

They Returned the Hours Without the Power

A controlled fictional future where labour time returns, but practical continuity still follows accounts, contracts and assets.

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A controlled fictional future about returned time and separately allocated continuity.

Afternoon Universe**Part II of III**

Narrative method · Controlled fictional future. This story places documented mechanisms inside institutions and events that do not exist. It is not a forecast. [Why Composite Stories?](#)

[\(https://hedegreenresearch.com/articles/why-composite-stories/\)](https://hedegreenresearch.com/articles/why-composite-stories/)

The Session Expired

The machine gave them ninety seconds.

It did not sound an alarm. A thin amber line appeared above the project file:

Workshop session control Machine continuity

00:01:30 Remaining

Project state

Will be preserved

Continuity notice Booking account attached

The warning had been there when they began. It was part of the booking, printed beside the workshop rules and repeated on the machine display. Nothing had been hidden.

The child watched the cutter remove another bright curl of aluminium from the small wing joint clamped to the table. On the screen, the unfinished part rotated slowly inside a blue outline of the model glider it was supposed to hold together.

The adult stood behind the yellow floor line with the safety glasses in one hand. They had already used part of the interval correcting a measurement and part of it cutting a first piece with the hole two millimetres too far to the left.

The second piece was right.

It was not finished.

At thirty seconds, the machine reduced its speed.

At ten, it moved the cutter away from the metal.

At zero, the spindle stopped, the coordinates were saved and the amber line became a price.

Workshop session control Session complete

Continuation options

Continue now

22.40

Charge to

Workshop account

Lower rate available

Tomorrow 09:10

Machine remains available Project state preserved

The lights remained on.

The ventilation continued above them. At the next table, someone tightened a wooden clamp by hand. The emergency cabinet beside the door still showed its green status light.

The child pressed the information button.

The display explained that the workshop's public floor covered admission, safety systems, hand tools and project storage. Continuous machine access was provided through the account attached to the booking. A help route appeared beneath the explanation.

There was no error to appeal.

Outside the long window, the afternoon freight line moved between the buildings. The nearest train passed without a driver and without slowing. A small symbol on the municipal load map identified the freight depot's continuity profile: contracted import, local storage, response active.

The adult looked at the new price and then at the unfinished joint.

They could continue. The account would allow it. It would mean using most of what remained in the day's discretionary-services budget, and the apartment was already warm.

“Can we leave it here?” the child asked.

The project file had already answered.

The machine had stopped safely. The freight had kept moving. The workshop was still open.

Nothing had failed.

The afternoon was theirs.

Finishing it was sold separately.

The Triumph of Released Labour

The workshop belonged to a society that had succeeded at reducing work.

That success mattered.

Goods were inexpensive. Clinics functioned. Freight moved. The hours once spent repeating routine tasks had not all disappeared into higher targets or thinner staffing. A large share had been returned as time that employers could no longer schedule by default.

Public screens counted those hours. The number rose each day beside quieter commuter platforms and shorter office calendars. People argued about how the gain had been distributed, but few wanted the old working week back.

The adult in the workshop had received part of that gain. There were only a few scheduled maintenance periods each week. The rest appeared as open space on the calendar.

It was open space with conditions.

Until early evening, the adult remained inside a responsive-employment window. No message had arrived. No work had been performed. But the required response time made distance, concentration and long projects harder to promise. The afternoon was free enough to begin something and uncertain enough to keep one eye on the account.

That did not make the returned hours fraudulent. It made them incomplete.

The old labour claim had weakened. An employer could no longer take the whole day merely because that had once been normal.

But time was only the first claim.

The workshop, the machine, the cooling at home, the tools and the ability to continue belonged to another settlement.

The Continuity Market

The Continuity Market does not exist.

Neither the workshop account, the discretionary-services budget nor the freight depot's continuity profile describes a current programme in any jurisdiction. They are fictional institutions built from mechanisms that already exist separately across different jurisdictions.

European Union electricity law (<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2019/944/oj/eng>) defines contracts whose prices reflect variation in spot markets and defines demand response as customers changing load in response to prices, incentives or accepted market bids. Japan's Agency for Natural Resources and Energy

https://www.enecho.meti.go.jp/category/electricity_and_gas/electric/fee/structure/ratesystem.html

illustrates retail plans that vary by time, day and season, alongside rewards for reducing consumption at specified times.

Account-mediated access is real too, but it is not one universal system. In Great Britain, Ofgem's prepayment rules govern circumstances in which a smart meter may be moved into prepayment mode, including stronger protections for vulnerable households. Prepayment is not the same as disconnection, and British rules are not evidence of a universal continuity tier.

Larger users can also occupy different contractual positions. US Department of Energy material describes long-term power purchase agreements that establish transaction terms such as price. A separate department brief examines special rates, agreements, risk allocation and onsite generation. Storage and local generation can add physical resilience.

A long contract is not electricity. A price agreement is not physical priority. Storage, connection, legal status and market position are different forms of continuity.

The fictional market combines these separate mechanisms into one settlement. Basic public access keeps the workshop open. Machine use is sold in intervals. Households trade price against timing. Flexible loads receive rewards for moving. Organisations with stronger agreements, storage and longer planning horizons can build more continuity around themselves.

There is a serious defence of this arrangement. It makes scarcity visible, rewards flexibility, finances capacity and reduces the need for officials to decide whether a glider, a game or an afternoon project deserves electricity. Many people choose the cheaper flexible option and benefit from it.

The market does not ignore human activity.

It records the activity in the category the settlement knows how to recognise: demand with a price.

The Model Understood Everything

The modeller did not hide the workshop.

That was the achievement.

The new demand model contained the afternoon in detail. It included public baths, community kitchens, cooling rooms, domestic work, care visits, local compute, workshops, charging, storage and the small machine sessions people bought after scheduled labour had released them.

Each activity had a profile.

The model estimated when it would begin, how long it might continue, how prices would change it, how much could move to another hour and which accounts had storage behind them. The workshop was not buried inside household and other. It had its own line.

During the annual model review, someone asked where public purpose appeared.

The modeller opened the classification table.

“Care is here. Education is here. Civic facilities are here. Nothing is missing.”

She was correct.

The model had been built to forecast demand under the settlement that existed. It could estimate how households responded to a price, how an aggregator assembled flexibility and how a stronger continuity profile changed exposure to a constrained hour.

It could not create an entitlement the law and contracts had never supplied.

That was not a defect in the software. No secret instruction had removed ordinary people. No machine had decided that freight mattered more than a child's unfinished wing.

The model understood the choices people were permitted to make.

It did not ask whether the starting claims from which they made those choices should have been different.

An earlier generation of planning models had buried released human activity inside residual categories.

This one saw it and priced it.

Freedom in Fragments

The Continuity Market did not make everyone less free.

In the same district, another household preferred the flexible plan. Their building had shared storage. Water heating, laundry and vehicle charging moved automatically into cheaper periods. The adults worked predictable mornings and could use the workshop, public baths and local compute when prices were low.

They understood the alerts. They saved money. During constrained hours, the building battery kept cooling, refrigeration and communication running within its limit.

For them, flexibility was not a polite word for deprivation. It was a useful service.

The household with the unfinished wing lived differently. The adult's responsive-employment window made some cheap periods difficult to promise. Care visits to an older relative happened when the relative needed care, not when the account preferred demand to move. Cooking, cooling and laundry could shift a little. They could not always shift together.

Nothing was forbidden.

The bath was available later. The machine could run tomorrow. More compute could be bought. The apartment could be cooled now if another service waited. Each decision was reasonable in isolation.

Together, they turned freedom into coordination work.

Present evidence does not prove this fictional future, but it shows why resilience assets cannot be assumed to arrive evenly. The US Department of Energy (<https://www.energy.gov/cmei/systems/solar-and-resilience-basics>) describes how properly configured solar and storage can maintain selected loads during an interruption. In US residential solar-adopter data, Berkeley Lab (<https://emp.lbl.gov/publications/residential-solar-adopter-income-3>) reported that battery attachment in 2023 was 6 percent among households earning below USD 50,000 and 14 percent among those above USD 200,000.

That is not a forecast for the fictional setting, and income alone does not explain the difference. It establishes something narrower: access to physical resilience does not distribute itself merely because the technology exists.

The system created choices.

It did not distribute equal starting positions from which to make them.

Every Contract Was Honoured

At the end of the day, the system published its report.

Every line was green.

Hospitals had received continuous service. Water, transit and communication remained stable. Freight targets were met. Flexible households had reduced or moved enough demand to avoid emergency measures. Storage reserves remained inside their operating limits.

The report was not propaganda.

The settlement had priced scarcity, rewarded flexibility and helped finance new capacity. It gave households choices instead of one mandatory consumption pattern. It avoided creating a public committee that had to decide whether a model glider, a bath, a game or an afternoon workshop deserved to continue.

Its supporters could point to real achievements.

They were right to do so.

No public allocation system could remove physical limits. More electricity would not automatically create freedom. Some activities would still have to wait, and private agreements were not illegitimate merely because they were private.

The criticism was narrower.

When compulsory labour retreated, the society treated the distribution of time as a public settlement. When people tried to use that time, continuity followed contracts, assets and the ability to keep purchasing.

The system did not invent those starting positions. It inherited them and called the resulting choices neutral.

The daily report did not record the unfinished wing joint. It was not designed to.

The child could return the next morning. The project had been saved correctly. The lower rate would probably be available. Nothing had been confiscated, and every contract had been honoured.

The hours had come back.

The power had not.

— Dennis Hedegreen, trying to see the structure

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AFTERNOON UNIVERSE / 02



They Returned the Hours Without the Power

CAPTURED CUT

A FILM THAT DOES NOT EXIST

FICTIONAL PEOPLE AND CONTINUITY MARKET • SOURCE-BOUNDED MECHANISMS

A film that does not exist. Its people and continuity market are fictional; its mechanisms are source-bounded.

RELATION MEMORY

MATURES FROM [The Afternoon Was Not in the Forecast](#) · Takes the returned-hours premise into a deliberately captured institutional branch.

MATURES FROM [The Saved Hour Also Needs Power](#) · Turns the article's allocation question into a controlled fictional future.

NEARBY [They Returned the Power With the Hours](#) · The constructive twin: the same scarcity problem under a different allocation rule.

METHOD [Why Composite Stories?](#) · The public method statement governing controlled fictional futures.

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