


# Alan Ford Goes to Yugoslavia: From Tautology to Ideology

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**Abstract.** *Alan Ford*, originally an Italian comic book created in 1969 by Max Bunker and Magnus, soon after its translation into Serbo-Croatian, gained huge popularity in Yugoslavia. Its ironic take on the genre of espionage, combined with a surreal black humour and a satirical critique of Italy and the West in general, apparently brilliantly translated as an ironic depiction not only of Yugoslav party politics of the period, but also of contemporary politics in post-Yugoslav countries. The article thus deals with the comic aspects of the Yugoslav *Alan Ford*, focusing on its specific irony and tautology, since both provide a direct link between the spheres of comedy and ideology.

**Key Words:** *Alan Ford*, comedy, Yugoslavia, ideology

## **Alan Ford gre v Jugoslavijo: od tautologije do ideologije**

**Povzetek.** *Alan Ford*, italijanski strip, ki sta ga leta 1969 ustvarila Max Bunker in Magnus, je kmalu po prevodu v srbohrvaščino pridobil izjemno popularnost v nekdanji Jugoslaviji. Njegov ironični pristop k žanru vohunjenja, združen z nadrealističnim črnim humorjem in s satirično kritiko Italije ter Zahoda, je očitno odlično preveden kot ironična upodobitev jugoslovanske politike tistega obdobja, ki je večinoma vplivala tudi na sodobno politiko v postjugoslovanskih državah. Prispevek se osredotoča na komične vidike jugoslovanskega Alan Forda, še zlasti pa na ironijo in tautologijo kot dvojce specifičnih tehnik proizvodnje komičnega učinka, ki si jih komedija deli z ideologijo.

**Ključne besede:** *Alan Ford*, Jugoslavija, komedija, ideologija

Perhaps it is not a coincidence that *Alan Ford* by Luciano Secchi and Robert Raviola – *in arte* Max Bunker and Mangus – started its journey in the revolutionary year of 1969, when the post-war optimism was slowly fading away and the dominant liberal ideology started to crumble. The comic book is basically a satirical take on the classic secret agents genre,

spiced with black humour and cynical references to certain specific aspects of Italian society of the period, but also a mockery of certain universal aspects of Western society at large. Although it became widely popular in Italy shortly after its introduction, *Alan Ford* remained relatively unknown outside its country of origin, except for one formidable exception: Yugoslavia. Curiously enough, leaping from capitalist Italy to its socialist neighbour, *Alan Ford* became such a huge success that even later on, after the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia, in its successor states it remained one of the most popular comic books. Thus, if in Italy *Alan Ford* was intended and interpreted as a satire of capitalism, then it is even more interesting to know that on the other side of the so-called Iron Curtain in Yugoslavia, it was, to the contrary, read as a political satire of socialism, or even, to put it in 'Alanfordistic' terms, as its 'accurate depiction.' How, therefore, to reconcile these two contradictory perceptions/receptions of the comic book? How can one satire of society become such an effective ironic critique of two such different ideologies? Rather than asserting a kind of comic universalism as if comedy is so universal that it can take on different ideologies and function in different historical contexts – the error would be the same as if asserting the universal validity of this or that ideology – I would like to propose a certain particularism of comedy, focusing on its specific techniques of irony and tautology as two hallmarks of how *Alan Ford* functions in these two very different contexts.

### **Max Bunker's and Magnus's *Alan Ford***

The original idea for *Alan Ford* as conceived by Max Bunker along with illustrator Magnus was to create a satire of James Bond, the iconic British spy, who for the decades to come defined the whole genre in literature, cinema, and TV shows, and pop-culture in general.

The initial script for *Alan Ford* was written in August 1967, and included its six main characters that form the legendary Group TNT: Alan Ford, Bob Rock, Sir Oliver, The Boss, Jeremiah, and Grunf. Group TNT is an assembly of misfit secret agents, who operate from a flower shop in New York, which they use as a front for their secret headquarters. They are depicted as lazy, poor, and incompetent, yet somehow also intelligent and cunning, especially when it suits their own personal interests. Their outlandish biographies are dwarfed by that of their leader, the wheelchair-ridden Number One or Broj Jedan (introduced in the series only later on in the eponymous 11th issue, see Bunker and Magnus 1970), who embezzles the millions paid to the group for various secret missions while pay-

ing a pittance to his agents, leaving them poor to the bone in the process (Lucchesi 2014).

The now legendary first issue of the comic book, entitled *The Group TNT* (Bunker and Magnus 1969a), was received mildly by its audience, and thus the second issue, *The Hollow Tooth*, which appeared in June 1969 (Bunker and Magnus 1969a), was overshadowed by the first issue's fiasco. However, the reputation of *Alan Ford* grew steadily with subsequent issues. Magnus drew the first 75 issues, after which he was replaced by Paolo Piffarerio in 1975, who was also replaced in 1983, when the comic book moved to the Max Bunker Press. Currently the comic book is drawn by Dario Perucca with inks by Omar Pistolato, who retained the same drawing style as set by Magnus. The comic book has been adapted to animated film and theatre plays, as well as used as a source of inspiration in books and movies, most notably a low-budget 30-minute animated short called *Alan Ford e il Gruppo TNT contro Superciuk*, which was directed by Max Bunker in 1988.

Max Bunker initially wanted to create a comic book that would not fall into either of the then predefined categories of adventures and dark comics, like *Satanik* or *Kriminal* (Bunker and Raviola), or funny comics like Mickey Mouse (Walt Disney), but rather would employ a mixture of genres (adventure, romance, etc.) held together by the main spy storyline (Terzi 2011). This pastiche of genres could be read as one of the distinctive elements of postmodernism (Jameson 1997, 64); however, we must be precise that in *Alan Ford* the element of parody still prevails over the pastiche since the different genres are always parodied despite the anchoring on the spy genre which is itself an object of parody – and therefore it would still fall, according to Jameson's own criteria as laid out in his book on postmodernism (1997), nearer to modernistic than postmodern art.<sup>1</sup>

The difference between *pastiche* and *parody* is important to understand the subversive effect of *Alan Ford*: 'Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and any conviction that alongside the

<sup>1</sup> Jameson, in his book on postmodernism, is adamant about the difference between the two concepts, while pinpointing the historical origin of 'pastiche' (as theoretical concept) (1997, 76): 'This concept, which we owe to Thomas Mann (in *Doktor Faustus*), who owed it in turn to Adorno on the two paths of advanced musical experimentation (Schoenberg's innovative planification, Stravinsky's irrational eclecticism), is to be sharply distinguished from the more readily received idea of parody.'

abnormal tongue you have momentary borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists' (Jameson 1997, 65). Pastiche is, in short, 'blank irony, a statue with blind eyeballs' (p. 65). Parody, on the other hand, could be thus defined as a very special kind of irony that imitates a peculiar mask with its specific discourse, and it does so in a very vivid language that is far from neutral, but rather engaged, motivated by its satiric impulse that bursts into laughter as soon as it touches the serious reality it tries to mimic with its process. *Alan Ford* is definitely such kind of parody, for its pastiche of different artistic genres is in function of its more general – and at the same time very idiosyncratic, as we will see later on – ironic take on reality.

However, what kind of reality exactly? *Alan Ford*'s New York is not exactly New York, and neither is the rest of the World that the protagonists visit during their exotic voyages abroad when sent on this or that mission (a distinctive feature of the spy genre): reality is 'seen' from a very specific angle, shaped through the substance of the genre that defines what is real and what is not, which is true also in many other comic books that are not set in alternative realities but rather in real locations seen from a very particular perspective (as, for example, the London of *Dylan Dog* that is shaped through the lenses of the horror genre). One would imagine that the world of *Alan Ford* would be shaped and defined by its predominant genre so that we would get a glimpse into the secret world of spies, but what the comic book actually evokes is a world as seen through the perspective of class-struggle: 'Reality as such is first presented as split into two separate worlds that do not share any "common reality" [...] In *Alan Ford*, the central scission runs between the reality of the "poor" and the reality of the "rich" that *coexist on the same spot without really existing for each other*' (Bunta 2016, 893). The world of *Alan Ford*, is thus split through class struggle, where the parodic reality of the poor and the reality of the rich antagonistically collide with each other in satirical bursts of laughter.<sup>2</sup>

Point in case: *Superciuk*, one of the main reoccurring villains in the comic book series and *Alan Ford*'s antagonist *par excellence*. As Ezechiele

<sup>2</sup> Bunta, in his article dedicated to Crepax and Magnus, argues that there are two principal methodological concepts linking Crepax's and Raviola's respective approaches in *Valentina* and *Alan Ford*, namely, the 'pornological' and the 'metaphysical', the former referring to the sexual aesthetics, the latter to the above-mentioned split in reality, where, however, he constantly and systematically avoids the term 'class struggle' but rather speaks of 'antagonism' (Bunta 2016, 891–894).

Bluff he is depicted as a typical underdog member of the working class, but as Superciuk with his deadly alcoholic breath as his main weapon, he is portrayed as a sort of anti-Robin Hood, for he 'steals from the poor and gives to the rich,' thus encapsulating both realities as a living paradox or embodiment of class struggle itself.

However, if one can still understand why such a satirical take on reality through parody was so effective in post-war capitalist Italy, one cannot marvel enough at why it was even more effective in socialist Yugoslavia, as if with the translation from one language and cultural context to the other something was produced as surplus.

### ***Alan Ford Goes to Yugoslavia***

Considering the distinctive Italo-American character of *Alan Ford* with its direct references to local Italian reality with many terms in Milanese dialect, as well as its open ridicule of certain aspects of contemporary capitalist society, especially the (anti-)utopic 'American Dream,' it is almost incredible that it achieved such a great success in SFR Yugoslavia almost immediately after its first translation of 1972 on an already vividly crowded comic book market (Draginčić and Zupan 1986), and even more incredible that it survived Yugoslavia's violent dissolution and kept its momentum afterwards with its Croatian, Bosnian, Serbian, Macedonian and Slovenian editions (Patruno 2006).

*Alan Ford* was first published in former Yugoslavia by the state-owned company Vjesnik from Zagreb, where the first few issues did not gain much success until the appearance of the above-mentioned antagonist Superciuk, translated as Superhik, in issue #25, with his famous motto of 'steals from the poor and gives to the rich,' which apparently was read not only as a perfect critique of American-style capitalism but of Yugoslav socialism as well. Although from two very different, irreconcilable perspectives, emphasised by the two different names given to the same character: while Superciuk denotes the 'perverse logic' of capitalism where the poor are exploited in favour of the rich, Superhik denotes a similarly 'perverse logic' of socialism where the poor are exploited by themselves (and Superhik fits this role marvellously since he is himself a proletarian).

A lot of the comic book's success in Yugoslavia is due to Nenad Brixty's free-form witty adaptation and translation, both linguistic, into Croatian slang, and of course also political in terms of the many implicit references to the Yugoslav socialist system (Džamić 2012). Certain pictures from the book were removed or repainted in some editions, while in some

other editions those very same pictures appeared in the original version, and unsurprisingly, some of Vjesnik's editions were occasionally also censored by the publisher.<sup>3</sup> Even Max Bunker acknowledged Brixy's contributions to its popularity in Yugoslavia, which at a certain point exceeded even the domestic Italian one, praising him as 'one of the rare translators who successfully depicted the black satire of the *Alan Ford*'s story and drawings.' When Brixy died in 1984 the date marked, in many ways, the end of an era for *Alan Ford* in Yugoslavia.<sup>4</sup>

If we refer here to Williams's three-part theory of dominant-residual-emergent culture (1977, 121–127), and understand *Alan Ford* as an implicit critique of the Yugoslav socialist system due to its parallelism with the society of the period, the translation of *Alan Ford* – in terms of language as well as culture – could be regarded as part of the 'emergent culture' in opposition to the 'dominant' and 'residual' elements of Yugoslav society.<sup>5</sup> In terms of parallelism and satire, Flowershop uncannily resembles the Kuća cveća, the mausoleum of Tito, and the man himself resembles broj Jedan or Number One, as noted by Džamić (2012) in his book on *Alan Ford* with the brilliant and telling title: *Cvjećarnica u kući cvjeća* (Flowershop in the House of Flowers) (Ivic 2013). However, despite the fact that the parallels between the Yugoslav situation and the world of *Alan Ford* are one step short of uncanny, one must still be precise about where the parallelism starts and where it ends: while the 'outside world' of *Alan Ford* depicted the other, 'poor,' flip side of capitalism, it is only the 'inside world'

<sup>3</sup> For example, in issue #16, 'Don't Vote for Notax,' a line making fun of distinctively American racism, reading 'Firstly, I promise that we will get rid of the Blacks [...]' This is a country of the white race, and whoever doesn't think that way will get punished' was changed to 'Firstly, I promise that we will get rid of *our enemy*. This is *our* country and whoever doesn't think that way will [...]'

<sup>4</sup> The edition continued after Brixy's death, eventually ending in 1992 with the outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars, after which it was Borgis who picked up the publishing rights for the Croatian market, keeping the original series title *Alan Ford Superstrip*. Maverick from Kraljevo initially started publishing for the Serbian market, and in 2003 the comic was picked up by Color Press Group from Novi Sad. In the 2000s, the original episodes in Brixy's translation have been republished by the Croatian Strip-agent under the title *Alan Ford Klasik*, who also published *Alan Ford Extra* (new Italian episodes), and *Priče broja 1* (Number One's Stories).

<sup>5</sup> Williams, in his *Marxism and Literature* (1977, 121–127), devotes one chapter to the dialectical development of culture as the interplay between these three concepts, where *dominant* elements refer to the hegemonic values and practices of society; *residual* to those past elements that still operate within the dominant ones; and *emergent* to those elements that go against and defy both the dominant and residual ones.

of the Flowershop from where the TNT group operates that portrays Yugoslav socialism. If the social dynamic of the group TNT – chaotic relations, dysfunctionality, bad organisation, incompetent agents – was seen as depicting the Yugoslav society, then its outside world can be taken as the Yugoslav ‘outside’ as such, i.e. the capitalistic West in general.

Despite the fact that initially *Alan Ford* functioned as an emergent counterculture, it soon gained such an immense popularity that it became dominant soon after Tito’s death, and later on, after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, residual in its successor states. Attesting to the immense popularity of *Alan Ford* in Yugoslavia are the numerous movies, theatrical and other artworks that were directly inspired by the comic book in its Yugoslav variant: in 1994 a theatre play titled *Alan Ford* was staged at Teatar T in Belgrade, and in 2002 Radio Belgrade performed a radio drama based on the play; Emir Kusturica’s *Black Cat, White Cat* from 1998 features a character who reads an *Alan Ford* comic book throughout the film; Prljavo kazalište, a Croatian rock band, was named after the translated line from an *Alan Ford* issue called Broadway; Pero Deformero, a Serbian heavy metal band, was named after one of the minor characters of the comic book; as was Superhiks, a Macedonian rock band; in the 1980s the Yugoslavian software studio Suzy Soft made a game titled *The Drinker*, inspired of course by Superhik.

Besides these pop-cultural references one must not fail to mention that *Alan Ford* catchphrases become part of everyday slang in almost all of post-Yugoslav successor states regardless of their (different) national languages: Broj Jedan is used to refer to any old, grumpy, influential person; Superhik is used for anyone with a serious alcohol problem; and Jeremija for someone who is easily hurt, as synonymous for ‘snowflake’; and Sir Oliver’s line ‘Cijena, prava sitnica’ (‘Price? A bargain!’) as commonplace for ‘it’s too expensive’.

This last line especially is, I think, emblematic of one of the distinctively dialectical characteristics of *Alan Ford*, namely, its ability to express the true meaning via its opposite, or what was in classical rhetoric referred to as *antiphrasis*, or in philosophy as *irony*.

### **The Ideological Function of Irony and Tautology**

Perhaps the most famous philosophical form of irony is Socratic irony, a dialectical method of inquiry where, to put it simply, one fakes ignorance in order to gain an admission from the interlocutor, whose knowledge is then shown as null and void.

Hegel, a fan of both Socrates and his method – as Brecht puts it (1967, 1460–1462): ‘He has the makings of one of the greatest humorists among the philosophers, like only Socrates otherwise, who had a similar method’ – developed his dialectics in close connection with irony, which worked in a similar fashion, for he ‘faked absolute knowledge in order to gain an admission of ignorance from the interlocutor,’ and whose knowledge is again shown as null and void.

And could one not regard *Alan Ford* as precisely such an exercise in Hegelian irony? The main protagonists of the comic book are comical first and foremost because they adhere to the Hegelian principle of comedy where the relationship between substance and subject as enacted in tragedy is reversed: instead of the ethical substance affirming itself over the subjective action of tragic individuals, the comic individual affirms its subjectivism over ethical substance (Hegel 1997, 1380). While the naive Alan Ford himself is faking ignorance while in fact enacting what could be understood as the ethical substance of the comic book, his idiotic comrades from the Flowershop are faking absolute knowledge for they are so sure of themselves even when their own actions collide with reality and prove them wrong, and this discrepancy between their subjectivity and reality is the subject of laughter.

The irony, even double irony is, that if in the original Italian *Alan Ford* the satire of capitalistic reality was explicit – and therefore comes as no surprise that it did not make it into the Anglo-Saxon world where capitalism itself originated and is at home with itself – in the Yugoslav translation it was only implicit that the Flowershop and its inhabitants were a satire of socialist society, as if the comic book enabled an indirect satisfaction of an unconscious desire to ridicule a system that allowed none.

Freud referred to *antiphrasis* as one of the ways in which the unconscious works in order to avoid the conscious censorship of the ego, where the opposite of what is otherwise censored is shown precisely as *vorstellungs-repräsentanz* of the repressed content: as shown extensively in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, this process can affect characteristics of objects or people, thus transforming a small object into a very large one, or someone whose intelligence is envied in real life appears stupid in a dream, or climbing the stairs instead of falling, and so forth (Freud 2010). Or, more pertinently related to our topic, in his book on the *Witz*, where a similar process takes place in order to disguise a taboo content in its contrary by way of euphemisms (Freud 1916), like in one of Žižek’s eminently Freudian jokes: ‘What is a Freudian slip of the tongue?’ – ‘When



you say one thing and mean your mother.' Althusser, who in many of his works tried to combine Marxism and psychoanalysis, detected a certain conceptual parallel between the Marxist understanding of ideology and the psychoanalytical conception of the unconscious, thus paving the way for his pupils – most notably Balibar, Macherey, Pecheux – and their specific critique of discursive ideology, where art in general and literature in particular is understood as a potentially subversive practice of class struggle.<sup>6</sup>

There is, however, another similar usage of contrary meanings as in irony, which has, however, a directly opposite function: an ideological assertion rather than subversion of the existing order of things. The direct opposite to the dialectical use of irony in general and the rhetorical device of antiphrasis in particular is what is called 'subversive affirmation' or 'over-identification,' as first employed in performing arts and literature, most notably in Vladimir Sorokin's exaggeration of socialist realism in his novels. Žižek later on (2006) popularized the concept through his contribution on 'Why Are Laibach and the Neue Slowenische Kunst Not Fascists?', where he discusses the totalitarian aesthetics of the group and collective as a style that relinquishes irony in order to achieve a subversive over-identification with the dominant ideology. The conceptual nuance is minimal, but important: in order for such a subversive over-identification to work, one must, so to speak, 'take it seriously,' and that is also why Laibach denies that what they do is intended to be either ironic or subversive.<sup>7</sup>

The most minimalistic form of such a mechanism of over-identification can be identified in a special usage of *tautology*, otherwise from times immemorial the linguistic tool of ideological conservatism, as attested, for instance, in the Christian expression 'God is God.' Jean-Jacques Lecer-

<sup>6</sup> Althusser (1991, 17–30) argued, most notably in his 'On Marx and Freud,' for a parallel reading between Marx's theory of class-struggle and Freud's discovery of the unconscious, both being conflictual theories demonstrating their essential epistemological break from tradition in their resistance to the dominant capitalist ideology. For the complex relation between Althusser and psychoanalysis see also Pascale Gillot's (2009) *Althusser et la psychanalyse*.

<sup>7</sup> Gregor Moder, in his 'What can Althusser Teach Us about Street Theater – and Vice Versa' (2014, 86), discusses several such tautological examples where performers do precisely what the oppressive government directs them to do, often simply copying the gestures or commands of authorities, thus producing a 'blind spot' of ideology, a point of view from which such performances 'become subversive with respect to the dominant ideology.'

cle (2008, 162–166), in his ‘A Marxist Philosophy of Language,’ writes that a tautology is a grammatical marker of ‘the ideology of consensus’ in that it ‘deliberately ignores economic, social, and political problems at the very moment it promises to resolve them.’ If someone, for example, points to the cruelties of ongoing wars, to the persistent problem of poverty, and how does God justify all these, the most ideologically conservative reply is precisely ‘God is God,’ asserting the identity of the Almighty as explanation for the atrocities while avoiding the historical causes for them, and at the same time implicitly asserting its existence as the ‘Big Other.’ But if the same tautology of ‘God is God’ is employed by the above-mentioned Laibach as the title and refrain of their song, the effect is quite the opposite, the futility of such an explanation and negation of its existence, or again in Lacanian terms: ‘There is no Big Other.’ Conversely, a simple denial of an ideological statement operates much in the same vein, as in the statement: ‘The one that sacrificed for us on the cross does not exist.’ A denial can always be only a denial of a presupposed, already existing content, that is thus re-affirmed through its very denial. Michel Pêcheux in his ‘Discours and Ideology(s),’ following step-by-step Althusser’s theory of ideological interpellation in connection to Lacan’s logic of the signifier, at a certain point notes that there is an implicit identity-affirming process at work in the ideological interpellation, and that the symptomatic absurdity of its ‘evidence’ is shown in its twisted, humorous, ironic usages, like in the following joke: ‘Mr. Tainta, tell us your name!’ Or: ‘I have three brothers, Paul, Michel, and me’ (Pêcheux 1975, 125–166). By ironically counting ‘myself’ as one of the ‘three brothers’ one denounces the absurdity not only of the elemental structures of kinship, but also of counting.

There is, in short, a specific ironic usage of tautology that can be best described as subversive over-identification, and what *Alan Ford* does is precisely such a twist of the tautological ideology of interpellation inside-out so that in the final analysis it becomes its opposite, not an ‘ideology of consensus’ but rather an ‘ideology of conflict’ that emphasises economic, social, and political problems, as best attested from the gradual development of the following few examples that go from basic tautology to ironic antiphrasis up until a most direct critique of the ruling ideology.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Despite the fact that *Alan Ford* is, as a comic book, first and foremost *graphical*, we will nevertheless focus on its *discourse*, thus leaving aside the visual functioning of ideology, which is pivotal for the comics in general, and which, for instance, Bara Kolenc elaborates

### The Ironic Tautology of Alan Ford

*Alan Ford* has a plethora of memorable quotes that are, as already mentioned, still in use in present day Yugoslavia's successor states, and are also reproduced on T-shirts as well as recurrently circulated on social media, especially during voting periods, which already in itself attests to their political meaning, at least in the post-Yugoslav context.

'Tko spava nije budan.' – 'Whoever sleeps is not awake.' This is a simple tautology, a no-shit-Sherlock statement, that states the obvious, and is similar to another one: 'Ako kaniš pobijediti, ne smiješ izgubiti.' – 'If you want to win you must not lose.' However, look now how this one is turned about in the following: 'Ne predaj se nikad, osim kad moraš.' – 'Do not concede defeat ever, only when you must.' And in the final form the capitalist ideology of competition, as embodied in the sports as an allegedly ideologically neutral sector of society: 'Nije važno sudjelovati, važno je pobijediti.' – 'It's not important if you participate, but rather if you win.' By emphasizing the opposite of the Olympic slogan 'it is not important if you win but rather to participate' it shows the ideological falseness of the statement via its comic development into its contrary, 'It is not important if you participate but rather if you win,' thus demasking also the capitalistic ideology of competitiveness inscribed in the very essence of sports.

Another brilliant, eminently philosophical graduation from tautology to ideology, can be found in the following two aphorisms from the comic book: 'Bolje nešto od nečega, nego ništa od ničega.' – 'Better something of something than nothing of nothing.' It works best in our languages because of the genitive that changes the two apparent tautologies ('nešto ... nečega' and 'ništa ... ničega'), thus linguistically deconstructing the identity of 'something' on the one hand and of 'nothing' on the other, while apparently stating the evidential obvious.

And, based on this, my last example, the best political joke ever, with an ultimate ironic twist in terms of ideological subversion: 'Mi ništa ne

in her essay 'Voyeurism and Exhibitionism on the Internet: The Libidinal Economy of the Spectacle of Instanternity.' Among other examples, she points to the visual aspect of tautology in the form of 'stating (or, rather, staging) the obvious' in the sense that what is most hidden is what is shown in the most obvious way, a visual strategy of a lure which is certainly present in Alan Ford: 'In trying to grasp what is beyond what one shows me – an indefinite something that I assume is hiding behind the curtain – I fail again. There is nothing behind what one shows. For the subject is itself but a picture, a lure, a play with a screen' (Kolenc 2022, 201–237).

obečavamo i to ispunjavamo – stranka istine’ – ‘We promise nothing and we deliver. The Truth Party.’ The nothing is delivered, and therefore not nothing, but something, and that is the truth of the Truth Party, the only honest party in any given republican party-system of political representation.

## Conclusion

So, to return in conclusion to my initial question: how can we reconcile the apparently contradictory tendency implicit in *Alan Ford*’s ironic political satire, namely, that it can serve as a critique of capitalism as well as socialism?

The difference lies in its ideological function: *Alan Ford* provided a serious satirical critique of the capitalist system as seen in the world of the ‘rich’ outside the Flowershop, while its ‘poor’ inside – the caricature of its main tenants – delivered an ironic critique of socialism. The real kernel, however, lies not in the parody of capitalism or socialism, but rather in its distinctive use of irony that the comic book demonstrates precisely in its dialectical doublespeak, that is universal in form, but historically anchored in its usage and interpretation (it is, in short and to put it bluntly, ‘funny’ not in an universal, but rather in a particular way).

And to continue on the lines of historical materialism: we have noted in terms of Williams’s dominant-residual-emergent culture, if the Yugoslav translation of *Alan Ford* at the beginning functioned as an emergent, countercultural element, it soon gained momentum and became dominant, but – with a true dialectical turn in terms of historical Marxism – one could say that with the dissolution of Yugoslavia and its capitalistic aftermath it again holds the potential to become a countercultural element.

Thus, in the post-Yugoslav context *Alan Ford* can still serve as both a critique of contemporary capitalist society – since most if not all of its successor states embarked on the neoliberal boat – and at the same time as a regulatory idea for what socialism truly is: the theory and practice of class struggle.

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