Political Studies Association | POLITICAL STUDIES

Article

Transition or Interregnum? Two Ways of Understanding Politics in the Anthropocene

Political Studies
1–21

DOI: 10.1177/00323217251410748
journals.sagepub.com/home/psx

Mathias Thaler

Abstract

In our times, talk of 'transitioning' to a world without fossil fuels has become pervasive. Despite its prevalence in environmental politics, this article argues that it is counterproductive to envisage the current conjuncture through the prism of a transition. I defend this claim by first outlining three respects in which the transition paradigm falls short: political corruptibility, historical inadequacy and conceptual confusion. Rather than recuperate the meaning of transitioning for progressive purposes, the constructive part of the article then asks which analytical framework should take its place. My proposal is to take inspiration from Antonio Gramsci's notion of an interregnum to illuminate the distinctive political challenges of the Anthropocene. Gramsci's conceptual apparatus foregrounds the fundamental openness of the future and thus facilitates a better understanding of various 'morbid symptoms', whose proliferation today can only be explained through a theoretical approach that combines attention to both individual well-being and social pathologies.

Keywords

Anthropocene, Antonio Gramsci, climate change, interregnum, transition

Accepted: 5 December 2025

Today, the vocabulary of 'transitioning' is ubiquitous in environmental discourse, both in the public sphere and across academia. Especially the concept of a 'just transition' has become pivotal for weighing up the costs and benefits of overcoming a fossil-based economy. Technological breakthroughs are often deemed necessary to facilitate such a transition, but those who employ the term likewise insist that such discoveries cannot be effective in isolation from other measures. What is needed, according to this perspective, is a careful unpacking of wider processes across society, including those affecting the working population, that will create a more sustainable and equitable world.

Most prominently over the past 10 years, the controversy around a Green New Deal has inspired and galvanized much of the Left's growth-based rejoinder to climate change.

University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK

Corresponding author:
Mathias Thaler, University of Edinburgh, Chrystal Macmillan Building, George Square 15a, EH89LD, Edinburgh, UK.
Email: mathias.thaler@ed.ac.uk

It revolves around the issue of how the energy transition away from fossil fuels could be facilitated in socially favourable and democratically legitimate terms. Even though new geo-engineering technologies (Oomen and Meiske, 2021), such as carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS) and solar radiation management, are regarded as indispensable to such a system-wide transformation towards a decarbonized future, they must be accompanied by, and embedded in, social and democratic innovations (for various engagements, see Ajl, 2021; Aronoff et al., 2019; Eaton, 2021; Mijin Cha et al., 2022).

In this article, I build on existing scholarship to defend the claim that, despite its prevalence across the political spectrum and its prima facie appeal, it is in fact counterproductive to use the vocabulary of transition when considering the impending crises of a climate-changed world. Upon closer inspection, the stakes of the present moment render visible the woeful inadequacies of the social imaginary undergirding what I shall call the 'transition paradigm'. As a consequence, we must search for alternative ways of envisaging the political challenges of the Anthropocene.[1] That is the main ambition behind this article.

Embarking on such a quest is more than just a quibble over empty phrases without real-world ramifications. A basic insight of critical theory is that the words we employ in our discourses, scholarly or otherwise, to talk about the world are themselves part of social reality, and thus play a role in confronting the problems of the current conjuncture (for the locus classicus, see Horkheimer, 1982). It matters politically how we name the obstacles we face in politics, who gets a say in this conversation and with what tangible effects.[2] That is why the task of scrutinizing the transition paradigm is so timely right now, not just for scholars working on politics and international relations, but for environmental activists as well: it will enable us to assess whether the terminology we deploy to make sense of reality continues to be fit for purpose. What is at stake in this article, then, is not merely the descriptive and explanatory force of one framework over another, but rather the politics of the present moment itself.

In the following section, I show that there are three issues with the transition paradigm: a political one, related to its pervasive and systematic co-optation by powerful actors; a historical one, based on the actual record of how energy systems get transformed over time; and a conceptual one, connected to the basic openness of the current conjuncture. In a further step, I inquire into what should take the transition paradigm's place and suggest that Gramsci's concept of an 'interregnum' provides a more suitable lens for envisioning politics in the Anthropocene. The motivation for turning to Gramsci is that his conceptual apparatus accentuates the fundamental uncertainty of the future. Moreover, as the next section maintains, an interregnum is also a period in which various 'morbid symptoms' materialize and proliferate. In our age, one such symptom – that is, a surface-level expression of deeper social pathologies – stands out as key to the contemporary 'structure of feeling'[3]: denial. The conclusion clarifies the essay's scope and restates the interregnum's comparative advantage vis-à-vis the transition paradigm.

Before proceeding, a note on terminology: throughout this article, I employ the term 'social imaginary' to describe the transition paradigm. Cornelius Castoriadis (2005), Paul Ricœur (1986) and Charles Taylor (2004) have each developed distinctive formulations of that term, but at its core a social imaginary describes the 'images, symbols, metaphors and representations which help construct various forms of subjectivity' (Gatens, 2005: viii).

This means that social imaginaries always operate on a collective level and cannot be reduced to the individual faculty of the imagination alone. They are hence constitutive of

societal formations, rather than merely abstract reflections or ideological distortions of a pre-given reality 'out there'.[4] As such their power resides in the ability to productively shape, through images, symbols, metaphors and representations, how people imagine their own selves and their relations with others (Adams et al., 2015). Importantly, at any moment in time, different social imaginaries are in competition with one another. There is no singular imaginary that dominates society as such, even though some are obviously more powerful than others. Social imaginaries are also internally ambivalent – they can be pushed into progressive or reactionary directions, depending on the concrete ideas underpinning them (Hatzisavvidou, 2024).

Now, if we apply this theorization to our case, it becomes immediately evident that the transition paradigm possesses all the features of a social imaginary. The idea has found its way not only into policy circles of the highest calibre, such as the EU's Just Transition Mechanism (Andersen et al., 2023), it has also spawned an abundance of images, symbols, metaphors and representations that all contribute to the societal impact of the transition paradigm, from climate fiction bestsellers, such as Kim Stanley Robinson's (2020) *The Ministry for the Future* to educational initiatives across the globe (Droubi et al., 2023).

Simultaneously, and despite its ubiquity, it is also clear that other social imaginaries have entered into vehement conflict with the transition paradigm, most notably the position that 'business as usual' should remain a viable option right now (Celermajer et al., 2024). Finally, regarding the internal ambivalence of social imaginaries, it is easy to find evidence for heavy contestation within the transition paradigm, for the basic intuition can be spelled out in intensely divergent ways (Stark et al., 2023). This has created rifts within the diverse environmentalist and labour movements struggling for a just transition (Harry et al., 2024; Stevis and Felli, 2015).

Three Problems with the Transition Paradigm

What could be wrong with the transition paradigm, then, given the variegated nature of its underlying social imaginary? In this section, I want to argue that there are three major reasons for why we ought to contemplate abandoning the transition paradigm as both a guide to action and as an analytical framework: a political, a historical and a conceptual one.

First, the language of transitioning in environmental politics has become comprehensively co-opted by elite actors, to such an extreme extent that it is nowadays emptied of all its critical purchase. To grasp this point, a quick look back in history will be instructive. The emergence of the transition paradigm in environmental politics is by now well-established. As Jonathan White (2025: 2–4) has demonstrated, the 1980s were the decade in which the idea of a green transition really took off. From the start, a major motivation was the move away from carbon-based fuels that were deemed at risk of running out. Spurred by fears of 'peak oil' and seduced by the promises of an atomic age (Fressoz, 2024: 142–173), the pursuit of sustainable energy was gradually couched in terms of a comprehensive transition. International organizations, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), increasingly employed the term as well, to stress the need for a system-wide change in light of global warming. Importantly, this institutional shift was complemented by a general re-orientation of the green agenda, from enduring efforts to preserve elements of nature through conservation projects to a forward-looking anxiety about the escalating rise in greenhouse gas emissions.

Over the past 40 years, the currency of the transition paradigm has gained in value even further, not least since it was also pushed by social movements insisting on the justice component of any transition process. Although the idea was initially revolutionary, underscoring the essential interdependence of labour and environmental concerns (Stevis, 2023; Wilgosh et al., 2022), today it seems that invoking a 'transition' towards new and sustainable energy sources primarily serves as a welcome excuse for not acting immediately and for downplaying the challenges that humankind has to face. In fact, zooming forward to the 21st Century reveals how much transition talk has by now morphed into a distinctive type of 'dithering' (Haraway, 2016: 144–145), of failing to take responsibility, of postponing existential choices.

We can illustrate this fact by revisiting the COP28 meeting in the United Arab Emirates. Up until the very last day, it looked like the 2023 summit would end in ignominy and produce no final declaration. The bone of contention was a dispute around the plea to 'phase out' or (less ambitiously) 'phase down' fossil fuels in the near future. On this specific point, the COP could not settle, despite scientists and activists unanimously advocating for it (Carrington, 2023). What ultimately facilitated a breakthrough in the negotiations was the following formulation, recommended by almost 200 countries: that worldwide efforts would be undertaken to *transition away* from gas, oil and coal 'in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science' (Morton et al., 2023).

This might at first sound like an audacious statement in favour of renewable energy, but its genesis exposes the corruption of transition talk. The vignette vividly proves that in global diplomacy around climate change, 'transitioning away' from fossil fuels has degenerated into the lowest common denominator, rather than a genuinely transformative objective – not a very auspicious outlook, given the vested interests of incumbent elites that will have to be defeated in the years to come (Geels, 2014).[5]

The negotiations in the United Arab Emirates epitomize a political strategy that Antonio Gramsci – our interlocutor in the following section – portrayed as 'passive revolution', or 'transformism' (Gramsci, 2011: 257): 'a strategy of assimilating and domesticating potentially dangerous ideas by adjusting them to the policies of the dominant coalition' (Cox, 1993: 55). While, just like any social imaginary, the transition paradigm remains internally ambivalent and riven by ongoing contestation, the preponderance of such transformism reveals that its normative core has become so corroded that it is nowadays entirely stripped of its progressive purchase.

Beyond this specific example, a major concern with the politics of the transition paradigm more generally relates to its top-down understanding of social change, as a result of which popular power is consistently sidelined. In accordance with their technocratic and solutionist approaches to the climate emergency, many advocates of a green transition entertain a profoundly ambivalent relationship with the principles and practices of democracy, as Jonathan White remarks:

> The thought of an endpoint within touching distance can make weakly democratic methods seem more palatable, on the understanding that they are task-specific and need only be temporary. The idea of a transitional period that is but an interlude between two points of equilibrium invites the willingness to use whatever methods seem able to expedite the process. (White, 2025: 14)

The second problem with the transition paradigm is its resting on a shaky historical record. The hope behind this social imaginary appears forthright: that decarbonization

would eventually lead to a world in which fossil fuels are completely replaced by renewable energy sources, such as wind or solar. Historians sometimes follow the same logic of simple replacement when they home in on a singular energy source and related technological advances of a given period, such as coal during the Industrial Revolution, for example. Yet, Jean-Baptiste Fressoz (2024) has contended that this view of an emerging energy system substituting, in a linear fashion, the preceding one is empirically incorrect. 'Mono-energetic' explanations like this fail to factor in the stubborn persistence of parallel energy systems, which interfere with novel sources as they slowly rise to full dominance. Wood was not simply 'replaced' by coal during the Industrial Revolution but kept on playing an outsized role in the extraction of coal and beyond.

Fressoz's conclusion is that the very notion of an energy transition needs to be called into question, for it makes it appear as if certain inventions, like the steam engine in the past or wind and solar today, seamlessly managed to steer the shift from one energy system to another. Such technology-focused approaches betray a tendency to overstate the extent to which every epoch can be defined by what is innovative, thereby ignoring the 'place of technology within wider historical processes' (Edgerton, 2008: 211). By contrast, a materialist history of ecological transformations must stress the symbiotic intermingling of old and new energy systems. Instead of transitions, we should thus speak of '*successive additions* of new sources of primary energy' (Bonneuil and Fressoz, 2016: 101; italics in original).[6]

On this account, the transition paradigm is not only the product of a blinkered historiography, but it also affords elite actors a welcome opportunity to uphold the status quo. By hailing groundbreaking innovations in the pursuit of decarbonization, the energy transition feeds into a 'real policy of procrastination' and even amounts to a 'form of climate denial' (Fressoz, 2023). According to this perspective, faith in technology to somehow 'solve' the climate crisis in an indeterminate future underpins the transition paradigm. Therefore, its social imaginary enters into close contact with the 'business as usual'-mentality. This conclusion might at first sound counterintuitive, since proposals for an energy transition are usually marketed as profound challenges to the status quo. But Fressoz submits that it is the relentless investment (both financial and affective) in new, groundbreaking technologies that ultimately renders us oblivious to the contentious politics of energy systems and their material foundations.[7]

The third objection is conceptually grounded and entails the most powerful refutation of the transition paradigm. The notion of a transition implies that we have a reasonably well-defined sense of where we shall arrive once the intermediate phase of structural transformation comes to an end. Transition talk is teleological, presupposing the known existence of an end state towards which we should collectively strive. Ulrich Brand (2014: 249) makes the point that etymologically the meaning of transition in Latin derives from 'going across'. Any crossing needs a landing spot. Without it, the social imaginary behind the concept of 'transitioning' relinquishes its promise of guiding collective action.

However, such confident assumptions about an end state of the current conjuncture are under severe pressure right now. It is one of the most disconcerting aspects of living in a climate-changed world that we are, in fact, incapable of fully anticipating the future of our species' place on a planet undergoing turmoil. As a consequence, the process of coming to terms with the Anthropocene must remain open-ended, without the facile assurances of a known end state. This anti-teleological stance frustrates the expectation of a straightforward resolution to the multiple obstacles of the Anthropocene. The ostensibly

optimistic horizon of decarbonization is simply too generic and vague in this regard, offering too little by way of concrete hope. As Julia Nordblad puts it:

> [t]he problem with conceptualizing the Anthropocene in terms of a transition is that it suggests that the main challenge ahead is to trace the itinerary from one predetermined state to another, rather than to think about what kind of futures would be desirable, why, for whom, and how they could be made possible. (Nordblad, 2021: 335)

Since it takes for granted that which cannot be ascertained, namely firm knowledge of where we are actually heading, let alone how long it will take us to get there, the metaphor of 'transitioning away' from fossil fuels is misleading on a conceptual level. When the novelist Amitav Ghosh (2016) calls our times an age of 'great derangement', it is precisely this generalized disorientation that he alludes to. The issue with transition talk, then, is that it offers false comforts about a desirable future trajectory that must in fact escape the control of political agents.

Concluding this section, it is vital to recall that, despite all these concerns, the transition paradigm remains firmly anchored both in policy circles, the wider public and across academia. How can this be explained? Its entrenchment, it turns out, has at least to some degree to do with the controlling influence of elite actors, to quote Jonathan White once again:

> It [the transition paradigm] promises a way to control change so as to make it palatable, predictable and time-bound, and possible to discontinue when it threatens to interfere with other goals. [. . .] Paradigms are embraced because they suit interested actors and are maintained long after observers have questioned their worth. [. . .] The effect is a distorted understanding of the challenge. 'Transition' suggests a process whose end is in sight. The ecological project is by contrast open-ended, and one should be wary of concepts that obscure this. (White, 2025: 16)

The Politics of Interregnum

Together, these three criticisms mount a significant challenge to the transition paradigm, by uncovering its political corruptibility, historical inadequacy and conceptual confusion. This naturally raises the question which rival framework might help us make better sense of the status quo. Responding to this question is the chief aim of this section.

An obvious candidate might be the vocabulary of a 'polycrisis', which has recently gathered significant traction across a wide range of debates. Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern (1999: 74), who first came up with this neologism, remark that in a polycrisis there 'is no single vital problem, but many vital problems, and it is this complex intersolidarity of problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrolled processes, and the general crisis of the planet that constitutes the number one vital problem'. Michael Albert (2024: 2) elaborates on this definition when he notes that a polycrisis consists of a 'nexus of reciprocally entwined crises characterized by complex feedback loops, blurred boundaries, cascade effects, and (in many cases) mutual amplification'.[8]

The term 'polycrisis' directs attention to the complexity of the current conjuncture, but it ultimately does not enhance our diagnostic capabilities, apart from more strongly concentrating on the multiple intersecting obstacles we are presently facing, linking together economics, politics, psychology, etc. Despite its sensitivity to the compounding and cascading character of these impediments and its strong emphasis on emergence, the concept is indebted to a problem-solving mind-set that superficially rejects the goal of a 'single

fix', but still remains wedded to an ideal of 'progress by way of improvisation, innovation, reform and crisis-management' (Tooze, 2022). What is more, key promoters of polycrisis thinking tend to magnify the multiplicity of its causes, while underrating the degree to which the current conjuncture can still be explained by the core unifying logics of the capitalist system (Penner, 2023; Wainwright, 2024).[9]

My proposal in this section is to tease out a more appropriate vocabulary by repurposing Antonio Gramsci's idea of an 'interregnum' instead. Before delving into the details of this idea, a word on how I intend to read Gramsci. Following Stuart Hall's injunction to ''think' our problems in a Gramscian way', rather than 'use Gramsci [. . .] like an Old Testament prophet' (Hall, 1990: 161) who possesses all the answers, I shall attempt to investigate the ways in which one of Gramsci's operative terms might enable us to cast the present moment in a new light. The goal is therefore not to mine Gramsci's thought for ahistorical, decontextualized truths that could then be applied to grapple with contemporary problems, but to examine whether his conceptual apparatus affords novel perspectives on the specific obstacles of our times.[10]

Space constraints prevent me from exhaustively expanding on Gramsci's relevance for this debate, so the purpose here is merely to offer a primer for conceiving the Anthropocene as an interregnum period. Even though I will not be able, for example, to scrutinize in detail what it might mean to think conjuncturally about our ecological predicament, the hope remains that looking at the Anthropocene and its distinctive obstacles through the prism of Gramsci's conceptual apparatus may give the reader an impression of the diagnostic and prescriptive potential that the term 'interregnum' harbours.[11]

Writing in his *Prison Notebooks* from 1930, Gramsci remarked that '[t]he crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum, morbid phenomena of the most varied kind come to pass' (Gramsci, 1992: 32–33). Rather than following the traditional understanding of the term as the temporally limited transfer of power from one legitimate ruler to another, Gramsci re-interpreted 'interregnum' to cover any exceptional situation in which a hitherto stable political order has lost its hegemonic grip, but no new system of power yet manages to establish itself.

Even though it is not known whether Gramsci was explicitly drawing on the Republican office of an interrex in Roman law, according to which patricians would be chosen by the Senate to govern for a maximum of 5 days in case both consuls had died (Koptev, 2016), his construal undoubtedly departs from the ancient sources. For the Romans, the interrex was supposed to accommodate a basic constraint of both law and religion, namely that there 'must be no break in the supreme authority of the state' (Friezer, 1959: 301). Gramsci saw things differently, since for him an interregnum is always prompted by the disintegration of authority.[12]

Given that Gramsci refers to the interregnum in just a few places of his vast oeuvre, it will be beneficial to quickly situate the term, both within his own thinking and within the intellectual landscape he was navigating. To begin with the first dimension, key to grasping Gramsci's claim is the modal verb describing the effect of a hegemonic order's termination: 'the new *cannot* be born'. This phrasing suggests that the establishment of novel power structures cannot be easily enforced or expedited. During an interregnum period, a profound and protracted unravelling of authority occurs such that formerly leading ideologies fall into abeyance and elites as well as the working class start quarrelling among themselves over the best way forward.

Another formulation that Gramsci introduces to analyse the same phenomenon is a 'static equilibrium' of opposing forces, in which 'no class, neither the conservative nor

the progressive class, has the strength to win' (Gramsci, 1992: 242). Both the biological and the architectural metaphor highlight that under certain circumstances extreme polarization creates a stalemate in which an 'organic crisis' becomes irresolvable and thus instigates institutional instability (Antonini, 2021: 112). Such a crisis differs from a conjunctural one in vital regards. Whereas the former describes often protracted phases during which the ruling class faces 'incurable contradictions' (Gramsci, 1992: 177), the latter captures more local disruptions of the common sense that overall do not imperil the stable edifice of hegemony. Evidently, under certain conditions a conjunctural crisis may trigger the onset of an organic one, but this need not necessarily be the case. Given the textual proximity of these two concepts, it seems compelling to infer that Gramsci employed the terms 'interregnum' and 'organic crisis' interchangeably (on this point, see Ó Rálaigh, 2025: 4).

Moving to the wider context, it is crucial to realize that Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks* ought to be read as responses to the violent disorder of early 20th Century Italy. While the notion of an interregnum was not commonly used in Marxist circles of the time, Gramsci's reflections on this topic can be deciphered as interventions into the most urgent debates of the day. Concretely, this means that it is the 'crisis of the liberal order that supplies the immediate backdrop to Gramsci's thought' (Martin, 2015: 35). Gramsci sought to illuminate how the downfall of the liberal regime historically unfolded and why it eventually culminated in Mussolini's brutal oppression of the workers' movement and the inauguration of a fascist dictatorship in 1922 (Martin, 1998: 12–38).

As a consequence of this orientation towards actual struggles, Gramsci's rendering of interregnum politics kept in constant dialogue with major theorists of liberalism in Italy, such as most prominently Benedetto Croce, who tried to proffer an idealist justification for the state (on this discussion, see Bellamy, 1990). The historical period in which Gramsci wrote was, in sum, shaped by the deadly conflict between the revolutionary forces of fascism and communism, from the interwar years onwards; a rivalry that Gramsci himself, as a prisoner of the Mussolini regime, ultimately fell victim to (on Gramsci's life, see Pearmain, 2020).

Despite this very different setting from ours today, there is no reason to conclude we should not redeploy Gramsci's conceptual apparatus for the purpose of exploring other epochs and their organic crises as well.[13] Political economists, students of international relations and critical theorists have already started to draw on the notion of an interregnum to investigate a variety of social phenomena, from the shift to a post-capitalist economic system (Streeck, 2016), to the breakdown of the liberal world order (Babic, 2020) and the ascendancy of left-populist movements (Mouffe, 2018).[14] Notwithstanding this recent wave of reception, many commentators casually nod at Gramsci without engaging with his ideas in depth. To remedy this shortcoming, Rune Møller Stahl has carefully reconstructed Gramsci's compressed thoughts on this topic and isolated four elements that together make up an interregnum: '(1) absence of a stable consensus, (2) presence of competing economic strategies, (3) institutional continuity but decreased effectiveness of key institutions, and (4) realignment of social forces' (Stahl, 2019: 343).

This analysis emphasizes the alterations within the political economy of an interregnum period; an interpretive route that many of the contemporary applications of Gramsci's framework pursue as well. Instead of following in their footsteps, I want to zero in on openness and uncertainty as crucial tenets of an organic crisis. The motivation behind this focus is the direct comparison with the transition paradigm as a diagnostic and prescriptive model for understanding politics in the Anthropocene. My claim in the remainder of

this section will be that Gramsci's approach, with its characteristic sensitivity to the contingent nature of an organic crisis, succeeds in elucidating the present moment in such a manner as to alleviate the political, historical and conceptual inadequacies of the transition paradigm.

Initially, it would appear that there is a parallel between the social imaginary of an energy transition and Gramsci's notion: they both capture phases between more stable regimes (drawn-out interims), in which the hegemonic order is not undergoing a protracted unravelling. This temporal liminality is a crucial uniting factor, but it also discloses a significant difference between these two approaches to the current conjuncture. The transition paradigm conceives of the in-betweenness of the present moment as an occasion for substituting an ecologically devastating energy system with a more sustainable one. Even though the horizon of decarbonization remains undetermined, it is designed to serve as an inchoate guide to action, ideally turned into reality with the support of innovative technologies that still have to be invented and scaled up in the future. That this goal-driven process is often managed in a top-down and anti-democratic fashion is just one of the reasons why the transition paradigm has become so attractive to elite actors.

By contrast, Gramsci's conceptualization foregrounds the urgency of coming to terms with the ineradicable openness of an organic crisis. In an interregnum, it is in principle not feasible to anticipate how the game will unfold, who will end up winning and who will end up vanquished. Once the authority behind political projects collapses, social forces seek to realign and build a new hegemonic order – without any prospect of immediate success. The aporetic nature of an interregnum thus highlights that everything in these dangerous times is up for grabs, and existing schemata for understanding and doing politics have forfeited their value. As Donald Sassoon (2021: 1) maintains, the 'chief characteristic of the interregnum between old and new is uncertainty'. For this reason, an organic crisis often breeds apprehension and dread, of course, but it may also generate surprising occasions for positive change – a point I shall return to below.

Now, what renders the more specific claim about the Anthropocene as an interregnum period plausible?[15] It is a key intuition behind the controversy around the Anthropocene that it marks the inception of a novel epoch, beyond the Holocene, in which our species has become a geological force in its own right (for an introduction to this intricate debate, see Lewis and Maslin, 2018). So, one relevant sense in which we might wish to speak of an interregnum today is in terms of a historical constellation where the old structures of authority of the Holocene have collapsed, but a new order based on the Anthropocene has not yet managed to establish itself. The recognition of planetary boundaries (Rockström et al.,2009a, 2009b) has brought with it a momentous reckoning: that humanity's 'safe operating space' is under threat right now and might only be salvaged if radical alternatives to the status quo are explored (Brand et al., 2021).

There are material circumstances on a planetary scale – empirically observable biophysical processes, such as the extensive destruction of ecosystems and ever-rising levels of carbon emissions – that make the current conjuncture distinctive relative to prior eras. The human costs of this new epoch are already enormous: toxic pollution, to name but one ramification, is nowadays causing more than 8 million deaths per year (Marcantonio et al., 2021: 2), affecting almost exclusively low- and middle-income countries (Fuller et al., 2022). The impact on non-human nature is greater still, as the biodiversity crisis continuously deepens, initiating what some have started to call a 'Sixth Mass Extinction' event (Cowie et al., 2022).

Beyond this Earth System perspective, we can witness a transformation of the emotional circumstances of politics, sparked by the openness and uncertainty of an organic crisis. What the present moment reveals is the often-chaotic interaction between human-induced turbulences on a planetary scale with the local conditions of politics (Schlosberg, 2023). One way in which this manifests itself is through feelings of stuckness, of running into an impasse that leaves no way out.[16] As Donna Haraway has remarked, we nowadays seem trapped between two equally unappealing positions: between, on one hand, the 'position that the game is over, it's too late, there's no sense trying to make anything any better', and, on the other hand, a 'comic faith in technofixes' (Haraway, 2016: 8). On this view, we have in essence become caught between an excessively pessimistic view of the future ('doomism') and a naively hopeful one ('hopium'). As a consequence, little room for genuine manoeuvre is left. It is this lived experience of stuckness, of not being able to move, that pervades the current conjuncture as one of its constitutive affects.[17]

This take on the Anthropocene enables us to comprehend, then, that the transition paradigm, with its questionable suppositions about the politics, history and conceptualization of a climate-changed world, needs to be discarded in favour of a framework that acknowledges the openness and uncertainty of the present moment. This is where the advantages of Gramsci's notion of an interregnum surface, as a lens for seeing the current conjuncture that operates both diagnostically (what it is) and prescriptively (how it might be engaged). In the next section, I shall expand more on both these dimensions to further strengthen my argument.

Morbid Symptoms and Social Pathologies

Which lessons can be derived from the observation that during an interregnum period 'morbid symptoms' tend to surface and multiply? An additional benefit of Gramsci's approach, I argue, lies in its acute grasp of those 'morbid symptoms' that inevitably manifest during an organic crisis.

Just as the term 'interregnum' enjoyed an increased uptake over the past decades, so did the phrase 'morbid symptoms' find its way into a range of scientific publications, from a study of capitalist catastrophism and eco-apartheid (Heron, 2024), to an exploration of reactionary ways of thinking about the Anthropocene (Hoggett, 2023: 71–108) and a polemic around global politics today (Sassoon, 2021). Many of these invocations of Gramsci's phrase are insightful, but they sometimes lack interpretive rigour. The standard reading states that Gramsci gestured at the proliferation of fascism in his times when he alluded to an interregnum's 'morbid symptoms'. This is often interpreted as a prescient judgement of our age as well, where right-wing populist parties are starting to tighten their grip on many countries around the world (Worth, 2019). Yet, as Gilbert Achcar has argued, such a reading is somewhat deceptive. In fact, the phrase most likely referred to the emergence of 'ultraleft symptoms' (Achcar, 2022: 383), that is, to debates within progressive movements in the 1920s as they sought to grapple with the working class's as-yet weak capacity to wrestle power from a failing liberal state.

In its contemporary applications the metaphor itself has proven highly productive, not only in the context of phenomena such as reactionary feminism (Sturman, 2024) but also with respect to the climate emergency. Recall that the openness of an interregnum renders existing schemata for understanding and doing politics obsolete. Whereas the social imaginary behind an energy transition seeks to reassure us that a viable path towards

decarbonization exists (projected into an unspecified future), the framework of an interregnum foregrounds the uncertainty of the current conjuncture.

Against this backdrop, I would like to pick out one dimension of this general and diffuse sense of disorientation that might be described as a 'morbid symptom': denial. There are undoubtedly other developments today that could also be classified as 'morbid symptoms', such as, for example, the emergence of ecofascist social movements and far-right environmental parties that criss-cross ideological boundaries in a diagonal fashion (Lubarda, 2020; Moore and Roberts, 2022), but this one strikes me as particularly widespread and impactful.

Climate change denial is a complex phenomenon that has over time taken many different forms, from the 'denial of global warming, the denial of its anthropogenic sources and the denial of its seriousness' (Dunlap and McCright, 2010: 240). Over the past 40 years or so, the main promoters of climate change denial have shifted as well. While in the past it was primarily the fossil fuel industry that strategically funded 'merchants of doubt' (Oreskes and Conway, 2011), denying the human impact on climate change has in the meantime become a core plank of the conservative policy agenda around the globe (Dunlap and Brulle, 2020). That said, it would be myopic to associate denial exclusively with the extreme right fringes of the political spectrum. Despite incontrovertible scientific evidence around climate change, denial remains deeply ingrained in all of society. One plausible explanation for this fact suggests that the trauma climate change is already inflicting on populations worldwide has morphed into a major driver of social inertia, 'the interrelated cultural, institutional, and individual processes that inhibit actions to address this pressing issue' (Brulle and Norgaard, 2019: 887).

All this is abundantly well-documented. What is sometimes less clearly recognized is that climate change denial does not only pertain to the construction and communication of objective knowledge about an Earth system undergoing turbulence but also to a strong sense of disavowal about life in the Anthropocene (on disavowal, see Zupančič, 2024). This stance stems from a psychological resistance to appreciating the actual extent of the ecological crisis. As scholars of environmental emotions have maintained, living in denial produces a constant need, on an everyday basis, not to know about the true reality of climate change (Norgaard, 2011). Crucially, the underlying problem is not simply a 'knowledge deficit' that could swiftly be fixed with the help of targeted education measures (Suldovsky, 2017). Rather, the desire to 'ensure that reality can be seen and not seen *at one and the same time*' (Weintrobe, 2013: 38; italics in original) has its origins in an inability to cope with anxiety and grief.[18]

Gramsci's thinking shows that existing approaches to the affective circumstances of politics could be enhanced by linking denialism directly to the realities of an interregnum period. In other words, denial should be conceived as an upshot of an organic crisis. The distinctive benefit of envisaging denialism as a morbid symptom in Gramsci's sense is that it traces the roots of psychological states, such as the double seeing characteristic of disavowal, back to the disorientating circumstances of an interregnum period. Being in denial is both individually experienced and socially structured (for the locus classicus, see Zerubavel, 2006). Its causes are intimately related to the specific nature of the present moment, where social forces realign in response to ideological and material pressures (DeLay, 2024). The advantage of a framework assembled around Gramsci's concept of 'morbid symptoms' is therefore that it allows us to identify politics, and not psychological well-being alone, as the central arena wherein rejoinders to denialism need to be forged.

Regarding the prescriptive dimension, it is necessary to begin by highlighting what the interregnum will *not* manage to deliver, in contrast to the transition paradigm. When we interrogate what type of intellectual and political project could be built on the diagnosis of an interregnum period, a clearheaded acceptance of the term's limitations seems warranted. In this respect, the transition paradigm is more than just a step ahead. There are entire research programmes across the social and natural sciences dedicated to furthering decarbonization policies, and much of what they spearhead, such as confronting the fossil fuel industry (for an overview, see Rempel and Gupta, 2022), is eminently laudable.

So, if Gramsci's framework does not lend itself to the elaboration of a straightforward action plan, what other practical implications could it have? To answer this question, we should in principle distinguish between three possible outcomes of an organic crisis, namely 'the restoration of the old, reconstruction, or transformation' (Taggart, 2022: 909). While the first two results are essentially reactionary, the final option is more promising, for it permits us to engage with the openness and uncertainty of the present moment in a constructive manner. This is a precarious endeavour, though, fraught with serious risks. In an organic crisis, the normative goalposts of the old order are shifting such that new opportunities for imagining alternatives may finally emerge (Latour, 2018; Savransky, 2022). That is why an interregnum is typically a period where various utopian visions of the future clash over the possible contours of the world to come (Claeys, 2022; Thaler, 2022).

At this point, I want to shortly leave Gramsci behind and turn to other theoretical outlooks that may contribute to the study of 'morbid symptoms' during an organic crisis. In particular, thinkers from the first generation of the Frankfurt School, such as Herbert Marcuse (2007) and Erich Fromm (2008), have come up with a useful toolbox to counteract alienating tendencies across society. In their ambition to unify Freudian and Marxian outlooks on both the individual and society, these authors have – despite bitter disagreements over the precise way forward (Rickert, 1986) – shown that 'morbid symptoms' cannot be treated unless psychic ills on the subjective level, such as denial in our case, are handled with explicit reference to the wider world of politics (and of capitalism, more specifically, in Marcuse's and Fromm's accounts).[19]

This emphasis on the interdependence between the structure of feeling and pervasive 'social pathologies'[20] is especially pertinent for understanding an interregnum. Whereas proponents of the transition paradigm insist on the known existence of an end point to the interim period, those who deploy the concept of an interregnum refrain from issuing such guarantees. As should be clear by now, an interregnum marks a time of extreme perils, which has an immediate impact not only on the way people reflect on the future through forecasting, planning and imagining (for a systematic survey, see Andersson, 2018) but also on how they emotionally anticipate the world to come. Gramsci's use of the phrase 'morbid symptoms' indicates that it would be mistaken to treat phenomena like denial as first-order problems. Rather, they are better understood as surface-level expressions of deeper upheavals that inevitably come to the fore during an organic crisis.

One further implication of this diagnosis is a heightened sense of responsibility on the part of those living through the Anthropocene interregnum (for different approaches to this problem, see Andersson, 2024; Krause, 2023). If the transition paradigm has by now turned into a vehicle for shirking existential choices, Gramsci's concept makes dithering inconceivable, because continuous inaction and indecision would only enable one's opponents to get the upper hand. Perceiving our climate-changed world through the prism of an interregnum thus dramatically politicizes the options that agents have at their

disposal when they engage with the complications of the Anthropocene. This becomes apparent, for example, if we comprehend tipping points not only in terms of biophysical thresholds but also as inherently relational and social (Whyte, 2020). The task of avoiding the breach of planetary boundaries is hence a momentously complex undertaking that will require a wholesale change of focus, away from top-down managerialism towards considerations of justice and equity (Pereira et al., 2025).

In this section, I have shone a light on denial so as to illustrate the descriptive and explanatory force of Gramsci's framework, its capacity to name the present moment in such a manner as to reveal crucial aspects of it that the transition paradigm tends to eclipse. Obviously, much more would have to be done by way of a proper conjunctural analysis to paint a satisfactory picture of how the actual causes of denialism, and other morbid symptoms, can be linked to the interregnum period I have been diagnosing before. Yet, the basic point I wish to drive home is one of comparative advantage. The transition paradigm, notwithstanding its internal ambivalence, has far too little resources for making sense of the openness of the Anthropocene epoch we are currently living through. As a consequence, it fails to empirically map and practically navigate the affective landscape of an age in which uncertainty prevails.

Re-Visioning the Anthropocene

One of the premises behind this essay has been that debates on climate change always revolve around naming the present, who gets a say in the conversation and with what tangible effects. There is a frequently overlooked politics to designating the current conjuncture one way or another. Part of what it means to be engaged in social inquiry, then, is to critically interrogate how certain concepts are mobilized in the strategic pursuit of specific interests.

In the case of the Anthropocene, this mission could not be more urgent, for we are nowadays on an almost daily basis stunned by techno-optimist celebrations of our species' ingenuity and skill; celebrations that casually obfuscate the openness of the present moment. In the fantasy realm dreamed up by today's oligarchic class, under no circumstances must there be any space left for uncertainty, lest the immense perils and (unexpected opportunities) of an organic crisis become apparent. The billionaire Marc Andreessen pronounced this Pollyannish vision with utmost lucidity when he confidently stated: 'We believe that there is no material problem – whether created by nature or by technology – that cannot be solved with more technology.' (Andreessen, 2023)

If my analysis so far is sound, we must determine that the transition paradigm is not only compatible with, but instrumental to, this divisive and destructive view of the world. Gramsci's conceptual apparatus, by contrast, contains a much-needed antidote to such deleterious wishful thinking, for it envisages the current conjuncture as a deeply contested terrain, suspended in time between the comprehensive demise of an old order and the arrested resurgence of a new one. Applied to our topic, the interregnum concept enables us, moreover, to better comprehend the interaction between the biophysical turbulences of the Anthropocene and the changing circumstances of contemporary politics, as a consequence of which morbid symptoms like denialism become manifest.

Let me draw my argument to a close by adding a clarification on the scope of this article. To avoid a misunderstanding, it is fundamental to stress once again that the transition paradigm is neither monolithic nor static. Indeed, many defenders of the idea of a just transition would likely share the worries I have been expressing in this article. Their

method, however, usually differs from mine in that they seek to reclaim the underlying notion for the sake of a more progressive agenda. Dimitris Stevis and Romain Felli, for example, accept that the concept is controversial, yet try to deal with its shortcomings by fleshing out a more coherent meaning. Accordingly, they speak of a 'planetary just transition' (Stevis and Felli, 2020) to foreground the scale and complexity of the problem.

In a similar vein, Irina Velicu and Stefania Barca seek to radicalize the justice component of the transition paradigm, which in its contemporary form 'contributes to maintain a postpolitical notion of sustainability as a consensual, techno-managerial type of politics' (Velicu and Barca, 2020: 264), by stressing the category of equality. Relatedly, Peter Newell calls for a transformative reading of 'transition' to highlight the issue of

> how to dislodge an incumbent order resting on a tight alignment between a global economy materially dependent upon fossil fuels, global and national political institutions working to protect productive capital tied up in such an economy and deploying discourses of accommodation around green growth and climate-compatible development to deflect and manage threats to the pursuit of these strategies. (Newell, 2019: 41; see also Newell et al., 2021)

Even though I diverge from their viewpoints, I readily accept that there can be great merit in such creative efforts at recuperating key terms of the political debate, not least because they tap into existing schemata of understanding and doing politics and therefore potentially facilitate wider public uptake. The immanent critique of social imaginaries can obviously be very productive.[21] Nevertheless, the crux of this article has been that sometimes a comprehensive change of perspective might be required, rather than a careful refining and sharpening of concepts already at our disposal. This is so because we always run the risk of being held captive by certain ways of seeing the world, preventing us from espousing rival frameworks that might yield distinctive benefits (Owen, 2002).

While I hope to have demonstrated that Gramsci's framework furnishes us with a vocabulary that alleviates the deficiencies of the transition paradigm, I do not claim here that the notion of an interregnum opens up the only promising path for grasping new aspects of the Anthropocene. Beyond the already mentioned 'polycrisis', other concepts, like 'transformation', with its explicit focus on power and politics, have been introduced to deal with the inherent limitations of the transition paradigm (Brand, 2012; Linnér and Wibeck, 2019; Scoones et al., 2015). It remains to be seen in future research, then, whether these terminological moves are complementary or antithetical to the claims I have advanced in this essay.

Given the transition paradigm's entrenchment as both '*analysis* and *practice*' (White, 2025: 5; italics in original), the prospect of Gramsci's conceptual apparatus superseding it in the near future appears slim. My more modest ambition has therefore been to persuade those who remain, for whatever reason, wedded to the term 'transition' that it might be worthwhile to subject it to critical evaluation and embark on an exercise of what Ludwig Wittgenstein (2009: 224e) called 'aspect change': seeing the ecological crisis as an interregnum brings out crucial dimensions of the present moment that the term 'transition' does not adequately capture. Not only students of politics and international relations but also environmental activists should therefore consider adopting the interregnum term, especially if they aspire to approach the Anthropocene with the intellectual seriousness and passionate commitment it demands from us.

Acknowledgements

While I first developed the idea behind this article in my inaugural lecture as Professor in Edinburgh in May 2024, I presented later versions at workshops in Uppsala, Hamburg, Nijmegen, Amsterdam and Nisyros. Many thanks to the attentive and helpful audiences in all these places. I also owe gratitude to a few colleagues who have read various drafts and provided constructive comments, in particular Michael Albert, Mihaela Mihai, Lukas Slothuus and Timothy Stacey. For institutional support and intellectual companionship, I wish to thank the staff and fellows at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (Uppsala) and the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (Amsterdam), where I spent time during my sabbatical in 2024/2025. Finally, the journal's referees and editors offered extensive and generous feedback, which much improved this article.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: Institutional support for this project was provided by the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (Uppsala) and the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study (Amsterdam).

ORCID iD

Mathias Thaler https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7045-6159

Notes

1. It is this goal that sets my project apart from cognate ones, such as Jonathan White's (2025) recent critique of the transition paradigm, that – while in many respects exemplarily insightful – largely refrain from searching for new frameworks.
2. For a discussion of the politics of naming in the context of violence, see Thaler (2018).
3. I borrow the phrase 'structure of feeling' from Raymond Williams, who defines it as 'affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in living and interrelating continuity' (Williams, 1992: 132). Jeremy Gilbert and Alex Williams (2022) refer to 'structure of feeling' in a similar fashion, in their attempt to deploy a neo-Gramscian approach for the sake of illuminating the hegemony of big tech and financial capital.
4. That is why Taylor remarks that the 'gain involved in identifying these social imaginaries is that they are never just ideology. They also have a constitutive function, that of making possible the practices that they make sense of and thus enable. In this sense, their falsity cannot be total; [. . .] Like all forms of human imagination, the social imaginary can be full of self-serving fiction and suppression, but it also is an essential constituent of the real. It cannot be reduced to an insubstantial dream.' (Taylor, 2004: 183)
5. To wit: the President of COP28, Sultan Al Jaber, has publicly asserted that 'there is "no science" behind demands for phase-out of fossil fuels'. See Carrington and Stockton (2023).
6. On the deeper structural changes that underpin this process, see Malm (2016).
7. On this point, see Malm and Carton (2024).
8. For further context and applications, see Lawrence et al. (2024).
9. I do not mean to imply that all invocations of 'polycrisis' are solutionist to the same degree. Just like the transition paradigm, the concept of 'polycrisis' is open to various, often conflicting interpretations. Relatedly, Robyn Eckersley (2021) suggests that we need to hold apart critical from uncritical problem-solving, and perhaps that is also how we should understand polycrisis thinking, as divided between a critical and an uncritical strand. Notwithstanding such qualifications, I remain convinced that the gains of polycrisis thinking are relatively marginal when compared to the framework explored in this section.
10. This is not to say, of course, that there would no place for historically situating Gramsci's work. See, for example, Thomas (2009).

11. In this sense, my interpretive approach is indebted to various authors, such as Zygmunt Bauman (2012), Carlo Bordoni (2016) and Nancy Fraser (2019), who have all been creatively employing the term to analyse a variety of social phenomena in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008.
12. Accordingly, Philippe Theophanidis summarizes the distinctive feature of Gramsci's definition in the following manner: 'In contrast to the interregnum of Roman law, where authority persists despite the suspension of executive power, Gramsci evokes an interregnum where the dynamic is inverted: for him, the crisis is characterized first and foremost by an interruption in authority, while the ruling persists.' (Theophanidis, 2016: 111)
13. On the complexity of such attempts at 'thinking with Gramsci', see Morton (2003).
14. For a comprehensive review, see Ó Rálaigh (2025).
15. Despite important objections to its homogenizing tendencies (Di Chiro, 2017; Malm and Hornborg, 2014; Moore, 2016; Whyte, 2017), we may still employ the notion of the 'Anthropocene' on pragmatic grounds, as a means to understand 'the modern ecological catastrophe, rather than a prescription for resolving it' (Davies, 2016: 193).
16. On the notion of an impasse and its surprising affordances, see Berlant (2011: 191–222).
17. Stuckness can surface in various forms. Some have associated it, in a Freudian vein, with the death drive as the 'compulsion to repeat' (Ware, 2024: 78); others have homed in on the psychic devastations that depression and burnout wreak, as the results of self-alienation in a world where 'all axes of resonance have become mute and deaf' (Rosa, 2019: 184). Stuckness has even seeped into fiction writing where certain micro-conventions, such as the 'hopeful ending', have turned into empty gestures whose primary purpose it is to deliver comfort to writer and reader alike (Houser, 2022).
18. Jonathan Lear (2022: 105–118) has identified this mechanism as a 'revolt against mourning'.
19. The Freudo-Marxism of the early Frankfurt School offers only one, distinctively therapeutic, model for operationalizing this approach. Other candidates might be found in Pierre Bourdieu's (2008) theory of habitus, field and capital, Hartmut Rosa's (2019) account of resonance as a remedy to alienation, as well as the numerous applications of conjunctural analysis inspired by Stuart Hall (Clarke, 2019; Gilbert, 2019; Grossberg, 2019).
20. While Axel Honneth (2014) is today considered the most prominent advocate of the analysis of social pathologies, I follow Neal Harris's (2022) proposal to return to the founding stalwarts of the Critical Theory tradition so as to recover a more radical understanding of social pathologies.
21. For a reconstruction of the role of ideology critique in the analysis of social imaginaries, see Winter (2025).

References

Achcar G (2022) Morbid Symptoms: What Did Gramsci Really Mean? *Notebooks: The Journal for Studies on Power* 1 (2): 379–387.

Adams S, Blokker P, Doyle NJ, et al. (2015) Social Imaginaries in Debate. *Social Imaginaries* 1 (1): 15–52.

Ajl M (2021) *A People's Green New Deal*. London: Pluto Press.

Albert MJ (2024) *Navigating the Polycrisis: Mapping the Futures of Capitalism and the Earth*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Andersen AS, Hauggaard-Nielsen H, Christensen TB, et al. (eds) (2023) *Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Socio-Ecological Challenges: Sustainable Transformations Globally and in the EU*. Abingdon; New York: Routledge.

Andersson J (2018) *The Future of the World: Futurology, Futurists, and the Struggle for the Post-Cold War Imagination*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

Andersson J (2024) Between Responsibility and Escape: The Future as an Object of Knowledge in the Humanities and Social Sciences. *European Journal of Social Theory* 27 (2): 174–190.

Andreessen M (2023) The Techno-Optimist Manifesto. Available at: https://a16z.com/the-techno-optimist-manifesto/ (accessed 4 January 2024).

Antonini F (2021) *Caesarism and Bonapartism in Gramsci: Hegemony and the Crisis of Modernity*. Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill.

Aronoff K, Battistoni A, Cohen DA, et al. (2019) *A Planet to Win: Why We Need a Green New Deal*. London; New York: Verso.

Babic M (2020) Let's Talk about the Interregnum: Gramsci and the Crisis of the Liberal World Order. *International Affairs* 96 (3): 767–786.

Bauman Z (2012) Times of Interregnum. *Ethics & Global Politics* 5 (1): 49–56.

Bellamy R (1990) Gramsci, Croce and the Italian Political Tradition. *History of Political Thought* 11 (2): 313–337.

Berlant L (2011) *Cruel Optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Bonneuil C and Fressoz J-B (2016) *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History, and Us*. London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso.

Bordoni C (2016) *Interregnum: Beyond Liquid Modernity*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag.

Bourdieu P (2008) *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Brand U (2012) Green Economy and Green Capitalism: Some Theoretical Considerations. *Journal für Entwicklungspolitik* 28 (3): 118–137.

Brand U (2014) Transition und Transformation: Sozialökologische Perspektiven. In: Brie M (ed.) *Futuring: Perspektiven der Transformation im Kapitalismus über ihn hinaus*. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, pp.242–280.

Brand U, Muraca B, Pineault É, et al. (2021) From Planetary to Societal Boundaries: An Argument for Collectively Defined Self-Limitation. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy* 17 (1): 264–291.

Brulle RJ and Norgaard KM (2019) Avoiding Cultural Trauma: Climate Change and Social Inertia. *Environmental Politics* 28 (5): 886–908.

Carrington D (2023) Failure of COP28 on Fossil Fuel Phase-Out Is 'Devastating', Say Scientists. *The Guardian*, 14 December. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/14/failure-cop28-fossil-fuel-phase-out-devastating-say-scientists (accessed 29 October 2024).

Carrington D and Stockton B (2023) COP28 President Says There Is 'No Science' behind Demands for Phase-Out of Fossil Fuels. *The Guardian*, 3 December. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/03/back-into-caves-cop28-president-dismisses-phase-out-of-fossil-fuels (accessed 3 October 2024).

Castoriadis C (2005) *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Celermajer D, Cardoso M, Gowers J, et al. (2024) Climate Imaginaries as Praxis. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 7 (3): 1015–1033.

Claeys G (2022) *Utopianism for a Dying Planet: Life after Consumerism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Clarke J (2019) A Sense of Loss? Unsettled Attachments in the Current Conjuncture. *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 96 (1): 132–146.

Cowie RH, Bouchet P and Fontaine B (2022) The Sixth Mass Extinction: Fact, Fiction or Speculation? *Biological Reviews* 97 (2): 640–663.

Cox RD (1993) Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay in Method. In: Gill S (ed.) *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.49–66.

Davies J (2016) *The Birth of the Anthropocene*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

DeLay T (2024) *Future of Denial: The Ideologies of Climate Change*. New York: Verso.

Di Chiro G (2017) Welcome to the White (M)anthropocene? A Feminist-Environmentalist Critique. In: MacGregor S (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Gender and Environment*. London; New York: Routledge, pp.487–505.

Droubi S, Galamba A, Fernandes FL, et al. (2023) Transforming Education for the Just Transition. *Energy Research & Social Science* 100: 103090.

Dunlap RE and Brulle RJ (2020) Sources and Amplifiers of Climate Change Denial. In: Holmes DC and Richardson LM (eds) *Research Handbook on Communicating Climate Change*. Cheltenham; Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp.49–61.

Dunlap RE and McCright AM (2010) Climate Change Denial: Sources, Actors and Strategies. In: Lever-Tracy C (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Climate Change and Society*. London: Routledge, pp.240–259.

Eaton E (2021) Approaches to Energy Transitions: Carbon Pricing, Managed Decline, and/or Green New Deal? *Geography Compass* 15 (2): e12554.

Eckersley R (2021) Greening States and Societies: From Transitions to Great Transformations. *Environmental Politics* 30 (1–2): 245–265.

Edgerton D (2008) *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History Since 1900*. London: Profile Books.

Fraser N (2019) *The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born: From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump and beyond*. London; New York: Verso.

Fressoz J-B (2023) The Term 'Energy Transition' Must Be Dropped. Available at: https://www.philonomist.com/en/interview/term-energy-transition-must-be-dropped (accessed 26 June 2024).

Fressoz J-B (2024) *More and More and More: An All-Consuming History of Energy*. London: Allen Lane.

Friezer E (1959) Interregnum and Patrum Auctoritas. *Mnemosyne* 12 (4): 301–329.

Fromm E (2008) *The Sane Society*. London: Routledge.
Fuller R, Landrigan PJ, Balakrishnan K, et al. (2022) Pollution and Health: A Progress Update. *The Lancet Planetary Health* 6 (6): e535–e547.
Gatens M (2005) *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality*. London; New York: Routledge.
Geels FW (2014) Regime Resistance against Low-Carbon Transitions: Introducing Politics and Power into the Multi-Level Perspective. *Theory, Culture & Society* 31 (5): 21–40.
Ghosh A (2016) *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (E-book). London: Penguin Books.
Gilbert J (2019) This Conjuncture: For Stuart Hall. *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 96 (1): 5–37.
Gilbert J and Williams A (2022) *Hegemony Now: How Big Tech and Wall Street Won the World (And How We Win It Back)*. London: Verso.
Gramsci A (1992) *Prison Notebooks* (ed JA Buttigieg). New York; London: Columbia University Press.
Gramsci A (2011) *Prison Notebooks* (ed JA Buttigieg). New York; London: Columbia University Press.
Grossberg L (2019) Cultural Studies in Search of a Method, or Looking for Conjunctural Analysis. *New Formations: A Journal of Culture/Theory/Politics* 96 (1): 38–68.
Hall S (1990) *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, 2nd edn. London: Verso.
Haraway D (2016) *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Harris N (2022) *Critical Theory and Social Pathology: The Frankfurt School beyond Recognition*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
Harry SJ, Maltby T and Szulecki K (2024) Contesting Just Transitions: Climate Delay and the Contradictions of Labour Environmentalism. *Political Geography* 112: 103114.
Hatzisavvidou S (2024) Envisioning Ecopolitical Futures: Reading Climate Fiction as Political Theory. *Futures* 163: 103456.
Heron K (2024) Capitalist Catastrophism and Eco-Apartheid. *Geoforum* 153: 103874.
Hoggett P (2023) *Paradise Lost? The Climate Crisis and the Human Condition*. Coburg: Simplicity Institute Publishing.
Honneth A (2014) *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* (trans. J Ganahl). Cambridge: Polity Press.
Horkheimer M (1982) Traditional and Critical Theory. In: Horkheimer M (ed.) *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*. New York: Continuum. pp.188–243.
Houser H (2022) Is Climate Writing Stuck? *Literary Hub*, 3 January. Available at: https://lithub.com/is-climate-writing-stuck/ (accessed 29 September 2024).
Koptev A (2016) The Five-Day Interregnum in the Roman Republic. *The Classical Quarterly* 66 (1): 205–221.
Krause SR (2023) *Eco-Emancipation: An Earthly Politics of Freedom*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Latour B (2018) *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime* (E-book). Cambridge; Medford, MA: Polity Press.
Lawrence M, Homer-Dixon T, Janzwood S, et al. (2024) Global Polycrisis: The Causal Mechanisms of Crisis Entanglement. *Global Sustainability* 7: e6.
Lear J (2022) *Imagining the End: Mourning and Ethical Life*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
Lewis SL and Maslin MA (2018) *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene*. London: Penguin Books.
Linnér B-O and Wibeck V (2019) *Sustainability Transformations: Agents and Drivers across Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Lubarda B (2020) Beyond Ecofascism? Far-Right Ecologism (FRE) as a Framework for Future Inquiries. *Environmental Values* 29 (6): 713–732.
Malm A (2016) *Fossil Capital*. London; New York: Verso.
Malm A and Carton W (2024) *Overshoot*. London; New York: Verso.
Malm A and Hornborg A (2014) The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative. *The Anthropocene Review* 1 (1): 62–69.
Marcantonio R, Javeline D, Field S, et al. (2021) Global Distribution and Coincidence of Pollution, Climate Impacts, and Health Risk in the Anthropocene. *PLoS One* 16 (7): e0254060.
Marcuse H (2007) *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* (Reprint). London: Routledge.

Martin J (1998) *Gramsci's Political Analysis: A Critical Introduction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
Martin J (2015) Morbid Symptoms: Gramsci and the Crisis of Liberalism. In: McNally M (ed.) *Antonio Gramsci*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.34–51.
Mijin Cha J, Stevis D, Vachon TE, et al. (2022) A Green New Deal for All: The Centrality of a Worker and Community-Led Just Transition in the US. *Political Geography* 95: 102594.
Moore JW (ed) (2016) *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Oakland, CA: PM Press.
Moore S and Roberts A (2022) *The Rise of Ecofascism: Climate Change and the Far Right*. Cambridge; Medford, MA: Polity Press.
Morin E and Kern AB (1999) *Homeland Earth: A Manifesto for the New Millennium*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
Morton A, Greenfield P, Harvey F, et al. (2023) Cop28 Landmark Deal Agreed to 'Transition Away' from Fossil Fuels. *The Guardian*, 13 December. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/dec/13/cop28-landmark-deal-agreed-to-transition-away-from-fossil-fuels (accessed 3 January 2024).
Morton AD (2003) Historicizing Gramsci: Situating Ideas in and beyond Their Context. *Review of International Political Economy* 10 (1): 118–146.
Mouffe C (2018) *For a Left Populism*. London; New York: Verso.
Newell P (2019) Trasformismo or Transformation? The Global Political Economy of Energy Transitions. *Review of International Political Economy* 26 (1): 25–48.
Newell P, Srivastava S, Naess LO, et al. (2021) Toward Transformative Climate Justice: An Emerging Research Agenda. *WIREs Climate Change* 12 (6): e733.
Nordblad J (2021) On the Difference between Anthropocene and Climate Change Temporalities. *Critical Inquiry* 47 (2): 328–348.
Norgaard KM (2011) *Living in Denial: Climate Change, Emotions, and Everyday Life*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Ó Rálaigh C (2025) Interrogating the Interregnum. *European Journal of Social Theory*. Epub ahead of print 17 August. DOI: 10.1177/13684310251367363.
Oomen J and Meiske M (2021) Proactive and Reactive Geoengineering: Engineering the Climate and the Lithosphere. *WIREs Climate Change* 12 (6): e732.
Oreskes N and Conway EM (2011) *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (E-book). New York: Bloomsbury Press.
Owen D (2002) Criticism and Captivity: On Genealogy and Critical Theory. *European Journal of Philosophy* 10 (2): 216–230.
Pearmain A (2020) *Antonio Gramsci: A Biography*. London: I.B. Tauris.
Penner M (2023) The Paradox of Polycrisis: Capitalism, History, and the Present. *Journal of History* 58 (2): 152–166.
Pereira LM, Smith SR, Gifford L, et al. (2025) Beyond Tipping Points: Risks, Equity, and the Ethics of Intervention. *Earth System Dynamics* 16 (4): 1267–1285.
Rempel A and Gupta J (2022) Equitable, Effective, and Feasible Approaches for a Prospective Fossil Fuel Transition. *WIREs Climate Change* 13 (2): e756.
Rickert J (1986) The Fromm-Marcuse Debate Revisited. *Theory and Society* 15 (3): 351–400.
Ricœur P (1986) *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (trans. GH Taylor). New York: Columbia University Press.
Robinson KS (2020) *The Ministry for the Future*. New York: Orbit.
Rockström J, Steffen W, Noone K, et al. (2009a) A Safe Operating Space for Humanity. *Nature* 461: 472–475.
Rockström J, Steffen W, Noone K, et al. (2009b) Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity. *Ecology and Society* 14 (2): 1–33.
Rosa H (2019) *Resonance: A Sociology of the Relationship to the World* (trans. JC Wagner). Cambridge: Polity Press.
Sassoon D (2021) *Morbid Symptoms: An Anatomy of a World in Crisis*. London: Verso.
Savransky M (2022) Ecological Uncivilisation: Precarious World-Making after Progress. *The Sociological Review* 70 (2): 367–384.
Schlosberg D (2023) Turbulence, Converging Crises, and Environmental Justice. In: Dauvergne P and Shipton L (eds) *Global Environmental Politics in a Turbulent Era*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp.13–24.
Scoones I, Leach M and Newell P (eds) (2015) *The Politics of Green Transformations*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Stahl RM (2019) Ruling the Interregnum: Politics and Ideology in Nonhegemonic Times. *Politics & Society* 47 (3): 333–360.
Stark A, Gale F and Murphy-Gregory H (2023) Just Transitions' Meanings: A Systematic Review. *Society & Natural Resources* 36 (10): 1277–1297.
Stevis D (2023) *Just Transitions: Promise and Contestation*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
Stevis D and Felli R (2015) Global Labour Unions and Just Transition to a Green Economy. *International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics* 15 (1): 29–43.
Stevis D and Felli R (2020) Planetary Just Transition? How Inclusive and How Just? *Earth System Governance* 6: 100065.
Streeck W (2016) *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System*. London; New York: Verso.
Sturman A (2024) Hegemony, Gender and Social Reproduction. In: Carroll WK (ed.) *The Elgar Companion to Antonio Gramsci*. Cheltenham; Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp.299–314.
Suldovsky B (2017) The Information Deficit Model and Climate Change Communication. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Climate Science*. Available at: https://oxfordre.com/climatescience/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228620.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228620-e-301 (accessed 27 September 2024).
Taggart JR (2022) Global Development Governance in the 'Interregnum'. *Review of International Political Economy* 29 (3): 904–927.
Taylor C (2004) *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Thaler M (2018) *Naming Violence: A Critical Theory of Genocide, Torture, and Terrorism* (New Directions in Critical Theory). New York: Columbia University Press.
Thaler M (2022) *No Other Planet: Utopian Visions for a Climate-Changed World*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
Theophanidis P (2016) Interregnum as a Legal and Political Concept: A Brief Contextual Survey. *Synthesis: An Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies* 9: 109–124.
Thomas PD (2009) *The Gramscian Moment: Philosophy, Hegemony and Marxism*. Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill.
Tooze A (2022) Welcome to the World of the Polycrisis. *Financial Times*, 28 October. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/498398e7-11b1-494b-9cd3-6d669dc3de33 (accessed 19 September 2024).
Velicu I and Barca S (2020) The Just Transition and Its Work of Inequality. *Sustainability: Science, Practice and Policy* 16 (1): 263–273.
Wainwright J (2024) Capitalism Qua Development in an Era of Planetary Crisis. *Area Development and Policy* 9 (3): 407–427.
Ware B (2024) *On Extinction: Beginning Again at the End*. London; New York: Verso.
Weintrobe S (2013) The Difficult Problem of Anxiety in Thinking about Climate Change. In: Weintrobe S (ed.) *Engaging with Climate Change: Psychoanalytic and Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. London; New York: Routledge, pp.33–55.
White J (2025) Transition: Revisiting a Troubled Concept in the Age of Climate Change. *Political Studies*. Epub ahead of print 28 May. DOI: 10.1177/00323217251343442.
Whyte K (2017) Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene. *English Language Notes* 55 (1–2): 153–162.
Whyte K (2020) Too Late for Indigenous Climate Justice: Ecological and Relational Tipping Points. *WIREs Climate Change* 11 (1): e603.
Wilgosh B, Sorman AH and Barcena I (2022) When Two Movements Collide: Learning from Labour and Environmental Struggles for Future Just Transitions. *Futures* 137: 102903.
Williams R (1992) *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.
Winter Y (2025) Are Social Imaginaries Immune to Ideology Critique? *Constellations* 32 (2): 255–263.
Wittgenstein L (2009) *Philosophical Investigations* (eds PMS Hacker and J Schulte, trans. GEM Anscombe, PMS Hacker and J Schulte), 4th edn. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.
Worth O (2019) *Morbid Symptoms: The Global Rise of the Far-Right*. London: ZED books.
Zerubavel E (2006) *The Elephant in the Room: Silence and Denial in Everyday Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Zupančič A (2024) *Disavowal*. Cambridge; Hoboken, NJ: Polity Press.

Author Biography

Mathias Thaler is Professor of Political Theory at the University of Edinburgh. His main research interest is in contemporary political theory. Thaler regularly teaches courses on democratic theory, populism, human rights and the morality of war and violence. He is the author of *No Other Planet* (Cambridge University Press 2022),

*Naming Violenc*e (Columbia University Press 2018), *Moralische Politik oder politische Moral?* (Campus 2008), and co-editor (with Mihaela Mihai) of Political Violence and the Imagination (Routledge 2020) and of *On the Uses and Abuses of Political Apologies* (Palgrave 2014). His papers have appeared in journals such as the *American Political Science Review*, *Environmental Politics*, *European Journal of Political Theory*, *Perspectives on Politics*, and *Political Theory*, among others.