The concept of formal subsumption within the contemporary global capitalist framework refers to how different forms of exploitation merge with one another. In this essay I investigate formal subsumption as form, not a stage. Indeed, formal subsumption did not constitute a historical stage that precedes real subsumption, but it is rather the process of inversion according to which production is not primarily organized in order to satisfy human need, but to valorize value. That inversion, pertaining to the objective of production, simultaneously changes social and political relationships and the entire configuration of property relations within the societal structure. Historically, this process accompanies the so-called primitive accumulation of capital, which cannot be confined in the prehistory of capitalism, but rather constitutes its basic structure. The ongoing accumulation can be understood as the long war against commons and any form of collective property. The result of this war is not, however, a world homogeneously subsumed to capital. On the contrary, the expansion of capital and its constant attempt to subsume different forms of production to the global market generates a multiplicity of temporal frictions, asynchronies and anachronisms that contain not only a multiplicity of conflicting elements, but also, and above all, non-capitalistic possibilities of re-orientation of the trajectories of modernity. From this non-romantic point of view, I also intend to look at that which is archaic within the modern.

Formal Subsumption as Form

Subsumption (Subsumieren) signifies the inclusion of something particular (Besonderes) under a universal (Allgemeine) system. In Marx, it designates a process in which capital incorporates labor-force and transforms the latter into capital. From this perspective and in the English history of primitive accumulation, the labor incorporated in capital is wage-labor — the labor that constitutes the basis of the capitalist mode of production. In these pages I want to call into question the teleological view of the transition from the feudal mode of production to capitalism, a view that unfortunately has often been referred to as a kind of normative history for the rest of the world. Moreover, I want to free formal subsumption from the unilinear conception of time and any stage-theory conception.
Dipesh Chakrabarty correctly highlighted that it is a historicist point of view to consider “Marx’s distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘real’ subsumption of labor [. . .] as a question of historical transition.”¹ In order to distance ourselves from any Eurocentric approach, we must develop a non-historicist conception of formal subsumption that is relevant for the reciprocal implications of different forms of exploitations. In order to redefine the concept of formal subsumption, we must think with Marx in relation to his categorical presuppositions. Maybe even think beyond Marx.

Formal subsumption should not be understood within the historicist paradigm that portrays formal and real subsumption as historical stages. This paradigm exists in many different traditions and readings of Marx. For example, Etienne Balibar identified formal subsumption as manufacture and real subsumption as large-scale industry.² The Italian workerist tradition, i.e. Antonio Negri and others, love to historicize the distinction between formal, real, and, more recently, total subsumption, which entitles the stage of cognitive capitalism.³ In my reading, instead, formal subsumption defines the form in which the capitalist mode of production works. Moreover, it is the form that capital produces by reconfiguring pre-existing temporalities, such as patriarchal, gender or racial hierarchies on the one hand, and an entire configuration of property relations on the other.

The capitalist mode of production does not create its own conditions of existence and reproduction ex nihilo, but meets pre-existing relationships of production, property and politics which are re-configured differently. This encounter of different temporal trajectories gives rise to a “heterogeneous mix rather than the destruction of one made by another.”⁴ So, for example, the capitalist mode of production neither invents nor suppresses slavery, but encounters forms of slave labor that are reconfigured starting from new owner relationships and from the orientation of production, no longer aimed at the satisfaction of limited needs of the community but at the world market. Capitalistically subsumed into the world market, forms of slave labor become more brutal and intensive because it is no longer the will of the slave driver that beats the rhythm of labor, but the impersonal clocks of world stock markets.

What I intend to assert is not only the compatibility between forms of slave labor and capitalism, but that capitalism is configured in different ways based on the political and economic forms that it meets and on the resistance that it encounters in its attempt to give new form to social

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fabric. This does not mean that there exist many diversified capitalisms based on the traditional, political and economic elements met. The form, in the singular, of subsumption is given by the orientation of production towards the valorization of value and, therefore, towards the world market. In this way, socially necessary labor-time becomes normative for each individual capital that has to survive in the world market.

Before going on to analyze how historically the mode of production unfolds and produces a variety of asynchronies, we need to clarify the meaning of the notion of socially necessary labor. According to Marx, “the real value of a commodity (...) is not its individual, but its social value; that is to say, its value is not measured by the labor-time that the article costs the producer in each individual case, but by the labor-time socially required for its production.”\(^5\) The value of a commodity depends on the amount of socially necessary labor-time required for its manufacture. However, the amount of socially necessary labor-time objectified in the commodity is not the labor-time that is spent for its production. Socially necessary labor-time can be either greater or smaller than the individual time spent for the production of a use-object. The generic human labor time in the substance of value must be adjusted according to the time required by social labor to perform that same job. Thus, the value produced, which is an objectification of socially necessary labor, is not deductible from the labor actually expended in a single productive process, neither is surplus value a quantifiable amount within the accounting of a single firm or factory.

For example, an hour of high productivity work can correspond to two hours of socially necessary labor-time in places where technological innovation remains untouched by a society as a whole. The labor-time effectively exploited by the capitalist—who uses the new machine—is inferior to that which is socially necessary. Therefore, the capitalist, selling the commodity at its value, appropriates social surplus value and can exchange one hour of labor-time for two. As Marx explains, “the capitalist who applies the improved method of production appropriates and devotes to surplus labor a greater portion (\textit{Extramehrwert}) of the working day than the other capitalists in the same business.”\(^6\) \textit{Extramehrwert} corresponds to the quantity of social surplus value that the capitalist can withdraw from the society. Appropriating \textit{Extramehrwert}, the capitalist extracts relative surplus value and exploits labor with a higher productivity level than the social average. In this way a greater number of hours of work concretely performed pass through the hands of the capitalist who utilizes a greater productive power of work without violating the law of equivalence.

I reason, first, that the difference between capitalists who exploit work of diverse productivities is therefore necessary in order to extract relative surplus value from the benefits of technological innovation. According to Marx, the immediate repercussion of the absence of technological

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\(^6\) \textit{MECW} 35, p. 436.
innovation is a *prolonging* of labor-time: “One of the first consequences of the introduction of new machinery, before it has become dominant in its branch of production, is the *prolongation* of the labor-time of the laborers who continue to work with the old and unimproved means of production.”

The introduction of a new machine increases extra-relative surplus value only if the productivity of the necessary social labor remains lower. This becomes possible through the prevention of the general spread of new technological innovations and machines. In other words, automated production remains profitable until there are low-tech areas of production where the innovation has not been employed, and in which a proportional increase in the extraction of *absolute surplus value* occurs in order to compete within the capitalist market.

The relative surplus value is in fact *relative* because it must be placed *in relation* to absolute surplus value. This is emphasized when the capitalist, who exploits a technological innovation, concretizes at least a part of the relative surplus value that is potentially his own. This surplus value is then materialized through a social transfer of value from productive areas of high absolute surplus value to areas of high relative surplus value. The differential quota between a given productivity of labor and socially necessary labor makes possible a transfer of value from production spheres in which the productivity of labor is lower to areas in which capital exploits labor at a productivity that is higher than the social average.

In the early 1860s, Marx clarified how the competition of capitals functions within the global market. He was then able to show that the machine neither creates value nor *does it produce surplus value*: “As machinery comes into general use in a particular branch of production, the social value of the machine’s product sinks down to its individual value, and the following law asserts itself: surplus value does not arise from the labor-power that has been replaced by the machinery, but from the labor-power actually employed in working with the machinery.” When a technological innovation becomes widespread, the growing productivity of labor obtained through its employment also becomes socially dominant, allowing few opportunities for extracting quotas of extra-surplus value. Secondly, I reason that capitalist development is necessarily differentiated. Absolute and relative forms of surplus value are interwoven and are implied in a reciprocal way within the global market. Therefore, no form of production can be considered backward or residual. Capital requires instead a vast differentiation of forms of exploitations, which are synchronized in the global market by the socially necessary labor-time.

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8 The conceptual framework of the so-called “Fragment on Machines” of the *Grundrisse* is abandoned in *Capital*. With it, every idea, profoundly Eurocentric in reality, on the end of labor through machines and automation should be called into question.
9 *MECW* 35, p. 530.
The introduction of new machinery, technology and knowledge is not a pre-determined normative route in the capitalist history of all countries. On the contrary, different capitals directly competing with each other in the world market give rise to diverse geographical spaces with different labor powers and wages.\textsuperscript{10} Colonial and neo-colonial violence continuously create and recreate these differentiations and hinder the dissemination of innovation in the machinery. The supposed neutrality of knowledge and technology is theoretically false and politically ignoble:\textsuperscript{11} modern technology and machines are not only the reaction of capitalists to the rebelliousness of laborers, but also and principally the result of competition between capitals under pressure from socially necessary labor-time. Technologies and machines are needed a) to increase labor productivity, b) to reduce its porosity, and c) to create differentials of surplus value in the global market.\textsuperscript{12} Indeed, the uneven distribution of knowledge is necessary to capital in order to differentiate the distribution of innovations and, therefore, of relative surplus value production in the global market. Stated differently, the reciprocal combination of absolute and relative surplus value pushes the global market toward an extreme differentiation of the forms of exploitation by stationing technologies and high organic composition of capital in some places, and in others, enormous concentrations of living labor, long hours and high intensity of labor. These differentiations can be produced and reproduced only through the constant use of extra-economic violence, which intervenes by blocking development in some geographical areas or by obstructing the movement of the migrant labor-force. Borders, clearly in today’s world, express their economic-political significance by directing flows of labor-force, creating an ethnic division of labor, and defining wage areas that can only be reproduced by blocking a massive movement of migrants.

We need a concept of formal subsumption that is not based on the specific configuration of European history, but which is instead capable of understanding a multiplicity of forms of wage and non-waged, free and forced labor. And it is possible to find this broader way of understanding formal subsumption in Marx himself: it regards non only the “labourer as wage earner” but rather the “owner of labor power.”\textsuperscript{13} The waged form of labor is one of the elements that denote the capitalist mode of production, which, however, can also work with non-waged forms of exploitation.

\textsuperscript{13} Harootunian,\textit{ Marx after Marx}, p. 227.
In the *Results of the Immediate Process of Production*, Marx wrote: “This I call the formal subsumption of labor under capital. It is the general form of every capitalist process of production; and at the same time, however, it can be found as a particular form alongside the specifically capitalist mode of production in its developed form, because although the latter entails the former, the converse does not necessarily obtain.” Following Marx’s definition of formal subsumption as the “general form of every capitalist process of production,” I would suggest redefining it as the *form* that enables us to determine the mode of production as a capitalist one. This idea can be developed in various ways. From a historical-logical perspective, one can define formal subsumption as a form in which money is capital, or alternatively, as a form that reshapes the relationships between exploiters and exploited based on the form of capital. Exploitation is not an exclusive characteristic of the capitalist mode of production. There are many non-capitalist forms of exploitation. According to Marx, in order to define formal subsumption of labor under capital, “it is sufficient that handicraftsmen who previously worked on their own account, or as apprentices of a master, should become wage laborers under the direct control of a capitalist.” This picture represents the Western-European historical development of the capitalist form of production. However, Marx himself understood it in the 1870s as the English path of capitalist accumulation and not a general rule for all countries.

I would like to raise the following question: what is the *form* in which many different modes of exploitation work together within the capitalist global market? As we have seen already, Marx’s definition of capitalist production as an inversion (*Verkherung*) can be useful to define the essence of capitalism. *Inversion* indicates that the goal of production is neither use-value nor does it relate to satisfying the needs of a given community. On the contrary, use-value becomes the indifferent bearer of value, which in turn develops into the real goal of production. In this broader conception of the capitalist form of production, *formal subsumption* can be defined as the basis of capitalist production, i.e. the production of surplus value in a process whose end is the production of commodities for the market; *real subsumption* incorporates previous social relations of production into the capitalist framework; it revolutionizes the technical processes of production and the configuration of social groups (*gesellschaftliche Gruppierungen*). *Formal subsumption* and *real subsumption* coexist from the very beginning, since the subsumption of existing forms of

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15 *MECW* 35, p. 511.
16 When comparing the first edition with the second edition (1867) of *Capital*, Volume 1, one perceives that Marx tones down some statements on the history of the capitalist development (*Entwicklungsgeschichte*). The general “succession of historical processes (*Reihe historischer Prozesse*)” cedes its place to a specific analysis of the English case; compare the first edition of *Capital* (1867), in *MEGA*² II/5, 581, with the text of the fourth edition (1890) in *MEW* 23, 751.
17 *MECW* 35, p. 645.
production into the global market changes both the end of production and social and property relationships.

A rarely studied third form, the hybrid or “intermediate forms (Zwitterformen) of subsumption,” can also be discussed in addition to formal and real subsumption. It can help us to clarify the combination of different forms of exploitations. Marx speaks of the hybrid forms of subsumption for the first time in Capital. According to Marx, prima facie these types of subsumption are forms of transition to capitalism. He stressed that in these forms, surplus labor is not extorted by direct compulsion from the producer: “the producer has not yet become formally subordinate to capital,” mentioning both usurer and merchant capital. However, another, more interesting dimension of the hybrid forms is discussed in Capital: “as in the case of modern domestic industry (Hausarbeit), certain hybrid forms are reproduced here and there against the background of large-scale industry, though their physiognomy is totally changed.” Here, surplus labor is extracted from these forms by means of direct coercion (direkter Zwang).

Although the hybrid forms are not “formally” subsumed to capital and are not conditioned by wage labor, they fall under the command of capital. This allows us to comprehend the contemporaneity of seemingly anachronistic forms like slavery, which are not mere residues of past epochs but forms that, though with an altered physiognomy, are produced and reproduced in the background of the current capitalist mode of production. Capitalism encounters pre-existing forms of production and it “encounters them as antecedents, but not as antecedents established by itself, not as forms of its own life process.” Capital subsumes and re-configures them in a new framework. The result, as Harry Harootunian points out, is a “heterogeneous mix” of temporalities and forms of life and production. Capital comes into conflict with the pre-existing forms of life because, by re-configuring them, it tends to synchronize their different temporalities to the rhythm of socially necessary labor-time. This violence on the pre-existing forms generates new friction and tension.

The productive power of socially necessary labor is enforced in the world market and imposes its own temporality, synchronizing the different forms of production; for instance, the patriarchal command and the whip of the slave driver intervene continually in order to synchronize that particular labor with the universal chronometer marked by the temporality of socially necessary

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19 MECW 35, p. 511.
20 MECW 35, p. 511.
22 Harootunian, Marx After Marx, p. 27.
labor. If “the place of the slave-driver's lash is taken by the overlooker’s book of penalties,” then these different forms of command also exist alongside each other and constitute a single time, in which the law of value is enforced in the work market. As soon as seemingly anachronistic forms of labor such as slavery or the corvè “are drawn into the whirlpool of an international market dominated by the capitalistic mode of production […] the civilized horrors of overwork are grafted on the barbaric horrors of slavery, serfdom, etc.” The subsumption of different social and productive forms within the capitalist form occurs when they begin to produce commodities for the world market instead of use-values for the needs of the community. In this same moment, they are incorporated into the global capitalist market. Although labor apparently remains within the same brutal form of subjection, command overpowers labor, changing its inherent nature. The law of valorization requires every single producer to employ either ‘social average labor’ or labor of an intensity superior to that of socially necessary labor—where the resistance is hindered or the economic and extra-economic violence of the system enables it. As anything but a residual form of labor, slave labor is thus presented as a possibility for augmenting the intensity of labor and guaranteeing absolute surplus value to capital masses. Marx observed how, upon entering into the world market – that is, when the export of cotton was viable for the world market – the overworking of slave labor in the American plantation became a factor in a “calculated and calculating system.” Slavery became modern when the labor of slaves was directed to the production of commodities for the world market. As Dale Tomich stated, the “world market and division of labor are not just the background for slavery in the Americas but the historical conditions of the existence of this particular form of production.” From the time that the productivity of labor had to be measured on the global stock market, labor time was intensified and rendered as little porous as possible. What we are interested in pointing out is that slavery is formally subsumed to capital when it becomes “part of the organization of social labor on a world scale.” That is, when production becomes production of commodities for the world market and the socially necessary labor-time asserts itself as a normative of productivity and intensity of work done by non-waged slaves.

24 Ibid, p. 244.
25 Ibid, p. 244.
28 Tomich, Slavery, p. 5.
The colonial system promoted the development of the industrialist capitalist system, but this is hardly a progressive history. In *Capital*, Marx assembled the historical fabric to recount the counter-history of a development that was possible through the "great slaughter of the innocents." Capital comes into the world with blood, displaying its deadly side right from the start: "Wherever they (the Dutch) set foot, devastation and depopulation followed." This extreme violence was deployed, as Marx explains, "in plantation-colonies destined for export trade only, such as the West Indies, and in rich and well-populated countries, such as Mexico and India, that were given over to plunder." Slavery, subsumed in the capitalist mode of production inasmuch as it becomes labor destined for world commerce, takes on a new form in which the rhythm and intensity of labor are regulated by the pace of the socially necessary labor-time. Insofar as forms of slave labor enter the world market, they can no longer be considered as being remains of former times. The network of the world market supports various forms of exploitation by simultaneously combining them.

*Original Accumulation and Asynchronisms*

The world market began in the seventeenth century with colonies and slavery. Its creation included new forms of wage labor, non-waged and slave labor, giving rise, in the eighteenth century, to a new assortment of forms of wage and non-waged labor: the pre-existing forms of organization of labor were not destroyed, but were reshaped into a new constellation of political and economic powers. Understanding interwoven pluralities of temporal layers in the same historical dimension of modernity requires a historiography able to incorporate plural, spatial, and temporal relations within new causal models.

We need now to abandon the teleological vision of primitive accumulation of capital. The historical analysis that Marx made in *Capital* should be reinterpreted in the light of a historiographical paradigm capable of contemplating a plurality of historical times that, like geological layers, are present at the same time and, in their movement, create friction and tension that can bring back to the surface that which is not otherwise visible.

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30 MECW 35, p. 745.
34 Tomich, *Through the Prism of Slavery*, p. 61.
It is known that the capitalist mode of production could not be configured as such without laborers deprived of the means of production. They need not be formally free wage laborers. The capitalist mode of production is, in fact, compatible with different forms of non-free labor. If capitalists make use of formally free workers it is because they encounter them as a result of a different temporality: as a result of the struggles against feudal subjugation and slavery. The freedom of the “new freedmen” was and is open to different possibilities: on the side of subjectivity, it is the result of the numerous struggles of the servants to free themselves from slavery and escape the dominion of corporations and guilds. On the side of the rising capitalist mode of production, that freedom is formally subsumed into a new apparatus of domination and control: the “new freedman” is stripped of the means of production, even deprived of the guarantees offered by the feudal system, and finally forced to sell its labor force and ordered to do so through the “bloody legislation” against vagabonds who were trying to evade the new capitalist order of labor. Marx shows some of these measures aimed at realigning in spirit and body the new labor force: “whipping and imprisonment for sturdy vagabonds. They are to be tied to the cart-tail and whipped until the blood streams from their bodies, then to swear an oath to go back to their birthplace or to where they have lived the last three years and to ‘put themselves to labour’. (...) For the second arrest for vagabondage the whipping is to be repeated and half the ear sliced off; but for the third relapse the offender is to be executed as a hardened criminal and enemy of the common weal.”

A statute of the first year of the reign of Edward VI (1547) “ordains that if anyone refuses to work, he shall be condemned as a slave to the person who has denounced him as an idler.” The end of the English legislation during the 16th and the 17th centuries was the immobilisation and discipline of the labor-force, even through slavery, which was one essential component of capitalistic accumulation. Indeed, slavery was not an anomalous case in the colony but rather was a violent answer, quite homogeneous, to control the mobility of European and North American living labour on the market.

The freedom obtained by the new freedmen at the cost of hard struggles could have taken another trajectory and reconfigured the elements of the Medieval order in a different way. Beside the trajectory of private property and the modern State, on whose path there rise such names as Luther and Cromwell to the Le Chapelier law against corporations, other trajectories were possible. Along these alternative trajectories commons and associations are articulated. The transformation of

36 MECW 35, p. 723-4
37 MECW 35, p. 724.
feudal exploitation into capitalist exploitation is not a necessary historical outcome. The legal, political and economic material of the Middle Ages could have been configured in a way quite different from that formed by capitalist modernity. The Marxian chapter on accumulation shows the elements in play as if they were different temporalities combined and then synchronized into the capitalist mode of production.

The question on how to reconsider history, recounted in the chapter on accumulation, came to Marx from Russia. On 16th February 1881 Vera Zasulich posed Marx an important question, which probably gave him some troubles. She wrote: “Honoured Citizen, you are not unaware that your Capital enjoys great popularity in Russia. [...] Nowadays, we often hear it said that the rural commune is an archaic form condemned to perish by history, scientific socialism and, in short, everything above debate. Those who preach such a view call themselves your disciples par excellence: ‘Marksists’ [...] So you will understand, Citizen, how interested we are in Your opinion. You would be doing us a very great favour if you were to set forth your ideas on the possible fate of our rural commune, and on the theory that it is historically necessary for every country in the world to pass through all the phases of capitalist production.”

Marx hesitated before answering and wrote four different drafts of his letter. His agreement was with the populists instead of the “Marksists.” Russia, he wrote, is not obliged to pass through the “fatal dissolution of the Russian peasants’ commune”, which can instead become “an element of collective production on a nationwide scale”. Displaying the persistence of non-capitalist communities that existed at the same time as capitalist production, Marx delineates the possibility of a new regime of combination of historical times. It urges a new historiographical paradigm: “The history of the decline of primitive communities (it would be a mistake to place them all on the same level; as in geological formations, these historical forms contain a whole series of primary, secondary, tertiary types, etc.) has still to be written.”

The dissolution of common property and the spread of private property are not the necessary outcome of a historical development; different configurations of the secondary could and can arise from the primary. Different temporal layers coexist at the same time, combine and conflict with each other. There is no guaranteed outcome from this interweaving of temporalities. Just as, conversely, not even the outcome of capitalist modernity from the elements

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41 MECW 24, p. 349.
42 MECW 24, p. 349.
43 MECW 24, p. 358.
that formed its basis was guaranteed. From this perspective it is possible to re-read the chapter on primitive accumulation.

The original constellation of so-called capitalist accumulation, read without teleology of history, does not show a linear path from feudalism to capitalist modernity, but a mass of trajectories open to different outcomes. In fact, different historical trajectories intertwined and combined with each other: the “expropriation of the agricultural population from the land,” the “the breaking-up of the bands of feudal retainers,” the Reformation and “spoliation of the church property,” the “restoration of the Stuarts” and the abolition of “the feudal tenure of land.” Various events intermixed, through the systematic use of extra-economic violence, in a war of private property against “communal property (Gemeindeeigentum).” In his later years, Marx would be extremely interested in the changes in communal property in the Russian and extra-European contexts, which he learned from his dialogue with Maxim Kovalevsky. In his comments to Kovalevsky, just as in his ethnological writings, Marx presents history with many possible levels and trajectories: the dissolution of community property gave different outcomes in different economic, political and social contexts, so that European development ceases to be normative and, indeed, can be better understood from an extra-European perspective. In fact, Marx criticizes Kovalevsky for having found “European-western feudalism” in Indian community relations. In this way, for Marx, and contrary to what he had supported, for example, in the Grundrisse, “feudalism” ceased to be a category applicable to all historical and geographical contexts.

“Communal property” was not and is not destined for dissolution in the forms of modern European private property. It could and can be configured in forms different from those followed by the trajectory of dominant Western civilization. It should immediately be said that communal property is not property of the state, but regards a form of community ownership regulated by

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44 MECW 35, p. 707.  
46 MECW 35, p. 709-10.  
47 MECW 35, p. 711-13  
48 MECW 35, pp. 713-14  
49 MECW 35, p. 714.  
52 I agree with Kevin Anderson, who is among the editors of the critical edition of the works of Marx, when he points out that the theoretical core of the Ethnological Notebooks consists of a “multilinear model of historical development” as opposed to a unilinear one: K.B. Anderson, Marx’s Late Writings on Non-Western and Precapitalist Societies and Gender, in «Rethinking Marx», vol. 14, n. 4 (2002), p. 90. See also L. Krader, Introduction, in Marx, Ethnological Notebooks, cit., pp. 1-85.  
53 Marx, Exzerpte aus M.M. Kovalevskij, in Harstick, Karl Marx über Formen, cit., p. 76.  
customs and traditions. One example of this, in the European context, is the manifesto of German peasants of 1525, also called the “Twelve Articles”, which claimed the use and restitution to the community (“gemain”) of woods, pastures and common land unjustly appropriated by the lords.\footnote{P. Blick, \textit{Die Revolution von 1525} (Oldenbourg Verlag: München 2004), pp. 321-327.} In England, “common rights” and “common grazing” defended by the Diggers came into conflict with the \textit{enclosures}.\footnote{J. Thirsk, “Enclosing and Engrossing”, in J. Thirsk and H.P.R. Finberg (ed), \textit{The Agrarian History of England and Wales} (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1967), vol. 4, p. 200.} The conflict between collective forms of property and its individualization could have had different outcomes. If Hobbes and Locke are celebrated in the official canon of political thought among theoreticians of the state and modern possessive individualism, Müntzer and Winstanley are the representatives of the alternative canon of countless practical and theoretical uprisings against private property. Müntzer evoked the community of goods created by God drawing on agrarian communism and the common property of the \textit{Markgenossenschaften}, which in Germany were able to survive until the nineteenth century;\footnote{G. Rudolph, \textit{Thomas Müntzer Sozialökonomische Konzeption und das Traditionsbewusstseins der sozialistischen Arbeiterbewegung}, in “Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie”, vol. 23 (1975), p. 562.} Winstanley reactivated the Christianity of the original community and the community of goods, the right of the commons against enclosures.

Marx follows the long war against the commons through Kovalevsky’s studies which describe it in terms of the transition from common ownership by the community to its dissolution, and “individualization” into individual private property.\footnote{Marx, \textit{Exzerpte aus M.M. Kovalevskij}, in Harstick, \textit{Karl Marx über Formen}, cit., pp. 57-8.} The process of “individualization” is twofold: on the one hand it concerns the transformation of common property from “inalienable” into privately owned and traded property, on the other hand, the transformation of relations between members of the community into relations between atomized individuals and competitors. This war against the collective required the constant intervention of extra-economic violence from the state, of countless “Acts for enclosures of Commons, in other words, decrees by which the landlords grant themselves the people's land as private property, decrees of expropriation of the people.”\footnote{MECW 35, p. 715.} This war still continues today against collective forms of property and association. Marx describes how during the French Revolution this conflict passed through the Le Chapelier law, whose Article IV declared that if “citizens belonging to the same profession, craft or trade have joint discussions and make joint decisions with the intention of refusing together to perform their trade or insisting together on providing the services of their trade or their labours only at a particular price, then the said deliberations and agreements ... shall be declared unconstitutional, derogatory to liberty and the declaration of the rights of man, etc.”\footnote{MECW 35, p. 730.} The workers’ associations were banned inasmuch as they
were seen as an attempt to restore the old feudal corporations. This is why they were fought against in the name of human rights. But during the Revolution it wasn’t the nostalgics of feudal privileges, but rather the radical exponents of the Sansculottes, who tried to reactivate the associations in a new form, the sovereign rights of the citizens' assemblies and the binding mandate, thereby undermining the concept, shared by both the Girondins and the Jacobins, of national unity and its representation. These associative and communal traditions were later reactivated during the Paris Commune and in the experiments of the workers' councils of the twentieth century.

The reactivation of seemingly secondary traditions, yet still vital in community life forms, triggers a conflict between temporalities providing energy to resist the violence of capitalist modernity and redirect its course. During the Haitian revolts of August 1791, Voodoo traditions acted as regenerating energy that “enabled the slaves to break away psychologically from the very real and concrete chains of slavery and to see themselves as independent beings.” The black slaves reactivated their own traditions in order to realize freedom in the same way “the masses of the old French Revolution, performed the task of their time – that of unchaining and establishing modern bourgeois society – in Roman costumes and with Roman phrases.” Social, political and economic conflicts are always conflicts between times, and anachronisms are the fuse that is able to activate new configurations of common life.

Historically, capital encounters a large spectrum of differences of gender, religion, ethnicity, as well as differences generated by racism. Capital is able to use these differences for its own profit in order to differentiate wages and intensities of exploitation, thereby dividing the working class. These differences and hierarchies are understood to pre-date capitalism; however, as soon as capital subsumes them, they are reconfigured and reshaped. Capital uses these differences and hierarchies, but in order to subsume them they “must first be destroyed as independent forms and subordinated to industrial capital” through economic and extra-economic violence. I would like to stress that those differences are neither historical invariants nor pure products of capitalism. Instead, already existing differences and practices are located on a different temporality and, even when they are reshaped and reorganized by capital, they can appear with the physiognomy of traditional hierarchical relationships. While subsuming these differences and converting them into dimensions of its own life-process, capital cannot prevent them from also appearing as nonsynchronisms that,

64 Karl Marx, Theories of Surplus Value (1861-63), p. 1496.
when confronted with the dominant capitalist temporality, can disclose both emancipatory and reactionary possibilities. And sometimes these two sides are interwoven.

In India, the 1855 rebellion of the Santals was explained by the “leaders” in “supernatural terms, as an act carried out at the behest of the Santal god Thakur.”65 The rebel peasants stated that Thakur made an appearance and told them to rebel by assuring “them that British bullets would not harm the devotee-rebels.”66 In the self-representation of the rebels’ leaders the real agency belongs to supernatural beings, indeed it is the god himself who is fighting, as they said.67 We must recognize, in accordance with the leaders of the rebellion, the agency of the god Thakur. The problem is not questioning the existence of the god or categorizing those beliefs among pre-modern superstitions. The issue is that without the intervention of Thakur, or the Voodoo Ceremony in Haiti, those rebellions would not have taken place, or at least not in that form.

But if the friction between layers of time causes tension and conflicts, then the anachronisms point out possible directions and solutions. That is what Mariátegui gathers when he combines the socialist project in Latin America with the archaic Inca communal organization, which can disclose a different, non-capitalist trajectory to the present.68 This idea escapes romanticist criticism only if one abandons the unilinear paradigm of historical time that reads everything in terms of before and after, backward, residual and advanced. Instead we must understand history as a vertical stratification of temporalities that can be reactivated in the present. Formal subsumption incorporates a heterogeneous mix of forms of life and temporalities that continue to conflict with each other. In these conflicts the archaic, like asynchronous time, can generate a reactionary configuration, as happened in Nazism,69 or it can display a different trajectory for the present, the way Mariátegui tried by combining socialism and Incan communism.

Reading *Ancient Society* (1877) by L.H. Morgan, Marx refers constantly to the Slavs in relation to the communist organization of the primal families.70 Moreover, quoting Morgan, Marx wrote that modern societies tend towards “a revival in a superior form of an archaic social type”. He then adds that “we should not let ourselves be frightened by the word ‘archaic’.”71 Indeed, the

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66 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, p. 103
71 Marx to V. Zasulič, in MECW 24, 350.
elimination of capitalist production can be understood as “the return of modern societies to an ‘archaic (archaïque)’ type of communal property.”\textsuperscript{72} The archaic, being contemporary, is not condemned to die, but can be combined with the temporality of the working class struggles, thus giving rise to a new social formation that is alternative to the capitalist modernity. In other words, there is future that is still encapsulated in the past and can be freed from the contemporaneity of the archaic in constellation with other temporalities. Wherever and whenever existing forms come into contact and conflict with capitalist modernity, the result is a proliferation of temporalities and conflicting asynchronisms. In this clash of temporalities the archaic is no longer such, but rather it releases possibilities of emancipation and reorientation of the trajectories of modern civilization. Only, as Marx said, “we should not let ourselves be frightened by the word ‘archaic’.”\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, p 350.
\textsuperscript{73} Marx to V. Zasulič, in MECW 24, 350.