



The Time of Capital: Suspension and Acceleration in the Post-Pandemic World¹

*El tiempo del capital: suspensión y aceleración
en el mundo pospandémico*

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic constituted a historically unprecedented phenomenon: never before had more than half the global population been confined while digitally interconnected. Initially appearing as interruptions in the flow of capital, lockdowns became opportunities for functional reintegration, as digital platforms and generative artificial intelligence intensified labor rhythms and accelerated the logic of accumulation. This paper analyzes the dialectical structure of this temporal contradiction, showing how pandemic suspensions were rapidly subsumed by capitalist acceleration, exemplifying capital's adaptability. Drawing on Karl Marx's critique of political economy—particularly the concepts of real subsumption, general intellect, collective worker, and commodity fetishism—alongside the philosophies of Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno, it distinguishes between pseudo-interruptions internal to capital and genuine ruptures grounded in material resistance.

Key Words: artificial intelligence (AI), COVID-19 pandemic, domination, time, social acceleration.

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Resumen

La pandemia de COVID-19 constituyó un fenómeno sin precedentes: nunca antes más de la mitad de la población mundial había estado confinada y, al mismo tiempo, conectada digitalmente. Lo que al inicio pareció una interrupción del flujo del capital pronto se convirtió en una ocasión para su reintegración funcional, pues las plataformas digitales y la inteligencia artificial generativa intensificaron los ritmos laborales y aceleraron la lógica de la acumulación. Este artículo analiza la estructura dialéctica de dicha contradicción temporal y muestra cómo las suspensiones pandémicas fueron rápidamente subsumidas por la aceleración capitalista, lo que pone de manifiesto la capacidad adaptativa del capital. A partir de la crítica de Karl Marx de la economía política —en particular, los conceptos de subsunción real, intelecto general, trabajador colectivo y fetichismo de la mercancía— y en diálogo con Walter Benjamin y Theodor W. Adorno, el texto distingue entre pseudointerrupciones internas al capital y rupturas efectivas ancladas en la resistencia material.

Palabras clave: inteligencia artificial (IA), pandemia COVID-19, dominación, tiempo, aceleración social.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a historically singular event: never before had over half of the world's population been simultaneously confined under conditions of unprecedented digital connectivity. What at first appeared as a suspension of the flows of capital and daily life soon emerged as a moment of functional reorganization within capitalist temporality. Rather than undermining the logic inherent to society based on capitalist relations of production, the crisis catalyzed a restructuring in which digital infrastructures, artificial intelligence (AI), and algorithmic governance accelerated the rhythms of labor, production, and consumption. This paper interrogates the dialectical character of this transformation, analyzing the simultaneous suspension and intensification of capitalist time regimes as neither purely contingent nor externally imposed, but as expressions of capital's structural adaptability.

What emerges from this conjuncture is a dual process. On the one hand, the logic of capital absorbed the interruption through mechanisms that intensified accumulation and discipline, embodying a positive dialectic that reinforced domination. On the other hand, moments of resistance, for instance the Staten Island Amazon unionization, disclosed the potential for a negative dialectic rooted in material standstills and historical

memory of the oppressed. By bringing Marx's critique of political economy into dialogue with the temporal philosophies of Benjamin, Adorno, and contemporary theorists of capitalist temporalities, the article aims to distinguish between pseudo-ruptures internal to capital and genuine interruptions that may reconfigure its temporal logic. The stakes of this analysis lie in rethinking the politics of time under digital capitalism: how to recognize and act within the cracks that crises momentarily open.

1. DIALECTICS OF TEMPORAL RUPTURES AND ACCELERATION

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic we witnessed the coexistence of two divergent temporal regimes, an unprecedented and revealing historical experience. This pandemic was unparalleled, first, because it has forced more than four billion people or fifty four percent of the global population into confinement simultaneously (International Energy Agency, 2020)—a scale of lockdown never before seen—and, second, because, unlike earlier quarantines, it has unfolded under conditions of widespread digital connectivity and establishment of an infrastructure for tracking, measuring, and forecasting human behavior (Beaunoyer et al., 2020; Pasquinelli, 2023). Thus, the COVID-19 pandemic should be understood not simply as a temporary disruption but as a dialectical reconfiguration of capitalist temporality—marked by a simultaneous suspension of lockdowns and acceleration due to digitalization.

On one side, the pandemic introduced a partial suspension in the temporal continuity of capitalist production and a detention of habitual activity on a planetary scale. By June 2020, estimates suggest that confinement had extended to more than four billion people across over one hundred countries. In parallel, global air passenger volume fell by more than sixty percent and road traffic by roughly half worldwide, with thirty-four metropolises registering declines of up to ninety percent in April 2020 (Chu et al., 2020). These figures index a generalized disruption of ordinary social and economic rhythms during pandemic.

As Penzin (2020) suggests, the widespread lockdowns interrupted to some extent the movement of capital, disrupting global supply chains and value production. Although a similar kind of time interruption—albeit in markedly different social contexts and derived from transformative human praxis of revolutionary agents—was viewed with hope by authors such as

Sorel (2004), who theorized the general strike, and Benjamin (2006), who conceived interruptions of the historical continuum as potentially emancipatory, what actually unfolded during the COVID-19 pandemic was not a disruption but rather a further consolidation and acceleration of capitalist dynamics.

Yet Penzin's reading of this *pause* remains partial, overlooking the simultaneous acceleration in the deployment of digital technologies and the intensification of work within virtual platforms, where productivity was increasingly organized through AI. Indeed, the pandemic functioned less as a historical rupture capable of precipitating the collapse of the existing system of production than as a catalyst that intensified and rendered visible already existing tendencies. As Amankwah-Amoah (2021) argues, it marked a "great acceleration" in the global turn toward digital platforms and algorithmic governance, particularly in domains such as remote work, online commerce, logistics, and data-driven services.

Crucially, this suspension was not experienced as a uniform temporal cease. The capacity to shift work online was both limited and sharply stratified: globally, only about one in five jobs could be performed from home, yet this average concealed steep gradients between high-income countries, where roughly one in three jobs was teleworkable, and low-income countries, where only about one in twenty-six could be done remotely once internet access is taken seriously (Garrote Sánchez et al. 2021). For vast segments of the global non-cognitive working class, those employed in factories, agricultural labor, care work, healthcare, and transport, there was no withdrawal from labor, but rather an intensification of exposure and exertion. These workers were not integrated into digital migration; they remained materially tethered to essential infrastructures, performing the very tasks that sustained life under lockdown.

Nonetheless, the implementation of digital mediation also reshapes work that still requires workers' physical presence. For instance, in warehouses and delivery networks, algorithmic scheduling and real-time performance metrics coordinate tasks and pace labor even though the work itself remains irreducibly on-site. Recent research on Amazon fulfillment centers shows that on-site labor is increasingly organized through integrated labor-tracking systems that combine productivity metrics, handheld devices, and barcode scans, effectively rendering workers' activity legible as continuous streams of numbers (Cheon & Erickson, 2025).

At the level of organizational performance, recent econometric evidence similarly finds that sustained AI adoption is associated with higher output growth and gains in total factor productivity, even if implementation costs can be nontrivial and the benefits are uneven across sectors and firm sizes (Sun & Minjie, 2026). Together, these findings support the claim that digital mediation and AI actively reshape work organization and its tempo.

Even though the pandemic introduced a spatio-temporal shift toward virtual labor, for manual and care workers it entailed heightened material exposure to sickness and death. In this regard, Matthay et al. (2022) show that the pandemic's "virtual turn" redistributed the risk of death: in a cohort of twenty-five million working-age adults in California, the authors estimate that if everyone had occupied the lowest-risk position, namely employment in a nonessential sector with a telework option and in the highest wage quintile, COVID-19 mortality would have been forty-three percent lower. This counterfactual makes clear that excess death was concentrated in racialized, essential, on-site, non-telework forms of labor.

What the pandemic suspended for some, it intensified for others, revealing a stark asymmetry between those whose lives could be mediated through screens and those whose labor, precisely because it could not be digitized, became more precarious and disposable:

those who constitute replaceable labor or who dwell outside the zone of productivity [...] are considered the refuse, the waste of the common world, living, in fact, in the endless time of unpayable debt, a debt that suffuses life and survives the life of the debtor (Butler, 2022: 4).

In this sense, the digital divide is a structural condition of contemporary capitalism: the exclusion of bodies from digital abstraction is the very mechanism that renders their labor essential and their lives expendable.

Amazon's warehouses revealed the pandemic's uneven impact on labor, becoming sites of both intensified accumulation and organized resistance. As Kassem (2023) shows, Amazon's exponential growth during the pandemic was enabled by the intensified exploitation of a racialized and precarious workforce, whose designation as "essential" masked their systemic disposability. While white-collar labor was digitally abstracted, warehouse workers remained physically exposed, disciplined by algorithmic surveillance, denied adequate protection, and systematically targeted

by anti-union campaigns. Despite walkouts and coordinated transnational actions, Amazon's decentralized infrastructure and reliance on contingent labor neutralized much of the workers' disruptive potential, illustrating how capital reorganizes in moments of crisis to deepen its grip over labor.

And yet, precisely within these repressive conditions, new antagonisms crystalized. In April 2022, workers at the JFK8 warehouse in Staten Island formed the first union in Amazon's U. S. history (Kassem, 2023: 451). This victory reveals the contradictory unity of crisis and resistance: the very conditions that intensified capitalist domination also rendered its mechanisms more legible, catalyzing processes of politicization and collective subjectivation. Thus, while the pandemic reinforced the logic of accumulation, it simultaneously exposed its fault lines, opening a horizon, however tentative, for renewed struggles over the organization of life and labor under late capitalism.

While Penzin (2020) reads the turn to digital labor and remote work as a reactive maneuver—a defensive strategy by capital's managers to maintain continuity during a moment of disruption—, a more dialectical account reveals these developments as immanent to capital's historical logic. Rather than *ad hoc* responses, they exemplify what Braudel (1977) famously described as capitalism's greatest strength: its ability to adapt and to absorb disruption by reorganizing its modes of accumulation. The pandemic, in this light, did not inaugurate novel tendencies *ex nihilo*, but it functioned as a catalytic moment that intensified and rendered visible contradictions already embedded in the late-capitalist formation.

This dialectical narrative is offered in this paper not as a totalizing or teleological history of the COVID-19 pandemic, but as a situated critical interpretation that highlights a determinate connection: the contradiction between the partial interruption of corporeal circulation and the acceleration of digital infrastructures of coordination and control. The claim is not that the pandemic inevitably produced digital acceleration, but that, under existing capitalist relations, it was largely processed in ways that made already operative dynamics—platformization and AI-mediated organization of work—more legible and more intense.

On the other side of the temporal suspension, the pandemic triggered an acceleration in the deployment of AI—usually defined as the simulation of human intelligence contained in social relations of labor by machines—across multiple domains, most notably healthcare, epidemic management, teleworking, and education. Far from representing a temporary adapta-

tion, this shift has transformed the social, economic, and cultural fabric of contemporary life.

This is evident in the convergence of several critical diagnoses formulated prior to the crisis. Crary's (2013) analysis of the imposition of a 24/7 temporal regime—designed to eliminate the distinction between work and rest in order to capture every waking moment for production or consumption—anticipates the pandemic's amplification of digitally mediated labor and life. Likewise, Rosa's (2013) account of social acceleration as a structural feature of late modernity—manifested in the speeding-up of technological innovation, social change, and everyday rhythms—gained empirical clarity during the pandemic, when digital infrastructures intensified rather than suspended capitalist temporality. Finally, Virilio's (2000) notion of the "dromospheric effect," describing the saturation of social life by the logic of digital acceleration, offers a prescient framework for grasping the pandemic's role in heightening the velocity and ubiquity of digital capitalism. While it is essential to recall that these regimes of acceleration and temporal intensity are unevenly distributed across the population (Wajcman, 2014), their general tendency remains a crucial element in understanding post-pandemic transformations.

To summarize, lockdowns and social distancing measures compelled the near-instantaneous migration, where possible, of labor, learning, and social interaction into digital space, giving rise to the acceleration of digitization, which can be defined as a transformation that uses digitized information to make our work faster and more efficient (Pellicelli, 2023). The implementation of generative AI tools has accelerated everyday life by enhancing productivity while simultaneously redefining the very notion of efficiency within the hegemony of instrumental rationality centered on solving the problems in the most efficient manner (Morozov, 2024).

As Lund et al. (2021) suggest, the pandemic accelerated trends in remote work, automation, and labor market restructuring, with up to twenty-five percent more workers than previously estimated likely needing to change occupations. In this sense, the pandemic condensed and projected into the future the contradictions already inscribed in the transformation to digital capitalism: platformization, outsourcing, financialization, and algorithmic control (Morozov, 2020; Žižek, 2021).

In light of the foregoing, the pandemic emerges not merely as a health crisis but as a temporal and technological inflection point in the history of capitalist development. What was partially suspended was the material

circulation of capital, its corporeal flows of labor, commodities, and bodies, temporarily arrested by lockdowns that fractured the spatial and temporal continuity of global value production. Yet this suspension was dialectically accompanied by an unprecedented acceleration in the digitization of life, which reconfigured the conditions of social reproduction, and, for the population not excluded from digital infrastructures, made everyday life faster and increasingly governed by the imperatives of digital tempo.

To characterize the temporal dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic as dialectical is to emphasize the internal contradictions that drive capitalist development. The partial interruption of physical circulation did not constitute a mere external disruption to capitalism's ordinary functioning. Rather, this interruption formed an internal contradiction, creating the precise conditions for the acceleration of digital capitalism. Thus, the pandemic's suspension of traditional capitalist rhythms and its simultaneous acceleration of digitization were dialectically intertwined, revealing the capacity of capital to regenerate itself precisely through the contradictions it generates, since Marx (1973: 706) claims that "capital itself is the moving contradiction." Nonetheless, the temporal dialectic analyzed in this section is positive in the specific sense that its contradictions did not destabilize the system but were swiftly absorbed and mobilized to extend the totalizing logic of capital.

2. FETISHIZED AI COMMODITY AS A DISPOSITIVE OF ACCELERATED TEMPORALITY

To develop a more profound comprehension of the deeper dynamics that generate the perceptible acceleration described in the previous section, I argue that a dialectical materialist approach, critically derived from Marx's writings, offers the conceptual tools needed to elucidate its meaning within capitalist society. To grasp how AI tools transform the labor process, I argue that Marx's account of the real subsumption of labor under capital, developed in chapter fourteen of the first volume of *Capital* (Marx, 2024), offers a meaningful framework, since it captures how AI reshapes the labor process from within in order to intensify productivity and increase profit. Marx (2024: 467) argues that in order to increase productive power of labor, independently of the limits of the workday, the labor process must be revolutionized. My contention is that the deployment of AI

remakes the labor process itself, marking a renewed phase of real subsumption that, as argued in the previous section, intensifies the rhythm and productivity of labor.

In this section, I show how Marxist categories clarify the nature of this transformation of labor, providing a deeper grasp of the temporal acceleration that the previous sections described at a more surface level. If the pandemic revealed a positive dialectic of suspension and acceleration within capitalist temporality, the everyday application of generative AI should be understood as the core expression of its accelerated pole—not simply as a technological advance, but as the concentrated embodiment of historically developed collective human capacities. AI within the critical materialist tradition can be defined as:

a systematic mechanization and capitalization of collective knowledge into new apparatuses, into the datasets, algorithms, and statistical models of machine learning, among other techniques... as a late avatar of the collective worker, the *Gesamtarbeiter* (Pasquinelli, 2023: 94).

Under this critical materialist understanding, the development of new technological diapositives like AI is correlated with the division of labor—the most fundamental of which is the separation based on the illusory dualistic divorce between *head* or intellectual labor and *hand* or manual labor—and of material conditions driven by the exploitation of surplus value. While all human labor is necessarily an ontological unity of thought and matter, only ideologically separated into manual and intellectual, AI reinforces the illusion of the possibility of purely intellectual labor, obscuring the material genealogy of all knowledge.

Marx (2024: 352) argues that the social relations of production (the division of labor within the wage system) drive the development of the means of production (machinery): “Machine-drive production thus arose spontaneously on a material foundation.” Thus, the new scientific discoveries are usually not simply the inventions derived from autonomous scientific disciplines existing somehow *above* the society, since for instance “it was the steam engine which gave birth to thermodynamics, rather than other way around” (Pasquinelli, 2023: 91).

Another example of social and material conditions of what seems purely *theoretical* knowledge is Galison’s (2003) contention that the transition from Newtonian to Einsteinian physics stems from a technological

reconfiguration of temporal synchronization during their lifetimes and not from the autonomous reconfiguration of ideas within the minds of scientists: whereas Newton's framework relied on a single, centrally governed clock that imposed uniform time, Einstein's emerged within an electromechanical network of telegraphic and telephonic signals that distributed time relationally across space.

It is now widely recognized (Pasquinelli, 2023; Veraza, 2023) that Marx's notion of the general intellect, introduced in the "Fragment on Machines" of the *Grundrisse* (1973: 706), offers a valuable perspective from which to analyze the political economy of AI—not as autonomous machine intelligence, but as historically accumulated social knowledge that has been objectified, abstracted, subordinated to capital so as to remake the labor process toward greater productivity, thereby increasing relative surplus-value. In Marx's (2024: 466-467) terms, this shift concerns the production of relative rather than absolute surplus value, since instead of expanding exploitation by lengthening the working day, capital increases surplus-value by raising productivity so that necessary labor time is reduced and a larger portion of the same day is converted into surplus labor.

The reading of AI developed here treats it as a material objectification of the general intellect and, in that sense, as a central medium through which contemporary social time is organized and labor process, revolutionized. The emphasis on AI's role in reorganizing temporality is intended to capture a historically specific form of appearance when technology presents itself as an autonomous subject, as though the tempo of life were imposed by the machine itself. The argument, however, concerns precisely this fetishized appearance, analyzing how objectified social knowledge comes to stand over against its producers as an independent power, thereby preserving a materialist orientation that locates the driving force in capitalist social relations rather than in any alleged technological inevitability.

Nonetheless, Marx refers to the notion of the general intellect only once, and precisely in the *Grundrisse*, a text often regarded as his most imaginative but also his most experimental work. As Harvey (2019: 342) cautions, it is therefore somewhat presumptuous to ground an entire Marxist interpretive tradition—namely that of cognitive capitalism (Moulier-Boutang, 2011; Rindermann, 2018; Virno, 2007)—on so slender a textual foundation. For this reason, I limit myself to briefly drawing out certain

productive associations out of the idea of the general intellect without exceeding the theoretical boundaries that Marx conceptualization permits.

In this perspective, Marx argues that the growth of fixed capital—machines, technology, infrastructure—reveals how extensively society's collective knowledge—science and technology—has itself become a productive force. Rather than relying primarily on individual labor, capitalist production increasingly depends upon objectified forms of human collective knowledge, derived and separated from concrete labor, embedded in machinery. Marx writes explicitly in *Grundrisse* in the sole fragment where the notion of general intellect is mentioned:

Nature builds no machines [...]. They are *organs of the human brain created by the human hand*; the power of knowledge, objectified. The development of fixed capital indicates to what degree general social knowledge has become a direct force of production, and to what degree, hence, the conditions of the process of social life itself have come under the control of the general intellect and been transformed in accordance with it (Marx, 1973: 706).

Consequently, the conditions of human social life and labor processes become directly governed by this generalized, externalized knowledge, whose genealogy is obscured by its apparent autonomy and technical neutrality—what Marx calls the general intellect—, shaping society according to its logic accumulation and exploitation rather than human needs or autonomy. Viewed through Marx's concept of general intellect, AI appears as an advanced form of objectified collective knowledge, as an alienated instrumental rationality indifferent toward whichever ends is being used, but ready to solve as fast as possible any given task. Once embedded in machinery, such accumulated knowledge becomes a direct productive force that, by increasing the productivity of labor, augments surplus value.

However, once historically produced human knowledge becomes crystallized in machines, it is necessarily alienated from its producers. Marx observed, both in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, that workers cease to act as active subjects in the labor process and instead confront machinery—and the embedded knowledge—as external and alien forces dominating and regulating their labor. In this regard, AI is not a neutral tool, but rather a “social hieroglyphic” (Marx, 2024: 51) that conceals the social relations of production, while simultaneously acting as an intermediary that reconfigures those relations toward an accelerated and more productive rhythm. The general intellect, in its objectified AI form, now confronts its human

source—living labor—as an independent and normalizing power. The contemporary AI systems replicate and intensify the disciplinary functions performed by industrial machinery in the nineteenth century, restructuring labor to maximize productivity and surplus value extraction through forms of algorithmic control: “In the current debates on the alienation of collective knowledge into corporate AI we are [...] still hearing the clunky echoes of the nineteenth-century Machinery Question” (Pasquinelli, 2023: 100).

While the idea of the general intellect has often lent itself to idealist or Hegelian interpretations as a kind of spiritual being (Harvey, 2019), and has been read as harboring the hope of a “capitalist implosion due to the overproduction of knowledge as fixed capital” (Pasquinelli, 2023: 118), Marx later clarifies this theoretical approach in *Capital* (2024: 316) through the new concept of the collective worker—*Gesamtarbeiter*—that represents the coordinated totality of specialized laborers functioning as a single productive force to enhance efficiency and surplus-value: “Made up of a combination of many specialized workers, the collective worker is armed with many tools in his multiple pairs of hands: he uses one pair to pull the wire, another to straighten it, another to cut it, and so on.”

In this new formulation, the accumulation of knowledge serves to enhance the extraction of surplus value, rather than precipitating capitalism’s collapse through its own cognitive overdevelopment. Heinrich (2013: 207) explicates how, at a certain stage in Marx’s theoretical development, the critique of the notion of general intellect entails a decisive break with the supposition that capitalism, grounded in exchange-value, would inevitably collapse once immediate labor ceased to be the principal source of wealth. Marx comes to recognize, in his later writings like in *Capital*, that the dissociation of the intellectual capacities of the production process from the workers is not an aberration but an immanent tendency of capitalist production itself. Far from signaling its breakdown, this structural separation reinforces capitalism’s inner logic, since—as Heinrich (2013: 212) underscores—“the capitalist is not interested in the absolute value of the commodity, but rather, merely in surplus-value contained within it and able to be realized by means of sale.”

Accordingly, the idea of collective mental labor as a disruptive force is supplanted by its personification in the figure of the collective worker, who embodies the internal division of labor as a constitutive mechanism that enhances the extraction of surplus-value, which, according to Marx, can be increased not only by lengthening the working day, depressing wages,

and material costs but also by increasing the intensity the labor in general by redesigning the division of labor and machines: “the speed of labor, and thus its intensity, spontaneously increases as the use of machinery gains traction in more and more places and the members of a special class of machine workers accumulate experience” (Marx, 2024: 376).

To recapitulate, within the Marxist tradition, the notion of general intellect has evolved along two divergent paths. Cognitive-capitalism interpretations emphasize the diffusion of intellectual capacities beyond the confines of factory labor, sometimes predicting a crisis of value, driven by the increasing productivity of social knowledge. In contrast, more cautious readings emphasize that Marx’s use of the concept is limited to a brief mention in the *Grundrisse*, while his mature critique in *Capital* shifts focus to the collective worker and the reorganization of the labor process via machinery, discipline, and the division of labor. My analysis adopts this latter, critical-materialist approach where general intellect is viewed not as a promise of emancipation but as a category to understand how collective human capacities are expropriated and put in service of capital. In this light, AI represents a contemporary form of objectified social knowledge that advances the real subsumption of labor under capital by assigning tasks, dictating pace, and enforcing discipline through continuous data capture, ultimately increasing productivity and increasing relative surplus value.

In addition, I consider that AI constitutes a relatively new form of social relation that operates across both registers of subsumption. In some settings it functions primarily as formal subsumption of labor under capital, blurring the boundaries between work and non-work and thereby extending the working day through continuous connectivity and availability, while also generating emotional exhaustion through the fear of replacement (Zheng & Zhang, 2025). In others, it advances real subsumption by reorganizing the labor process itself, calibrating pace, evaluation, and coordination in ways that raise productivity and intensify control. In both cases, the dynamic resembles the disciplinary role of the “industrial reserve army,” which, by being perceived as competition, compels active workers to increase productivity, depresses wages, and keeps hopes for emancipation in check (Marx, 2024: 585-586). AI thus shapes and accelerates the rhythm of work, boosting labor intensity and enhancing exploitation (Cini, 2023), while reinforcing an instrumental, solution-oriented rationality.

Having demonstrated the structural synergy between the pandemic condition and the rise of generative AI, we now turn to examine how this technology is being fetishized. Commodity fetishism, considered by some relevant thinkers, like Rubin (2025) and Ramas San Miguel (2021) as a concept that occupies a central place in Marx's critique of capitalist reality, is an ontological inversion within the realm of reality that is immanently intrinsic to it. Marx (2024: 48) defines it as the process by which, under the capitalist mode of production, social relations between people—specifically, the relations between workers in the production process—are inverted and appear necessarily as relations between things: “the relations among producers themselves [...] take on the form of a social relation among labor products.” AI commodity, while presenting the objective appearance of an autonomous subject, conceals the vast infrastructures of human labor, data extraction, and environmental degradation that sustain its functioning—an occlusion that is not incidental, but structurally inevitable under capitalism, where “social relations of production of people inevitably take on the form of things—and cannot but manifest themselves through things” (Rubin, 2025: 28).

In this apparent form, commodities, AI included, seem to possess value inherently, as if it were a natural property, rather than being the result of human labor. The fetish arises when the products of labor are not recognized as such, but are treated as autonomous entities, endowed with their own power and logic. Just as in religion the creations of the human mind confront their makers as independent, spiritual forces, in capitalist society the objects humans produce dominate them, concealing the exploitation and social dynamics from which they emerge.

Artificial intelligence, when viewed through the lens of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, reveals a new form of mystification: the social labor, historically produced knowledge, and collective intelligence embedded in algorithmic systems are obscured, and these systems take a socially necessary appearance of autonomous, neutral, and self-generating beings: “the portrayal of contemporary algorithmic systems as ‘intelligent’ machines might not be merely a marketing strategy or ideological veil to get rid of, but rather a necessary fetishized appearance of these technologies under capitalism” (Díaz, 2004: 17). The result of growing dominance of this relatively new form of fetishized technical rationality is that it dictates the speeded-up experience of time, intensification of labor and the consequent rise of exploitation levels.

3. HOPE IN SUSPENSION?

This part clarifies the critical-theoretical stakes of the suspension-acceleration dialectic developed earlier, where the pandemic was shown to combine an unprecedented interruption of corporeal circulation with a simultaneous intensification of digitally mediated coordination, and where this contradiction was experienced unevenly across classed and racialized positions of labor. After the subsequent reconstruction of the accelerated pole in Marxist terms, through categories such as real subsumption, general intellect, and fetish-form, the remaining question is how to distinguish administered pauses from interruptions that may genuinely contest capitalist temporality. To address this question, the argument first draws on Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of administered leisure in order to show why suspension does not, by itself, amount to rupture. It then turns to Benjamin's concept of *Jetztzeit* to articulate a conception of interruption grounded in collective praxis, while retaining Adorno's negative-dialectical vigilance against false reconciliation.

Whereas AI operates on the promise of resolving at extreme speed any problem within the confines of instrumental rationality, the suspension moment and the promise of distanced detention in the temporal dialectic may appear to hold a fragment of hope, insofar as it is not entirely subsumed by the logic of productivity acceleration. Yet, it can be too naïve to defend this hope in the suspension, taking into consideration Horkheimer and Adorno's contention in "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (2002) that the very structures that appear to grant a temporal rupture—leisure and entertainment—are in fact engineered to resemble the scheme of working under capitalism: "Entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism. It is sought by those who want to escape the mechanized labor process so that they can cope with it again" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: 109).

Leisure, under the monopoly of the culture industry that "infects everything with sameness" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: 94), no longer constitutes a genuine interruption of instrumental rationality but rather its secondary circuit. This diagnosis converges with Crary's (2013) analysis of the 24/7 regime and Rosa's (2010) notion of social acceleration, both of which demonstrate that the boundary between work—sphere of exploitation—and non-work—sphere free from exploitation—is structurally eroded under capitalism. What initially appears as time off is already cap-

tured by the intention of maintaining the subjects in tempo of accumulation. Standardized films, packaged music, and serialized digital content on TikTok or Instagram occupy workers' free time with prefabricated experiences that reproduce the division of labor and accustom them to the accelerated tempo of production through rapidly shifting digital stimuli that erode attention and promote fleeting intellectual fashions within virtual reality. Multitasking, characterized by constant shifts in attention, is elevated to the status of a productivity ideal, when in fact it reduces the subject to a state of hypervigilance akin to that of an animal whose focus is fragmented by the perception of omnipresent threats to its survival.

Far from offering a moment of real suspension, these temporal pseudo-ruptures of leisure and entertainment function as *time-bridges* whose main purpose is to recharge labor power and to reintegrate the individual more fully into the regimented pace of production upon return to work. Thus, what appears as detachment is in fact a form of social normalization that "advertises the system as a whole" (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: 115), for it renders even the subject's leisure time subsidiary to the acceleration imperative of late capitalism.

If leisure under late capitalism functions less as interruption than as recuperation, the problem becomes conceptual: what would distinguish an administered pause from an emancipatory break with the homogeneous time of accumulation? By "real rupture" I mean, in the first instance, a regulative horizon internal to critical theory: the idea of a break with the homogeneous time of accumulation that allows us to distinguish administered pauses from emancipatory interruptions. Analytically, such rupture can appear only in partial and fragile instantiations: moments of organized refusal that suspend, however locally and temporarily, the reproduction of capitalist temporality.

So, how can we break free from this enchanted circle that entangles us within the self-reinforcing cycle of capital reproduction through the moments of acceleration and suspension? An answer is offered by Benjamin (2006), whose notion of *Jetztzeit*—a now-time that blasts open the continuum of history—opposes the false suspensions offered within the capitalist society by demanding a rupture that is both experiential and political, a dialectical "leap in the open air of history" (Benjamin, 2006: 395).

Unlike the pandemic suspensions and the culture industry's temporal diversions, which serve to disarm mass discontent and overcome crisis, Benjamin's (2006: 395) conception of *Jetztzeit* is marked by the awareness

that oppressed classes, in the moment of action, revive suppressed past struggles in order to explode the continuum of history. Thus, the positive dialectic of capitalist suspension and acceleration is interrupted by Benjamin's *Stillstand*—a cessation effected through the revolutionary struggle of the oppressed, which halts the machinery of capitalist production and opens a breach in historical continuity. The possibility of historical rupture emerges not through abstract negation, but through a concrete material negation such as the Staten Island Amazon unionization, where the temporal logic of accumulation was momentarily suspended by organized refusal. In *Jetztzeit*, history ceases to be a causal succession of events and becomes a site of conflict, where the “image of enslaved ancestors” (Benjamin, 2006: 394) flashes up at moments of danger to illuminate the present with emancipatory potential.

Benjamin (2006) draws a distinction between the empty, homogeneous time of capitalist production—embodied in clock time—and the historical, heterogeneous time expressed in revolutionary and religious calendars. In his view, holidays are not mere pauses within the rhythm of production, but qualitative interruptions that condense the memory of past struggles and the possibility of a new beginning (Löwy, 2005: 90). Far from being days of escapism, they are days of remembrance—*Tage des Eingedenkens*—, capable of activating a revolutionary temporality in which past and present converge in the prospect of revolution.

This stands in contrast to the analyzed above regarding Horkheimer's and Adorno's conception of leisure under late capitalism—particularly as promoted by the culture industry—that does not genuinely interrupt the cycle of work but rather extends it in disguised form. Such leisure remains subordinate to the logic of production and provides neither memory nor redemption, but only a false suspension that further integrates subjects into the rhythms of capital.

Both analyses are only apparently contradictory, while in fact they expose distinct aspects of the same totality. Horkheimer and Adorno are right in diagnosing how capitalist society neutralizes even the promise of rest, turning leisure into a tool of domination that reproduces submission under the guise of freedom. Yet Benjamin grasps a dialectical surplus: in certain temporal ruptures—such as revolutionary holidays or ritual commemorations—there remains the potential to reactivate historical memory and interrupt the continuum of domination. Horkheimer and Adorno guard us against false hopes, while Benjamin insists on the necessity of real ones

grounded in the sudden appropriation of the memory of the past struggles in the present as a demand for justice for victims of history.

This conception of historical rupture resonates with Adorno's (2004) negative dialectics, in which truth emerges through the persistence of contradiction and non-identity in the fragmented world, whose fissures are the signature of modernity. Where dominant temporality aims at closure and resolution—whether through digital acceleration, AI oriented toward problem solving, or leisure as recuperation—, both Benjamin and Adorno insist on the necessity of preserving the fractures, tensions, and historical wounds that resist subsumption to the polished narratives.

Benjamin's messianic temporality and Adorno's negative dialectics remain distinct, and the proximity drawn between them should not be read as an identification. Benjamin's *Jetztzeit* is oriented toward interruption, naming a break that contests homogeneous time through a politically charged rupture, whereas Adorno's negative dialectics refuses any affirmative image of reconciliation and insists that critique remain faithful to non-identity and the persistence of contradiction. The tension between these conceptions lies in the fact that *Jetztzeit* can appear as a promise of redemption, whereas negative dialectics guard against such promises when they petrify into consoling narratives. Yet this divergence is also methodologically productive, since *Jetztzeit* provides a concept of rupture that prevents suspension from being mistaken for emancipation, while negative dialectics supplies the vigilance that prevents rupture from being converted into a positive mythology or a premature synthesis. Read together, the two do not dissolve the contradiction but keep it active, allowing interruption to remain intelligible without being idealized and non-identity to remain critical without abandoning the interpretation that history could be otherwise.

In the irreconcilable contradictions disclosed by capitalist temporality—between suspension and acceleration, leisure and labor—there lies a negative decisive moment: the possibility of breaking with what it is. Hope, then, does not reside in any positive vision imposed from above, but in the uncompromising critique that exposes the contradictory fissures in totality and holds open space for radical social transformation.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This article has treated the pandemic as an unveiling experience in capitalist temporality, one in which the interruption of corporeal circulation coincided with an intensification of digitally mediated organization. The guiding claim is that capital proved capable of turning disruption into a condition of recomposition, and of converting suspension into an occasion for acceleration. In that sense, the pandemic condensed a familiar dynamic in an unusually visible form, namely the way capitalist time renews itself through contradiction.

This also sharpens the meaning of commodity fetishism in the present conjuncture. When social knowledge is crystallized in algorithmic infrastructures, AI readily appears as an intelligence that organizes time on its own, as if the tempo of life were imposed by the machine rather than by historically specific relations of production. That appearance is philosophically important because it expresses an inversion at the heart of capitalist modernity: relations among people appear as properties of things. Fetishization, in this sense, operates as a durable form of social appearance, one that accompanies the real abstraction of labor and its technical mediation.

The pandemic also made clear that capitalist temporality is not lived uniformly. For some, digital mediation enabled work and everyday life to be coordinated through screens. For others, the same infrastructures intensified on-site labor under new regimes of monitoring and pace. The *virtual turn* therefore redistributed exposure and risk along classed and racialized lines, while presenting that redistribution as a technical necessity. The post-pandemic condition is best described as a recomposition of labor time that amplifies these asymmetries: acceleration takes the form of abstraction and remote coordination for some, and of intensified corporeal exertion for others.

The question of hope emerges at this juncture. The analysis has distinguished between pauses that function as recuperation within the reproduction of capital and interruptions grounded in material resistance that suspend, even if briefly, the temporal logic of accumulation. Benjamin's *Jetztzeit* names the possibility of such interruption as a politically charged break with homogeneous time. Adorno's negative dialectics, in turn, keeps that break from petrifying into a redemptive image by insisting on non-

identity and the persistence of contradiction. Taken together, they allow rupture to be thought in a critical manner.

The broader implication is that post-pandemic AI deployment consolidates a temporal project. It shapes pace and attention, redefines what counts as efficiency, and reorganizes the rhythms through which labor and social life are coordinated. A critical approach gains force when it links this technical acceleration to the political economy of time, and when it treats struggles over work and social reproduction as struggles over temporality itself.

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