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Aesthetic Affinities and Political Divergences Between Italian and Romanian Futurism

Emilia Dădăroaeanu

In the period 1909–1930, Romanian avant-garde literature was heavily influenced by Italian Futurism and responded to the Italian movement in a complex process of adaptation and critical reflection. This paper presents the main phases and some of the modalities, themes and products of Romanian avant-garde literature and assesses to what degree it was influenced by the aesthetic programme of Italian Futurism. The first part discusses Marinetti’s relations with the Romanian literary world between the years 1905 and 1909 and examines a number of texts, including the *Manifestația* and *Manifestul de la București*, that appeared in the Romanian national press in 1909. The second part presents a corpus of manifestos, essays, poems and reproduction of paintings that were published in Romanian literary reviews. A third section is dedicated to the birth of a Romanian avant-garde after 1924 and its ‘Integralist’ project of fusing the foreign stimuli of Constructivism, Futurism, Expressionism, Surrealism etc. into a typical Romanian melange. The last part of the paper focuses on Marinetti’s visit to Bucharest in 1930 and shows how, despite the opposite political choices made by the Futurists and the Romanian avant-garde in the course of the 1920s, he was given a celebratory welcome and how he was praised in many laudatory articles as a distinguished writer with innovative skills in the aesthetic field.

*Keywords: Romanian avant-garde, Romanian modernism, Constructivism, Surrealism, Integralism, zidetare, manifesto, Communism, Fascism, Marinetti in Bucharest (1930), Words-in-Freedom, pictopoetry*

Introduction: Current appraisals of the Romanian avant-garde

Critical studies of the Romanian avant-garde have often raised the question of what may be considered the key aspect that distinguishes it most from the other European movements. I wholeheartedly agree with those scholars who are of the opinion that the Romanian avant-garde was characterized by its tendency to synthesize the multifaceted artistic currents that emerged in continental Europe in the course of the 1910s and 1920s.¹

culture in a process he called the “paradox of simultaneity.” He discerningly asserts that
in all literature there are few writers whose work may lead them to be included in
a single literary movement. [...] This aspect seems, above all, to characterize
Romanian literature, since none of its great authors, except for Eminescu, belong
to a single cultural current. Furthermore, as a result of this unusual commixture,
currents themselves are to be defined exclusively by means of their texts and not
their authors.4

This interesting phenomenon, which finds a parallel in the Fine Arts, was
examined by Virgil Nemoianu, who, by borrowing the term telopage (literally, a collision, or figuratively, an overlap) from social science, referred to the simultaneity of different orientations, cultural movements, historical and cultural phases, within the same culture and in a relatively
short space of time.5

In the Romanian avant-garde there always existed an unresolved dichotomy between old art and new art, between “prehistory” and “history.” In 1925, the poet Mihail Cosma participated in the foundation of the journal Integral, which took over the leading role from Conspiratorul and, as the name indicated, sought to develop a cohesive programme of “integrating” the various tendencies of the European avant-garde of past and present. In an article entitled “De la Futurism la Integralism” (From Futurism to Integralism), Cosma placed the avant-gardes prior to Integralism in the category of “prehistory” and wrote: “From now on, we shall discern between Old Art and New Art. Old art means: Futurism, Expressionism, Dadaism; New art means: Integralism.”6 Futurism, in this context of the 1920s, was critically integrated into a new formula called “Integralism.” A key example of this was provided by Ilarie Vorona, the most reputable theorist of the Romanian avant-garde whose proclamation “Superrealism și Integralism” (Surrealism and Integralism) appeared in the first issue of Integral. It was Vorona’s fervent belief that the tâbula rasa created by the impact of the first revolutionary avant-gardes could serve as a foundation for his Integralist project:

The time for constructing a new Europe had arrived. Living organisms, crea
tions out of stone, wood, stage designs and aeroplanes were rising from a blood
drenched earth. Constructivism: abstract order, with a harmony based on rules

3 Alexandrescu: Paraadoxul roman, p. 54.
4 Ibid.
6 Cosma: “De la Futurism la Integralism”?, pp. 8–9.

and well-balanced lines, had been overcome. [...] Under the heading of an in
tegral century, Surrealism had vanished. Today, the time of achievements has arrived. Poetry, music, architecture, painting, dance, all walk together towards a clearly defined and elevated station. Surrealism has ignored the appeal of this century that shouts: INTEGRALISM.7

Vorona’s rigorous stance of expelling Surrealism from his Integralist projec
t was confirmed by his subsequent statements in which he showed no mercy with rebuilding Breton’s movement. Not only was Surrealism accused of “repeating, researching already undertaken by the Dadaists”; it was also con
cidered to be inferior to Dadaism because “its effort limits itself to the la
belling of previous or current achievements.” Such accusations reached their peak with the allegation of anachronism: “Surrealism does not respond to the rhythm of the times.”

In a programmatic article, “Glasuri” (Voices), issued in January 1925, the same author offered a complementary perspective on the Integralist position by rejecting all previous labels (Cubism, Futurism, Constructivism, etc.) and instead creating a new one: THE SYNTHESIS? Finally, in the interview “De vorbă cu Luigi Pirandello” (Talking with Luigi Pirandello), Mihail Cosma defined Integralism as the “scientific and objective synthesis of all efforts that have been undertaken up to that moment [...]. All this was based on Constructivistic principles and intended to reflect the intense and magnificent life of our century.8

Marinetti, Poiesis and Romanian intellectual life, 1905–1908

Futurism was the first avant-garde movement in Europe and made an im
mediate inroad into Romanian intellectual circles, mainly because Marinetti had been in contact with its key representatives through his journal Poiesis from 1905 onwards. Marinetti took a great interest in contemporary Romanian poetry and published in his review contributions from three woman poets and novelists, Anna de Noailles, Elena Văcărescu and Sma-
randa Gheorghiu, and from the leading Romanian Symbolist Alexandru Macedonski. According to a note in Poiesis, the review was distributed in Bucharest by a certain Prof. Tiu.9

7 Vorona: “Superrealism și Integralism”?, p. 4.
8 Vorona: “Glasuri”, p. 2.
10 This person may have been identical with Lorenzo Buzachi Tiu, author of the volume
Guardia al Ferro, published by the Edizioni Galliarda fascista in Florence (1938), and
Over time, Marinetti’s network of contacts in Romania widened. Of particular significance, also for the later dissemination of Futurist concepts, were the two journals Democrația and Biblioteca Modernă. The former was published in Craiova from 17 May 1908 to 12 June 1914 (originally a bimonthly, after 1 September 1908 it became, with some irregularity, a weekly). This political, economic, and literary review served the cause of “moderate democracy” pursued by Tătărușanu, head of the Conservative Party and Secretary of State of various governments during the wartime period. Poetia was mentioned for the first time in the eighth issue in the column Bibliographe with a laudatory note: “Poetry, Senate St. 2 in Milan, Italy – magnificent thanks to its elegance and fine contents.” Democrația offered to the Romanian public the complete table of contents of Poetia 4-8 (September 1908). Soon afterwards, it carried a report, “The Triumphant Success of Les Deux s’en vont, D’Annunzio reste”, and documented Marinetti’s literary conquests through comments taken from the international press and various literary luminaries. Furthermore, the periodical quoted from several poems published in Poetia, for example Adelio de Basti by Paolo Buzzi, Fragmente by Jean Richepin, Voci del mare by Ada Negri, Beethoven by Corrado Govesi (whose name was misspelt “Corrado Giovanni”), Meditazione by Gian Pietro Lucini, Tesi d’arte by Jean Cocteau, Conil by Jean Picard and from the review section Toute la fure, compiled by Paolo Buzzi.

It is interesting to observe that Democrația was not the only periodical to take note of Marinetti’s literary activities. His pamphlet Les Deux s’en vont had also been reviewed in July and August 1908 in the newspaper La Revue românite – published in French in the Romanian capital – by the critic and journalist Theodor Cornel. The review expressed the high appreciation of the refined spirit and critical-ironical acumen with which the future founder of Futurism approached the illustrious representative of Italian Decadent literature. Cornel was an art critic in the fullest sense of the word and may have been familiar with Marinetti’s French writings due to his cosmopolitan cultural tastes acquired in the Parisian literary world. Adrian Marino certainly argues that Cornel’s comments were the first to provide an in-depth exploration of a work by Marinetti in Romania.

When the editor of Poetia received the articles, he immediately reproduced them in the September issue of his literary review. We can deduce from these facts that relations between Bucharest and Milan were close and amicable and that the Romanian modernist circles were well prepared for the onslaught of Futurism in 1909.

Another indication of Marinetti’s cordial relations with Romanian intellectuals can be gleaned from some dedication copies preserved in the Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest. An autographed copy of La conquête des étoiles was given by Marinetti as a present to the Queen of Romania, Carmen Silva (or Sylva), who was also a writer. Crochêlițescu observed with amusement that Marinetti, in one of his essays written after the visit in Bucharest (1930), defined all the writers of Contemporanul, including the Queen of Romania, as Futurists. Another contact was Elena Văcărescu (Hélène Vacaresco), descendant of an ancient family of nobles and poets from Wallachia. She occupied important positions in Romanian culture and in Parisian diplomatic circles. Marinetti may have encountered the woman poet in her salon in rue Washington and persuaded her to become a collaborator of Poetia. His dedication copy of Destruction: Poèmes lyriques (1904) is also preserved in the Romanian Academy Library.

From these indications mentioned above, we can deduce that Poetia was circulating widely in the capital and provincial towns of Romania, and that Marinetti’s contacts in Bucharest were close enough for him that he would inform them early on about his intention to form a new literary school.

Democrația shared a number of collaborators with Biblioteca Modernă, one of Bucharest’s foremost literary reviews, published between January 1908 and April 1912, and also with Marinetti’s review Poetia (e.g. Camille Mendès, Camille Maucaire and Enrico Cavacchioli). There was a strong affinity between the editorial policies pursued by the two Romanian journals; they were both primarily literary and post-Symbolist in orientation. And, most importantly, its editor-in-chief, Mihăi Drăganescu, supplied both magazines with material he received from Italy, including Marinetti’s first manifesto, which was published on 20 February 1909 in Democrația and on 14 June 2009 in Biblioteca Modernă.

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12 [Anon.]: "Bibliografie", Democrația, 5 September 1908, p. 15.
The reception of the *Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism* in Romania

It has by now been firmly established that Marinetti's publication of his *Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism* in *Le Figaro* was preceded by and then went hand in hand with a concerted campaign designed to reach all significant newspapers and literary reviews in Italy, Europe and even beyond. The founder of the first historical avant-garde movement employed effective advertising strategies to spread his radical proclamation and thus acquired the nickname 'The Caffeine of Europe'. According to accounts published by his Futurist collaborators, Marinetti's address book contained the details of more than seven hundred contacts throughout the world. Palazzeschi, Cangiollo and Gomori said that they had to spend hours copying addresses onto envelopes, while the inexhaustible Marinetti dictated dedications to accompany the Futurist publications sent out into the world. It was thus that the famous manifesto also found its way to Romania.

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18 Luca: Marinetti, p. 92.
Marinetti’s manifesto was greeted by Romanian intellectuals with considerable interest but was also judged a rather extravagant proclamation. In the following months, attention to the pronouncements by Marinetti and other Futurist artists continued, not least because the Futurist Headquarters kept supplying the key figures of the Romanian cultural scene with an endless stream of publications. Numerous Futurist proclamations, concurrent with their circulation in Italy, found their way into Romanian reviews such as Târâ ncântăt (Our country) and Ondul liber (The free wave), which did not necessarily follow an avant-garde orientation but possessed a broadly modern outlook. There can be no doubt that these and other periodicals paved the way for the coming avant-garde in Romania.

In early 1909, Democrația presented in its review section a synthesis of issue 11–12 of Marinetti’s review Poesia and made detailed reference to some of its main items that had come from the pens of Gian Pietro Lucini, Paolo Buzzati, Enrico Cavacchioli, etc. In the column “Bibliographies” we find an indication of another point of contact, the literary and political review, Românul (The Romanian, also known as Românul literar), which Marinetti repeatedly quoted in Poesia. On 25 May 1910, the owner of Românul, the lawyer Nicolae Alexandru Ionescu-Caion, had written a very positive review of the play and wished to publish a translation of it. Nothing came of it, but Marinetti continued to supply his partners in Bucharest with material from his publishing house, Ediționii de Poesia, as we can see from the “Bibliographies” column in issue no. 1 of 24 May 1909 of Democrația, which contained a reference to the recently published volume by Enrico Cavacchioli, Le ranocchi turche, and mentioned the fact that it contained the text of Marinetti’s “Manifesto of Futurism.”

Concerning the reception of the Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism in Romania, it should be noted that Biblioteca Modernă’s issue of 14

20 Drăgoiucu, “O nouă școală literară”, p. 3.
21 Ibid., p. 6.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., p. 7.

27 The letter was found in the archive of documents on Futurism that is under the care of Prof. Sergiu Zoppo, in the Department of Language Studies and Comparative Literature of the University of Turin. It has been published in David (Dragonescu): Poesia, dedicateză este avansguirdii române, pp. 150–151.
28 [Anon.]: “Bibliography,” Democrația, 24 May 1909, p. 7. The manifesto was indeed reprinted on pp. 2–16 of Le ranocchi turche.
June 1909 reprinted all the material that had originally been received by *Democraţia*. Marinetti’s telegram, in which he had asked for Mihail Drăgănescu’s support for his movement, reappeared under the title ‘A new literary school.’ The translation of the ”Manifesto of Futurism” and the Romanian journalist’s response to it, as requested by the new movement’s founder, followed on the same page and was identical to the one published in *Democraţia*. At the end of the issue, we find again a note from the leader of Futurism, in which he thanks the editor Vasile Alecsandrescu, as he had done before with Drăgănescu. This time, as a sign of appreciation, he sent the editor a copy of Cavacchioli’s *Le ramacite turbiche* with a dedication by both the author and himself: “To Vasile Alecsandrescu, a tribute of an intellectual sympathy.”

The close collaboration between Biblioteca Modernă and *Democraţia* was based, so it seems, on a joint affinity towards post-Symbolist aesthetics. Biblioteca Modernă was characterized by an elegant, graphic format and counted amongst its contributors Smara (Smaranda Gheorghin) and Ana Codreanu. It printed recent novels issued in instalments, poetry, short stories, science reports, reviews of theatre and music events, as well as translations of foreign works, for example by Camille Maclaur and Enrico Cavacchioli. The aspect that best defines this periodical’s relation to Futurism, and which made it unique among the Romanian avant-garde, was the fact that it published translations of seven Futurist manifestos, often in a full and complete version. If one adds to these texts the supplementary editorial comments, also on Futurist plays and poems, one begins to understand why the Futurist Headquarters in Milan enjoyed such a cordial relationship to *Democraţia*. Biblioteca Modernă, *Romanul literar* and other Romanian magazines of the period.

The “Manifesto of Futurism” was published in Biblioteca Modernă a few months after *Democraţia*. The translator’s name was not mentioned (it also remains anonymous in the Craiova journal), as was the case with all subsequent manifestos. The text was taken from the French version and omitted the prologue that described Marinetti’s gathering with his friends under the mosque lamps in his study, his rebirthing experience in the maternal ditch, etc. It starts with the eleven paragraphs of the manifesto proper and finishes with the Futurist’s defiant challenge to the stars. The following issue of Biblioteca Modernă published from Cavacchioli’s volume *Le ramacite turbiche*.

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29 Drăgănescu: ”Vioanămel: O nouă școală literară”, Biblioteca Modernă, p.3.
30 Ibid., pp.4–5.
33 Cavacchioli: *Cazanele del Sono*, Biblioteca Modernă, p. 5.
34 [Anon.], “”Stiri”, Biblioteca Modernă, p.23.
35 [Anon.], ”Bibliografie”, Biblioteca Modernă, 5 January 1910, p. 16. As a matter of explanation: the column in *Democraţia* is using the plural ”Bibliografie”, in Biblioteca the singular ”Bibliografie”.
37 Marinetti, ”Gueria todi igiene del mondo”, in *Teoria e invenzione futurista*, p. 203. The performances in Trieste and Milan have been reconstructed in great detail in Berghaus, *Italian Futurist Theatre*, pp.86–97.
38 Orsic: ”Poeții Futuristi încep lupta în mariile teatre italiene”, p. 20.
internationale sur le livre libre et Manifeste du futurisme. Finally, in the issue of 15 February–1 March 1911 the editorial staff published a Futurist protest call, dated 29 January 1911, that concerned itself with the trial of Mafarka il futurista, accused of being pornographic and of offending against the laws of decency and decorum. The abolition that had been achieved in October 1910 was overturned in January 1911 in the court of appeals. The verdict of a two-month prison sentence evoked vehement protests amongst the audience, which the Romanian editorial staff was requested to join:

What do you think about this sentence against the poet Marinetti, praised and glorified by the most important French writers and condemned by the Italian justice as a common pornographer? Please reply in the papers and reviews at your disposal or on the back of this page.61

The document was signed by thirteen co-authors including Boccioni, Carrà, Russolo, Balla, Severini and Balla Pratella. In Biblioteca Modernă’s reply, Marinetti was considered as a great creative spirit who was being sacrificed in the manner of another great creative spirit, Jesus Christ:

Our reply... We are not at all surprised by the sentence of the Court of Appeals: on the contrary, we find it quite natural. [...] Twenty centuries ago, that ingenuous man called Jesus Christ gave birth to the most sublime of all religions, in those times of absolute ignorance. How was he compensated by his contemporaries!... In the end he encountered an Emperor that crucified him!... Marinetti found a contemporary Pilate in the President of the Milan Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal did its duty as representative of the past, against which you are fighting.

Violeşcu Alexandrescu.62

In 1912, the “Bibliography” column of Biblioteca Modernă dedicated a long and enthusiastic recommendation to the second series of Noua Revistă Românilă (The New Romanian Review), which had always welcomed debates on modern art and had recently praised Futurism for its “spiritually cleansing function”.63 Other papers singled out for praise were Viteasa Nenă (The New Life), the first review that had published critical reports on Futurism in Romania,64 and Romuri (Branche), also from Craiova, whose editorial office received Poetisa printed in 1909 a translation of the Foundation and

45 Manifesto of Futurism. Soon after, in issue 3–4 (March–April 1912), the “Bibliography” column of Biblioteca, inspired perhaps by an almost similar title of an informative section in the review Democrația, brought to the attention of its readers the volume La Bataille de Tripoli, vécue et chantée par F. T. Marinetti,65 a panegyric on the Libyan war (1911–1912) that had originally appeared in installments in the Parisian daily, L’Intransigeant.

A copy of La Bataille de Tripoli is still available at the Romanian Academy Library in Bucharest66 as well as Destruction: Poèmes lyriques (Vanier & Messein, 1904), the second edition of La conquête des eaux (Sanson, 1904), and the third by the same publisher of 1909, and the first edition of Poupées électricques (Sanson, 1909). Finally, the library possesses Les Mots en liberté futuristes (1919), a volume that documents Marinetti’s mature experimentation with visual poetry.67 The Central Library of Bucharest should be added to the list here as it possesses an autographed copy of Le Roi Bombance, sent to the poet Alexandru Macedonski. The fact that Marinetti was offering these gifts to his Romanian acquaintances shows that he entertained regular contacts with them due to their shared language: French. And as the many references to Futurism in the periodicals mentioned above demonstrate, there existed a general curiosity about this extravagant artistic school, which in subsequent years encouraged and stimulated innovative tendencies in Romanian culture.

Responses to Futurism in Romanian avant-garde reviews

(1924–1931)

In order to gain a clear picture of the collaboration between the eastern and western avant-gardes, as well as of the cultural exchanges that took place between the modernist circles of Eastern Europe, it is worth considering the ties that connected the Romanian avant-garde of the 1920s to contemporaneous movements in Central Europe. As we shall see, this will offer some interesting insights into the role played by Futurism in Central Eastern Europe, that is, in the so-called “periphery” of the continental avant-garde.68

The 1920s experienced a lively exchange of avant-garde periodicals between Italy and Romania and of reports on the activities of the various movements active in the period. The following journals sent each other articles of their own major representatives and theorists, irrespective of whether they pursued a Constructivist, Futurist, Dadaist or Expressionist orientation. *Contemporanul* received *Noi*, edited by Enrico Prampolini, which in turn became the most quoted Futurist review of the time. Less frequent were references to Bragaglia’s *Cronache d’attualità and Il Futurismo / Le Futurisme*, edited by Marinetti in an Italian and French version. Other reviews contained advertisements for *Der Sturm* (Berlin), *De Stijl* (Leiden), *Les Feuilles Libre, Cahiers d’Arts, Discontiniuati, L’Esprit Nouveau, La Vie des lettres et des arts* (all published in Paris), *Anthologie (Lège)*, *Blake and Zerostro*, *Kronos* and *Der Querschnitt* (Berlin), *Documenta* (Budapest), *Zeit* (Zagreb and Belgrade), *Dikt, Starba* and *Vesakom* (Prague), *Semic dunei* (Moscow), *Le Disque vert* and *7 Ars* (Brussels).

*Contemporanul* did not only publish numerous Futurist texts (passages of manifestos, essays, short dramas, prose and poetry, editorial notes related to the activity of the Italian current), but also received and re-proposed to its readers short letters from the direction of the Futurist movement. *Integral* dedicated a special issue to Futurism in 1927, in which another telegram by Marinetti was printed. This time it was addressed to Mihail Cosma, who was then living in Pavia, having been charged with the role of acting as intermediary between the two avant-garde circles.50 Romanian-Italian epistolary relations were intense not only during the launching period of the movement and the time of its first manifestos but also between 1930 and 1931. Following Marinetti’s visit to Bucharest in May 1930, *Contemporanul* dedicated another special triple number 96–98 to Futurism. It contained many contributions by the Futurist writers and painters, amongst them a telegram of the Italian leader to the director of the paper, Ion Vinea.51

With such a wealth of Futurist material reaching the periodical press of Romania, it is not astonishing that Futurism influences can be traced in the works of several leading Romanian writers, although on the whole – and this needs to be reiterated here – they also subscribed to other modernist aesthetics. A typically Romanian mixture of avant-garde features taken from Constructivism and Expressionism can be seen in the works of Ion Vinea and Barbu Funoianu (known as Benjamin Fondane in France), of Constructivism, Futurism and Dadaism in Stephan Roll, Mihail Cosma and Jacques G. Costin, and of Futurism and Surrealism in Ilarie Voronca. The “Integralist” position with a Futurist, modernist aesthetic was particularly strong in the literary works of Ilarie Voronca and Stephan Roll. Their lyrical, kaleidoscopic reportages from the Big Cities captured the fever of a hectic life in a modern metropolis. They reflected the encounter with modernity, the enchantment of modern civilization and its accelerated rhythm, the excitement of the “sportman-post” or the “engineer-post,” and translated these experiences into verse form. The exuberance of Voronca’s exploitative, concrete and transitive imagery emerges from some of this writer’s volumes.

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50 Marinetti’s telegram to Mihail Cosma was published on the title page of the special issue of April 1927.
51 Marinetti’s letter addressed to Ion Vinea was published by *Contemporanul* in the special issue of January 1927, p.2; reprinted by Elena Zaharia Filipescu in *Ion Vinea*, pp. 284–285.
such as Colombo (1927), Ullie (1928) and from the poems of Invitatie la bal (Invitation to the Ball), issued in 1931 by the publishing house Unu. It included poetic texts that had been written between 1924 and 1925, when the author was collaborating with Contemporanul, Punct and Integral.32 Stephan Roll’s Futurist leanings transpire in his Poeme în aer liber (Poems in the Open Air), especially those concerned with playful, sportive or acrobatic performances in which the whole universe participates, plant and animal kingdoms included.53

In the Romaninan avant-garde, the principle of synthesis did not only become apparent in the acculturation of various currents of European modernism, but also in the emergence of novel literary genres, for example pictopoetry. Ilarie Voronca and the painter Victor Brauner launched this fusion of painting and literature in their review 75HP (single issue of October 1924). A comparative analysis of pictopoems and Futurist synoptic tables reveals that the two inventions had much in common, both on a thematic and a formal level.54 Pictopoetry and Words-in-Freedom were inspired by the same themes: the myth of machine, the power of the media and advertising, the fascination with the continuing of art and life, and so on. The extremely elaborate game of typographic formulations and the geometrical use of images prompt in the viewer complementary sensations of dynamic and multi-directional simultaneity. The structure of the texts and the methods of organizing the material on the surface of the page require a contextual, simultaneous and accumulative reading of the textual zones and images. The pictopoems fulfill their authors’ multi-directional intentions when they are being read like puzzles or optical toys with constantly changing shapes. Thus, both Futurist synoptic tables and pictopoetry transcend the boundaries of poetry and move towards a new art that merges painting, sound art and performance.

Political divergences between Italian and Romanian Futurism

Given those links between Futurism and the Romanian avant-garde, it is not astonishing that Marinetti planned to visit Bucharest as early as 1924. However, it was only in May 1930 that the event could actually take place. But by then, the situation had markedly changed in Bucharest and Marinetti’s visit was thus only a qualified success. The artistic community in Romania was fully aware that Marinetti had recently been appointed to the Royal Italian Academy, a fact that was widely ridiculed and not just in Romania. Furthermore, the intellectual elite in Bucharest had, also politically, come under the influence of Left-wing movements such as Constructivism and Surrealism. Consequently, they rejected Marinetti’s philo-Fascist leanings. Tăzara, Punduianu, Voronca, Brauner, Sernet and Luca supported Breton’s philo-Communist Surrealism. Also the editors of unu – Roll, Voronca, Brauner and Cosma – adopted a political line that made them progressively abandon their aesthetic positions in favour of a more pronounced political commitment.

Breton’s second manifesto of 192955 was widely diffused in Bucharest’s editorial offices of unu and Alfa, Surrealism at that time aimed at a transgression of the boundaries of art into the political domain.56 The Romanian intellectuals, like their French counterparts, propagated an absolute freedom of the spirit and the need for revolutionary change on an epochal scale. For a while, the inherent contradictions between artistic freedom and the Marxist concept of a “dictatorship of the proletariat” did not seem to register with many of them. However, Breton’s manifesto of 1929 created a schism within Bucharest intellectual circles. The notes in Săpârii’s diary indicate that he had extensive knowledge of the developments in Paris and that there were heated debates among the collaborators of unu57 as to the line they should adopt in their periodical with regard to Left-wing politics and, at the same time, avoiding the risk of having it closed down by the anti-Communist government. Voronca defended a purely artistic literary praxis, while Stephan Roll, a member of the PCDR since 1921, argued in favour of transforming their periodical into an ideological and propagandistic instrument of the Party. This, eventually, led to an internal crisis of the group and to the withdrawal of Brauner, Voronca and Cosma from unu.

In the preface “Zece note despre avantgardă” (Ten Notes on the Avant-garde) in the collection of historical documents, Avangarda română în arhivele Siguranței (The Romanian Avant-garde in the Archives of the Siguranța), Stelian Tănase points out that from the writers who caught the attention of the Siguranța in the early 1930s,58 several gradually moved towards a stronger

55 Breton: Second Manifeste du surrealisme, pp.67–139.
57 Pant: Naștere în 62, pp.300–301.
58 Tănase, ed.: Avangarda română în arhivele Siguranței, pp.32–33. Siguranța was the name of a Department of State Security that provided official and unofficial information services during the period between the two World Wars. In Communist times (1948–89), it became the Securitate.
social and political commitment, testified by their journalistic activities in Left-wing papers such as Cuvantul liber (The Free Word), Diminețea (The Morning), Adevărul (The Truth), and Viața z Nicolita (Union Life).

I feel inclined to believe that in 1930 Marinetti was only partially informed about the social commitment of his colleagues in Bucharest. Those who had opted for an exclusively artistic path deplored the Futurist rapprochement with Fascism after 1923, who those in favour of a political engagement on the Left rejected his line of action for other reasons. The result, however, was the same. Consequently, Marinetti did not find a particularly warm reception amongst the leading (Leftist) intellectuals of Bucharest. Nonetheless, the arrival of the Futurist leader in Bucharest was covered in journals with a modern outlook, such as Contemporanul and Facta, who dedicated special issues to Futurism, printed peremptory comments and offered extensive comparisons between the Futurist avant-garde and the achievement of the Romanian modernist movements. Vinca, Vorona and other intellectuals celebrated Marinetti in laudatory articles and poems and praised him as an homo europaeus with innovative, progressive skills in the aesthetic field. The articles covered all artistic domains in which the rebellious spirit of Futurism had played a significant role—literature, fine arts, theatre etc.—thus also covering the fields in which the Romanian avant-garde had been particularly active. Although the Unionlyric critics who censured and criticized the Italian visitor, this did not on the whole detract from the overall celebratory mood. The Leftist artists of the Romanian avant-garde rejected Fascist ideology and accepted only the aesthetic aspects and the anti-bourgeois spirit of Futurism, while the Right-wing intellectuals of the 1930s welcomed the movement’s affinities with the Fascist government. A typical exam-

63 There were several reports of Futurist manifestos, essays and poems, such as “Manifestul Futurismului”, [Anon.]: “Pictura și sculptura futuristă”, [Anon.]: “Filosofia și literatură futuristă”, Facta, p. 4; Marinetti: “Température du corps d’un nageur (Poésie thermométrique – Met en liberté”, Buzzi: “Simulacri fisici dell’uomo futuristico a diminnuata privigenito”, trans. into Romanian by E. Costea, Ibid., p. 5; and paintings by Depen: Stereogra
dia, by Marchi: Arhitectura futuristă and by Prunost: Cerătura, Ibid.
64 [Anon.]: Note in the column “Excert”, Facta, p. 3.

Example of the latter trend was Emil Jünger-Dinu, popularizer of Futurism in Contemporanul (in the last phase of its publications, eclectic and inclined towards Right-wing ideologies) and author of the enthusiastic “OWelcome to Marinetti” that appeared in Facta. It was not forzaful that Marinetti was celebrated mainly by the periodicals Contemporanul and Facta, both directed by Vinca, who tended to align himself with Right-wing intellectuals. Furthermore, mention should be made of Mircea Eliade, later to become a world-famous scholar of comparative religion, who in 1935 was an admirer of the Futurist movement. Eliade treated Futurism, to which he had been introduced by Giovanni Papiini, in a very personal manner that was largely related to his own interest in nonconformist behaviour, Nietzschean vitalism, the mythology of youth, battle and war, body culture and sport, etc.

The arrival of the Futurist leader in Bucharest was celebrated by the Association of Romanians writers with a banquet, where Jacques G. Costin made an inaugural address in accordance with diplomatic rules: “On behalf of all Romanian modern artists—painters, sculptors, writers, musi-
cians, elated by the indescribable joy of having among them the leader of international Futurism—we send our heartfelt greetings of admiration to Marinetti, the prophet and creative genius of modern art.”

65 Costin, a fervent admirer of Futurism, transmitted his deeply felt desire that the honoured guest would keep the flame of his creative genius burning, and offered a toast to the health of “the most famous creator and poet of our age of anxiety.”

Also Facta published a description of the banquet held in Marinetti’s honour on 18 May 1930 in the modernist environment of the Kisseloff sports complex, designed by Marcel Janczo.

The cultural organiser Marinetti was celebrated last night in the pleasant, modern and gracious ambience of the Kisseloff Baths by the Romanian modernists. In a friendly and affectionate atmosphere, speeches were given by Ion Vinca, Marcel Janczo, Ilarie Vorona, Valeriu Marcu and Corneliu Mihăilescu. Jacques G. Costin, Ilarie Vorona, Ion Mihăilescu, Ion Vorona, (Stephan) Roll recited poetry and modern prose, etc. The distinguished guest Marinetti responded with great joy and elation, communicated his enthusiasm for Romanian art and expressed his hope for a consolidation of the artistic relationships between the two countries.

67 Ibid.
68 [Anon.]: “Banchetul lui Marinetti”, p. 5.
Voronca, one of the participants of this banquet, wrote a literary portrait in the periodical Rampa that used a laudatory rhetoric that borrowed its emphatic style from Futurist manifestos. The celebratory article once again confirmed Voronca’s interest in the Italian movement, something that had characterized the poet’s “Constructivist-Integralist” activity from his literary debut to his collaboration with unu. Although by 1930 Voronca’s iconoclasm had vanished, his appreciation of Futurism’s rebellious spirit had remained intact. Marinetti was for him still “a name like a slingbag breaking all the windows of mediocrity” and a physician who has restored health to Italian poetry by “operating with stellar violence and sensitivity on all forms of art, curing them from the appendix of the clair de lune, the anarchy of the lexicon and of all obsolete sentimentalism.”90 The inventor of piccolo poesia knew all these ailments, as probably other Romanians writers did, and concluded that in Marinetti they were honouring an all-round artist.

Finally, Marinetti’s visit did not only attract the attention of the Romanian press, but was also commented upon in Italy. On 20 May 1930, while the Futurist leader was still in Romania, Impero d’Italia printed an anonymous article, “Marinetti inaugura a Budapest [sic] una grande mostra futurista rumena”, which, among other interesting details, reported that Marinetti made no less than twenty speeches at various banquets, parties and receptions organized in his honour and held, with increasingly success, a series of lectures that spread knowledge of Italian art in Romania.91

Summary

The reception of Futurism in Romania began as early as 1909 when, on 20 February 1909 — i.e. on the same day as Le Figaro — the Craiova newspaper Democrația printed the Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism and initiated a series of further manifestos and critical commentaries in the Romanian national press. Despite this early acquaintance with the Italian avant-garde, there was a considerable lapse of time before an experimental Romanian modernism came into being. A distinctly Romanian avant-garde movement was established only after 1924, mainly through the good offices of Contemporanul and Integral, known for their connections to leading European avant-garde journals such as Nai (Rome), Der Sturm (Berlin), De Stijl...

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