

THE DYNAMIC OF THE AVANT-GARDE GROUP AROUND *UNU* LITERARY MAGAZINE

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ABSTRACT. *The Dynamic of the Avant-garde Group around Unu Literary Magazine.* Going through the history of *unu* literary magazine, the article describes the dynamic relationship of its group members taking into account their artistic and cultural-political stance. The evolution of the group towards a radical approach and its “ideology” is grasped on taking on two study cases: the *Contimporanul–unu* debate and the relationship carried among the group’s members. The purpose of the study is to point to how the group’s “ideology” had an impact on its progress and dynamic constitution. Moreover, finally, the study indicates how the internal and exterior pressure led to the magazine’s dissolution.

Keywords: *Romanian avant-garde, unu, Contimporanul, intellectual history*

Introduction

The purpose of the paper is to describe the internal dynamic of *unu* literary magazine: one of the most influent magazines of the Romanian avant-garde from the 1930’s. We start from the first moment when the group turns towards a more radical approach, in 1930, asserting its specificity on the Romanian cultural scene (the *Contimporanul–unu* debate) and go further into describing how the radicalization of the group’s ideas nurture a group ideology, changing the group dynamics and the magazine’s content and subject matters (1930-1932). We will argue that the internal disagreement and the external pressure are those who, in the end, lead to the disappearance of the magazine. Documents that will serve our inquiry are the articles released in *unu* (1930-1932), the group’s members’ correspondence and the documents found in the Secret Police’s archives.

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Unu: literary “institution” of the Romanian avant-garde

Unu literary magazine came on the Romanian avant-garde scene in 1928, bringing together some of its most important exponents. The magazine appears under the direction of the poet Sașa Pană. A military doctor by profession, Pană will support by his own financial means the magazine during all of its years of existence. Its main collaborators were former contributors of *Contimporanul* (1922-1932), the most long-lived avant-garde magazine, and for a good part editors of the defunct *Integral* (1925-1928). Ilarie Voronca and Victor Brauner were already well known for their contribution to the single issue of *75 H.P.* and as the inventors of the so-called “picto-poezia”. Gheorghe Dinu alias Stephan Roll, an ambitious poet and columnist, friend of the former two was part of the *unu* group from the beginning as well. The young poet Geo Bogza was acquainted to the group through Gheorghe Dinu. Ion Călugăru, prose and theatre writer, former collaborator at *Integral* and redaction colleague with the above mentioned came on board as well. Other contributors and friends include M. H. Maxy, painter and theoretician of the avant-garde movement, leading figure of the *Integral* magazine, B. Fondane (poet), Mihail Cosma alias Claude Sernet, Moldov (poet), A. Zarembo (poet), Marcel Iancu (architect, theorist), Dan Faur (poet), etc.

Lasting for almost five years at a time when the literary magazines often had an ephemeral existence, *Unu* makes for a good case study of the Romanian avant-garde and its evolution. Constantly up to date with the trends of the European avant-garde, *unu* announces its novelties and directions, from the new magazine releases to the new art manifestoes. Moreover, *unu* keeps a close connection with the French surrealist movement in particular, noting their every step and sometimes mimicking its stances.

Jockeying for position unu’s self-imposed role on the cultural scene

Unu group constantly asserted its specificity on the Romanian cultural scene, reacting not only to the mainstream but also to the other avant-garde groups. Behind this continuous self-affirmation stood the effort of maintaining the creed and image of the *avant-garde*, seen as an artistic movement that was arguably to shape the way out of the horrors of the century and bring about a new and better society.

In doing so, *unu* was bolstering their group individuality while jockeying for position on a dynamic cultural scene, which understandably led to shifts in their own “ideology” as well. At first, there is the clear delineation set by *unu* from

Contimporanul. As we shall see, in 1930 *Unu* reacts to *Contimporanul*'s program that seemed to be unfit for the title of avant-garde magazine, having settled up for a mainstream evolution, and declares itself the defender of the new avant-garde art principles. At this point, its denunciations come from an aesthetic or rather cultural-political standpoint. In 1931-1932, however, *unu* inches closer to a more radical approach. Fuelled by similar evolutions in France and maybe motivated by a need to give new dimensions to the Romanian avant-garde project, towards the end of 1931, different political ideas creep into the magazine's articles and poems. Speaking about the "modernist movement" in Romania M. H. Maxy describes *unu*'s position as being of a more contemplative than activist complexion and insists that such a stance must be overcome.¹ However, the reluctance of some of the members and the pressure exerted by the law enforcement agencies made the task difficult and, finally, led to the dissolution of the group and the closedown of the magazine at the end of 1932.

Unu vs. Contimporanul

Though it is not the first registered attack *unu* directed towards *Contimporanul* and its contradictory content, the confrontation between *Contimporanul* and *unu* brings to the fore the divergent paths followed by the two avant-garde magazines.

The trigger of the attack is Marinetti's visit in 1930. The Romanian-Italian Cultural Association invited Marinetti to hold three conferences in Bucharest. The leaders and the rank and file of *Contimporanul* attend the conference and would not lose the occasion to rub their shoulders with the great figure of the Italian sister movement. *Contimporanul* obtained the rights to publish the poem wrote by Marinetti during his visit to Moreni, on the same occasion, and proudly announced the appearance of the poem called "The Fire of the Moreni Derricks", sneering at the "lowely" envious critics:

„**F.T. Marinetti** which was exquisitely welcomed at Bucharest at the Romanian Academy, at *Contimporanul*, at the Intellectual Union and to S.S.R. by the »Balkan bootlickers« (as the poet from »**Gândirea**« said) has set up [sic!] the poem »The Fire of the Moreni Derricks«, which will appear in the next issue of »*Contimporanul*«.”²

¹ M. H. Maxy, "Contribuțiuni sumare la cunoașterea mișcării moderne de la noi" ["Small contributions towards the understanding of our modern movement]. *unu*, Year IV, No. 33, February 1931.

² R. D., "Note, cărți & reviste" ["Notes, books & magazines"], *Contimporanul*, Year IX, No. 93-94-95, 1930.

Marinetti's ideological proximity to fascism was surely known to *Contimporanul*. As was his newly acquired status as member of the Italian Academy. Neither was all this strange to *unu*. They criticized *Contimporanul* for giving in to the obsession of "promoting the Romanian art abroad with the price of fostering ex-avant-garde fascist artists, meanwhile academically institutionalized, such as Marinetti"³ and for being interested only in the symbolic capital that comes with it. Precisely the association with an artist that had relinquished his status as avant-garde artist once taken the academic profession was the target of *unu*'s critique.

Unu's reaction in the sharp diatribe called "Coliva lui Moș Vinea" ("Moș Vinea's funeral cake"), signed by the editorial board, puts the matter in black and white:

„We witnessed with a barely whispered sadness to the pitiful bogging down of »*Contimporanul*«, and to the embarrassing decrepitude of its collection from the past five years [...] To make our position clearer, [...] and to dissipate all confusion between us and Ms. Vinea's magazine, we want to underline the following contradictions of »*Contimporanul*« [...] The contrast between the drawing set on the first page of this magazine and the attacks on its last page against any new [art] demonstration, the false pretence of harbouring a daring and innovative spirit, entirely contrarious to its summary and collaborators, the praises brought to »*Adevărul Literar*« and the white hems of Otilia Cazimir, whose verses signed Emil Rigler-Dinu, Camil Petrescu, Paul Papădopol often reproduce; and especially its ability to arrogate only the goods and the parade of some artistic stances (we haven't forgotten Marinetti's visit) which imply, first and foremost, sacrifice and solitude. Still, we cannot cotton on how is it possible to associate – within the pages of a magazine which once claimed a new vision – Ms. Marcel Ianu, former Zürich revolutionary, to Princess Marthe Bibescu.”⁴

Surely, *Contimporanul*'s editorial policy of publishing without any discrimination, from manifestoes against the cultural establishment to articles and poems by institutionalized members, does not escape the eye of *unu*.

Moreover, the collaboration with Princess Marthe Bibescu, an exponent of the bourgeoisie, which *Contimporanul* additionally named "ambassador", was accounted as "compromise with the bourgeoisie"⁵ – a stance that contravenes the avant-gardes demeanour. The above-mentioned critique refers to an article that

³ Paul Cernat, *Avangarda românească și complexul periferiei*, Ed. Cartea Românească, București, 2007, pp. 173–174.

⁴ UNU, "Coliva lui Moș Vinea" ["Moș Vinea's Funeral Cake"], *unu*, Year III, No. 29, September 1930.

⁵ Paul Cernat, *op. cit.*, pp. 241–243; Stelian Tănase, *Avangarda românească în arhivele Siguranței*, Ed. Polirom, 2008, p. 32.

Princess Bibescu had published in *Contimporanul* titled "Iuliu Maniu"⁶. Hereunder, Iuliu Maniu is portrayed as martyr who "suffered from an Idea", the idea of national unity and who paid his price for it. Obviously, though there is no reference to be found in the avant-garde's article, the nationalism exposed in Princess Bibescu's column must have not passed unnoticed.

Furthermore, there is also the supposition that *unu*'s critique towards *Contimporanul* had political reasoning. Paul Cernat claims that what is being criticized in the complacency towards bourgeoisie has something to do, as well, with its "fascist connotation",⁷ that *unu* assign. On the same note, Stelian Tănase argues that *Contimporanul*

„publishes a text by Marthe Bibescu, which stirs up the reply of those around *unu*. *Unu* rejects Marinetti's literature from an aesthetic point of view, but also from a political one (those around *unu* were leftists, and the Italian poet was fascist)".⁸

However, at this stage, there seems to be a lack of arguments to underpin a direct connection between the groups' attitude towards *Contimporanul* and a denunciation of fascism, bearing in mind only its similes with the surrealist group. We found no concrete evidence in *unu*'s articles that would point to a straightforward accusation of fascism directed towards *Contimporanul*.

We can only assume that Stelian Tănase's assumption is related to the fact that he considers that *unu* was mimicking the gestures of disobedience and the interactions identified among the surrealist groups around Breton. For instance, the Romanian historian argues that "Moș Vinea's funeral cake" is being written in the same key as "Le Cadavre" – a brochure released on January 15th 1930 as a reaction to the *Second surrealist Manifesto* (1929) formulated by the surrealist members that were set apart from the group around Breton, presumably because they did not want to surrender the movement into the hands of political agitators. Indeed, the Romanian avant-garde was well aware of the schism marking the Parisian surrealist movement, delivering news regarding its status. For that matter, the announcement of the appearance of the surrealist brochure is signalled in the Issue No. 23, on March 1930:

"**LE CADAVRE** is the name of the brochure Robert Desnos, Ribemont-Dessaignes, André Masson, Georges Limbour, Dida de Mayo, Antonio Artaud, Seiris, Prevert, Vitrac and others had printed following their taking apart from the »Revolution Surréaliste« group".⁹

⁶ Marthe Bibescu, "Iuliu Maniu", *Contimporanul*, Issue No. 93-94-95, 1930.

⁷ Paul Cernat, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

⁸ Stelian Tănase, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁹ "Vestiar", *unu*, Year III, No. 23, March 1930.

The note signals that at this point *unu* embraces the position of the artists cast away by Breton. *Unu* seems to share its point of principle that art must be separated from any utility. That means, art should not adopt political ideas, but operate on a spiritual level. A pure language was to be the means of liberating man and society from all prejudice (ethnic, sexual or by other nature) and from its present rational imprisonment. Behind the disapproval of *Contimporanul*, one can read not only the disgust for the bourgeois and cultural establishment and its arrivistes, but also the deeper creed that art should not have any finality:

„It should be known once and for all: CONTIMPORANUL has nothing in common with our enthusiasm and youth, with the art and spirit which we represent here, at this hour. And we have one more thing to add: even if there was no question of the doubtful flagrant stance of Contimporanul, the art movement which they want to stand for, »constructivism«, where they settled since its appearance, it is entirely alien to »Unu's« current views, that demand a conduct torn apart from reality, totally out of the constructivist utilitarianism”¹⁰.

We can conclude, for now, that *unu* was poised on stressing out its position, status, and individuality as opposing that of the other cultural institutions (from mainstream magazines to the national editing houses) stating their aesthetic principles and avant-garde policies. Their creed was to further shape their group “ideology” and the content of the magazine.

The relation between the members of *unu* circle

Group cohesion and the craving for more

At the first sight, the main concern of the group was to foster their mutual artistic friendships and to bolster their position as a group against the establishment, much in the vein of the first, “anarchic” avant-garde. For the most part, the contributors were writing literary pieces, remembering their encounters, their experiences and creeds, dedicating poems and prose to one another, announcing new book appearances and issuing favourable reviews of the recently released books of their colleagues. For instance, B. Fundoianu dedicates a poem called “Priveliști” (“Sights”) to Ilarie Voronca, Raul Iulian writes “Lui Ilarie Voronca” (“To Ilarie Voronca”);¹¹ Stephan Roll imagines the meeting between “Margitte și Victor”¹² (“Margitte and Victor”), Sașa

¹⁰ UNU, “Coliva lui Moș Vinea”, *unu*, Year III, No. 29, September 1930.

¹¹ *Unu*, Year III, No. 22, February 1930.

¹² Victor Brauner and his wife Margitt Kosch.

Pana dedicates her a poem "Margitt, ascultă" ("Margitt, listen"), Ilarie Voronca recalls his meeting with "GEO BOGZA", an encounter mediated by Roll;¹³ etc. The same issue (No. 23, March 1930), announces the upcoming book releases at Unu publishing house: *Zodiac (Zodiac)* and *A doua lumină (The second Light)* by Ilarie Voronca; *Moartea vie a Eleonorei (The Living Death of Eleonora)*, *Steaua inimii (The Star of the Heart)* and *Scurt Circuit (Short-circuit)* by Stephan Roll; *Pictopoiezii* by Ilarie Voronca and Victor Brauner; *Diagrame (Diagrams)* by Sașa Pană, and the list goes on.

By the end of 1930, the tensions that were building up in the back stage, as we shall see in a moment, still don't seem to find space in the pages of the magazine: Ilarie Voronca nostalgically remembers his encounter with Victor Brauner, whom he highly praises; Moldov dedicates a poem to Geo Bogza ("Serpentina" / "Serpentine winding"), Gheorghe Dinu writes a piece of prose ("Statuia din aier" / "The Statue of Air") dedicated to Edy (Ilie Voronca); *Plante și Animale (Plants and Animals)*, *Brățara Noptilor (The Night's Bracelet)* and *Calea Laptelui (The Milkway)* by Ilarie Voronca receives favourable critique (in "Pulsul recenziei" / "The Pulse of the Review").¹⁴ Still, by 1931, in "Chronicle on a Confeta" Stephan Roll remembers his meeting with Edy and Nesty (Mihail Cosma alias Claude Sernet) in "the chambers of Poldy, which remains still the same delicious friend".¹⁵

But there is more than meets the eye. As in any given group that perceives itself as such, there is a distribution of roles and many stories of friendship, loyalty, ambition and betrayal that articulate the group's dynamics. The tensions between the group members of *unu* stem from the need to keep their program on the role and improving their status on the avant-garde scene. Stephan Roll and Victor Brauner were the hardliners. They push for ideological discipline and they were also the self-entitled trendsetters, the ones that strive to set the course for *unu* and for the "true" Romanian avant-garde movement. Sașa Pană, the editor in chief and mecena, tries to accommodate the different opinions within the group. However tolerant, he insists on a common position of the group that is to be reflected in the magazines pages, yet shows reluctance to adopt a "radical political" stance. He is left nursing a hornet's nest.

In 1930, Sașa Pană writes two letters to Geo Bogza, the young avant-garde poet and collaborator at the magazine, recounting the group's meetings at Ilarie Voronca. Their content summarizes the groups' present state and the problematic relationship between the members in wake of significant shifts of course:

¹³ *Unu*, Year III, No. 23, March 1930.

¹⁴ *Unu*, Year III, No. 21, January 1930.

¹⁵ *Unu*, Year IV, No. 36, June 1931.

„The last events that completed the Atlantis from secolul,¹⁶ though they have no strength any more to affect me, immunized by the bruises from the last three months; I feel the *refrigerate* [condition], getting more and more intensified, between Nesty [Mihail Cosma alias Claude Sernet] and Edy [Ilarie Voronca] and between Nesty and myself. At the last visit made to Edy, Ny Claude Sernet dodged even a »good day«.”¹⁷

And:

„the body of all crossed people who gave their hands at the arrival and departure, and intermezzo they're kind of like this:

Voronca, Sașa Pană ≠ Roll

Sașa Pană ≠ Claude Sernet

M. H. Maxy, Coana Mela [the wife of M. H. Maxy] ≠ Roll

Poldi Mieznik, Ronca [the sister of Victor Brauner] ≠ M. H. Maxy, Coana Mela”¹⁸

The point of the matter seems to be the fact that Stephan Roll and Victor Brauner (probably in incongruent agreement with Maxy) insist on taking a left its position. Sașa Pană agrees on principle but calls for caution and cannot help notice that the shift may endanger some of its members and even the magazine. Pană himself, as an army doctor, fears losing his job and livelihood, and others, too, seems to find it hard to conjoin their interests with that of the group, as, for instance, Ilarie Voronca, who “enjoys his bath in tepid waters”.¹⁹

The Secret Police

There is something to say, indeed, about the obvert censorship exerted in the young Romanian democracy of the interwar period and its role in the evolution of the avant-garde. The state's Secret Police practically surveyed all publications. Its purpose was to spot any danger to the “national unity” and to counteract those believed to plan to overthrow the social order. Its preoccupation was to survey and take hold on clandestine activities and suspicious sponsorship. One of its main targets was the “communists”, even more so after the party was banned in 1924.

¹⁶ A gathering place of the avant-garde from Bucharest, also known by the name “Lăptăria lui Enache” (“Enache's Dairy”), owned by Enache Dinu, the father of Gheorghe Dinu, alias Stephan Roll, one of *unu's* collaborators.

¹⁷ Sașa Pană to Geo Bogza, “XLV, București 18. XI. 930”, in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *Epistolar avangardist*, Ed. Tracus Arte, București, 2012, p. 95.

¹⁸ Sașa Pană to Geo Bogza, “XLVI, 24. XI. 930”, in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 95–96.

¹⁹ Sașa Pană, *Născut în '02*, Ed. Minerva, București, 1973, pp. 300–301; p. 305.

Numerous magazines were being withdrawn from the shelves if its collaborators were suspected of having communist partisanship or if the articles contained words or ideas that sent to Marxist or revolutionary theories, or simply because they were supposedly financed by states or entities assumed to propagate the “red doctrine” – such as France Legation, URSS, and Czechoslovakia.²⁰

Though its attention was directed towards any sign of menace to the Romanian state, there are various documents that point to the fact that the surveillance went further than that. That is, the Secret Police maintained a close interaction with the Police, the Courts and other administrations, requesting registered documents and information, more, asking for public institutions’ supervision and investigation when an article or text were considered to have pornographic content, requesting that the authors should be sent into court by the accusation of crime against social morality – yet, this was beyond its attributes. That transformed the Secret Police in a mores’ police. Avant-garde artists and publication, not to mention “communist” artists were prime targets. Not unexpectedly, *unu* magazine and group were under the eye of the Secret Police. Already on the 4th of January 1930 Secret’s Police files registers that

„In its own collaborators belief it is a literary periodical pertaining to the new art. Now [...] either the new art is too profound for our discernment, or the content of this magazine is almost entirely incoherent, with explicit pornographic tendencies. [...] In our humble opinion this magazine, not promoting the Romanian culture in the slightest, spoils the taste of our youngsters and is utterly intolerable due to its evident pornographic [content] and other [delicts].”²¹

A copy of the magazine is sent to the Council of Ministers’ President (General Directorate for the Press) on January 16th 1930.²² On December the 12th 1930 is opened a surveillance file of the magazine recommending that any prior pornographic reference in the pages of the publication should be retrospectively documented and referred to the Court.²³

Geo Bogza’s trial

We came across the information in the Secret Police’s documents that the January issue of the magazine (no. 32) was seized on grounds of public morality infringement.²⁴ In their own explanation of the events that appeared in the next

²⁰ Stelian Tănase, *op. cit.*, pp. 34–36.

²¹ Stelian Tănase, *op. cit.*, pp. 227–228.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 229–230.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 231–232.

issue, the culprits were a poem and an article by Geo Bogza, which were considered to have pornographic content. The editorial board confronted the accusers, mockingly denouncing other publications that might be found guilty of the same charge:

„For a poem and an article signed Geo Bogza the former issue of the »Unu« magazine was seized. To a new abet of this perversion, we notify the judicial official of the Bucharest’s Police Prefecture the existence of the following volumes and magazines in which the words may defy the public morality:

1. Ion Barbu, *Joc secund* (Edit. Cultura Națională, 1930), »Mouths yawn when Nastratin«. – p. 88.
2. Mihail Eminescu, *Poesii* (Ediția Titu Maiorescu 1889 și următoarele) »Kamadeva The Indic God«. – p. 309. [...]”.²⁵

On the 6th of October of the same year, Sașa Pană announces Geo Bogza that he received a Court citation and he has to appear as defendant on 29 Mai on Court. Worried, he writes to Geo Bogza that he should keep this information for himself, „because Edy [Ilarie Voronca] might fear to collaborate [at the magazine]”.²⁶

On November 13th 1931, the volume *Poemul invectivă* (*The invective poem*) by Geo Bogza was seized and its author was brought into justice, the trial being set at Ilfov Court, Section V.²⁷ The whole group rallies to support him. Voronca seems especially active, trying to find good lawyers and using his connections to convince high profile men of letters to defend Bogza’s character in the court. He writes to Bogza about his endeavours in his part, noting, among others, the hilarious reaction of Eugen Lovinescu, that seems ready only to send a letter of support, but declining to appear in person since he “dislikes going out”.²⁸

Geo Bogza will be eventually pardoned.

Ilarie Voronca’s contradictory loyalties

The unwanted attention it received from the Secret Police worried the group and made some of the senior editors fearful and hesitating. After all, there were (public) jobs on the line, if not their good names in the society. Sașa Pană records in a letter to Bogza an early attempt from the Secret Police to intimidate him:

²⁵ Sașa Pană, “acvarium”, in *Unu*, Year IV, No. 33, February 1931.

²⁶ Sașa Pană to Geo Bogza, “LVIII, 15. III. 931”, in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 105.

²⁷ Stelian Tănase, *op. cit.*, p. 66; Stelian Tănase, *op. cit.*, pp. 69–71.

²⁸ Ilarie Voronca to Geo Bogza, “XLVIII, [București, 26 noiembrie 1931]”, in Mădălina Lascu (Ed.), *op. cit.*, p.212.

„I was looked for, in absence, 10 or 12 days ago, by some individuals from the Secret Police and they asked Margareta if this is the location of the editorial office, if journalists are coming here, if people are gathering here, etc... and [they said] I will get an »invitation«. I haven't got one yet.”²⁹

If Sașa Pană makes the matter rather impassible, one of *unu*'s constant contributors, Ilarie Voronca, seems at the brink of panic. On the 8th of December 1930, Ilarie Voronca writes to Geo Bogza:

„Please try not to write to me now about some persons, my letters might be intercepted.”³⁰

Already considering the possible disadvantageous outcomes, he tries to accommodate the artistic mission of *unu* with both his job as a clerk in the state administration and his reputation as a writer, as he puts it on 14th December 1930, in another letter to Bogza:

„I will not use names because my letter might get on someone else's hands. I hope you will cotton on to it solely by the allusions: Thursday, my director told me he received a complete dossier, having the address of the Secret Police, which stated the measurements against »unu« magazine, being accused of breaking the decency laws. He also drew my attention to the fact that I should stop collaborating with the magazine. He asked me to intervene and tell my friends to stop writing pornographic [literature]. They can make modern art if they wish so, but stop writing vagina etc. You can only imagine my disgust. I have a two months leave, but I will only receive my pay cheque afterwards. Therefore, I had to put up with it, temporary, for two months. If I find something [else], I quit. [...] I put »unu« above any job in the world. So »Unu« must continue [...] but I must not publish – until I get my salary – to create the impression I settled down.”³¹

Perceived as hesitations, Ilarie Voronca's worries and fear of penalties might have drawn the first fight between him and Gheorghe Dinu (Stephan Roll). Ilarie Voronca accuses that Gheorghe Dinu assumed an (unwanted) hard line leadership at *unu*, demanding full commitment to the group and its mission of promoting the new art, in any given circumstances, which was clearly detrimental

²⁹ Sașa Pană to Geo Bogza, "XLIX, Galați 23. XII. 1930", in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 100.

³⁰ Ilarie Voronca to Geo Bogza, "XXIV, Luni 8. XII. 1930", in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.186.

³¹ Ilarie Voronca to Geo Bogza, "XXV, Duminică [14 decembrie 1930, București]", in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 187–188.

to his own interests.³² During the 1930s, he continues to publish occasionally in the magazine, but the relations between the two were hardly peaceful.

The relations among the group members get more and more tensioned. The news that Ilarie Voronca collaborates at *Contimporanul* and meets with other group members that were once the target of *unu's* critique (Lovinescu, Perpessicius, etc.); and additionally, that he will publish at *Cultura Națională* and signed up for S.S.R. (the Romanian Writers Society), enraged them. Any of these misdeeds would have been too much: publishing in the despised *Contimporanul*, or mingling with inimical literary figures, or (oh, horror!) becoming a member of the detested bourgeois institution of writers, the S.S.R and publishing at one of the institutionalized editing houses. Voronca had done it all – and will face the consequences. The letter sent by Sașa Pană to Geo Bogza is telling:

„I will not sum up for you, I will not recall any of the harsh discussions with Roll and Voronca, took until the release of No. 40; nothing of the immense false disquiets and compromises that agitated Voronca (anxious about the fact that someone might find out that he signed up to S.S.R., anxious by the visits made to Lovinescu, Perpessicius, (maybe even Dragomirescu), anxious that some one might find out that he is printing, by paying, (he is editing...) 50 % a book to *Cultura*, anxious, anxious due to so many things that have nothing in common with »Unu«, except his great talent, of an authentic poet, a talent which [...] I take and keep to the bottom standard; at the level of the free horizon of the last floor, I place the loyalty, the lack of compromises.”³³

The compromises that Sașa Pană underlines are enough to bring the end of the friendship between Voronca and Roll. To top it all, Voronca sends an article to Sașa Pană containing allegations towards Stephan Roll and Victor Brauner. Apparently, the article falls on the hands of Stephan Roll, before its expected release. As punishment for its backstabbing attempt, Roll writes a sharp reply and Voronca is informed that he should choose whether the articles will appear side by side in the upcoming magazine release or whether he prefers to publish it separately in a later issue. The dispute is recorded in two of the letters send by Voronca to Geo Bogza on 29th of October and 30th of October 1931.³⁴ Voronca complains about the fact that an unfair public infamy was to be put into stage.

³² See for instance the letter sent by Ilarie Voronca to Geo Bogza, "XXIV, Luni 8. XII. 1930", in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 184.

³³ Sașa Pană to Geo Bogza, "LXXVI, 23 Noiembrie 1931", in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 117.

³⁴ Ilarie Voronca to Geo Bogza, "XLII, [București, 29. X. 1931]", in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 203; Ilarie Voronca to Geo Bogza, "XLIV, Vineri, ora 10 dimineața, [București 30 octombrie 1931]", in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 205–207.

However, the two articles never make their way into the pages of the magazine. The only negative remark that was actually registered was the critique that Roll brought on his decision of publishing to *Cultura*, an unfavourable review to his *Incantations* and a harsh critique for his acts of compromise.³⁵ As Sașa Pană underlines:

„There never was an infamy directed towards Voronca and no intrigue. Voronca left »Unu« the day his postponements [sic!], his lack of courage and the entire row of his ambiguities reached the bearable aggregation; and it was enough that I slightly shake the branch. I congratulate myself for doing so before the release of *Incantations*.”³⁶

Nevertheless, Voronca would not go down easy. As his frustration reaches its peak, he presumably tried to dissuade others from collaborating with *unu* and goes as far as to accuse its former colleagues of lack of probity, if not plagiarism

„His article [Roll’s] from the last published issue, full of inaccuracies, reproduces – when he’s speaking about war – an article of mine, published in »Integral« and in *A doua lumină* [*The Second Light*] (I think »pe marginea unui festin« [»On the Feast«]). I can’t help telling you about the huge fabrications Sașa writes in his notes talking about infamous movies (which he had not seen, I did) or vice versa, Nesty broke any connection with them (without my intervention) and the ignoble Sașa keeps writing him.”³⁷

A few days later, on 15th February a new letter arrives to Bogza. It is content, full of bitterness, points out Voronca’s inconstancy:

„You got me all wrong when I told you to collaborate at »Unu«. I told you that with the same open heartedness with which I pushed Roll (I thought I was pushing him, but he actually took pleasure in it) into collaborating at »Contimporanul«, from which I parted.”³⁸

By now, his dismissal was irrevocable. This time, the breakup and Voronca’s disgrace is brought in public. In the June issue, Voronca is publicly shamed:

³⁵ See roll [sic!], "acvarium", in *unu*, Year IV, No. 41, December 1931.

³⁶ Sașa Pană to Geo Bogza, "LXXVI, 23 Noiembrie 1931", in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 117.

³⁷ Ilarie Voronca to Geo Bogza, "LV, [București 30 ianuarie 1932]", in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 221–222.

³⁸ Ilarie Voronca to Geo Bogza, "LVI, [București, 15. II. 1932]", in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 222.

„Voronca! Stop tearing up the posters, stop hiding our magazine under the piles of the other magazines in the bookstores. [...] It’s useless and – especially – it just shows your exasperation, which is the fury of a hem, of the author constrained to support himself through lies and an entire system of petty schemes [...] Calm yourself down, hide yourself [...] We promise this is the last time we take care of you, no matter what [...] Lay on your dandruff the golden soup of the moon and flannels on top of your everlasting rheumatisms and settle down: your fury is useless and comic and epileptic.”³⁹

The text is accompanied by a picture with the explanatory note: “Our friend Gheorghe D’Unu received the Legion of Honor Croce and the rank of knight.” The issue also contains a picture with Stephan Roll and Ilarie Voronca having the explanatory note:

„Snapshot: Ilarie Voronca, and twice that time Stephan Roll.
Above: I. V. after the S.S.R. operation”⁴⁰



The message was clear. Voronca was cut down from the group. In a letter to Geo Bogza, Gheorghe Dinu justifies the decision:

„For two months now, I intended to write to you about a whole series of avatars and conformism that came about. [...] The last month’s event, when I had to speak out loud about the breakup – even though I might be wrong, I was convinced that was the manner in which I had to respond to the situation. [...] I am not sure which of us was discredited, Voronca or myself. [...] I could not understand Voronca and

³⁹ “UNA – PARK”, *unu*, Year V, No. 46, June 1932.

⁴⁰ Sașa Pană, “Reportaj: Motociclistul morții”, in *Ibid.*.

I came to find he was doing a thousand things behind our back. You'll say that he's a poet and that we have to overlook his mistakes. It was exactly what I've been doing for the past 3 years. [...] I guess Voronca didn't have an artistic honesty. And the day he came spitting in front of and on Victor and Nesty and myself, which, however, were less guilty of innocent concessions and infamy, I had to give it to him."⁴¹

All in all, it should be noted that the cultural-political stance and group ideology become the principle and base for friendship among *unu* collaborators. Voronca's inconstancy and cowardly attitude did not match Roll's expectations; therefore, his company was never to be sought again.

Year 1931-1932: the shift

By the end of 1931, the content of the articles that the magazine displays reveal a number of explicit political ideas. The reason that lay behind this shift from its older position, seems to be, as already noted, the need for a change in the plan of the magazine. A radical (leftist) approach would have differentiated the avant-garde's position compared to the mainstream cultural movement, for a second time – the first being its delimitation from *Contimporanul*.

Through its informants, the Secret Police is well aware of the shift and its motives. Mihail Dan, ex-editor in chief of *unu* (and the "mole" of the authorities) recalls the events in a Secret Police report:

„»UNU«.Body of »surrealist« literature (a euphemism of a tolerated dotage). [...] The group wanted to represent a conterminous movement with the French one, which has, at least, the excuse of a sincere evolution and of a long-lived culture. [...] The undersigned was the magazine's chief-editor for three months. The group had no effect on him. Therefore, he is perfectly healthy [...] When the French group took a political stance – politically militant, along the literary one [...] on our parts the question of a political forwardness was raised. Our moral and material director being a military man ceded the direction of the magazine to me. A program has been written in that sense by St. Roll (poet, dairyman and communist) and the activity begun."⁴²

⁴¹ Stephan Roll to Geo Bogza, "XXVII, [decembrie 1931 – ianuarie 1932]", in Mădălina Lascu (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 57–58.

⁴² Stelian Tănase, *op. cit.*, pp. 232–235.

Indeed, most of the militant articles are written by Stephan Roll, accompanied by prose pieces authored by Ion Călugăru. As for the “French connection”, the opinion seems to bear some truth. On October 1931, a signal written by Roll announces in an enthusiastic tone the earlier release of “Nouvel Age”, a French literary magazine under the direction of Henry Poulaille, writer of proletarian literature and political activist:

„**NOUVEL AGE.** An issue dedicated to U.R.S.S. Over 30 young signatures, all from one country, which, for most, is plagued by a red hydra. Their literature comes from the lowest parts, by the shoulder of the proletarian raising his hammer; by the mechanic covered in the black hoarfrost of the factory [...] A vigorous life, an unstoppable élan, an enthusiasm and an emulation unique in the history of human civilization development raises in a shout. Their example today, when we witness a general fall [...] feels you up with upraise and gives your heart a punch towards it.”⁴³

The shift in the editorial policy is evident when compared with the silent siding with the *Le Cadavre* against the revolutionary surrealist movement a couple of years before. Now the cause is not as much literary, but rather that of the oppressed, hungered and abused “proletarian”, at a turning point of history:

„You will be his victims, you will be his winners. [...] Your destiny is twice written in your palm. Take your fist and punch this head [...] and you will carry on starving and others will come to take your crystal coffin in which you'll lay pale and surreal like a princess of your glorious and woefully past, [that] of historical materialism.”⁴⁴

The same year, in December, a new article called “Cuvinte fără degete” (“Words with no fingers”) signed Stephan Roll appears in *unu*. Its author declares its sympathy with the Russian revolution and describes its process as one that will, probably, finally decode the new human structure:

„A new pragmatism, a new unanimous proletarian transformation of the individual [...] A new humanism, not in the sense of a benign moral as that of Tolstoy, but one of a more advanced, more universal potency. I know a newer testament: the political economy; I know a Jesus far more crucified and more prophetic: the proletarian. [...] And maybe Majakovsky, maybe Alexandru Block, maybe a part of the Russian dynamism, or the Russian people with its fantastic resource, will give, in a certain sense, the meanings of our structure.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Stephan Roll, “Represalii”, *unu*, Year IV, No. 39, October 1931.

⁴⁴ Gheorghe Dinu, “Chiromancie”, *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ Gheorghe Dinu, “Cuvinte fără degete” [“Words without fingers” n.], *unu*, Year IV, No. 41, December 1931.

His celebration is accompanied by a prose by Ion Călugăru called “Turbine Retorice” (“Rhetorical Turbine”), which narrates the story of a Russian soldier on the battlefield with its comrades. To accentuate the revolutions loses and the hardship, the fight for socialism is described in sombre lines. The soldiers, victims and heroes of the time, are portrayed as merely disposable objects. More, the act of war is described as necessary and above all morality:

„We do not enforce a moral stance on you, but discipline. Whoever breaks the discipline will be shot. We do not ask you to pass out of love for humans, as it has been preached beforehand[...] but we want you to defend the revolution by defending yourself [...] We ask you *to kill* in order for us to accomplish socialism.”⁴⁶

Material written in the same vein and spirit appear throughout the 1932 issues. In January, for instance, in an article called “În 1931 Pictura” (“In 1931 The Painting”) Gheorghe Dinu welcomes the new age that the proletariat announces⁴⁷ and in the March issue he writes a poem where he imagines a reencounter with a feminine instance met at a time when: „With great steps life passed through the fortress / Through the proletarians thin as alcoves”.⁴⁸ Last, but not least, in the June issue of the magazine he underlines the amplitude and the impact of the Russian revolution, at the turn of the century, a revolution that will shape a new and improved society:

„Promiscuity, as a result of the war and of the Marxist prophecy that was being carried out, reigned everywhere. Even in the East, where the proletarian revolution had taken place, establishing a new rhythm of the times, there was also a chaos and a blockade that didn’t let you hear or see anything precise as to the arrangements for the new world, the rebuilding and the start of a new age. [...] There was something happening there, on Volga’s lands, a movement which, if once ignored, had begun to raise thoughts. The revolutions that took place in the rest of Europe seemed small, pigmy compared to the effort and the proportions of this effort from the East.”⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ion Călugăru, “Turbine retorice” [“Rhetorical Turbine”], in *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ Gheorghe Dinu, “În 1931 Pictura” [“In 1931 The Painting” n.], *unu*, Year V, No. 42, January 1932.

⁴⁸ Stephan Roll, “Inaugurarea primăverii” [Inaugurating Spring], in *unu*, Year V, No. 43, March 1932.

⁴⁹ Stephan Roll, “Scurt circuit. Ilarie Voronca »ACT DE PREZENȚĂ«” [“Short-Circuit. Ilarie Voronca »TAKING NOTICE«], *unu*, Year V, No. 46, June 1932.

The magazine ceases its appearance

By publishing articles containing explicit political ideas, the magazine's director feared that his position as army doctor might be endangered; in spite his earlier attempt to protect himself by ceding the editorial position to Mihail Dan. To avoid consequences, Sașa Pană finally decides to stop the publication of the magazine altogether at the end of 1932. Mihail Dan recalls the event:

“[Victor Brauner] gave indications for the release of the new issue of *unu* under new conditions, that were to be applied had Sașa Pană not decided to stop its publication altogether for all the troubles it put him through already.”⁵⁰

Apparently, this was not the first misunderstanding between Victor Brauner and Sașa Pană. As Mihail Dan points out, Sașa Pană was being „cursed on numerous occasions in writing [...] for his indecisions”.⁵¹ But why don't his fights with the collaborators suffer the same outcome as seen in the case of Voronca? How come he remains the chief editor at *unu*? Mihail Dan argues that the group agreed to a compromise: “He was deemed to be loyal, and the matter was settled in that he would continue to make the same literature as always, while the rest of the group – activist literature.”⁵²

Yet, a simple pledge of allegiance would have been insufficient. We assume that his stay at the magazine was warranted by the fact that he provided the financial means for its existence. Under these circumstances, its non-interference politics and its tolerance were being acceptable. Still, he had the last say. When in 1934 Roll requests the name of the magazine to revive its appearance, Sașa Pană refuses. The situation should point out to how important the magazine's continuity was in the eyes of its collaborators. This would be also the reason why Stephan Roll, Victor Brauner, M. H. Maxy and others saw the chance of introducing a straightforward and bold direction – it was a granted possibility due to the magazine's endurance, its promise of perpetual evolution; and, in order to sustain such an evolution, it had to be constantly radicalized.

⁵⁰ Stelian Tănase, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 237.

Conclusion

The clear delineation from *Contimporanul* points to the fact that the avant-garde group around *unu* disagreed with their program, a program that revealed *Contimporanul*'s compromise with the bourgeoisie and its contradictory summary, which violated the avant-garde aesthetic and cultural-political principles. Declaring itself as defendant of the new avant-garde art principles, *unu* maintains its aesthetic or rather cultural-political standpoint, accepting no compromise from part of the magazine's collaborators. However, such loyalty to the avant-garde cause proves to be problematic. First, there is the question of how *unu* program should be implemented and what were to be the direction of the group and the content of the magazine. Constantly struggling to establish a position on the cultural scene, *unu* takes a radical position adopting in the late 1931 and 1932 political ideas.

The internal disagreements accentuate once the question of the radicalization of the groups ideas evolve. Then, there is the external pressure exerted by the Secret Police, who menaces to disrupt *unu*'s activity and to break the ties between its members. Fearing the penalties they might face, some of the avant-garde group members temper their rebelliousness. Unwilling to accept a compromise or a deviation of its natural course – that of changing the world through art – Stephan Roll and Victor Brauner, the hardliners and self-entitled trendsetters from *unu*, push for an ideological discipline and strive to set the course for *unu* and for the “true” Romanian avant-garde movement and, therefore, decide to remove all the disruptive elements. The case of Ilarie Voronca is telling.

All things considered, it should be noted that the presence of the political ideas in the magazine's articles are merely signs of the group's creed. Their urge to take action in the active transformation of the society through art – a position that implied taking part to a political cause –, defined the manner in which by 1931-1932 the *unu* members saw their mission. That did not mean that the *unu* searched for ways of entering or establishing a political institution. They were considering the Russian revolution more an example of how a new world can be brought into existence. It is merely a question of artistic ambition: to bring forth a new social order and free the society from its prejudices (ethnic, sexual or by any other nature). Nevertheless, as expected, the Secret Police saw in the avant-garde only a disruptive element, a group that was boldly opposing the present state of affairs. Assuming there was something dangerous in their approach, even though they could not lay the finger on it, the control body acted upon it. Unfortunately, the tensions gathered inside the group and the pressure exerted by the Secret Police bring the magazine to its end at the end of 1932.

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