Response to Gal Kirn

In his response, Gal Kirn misrepresents several points I make in my review of his books *Partisan Ruptures* and *Partisan Counter-Archives*. I want to make my answer very brief, as this debate is getting away from performance studies, and might become too hermetic for the readers of *TDR*.

First, Kirn begins by asserting that in my review I "misunderstood" and "misread" his work. My criticisms were aimed at material mistakes and conceptual shortcomings in his books. The first ones are indisputable, and I cited only a few representative examples. I want to keep it that way. If necessary, I can point out more of those. The second ones could be the subject of further conversation.

Second, Kirn asserts, on the sly, a certain ideological consonance between my criticism of his books and the ideas of the Yugoslav dissident Milovan Djilas, who went from a communist revolutionary to a Cold War liberal ("Djilas and indirectly also Jakovljević," etc.). I never said that I support Djilas's ideological positions. However, I do insist that the author should demonstrate basic familiarity with the historical material he is discussing. When I said that Kirn is "dismissing" and "disqualifying" Djilas, I was trying not to be too harsh in my criticism. Here is a more straightforward way of putting it: taking as a reference point "the publication of Milovan Djilas's book in the early 1950s" (*Partisan Ruptures*, 110), while not providing the title or the publication year just doesn't cut it.[1] There is nothing "specific" and "engaged" in this (non)reading of "the partisan and socialist past." At best, it's sloppy scholarly work; at worst, well, you name it.

Third, Kirn seems to conflate archival research with positivism (and, while we are at it, he contradicts himself on the point of historicism). Having one's facts straight is not positivism, but rigorous scholarship. In order to be able to claim that his engagement with the past is "materialist," a scholar needs to appreciate the historical material he is considering. "Providing" another scholar's (even if it's Althusser!) "theoretical concepts with concrete historical material," while twisting and tailoring it to fit the theoretical mold, is not "criticism" but what Alberto Toscano called "materialism without matter" (2014).

Fourth, in my review I state that the challenges that all of us on the post-Yugoslav Left are facing come from the unanswered questions that emerged from the Yugoslav and all other 20th-century revolutions: revolutionary violence and the cult of personality. Commenting on Kirn's wishy-washy approach to the important question of revolutionary violence, I stated: a) that nationalization of private property ("expropriation of expropriators") in the immediate aftermath of WWII, which he fails to engage in his books, was a form of the primitive accumulation of capital in the socialist state; and b) that wealth created in the socialist Yugoslavia was, and still is, the object of plunder in the process of privatization that started in the 1990s. Kirn mashes these two distinct ideas into one statement that is nowhere to be found in my review and that I would never make: "the idea of social

1. According to my own research, apart from a few reports, the only book Djilas published between 1950 and 1955 was the one he coauthored with Edvard Kardelj in 1951, *Nova Jugoslavija u savremenom svetu* (New Yugoslavia in Contemporary World). That book did not ruffle any feathers when it came out.

TDR 70:1 (T269) 2026 https://doi.org/10.1017/S1054204325101159
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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1054204325101159 Published online by Cambridge University Press

property being solely a [...] 'primitive accumulation of capital' for the new elites," etc. Here, he seems to be referring to the new ruling structures in post-WWII Yugoslavia, which I never mention in this context. What I say about the privatization barons of the 1990s, Kirn conveniently slips into the late 1940s. All of this is, I guess, to dodge the question of his position on revolutionary violence (and there is more convoluted stuff on the personality cult, but we can leave that aside).

Lastly, this is just one of many illustrations of Kirn's opportunistic and laissez-faire use of sources he is engaging. Even in his response to my review, Kirn demonstrates his propensity for off-handed assessments of important historical processes. His comment about boosting the "processes of undevelopment" of under-industrialized regions in the socialist Yugoslavia would make serious economic historians of that country scratch their heads.

I don't dispute the enormous and vital importance of upholding the accomplishments of "partisan and socialist Yugoslavia" (I hope that Kirn understands that when he uses this formulation, he is talking about two different state forms: even on the level of basic periodization, the first one lasted from 1943 to 1945, and the second from 1945 to 1991): from antifascist and revolutionary struggle that led to its formation, to its bold innovations in industrial democracy, to its unwavering support of liberation movements in the process of decolonization across the Global South, and many more. What I do object to is shoddy and irresponsible scholarship. At the very least, it shows disrespect toward important legacies of the socialist Yugoslavia. A noble cause cannot justify questionable execution. More often, it's the other way around: the latter diminishes the former.

— Branislav Jakovljević

Reference

Toscano, Alberto. 2014. "Materialism without matter: abstraction, absence and social form." *Textual Practice* 27, 7:1221–40.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1054204325101159 Published online by Cambridge University Press