences, humanities, and the fine arts that are concerned with forms of learning that do not readily translate into either private gain or commercial value.” (Giroux, 2009, p. 18). Since the education of a population is a common good — benefiting society as a whole through social cohesion, democratic reinforcement, increased productivity, attractiveness, soft power, and more — it is the entire community that loses when “academic labor is increasingly based on corporate needs rather than on the demands of research for the public good” (Giroux, 2009, p. 5).

The End of Tenure?

The decline of quality research and teaching can be traced not only to hyper-specialization but also the pressures on Professors, who, to secure ever-lower compensation and increasingly precarious contracts, are forced to teach ever-larger classes, secure further funding, publish a set number of articles, and generate revenue for their institutions (Giroux, 2009). Currently, 75% of U.S. faculty are either non-tenured or not on a tenure track (Schrecker, 2012, p. 39). Unable to measure the quality of work or translate its value economically, universities now seek to “extract labor from campus workers at the lowest possible cost, one willing to sacrifice research independence and integrity for profit” (Nelson, 2002, p. 717).

Precarity and quality are inseparable dynamics: a researcher or professor cannot focus on producing meaningful work without confidence that their basic present and future needs will be met. Despite the passion and commitment of many academics, paying bills is a natural priority — especially in a context where producing quality work carries no guarantees. Two paths therefore present themselves: first, compromise integrity by adapting research to secure income. This may include pursuing research specifically designed to attract funding, producing truncated results when investors may disapprove, publishing in predatory journals, or creating self-referential research

groups to simulate popularity. The second path, to preserve integrity, is overwork: simultaneously pursuing income-generating activities alongside research and teaching deemed valuable by the scholar (Gill, 2010; Courtois, 2015; Standing, 2012). This is particularly relevant for the growing number of academics whose contracts are not only temporary but part-time. Ellen Schrecker paints their situation vividly:

These people are often as competent as their full-time tenured and tenure track colleagues, but they cannot always offer a comparable education. To begin with, they are often hired at the last minute with little time to prepare their classes, sometimes in fields they know little about. In addition, because many must commute to several institutions in order to pay the rent, they can rarely hold office hours - that is, if they even have offices, which many do not. They also lack the time and professional resources to keep up their scholarship. (Schrecker, 2012, p. 44)

Distress and Alienation

Nasreen Khan Clark’s article, *Shame and Disgust in the Academy: For-Profit Education and the Crisis of Educators*, offers a poignant and deeply personal account of the moral dilemmas imposed by this crisis:

Desperation forces you to make decisions about your career that often go against what you believe in as an educator. (Clark, 2019, p. 137).

If possible, it would be valuable to further explore the psychological impact caused by loss of purpose, taboos, pressure, and overwork triggered by this “epistemological” problem. Strasburger asks:

Why does it take a business plan to show what you are worth? The new currency of academic departments seems to be the business plan. You cannot hire new faculty without one, and you cannot even demonstrate your own value to the department if you do not have one. But should not there be other criteria besides money? (2014, p. 1030)

Here, the façade of academic neutrality and objectivity erodes, revealing vulnerability and the author’s emotions. Clark conveys as well the incomprehension, disappointment, and sense of meaninglessness felt by academics, now expected to be “academic entrepreneurs,” valued solely for the grants and prestige they bring rather than for the meaningful teaching, research, and public service they can provide. She goes further, writing in the first person and describing her own emotions: the tears after a job interview at a for-profit school, the shame of parking in staff spaces in the

morning... What is striking is the “anathema”, in her words (2019 p. 137) associated with working at a for-profit school.

Yet, as noted by Cary Nelson, Henry A. Giroux, Victor C. Strasburger, and many others, so-called “non-profit” universities exhibit the same profit-maximizing behaviors, which, even if not benefiting shareholders, still serve to acquire prestige, resources, and power for institutional members. In other words, the contempt is directed at an explicit and “direct” logic, reproduced by individuals implicitly and indirectly — a form of externalization, perhaps, projecting troubling traits onto an “other” outside the group. Clark emphasizes:

There is an ingrained culture of shame around the unjust and unreasonable realities of the part-time academic job experience. (Clark, 2019, p. 137).

Academic Freedom in Peril

Further echoes can be found between Clark’s experience and the dynamics observed in the “liberal university.” Regarding academic freedom, she recalls:

The concept of academic freedom was extraneous there. My interactions with students were required to be primarily online and the web platform was monitored to make sure that I was actually teaching. This corporate culture meant that my teaching was not only evaluated through classroom observations; I was also required to print out dialogue from my online interactions with students to demonstrate that I used correct mechanics, punctuation, and formal academic language. (Clark, 2019, p. 138)

These extreme measures, relying on arbitrary evaluation tools and systems — the use of formal academic language being no guarantee of teaching quality — reflect the subtler forms of assessment prevalent in the traditional university. Think of the now well-known “publish or perish,” funding obtained, PhDs supervised, project participation, citation counts, and even student evaluations of professors. The weight of these indicators might be negligible if positions were permanent, offering long-term stability despite the “numbers.”

Unfortunately, the proliferation of short-term and fixed-term contracts allows administrations to “evaluate” performance based on these illegitimate metrics and dismiss staff if the statistics fall short. As Schrecker notes:

“In particular, because hiring decisions for contingent faculty tend to rely heavily on student evaluations, these teachers are tempted not to challenge their students with difficult or controversial material or to give them low grades.” (Schrecker, 2014, p. 44).

Delimitation, Differentiation, and Exclusivity

As noted, commodification does not simply involve better assessment of a product's direct benefits, but the creation of the product itself. This requires a keen eye for fragmenting processes into consumable goods and services — above all, ones that can be privatized. Schrecker observes that, following the 2008 financial crisis:

Academic administrators began to seek alternative sources of income. They licensed the logos of winning teams to sportswear manufacturers, developed office parks on university land, and sought to patent the results of their faculty members' research. (Schrecker, 2012, p. 43).

Here, the prestige of the university becomes a “brand association,” with exclusive access to the academic community and to the research produced. Intellectual property and confidentiality agreements play a key role in defining knowledge as a “product” sold in modular pieces (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). Porta et al., in the field of biotechnology, note:

Following economic successes in other industries (semiconductors, software, and “dot-coms”), monetization of IP tries to market small fragments of big research “puzzles”; the strategy seems partly responsible for the biotech industry having underperformed methodological, clinical, and economic expectations.

Knowledge is thus reduced to a collection of hyper-specialized, access-controlled information, prioritized for immediate strategic interest, secured under legal “locks” in consulting firms and research centers. Common resources are exploited within a carefully selected set of channels, often tied to national (particularly security-related) or commercial interests, producing results that are increasingly less shared (Giroux, 2009, p. 6). Mauro Giovanni Carta et al. (2020), in a recent study, observe that academic research is losing ground to private research, suggesting that the latter may play a dominant role in the coming years and warning of the risks to independence and integrity this trend could entail. Schrecker underscores:

“Because corporations tended to be more interested in profiting from the research they sponsored than in furthering scientific progress, they often placed restrictions on their grantees' ability to publish their work or

share it with colleagues. They were also known to pull the plug in midstream if the research would not be remunerative enough, or if it did not reach the desired results.” (Schrecker, 2012, p. 43).

The Loss of a Common Good

A retreat of intellectuals from the public sphere has also been observed, largely explained by their inability to secure sufficient income independently in an era dominated by entertainment. Dependent on the commercial world for their survival, most opt for the safer path of limited exposure or as “neutral” an expert as possible, to avoid jeopardizing future contracts. Giroux notes an even more troubling trend:

Public intellectuals are now replaced by privatized intellectuals often working in secrecy and engaged in research that serves either the warfare state or the corporate state. Intellectuals are no longer placed in a vibrant relationship to public life but now labor under the influence of managerial modes of governance and market values that mimic the logic of Wall Street. (Giroux, 2009, p. 2).

Knowledge, once intended to be accessible to all for the common good, is gradually becoming a resource produced and controlled by a minority whose priority is not contributing to its advancement but generating profit. Consider the irony of the dozens of pages behind exorbitant paywalls — material many researchers would access not for personal gain but to integrate, refine, advance, or critique knowledge. The ultimate irony is the chapter titled *“Fragmentation of Knowledge: An Obstacle to Its Full Use,”* available only in print via Routledge.com, or *“Optimal Use of Knowledge,”* priced at over 30 euros on Taylor & Francis.

This perfectly illustrates what Vincent Larivière, Stephanie Haustein, and Philippe Mongeon (2015) call the academic publishing “oligopoly,” where a handful of players concentrate access to knowledge while raising costs, undermining both dissemination and the original mission of scholarship. Precarity becomes tangible when researchers must purchase their raw materials, write articles, and pay journals to publish them, all in the hope of establishing a profile that might secure them limited stability.

The vicious cycle is clear: commodification, hyper-specialization, precarity, declining quality in teaching and research, legitimacy crises, compensatory reliance on metrics to offset the loss of legitimacy, further precarity, and so on.

It seems that these analyses directly contradict the “realistic” view of the former president of an American university, who, as Giroux reports, insisted that:

it was an utterly romanticized assumption to suggest education is not a business... (Giroux, 2009, p. 9).

As observable, the three mechanisms Schrecker (2012) identifies as protecting academic freedom — faculty governance, long-term or tenured contracts, and peer review — are under severe attack. I would also note that, in my view, critiques fall short of the crisis. This intuitively points to barriers preventing direct engagement with the problem: fear of lost opportunities, exclusion from research groups, and so on. It is a sociologically evident fact: criticism of one's own social group, particularly when it threatens members' interests, often results in the exclusion of the disruptive element.

So why take this risk, especially at the very start of one's career? Part of the purpose of this overview is to provide a PhD candidate's perspective. Chances of succeeding are now so limited and arbitrary, economic and social rewards are so mediocre and uncertain that becoming a young scholar simply implies an opportunity cost far, far too high. A cost, it goes without saying, paid with the sacrifice of scientific values and personal interests.

The current crisis makes alternate career choices — or dedicating our time to criticism of the system — far more attractive than participation in it. Faced with more than a decade of increasing precarity and overwork in academia, it seems more than reasonable to risk the same uncertainty and long work hours in entrepreneurship, where one at least seems to have greater chances of maintaining integrity and autonomy. But maybe this must not be an either-or choice. Maybe the production of high-quality knowledge can still be aimed through entrepreneurial and emancipative means.

Zero Horizon: An Initiative of Entrepreneurial Intellectuals?

Zero Horizon's Relationship with Academia

No one in this initiative intends to exploit the crisis or ally with populist critics to accelerate the collapse of the academic system. Quite the opposite. For many students, the university is a deeply nurturing space: it is where ideas gestate. Nourished by its intellectual vigor, cradled within its walls, students emerge at the end of long years of study ready to pass through its gates and be reborn as intellectuals. For all, the university embodies an ideal — a place of encounter, exchange, and pursuit of knowledge for knowledge's sake. It is where the great theories that have transformed our world were born, allowing us to heal, educate, govern, lead, produce, and much

more. The university is the brain of our democracies, the loom that weaves together the many threads of knowledge, the relay station where, for nearly a millennium, generations of thinkers have transmitted cultural, intellectual, scientific, and symbolic heritage to the next.

It is this ideal that drives us, anchoring the initiative in a mission not to replace or attack, but to untangle, integrate, synthesize, resolve, and connect. Collaboration with universities, wherever possible, is therefore actively sought.

Zero Horizon does not position itself as an alternative or competitor. It is conceived as a space for dialogue and experimentation, inviting academics to address the challenges of the contemporary world, both theoretically and practically. It leverages market mechanisms to generate profit and enable researchers to claim the full value of their work, while establishing a system of incentives that places academic excellence at the apex of its value hierarchy. Zero Horizon seeks to redefine the concept of the “market value” of knowledge, aiming for better evaluation and greater transparency.

Zero Horizon puts the researcher at the center, allowing them to conduct independent research under their own leadership, without being trapped in a constant pursuit of offers that waste time, maintain precarity, and compromise the quality of their output. The initiative is designed to adapt to contemporary challenges while making use of the opportunities they present. It is rooted in a community-oriented logic, aiming to contribute to the reconciliation of academia and the arts, and to foster more open and productive dialogue between political, economic, and intellectual spheres. Zero Horizon is ultimately an experiment — a project far from having all the answers, intending to grow, evolve, and achieve its objectives progressively, drawing on critique, collaboration, and constant confrontation with practice, alongside advanced reflection on current epistemological challenges and possible solutions.

In the following sections, I will detail the business plan, the spirit of the initiative, its objectives, its core characteristics, and the ways it seeks to address the fragmentation of knowledge.

Knowledge Reduced to Its Symbolic Value?

First, our initiative builds on the model of the entrepreneurial intellectual discussed by Clyde W. Barrow (2018). What must be understood is that our entire generation, regardless of sector, is being pushed into entrepreneurship. Modern capitalism and global competition unreasonably demand that individuals distinguish themselves as

skilled suppliers offering their services rather than market themselves as laborers requiring work. Resumes today must demonstrate expertise, experience, competitive advantage, personality, technical skills, and social skills. Companies no longer hire workers to perform tasks — they recruit “talent,” a “persona.” Success depends less on professional excellence than on an individual’s ability to leverage their experience and construct the most attractive portfolio possible — not to climb the hierarchy within a specific company, but to secure better positions at every career transition (Brown, 2015; Bröckling, 2015; Gershon, 2017).

In academia, just as in other fields with inherently diverse activities, like the arts, this trend is even more pronounced. The world no longer seeks a mere expert but a “profile”; one must accumulate numerous metrics to attract success. Excellence alone is insufficient: one must lecture, write books, publish articles, impactful research, attend seminars, appear on television or know how to generate social media content, create visibility, cultivate a competitive edge, carve a niche, be charismatic and self-promoter, stay updated, produce prolifically, maintain a social media presence, give interviews, engage in projects, collaborate internationally, secure private contracts, consult, teach, participate in courses at major universities or pursue very expensive business diplomas and certificates, obtain funding, pile up scholarships and grants, join networks, and more (Gill, 2010).

The problem is this: the underlying principle determining the perceived value of a researcher and their work is not excellence, but popularity. Let us not be mistaken — popularity can indeed signify excellence. Historically, popularity and excellence were closely linked; recently, however, the measurement of excellence has been replaced by that of popularity. One factor driving this split is the rise of entertainment, which is more lucrative than excellence. Entertainment seeks immediate gratification, whereas excellence demands effort and delayed reward (knowledge accumulation). Once again, we see the preference for direct utility over the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Over time, the emphasis on representation has developed at the expense of content. The appearance of excellence now yields as much, if not more, benefit than excellence itself.

When content is delivered by a charismatic individual with a polished CV, audiences often gain more satisfaction than from engagement with genuine expertise. The image of excellence flatters pride, stimulates curiosity, and evokes desire and admiration. True excellence, by contrast, can provoke discomfort, confusion, or embarrassment because it demands effort and confronts the audience with the limits of their own understanding. Similarly, in the private sector, investing in grand, symbolic research

that flatters the ego and sparks imagination — like space exploration or tracing our origins — can carry more perceived value than funding less visible research whose outcomes, though uncertain, may be crucial to society (Moore et al., 2017).

In other words, researchers are just as subjected to this commodification as the knowledge itself, which increasingly values the direct benefits they can generate over the substance of their work. What is being marketed is their image — the aura of prestige and excellence — not their actual production. Empirical observation confirms this: impostors and fraud flourish precisely because the system rewards the shortest route to perceived value.

If fraud rates are rising sharply, if one can now pay to “pass” peer review, pay to inflate citation counts artificially, and if plagiarism and data falsification are becoming increasingly common even in the most selective institutions, then the only plausible explanation is a system that prizes appearance over content. Criticizing this is difficult — how can one act otherwise in a world constrained by such tight timelines? Prioritizing quality demands resources, both financial and temporal, which are often beyond reach. Over recent decades, quantity has been valued over quality, and the digital world functions on the same principle: the more you produce, the greater your chance of establishing yourself at the expense of competitors, who, unable to keep pace, are left behind. Consequently, the sheer volume of material to evaluate has become unmanageable.

The deeper problem is that this system rests entirely on a single concept: the ability of research and the academic world to be associated with prestige, excellence, and competence. The institution’s millennial heritage certainly helps maintain this image over the long term — but if this perception is increasingly called into question, the entire edifice is at risk of collapse.

The issue is not so much the valorization of appearance per se — it conveys crucial information allowing for quick judgments of quality in an era of information overload. The problem lies in the top-down logic, where appearance is constructed *ex nihilo* rather than emerging from material reality. Some researchers attain an image of excellence by imitating its signs without truly possessing it. It is a sign without a signified, a representation, a reference of a reference, severed from reality.

This problematic dynamic was already addressed epistemologically in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (Glaser and Strauss, 2017), which emphasizes that theories must emerge from empirical reality, rather than constructing hypotheses first and then

trying to confirm or falsify them. If this logic is problematic in the creation of knowledge, it is equally so in the formation of researchers themselves.

Passivity and False Consciousness

So why is there not more reaction within academia to these “existential” issues? I will refer here to Barrow’s interpretation (2001, p. 151):

this professional mythology – what sociologists have called the ideology of the intellectuals – undermines the capacity of faculties to politically challenge the hegemonic bloc in higher education by pursuing organizational and political strategies anchored in their own position in the process of knowledge production. For most professors in the United States, the academic ideal and the corporate reality of the university exist side by side as co-equal components of their professional consciousness and this conflict between ideal and reality is generating a bizarre dialectic of false consciousness and self-disempowerment that will only intensify as colleges and universities are more tightly integrated into post-industrial capitalist economies.

Barrow also challenges the notion of the “liberal” university, which increasingly seeks to conceptualize itself as a business, a brand. He reminds us that the university is:

not a brand; it was just a warehouse where intellectuals happen to congregate and do business in contrast to attorneys, doctors, or accountants, who do business in proprietary companies and limited liability partnerships. (2018, p. 88–89)

He continues:

The difference between those professionals and the intellectuals is that the former capture the full value of their labor, whereas the bureaucratic intellectuals slavishly hand it over to Provosts and sponsored research bureaucracies as monopolistic rent payments for the use of their sparsely equipped warehouse.

This situation must, if nothing else, be made clear. It is obvious that the current academic landscape divides scholars into distinct groups: those who know how — or are willing — to navigate the world of business, and those who cannot or refuse to. It is no secret that many researchers have little affinity for market demands, and some even hold firmly anti-capitalist positions. Yet, as Barrow emphasizes, the dilemma is stark: either accept the role of a petty-bourgeois intellectual, or choose servitude.

The latter preserves a degree of dignity through detachment — a kind of “refusal to engage” — but it keeps the researcher fully at the mercy of the market and, through passivity, contributes to the perpetuation of the system. Is there any meaningful difference between “petty-bourgeois entrepreneurs” and “servile” intellectuals beyond the lived constraints of the latter? Is there any justification for our passivity, aside from lack of skill or means? Such psychological mechanisms are critical to explore; worse, they are our responsibility.

During the early stages of this project, I noticed uncertain reactions around me regarding financial gain. Several encouraged me to pursue a “non-profit” path, or confided discomfort at the idea of “exposing” myself in this way. I suspect these behaviors are characteristic of a specific social subset within academia — one that particularly values excellence, harbors hostile attitudes toward market economics, and does its best to frame any financial initiative as a necessity or a means, but never as an end.

I am therefore fully aware that in faculties where entrepreneurship and profit creation are valued — such as in business and economics — this behavior is rewarded. Unfortunately, the scale of values that governs those faculties is not mine. In short, pursuing entrepreneurship, actively seeking profit, and asserting independence may result in a certain degree of exclusion within social groups that prioritize academic excellence — precisely the social group to which I belong.

It therefore becomes essential for me to justify this choice, highlighting how such attitudes can have a destructive effect on long-term knowledge production. Indeed, refusing profit and independence may initially preserve integrity, but many researchers, due to the perverse dynamics we have already discussed, are forced to adopt behaviors that compromise it just to make ends meet. Clark (2019), compelled to teach at a for-profit institution, is a clear example.

As Barrow (2018, p. 96) writes:

The vows of poverty that are implicit in these disciplines still rest on the medieval notion that we are pursuing a *summum bonum* or a sacred calling, but we are in fact doing nothing more than selling ourselves short and giving away our labor. It is time to leave the ivory towers of the Middle Ages and enter the spectacle of global postindustrialism.

Another harmful consequence of this attitude is that it allows illegitimate valorization of work: if ethical researchers who genuinely pursue excellence remain in servitude, avoiding profit and fame, they leave ample room for others to gain recognition far

beyond the actual quality of their research. These opportunistic individuals obtain resources and audiences, while the principled scholars face increasingly precarious conditions — time scarcity, overwork, the necessity of conforming to market expectations — that ultimately compromise their research (Gori, 2015). This observation applies especially to the newest generation of researchers.

Embracing the “Petty-Bourgeois Intellectual”

I therefore fully embrace Barrow’s proposition (2018, p. 90–91):

What I propose now in contrast to this ancient ideal is that university scholars embrace the reality, and all of the contradictions, of being a petit bourgeois intellectual, which means establishing their status as independent proprietors, who will increasingly find themselves leaving the university, adopting an arm’s-length contractor relationship with it, or carving out unstable and temporary oases of proprietary relations within the interstices of bureaucratic malaise. The entrepreneurial intellectual rejects the two dominant ideal types of the intellectual, while embracing the marketization of intellectual skills and advanced knowledge. The entrepreneurial intellectual carves out ownership shares of the university, either individually or in small groups, to claim the full value of their production and, when necessary, to spin off those shares into small private companies owned by the intellectuals.

First, I want to encourage anyone seeking to develop a solution to the growing crisis to pursue it — if another path appears, one that avoids both servitude and collaboration, it deserves exploration. As for me, it is clear that revolutionary or systemic overthrow is unlikely; I therefore choose to invest and experiment within an initiative that I believe has the potential to challenge the “neoliberal university”.

As Barrow puts it:

My proposed strategy of entrepreneurialism does not surrender to the social forces of corporatization, nor does it entail the end of resistance to the corporate-bureaucratic university. However, for now, the development of the entrepreneurial intellectual remains a provisional strategy that requires university intellectuals to reconceptualize and redefine themselves and their labor within a market for educational and intellectual services. (2018, p. 91)

Regarding the ideological dimension, I invite interested readers to explore how Barrow situates his concept of the entrepreneurial intellectual within a Proudhonian-inspired market socialism:

I have anchored my concept of the entrepreneurial intellectual, and the possibility of a genuinely entrepreneurial university in a form of market socialism where the intellectual production process is based on Proudhonian principles of worker association. Furthermore, my emphasis on doing good, while doing for one's self nods to an emerging literature that expands the meaning of entrepreneurialism to include value change and organizational transformation. The entrepreneurial literature on value change and organizational transformation actually suggests that social and cultural change, even revolution itself, is an activity that requires entrepreneurs — entrepreneurs in values, leadership, organization, ideas, and technology.⁶ Thus, my proposed strategy of entrepreneurialism does not surrender to the social forces of corporatization, nor does it entail the end of resistance to the corporate-bureaucratic university. However, for now, the development of the entrepreneurial intellectual remains a provisional strategy that requires university intellectuals to reconceptualize and redefine themselves and their labor within a market for educational and intellectual services. It is a risky strategy, because it demands a type of entrepreneurialism that evades, avoids, and eludes bureaucracy in a subterranean war waged within the interior of the corporate-university bureaucracy. My suspicion is that we are too far down the road of corporatization for this strategy to appeal to many university intellectuals, because even in their strategies of resistance most intellectuals participate in their own bureaucratic institutions, such as senates and unions that have a *raison d'être* only in relation to the administrative bureaucracy, and it is the interaction of these dual bureaucracies that are the pillars of the corporate university. The strategy of the entrepreneurial intellectual is one of dual power that generates alternative institutions and forms of behavior, alternative norms of intellectualism, and competing modes of legitimation that also erode the corporate university from its edges, while carving out entrepreneurial spaces from within its interior (2018, p. 96).

He continues:

Thus, the long-term strategy of the entrepreneurial intellectual goes beyond a dual power alternative to the capitalist university by creating multiple centers of decentralized production and power that generate alternative institutions and forms of behavior, alternative norms of intellectualism, and competing modes of legitimation that

simultaneously erode the corporate university from its edges, while carving out entrepreneurial spaces from within its interior. (2018, p. 97)

His second footnote is equally instructive (2018, Note 2):

My proposal will seem appalling to many left intellectuals, particularly those who view “the market” as an inherently “capitalistic” economic institution. In contrast, my proposal takes the Proudhonian position that markets are not a mode of production, but a social form of distribution that is compatible with alternative modes of production (e.g., market socialism, anarcho-syndicalism). Thus, I am proposing to deploy and develop intellectual markets against capitalism in what Proudhon calls a “third form of society” between capitalism and communism.

Responding to Emerging Needs

The aim of Zero Horizon is to recognize that there are two major needs in today’s market. First, there is the need for generalists and synthesists capable of integrating produced knowledge, helping us navigate the complexity of the contemporary world, and generating research of genuine excellence. Second, there is the need for organizations that can support researchers in addressing contemporary challenges: developing essential soft skills, mastering sales and marketing, representing their work, maintaining both short- and long-term perspectives on their research and interests, being open to opportunities and able to seize them, building networks, negotiating contracts, ensuring market visibility, setting prices, and managing schedules — all while upholding the standards of excellence we have emphasized.

The economic equation is therefore straightforward: the material conditions are such that these two needs cannot be fully met by a single individual (the researcher). As a result, the researcher tends to prioritize the activity with the lowest opportunity cost. This often leads to an investment of the researcher’s resources in marketing and commodifying their output, rather than in the output itself, which remains below its potential level of excellence. It also encourages fraudulent and deviant behaviors, as marketing increasingly precedes the product, leading to misleading representations that can undermine trust among consumers.

We believe the first step toward addressing this vicious cycle is to confront these needs directly and provide solutions.

Accordingly, the long-term objectives of Zero Horizon are, first, to provide continuous support to researchers through coaching, training, and think-tanks, improving both

the content and presentation of their work while helping them develop their own unique areas of expertise. Second, to act as a channel for opportunities, helping researchers gain visibility, representing them, and handling most administrative tasks so they can focus fully on knowledge production while earning competitive income. Third, we hope to contribute not only to the production of knowledge but also to its dissemination. This will be achieved through a freely accessible academic magazine with compensated authors, as well as by offering developed expertise in various forms to public and private sectors, providing those who wish to invest in knowledge integration with the tools necessary to do so.

This last point may appear charitable, but it is in fact the core of our business strategy. Zero Horizon is a business initiative conceived by aspiring researchers. We are therefore not simply creating a product and attempting to insert it into the market. Instead, we are conducting a thorough analysis of a failing system and aiming to build a specific solution to realign it. This distinction is crucial, as it explains the values, vision, and commitment that guide the development of this project. Our goal is to demonstrate how the identification of multiple needs leads us to formulate an appropriate response. However, reality today is far more complex than a simple demand–supply dynamic, and we intend to show the attention we pay to broader systemic dynamics.

What does Zero Horizon ultimately aim to offer? *Prima facie*, academic excellence. But in this regard, we would compete frontally with established universities, research centers, and academic institutions that currently provide this excellence to students, firms, governments, and other stakeholders. By focusing on complex dynamics and integration, we would only be adopting a differentiation strategy that would still place us in competition with well-resourced, prestigious, and widely recognized institutions. Zero Horizon seeks to remain grounded and realistic, rather than adopting idealistic approaches to complex problems or relying on aspirational narratives. We are aware that good intentions and even a renewed commitment to excellence are not sufficient to generate the momentum required for long-term growth in such a competitive and guarded environment.

This is why what Zero Horizon is primarily selling is not academic excellence, but transparency. As we have indicated above, this is where new demand is emerging and where a genuine opportunity lies. As knowledge's fragmentation and marketisation is compromising its quality, traditional indicators fail to capture its value; institutional labels get questioned and academia's legitimacy erodes. The "product" sold is having trouble delivering its artificial promises, and initiatives designed to market research,

education and expertise are increasingly perceived as inauthentic and misleading, damaging trust and confusing audiences. Online, more influencers argue that “college isn’t worth it,” while governments progressively reduce research funding.

How, then, do we intend to sell this “transparency”? Through a straightforward and increasingly recognized operating model: delivering excellence freely and offering tailored, practical premium services. This approach emerges in contrast to the traditional structure, which provided limited foundational value and reserved excellence for paid access. The public’s appetite for transparency has grown significantly, particularly as that older model has been repeatedly exploited by fraud. What once served as a signal of expertise, namely offering basic value through websites or social media, is now losing the rest of its credibility. With the rise of AI, superficial knowledge can now be replicated instantly, and only demonstrable depth and transparent excellence can sustain trust and authority.

A contemporary business case illustrates this logic: Acquisition.com, led by Leïla and Alex Hormozi, operates on a model increasingly recognized across knowledge-based industries: rigorous expertise development paired with radical transparency. The organization systematically researches business performance, formalizes findings, and distributes substantial educational material freely. This strategy builds public trust and professional credibility without traditional marketing expenditure, while simultaneously creating a market for premium, more specialized services. This model has enabled Acquisition.com to surpass highly recognizable figures such as Jordan Belfort in influence on social media platforms — an outcome reflected, among other indicators, in a follower base approximately six times larger — illustrating that transparent, demonstrable rigor can disrupt competitors whose authority rests primarily on reputation or legacy visibility.

Although situated outside academia, similar dynamics can be observed in open-science initiatives such as MIT OpenCourseWare and the broader open-access movement. What is worth noting is that the underlying mechanism — public access to foundational value as a trust-building strategy — seem to demonstrate transferability to research and higher education contexts. The following sections will explain how we aim to develop a structure composed of: (1) an academic community, (2) a transparent “storefront” showcasing excellence through an academic magazine, and (3) an ecosystem of premium services in which excellence becomes accessible, applicable, and marketable. We believe that it is by leveraging both transparency and accessibility that an organization could rebuild trust and allow the realignment of excellence and economic resources. We propose an experiment wherein we attempt to articulate a

synthesis of the imperatives of market logic, and those of intellectual mentation - necessitating creative expression, freedom of inquiry, community and exploration.

A Learning Community

To pursue excellence organically, our approach draws inspiration from the concept of “learning communities” as defined by Senge and Kim (2013). Such communities integrate three core activities: theory production, practice, and capacity building — activities central to older communities before the fragmentation of knowledge and division of labor. They describe them as follows:

Imagine a learning community as a group of people that bridges the worlds of research, practice, and capacity-building to produce the kind of knowledge that has the power to transform the way we operate, not merely make incremental improvements. (2013, p. 4)

The ability to combine different knowledge-production activities is highly beneficial, as it allows integration, evaluation, and dissemination of knowledge, while also including the individuals producing it — even those who are not formally researchers. It encourages collaboration, facilitates the application of new research, raises awareness of accessibility, supports ongoing civic education, strengthens social relations, boosts productivity, and fosters positive social connections. Senge and Kim express it this way:

“In a learning community, however, from the outset, the team conceives of the initiative as a way to maximize learning for itself as well as for other teams in the organization. Those involved in the research process are integral members of the team, not outsiders who poke at the system from a disconnected and fragmented perspective. The knowledge creating process functions in real time within the organization, in a seamless cycle of practice, research, and capacity-building.” (2014, p. 4)

The involvement of researchers in practice, and of professionals in knowledge production, lies at the heart of our values, rooted in the idea of service. Zero Horizon is committed to serving society through support for development, education, and knowledge production in an evolving manner. We recognize the role of our clients as collaborators directly participating in the knowledge-creation process through their insights, perspectives, field experience, and practical engagement.

Service also requires humility and authenticity. Zero Horizon, fully aware that it does not possess all the answers nor can produce results that are 100% complete, seeks to

integrate its margin of error as a space for growth. Our pricing strategy will reflect this commitment and support a long-term pursuit of excellence, making failure, critique, limitations, and unexpected challenges a central part of the process of creating and disseminating knowledge.

What Kind of Researchers Do We Aspire to Train and Become?

We believe excellence lies in open-mindedness and aim to train scholarly researchers whose intellectual curiosity extends well beyond their narrow area of specialization. We particularly want to encourage researchers with interests in art, philosophy, literature, the hard sciences, crafts, and other practical pursuits, as we believe exploring these domains significantly enriches the work they produce.

We aspire to cultivate innovative researchers who take risks, experiment, and rigorously reflect on the limits and challenges they encounter with transparency. We want to support the publication of research that may lead to dead ends, valuing it as much as work whose results are decisive. We also encourage researchers to publish research notes alongside their articles, reflecting on their approach, proposing new avenues of inquiry, and framing their research in ways that allow others to connect, expand upon, or continue the work.

We aim to emphasize the individuality of researchers because we believe academic rigor and personal style are not mutually exclusive. We encourage our researchers to develop their own voice, refine their style, and define a distinctive perspective, all while maintaining the highest standards of excellence.

We seek researchers who see themselves as members of a learning community. We encourage collaboration through interdisciplinary projects, debates on their respective questions, and exchanges about promising research areas. We also aim to foster deep relationships with artists and writers, believing that the intersection of art and research is essential to the vitality of both fields.

To conceptualize this researcher, we draw on the recommendations of N. Henry Moss, surgeon and academic, and Sandra Haack, award-winning philosophy professor at the University of Miami.

Moss, in a 1968 lecture emphasizing the urgent need for such profiles, describes the synthesist, or generalist, as an

individual really capable of accurately and effectively encompassing a broad perspective beyond his own special area, a person with extensive and variegated knowledge who can see the forest for the trees, the strengths and weaknesses of each narrow subcategory within his own major discipline, and even beyond. Instead of intensive preoccupation with one small body of information, such a person ranges wide and consequently sees the relationships and cross-fertilization potential of one realm of knowledge to another, as did some of the giants of yesteryear. He is competent to engage in interdisciplinary discussion and investigation, or to work at the interface of his field. He identifies neglected areas of study and encourages other investigators to become interested in them.

I am reasonably sure that industry, government, universities, and medical schools have need of and eagerly seek capable people who can effectively give the broad sweep, recognize the important from the unimportant, and maintain a reasonable understanding of the literature in multiple medical and scientific areas. As our nation grows, not only in its gross national product, but also in its population, its technological products, and its per capita income, we must be able to develop a corps of such scientists and physicians as synthesizers and integrators to help guide us in directing our resources toward optimum use. We need such people and must meet the demand for them.

... he must have a firm background in the humanities and a good understanding of the history of science as well as the history of man through the ages. He should be able to demonstrate his creativity, for the truly educated man differs from the trained man only by the extent of his creativity.

Haack, in turn, addresses the aspiring researcher or philosopher directly, advising:

I would first insist that philosophers, and those aspiring to be philosophers, heed Locke's sound advice: instead of reading only one type of book or listening to only one type of person, they should 'venture into the great ocean of knowledge' — read novels, newspapers, biographies, history books, journals beyond the narrow scope of the *Philosophers' Index*, study both long-deceased philosophers and contemporary thinkers, and so on. They should also listen to people from other branches of philosophy, other disciplines, other countries, and yes, even outside the academic world.

Pay attention to the world; cultivate your peripheral vision — when working on a problem, stay aware of both the gaps (which concepts seem hollow or weak, and how to improve them; which continuities are

overlooked) and the perspectives (to which other questions, perhaps in other fields, might this work contribute). In my experience, working in philosophy is like filling an immense crossword puzzle; a solid solution to one question often provides an anchor for another, just as a partial answer in one square helps complete the next.

Above all, be constructive rather than merely clever. Don’t aim to produce yet another variation on a familiar idea; aim to solve, or at least contribute to solving, problems that genuinely interest you. You may find it useful, as I have, to start with an answer that seems indisputably true but frustratingly vague, and gradually refine it without rendering it false — tracking each step to allow for retreat if you stray. Remember Peirce’s notion of ‘prudent reflexivity’: do not fear speculation but also know that almost no philosophical formulation cannot be improved, and the most essential tool for a philosopher is a wastebasket.

‘Pay attention to the world; be constructive.’ I echo here the advice of centuries past, from Francis Bacon, who urged philosophers to imitate not the ant, busy amassing and stacking materials, nor the spider, spinning webs from its own substance, but the bee:

‘...for the bee follows a middle path; it collects materials from the garden and field flowers, yet transforms and digests them through a power of its own. Likewise, such is the true work of philosophy...’ (2016, p. 26-27)

Knowledge Production as an Ecosystem

Amidst all this sage advice, one central idea emerges: the production of knowledge cannot be industrialized. Knowledge creation requires both an internal and external ecosystem — not merely a chain of hyper-specialists on an assembly line. What interests us is a large-scale, real-world experiment to explore what such an environment could look like. Which tools, roles, dynamics, and resources are necessary to create an ecosystem that grows, innovates, self-regulates, and yields fertile outcomes in countless ways?

While the notion of generalists might seem like a step backward to some, the concept of an ecosystem is a definite step forward. It should be clear that, even if similar dynamics have existed historically — particularly among artists, philosophers, and writers — we aim to build something new. Traditional circles allowed movements or schools of thought to emerge, but they were largely one-directional: the individual related to the group and its members, while maintaining a high degree of personal autonomy. Today, technological advances allow us to go far beyond this model. We

do not want a circle of architects meeting occasionally to discuss projects and exchange ideas. We want to leverage available tools to enable the group to carry out multiple construction projects simultaneously, interactively, and collaboratively.

We seek to harness technological opportunities to cultivate a degree of chaos, letting it evolve into increasingly structured forms. Indeed, we propose that research generates enormous “waste” or “residuals”: abandoned leads, dead ends, unused information, unexplored opportunities due to time constraints, unanswered questions, and so on. In classical research, each scholar produces vast amounts of residual work that remains unused. The ecosystem concept introduces a circular logic: these residuals become inspiration, information, content, fertile ground, or resources for other researchers.

This is only possible when a sufficiently large and diverse community comes together, and when synthesis tools — digital platforms, artificial intelligence — help individuals detect trends, identify connections, and, crucially, organize them into structured systems or products. These outputs can be academic knowledge, but also other forms of insight. For instance, aggregating residual work — research notes, drafts, discussions — on the challenge of sourcing materials and creating efficient systems for their use can, over time, become an innovative system addressing this very problem, usable by researchers within the organization or adaptable into training programs for companies and individuals (workshops, audits).

As Peter Senge and Daniel H. Kim note, this challenge is not merely organizational:

... within a large institution can produce significant innovations, but this new knowledge often fails to spread. Modest improvements may spread quickly, but real breakthroughs are difficult to diffuse. Brilliant innovations won't spread if there is no way for them to spread; in other words, if there is no way for an organization to extract the general lessons from such innovations and develop new methods and tools for sharing those lessons. The problem is that wide diffusion of learning requires the same commitment to research and capacity-building as it does to practical results. (2013, p. 3)

This is precisely the kind of system we aim to develop: one in which theorization, practice, and capacity-building coexist, inspire one another, and feed into each other.

Our vision draws, in part, on Paul Feyerabend (2010), by providing a space for anarchic investigation where researchers are encouraged to innovate. As ideas, concepts, systems, mechanisms, projects, and theories are developed, structured, and implemented, they are confronted with principles of scientific rigor, refined in light of falsifiability, and assessed according to academic standards. This approach is

particularly suited to the social sciences, where residuals are highly reusable. When a theory in physics is disproven, it is rarely reusable except as an example of a path not to take. In social sciences, however, a disproven theory retains value: it may reveal bias, point in a new direction, apply in a different context, highlight overlooked conditions, or reveal previously unknown connections.

For example, consider a sociological study suggesting that “the presence of women in security forces increases public trust in the police and fosters healthier relationships,” but whose results are inconclusive. Even then, the theory remains valuable: it prompts questions such as — “did other contextual factors influence the outcome?” “Does the nature of the political system (democracy versus authoritarianism) matter more than gender?” “Might the observations hold in rural areas but not urban centers?” “Is it biological sex or socialized behaviors driving conciliatory attitudes?” These residual insights can guide future research.

This circular system applies not only to resources but also to the evaluation and refinement of produced knowledge. As noted earlier, the sheer volume of new knowledge requires a substantial number of experts for rigorous assessment — a process costly in both time and money. Here, we propose a more balanced system, where two groups of researchers naturally share these tasks. Researchers focusing on knowledge integration evaluate the work of those expanding it, in light of how well it connects to existing knowledge. Conversely, frameworks, models, and connections established by integrators are assessed against newly discovered insights.

Using the puzzle metaphor: one team searches for new pieces, the other integrates them into existing puzzles. Integration requires sorting pieces — discarding irrelevant or misplaced ones, and sometimes reshaping overlapping pieces — to identify patterns and dynamics. Yet, just as an integrator may reject a piece that doesn’t fit, a particularly compelling new piece may invalidate a pattern, forcing partial reconstruction. Sometimes, the application of models in real-world settings serves as “evidence” that challenges the integrators’ puzzle.

The core idea is to follow the natural cycles of knowledge. As Haack expresses it: “Philosophy progresses through both fission and fusion.” We believe it is the interplay between these two processes that enables the development of high-quality knowledge without unnecessary resource expenditure. Naturally, certain technical research tasks — data verification, plagiarism checks, citation tracking — remain essential, although recent advances suggest that they may increasingly be automated.

A Philosophical, Epistemological, and Theoretical Experiment

Reject “Theories of Everything;” Seek Totalizing Meta-Narratives

We now enter the most technical — and arguably the most difficult to defend — part of our initiative. While we aim to propose a specific system capable, in the long term, of addressing the challenges knowledge faces in contemporary society, it does not resolve the existential question posed by Robinson: what if the disciplines themselves are not ready for integration? How can we integrate diverse disciplines without a “Theory of Everything”?

Robinson explains:

What we seem to be after is a kind of knowledge. What we want that will integrate all the other forms of knowledge is itself a form of knowledge. We might describe it as a vision or a grasp of the relationships among all the departments of knowledge and, by means of that, an understanding of the relationships among all the departments of human life. The physicists hope someday to devise what they call a Grand Unified Theory, which will interrelate all the fundamental natural forces. Our educational ideal is even more ambitious, for it hopes to extend the scope of integration far beyond the phenomena studied by physics. It seeks a grander unified theory which would truly deserve to be called a “theory of everything.” One of the main things we want from a metaphysics is a remedy for the radical fragmentation of culture in the last century. We want the gaps among the disciplines to be bridged, if they cannot be closed. In particular, we want to see a resolution of the dichotomies between fact and value, between reason and passion, between the indifference of nature and the deep concerns of human beings, dichotomies which to some extent underlie the divisions between Snow’s two cultures. We don’t want a metaphysics that satisfies the head but not the heart, a metaphysics that achieves unity only by relegating to insignificance the things that matter the most to us. (2025, p. 104-105)

Haack, meanwhile, suggests:

True answers to questions about what makes beliefs more, or less, warranted must interlock with true answers to questions in philosophy of mind — about the nature of belief, of perception, and of introspection, for example; with true answers to questions in metaphysics — about how we, and the world, must be if we are to have knowledge of it, and whether any, and if so what aspects of the world might be in principle beyond our ken; even with true answers to questions in ethics — about the character of ideals and norms, the place of epistemic virtues among

the virtues more generally, ..., and so on. And these in turn must interlock with the answers to questions about how it’s possible to learn about what makes human beings tick not only from psychological, sociological, and anthropological studies and from history, but also from works of fiction; which in turn must interlock with answers to questions about the ontological standing of fictional characters, about the relations of reason and emotion, and about the role of the imagination in literature and in science. The answers to questions in philosophy of science must interlock with the answers to epistemological, metaphysical, ethical, and even aesthetic questions, ..., and so on; indeed, by my lights, philosophy of science really is, in significant part, a branch of epistemology and metaphysics. (2016, p. 16-17)

In the pages that follow, I wish to outline the theoretical path we intend to explore. We make no claim to possess comprehensive or deeply developed knowledge in this area, but we believe that such a goal cannot be formulated purely in the abstract; practice is essential to develop a method capable of fulfilling this historic role. I could certainly spend my entire career studying this question theoretically — but that has already been done. Instead, I choose to venture forward, prior to any final conclusion or fully-formed proposal, to indicate a direction, suggest a path, and propose an experiment.

What I present is meant to be attacked, critiqued, challenged, reworked, adapted, and changed. The challenge I set for myself is to allow all of this to avoid falling for the trap of a “Theory of Everything,” so that it can take the form necessary to accommodate, integrate, circumvent, and absorb the full spectrum of critique. I wish to present this theory as a lump of clay — rather than spending my life sculpting it into a supposed final form, I invite as many hands as possible to shape it until it solidifies as the cement of our collective ideas.

One epistemological problem arises immediately in addressing this crucial question: the common notion that a “Theory of Everything” must explain or give meaning to reality. We reject this idea. What we are seeking is a totalizing meta-narrative, a holistic way to weave through discrete fields. Such a meta-narrative, unlike a positive and all-encompassing theory, must be neutral, it helps us to better *describe* and *interconnect* languages that have been set apart by fragmentation. It is akin to a mathematical language — a “metacode” of the structures reality assumes — but it may lead us to better, more informed, more humane prescriptions. It must not directly confront value-systems, beliefs or spiritualities; on the contrary, it should inhabit them, as beliefs are also part of our reality.

The meta-narrative must aspire to universality, favoring no political stance, ethnicity, or social group. It must be applicable in practice as well as in theory, across all disciplines, levels of reality, scales, cultures, past, present, and future, including general forecasts. It should be teachable, applicable to art, music, craft, technology, and industry. Crucially, it must transcend any single individual who might shape it. No one can develop such a meta-narrative alone; it is relational at its core.

The Potential of Dialectics as a “Super Frame of Reference”

Our proposal is to explore, through both theoretical and practical research, whether dialectics has the potential to fulfill such a role. You will notice that, in line with the principles outlined above, I do not wish to assign it any qualifiers. We are not here invoking widely known philosophical notions like the Hegelian or Marxist dialectics, as both imply direction and endpoints. We want to step back and reimagine the very idea of dialectical thinking and its operational potential.

This is not to say that dialectics cannot be applied within ideological contexts, or that the interpretations of those thinkers are uninteresting or to deny they are philosophically crucial. Rather, we want to give dialectics a chance to exist independently of such frameworks.

Dialectical thinkers tend to propose the following: the history of the world is the story of A encountering B (contradiction) and creating C (a synthesis containing elements of A and B). But I propose to conceive it in a more complex manner -- a multipolar, multidimensional way. The structure of reality consists of an infinite number of poles, whose interactions are themselves endlessly varied. Everything, material or immaterial, can constitute a polarity — thesis or antithesis — and a synthesis. Each thing is defined not by its intrinsic characteristics but by how it differentiates itself from an infinite array of other things. The relationship between two poles can take countless forms: tension, encounter, opposition, complementarity. Dialectics is fractal: “contradictions” can be observed from the infinitely large to the infinitely small, in both space and time. Dialectics does not negate (though negation is comensurate to its process) — it situates. A thing can simultaneously exist and not exist; it can be true and false, material and abstract.

From our perspective, dialectics enables us to find a better way of grasping Haack’s (201, p. 19) insight:

what “real” means should fuse with an understanding of how the physical differs from the mental, the natural from the social, the particular from the general, etc.

One aspect of dialectics we wish to challenge and explore, both theoretically and practically, is the notion of synthesis. Our suggestion is that synthesis, as it is often understood — the resolution of thesis and antithesis into a higher, more harmonious thesis — is incomplete and imperfect, particularly on a micro level in contexts like the development of social sciences. The dialectical process can fuel a dynamic of fragmentation, when syntheses spiral upwards in closed, ever-thinner, systems, and overall, end up fostering the dominion of one pole over another. Because of the multipolarity wherein dialectical unfolding actually takes place, nothing implies for certain that the C formed from A meeting B is necessarily a *better* or more harmonious synthesis, for it might very well be rather *a kind of fine-tuning*, a common characteristic of the dynamics of specialization. We don’t deny, of course, that in such higher syntheses good outcomes springing from such encounters are possible. Our claim is that we must be able to understand through dialectical thinking, why it is that these might only rarely take place, if we are to be able to make good interventions.

I will not venture further along these paths here; they are meant for in-depth study, debate, and above all, experimentation. Dialectics is renowned as a method for analyzing the past — but we wish to experiment with its use as a strategic tool: to aid planning, decision-making, problem-solving, navigating complexity, managing a team, forecasting, and so on. The project itself is guided by dialectical principles, as every project is a vision (an abstract form of expansion) seeking to incarnate in material reality, using its resources and opportunities while navigating or overcoming its challenges.

Our general suggestion is that dialectics should be treated like an algorithm: applied broadly across a wide diversity of problems and situations to gain true relevance and legitimacy. We propose that it could be considered the structuring principle of contemporary complexity, and a valuable tool for navigating it.

What is fascinating about dialectics is precisely that it does not necessarily attempt to find final solutions, but to provide a structure that maps processes which are comprehensive enough to foster better, if still conditional, solutions. In a fragmented and polarized world, this may be exactly what is needed. A thinking tool that favors no pole over another but gives all voices a place to exist within the same space, despite their tensions - there enduring solutions can be found. It is also a highly flexible and adaptive system, allowing observation of how each fragment of reality constantly

dialogues with others, pushing and pulling in different directions and generating patterns and dynamics over time.

Dialectics resolves the problem of “frames of reference” by acting as a “super frame of reference,” allowing different frames to relate and articulate with one another.

Trading the Answer Key for the Crossword Grid

What does this imply for the creation of theories? This is a question we still need to explore in depth, but we can offer an initial perspective on how we intend to engage with theory development. The idea is to stay close to the current concepts of “grounded theory,” as developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (2017). It is crucial to understand that we will not conceive of dialectics as a theory in itself, but as a structuring framework. Theories, then, are more akin to conceptualizations of dynamics and patterns “drawn” by the interaction of all contradictions within a given space. Dialectics, in our view, simply allows for a more “productive” investigation: it can guide the researcher from tension to tension, from one pole to another, helping them relate these tensions until a dynamic — or theory — emerges organically.

Dialectics remains, as Haack describes it:

But perhaps you were expecting that, in this last section, I would offer a synoptic, unified philosophical picture. The best I have, however, falls well short of that — a partially-completed crossword puzzle in which there are huge blank spaces, and all the entries that are completed are only in pencil, many of them rubbed out and redone more than once. (2016, p. 28)

Dialectics does not fill the grid — it gives it. It draws the lines of the grid. The words must always be discovered, and they can only be discovered by us.

A Bridge to Art and Subjectivity

Robinson (2025, p. 107) comes close to dialectics when he suggests exploring analogies:

Throughout our intellectual history, a common method for interrelating disparate phenomena has been the use of analogy. Analogy can be dangerous. It provides a way of displaying similarities among incredibly diverse subjects, but such similarities are not all on the same footing. Some seem to be tremendously enlightening, some are striking, pleasing, or repellant, some controversial, and some just silly. But if we're

prepared to make the necessary discriminations, analogy seems an avenue worth exploring.

From our perspective, analogy captures the resemblance between two situations because they share similar contradictions. These contradictions may be central, making the resonance between the situations worth studying, or they may be symbolic or minor, rendering the comparison inappropriate or academically weak. What Robinson highlights, and which we find particularly relevant, is how analogy is often emotionally charged. Symbols, polarities, metaphors, and analogies, as Young notes, are the language of the unconscious. Dialectics is thus particularly compelling for its ability to create a bridge to our sensibilities and emotions, and by extension, to the world of art.

In particular, I would point out the close affinity (if it is not more than that) between analogy and metaphor. It might well be that the most effective way to help students to integrate their learning is to immerse them in poetry. I can’t think that this would be a popular move, among students or among faculty. But then, the best course of action is not always popular. (Robinson, 2025, p. 111)

We respectfully disagree with Robinson’s last point, as we believe many would welcome the opportunity to engage their sensibilities, emotions, and personal perspective. Positionality should not be viewed as a constraint, but as a resource enabling each individual to deploy their unique angle on the world, potentially revealing to others what is most evident and central to them. In line with Marxist theories of alienation, we also believe that an individual’s ability to personally engage with their work, using it as a process of self-realization, allows them to find meaning in their daily life. As Robinson so elegantly puts it, this approach is “...capable of restoring our sense of kinship with the cosmos in which we live, our sense that this is not just our location, but our home.” (2025, p.111)

Zero Horizon, Starting Today

In this section, we turn to the practical aspects, outlining how we envision bringing this vision to life.

The Community

At the heart of Zero Horizon lies an open, vibrant space — a community welcoming researchers, students, and artists. Its purpose is twofold: to foster connections among

members and to provide a set of resources that enrich their work and intellectual journey.

The community thrives on exchanges of all kinds — intellectual, practical, emotional, material, and immaterial. To stimulate these interactions, we establish regular initiatives. Every month, two types of training sessions will be offered:

- **General education sessions**, focused on political, artistic, or cultural themes.
- **Practical skill workshops**, centered on concrete abilities such as writing, research, argumentation, and decision-making.

These sessions will be followed by discussion and debate. On a daily basis, members will also have access to content, exercises, and challenges designed to spark creativity, with particular attention to artistic forms. The overall goal is to encourage interdisciplinary connections, engage both intellect and emotion, and stimulate the emergence of new approaches.

Community life will be punctuated by events, collaborative activities, and member-led projects: research presentations, creative workshops, and interdisciplinary experiments. External speakers will occasionally enrich this framework. Collective projects will receive support, including potential material or editorial assistance from Zero Horizon.

The organization will remain flexible and open. If the community grows, it may form thematic subgroups to preserve closeness and avoid anonymity. Economically, access will be set at a price comparable to a gym membership in the member's country of residence. Membership should be seen as a commitment, supporting both active participation and the financial stability of the project.

The community rests on three principles: **richness, sharing, and density**. It invites slowing down, deepening understanding, and exploring complexity rather than skimming over it. It aims to be intellectual, artistic, and meditative. It seeks to help researchers reconnect with the personal dimension of their work and encourage artists to engage with academic approaches, opening entirely new perspectives.

Concretely, for its members, the community functions as a space for regular intellectual training:

- For a student, it is an opportunity to exercise critical thinking, receive constructive feedback, and refine methods.

- For an early-career researcher, it offers fertile ground for collaboration and a space to share concerns with peers.
- For an artist, it provides an interdisciplinary playground where their practices can resonate with other forms of knowledge.

The immediate advantage is clear: members do not work in isolation, but in an environment that stimulates and supports them. Finally, the community serves as a flowerbed for the magazine: ideas and experiments emerging from interactions find a public form and visibility through its pages.

The Magazine

We speak of a magazine rather than a journal: the term opens a more flexible space, welcoming both rigorous research and artistic or cultural expression. The magazine will publish academic articles as well as visual and literary works, reflective notes, debates, and interviews.

It is the place where the community transforms inspiration into finished work. Here, ideas still in motion through discussion find their final form. The magazine allows researchers to experiment with different genres, try various formats, develop editorial skills, and share their perspectives through media that transcend strict academic conventions.

It also functions as a showcase: it presents the work of Zero Horizon and opens a dialogue with the wider public. Published online and freely accessible, it circulates thought beyond the circle of members. If the community is the clay where material is gathered and refined, the magazine is the fired brick: ready to be used, transmitted, and repurposed elsewhere.

One guiding principle is **excellence**. Publications undergo a selection process led by the editorial team, ensuring a balance between openness and rigor. Two pathways are available to authors:

- **External contributors**, non-members whose articles align with the editorial line and require only minor revisions. In such cases, Zero Horizon acquires the copyright of the piece.
- **Fellowship authors**, community members whose articles align with the editorial line. In addition to remuneration, they receive an “author page” on our gallery, showcasing their work, along with dedicated promotion. For authors

who require mentorship, review, and editorial guidance to meet our excellence standards, a paid, tailored coaching service is available. The author may then choose either to sell the copyright of the final piece to Zero Horizon — provided it fits the magazine's editorial line — or to pursue publication in another academic journal. This system supports authors' development and ultimately prepares them to produce contributions that are directly and consistently publishable.

For members, the magazine is both a public showcase and a school. Publishing teaches how to write to be read, accept critique, and gain tangible recognition. For a young researcher, it builds an initial portfolio and confronts them with a real audience. For an established author, it offers the chance to share ideas in an accessible format or experiment with less conventional approaches.

Beyond its members, the magazine acts as a bridge between research and society. By publishing content that is both accessible and rigorous, it makes research less opaque, inspires other researchers, serves as a teaching resource, and fuels public debate. By highlighting marginalized or alternative voices, it broadens the spectrum of intellectual references available.

Finally, the magazine is not limited to content dissemination: it also elevates its authors. Each publication is part of a journey, a logic naturally extended into the gallery, designed as a personal and evolving space for every contributor.

The Gallery

The magazine's role is not limited to publishing content; it also seeks to elevate the people behind it. This function extends into the gallery, conceived as a personal and evolving space for each contributor.

The gallery operates like a living business card. Every fellowship author who publishes regularly has a detailed profile. Each profile includes a concise biography, the researcher's specialties, their contributions to the magazine, academic CV, links to other publications, and contact information.

The goal is to enhance the visibility of each contributor and make their work accessible in a clear and organized way. For a student just beginning their path, the gallery provides professional support that can be immediately leveraged. For an established researcher, it serves to expand networks, facilitate collaborations, and increase career opportunities.

In the long term, the gallery could become an active tool of intermediary support for researchers who wish for Zero Horizon to facilitate connections or assist in contract negotiations, promoting more balanced and fulfilling collaborations.

Finally, the gallery strengthens Zero Horizon’s online presence. By showcasing contributors’ profiles and work, it amplifies their audience, enhances credibility, and allows the community to radiate beyond its own boundaries.

Online Presence

By highlighting contributors’ profiles and work, the gallery forms the backbone of Zero Horizon’s online presence. This digital presence acts as a sounding board, extending the reach of contributors, enhancing visibility, and making their work accessible to a broader, more diverse audience.

The digital ecosystem will revolve around a central website and associated platforms. Its functions are multiple: disseminating magazine publications, highlighting gallery profiles, and presenting Zero Horizon’s mission, progress, and vision. It will be a living space, regularly enriched with accessible content: simplified explanations, sources of inspiration, teaching resources, researcher testimonies, and artistic creations.

This space is not limited to members. It also targets a wider audience: independent students, self-learners, curious professionals, or enthusiasts seeking exposure to new ideas. By linking to contributors’ social networks and personal projects, it helps strengthen their digital identity and credibility within their field.

For members, this increased visibility offers tangible benefits: their articles or profiles reach beyond the internal circle to an international audience. This may translate into invitations to events, contact for collaborative projects, or simply recognition for an original, noteworthy idea. For students, it marks initial academic or professional acknowledgment. For established researchers, it consolidates networks and amplifies the reach of their ideas.

Finally, the online presence acts as a bridge to civil society. It disseminates reflections that would otherwise remain confined to restricted circles. By narrowing the gap between scholarly communities and the public, it fosters smoother knowledge circulation and enriches intellectual and cultural debate.

The Network

This online visibility also supports the development of Zero Horizon's network: the ensemble of individuals and organizations outside the community that support and accompany the project, including professors, established researchers, universities, associations, NGOs, and like-minded companies. Support may be ideological, collaborative, or sometimes financial.

A primary objective is to establish a circle of mentors. Experienced researchers and teachers contribute legitimacy by publicly supporting the project, while also nurturing its intellectual growth through critique, advice, and guidance. This mentorship is conceived as a sustainable resource for young researchers, offering forms of transmission and support often lacking at early career stages.

For members, the network provides immediate advantages. A student or young researcher may gain initial contact with recognized academic figures, a recommendation, or a decisive introduction. Established researchers, in turn, may benefit from broader collaboration opportunities involving other institutions, associations, or cultural actors. Concretely, this could result in co-publications, event organization, or participation in international projects.

Beyond individuals, the network serves as an institutional bridge. By connecting universities, associations, NGOs, and companies, it fosters the exchange of ideas between circles that rarely interact. Its external impact is twofold: it enables unprecedented collaborations with tangible effects on projects or policies, and it strengthens young researchers' legitimacy, giving them weight and credibility through institutional support.

Finally, the network provides a framework for Horizon 2050 workshops. With partner support, these workshops can reach a more diverse audience, extend beyond the academic circle, and embody the most practical dimension of the project.

Workshops: Horizon 2050

The network provides the ideal framework for the deployment of the Horizon 2050 workshops: *Navigating Complexity*. These workshops embody the project's most directly practical dimension: teaching dialectics as a core skill alongside critical analysis and problem-solving. The goal is not to present yet another theory, but to equip participants with tangible tools for navigating complexity, anticipating

tomorrow’s challenges and differentiating themselves, and/or their company, on the global market.

The modules are structured around three clear and complementary axes:

- **Polarity:** identifying the structural oppositions that run through any situation.
- **Conflict:** reading tensions not as obstacles, but as indicators of underlying stakes.
- **Resolve:** experimenting with methods to transform contradictions into actionable decisions.

The format emphasizes experimentation: interactive workshops, polarity mapping, case studies, and group exercises. Each session aims to make dialectics immediately applicable — whether to clarify a decision, structure a project, or better understand group dynamics.

The workshops target a diverse audience: corporate executives, startups, NGOs, educational institutions, and research and development teams. All share a common challenge: operating in unstable environments where contradictions accumulate without always reaching a clear resolution. The workshops aim to provide them with a language and method to transform these contradictions into levers for decision-making and innovation. The promise is simple: learn to see complexity not as a threat, but as a resource.

Externally, the workshops have both organizational and cultural impact. By introducing dialectics into non-academic contexts, they foster shifts in practice: more nuanced decision-making, better tension management, and increased capacity to innovate under uncertainty. They thus serve as a channel for disseminating knowledge far beyond the academic sphere.

Finally, the workshops play a strategic role within the Zero Horizon ecosystem. They serve as:

- A bridge between theoretical research and organizational practice.
- A showcase of our methods, attracting the attention of external partners.
- A stable source of funding, ensuring the project’s independence.
- An experimental space where tools developed within ZH are tested and refined before publication.

In return, feedback collected from the workshops feeds back into the internal community. It enriches discussions, sharpens methods, and strengthens the living, evolving nature of the ecosystem. It is within this loop between theory, practice, and user feedback that Zero Horizon's unique dynamic takes shape.

Conclusion

Zero Horizon is not intended to provide a definitive solution to the tensions that permeate the production and transmission of knowledge. Our ambition is simultaneously more modest and more demanding: to create a space where these tensions can be recognized, worked through, and transformed into collective resources. We start from the premise that complexity is not resolved but navigated — and that navigating it requires methods, tools, and a community capable of experimenting with them.

Zero Horizon has one central ambition: to stimulate — intellectually, artistically, and collaboratively in research, dialogue, and innovation. As an entrepreneurial experiment we see the creation of value and profit not merely as an end, but as a challenge and a key to securing the project's sustainability. And further, to incrementally reinforce the means necessary to pursue our intellectual and collective goals with ever greater quality.

This manifesto is not a fixed program, but a starting point. It outlines an intellectual and organizational experiment designed to be both rigorous and open, attentive to critique as much as to possibility. Dialectics serve as its guiding thread — not as doctrine, but as a flexible method, capable of integrating other frameworks and engaging in dialogue with diverse traditions.

The future of Zero Horizon will depend on the encounters, practices, and partnerships we are able to cultivate. By laying these initial foundations, we hope to contribute to a culture of knowledge that is more collaborative, more reflective, and more inventive. We do not offer a finished theory, but a working framework — one to be completed and transformed by those who choose to engage with it.

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