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Reception and Appropriation of Alan Ford Comic Book Series in Yugoslavia

A critical review

Jan Charvát
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Student Number: s2575116

Supervisor: Mari Nakamura

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In Cheb | Eger on the 31st of August 2020

Jan Charvát

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Introduction

As the fundamentals of this thesis had to be revised on multiple stages of my research due to external factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the final product you now have in front of you went a long way from its starting point. Alan Ford and the genre of Capitalism-critical comics as a whole are already a topic of two of my articles in late stages of development and most importantly, a comparative doctoral thesis for a double degree programme at Charles University in Prague and Sapienza University of Rome. Therefore, I had to be extremely careful not to self-plagiarize from yet unpublished work that will appear elsewhere.

The aim of my research is to grasp the complexity of the Alan Ford popular phenomenon in Yugoslavia and ex-Yugoslav states. In doing so, I insofar conducted dozens of interviews with scholars, students and ordinary people from the ex-Yugoslav states and some scholars which are (as is the case with me) foreign to the region, who have research focus in the contemporary history of the area and its peoples. As the origin of the comic book series is Italian, I had to consult Italian cultural analysts and Croatian-Italian scholars at multiple stages of my research. I had to consider what is useful to publish within these pages and what is to be published elsewhere. I answered the question with the help from Eco:¹ I asked what the role of the reader of this thesis is, but also, who will this reader most likely be. For the most part of my more than a yearlong research, the questions permeating all my efforts were:

“What can the intercultural Italian-Croatian (/–Yugoslav) phenomenon of Alan Ford tell us of the contemporary reality of popular misconceptions regarding former Yugoslavia?”

and

“How can knowledge of in-group humour be relevant to the practice of policy makers and students of IR who (will) hold stakes in the political landscape of former Yugoslavia.”

Such broad questions are not only permeating the efforts of this thesis, but also the manuscripts mentioned earlier. Therefore, what I decided to focus on here within the questions-delimited field was to give an exhaustive, yet hopefully easy to read overview of the problems arising from research being done as part of a West-centric field of IR. Simultaneously, I had to account for the misconceptions of the Non-Aligned Movement Yugoslavia² being “behind the Iron

¹ Eco, Lector in Fabula: Role čtenáře, aneb, interpretační kooperace v narativních textech.

² A movement established in Yugoslavia’s capitol – Belgrade; see Rubinstein, *Yugoslavia and the Non-Aligned World*, 106.

Curtain” and also explain why I see the methods of semiotics as described in our handbooks not being utilizable in the study of socialist cultures.

Same goes for the case of what has been presented to us in our classes as “Marxist IR”, regrettably omitting anything written “East of Bonn” during the Cold War. I therefore had to take it on me to not only introduce some artefacts of comic book and comics artform inspired production from within the other side of “Iron Curtain”, but also the different and our curricula-omitted internationalist theories of humanist Marxism as not only a critique of Marxism-Leninism popular especially in Yugoslavia, but also a theoretical framework for analysing socialist cultures. With referencing concepts and theories of Western and humanist Marxists, I explain how that what has been possible to publish in the non-aligned Yugoslavia (such as is the case with the Alan Ford series) would not be allowed in print within the “Eastern Bloc” after the *événement manqué* of the humanist Marxism inspired reforms of 1968 in Czechoslovakia being suppressed by military intervention.³

The last chapter of my thesis then gives a summary introduction to the phenomenon of Alan Ford, but also to what the comics studies and political semiotics scholars of ex-Yugoslav had to say on the subject. Content-wise this includes only examples from my research I decided to exclude from other writings.

³ Drechselová, “Alain Badiou: 1968 est un événement manqué.”

Part 1 – Historical Contextualization

Incommensurability of nation and narod and cultural subjectivity of socialist states

It is obvious that a case that reviews the popularity of an Italian-originated series in Yugoslavia as a multi-national state that split up into separate nation states case is a case multidimensionally international. However, as internationality speaks about relations of nations, I need to explain how the real-world implementation of nation differs around the world and how this nationality was conceived of in Yugoslavia. As the Leiden University IR programme was of an anglophone focus, it is was too easy to ignore certain aspects of the concept's history. Maybe it is not important to go as far back as medieval universities precursor to university corporations – *nationes*. And yet, it is impossible to ignore them completely due to their significance. Each *natio* was a student body grouping together students of the same region of birth, presupposing that they will be able to get along due to subjective cultural and linguistical closeness. I consider *nationes* in the terms of historical allusions connected to them.

Much of what I would want to say in this matter has already said much better by the contributors to *Imagined Communities: Constructing Collective Identities in Medieval Europe*. Of course, the title itself alludes to Benedict Anderson's famous book *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*⁴ that had been sporadically mentioned even in some Leiden University classes I attended. Authors of the said book allude to Anderson as a means of making a step in the direction of the deconstruction of his myth and the myth of his research being sound. By this, I mean his *Imagined Communities* being perceived (also in our Leiden classes) as an objective summary of what has been – an attempted history of nationality. The entire compendium the authors put together is a monument to why this is not the case and why and how subjectivity appears. At one point they go as far as to tell the reader that Benedict Anderson is not a historian himself.⁵ I would try to mitigate their critique by saying that he is a scholar important for the study of history. However, writing this thesis for the eyes of people from the field of IR, the average reader/ listener might not be familiar with entry-level readings on the conceptual and political history of nations, the four authors point out to.⁶

⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

⁵ Pleszczyński et al., *Imagined Communities: Constructing Collective Identities in Medieval Europe*, 4

⁶ *Ibid*, 250.

Although alongside of Anderson they only mention Eric Hobsbawm for his *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* and Ernst Gellner for *Nations and Nationalism*, I would also add Czechoslovakia-based Miroslav Hroch amongst the most pivotal readings on the matter.⁷ This is because as a trained historian of the political thought and myths of East Central Europe, I see the impact of his work on many if not most historians of the mesoregion that deal with nationalism. In a triangular comparison of Hroch with the communist historian Eric Hobsbawm and the anti-Stalinist Ernst Gellner, we can attempt to historicize not only the three scholars, but also the internationality of the 20th century in East Central Europe. Gellner's emigration from Czechoslovakia to England after the Second World War was motivated by his fears of a Stalinist regime taking power. His fears came true with nearly 110 people being executed in political processes in between 1949 and 1960.⁸ Amongst them a Marxist historian Závěš Kalandra, perceivable as a scholarly precursor to not only Gellner, Hobsbawm, Hroch, but also many figures of the Czech narratology, new historiography and semiotical schools (including the semiotician pivotal to the second chapter of this thesis Vladimír Macura) due to his work on the deconstruction of national and political myths.⁹

Gellner repatriated to Czechoslovakia after the so-called Velvet Revolution of 1989 and before the dissolution of Czechoslovakia on 1st of January 1993, he became a professor at the newly founded Central European University. At the same university, during the opening of its Budapest campus, Eric Hobsbawm gave a speech to the new generation of historians, calling them to deconstruct national myths and be wary of the legitimizing ones. Amongst the multitude of global examples some came from the Czech Lands or dealt with the Kosovo Oath that is accompanying the Serbia-Kosovo struggle to this day. He also spent some time contemplating the legitimizing myths of the newly independent state of Croatia with Zvonimir the Great being Franjo Tuđman's ancestor.¹⁰ Franjo Tuđman may not be a household name for many students of IR, however, he was the Yugoslav military general turned professor of socialist and worker movement history turned president of Croatia in the 1990s. His presidency cooperated with Croatian emigres from Yugoslavia who were behind dozens of fatal terrorist attacks, operating in various pro-Croat independence movements on multiple continents de facto since the end of the Second World War.^{11,12}

⁷ Hroch, *European Nations: Explaining Their Formation*.

⁸ Vlček, "Seznam popravených pro politické trestné činy,"

⁹ Charvát, "Polish, Czech and Serbian Myth Deconstructors".

¹⁰ Horn, "E.J. Hobsbawm: The New Threat to History.".

¹¹ Hockenos, *Homeland Calling: Exile Patriotism & the Balkan Wars*, 88-89.

¹² For more on this see Tokić, *Croatian Radical Separatism and Diaspora Terrorism during the Cold War*.

As the academic sphere and the nation (re-)building statist movements share the same public sphere, the paragraphs preceding this one are necessary, because they contextualize the artificiality of the concept of a nation. Something to be artificial, however, only denotes that it was made by man and just as any man-made instrument, the concept of a nation can be used with some purpose in mind. Nations being man-made is a thought that stands opposite to the thought of them being pre- or God-given. It may be due to this that in our classes of International Relations, we almost omitted this deconstruction. As there is not a universal consensus on the existence or powers of a universal Deity, any such interpretations may be interpreted as direct attacks on someone's individual belief system or the belief system of a majority-collective.

In Titoist Yugoslavia, the scholars did not have the same starting point as those in universities of states who have monarchs who historically ruled with the divine right – By the Grace of God. Not even was “In God we trust” written on Yugoslav dinars. As a secular socialist country, they were free to dismiss the non-arbitrariness of nations as things of a pre-given nature automatically deserving a right to self-rule. It was the workers' self-rule that held the prime in the Yugoslav socialist theory. Generalizing, Yugoslavia was (at least for the first two decades of its existence) an attempt to form a top-down trans-national identity that would have the former national identities be progressively dissolved into the transregional and post-national one. The official politics of the state were that of building Socialism rather than building or maintaining a nation; definitely not a ‘nation = state’ as the anglophone term sometimes misleadingly universalizes.

This gets more complicated with non-Western Marxists in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia or the Soviet Union understanding the objects to be surpassed – nations – differently. To only mention Czechoslovakia, “Czechoslovakism” – an attempt to create a “multinational nation” similar, but not the same as “Yugoslavism”, could be understood as a reference to the interwar president and sociologist T. G. Masaryk. This would be perceivable as reactionary. Keeping in mind that Czechs have different words for peoples and nation, their word for “nation” was perceived in the contexts of Czechoslovak history curricula and popular propaganda as something having to do with the proto-communist Christian Hussite movement in the 15th century and the anti-Austrian and anti-German struggles of the oppressed Czechs. Slovakia had a different nation-building process with the significant Other also being the “protestant” Czechs (aside of the more important Hungarians) against whom Slovaks aimed to define themselves.

The Slovak nation was also undoubtedly the primary movement behind the popular Slovak National Uprising against the German Nazi oppressors during the Second World War. The importance of the uprising being so big that the post-war governments of Czechoslovakia had

to recognize the importance of the Slovak nation within the state structures. This all the more signified by the national emblem of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic used in between 1960 and 1990 being a Bohemian lion without a crown, that was substituted with a red star; the symbol of Slovak National Uprising being a centrepiece on the lion's breasts. Predominantly white and red colours being the historical colours of the Bohemian nation; the shape of the emblem alluded to the pavise used by Hussite defenders of the Czech Lands from their crusader enemies.



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Now consider the other, Yugoslav, symbol in use after the 1963 amendments to the constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia effectively turning it into the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.¹⁵ As the reader can see, there are no symbols directly referencing any of the nations. The torches represent, similarly to the fire in the crest of the Slovak National Uprising, a fire of revolution. All torches being added together alludes to the state motto of “Brotherhood and Unity”.¹⁶ 29th November 1943 denotes grounding of the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, a Tito-led partisan state-like body the aim of which was to have a formal state structure after the military victory is achieved. The trouble with the nation-concept is even more visible when I would like to give an English name to the conflict the military victory was to be achieved in. Narodnooslobodilačka borba is the Yugoslav term for the struggle. It can be competently translated to German as Volksbefreiungskampf, but in English that could be both “Struggle of the Liberation of the Peoples” and “National Liberation Struggle”. The latter ignoring its revolutionary dimension. Narod is thus a homonym for both nation and peoples.

¹³ Tferenczy, *Coat of Arms of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic*.

¹⁴ Koreanovsky, *Emblem of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*.

¹⁵ In comparison to the emblems of the 1943-1945 Democratic Federal Yugoslavia and Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, the difference is the addition of a 6th torch for the Bosnian Muslims and the red star (crvena zvezda petokraka) being of a slightly different shape and a lighter shade of red.

¹⁶ Some national imagery can, however, be seen in the symbols of the Croatian and Serbian Socialist Republics existing within the federation. Those include historical crests.

The semiotics of the nation included in (realsocialist) state symbols is not complete without a last comparison with the Czechoslovak case referencing the national anthem. The Czechoslovak anthem had two parts. One sung in Czech, the other in Slovak. Both parts; Czech “Kde domov můj” – “Where Is My Home” and Slovak “Nad Tatrou sa blýska” – “Above Tatras is Lightning” taken from two different songs, each representing one of the two officially recognized nations. Although not impossible in the Yugoslav case, with the torches representing 6 different nations/officially recognized peoples, it was impractical. Therefore, Yugoslav national anthem was “Hej Slaveni!” – “Hey, Slavs!”. The same song with the same melody and only some minor changes such as substituting the “Slavs” for the “Slovaks” was the official anthem of the Slovak State, a puppet clerical fascist regime put in power by Hitler in Slovakia against which the Slovak National Uprising was aimed. This is worth noting, because it speaks volumes of the transregional character of the East Central European mesoregion.

Research study in the problemology of an exclusively Western-centric Marxist IR

For a reader who reads of “panslavism” for the first time in this sentence, it would probably be understandable to dismiss this ideology as something secondary to geographical proximity. However, the importance to even have this elaborate comparative contextualization of this matter is based on the most likely reader of this thesis being an affiliate of Leiden University and from my experience thus never being acquainted with it. From the countless interactions with students and having read the syllabi of not only my classes, but also classes of my classmates, I must confess that not to mention pan-Slavism amongst the ideological currents of the 19th and 20th century is somewhat strange. What else was used en masse in rationalizing the emergence of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia or in defending the invasion of the “brotherly armies” of the Warsaw Pact to Czechoslovakia in 1968?

It would not be incorrect to answer “Marxism-Leninism” as for the latter, however, is there any way of telling if the students actually know of the ML interpretations of the international relations if the only three Marxist thinkers mentioned in our mandatory classes were Gramsci (representing Italian anti-structure Marxist leftism, theorized around the same time as Stalinism), Wallerstein and Cox (both representing Western Marxist IR rather than Marxist interpretations of international relations and structures)?

The MA courses at Leiden give out the impression that the international relations and the problematic of international were only theorized by scholars native to the “winning bloc of the Cold War”. The absence of intellectual currents such as panslavism from the curricula is then telling of how alongside “Eastern (and at times Western) Marxism” all other theoretical currents thought by Eastern thinkers are not only marginalized, but rather completely left out. This poses a moral dilemma: Is it even possible for this thesis to not take part in legitimizing the structure that degrades East Central European thinkers to a “*to be left out of curricula*” position?

I believe, there is, because I hold there is more to IR than Cold War warrior-like lecturers, who adamantly refuse to go past 1989 or 1991¹⁷ in reshaping their theory. Not only is that impossible for me, as the dissolution of Yugoslavia only happened in. A honourable mention of an IR scholar who in fact actively tries to dismantle such dehumanizing and metaphorically book-burning structure by putting Eastern and Western (or in some understanding Western and US-American) Marxist thinkers in a dialogue with one another is Kai Jonas Koddenbrock for his *Strategies of critique in International Relations: From Foucault and Latour towards Marx*.¹⁸ His article, as its name suggests, however, mainly deals with the hardships of said critique and does not take much time to explain the core tenets of the theory behind the critique. It is arguable that this would not even be possible due to the length-restrains of an article format, however, some other authors have seemingly tried to do that.

So is the case of *The Dialectic of the Concrete: Reconsidering Dialectic for IR and Foreign Policy Analysis* penned by Benno Teschke and Can Cemgil.¹⁹ As anyone with the most elementary knowledge of Marxist humanist tradition can see, the title alludes to Karel Kosík’s attempt to reformulate the tenets of Marx utilizing a phenomenological frame – “*Dialectics of the Concrete*”.²⁰ Unlike the authors of *Imagined Communities: Constructing Collective Identities in Medieval Europe* whom I mentioned critiquing the pedestal of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* in Constructivist IR currents, I argue Teschke and Cemgil do not pay lip service to Kosík in order to deconstruct his myth, but rather to invite for deconstruction of IR in order to make space for a truly international way of perceiving the international. A bridge where the West could meet that what is excluded from its curricula.

¹⁷ Years of the takedown of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union respectively.

¹⁸ Koddenbrock, “Strategies of Critique in International Relations.”

¹⁹ Teschke, and Cemgil. “The Dialectic of the Concrete”.

²⁰ Kosík, *Dialectics of the Concrete*.

The authors themselves remind the reader of valid critique of their insofar work by Brincat:²¹ “Heine and Teschke²² emphasise intersubjectivity and state its importance in a historical materialist dialectic, yet they do not ‘expand upon’ it sufficiently.”²³ Although insufficient, they introduce the IR readership to the pivotal tenet of young Marx – praxis. The appeal for the recovery of the notion of philosophy of praxis is central to Teschke’s and Cemgil’s undertaking.²⁴

Speaking of this category embedding them into international communities, they say: “*These ‘transnational communities’ socialise their individual members into patterned ways of doing diplomacy, statesmanship, bureaucracy, etc. The difference between ‘praxis’ and a ‘practice’ is that while praxis refers to all human action, practice is only one class of action among others: patterned social action. The notion of praxis, in contrast, is resistant to an ontological definition—like the conception of humans as rational utility maximisers—as it has to remain historically open to its many-sided manifestations. Ontology needs to be historicised. Praxis is what bridges ‘the world and thinking’.*”^{25,26}

I perceive the self-recognition of their insufficiencies with the strive to speak about praxis within the international and internationalist communities as a call for bringing forth examples that could help amend their theory with historical examples probably unbeknownst to them, because otherwise, I see no reason for them not being mentioned. Before I get to do that in my elaboration of the Yugoslav based school of international thought ‘Praxis’, however, I must give Tesche the respect his scholarly struggle deserves in deconstructing the myth of 1648 that was regrettably repeated even in our “ideas class”.²⁷ The other scholars building up this critique from a myth-deconstructing standpoint are also scholars with interpretive approaches to the study of IR such as Halvard Leira and Benjamin de Carvalho, who’s endeavour in revising the IR theory-based myths of 1648 and 1919 motivates IR researchers and students to challenge the theory contemporarily taught.²⁸

The myth I find it necessary to focus on is the myth of 1989 with the Western theory winning over the Eastern. The myth has the student of IR presume that during the Cold War there was

²¹ Brincat, “Towards a Social-Relational Dialectic for World Politics.”

²² Heine, and Teschke. “Sleeping Beauty and the Dialectical Awakening”

²³ Teschke, and Cemgil. “The Dialectic of the Concrete,” 14.

²⁴ Ibid, 5.

²⁵ Kitching, Karl Marx and the Philosophy of Praxis.

²⁶ Teschke, and Cemgil. “The Dialectic of the Concrete,” 12.

²⁷ Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*.

²⁸ Carvalho, Leira, and Hobson, “The Big Bangs of IR: The Myths That Your Teachers Still Tell You about 1648 and 1919.”

only the Capitalist “Free” Western Bloc and the Rest. Within this Rest there was to be the Soviet Union-led Communist Bloc and the so-called “Third World” in which the two Blocks struggled for ideological dominance. Stalinism and by proxy all of Marxism being equated with Nazism. The question that is not being raised often enough is: What happened to the states or inter-state agents and thinkers that did not want to be part of either the Soviet-led or the “Free” Bloc? One example of what happened to a country that wanted to build a socialism with a human face, without the subordinate position to the Soviet Union is the Warsaw Pact occupation of Czechoslovakia which lasted nearly 25 years. The Czechoslovak reform movement being led by communists within the party structures, including the then president and the prime minister.²⁹ Another example is the post Tito-Stalin split Yugoslavia, the founder of NAM.

Yet another, also Eurocentric, example could be the 1956 Hungarian Uprising led by the Hungarian communist government of Imre Nagy. In said communist government, two intellectuals held seats that are worth mentioning. The first was George Lukács, a Marxist aesthetician and a defining figure in non-European postcolonial theory.³⁰ Although world-renown and de facto pivotal for postcolonial theory, none of the texts in our Leiden IR MA core class dedicated to aesthetics mentioned him. The other was István Bibó, a PhD graduate of the Geneva Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, an IR expert who held the position as the minister of state.³¹

The first intellectual – Lukács – could serve as a good introduction to the critique of Marxist Orthodoxy and Marxism-Leninism as understood by the leading cadres of the Soviet Union or their perceived adversaries in Pentagon. The core handbook of our class *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*,³² which we used in the course Ideas in World Politics – a course that was to give us understanding also of Marxism – there is a chapter dedicated to Marxism, Chapter 8. The class itself had us read multiple chapters from the book per each class. For the class I have in mind, it was chapters 8-13, the topics being namely Marxism, Critical Theory, Constructivism, Feminism, Poststructuralism, Postcolonialism. Additionally, two articles were given as mandatory and four handbooks as recommended reading.

In recommended readings there was no reference to Lukács aside of a sentence-long reference in the article of Kamran Matin in one of the recommended books that dealt with Ali Shariati,

²⁹ Pruša, “Muži Ledna.”

³⁰ Persram, *Postcolonialism and Political Theory*, 112.

³¹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “István Bibó.”

³² Dunne, et al., *International Relations Theories*.

an Iranian modernist revolutionary, comparing Shariati's intellectual effort in defining the grounds of a class consciousness with Lukács's understanding of it;³³ and the footnote 44 in Richard Devetak's *Critical International Theory* dealing with the difficulties of delimiting "Western Marxism". To quote Devetak quoting Martin Jay in this footnote: " [Western Marxism] finds its origins in 'a loose circle of theorists who took their cue from Lukács and other founding fathers of the immediate post-First World War era, Antonio Gramsci, Karl Korsch and Ernst Bloch'" then adding "For useful, if competing, accounts of Western Marxism, see Perry Anderson,³⁴ Martin Jay,³⁵ and David McLellan."³⁶,³⁷

To get back to our core handbook, Lukács is in fact mentioned. Not in chapter 8 on Marxism, however, but in the chapter following this one, Chapter 9 on Critical Theory penned by Steven C. Roach: "But, between Hegel and Marx and the Frankfurt School stood the Western Marxists, in particular Georg Lukács (Chapter 8)." In Chapter 8 Lukács is, however, not mentioned nor referred to in the sources for the chapter. This even as reification and class consciousness is recalled.³⁸ In this chapter written by Mark Rupert has reification summed up as: "[T]he practice of conflating abstractions with reality."³⁹⁴⁰ Class consciousness is mentioned only when calling for an (in Rupert's words) "apt summary of the Western Marxists" and omits the class dimension: "those individuals who became known as "Western Marxists" saw the need to concern themselves with consciousness, subjectivity, culture, ideology and the concept of socialism precisely in order to make possible radical political change."⁴¹ On page 12 of Douglas M. Kellner's *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, we can read that the sentence quoted by Rupert is short one word – it is preceded by "Thus", which is in turn preceded by an entire paragraph that tells us of the motivations of the 'Western Marxists' to concern themselves with things that seemingly only deserve a mention as an out of context quotation. Kellner spends the paragraph explaining that although Western Marxists agreed that objective conditions for a revolution in post-WWI Europe were met, those subjective for each and every such peoples,

³³ Shilliam, *International Relations and Non-Western Thought*, 116.

³⁴ Anderson, Considerations on Western Marxism.

³⁵ Jay, *Marxism and Totality*.

³⁶ McLellan, "Western Marxism."

³⁷ Devetak, *Critical International Theory*, 73-74

³⁸ Rupert, "Marxism."

³⁹ This summary is by no means acceptable if our aim is to understand it. If we need to be succinct, the definition by Kellner, whom Rupert quotes does a much better job: "[Reification is] the process through which human beings are turned into things, and thing-like, objectified relationships and ideas come to dominate human life - as an important component of the critique of capitalism." (see Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, 11) Reification in Lukács is not a stand-alone concept, however, and should be understood as part of the reification theory (see Reification Theory in Stahl, "Georg [György] Lukács.")

⁴⁰ Rupert, "Marxism.", 171

⁴¹ Ibid.

state or nation (and more importantly proletariat within these units) were not.⁴² In other words, the questions at hand were: Why did a successful international revolution not take place?; What conditions must be met for this to happen?; and What can intellectuals do to go about fulfilling such conditions? These questions are more widely elaborated on in Kellner's introductions of individual Western Marxist thinkers' theories that come later in the book.⁴³

It is visible that Rupert is much more observant of Western Marxist thought when it comes to Gramsci, however this chapter was supposed to be introducing Marxism and not Gramscianism with an occasional reference to other trends within Marxism. I must therefore stress that just as was the case with the subjective being an obstacle in going forth with the revolution, it is an obstacle in the study of Marxism and Marxist IR if we are to explain the totality of Marxism with a dominance of one subjective school. What is true to one, does not have to be true to the others. Especially if Gramscianism is only a subset of Marxist thought and by no means one defining the entirety of it. It is all too easy to fall into the logical fallacy of composition in a parallel to: "a car is a vehicle; hence all vehicles have wheels (and are car-shaped, etc.)".

It is legitimate to ask why Gramsci holds such prominent position within the Western academic accounts of Western Marxism and Marxism in IR. I would argue it is because of the structural problems Western academia faces both within and outside the ivory towers. It is possible to read case of Rupert's preoccupation with Gramsci in the context of his main research – namely domestic politics and (right wing) populist thought in the United States of America.⁴⁴ His interpretations of Marx are therefore interpretations for a very subjective US-American audience. This is by no means a personal attack. Rupert, much like Gramsci, Lukács or Marx writes within a specific historical context and for a specific audience.

Rupert-like subjective interpretative summaries of (maybe) useful, yet (definitely) competing accounts of Marxism put him next to Perry Anderson, Martin Jay, and David McLellan (as in the understanding of Devetak and Jay). The other question would be if there are there not more diverse interpretations of international Marxism even within the United States that students of the IR theories could draw from as case studies? There is, of course, the dimension of the scholars of the political thought entering the political mainstream. As a relatively new case of this, we could point out the former Democratic presidential hopeful Pete Buttigieg as a son of

⁴² Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity*, 12.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 12-232.

⁴⁴ "Mark Rupert, Professor, Political Science."

one of the first editor/ co-translator of Gramsci for an anglophone audience⁴⁵ and Pete Buttigieg's own attempt to contextualize the philosophy of Bernie Sanders.⁴⁶

What this case has in common with much of the Marxist IR literature, however, is that the US interpreters introduced for an IR reader happen to be white and US-born. The issue at hand is, however, that many thinkers whose interpretations shaped the left intellectual currents are not exclusively that. Take Albert Einstein's essay "Why Socialism?"⁴⁷ or the Marxism-critical Martin Luther King and his progressive, theological interpretation of what Marxism stands for in the United States.⁴⁸ Why not speak, if there is a need to be US-centric within the IR discipline, of Angela Davis,⁴⁹ Malcolm X,⁵⁰ Claudia Jones,⁵¹ W. E. B. Du Bois⁵² and others with their anti-capitalist or outright Marxist interpretations of international relations? Are their intellectual efforts regarding internationality not worth considering, if only for a necessary critique of subjectivity? Western Marxist thought on the matters of international relations is not well represented by Gramsci alone.

Is the upkeep of the stigmatization effect of the mark of a Marxist truly so important to our field that in the chapter 13 of the said core book on colonialism, Franz Fanon is to be mentioned only as someone, who's *The Wretched of the Earth*⁵³ has an introduction written by Paul Sartre?⁵⁴ Franz Fanon was not only a Marxist, he was an intellectual father of postcolonialism who's book (according to Edward Said) *The Wretched of the Earth* "...is in part a dialogue with George Lukacs' 1922 analysis of Reification in 'History and Class Consciousness'".⁵⁵ In said dialogue, it is visible how Lukács helped shape one of the core theorists of postcolonial thought and how he can still be used to amend it. The other theorist is very well represented in a recently published book *Confronting Reification* edited by Gregory R. Smulewicz-Zucker.⁵⁶ The editor-written chapter 12 *Linking Racism and Reification in the Thought of Georg Lukács* deals with combining Lukács's reification and class consciousness with the concept of double

⁴⁵ Gramsci, Prison Notebooks - Volume 2.

⁴⁶ Buttigieg, "Bernie Sanders."

⁴⁷ Einstein, "Why Socialism?"

⁴⁸ Boswell, "MLK and Marxism."

⁴⁹ Davis, "Angela Davis on Black Lives Matter, Palestine, and the Future of Radicalism."

⁵⁰ Smith, "Malcolm X: 'You Show Me a Capitalist, I'll Show You a Bloodsucker.'"

⁵¹ Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*.

⁵² Fletcher, "Remembering W.E.B. Du Bois."

⁵³ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

⁵⁴ Grovogui, "Postcolonialism.", 223.

⁵⁵ Black, "Rethinking Fanon: the Continuing Dialogue. Edited by Nigel C Gibson."

⁵⁶ Smulewicz-Zucker, *Confronting Reification: Revitalizing Georg Lukács's Thought in Late Capitalism*.

consciousness coined and developed W. E. B. Du Bois in order to analyse the racism in contemporary United States.⁵⁷⁵⁸⁵⁹

At the first reading of what Steven C. Roach has to say on Lukács in Chapter 9 of our core handbook,⁶⁰ it is visible he understands the need of him being read as part of the IR theory and not in the form of a footnote. The passage quoted earlier could also be interpreted as a genuine reference to a colleague's chapter that Roach thought must include the founding father and simultaneously the harshest critic of the Frankfurt School. To end this subchapter on a moderately positive note, in 2020 Roach has edited a new handbook called *Critical International Relations*⁶¹ in which the authors do well to make a strong case for IR theorists learning to understand the entailments of reification theory. Although yet again excluding virtually all theorists "East of Bonn" (/Frankfurt), it leaves me hopeful for Western academia.

Can the subaltern draw comics and employ comics-inspired forms?

Drawing from the question raised by Spivak in "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*"⁶², I would like to go further and explain what the Easterners excluded from our Leiden classes had been producing in art and theory. Both the Czechoslovak 1960s socialist reformist attempt that triggered a military response from all countries of the Warsaw Pact (apart from Ceaușescu's Romania) in 1968 and the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary are examples of intra-Soviet Bloc tensions. As during my Leiden thesis and methods class, a member of faculty gave me the advice to explain culture of the other side of the Iron Curtain on the case of Yugoslavia, I attempt to do this in the subchapter you are reading right now. I do this, because I worry that the well-meant advice was based on a misconception that Yugoslavia was part of the Soviet Bloc and was therefore behind the "impenetrable" Iron Curtain. I need to stress that this was simply not the case.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 252-253.

⁵⁸ Du Bois's ventures into pan-Africanism itself allowing for a further possible development of understanding of pan-nationalist movements such as pan-Arabism or pan-Slavism, which this chapter partially deals with. For Du Bois involvement in the Bandung Conference and NAM see Du Bois, "Memorandum on the Bandung Conference, April 1955."

⁵⁹ Some steps in the right direction seem to be made by the authors in the volume on IR theory "*Shilliam, International Relations and Non-Western Thought*", however, this book excludes all Eastern European thinkers.

⁶⁰ Roach, "Critical Theory."

⁶¹ Roach, *Handbook of Critical International Relations*.

⁶² Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Focusing on comic books and spy comics in particular, I would therefore still want to give four brief examples of the comic book genre permeating different art forms within the ‘Soviet Bloc’. Again, every state and its art production culture being very subjective. To start with the Polish People’s Republic, the most renowned such comic series there is undoubtedly Kapitan (Captain) Kloss dealing with a Polish double agent working within Nazi Abwehr structures with the aim to sabotage and gather information necessary for Poland’s liberation from Nazism with the help of the Soviet Union.⁶³ Such straightforward ideological narrative does not need further elaboration. It is important to mention that the censorship-revised series was published in Yugoslavia as well.⁶⁴ As both comic book series and the TV adaptation, Kapitan Kloss stands as a good example of a comic artwork legitimizing both Polish and Soviet ruling cadres.

It is also interesting to point out that Soviet comics are apparently non-existent apart of the well-researched golden era of Russian comics published in emigration in Belgrade as the capitol of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Unofficially called the Kingdom of Yugoslavia).⁶⁵ The first Soviet Union-originated comic book that I was able to find was 1989 Uzbek SSR sci-fi “Kosmičeskij detektiv” – “Space Detective”, following a story of a spy-like astronaut detective “Jim Carter” on his mission given to him by the International Organisation of Space Research to investigate a Mars base gone rogue. The astronaut’s name being an obvious homage to the US-American president Jimmy Carter, who held the office during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. It is worth noting that this was being openly sold.⁶⁶⁷

José Alaniz book *Komiks: Comic Art in Russia*⁶⁸⁶⁹ dedicates an entire chapter to why comics and superhero comics/ hero-adventure comics were forbidden in USSR. He does, however spend this chapter speaking of the history of panel, 1-page cartoon-like propagandist ROSTA windows, revolutionary posters and occasional political satire cartoons within Krokodil and similar magazines.⁷⁰ The importance of later-stage Gorbachev-era “Glasnost” – “Openness” (inspired by Marxist humanism) that gave rise to first soviet comics as we know them from the other parts of the world must also be noted.

⁶³ Szatko, “Kapitan Kloss.”.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Antanasievič, *Russkij komiks Korolevstva Jugoslavija*.

⁶⁶ Suren, “Kosmičeskij Detektiv.”.

⁶⁷ Ibid, 17.

⁶⁸ Alaniz, *Komiks: Comic Art in Russia*.

⁶⁹ Alaniz omits the Space Detective case, as it is likely Alaniz makes the much important distinction between culturally subjective landscape of Uzbek SSR and Russian SFSR.

⁷⁰ Alaniz, *Komiks: Comic Art in Russia*, 31-78.

In the Hungarian People's Republic, there was a big variety of comics either produced domestically or imported from the West or other inter-bloc countries translated for domestic public. To my knowledge, the comics were predominantly of the adventure genre, with superhero comics being ideologically unsuitable for print until late 1989.⁷¹ Just as in other countries of the Soviet Bloc, illegal smuggling of such comics did take place.⁷² It is worth noting that Hungarian adventure comics were legally published and read in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (in Czech and Slovak mutations) and therefore stand as a reminder for the intra-bloc cultural overlaps and mainly the fact that there were things of cultural value shared amongst the Socialist states and that not all of cultural value was to be imported from the "Free" Bloc.⁷³

History of comic book writing in the Czech Lands goes as far back as the late 19th century.⁷⁴ This being said, as for Czechoslovakia, the most important young detectives/ boy adventure comic series is undoubtedly "Rychlé Šípy" – "Rapid Arrows" first published during the short-lived 2nd Czechoslovak Republic (1938-1939 after the Nazi occupation of Sudetenland, Hungarian occupation of southern Slovakia and Transcarpathia and Polish occupation of Zaolzie/ Těšínsko). The series is far from unproblematic, as print continued after incorporation of the rest of the Czech Lands into the German Reich as 'Protectorate Bohemia and Moravia'.⁷⁵

The cartoony art form was not used exclusively in the Nazi legal system-recognized structures and publishing houses. In the post-war Prague, the superhero cartoon "Pérák" – "Spring-man" was invented on a basis of a wartime urban myth.⁷⁶ In 1946 a short animated humorous movie of a masked man with a sole superpower – "boots with springs" could be watched in cinemas around Czechoslovakia, Pérák single-handedly combating legions of SS soldiers. After the animated movie, a series of comics strips followed, however, this time in the Communist Party-affiliated daily newspaper Haló noviny. In the strips, Pérák puts aside his mask and starts working on building a better, socialist Czechoslovakia hand in hand with his party comrades. The propagandistic attempt being very straightforward, it is worth noting that the next incarnation of Pérák came in the year 1968 in the pro-reform humanist-Marxist oriented magazine "Mladý Svět" – "Young World". Called "Pérák a SSSR" – "Spring Man and USSR", the superhero was yet again needed to fight the hordes of occupiers on the streets of Prague.⁷⁷

⁷¹ Kertész, *Comics Szocialista áruhában.*, 297-298.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 226-233.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 188-197.

⁷⁴ Prokúpek, and Foret, *Před Komiksem: formování domácího obrázkového seriálu Ve 2. polovině XIX. století.*

⁷⁵ "Jan Fischer."

⁷⁶ "Haló Nedělní Noviny – 4.Ročník – 1948 – Pérákovy Další Osudy."

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Czechoslovak animation industry undergoing a boom in the decades after the war, it should not come as a surprise that some US-American TV shows such as Tom and Jerry or Popeye were produced there to lower production costs.⁷⁸ The Czechoslovak film industry blooming financially and the Czechoslovak New Wave in experimental filmography being underway, it is important to mention that just as the revolutionary year 1968 heralded the directors of the Yugoslav Black Wave losing favour of the Yugoslav communist leadership, the so-called Prague Film School of Prague- (and Czechoslovak New Wave directors-) taught young Yugoslavs came back to Yugoslavia, where they were later able to start producing their own takes on absurd comedies. Take the case of the Prague Film School's (not unproblematic) Emir Kusturica and his world-famous *Black Cat White Cat*, where we can see not only his affiliations with Prague, but also, some of the characters sole purpose in the movie being that they are shown reading Alan Ford comic books.⁷⁹ The movie being a hybrid of Alan Ford-like situational absurdism and experimental comedy à la the Czechoslovak New Wave.

The intercultural exchange between Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia not being one-sided, it is also worth pointing out that Nenad Bixy, the translator of Alan Ford comic book series, wrote the template for Czechoslovak New Wave-affiliated director Oldřich Lipský's comedy "Four Murders Are Enough, Dear".⁸⁰ This circle of experimental, rigid system-critical and Marxist humanist reform inclined directors were not the only directors in Czechoslovakia, which is well portrayed by the genre of "normalization comedies" and escapist "crime stories". The aim of the production of such movies being "to make people forget the new post-occupation reality" is a well-documented phenomenon.⁸¹ One of such non-affiliated directors Václav Vorlíček, who later produced mainly live action fairy tales beloved by the Czechoslovak public to this day.⁸²

Two of his 1960s reform-era movies are worthy of a mention, if only for their similarities with Alan Ford. The first is 1967 "Konec Agenta W4C" – "The End of Agent W4C".⁸³ As the name including an allusion of the codename to a "water closet" suggests, it is a spoof film parodying the James Bond genre. The other movie is 1966 "Kdo chce zabít Jessii" – "Who wants to kill Jessie". Both movies made in black and white, the latter is important, because it combines literal comics imagery such as word balloons and graphic interjectional exclamations with live action. All graphic art comes from the comic book artist Kája Saudek. The premise of the movie is that

⁷⁸ Rousek, "U.S. Cartoons Came from Communist Czechoslovakia."

⁷⁹ Trogi, "Alan Ford in realtà era ambientato in Jugoslavia".

⁸⁰ "Čtyři vraždy stačí, drahoušku (1970)."

⁸¹ Česká televise, "Těžká léta československého filmu 1969 - 89: Netrapte se, bavte se!".

⁸² "Václav Vorlíček."

⁸³ "Konec Agenta W4C Prostřednictvím Psa Pana Foustky (1967)."

a scientist invents an instrument that allows her to erase dreams. She erases one in the mind of her sleeping husband, who dreams of comic book characters he has read about – mainly the beautiful Jessie, but also a ‘Gunslinger’ and a ‘Superman’. The next morning, the couple wakes up to find Jessie in their living room. Seemingly alive, Superman and Gunslinger soon to appear as well.⁸⁴ It is clear what comic book genres these three archetypes allude to – Jessie for the mild erotica/ misogynist female body objectifying Western literature; Gunslinger for the genre of ‘Western’ comics also popular in Hungary, Italy and the West; and finally Superman for the extremely problematic connection to fascist Nietzschean thought-twisting ideology of the Übermensch – literally a “Superman” being a genocide-legitimizing mythology.

What sayeth the Eastern subaltern through ML-critical theories of ideology?

Furthermore, as this is happening within the 1960s Czechoslovakia which had been slowly opening up since the beginning of the decade, I want to point out to the starting point of the thing-like being within dreams to the semiosketches of Vladimír Macura. Having been trained in Tartu-Moscow “Lotmanian” semiotics, Macura tries to combine some instruments of Lotmanian semiotics such as the minus device/ minus priem to the analysis of socialist cultures.⁸⁵ For something to not be present does not mean it does not have an effect on the shape of the thought-reality due to its non-presence. Non-presence not being equal to inexistence.⁸⁶ The DC/ Action Comics Superman, which could not officially be printed in the countries of the Eastern bloc still shaped the thought of the genre of comics and comics-inspired forms. This is in part due to the state ML-critique validating it being excluded from the socialist publishing being available to be read. José Alaniz’s *Komiks: Comic Art in Russia* includes an entire subchapter on “anti-comics” studies, something that is yet to be further reviewed by scholars of the other parts of the former Eastern Bloc.⁸⁷ I say “of” and not “from”, because as of April 2020 a very erudite scholarship on the matter of overview of theory and production of comics also comes from Leuven University with Alaniz alongside Martha Kuhlman publishing a ground-breaking account on the reflections and intersections of ‘New Europe’ comics.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ “Kdo Chce Zabít Jessii? (1966).”

⁸⁵ See especially the chapters “Symbol with a human face” and “Minus-Stalin” in Macura, Píchová, and Cravens, *The Mystifications of a Nation*, 69-72 and 107-113.

⁸⁶ Ibid, xii.

⁸⁷ Alaniz, *Komiks: Comic Art in Russia*, 68-73.

⁸⁸ They even mention Alan Ford (though only in one sentence). See Kuhlman, and Alaniz, *Comics of the New Europe: Reflections and Intersections*, 26.

To stay a bit more with Macura, I must explain why his encyclopaedical and narratological scholarship on semiotics is more utilizable in this thesis than the accounts of Gillian Rose we were introduced to in her undergraduate handbook of *Visual Methodologies*.⁸⁹ In it, she bases her understanding of “semiology” on the interpretations of Williamson and the social semioticians Hodge and Kress.⁹⁰ This is extremely problematic, as the latter two authors infamously relegated Saussurean semiotics – the fundamentals of Barthesian and Lotmanian (Macurian) semiotics – to the “*contents of Saussure’s rubbish bin*”.⁹¹ In turn, they speak only of US-American Peircean sign theory as the proper way to ground the field. In my interpretation, this underlines the century-long analytic philosophers’ strive to unfairly discredit anything that is not written by them (or what they do not understand within the limits of their discipline) as a ‘continental rubbish bin’ of sorts.

As the Lotmanian and Barthesian schools of semiotics build heavily on critiques of structuralist linguists and structuralists who came after Saussure in the incarnations of Prague, Copenhagen and Moscow schools, it is also discrediting all of their work, telling the reader their place is also in said bin. As the Prague and Moscow Linguistic Circles with the names such as Roman Jakobson or Jan Mukařovský have achieved significantly more in conceptually grounding contemporary social anthropology than the colleague-degrading Hodge and Kress ever aimed to do, it is very bold of Rose to follow their interpretations of what is and what is not to be introduced to students. The further problem of bringing Gillian Rose into my analysis is the fact that she stands for the interpretations of Marxism that I stand against and that much of this thesis is trying to point out the tenets of her and her-alike interpretations as factually wrong.

Open about Marxism (alongside Socialist feminism) shaping her theory of Feminist Geography explained in the 1993 book of the same name, she credits the humanist Marxist tradition solely to Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson and John Berger. That is understandable, as she credits this interpretation of Stephen Daniels as “an excellent discussion of this tradition”.⁹² Although undoubtedly an important book of an internationally-read author as Gillian Rose is, her 1993 endeavours are just as visibly lacking self-reflection of her Anglocentrism as they are lacking it in the insofar editions of the *Visual Methodologies* in regards to only Semiotics devised from Pierce’s sign theory being included.

⁸⁹ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 106-146.

⁹¹ Hodge, and Kress, *Social Semiotics*, 15-17.

⁹² See eBook’s first paragraph in subchapter on Landscape as visual ideology in Rose, *Feminism and Geography*.

It is as if the Eastern thinker lacked the agency to write. But I argue for another explanation, namely that the Western thinker lacks the access and motivation to consider anything that is not legitimizing their position, as anything else deconstructs the myth of their fields being objective and not necessitating critique from non-Western parts of the World. It would prove the subjectivity of Anglophone authors. It is more than possible that Gillian Rose as a scholar is aware of this, however this is not stressed in foreign-to-England/ USA classes using her textbook without concern for its limitations. Therefore, I claim Macura to be surpassing Rose when it comes to non-Western applications of semiotics. Macura even surpasses Barthes⁹³ when it comes to ‘the role of the reader’ in his semiosketches. Dubbed “dreams” rather than “myths”, the object to be deconstructed loses its negative connotation and the agency to decide if the dream is to be deconstructed is left solely to the reader.⁹⁴ The binary is not something Macura preoccupies himself with as is the case with the highly normalizing Barthes, who at times openly wills the negative-connotated myths that he describes to be deconstructed.⁹⁵ As a novelist and political comic strip author, Macura did, however, at times openly criticize the political. Such was the case of his novel tetralogy “The One Who Will Be” including historical parallelisms between 1968 occupation and 12th of June 1848 panslavist revolt in Prague or his 1968 comic strip on the occupation armies.⁹⁶

Here I want to point back to Benno Teschke and Can Cemgil. Namely, to their understanding of international praxis. What is international praxis if not when the theory of Marxist humanism/ Socialism with a human face -inspired reforms are deemed so powerful that an international military invasion⁹⁷ is deemed necessary? Now to give Kosík the space he deserves, I must introduce him as a half of the power-couple with Růžena Grebeníčková. Grebeníčková being a laureate of the prestigious Herderpreis for her work on comparative literature.⁹⁸ Her husband, Karel Kosík, is alongside the Polish Adam Schaff, a thinker behind the Marxist humanist theories within East Central Europe that went hand in hand with “Socialism with a human face” reformism.⁹⁹ Marxist humanist theories that Rose credits only to some English- and Welshmen.

⁹³ Rose mentions him as the token representative of the continental Semiotics. Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 34.

⁹⁴ Charvát, “Polish, Czech and Serbian Myth Deconstructors”, 50.

⁹⁵ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 131.

⁹⁶ Janoušek, Ten, který byl, 354.

⁹⁷ The largest deployment of military force in Europe since the end of World War II (See History.com Editors. “Soviets Invade Czechoslovakia.”)

⁹⁸ Named after J. G. Herder, a German romantic nationalist who helped shape the East Central European understanding of the nation-concept.

⁹⁹ Kovaly, “Is It Possible to Humanize Marxism?”, 292.

This concept was not developed in a vacuum and was widely read (and as we can see on Rose's mention of Daniels also developed) also in the Anglophone space. Kosík's *Dialectic of the Concrete* stands as the most widely translated Czech philosophical work of the 20th century.¹⁰⁰ Criticized by both Jan Patočka from the Heideggerian phenomenology standpoint and by George Lukács for its over-emphasis of the necessity for freedom;¹⁰¹ the event of military invasion of Czechoslovakia to stop humanist-Marxist reforms made it more popularly read in Soviet Union-critical Marxist circles in East Central Europe.

One of such circles was that of theoreticians around Socialist Republic of Croatia-based philosophical school and journal of the same name: *Praxis*.¹⁰² This circle included not only Ivan Sviták¹⁰³, but also Karel Kosík and Ágnes Heller from (Lukács-raised) Budapest School who both participated even in the editorial board of the journal that was translated to English, French and German.¹⁰⁴ Seminars attended by the likes of Fromm, Habermas, Bloch or Marcuse.¹⁰⁵ As the most prominent scholar of this humanist Marxist school Una Blagojević puts it: "*It became seen as a major place for the international academic gathering and both of these platforms (virtual and real)*¹⁰⁶ *have been described as international hubs for the exchange of ideas. According to Erich Fromm [the Praxis summer] school enabled the exchange of ideas and contact between the intellectuals of Europe and America in the atmosphere of complete freedom and mutual respect. Internationalism was at the core of their practical and theoretical activities and this is how [they] also self-fashioned themselves.*"¹⁰⁷

If we remain true to the Rose's interpretation of Marxist humanism being excellently represented by English and Welsh men, it is very hard to use her own theory to analyse places, where Marxist humanist thought was produced. The subaltern is not recognized as speaking, due to their intellectual production being omitted from curricula. Critique of the state of the art of what is described as "Marxist IR" seems to be the only way to understand that the virtual and real international hub of internationalist Marxist humanist thought – *Praxis* – was also a place where patriarchy was partially being reproduced and partially mitigated.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁰ Zouhar, "Jan Patočka a Kosíkova Dialektika Konkrétního."

¹⁰¹ Taft, "Testament of George Lukacs.", 5 (48).

¹⁰² *Una Blagojević: Women Intellectuals - Praxis - the Korčula Summer School: 1963–74.*

¹⁰³ The other name of Czechoslovak Marxist humanism.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 06:50.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 08:00.

¹⁰⁶ Referring to the spatial, real platform of summer school and the virtual journal.

¹⁰⁷ *Una Blagojević: Women Intellectuals - Praxis - the Korčula Summer School: 1963–74*, 07:10.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 08:00-08:20.

The events of 1968 led to a new status quo in Yugoslavia. As the Czechoslovak road to implement Marxist humanism led to tanks in the streets, the Yugoslav party leadership had to review the possible dangers of the theory being developed in Yugoslavia. Some members like Zarko Puhovski say “*that the group's disputes over politics and ideology were often disguised as conversations about less controversial questions of aesthetics or ontology. ‘One kind of debate functioned as a replacement for other kinds of debate.’*”.¹⁰⁹ Hiding some of their critique of the Yugoslav politics and ideology of the Yugoslav Marxist-Leninist leadership may be true, however, the attack on the “Socialist exceptionalism” of the Titoist Yugoslavia is visible even in the founding manifest of the circle – *Why Praxis: “However, problems of Croatia today cannot be discussed separately from the problems of Yugoslavia, and the problems of contemporary Yugoslavia cannot be isolated from the big questions of the contemporary world. Neither socialism nor Marxism is something strictly national, so Marxism cannot be Marxism, or socialism – socialism, if we enclose ourselves in narrow national frames.”*.¹¹⁰

I would maybe not call the emergence of the school in Yugoslavia a miracle, as Laura Secor does,¹¹¹ however, I agree with her that it was merely tolerated by the Yugoslav authorities. When eight of the scholars affiliated with Praxis actively supported the 1968 Yugoslav student protest in Belgrade alone, the question was for how long will this tolerance last.¹¹² Although they were not sacked from their posts at the university, their activities were noted and not long after – in 1974 the activities of the internationalist and humanist Marxist intellectual circle; that aimed to theorize critiques of the contemporary world and Marxist Leninist leadership of Tito’s Yugoslavia; had to dissolve. Critique of Marxism-Leninism was signalled to be off limits.

Here, I stress what I said on Macura. For something to not be present does not mean it does not have an effect on the shape of the thought-reality due to its non-presence. Non-presence not being equal to inexistence. In a matter similar to how Macura writings of historical parallelism of the 1848 and 1968, or Zarko Puhovski pointing to the ‘*One kind of debate functioning as a replacement for other kinds of debate.*’¹¹³, what I argue about Alan Ford is that its critique of Capitalism acted for the Yugoslav reader as not only that, but also as a replacement to critique of the Capitalism’s assumed parallel – Yugoslav Socialism.

¹⁰⁹ Secor, “Testament Betrayed: Yugoslavian Intellectuals and the Road to War.”

¹¹⁰ Praxis Editorial Board, and Petrović. “Why Praxis?”

¹¹¹ Secor, “Testament Betrayed: Yugoslavian Intellectuals and the Road to War.”

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Part 2 – Alan Ford

A semiosketch-characteristic of the Group T.N.T.

Alan Ford has nothing to do with the actor of the same name that comes up if we put the name in a search engine. Actor most renowned for his roles in Guy Ritchie’s crime capers *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* and *Snatch*. In the latter of the two movies, the actor embodies a memorable role of “Brick Top”, a sadist that is known to feed his enemies to starved out pigs. I would like the reader to imagine Alan Ford I introduce as the polar opposite of such character. Although inhabiting a similar world, where crimes are committed in virtually every issue, many a time by the protagonists. Our good, ever-shy Alan could never commit to something like feeding a human to pigs. Taking into consideration that if he and his comrades from the clandestine spy circle “**Group T.N.T.**” know one thing very well, it is hunger. He is portrayed as someone who would never purposefully starve a living being, had he gotten the chance to feed it. This experience combined with the agents being paid little to nothing paves a way for the agents to occasionally commit fraud or other kinds of crimes in order to feed themselves and their friends.



The one member of the group that embodies the internalized criminality of the spy circle the best is undoubtedly **Sir Oliver**, an aristocratic English member of the Group. His catchphrase has a loose format. Usually, after stealing anything of value, he is shown calling his never seen friend Bing: “Halo Bing! (Hello Bing!) < include a conversation about fencing goods acquired by the kleptomaniac aristocrat > Cijena? Prava sitnica! (Price? Real bargain!).”

¹¹⁴ Alan Ford.

¹¹⁵ Sir Oliver.

Alan’s partner throughout most of the series is **Bob Rock**. A short-built, big-nosed agent who is his senior, yet at the same time does not get as much credit for successful missions as Alan does. Bob’s ugliness bothers him and he often dreams of becoming rich and having plastic surgeries to make him look better than Alan. Being one of identical quadruplets, he is the only one of the four that decided for a career in state-affiliated structures rather than spend his days as a non-state-affiliated criminal. Sometimes even open to switching to a career in a police department, Bob’s attire alludes to Sherlock Holmes with the chequered tweed. Bob’s dreams of becoming rich are represented in the picture bellow, where he exclaims: “*Now is the moment of big decisions! Better to live one hundred years as a millionaire than seven days in poverty!*”.



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In my understanding, Bob serves the role of anthropomorphic representation for the critique of the American Dream. He truly gives all his efforts to do the best, however, this goes unnoticed by his superiors. This neglect slowly turns Bob into a cynic, only to give him hope when he is at his lowest; only for this hope to be promptly taken away. However, his comrades in the group are his safety net and he can count on Alan and the dog **Nosonja** (“**Big-Nosed**”) to have his back. The first non-human, canine member of the group is introduced in issue 18 of Alan Ford, “Pas za milijun dolara” – “A Million Dollar Dog”.¹¹⁸ In the issue, Bob and Alan get to have their very first time off work only for this time to be disturbed by people from the “rich part of the beach” throwing their trash over the wall to “beach for the poor”. After an altercation with the rich, they have to run away from the beach and run into Sir Oliver being treated to a warm welcome by the staff of a nearby hotel as if he was (in Bob’s words) a maharaja. This scene is

¹¹⁶ *Bob Rock*.

¹¹⁷ In the picture *Nosonja*. above, the writing says: “Poor/ orphaned blind dog. Son of a blind dog. donate to the (also blind) owner without hesitation.”

¹¹⁸ AF 18

as the series progresses. Later in the issue, a rich woman has posters put up for a lost dog with a million-dollar reward. At first, Bob catches a random dog on the street and makes it look like the dog in the posters. As he tries to get his reward, he reaches an obstacle – a long line of like-minded citizens trying to get their reward for random dogs. He pretends to be a city administration officer and after getting in front of the people already standing in the line (some of whom call him “big-nosed”), he threatens the gathering to fine them 1000 dollars each if their dogs do not have an officially-issued collar. The threat of a fine makes everyone but him and his dog run away. His fraud is found out, however and the people with an interest to have the dog found send guard dogs to attack Bob. Bob, however, does not give up and comes back in a costume dressed as a dog himself. This attempt ends the same way – dogs come chasing after him. When he gives up his hope, Nosonja the dog finds him. Coming back to the place for his reward, he is given a visibly fake cheque and is kicked out of the doors. The people that put up posters being after a microfilm in Nosonja’s collar containing top secret information then turn on each other with one of them poisoning the others. When it seems Bob, who witnessed the scene after breaking back into the building, is going to be shot dead by the surviving criminal, Alan and Sir Oliver save the day. The dog’s true owner appears and after admitting she does not care for the dog either, also only being after the microfilm, she drinks one of the (unbeknownst to her poisoned) champagnes on the table to celebrate her victory. As the woman dies on the spot, Nosonja the dog is then introduced as a reward to the group. They will not be paid, but they can keep it.

The part of Bob Rock committing frauds and literally dehumanizing himself for the possibility of getting the reward and thus attaining his goal of becoming rich is a repetitive trope throughout the series. This reification of a worker trying to attain the goal of an “American Dream” is stressed by something an attentive reader can recall – Bob is called the same name as the dog. The dog’s appearance in the series under the name of Nosonja then acts as a reminder of how Bob can be perceived the same way by strangers. The unattainability of “American Dream” is, however, not something the series would suggest for all people. It only affects those born to underprivileged households. The example of this is the aristocratic-born Sir Oliver being able to perform the role of a rich man as seen in the ‘Maharaja scene’. Sir Oliver, however, performs this role in this issue because he is on a top-secret mission. This mission is to infiltrate organized crime circle operating within the highest echelons of the United States of America. With an allusion to plutocratic oligarchy, the leader of said circle is called “Caesar”.

After a gradual, multi-issue infiltration of Caesar's circle, he is drafted to work directly for the leader of the spy organization – **Number One**. If we believe the stories Number One tells the group members, he is older than Methuselah and was around the most important events in World history, always aiding one side or the other (but likely both) in diplomatic and espionage matters. This paraplegic leader has three obedient servicemen within the ranks of the Group T.N.T.. The First is "**The Fat Boss**" acting as an intermediate of Number One's orders to the agents and having slightly more food on his table than the other agents; the other is a hypochondriac called **Jeremiah**, whose task is to maintain a florist's as a front for their clandestine operations; and the third and most popular one is the ever-loyal former Nazi Luftwaffe inventor known as **Grunf**. Grunf is known for his inventions parodying both the Operation Paperclip Nazi scientists and James Bond's own 'Q', his inventions are whacky renderings of gadgets and poorly designed vehicles that usually necessitate manpower of Bob, Sir Oliver or Alan to be operated.

In issue 65,¹¹⁹ the issue of the agents going without pay for months in a row is raised. Number one has an idea to make up for it, so that the agents do not go on strike. All money obtained as a reward from a previous mission is put as a bet in a dog race. Their dog wins, but the aeon-old Number One did not in fact make said bet and merely left a note saying that his grandfather has fallen sick and he needed to urgently go see him. Number One's grandfather is important in issue 100,¹²⁰ as from him, Number One receives **Klodovik** – a speaking parrot and a raging/recovering alcoholic. Klodovik seems to act as the only voice of reason throughout the series, often being the one who realizes his comrades' stupidity and saves them from themselves. Issue 100 is also a special issue in the sense that the members of the group hallucinate almost all their former nemeses during an adventurous subplot. We can see ghosts, vampires, thieves, magicians, but also more serious antagonists whose aim is to kill millions of people with chemical weapons or to "detonate a billion megaton TNT bomb" and destroy Earth. Such is the case with **Tromb** – a clear anthropomorphic representation of nuclear self-annihilation of humanity, mixed with an authentic joy from its destruction. One more necessary introduction of an antagonist present in the issue is **Superhic** known as Supergulp in the Italian original. A former street sweeper, he takes on the mantle of the protector of the rich. His aim is to steal from the poor and give to the rich, who (in his understanding) deserve it more. He is both a parody of the Robin Hood trope and an anthropomorphic personification of false consciousness.

¹¹⁹ AF 67

¹²⁰ AF 100

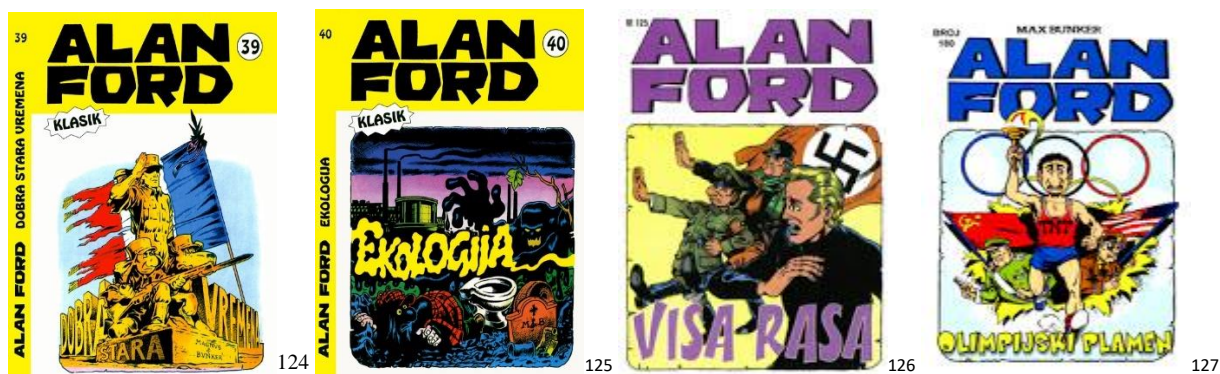
The still ongoing series to this date counts more than 500 issues with 120 pages each, most of the pages (that is not counting an occasional splash page) having the form of 2 black and white frames with the verbal communication between the characters being included in text bubbles.



The pages being small do not make the analysis of 60 000+ page series any smaller task. Therefore, I explain the international commentary and critique of Capitalism inherent to the comic book series on a mere fraction of them. Therefore, I focus on the divergences from the Italian run, the numbering of which is used to refer to the sources.

¹²¹ If you are reading this thesis in a printed A4 form, this is the size of the original Alan Ford format. (With some later reprints being larger). This picture shows the aforementioned antagonist Tromb explaining his plan to “blow up this stupid world”. (See Bunker, “Crne planine Južne Dakote”. alias AF 100)

I find the issue 180 – Olimpijski plamen – Olympic flame,¹²² one of the most interesting of the whole series for its publication history.¹²³ For undisclosed reasons, it was omitted from the initial run and hence was not translated by the official Yugoslav-Croat translator Nenad Brixy.



At least four important issues (the covers of which you can see) were, in fact, omitted. First two are (in the original Italian publication numbering) issue 39 “Dobra stara vremena” – “Good Old Times” dealing with a critique of French colonialism and alluding to the Algerian Revolution and issue 40 “Ekologija” – “Ecology” dealing with a green critique of industrial exploitation of nature. I cannot see anything problematic in them that could trigger the state censorship to react. The issue that could be seen as problematic for the censor loyal to the Marxist-Leninist regime of Titoist Yugoslavia, however, is issue preceding them – issue 38 “Pukovnik Kattykat” – “Colonel Kattykat” that was translated by Brixy.¹²⁸ In the issue, all members of the Group T.N.T. enrol in the US Army. As the United States Army was an seen as an imperialist instrument of the USA in the struggle for World domination, the publisher could have been noted of crossing a line and retracted the next two issues for fears of the series as a whole being cancelled.

The more obvious issues that went unpublished are “Otok Mračnjaka” – “Island of Obscure”, known also as “Viša Rasa”, which is closer to the Italian original “Super Razza Maggiore” – “The Superior Race”.¹²⁹ In it, Alan sees a poster for a free vacation on an island. When he gets to said island with his friends, he soon realizes it is a Nazi centre for brainwashing people to join their ranks. His friends do not need much persuasion to join willingly. In the case of Bob,

¹²² AF 180

¹²³ Stašić, “Pedeset godina najtajnije od svih tajnih grupa.”.

¹²⁴ AF 39

¹²⁵ AF 40

¹²⁶ AF 125

¹²⁷ AF 180

¹²⁸ AF 38

¹²⁹ AF 125

the promise of being taken seriously is seemingly enough. At the end of the issue, Alan wakes up in an airplane and the stewardess tells him it was all a dream. He is uncertain and, in the moment when he makes peace with it exiting the plane, a child points out that he is wearing a Nazi armband. The author then breaks the fourth wall, telling the reader to only believe what Alan tells them. Nazi ideology or symbolic being an absolute taboo in Yugoslavia, this issue was impossible to publish, as even minor one-frame references to Hitler or Nazism were censored in previous issues. This is best shown by Haris Cerić in his *Comics in Socialism: Capitalistic Pulp or Educational Literature?*¹³⁰¹³¹ On page 42, he shows parallel frames in the Croatian and Italian edition of the sixth issue of the series. The Croatian edition has Alan and Grunf conversating in Grunf's workshop, "TNT" written on the wall and a picture of a rocket next to it. In the Italian version, Grunf's wall has a picture of Adolf Hitler on the wall, with a small altar with a wreath and a lit candle beneath, the wreath has a writing on it that translates "To uncle Adolf". Omitted from Cerić's analysis is the writing on the wall – "Noi tireremo diritto", which is a famous Italian fascist slogan of Mussolini loosely translating as "We will go/shoot straight", referring to deviations to the fascist ideology being forbidden.

It is extremely problematic to show Grunf in this light even in contemporary Croatia, as his "clean" version free of the baggage of popular allusions to Operation Paperclip scientists being adamant Nazis¹³² or the Gehlen Organization of Nazi intelligence officers incorporated into CIA structures.¹³³ Still, the substitution of the Hitler picture with a rocket can be read as an intelligent inside joke for those who know of said substitution, alluding to Wernher von Braun. Grunf and his humorous folly pastorals are one of the central cases of Aleš Bunta's *Magnetism of Stupidity: Plato, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Alan Ford*.¹³⁴

In said book, Bunta explains how the concept of folly must not only be perceived as something to be dismissed, but also to be taken seriously, as historically, it is a method of powerful critique. Also speaking of other works of Max Bunker and Magnus, the author and first artist of Alan Ford respectively. Bunta introduces the readers to "Nekron", a porn comic strip series from the authors with the main character of a West German necrophiliac woman, who constructs a Frankenstein-like monster to give her pleasure. This, to Yugoslav public unknown, work of the authors sheds a new light on the authors. In doing so, it underlines the problems of stereotype-

¹³⁰ Cerić, "Strip u socijalizmu: Kapitalistički šund ili edukativno štivo?"

¹³¹ In said article, Cerić also gives a good summary of Yugoslav partisan comics. Ibid, 39.

¹³² Teitel, "Wernher Von Braun: History's Most Controversial Figure?"

¹³³ West, *Historical Dictionary of International Intelligence*, 41, 108.

¹³⁴ Bunta, *Magnetizam Gluposti: Platon, Erazmo Roterdamski, Alan Ford*.

driven anti-West German racism and sexism. As the reader of this thesis may have noticed, all the protagonists of Alan Ford I introduced are male. This is no mistake on my side. The first strong female protagonist that did not act either as trope of a “femme fatale” or a “sexy lamp”¹³⁵ is only introduced in 2002, a decade after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. It is also to be noted that the new character of Minuette Macon is showed bare breasted in this issue and fake marries Alan.¹³⁶ Minuette later plays an important role as a partner in a to intelligence agency’s successor detective agency “T.N.T.”. She also marries Alan for real.¹³⁷ The issue of her introduction is 398 known as “Fate l’amore con” in Italian or “Vodite ljubav sa” in its Croatian translation, which came out a year later in 2003. It is also in this issue that we can find a very problematic, racist-misogynist message.¹³⁸ Bob is shown buying virtual reality porn, with money that is for a short while stolen by a Black man, who is drawn rather stereotypically. As Bob runs after the man, he passes a poster ridiculing a burqa-wearing woman.

This contradicts the nostalgic, subjective view represented by Lazar Džamić and his book *Flower-shop in the House of Flowers*.¹³⁹ The Serbian author of the cultural overview of the series argues for an unproblematic character of the series in Yugoslavia. On goodreads.com there is a thread in the commentaries section, which includes a lengthy review by a user with the name ‘Jelena’. She points out that the book says more of Džamić’s life through the anecdotes he shares with the reader rather than about the strip itself. Another user ‘Bimbo’, after admitting that Jelena’s review is sound, claims: “Jelena, as a wench, cannot understand, because Alan Ford was not read by wenches.”¹⁴⁰ To put the critique of sexism aside, Bimbo is factually false in this consideration. From the numerous interviews I insofar gathered, it is clear that both men and women were reading the strip. In fact, to consider the comic only in regard to nostalgic self-presentation is incorrect, as the strip is still published and sold all over former Yugoslavia by new, young generations of readers.

From my fieldwork visiting hundreds of kiosks and newsagents, the prevalent popularity is still clear, all over former Yugoslavia. The only part of former Yugoslavia where the strip is not known amongst the younger generation is Kosovo. Interviews with both young cultural analysts and ordinary people show that nobody really knows it. This is very likely due to the Albanian translation being discontinued after there being no demand for it with the Albanian speaking

¹³⁵ “Sexy Lamp Test.”

¹³⁶ AF 398

¹³⁷ AF 500

¹³⁸ That is apart of Minuette’s portrayal as a naked French woman who wants to marry for a green card.

¹³⁹ Džamić, *Cvjećarnica u Kući Cveća*.

¹⁴⁰ Goodreads review of said book available in sources.

majority public. It may be the case that in ethnically Serbian-majority parts of Kosovo such as Kosovska Mitrovica, the comic is still popular. To speak of translation, the phenomenon of Alan Ford is so strong that even comics studies scholars native to Croatia make their notes seem they believe the popularity to be “world-wide”.¹⁴¹ Alan Ford was internationally translated to French, Portuguese, Macedonian, Danish and Albanian, however these translations were outside of Serbocroatian language-sphere always limited to 12 or less issues.¹⁴²

This semiosketch would not be complete without a consideration of the international ideology-oriented issue that motivated me to write this thesis. “The Olympic Flame” deals with a Soviet athlete turning sides during the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics.¹⁴³ The problem is, this contrasts with the real-world history, as there was a boycott of the Olympics by all countries of the ‘Soviet Bloc’ with the exception of Romania (as was the case in 1968 with the invasion of Czechoslovakia). Yugoslavia as a country not aligned with the Soviets (or the USA) did attend. The boycott was only made known in May of that year which gave a little time for the pre-drawn and pre-scripted comics to be changed.¹⁴⁴ In the issue two Soviet representatives (one from the military and one from the diplomatic service) are asking for bribes from the US-Americans to let the Athlete emigrate. Group T.N.T. is involved and completes its mission.

However, the athlete is killed off in the very next issue,¹⁴⁵ this signifying a turning point in the series. Someone is working directly against the Group T.N.T.’s interests. The situation with the spy circle gets so bad that Number One eventually decides to fake his own death and the group is dissolved. The agents go on with their lives with Bob becoming a police officer and Alan moving in with nice girl he falls madly in love with. Sir Oliver keeps his cover of a rich man colluding with mafia and it is there where he uncovers the truth – Brenda, Alan’s love, is Cezar’s mole in the agency and it was Cezar as the boss of the organized crime who acted against the interests of the Group T.N.T. all the time. He is unmasked as a traitor by Number One in issue 200¹⁴⁶ and every member of the group and proclaims him guilty. Every member including Klodovik, who, as a non-human “speaking subaltern” asks for his voice to be heard. In the issue 200, it seems the world can be a better place if governments stop baring criminals in their ranks.

¹⁴¹ Munitić, *Strip, Deveta Umjetnost*, 233.

¹⁴² Džamić, *Cvjećarnica u Kući Cveća*, 21.

¹⁴³ AF 180

¹⁴⁴ Doder, “Soviets Withdraw From Los Angeles Olympics.”

¹⁴⁵ AF 181

¹⁴⁶ AF 200

Conclusion

The structure of this thesis first contextualizing and historicizing the critique of the ML regimes and only then introducing the Alan Ford phenomenon has a clear rationale. With it, I am alluding to the argument that when the humanist Marxist intellectual currents were suppressed after the vibrant year of 1968, the anti-Capitalist critique of the reality of Titoist Yugoslavia became a Lotmanian minus device. It was missed and at the same time, it deformed the reality around itself. In the last two decades of Yugoslavia, the critique of Capitalism present in the popularly read comics “Alan Ford” could then be appropriated as a substitute for the Marxist critique of Marxism-Leninism of Yugoslavia.

Paradoxically, within the folly of the absurdly situational comics, the readers could find tropes relevant to their own lives and experiences. As Kovaly argued in *Is It Possible to Humanize Marxism?*,¹⁴⁷ after 1968 many intellectuals of the region gave up on Marxist-inspired alternatives to ML. Within Yugoslavia this led to a creation of both nationalist¹⁴⁸ and liberal schools of analysing the culture(s) of the Yugoslav space. In the case of the liberal schools, it is to be noted that although I would like to be able to reference them in this research, the truth is that they did not concern themselves with theories of folly comic strips. I would argue it is not only so, because the destructive war of the 1990s made it almost impossible to look at the unserious parts of our everyday life and cultural consumption outside of that what was directly related to the war itself. Brilliant Serbian political anthropologist and publisher Ivan Čolović, whom I reviewed at length for my previous thesis is a good example of this.

The other reason for the non-consideration of the folly by the non-Marxist or anti-Marxist liberal intellectuals is that much like the Marxist humanists of Praxis they strive to be taken seriously both within Yugoslavia and outside of it. This creates its own problems, because in the formal structures of Western academia, there is little to no representation of them and it is more usual for a foreign scholar to be taught on Yugoslav and ex-Yugoslav political culture rather than a scholar from the circles of Zagreb, Belgrade or Sarajevo. The paradigmatic or rather syntagmatic shift comes with the Ljubljana circles of Žižek and Dolar shaping the thought of not only authors of said circles like the quoted Aleš Bunta, but also the thought of foreigners.

¹⁴⁷ Kovaly, “Is It Possible to Humanize Marxism?”, 292.

¹⁴⁸ Which Hobsbawm reminds us of in his speech. Horn, “E.J. Hobsbawm: The New Threat to History.”.

Although they may understand that they are perceived as funny clowns, they are no ordinary parrots repeating what the Western academia would like them to say for the sake of upkeep of the myths still being reproduced in curricula via omitting East Central European theory from the curricula. Halfway in between the post-Marxist humanist and neo Hegelian Žižek, there is a path of method paved by the likes of Macura. The deconstruction of the structure is not done as an act of rebellion, but rather to show that no deconstruction is ever fully complete. The minus device can act long after the hubris decays.

The Lotman-inspired and affiliated semiotics as is the case with Macura's semiosketches are good method in accounting for the role of popular comics in Socialist and post-socialist states. Not only for the sake of the theory alone, but also, because the context in which they appeared is commensurable with the context of other states with similar history or entangled history. The authors treat each other with respect or at least not put one another into rubbish bins. What they do is that they merely point out myths they see, but let the reader decide if they want to keep dreaming the dream or wake up.

This is further proven by Hrvoje Gržina, author of *A Semiotic Analysis of Visual Elements Particular to the Medium of Comics in Alan Ford by Max Bunker and Magnus*.¹⁴⁹ His work I discovered this Summer, extremely close to what I had envisioned for this thesis in the very beginnings (but better), did not only make me reshape what I had written into the form you have read. It also gave me the motivation to keep on researching. At the same time, my own knowledge is not all-encompassing and for a better understanding of the Italian cultural background of the phenomenon to be developed in my PhD dissertation, it will be necessary to include the semiotic theories on mass culture of Italian-based semioticians like Umberto Eco and others.¹⁵⁰ With Eco, it will be especially interesting to consider his intellectual production coming only after his career in satire and parody and personal consideration on creating "a nomenclatura of the masses" in a non-orthodox Marxist sense.¹⁵¹ Perceiving comic strips as a method of popularizing theory for the public seems to be one of the ways to achieve that.

¹⁴⁹ Gržina, "Semiotička Analiza Mediju Stripa Svojtvenih Vizualnih Elemenata u Alanu Fordu Maxa Bunkera i Magnusa."

¹⁵⁰ Eco, *Apocalittici e integrati*.

¹⁵¹ Marshall, "The World According to Eco."

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