**21st Century Gramscian
theory and politics**



**Introduction**

This part of the website provides a 21st-century interpretation of Antonio Gramsc's theory and politics - *Gramsci in the Age of the Anthropocene*.  Spanning several web pages, it contains an Introduction to key components of the Gramscian theoretical universe gleaned from his extensive, but inevitably fragmentary, [Prison Notebooks](https://abahlali.org/files/gramsci.pdf).  These are reinterpreted in the context of the growing multiple crises of neoliberalism and the continued underdeveloped condition of social and political opposition movements.  The 'overdevelopment' of neoliberal crises and the 'under-development' of progressive forces is termed the 'change paradox'.

This is followed by web pages on the 45-Degree Change Model comprising the dimensions of the vertical, horizontal and 45-degree mediation which plays a major part in the 21st Century reinterpretation of key elements of his work.  The 45-Degree Model - [Transforming Society from Below and Above](https://www.compassonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Compass_45-degree-change-1.pdf) - is a concept of change developed by Neal Lawson in 2019 through the think-tank and campaigning organisation Compass which he leads.  Since the inception of the model, I have been theoretically extending it as a change concept to support progressive transitioning**.**

This 21st-century Gramscian framework has been applied to an analysis of the recent hegemonic position of [modern UK Conservatism](https://www.kenspours.com/uk-conservative-hegemony) and its ability to repeatedly adapt to retain political advantage.  As part of the same analytical exercise, the 45-degree change model has also been used in the study of political subordinate forces, notably the UK Labour Party.  A page is devoted to the task of building a progressive hegemony with a new analysis of Starmer's Labour in the run-up to the coming General Election in 2024.

**Gramsci and me**

The Marxism of Antonio Gramsci has been part of my life for over 50 years.  Back in 1972 as a young trainee history teacher I first came across his life and work as I studied a topic on Italian Fascism.  While his Prison Notebooks had been translated into English two years previously, my introduction to his ground-breaking ideas was relatively gentle in the form of Giuseppe Fiori's biography - [Antonio Gramsci - Life of a Revolutionary.](https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/products/1001-antonio-gramsci) Only later would I venture to the demanding pages of the Prison Notebooks.

I was fortunate to discover Gramsci at a critical moment in my political and ideological formation, being already active in the anti-apartheid movement, thus moving politically leftward.  I was, however, theoretically rootless.  Gramsci provided me with an anchor and so it has been ever since.  My first real political commitment was to join the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) in 1973 while undertaking teacher training at St Paul's College, Cheltenham.  Following my B.Ed year I graduated to Essex University to embark on a Masters's Degree in Soviet Government and Politics.  Essex was a focal point of student activism in the 1970s and I became fully involved with the CP student branch, helping organise the annual gathering of the Communist University of London and going on to become the CPGB National Student Organiser in 1977.  In the intervening years, I was invited to join a Gramsci study group involving Anne and Don Sassoon, Harold Wolpe and Ernesto Laclau.  Participation in this esteemed company helped form a rounded approach to Gramsci and confirmed my political and ideological identity as a 'Euro-Communist'.  Euro-Communism has long gone, but it remains an accurate description of my political orientation, albeit it now with hues of green politics.

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In the following decades, it was my political orientation that influenced the approach to my specialism in education and subsequent academic career.  Throughout these years, Gramsci came in and out of view.  He was more to the fore in my academic relationship with Michael Young and then moved more into the background in the long partnership with Ann Hodgson.  But he was always there.

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In terms of political life, I drifted away from the CPGB in the late 1980s and ended up joining the Labour Party in the 1990s.  A critical point came when I joined Compass in 2009.   I regard this alliance-based political formation as Gramscianism in action.  Becoming active within Compass has afforded me a political outlet and through this Gramscian political theory has been used to analyse education, Conservative hegemony together with an analysis of the shortcomings of the UK Left.

An outstanding feature of his theoretical framework is that it has continued to afford space for conceptual elaboration.  In part, this is a consequence of the fragmentary nature of his Notebooks, drafted in extremely difficult prison conditions and declining personal health during the 1930s.  Gramsci saw them as expressing his inner being and possibly they were never intended for publication.  Ironically, had he not been imprisoned his Notes might never have been written so extensively.

Even though Gramsci's key concepts can be read as a highly connective whole, they were relatively unfinished thus contributing to the phenomenon of 'several Gramsci's' in the subsequent differing interpretations of his work.  Luckily, I managed to avoid being caught up in debates as to whether his work was Leninist, reformist or even Marxist.  What I came to appreciate is that he provided us with new political and ideological dimensions of Marxist thinking; these days highly relevant to understanding the constant evolution of capitalist hegemony and casting light on what the Left might do to produce an effective counter-hegemony to develop a new progressive order in 21st Century conditions.

However, one Gramscian tradition with which I have come to identify closely is that of the cultural scholar Stuart Hall.  Back in 1987 he wrote a seminal piece ['Gramsci and Us'](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Antonio_Gramsci_Contemporary_application/htMXH5bCeSsC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=gramsci+and+us&pg=PA227&printsec=frontcover) for Marxism Today in which he used Gramsci's work to reflect on the challenges facing the UK Left concerning the rise of Thatcherism and the wider global neoliberal order.  Subsequently, he employed his Gramscian lens to reflect on the complexities of New Labour and its 'Double Shuffle' politics, arguing that New Labour combined a dominant discourse of adaptive neoliberalism with a mild subordinate social democracy.   I have developed his combinational concept of the dominant/subordinate as a more general political theory to understand the processes of ['Passive Revolution'](https://brill.com/view/journals/hima/30/3/article-p3_1.xml?language=en) and also a key to progressive combinational and alliance-based politics.

Hall also reminded us not to dogmatically 'follow Gramsci' and use his text like an Old Testament prophet, but to develop Gramscian thinking.  Applying the fragments of Gramsci's theoretical universe to understand contemporary hegemonies has been a prime concern and reflected in all my work for Compass, with the recent period seeing a more extensive engagement in the development of the 45-degree change model.  Like Stuart Hall, I have used and developed his conceptual 'toolkit' to help us understand the world in which we live and to cast light on the one that we seek to create.  Through all of this, I do not regard myself as a Gramsci scholar researching and writing on his work in specialist journals.  Rather, I remain a Gramsci enthusiast who aims to renew his enormous theoretical and political legacy in service of progressive transformation.

**Key elements of Gramsci's theoretical universe**

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist and Communist, was arguably one of the greatest thinkers of the 20th Century.  Mario Candeias in [Gramscian Constellations](https://www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/allg_Texte/Gramscian_Constellations.pdf) observes that during his imprisonment Gramsci was reflecting both on the defeat of the European Left following WW1 and the rise of a new form of economic production - mass production.  Amidst the defeat of proletarian revolution in the West and the further development of capitalism, Gramsci elaborated new dimensions in Marxist political theory, particularly an understanding of the relationships between coercion and consent as a basis for the maintenance of dominance and the development of a new order.

The corpus of Gramsci's work revolves around the related concepts of *Hegemony* representing combinations of coercion and consent; *Historical Bloc* as economic, political, social and ideological assemblages related to the exercise of hegemony; the modern Expanded State comprising the interlocking components of *Governmental State and Civil Society*; the roles of *Organic Intellectuals* to cohere the Historical Bloc; and *Passive Revolution* as a means of capitalist evolution and adaptation.  While developing a theory of politics relatively autonomous of the classical Marxist concept of the economic base, Gramsci remained a materialist, reflected in his work on historical blocs and the relationship between structure and superstructure and his study of *Americanism and Fordism*as a new form of production.

Gramsci's political and ideological approach to Marxism, while continually mindful of the coercive capacities of capitalism - *Integral State*- highlighted the necessity of an ambitious educative ethico-political project to create a new progressive hegemony.   With the emphasis on the development of consent, Gramscian political theory marked a break with the coercive tendencies in Leninism (and certainly Stalinism) and thus has become closely associated with the deepening of modern democratic politics in the decades since.

**Gramsci in the Age of the Anthropocene​**

**The crisis landscape and the need for new conceptual responses​**

Late 20th Century neo-Gramscianism (e.g. [Burnham 1991](https://research.birmingham.ac.uk/en/publications/neo-gramscian-hegemony-and-the-international-order), [Jessop 1997](https://brill.com/view/journals/hima/30/3/article-p3_1.xml?language=en), [Morton 2003](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0893569032000113514)) focused mainly on applying the concepts of Hegemony, Historical Blocs and Passive Revolution to the growth of globalisation and the domination of the neoliberal world order.  In the 21st-century, the neoliberal world order has swiftly moved from expansion to multiple crises - the 2008 banking crash; the nature/climate emergency; policies of austerity and increased global inequalities; global disruptions reflected in growing conflicts and mass migrations; the misuse of artificial intelligence and machine learning; together with threats to democracy from 21st Century fascism.  These intersecting crises, variously described as [poly-crisisor](https://www.ids.ac.uk/opinions/are-we-in-the-age-of-the-polycrisis/)[meta-crisis](https://www.humanetech.com/insights/a-deeper-dive-into-the-meta-crisis)*,*not only undermine the lives of billions but have come to pose existential threats to Humanity.  A key question is whether neo-Gramscian theory can help not only to comprehend the new crises, but also to conceptualise the building of more sustainable, fair and democratic futures in the [Age of the Anthropocene](https://historiansatbristol.blogs.bristol.ac.uk/archives/309)?

**The 'change paradox' - twin crises of global neoliberalism and progressive thinking​**

**A**n integral part of the crisis terrain is the related failure of the Left to pose alternatives to the neoliberal surge of the 1980s and 1990s.  These failures are intimately tied to the collapse of the Soviet Socialist model and the inherent political limitations of social democracy. State socialism (e.g. the Soviet model) was top-down and coercive, insufficiently innovative and lacked democratic legitimacy.  Traditional [Social Democracy](https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/articles/populism-and-the-decline-of-social-democracy/), on the other hand, has found itself in almost terminal decline, marked by the abandonment of the 'left behind' working class and its gravitation towards educated sections of society.  This has left Social Democracy particularly vulnerable to rejuvenated capitalism in the late 20th Century and the rise of Right Populism in the 21st.

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More recently, the banner of change has been taken up by social movements on a series of fronts, notably against inequality (e.g. Occupy) and environmental degradation (e.g. Extinction Rebellion).  However networked social movements, while vital to the lifeblood of progressive politics, tend to rise and fall without being able to create more permanent political forms.  Vincent Bevins, in his new [book](https://vincentbevins.com/book2/)[“If We Burn: The Mass Protest Decade and the Missing Revolution”  (2023),](https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-struggle-continues-on-vincent-bevinss-if-we-burn/)suggests this is the result of the failure by social movements to develop protective disciplined and hierarchic structures.  Jonathan Davies (2016) uses a Gramscian analytical approach to criticise '[network governance](https://cura.our.dmu.ac.uk/2016/10/27/why-network-governance-wont-stop-climate-change/)' in relation to climate change on the grounds that it does not sufficiently engage with power structures and the coercive nature of the integral state and, therefore, is unlikely to make a difference. ​ The various shortcomings of traditional and radical Left political approaches (too top-down and too bottom-up) point to the need for new combinational forms of a dialectic between the horizontal and the vertical.

**Extended Gramscian thinking in 21st-Century contexts**

As a response to the 'change paradox' - the multiple crises of global neoliberalism and the crisis of progressive thinking and politics - are reinterpretations of key Gramscian concepts aided by a '45-Degree Political Economy Ecology Framework'.  This combines a structural and class-based analysis with human ecological networked thinking to represent a blended 21st Century Social Ecosystem interpretation of Gramsci's theoretical universe.  This combinational analysis can be added to 21st-century neo-Gramscian literature applied to the politics of climate change (e.g. [Levy & Egan 2003](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/1467-6486.00361), [Winkler 2020).](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2214629620303649#:~:text=Neo%2DGramscian%20thinking%20has%20been,from%20forestry%20projects%20%5B32%5D.)  Harald Winkler in his conceptual and political work on the Just Transition, uses Gramscian theory to conceptualise ways in which change agents can build alliances to act on fundamental conditions (see Figure 1).

*Figure 1. Winker's political-economy-ecology model of the Just Transition*

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Recent scholarly work, notably Peter Thomas's [The Gramscian Moment](https://www.workersliberty.org/files/PDThomasinterview.pdf) (2011) continues the neo-Gramscian tradition.  While my work can be seen as part of a neo-Gramscian tradition, the reinterpretations are arguably on a greater scale insofar as each key component of his theoretical framework has been extended within the 45-degree political-economy-ecology change model.

**From national crisis to organic global crises**

Gramsci's concept of crisis was closely related to his understanding of how a national dominant bloc (in his case the Italian Risorgimento Bloc) attempted to revitalise political and economic life to maintain its hegemonic position.  He characterised these attempts at system renovation - modernisation from above but without popular participation - as 'Passive Revolution'.  As part of this analysis, Gramsci made a distinction between '[conjunctural'](https://ueaeprints.uea.ac.uk/id/eprint/63891/1/Published_manuscript.pdf)  and  ['](https://spectrejournal.com/an-organic-crisis-is-upon-us/)[organic'crisis](https://spectrejournal.com/an-organic-crisis-is-upon-us/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)['](https://spectrejournal.com/an-organic-crisis-is-upon-us/).  Conjunctural crises were essentially surface and political, whereas organic crises concerned the build-up of contradictions that rune to the heart of capitalist hegemonic relations.  In the 21st Century, we need to expand the Gramscian concept of conjunctural/organic crisis to help comprehend the complexities of their intersections on a global scale.

Globalised capitalism is not one entity, but is transitioning into competing 'transnational blocs' (e.g. Anglo-Saxon capitalism of the UK and US; the mildly socialised capitalism of the EU; BRICs and the state-led capitalisms of China, South-East Asia and now post-Ukraine Russia).  These '[varieties of capitalism](https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/hall/files/vofcintro.pdf)', while having played their role in assisting the neoliberal era since the 1990s, are now weakening responses to the global crisis.  At the centre of this is the decline of US (and UK) hegemony, leading to new conflicts with Russia and tensions with China.  Interestingly, transnational institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, OECD and the annual meeting of elites at Davos, Switzerland can be seen either to reflect either traditional Anglo-Saxon leadership or now the shifting sands towards a more multipolar world.  Their unifying function can be seen as trying to resolve the ever-changing contradictions of globalised capitalism, whether this be slow global growth rates, the climate crisis or the impact of Artificial Intelligence.  The UN on the other hand, while still dominated by the West, is increasingly becoming a platform for low-income countries.  This internal conflict has weakened its mandate.  The 'smoothing' role of transnational institutions (and thus a rule-based global order) is thus in decline.

Multiple crises can be understood as a '[wicked problem](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590291121000693)' - globalised, complex, apparently intractable and rapidly accumulating.  Rather than possessing a single dominant character; ecological, economic, geopolitical and health crises have become closely entwined, requiring a holistic and multi-faceted mode of analysis and more reflexive meta governance approaches.

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The concept of a *New Organic Crisis*, on the other hand, adds another dimension to the concept of multiple crises.  An organic crisis refers to challenges facing the globalised regressive bloc in the Age of the Anthropocene to retain its hegemony.  Gramsci, while having avoided the trap of economism (over-emphasising its determining role), did nevertheless recognise that the depth of a crisis is reflected in the declining capacity of the dominant bloc to reform relations of production.  Despite his emphasis on the key role of political and ideological factors and forces, Gramsci never ceased to be a materialist.  And so it is today.  The crisis of neoliberal global capitalism has at its roots the rapid decline of US economic hegemony that, unlike in the 1980s, is now accelerated by its military spending and lack of resourcing for supportive infrastructure.  It is also being undone by its polarised national politics which prevents the addressing of its fundamental economic and social crises and its contribution to alleviating the climate/nature crisis.

Other state-led economies, notably in South and East Asia, have proven more able to ride out the economic and social crises, but they too have internal contradictions, most notably China's inflated property market.  But this does not remove the fact that the only people doing well are the [plutocracy](https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/pandemic-creates-new-billionaire-every-30-hours-now-million-people-could-fall) who have rapidly increased their wealth through the pandemic and beyond.  Neoliberalism, in all its forms, is now increasingly unable to lift people out of poverty, as its advocates would claim that it did in the 1980s and 1990s.  And all of this is in the context of any type of neoliberal growth being unsustainable.  In themselves, these contradictions do not mean that a moment of reckoning is suddenly at hand. Dominant neoliberal forces will attempt to use their wealth and influence to block progressive advances on the political terrain.  But crises keep spiralling out of control in which a particular layer of the poly-crisis suddenly affects the wider assembly of factors, often in unpredictable ways.  In 2023-24 the crisis terrain has been overlaid by politico-military conflicts that can only be properly understood by examining them in the wider context of the [rise of China, global realignments and the decline of US hegemony](https://www.asiaglobalinstitute.hku.hk/storage/app/media/Research/The-Decline-of-the-West-What-Is-It-and-Why-Might-It-Matter.pdf).​

**From national political hegemony to global hegemonies**

The exercise of hegemony can be considered the key organising concept of Gramsci's Marxism as he sought to explain the resilience of capitalism and the failure of proletarian revolutions in Italy and Western Europe in the years following the First World War.  Gramsci's unit of analysis was the various European nation-states in which the exercise of hegemony (a mixture of coercion and consent) was largely determined by national factors, although in his later work, he also recognised the influence of wider capitalist innovation in his reflections on 'Americanism and Fordism'.

*Layered hegemonies* - fast forward 100 years and the hegemonic terrain looks much more complex, to the point that we need to move beyond singulars and work with plurals.  As the concept of crisis has become more complex, the exercise of hegemony has also become more internationalized and multi-layered.  It would be now more accurate to refer to 'constellations of hegemonies' - economic, political, social, military, technological and cultural - that emerge in various forms within differing nation-states.  The most powerful concentration of hegemonic layers in any one society can lead to the exercise of types of global hegemony.  However, the general point here is that no nation-state is an island and that any form of national hegemony will interact with global trends and influences.

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*Inter-locking hegemonies* - the concept of hegemony is also complicated by the fact that it can be regarded as a 'zero-sum game'.  The hegemonic position of the dominant bloc is never complete. Conversely, subordinate forces will exercise some degree of counter-hegemony, even if this may not always prove politically significant at any particular conjuncture.  The concept of interlocking hegemony and historical blocs raises the interesting issue of 'autonomy' as a political strategy of the subordinate bloc.  Influential analysts on the Left -notably the Italian Autonomists, such as [Toni Negri](https://thewire.in/world/antonio-negri-a-philosopher-of-autonomism)- argued for the autonomy of oppressed groups in their direct struggles with capitalism.  However, in the world of the hegemony/counter-hegemony dialectic - a new variant of Gramsci's concept of war of position - the strategy of creating autonomy to develop the space for progressing thinking and governance should be seen more as a necessary 'moment' rather than an absolute.

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**45-Degree political-economy-ecology framework as Historical Blocs**

*'A hegemonic social structure, or a ‘historical bloc’ in Gramscian terms, rests on a specific configuration of societal groups, economic structures, and concomitant ideological superstructures. A historical bloc exercises hegemony through the coercive and bureaucratic authority of the state, dominance in the economic realm, and the consensual legitimacy of civil society. Gramsci used the term historical bloc to refer to the alliances among various social groupings and also, more abstractly, to the alignment of material, organizational, and discursive formations which stabilize and reproduce relations of production and meaning'*(Levy & Egan 2003).

*Historical Bloc as an economic, political, social and cultural assemblage*- Levy and Egan's interpretation of Gramsci's concept of the Historical Bloc suggests it exists in a hegemonic form based on the alignment (or otherwise) of different levels of society - economic, political, social and ideological that are always involved in [dynamic and often contradictory relationships](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/329111365_GRAMSCI%27S_HISTORICAL_BLOC_Structure_Hegemony_and_Dialectical_Interactions).  In terms of classical Marxism, Gramsci's concept of the Historical blocs is about the relationship between structure and superstructure in which he accords more power to the ideological and political layers within the formation than traditional Marxist interpretations.  This opens up greater possibilities for thinking about strategic intervention and far less emphasis on the so-called determining role of the economic domain.  However, Gramsci remained clear that the alignment of structure and superstructure was a route to more stable hegemonies.

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*Dual bloc contestation*- the 45-degree framework goes further than theorising the dominant bloc.  Comprising verticalities, horizontalities and mediation, the Framework also helps understand the operation of subaltern historical blocs.   As part of this more politically inclusive analysis, the vertical axis has been layered to include different types of verticalities that stretch beyond the national (e.g. international verticalities such as World Bank and IMF regimes).  Similarly, the horizontal dimension is also layered and it too can be internationalized to account for lateral forms of collaboration.

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A central feature of the dual-bloc model is class-based contestation.  The next web page, focusing on the 45-degree Framework, devotes equal attention to the anatomy of the regressive bloc in its role of maintaining neoliberal hegemony as it does to its alternative bloc in building a progressive counter-hegemony.  In this conflictual context, the 45-degree mediation zone is not simply a zone of progressive bloc building but also of intense political competition with dominant forces.

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*45-Degree Zone as Ecosystem* - where the horizontal meets the vertical (or vice versa) is thus seen as the zone of innovation for both blocs.  While Gramsci argued that the main aim of organic intellectuals was to remove historical contradiction from historical bloc formation, here I take his argument a step further by suggesting that the aim should be not only to remove contradiction but also to develop political-economy ecosystem dynamics.  This appears to have already been achieved by [Platform Capitalism](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsereviewofbooks/2017/06/05/book-review-platform-capitalism-by-nick-srnicek/) in the form of [elite entrepreneurial ecosystems](https://www.kenspours.com/set-and-cities) in Silicon Valley and FinTech concentrations in large global cities; formations that can be seen to represent the most advanced forms of capitalism in the early 21st Century.  At the same time, constructing alternative, inclusive and collaborative social ecosystems could also be seen as a 'superior' way of developing the subaltern progressive historical bloc.  The application of 45-degree analysis to the formation of Regressive and Progressive historical blocs is explored in greater detail in the next web page.

**State and Civil Society as Vertalities and Horizontalities**

Gramsci's concept of the expanded modern state, comprising the inter-relationship of governmental state and civil society, has provided rich territory on which to understand the evolving relationship between coercion and consent in socio-economic relations.  It has also pointed progressive socialist politics in the direction of building a permanent consensus for change rather than focusing on state force as an instrument of change.

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I will suggest here that the introduction of the 45-degree change model with its vertical and horizontal axes can offer fresh insights into the exercise of hegemonies of the dominant and the counter-hegemony of the subaltern.  Unlike the single entity of the governmental state, verticalities and horizontalities can exist in multiple forms across different terrains and thus accord more with the complex anatomies of crises and historical blocs.  The dynamics of the vertical and horizontal are explored further in the 45-Degree Framework web page.

**21st Century Organic Intellectuals, the Organic Intellect and 45-degree mediation**

*Organic intellectuals (regressive and progressive)*- Gramsci saw the role of organic intellectuals as providing the historical bloc with a sense of direction and development.  Organic Intellectuals, both individual and collective, can be organised through political parties and also through institutions in different parts of state and civil society.  While Gramsci focused much of his attention on the necessary development of organic intellectuals of the working class, the functions of regressive organic intellectuals deserve equal scrutiny in their service of regressive historical blocs.  The dominant bloc has the advantage of its enormous wealth to fund the organisation of its intellectual strata, for example by supportive [right-wing think tanks](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/nov/29/rightwing-thinktank-conservative-boris-johnson-brexit-atlas-network), as well as its continued cultural and media dominance in both state and civil society.  However, in the context of failing economic, social and environmental policies, regressive organic intellectual activity becomes more manipulative and coercive in its attempts to disorganise and demoralise progressive forces.

Despite the challenges, Gramsci was insistent that the working class had to develop its intellectuals to build a progressive hegemony.  In this regard, 21st-century contexts present both challenges and opportunities.  In addition to disproportionate resourcing, the impact of four decades of neoliberalism has eroded the organised fabric of civil society, notably the role of trade unions, local government, education and other parts of the public realm - that could provide the proving ground for the development of progressive organic intellectuals.  On the other hand, there has been a flourishing of [elements of radical civil society](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/medialse/2021/11/15/was-occupy-10-years-ago-the-start-of-the-new-new-social-movements/) in the form of social movements, grassroots ecological initiatives and the rising social and political roles of women and people of colour.  Moreover, despite the impact of austerity and managerialism, the important role public and their institutions remains strong.  The challenge here is not the lack of numbers of potential progressive organic intellectuals both individual and collective, but their present fragmentary state.  Developing and connecting the fragments of the progressive organic intellectual formations through a profound ethical and political project should be considered a priority.

*Organic Intellects -* a key development of 21st Century Gramscian theory to accompany the role of organic intellectuals is the concept of the Organic Intellects.  This refers to the fusion of general/horizontal and specialist/vertical thinking and practice required to support economic, social and technological innovation.  This particular neo-Gramsian combination recognises the mutual needs of the horizontal and the vertical.  Horizontal socially shared knowledge (known as the General Intellect) cannot achieve sufficient expertise without the infusion of vertically organised specialist knowledge and skill.  At the same time, specialist thinking can become insular and morally directionless without the foundational influence of a socialised General Intellect.  This brings us to the proposition - to address big intersecting crises, while undertaking progressive transitioning in a contested mediation zone, will require a combinational intellect where political consciousness meets scientific and cultural expertise.

**The political party as a 45-degree political ecosystem**

Gramsci conceptualised the political party as an 'organism' that in its composition and activity reflected the new civilisation and future society.  Using the metaphor of the [Modern Prince](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26210463.pdf?refreqid=fastly-default%3Aa6f99abe63a61a888003e5c7619ac5de&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1)(a reworked expression of Machiavelli's mythical prince who understood the basis of Florentine politics), Gramsci's formulation of a  political party as a profoundly educative force constituted a dramatic break with the established Leninist concept of the vanguard party.  100 years on, traditional political parties of the Left (socialist and social democratic) have been in a protracted state of crisis losing touch with social movements while being unable to effectively govern in the neoliberal era.  In a recent Compass publication - '[The Very Modern Prince](https://www.compassonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/The-21st-Century-Party-Very-Modern-Prince-2.pdf)' - I argued that the 21st Century political party has to function as a '45-degree social ecosystem' (the organism) by combining horizontal and vertical features to fulfil its strategic and educative role.  The VMP concept of the political party thus constitutes a twin critique of established bureaucratic Labourism and also recent idealistic networked concepts of the political party.

**Equilibria as Double Shuffle settlements**

The concept of '[equilibria'](https://library.oapen.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/31745/625289.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y) plays a central role in Gramsci's political thinking.  He used the concept of balance and relationship in several ways.  This includes his concept of 'theorem of fixed proportions' when analysing the role and number of different levels of layers of the political party so that it can both innovate from below and prevent the decapitation of its leadership by political coercion.  His concept of equilibrium was also applied to 'strategic compromise' in which the leading force is prepared to make material compromises to win social and political allies to conduct a long 'war of position'.

The differing nature of compromise and accommodation can be helped by Stuart Hall's concept of the 'Double Shuffle' in which an outcome, settlement or compromise comprises dominant and subordinate elements.  Dialectic contestation of verticalities and horizontalities within the 45-degree framework can result in differing types of settlement - regressive and progressive.  Both types of settlement will comprise dominant and subordinate elements.  Regressive settlements can comprise dominant neoliberal ideology together with mild reform (reflected in Hall's original analysis of the Double Shuffle of New Labour).  A progressive Double Shuffle, on the other hand, would need to contain a dominant organising element of progressive transitioning, while the subordinate element would have a largely political and ideological role in securing maximum consent from a wide range of social groups.

**Regressive and progressive temporal models**

A concept of history and of time is fundamental to the envisaging of change for transitioning to a more sustainable, fair and democratic society. This section briefly reviews three issues of the temporal domain.  First, the urgency of addressing the climate emergency and the necessity of living with constrained time.  Second, a brief discussion of neoliberal approaches to history and time that serve to remove the idea of futures and the experience of hope.  The final part constructs a progressive approach to history and time based on the Gramscian concept of historicity and the introduction of social-ecological time, related to the period of development of social-ecological systems that form the basis of a new progressive settlement.

***The time challenge***

We have [15 years at best](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/20/climate/global-warming-ipcc-earth.html) to make significant progress towards carbon net zero.  Time is running out of time to create a planet habitable for the Global South now and for future generations everywhere.  Living on this kind of borrowed time is reflected in the ticking of the nuclear '[Doomsday Clock](https://thebulletin.org/doomsday-clock/current-time/)', now showing 90 seconds to midnight.  Turning the clock back will involve the major nuclear powers (US, Russia and China) recognising the real nature of global threats and the unprecedented level of danger to Humanity.  The depth of the poly-crisis and the scale of change required for a sustainable future is historically unprecedented.

***Regressive temporal model - neoliberalism, history and time***

The previous era of capitalism - the Keynsian era - had a concept of progress.  This came from the relationship between capitalism and the state - post-war reconstruction, the role of the state planning and technological change, epitomised by the [1962 JF Kennedy speech](https://www.jfklibrary.org/about-us/social-media-podcasts-and-apps/jfk35-podcast/season-2/jfk-and-the-space-race/transcript)on the 'space race'.  This sense of progress was underpinned by post-war optimism and a general sense of improving living standards, remembered as the '[Golden Age of Capitalism'.](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/WESS_2017_ch2.pdf)  In a bipolar world dominated by the West and the USSR, each system also had its version of progress.  This all came to a close with the collapse of Soviet-style socialism at the end of the 1980s, the short-lived triumph of neoliberal capitalism and the now pervading sense of multiple global crises that is serving to erode a sense of progress and hope.

*End of history*- neoliberal capitalism acts upon history and time as its intellectuals try to suppress a reflective view of history and freeze time with its existing relationships between the dominant and subaltern.  Famously Francis Fukuyama, in 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall, declared that liberal democracy and free-market capitalism marked the final phase of human economic and political development and thus constituted the '[end of history](https://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184?seq=1)'.  Capitalist determinist optimism replaced the socialist determinist conviction that socialism would automatically replace capitalism.

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*Expanded present* - my concept of an expanded present is derived from the work of Christopher Pollitt on [institutional amnesia](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2008.01738.x) and what he referred to as the 'extended present'.  Pollitt argued that organizational memory was undermined by a culture of constant change, thus removing any sense of the past from which to learn and the absence of a sense of the future.  Similar work has taken place analysing '[policy amnesia](https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1541871/1/Spours_Raffe_2008Ch1.pdf)' and the inability of policy-makers to learn lessons from the past.   Building on both these literatures, the concept of the expanded present is used here more broadly in understanding the time dynamics of neoliberal capitalist society.  The expanded present (which can contain the very recent past and the immediate future) comprises several tendencies - [neoliberal accelerationism](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0022167817716686) of market rationality; the constant and compulsive presence of social media; and long working hours, particularly for those in low-paid jobs.  Exhaustion and distraction combine to produce '[time poverty](https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryanrobinson/2019/09/15/is-time-famine-starving-you-how-to-satisfy-your-hunger-for-more/?sh=497bc9141c30)' - the lack of time for purposeful social activity, to reflect and to imagine.

*Social groups with futures and those without* - within the overall parameters of ecologically constrained time and the expanded present, different social groups have different perceptions of futures and progress.  Within the UK the social group that stands out are the generation of young people who post-2008 have had to live with student debt, high rents, poorly paid jobs and austerity; a group known as [Generation Z (Zoomers)](https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/word-less/202212/have-we-overburdened-gen-z-with-fears-of-the-future).  They are also the social age group disproportionately affected by the COVID pandemic and who are now trying to raise children with the portends of the climate/nature crisis.  Many see themselves as the first generation destined not to be as materially well off as their parents and are understandably angry about the legacies of Generation X and anxious about the future.

*A temporal double shuffle* - enveloped by the expanded present is not the total picture.  Rather, the current balance of time and history relations could be regarded as a 'temporal double shuffle' - a dominant neoliberal behavioural tendency periodically punctured by subordinate moments of human reflection - a child being born, a loved one passing, going to school to learn, thinking about a career, meeting someone and wanting to spend your life with them - and so it goes.  These life-course events act to pull us momentarily out of the expanded present.  However, in themselves, they do not necessarily restart a social perception of history and the future.  That requires larger forces and larger imaginations.

***A progressive temporal model - social-ecological time***

A central function of the progressive temporal model is its ability to act against the effects of neoliberal time and to contribute to progressive transitioning.  This section outlines its different elements through the concept of social-ecological time; a key dimension of the 45-degree change model.

*Beyond historicism* - as part of his explanation of the development of hegemonic ideologies, Gramsci integrated history and social theory to provide a theory of causality and a methodology he referred to as [integral history.](https://philpapers.org/rec/DULGHA)[Also understood as absolute historicism in](https://brill.com/display/book/9789047443025/Bej.9789004167711.i-478_008.xml)that human ideas and activity could be viewed through the lens of hegemony and by their relationship to wider historical and societal factors.  If ideologies and social formations could be historically located and their power relations understood, therein lay the possibility of moving to a different type of society.  Historicism as analytical quality sows the seeds of possibility but does not in itself produce historical change.  Futures need to be constructed by the envisaging of a society beyond the current condition and a politics of transitioning.

*Crisis as catalyst* - the neoliberal hubris of the 'end of history' itself came to an end 16 years later with the 2008 Banking Crash.  But in the years since, the main beneficiary has not been the Left but Conservatism and the Far Right.  Crisis has signalled instability in the neoliberal historical bloc, but does not act as the 'hidden hand of history' in the cause of progress.  Crises have to be acted upon, being both problem and opportunity.  A crisis only becomes a catalyst if progressive forces can utilise the instability to create social and political alliances in support of a new settlement.  The complex nature of poly-crisis, however, demands not a single catalytic factor but a comprehensive array of strategies that can act synergistically; what is referred to elsewhere as a 'political-economy-ecology ecosystem'.

*New Settlement*- a progressive settlement can be conceptualised as a 'medium-range' period, referring to the achievement of a new set of stable societal relations that take more than a term of Parliament to be built but can be reached within a generation.  Defined in this way, a new settlement is something most people could hope to see in their lifetime.  [Progressive new settlements](https://www.compassonline.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/New-Settlement-report-1.pdf)leave their mark on history, notably the post-war 'Spirit of 45' that gave birth to the welfare state and much of the public fabric we still have today despite the ravaging effects of successive conservative governments.  The stability of a new settlement would be underpinned by two factors in particular - a public 'settled will' reflecting a sea-change of popular attitudes and a new institutional formation that collectively strengthens the economic, political and social realms.  At this juncture, it is painful to observe that Starmer's Labour does not possess a vision of a new settlement on account of finding it difficult to see beyond the prow of the electoral ship.

*Nurturing purposeful time* - we must address the issue of time starvation in everyday life caused by overwork, market accelerationism and the culture of distraction.  Here, two actions could prove decisive - introducing a four-day working week and the reinvigoration of lifelong learning for all.  [UK four-day working week trials](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/03/four-day-work-week-uk-trial/)in 2022 showed that reductions in the working week offered social benefits without damaging productivity.  In the context of the greater affordances of non-work time, a new era of l[ifelong learning opportunities](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00071005.2012.756163) could also bring not only labour market benefits, but also personal cognitive growth without detracting from family time.  These time-related measures could also have reciprocal social benefits in other areas of life with the possibility of increases in volunteering and political engagement.  As such the nurturing of purposeful time would constitute an important part of the New Settlement.

*Conservation/restoration*- Marx famously remarked on the sweeping effects of capitalism on traditions and stability - *'all that is solid melts into air'.* 150 years on capitalism continues to reinvigorate itself by finding new ways to innovate, but also to destroy.  This begs the question as to whether it is possible to undertake rapid innovation for sustainability without further dissolving the solidities upon which we depend for purposeful living.  This can be understood by way of another question.  Is it possible to combine major social and technological change with progressive forms of conservation/restoration?  One of the most visible destructive effects of neoliberal capitalism has been the [hollowing out of high streets and town centres have been brought about by a complex developmental mix -](https://www.politics.co.uk/reference/high-streets/)out-of-town shopping since the 1970s, the growing impact of online shopping over the past two decades, high local business rates and the '[supernova](https://www.kenspours.com/set-and-cities)' concentration of services in global city centres.  Town centres have historically been regarded as economic, social and cultural hubs by British communities and their decline is seen as symbolic of the loss of ways of living and working.

However, in the context of a discussion of history and time, we can approach the issue through ideas of 'civic memory' - nostalgia for something valuable that has been lost with the hope that restoration and remaking of the social fabric can lead to better and more sustainable lives.  This is not about recreating the past but capturing the timeless spirit of community and social solidarity in a new era. What might be termed 'progressive nostalgia' points to the particular importance of urban regeneration to remake town centres as places for working, living and learning; places where people gravitate for social activity.   Reclaiming urban spaces could also be seen as a juncture of radicalism and conservatism, in which the transition to more sustainable living becomes attached to the 'little traditionalisms' of conserving and restoring.  In terms of UK city regions, this combinational approach would not be on global city centres as such, but more on the peripheral towns in the city region that have lost their urban energy.

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*New institutions and new democracy* - civic memory can be stimulated by the historical arrival of new institutions and new ways of exercising public power.  This was the case with the 1945 settlement with the foundation of the welfare state, including the totemic NHS.  The intervening years have mainly seen Conservative Governments and the Labour interludes did not see the same type of institution-building.  This was particularly the case with New Labour.  Its period of government lasted 13 years, the end of which had relatively little to show institutionally.   Apart that is from democratic devolution to the smaller countries of the UK, the historical effects which cannot be underestimated even though it was the exception to the rule for New Labour.   Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland now have historical markers from which they can measure the evolution of their countries.  In this sense, they live to a different tick of the historical clock compared to England.  The largest country in the UK looks relatively stuck.  Following the institutional logic of democratic devolution, a similar process in England might become expressed by the historical strengthening of regional and local government to develop and integrate public services, economic development and green infrastructure.  In parallel, experiments in local democratic participation could be initiated.  Together these too would become pillars of a new democratic settlement in England.

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*General Intellect*- a new settled will resulting from an irreversible change in public consciousness would be of historic significance.  However, given the history of the ideological timidity of Labour and the ideological aggressions of UK Conservatism, a new popular settled will could be long in the making.  The question is how this is to be addressed and whether the whole or parts of the population are involved.  Presently, there's a stark divide between the political and social outlooks of younger and older people in the UK, with the former having been radicalised by the effects of neoliberalism on the lives in particular of Millenials and Generation Z.  Older 'baby boomers', particularly those who did not experience higher education, have become an integral part of the Conservative/Right political bloc.  The concept of the 'General Intellect' (GI) is worth exploring because it holds greater theoretical potential than the term 'political consciousness'.  The GI is elaborated in another section of the website in relation to the elaboration of the Organic Intellect.  However, in relation to the progressive temporal model, the GI would include historicity as a mode of analysis; a critical appreciation of history in progressive memory and the imagination of future possibilities.  In addition, the GI could contain an ethico-political sense of connection with nature and wider humanity in which we can experience timelessness.

**Extended Gramscian concepts - analytical and political implications**

The extension of key Gramscian concepts provides a wider historical framework within which to explore the dynamics of the 45-degree Political-Economy-Ecology Framework and the Social Ecosystem Model Version 2.  These deliberations have highlighted several important analytical and political implications.

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*Bloc contestation* - the emphasis on the interactions of regressive and progressive political formations is a recognition of contestation between the dominant and subordinate blocs.  Their constant state of entanglement and conflict (material, political and and ideological) means there is no such thing as the absolute autonomy of the subaltern bloc.  Rather the contestation could be regarded as a huge 'zero sum game' - any element of hegemony that is added to one bloc is subtracted from the other.  Gaming theory is applied here only to the analysis of hegemony and counter-hegemony and, by extension, competing ecosystems in the 45-degree change model.  However, this competition does not remove the possibility that, through subaltern bloc alliance building and the winning of a new popular consensus, most people might win.

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*The movement from singulars to plurals* - crisis to poly-crisis, hegemony to hegemonies, governmental state to verticalities and civil society to horizontalities - the movement from singulars to plurals results in a more layered analysis of power, reflected in the elaboration of multiple layerings of the horizontal, vertical and mediation dimensions in the 45-degree change model.  The multi-layered analysis of the two axes and 45-degree mediation zone suggests highly complex and interlinked terrains of struggle.

*History, future and time* - particular attention has been paid to competing temporal models in which a 'progressive double shuffle' of the dominance of urgent transitioning, but accompanied by the reassurances of 'little conservatisms of place and identity', may provide an important key to winning popular support for widespread change through creating stronger communities and better lives.

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*State and democracy*- Neal Lawson argued that the intersections of the vertical and horizontal (fusions of bottom-up and top-down change along the 45-degree metaphorical line) are where the new politics of transformation can be born.  Here we need to dialectically relate two imperatives - the 'good state' undertaking decisive facilitating actions to kick-start rapid change and the new active 'popular democracy' so that people know that they are taking control, not only of their lives but also of the factors that affect those lives.