

[A] Chapter Twelve

[A] “Il faut continuer”: Always-on Capitalism and Subjectivity

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“The *constant continuity* of the process, the unobstructed and fluid transition of value from one form into the other, or from one phase of the process into the next, appears as a fundamental condition for production based on capital to a much greater degree than for all earlier forms of production.”

Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (1858)<sup>1</sup>

“... il faut continuer, je ne peux pas continuer, je vais continuer...”

Samuel Beckett, *L’Innommable* (1953)<sup>2</sup>

“What happens to us if we must be “on” all the time?”

Margaret Atwood, *When Privacy Is Theft* (2013)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), 535; Marx’s italics.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel Beckett, *L’Innommable* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1953), 213. In Beckett’s own translation, this is rendered: “you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on”, as per Samuel Beckett *Three Novels* (New York: Grove Press, 2009), 407.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret Atwood, “When Privacy Is Theft,” *New York Review of Books*, November 21, 2013, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/11/21/eggert-circle-when-privacy-is-theft/>.

[B] 1.

In a number of recent publications, and conference talks, I have proposed the term “always-on capitalism” to contribute to the debates on the contemporary condition, commonly referred as “24/7”.<sup>4</sup> This widely accepted numerical acronym introduces an idea of a socio-economic continuum that operates smoothly and incessantly, twenty-four hours a day, and seven days a week. The essential feature of 24/7 regime is not difficult to summarize as an uninterrupted *continuity* of production, exchange, consumption, communication, and surveillance. The social and technological infrastructure of 24/7 includes the Internet, social media, “incessant social organisations” and digital platforms providing various services, consumptive and leisure activities, nonstop global electronic trade, as well as control and “security”.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Alexei Penzin, “Always On: Capitalist Continuity and Its Discontents,” in *Time, Forward!* ed. Omar Kholeif and Karen Sarkisov (London: Prestel and V–A–C Press, 2019), 95-110, and Alexei Penzin, “Continuity-form and Counter-continuity,” in *Glossary of Common Knowledge*, ed. Zdenka Badovinac and Ida Hiršenfelder (Ljubljana: Moderna Galerija, 2018), 175-185. The current chapter revises and expands the arguments of these texts. An early version of this text was presented as a paper at the Rome Conference on Communism, organised by C17 – a network of the Italian researchers, political activists and writers – in January 2017. At various times, I have received stimulating comments concerning this research from Jodi Dean, Gerald Raunig and Michael Heinrich. I am also thankful to Benjamin Halligan for reading and commenting on the manuscript, and for his many editorial suggestions.

<sup>5</sup> The pioneering argument about “colonization of time”, “incessant organisations” and emergence of the 24/7 temporality had already been made in the 1980s by the US

However, 24/7 seems too neutral and technical a term, since it is one that presents the social reality to which it refers uncritically – as something natural, technologically advanced, and opening new opportunities.<sup>6</sup> Of course, this condition may have some positive side effects, such as a continuous access to knowledge through online resources and platforms – even “off-line” university libraries now want to be 24/7. At the same time, and far more devastatingly this condition creates new avenues for an almost unrestricted accumulation of capital, as manifested in an extreme violation of all anthropological limits of psychical and physical ability to withstand the exposure to incessant activities, and new forms of exploitation and exhaustion of the workers.<sup>7</sup>

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sociologist Murray Melbin; see his *Night as Frontier: Colonizing the World After Dark* (New York: Free Press, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> One of the first works about the 24/7, published in late 1990s, was the book by Leon Kreizmann, based on his research, commissioned by the British Telecom. Kreizmann does not question the capitalist nature of the 24/7’s regime. His book, rather, praises new opportunities for productivity and flexibility, and the benefits of 24/7 for electronic commerce and the services sector. See Leon Kreizman, *The 24 Hour Society* (London: Profile Books, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> About the effects of tiredness and exhaustion, caused by the pressure of timetables, deadlines and technologically enhanced constant connectivity, see Byung-Chul Han, *The Burnout Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015). Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s many works consistently emphasize the link between the sensory “overload” as an effect of contemporary “semio-capitalism”, and the widespread burnout, depression and various “psychopathologies”, or general social and political “impotence”. See, for example, Franco “Bifo” Berardi, *Futurability: The Age of Impotence and Horizon of Possibility* (London: Verso, 2019).

The term “always-on capitalism” or, in its shorter variant, “the always-on”, is not just a reference to a permanent connectivity and “plugged-in-ness” that is typical of contemporary technologies.<sup>8</sup> It is also a reference to the way in which contemporary capitalism imposes the always-on continuities of production, exchange, consumption, communication, surveillance and algorithmic digital activity all over the globe. These multiple continuities are heterogeneous and of different scales: large and small, microscopic and macroscopic; they are embedded in various socio-economic, political and technological processes. Since this empirical diversity persists, it would be appropriate to explore a general model or a *continuity-form* that can be abstracted from the contents it shapes and modulates.

The growing awareness of this formal dimension of continuity has become a subject of research in recent years. For example, the authors of a special issue of the journal *Theory, Culture & Society*, focused on topological aspects of contemporary culture, also single out this aspect of continuity. They see the proliferation of continuity’s forms as a growing trend, to the extent that they feel emboldened to make an “epochal claim” about “a new order of spatio-temporal continuity for forms of economic, political and cultural life today”.<sup>9</sup> However, the authors mostly discuss the implications for new computational and informational architecture, and decline to substantially explore the theoretical link between this “order” and the *social* form of contemporary capitalism.

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<sup>8</sup> I would like to thank Matthew Fuller for his suggestion to use “always-on” as a term.

<sup>9</sup> See Celia Lury, Luciana Parisi and Tiziana Terranova, “Introduction: The Becoming Topological of Culture,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 29: 3 (2012): 4.

Perhaps the best known work in critical theory that addresses this link, so far, is *24/7: Late Capitalism and Ends of Sleep* by the North American art historian Jonathan Crary.<sup>10</sup> The book presents a convincing diagnosis of a contemporary predicament, supported by many arresting examples of the devastating effects of the nonstop social universe of late capitalism driven by the new digital technologies. Crary's work mentions a number of classical figures belonging to philosophical and critical-theoretical fields, ranging from Hobbes and Descartes to Marx and Hanna Arendt, Emmanuel Levinas, as well as Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault. But the author limits his scope by providing only brief comments on the ideas picked up from different époques, stretching from early modernity to contemporaneity. Though these miniature accounts contain illuminating points and references, some of these accounts are based on simplifications, even to a level of misreadings. One example: in his several paragraphs about Emmanuel Levinas's philosophical understanding of insomnia, Crary ignores, crucially, the difference between Levinas's early (negative and radical) understanding of insomnia as an expression of a global and horrifying "ontological insomnia", and his late use of insomnia (as a metaphor for ethical vigilance).<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, Crary does mention, in passing, a "principle of continuous

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Crary, *24/7: Late Capitalism and Ends of Sleep* (London: Verso, 2014). A number of recent philosophical and sociological works also reflect, rather indirectly, some aspects of the 24/7, such as Boris Groys, *In The Flow* (London: Verso, 2017), Maurizio Lazzarato, *Governing by Debt* (Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e), 2016), and Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> See Crary, *24/7*, 18-19. On the ontological insomnia, see Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1978),

functioning” – that is, one of the main concerns of the present chapter – albeit without much further theoretical reflection on this theme. And, in linguistic proximity to the always-on, Crary mentions “a switched-on universe for which no off-switch exists”.<sup>12</sup> Whilst acknowledging all significant aspects of Crary’s book, one has to emphasise that it ultimately fails to construct a systematic – critical and theoretical – genealogy of 24/7.

To grasp the dimension of the capitalist always-on that dominates contemporary forms of life, one has to focus primarily on one specific philosophical question. This question can be formulated as the following: *how the form of continuous activity became the dominant paradigm in contemporary capitalism, and what kind of subject does this form presuppose?* In this chapter I want to extend my research through the outlining of a hypothesis about the subjective dimension of the always-on. But first I would like to recapitulate several theoretical hypotheses related to always-on capitalism and to another term, “continuity-form”. Both these terms are proposed in order to emphasize a violent imposition of specific socio-economic condition that, subjectively, appears as an imperative or command to continue, to “go on”, incessantly.

[B] 2.

My first hypothesis in respect to the always-on draws on a philosophical reading of continuity as a non-teleological form of the social, economic, political and cultural

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65. Further to this, see also the critical discussion of Crary’s misuse of Freud’s concepts in Lorenzo Chiesa’s chapter in this book.

<sup>12</sup> Crary, 24/7, 8, 30.

processes within contemporary capitalism. The classical Marxist tradition usually mounts an inquiry into a possible scenario of the *end* of capitalist social formation – understood as a revolutionary transition to communism which is seen, dialectically, as a *beginning* of an authentic human history. However, in recent decades, after collapse of the socialist experiments of the twentieth century, the end of capitalism is imagined in less utopian, inspiring ways than before, ranging from explosive, unpredictable technological acceleration, random catastrophes, and ecological disaster, to more sober debates about the opportunities for a renewal of radical politics.<sup>13</sup> Before asking such questions regarding the end of capitalism, it would be better to investigate the “no ends” of capitalism’s contemporary continuities. My first hypothesis considers these continuities not only as an empirical reality of contemporary “24/7 societies” but also as a substantial dimension of the entire capitalist modernity. It would be more precise to argue that this continuity – as a structural element of the capitalist mode of production – was rather rendered fully visible in the monotonous, non-teleological sequence that unfolded after the collapse of communist alternatives of the twentieth century. This period has been widely identified as that of the so-called “end of history”.

The “end of history” was, originally, a provocative hypothesis developed in the 1930s by the Russian-French philosopher Alexandre Kojève. This identification, in fact – in a manuscript written at the outbreak of the Second World War (i.e. after his famous lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology*, given in the 1930s at École Pratique des Hautes Études) – quite explicitly conceived this idea by way of advancing

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Wolfgang Streeck, *How Will Capitalism End? Essays on a Failing System* (London: Verso, 2016).

universal communism.<sup>14</sup> However, in a footnote that can be found in his well-known *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, published after the Second World War, Kojève also hints at an understanding of communism, in Marx, as the actual or proper end of history:

Let us recall that this Hegelian theme, among many others, was taken up by Marx. History properly so-called, in which men (“classes”) fight among themselves for recognition and fight against Nature by work, is called in Marx “Realm of necessity” (Reich der Notwendigkeit); beyond (jenseits) is situated the “Realm of freedom” (Reich der Freiheit), in which men (mutually recognizing one another without reservation) no longer fight, and work as little as possible (Nature having been definitively mastered – that is, harmonized with Man).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of unpublished manuscript, see Alexei Penzin, “Stalin Beyond Stalin? A Paradoxical Hypothesis of Communism by Alexandre Kojève and Boris Groys,” *Crisis and Critique* 3, 1 (2016): 301-340.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 159. Kojève refers to the following passage from the third volume of *Capital*: “The true realm of freedom, the development of human powers as an end in itself, begins beyond it [i.e. beyond a realm of necessity], though it can only flourish with this realm of necessity as its basis.” Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 3*, trans. David Fernbach (London, Penguin Classics, 1981): 959.

For Kojève, who derived the idea of the end of history from his highly original reading of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the main argument for this hypothesis is that "absolute Knowledge, which reveals the totality of Being, can be realized only at the end of History, in the last World created by Man".<sup>16</sup> This "last World" would be marked by a "circularity" of knowledge and modes of action: at the end of history, everything that can be said and done has already been said and done, and can be only repeated.<sup>17</sup>

In debates concerning Hegel's legacy, revived in recent decades, Kojève's "circularity" has a much more intense resonance than only being a dull and monotonous state after the presumed end of the historical-dialectical process.<sup>18</sup> In his reading of Hegel, as developed in a number of his recent books, Slavoj Žižek argues that the circularity is immanent to dialectical processes. Hegel's "Spirit" is not an unattainable "One" of a supreme totality, and not covered even by the Maoist slogan of "one divided into two" but, rather, presents a paradoxical case of "two divided into

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<sup>16</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 32; Kojève's capitalisations. As a contemporary commentator succinctly and correctly notes, the crux of Kojève's interpretation bases itself "on the identification of time (die Zeit) and the concept (der Begriff) at the end of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, suggesting that when the concept is fully realized, time, and thus history, is also complete." Eric M. Dale, *Hegel, the End of History, and the Future* (Cambridge University Press, 2014): 81.

<sup>17</sup> Kojève, *Reading of Hegel*, 97.

<sup>18</sup> I refer here to the debates in continental Hegelian-Marxist philosophy, as developed in the writings of Slavoj Žižek, Fredric Jameson, Catherine Malabou and several others authors.

one”, meaning that the two shape a contradiction intrinsic to the One.<sup>19</sup> As Žižek argues, the Hegelian Spirit constitutes itself retroactively and is subject to a series of contingencies and inconsistencies. This process of constitution is retroactive: it is not an unfolding of the predetermined One, but the One’s erratic self-formation through the very process of division. In this, past moments shape the terrain of the present while the present acts upon these past moments, and shapes them in turn by making them recognisable and cognisable. Žižek compares this circularity between past and present moments with the Möbius strip – the well-known ring-like topological figure, which has only one side, and allows endless circular movement along its surface.<sup>20</sup> He notes that “[i]t is thus only by way of fully accepting this abyssal circularity in which the search itself creates what it is looking for, that the Spirit ‘finds itself’”.<sup>21</sup>

Whatever strains of idealisation would seem to be present in Kojève’s “totality of Being” in the light of new materialist debates, this totality is not something monolithic for him. Kojève’s “end of history” involves the logic of retroactivity, more than half of a century earlier than the debates of the last decades. Indeed, for Kojève, the end of history has already begun to happen, but can only be recognised retroactively. According to Kojève, the end of history began at the time of the completion of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* in 1806, and the post-revolutionary rise of the Napoleon’s Empire, is therefore seen as a prototype of the post-historical “universal and homogeneous State”.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 220.

<sup>20</sup> Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, 222-225.

<sup>21</sup> Žižek, *Sex and the Failed Absolute*, 221.

<sup>22</sup> Kojève, *Reading of Hegel*, 44.

However, for my hypothesis, as discussed here, the circularity, which is dialectically implicated in Kojève's idea of "end of history", is important as not only synonymous with the retroactivity but also as the aspect of a continuous, non-teleological process. It is as if this circularity was indeed running along the surface of a Möbius strip – as if devoid of any goal except that of its own, quantitatively measured, continuation.

Kojève's understanding of the end of history has several other facets and so would require a longer engagement than that provided here. In a second edition of his lectures on Hegel, first published in 1962, Kojève revised and amended his footnote on the end of history. The footnote became far more conservative in its conceptions, identifying the post-historical paradigm with specific – American or Japanese – forms of life, which were de facto subsumed to capitalism in various historically ways.<sup>23</sup> Ironically – with respect to Kojève's earlier enthusiasm about communism – under the hegemonic neoliberalism of the 1990s, all alternatives to the capitalist order were considered definitive failures by the mainstream politics and ideology, and liberal-democratic institutional and ideological frameworks became the very embodiment of the "end of history". For the time being, I will place to one side a number of well-argued challenges to the idea of "end of history" in order to suggest another reading, and indicate this reading's relevance to a critical theory of always-on capitalism.

[B] 3.

Paolo Virno presented, perhaps the most original and articulated critique, and constructive rethinking, of Kojève's concept in his book *The Memory of the Present*,

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<sup>23</sup> Kojève, *Reading of Hegel*, 161-162.

first published in 1999.<sup>24</sup> For Virno, the end of history appears not so much an “end” but, rather, an opening of a “hyper-history.” This opening promises the emergence of a fundamentally new situation, in which the condition of possibility of history ceases to be hidden and becomes a part of actual history. Virno specifies that this opening marks the moment when historicity, potentiality and the other fundamental traits of human being that make possible the process of history become observable – like a root that has risen to the surface. As Virno notes:

... the “end of history” is an idea, or state of mind, that arises precisely when the very condition of possibility of history comes into view; when the root of all historical activity is cast out onto the surface of historical becoming, and is evident as a phenomenon; when the historicity of experience is itself also manifested historically.<sup>25</sup>

According to the well-known claim advanced by Virno and other thinkers of the Italian post-Operaism (or Neo-Operaism), the contemporary form of capitalism extracts economic value from entire life – that is, with life’s mental, affective, linguistic, performative and other elements, which constitute “human nature” – and thus effectively make this “root of all historical activity” the vital part of actual production processes. <sup>26</sup>One can disagree with this position, however: this point seems

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<sup>24</sup> Published in English as Paolo Virno, *Déjà vu and the End of History*, trans. David Broder (London: Verso, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Virno, *Déjà vu*, 33.

<sup>26</sup> Elsewhere, Virno argues: “[w]ith a simplifying but not empty formula, we could even say that post-Fordism puts to work *life* as such.” Paolo Virno, “Natural-

to presume that the contemporary capitalism perfectly *corresponds* to the “human nature” (as it “puts to work” this very nature) – and this position is, in a way, not so different from being a flipside of the neoliberal argument that presents the market-driven society as something “natural” to the humans, i.e. corresponding to their “nature”. Moreover, from my perspective, always-on capitalism requires subjects whose capacity to endure exposure to continuous activities *exceeds* “human nature”, and thus always-on capitalism puts real human beings in a permanent and agonising crisis, with their “human nature” besieged. Indeed, putting life to work creates a wide and widening space of *universalised procrastination* – a vast limbo, which is neither a properly creative, or at least productive, work phase, in whatever sense – nor, even, a fulfilling leisure phase.<sup>27</sup>

At the same time, and in agreement with the general approach of Virno’s argument, one can argue that the continuity-form which was the fundamental, albeit implicit, condition of capitalist modernity becomes visible at this very moment: when “the very condition of possibility of history comes into view” – at the empirical surface of the always-on social regime. In this sense, the monotonous formal continuity, purged of teleology, of being always-on, accurately reflects the current historical and ontological state of affairs. Kojève’s hypothesis, if we abstract this idea itself from its presumed political allegiances (be that communist or neoliberal),

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Historical Diagrams: The New Global Movement and the Biological Invariant,” in *The Italian Difference: Between Nihilism and Biopolitics*, ed. Lorenzo Chiesa and Alberto Toscano (Melbourne: Re. Press, 2009), 146; Virno’s italics.

<sup>27</sup> On this, see Alexei Penzin, “No Time: Contemporaneity between Time Pressure and Procrastination,” in *More Light: Catalogue of the 5th Moscow Biennale*, ed. Catherine de Zegher (Ghent: Mer Paper, 2013), 313-323.

suggests the emergence of a post-historical continuity, with no end and no goal, since the end has already been eliminated.

For this reading of Kojève it is more productive to emphasize one neglected aspect of the Kojève's hypothesis of the post-historical existence – that one which preoccupied me here – of a non-teleological sequence or “circularity”, structurally “without end”: a pure form of continuity, imposed upon society.<sup>28</sup> According to this reading, Kojève's paradoxical “circularity” would be, rather, a new form of deactivation of the teleological dispositive (or *dispositif*, to use Foucault's term here) embedded in European philosophy and theology. In contradistinction to the *dispositif* of historical teleology that captures any continuous activity or process into a presumed goal or outcome, the *dispositif* of pure continuity, which became visible on the ruins of “real socialism”, now subordinates any goal to an unfolding of incessant processes. Of course, once governed by this *dispositif*, concrete productive and reproductive processes have their specific goals and outcomes, but their general teleological horizon is devoid of any meaningful content, except of that formal imperative to “go on.”

Boris Groys provides an insightful observation on this new *dispositif* with respect to art, in a recent book, *In the Flow*:

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<sup>28</sup> In this context, one reference to a Kojève as-yet-unpublished manuscript seems to be quite intriguing. The materials kept among twenty-one boxes in the Fonds Kojève, at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, apparently include a manuscript “on the problem of the continuum (written in German).” See Jeff Love, “Introduction: Atheism and Politics,” in Alexandre Kojève, *Atheism*, trans. Jeff Love (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), XII.

Our real social, political, and technical programmes are oriented towards achieving a certain goal – and they are judged according to their efficiency or ability to achieve this goal. Art programmes and machines, however, are not teleologically oriented. They have no definite goal; they simply go on and on. At the same time, these programmes include the possibility of being interrupted at any moment without losing their integrity. At the same time, these programmes include the possibility of being interrupted at any moment without losing their integrity. [...] Such an [non-teleological] action is conceived from the beginning as having no specific ending – unlike an action that ends when its goal is achieved. Such an action is conceived from the beginning as having no specific ending – unlike an action that ends when its goal is achieved. Thus artistic action becomes infinitely continuable and/or repeatable.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of the perspective outlined here, contemporary art, as an assemblage of the most advanced and anticipatory “machines” of the capitalist culture, perfectly exemplifies the dispositif of continuity. According to Groys, “materialist theory” makes us aware of our own finitude. This in turn provokes a sense of urgency and hectic activity, which is not “teleologically oriented” because of our lack of time.<sup>30</sup> Although Groys refers to a “materialist theory” he links the non-teleological character of the artistic performance to the existential theme of human finitude and lack of time rather than with the ontological pressures of the capitalist continuity-form.

As Groys pointedly notes, in updating his analysis by extending his observations to the field of the political, the contemporary forms of resistance and struggles – such as temporary and sometimes contingent occupations of public spaces

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<sup>29</sup> Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (London: Verso, 2016), 37.

<sup>30</sup> Groys, *In the Flow*, 37.

– are quite similar to contemporary art practices, exactly because of their non-teleological character. These occupations can be stopped or interrupted at any moment. And yet, because they are not “teleologically oriented”, their temporary closures cannot be qualified as their defeats.<sup>31</sup> This insightful parallel creates an important link between the continuity-form and its political and social repercussions. Similarly to Groys, Judith Butler defended the “episodic” character of the movement that had no clearly identifiable goals derived from a specific list of demands but, rather, presented a case for a corporeal and performative alliance of the protesters: “... if Occupy is episodic, then its target is not known in advance.”<sup>32</sup> At this point, Butler had been considering Occupy as an opening of a new type of radical politics – one that flashes and then disappears, only to emerge at another spot, by way of an open-ended continuity of the episodic struggles. Instead of a mobilising teleology, the episodic continuity of contemporary political movements has been considered by Butler similarly, as a sign of its efficiency, not of its defeat. Whatever value these debates may now retain, some years beyond the moment of Occupy, they are indicative of the political resonances of the continuity-form.

[B] 4.

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<sup>31</sup> See for example, Line Spellenberg, “The Death of Spectator: An Interview with Boris Groys.” *Kampnagel*, May, 2015, [https://www.kampnagel.de/media/kosmos/files/16\\_59b12204e4b1e.pdf](https://www.kampnagel.de/media/kosmos/files/16_59b12204e4b1e.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Judith Butler, “So What Are the Demands? And Where Do they Go from Here?” *Tidal: Occupy Theory, Occupy Strategy 2* (2012): 11. Also see Judith Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015).

Contemporary always-on capitalism is fraught with political antagonisms, wars, infrastructural disruptions, and various states of emergency (or, states of exception). One has to recall here Walter Benjamin's famous claim, made in *On the Concept of History*, that "[t]he tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule".<sup>33</sup> Recently Giorgio Agamben has theoretically enhanced this claim, arguing that the state of exception has now become permanent or *continuous*.<sup>34</sup> For Agamben, the contemporary global state of exception presents an outcome of an autonomous political-theological sequence that unfolds from Classical Antiquity, independently from specific socio-historical formations. According to the well-known thesis of Agamben, the division of two types of life, one is personal-biographic (*bios*) and another is impersonal-vegetative (*zoe*) had been introduced already in the Greek polis and then justified in philosophy and theology since Aristotle. Life as *bios*, a biographical life of an individual, had been a part of political and public life from Classical Antiquity. Only in modernity, life as *zoe*, i.e. impersonal-vegetative aspects of human corporeal existence, enters the field of politics, and creates a new, biopolitical condition. The state of exception, which originally meant a temporary suspension of law in situations of war, plague or disaster, gradually becomes permanent or indefinitely continuous since it facilitates the capture of entire human life into the tenets of biopolitical control. As Agamben

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<sup>33</sup> Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History", trans. Rodney Livingston, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938–1940*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), 392.

<sup>34</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

notes, the state of exception is “the original structure in which law encompasses living beings by means of its own suspension”.<sup>35</sup>

From the perspective of the hypothesis of continuity-form, a different genealogy of the contemporary state of exception can be glimpsed at this juncture. This genealogy is closer to Michel Foucault’s position, which – in contradistinction to Agamben – materialistically admits that historically specific epistemic forms are predicated on their biopolitical preconditions.<sup>36</sup> From this perspective, the situation of continuous state of exception is the outcome of an on-going and all-embracing “continualisation” at work, in modern and contemporary capitalism. Even the juridical matrix, i.e. historically specific form of law, can be related to the metamorphosis of capitalist value-form, as the prominent Soviet theorist Evgeny Pashukanis was first arguing in 1920s, followed by other Marxist legal theorists.<sup>37</sup> If the process of value metamorphosis cannot be suspended and has to be incessant, this means that the juridical discourse and its applications are rendered, accordingly, in ways that adjust to dominant capitalist forms. The fluidity of contemporary legislation – its permanent editing, new incidents of “temporary” or exceptional measures (including those which suspend basic human rights) – is predicated on the continuity-

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<sup>35</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> See Foucault’s discussion of the “principle of exteriority” as applied to analysis of epistemic formations, in Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know: Lectures at the Collège de France 1970-71 and Oedipal Knowledge* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 198.

<sup>37</sup> See Evgeny Pashukanis, *Law and Marxism: A General Theory* (London: Pluto Press, 1987) and, for further commentary, Antonio Negri, “Rereading Pashukanis: Discussion Notes,” *Stasis* 5:2 (2017): 8-49.

form of contemporary capitalism. At the same time, even that which is “urgent” or “extraordinary” – that which usually accompanies such states – is trivialised, today, by the continuous flow of media reports, corrections, and updates that render all event-like ruptures in neutralised forms, or as “dead” sequences and bits of abstract information and images.

Remarkably, Agamben’s rethinking of Walter Benjamin’s legacy also includes another aspect related to the question of continuity – in his reading of “Capitalism as Religion”, a thought-provoking fragment from 1921.<sup>38</sup> According to Benjamin’s fragment, the Christian doctrines were secretly germinating embryos of later capitalist practices, as a sort of a “parasite” hidden within their sacramental, scriptural and liturgical corpus. Benjamin argues that religion is not simply one of the conditions of capitalism (as with Protestantism, according to the famous thesis of Max Weber who argued that Protestant ethics is a precondition for the entrepreneurial “spirit” of capitalism); capitalism *is* a religion itself. In his text Benjamin claims that capitalism is a purely practical cult – without any doctrinal element, except for some parodic resemblance to Paganism. However, in noting the importance and originality of Benjamin’s ideas, and providing his own interpretation of them (in terms of sacralisation and “profanation” as two opposite operations, and their contemporary collapse), Agamben somewhat neglects an important aspect of Benjamin’s argument. One of the key features of the cultic practice of capitalism for Benjamin is its

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<sup>38</sup> For the English translation: see Walter Benjamin, “Capitalism as Religion,” trans. Rodney Livingston, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Vol. 1, 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 288-291. See Agamben’s essay “In Praise of Profanation” in his *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 73-92.

“permanent duration”. According to Rodney Livingston’s translation, “[t]here is no day that is not a feast day, in the terrible sense that all its sacred pomp is unfolded before us...”<sup>39</sup> Capitalism-as-cult thus functions as bypassing the distinction between workdays and holidays, in the sense of its nonstop “sacred pomp” and “worship” – that is, the incessant activity of capital itself. Although Benjamin does not provide any explanation of the “permanent duration” of capitalist cult – which can be, as I will argue shortly, derived from Marx’s concepts of political economy – his insights remain far-reaching. Even by the early 1920s, Benjamin had prefigured the limbo of the merging of work and leisure time in late capitalism. But, even more than this, for Benjamin the “permanent duration” points towards a more fundamental continuity, as necessary for capitalist production.<sup>40</sup>

However, in a recent essay (and one that bears the same title as the Benjamin’s fragment) – and, again, with a different interpretative framework, which draws on the theological underpinnings of the notion of credit – Agamben notes: “Capitalism has no *telos*; it is essentially infinite yet precisely for this reason, incessantly in prey of crisis, always in the act of ending.”<sup>41</sup> This never-ending ending – a bad infinity without end or *telos* – highlights another subtle facet of the capitalist continuity. This formulation – although being based on the notion of messianic time of “ending” –

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<sup>39</sup> Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, 288.

<sup>40</sup> The theme of continuity in the earlier works of Benjamin is thoroughly explored in Peter Fenves, *The Messianic Reduction: Walter Benjamin and the Shape of Time* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>41</sup> Giorgio Agamben, “Capitalism as Religion,” in *Creation and Anarchy: The Work of Art and Religion of Capitalism*, trans. Adam Kostko (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 74.

provides a further insight into the idea derived from Kojève's philosophical oeuvre: continuity without *telos*.<sup>42</sup>

[B] 5.

At this point, and to advance to our second hypothesis, a crucial question has to be asked. What would constitute a historical and theoretical genealogy of contemporary capitalism's empirically massive, obsessive continuities? At the centre of my argument here will be the nearly unnoticed discussion of continuity as a condition of capitalist production in several politico-economical works by Karl Marx.

In his late works on political economy, Marx uses the word "continuity" (Kontinuität) with a quite significant emphasis, especially in *Capital*, and other texts related to this fundamental project. In the second volume of *Capital*, Marx notes that "continuity is the characteristic feature of capitalist production and is required by its technical basis even if it is not always completely attainable."<sup>43</sup> By "technical basis", Marx means the factory's machinery – which, ideally, should run without interruption, in order to continue producing value.

The notion of continuity is elaborated at greater length in Marx's earlier draft of *Capital*, the *Grundrisse*, which was completed in 1858 and published

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<sup>42</sup> In his *The Open: Man and Animal*, Agamben intensely and directly engages with Kojève's concept of the end of history, criticizing him for privileging "the aspect of negation and death" while ignoring the biopolitical valorization of life. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 12.

<sup>43</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 2*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Penguin Classics, 1992), 182.

posthumously only in 1939, in the USSR. The noun *Kontinuität* and the adjective *kontinuierlich* are used frequently in the *Grundrisse*, especially in the manuscript sections containing the short subchapters “Continuity of production presupposes suspension of circulation time”<sup>44</sup> and “Fixed capital and continuity of the production process. Machinery and living labor.”<sup>45</sup> In these texts, Marx systematically stresses the importance of “the continuity of production processes” in their capitalist modes, and outlines three aspects of this continuity.<sup>46</sup>

The first two aspects of this continuity are found in the production process and circulation of capital, and they extend and enrich the notes on the continuity of production that briefly surface in the second volume of *Capital*. Marx’s argument, however, is more nuanced in the *Grundrisse*, where he claims that the continuity of production belongs to the very “concept of capital” and can be an “externally compelling condition” in which the reorganization of fixed capital or machinery plays a key role:

Hence the continuity of production becomes an external necessity for capital with the development of that portion of it which is determined as fixed capital. For circulating capital, an interruption, if it does not last so long as to ruin its use value, is only an interruption in the creation of surplus value. But with fixed

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<sup>44</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), 544–549. Although, as is well known, the Soviet editors of *Grundrisse* added headings for sections of the manuscript, the headings nevertheless reflect their contents reasonably well.

<sup>45</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 702–705.

<sup>46</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 719.

capital, the interruption, in so far as in the meantime its use value is necessarily destroyed relatively unproductively, i.e., without replacing itself as value, is the destruction of its original value itself. Hence the continuity of the production process which corresponds to the concept of capital is posited as *conditio sine qua [non]* for its maintenance only with the development of fixed capital; hence likewise the continuity and the constant growth of consumption.<sup>47</sup>

Elsewhere in the *Grundrisse*, Marx makes the same claim more abstractly, presenting it as the value-form's constant metamorphosis:

The *constant continuity* of the process, the unobstructed and fluid transition of value from one form into the other, or from one phase of the process into the next, appears as a fundamental condition for production based on capital to a much greater degree than for all earlier forms of production.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, continuity is specific to capitalist production itself, in Marx's conception, critically *distinguishing* capitalist production from pre-modern, feudal and ancient social-economic formations. This feature of continuity has, as can be expected, now intensified, as the role of machinery in the production of value, including the information-processing technologies and the Internet, has become incommensurably more important. As machinery has been increasingly automated and less dependent on living labour – with the human body's "natural"

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<sup>47</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 719.

<sup>48</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 535; Marx's italics.

anthropological limitations, causing breakdowns and interruptions in the continuous production process – continuity has the potential to emerge in its purest form.

At this point it is possible to note post-Operaist readings of Marx's so-called "Fragment on Machines".<sup>49</sup> This fragment was central for the thinkers of the Italian Autonomia, and partly overlaps with the sections of the *Grundrisse* noted above. This proximity is important since the Fragment also constructs its argument drawing on the premise of the growing importance of fixed capital, i.e. machinery, and, consequently, of scientific knowledge and the "general intellect". Not having space to engage into further debate here, I only allow myself to note that the post-Operaist reading overlooks the question and concept of *Kontinuität*. For example, in his reading of the *Grundrisse*, Antonio Negri briefly mentions "the continuity of value" which "exercises its reign and, with it, the continuity of command" and quotes the passage of Marx about "constant continuity of the process [of production]".<sup>50</sup> But Negri's reading, preoccupied with other questions, never dwells on those points strategically. At the same time, contemporary value theorists who contest this reading are also neglecting this concept. In general, their critical interpretations argue that the position of this fragment is exceptional, rather in a bad way, with respect to Marx's other mature writings on political economy. However, as we noted, the theme of continuity is present not only in the *Grundrisse* but also in *Capital*, which makes it appear as a more systematic and not an exceptional term.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 690-712.

<sup>50</sup> Antonio Negri, *Marx Beyond Marx: Lessons on the Grundrisse* (London: Pluto Press, 1991), 62, 114.

<sup>51</sup> See Riccardo Bellofiore, Guido Starosta and Peter D. Thomas, eds., *In Marx's Laboratory: Critical Interpretations of the Grundrisse* (Chicago: Haymarket Books,

Marx's third discussion of continuity in the *Grundrisse* is no less important. This discussion deals with credit, whose main function is to maintain the continuity by making money available to production processes:

It thus appears as a matter of chance for production based on capital whether or not its essential condition, the continuity of the different processes which constitute its process as a whole, is actually brought about. The suspension of this chance element by capital itself is *credit*.<sup>52</sup>

Marx goes on to argue that continuity is also essential to capitalist production with respect to credit. In earlier modes of production, there was no true credit system, although acts of lending and borrowing, and the practice of usury, were exercised as primordial, "antediluvian forms of capital."<sup>53</sup> The simple acts of lending and borrowing do not amount to credit, however. In capitalist production, credit is necessary to the system since it secures the continuity of production and avoids all interruptions and contingences in the process of value metamorphosis.<sup>54</sup>

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2014). See also Martin Spence, "Marx against Marx: A Critical Reading of the Fragment on Machines," *tripleC* 17:2 (2019): 327-339.

<sup>52</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 535; Marx's italics.

<sup>53</sup> Marx, *Grundrisse*, 535.

<sup>54</sup> For a further discussion of the concept of continuity in Marx, including its distinction from concepts of reproduction and "real subsumption", and the discussion of interpretations of the *Grundrisse* (by Roman Rosdolsky and Alfred Sohn-Rethel, among others), see Penzin, "Always On," 103-105.

This aspect of Marx's reflections on continuity sheds light on contemporary always-on capitalism which, from this perspective, can now be seen to have emerged historically as the solution, it would seem – and a temporary solution, at that – to the problem of continuity. Capitalist continuity-form has been constantly threatened by crisis, economic uncertainty, contingency, and other disruptive factors. These factors can be significantly reduced by multiplying financial instruments, meant to facilitate the smooth, incessant metamorphosis of value. But it also would seem that the role of pure chance in contemporary capitalism has been amplified by a strong speculative trend that can generate profits in one part of the globe while causing havoc and discontinuity in another. Perhaps we should identify this systemic continuity, or continuity-form as contemporary capitalism's necessary condition, and one which, as Marx says, is “not always completely attainable”.<sup>55</sup> That is: we should regard continuity-form as a hegemonic tendency, while admitting there are local displacements of the continuity, caused by contingency, inevitable contradictions, and speculative games.

One can identify a symptom of the impossibility in achieving (so far at least) the “complete attainability” of the ideal continuity-form. This symptom is that the striving is excessively symbolized – in the geometrical forms of countless graphs, curves, diagrams of economic growth and decline, market indexes, and so on. Marx's later interest in the calculation of infinitesimals, expressed in his baroque *Mathematical Manuscripts*, arguably points to his preoccupation with the task of formalising capitalist continuum.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Marx, *Capital: Vol. 2*, 182.

<sup>56</sup> Karl Marx, *Mathematical Manuscripts of Karl Marx* (London, New Park Publications Ltd., 1983). In his letter to Engels of May 1873, Marx wrote: “The

[B] 6.

We now move beyond today's damaging pressures of always-on capitalism and its discussion in Marx's works, in order to address our third theoretical hypothesis. This hypothesis assumes that the theoretical link between subjectivity and capitalist continuity can be established if we delve into the period preceding Marx's philosophical and political-economic works. For this, one can track the foundational debates on subjectivity and continuity back to the debates in philosophy of the seventeenth century, in predications or anticipations of the coming capitalist modernity.

Since the early 1970s, several important Marxist interpretations of this historic period, by thinkers such as Balibar, Negri and Elster, emphasized connections between the emergent dynamics of capitalism and many aspects of the seventeenth century's philosophical thought. These aspects and connections include Locke's concepts of "personal identity", property and appropriation, Descartes's *cogito* and its separation from the world (as reflecting the crisis caused by the imposition of the bourgeois State-Form on the early modern society), and Leibniz's "pre-established harmony", as linked to the impersonal modality of emergent capitalist power. They also included important structural analogies between the understanding of divine

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matter is as follows: you know tables in which prices, calculated by percent, etc. etc. are represented in their growth in the course of a year etc. showing the increases and decreases by zig-zag lines. I have repeatedly attempted, for the analysis of crises, to compute these 'ups and downs' as fictional curves, and I thought [...] to infer mathematically from this an important law of crises."; Marx, *Mathematical Manuscripts*, 220.

creative acts in the philosophical theology of seventeenth century, and early capitalist entrepreneurial activity governed by the imperative of maximizing profits.<sup>57</sup> Yet even in these innovative studies, the continuity of consciousness or thinking has not been related to Marx's concept of continuity as necessary condition of emergent capitalist production. There are many instances, in the source texts, indicating the possibility of just such relations. The concept of "personal identity" in John Locke – and, perhaps, the very invention of the crucial concept of consciousness – could lend to the idea of continuity of the (to use here Hannah Arendt's later expression) "life of mind".<sup>58</sup>

Thus continuity becomes an essential characteristic of consciousness and mental life. Even prior to Locke, Descartes's *cogito* (that the grounding certainty of the very act of "I think") bases itself on the idea that "the soul always thinks". For Descartes, despite the illusions of the very opposite to thinking (brought about by fainting, sleeping, or lapses of memory), the "thinking substance" cannot but think,

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<sup>57</sup> See Antonio Negri, *Political Descartes: Reason, Ideology and the Bourgeois Project* (London: Verso, 2007), originally published in Italian in 1970; Jon Elster, *Leibniz et la formation de l'esprit capitaliste* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1975); Etienne Balibar, *Identity and Difference: John Locke and the Invention of Consciousness* (London: Verso, 2013), originally published in French in 1998.

<sup>58</sup> For an analysis of consciousness and personal identity in Locke, see Etienne Balibar, *Identity and Difference: John Locke and the Invention of Consciousness* (London: Verso, 2013). Balibar also stresses connections between Locke's thought and early capitalist modernity. Among the secondary literature on the history of early modern philosophy see, for example, Udo Thiel, *The Early Modern Subject: Self-Consciousness and Personal Identity from Descartes to Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

and all the time, since this substance has only one attribute – to think. Gottfried Leibniz elevates continuity into a principle that embraces both the mental and material aspects of the universe, in introducing the so-called “Law of Continuity” (*lex continuitatis*), as applied to both nature and human mind. According to Leibniz, all the ostensible interruptions of continuity that can be observed, or encountered in our experience of the world, are only illusions created by the imperfection of our cognitive apparatus, which is not able to perceive, consciously, the infinitely divisible portions or “folds” of matter.<sup>59</sup>

Whatever specific reasons and arguments for asserting the continuity of consciousness may have been in operation, classical thinkers of the seventeenth century all agree about one important constellation of ideas that combines a principle of continuity with the subjective “life of the mind”. For instance, for Descartes, the reason for continuity of mental life follows from his understanding of the two postulated substances, which he identifies as Thought and Extension. *Res cogitans*, or thinking substance, has only one attribute: to think. If thinking ceased, even momentarily, this substance, defined in this way, would also immediately perish:

I saw on the contrary that from the mere fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed;

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<sup>59</sup> See, for example, Richard T. W. Arthur, “The Labyrinth of the Continuum,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Leibniz*, ed. Maria Rosa Antognazza (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 276-289.

whereas if I had merely ceased thinking, even if everything else I had ever imagined had been true, I should have had no reason to believe that I existed.<sup>60</sup>

For Locke, the idea of “continued consciousness” emerges from his debate with Descartes and his followers, the Cartesians.<sup>61</sup> In his development of an empiricist epistemology in his *Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), Locke fundamentally rejects the concept of innate ideas, as had been implied in the Cartesian concept of thinking substance. And, together with this rejection, Locke admits that we are not always-on in relation to thinking – exceptions may be found in such states as sleep and fainting, as well as in early infant years. However, there is a *higher* continuity than only the continuity of fragile, empirically understood thinking, and that is one of a consciousness, whose continuity is sealed, and kept intact, due to personal identity, which seamlessly connects the sequences of our daily experiences.<sup>62</sup> And, finally, for this sequence of ideas: in 1704, Gottfried Leibniz attacks Locke, in his *New Essays on Human Understanding*. He introduces the idea of a continuum of mental activity that cannot be broken since our perceptive apparatus is based on

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<sup>60</sup> René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writing of Descartes, Vol. 1*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 127.

<sup>61</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Kitchener, Ontario: Batoche, 2001), 278.

<sup>62</sup> See the chapter “Of Identity and Diversity” in Locke, *Concerning Human Understanding*, 262-280.

“minute perceptions” (“les petites perceptions”) and that perceptive apparatus is always-on – even in such low-intensity states as sleep or fainting.<sup>63</sup>

In all this therefore, it is reasonable to propose that the importance of the, or a, model of an incessant, continuous activity – the model that now dominates contemporary always-on capitalism – can be found in these subtle inventions of centuries before, by interpreting them (as Foucault’s concept of genealogy suggests) in the light of our historical present. One could, of course, go further back, and find the emergence of ideas on continuous intellectual activity in Aristotle (who first wrote on the problem continuity in *Metaphysics and Physics*) and then in Medieval theology, with its position on God’s “continuous creation” (*creatio continua*) which effectively supplements the concept of the original creation, and is seen as a fundamental divine activity that provides an unending and incessant maintenance for the world.<sup>64</sup> But, crucially, it was the philosophers of the seventeenth century who

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<sup>63</sup> G. W. Leibniz, Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, *Leibniz: New Essays on Human Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 54-56. For commentary, see Larry M. Jorgensen, “The Principle of Continuity and Leibniz’s Theory of Consciousness,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 47 (2009): 223–48.

<sup>64</sup> For a useful overview of philosophical, theological and mathematical theories of continuity, see John L. Bell, *The Continuous, the Discrete and the Infinitesimal in Philosophy and Mathematics* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019). Giorgio Agamben indirectly tackles this concept in his analysis of the “providential machine” of the Christian theology. However, he does not discuss directly the paradigm of “*creatio continua*” and its implications for the economic practice of capitalism. See Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory: For a Theological Genealogy of Economy and Government* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

identified continuity as the characteristic of the subject, not only of material universe. And it was this identification which first opened up the space for the philosophical justification of the modern form of permanently active subjectivity and incessantly operating social institutions. This subjective continuity eventually encounters the objective continuity (“Kontinuität”) of the value-metamorphosis, which Marx first articulates in the *Grundrisse*. Thus Leibniz’s *lex continuatis* not only expresses continuity as a key principle of the material universe and subjective consciousness, but actively and powerfully affirms the extant conditions of continuity as of primary importance. Thus the incessantly conscious subject of early modern philosophy anticipates, and justifies, the social paradigm of continuous activity that will be fully *objectified* and established a few centuries later – as a pressuring imperative in the social reality generated by late capitalism.<sup>65</sup>

[B] 7.

By way of conclusion, let me recapitulate the three hypotheses that have been outlined so far, and add a fourth.

Firstly, via the discussion of Kojève’s concept of the “end of history”, the argument was advanced that capitalist continuity has become, today, a dominant social form, and one that has a non-teleological character.

Secondly came the argument that continuity (Kontinuität) presents a “*conditio sine qua non*” of capitalist production, apparent in Marx’s political-economic work.

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<sup>65</sup> By using the term “objectified”, I refer here to the way in which continuity, being originally a philosophical principle, becomes “objective” in the sense that it acquires the status of a regulative principle that governs social and economic life in contemporary capitalism.

Thirdly I suggested that the philosophical discourse that emerged in early capitalist modernity emphasised a continuity of the “life of mind” as a constitutive feature of subjectivity. And this then, in its encounter with the objective processes of the capitalist value-metamorphosis, came to constitute the paradigm of incessant activity.

My fourth hypothesis will now be shaped by looking for *other* continuities, which would work *against* monotonous pressures of the capitalist always-on.

In these brief closing notes I want to identify – broadly, and through the lens of the concepts discussed throughout this chapter – the two main forms of struggle against the capitalist continuum that have emerged, despite the capitalist continuum’s strengthening in late modernity, together with their numerous, intense and sometimes overlapping variations.

One form of struggle has honed in on a straight and non-teleological suspension of the continuous metamorphosis of value, and effected its violent disruption. Groups and strategies associated with this first form include Théorie Communiste, Tiqqun, and the Invisible Committee – which could be identified as insurrectionist in their approach to struggle.<sup>66</sup> The second form of struggle is based on *constructing another continuity* altogether: the continuity of struggles and organisations, lasting comradeships, mutual care and support, and enduring political affects, strategies, and aspirations. In terms of the specific shape of this form, the second model has been conceived as a continued collective and radical effort (a “permanent revolution” no less), or a stubborn continuity of struggles in spite of any

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<sup>66</sup> See Benjamin Noys, *Communization and its Discontents: Contestation, Critique, and Contemporary Struggles* (London: Minor Compositions, 2012).

and all defeats. This form recalls the name of the radical 1970s Italian group, to which Pier Paolo Pasolini belonged: La Lotta Continua – “the struggle continues”.

Even at the level of specific individuals, this continuity of struggles can be embodied as an incessant, sometimes feverish and self-sacrificial activity. For instance, Alexander Voronsky, describing his encounters with Lenin in a memoir, writes: “[s]ometimes he had been closing his eyes, being extremely exhausted, and these moments, very short, seemed to be enough to recover his forces and return to continuous activity again.”<sup>67</sup> And, remarkably, in her recent book *Comrade*, Jodi Dean also emphasizes a similar form: one that connects individual and collective continuities, intrinsic to this important concept of the radical left political and intellectual legacy, and which she singles out from other forms of social and political belonging. As Dean writes (in drawing on a novel by the Soviet communist writer Andrei Platonov), comradeship is “the zero-point of relationality necessary to continue”.<sup>68</sup>

Consider then such a “permanent revolution” mode, outside its intense political uses in the debates among various groups and tendencies of the radical left

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<sup>67</sup> Alexander Voronsky, *Za živoj i mertvoj vodoj* (Moscow: Common Place, 2019), 470 (my translation). For an abridged English translation, see Alexander Voronsky, *Waters of Life and Death*, trans. L. Zarine (London: Allen & Unwin, 1936). Voronsky was a Bolshevik activist before the October Revolution, and a literary theorist and a member of the Left Opposition in the 1920s. He was executed in the 1930s.

<sup>68</sup> And Dean also notes a performative continuity of comradeship, with the observation that the Communist Party members “incessantly hail each other as ‘Comrade’”; Jodi Dean, *Comrade: An Essay on Political Belonging* (London: Verso, 2019), 55, 96.

across the twentieth century – where this mode meant, mostly, the possibility of a growth of local democratic revolutions into a global socialist revolution. Even a very brief excursus from the viewpoint of the history of the concept “permanent revolution” will be fruitful, revealing meanings that were marginalised in their later uses, and now seem relevant for the discussion here. The expression “permanent revolution” was already recognized around the time of the French Revolution. It initially addressed the idea of a continuously unfolding assembly, and one which could not be dissolved by a sovereign decision.<sup>69</sup> Marx first mentions a necessary permanence of revolutionary processes in his early *Jewish Question* (1843), and he elaborates further, together with Engels, in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848).<sup>70</sup> Slightly later, in the most radical pronouncement of “permanent revolution” of *Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League* (1850), which was written in the aftermath of the Revolution of 1848-1849 in Germany, Marx and

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<sup>69</sup> See Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido, “The Historical Origin of the Expression ‘Permanent Revolution’,” in *Witnesses to Permanent Revolution: the Documentary Record*, trans. and ed. Richard B. Day and Daniel Gaido (Leiden: Brill/Historical Materialism Book Series, 2009), 2.

<sup>70</sup> In the *Manifesto*, Marx and Engels also note the permanent “revolutionizing” character of their enemy (i.e. capitalism) itself, according to the famous dictum that “all that is solid melts into air”. From the point of view developed here, this chimes with “continuity-form”, which dissolves all solid social units and traditions by throwing them into its incessantly unfolding processes.

Engels emphasized permanent revolution as a “battle-cry” for the workers.<sup>71</sup> Among other things, they note a continuity that even exceeds the character of the revolution, as a singular event: the revolutionaries “must work to ensure that the immediate revolutionary excitement is not suddenly suppressed after the victory. On the contrary, it must be sustained as long as possible.”<sup>72</sup>

There is a more general political-philosophical concept that reflects the continuity of struggles that exceeds singular revolutionary events: le pouvoir constituant, or constituent power. This is a concept that also arose around the time of the French Revolution. In *Insurgencies*, Antonio Negri frequently emphasizes the “creative continuity of constituent power”,<sup>73</sup> in a book which established an important theoretical link between the formal and juridical understanding of constituent power as a faculty of the general assembly of people, in order to create basic laws and constitution for their country, and the Marxist tradition of the class struggle. This continuous constituent process – as always present in society, even when in a weak or subterranean form at certain moments – reflects the ontological continuity of the power coming from the “Many”, and not from the sovereign “One.” This power can be understood as both insurgent political power and as the power of labour – that is: the power of the majority who creates all social wealth. Another continuity that can be uncovered in this process indeed belongs to the collective subject of the “Many”

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<sup>71</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, “Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League,” *Marxists Internet Archive*, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1850-ad1.htm>.

<sup>72</sup> Marx and Engels, “Address of the Central Committee.”

<sup>73</sup> Antonio Negri, *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 329.

rather than the sovereign “One”. The sovereign power constantly attempts to disrupt the constituent power of the Many, in order to establish the abstract continuity of the capitalist value-metamorphoses.

At the most general level, the very idea of communism has become the name for the ultimate and most radical expression of struggle against the imposed continuity of the capitalist value-metamorphosis, in its anticipation of a different social and ontological regime altogether. Even the “real socialisms” of the twentieth century, in a sense suspended (during the historical sequence opened in 1917) the incessant and catastrophic movement of the capitalist value-metamorphosis that celebrated its regained powers after 1991. The emerging new understanding of the “real socialisms” of twentieth century then goes beyond the well-known clichés about their inner negativities, ideological deviations and political failures.<sup>74</sup> It is precisely the ultimate unworkableness of the “command economy”, with its inexorable “inefficiency”, that has been the sole witness of an early attempt to counterbalance that economy’s incessant effectuation of the continuity-form. These radical experiments, in the name of communism, were dysfunctional attempts to suspend the capitalist continuum. Or, better yet, to turn it into another continuity – and one coordinated by the whole society, rather than by the elemental forces and flows of the market. Future radical endeavours to undermine the ontological-economic machine of “always-on capitalism” will need to build on these radical experiments, and to develop their own scenarios.

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<sup>74</sup> On this new understanding, see Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript* (London: Verso, 2009), and Alexei Penzin, “Stalin Beyond Stalin? A Paradoxical Hypothesis of Communism by Alexandre Kojève and Boris Groys,” *Crisis and Critique* 3: 1 (2016): 301-340.

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