

Cinema on Trial: The Films of the Albanian Communist Show Trials

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The Special Court for War Criminals and Enemies of the People, also known as the Albanian Treason Trial, is often considered to be one of the most spectacular events of the early period of the Albanian communist regime. The Court began its proceedings on March 1st 1945, having been set up just over two months earlier, on December 25th 1944, by order of the Anti-Fascist Liberation Council. It seems that one of the first tasks that the new communist government had set itself in the immediate aftermath of the withdrawal of the last German troops from Albania was to deal as swiftly as possible with those who were perceived to have collaborated with the fascist and Nazi occupiers, including political opponents in the liberation struggle during wartime. Sixty men were rounded up on fourteen charges and brought to trial. The sentences were pronounced on April 13th 1945. Seventeen of the defendants were condemned to death: Fejzi Alizoti, Terenc Toçi, Kolë Tromara, Bahri Omari, Javer Hurshiti, Hilmi Leka, Kostandin Kotte, Zef Kadarja, Ismail Golemi, Reshit Merlika, Shyqri Borshi, Tahsim Bishqemi, Dik Cami, Beqir Valteri, Daut Çarçani, Gustav von Myrdacz and Aqif Përmeti. The rest of the defendants received sentences of three years to life in prison while two were found not guilty.¹

One of the reasons why the Treason Trial is regarded as one of the most spectacular events of the early period of communism in

1 Elsie 2015.

Albania is the amount of publicity that it generated. In this context, it is significant that the trial was open to the public and that it took place inside a movie theatre, namely, Kinema “Kosova”. While the building of this particular movie theater would soon make way for the National Theater, the Treason Trial was not the last time that the Albanian communist regime would use spaces normally dedicated to cultural activities, movie theaters in particular, for the staging of show trials. Indeed, it marked only the beginning of a trend that continued well into the 1980s. As in the case of the Treason Trial, reports on the proceedings of these subsequent trials also appeared in the daily newspapers, etc. Footage of a number of these subsequent trials, however, was also included in the newsreels produced, at first, by Ndërmarrja Kinematografike and, from 1952 onwards, by Kinostudio “Shqipëria e Re”. A handful even became the subject of documentary films. What this means is that the communist show trials were not only a fixture in the Albanian political landscape for decades but also in the country’s artistic-cultural landscape. It is rather ironic then that today the filmic recordings of the communist show trials, which tend to circulate on television programs and, to a lesser extent, on the Internet, are discussed primarily in terms of their documentary value and little to no attention has been paid to their cultural significance.

In this paper I am going to discuss three short documentary films that focus on three different show trials. They are: “E kaluara nuk kthehet më” (1954), “Gjyqi kundër një grupi të pandehurish për krime kundër shtetit” (1961), and “Gjyqi kundër të deklasuarve nga Poshnja” (1978). The setting of the first two documentaries is Kinema “Brigada” in the capital Tirana, while the setting of the third documentary is the cine-club of the “Mao Zedong” Textile Mill in Berat. I will examine the cultural significance of these films by focusing on the *mise-en-abîme* produced when a film depicting the proceedings of a trial unfolding inside a movie theater and in front of a live audience is subsequently screened inside a similar movie theater in front of a similar audience. What or who is placed *en-abîme* here, however? From a certain point of view, it is the cinema as such that is

placed *en-abîme*, so long as what is understood by ‘the cinema’ is the entire apparatus: the *mise-en-scène* and the cinematograph; shooting and editing; distribution and reception. Because in the case of the films of the communist show trials the first moment, i.e., the *mise-en-scène*, coincides with the final moment, i.e., the projection of the finished film onto a screen inside the darkened movie theater, we could say that all of these different moments collapse into one, which is the sense in which the cinema is placed *en-abîme*. The implication here being that the cinema cannot be reduced to the images it shows and/or the stories it tells, which leads me to my next point. From another point of view, it is the spectator – looking, on the screen, at a room very much like the one in which he or she is seated, and at an audience very much like the one he or she is a part of – who is placed *en-abîme*. In the movie theater the spatial conditions of viewing are usually suppressed, so that just as the cinema spectator ignores everything around them except for the screen – or, rather, the images on the screen – sight ends up being privileged in analyses of the cinema spectator’s experience of these images. In the case of the communist show trials, however, the spatial conditions of viewing are explicitly acknowledged so that the spectator can no longer ignore the other components of his or her experience, i.e., the screen itself as a three-dimensional object, the projector’s light beam, the architecture of the movie theater, the other spectators in the room, etc. This calls for an analysis of the interaction between the spectator’s body and the image(s) on the screen.

To the contemporary viewer, the documentary films discussed in this paper appear distinctly noirlike in certain respects. Their dimly lit and claustrophobic setting, to be expected of the interior of a movie theater, coupled with the fact that they were shot in black and white play a part, certainly, though as we shall see below there is more to the noiriness of these documentaries than solely the *mise-en-scène* and/or

the technology employed.² Needless to say, the fact that these films appear noirlike to us today does not mean that contemporary audiences saw them in the same light. In fact, it is highly unlikely that they did since they would have been unfamiliar with films noirs, for they were not considered appropriate viewing for the masses in communist Albania. Along the same lines, it is perfectly possible that the people involved in the production of these documentaries were not attempting to reference the style, the mood, etc., of film noir in a conscious, or self-conscious, way either. In other words, it is very probable that producers and audiences alike did not distinguish between the films of the communist show trials and the overall output of Kinostudio “Shqipëria e Re”, the only film production and distribution entity in Albania from 1952 until the collapse of the communist regime, in an absolute way.

In fact, the noirlike quality of these documentaries is connected to those elements in these films that draw attention to the process of filmmaking and the conditions of cinematic viewing, the *mise-en-abîme* mentioned above. The reason for this is quite simple. Whereas contemporary audiences would have focused on the actual trials documented in these films, this is not quite the case for us today. For us today, the trials documented in these films serve as a pretext, almost, for another trial, the ‘real’ trial, as it were, which is superimposed onto them (the term ‘show trial’ takes on a particular significance in this context.) Because in our post-communist world, the communist show trials have become synonymous – whether rightly or wrongly – with the crimes perpetrated in the name of communism in countries like Albania, what is actually on trial in these films is the past as such. More specifically, it is the cinema and more generally the art of the past, i.e., socialist realism. In other words, in discussing the noirlike quality of the films of the communist show trials, it is absolutely not my intention to impose a false identity on them. Moreover,

2 Incidentally, two of the documentaries discussed in this paper, “E kaluara nuk kthehet më” and “Gjyji kundër një grupi të pandehurish për krime kundër shtetit”, as well as the majority of the newsreels of the communist show trials were produced during the golden age of American film noir, starting from the end of WWII and ending in the late 1950s.

terms such as ‘noirlike’, ‘noirness’, etc., are used quite loosely. In his important study of film noir, “More Than Night: Film Noir in Its Contexts”, James Naremore writes: “It has always been easier to recognize a film noir than to define the term.”³ It is in the same spirit that the noir dimension of the documentaries discussed below, and the noir elements in each of them specifically, will be outlined and analyzed. That is to say, I make no claims that the elements that I identify as giving these documentary shorts their noirlike quality can be found in all or even most films that would be considered to be part of the noir cannon, or that they capture the essence of noirness more or better than other elements which I do not discuss here.

Before I go on to discuss “E kaluara nuk kthehet më”, “Gjyqi kundër një grupi të pandehurish për krime kundër shtetit”, and “Gjyqi kundër të deklasuarve nga Poshnja” in more detail, I want to make some general remarks that apply to all three of them. As mentioned earlier, one of the reasons why these documentary films appear noirlike to us today is because they are set inside movie theaters. But why should a movie theater provide the ‘perfect’ *mise-en-scène* for a film noir? In his discussion of the enduring influence of black-and-white lighting/photography in shooting noir subjects, Naremore observes that one of the reasons the chiaroscuro lighting in the noirs of the 1940s and 1950s continues to appeal to filmmakers and audiences alike is because it captures the conditions of cinematic viewing and the fundamental attributes of film as a medium: “In general, they are films that brilliantly exploit the darkness of cinema, replicating the effect of a projector beam splitting through the gloom of an auditorium; again and again, they remind us that the medium itself originated in shadow play, or in the primitive fascination of hot fire gleaming in cold blackness.”⁴ But the question of light and darkness in the cinema is intimately bound up with those of past and present,

3 Naremore 2008, 9.

4 Naremore 2008, 175.

life and death, and so on. For instance, André Bazin famously described photography as a process akin to mummification by the manipulation of light (and darkness), since the object captured by the lens is ‘freed from the conditions of space and time that govern it’, a metaphor he extends to the cinema as well describing it as ‘change mummified’.⁵ The difference between the two is that when a film is projected inside a darkened movie theatre the objects captured by the movie camera are temporarily brought back to life by being reinstated in the here and now. There is something profoundly poignant about this, which is much more pronounced in the case of older films depicting a bygone era.⁶ Thus, film noir does not capture the production of cinematic images and the conditions of cinematic viewing in a neutral way, it also reflects their distinctively ‘noir’ quality. After all, these are films in which crime and punishment are often at the heart of the story, as are guilt and repentance – or lack thereof, as in the case of many of the *femmes fatales* of film noir. The same can be said for ‘evil’ – viewed through the lens of film noir the world is utterly and hopelessly corrupt – and fatalism – often taking the form of an inability to escape one’s past or one’s predicament in the present.

In “E kaluara nuk kthehet më”, “Gjyqji kundër një grupi të pandehurish për krime kundër shtetit”, and “Gjyqi kundër të deklasuarve nga Poshnja” the ‘noir’ quality of the film medium and the conditions of cinematic viewing are exploited in an interesting way. Whereas film noir draws attention to the projector beam these films show us the harsh bright light pointed at the ‘action’ unfolding on the stage; whereas film noir draws attention to the gloom of the auditorium, these films show us the aisle lighting inside the movie theatre; whereas film noir draws attention to the origins of the film medium in shadow play, these films show us a rolling movie camera and the cameraman standing behind it. Paradoxically, this does not diminish the noirness of these films. On the contrary, these elements function almost like the clues in a crime scene. The crime scene is the cinema

5 Bazin 2005, 9–16.

6 Cf. Mulvey 2006.

itself, a complex apparatus that cannot be reduced to the quasi-magical play of light and darkness as the images flickering on the screen would seem to suggest. The idea of the cinema as a crime scene obviously resonates with the events that these documentaries depict. It is important to remember that the majority of the men facing trial in these documentaries received death sentences and were executed shortly after the conclusion of their trial. This leads me to my second point.

Another reason why the documentary shorts discussed below appear noirlike to us today is because of the quality of their pervading tone or mood which is due just as much to the subject matter of these films as the wider context in which the trials took place. Regarding the subject matter, the films depict the trials of men accused of crimes like espionage, sabotage, and treason – agents at the service of Anglo-American imperialism. Upon taking the stand the defendants recount details of secret meetings, conversations, communications and so on, and in the process incriminate themselves further and further with minimal prodding and pushing from the state prosecutor or the judge/s. Then again, we must not forget that these were not ordinary trials and did not play out like ordinary trials. Thus, the guilt – and sometimes the innocence – of the defendants are not actually in question at any point during such trials. It is safe to assume that everyone involved was aware of this – from the defendants and the defense lawyers to the judges and the state prosecutor, including the press and the audience. Precisely because of this, however, the point of such trials was not at all to merely get the defendants to admit their guilt upon taking the stand. The guilt had to be performed, in a way, which makes the defendants appear doubly doomed and fatalistic figures. The wider context is that of the Cold War, before the thaw in the case of the first two films. Needless to say, there was plenty of paranoia to go around on both sides. The perpetual threat that the popular democracies of Eastern Europe, and specifically that of the People's Socialist Republic of Albania, faced from the outside is explicitly acknowledged in each film. There is talk of a web of international intrigue and conspiracy, sometimes

justified while at other times rather fantastic-sounding. The dimly lit and claustrophobic interior of the movie theatres in which the trials take place becomes a symbol of this shadowy outside. It is also a symbol of the deceitful, double-dealing ways of the defendants, their moral corruption and their heinous crimes.

Notes on: “E kaluara nuk kthehet më” (1954)

“E kaluara nuk kthehet më” (“No Turning Back”) is an 18 min 16 sec documentary film directed by Endri Keko and produced by Kinostudio “Shqipëria e Re”. It focuses on the trial of “a band of saboteurs and spies at the service of American intelligence” in April 1954. The defendants – Zenel Shehu and Halil Branica (“traitors”); Hamit Matjani and Naun Sula (“terrorists”); Ahmet Kabashi, Gani Malushi, Rrapush Agolli, and Ibrahim Lamçe (“criminals”) – were for the most part Albanian émigrés recruited by the SIS/MI6 and the CIA in the context of a covert paramilitary operation codenamed Operation VALUABLE by the British and Operation FIEND by the Americans. Operation VALUABLE/FIEND is famous, or rather infamous, for three reasons: it marked the first US operation of its kind behind the Iron Curtain, it failed spectacularly, and because of Kim Philby’s involvement. Philby is believed to have informed Moscow about the anti-communist insurgents being slipped into Albania and the Russians, of course, informed the Albanian communists who were ready and waiting when the insurgents finally made their way into the country. Those who were not killed were captured and put on trial, all but two of them receiving the death penalty. The trial was staged inside Kinema “Brigada”. Built at the outset of WWII following the occupation of Albania by Mussolini’s Italy, this movie theater was initially known as Kinema “Tomori”. It was renamed Kinema “Brigada” shortly after the end of the WWII, in 1947, and remained functional until 1970.

In “Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*”, Janey Place and Lowell Peterson argue that minimal or restrained camera movements and sharp cuts are characteristic of the *noir* visual style:

Camera movements are used sparingly in most *noir* films, perhaps because of the great expense necessary to mount an elaborate tracking or boom shot, or perhaps simply because the noir directors would rather cut for effect from a close-up to a long shot than bridge that distance smoothly and less immediately by booming. What moving shots were made seem to have been carefully considered and often tied very directly to the emotions of the characters.⁷

Both of these elements are what give “E kaluara nuk kthehet më” the noirlike quality that sets it apart from the other two documentaries discussed in this paper. “E kaluara nuk kthehet më” consists, for the most part, of static shots. There are two notable exceptions, namely, on two occasions at the beginning of the film horizontal panning shots provide an overview of the evidence against the defendants, which is displayed prominently on the proscenium, while a vertical panning shot halfway through the film offers a good look at the key defendant in the trial, Hamit Matjani, as he takes the stand. Additionally, medium shots, medium close-up shots, and close-ups are favored over long shots.⁸ Both of these features of the camerawork of Sokrat Musha and Jani Nano are exploited to maximum effect in the editing process. For instance, during the first half of the film the judges, the state prosecutor, the defense lawyers, and the defendants appear separately in every shot. Coupled with the use of sharp cuts between shots, this makes it difficult to determine where they are positioned in relation to one another. This breaks up the space in which the ‘action’ takes place, i.e., the area on and around the proscenium, in a way that adds a dynamic quality to the proceedings but also produces a certain amount of confusion or uncertainty in the spectator. Similarly, because long shots of the crowds gathered outside of Kinema “Brigada” following the trial through loudspeakers

7 Place – Peterson 1996, 69.

8 There is a memorable scene starting at the 08:06 mark and ending at the 08:20 mark, in which close-ups of the faces of the defendants first appear and then disappear in quick succession as the following remarks are heard in voiceover: “Gjatë pushimeve populli shikon me përbuzje dhe urrejtje këto fytyra të shëmtuara tradhëtaresh që ngjajnë aq shumë me gansterrët amerikanë.” (“During the breaks the people observe the faces of these traitors, which resemble so much those of American gangsters, with hatred and contempt.”)

are intercut throughout the film, the use of medium shots and medium close-ups inside Kinema “Brigada” makes the space appear even more claustrophobic and oppressive than it already seems.

Inside of Kinema “Brigada”, long shots are generally used to signal an important development in the proceedings of the trial. Thus, at the 08:32 mark, a long shot from the back of Kinema “Brigada” marks the end of recess and the beginning of the main portion of the trial, in which six of the defendants, including the chief defendant in the trial, are shown taking the stand. This is also the first shot in which the viewer is finally able to get a good look at the proscenium. Another long shot at the very end of “E kaluara nuk kthehet më”, again from the back of the theatre but this time from a high angle, coincides with the reading of the verdicts. In this shot, we get a good look both at the proscenium *and* the auditorium, the entire movie theater in other words. Interestingly, included in this shot are a spotlight on the left-hand side of the frame, opposite the defendants, and a movie camera on the proscenium, adjacent to the state prosecutor. In other words, precisely at the moment of the film’s denouement, viewers are reminded that Kinema “Brigada” is not actually a courtroom but, precisely, a movie theater, and that what they have been watching is not the trial itself but, rather, a film (albeit a documentary film) about the trial.⁹

Notes on

“Gjyji kundër një grupi të pandehurish për krime kundër shtetit” (Tiranë, 15–27 May 1961)

The May 1961 trial of Teme Sejko, Tahir Demi, Abdul Resuli, Ali Xhelò, Hajri Mane, Sami Murati, Nasho Gerxho, Jonuz Purizo,

9 This underscores the difference between the viewer of “E kaluara nuk kthehet më” and the live audience inside Kinema “Brigada”. The information that the viewer of “E kaluara nuk kthehet më” receives piecemeal, in line with the dramatic unfolding of the film, is readily available to the live audience inside Kinema “Brigada”.

Adem Osmani, and Asllan Veliu, accused of participating in a conspiracy to “overthrow the popular democracy” in the People’s Socialist Republic of Albania in collaboration with “the Greek monarcho-fascists, Yugoslav revisionists, and the USA’s 6th Fleet, also assisted by traitors inside and outside of the country” was staged inside Kinema “Brigada” as well. The documentary film based on this trial, completed during the same year, was directed by Ilo Pando and produced by Kinostudio “Shqipëria e Re”. What stands out as the noir element that sets this documentary film apart from the other two is the portrayal of the defendants. They are repeatedly shot in close-up, their heads held down, avoiding the camera’s gaze – at times shielding their eyes from its glare with their hands, chain-smoking in one case, sweating profusely in another case, and so on. In spite of this, they do not necessarily look like men who are terrified of losing their lives. For instance, Teme Sejko, the chief defendant in the trial, looks composed throughout the film and is often shown scribbling in a small notebook. He received a death sentence. By contrast, Nasho Gerxho, who is visibly tense throughout the film, grimacing and sweating profusely, received a prison sentence, albeit a long one, as opposed to a death sentence.

There is a well-known passage in “Camera Lucida” in which Roland Barthes remarks on Alexander Gardner’s 1865 photograph of Lewis Payne waiting to be hanged in his cell: “The photograph is handsome, as is the boy: that is the *studium*. But the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake.”¹⁰ The same can be said of the men facing trial in these documentaries. As the sentences are read out at the end of each film, it is impossible not to think: *They will die* and *they are already dead*. In fact, this ‘anterior future of which death is the stake’ haunts every single image in these documentaries, from beginning to end. From this point of view, the fact that we are dealing with moving images as opposed to still ones, as in the case of Alexander Gardner’s photograph of Lewis Payne,

10 Barthes 2000, 96.

takes on a special significance. Namely, in these documentaries this ‘anterior future of which death is the stake’ cannot be ascribed to a single moment in time because it has duration, it stretches itself over time and the tension between ‘they will die’ and ‘they are already dead’ is incorporated in the logic of the movement of the images themselves. The defendants’ avoidance of the camera’s gaze captures the paradoxical temporality of this ‘they will die’ and ‘they are not dead’ exceptionally well.

Incidentally, it is also not difficult to see how the paradoxical temporality of *they will die* but *they are already dead* would constitute an appealing subject or plot device for a film noir. In fact, it was used by Rudolph Maté in *D.O.A.* (1950), which tells the story of a man’s race against time to find his murderer before the poison that was put inside his body kills him. To complicate things further, the story is told entirely in flashback. As a result, the film is peppered with lines such as this exchange between Bigelow and a detective: “I want to report a murder.” “Who was murdered?” “I was.” Or a doctor to Bigelow: “I don’t think you fully understand, Bigelow. You’ve been murdered.” Or Bigelow to another character: “But I’m not alive Mrs. Philips. Sure I can stand here and talk to you. I can breathe and I can move. But I’m not alive.”

Notes on “Gjyqi kundër të deklasuarve nga Poshnja” (Berat, 6–7 January 1978)

Compared to the previous trials, the 1978 trial of Ushtar Muço Çobo, Riza Ahmet Azizi, Luftëtar Sako Protoduari, and Muharrem Sako Protoduari, “déclassé elements and kulaks” accused of founding a counterrevolutionary organization and of plotting to blow up the “Mao Zedong” Textile Mill in Berat with the intention of subsequently seeking exile in either Greece or Yugoslavia, is a low-profile case. The trial was still deemed to be documentary material however. The documentary in question, which bears the rather uninspired title “Gjyqi kundër të deklasuarve nga Poshnja” (“The trial of the déclassé from Poshnja”), was directed by Abaz Hoxha and produced by Kinstudio “Shqipëria e Re”.

“Gjyqi kundër të deklasuarve nga Poshnja” begins with a horizontal panning shot – from right to left – of the crowd gathered outside of the “Mao Zedong” Textile Mill. They appear to be waiting for the trial to begin though it is quite clear that the mill’s cine-club, which is where the trial took place, could not possibly accommodate them all. As in the case of the previous two trials though, loudspeakers have been placed outside of the cine-club so as to enable those unable to enter to nevertheless follow the proceedings. A second horizontal panning shot, this time from left to right, follows on swiftly from the first, showing the judges making their entrance onto the stage and taking their seats. This makes for a smooth transition from the outdoors to the interior of the theater. As for the trial itself, while all the elements of a show trial are there it feels like a *rehearsal* of a show trial instead. For instance, two of the presiding judges are completely expressionless in every frame in which they appear. Similarly, one of the defendants, Ushtar Muço Çobo, shows what seems like impatience when he is repeatedly asked to specify where exactly he and his collaborators had intended to plant the explosive and why. Another one, Muharrem Sako Protoduari, seems to be suppressing a chuckle or a sneer when he is asked about another defendant’s penchant for Italian music. The prosecutor has a peculiar, almost self-satisfied smile plastered on his face anytime he is not speaking which is impossible to reconcile with his facial expressions when he is actually speaking. This general mood or tone carries over to the audience as well.

There is a marked difference between the audience in this trial and the audiences of the previous two trials. This is not a lively audience; there is no gasping, laughing, or jeering here; people do not stand up or push each other in order to better see the ‘action’ unfolding on the stage. Indeed, almost every single face in the audience appears impassive if not somber. Because of this, the degree of what we might call “audience participation” in this trial is quite extraordinary: Following the testimonies given by the witnesses called by the prosecution, members of the audience “spontaneously” decide to sit up

and speak out against the defendants and in support of the new way of life in communist Albania. In this context, it is interesting that while eye-level shots are generally used to frame the judges, the state prosecutor, the defendants, and the witnesses, high angle shots are generally used to frame the audience. The audience forms neat rows and columns that seem to be extensions of the architecture/design of the interior of the theater. In other words, the audience seems almost like a part of the *mise-en-scène*.

Obviously, the fact that “Gjyqi kundër të deklasuarve nga Poshnja” looks less like a show trial and more like the rehearsal of a show trial draws attention to the fact that all show trials were carefully staged. At the same time, because “Gjyqi kundër të deklasuarve nga Poshnja” fails to draw the viewer in in the same way or to the same degree as “E kaluara nuk kthehet më” or “Gjyqi kundër një grupi të pandehurish për krime kundër shtetit”, it heightens the viewer’s awareness of the implication of the trial for the four defendants, two of whom were executed while the other two received long prison sentences.

In discussions of socialist realist art, sight, more specifically the collective optics that socialist realist art both helped shape and required in order to be perceived ‘as intended’, is often emphasized at the expense of the other senses. By contrast, the production of the collective body in the formerly socialist societies of Eastern Europe is usually examined in terms of communal living and working conditions. The implication here being that whereas the collective optics of socialist realist art was utopian, the production of the collective or communal body by virtue of being rooted in reality and not in idealized representations was anti-utopian. An example of this approach can be found in Victor Tupitsyn’s “The Museological Unconscious”.¹¹ By contrast, in “The Total Art of Stalinism” Boris Groys argues that

11 Tupitsyn 2009.

socialist realist art did not actually deal in idealized representations even though it was, indeed, divorced from real life. According to Groys, socialist realist art was divorced from real life *in the present* because it was oriented towards the future, a future that art too must help bring to life.¹² As such, socialist realist art is profoundly dialectical, that is to say, it incorporates a dialectics between utopia, i.e., the society to come, and anti-utopia, society in its current state. Similarly, the films of the Albanian communist show trials challenge the view that the production of a collective optics and the collective body in the formerly socialist societies of Eastern Europe were processes radically opposed to one another. By drawing attention to the spatial conditions of viewing in the cinema, these films foreground the centrality of the body or, to be more precise, of embodied perception, in the reception of the images of socialist realism. Moreover, because these documentaries depict, or at least claim to, the immense threat under which the bright future is from within as much as from without, they embody the dialectic between utopia and anti-utopia at stake in socialist realist art in a very vivid way, perhaps much more so than any fiction film could ever hope to.

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12 Groys 1992.

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