

The Strange Absence of Capital(ism)

Stipe Grgas

If capitalism, as is customarily supposed, is the “other” of socialism, then Yugoslavia, which has been dubbed “America’s communist ally” by Tvrtko Jakovina (2003), ought to provide ample evidence proving that the binary opposition is not as clear-cut as it initially seems. Different aspects of the Yugoslav experience, not confined to its geopolitical position and to how its politicians capitalized on this position, bear this out. However, this does not mean that the ex-polity readily acknowledged its hybrid status, nor that it, at least on the level of official political pronouncements and self-representations, wavered from its proclaimed commitment to the socialist path. Although numerous socio-economic realities clearly marked a departure and deviation from the practice of the real-socialist order, as instituted in other parts of Eastern Europe, they were regularly portrayed as being episodes, tactical moves in the overall strategy of implementing the socialist project in particular geopolitical conditions. A medley of euphemisms, with regard to both processes and structural changes in the economy, were resorted to in order to package the way Yugoslavia had compromised the then established path of building a socialist society.

Depending on one’s political leanings, these compromises can be evaluated in different ways. But regardless of these differences of valorization, the euphemisms—whether referring to profit, property rights, labor relations, or for that matter, capital itself—can be mustered to explain the specificity of the Yugoslav experience. Although an overview

of these euphemisms would yield an archive of how the Yugoslav party politicians “tamed” or justified the presence of capital in the system they were building—which was supposedly antipodal to capitalism—this is only tangentially related to what I propose to do in the following. Rather, the departure point of this chapter is the question of why, in light of the evidence of the structuring power of capital in Yugoslavia, it registered so feebly in Yugoslav self-representations and its cultural discourses. In what follows, I insist on the necessity to distinguish between capitalism as a historical socio-economic formation and capital as a more fundamental notion, if not an entity. Capital’s priority, or its anteriority to the capitalist order (which Marx’s analytic explored and critiqued), and its retentive power in the societies that legitimized themselves by arguing that they had overcome its laws, are explored in Vanja Sutlić’s (1925–1989) thought. Considering the many occasions when the Yugoslav project had to accommodate itself to the challenges of capital, and considering that the breakup of the country was marked by the widespread universalizing of capitalism, one would expect that an archive of pronouncements is at hand that deal with capital(ism). But neither a search that retrieves the Yugoslav experience nor one that explores the (post)Yugoslav present yield much evidence. In that regard, Sutlić is an exception.

The absence of capital during the first period can be explained, I think, by the fact that, back then, the issue that was prioritized within dominant cultural discourses was the problem of revolutionary agency and the possibility of historical transformation. The fact that I use the phrase “dominant discourse” points to a specificity of the Yugoslav public sphere, which allowed fractures and the voicing of countervailing worldviews. These were not only the views that articulated the notions of identity and nation, as is nowadays all too frequently maintained, but also positions that fractured the Marxist thought itself. One of the most important of the latter group was Vanja Sutlić’s reading of Marx. His reading presented an apostasy to those who towed the line of revolutionary transformation. For those familiar with the Praxis group and its importance for the Yugoslav and Western European Marxist thought, I add that Sutlić contributed to what the Praxis philosophers achieved, but that he did not share in its humanistic turn nor did he indulge in its revolutionary zeal. I have chosen to go back to Sutlić not only to retrieve a problem in Yugoslav philosophical thought, but to show that a certain branch within that thought continues to have a relevance for our present

time, marked by both the defeat of the revolutionary project and the hegemony of capitalism. I will argue that it is within this hegemony that Sutlić's thought has a continued relevance. In my conclusion, I show how Sutlić's thinking on the absence of capital(ism) in Yugoslav philosophical thought has a more than local relevance now that the "other" of capitalism has disappeared both from the postsocialist reality and from the horizon of thinking the present-day conjuncture.

2. I will start with Marx, but with a Marx who could not be assimilated into the revolutionary project. One of Marx's metaphors will do. Namely, I will show how the Serbo-Croatian translation of a word in a passage from Marx's *Capital Volume III* is symptomatic of what I would call a reductionist use of Marx's thought. This is the quote:

We have seen how merchant's capital and interest-bearing capital are the oldest forms of capital. But it lies in the very nature of the matter that interest-bearing capital should appear to the popular mind as the form of capital *par excellence*. In merchant's capital we have a mediating activity, whether this is considered as fraud, labor or whatever. In interest-bearing capital, on the other hand, the self-reproducing character of capital, self-valorizing value, the production of surplus-value, appears as a purely occult quality. (1991: 744)

Putting aside Marx's qualifications such as "popular mind" and "appears," I think one cannot but recognize how Marx anticipated today's mutation of capital, the mutation in which finance capital has displaced production and enthroned itself as the ultimate creator of value. For the moment, however, this is of secondary importance. I primarily choose this passage—among others that could have served the same purpose—because of the way Moša Pijade translated the last syntagm ("occult quality"). In his Serbo-Croatian translation it reads "skriveno svojstvo" (1974: 516), that is, to retranslate it into English, "hidden" or "concealed" quality. Pijade, one of the foremost intellectuals in the Yugoslav Communist Party, was not translating from an English translation. But if we return to the German original, we recognize that the English translator gave a more literal rendering than Pijade: "der sich vertwertende Wert, die Produktion des Mehrwerts, als okkulte Qualität rein dar" (1959: 657). Moša Pijade did not embellish the original, nor did he add to its flourish. On the contrary, he downplayed Marx's emphasis ("rein"), but also mistranslated Marx's representation of

capital, or rather, his inability to represent it as such. What can be deduced from this substitution of terms?

The gap between the meaning of “hidden” and “occult” is more than evident. They are not interchangeable terms, and resorting to one or the other is consequential. This is all the more striking because Moša Pijade had at his disposal an assortment of equivalents, including the Serbo-Croatian word “okultan” and other synonyms that are truer to the original. However, unlike the “occult,” with its connotations of the mysterious, beyond human understanding—qualities which thwart both human thought and action—if something is “hidden,” one needs only analytical skill and acumen to unhide it, bring it out into the open, and deal with it. Put differently, Pijade’s taming of the semantic potential of a word designating more than the human realm privileges human agency. The original word “occult” thwarts human effort and remains outside, unaffected by anything that revolutionary practice can strive to achieve. Repositioning Pijade’s translation within its historical and political context, his choice of wording is here a signal indicating that analytic socialist thought believes itself capable of revealing the truth of capital and thusly enables a field of effective political action. From such a perspective, the surplus metaphoricity in Marx, and its implications, were obstacles that had to be put aside. In order for Marx to be put to political use, he had to be simplified. To generalize, “scientific socialism” was driven by a belief that it could harness and overcome capital(ism) and had little truck with what it saw as, to use G.M. Tamás’s words, Marx’s “esoteric matter” (2013). Socialist revolutionaries proceeded from the truth Marx had supposedly discovered; opacity was unacceptable to revolutionary hubris. Such simplifications of Marx were a part of the voluntaristic project that legitimated itself by its promise of being capable of overcoming the workings of capital.

How capital was envisioned factored prominently in the emancipatory project which, as Darko Suvin writes, was driven by “heaven-storming hopes” and which, as Suvin has indefatigably argued, did have “even great and memorable successes.” But, as Suvin goes on to write, “the revolutions finally did not overcome the formidable internal and external obstacles which we can in one word call capital—outside and inside the countries of revolution” (2016). Not only was the possibility of failure unacknowledged in dogmatic Marxism, but capital, if thought of at all, was considered in strictly economic terms. My intent here is to show

that Yugoslav cultural figures, and its philosophers in particular, were not all constrained by these ideological exigencies, nor did they unquestioningly toe the line of party policies. In an article dealing with Boris Kidrič, Darko Suvin summarizes the debates that ensued after Yugoslavia had embarked on its own path of socialist development:

Decisive for these processes are depth economic and psychological currents that can be theoretically identified as the ‘law of value’ and an economy based on commodity exchange. Kidrič was without doubt the pioneer of a protracted discussion about these processes in SFRY, which in the decades after his death came to no satisfactory conclusion. The theoretical and highly practical question remains: does Marx’s opus equate commodity production with capitalism, or does commodity production, once begun, continue forever, that is, after capitalism too? In SFRY theoretical thought there were conflicting stances about this question. One group, the official view whose main spokesmen were Edvard Kardelj and, among social scientists, Miladin Korać, held that Marx does not criticize commodity production per se but only its capitalist “form,” so that a socialist political economy whose object is ‘socialist commodity production’ is possible. A second group, mainly composed of Praxis collaborators such as Gajo Petrović, Vanja Sutlić, Ljubomir Tadić, and Žarko Puhovski, held that in a truly Marxist analysis only a socialist critique of commodity production, as well as a critique of political economy, is possible. (Suvin 2015)

Suvin convincingly charts a debate that was not only theoretical but also impacted upon the political order. The names refer to the people who were, and some still are, influential in public life in Yugoslavia, and in the politics that it spawned. Not all had the same weight and stature, however. In what follows, I turn to Vanja Sutlić, who provided us with the most profound, philosophically-informed articulation of the opinions of the second group.

Before going to his book *Praksa rada kao znanstvena povijest* (*The Praxis of Labor as Scientific History*) (1974), by all accounts Sutlić’s most important work, I will quote a remark Sutlić made in a discussion held with the workers of the rolling stock producing factory Janko Gredelj in Zagreb in 1969. He starts off by demystifying the notion of class solidarity: “People responsible at their workplace forget the goals of the whole for the benefit of specific, partial interests.” He continued with an apodictic assessment:

This means that the working class continues to exist in our socialism. And this means that, I would say, in a crucial sense, the position of people in the process of production still hasn't changed. Because they continue to work for the increase of capital, they continue to work for that so-called surplus of labor which is another word for the surplus of value. (Banjeglav and Koprivnjak 1983: 552)

As though his equation of "surplus labor" with "surplus value" was not enough, Sutlić continued demolishing one of the mainstays of the ideological lore of his time, which proclaimed that a new order, transcending capitalism, had been established:

Accordingly, in that respect, the mode of production has not essentially changed although the legal form has undergone change. Because, neither private ownership nor joint-stock companies exist, but a process of socialization has set in. Things have to be given their proper names: if the working class exists, then there exists something that is capital. Because where there is no capital there is no working class. People become working people when there is no capital, but when capital exists, so does the working class. (552)

In this ad hoc "intervention," as it is dubbed in the transcript, in the 1969 discussion with Janko Gredelj workers Sutlić took aim at the basic wishful thinking of voluntaristic revolutionary ethics:

It is clear that in the most important spheres of life we no longer have the personified private owner of the means of production. However, we do have a mode of production, which is a specific social power, and which creates differences between producers – the so-called immediate producers – and those who dispose the products of these immediate producers. This is one of the basic contradictions in our society, the difference between the importance assigned to the producer in the broadest meaning of the word – I here include technical production – and the actual weakness of these producers in the development of the entire life of our society. (552–553)¹

There are no documents to tell us whether Sutlić's observations elicited any kind of response on the occasion of their pronouncement. However, if attended to closely, it can be seen that they already provide a kernel of

Sutlić's thinking which, on a later occasion, did impact the Yugoslav cultural scene and its theoretical horizon.

Just as it is difficult nowadays to imagine the most sophisticated Yugoslav philosopher participating in a workers' meeting, it is equally difficult, after what occurred in the late 1980s in the former Yugoslavia, to fully fathom the apostasy of these pronouncements. What I think cannot be denied is that they are not mere political gesturing. On the contrary, they stem from a thinking of labor, of capital and of Marx, which strove, as Sutlić formulated it, to think "essence" "in contrast to operative-calculative problems" (1974: 3). In his elaboration of "the philosophical structure of Marx's thought," as the subtitle of his 1974 book reads, Sutlić sought to show how Marx "does not criticize 'ideas,' 'reality,' 'phenomena' and 'what exists' by setting one against the other, but each one individually, and in the confrontation of the one with the other seeks the *third*, which does not come after, but prior to that difference" (9). Sutlić's theoretical project was to show that Marx did not remain on the level of explicating ontic differences, but that he strove to articulate Being as such. Arguing for the abiding relevance of Sutlić's study, I am proposing that, although Sutlić focuses his thinking on labor, the "third" in the above sentence can equally be identified as capital. Seeking out "the founding essence" and labeling it as labor, Sutlić simultaneously inscribes into his argument a slippage which tends to move his fundamental concept into the semantic field of capital. Since this is the crux of how I read his book, I offer a number of examples. Here is one:

Capital is nothing other than that, a "circuitous" path on which the "whole laborer" exists, just as "labor" in the strict sense of the word, that is, in the economic sense of the word, is nothing other than that relation and simultaneously that thing which 'is personified' in the laborer as an empirical individual and which by way of the "circuitous path" shows that the empirical individual belongs to the whole of the "collective laborer" (Gesamtarbeiter). (27)

Another thick description further exemplifies this slippage:

In the process of the production of capital, on the basis of the productivity of labor itself, on the basis of the development of productive forces, the "circuitous," "surrounding," "reified" world of relations in production

and the means of production associated with them grows independent – into a force over labor as a process of the self-expansion of capital, that is, over “living” labor in the name of “dead” labor; the system of satisfying needs grows independent, wealth etc. becomes independent in the economic sphere, the whole becomes independent at the expense of its parts, human “nature” at the expense of its “existence,” “spiritual” production at the expense of the “material” one, “creativity” at the expense of the “created,” in short – the family, society, the state, spirit, nature and logos at the expense of naked labor, mere labor, the expenditure of labor power for purposes which are outside it. (31)

What is “outside” is, as Sutlić has it, the third before difference. This rhapsodic moment in the book conveys, in Sutlić’s at times untranslatable prose, how he strives to fathom an essence that lives and thrives “outside” of the “operative-calculative” categories. This striving is manifest in the way that the “praxis of labor” always already oversteps the confines of how we would semantically delineate the latter term so that it becomes an absolute, as in the following: “Labor is mastership and authority over everything that exists and over itself, the final possibility of everything, and the power over everything which sets itself up and sets itself forth in everything that is” (43).

That contention absolutely reverberates with Marx’s definition of capital as “the endless and limitless drive to go beyond its limiting barrier” (1993: 334). In what follows, I offer a sampling of Sutlić’s observations that echo Marx’s definition: “In a higher sense, outside its specifications, labor is the power ‘superior’ to everything, everything is ‘subservient’ to it; it is the very ‘order’ of things whose ‘ruling’ determines the ‘rule’ of all that is” (Sutlić 1974: 51) because, as Sutlić asks while echoing Marx, “what else is that ‘production for the sake of production’ but ‘the productive development of human labor?’” (75). In the same vein, Sutlić writes that the “immanent goal” of history is not society “but that which enables both society and nature as ‘being for man’ that which is labor itself, endlessly developing in itself for the sake of itself, ‘production for the sake of production’” (121). If we recall that the last formulation is frequently resorted to in order to designate the specificity of capitalism, what we see Sutlić doing is replacing the concept of capital with the concept of labor. Elsewhere in the book, Sutlić emphasizes that neither man nor nature put themselves in the place of the absolute of the concept/

idea, but that labor itself assumes that place. However, having said that, Sutlić has the need to remind his reader that this labor is absolute labor and that this labor is ontically neutral (136–137). Even more emphatically, such a philosophical conception of labor leads Sutlić to state that in capital, which is nothing else but “partially already ‘reified’ (*vergegenständlichte*), ‘dead labor’ (social labor), and partially ‘living’ labor that transfers and creates value, all the productive forces of (social) labor show themselves to be the productive forces of capital” (169). One can say that Sutlić is here expanding on the aforementioned discussion with the factory workers. We also find echoes of his earlier “intervention” in the following observation:

The subject-substance of the entire process is capital, capitalists are merely its personifications. The entire development of productive forces, their type and historical modification are “the act of capital.” In relation to these forces not only is the individual laborer passive, but they take place against him and behind his back. In brief outline, this is Marx’s description of the absolute set-up of capital, capital as an absolute whose actors and agents serve it. (173–174)

What Sutlić is alluding to here, without any explicit referencing, is those utterances in Marx where Marx contended that both the wage-laborer and the capitalist are merely “personifications of economic categories,” that they are no more than the bearers (*Träger*) of particular class relations and interests. For our purposes, the most relevant observation is Sutlić’s contention that capital is an absolute and that it “acts” against and “behind the back” of human volition.

Sutlić’s formulation that “capital is an absolute”—substantiating my claim that, when referring to labor, he is always already implicating capital—is not restricted to philosophical categories but enables him to make pronouncements that contradict the then reigning eschatology of dogmatic Marxism. After distinguishing the specificity of the capitalist mode of production Sutlić writes:

This is why the capitalist mode of production signifies at one and the same time both an economic and a productive expansion, tendentially limitless, because productive forces as such are capital’s productive forces and its thirst for surplus value is in principle unquenchable. In other words,

when capital and forces of production come together in such a way that the forces of production appear as forces of the production of capital, then, in principle and as a tendency, the growth of the forces of production has no end. Then the growth of the forces of production as well as the production of surplus value that develops in immediate unity with this growth and develops only through it are without bounds. This is a thought that ought to be thought through when, in an impromptu manner one wants to reach conclusions, sometimes from the immanent contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, about the impossibility of the development of forces of production within the framework of capitalism. (19–20)

Sutlić's contention that the capitalist mode of production is "tendentially without limits" is in accordance with a potentiality in Marx's philosophy but was, of course, anathema to the progressivist revolutionary program. In retrospect, I wager to say that Sutlić's take on capitalism was one of the most radical pronouncements made by a public figure in Yugoslavia. Sutlić added to the blasphemy when he wrote that: "In its classic, that is, Marxian form, socialism can never economically compete with modified capitalism and its inventiveness regarding needs and the mechanisms for satisfying them" (182). Not only did Sutlić, by proposing the possibility that capitalism might be without end, take issue with the reading of history espoused by "scientific socialism," but he also warned that socialism could not deliver on its promise of creating material prosperity better than capitalism. It needs to be kept in mind that although Yugoslavia served as a model for "socialism with a human face" because its politics and civil life were more tolerant than was the case in other Eastern European countries, the legitimacy of its order rested very much on the system's ability to provide material well-being. Recalling this, it becomes clear how explosive Sutlić's diagnosis regarding the superior "inventiveness" of capitalism was.

Sutlić's thought, as well as his style, owe a great deal to his encounter with Heidegger. I do not take up this issue here (see Grgas 2014). Rather, just as his diagnosis of Yugoslav socialism, in the aforementioned engagement with the workers, led him to fathom the reality and not the ideological representations of reality, Sutlić, unlike most of the philosophers with whom he is usually put together and who took little cognizance of the changes capitalism was undergoing, attended to how capitalism had mutated. Thus, referring to the historical moment of his writing, he remarked on

the expansiveness of modern capitalism or of so-called neocapitalism, late capitalism, the expansiveness of its forces of production which affect the whole world in such a way that the world orients itself in accordance with the tempo, the goals of enlarging this “society of plenty,” this “consumer society.” (21)

Sutlić recognizes the emergence of consumerist society but does not revert to a humanist criticism of its inauthenticity. Rather, in line with his insight into the universalizing tendencies in capitalism, he points to its exponential growth.

A section of Sutlić’s book deals with the “cultural sphere.” There he voices the need to address “the specific ‘synthesis’ of intellectual and manual labor interior to capitalism ... which deepens the subsumption of labor under capital” (168). I mention these two themes in the book—neocapitalism and Marx’s “general intellect”—to identify what Sutlić was talking about in his ‘synthesis,’ and to show that Sutlić’s philosophical reading of Marx enabled him to recognize the growing hegemony of capital, but also its mutation into what is nowadays called cognitive capitalism.² Arguing for the relevance of Sutlić’s thought, I am at the same time arguing that “cultural life,” to use one of the terms that set the agenda of the volume at hand, has to incorporate philosophy. Cultural studies frequently eclipses this domain in its disciplinary protocols. I think that its inclusion is particularly necessary in discussing ex-Yugoslavia because it was in that domain that one finds not only the no longer pertinent simplifications of the “other” of socialism but also, as Sutlić proves, “conceptualizations of that other that are still germane and usable.”

3. The implications of Sutlić’s argument did not pass unnoticed when the book was published. It was the cause of many polemics in different quarters of intellectual life. The then prominent journal *Kulturni radnik* (*Cultural Worker*) organized a roundtable discussion which was published in two of its issues in 1974 and 1975. Noting how the word revolution was absent in the book—an absence that in itself was a cause of controversy at the time—Ivan Urbančić described “an indeterminately present background, not explicitly articulated in the text, something that is only anticipated in the book, but which is not explicitly developed” (1974: 102). Using Urbančić’s terms, I would argue that the “indeterminately present background” was the slippage Sutlić enacted

between labor and capital. Urbančić rightly held that Sutlić attempted to find “that source from which labor springs,” that something according to which “both labor and metaphysics are,” and which cannot be labor itself (104). Hotimir Burger pointed out the ambiguity of Sutlić’s central term and the author’s dilemma about “what is really at stake with this term labor, does it really correspond to what he wants to describe, define and to which he ascribes a fundamental role” (1974: 112). Close to what I see Sutlić’s thinking of labor to be Burger continued: “I think we would be truer to Marx’s solution of the problem—which then leads us elsewhere—if we remember Marx’s other position in the *Grundrisse* where he speaks of capital production as that which establishes the socially and historically created element. We can conclude from this that, according to Marx, it is capital that makes history” (114).

Participants in the roundtable discussion who were critical of Sutlić’s book were more explicit about what Sutlić had done in the book. Thus, Neven Mates points to a duality in Sutlić’s thought that is, on the one hand, a “lucid explication of Marx’s thought” and on the other a refutation of Marx’s position. In other words, Mates pays tribute to Sutlić’s philosophizing of Marx but disparages the absence of the possibility of transformation/revolution in the book. In a subsection of his discussion of the book, tellingly entitled “Concerning the infinite developmental possibilities of capital and how crises are pure figments of the imagination,” Mates explicitly cited Sutlić’s contention that capital might have no bounds and commented:

The rejection of Marx, of his labor theory of value is here clear... For Sutlić “forces of production as such are capital’s forces of production.” Sutlić does not see the contradiction between capital as a social relation and the forces of production, or, put even better, Sutlić does not see at all that capital is a social relation – he believes and holds that capital is a machine, technics and science, man’s relationship towards nature. (Mates 1974: 168)

Milan Kangrga was even harsher in his critique of Sutlić and claimed that the latter had rejected “the pathos of Marx’s critical position in relation to all forms of dehumanization” (1975: 160). His overall assessment is telling:

“The truth and accuracy” of Sutlić’s interpretation of Marx’s teaching reaches only so far as everything he says here about Marx is only one

moment of Marx's thought that moves – we can say – within the horizon of the Being of the existing world which has, owing precisely to Marx himself, its name and surname: the bourgeoisie-capitalist world of the production and reproduction of life according to the principle of the production of surplus value for the sake of surplus value. (182)

Kangrga attacked Sutlić for remaining within the “horizon of the Being of the existing world” because Kangrga, speaking for those championing the platform of “thinking the revolution,” saw that Sutlić was undermining its basic premises. Kangrga could not accept this and saw Sutlić as choosing “capitulation that resembles a grimace” (184). One can say that it was precisely Sutlić's willingness to think through the implications of Marx's conceptualization of capital that set him apart from the revolutionary pronouncements of Yugoslav leftist critique. Kangrga was right in recognizing Sutlić's defeatism, but was wholly wrong if we judge their positions in hindsight.

The last text in the 1975 issue of *Kulturni radnik* is the transcript of the interview Sutlić himself gave to Ivan Salečić on Zagreb TV on February 10, 1975. The fact that such a hermetic book was given a public hearing, in which Sutlić, among other things, took jibes at some of his critics (dubbing Kangrga an “activist full professor”), evinces the quality of the then cultural scene. In one of his responses Sutlić observes:

Marx's historical conceptualization of epochal, absolutely valid categories (for example, “capital”), the essential primacy of capital over all possible, factually given, concretely (“spatial” and “temporal”) determinate, conditional and modified capital, does in no way imply some “naturalness,” an extra-temporal constancy of these categories. On the contrary, it implies the revolutionary transformation of the epoch. (1974: 185)

Sutlić certainly did not think that the transformation inaugurated by “real existing socialism” was epochal. Such a transformation, if it is at all possible, has to take note of “the essential primacy of capital,” something that the revolutionary projects of the twentieth century did not do. The challenge that he left to those who continued in his path was to think the possibility of epochal transformation with the full knowledge of what that transformation had to surmount. The transformations that came after the death of both Sutlić and of Yugoslavia had no truck with

the “primacy” that he had uncovered in Marx. They were empowered, among other things, by concretized forms of capital, and by the agencies unleashed by those forms of capital. As a rule, the “primacy” was strategically hidden and occluded. Therefore, it was to be expected that, after the demise of the culture and society in which he had lived and worked, Sutlić became a collateral victim of not only the ostracism of Marx in post-Yugoslav reality, but also of the strategic erasure of capitalism/capital in the discursive practices that legitimated the new polities.

However, Sutlić’s thought has not been completely eclipsed in the new realities. A collection of essays produced on the eightieth anniversary of his birth brings together a number of authors who revisit Sutlić’s work (Paić 2006). Perusing the collected texts, I was struck by the absence of capital as a theme. Although it might be said that most of the authors repeat Sutlić’s strategy of adumbrating an “indeterminately present background,” which can be said to insinuate the question of capital as I have outlined it above, there are few instances in the collection where it is explicitly referenced. One exception is Žarko Paić’s reference to Sutlić’s “closed circuit” in which “the world of labor reduces all that is ‘natural’ and ‘social’ to the character masks of the system of capital production” (188). Although the essay by Dragutin Lučić Luce brings more concerning capital, particularly the section in which he describes how Marx found the “anatomy of fear” in the economy (196–202), it does so without really engaging with any of Sutlić’s texts.

Damir Barbarić has also edited a collection of essays commemorating Sutlić’s work (2016). As a rule, the collected authors work within the agenda indicated by the title “towards historical thinking,” that is, to return to Sutlić’s TV interview, they engage the question of epochal transformation. Again the “primacy of capital” is given short shrift. The exception is Ozren Žunec’s paper entitled “Labor and Capital,” which reengages Sutlić’s thinking of the two categories and recognizes that the “destruction of the original unity of the historical framework” results in the independence of the “economic sphere” which then works to engulf the totality of things and makes everything subservient to its instrumentality. Žunec has persuasively argued for the necessity to think both Marx and the economic sphere in philosophical terms and writes:

There is no doubt that labor in the time of capital, that is, capital as the key labor of bourgeoisie society, “works” in a manner similar to the absolute in Hegel’s philosophy. Capital is the moving force and power which out of itself, “self-explicating” itself, produces commodities as the beings of the epoch. Capital is the absolute of bourgeoisie society, similar to “Hegel’s absolute.” (2016: 72)

Žunec’s observation lends support to my contention that there is a slip-page of the categories of labor and capital in Sutlić’s text. On a more general level, the above quote is evidence that, if we seek an understanding of capital, we have to include philosophy into the corpus of our primary evidence.

My choice of Sutlić’s text was motivated by an intuition that one cannot generalize about the absence of capital in the socialist world. Sutlić’s thinking of the “praxis of labor as scientific history” was an intervention in a culture and society that had proclaimed the establishment of a post-capitalist order. Although Yugoslav circumstances provided enabling conditions for his “defeatist” opinions—I know of no similar views voiced in the socialist bloc—they possess more than local relevance. For instance, Philip Goodchild recently wrote:

All social systems involve the production of means of production. *Capitalism may be regarded as the social system in which capital is measured as an accumulated quantity in terms of exchange value.* It matters little whether the means of production are privately owned, or owned by the state, or owned by workers’ or buyers’ cooperatives. Each is a form of capitalism. Each measures the means of production in terms of its exchange value. (2009: 80, emphasis in the text)

The retrieval of Sutlić’s insights, as well as those who have continued to engage his thinking, shows that the socialist and especially Yugoslav archive has something to contribute to the discussions of capital and capitalism.

The necessity to differentiate between capital and capitalism is the most pressing methodological issue in the now intensive discussions of a world in which capital has unconcealed its universalizing thrust. In Sutlić, that difference is implied in the contention that capital persists in socialism and that it has a tendency to permanently expand and grow.

To the extent that he arrived at this position by philosophizing Marx, he was equally cognisant of the contradictions in the socialist system and of the developments in the capitalist world. Sutlić's thinking of labor/capital belongs to those efforts that attempt to think beyond the epiphenomenal and uncover a more fundamental essence. István Mészáros is one such thinker who, in *Beyond Capital* (2010), insists on the need to differentiate between capital and capitalism. According to him, if the difference is not recognized, the critic or the activist loses sight of the roots of "the globally dominant mode of socioeconomic reproduction" (2010: 132). Mészáros argues that this results "in a fateful underestimation of the magnitude of the task facing socialists." He continues:

For by concentrating on some rather limited characteristics of the relatively short *capitalist* phase of historical development – and in particular on those aspects of its property relations which can be directly affected by the overthrow of the capitalist state and the legal/political expropriation of private property – the immense regenerative/restorative power of the prevailing mode of social metabolic reproduction, asserted through the vicious circle of its second order mediations, is completely lost sight of. (132, emphasis in the text)

The Hungarian dissident initially wrote this in 1995, after the demise of the socialist world. Sutlić, we recall, made a strikingly similar statement in 1969, in a factory whose workers were being indoctrinated in the belief that capitalism had been transcended and that a new order was emerging. Those differences ought to be kept in mind just as one has to keep in mind that there is an identity in those differences that persists regardless of locality and time.

My retrieval of Sutlić's thought is not disinterested. It was instigated by a sense that we live in a time when, not only in ex-Yugoslavia but everywhere else, we are witnessing the all-determining power of capital and the globalization of its present mutation. In their book *Capital as Power*, Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler noted that, in recent times, capitalism "seems to be everywhere" (2009: 2). They go on to enumerate how it has erupted into various spheres of culture and social life and how no aspect of capitalism seems to escape debate but, tellingly, add "almost no aspect" and continue: "because something really important is missing. In all the commotion, we seem to have lost sight of the concept that matters most: capital itself" (2). I point to their

book as an instance that takes up the problem of how discussions of capitalism tend to elide its antecedent category. It is coincidental that their conceptualization of “capital as power” is identical to how Sutlić, as we saw, defined it in one of the fragments from his book on the “praxis of labor.” The formulation is the same, but if we compare the two discussions, Nitzan and Shimshon do not strive to unearth the fundamental (un)grounding of capital that is Sutlić’s task. Not only does his definition predate theirs, but it comes from a different horizon of thinking. Let me substitute capital for labor in the earlier quote from Sutlić (1974: 43), rephrase it and offer it as a departure point for the task of thinking capital: Capital is mastership, rule and authority over everything that exists, it is the horizon of possibility of becoming itself, and it is the power over everything which sets itself up and sets itself forth in everything that is.

My contribution to the discussion of capital(ism) in the (post-) Yugoslav context stems from a firm conviction that Yugoslav leftist critique, and Sutlić as one of its most philosophically relevant voices, deserves a hearing at a time when, as Fredric Jameson contends, rightly so in my mind, that the “ultimate referent, the true ground of being in our time” is capital (1995: 82). To “think the true ground of being” of capital in our time demands a swerve of thinking which does not reduce it to its ephemeral appearances, which does not affiliate with capital and which, as Sutlić’s work shows, does not simplify it to proclaim how it can be surmounted. Such a critique that engages the founding rationales of phenomena can, I have shown, be reclaimed from the Yugoslav experience, particularly from those who took up the task of thinking that experience from a non-operative-calculative perspective.

NOTES

1. My colleague Sven Cvek, whose work on capitalism and his interest in the former Yugoslavia and its economy converges with mine, drew my attention to this text. See also Cvek’s chapter in this volume.
2. I mention these aspects of Sutlić’s argument to show how his insights reverberate in the present moment. As far as cognitive capitalism is concerned it is interesting that those who use Marx to explain the growing significance of knowledge in today’s society regularly employ his notion of the General Intellect as he expounded it in *Grundrisse*. Sutlić was, of

course, familiar with the notion and uses it in his argument. This comes as no surprise if we recall that Marx's text was translated in Yugoslavia at an earlier date (1977) than in other countries.

REFERENCES

- Banjeglav, M., and V. Koprivnjak. 1983. *Klasa i avangarda: Jugoslavensko iskustvo*, vol. I. Zagreb: Globus.
- Barbarić, D. (ed.). 2016. *Prema povijesnom mišljenju: Uz djelo Vanje Sutlića*. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska.
- Burger, H. 1974. Dvosmislenost pojma rada. *Kulturni radnik* 27 (6): 111–114.
- Goodchild, P. 2009. *Theology of Money*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Grgas, S. 2014. Croatian Leftist Critique and the Object of American Studies. darhiv.ffzg.unizg.hr/6279/1/wpas_v1_huams_2014-grgas.pdf. Accessed July 02, 2016.
- Jakovina, T. 2003. *Američki komunistički saveznik: Hrvati, Titova Jugoslavija i Sjedinjene Američke Države: 1945–1955*. Zagreb: Profil International.
- Jameson, F. 1995. *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*. Bloomington: BFI/Indiana University Press.
- Kangrga, M. 1975. S Marxom protiv Marxa. *Kulturni radnik* 28 (1): 159–186.
- Marx, K. 1959. *Das Kapital, Dritter Band*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag.
- Marx, K. 1974. *Kapital: Treći tom*, trans. M. Pijade. Beograd: Prosveta.
- Marx, K. 1991. *Capital III*, trans. D. Fernbach. London: Penguin.
- Marx, K. 1993. *Grundrisse*, trans. M. Nicolaus. London: Penguin.
- Mates, N. 1974. Sutlićev krug. *Kulturni radnik* 27 (6): 157–182.
- Mészáros, I. 2010. *Beyond Capital: Toward a Theory of Transition*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Nitzan, J., and Sh Bichler. 2009. *Capital as Power: A Study of Order and Creorder*. London: Routledge.
- Paić, Ž. 2006. *Izgledi povijesnog mišljenja: Zbornik radova povodom osamdesete obljetnice rođenja Vanje Sutlića*. Zagreb: Tvrdla.
- Sutlić, V. 1974. *Praksa rada kao znanstvena povijest: Ogledi uz filozofijsko ustrojstvo Marxove misli*. Zagreb: Kulturni radnik.
- Suvin, D. 2015. The Economico-political Prospects of Boris Kidrič: A Betrayed Disalienation. <https://darkosuvin.com/2015/05/20/the-economico-political-prospects-of-Boris-Kidrič>. Accessed July 02, 2016.
- Tamás, G.M. 2013. Words from Budapest. *New Left Review* 80. <https://newleftreview.org/II/80/g-m-tamas-words-from-budapest>. Accessed July 01, 2016.
- Urbančić, I. 1974. O knjizi Vanje Sutlića *Praksa rada kao znanstvena povijest*. *Kulturni radnik* 27 (6): 101–107.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Stipe Grgas is Chair of the American Studies program at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb (Croatia). In addition to American studies, his fields of interest are the contemporary American novel, Irish literature and culture, human spatiality and the new economic critics. He has published four books: *Nietzsche i Yeats* (1989), *Ispisivanje prostora* (2000), *Kažnjavanje forme* (2006) and *Američki studiji danas: identitet, kapital, spacijalnost* (2014). He co-edited a collection of essays *The Construction of Nature* (1994), and was editor of a collection of Croatian translations of contemporary Irish short stories (2004). He has been awarded Fulbright scholarships on two occasions (Yale and Cornell).

The Cultural Life of Capitalism in Yugoslavia
(Post)Socialism and Its Other

Jelaca, D.; Kolanović, M.; Lugarić, D. (Eds.)

2017, XVII, 359 p. 9 illus., 6 illus. in color., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-47481-6