

Introduction

This issue of *Art Studies* explores the theme of revisionism, understood both as a historical phenomenon—insofar as the struggle against so-called “modern” revisionism (initially Soviet but subsequently Chinese revisionism as well) played a decisive role in the path pursued by the Albanian Party of Labor from the beginning of the 1960s and up until Enver Hoxha’s death in 1985, if not the collapse of the state socialist system itself at the beginning of the 1990s—and more generally as an attempt to rewrite history—in which case revisionism represents an impulse that defines the post-socialist period just as much as the socialist period, enabling the contributors to this issue to investigate the continuities *and* ruptures between the socialist and post-socialist eras, and also what the latter might tell us about the contemporary moment.

The issue opens with Raino Isto’s article, “‘An Ancient Dance That Is Still Performed Today’: Folk Culture, Nationalism, and Socialist Art in Albania after the Fourth Plenum of 1973”, which is a companion piece to “‘This exhibition will go down in our history of painting’: Art Exhibitions in Albania around 1972 and the Promise of Spring”, published in the previous issue of the journal, which explored the topic of beginning(s). There, Isto looked at how the Ideological and Cultural Revolution set the stage for a meaningful if short-lived engagement with modernist styles in the Albanian painting of the late 1960s and early 1970s, as part of an effort to broaden the scope of Albanian Socialist Realism in the wake of the Soviet Union’s

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revisionist turn at the beginning of the 1960s. Here, Isto turns his attention to the post-revolutionary era, namely, the period after the infamous Fourth Plenum of the APL in June 1973, when the emphasis shifted toward an engagement with popular and folk culture instead. Isto argues that this seemingly “revisionist” turn actually represented a strategic retreat in the face of diminishing revolutionary possibilities globally, all the while attempting to produce an alternative framework for a revolutionary art and culture that engaged with the emancipatory potential of decolonization in the Global South.

This is followed by Dorina Pllumbi’s article, “Urban Façades, Political Shades: Tirana’s Nationalistic Turn in Architecture and Its Subtexts”, in which she argues that we are currently witnessing a second nationalistic turn in Albanian post-war architecture after that of the 1970s. In her discussion, Pllumbi focuses on the concrete manifestation of these nationalistic turns—through a close analysis of emblematic buildings—and on the deeper motivations behind them—by examining the broader context in which they emerged. What slowly transpires is that the continuities between the socialist and post-socialist periods, such as the recycling of Orientalist discourses (through the figure of Skanderbeg) or the political instrumentalization of artists and (in this case) architects, betray profound ruptures. Whereas the 1970s nationalistic turn was aimed, at least in principle, at preserving the “purity” of the Albanian socialist project while resisting both US and Soviet imperialisms, the recent nationalistic turn is an attempt at nation branding coinciding with the entrenchment of the neoliberal state in Albania and the implementation of neocolonial projects in the Balkans more generally, exacerbated by the rightwing turn of European politics in the past decade.

The last point is further elaborated in Tong Lam’s contribution “Screens of Enchantment: From People’s Mobile Cinema to Digital Consumption”, this time through the lens of mobile cinema in China. Lam argues that the revival of state-sponsored mobile cinema in

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contemporary China has been deployed, amongst other things, to shape a revisionist history that strives to project a seamless continuity between the country's revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods, by feeding into a nationalist discourse that glorifies "narratives of national triumph and the heroic leadership of the party-state" (p. 163). Lam suggests that such attempts at obfuscation—of the ruptures between the socialist and post-socialist eras—and the recourse to nationalism, signal the failure of the post-reform era—and specifically of the authoritarian state capitalist system installed during that period—to deliver on its promise, which has become particularly evident in the reactionary tendencies of the last decade. Indeed, the analysis of the conditions of production, distribution, and reception of state-sponsored mobile cinema in the revolutionary period versus the contemporary period, as well as of the films themselves, reveals a clear shift towards a neoliberal logic.

Ruptures, and more specifically the impressions left by consecutive ruptures on Albania's natural environment and deindustrialized landscapes, are the subject of Dimitra Gkitsa's contribution "Memory Matters: Postsocialist Wastelands as Materials Bearing Witness". Gkitsa examines how Albanian contemporary artists have mined these sites in which time is continuously accumulated and multiple temporalities overlap, in order to critique linear conceptions of history, which represent some of the most problematic continuities between the socialist and post-socialist periods. As Gkitsa points out, the idea of progress—and particularly the exploitation and subjugation of the nature in the name of progress—was of central importance in the socialist period as well as in the post-socialist period, though of course in different ways and for different reasons. Like the other contributors to this issue, Gkitsa emphasizes that understanding these differences is essential, and that the collective memory of socialism can still help shape an effective critique of the neoliberal present.

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Concluding this issue are Ana Grgić's review of Bruce Williams' monograph *Albanian Cinema Through the Fall of Communism: Silver Screens and Red Flags* (Amsterdam University Press, 2023), and Vincent W.J. van Gerven Oei's review of Nicholas Tochka's book *Projekt Jon* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2024). The next issue of *Art Studies* will focus on the theme of endings, and specifically on the final decade of communist rule in Albania. The aim of the issue will be to identify cultural products that anticipated the imminent collapse of state socialism in a critical way.

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