

## HOW TO BE TRANSNATIONAL? IDENTITY TRAJECTORIES OF THE ROMANIAN AVANT-GARDE MAGAZINES

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*Abstract: Rather than focusing on a pristine reading of the avant-garde, all along our argumentation we prefer a cohesive view of an intricate cultural phenomenon that is the tension, discord and reciprocal contaminations of modernism, avant-garde and traditionalism in Romania, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Firstly, our advocacy is that the ambiguous relationship between the traditionalist block and the promoters of a national ‘specific’ style indicates the bifrons image of Romanian modernism and should be regarded as a platform for the emergence of the avant-garde and not exclusively as an opponent of all new art. Secondly, we would like to suggest that the case of the Romanian avant-garde stands as both a vector of the Central and Eastern European avant-gardes and also as an outcome of the cultural hegemony tactics brought into play at the time. Attempting no hierarchical bias between traditionalism and avant-garde, we are interested in their reciprocal motivations (historical and ideological) and in the way in which their tribunes, the magazines, help us reconfigure a systematic profile of the modern Romanian cultural space.*

*Keywords: European avant-garde, magazines, traditionalism, periphery, literary field*

### **Introduction: Avant-garde and traditionalism as facets of the Romanian modernity**

Precipitously dismissed as retrograde, experimentalist or listed among the native background of some of the most famous key characters of the European artistic scene, the Romanian avant-garde prolifically mimes the illusion of the Centre and incessantly negotiates its status of a peripheral culture. Confronted to the wider context of the historical avant-gardes, which surfaced a radical and revolutionary vision of the world where art was reintegrated to the social praxis, its boldest coordinates are blurred. It is now commonplace that the principles of avant-garde artistic revolution were not arcane to the Romanian artists of the time, yet their association to an ascending Eastern European nation engaged them in a different interplay, with different manifestations than the metropolitan ones. In his seminal study of the literary fields, Pierre Bourdieu brought up the question of the social effects of a chronological contemporaneity that could, in his opinion, determine an even wider line of preoccupations than those cautioned by the autonomy of distinct fields alone. Seen as more influential than the idea of *Zeitgeist* or a cohesive spiritual community, the bourdieusian “space of possibles”<sup>1</sup> would best describe both how specific works are dated and situated and how they interconnect with seemingly or overtly opposing trends. Designed as a historical and

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<sup>1</sup> “[...] *les effets sociaux de la contemporanéité chronologique, voire de l’unité spatiale*, comme le fait de partager les mêmes lieux de rencontre spécifiques, cafés littéraires, revues, salons [...] ou d’être exposées aux mêmes messages culturelles, œuvres de référence communes, sont assez puissants pour déterminer, par au delà la de l’autonomie des différents champs, une problématique commune, entendue non comme *Zeitgeist*, une communauté d’esprit ou style de vie, mais comme un espace des possibles, systèmes de prises de position différents, par rapport auquel chacun doit se définir.” See: Pierre Bourdieu, *Les règles de l’art. Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Paris, Seuil, 1998, p. 330.

objective concept, the space of possibles comprises a network of coordinated (even if often dissonant) intellectual relations and position takings that help define the agents of the literary and artistic field.

Consequently, the relations and reactions to the metropolitan cultural centre of reference, represented by the cosmopolite Parisian avant-garde circles, and to the local authoritative critical voices, personified by the traditionalist block, are part of one and the same space of possibles that shapes the identity of the Romanian avant-garde magazines and builds their specificity. Their interplay arbitrates both a national and a transnational voice of the periphery and defines the historical, ideological and aesthetic outlook of the avant-garde magazines.

The (non)-specificity of the Romanian publications in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: nomads and hybrids in context

As any attempt to define the status of avant-garde journals would be if not limited at least hazardous, and most of the literature dedicated to this subject agrees upon their eclecticism and non-specialisation, the Romanian avant-garde makes no exception in this respect. Our revaluation of the emergence of the avant-garde aims at exhibiting the most important elements that make their specificity visible and operational, in a chiefly overlapping logic, which imminently includes the traditionalist formulas of the time. Such a hybrid context is far from suggesting the avant-garde's dysfunction, but signals its diversity and its capacity to engender functionally and artistically meaningful peripheral avatars. The avant-garde magazines seem all the more important to our reading as they are situated in the heart of the cultural debates occupying the prime time of a young nation, they are the interface of a social network of avant-garde artists, editors or aficionados whose efforts are most often than not self sustained and most importantly, they capture the dynamics and trajectories of the international circuit of the artistic world and of its protagonists in the making.

As we have already anticipated, Pierre Bourdieu<sup>2</sup>'s paradigm of the *cultural field* is an inherent reference to any attempt of mapping the dynamics of a cultural space. Custom made for the French literary space and precariously functional when applied to other artistic contexts<sup>3</sup>, the bourdieusian theory serves the purposes of our demonstration in as much as it can engender a cultural turn. Consequently, without aiming to curtail Bourdieu's model, we would rather suggest a theoretical shift towards an "effet de champ"<sup>4</sup> in as much as the Romanian early 20<sup>th</sup> century artistic scene is concerned. This conceptual transfer allows us, on the one hand, to test the plausibility of the original model in a different temporal and geographical space and, on the other hand, to underline the hegemonic influence of the French culture over the Romanian artistic milieu during a period largely catalogued as historical or heroic avant-garde. Thus, we would further argue, along with Bourdieu, that every cultural field is eminently a field of social positions and position-takings, which are to be understood

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<sup>2</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *op. cit.*

<sup>3</sup> The potential of universal validity for the cultural field theory has been taken into consideration by Pierre Bourdieu himself: "La démarche consistant à appliquer à un autre monde social un modèle construit selon cette logique [...] vise à appréhender des structures et des mécanismes [et à les] représenter dans un modèle prétendant à une validité universelle.", in Pierre Bourdieu, *Raisons pratiques sur la théorie de l'action*, Paris, Seuil, 1994, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> For further references, also see: Boschetti, Anna (dir.), *L'espace culturel transnational*, Paris, Nouveau Monde, 2010, p. 47.

in a relational manner, as a system of individual differences, where every literary strategy is overdetermined. Each choice being simultaneously political and literary, internal and external, such a double-bound perspective is nevertheless key to the analysis of the avant-gardes and of their passionate mouthpieces, the magazines.

Frequently rated as a transdisciplinary item at the confluence of literary history, journalism, literary sociology and the history of the intellectuals, the magazines are recognized as public spaces par excellence, especially in the usage fostered by the avant-garde. As collective works and platforms of artistic sociability, the avant-garde magazines have, to a large extent, redesigned international artistic circulation and have enhanced a flux of cosmopolitanism to the artistic practices.

Before reaching the cusp of our argumentation concerning the Romanian avant-garde publications, a contextualising passage connoting their eclecticism should be shaped. Politically and ideologically biased during their initial phase, the Romanian magazines like *Contimporanul* became the hybrid site of an interpersonal network, whose progressive specialization fostered the cultural nomadism of its members. The agents of this network of publications moved back and forth from the decorum of a mellow modernism towards the avant-garde, briefly courted Expressionism and Dada and progressively switched from Constructivist to Surrealist pleas. Even if theoretically opposed, such tendencies contributed to the hybrid aspect of the Romanian cultural ideology at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and have also underscored its specificity.

As we have already mentioned, the interpenetration of modernism and a certain traditionalist vein is symptomatic, especially to the first phase of the Romanian modernism.<sup>5</sup> If theoretically such a state of affairs had some degree of plausibility, given the historical context of new nationalist era all around Europe, at the practical level the same paradox might seem striking. We are though inclined to believe that the recurrence of congruent aspects that link apparently unrelated artists, works and events, situated at different poles of the same art scene are far from being simple coincidences. As Carmen Popescu also suggests: “At the edges of modernity, the voices of the periphery need to adopt specific tonalities in order to make themselves heard. ‘Specificity’ becomes a guarantor of ‘civilisation’ for any culture identifiable in this way. This is why formulas of national identity, translating the cultural idiosyncrasy demanded by the modern world, are symmetrical with progress: the abnegation with which these formulas are asserted derives from the condition of a willed and accepted modernity.”<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, if we skim through the journals edited from 1905 to 1939, a period generally reserved to the historical avant-gardes, we are confronted with an uneven representation. Should our first reflex be diachronic, at the beginning of 1905 we discover journals like the symbolist *Viața nouă* [The New Life], or *Viața Românească* [The Romanian Life] and *Semănătorul* [The Sower], published in 1906 and enthusiasts of the traditionalist ideology. Interestingly enough, during the same period we trace the origins of the *Bizarre*

<sup>5</sup> By this syntagm we generally make reference to the first decades of the 20th century, especially to the period before 1924, the latter being considered a symbolic landmark of the authentic Romanian avant-garde.

<sup>6</sup> Popescu, C., (coord), *(Dis)continuities. Fragments of Romanian Modernity in the first half of the 20th century*, Bucharest, Simetria, 2011, p. 12.

*Pages* by Urmuz<sup>7</sup>, the herald of the Romanian avant-garde, whose texts circulated in the bohemian milieu of the time. The more we shift towards the moments of consecration of the avant-garde, around the year 1924, the more our reference points are disturbed, enabling us to proof read a diffracted modernism, along the thin line separating the avant-garde group and the “antimodernists”<sup>8</sup> like Eliade, Cioran & Co. and an ascending traditionalism. Moreover, dramatically affected by nationalist, anti-Semitic or antifascist stands of the 30’s, propellant for the left wing views of most of the avant-garde artists in Bucharest, by the fourth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Romania was already under the influence of the Soviet Union, behind the Iron Curtain. Such isolation faulted the existence of the avant-garde and most of the former surrealists (especially those who regrouped during the 40’s and generated the second wave of Romanian surrealism dissolved after 1948) either left the country (Ilarie Voronca, Victor Brauner and later on Gherasim Luca, Paul Păun etc.) or became spokesmen of the Communist regime (like Virgil Teodorescu, Max Hermann Maxy, Ștefan Roll etc.). The traditionalist block also underwent critical transformations as the concept of national specificity to which they had grown so attached to deviated towards the rightist wing of nationalism.

Apart from disclosing a very contradictory and elliptical evolution, the common battleground of Romanian modernism leaves very little space for compact and unspoiled programmes, as both the avant-garde and the traditionalist journals recur to eclecticism rather than one-dimensional guidelines. Consequently, during their early years, neither one of the journals is strictly literary or artistic, nor do they indulge in pure and exclusive social, political or cultural analysis. If traditionalist journals, like “*The Sower: journal of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*” declare to be “an organ of general public interests” serving an ideology of linear, wide public information, the same heterogeneous status is exploited by the avant-garde journals. The difference, if not flagrant enough by nature, is also transparent at the level of their programmes, as the avant-garde journals function according to synthesis mechanisms (of arts, of society), targeting an endogenous and limited public. In the double number of *Integral*, undertitled “Journal of modern synthesis”, Ion Călugăru, an ascending artist, in his article “Interpretations” captures the force lines of the Romanian cultural field structured by the “major officialdom”, culturally dominant and institutionally significant, and “the minor officialdom”, that of the avant-garde artists: “Yes, we admit it: we represent a formula. [...] Every idea, which turns into an expression, is a formula. [...] (and) Ours is disregarded because it is synthetic. [...] We could not expect the officialdom to have any other attitude than the repudiation of innovation, of the formula. [...] Consequently, the avant-garde artists especially know the reaction of democracy and often feel its repression. Democracy wants nothing to do with art!”<sup>9</sup> However, the long and engaging history of this controversial relationship between the avant-garde artists and the autochthonous critical

<sup>7</sup> The Writings of Urmuz (pen name for Dan Demetrescu-Buzău), an approximately 50-page collection of absurdist stories, were first published in 1922 and he rapidly became the hero figure of the Romanian avant-garde, widely reckoned as a forerunner of Dadaism and Surrealism.

<sup>8</sup> For more insight on the issue concerning the aesthetically convergent pleas of the avant-garde group and the “antimodern” group, see Paul Cernat, “Futurismul italian și moștenirea sa culturală în România interbelică : Între avangarda și « tânăra generație »”, in Ioana Vlasiu, Irina Cărăbaș (eds.), *Studii și cercetări de istoria artei, Arta Plastică Series, Special Number “Viitorismul azi : 100 de ani de la lansarea Manifestului futurismului”*, Romanian Academy Press, 2010, p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> Călugăru, I., “Interpretations”, in *Integral*, no. 6-7, 1924, p. 1. Except mentioned otherwise, the English translation of the texts belongs to the author of this article.

figures of the Romanian artistic field was not necessarily a radical and continuous feud, it alternated militancy for new art and innovative means of expression to dispute, public denunciations, scandals or even group exclusions.

The Romanian avant-garde: a synthetic/ integralist/ pictopoetic identity

It is not before 1916 that the historic avant-gardes emerge in the Romanian artistic milieu, mostly by informal means, due to various foreign contacts of Romanian scholars and artists studying abroad. At variance with 15 years after the explosion of futurism in Italy, in 1924, Ion Vinea publishes the founding manifesto of the Romanian avant-garde, the “Activist Manifesto for the Youth”<sup>10</sup>, in the pages of *Contimporanul*. If such a consistent discrepancy is critical to the understanding of the status of the Romanian avant-garde and of its development, the neo-Stalinist ideology implemented in the 70’s referred to this period in protocronistic terms and rebranded the Romanian avant-garde as the absolute precursory of its European counterpart. Marinetti’s first futurist manifesto published in *Le Figaro* on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1909 also circulates in the Romanian magazine *Democrația*<sup>11</sup> [*The Democracy*], as the acclaimed futurist leader had made it his mission to send thousands of copies all over the world. The anecdotic aura of this event has made the object of many literary investigations but what matters to our demonstration, besides the fortuitous tuning of events, is the peripheral reaction<sup>12</sup> of the Romanian context to the futurist text and its principles. Translated into Romanian, the anarchic tone of the manifesto disappeared completely and came to resemble a pleading for an art of the future. The moderate enthusiasm of its responses denoted, in fact, the insufficient development of the Romanian cultural field, a precarious distribution of its focal points, the absence of a modern tradition of the anarchic gesture and the spectre of a *retour à l’ordre* that seems to gain momentum over the revolutionary potential of the emerging cultural space of modern Romania.

Moreover, during the first years of the Romanian modernism the case of the journals *Contimporanul* and *Gândirea* [The Thought] is particularly relevant, especially for the way in which their programmes meet the expectations of an incipient cultural field. Analysed together, the two journals connote a pattern of dis-solidarity<sup>13</sup>, which stands as a viable legitimising strategy. In fact, the so called generation of the 20’s, labelled by the fist issue of *Contimporanul* in 1922, was essentially motivated by strategies of rupture with the nationalist ideological block while promoting the cosmopolite modernisation of society. Under the guidelines of synchronicity and the imperatives of specificity, the Romanian pre-avant-garde groups (the ones before 1924) were more likely involved in post-symbolist and anti-academic stands, hesitantly responding to the modern international movements.

The role of *Contimporanul* is key for this period of trial and error, as on the one hand it is the most longevous modern magazine, counting almost ten years of existence (1922-1932), and on the other, it was seen as the epitome of the Romanian avant-garde journals.

<sup>10</sup> Vinea, I., “Manifest activist către tinerime”, *Contimporanul*, no. 46, May 1924, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> As at the time Romania was using the old calendar and the revised Gregorian one was only implemented after 1923, this case of perfect synchronism between the publication of the Marinettian manifesto and its simultaneous presence in the Romanian journal *Democrația* from Craiova, needs further adjustments, as there was a several day difference between the two texts.

<sup>12</sup> Also see Ioana Vlasiu, “Arta viitorului în România la începutul secolului XX”, in Ioana Vlasiu, Irina Cărăbaș (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 3-13.

<sup>13</sup> Cernat, P., *Avangarda românească și complexul periferiei*, Bucharest, Cartea Românească, 2007, p.10.

Nevertheless, *Contimporanul* exhibits a discontinuous trajectory from left wing social and political militancy during 1922-1923, to consistent avant-garde artistic preoccupations and then, towards the 3<sup>rd</sup> decade, to an extensively heterogeneous programme that enabled the cohabitation of divergent ideologies. During the second phase in the evolution of the magazine, the constructivist dominant is paramount and the journal is placed in the pole position of artistic innovation. Progressively it becomes the centre of the Romanian autochthonous avant-garde and the year 1924 is seen as its absolute landmark. Published in the number 46 of *Contimporanul*, by the time Breton was launching the First Surrealist Manifesto in Paris, Ion Vinea's "Activist Manifesto to the Youth" emerges as an inflexion point in the evolution of the journal. If the tradition of manifestoes<sup>14</sup> was somewhat new to the modern Romanian cultural scene, its exhortative and radical tone seems all the more audacious: "Down with Art/ For it has prostituted itself! [...] WE WANT/ The miracle of the new word [...]. The plastic, strict and fast expression of the Morse machines [...] SO/ We want plastic arts free of sentimentalism, literature and anecdotes, an expression of the pure shapes and colours [...] We want to banish individualism as a purpose and to aspire towards an integral art [...] Romania is being constructed today. [...] Let's kill our dead!"<sup>15</sup>

Influenced by the European version of Constructivism, the Activist Manifesto is reckoned as the birth certificate of the Romanian avant-garde. Collaterally, the International Exhibition organised by *Contimporanul* in 1924, the first large-scale manifestation of the Romanian authentic avant-garde, also became a reference point of the peripheral avant-garde's consecration on the transnational scene.

Another significant step towards the avant-garde was made by the magazine *Integral*<sup>16</sup>, that had two locations for its editing board, one in Bucharest and another in Paris. As "Futurism was an incomplete sports school"<sup>17</sup>, "Dadaism was a gun loaded with pure noise [...]" and its members "without knowing slept under the walls of the academy"<sup>18</sup>, and Surrealism "has established dreams and hashish as art principles"<sup>19</sup>, *Integral* "without the protectorate of major and minor officialdoms brings the vital and artistic standards to a common denominator."<sup>20</sup> Consequently, any art that preceded *integralism* was synonymous to: "systems, theories, manifestoes. Their names and their multiples badges have only been different facets of the same sensibility. [...] There was no pantheist vision of plural concentration, back then there was no power of synthesis. Today we are in a full process of accomplishment [...] we want integral realisations."<sup>21</sup>

Attempting to transform eclecticism into a "higher synthesis" and to dismiss any connection to the art of the past, the journal *Punct*<sup>22</sup>, the satellite of *Contimporanul*, also promoted a constructivist programme. Their purpose was to: "destroy, at the risk of violence

<sup>14</sup> For a more elaborate study regarding the evolution of the manifesto in the Romanian literary space, see Rodica Ilie, *Poetica manifestului literar. Aspecte ale avangardei române*, "Transylvania" University of Braşov, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> Vinea, I., "Activist Manifesto [...]", *op.cit.*

<sup>16</sup> There were 15 issues of the journal, from March 1925 to April 1928.

<sup>17</sup> Cosma, M., "De la futurism la integralism" [From futurism to integralism], *Integral*, no. 6-7, 1925, p.8.

<sup>18</sup> F.B., "Sept Manifestes Dada", *Integral*, no. 1, March 1925, p.6.

<sup>19</sup> "From Surrealism and Integralism", *Integral*, no. 1, March 1925, p.2.

<sup>20</sup> Manifesto, published in *Integral*, no. 1, March 1925, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Cosma, M., *op.cit.*

<sup>22</sup> *Punct*, 16 issues between November 15, 1924 and March 1, 1925. We would like to mention, that although the journal had not published a manifesto in its first issue, this front-page article has a manifesto-like status.

and exaggerations inherent to any revolution, even an artistic one, all sub-mediocre literary, sculptural or musical creations. In the scared and scandalized look of the public we have to place the pleasure of contemplation of the new art forms. Step by step we have to make all art lovers instinctively assail all the photographers and all the initiators of any passeist art”<sup>23</sup>.

No later than October 1924, *75 HP* calls itself “the only avant-garde group of Romania” advocating for a new type of synthesis: pictopoetry. The members of the group introduce themselves in terms that echo the style of Dadaist manifestos and the Futurist *parole in libertà*, yet the constructivist dominant is most striking: “The 75 HP Group is organizing a great anti-theatre theatre with performances striking asphalts hepatic diathermy carbonic acid THE AUDIENCE MUST DON SPECIAL ATTIRE INCLUDING boxing gloves shoes potatoes klaxons trumpets signals revolvers preferably brownings asbestos toupees.”<sup>24</sup>

Undoubtedly, the great novelty proposed by 75 HP is PICTOPOETRY, co-signed by Victor Brauner and Ilarie Voronca. The definition given by the authors is an ironic tautology: “Pictopoetry is not Painting/Pictopoetry is not Poetry/Pictopoetry is Pictopoetry”. Even if the adventure of the magazine resumed to one sole performance (it was also the case of another ephemeral magazine, *Viața imediată*, edited by Geo Bogza in December 1933) it largely contributed to the consecration of Integralism, the Romanian version of constructivism, and imposed new standards in typographic design and visual synthetic approach of the magazine as a work of art per se, challenged by no other local journal.

Eventually, our descriptive rendering of the most important Romanian avant-garde magazines brings forth an essential symptom of their specificity: a syncretic vocation, the pursuit of synchronicity and the configuration of an international artistic identity. This specificity is to be understood not in terms of isolation, designing an irreducible self-sufficient ethos, but as part of an integrative trajectory, a summarizing vision, best represented by the absolute synthesis of integralism and pictopoetry.

### **Legitimising trajectories of the periphery:**

Under the sign of spatial and cultural determinism, the evolution and development of the of avant-garde magazines, well known for their cosmopolite and international character could be seen as a consequence of an active form of artistic imperialism. Situated in the proximity of the Balkans and courting the extensions of Western Europe, the Romanian cultural space represents the dissonant voice of the periphery. As an embodiment of a “small” and “minor”<sup>25</sup> nation, and consequently of a minor avant-garde, the Romanian cultural space could be analysed from at least two points of view. Regarded as an interconnected fragment of the central avant-garde, especially the Parisian one, the Romanian avant-garde stands out as a negotiable cultural entity and its identity becomes part of a paradigm of artistic imperialism. We could therefore imply that such a paradigm implied artistic strategies of rupture and

<sup>23</sup> Calimachi, S., “The Punct Journal”, *Punct*, no.4, December 13, 1924, p.1.

<sup>24</sup> *75 HP*, single issue, October, 1924 (no original pagination). The text was originally published in French. For the English translation see: Răileanu, P., 1922-1928. [http://www.plural-magazine.com/article\\_1922-1928.html](http://www.plural-magazine.com/article_1922-1928.html).

<sup>25</sup> As the debate concerning the plural typologies of the world’s literatures is extremely vast, by “small/minor nation” we make reference to the typology issued by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their work *Kafka. Toward a minor literature* published in 1975.

renewal and that the political and artistic body of the nation had to shape itself at the margins of a Western model and those of an inescapable Eastern heritage.

Another more cosmo-politically correct perspective, which orients the cursory of interest towards the minor culture, enables us to say that the case of the Romanian avant-garde stands for a non-linear, hybrid and multi-layered literary history of “the other Europe”. Hence, the network of journals would be the most accurate and open interface of this hybrid history. Being extremely flexible and plurivocalic by nature, within the same page it reunites an international programme and a national agenda, all in bold characters. From this point of view the study of the magazines is key to the understanding of essential issues like the peripheral artistic identity and its articulations to a central, transnational space.

In his extremely controversial book *Images and books from France*<sup>26</sup>, published in 1922, Benjamin Fondane draws a radical picture of the Romanian cultural field and also shortlists some fundamental aspects regarding the engaged posture of the artist and of the types of cultural responsibility that were attached to it. While, his artistic self-exile leads him to the conclusion “the foreigner is the only posterity”<sup>27</sup>, he notes: “For a moment, the idea of doing literary criticism has tempted us. Such an idea was soon suppressed in a drawer, by the national necessity (could it be passed on by heredity?) to perform the part of cultural importer of the European culture”<sup>28</sup>. Although such a radical position became the centre of numerous critical remarks, especially from the traditionalist and conservative voices affiliated to the doctrine of national specificity, Fondane’s position was not singular, being part on an almost organic trend of what Sorin Alexandrescu called “the paradox of belonging”<sup>29</sup> that reunited a gallery of characters like Panait Istrati, Emil Cioran or Eugen Ionesco.

This historical and cultural insufficiency was most often than not conjugated with a sense of uneven chronology, which was the litmus of the Romanian cultural vocation of synchronicity. The centripetal pursuit of an international cultural pace was resolved by well-designed legitimising artistic mechanisms which combined time and visibility accelerators specific to cultural peripheries. One of the most important synchronicity-enhancing factors was the appeal to an international style like constructivism. Although it also had local variant, Integralism<sup>30</sup>, the constructivist programme was a strategic solution for a cultural field, which needed to mark and legitimise its position within the French cultural hegemony framework. In this respect Edward Said speaks of cultural centralization, a direct consequence of imperialism and globalisation, which helped the great canonical literatures to place

<sup>26</sup> Fondane, B., *Imagini și cărți din Franța* [Images et livres de France], partially translated into French by Odile Serre in 2002.

<sup>27</sup> Fondane, B., “Préface”, *Images et livres de France*, Paris Méditerranée, 2002, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Original quotation: “Un instant cette idée de faire de la critique littéraire nous a tenté. Cette activité a été vite étouffée par la nécessité nationale (serait-elle transmise par hérédité ?) de remplir d’abord de rôle d’importateur de la culture européenne”, in *op. cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Alexandrescu, S., “Une culture de l’interstice”, *Les Temps Modernes*, no 522, janvier, 1989.

<sup>30</sup> Central to the artistic program of the journal *Integral* (1924-1929), Integralism is considered to be the Romanian version of Constructivism. For further arguments and a more extended development of this subject which surpasses the purposes of our analysis also see: Kessler, E., (ed) *Culorile avangardei/The Colours of the Romanian Avant-garde/Die Farben der Avantgarde Rumanische Kunst 1910-1950*, Bucharest, ICR, 2007 and Passuth, K., *Les Avant-gardes de l’Europe Centrale 1907-1927*, Paris, Flammarion, 1993.

themselves “in the centre of the centre [from where] they can therefore either touch or include the historical experience of the peripheral and the marginal.”<sup>31</sup>

Especially to those sceptical about a possible cultural imperialism scenario, that touches some delicate ethical and political issues subject to an extensive post/(neo)colonial literary treatment, the hypothesis of a relative internationalism<sup>32</sup> of the avant-garde or that of a cultural and artistic hybridity<sup>33</sup> might seem more appealing. From such an angle, the avant-garde magazines appear as an all encompassing, integrative marketing strategy. Be it by means of quotations, translations, interviews or simply by an advertising column which groups the most important international avant-garde journals of the time, the Romanian journals infiltrated themselves in the extensive network of the European journals, or what could be called the field of literary and art publications.

Conclusive remarks: The Romanian avant-garde and the paradoxes of an ascending periphery

The Romanian avant-garde scene cultivated the condition of the *in betweener*, that of a mediator between the metropolitan and peripheral Europe, between tradition and modernity. The cosmopolite overture of the magazines such as *Contimporanul*, *Integral*, *Punct*, *75 HP*, *unu*, *Alge* was an important issue on their agenda, as they stood under the influence of the French culture. It goes without saying that publications bear the spatial marks of a cultural geography both national and international with precise political, ideological and aesthetic objectives. The relationship between what Michel Trebisch<sup>34</sup> calls intellectual “places” (the cultural metropolis, Paris, Berlin, Moscow) and the “counter places” (Europe’s peripheries etc.) has an important part in designing the trajectories of cultural legitimating of the avant-garde and have never ceased to fascinate its promoters. According to Edward Said<sup>35</sup>, extraterritoriality generated a whole genre in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a literature of the exiles, symbolising the age of the refugee, the nomadic, the de-centred and the contrapuntal. In the age of the displaced, Paris was well known for its cosmopolitan exiles, siege of the subsequent uprooting and transplantation of the founders of the avant-garde who later on became transnational cultural mediators. Energized by prestige, Paris was not an essentialist cultural formation, although it functioned by authority of recognizable cultural patterns but a “contrapuntal ensemble”<sup>36</sup>, a market force whose main attribute was the internationalization

<sup>31</sup> Said, E., *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays*, London, Granta Books, 2001, p. xxxi.

<sup>32</sup> See: Mus, F., Roland, H., and van Mol, D., “Discours internationaliste et conscience identitaire des échanges culturels”, in Bru, S., Baetens, J., Hjartarson, B., Nicholls, P., Ørum, T., van den Berg, H., *Europa? Europa! The avant-garde, Modernism and the Fate of a continent*, Berlin, DE Gruyter, 2009, p. 281 The authors take into consideration a relative internationalism to speak about the case of the Belgian avant-gardist Pensaers who oscillates between a sense of nationalism and an international input.

<sup>33</sup> Cheah, P., “Rethinking Cosmopolitical Freedom in Transnationalism”, in *Cosmopolitics. Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation*, Cheah, P., Robbins, B., (ed), Minneapolis, London, University of Minnesota Press, 1998, p. 292. By making reference to James Clifford’s theory of cultural hybridity, the authors suggests that such a theory celebrates « a dispersed polycentric globe where cultures are hybrid, inorganic and indeterminate because they are relational and in persistent flux ». Further on, Homi Bhaba another great figure of this trend is invoked to emphasize the fact that hybrid culture is “the strategic activity of authorising agency, not the interpellation of pre-given sites of celebration and struggle”. If a colonising paradigm naturally involves mimicry of the coloniser by the colonised, cultural hybridity hints at a negotiable identity, by means of reciprocal assimilation.

<sup>34</sup> Racine, N., Trebitsch, M., *Les Cahiers de l’Institut du Temps Présent, Sociabilité, Intellectuels. Lieux, Milieux, Réseaux*, Cahier n° 20, mars 1992, Paris, CNRS.

<sup>35</sup> Said, E., *op.cit.*, p.175.

<sup>36</sup> Said, E., *Culture and Imperialism*, New York, Knopf, 1993.

of culture. The sociology of the metropolitan encounters and associations between artists (mostly immigrants) and the mainstream ground is extremely revealing in the case of the Romanian protagonists of the avant-garde Tristan Tzara, Benjamin Fondane, Constantin Brâncuși, Victor Brauner, Marcel Janco, Arthur Segal, Claude Sernet, Ilarie Voronca. Their voluntary exile (be it temporary or permanent) is the outcome of legitimatizing strategies performed at the Centre, a reflection of art's imperialist vocation and an imminent violence inflicted upon their national heritage. In spite of an achieved synchronism (the so called *exported modernism*) of Tzara, Brâncuși, Isidore Isou and later on of Ionesco, who experienced expatriation as a positive assimilation of the Centre, Romanian modernity was under the sign of a complex of the periphery<sup>37</sup>. The return of the prodigal sons, like Iancu, who once a famous architect and artist at the cabaret Voltaire in Zurich and Paris joins the Romanian local group of avant-garde and becomes a leading figure in the pages of magazines such as *Punct* and *Integral*, wasn't assertive enough to radicalise the Romanian context.

Moreover, the intense collaboration between the local avant-garde and international artists, among which the most significant event was the 1924 Exhibition organised by *Contimporanul*, created an visible artistic movement and placed the Romanian culture on the international avant-garde orbit but did not succeed to expiate it from the accusation of bovarism (synonym with provincial art), and cultural import.

Even if its initiators were fully involved in the European movement and the period revolving around the prolific year 1924 is usually regarded as the authentic stage of the Romanian avant-garde, this extremely affluent and controversial cultural phenomenon remained a paradox even to its recent critics as it is more often than not regarded as a quasi-avant-garde or a retro-avant-garde. It dwells, nevertheless, also under the sign of the exceptional because during a limited time span (1920's - 1940's) and under nationalist prone historical conditions, the local avant-garde managed to blend in the context of the international movement and also to vividly capitalize its peripheral transnational specificity.

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<sup>37</sup> Cernat, P., *op.cit.*

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