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This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of the first issue of *Art Studies*, which came out in December 1995. What started out as a pilot project – the first issue seems to have been conceived more like an edited volume, with the hope that it would become a regular (annual) publication in the future, perhaps once sustainable funding for the journal was secured¹ – is now the leading source of scholarship on the history, praxis and theory of Albanian modern and contemporary art. Similarly, what was initially conceived as a showcase for the research output of local academics, is now a dynamic space for international collaboration between Albanian researchers and their colleagues working in other parts of the world. The journal has made great strides forward in other respects as well: *Art Studies* is now an open access journal, it publishes articles in both Albanian and English, and it is also making progress on its way to being indexed in international databases.

Meanwhile, the present issue of *Art Studies* marks the conclusion of a thematic arc that has spanned the past five issues of the journal (nos. 19–23), which was informally referred to as

¹ The printing of the first two issues of *Art Studies* was made possible, at least in part, by a private publishing house.

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“the temporal cycle” by the editorial board of the journal. The goal of this five-year arc was to map a series of important continuities and ruptures between the socialist and post-socialist eras in Albania through the lens of art and culture. It began – rather improbably, or somewhat paradoxically, one might argue – with a double issue on the archive, which investigated the afterlives of the socialist past in the neoliberal present. The issue that followed took the readers of *Art Studies* back to the beginning, exploring the attempts made by Albanian artists and cultural workers (and not only) to redefine the parameters of Albanian art and culture during key turning points in the country’s modern and contemporary history, most notably, at the height of the Ideological and Cultural Revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and in the aftermath of the collapse of the communist regime at the beginning of the 1990s. The failure of these new beginnings to live up to their promise was explored in the issue on revisionisms, which examined the retreat to nationalist tropes in times of crisis both during the socialist and post-socialist period. Fittingly, this year’s issue focuses on the theme of endings. More specifically, it focuses on the last decade of the socialist period, and the cultural products that anticipated in one way or the other the imminent collapse of the socialist project.

The issue opens with Vincent W. J. van Gerven Oei’s article, “Albanofuturism and Star Death”, which examines the emergence and development of science fiction literature in Albania in relation to the country’s engagement with anti-colonial struggles in the Third World following its breach with Moscow at the beginning of the 1960s, a reorientation – which

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was framed as an extension of the country's anti-imperialist stance – that lasted throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. What makes science fiction literature particularly interesting as a cultural phenomenon of Albanian late socialist society, is that it represents a final effort to give credible expression to the radical utopianism that had characterized Socialist Realism – something that was becoming increasingly difficult with the waning prospect of world revolution, while at the same time leaving room for the contemplation of “life after ideological death” (p. 34). Against the backdrop of Albania's increasing isolation from not only the capitalist West but also the socialist East, space travel became a means of holding on to the ideals of socialist solidarity and brotherhood by projecting them onto the future and alien civilizations in the far reaches of the cosmos. On the other hand, the recurring motif of star death that pervades much of this minor literary genre alludes to the possible defeat of the socialist project in the present.

This is followed by Anxhela Çikopano's article, “The Perfect Parasite Lives in Apartment Block 176”, an analysis of *Pallati 176 (Apartment Bloc 176)*, which is perhaps *the* most famous Albanian comedy of all time. The author identifies the root cause of the play's enormous popularity, which premiered in 1986, in its redemption of the figure of the social parasite, embodied in the charismatic protagonist of the play, Jovan “Vani” Bregu. Masterfully interpreted by Roland Trebicka, Vani is a work-shy member of the working class who dreams of leaving physical labor behind, and has no qualms about bribing and cheating his way to the position of storehouse manager. Incredibly enough, by the play's end Vani gets *more* than he

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bargained for, not in spite of but *because of* all the schemes and tricks he uses to climb the social ladder. In particular, the chain of events that Vani sets in motion when he decides to write his infamous “anonymous letter” in order to blackmail the director of the state enterprise where he is employed, can be read as an allegory of the Marxist theory of surplus value, thereby anticipating the imminent collapse of state socialist at the turn of the decade and the restoration of capitalism. Of course, the bureaucratic class that Vani dreams of belonging to would soon transform from a socialist bourgeoisie into the new capitalist-entrepreneurial class in the 1990s.

The bourgeoisie – both in its socialist or “red” variant, as well as in its capitalist or “black” variant – is the subject of Enis Sulstarova’s article, “Borgjezi e kuqe, borgjezi e zezë: Perceptime mbi fundin e socializmit në romanet *Dimri i madh* dhe *Koncert në fund të dimrit të Ismail Kadare*” (“Black Bourgeoisie, Red bourgeoisie: Impressions on the End of Socialism in Ismail Kadare’s novels, *The Great Winter* and *The Concert*”). Sulstarova’s analysis foregrounds Ismail Kadare’s strategic appropriation of the Orientalizing discourse deployed by the Albanian communist regime vis-à-vis the country’s prewar bourgeoisie, i.e., the “black bourgeoisie”, in order to transpose it onto Albania’s former allies in the socialist world, i.e., the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China, ostensibly because the latter’s revisionist politics had given rise to a “red bourgeoisie” that would pave the way for the restoration of capitalism in these countries. This led to *Koncert në fund të dimrit* being banned in 1983, though it was ultimately published five years later. Sulstarova reads the novel’s publication in 1988

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as signaling Albania's imminent rapprochement with the capitalist West, while also anticipating the permutations that Orientalism would undergo in Albanian public discourse following the collapse of state socialism. Thus, one of the primary targets of Albanian Orientalism in the post-socialist era would be the socialist past itself, making it an important instrument of neoliberal reform.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the utopia of open borders was countered by the traumatic experience of immigration and the visa regimes imposed by other nations. This is the subject of Ervin Shehu's report on the Archive of Albanian Migration – a pilot project by Contemporary Social History Archives (ASKI) in Athens, Greece. In his analysis of this new archival undertaking and accompanying exhibition, *A Bag Full of Telephone Cards: Making the Archive of Albanian Migration* (TAVROS, 18-28 September 2024), Shehu is cautiously optimistic about the emancipatory potential of migration archives and exhibitions that are created with the participation of the immigrants themselves and that in turn seek to transform visitors into active participants. By giving a voice to the complexity of migration experiences, such archives and exhibitions can transform collective memory into a tool for not only righting historical wrongs through a critical reinterpretation of the past – moving away from narratives centered on the demonization/victimization, or the assimilation/depoliticization of immigrant communities, but also for articulating alternative political imaginaries for the future.

The issue concludes with two reviews. The first is Bruce Williams' poignant review of *Ditari i një kinoregjisori* (*Diary of*

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a Film Director), the publication of the memoirs of Endri Keko (Tirana: Muza Printing, 2024) – who was one of the pioneers of Albanian documentary film and also one of the founders of *Kinostudio “Shqipëria e Re”* (New Albania Film Studio). The second is Artan Hoxha’s review of Agata Fijalkowski’s monograph *Law, Visual Culture, and the Show Trial* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2023), which Hoxha argues should serve as a cautionary tale to foreign scholars undertaking research in and on Albania, and also as a warning to Albanian researchers to produce higher caliber scholarship.

Art Studies will follow up its “temporal cycle” with a double issue on the theme of participation and collectivity, and the myriad ways in which art in Albania and related geographical and historical contexts has contributed to new forms of participation and collectivity throughout the twentieth century and until the present day.

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