



# TROUBLING CIRCULATION: EARLY SURREALISM AS A CASE OF NEGATIVE TRANSFER

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**Abstract:** The article explores a particular case of negative transfer of the Surrealist artistic project during the early phase of the French-centred movement within the Romanian avant-garde magazines network. Dismissed as “inauthentic” or mediated for its scandalous allure, Surrealism is unsuccessful at making inroads into the Romanian avant-garde press, closely connected to International Constructivism. This process triggers a delayed, albeit impressive, response to the Surrealist aesthetic and political thought, toward the end of the 1920s, and is, initially, largely regarded as a fraught association. Arguing that artistic circulation and transmission is not always a synchronous or symmetrical process in a centre-periphery direction, the article opens an inquiry into the motivations and implications of the Romanian negative response to early Surrealism. Additionally, the article provides insights into the complex interplay between Constructivism and Surrealism in the space of the Romanian avant-garde periodicals, essential for the understanding of Central and Eastern European avant-gardes, and a new perspective on how the periphery moderates the Surrealist label and its artistic project.

**Keywords:** negative transfer, Surrealism, Romanian avant-garde magazines, International Constructivism, periphery.

**Citation suggestion:** Lazăr, Adriana. “Troubling Circulation: Early Surrealism as a Case of Negative Transfer”. *Transilvania*, no. 4 (2023): 35-44.  
<https://doi.org/10.51391/trva.2023.04.05>.



The literature devoted to Romanian Surrealism routinely gives prominence to two flagship moments, one revolving around the activity of the magazine *unu* (1928-1932) and *Alge* (1930-1933), while a second is mainly associated to the “Infra-noir” experience, connecting a community of surrealist artists active in Bucharest between 1944-1947. However, attending to the inroads that Surrealism has made beyond the French border, since its emergence in 1924, and additionally to the circulation of its doctrines, should also involve something that resembles a less measurable horizon, an earlier period of indeterminacy, unblending and resistance, even, to Surrealism, a time when Surrealism and Constructivism stirred crosscutting debates on the Romanian avant-garde scene and beyond. As the reputation of these two flagship moments of Romanian surrealist activity increases, mainly due to new interest in global Surrealism, we must also weigh this misrecognized stage, indispensable to

an understanding of the workings of a larger pattern concerning the dynamics of cultural transfer<sup>1</sup> and circulation of Surrealism, particularly within the pages of the Romanian avant-garde periodicals. Therefore, our interest is drawn to the years 1924-1928, delimited by the constitution of the surrealist label in France, followed by a symptomatically limited press coverage in the Romanian avant-garde venues, on the one hand, and, on the other, by the publication of the magazine *unu*, within a four-year time lapse, at a time when Surrealism was becoming more vocally engaged in taking centre stage in the avant-garde world.

We therefore attempt to show the potential of a more dynamic comparative framework<sup>2</sup>, responsive to local heterogeneity rather than unified, global narratives, a framework that dispenses with historical reading of well-travelled timelines, as well as with canonical understanding roused to promote Surrealism as “master

of the world.”<sup>3</sup> Although rarely labelled as such, negative transfer has been reviewed as an indicator of impact or a “failure”<sup>4</sup> mode, qualifying practices where cultural transfers generate ill-insertions, “false reading”<sup>5</sup> or, generically, as cases when “the transferred material encounters negative forces of resistance in the receiver system.”<sup>6</sup> Within these lines, we propose to discuss more fully an initial process of negative transfer<sup>7</sup> of early, “heroic,” Surrealism from Paris to Bucharest, viewed as a form of assimilation by difference and deferral, an exclusionary response to the logics of circulation, via an analysis of what is resistant to Surrealism within the local avant-garde press. In the context of our research, such a phenomenon becomes even more intriguing, as Surrealism will reap the rewards of espousing a more internationalised orientation by end of 1928. Significantly, at the same time, in Romania, the detractors of the Surrealism of *The First Manifesto* would convert into prolific affiliates of the movement, making two narratives – of opposition and, subsequently, of close alignment to the surrealist project – appear as equally possible within the same cultural space.

Implicitly, a scrutiny of this first stage of negative transfer of Surrealism leads to question hierarchising forms of comparison that exacerbate the relation between the centre and the periphery, diffusing the temporal and territorial tensions that govern their continuous configuration. Instead, we propose to counter-focalize on the indeterminate relations and ambiguity that infuse the phenomenon of cultural transfer and circulation. In the context of a reevaluation of a period of polarising – constructivist and surrealist – influence, albeit of undisputed constructivist pre-eminence on the local Romanian scene, we also turn to the relational nature of the process of circulation of doctrines and cultural transfers. This also needs to be regarded as an interplay of discrepancies, dissymmetries of reception, and negotiations with difference. Invariably, international circulation is reflective of a dialectics of consecration and international competition, and together they shape the collective, relational identity of a cultural space. Therefore, within this optics, a cultural space is never finite, closed – it is a *continuum*<sup>8</sup> of situations, a multi-plotted territory of imperceptible transitions. This continuum of situations is to be understood both in terms of orientation, affiliation, and attachment, but also read in an etymological sense, indicating positions, localisations in space and time. And if we contend that the “compulsive act of *localising*”<sup>9</sup> is constitutive of “small” literatures, we must also acknowledge how increasingly inseparable geopolitics is from the self-definition of the avant-gardes, and how this allowed for an accommodation of an idea of the avant-garde world understood as multiple localities. Particularly in the case of the avant-gardes, it would be by virtue of its degree of autonomy and cultural legitimacy, that a smaller group

could navigate to one location of interest or another, moving constantly toward a network of centres and time zones that made the whole idea of the Greenwich meridian of letters redundant.

Thus, looking beyond the regulative power of a singular time, and a geography of convergence, reading beyond or against clear-cut relations, reveals a dynamic of differentiation, thus an avant-garde network that can be explored beyond its strategies of manifest allegiance and solidarity toward a particular artistic project. Such a counter-focalisation permits us to acknowledge how the spread of Surrealism occurs, how it turns into something more dynamic than the initial Paris-centred movement. Eventually we can also trace the breadth of a movement that partially resisted transnationalism, in its early stages, in the same way that Constructivism embraced it, and foster more awareness of the ways in which the Romanian cultural periphery, committed to international Constructivism<sup>10</sup>, mediates the novelty that Surrealism brought to the avant-gardes.

In this sense, emphasizing the distinct capacity of avant-garde periodicals to reunite both sides of a familiar border between a logic of exchange and artistic sociability, on the one hand, and the production process of an artistic project relative to a specific group, on the other, is crucial for grasping the relational nature of the process of cultural circulation viewed through the lens of a case of negative/deferred transfer. The study of periodicals provides a particularly fertile ground for any comparative analysis of the circulation of ideas and cultural transfers, as the periodical as object requires that we grapple with a type of media that is plural, polymorphic, and inherently relational. This complicates the geopolitical reading of the centre-periphery relationship, offering a nuanced perspective on the way in which this particular lens revealing transfers and circulation routes provides a dynamic picture of the art world.

Recent advances in network analysis<sup>11</sup>, for example, show a reality other than the one exhorted by the monocentric approach, casting doubt on the notion of a unitary centre as lieu of emanation. In this sense, Emanuel Modoc’s work<sup>12</sup> on Central European and Eastern avant-gardes is particularly revealing as it proposes a new model of intersecting internationalisms aligned to multiple centres, more responsive to the circulation patterns of peripheral avant-gardes. Additionally, Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel’s extensive research on visual avant-garde resorts to digital tools to recreate the networked structure of the avant-gardes of the 1920s, reported to be centred around three “incubators.”<sup>13</sup> One might not recognize it immediately, but surprisingly enough, the constructivist periodicals of Central and Eastern Europe were actually the most prominent of these incubators, both from the point of view of the fabric of relationships they aggregated as from that of the patterns of circulation of artists involved. Conversely,



it is worth noting that *La Révolution Surréaliste* more markedly entered the circuit of international alliances and collaborations relatively late, at the beginning of the 1930s. This implies that any examination of the long-time of the history of Surrealism, must admit to an initial disengagement of Surrealism from internationalism, or from anything non-literary, for that matter. Thus, taking lead from Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel's observations,<sup>14</sup> we would need to emphasize a reality that can be ostensibly overlooked by scholarship, meaning that throughout its first years of activity on the scene of the avant-gardes, Surrealism did not acquire a global scale. Such a reading of the European avant-gardes only exposes one of the direct consequences of the canonical frame, invariably based on a logic of prestige, which falsely attributes to Surrealism the status of dominant trend on the international avant-garde market.

The history of the reception of Surrealism in the pages of the Romanian avant-garde periodicals is at first sight difficult to trace and one could speak of a lack of success of the surrealist strategy on Romanian soil. From the point of view of its deployment, references to Surrealism are uneven and especially in the case of small magazines, such as *Punct* and *Integral*, they reflect a negative rhetoric that ranges from declarations of aesthetic incompatibility to declamations of an obsolescence of Surrealism. Apparently, the Romanian avant-garde scene kept itself secured from the grip of euphoria surrounding the emergence of a new avant-garde movement in Paris, and the year 1924 marked a strong gap between the two cultural spaces which evolved in a largely independent way. If in October the surrealists released *La Révolution surréaliste* and opened in Paris, rue Grenelle, the Bureau of Surrealist Research, on the Romanian side, the first manifesto of the avant-garde had been published four months earlier, in May, by the magazine *Contimporanul*. Also, *75 HP* was being launched in one instalment the same month as the French periodical, whereas *Punct* joined the ranks of the Romanian constructivist network one month later, in November 1924.

In France, the beginnings of Surrealism reflect a process of gradual autonomization of the avant-garde market within the modern art scene, an entry into literature punctuated by opposition and struggle, along with whole series of public strategies which completed the surrealist aesthetic project and ultimately contributed to its consecration as one of the most important movements of the interwar period. On the other hand, the Romanian avant-garde responds to the surrealist project by difference: both for aesthetic reasons and for reasons that exceed the sphere of art, the Romanian avant-garde groups prefer the alternative of international Constructivism to Surrealism.

### *Punct* and *Integral*: Opposition to Surrealism

Our micro-analysis of the space of avant-garde periodicals highlights two local routes of circulation of Surrealism. The first route would be shaped by the responses of *Punct* and *Integral*, which constituted the landscape of small constructivist periodicals. On a local scale, they tended to perpetuate alternatives to the dominance of *Contimporanul*, while paradoxically remaining relatively anchored in the conditions that produce it: partial dependency to the aesthetic project of *Contimporanul*, overlapping sociability network of collaboration and exchange, both locally and internationally, identity-building strategies aimed to resituate the poles of authority of the local avant-garde. Overt or more subtle, their marginal status is not without repercussions for the reception of Surrealism which, at the time of the release of *Punct* and *Integral*, was still an unstable movement, insufficiently coagulated or voluminous enough in scale - or scope, to probe the artistic dynamics of the peripheries.

Confronted in Paris with internal imperatives (constitution of its own label, conflicts roused over leadership of the movement) as well as external ones (neutralization of the competition over the avant-garde label, position-takings against the *NRF*) once it arrived in Bucharest, Surrealism was unsuccessful at passing for original and was criticized for its aesthetic inauthenticity. A few months after its *First Manifesto*, Surrealism was viewed as a movement which failed to grasp the rhythm of the time - devoted exclusively to constructivist synthesis. One of its first vocal critics was Ilarie Voronca, who embraced Dadaism in his poetry and endorsed the glorification of Constructivism in his theoretical texts. The Dadaist contingency is not a discordant contact in this context, as the local avant-gardes shared a relation of aesthetic and emotional complicity with Dadaism which strongly influenced the disavowal of Surrealism. By this token, Voronca resorts to the Dadaist lens to undercut the legitimacy of the movement. In the only article published in *Punct* that considered recording a reference to Surrealism he noted: "The surrealism of André Breton is a late reissue, on Freudian foundations, of the Zurich achievements, of Tristan Tzara, Marcel Iancu, Arp, Eggeling."<sup>15</sup> He would make a similar case in another programmatic article, "Surrealism and Integralism," published symbolically in the first issue of *Integral*, in March 1925. If a dim form of enthusiasm toward Surrealism follows instinctively from its relative association with a more generalized contemporary effort to renew the artistic map of Europe, Voronca admits to having "infinite reserves" as to the artistic potential of Surrealism:

"Its doctrine is only a belated return to a source of the past. [...] Indeed, surrealism - as a doctrine - does not

claim any rights to achievements of its own. [...] The only genuine surrealist, one to whom surrealism concealingly owes its system, is Tristan Tzara – the indisputable poet. However, (as a dynamic) surrealism is inferior to Dadaism. [...] SURREALISM DOES NOT MEET THE RHYTHM OF THE TIME.”<sup>16</sup>

Invariably, this claim of inauthenticity developed around the circulation of the surrealist doctrines takes its ethos from an anxiety-ridden conception over the break with tradition that the Romanian avant-garde applied to its self-definition, and implicitly from its aspirational affiliation with the idea of an aesthetic revolution. Additionally, the refusal to immediately acknowledge the singularity of Surrealism, conveys a structural inability of the local avant-garde to make sense of one of Surrealism’s core motivations. Locally, there was no backdrop or necessity for the surrealist segregation with Dadaism, significantly devitalized after its arrival in France, but acclaimed by the Romanian avant-garde and, subsequently, still able to bestow recognition. Much in the same vein, another future surrealist, Mihail Cosma, calls attention to the inauthenticity of the foundational logics of Surrealism and dismisses its ancillary “discovery” of the “real functioning of thought,” its exploitations of the unconscious, its preoccupations for an enlargement of the concept of reality. Not only is such a reception unflattering, but ultimately it discounts the novelty Surrealism. As Cosma emphasized:

“after a hiatus handled for more than 10 years, in the midst of concerns for selection and generalization, Surrealism finally developed a doctrine – belatedly – for the reminiscences of the unconscious, embracing just another formula. Its predecessors had already used it, but in a primitive way. Without acknowledging its particularity, we thank surrealism for its best intentions, and we subsume it.”<sup>17</sup>

However, as the two magazines were espousing a critical weariness towards destabilising figures of a recognized authority, associated in this case to Dadaism and International Constructivism, Surrealism was brought into a new type of relation. Locally, it further became resituated and was faced with a separate relation of difference, ensued by the prospect of a local movement. In this sense, we need to also point to an attempt to balance international Constructivism with local forms, as both *Punct* and *Integral* became the mouthpieces of a self-legitimizing artistic project, aimed at producing a vernacularized form of international Constructivism. In a programmatic article in *Punct*, Voronca envisions a new, potentially transformed sensibility of the time, spanning like a red thread across “all human efforts, both present and eternal, all realisations of every field, [...] [which] overflow toward a new art form called

synthetism.”<sup>18</sup> The promise of an emancipatory, total art project would be materialized by *Integral*, the highly ambitious magazine edited by M. H. Maxy and published between 1925-1928. Featured as a form of “spiritual evolution,”<sup>19</sup> a limitless “new classicism,” *integralism* appears as an “amplification” of Constructivism. Such an ambition is one that builds on a mediated, culture-specific and “original” extension of Constructivism, as well as a distillation of “revolutionary”<sup>20</sup> art in general. Invariably, this orientation had a national connotation, extending over an aesthetic revolution that was itself enmeshed in an identity project. The shared commitment and the explicit preoccupation for an original art project, non-imitative of Western art, which would thus become incorporated into the international space, leads us to believe that unlike the surrealists, the Romanian constructivists broadly conceived artistic revolution as a national priority.

Marginal in relation to Constructivism, which fully responded to “the era of the construction of Europe”<sup>21</sup>, belated and outmoded, Surrealism is ascribed to the “morbid disintegration of Romanticism”<sup>22</sup> and finds itself deprived of any revolutionary significance. Rather than situate Surrealism in a Romantic conception of art, and be taken literally, this comparison is meant to exaggerate the gulf between Surrealism – viewed as a disintegrating movement – and a common internationalist program of reconstruction of art and society. Eventually, it could be argued that Surrealism’s unproductive reception, its “failure” to take root, means less that the Romanian cultural space metabolised an emerging artistic project at a slower rate, than the fact that Surrealism – in its “heroic” phase – overlapped very little with the exigencies of the Romanian avant-garde artists. In a strictly conflictual logic that governs position-takings in the field and the mechanisms of solidarity between the participants to the international artistic network, it could also be implied that in the case of marginal periodicals, like *Punct* or *Integral*, the attitude towards Surrealism functioned as a definition by opposition. Hence, the relegation of the innovative and specific character of Surrealism also betrays a competitive attitude, as fields with limited autonomy and polarising authority are known to have very low tolerance for seemingly simultaneous apologies for novelty.

### 1.2. *Contimporanul*: mediator of Surrealism

However, a second type of attitude concerning the reception of Surrealism in the Romanian artistic field could be traced. Unsurprisingly, *Contimporanul*’s position is much less radical, crediting a reconciliatory tone. Recognized as a venue for the contemporary manifestations of modern art, *Contimporanul* enacted a sensibly different public strategy. This was aimed at consolidating its role of mediator of the local



network, thus accommodating greater openness and a more pronounced heterogeneity. At the same time, this strategy responded to a logic of solidarity which animated the local network and which, especially in the case of a dominant journal, superseded the logic of competition. If in November 1924, *Contimporanul* announced the publication of *The Manifesto of Surrealism* in an informative note, the debate around Surrealism would be initiated from the following issue, published in December 1924. What appears to be an immediate reaction, perfectly justifiable given the status of *Contimporanul*, is however joined by an additional motivation. The reception of Surrealism was all the more significant as it was done with pomp and circumstance.

The December 1924 double issue also served as a catalogue for the International Exhibition organized in Bucharest by *Contimporanul*, between November 30 and December 30, 1924. Firstly, it is against the backdrop of this large-scale celebration of Constructivism, that *Contimporanul* opens an unexpected niche for the circulation of surrealist texts and publishes a fragment<sup>23</sup> of André Breton's assembled poem included in *The First Manifesto*. This choice is not only symbolic, promoting a foundational text of Surrealism, but, interestingly enough, it stands out as an intermixed translation, resulting in a bilingual text, that alternates French and Romanian stretches. While the likelihood of a noncommittal position of *Contimporanul* should be kept in mind, it is tempting to see the release of this text as a deterritorialized relation with Surrealism, enabling it to signify both within and beyond its context. Second, the series of unforeseen connections with Surrealism is prolonged by another text published in the "Reviews" section of the same issue, which reiterates *The First Manifesto* by providing insights into its core ideas and implications. As the passage stages a series of questions growing out of Breton's text, the familiarity with the problematics of Surrealism is also evident:

"What is poetry today? Have poets really discovered new ways of writing? Is this renewal of poetic means important enough to force us to reconsider our ideas about art, science and the life of the mind? What is Inspiration? [...] Does the thesis of surrealism definitively save us from individual responsibility? Is surrealism the communism of genius? André Breton answers all these questions."<sup>24</sup>

Although it trades oppositional rhetoric for a coalescing appearance, *Contimporanul* leaves these questions unanswered, and seems to offer deceptively easy access to the ideas associated to Surrealism, while remaining suspicious of the specificity of its role within the avant-garde landscape. On this side of the Romanian avant-garde, Surrealism was perceived as an audacity, a vulnerable endeavour of transforming revolt into a "thesis", a means of replacing inspiration with automatic

writing. Paradoxical as it may seem, given the value-laden nature of the context (valorisation of Dadaism, manifest predilection for Constructivism, celebration of an exhibition endorsed by Constructivism), the reception of Surrealism is nonetheless perfectly justifiable from the standpoint of a (self)-legitimising strategy of *Contimporanul*. Geared to grasp high visibility on the local and international scene, this double issue was designed to consecrate the central position of *Contimporanul* on the local scene and underwrite its immediate alignment to the central time of artistic Europe.

This orientation is confirmed by all subsequent issues which precariously echo the dynamics of Surrealism. Apart from seemingly unconnected reporting of editorial news showcasing various surrealist texts, it would be the "Declaration of January 25, 1925" that yields more explicit interest for *Contimporanul*. Once more, this appears to be an informed choice, as the text in question, featured in the double issue 57-58 of April 1925, marks a point of transition in the artistic and existential design of Surrealism, an engagement toward "the total liberation of the mind" launched as an aspirationally collective venture. Probably written by Artaud, this text bears the signature of thirty-one surrealists and heralds the end of a period of exploration of the movement. Committed to securing Surrealism ("Surrealism exists"<sup>25</sup>) and promoting formulations of identity in defence of "false interpretation of our enterprise, stupidly circulated among the public,"<sup>26</sup> the "declaration" foregrounds the group's ambition to seize control of the revolution, and needs to be read as an extension of the founding manifesto to a more international scale. By defining Surrealism as "a cry of the mind turning back on itself, [...]"<sup>27</sup> addressed "in particular to the Western world", the movement attempts to deflate its association to "a new ism" identified as French. Significantly, *Contimporanul* records this affirmation of a more European vocation of Surrealism, more compatible with its own declared internationalism, and supports the text's circulation directly in French.

Progressively, as we read through the various surrealist intertexts that cross the boundaries of *Contimporanul*, it becomes obvious that the Romanian magazine pursues its focus on relationality, further consolidating its position as a centralizing agent. Concomitantly, given that it facilitates greater mobility of the surrealist ideas, it also becomes a medium for the reception of Surrealism. By publishing controversial documents, such as the scandalous "Open letter to M. Paul Claudel"<sup>28</sup>, various tracts or apparently benign commentaries regarding the record sales reported in France by Desnos, *Le Manifeste surréaliste* by Breton and *Ariane* de Ribemont-Dessaignes, it contributes in various degrees to the construction of a horizon of reception of the French movement and its challenges. Although quantitatively the impact of Dadaism,

expressionism and international Constructivism is particularly powerful, the more fluctuating presence of Surrealism is no less so. Significantly, starting from 1926, *La Révolution surréaliste*, “the most scandalous periodical in the world,”<sup>29</sup> joins the usual circuit of promotion of *Contimporanul*. As any editorial policy involves a selection mechanism that is both functional and strategic, the year 1926 implicitly brings about a change in the positionings of *Contimporanul*. The Romanian journal gradually overcomes the level of a purely informative interest for Surrealism and appears to exploit the possible contiguity effects between its own program and that of Surrealism.

Therefore, the issue of May 1926 would feature a portrait of Breton by Marcel Janco on its front cover. Also, an interview conducted by Janco with the leaders of the Parisian surrealist adventure, Breton, Perret, Eluard, Georges Ribbent-Dessaignes, is published on the second page of the magazine. Breton tackles Surrealism’s victory over Dadaism, the advent of a new type of collective art practice inspired by Lautréamont, while promoting a democratized, egalitarian vision of art or defending revolutionary inaction (“Why would I go to the streets to fight without hesitation when I can write?”<sup>30</sup>). These positions pertain to the reasoning era of Surrealism, that of the different techniques of automatism, of the liberation of the individual and revolutionary aesthetics which underpinned their commitment to revolutionary utopias, manifest from 1925.

The same sensibility is promoted by Péret, who became a member of the Communist Party in 1926, and who appeals to more radical declarations. Disdaining patriotism, his message addressed to the Romanian readership is an instigation “against the French tradition”<sup>31</sup> which, in the eyes of the surrealists, had become synonymous with militarism and colonialism. Unlike Breton, who adopted a more general tone, Péret clearly expresses the surrealist preoccupation for a “de facto” revolution that would supplant the “revolution of mind”: “We are revolutionaries in spirit, why shouldn’t we also be in fact. We are ready to make the greatest sacrifices for a revolution”<sup>32</sup>.

As if to attenuate the momentum built by Péret’s words, the intervention of Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes briefly discusses theatre and cinema and casts doubt on the future of poetry during a period when the surrealists were turning their gaze from literature. His question: “L’avenir est à la poésie, seulement la poésie est-elle à l’avenir ?”<sup>33</sup> echoes a similar statement expressed in the “Declaration of January 27, 1925” (“We have nothing to do with literature”) also discussed in Paul Eluard’s intervention, the last in the series of interviews presented by Janco in this issue of the periodical. Illustrated in much detail, the scandal of the Saint Pol-Roux banquet is taken as an opportunity to discuss the surrealist

position vis-à-vis a revolution in the making: “We are all share a bourgeois education, but we do not consent to the consolidation of this authority that we detest so much, and which is disconnected from the efforts of our activity. But the moment of the revolution is not yet upon us and nor will it be for some time.”<sup>34</sup>

The common denominator of these interventions is undisputedly the perspective of the revolution, as the surrealist engagement itself was withstanding a course of trial and error covering the first half of the 1920s. The surrealists started to align more overtly to the revolutionary cause and their endorsement of political slogans was met with reluctance. However, the political context was such that in July 1925 they join the French Communist Party and contest the French-led war in Morocco, while also becoming receptive to the appeals of Henri Barbusse, who had released the communist daily paper *L’Humanité*. If at the onset, the revolution was not couched in any material or social conditions, as we could notice in the “Declaration of January 27, 1925” reproduced by *Contimporanul*, within a few months, the French surrealists crossed the line of disinvestment from history. This shift ensues a change of perspective for *Contimporanul*, as the magazine appears to revise the way it served its mediating position with regards to Surrealism.

Therefore, as the interview column guided by Marcel Janco can also be read in the following issue of *Contimporanul*, promoting the contribution of a figure like Joseph Delteil, an artist cited in the *First Manifesto* for having performed an “act of absolute surrealism”, we would need to question the stakes imbued in this intervention, since Delteil had been expelled from the group in 1925 on account of his estrangement from the surrealist credo. It is also noteworthy that in his answers, Delteil touches on issues complementary to the agenda of *Contimporanul*, such as the need to “expand the sphere of art”<sup>35</sup> to go beyond the cultural achievements of the Western world, to deal with the prospect of “a new language” founded on “the association and dissociation of words”, to pursue the articulations of art as construction, the advent of an epic art of “synthesis”<sup>36</sup>. Indeed, Janco’s interview with Delteil may still be seen as a fortuitous choice. However, considering the fact that the publication of *Joan of Arc*, a work mentioned in the interview, whose biographical formula, reinforced by its bookstore success, caused Delteil’s exclusion from the surrealist group, we would need to infer that at the time of his “meeting” with Marcel Janco the rupture had already occurred. This could roughly explain his “marginal” convictions in relation to the group doctrine of the surrealists.

Extended with Hans Arp, this series of interviews conjoins the aspiration of engagement with contemporary issues, as professed by *Contimporanul*, with the recognition of its curated vision of actuality. Nonetheless,



the interview with Arp circles back to a discursive fixity of *Contemporanul*, such as the active role of Dadaism on the avant-garde scene, and marks the sudden closure of the magazine's interest in accommodating the circulation of surrealist ideas. Consequently, while the references to Surrealism dim out completely<sup>37</sup>, the implications of our object of transfer remain in a state of opaqueness until a new route for its dissemination is created. As the routes of Surrealism and *Contemporanul* diverge, their trajectories are maneuvered into overlapping yet radically distinct cultural projects. The Romanian magazine gradually returned to its early concerns, developing a more prominent socio-political dimension in addition to its interest in artistic phenomena, which were becoming progressively anchored in architectural preoccupations. What caused this abrupt obstruction in the transfer of surrealist ideas towards the Romanian network? What set Surrealism apart from the Romanian venues? Partially, the reason for this fracture resides in aesthetic incompatibility, a moderating variable that has largely affected the course of the transfer process overall. However, for a more accurate perspective, one would need to acquire a deeper insight into the receiving context and chart the discordances and tensions affecting *Contemporanul*. The magazine was undergoing an untidy identity shift, gradually losing its force to preserve a dominant authority over the local network, as new players emerged, and to actively reconnect with its surrounding community. Conflated interests, irregular instalments, disruption of certain editorial collaborations, aborted projects or an incapacity to kickstart some of the engines that bestowed its consecration (exhibitions, manifestoes, public events), all largely amounted to *Contemporanul's* creeping isolationism.

Nonetheless, after the breakdown in the flux of information concerning Surrealism, mainly chartable between 1926 and 1928, newcomers to the local avant-garde landscape, such as the magazine *unu*, negotiate a more propitious reception of the French movement. Bringing together former constructivists and a new generation of artists, the group "Unu" will fill the vacuum of authority left by *Contemporanul* and will shape a more critical and more committed local avant-garde community, visibly engaged in the surrealist research and doctrinal line.

### Conclusion

As we have seen, microanalyses of cultural transfer reveal a particularly dense entanglement of relations and push mediated spaces into an open state of comparison. Well attuned to the study of the avant-gardes, the circulatory

approach reconfigures the centre-periphery binary oppositions that cloister the mobility of the avant-gardes and credits a dynamic comparative framework with a transnational focus. In a different form of circulatory approach of cultural transfers than we usually consider, this research turned to a case of negative transfer, viewed as a form of assimilation by opposition. By taking aim at the circulation of "heroic" Surrealism via the Romanian avant-garde periodicals committed to international Constructivism, two routes were discerned: smaller magazines, like *Punct* and *Integral*, illustrate a committed resistance to Surrealism, becoming platforms for assimilation by opposition, whereas the long-lasting *Contemporanul* deploys a particularly interesting practice of assimilation by mediation. A separate contention of this study regarded a more diffuse phenomenon of deferred transfer, and promoted the idea that the concept of negative transfer itself is often as unstable as the relational dynamics it denotes. We were able, thus, to depart from relatively fixed visualisations of negative transfers - analysed predominately in terms of rejection or invisibilization<sup>38</sup> of a cultural object. In exchange, we highlighted a situation that accommodated a transformative, modulated vision of negative transfer. Not only did local avant-garde magazines provide relatively different images of noncommittal to Surrealism, on account of their position in the local/international field and their individual cultural projects, but a deferred transfer of Surrealism could be identified with the emergence of a new local surrealist community. Partially reuniting former constructivists, this Romanian surrealist community fosters a revitalized relation with international Surrealism, itself rebranded from a former French-based movement toward the end of the 1920s, and eventually points out how our frames of reading change as cultural objects circulate.

To conclude, the study of negative transfers requires a diversified epistemological apparatus able to reveal the positive value of its object, as it is a particular type of circulation, not the lack thereof, that is at stake in analysing such a process. Thus, as we have attempted to show in our investigation, mapping negative transfers can be quantitatively rewarding, as in the case of periodicals, such a practice amounts to inventories of objects in circulation, texts, references, cases of cross-advertising. However, scaling impact is a more challenging endeavour, and to respond to this solicitation, one must be defiant of borders and go beyond selected images of the self-legitimising conditions and strategies of relational difference of a periodical network, in order for more specific patterns of artistic circulation and transfer to emerge.

## Notes

1. Michel Espagne, "La notion de transfert culturel," *Revue Sciences/Lettres*, no. 1 (2013).
2. For a more extensive approach of such a framework to Romanian literature, also see Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru și Andrei Terian, eds., *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).
3. Delia Ungureanu, *From Paris to Tlön: Surrealism as World Literature* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 20.
4. Stephanie Vanasten, Hubert Roland, Maud Gonne, "A propos de paradoxes, echecs et malentendus dans les transferts culturels, Interférences littéraires," *Interférences littéraires / Littéraire interferences*, no. 26 (2022): 3-26.
5. Anna Veronika Wendland, "Cultural Transfer," in *Travelling concepts for the Study of Culture*, ed. Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin & Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 55.
6. Walter Moser, "Cultural Transfer and Its Complexities: A Study on Transnational and Transhistorical Mobilities of the Baroque," in *Cultural Transfer Reconsidered: Transnational Perspectives, Translation Processes, Scandinavian and Postcolonial Challenges*, ed. Steen Bille Jørgensen and Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink (Leiden & Boston: Brill / Rodopi, 2021), 191.
7. Walter Moser, "Pour une grammaire du concept de transfert appliqué au culturel," in *Transfert*, ed. Pascal Gin et al. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2014), 61.
8. Pascale Casanova, *Des Littératures combattives. L'internationale des nationalismes littéraires* (Paris: Raisons d'agir, 2011), 23.
9. Dilip Menon, "Alocal cosmopolitan: 'Kesari' Balakrishna Pillai and the invention of Europe for a modern Kerala," in *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*, ed. Sugata Bose and Kris Manjappa (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire & New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 140.
10. For a discussion on the impact of international constructivism on the self-legitimation strategies of Romanian avant-garde magazines, see Adriana Copaciu, "Les revues roumaines d'avant-garde a la recherche d'un nouvel espace de parole," in *Paradoxes de l'avant-garde. La modernité artistique à l'épreuve de sa nationalization*, ed. Thomas Hunkeler et al. (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014), 197-215.  
<https://sonar.rero.ch/global/documents/308316>.
11. Also see Adriana Copaciu, *Les revues roumaines d'avant-garde au défi du réseau artistique international*, Phd. diss., University of Fribourg, 2015.
12. Emanuel Modoc, *Internaționala periferiilor. Rețeaua avangardelor din Europa Centrală și de Est* (Bucharest: Muzeul Literaturii Române, 2020), 61.
13. Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, "Internationalization through the Lens: Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Art Periodicals and Decentred Circulation," *Journal of European Periodical Studies*, no. 4 (2019): 62.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.21825/jeps.v4i2.14902>.
14. Béatrice Joyeux-Prunel, *Les avant-gardes artistiques 1918-1945. Une histoire transnationale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), 35.
15. Ilarie Voronca, "Glasuri" [Voices], *Punct*, no. 8, 1925, 2. Unless mentioned otherwise, all translations from Romanian or French are those of the author of this article.
16. Ilarie Voronca, "Suprarealism și Integralism" [Surrealism and integralism], *Integral*, no. 1, March 1925, 4.
17. Mihail Cosma, "De la futurism la integralism" [From futurism to integralism], *Integral*, no. 6-7, 1925, 9.
18. Ilarie Voronca, "Glasuri."
19. Ion Calugaru, "Precizari" [Clarifications], *Integral*, no. 5, July 1925, 1.
20. Ibid.
21. Scarlat Calimachi, "Revista Punct" [The Magazine Punct], *Punct*, no. 4, December 13 1924, 1.
22. Ibid.
23. *Contimporanul*, no. 50-51, December 1924, 10 (non paginated).
24. *Contimporanul*, no. 50-51.
25. *Contimporanul*, no. 64, January 1926, 2.
26. "Déclaration du 25 janvier 1925," *Contimporanul*, no. 57-58, April 1925, 11 (non paginated, original text in French). For the English version, see Maurice Nadeau, *The History of Surrealism* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), 240-241.
27. *Contimporanul*, no. 57-58.
28. *Contimporanul*, no. 64, January 1926, 2.
29. "La revue la plus scandaleuse du monde". See *Contimporanul*, no. 66, May 1926, 4. (original text in French).
30. "La André Breton" [At André Breton], *Contimporanul*, no. 66, *op. cit.*, 2. (original text in Romanian).
31. Marcel Janco, "La Péret." [In French in original].
32. "La Perret."
33. *Georges Ribbent D'Essaignes* (sic).
34. Ibid.
35. "În vizită la Joseph Delteil" [Visiting Joseph Delteil], *Contimporanul*, no. 67, June 1st, 1926, 2.





36. Ibid.
37. Until the end of 1926, only one reference to Surrealism could be traced. This is a chronicle centred on the activity of the Swedish poet Ludvig Nordstöm, writer and keen observer of French culture, preoccupied during the twenties by the idea of a new, proletarian literature of modern communities. Quoted by *Contemporanul*, Nordstöm returns to this aspect of the absolute topicality of Surrealism.
38. Hubert Roland, Maud Gonne, and Stephanie Vanasten, "A propos de paradoxes, echecs et malentendus dans les transferts culturels, Interferences litteraires," *Interférences littéraires / Littéraire intertextuelles*, no. 26 (2022): 6.

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