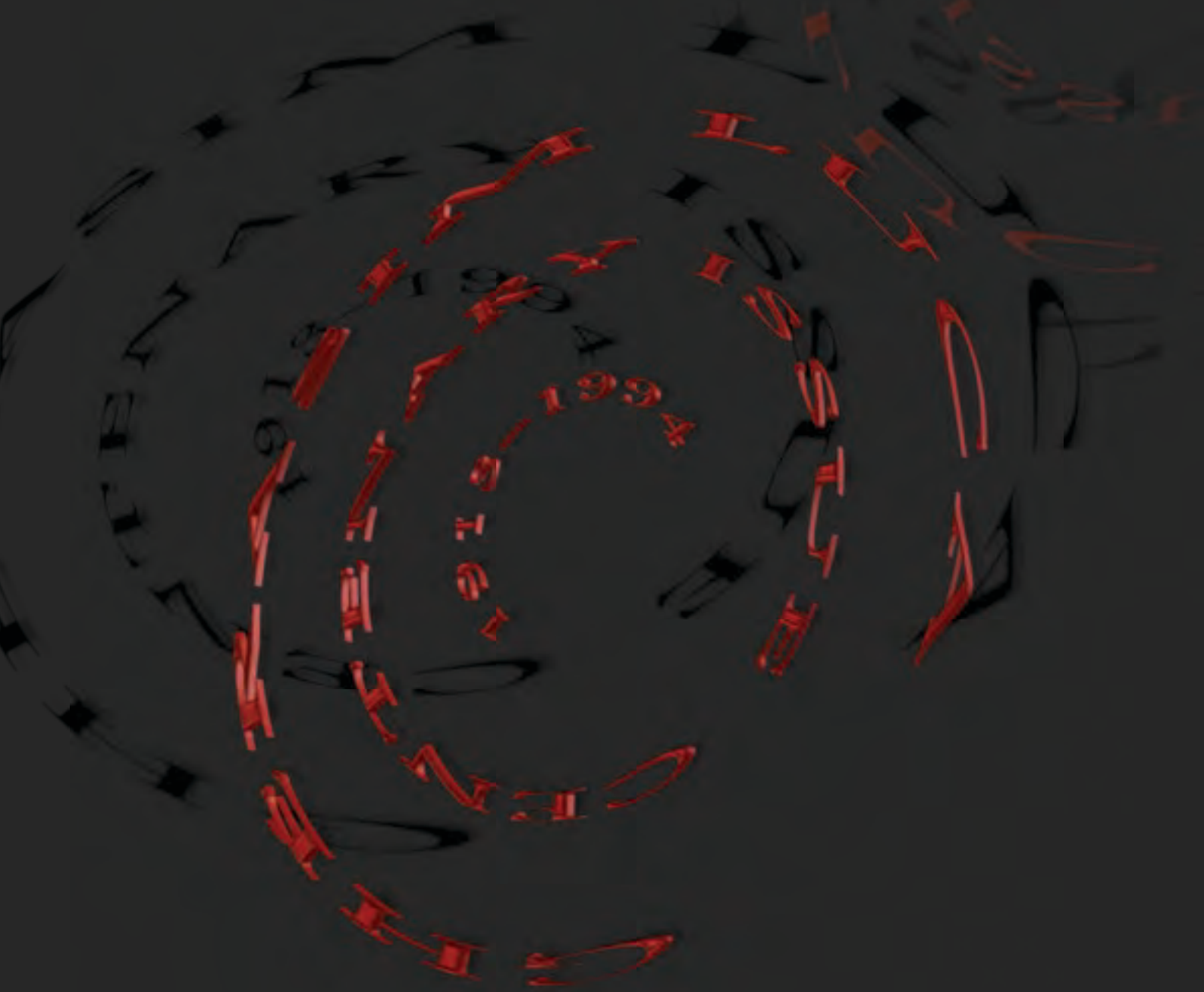
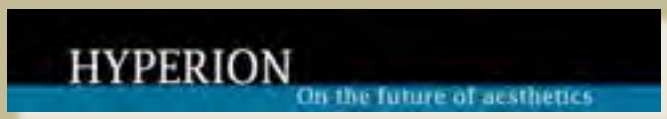
HYPERION

On the future of aesthetics

VOL. VII, NO. 3 (FALL 2013)





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Ghérasim Luca Centenary Issue
1913 – 1994

GUEST EDITOR'S NOTE

Ghérasim Luca is a singular presence. Whether considered in surrealist, avant-garde, or other circles, his poems, objects, theoretical texts, collages, drawings and performances resonate. Ever provocative then, when he first began to create them in the early 1940s to his death in 1994, little has changed now. For those of us who engage Luca, his is a sensibility that compels.

This issue of *Hyperion* elaborates on that engagement, both critically and creatively. Discussion of Luca's history, significance, complexity, affiliations and currency also includes contemporary work inspired by Luca. It is our contribution to the greater attention that Luca deserves.

Allan Graubard

New York

September 2013

Criticism and creation live in permanent symbiosis. Criticism feeds on poems and novels, but at the same time it is the water, bread, and air of creation. In the past, the "body of doctrine" was made up of closed systems: Dante was nourished by theology and Góngora by mythology. Modernity represents the rule of criticism: not a system, but the negation and the confrontation of all systems. Criticism has been the staple nourishment of all modern artists, from Baudelaire to Kafka, from Leopardi to the Russian Futurists. It has also become a form of creation: the work in the end becomes a celebration of negation ("Un coup de dés") or a negation of the work itself (*Nadja*). … Criticism as a method of creation, negation as a metaphysic and a rhetoric. … Creation is criticism and criticism creation. — Octavio Paz

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Ghérasim Luca: Dialectics and Ghost Stories

Jon Graham

William Blake, *Satan* (after Fuseli), ca. 1790

"Ghosts will be common and accessible, and there will no longer be any need for that pretentious ritual of trance séances for mediumistic phenomena to occur: in a world where mediumistic qualities will be commonplace, unconscious projections will occur naturally like a slip of the tongue."[1]

In his book, *The Passive Vampire*, Gherasim Luca describes how a language of black magic, bordering on dream and humanity's primordial tongue, formed a connection between him and André Breton. Knowing the profound influence

[1] Gherasim Luca, *The Passive Vampire* (Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2008).

Breton's books had on Luca's early activities can offer insight into how his works move ghost-like through Luca's own work, especially *The Passive Vampire*, which its English translator Krzysztof Fijalkowski astutely defines as an objectively offered object to the French surrealist.[2] This kind of object, the antithesis of the gift, was proposed by Luca as the means of activating a hitherto unconscious relationship between the giver and the recipient, whose selection is rigorously reflected in the symbolic nature of the object. These objects are the material concretions of relationships that "even an elementary interpretation would reveal to be as subversive, strange, and revealing as those of dreams."

Breton's *Nadja* opens with its author pondering the troubling ramifications implied in a popular French saying: *dis-moi qui tu hantes, je te dirai qui tu es* [tell me who you haunt, I will tell you who you are]. Idiomatically speaking, "haunting" here simply means "hanging with," but with his characteristic grasp of the deeper allusions present in what falls casually and unthinkingly from the mouths of others, Breton notes how this common catchphrase, when taken literally, tended to establish between certain individuals and himself "relations that are stranger, more inescapable, and more disturbing than I intended." "Such a phrase," he went on to say, "means much more than it says and makes me, still alive, assume the role of a ghost, obviously alluding to what I must have ceased to be in order to be who I am."

But where Breton counseled his reader that the word haunt meant more than he intended, Luca, who replaced his birth name Solomon Locker with a name he read in an obituary for an archimandrite of Mount Athos, seems to have taken haunting as his watchword. In *Theater of the Mouth* he calls the ghost the axis of the human being: one that has been divided into two corpses, as if reiterating what he said some 40 years earlier in *The Dead Death* to offer solutions to those ideational cul-de-sacs in which causes and effects are prevented from exchanging destinies among themselves. Luca counters human

[2] *The Passive Vampire* cites *Nadja* directly, and Luca's discussion of the law of objective chance — in this extended "dream conversation" with Breton — flows directly out of *Mad Love*.

biology with its cellular axioms rejected in *Dialectics of the Dialectic* as fatally leading to death, with multiple phantom personas that can maintain the necessary ambivalent tension between life and its contradiction.

For Luca, thought is not made in the mouth so much as staged in the theater of the mouth. The explosion of the self into selves accompanies his explosion of the word into ceaseless recombination of its meaning, which mirror the convulsive transformation of his own identity through the dueling lenses of Eros and Thanatos. Harnessing the fierce currents created by this accelerated dialectical dynamic would provide the aphrodisiac equivalent to a paroxysm necessary to sustain the newly invented forms of passion to replace the absurdity of "objective love."

Perhaps his phantomantic doubles arise from a state similar to the one Joë Bosquet described in a letter to Ferdinad Alquié: "What would you say if I told you that I sometimes deliriously feel that I am thought?" This echoes Luca when he says: "I always had the impression of being thought like Rimbaud and Lautréamont, but it never occurred to me that this other that thinks me could step out of myself and appear before me in as tangible and concrete a way as any other external object." This not only rejects the proprietary relationship between a man and his thought, much like Michel Leiris scorning the notion that language's purpose was to facilitate communication, but also seems to imply that when the individual is soluble in his thought, he creates doppelgangers that take their turn at the helm of consciousness.

In his book, *André Breton and the Basic Concepts of Surrealism*, Michel Carrouges noted: "Feeling like you are a ghost is a mental phenomenon that possesses an extremely concrete meaning. It indicates the extent to which one can feel like a stranger to oneself, to become disoriented in his normal ego awareness and be dragged down into subterranean layers of the mind, threatened by remote grumblings that rise from the underground lava of the mental labyrinth. The outside world begins to be shaken by the early symptoms of a seism of unknown nature. The individual then detects a vast framework

within of words, images, and thoughts he does not know, and in the interference of his ego and the world, he sees a subtle network of premonitions and magic coincidences. His own mind becomes the field of projections from dark powers."

Luca's development could be seen as paralleling the evolution of the ghost in Western culture from the corporeal form in which it was perceived in pre-Christian societies to the transparent incorporeal form given it by theologians as part of the process dematerializing pagan beliefs that threatened Christian hegemony (with the same corrosive skepticism that is emblematic of the orthodox partisans of modern scientism). His ghostly double first materialized in the form of these objectively offered objects, then transformed into that of his kleptobjects before finally assuming a less tangible form in a freely mutating language. It was as if in order to truly master the negation of the negation he had to assume the persona of a ghost trapped between life and death — a multi-dimensional death more in keeping with the dialectical leaps that gave structure to his thought, which he recast in spectral projections that have discarded their chains and groans for echoes, slips of the tongue, stammering, stuttering…

Fixed, mechanical absolute opposition in which a revenant whose fury never abandons him swaps instants of sadistic recess with those of a morbid passivity when the somnambulist holds sway. The stage is thus set for a revalorization of death in the form of the beloved whose appeal is never far from a promiscuous horror: "I caress your ectoplasm as I would a shark." Luca's relentless energy finds purchase on dialectical currents that offer an otherwise unobtainable access to the mind's deepest contents where "the most staggering aspects of love" can be discovered or invented, and where he confronts his "constant dialectical despair before love."

Like a ghost living off the disruptive power of Eros, Luca goes on: "I can't see what I might do with my persona, so frozen with desperation, if I didn't place it face-to-face with death, because only death can express its

obscurantist and fatal death, the real death that consumes me, that permeates me, that obscures me to the point of disappearance." To negate the negation of the death he identifies as the Absolute General Paralytic, Luca counters with a dead death that gives birth to a series of imaginary ghosts, each with its own suicide note. Luca identifies the unacceptable human condition as a death that is a dialectical dead end, a cul-de-sac in which his dialectical double that is constantly recombining with its host to create new amorous equations and a suicidal synthesis that calls the basic assumptions of the identity principle into question — countering conventional dichotomies with perpetually insoluble bisexual tendencies.

"Oralizing" himself in a verbal flow that shifted from stammering to a controlled skid, his poetry became a brand new avatar of the phonetic kabbalah, in which the breakneck pace of shifting meanings belied any notion of immutability; a transmentalism (to borrow a term coined by the Czech surrealist group) that denied and replaced the transcendental impulse in which love and death become inseparable thanks to Luca's constant dialectical despair, a despair that has three, four, five pairs of legs, phantomatic appendages of a *de raison d'etre*.

In *The Passive Vampire*, an anguished Luca emerging from a state of delirious interpretation that had dragged on for two full days, observes: "I do not know what part of it is magic and what part of it is love, I know neither the place where meet nor the place where separate these two terrible nuances of black, but I do know that the lover must be doubled by a magician, in order to be able to approach, without being terrified, these sublime deformations of darkness." Through deconstruction of the erotic circularity imposed by Oedipus in tandem with his dissatisfaction with death's non-dialectical finality, Luca not only sought that supreme point described by Breton in the *Second Manifesto*, but demanded it be inundated by the rivers of Heraclitus.

"Watch out," Roger Caillois warned the readers of his *Myth and Man*, "by playing a ghost, you become one!" Far from feeling any anxiety at this prospect, Gherasim Luca was counting on it.

Jon Graham, "Gherasim Luca: Dialectics and Ghost Stories"
Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VII, No. 3 (fall 2013) 0–5.

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La poésie sans langue: Ghérasim Luca, Visual Poet

Krzysztof Fijalkowski

Ghérasim Luca, *Passionément*, 1944

That it has taken the best part of twenty years since Ghérasim Luca's death for his reputation as a major figure of twentieth-century poetry (and one still uncommonly relevant to the twenty-first) finally to reach beyond the borders of his adopted home in France is no doubt unsurprising. Hermetic, simultaneously scattered and strategic, frequently defying translation, in perpetual emi-

gration from 'literature,' his writings are the epitome of work destined to resist assimilation.[1] But just as this extraordinary body of material is being discovered by new audiences, it emerges that there is another, even less familiar side to Luca's activity, one that complicates our understanding of him further and that places him among the vanguard not only of the fields of writing and performance, but also of visual practice: his engagement with graphic expression, with images, objects, collage, drawing and text-image relationships, along with his sustained collaboration with artists, all point to Luca's significant but until now largely unexplored contribution to the plastic arts.[2] The aim of what follows below is to give a first overview of this activity, with the intention of arguing that this 'artistic' practice (for want of a better word, since as we shall see next the notion of art could be a problematic one for him), as well as its interchanges with his writing, is a whole other area that needs acknowledging in any effective understanding of Luca's significance.

"It is always difficult for me to express myself in a visual language," Luca would observe.[3] While we might note that difficulty — along with long silences, fertile absences and secret correspondences — are the very stuff of Luca's work, and suspect an innate reticence to promote himself to the rank of those artists he frequented and admired, this statement goes hand in hand with Luca's reluctance to situate himself explicitly as an artist as well as a writer. While he seems never to have referred to himself publicly as an artist, there

[1] Even his name refuses to be administrated. Born Salman Locker in 1913, the poet borrowed the name Gherasim Luca (the acute accent on the 'e' adopted only after his permanent move to France in 1952) from a newspaper account of a visiting archimandrite, on the occasion of his first publication. But when later he came to formalize this change his name was recorded as 'Salman Gherasim Luca,' making 'Gherasim Luca' his surname — even if his friends, and subsequently most authors, refer just to 'Luca.' See Iulian Toma, *Gherasim Luca ou l'intransigeante passion d'être* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2012) 31.

[2] Despite, as we shall see, Luca's participation in numerous exhibitions both during & after his lifetime, the relative obscurity of his visual practice compared to his written output is true even in the countries where his work is better known, France & Romania: very few publications, i.e., have focused on this aspect of his work, and the three major monographs devoted to the poet (Dominique Carlat, *Gherasim Luca l'intempestif* (Paris: José Corti, 1998); Petre Raileanu, *Gherasim Luca* (Paris: Oxus, 2004); Iulian Toma, op. cit) all devote only minor attention to it.

[3] Serge Bricianer, interview with Ghérasim Luca, reproduced in *Oiseau-Tempête*, No. 4 (1998) 32. The interview would seem to date from around the mid-1960s.

is also at least one early moment — in the midst of his participation in the Bucharest surrealist group, spanning the onset and aftermath of the Second World War — when the problem of artistic expression is explicitly addressed. Written with fellow group member Trost, the manifesto *Dialectique de la dialectique* of 1945 acted as a kind of distress signal sent to fellow surrealists scattered around the world by the recent catastrophe, but it also contained some blunt critiques of the ways in which its authors saw surrealism's engagement during the 1930s — a period that had seen the movement, despite its claims to revolutionary rigor, come close to courting popular and fashionable acceptance — turning into an easily-recuperable style through a series of repetitious techniques, particularly in the domain of art. In contrast, the Bucharest group would explore a range of explicitly anti-aesthetic (in Luca and Trost's words, "aplastic, objective, and entirely non-artistic")[4] visual practices, of which Luca would be a leading exponent.[5] Two exhibitions of this work, one in January 1945 featuring Trost and Luca alone, the other presented by the whole group (September–October 1946, an event initially intended as an international survey of surrealist art), indicated the group's willingness to extend its activity into visual fields. The group's contribution to the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris on the other hand, in which one senses Luca's influence in particular, was significantly not artworks, but a text proposing a pitch-black room in which to encounter unknown objects.[6]

Following the demise of the group and Luca's departure from Bucharest in 1950, exhibitions would eventually form a significant strand of his pub-

[4] Gherasim Luca and Trost, *Dialectique de la Dialectique: Message addressé au mouvement surréaliste international* (Bucharest: Surréalisme, 1945) 27. This key text is available in translation as "Dialectics of the Dialectic," in Michael Richardson & Krzysztof Fijalkowski, eds, *Surrealism Against the Current: Tracts and Declarations* (London: Pluto, 2001) 32–41, though in an edited version that omits detail on this point.

[5] The Bucharest surrealist group were all predominantly writers, while the Romanian painters connected with them, Victor Brauner and Jacques Hérold, spent this period in France.

[6] Gherasim Luca, Gellu Naum, Paul Paun, Virgil Teodorescou, Trost, "Le Sable nocturne," in the catalogue *Le Surréalisme en 1947* (Paris, 1947) 56–58. See also the group's correspondence with André Breton in preparation for the exhibition, circa 1947, at: http://www.andrebreton.fr/fr/item/?GCOI=56600100524010#.

lic profile, but one that has scarcely been commented upon in any detail. In addition to an extensive bibliography and large numbers of electrifying public performances of his poetry, Luca continued to exhibit regularly, whether in group contexts (for example as part of the Phases movement, bringing together a large number of international artists, many of them close to surrealism), in collaboration with other artists or with solo shows across France. This activity was particularly marked from the 1960s onwards to the end of his life; posthumous exhibitions have continued to extend it to the present day, again for the most part in France.[7] Whilst many of these exhibitions showcased Luca's collage practice (the 'cubomanias' discussed in detail below) or his drawings, others explored a more complex interaction between text, publications, visual works and collaborations with other artists.

The Visual Text

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a participant in the adventure of surrealism and its vagabond inheritance,[8] one of the striking features of Luca's visual practice is the range of different levels and categories of activity it encompasses. As a result, and notwithstanding Luca's reputation as both an alchemist of language and an author of highly philosophical or theoretical poetic texts, one might argue that the visual impregnates his work at every turn. This can be seen, per-

[7] The definitive list of Luca's exhibition activity has yet to be drawn up and considered; the most extensive so far is found at the end of Iulian Toma's bibliography (op. cit.), which begins with the two Bucharest surrealist group shows followed by an exhibition in Tel Aviv with Mirabelle Dors and Paul Paun in December 1951 (information on all of these is scant), then a further 27 entries up to the year 2000. At least 20 of these are either solo or two-person shows (14 during his lifetime). A major exhibition covering the whole range of Luca's output toured three French venues in 2008–09 and was the occasion for a catalogue that remains the fullest published documentation to date of his visual work (*Cahiers de l'Abbaye Saint-Croix*, No. 110, special issue *Ghérasim Luca*, 2008), though it concentrates on only a few aspects of it.

[8] This is not the place for a discussion of Luca's relationship to surrealism, latent in the period of the 1930s, explicit in the 1940s, and then more complex from the 1950s onward, when he would describe himself as "surrealist in non-surrealism" (conversation with Micheline Catti, March 2013). For brevity and convenience, here I shall consider him as working within the broad wake of the surrealist adventure.

haps, at the most basic level of his careful supervision of the visual appearance of his printed texts. This is particularly true of those poems presented as *plaquettes* or loose sheets, a format already adopted by the Bucharest surrealists whose *Infra-Noir* series of publications consisted of publications made of a single double-sided sheet folded in four to produce a pamphlet that might almost be read as a kind of poster.[9] Luca's two contributions to this series, *Le secret du vide et du plein* and *Amphitrite* both featured a combination of a more formal short introductory essay, accompanied with an illustration, followed by the main poetic text.

Fig. 1. Gherasim Luca, pages from *Le secret du vide et du plein* (Bucharest: Infra-Noir, 1947). Private collection, Paris.

In the case of the former work, this text is an experiment with language, with the morphology of words and meanings and eventually the breakdown of the

[9] See the works by Luca, Trost, Paul Paun and Virgil Teodorescou made in the *Infra Noir* series in Bucharest, 1947, and reprinted in facsimile by La Maison de verre, Paris, in 1996. Several of Luca's later self-published pamphlets would play with the graphic format of the poster or leaflet, notably his playful but no doubt at least partly serious advertisement in 1960 for a new company 'Exactamo,' promising its customers the possibility of finding "the [mathematical] square of the word" and providing an "ontophonic" revelation of language (reproduced in *Cahiers de l'Abbaye Saint-Croix*, op. cit., p. 7).

verbal into pure typography, pure visual sound. This would be an experiment announcing the eventual direction of much of his post-war writings, and a contemporary, less well-known work *Niciodata destul* (*Never Enough*), in Romanian this time, offered an even more aggressive breakdown of language into visual-verbal components on a single, double-sided sheet of paper.[10] The actual typography of these works is unremarkable: sober, formal, using a traditional serif typeface, the poem is justified as expected to the left, titles and colophon are centered, and the results are far from the exuberant experiment, for example, of Dada publications despite the experimental nature of their texts.

A number of Luca's poems of the late 1950s and 1960s would adopt this type of format, deceptively simple in their appearance but presented with restrained care, and showing great attention to the balance between text and surrounding white space or to the placing and appeal of titles (as with his self-published poem-tract *La clef* of 1960, again on a single sheet which when folded over features just the title, in a style reminiscent of a bold nineteenth century woodblock font, occupying the full width of the paper). Later poems gathered in book-length collections often played with the space and movement of the words, with single lines of writing floating across otherwise empty pages, playful and variable intervals between lines or stanzas (suggesting pauses for reflection or hesitations pregnant with meaning), or changing positions and justifications of the text, making the simple turning of a page a game of discovery.

This interaction between the verbal and the visual could be just as important in Luca's personal correspondence (and we may note in passing that while his letters are often marked by a strong poetic sensibility, the epistolary register is also one that crops up at several points in his published works). Letters to friends from the 1940s, for example, could feature a complex play between handwriting, material support and image, as with a letter to Victor Brauner in August 1948 written in neat white script on brown card organized

[10] Gherasim Luca, *Niciodata destul* (Bucharest: Editura Suprarealistă Negația Negației, 1947).

around a full-length collage element that borrows an engraving of a gentleman with top hat and cane pausing on the stairs; or another to Julien Levy of April 1947, again in white on a dark paper facing a found image of a salamander.[11] Other letters feature more distinctive, flowing italic calligraphy, sometimes in colored ink and on carefully-chosen papers, such as the looping, joyous handwriting of a letter with ornate initial capitals sent to André Breton in August 1952, and which finishes with a graphic bouquet of flowers for Elisa Breton.[12] Earlier works, on the other hand, had already highlighted apparently more serious graphic experiments using handwriting. The opening essay of *Le Secret du vide et du plein* of 1947 was organized around an intriguing reproduction of an *échographie* entitled *Nécessairement belle*, seemingly a fragment of a larger piece of eccentric, frantic automatic writing on the verge of legibility, reversed out in white against black (*Dialectique de la dialectique*, presenting a range of Luca's and Trost's 'aplastic' techniques had listed *échographie* and *stéréotypie* as 'pathological procedures' pushing automatism to its limits).[13] Luca's earlier book *L'Inventeur de l'amour*, meanwhile, had ended with a troubling text featuring a set of documents on the border between tragedy and the absurd: five clumsily handwritten suicide notes made just before successive failed acts of self-destruction, dark poems scrawled like graffiti against the void.[14] The boundary and interplay between letter and artwork is tested still further in a work eventually sent to André Breton and made as a kind of mediumistic correspondence across space, where participants in different locations agreed to work at a set time, *Transpercer le transparence*, featuring a handwritten text in green ink on green-tinged embossed and deckle-edged paper, accompanying 13

[11] Gherasim Luca, letter to Victor Brauner, reproduced in Camille Morando and Sylvie Patry, eds, *Victor Brauner: Écrits et correspondances 1938–1948* (Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 2005) 220; letter to Julien Levy reproduced in *Cahiers de l'Abbaye Saint-Croix*, op. cit., 15.
[12] Ghérasim Luca, letter to André Breton August 15, 1952, André Breton archive: www.andrebreton.fr/fr/item/?GCOI=56600100292881#.
[13] Luca and Trost, *Dialectique de la Dialectique*, op. cit., 27.
[14] Gherasim Luca. *Inventatorul iubirii* (Bucharest: Editura Negația Negației, 1945). Translated as *The Inventor of Love and Other Writings* (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2009) 51–9.

delicate collages apparently made from sections of tracing paper overlaid on ornate blank 'cartes de visite.'[15]

Artistic Collaborations

Complementing Luca's concern with the visual aspects of text and writing is his sustained interest in collaboration with artists, starting with some of his earliest publications in Romania, which already incorporated illustrations.[16] This practice has been so widespread among writers participating in surrealism and its affiliated tendencies that it could be considered *de rigueur*.[17] In Luca's case, however, these encounters and exchanges are notable not only for their frequency and quality, but also for the range of activities they encompass, from the more familiar use of complementary image-text relationships in publications or writings in homage to artists published in catalogues to joint publishing activities and exhibitions, including several instances that seem to come closer to a kind of symbiosis between poet and artist (and resulting in works that can be hard to classify among Luca's already extensive and varied output). This latter type of intense exchange between Luca and an artist characterizes the engagement between Luca and his partner for over forty years, Micheline Catti.[18] As well as exhibiting together on a number of occasions, Luca and Cat-

[15] Gherasim Luca, *Transpercer le transparence: Compte-rendu plastique sur ma participation personnelle à la première manifestation surinternationale du surréalisme le 18 mars 1951 entre 6 et 7 (heure de Paris)*, manuscript, 1951:
www.andrebreton.fr/fr/item/?GCOI=56600100453810.

[16] To my knowledge, the only existing study focused on this aspect of Luca's practice is found in the short article by Aurélia Gibus, "Ghérasim Luca et les livres," *Cahiers de l'Abbaye Saint-Croix*, op. cit., 28–33. This catalogue also contains (36) an intriguing example of an artistic collaboration with other poets, and unexpected ones: an expressionist-style oil painting executed in 1957 with Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, and Peter Orlovsky.

[17] See, for example, Renée Riese Hubert's study *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), which discusses a wide range of exchanges between artists and writers (though the study does not include Luca's work).

[18] Micheline Catti (who sometimes uses the spelling 'Catty' for her surname) would share Luca's life from 1953 until its end, and has maintained a large responsibility for continuing to safeguard and promote his works and legacy; this is a good moment to acknowledge her invaluable and generous support for this article and my other writings on Luca. We might also note that Luca had at least two other significant emotional relationships with artists, Mirabelle Dors and Béatrice de la Sablière, in the early part of the 1950s.

ti would complete numerous joint publishing projects, in which the sometimes delicate and questioning, sometimes vigorous and assertive line of Catti's drawings and engravings would complement and enhance Luca's poems, producing a relationship between text and image, word and line, that feels closer to the mutual investigation of shared concerns than straightforward illustration. One example is the limited edition *Droit de regard sur les idées* (whose title, *The Right to Monitor Ideas*, but more literally, *The Right to Look at Ideas*, already asserts an intersection of the visual and the verbal), featuring two powerful, dark etchings by Catti to echo Luca's poem (as one line has it, 'The act of looking is accomplished internally / in a fugitive and constant manner').[19]

Fig. 2. Micheline Catti, untitled etching from Ghérasim Luca and Micheline Catti, *Droit de regard sur les idées* (Paris: Éditions Brunidor, 1967). Private collection, Paris.

Another work, *Non-Œdipus X*, is a portfolio of collages made from found nineteenth century colored engravings facing phrases made up of individual letters cut into squares and dancing across the page (as though in exuberant rearrangement of the image's original captions).[20]

[19] Paris: Éditions Brunidor, 1967.
[20] The unique copy of *Non-Œdipus X* was reissued in facsimile (Rome: La parole gelate, 1998).

The impressive range and quality of Luca's artist collaborators is exemplified by a hitherto rare, precious work that at the time of writing is on the point of being reissued in a more accessible format, *L'Extrême-Occidentale*, originally published as a deluxe edition and whose 'seven rituals' were illustrated with a woodcut by Jean Arp and engravings by Victor Brauner, Max Ernst, Jacques Hérold, Matta and Dorothea Tanning — all major figures of surrealist art.[21] Of these names, two stand out as particularly fertile collaborators: Brauner and Hérold, Romanian painters who had close links with the Bucharest surrealist group of the 1940s but whose residence in France during this period precluded direct participation in its activity. Both artists would play a significant role in the narrative of Luca's activity and relationships on his establishment in Paris at the start of the 1950s (a difficult period during which Luca declined to align himself directly with the Parisian surrealist group, no doubt at least in part because Brauner himself had been excluded from it in 1948). Establishing a close, intense friendship with Brauner, Luca's selection of the artist to illustrate *Ce château pressenti* of 1958 (a text dating from the grim period of the early 1940s showing Luca at his most lyrically hermetic and alchemically-inclined) is an acknowledgement of a correspondence across time and space, from a time when Brauner represented a literal and imaginary link to the apparent freedom of surrealism in France. Brauner's bold graphic rendition of a hieratic hybrid figure, half-human half-bird, wielding a sorcerer's staff and with a piercing sun-eye of inner sight, announces Luca's extended text, moving between prose and poem, that opens with 'The unnamed and forever inexpressible bird, [that] before marking its passage in the weft of our dreams, wipes itself once and for all from the memory of men.'[22]

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[21] *L'Extrême-Occidentale* (Lausanne: Éditions Mayer, 1960), edition of 125; reprint Paris: José Corti, 2013. According to Micheline Catti, Henri Michaux was also to have contributed to the portfolio but broke his hand just as the work was to be completed (conversation with Catti, Paris, March 2013).

[22] Ghérasim Luca, *Ce château pressenti* (Paris: Méconnaissance, 1958); the text itself dates from 1942. Sarane Alexandrian argues that Luca was a participant in an informal "groupe

Luca would enjoy an equally productive working relationship with his friend Hérold, with whom he undertook several interesting projects. Hérold notably completed illustrations for books such as the 1953 and 1970 versions of *Héros-limite*, whose first edition contained three illustrations and collectors' copies featured either one or three original engravings, while the later edition repeated one of the illustrations on its cover.[23] Hérold's signature motif, the theme of a crystalline world in which the scientific and the poetic intertwine to suggest a kind of alchemical mineralogy of the visible realm, seems calculated to appeal to Luca's interests in the intersection of the scientific (he had originally trained as a chemist), the para-scientific, and the hermetic realms, and *Héros-limite*'s investigations of morphologies of words and meanings is echoed by Hérold's vision of the body and the calligraphic line turned to precious stones. Soon after the war, Luca had sent Hérold a letter filled with word play around the notion of the crystal (and dedicated "to the prince of the crystal from a cubomaniac") featuring a collage of 13 found scientific images, mainly of mineral forms.[24] This exchange was formalized in an intriguing 'publication' of 1962, *Le sorcier noir*, subtitled "a formulation of a form by Jacques Hérold," in which a text by Luca was accompanied by an etching by Hérold but also by a haberdasher's sample — an old printed card (featuring a crystal at its summit) studded with a panoply of buttons whose forms suggested both entomological specimens and a lapidarist's collection, each of the edition of 50 featuring a different card and the entire work encased in a haberdasher's box.[25] An equally intriguing work, again blurring the boundaries between publication and artwork, was a poster produced by the two men — one of three poster collaborations by the artist, the others with Michel Butor and Jean-Pierre Duprey

infini" around Brauner in Paris in the 1950s: *L'Aventure en soi* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1990) 311ff.

[23] Ghérasim Luca, *Héros-limite* (Paris: Le soleil noir, 1953; 1970).

[24] Sale catalogue, *Collection Jacques Hérold* (Paris: Drouot Richelieu, 1998, lot 186).

[25] Ghérasim Luca & Jacques Hérold, *Le sorcier noir: La mise en formule d'une forme de Jacques Hérold* (Paris: published by the authors, 1962). See *Collection Jacques Hérold*, op. cit., lot 183, or: ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/23609.

— featuring a manuscript text by Luca integrated with a design by Hérold. *Déférés devant un tribunal d'exception* (*Summoned to an extraordinary court*) was pasted onto the walls of Paris on the evening before May 1, 1968 — only days before the events that would turn the streets of Paris into a violent theatre of protest and contestation, and in which posters and graphics would form a notable forum for popular opposition to state and institutional power.

A number of other collaborative works extended Luca's commitment to visual art in a large number of formally varied projects, such as the elegant and minimal *plaquette* featuring two poems by Luca and photographs of nine kinetic sculptures by the Belgian artist Pol Bury, or *Entre tiens! et où?* of 1971 in which a poem joined seven delicate collages (originals not reproductions) made from paper doilies, small everyday objects and subtle stencil painting by the aptly-named Philippe Collage.[26] In these works, one might almost wonder whether the preponderance of the visual makes Luca's work a verbal 'illustration' of the 'text' of an image, rather than the more customary reverse. Of note among such projects is one especially fine album, *Apostroph' Apocalypse* by Luca and the Cuban surrealist painter Wifredo Lam, limited to only 135 copies and featuring no fewer than 14 original etchings with aquatint.[27] Lam's prints for this large and elegant portfolio, edited by and carried out at the Grafica Uno studio in Milan, is considered among his finest graphic work, and involved a specially-devised procedure using bitumen powder on the copper plates that allowed a particularly free but subtle range of lines and tones.[28] Lowery Stokes Sims argues that Lam's etchings for *Apostroph' Apocalypse* surpasses his contemporaneous painting in the variety of their motifs, their ethereal qualities and "lightness of being and form,"[29] qualities that throw a haunt-

[26] Ghérasim Luca and Pol Bury, *Presence de l'imperceptitble, avec les Ponctuations de Pol* (no date, place, or publisher given, early 1960s); Ghérasim Luca and Philippe Collage, *Entre tiens! et où?* (Stockholm: Éditions Sonet, 1971). Edition of 40.
[27] Ghérasim Luca & Wifredo Lam, *Apostroph' Apocalypse* (Milan: Grafica Uno, 1967).
[28] Lowery Stokes Sims, *Wifredo Lam and the International Avant-Garde, 1923–1982* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002) 199.
[29] Ibid., 200.

ing light on the poem's ambivalent preoccupation with atomic catastrophe, as if Lam's syncretic and totemic figures might act as its harbingers.[30] Photographic documentation shows Lam and Luca working together on the project at Grafica Uno, suggesting Luca's involvement at every level of its production.

Luca would work with a number of artists and publishers in creating unique and sometimes genre-defying works combining texts, images, sculptures and elaborate *de luxe emboîtages*, resulting in objects that lie somewhere between the traditions of portfolio, sculpture, and the artist's book. One final instance of Luca's collaborative practice to consider here is the distinctive relationship between Luca and the Polish-born artist Piotr Kowalski. An architect by training and profession (he had worked with Marcel Breuer and I.M. Pei in the 1950s), Kowalski's artistic output pioneered unusual materials and cross-media concerns, integrating two-dimensional and sculptural forms with materials such as neon, glass, optical and electronic equipment, chemical reactions and large-scale urban art projects.[31] This ambition, the interferences between science and art, the movements across light, sound, space, geometry and philosophy would all have attracted Luca — even if Kowalski's œuvre appears at first sight diametrically opposed that of the surrealist artists Luca had hitherto worked with — and the two completed publishing projects, artworks and an exhibition. The first, limited edition of Luca's *Le chant de la carpe* (1973), for example, featured a relief by Kowalski in engraved and painted altuglass (a brand of hard-wearing clear acrylic) bearing a colored geometric design, as well as a recording of Luca reciting one of his poems reproduced on clear vinyl and then the book itself. The even rarer *de luxe* edition of 20, however, formed a complex 'book-object' comprising the book printed not on paper but on clear

[30] Would it be too fanciful to see Lam's spirit figures in this context as echoes of the global 'Mothman' myths, in which startling winged creatures appear as prophets of imminent disaster? Cf. Mark Pellington, dir., *The Mothman Prophesies* (Screen Gems / Sony 2002); the DVD release includes a 2002 documentary on the real events of 1966–67 behind this fictionalized account.

[31] For an overview of the relevant period of Kowalski's work, see Jean-Christophe Bailly, *Piotr Kowalski* (Paris: Hazan, 1988).

acetate, along with the clear vinyl disc in an altuglass case which formed the base for a sculpture featuring three small mirrored cubes (convex, concave, and flat) reflecting three more altuglass cubes of decreasing dimensions (but which all appear the same size in the mirrors).[32] The publication of *Le chant de la carpe* was marked by a joint exhibition at the Edouard Loeb gallery, Paris, which not only showed the book and objects, but also featured large-scale text in the gallery's window and further works by Kowalski such as a 'sonogram' of Luca's spoken voice (the title of his poem *Passionément*) — a visual mapping of sound waves that helped plot a vector in Luca's work from idea to text to performance to image.[33]

An extraordinary object completed in 1966 had already synthesized these concerns in a complex and ambitious editioned sculpture, *Sisyphe géomètre*.

Fig. 3a. *Sisyphe géomètre*. See full caption below.

[32] Colophon of Ghérasim Luca, *Le chant de la carpe* (Paris: Le soleil noir, 1973). Kowalski's object relates to other works of the period such as the much larger three part mirror and neon sculpture *Identité II*, 1973; see Bailly, op. cit., 70–1.
[33] See Gibus, "Ghérasim Luca et les livres," op. cit., 30–32.

Fig. 3b. Fig. 3a & b Ghérasim Luca & Piotr Kowalski, details from *Sisyphe géomètre* (Geneva: Éditions Claude Givaudin, 1966). Private collection, Paris, courtesy of Piotr Kowalski Estate.

In Greek legend, King Sisyphus was forced to atone for his crimes and lies by the punishment of rolling a boulder uphill only to see it roll down to the beginning again, a limitless torment echoed by Luca's contribution to the work: six short poems describing a set of classic geometrical solids (cone, cylinder, sphere, cube and pyramid), each line of mathematical description interspersed with the body's despair ("Anguished body / through the anguished rotation / of a rectangle of anguish / around one of its anguished sides").[34] Each of these poems is printed on a clear plastic sheet that stands like a tombstone behind small glass versions of the five geometrical forms, all of which stand on a substantial plastic base containing hidden mechanisms below and to one side.

[34] Reprinted in Ghérasim Luca, "Sisyphe géomètre," in *Paralipomènes* (Paris: Le soleil noir, 1976) 97–105.

With the work connected to electricity, electromagnets cause the glass solids to glow in different colors with the noble gases they contain: lift the fragile solids from their bases, the force-field weakens and the light dims. In some versions of this work, manipulating the solids also activates an audio mechanism relaying a recording of Luca's voice, intoning each poem.[35] In this fragile, unique edition, on the path to being sculpture, no longer quite a publication, flaunting absence and inhabiting a world of mathematical precision whose philosophical grounding it nevertheless promises to ruin, Luca's task as an unclassifiable re-thinker of meanings and experiences finds tenuous concrete form.[36]

Luca and the Object

One field to which Luca made a significant but largely unappreciated contribution is in the domain of the surrealist object — that category of activity on the fault-line between surrealism's artistic practice and its encounter with the materials and experiences of the everyday world. Celebrated examples of this genre, in which collisions of hitherto unrelated objects result in unexpected yet perfect juxtapositions, or in which found objects are interrogated as physical signs of the operation of objective chance, are among the movement's most iconic artifacts. Luca's first encounter with surrealism came at a period when this at times obsessive concern with the object among surrealists was at its height, and it is little surprise that he should have been similarly drawn to the object as a perfect strategy for bridging the gap between surrealist theory and

[35] See Bailly, op. cit., pp. 62–6. For a vivid demonstration of the work, see the documentary film of this and Kowalski's *Chant de la Carpe* object by Gisèle and Luc Meichler at http://vimeo.com/41038017. Kowalski would make a hologram response to *Sisyphe géomètre*, entitled *Epitaph pour Ghérasim Luca*, in 1993.

[36] The work is 'published' by Éditions Claude Givaudin, Geneva 1966. Can it be considered a book? The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris evidently thinks so, since they own a copy, catalogued as a 'book-object'; asking to consult it in the special collections room in the late 1980s without yet knowing what it was, with some initial reluctance the staff brought the work out and allowed me to play with the delicate enigma for a while.

its practice of everyday life, between poetry and the concrete, transformative action the movement promised to enact. Whilst Luca's direct involvement with this strand of activity seems to have been limited solely to the period of the Bucharest surrealist group, a concern with the problem of the object would, as we shall see, remain visible in his later work.

The world of Luca's earliest surrealist writings, dating from the very end of the 1930s and early 1940s, is already suffused with an ecstatic vision of things and their inter-relationships in which even the humblest article is capable of a benign or malevolent independent agency, part of a constellation of sentient forms gathered around our every step:

> The objects suavely heteroclite, the button, the veins, a mustache, a guitar, a thunderbolt, the piano thrown from the window, a hat from which a very beautiful woman consumes spaghetti […] a spider next to a fork, and the mythology of orgy take on a voluptuously fresh significance, the rendezvous of objects borrowing the velvety feel of nebulousness and the catastrophic nature of a rendezvous of planets […].[37]

More strikingly still, this vision of a tumult of everyday objects enacting their own promiscuous interactions or hastening an occult and erotic re-reading of human relationships formed the basis for a unique, legendary work within Luca's *œuvre*, one which was sometimes (though misleadingly) placed at the head of his bibliographies as if to suggest its status as an 'ur-text' preceding all others. *Quantitativement aimée* dates from 1944 (making it the first of Luca's explicitly surrealist works to be published, even if it postdates other manuscripts such as the text I have just cited).

[37] Gherasim Luca, "I Love You," in *Inventor of Love and Other Writings*, tr. by Julian and Laura Semilian (Boston: Black Widow Press, 2009) 96–100 (see 96). The original text in Romanian dates from 1942.

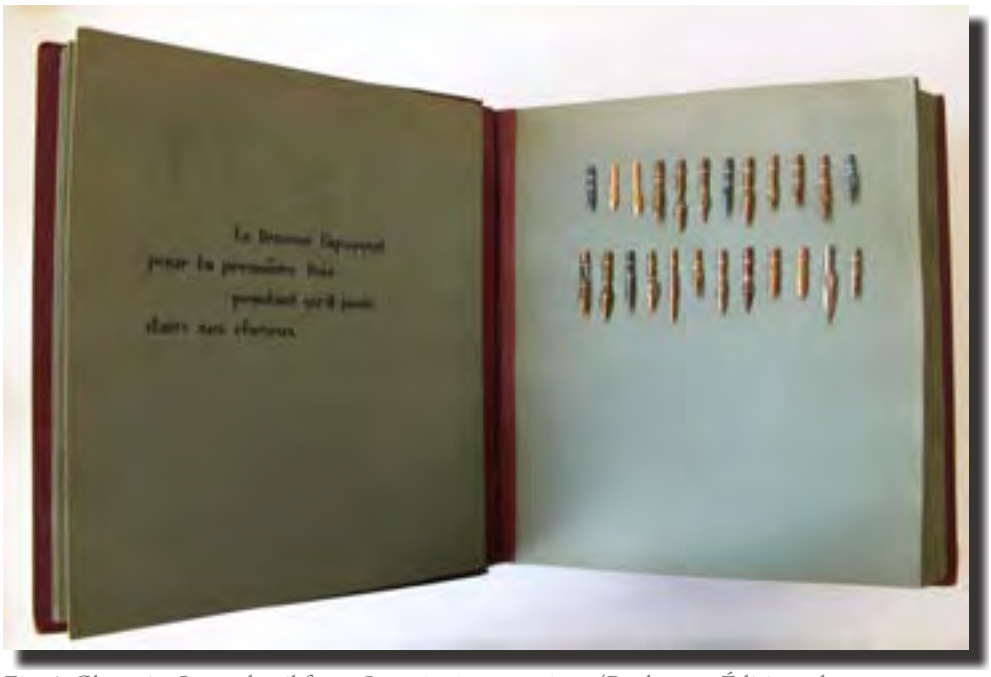

Fig. 4. Gherasim Luca, detail from *Quantitativement aimée* (Bucharest: Éditions de l'Oubli, 1944). Private collection, Paris.

But though 'published' by Éditions de l'Oubli, this was in fact a work made in an edition of a single copy, one frequently referenced but that has until recently remained almost entirely undocumented. Comprising two ready-made large scale albums, made of pale green card bound in a maroon cover, it features short hand-stenciled poetic texts describing a kind of violent, dream-like *Kama Sutra* ("The man bites her / lips while caressing a toothed wheel / while the woman / casts spells at him"), while the facing pages are filled with changing combinations of fountain pen nibs sewn to the card like a stationer's display board, 944 of them in all.[38] The irregular lines of the nibs, each apparently different, many embossed or engraved, some in the shape of spears, scythes, or pointing hands, seem to dance across the page, both answering and conjuring the intricate erotic struggle between the poem's nameless pair of protagonists.

[38] Left behind on Luca's departure from Bucharest, its two volumes were separated, one eventually being returned to its author while the other ended up in a Swiss private collection (conversation with Micheline Catti, Paris, March 2013). Although the work was exhibited several times — for instance, in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* of 2001 — the first time it seems to have been shown in print is in issue 17 of *Empreintes* (Paris, 2011, 24–27), which reproduces the whole text of the first volume with only details of its 'illustrations.'

Bereft of their customary use, the panoply of nibs — intended precisely for writing but here trapped, unused, and standing in for *illustration* — takes on a hallucinatory quality of promise, frustration, and proliferation. The *writing* of this manuscript, on the other hand, is precisely for once not handwriting, but stencils (with the exception of a single letter 'u' in red ink), a semi-mechanized form whose typography hints at uses other than poetic: industrial, commercial, impersonal at the moment its meanings are intrusively intimate.

This interplay between text and thing, between a dissolving sense of selfhood and the magical objects that hold it in thrall, had in fact already been the guiding principle for another key work published a year later but dating from 1941, *Le vampire passif*. A 'lost classic' of surrealism, this work would remain almost unknown until the following century, on its reissue by José Corti in 2001 and its publication in English in 2008.[39] An extended meditation on the problem of the object as an active sign illuminating the paths of desire and anxiety, or as an enchanted body linking inner and outer realities, *Le vampire passif* joins works such as Breton's *L'Amour fou* or the writings of Louis Aragon or Salvador Dalí as a key statement on the surrealist object, and like some of these writings maintains in tension divergent voices that move from the tone of a scientific or psychoanalytic document to an intense, mythologized language interspersed with personal accounts of the life of Luca and his friends in the clandestine Bucharest surrealist group of the early 1940s. Just as importantly, however, the book also features 18 illustrations, for the most part of surrealist objects either found or constructed by Luca (and photographed by Victor Brauner's brother Théodore). The fact that most or all of these objects themselves appear to have been lost, leaving only the photographic evidence of

[39] Gherasim Luca, *Le vampire passif* (Bucharest: Les Éditions de l'Oubli, 1945) and Paris: Corti, 2001; *The Passive Vampire* (Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2008). For more on the role of the object in this work, see my preface 'Luca the Absolute' in the latter edition, and on the role of the object in his work overall, see my article "From Sorcery to Silence: The Objects of Gherasim Luca," *Modern Language Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (July 1993) 625–638.

a hitherto obscure publication, is part of the reason why Luca's contribution to the category of the surrealist object has until now rarely been acknowledged.[40]

Le vampire passif is divided into two unequal parts, with the first and shorter section devoted to an "Introduction to the Objectively Offered Object." This essay, more didactic in tone and at times apparently modeled on psychoanalytic writings, locates the origins of Luca's interest in the object in a collective game of the Objectively Offered Object (O.O.O.), in which participants devise and ceremonially bestow upon each other ritual objects that mark a kind of unconscious but concrete transaction between individuals, undermining the stultified conventions of conventional gifts and object exchange. A set of examples follows, each accompanied by an image, a description and analysis. The illustrations are rarely adjacent to the relevant text but are scattered throughout the whole book, as if already to suggest their wayward, self-governing identity. *Dusk*, for example, comprising a cushion from which hang a pair of large doll's legs with a small doll's hand dangling between them, and on which is sewn yet more arrays of pen nibs (75 this time), is destined for Victor Brauner, prompted by an earlier present of two nibs from the artist.

[40] Luca's activity as an object maker does not seem to have featured in any of the books and catalogues around the surrealist object; at least one of *Le vampire passif*'s objects, the "found self-portrait" in metal with which it opens, does appear to have survived, since at the time of writing it is advertised for sale on AbeBooks.co.uk (again that tension between book and object) by a Parisian bookseller.

Fig. 5. Gherasim Luca, *Dusk*, object from *Le vampire passif* (Éditions de l'Oubli, 1945). Private collection, Paris.

Its making sets in train a difficult conflict with Luca's wife, charged with constructing the object, and the analysis of the work shifts from a Freudian reading of desire and onanism to a less expected numerological interpretation that turns *Dusk* into a portent of the death of Brauner's father. *The Letter L* on the other hand, whose genesis is described in detail, is formed from the body of a doll, covered in newspaper clippings of riddles, with a second doll's head slung between its legs that has razor blades thrust into its scalp and eye. Once again made using chance processes that are then taken as psychologically-charged, divinatory or magical signs, Luca reads *La Lettre L* as standing in for a missing

dialogue with André Breton (with the object containing specific echoes of the mysterious Nadja, subject of Breton's book, and Luca's readings clearly influenced by Breton's text "Equation of the found object" incorporated into *L'Amour fou*). A final pair of objects, only one of them illustrated, trigger a premonition of an earthquake which duly takes place that night.

The remaining, slightly longer segment of the book — "Le vampire passif" proper — begins to slip from the more controlled tone of the presentation of the O.O.O., and towards more unpredictable registers and descriptions. Sorcery, dream, phantoms, death and above all a hallucinatory libidinal energy are all invoked in this second text, but its actors are often not so much individual people — who, along with Luca's dissolving sense of identity in his writing, seem to fade in and out of reality — as things:

> Objects, those mysterious suits of armour beneath which desire awaits us, nocturnal and laid bare, these snares made of velvet, of bronze, of gossamer that we throw at ourselves with each step we take; […] objects, this catalepsy, this steady spasm, this 'stream into which one never steps twice' and into which we plunge as into a photograph; objects those philosophers' stones that discover, transform, hallucinate, communicate our screaming […].[41]

More surrealist objects by Luca, this time not described or analyzed but present just as photographs, intersperse the text — such as one itself titled *Le vampire passif* and featuring what appears to be a bronze neoclassical sculpture of an androgynous torso and head, laid prone upon a larger metal hand; little naked celluloid dolls fan out from behind it, two unidentified dark circular forms are placed close by, and a pair of pipettes suck at the figure's face. The final section of *Le vampire passif* describes an intense but fateful encounter between Luca and a woman, Déline, that is marked by — but it turns out apparently manipulated by — exchanges of such objects.

[41] Luca, *The Passive Vampire*, op. cit., 71.

At no point does Luca make a claim for the objects of *Le vampire passif* as artworks; from the evidence, some look to have existed solely in order to be photographed, while a few other illustrations simply document found objects or images. Nevertheless, the most striking of them bear comparison to the more celebrated examples of surrealist objects, looking particularly close, for instance, to some of the intricate multi-part assemblages of Oscar Dominguez from the 1930s (which often incorporate stand-ins for the human body and notions of penetration or incision). The influence of the objects of Salvador Dalí may also be discerned, as well as of his writings, given the book's tendency to veer from the lucid to the delirious, a bipolarity that the objects — with their manifest reality (since their source materials can usually be readily discerned) yet shifting and risky interpretations — seem to embody to a similar degree. Tied to text, embedded in Luca's narrative, then lost to audiences except as images in a book, the objects appear to float in a nether world, possible yet imaginary at the same time.

During the period of Bucharest surrealism Luca was also, however, pursuing object assemblages about which much less is known and that seem harder to read or classify. The evidence for this is a series of five illustrations for his book *Inventatorul iubirii* (*The Inventor of Love*) of 1945, though the suggestion is that the objects, like the text itself, in fact date from a few years earlier. These are works over which a palpable sense of enigma reigns: while the specific text to which they refer, "Parcurg imposibiliul" ("I Roam the Impossible") claims they were made not by Luca but by a mysterious, unnamed lover, the illustrations were omitted from its subsequent editions, and to my knowledge have never been reproduced since.[42]

[42] Gherasim Luca, *Inventatorul iubirii* (Bucharest: Editura Negația Negației, 1945). Only the original Romanian edition carries illustrations, and neither its reissue by Corti (Paris, 1994) in a revised version reedited by Luca himself which omitted the whole of "Parcurg imposibiliul," nor its translations into English, Spanish, or Italian retain them.

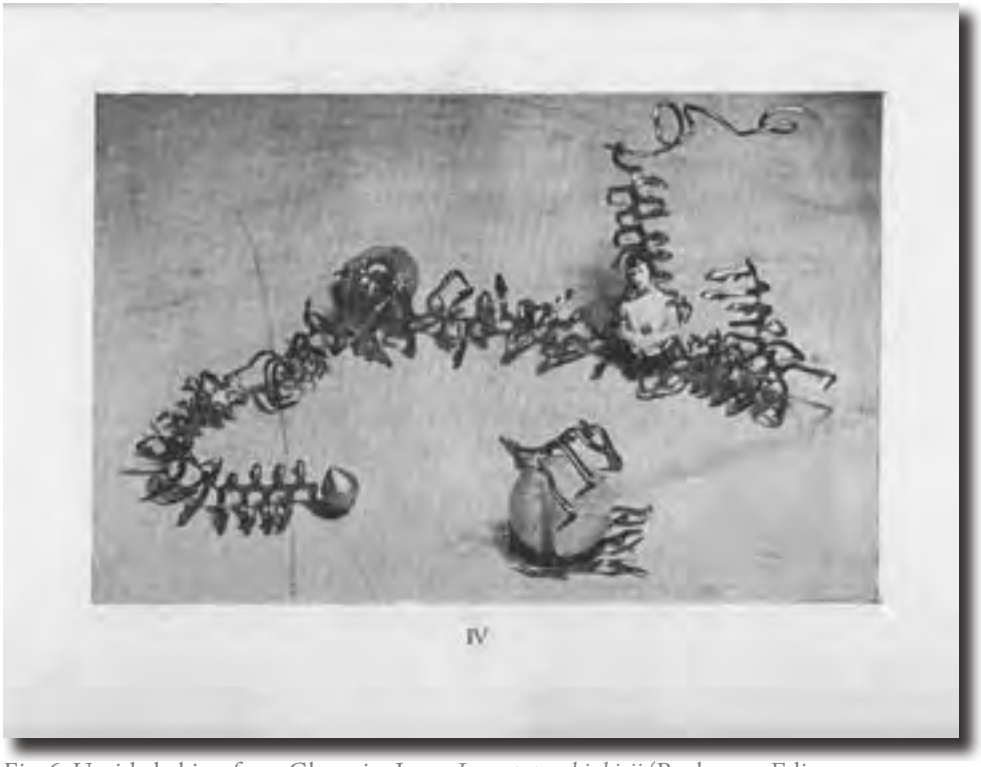

Fig. 6. Untitled object from Gherasim Luca, *Inventatorul iubirii* (Bucharest: Editura Negația Negației, 1945). Private collection, Paris.

The question of the objects' authorship remains open: while Luca's commentary repeats several times the assertion that they were given to him, both the text's sense of the porous identity of its protagonists, and the clear affinity between most of these objects and Luca's earlier assemblages, render their status ambivalent. The constructions themselves one can assume to be lost — indeed their provisional nature makes them appear already on the verge of dissolution. Low-quality photographic reproductions show assemblages against a plain background that makes their scale hard to judge. Numbered I–V but without titles or links from these numbers to the rest of the book, this time no direct readings accompany constructions whose components can sometimes be discerned but at others only guessed at: springs, balls, broken metal fixtures, twisted wire, rubber strands, an eyepiece (perhaps from a camera), a rubber bulb, fragments of clay figurines. Even more enigmatic and harder to classify than *Le vampire passif*'s assemblages, some of the works stand upright on small

plinths or supports as if to suggest weird para-scientific technical instruments, but another lies apparently strewn on the floor, makeshift and tenuous.[43] Like the objects of *Le vampire passif* governed by the hidden mechanisms of mediumistic and latent erotic agency, Luca's text stresses the lack of certainty embodied in these 'disconcerting and irritating' bodies:

> Entirely bewildered by these five objects, inflamed to the point of erection, irritated and chimerical at the sight of them, these objects perpetuate in me a state of visionary receptivity which incites me to grasp the distant messages contained in them and the consequence of making contact with these objects is that the very core of my quotidian life is engaged and not just its sublimated aspects.[44]

The objects were no doubt assembled from chance-derived found fragments, and have the same sense of fetishistic, magical resonance as those of *Le vampire passif*, though this time their more technical air, their more marginal, temporary, and un-assignable nature makes their purpose feel altogether murkier. Luca had been made to carry out forced labor as a street-cleaner during the war, notably having to clear up the rubble after enemy bombing raids,[45] a task which would have put him in daily contact with broken and abandoned objects but which (even if this is not the direct source of the elements in question) gives this process of finding them through objective chance an altogether more tragic resonance.

As the Bucharest surrealist group gradually abandoned its collective activities, the role of the object began to take on a different resonance for Luca. One of the group's last gestures had been a contribution to the 1947 Interna-

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[43] Amongst other possible reference points, these works recall some of the early, again rather provisional though larger combinations and scaffoldings of objects made by Jacques Hérold from the mid-1930s onwards, now known only through photographs but of which Luca must surely have been aware — see Emmanuel Guigon, *El objeto surrealista* (Valencia: IVAM Centre Julio Gonzales) 204–5.

[44] Gherasim Luca, "I Roam the Impossible," in *Inventor of Love and Other Writings*, op. cit., 33–41 (cf. 36 and 41).

[45] Ghérasim Luca, autobiographical note cited in Nicoleta Manucu, "Luca ou l'invention du soi," *Ghérasim Luca* (Cahiers de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix) op. cit., 9–16 (14).

tional Surrealist Exhibition in Paris with a text, "Le Sable nocturne," proposing an encounter in a completely blackened room with sixteen objects intended to provoke erotic responses — a "knowing through misunderstanding" — and listed entities that were now virtual, almost philosophical propositions rather than concrete bodies ("An immense crystal, impulsively scented, on the face of a feather").[46] Luca's work of the post-war period, on which his principle reputation rests, appears to move away from the theme of the object, and towards a focus upon language, performance and image instead. But while the poetry of this section of his life is usually characterized precisely by a lack of easily-definable things — dealing instead with concepts, states, conditions — every now and again an enigmatic, philosophical object surfaces. "Héros-Limite," the poem which gives its title to Luca's first collection of works to be published in Paris, in 1953, is organized around an obsessive enumeration of the morphology of sixteen objects apparently made up of holes (the final object characterized as a zero ('hero'), as an infinite and metaphysical limit).[47] Among the intricate wordplay and allusive descriptions of impossible forms, it would be easy to miss that the matrix of this poem lies in all probability in physical things: metal sheets, punctured with holes — the remains of some industrial process for stamping out die-cut circles — on the borders of 'thinghood,' are the real objects behind this apparently hypothetical proposition, a reminder that Luca's ideas always move towards concrete reality.[48]

[46] Luca *et al.*, "Le Sable nocturne," op. cit., 56.
[47] Ghérasim Luca, "Héros-Limite," in *Héros-Limite* (Paris: Le soleil noir, 1970; second edition) 13–24.
[48] See the photograph of Luca with one of these perforated metal sheets in *Cahiers de l'Abbaye Saint-Croix*, No. 110, p. 17.

Cubomania

The period of surrealism in Bucharest also generated what is perhaps Luca's single most distinctive visual innovation, the *cubomanie*, apparently dating from around 1944, revived in the early 1960s and then practiced for the remainder of his life.[49] A collage in which found images are reconfigured into grids, beneath the cubomania's formal economy lies a conceptual framework that makes it one of the most theoretically-driven examples of surrealist representation; two exhibitions (1945 & 1946) and a small publication, *Les orgies des quanta*, presented the first results, while cubomanias also featured on the cover of *Le vampire passif* and illustrated *Inventatorul iubirii*.

Fig. 7. Gherasim Luca, *Vol à la langue*, cubomania from *Les orgies des quanta* (Bucharest: Surréalisme, 1946). Private collection, Paris.

[49] The following section draws on my article "Gherasim Luca: Le désir desire," from the forthcoming volume, Monique Yaari, ed., *Un et multiple: 'Infra-Noir,' un groupe surréaliste entre Bucarest et Paris*. For a much more detailed consideration of the cubomania, see my forthcoming article "Ghérasim Luca: Cubomania," *Dada / Surrealism*, No. 19 (autumn 2013): http://ir.uiowa.edu/dadasur.

Identified as a manifestation of Luca's theory of non-Oedipal relations, Luca first defined the cubomania in terms of a critique of the alleged objectivity of social conditions, and as a vigorous rejection of the tyranny of Oedipal forces:

> The cubomania is the instantaneous ocular correspondent of our attitude towards the external world, an attitude consisting of the refusal to consider the axiomatic human condition as an objective reality, even in its apparently immutable aspects.[50]

A significant departure from existing Dada and surrealist collage practice, cubomania uses a disarmingly simple principle: found printed materials — photographs, engraved illustrations, and above all reproductions of paintings — are sliced into small, precise, and regular squares. These squares (usually from one source image per cubomania, sometimes more, but later typically from several copies of the same image) are then re-assembled into regular grid structures, initially 3 x 3 or 5 x 5 elements, then 3 x 4, and eventually in a whole variety of configurations and sizes, including associating several smaller collages into pairs or series. Component squares are rotated, shifted, jumbled in such a way that the original source image seems made to reveal its latent unconscious configurations, negating the first image while feeding on its contents and leaving the sense that every representation contains the possibility of its own explosion. Dismembered pictures have their meanings and hierarchies dissolved, while the seamless joining of squares gives no quarter to context or anecdote; distinctions between inside and outside, edge and center are set in play, everywhere is a border or a rupture.

For all its modest format, Luca conceived of the cubomania as part of a sweeping attack on the perception of the world of images and things whose structural integrity had failed, driven by the negation of negation: "The cubomania denies. The cubomania renders the known unknowable."[51] Titles of the

[50] Gherasim Luca, "Cubomanies," in Luca & Trost, *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d'objets* (Bucharest: Sala Brezoianu, 1945) unpaginated.
[51] Ibid.

works listed in the exhibition catalogue of 1945 suggest an intersection of the scientific and the ethical (*Analysis of Chance and the Play of Truth*) with several apparently sourced from the captions of a popular science manual (*Experiment with Falling Bodies*); non-Euclidean geometry, non-Newtonian mechanics, and non-Pasteurian biology are all invoked in Luca's presentation text of 1945. The cubomania's operation at the crossroads of science and eros, of the hyper-logical and the pathological, is underlined by Luca's title for the most extensive publication of his early cubomanias, *Les orgies des quanta* (*The Quanta Orgies*) of 1946, which features reproductions of 33 works, whose only text was their titles and a pair of quotes from Hegel and de Sade.[52]

The sources of the cubomanias vary, but with few exceptions they all incorporate elements of the human figure. At times this presence is explicit (those illustrating *Inventatorul iubirii* are made from photographs of nudes) while at others just a small body part peeps from among drapery or objects in a covert fetishized ritual. Like many of Luca's later texts the cubomania — its name already suggestive of a clinical condition — stresses a compulsive repetition and manic operation reminiscent of the stuttering typical of his subsequent writings. The echoing and uncanny doubling of many of the cubomanias figures here as a summoning of repressed desires, as though this collage form were part magic rite, part psychiatric case study. Above all, the cubomania stands, as Luca would write to Brauner in June 1946, as an attempt to rescue desire from the clutches of an Oedipal past, to reclaim "the tempting image of that love object which finally ceases to be a ready-made object […] so as to become the perpetual aphrodisiac of an object to be made, to be remade, to do anything."[53] But in its ruining and destructive strategies, in its enactment of a violent (Sadean) eroticism, the cubomania can also be read as a political act, a manifestation of a will to revolution that might operate as an aggressive dismantling of cultural values and biological truths. Limited for the moment to an

[52] Gherasim Luca, *Les orgies des quanta* (Bucharest: Surréalisme, 1946).
[53] Luca, letter to Victor Brauner, June 30, 1946, in Morando and Patry, *Victor Brauner*, op. cit., 220–1.

operation on the image, Luca would see cubomania's non-Oedipal logic as not just an expression of an attitude towards the concrete realm and lived experience, but as itself capable of extension to the rest of the world:

> A practical lesson of cubomania in everyday life: choose three chairs, two hats, a few stones and umbrellas, several trees, three naked and five elegantly-dressed women, sixty men, several houses, some cars of all ages, gloves, telescopes, etc.
>
> Cut them all into small pieces (for instance 6 x 6 cm) and mix them well in a large city square. Reconstitute them according to the laws of chance or your own whim and you will obtain an unknown or recognizable landscape, an object or beautiful woman, the woman and the landscape of your desires.[54]

Couched in an ironic, darkly humorous tone, Luca's promotion of its logic into the realm of things and experience gives the cubomania the flavor of an action, potential but at the same time already lived out everywhere in a world collapsing around the poet's ears.

The later cubomanias (better-known since the originals of many of those made in Bucharest seem to have been lost), on the other hand, were no longer accompanied by such ambitious theoretical statements; what they explored instead was above all the fleeting, constantly reformulated nature of representation and identity, in an restless reconfiguration of fragmented reproductions of paintings, in particular from the Renaissance.[55] Repeated elements from the same image (presumably using multiple sources such as postcards) invite the viewer to meditate on Walter Benjamin's notion of aura and the mechanically-reproduced image, or on repetition and the shudder of meaning as vision is multiplied in a *mise en abyme*. Where the cubomanias of the 1940s often featured larger arrays of components producing a dazzling, tessel-

[54] Luca, "Cubomanies," op. cit, unpaginated.

[55] See the selection in *Cahiers de l'Abbaye Saint-Croix*, op. cit., which is the best source for a range of cubomanias across Luca's career.

lated effect in which any original relation of figure to ground, for instance, starts to collapse, works from the 1960s onwards began to hone a complex but precise vision of the body. Smaller arrays of squares — often six or four, sometimes even just a pair, and then often in constellations of two or more configurations from the same source material on a painted backing board — feature limbs or faces quartered and then inverted, mirrored, folded into themselves or restructured into a kind of metaphysical architecture of physical anatomy. *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini* (1987), for example, takes Van Eyck's sober depiction of Arnolfini of 1435, removes his torso below the chest altogether, then makes two proposals for restructuring the sitter, leaving just the bare remnants of a face in which only an ear and part of an eye survive.

Fig. 8. Ghérasim Luca, *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini* (after Van Eyck), cubomania, 1987. Private collection, Paris.

The result is a kind of aporia of fugitive identity: as Arnolfini's visible self implodes, his striking red headdress begins to take on a life of its own, animating itself around the slender remnants of its owner.

Several small exhibitions of these works, in Paris, Saint-Paul-de-Vence, and Villeneuve d'Ascq, confirmed Luca's interest in pursuing this aspect of his work. Sometimes cubomanias featured in the context of Luca's later publications, and on at least one occasion he would explore the relationship between cubomania and text in a complex, private portfolio made with photographer Gilles Ehrmann and Micheline Catti. *Crier taire sourire fou* was a giant-format boxed portfolio featuring short, enigmatic texts and phrases by Luca in a precise, slightly futuristic hand-drawn typography which intersperse Ehrmann's photographs of Luca's cubomanias, glued to the pages in a playful variety of sizes and configurations and underlining the possibility that cubomania and poetry belonged rightfully in the same place.[56]

Drawings and Albums

Two final aspects of Luca's visual work still need to be considered, both of considerable interest but neither of which seem to have generated significant comment up to now: a small but intriguing body of drawings, and his activity at the intersection of word and image through the use of modified photographic albums. Luca experimented with a range of drawing techniques over his lifetime, but his most distinctive style, developed in the 1960s, consisted of laboriously building up diaphanous forms made of tiny individual dots in ink (made presumably with a fountain pen or a biro: in some cases the dots seem completely regular, in others they vary slightly in size). Luca's drawing practice is often explicitly tied to text, as well as to meditations on growth, place, space and time. An untitled and unpublished album of drawings, for example, opens

[56] *Crier taire sourire fou: éclairage du double reglé par Gherasim Luca, Gilles Ehrmann et Micheline Catti*, calligraphy by Pierre Boutillier, published by the authors, Paris, May 1961. This work, intended initially as a prototype for a larger edition, was in fact made only as two copies; according to Catti (conversation, Paris, March 2013) Ehrmann's copy was lost.

with the note: "Paris Naples Ginostra / Summer 74 / 'log' book / With no end or beginning."[57]

Fig. 9. Ghérasim Luca, *Aimée aquatique volcanique*, ink and pencil drawing from untitled portfolio of drawings, 1974; dated Stromboli, August 4, 1974. Private collection, Paris.

[57] "Paris Napoli Ginostra / Été 74 / Journal de 'bord' / Sans fin ni commencement." Private collection, Paris.

Made during a trip to Italy and the island of Stromboli, the dozen or so drawings on fine art paper (with the subsequent sheets blank as though beckoning the series' 'endless' completion) are mostly dated on the back and given a geographical location, while a few also have titles, indicating that Luca initiated the collection as a kind of diary of his journey, and that the drawings were made one per day rather than in closer sequence. Delicate shapes emerge from row upon row of dots — very faint pencil lines suggest some preliminary armatures but one can imagine the drawings being built up in spontaneous fashion — to form constellations evoking animal, protozoic, or plant forms (like growth rings or arrays of seeds on a sunflower head), or microscopic structures in crystals. Sometimes apparently abstract, other drawings suggest primitive human outlines, all of them working outwards into the white of the paper as if to assert and explore their emerging outlines. Alternating straight arrays with curving or radiating systems of dots, this is a form of mark-making where drawing's defining motif — the arrangement of sustained, more or less unbroken *lines* — is abandoned for a kind of mathematical or geographic plotting, marking out space and time, an infinite series of *points* that chart the possibilities and the becoming of form. Two published portfolios explicitly connect this practice to text: the second half of the large-format book *La fin du monde* of 1969 consists of five poems handwritten in Luca's italic script, each occupying a roughly square space in the lower part of the page. From the edges of these un-bordered text boxes radiate curlicues, filigrees, and striations of dots evoking ferns or textile forms.[58] Another, posthumously published work, *La voici la voie silanxieuse*, consists almost entirely of such drawings, some arranged in formal geometric patterns, others suggesting glyphs; in this case, significantly, many of them are chained directly to the text, which in the first section of the book is rendered in a subtle hand-drawn typography made from

[58] Ghérasim Luca, *La fin du monde* (Paris: Jean Petithory, 1969). The colophon identifies the images as engravings, though their origin (given that they include handwriting that would have been impossible to render in reverse) must surely have been drawings.

dots, giving the sparse, evocative language (sometimes only a word or two per page) a fleeting yet organic character.[59]

The final category of Luca's visual experimentation is perhaps the least known yet amongst the most intriguing, not least because its form rests precisely on the intersection between the verbal and the visual, forming a bridge between these two directions within his practice (and linking back to the key but obscure early work *Quantitativement aimée*). An avid collector of albums containing sets of old photographs, Luca would use them in a game of *détournement*, varying the format and process for each one and apparently resulting in several dozen fascinating objects; the documented examples of these all date from the 1960s.[60] To date, some details of seven of these albums have been made available, though only two have been published in their entirety; five are held in the collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou.[61] Lying somewhere between the status of collage, assemblage, and the artist's book, these albums are perhaps closest in spirit to André Breton's investigation of the 'poem-object' (works in which objects or images are interspersed with words), since for the most part Luca's albums are organized around a single poetic text, fragmented into component parts and spread throughout the album in such a way as to invite the viewer / reader to reconstitute it phrase by phrase. *Une tête perdue* of 1962, for example, threads a short poetic narrative "A lost head / driving at brisk speed / with all its lights off / swerved off at a bend / and crashed into / another head / full on […]" through an old photograph album (of the kind where images can be inserted into pre-cut frames) by

[59] Ghérasim Luca, *La voici la voie silanxieuse* (Paris: Corti, 1996). The final pages of this work feature some experimental iterations of the cubomania format, featuring concise, sparse combinations of extracts from reproductions of paintings that are this time in strips rather than squares, and incorporating clippings of found text.

[60] "Les Albums de Ghérasim Luca," *Empreintes*, No. 10 (summer 2007) 40–47. This very brief article (text p. 40) seems to be the only place to date where this aspect of Luca's practice is discussed; the journal has also published the text of *Quantitativement aimée* (see above) and reproduced another entire album (see below).

[61] The implications of the location are significant, since these works have effectively been classified as artworks rather than books or illustrated texts. The albums were donated to the MNAM by Micheline Catti in 2009.

inscribing each segment into the blank spaces where a photograph should have been.[62]

Fig. 10. Ghérasim Luca, detail from untitled album ("Une tête perdue…"), 1962. Private collection, Paris; image courtesy of *Empreintes*, Paris.

The darkly comic poem thus sits alongside those frames where photographs are still present (found in place already, one assumes, when Luca bought the album). Ladies and gentlemen in formal attire and stiff poses — kissing a lady's hand, doffing a hat, clapping at an invisible spectacle or trying out various seating positions — and their servants, a carriage and a car (the one direct echo of the poem's content) present a silent but absurd catalogue of turn of the century behavior in humorous contrast to the poem's automobile disaster.

This format, featuring handwritten poems in the blank frames of missing images in open-ended dialogue with found photographs, is the procedure for three of the albums in the collection of the MNAM. *"Tautologie de terreur sans tête..."* (1962), *"Ton pied absent"* and *"De rien à rien en 'tête à tête'..."* (both

[62] Ghérasim Luca, "Un album inédit," *Empreintes*, No. 14 (undated) 32–35. The poem is reminiscent of nineteenth century anarchist writer Félix Fénéon's 'three line novels,' comical and macabre journalistic *faits divers*.

1962–65) all feature snippets of text alongside late nineteenth-century family portrait photographs framed in albums, with the last of these using negative as well as positive prints, adding to the play of presence and absence where Luca's calligraphy with its complex word-play is often written in white on black paper. "*A la santé du mort…*" of 1962 is based on a much more ornate album, virtually an art object in its own right, with a heavy cover decorated with gold leaf, gilt edges, and oval vignette frames surrounded by brightly colored printed nature scenes alternating with full-page photographs (for example a fine 1920s or 1930s portrait of a couple dressed as *commedia dell'arte* characters holding large balloons). Once again the relation between text, image, and object is oblique and ambiguous, suggesting complex or hidden interactions through the poem's word play rather than allowing the relationship to settle into simple writing and illustration oppositions. A fifth album in the MNAM collection, *Sans titre (Femmes, chiens...)*, once again of 1962–65, this time has no text; larger found photographs and photocopies of a woman's face and body are cut into segments and re-presented in the cut-out frames of each page so as to create exploded, de-realized views of the body in ways that link back to some of Luca's very earliest experiments with the cubomania (a few of which had used photographs of nudes).[63]

Série Brésil (1960–70), the original components of which are also held in the MNAM archives, this time presents not an album but a portfolio of 16 fine, large format turn of the century photographs of Brazil: Corcovado, street scenes, and botanical gardens for example, but also documentary images of agricultural production and, most strikingly, portraits of a "negress from Bahia" and of indigenous natives.[64] Each reproduction features a printed caption (the series is presumably a tourist souvenir, with strong colonial overtones). Over every image and its legend, Luca has pasted cut-outs from an old Larousse dic-

[63] All five of these albums are documented at the Musée National d'Art Moderne's archive site, www.mnam-doc.cnac-gp.fr, though only a page or two of each is reproduced.
[64] The MNAM site reproduces these originals, but the portfolio has also been re-edited in facsimile, with a presentation text, by cipM, Marseille, 2008.

tionary, each featuring an engraved illustration and its own caption, so that now two levels of text-image relationships are in play, one Western, the other 'other,' the pair sometimes clearly inter-related but often connected instead at some secret or unconscious level.

Fig. 11. Ghérasim Luca, collage from *Série Brésil*, 1960s, reprint cipM, Marseille 2008

Images of formal gardens and wild forest are populated with arrays of plants and birds respectively; a picture of black workers harvesting coffee features little representations of boxes and jars but also shackles; clippings of algebraic formulae crop up repeatedly in the series. An arresting portrait of a child from a Matto Grosso tribe in a feather head-dress and arm bands is overlaid with

diagrams for sign language and braille, another mathematical equation, and labeled dictionary images for 'sphere,' 'bomb,' 'axis' and 'antipodes' (the last two again linked to pictures of a sphere and the Earth), as though to adorn him in the jewels of the world, and arm (or is it burden?) him with a coded private language. *Série Brésil* spins text and image around each other like atomic particles or planets, orbiting a still center in which meaning and culture, space and time implode. One of his albums of 1962 features a short aphoristic text (only published in book form much later): "Poetry / without language / Revolution / without anyone / Love / without end."[65] A sense of this endlessness, of the paradox of a poetry beyond words that touches something absent yet possible, vibrates through the whole of Luca's visual poetry.

Cromer, April 2013

Krzysztof Fijalkowski, "*La poésie sans langue*: Ghérasim Luca, Visual Poet"
Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VII, No. 3 (fall 2013) 6–44.

[65] "Les Albums de Ghérasim Luca," op. cit., 41; this poem was reprinted under the title "gREVE GENERALe sans fin ni commencement," in *La proie s'ombre* (Paris: Corti, 1991) 45–55. For an English version, see Ghérasim Luca, *Self-Shadowing Prey*, tr. by Mary Ann Caws (New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2012) 40–50.

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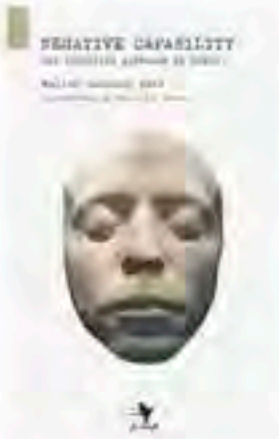

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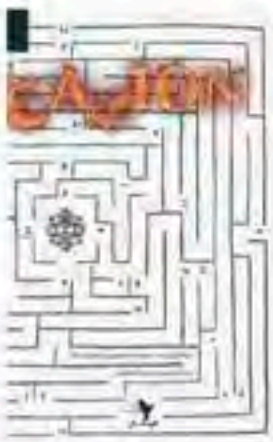

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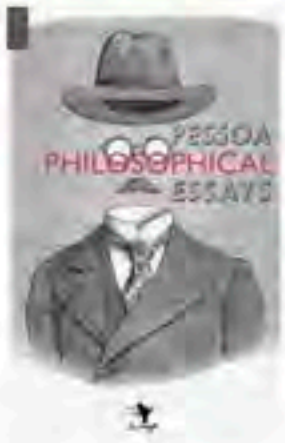

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HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Reading Luca, Reading Me

Allan Graubard

Gertrude Abercrombie, *Grey House* (ca. 1945)

In May 2012, Julian Semilian, who translated Luca's *Inventor of Love* with his wife Laura, called me up to ask if I might substitute for the two of them at a reading to celebrate the publication of Luca's third book, newly translated into English, *Self-Shadowing Prey*. Knowing Luca's work as I did, its magnetism, and the risks he endured when writing it — risks not unknown to us but certainly, as he dealt with them, uniquely his own — I agreed. I also knew that I would choose texts from *Inventor of Love*, not the new edition, because in some sense that early book of Luca's seemed to ground all else that was to come. In retrospect this may be true more in a conceptual than linguistic sense

— but the life he charted then, in Bucharest, in 1942, under the oppressive weight of a generalized Fascism, is hair-raising, and in its way foundational. As a Jew and a surrealist, the strikes against him were immanent. If caught, he would have faced execution or virtual enslavement in a work gang or a concentration camp. Somehow he survived avoiding each of those terrible possibilities, and somehow he and his surrealist friends found a way to endure, a small clandestine counter-force to a war-torn nightmare, sustained in secrecy.

For Luca, that kind of secrecy filtered through *Inventor of Love* as a kind of sub-text, revealing itself here and there, ever charging the momentum and heat he brought to his writing, and the desperation that drove him to his five failed suicide attempts. His living space become a kind of involuntary extenuation of that desperation — as much to rid himself of the familial organs that fed a scarred and fatally innocuous routine that love had become, and still, in 2013, is (drained of its violently asocial passion into a bastion for sexuality or child-rearing and oedipal relations) as to provoke the poetic as it was then, as it could be, and as he configured it amidst those circumstances.

But poetry like living is a complex affair, and from it, however striking its revelations are, and however hermetically it secures its sources, seep echoes of the quotidian. In fact, unless there is a clear *rapprochement* between the two, I usually suspect the result is too much of one or another, be it mask or vision or some other stridency that eludes our frailty and needs or other qualities that might not measure up to a particular idea.

What is lyricism in this sense other than a resonant bridge between the realities we face each and every day and the desires that push us, unrelentingly, to write? The one without, the one with less than, the other, perennially abstracts from language a tone that can, and often does, create literature but not that elsewhere in this world that makes of the poem an unforgettable, irreducible act of rapport: between us and the biosphere, and the things and systems we live with or revolt against.

Surrealism, as Luca knew it, fed from those waters, however dark they were in a traumatic era. It was the one medium that Luca adopted, and which lent to his efforts an over-arching valor. His suicide attempts were the riposte not only to the murderous world he faced but also a way to divest himself of any predisposition, valorous or not.

Isn't that the price of poetry, a price that all poets pay in their own, unique ways to ever gain a kind of strength, lucidity, and liberty that they also wrest from the world, and reveal again in words, phrases, metaphors?

So, as I read through *Inventor of Love* again, having already written a review of it, I emerged shaken but not for the evident reason: its brilliance and convulsive beauty. Yes, I thought, there are references to the street, the city and its crowds, the dissonant brutality of society and power then but far too few to claim as a leitmotif. It was as if Luca wrote to save himself from dealing with *all of that* — and why not, who in his right mind would desire anything other than escape. Yet he also wrote by virtue of refusing it, and in that refusal embraced, finally, the negation of that negation, with all his powers poised to aid him: poetic delirium, impassioned despair, erotomania, the magic of objects found and created, chance encounters, paranoia, persecution mania, as he called it, vertiginous sex, imaginary sadism, and rich, desperate love — this ever present extremity to forge anew in his solitude, shared and not, which he conducts as if it contained an orchestra for himself, for her, for anyone who cares to engage it in the texts he left as witness.

And then there is this, striking for its simplicity in an otherwise multi-valent universe, this Luca-verse that was his own:

> Separated from my friends who are scattered about the globe like an exigent leprosy, separated from them by multiple countries and an ocean serving as a conduit over which people make war with one another, I wake up alone each morning in my room, and it is not by accident that my room's windows open directly out onto the military tribunal where each night I hear the sobs of the confined and the convicted, alone in my

> room, always alone, even when my sex, in a perpetual state of erection, magnetically lures from the distance a woman's skirt, even when the woman's skirt perpetually caresses me, indulgent, allowing.[1]

And which ends with this plea that a child half Luca's age would recognize, and which Luca now accepted at last, having nothing else to give:

> I write these lines in the hope that they will be read by a king of thieves ferocious enough to receive me among his peers, a band of civic thieves, civic assassins, civic brigands with whom I would like to spend the rest of the days remaining until the end of the war. (Ibid., 134)

In order to render Luca's voice without appealing to its literalness, which would undercut the collective drama he lived through too much, I sought in his poems the kind of evidence I have just provided. More present as intonation than description, as one condition that fueled his desperation, but a condition he had no control over and which imposed its power on him and his friends, allowing them to dispose of it in the only ways they could — clandestinely — I also knew that discretion here was a necessity; that and a kind of imported balance between the quotidian and the poetic that Luca generally abjured for obvious reasons. I do not believe, at the same time, that I misjudged Luca or his voice in the style I performed it in, seeking the emotional source in his lines as if they were transparent to the world he endured. And that world, in turn, colored his lines and sometimes the very reason he took up his pen to chart, upon a sheet of paper, an exceptionally propulsive arc through it.

Equally important was determining if *Inventor of Love* was more than relevant for us during these opening years of the twenty-first century struck by wars, terrorism, ethnic cleansing, revolution, barbaric intolerance, religious fanaticism, misogyny, disasters natural and man made, bank engendered theft

[1] "The Kleptobject Sleeps," *Inventor of Love and Other Poems*, 133.

on a global scale, and the pressures of an exploding population in countries that can barely support them.

We live in a time that World War Two can easily mirror, however much in a minor key it can seem from our perspective; and that a poet, like Luca, can clarify and transform if by values precisely intimate: for him and for us. After encountering Luca in the early 1940s, it also doesn't matter so much that the stakes we face play out as if the rules are set, our intensities ever conflictive, and our hopes focused on carving out, from the quotidian maze, as much living and creative space as we can.

Performing *Inventor of Love* for the launch of *Self-Shadowing Prey* revealed to me, and to the audience I faced, that Luca was a poet whose work reverberated then, seventy plus years ago, despite his extreme marginalization, and now; with some of his work, for readers of English, finally present. Given the emotional subtext nourished by his place, that beleaguered Bucharest and the greater bloody communion of conquest, his struggle to mediate it through the poetic has consequence. Nor was this merely the vindication of a fascinating poet but the valorization of a sensibility that touches us.

His later, mature works will enchant those willing enough to encounter them, and him. And it comes with a change of address. In 1952, as the "socialist" revolution in Romania consolidates, a stepchild of Stalinist Russia, Luca flees to Paris through Israel. That the surrealist group in Bucharest had previously reached an apogee with public interventions between the end of the war and 1947, thereafter dispersing beneath the tide of cultural and political repression, makes Luca's flight all the more necessary and all the more poignant.

His rage in response and in retrospect, a blast of desert heat in a foreign space, the space of exile, refines. It is in Paris, too, that he enriches his signature positions on love and nature with a performative approach that echoes Dada techniques. Is the presence of Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven floating above Luca, a guardian angel he may never have known about but

which, from my vantage, seems apropos, given his different aims and vocal strategies? With Luca, the presence of the body returns within a concise language rooted in homonymic resonance — as savage and playful as they come. I turn to several poems in *Self-Shadowing Prey* with some notes that may be of interest.

In Luca's "The Forest," verbal alchemy displaces what we might expect when encountering a forest, substituting for any immediate perception — the depth and expanse of trees, the chatter of birds, the sound of the wind — an execution: a tree that captures the forest, this "forest hung from a tree," which in itself is curious but not unexpected, then "hides the tree from the hanged man/and the hanged man in the tree." What "crimes" lead Luca to envision this tree in this fashion? Violent but not sadistic, for what in nature is so human, Luca uses what the forest gives him — a tree that roots but now from a dark, truncated interiority that inseminates, within each word, a moral tempest and final linguistic regicide; the murder of the word "KING." And yet, in this poem the "forest" breathes and shudders and shifts, an underlying, heterogeneous senescent "edge … without beginning or end."

In "The Resisting Whirlwind," signification is precise yet evident meaning conflates, as expressions slip in and out of each other, creating and subduing the movements that a whirlwind provokes. In this poem, the mobility of the whirlwind becomes a double pretense: "the perfectly immobile" and the "strangely mobile." The two intersect and compel, commanding and obeying, just as the poem enwraps us within its movements and then becomes what we, its readers, will make of it. Yet the whirlwind of words that Luca composes in his room, in the room of the poem and the room depicted in the poem, this poem room, whose corners compress this whirlwind, is fixed to the sensibility of the wind, and its winding and unwinding, in pretense and not, moves us with it.

"Towards the Non-Mental" generates as if it were an automaton, flipping in and out of itself, its readers, and perhaps even Luca. The lines build from an "earthworm under a high heel" to the "incomparable." Is this hubris? How is it possible to span the distance between the two? Seemingly reasonable phrases become vertiginous, and within them is a thought, the "static frenzy" of a thought that takes its turn within the turns that Luca takes us on, turning one phrase into another as if the poetic act were a series of turns seeking a physical gesture not unlike a dancer who coils and uncoils around a sexual pivot — the hips — upon which we balance, move, vector and burn.

"Madeleine" also tones to a simple gesture that composes a portrait of effacement and beauty, the way that Madeleine masks and reveals herself in her mask. And its poignancy counterpoints the simplicity of this brief dance. "Madeleine hides Madeleine," as Luca writes her, writing Madeleine, finding and losing her in the poem he writes.

His other poems take different routes in similar ways to recast and reconfigure our living in and with the language we possess, that possesses us, and that gives us something of the world we know and desire to know. That we are, along with our language, so much abused by those who use it for mercantile and ideological ends, the two exchanging means and results with a customary ease that estranges us too much, and which we accept however begrudgingly or mindlessly, is a phenomenon that Luca usurps and subverts. In the end, he is less interested in making sense of the things and events that compel us, for however long or however briefly, but igniting a sensibility that finds in words, in silence, and in the body, a portion of the unsaid, the unfelt, the unthought, and the untouched suddenly revivified, suddenly clarified anew.

New York, February 2013

Allan Graubard, "Reading Luca, Reading Me"
Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VII, No. 3 (fall 2013) 45–51.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Gherasim Luca, L'Inventeur de l'amour

Petre Răileanu

Paul Delvaux, *L'Appel de la Nuit* (1938)

Gherasim Luca explore avec une ferveur singulière tous les thèmes de la « mythologie » surréaliste. Il apporte ses propres solutions dans la recherche du miraculeux, notamment l'invention de l'amour, l'Anti-Œdipe et l'admirable dialectique de la négation de la mort. Les surréalistes roumains, Luca et Gellu Naum notamment, entreprennent de 'transformer la vie' — leurs propres vies respectives selon les exigences surréalistes. Le surréalisme est investi et vécu, l'esthétique acquiert les particularités d'une ontologie.

Dés *Le vampire passif*,[1] son premier livre proprement surréaliste, Luca est en possession de l'outil réel et symbolique et du point d'appui qui permettent de faire basculer d'un monde à l'autre : de l'univers commandé par le mythe œdipien et situé sous le signe du Paralytique Général Absolu qu'est la mort dans le monde correspondant à notre désire intérieur. Cet outil est le levier ineffable de la dialectique et le point d'appui n'est autre que l'inconscient érigé en domaine continu de la pensée non-dirigée. Tenant ces atouts il s'adonne passionnément et en se coupant toute possibilité de retour, à une démarche de démiurgie délirante.

L'Inventeur de l'amour, suivi dans l'édition roumaine par *Voyage à travers l'impossible* et *La mort morte* constitue une phase décisive dans cette démarche: la construction explicite de l'univers non-œdipien.[2] La phrase « Tout doit être réinventé, il n'y a plus rien au monde » résonne comme un leitmotiv tout au long de ce texte. La naissance, l'amour et la mort sont les réalités qui tiennent en captivité « l'homme axiomatique Œdipe » propagé comme une « épidémie obscurantiste » depuis quelques milliers d'années. Refuser la naissance de cet homme-là, rejeter tout axiome « même s'il a pour lui l'apparence d'une certitude, » telle est la solution proposée et qui devrait préparer l'arrivée de l'homme sans passé, sans repères, sans pré connaissance. L'amour aussi doit être réinventé, surtout l'amour, et le poète prend la liberté de ne pas aimer un être déjà fait par le Créateur. La capacité propre à Luca de donner corps aux abstractions (« je prends l'esprit à la lettre ») est portée ici sur le terrain d'un exercice de démiurgie. La « nouvelle Eve » devra échapper au cercle vicieux

limitatif et suffocant
que nous tend comme un piège perfide
la biologie crispée de l'homme,

mais aussi à celui des références culturelles :

Gradiva ou Cendrillon
une fois rencontrées
cessent d'être égales
à leur propre parfum

[1] Terminé le 18 novembre 1941 et publié en français, Editions de l'Oubli, Bucarest 1945. En France,
[2] Bucuresti : Editura Negarea Negatiei, 1945. Le texte sera réécrit par l'auteur en français cinquante ans plus tard : *L'Inventeur de l'amour suivi de La mort morte* (Paris : José Corti, 1994).

et ne sont plus que des épouses
et des mères modèles.

La femme aimée est *non-née*, sa venue au monde est pareille à l'apparition d'une planète éloignée. Elle n'est pas un être accompli, elle doit être inventée et réinventée à tout moment, elle est une synthèse, le lieu de rencontre de plusieurs corps de femmes, de fragments, de diamants, de bouches, paupières, cils, chevelures, voiles. La femme est une création de l'artiste, telle une cubomanie, le fruit même de la confusion programmée du Possible et du Réel. Avec la facilité qui lui est propre de comprimer dans une même articulation du texte plusieurs registres, Luca insuffle à cet épisode dont l'apparence est celle d'un théorème, l'ardeur ténébreuse d'un meurtre-sacrilège et la solennité d'une cosmogonie :

Amoureux de cette aimée
seulement après avoir refusé
la condition axiomatique de l'existence
en dénonçant les auteurs de mes jours
de la même manière que j'ai tué le Créateur

je me donne la liberté de ne pas aimer
une image toute faite par le Créateur

et de poursuivre l'apparition au monde
de cette aimée
de la même façon que je regarderais
stupéfait
une planète lointaine surgir du chaos

d'assister à l'attraction et à la répulsion
qu'exercent entre elles
les différentes parties de son corps toujours surprenant.

Désormais l'amour ne saura être autre chose que « cette entrée à vie et à mort/dans le merveilleux », point limite de l'existence et dangereux, car il

contient dans ses avertissements secrets
le dépassement de la condition humaine
sous tous ses aspects oppressants
la solution du grand drame œdipien.

Luca sait qu'il est en possession d'une grande découverte qui pourrait donner un nouveau souffle au surréalisme dans l'immédiat après-guerre. Il rédige avec D.

Trost le manifeste *Dialectique de la dialectique* lancé comme une bouteille à la mer à l'intention du groupe parisien. Y sont présentés, dans un style rapide et efficace les contributions théoriques et les travaux pratiques des surréalistes roumains. L'amour, d'abord, comme « principale méthode de connaissance et d'action. » Poursuivant son raisonnement dialectique Luca arrive à cette déclaration poétique-révolutionnaire qui exprime la seule forme de caution à l'engagement que l'on peut lui attribuer : « l'érotisation sans limites du prolétariat constitue le gage le plus précieux qu'on puisse trouver pour lui assurer, à travers la misérable époque que nous traversons, un réel développement révolutionnaire. »[3]

Luca n'hésite même pas d'affirmer, avec une « grandomanie apparente, » contrairement à sa discrétion dont tous ceux qui l'ont connu en témoignent, que « l'Amour a été inventé en 1945. » Il le fait dans une lettre-réponse adressée à Sarane Alexandrian à l'occasion d'un nouveau questionnaire dont Breton avait le secret et dont la vocation était justement de relancer le surréalisme, en établissant l'état des lieux et les objectifs futurs, mais aussi de recenser les solidarités et les adversités.[4] Le questionnaire fut rédigé lors d'une séance présidé par André Breton, à laquelle participaient Yves Bonnefoy, Claude Taraud et Sarane Alexandrian. Ce dernier venait d'être désigner, aux côtés de Georges Henein et Henri Pastoureau, secrétaire de Cause, secrétariat international du mouvement. La très générale question d'ouverture « Qu'attendez-vous au juste, à l'heure présente, du surréalisme ? » mais surtout les autres, comme « Quelle est votre position à l'égard de la volonté révolutionnaire de *changer le monde ?* » — « Estimez-vous, sur le plan politique, que la fin justifie tous les moyens ? » — « Quelle possibilité d'action sur le réel accordez-vous à l'amour ? » — « Croyez-vous qu'une religion passée ou future puisse apporter quelque secours à l'homme ? » — « Quelle confiance êtes-vous porté à faire aux moyens rationnels de connaissance ? » et cetera, ainsi que le propre

[3] Gherasim Luca et Trost, *Dialectique de la dialectique*. Message adressé au mouvement surréaliste international (Bucarest : S, Surréalisme, 1945) 18–19.

[4] Les circonstances dans lesquelles a été établi ce nouveau questionnaire ainsi que la lettre-réponse de Gherasim Luca, datée « Bucarest, le 29 juin 47 » se trouvent dans Sarane Alexandrian, *L'Evolution de Gherasim Luca à Paris* (Bucarest : Editions Vinea Icare, 2006). La lettre de Luca, mise gratieusement à ma disposition par Sarane Alexandrian, a été publié pour la première fois dans Petre Răileanu, *Gherasim Luca* (Paris : Editions Oxus, 2004).

commentaire de Sarane Alexandrian,[5] confirmaient les interrogations auxquelles Luca avait entrepris de répondre dans ses écrits et fonctionnèrent comme un signe de solidarité dans sa solitude bucarestoise. Malgré le manque de contacts et d'informations dont il se plaint à la fin de la lettre, Luca entre dans le vif du sujet et donne à sa réponse écrite la fougue d'une intervention directe dans le débat, poussé comme il est par l'urgence irrépressible de communiquer. Il présente brièvement *L'Inventeur de l'amour*, et s'enquiert par deux fois s'il n'y avait aucun moyen de faire connaître même partiellement son livre révolutionnaire. Voici la lettre complète de Gherasim Luca :

Bucarest, le 29 juin 47

Cher Alexandrian,

Tout à fait d'accord avec la formation de 'Cause surréaliste.' On sentait vraiment le besoin de nous compter et de peser — même quantitativement parlant — nos forces. Mais je pense qu'il faut faire vite et qu'on dépasse le plus tôt possible cette étape (statique, statistique) absolument nécessaire du point de vue : « où en sommes-nous ? » mais tout à fait secondaire en ce qui concerne le « que faire » du surréalisme, ses actes, son devenir, sa profonde raison d'être.

L'avantage de votre questionnaire réside en ce qu'il a su centraliser les inquiétudes théoriques de cet instant et d'avoir posé des questions dont la réponse délimite une fois pour toutes ce qui est surréaliste de ce qui n'en est pas. Mais l'objet des actions à entreprendre, l'objet immédiat (UNITAIRE) de nos actions en commun, reste méconnu même après avoir qualifié les surréalistes à l'aide de votre excellent questionnaire.

Bien entendu que la diversité des « solutions » varie avec le nombre des surréalistes. Mais il y a au moins une ou deux mesures à prendre, mesures qui prétendent l'<u>unanimité</u> : notre position vis-à-vis de la politique, par exemple, doit être absolument commune, comme elle en était à l'égard du père et du désir. L'introduction d'une rigueur élémentaire vis-à-vis de quelques images élémentaires (politique, littérature, religion…) reste seule à pouvoir contrecarrer le confusionnisme et la dilution du message surréaliste.

Plus que votre questionnaire, la lettre explicative qui y est attachée contient le « que faire » et les réponses qui me sont très chères. Je regrette beaucoup que la langue dans laquelle je m'exprime habituellement ne vous est pas connue ; vous auriez eu l'occasion de rencontrer dans mon livre Inventatorul iubirii (L'Inventeur de l'Amour) le schéma d'un appareil théorique et <u>pratique</u> de délivrance TOTALITAIRE par l'amour.

[5] « Je pense qu'il s'agit aujourd'hui d'irrationaliser l'amour, et en particulier le comportement érotique, et que la poésie (au sens le plus large du mot) ne tient qu'à cette fin unique de l'homme. »

Excusez ma grandomanie apparente mais je vous assure que c'est pour la première fois que l'Amour rencontre LIBREMENT la Révolution et si je me suis permis d'affirmer que l'Amour a été inventé en 1945 ce n'est pas par simple désir de scandale. Le monde dilemmatique (amour unique et libertinage, la psychopathie sexuelle et la psychologie dite normale, l'âme et le corps, sens et cœur… et leur réconciliation ABSTRAITE) a cessé d'exister sur le plan du comportement non-œdipien. En ce qui concerne le dernier mot, il n'y a pour moi aucun doute : la lutte mythique entre la liberté et son contraire se donne actuellement entre Œdipe et Non-Œdipe. L'invivable vie œdipienne, férocement mais exactement décrite par les systèmes (marxisme, freudisme, existentialisme, naturalisme…) doit être follement dépassée par un bond formidable dans une sorte de vie dans la vie, d'amour dans l'amour, indescriptible, indiscernable et irréductible au langage des systèmes. Je parle de la vie et de la mort non-œdipiens (accessibles par le comportement surréaliste poursuivi à outrance) c'est à dire de la négation absolue du cordon ombilical nostalgique et régressif, source lointaine de notre ambivalence et de notre malheur.

Votre lettre et surtout les quelques remarques que vous y avez fait sur l'érotisme, justifie assez ma tentative de vous communiquez la direction de ma pensée, car elle ne vous est pas tout à fait étrangère. J'aurais préféré vous rendre sensible cette pensée dans ses projections concrètes dans la vie, dans l'amour, dans le comportement. Il n'y a aucune modalité pour vous de prendre connaissance du livre dont je vous ai parlé ? Un ami commun (Brauner, Hérold) pourrait éventuellement traduire à votre intention au moins le premier chapitre. Qu'en pensez-vous ?

Et maintenant, une petite question personnelle : parmi les signataires du questionnaire 'Cause' on rencontre Georges Henein, nom qui m'est particulièrement sympathique depuis une chaleureuse et lucide relation épistolaire. Je ne connais presque rien sur son activité passée ou présente mais les deux ou trois lettres qu'il y a quelques mois j'ai reçues de sa part ont suffi pour me persuader de l'identité de nos efforts. Maintenant j'apprends avec stupéfaction que Henein est un ennemi acharné de ma pensée et que les nouvelles qui lui parviennent de temps en temps sur l'activité de mes amis et de moi-même l'irritent au plus haut degré. Voulez-vous demandez à Henein, de ma part, la raison de ce détour et de cet inamitié subite ? Je lui aurais écrit directement mais ne lui connaissant pas d'adresse à Paris, c'est à vous que je me suis permis de m'adresser.

*

Que faire pour être au courant de l'activité surréaliste de Paris ? Le manque, presque total, des nouvelles rend beaucoup plus désespéré notre isolement géographique. Ne voulez-vous pas nous envoyer de temps en temps des comptes rendus détaillés et quelques-unes des publications susceptibles à nous intéresser ?

L'Exposition internationale du surréalisme doit être sur le point de s'ouvrir et nous regrettons de ne pas pouvoir y prendre une part plus active. Nous regrettons surtout de ne pas être avec vous là bas, mais peut-être que ce jour viendra.

Tout en attendant de vos nouvelles, bien amicalement,

Gherasim Luca

« Irrationaliser l'amour, et en particulier le comportement érotique, » l'impératif exprimé par Sarane Alexandrian, avait été parmi les expériences périlleuses du groupe surréaliste de Bucarest. Il est présent dans les livres de Gellu Naum *Medium*, 1945 *Castelul orbilor/Le Château des aveugles*, 1946, *Albul osului/Le blanc de l'os*, 1947 et plus tard dans *Zenobia*, 1985.[6] De façon plus radicale, Luca avait donné ses propres positions dans *Le vampire passif*, *Amphitrite*, les cubomanies, *L'Inventeur de l'amour*. Un intérêt particulier revêt *Parcurg imposibilul/Voyage à travers l'impossible* que Luca n'a jamais entrepris de traduire ou de réécrire en français. Le texte se présente comme la superposition des particularités de plusieurs types de discours : la transitivité impérative du manifeste, l'efficacité dénotative de la démonstration scientifique et la puissance incantatoire d'une poésie étrange. Se plaçant sur une position « subjectivement lyrique et objectivement amoureuse, » Luca met en page ses expériences sur le territoire de l'amour médiumnique, dans une ambiance imprégnée de « satanisme poétique. »

> En effet, ma chambre dans laquelle se dévoilent, depuis quelques mois, les plus inaccessibles secrets de l'amour, cette chambre où je suis comme un voyageur, comme un invité, comme un invité à un conseil permanent avec Satan et ses plus proches démons, donne à voir comme toujours le paysage dépaysant et irritant (le feu et le goudron de l'imaginaire populaire) qui rend possible la rencontre conspiratrice des forces infernales entre les quatre murs de ma chambre.[7]

Lors de ses expériences il découvre avec émerveillement les dons de son aimée, femme-médium dont « l'amour somnambulique et dévoué l'amène à surprendre avant ma propre pensée les messages arrivés du plus profond de mon être, cette aimée qui m'anticipe et me pense et qui me communique le lendemain que je lui avais transmis à distance plusieurs actions qu'elle a exécutées dans un état d'automatisme ambulatoire et de frénésie irrésistible… »[8]

Luca prolonge au delà d'une saison son séjour en Enfer où amour, poésie, magie, connaissance, désir se trouvent confondus. La femme avec ses qualités

[6] Ce dernier a été publié et en France : *Zenobia*, Traduit du roumain et présenté par Luba Jurgenson et Sebastian Reichmann (Paris : Maren Sell/Calmann-Lévy, 1995).
[7] Luca, *Parcurg imposibilul*, dans *Inventatorul iubirii* suivi de *Parcurg imposibilul* et de *Moartea moartă* (Bucarest : Editura Negația Negației, 1945) 56.
[8] Idem., 57.

médiumniques révèle « le fonctionnement voyant, actif et réel de la pensée. » L'homme est « anticipé, » « pensé, » dissout et diffusé dans la pensée de la femme. Elle, à son tour, se trouve « engagée à vie et à mort dans le labyrinthe de ma pensée, se laisse consommée avec frénésie par les flammes du cercle magique dans lequel se déroulent ces derniers temps les actions infamantes de ma pensée… » Le texte de Luca résonne comme un éloge de la spontanéité et de l'irépétabilité, un hymne à la fraîcheur de la première rencontre du premier homme et de la première femme.

Peter Răileanu, "L'Inventeur de l'amour"
Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VII, No. 3 (fall 2013) 52–59.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Gherasim Luca: The Inventor of Love

Petre Răileanu

Tr. by John Galbraith Simmons & Jocelyne Geneviève Barque

Paul Delvaux, *L'Appel de la Nuit* (1938)

Gherasim Luca explores with singular fervor all themes of surrealist "mythology." In search of the miraculous, he provides his own solutions — most memorably the invention of love, the concept of Anti-Oedipus, and the admirable dialectic of the negation of death. The Romanian surrealists, especially Luca and Gellu Naum, embarked on an ambitious effort to "transform life" — indeed, their own lives in accord with the demands of surrealism. Surrealism was to be empowered and lived, its aesthetics to acquire ontological status.

Luca's *The Passive Vampire*,[1] his first properly surrealist work, finds him in possession of a tool, at once real and symbolic, and a point of contact that enables him to move between two worlds: from the universe ruled by the Oedipal myth, situated under the sign of the Absolute General Paralytic, to the world of our inner desire; the former means death to the latter. The tool is the ineffable lever of the dialectic and the point of contact with nothing other than the unconscious, arising within the endless realm of undirected and uncontrolled thought. With leverage thus obtained, he invests himself with a passion that offers no prospect of return, and gives over to a course of action at once demiurgic and delirious.

The Inventor of Love,[2] published in the Romanian edition (Editura Negarea Negatiei) in 1945 together with *Journey into the Impossible* and *The Dead Death*, constitutes a decisive phase in this process: the explicit construction of the Non-Oedipal universe. His single sentence — *Everything must be reinvented, nothing exists anymore in the whole world* — resonates as a leitmotif throughout the text. Birth, love, and death are realities that hold captive the "axiomatic man of Oedipus" propagated like an "obscurantist epidemic" for several thousand years. To refuse birth to such a man, to reject every axiom "even if it has the appearance of certainty" — such is the proposed solution to prepare for the arrival of the man without a past, unmoored and without preconceptions. Love, above all, must be reinvented; and the poet takes the liberty to *not* love a being already created by God. Luca's singular ability to give substance to abstractions on this terrain becomes a demiurgic exercise. The "New Eve" will escape the vicious cycle.

Constricting and suffocating
set for us like a perfidious trap the
rigid biology of man

[1] Completed November 18, 1941 and published in French (Bucharest: Editions de l'Oubli, 1945). *The Passive Vampire* would be published in a French edition only in 2001 (Paris: José Corti). Recently, the Romanian manuscript of *Vampirul pasiv* was discovered in a private archive in Bucharest; parts of it were carefully dated by Luca: November 1, 1940, January 31, 1941, February 22, 1941, and November 18, 1941.

[2] Luca would revise the text to be published in French fifty years later: *L'inventeur de l'amour suivi de La mort morte* (Paris: José Corti, 1944).

But also with respect to cultural references:

Gravida or Cendrillon
once met
cease to be equal
to their own fragrance
and become only spouses
and ideal mothers.

The beloved woman is *not born* and her arrival on earth is like the appearance of a distant planet. She is not a finished being but must be constantly invented and re-invented; she is a synthesis and the conjunction of several bodies — fragments, diamonds, mouths, eyelids, eyelashes, hair, veils. Woman is the creation of the artist, such as the cubomanic outcome of programmed confusion that mingles the Possible and the Real. With his singular facility for compressing several registers within a single text, Luca instills in this passage, with its theorem-like quality, the dark ardor of sacrilege-murder and the solemnity of a cosmogony:

In love with this beloved
only after having rejected
the axiomatic condition of existence
by denouncing the authors of my days
in the same way I killed the Creator
I give myself the liberty not to love
an image made by the Creator

and to follow the appearance on earth
of this beloved
in the same way I would watch
stunned
a faraway planet emerge from chaos

to witness the attraction and repulsion
at play between them
the different parts of her body always surprising

Henceforth love will be nothing less than the "entrance to life and death / in the marvelous" — the dangerous boundary of existence, for it

in secret signals contains
the means to overcome the human condition
in all its oppressive aspects
the solution to the great Oedipal drama.

Luca was convinced he was in possession of an important discovery that could breathe new life into Surrealism in the immediate postwar years. With D. Trost he wrote "The Dialectic of the Dialectic," a manifesto sent off to the Parisian group like a message in a bottle tossed into the ocean. Presented there, in a rapid-fire and effective style, are the theoretical contributions and practical works of the Romanian surrealists. Love, first of all, as "our principal mode of knowledge and action." Pursuing a dialectical course, Luca arrived at a poetic-revolutionary declaration of the only kind of caution ever attributed to him: "[W]e believe that the eroticization of the proletariat is the most precious warrant that can be found to ensure them a real revolutionary development in the miserable era we are traversing."[3]

With "apparent grandomania" — rather unlike his customary discretion, attested to by everyone who knew him — Luca makes the claim that "Love was invented in 1945." He does so in his letter, in reply to Sarane Alexandrian, on the occasion of a new questionnaire through which André Breton aimed to re-launch the surrealist movement, summarizing its present situation and future aims while, at the same time, identifying friends in solidarity and adversaries who were not.[4]

The questionnaire was developed in the course of a meeting over which Breton presided with attendees that included Yves Bonnefoy, Claude Tarnaud, and Sarane Alexandrian. The latter, with Georges Henein and Henri Pastoureau, had just been appointed secretariat of the international surrealist bureau known as "Cause." The very general question at the beginning — "What do you exactly expect from Surrealism at the present moment?" followed others such as: "What is your position

[3] "Dialectic of the Dialectic: Message to the International Surrealist Movement" (Bucharest: S, Surréalisme, 1945) 18–19. See:
http://www.icr.ro/bucharest/the-romanian-avant-garde-03-1999/the-dialectic-of-dialectic.html

[4] Details concerning the questionnaire and Gherasim Luca's reply from Bucharest (dated July 29, 1947) can be found in Sarane Alexandrian's *L'Evolution de Gherasim Luca à Paris* (Bucharest: Editions Vinea Icare, 2006). Luca's letter, which Sarane Alexandrian kindly made available to me, was published for the first time in my *Gherasim Luca* (Paris: Editions Oxus, 2004).

regarding the revolutionary desire *to change the world?"* "Do you think that in politics the end justifies the means?" "What possibility to genuinely affect the world do you accord love?" "Do you think some past or future religion might be of help to mankind?" "What confidence do you have in the rational methods to attain knowledge?" et cetera — as well as Sarane Alexandrian's own comments,[5] confirmed the interrogatory to which Luca attempted to respond in his writings, and which would function as a sign of solidarity from his lonely outpost in Bucharest. Despite the lack of contacts or information, about which he complains near the end of the letter, Luca enters into the heart of the subject in a way that lends his written response the ardor of direct intervention in the debate owing to an irrepressible urgency to communicate. He briefly describes *The Inventor of Love* and wonders if there is no way to make his revolutionary book at least a little better known. Here is the entire letter:

Bucharest, June 29, 1947

Dear Alexandrian,

Complete and thorough agreement concerning establishment of "Surrealist Cause." We strongly felt the need to weigh in — even in terms of numbers — and be included. But I think it's important for us to move quickly beyond that stage (static and statistic) that may be absolutely necessary from the standpoint of "Where are we?" but entirely secondary to the problem as to "What should we do?" in terms of surrealism — its actions, future, and profound raison d'etre.

Your questionnaire is valuable for its ability to bring together current theoretical concerns at the present moment and to pose some questions to which the responses delimit once and for all what is and what is not surrealism. But the aim of actions to undertake, the immediate purpose of our common (UNIFIED) actions remains unknown even after having identified surrealists with the help of your excellent questionnaire.

To be sure, the diversity of "solutions" will vary with the number of surrealists. But there are at least one or two measures to take that require <u>unanimity</u>: our political stance, for example, must be shared absolutely, just like our position with regard to the father and to desire. The introduction of elementary rigor vis-à-vis certain fundamental matters (politics, literature, religion...) remains the only way to counteract confusionist tendencies and dilution of the surrealist message.

Going beyond your questionnaire, the explanatory letter herewith describes "what must be done" together with associated responses that are very important to me. I deeply

[5] "Today, I think love must be irrationalized, with erotic behavior in particular, together with poetry (in the broadest possible sense), as mankind's only aim."

regret that the language in which I customarily express myself is unknown to you, for it would give you the opportunity to find in my book Inventatorul iubirii (The Inventor of Love) *the outline of a theoretical and practical scheme for TOTAL AND COMPLETE deliverance through love.*

Excuse my apparent grandomania but I assure you it is here that for the first time love FREELY encounters the Revolution and if I permit myself to assert Love was invented in 1945, it is not from some simple desire to be outrageous. The dilemmatic world (exclusive love vs. libertinage, sexual psychopathy vs. so-called normal psychology, body and soul, sensuality and feelings from the heart... and their ABSTRACT reconciliation) ceased to exist on the plane of Non-Oedipal behavior. Regarding the latter, I harbor no doubt: the mythic struggle between freedom and its opposite is now between Oedipus and Non-Oedipus. The unbearable Oedipal life, ferociously but precisely described by the various systems (marxism, freudianism, existentialism, naturalism...) must be ecstatically overcome by a giant step into a sort of life within life, love within love, indescribable, irreducible to and indiscernible by the languages of systems. I talk about Non-Oedipal life and the death (accessible through surrealist behavior pursued to the extreme) — that is to say, absolute negation of the regressive and nostalgic umbilical cord, long the cause of our ambivalence and unhappiness.

Your letter and especially some of your comments about eroticism, should justify my attempt to communicate the direction of my thought, for it is not wholly foreign to you. I would have preferred to make my thinking perceptible to you with respect to its concrete projections into life, love, and behavior. Is there any way for you to become familiar with the book I mentioned? A common friend (Brauner, Hérold) might possibly translate for you at least the first chapter. What do you think?

Now, a quick personal question. Among the signatories of "Cause" I recognized the name of Georges Henein, whose name is especially familiar owing to our warm and lucid correspondence. I know almost nothing about his past or present activity but two or three letters I received from him a few months ago were enough to persuade me of the like nature of our efforts. But now I learn with amazement that Henein is a fierce enemy of my thinking and that the occasional news reaching him concerning the activities of my friends and myself he finds thoroughly irritating. Would you ask Henein the reason for this change of heart and sudden enmity? I would write to him directly but, not knowing his address in Paris, permit myself to solicit your help on this matter.

What can we do to stay current with surrealist activity in Paris? The almost complete lack of news makes our geographic isolation seem all the more hopeless. Could you not send us occasional detailed accounts and publications likely to interest us?

The International Exhibition of Surrealism must be about to open and we're sorry not be able to take a more active part in it. Above all, we regret not being with you, but perhaps one day soon we will.

Looking forward to hearing from you, with kind personal regards,

Gherasim Luca

To "irrationalize" love and particularly erotic behavior, to cite the imperative expressed by Sarane Alexandrian, was one of the more perilous experiences of the surrealist group in Bucharest. It can be found in certain books by Gellu Naum, including *Medium* (1945), *Castelul orbilor/Castle of the Blind* (1946), *Albul osului/The White of the Bone* (1947), and later in *Zenobia* (1985).[6] In more radical fashion, Luca set out his own positions in *The Passive Vampire*, *Anphitrite*, in the cubomania productions, and in *The Inventor of Love*. Of particular interest is *Parcurg imposibilul/I Roam the Impossible*, which Luca never undertook to translate or rewrite in French. This text presents several types of discourse superimposed on one another: the imperative transitivity of a manifesto, the denotative effectiveness of scientific demonstration, and the incantatory power of strange poetry. Situating himself as "subjectively lyrical and objectively in love," Luca sets down his experiences in the realm of mediumistic love in an atmosphere impregnated with "poetic satanism."

> *Indeed, my room, where during the last few months the most inaccessible secrets of love are being unveiled, this room where I feel at all times as a traveler, as a guest to a permanent dialogue with Satan and his faithful demons, offers me as usual the disconcerting and irritating view (the fire and pitch of popular imagination) that makes possible the conspiratorial rendezvous of the infernal forces between the walls of my room.*[7]

In the course of his experimentation, he discovers with amazement the gifts of his beloved, the woman-medium "whose somnambulistic and devoted love causes her to perceive, in advance of my own thought processes, the messages addressed to me from the depths of my being, this lover who anticipates me, who thinks me, who communicates to me only the day after I had radiated from afar a series of actions which she executes in a state of ambulatory automatism and irresistible frenzy."[8]

Luca prolongs beyond a season his own sojourn in Hell wherein mingle love, poetry, magic, knowledge, desire. The woman with her mediumistic qualities reveals

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[6] *Zenobia* was published in France in 1995, translated and presented by Luba Jurgenson and Sebastian Reichmann (Paris: Maren Sell/Calmann-Lévy).

[7] From "I Roam the Impossible," in *The Inventor of Love*, translated by Julian & Laura Semilian (Lanham, MD: Black Widow Press, 2009) 36.

[8] Ibid., 37.

the "visionary, active, and real functioning of thought." The man is "predicted," "designed," dissolved, and diffused in the thinking process of the woman who, in her turn, finds herself "[a]bsorbed in life-and-death engagement in the labyrinths of my thought processes … [and] allows herself to be frantically consumed by the flames of the magic circle within which the nefarious acts of my thought processes unfold of late."[9] Luca's text appears as an elegy to spontaneity and to the unrepeatable, a hymn to the encounter of the first man with the first woman.

Petre Răileanu, "The Inventor of Love"
Translated by Jon Galbraith Simmons & Jocelyne Geneviève Barque
Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VII, No. 3 (fall 2013) 60–67.

[9] Ibid., 37–38.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Luca: The Zen of Death & Immortality

Valery Oisteanu

Utagawa Kunisada/Toyokuni III, *Scenes from Kabuki Plays* (1856)

On February 9, 1994, at age 80, before throwing himself into the Seine, Ghérasim Luca sent a last message to his companion, Micheline Catti: "There is no place for poets in this world." It was the final statement of a remarkable poet, an original artist, and an illuminating theoretician for the future orbit of surrealism.

Luca was born into a liberal Jewish family as Salman Locker in 1913, in Bucharest, Romania. He was attracted to avant-garde poetry at a young age and became fluent in Yiddish, Romanian, German, and French. By the late 1930s he was traveling frequently to Paris, where he became friends with the Surrealists.

Thanks to a convoluted destiny and an unimaginable accident of fate, Luca became one of the major poets of French/Romanian literature. His contributions to French poetry and theoretical Surrealism were championed by the likes of surrealist poet/artist/critic Jean-Louis Bedouin (1929–1996), philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) (who also jumped to *his* death, from his apartment window), and psychiatrist Pierre-Felix Guattari (1930–1992).

Luca's groundbreaking avant-garde poetry influenced other poets such as Gellu Naum, Dolfi Trost, and Virgil Teodorescu. Luca burned his mark into modern French poetry by means of a fierce irreverence, intellectual daring, risky puns, and changing the meaning of words through "stuttering and stammering."

Early on he chose the pseudonym Gherasim Luca as an "ironic-necrophilia," the name appropriated from an obituary notice, and considered his work as conjuring the void at the heart of language and of existence itself. "The void voided of its void is fullness," he once remarked.

As a young man, Luca read an essay that would have a lasting effect on him, "On Not Wanting to Live," published by his compatriot Emil M. Cioran, who wrote: "There are experiences which one cannot survive, after which one feels that there is no meaning left in anything. Life breeds plenitude and void, exuberance and depression. I am only 22 and I am already a specialist in the question of death."[1]

From 1939–1946, along with Trost, Naum, Teodorescu and Paul Paun, Luca formed the core of the Bucharest Surrealists. Luca and Trost co-

[1] E.M. Cioran, *On the Heights of Despair*, tr. by Ilinca Zarifopol-Johnston (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 8.

authored the group's principal text, "Dialectics of the Dialectic" (1945), a manifesto for revolutionizing Surrealism per se. Automatism, collage, and delirium were too mechanical and not to be used; a perpetual revolution was necessary to keep the movement alive. As Luca declared in that text:

> This continually revolutionary state can only be maintained and developed by a dialectical position of permanent *negation* and of the *negation of negation*, a position which might be capable of the greatest imaginable extension towards everything and everyone.

As a visual artist, Luca again proved to be original and innovative. His book, *Beloved Quantitatively*,[2] was illustrated with dadaesque assemblages decorated with 944 "feathers of steel" (nibs from dip or fountain pens) of different shapes. Luca revisited three-dimensional modes of collage and assemblage, systematically studying the intervention of chance operation in the elaboration of images ("Cubomania," 1945). Indeed, he created delirious collages that consisted of cutting squares from illustrations and joining them in arbitrary patterns. The unexpected results in his album, *Les Orgies des Quanta* (1946), are of images cut up into squares as an irregular chessboard where squares are moved till a desired combination appears, a puzzle-like mysterious collage.

Luca also constructed assemblages from found objects echoing Duchamp's "ready-mades": discarded doll's heads, legs, and hands, miniature plastic dolls, as well as repurposed kitchen implements, such as a hand juicer, and from 1963 on he exhibited them in galleries in Bucharest, Berlin, and Paris. His collages were composed from collected found objects: the tattered cover of a popular serial pamphlet *Fantomas*, old postcards collaged with baby photos, or old illustrations from romance magazines. His artwork not only served as illustrations of his own writing (*Le vampire passif*), but also as individual works in such shows as "Unbound Desire" at the Tate and The Metropolitan (2001–

[2] (Bucharest: Les Éditions de L'Oubli, MMXIII).

2002). His influence on other artists can be seen in the works of the late French artist Arman, Theodore Brauner (brother of Victor Brauner), Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, Daniel Spoerri, and many others.

His other important book, *The Passive Vampire* (1945),[3] is a mixture of theoretical treatise and breathless poetic prose, personal confession and scientific investigation. There he unveiled a tenet of what he thought of as the psychology of the Surrealist movement, a concept he labeled OOO: "the objectively offered object." He defined this as an object constructed while the maker was thinking of the person for whom it was intended, thus infusing the piece with a certain *feng shui* of its own. But he considered this a complex karmic love-hate message with the potential of inducing a recipient to become unhealthily obsessed with the gift.

In *L'art surréaliste*, Luca's friend, the French art-critic Sarane Alexandrian, applied the meaning of OOO directly to art, stating that the electricity created by images, such as "an eye mounted on the metronome," à la Man Ray, or a doll giving birth to an identical doll head with a dozen double-edged razors stuck in her skull, à la Ghérasim Luca, became part of a dream-domain inhabited by grotesque, disturbing creatures, the image or construction destined for eternity as a nightmarish art-object.

At times taking shape as assemblages, these OOO's are meant to capture chance in its dynamic and dramatic forms and illuminate the continual connection between our love-hate tendencies and the world of things, when offering presents or mementos to others. The "diabolic power" with which these objects are imbued is our repressed desire and sexual fantasy transferred onto an "objectively offered object," using shamanistic-like techniques, where desire becomes the reality of desire. Dreams thus penetrate into real life, changing the relations among people according to the desire materialized in the object.

[3] This was translated into English by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and published by Twisted Spoon Press in 2008.

After some life-and-death adventures at the Romanian border and a short stint in Israel, Luca settled in Paris in 1952. As a poet he had previously explored the sonorities of French *ad absurdum* with a Duchampian flare (*Héros-limite*, 1945). He gave public recitals during which he rendered his texts free from mental controls, in a state of trance à la neo-dada. Philosophically he had advocated "the unlimited eroticization of the proletariat" (excluded by the capitalist society from pleasure, modern sexuality, and hedonism) and used deliberately provocative sexual puns and wordplay that were at the same time hypnotic and blissful.

His sound panoramas were experimental & paradoxical at the same time, inspired by jazz, as in "Passionnément," a poem-recital consisting of just one word deconstructed & pronounced, mispronounced & malformed in hundreds of ways, evolving into a sound-poetry composition. Indeed, throughout his lifetime, he continued to invent an entirely new blend of Surrealist performance poetry, a fusion of French and melodic religious incantations, rhythmic rhymes, stuttering and stammering, low-tech sound effects and an ad-hoc creation of puns.

By the late 1970s, Luca had joined a collaborative performance group called Polyfonix which included Jean Jack Lebel, Brion Gysin, William S. Burroughs, Ramuntcho Matta and others, and performed his own poetry in a manner inspired by the dada and jazz improvisations being created in galleries and museums in Paris and New York. He performed live on television, and Deleuze claimed in *Dialogues* (1977) that Luca was no less than "a great poet among the greatest," adding: "For those who attended the recitals he gave … his presence was a calm trance, spellbinding, unique, and unforgettable."

For Andre Velter, a French polyphonic performer-poet, Luca helped make it possible to "rediscover the power of poetry, its oracular power and virtue of subversion." In Romania, Israel, and France, Luca was regarded as a "saint of the avant-garde" for several decades and was invited to appear at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

As he grew older and fell into impoverished straits, he seemed to fall off the radar of publishing and performance art. In 1985, on a visit from Paris to perform at a reading at MoMA, Luca afterwards joined me, my late friend poet Ira Cohen, and Timothy Baum (surrealist curator and collector) for a day of poetry and art at various East Village galleries. A petite, baldish man clad in dark eyeglasses and Hush Puppies, he talked mournfully about the Diaspora of avant-gardes from Romania and friends left behind. We took him to a meeting of our Poets and Artists Surrealist Society (PASS) near St. Mark's Church and spent the rest of the day perusing the galleries that briefly flourished in the East Village of the 1980s.

Later on I found out that he had bought one of my art-assemblages, a coffee jar full of "Found keys on 9th St." (I wonder what happened to his art collection.) When he would come to visit me at "chez Val and Ruth," we'd converse for a while in Romanian, about his friend, the Romanian poet Naum, my surrealist mentor, and reminisce about departed writers Ilarie Voronca, Paul Celan, and Celine Arnauld, all of whom were of Romanian-Jewish ancestry, all suicides. Luca's conversations bore the fractured, sad cadence of a never-ending exile, his occasional puns an attempt to humanize his suffering and loneliness.

Eventually he grew depressed and could no longer cope. "I refuse to exist… I refuse to exist," he was often overheard saying, talking to himself while walking. He wasn't completely forgotten and when Andrei Codrescu, a contemporary Romanian/American poet, proposed Luca's writings for a literary prize (Neustadt), Luca refused it as a Surrealist stance against public honors: "I do not accept literary prizes,"[4] choosing yet again a path to martyrdom.

Alas, finally, he drowned himself at the Pont Mirabeau; the very same place where his compatriot Paul Celan committed suicide, and where many

[4] Luca, "The Flowers of Meat," and Andrei Codrescu, *Inventor of Love*, tr. by Julian and Laura Semilian (Black Widow Press, 2010).

romantically scarred lovers died too. As Luca put it in *La mort morte* (*The Dead Death*, 1945):

> If it is true, as is claimed
> that after death man continues
> a phantom existence
> I'll let you know

Death had hitched a ride on the surrealist rocket early on. In 1925, André Breton asked the question, "Suicide: Is it a solution?" in the first issue of *La révolution surréaliste*, and mortality was an obsession with the Romanian avant-garde, who took the lead over all of Europe in dada and Surrealism. In all, more than 30 Surrealist poets and artists wrote suicide notes (like Urmuz, a Romanian proto-surrealist, who shot himself in the head in a restaurant), suicides that were defiant gestures in response to a disappointing, boring, vulgar and banal world whose inhabitants were less interested in the subconsciousness and dream works than they were in material possessions.[5]

Luca's own ultimate statement on the subject was *La mort morte*, a personal account of five non-Oedipal suicide attempts (strangulation by the aid of a necktie, Russian roulette, stabbing, poison, self-asphyxiation) each delineated by a different farewell note and a commentary afterwards that depicts his struggle to rob death of its anonymity, such as:

> I can no longer bear this life full of privation.

> Causes of my death not to be looked for, there are no guilty, not even myself. I forsake life without any regrets. I ask for restraint at my funeral cremation if possible. Flowers for me not to be brought.

> Your tears, your perfume, your despair, my punishment! O, my darling!

[5] Cf. Valery Oisteanu, "An Un-alphabetic Encyclopedia of Dada and Surrealistic Suicides," BigCityLit.org (2013).

> A nervous illness never incurable never which never tortures me for many years never forces me never to end my days. I pay never my life for the sins of my parents never my heredity never was burden. If I never did no one wrong I never ask for forgiveness.
>
> If it is true, as the errors claim, that after death man continues a phantomatic existence, I will let you know. If you do not hear from me for one month, you will know that death is no different than the putrefaction of an onion, a chair, and a hat.
>
> I commit suicide out of disgust.[6]

Ultimately, Luca referred to death as "oppression, as tyranny, as limit, as universal anxiety and my real enemy, my quotidian, insupportable, inadmissible, unintelligible enemy."[7] And, of course, his sixth suicide attempt proved the charm.

While not a religious man, Luca bore the brunt of societal intolerance, a "Jew-stranger" to the French and Romanian Fascists, and later to the Russian/Romanian communists, and finally to post-war xenophobic French society. The last straw was the demolition of his Paris studio for "urban renewal" in February 1994, when, at age 81, he became officially homeless. Every social worker he encountered in the large French bureaucratic labyrinth failed the quiet Romanian genius, who, after more than four decades in France, did not have citizenship or the means to seek social or medical assistance. But then he repeatedly chose martyrdom over politically correct social assistance, poverty over welfare, suffering over a joyous bourgeois life.

"Let the planet explode, let the planet explode, let the planet explode!" he wrote apocalyptically in his last poem, before drowning.

At his centenary, Luca's legacy and influence started to be recognized in the history of art, poetry, and performance art. Some publishers, such as the Parisian José Corti, have printed editions in French of a dozen of his books,

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[6] Ghérasim Luca, *Inventor of Love*, ibid.
[7] Ibid., 45.

NRF-Poésie/Gallimard published *Héros-limite* (suivi de "Le Chant de la carpe" et de "Paralipomènes"), and in recent years a few English translations have appeared from Twisted Spoon, Black Widow, and Contra Mundum. But such relatively few publications are arguably inadequate for someone like Luca, a surrealist-provocateur whose profound erotic-existential and philosophical explorations demand more widespread recognition.

Luca invented a new poetical language, muttered in secret, subversively reaching around corners, crumpled into a pocket, read aloud to the dying, scratched or sprayed on walls. He entered the world a century ago, an avant-garde poet with a dead man's name, and then prepared himself and rehearsed for many decades to become a "ghost-poet," a deliberate search for poetry as a spirit, extending his presence after death as a phantom, in short a love affair with immortality. His work still stands and will continue to beckon.

> To try the card of loss
> to take down the fire to the cinders
> to avoid the meaning of fate
> to commit the drunken felony of refusing to be
> that delivered matter feels at this moment
> as the intense echo of what fumes we were
> and shall perhaps be [8]

Valery Oisteanu, "Luca: The Zen of Death & Immortality"

[8] Ghérasim Luca, "Key," *Self-Shadowing Prey*, tr. Mary Ann Caws (New York: Contra Mundum Press, 2012) 78.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Ghérasim Luca

in memoriam

Valery Oisteanu

It's an ill wind, which blows no one well

We seem to throw flowers to the poets who cannot smell them anymore

Eulogize ears that cannot hear our songs

Bad news from Paris; Luca had jumped into the Seine

Death to a fallen angel, by romantic surrender

Like so many lovers with broken hearts
Jazz bands play for necessary suicides
The world has no place for poets
Fish sing to his little body
Barges speedboats and ferries
Feel the gravitational pull of this surrealist diver with no oxygen mask
He floats on pure dreams
He sways on pure mad love
Past Notre Dame, past Saint-Germain-des-Prés
He defies French poetry and its tragic language
He retreats to the universal language of immortality
Now we have to pay attention to his prophetic verses
Thoughts that are expressed are already dead
Reality recorded is already passé
Admissible becomes inadmissible
The poet faints at the sight of the last sunset
The evil objects dissolve in darkness
The poet retreats in the occult
And the moon becomes the moonbow.

Valery Oisteanu, "Ghérasim Luca: in memoriam"
Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VII, No. 3 (fall 2013) 77–78.[1]

[1] Originally published in *Temporary Immortality* (New York: PASS Press, 1990).

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

EPISTOLARY HYPERCUBE

Andrei Codrescu & Allan Graubard

On September 5, 2012 at 9:19 PM, Allan Graubard solicits Andrei Codrescu for a contribution to the online journal, *Hyperion,* on the poet Ghérasim Luca.

"Julian (Semilian) suggested that I contact you directly... *Certainly, your sense of Luca and his works and life, your perspective, is an eminent one. And thus I hope*

you will consider contributing a text to the journal, which I am editing.[1] *I've attached the initial invitation letter for you and will add here a deadline of January 2013, should you finally wish to contribute.*[2] *At the moment, a number of people have elected to contribute.*[3] *Some of them you may know, some you may not know, but all have been struck in some poignant way by Luca, his works & his life, and have something to say about Luca: Julian and Laura Semilian, Krzysztof Fijalkowski, John Taylor, Will Alexander, Sasha Vlad, Mary Ann Caws, Rainer J. Hanshe, Joel Gayraud, Valery Oisteanu, some others and me. If possible, we will feature an interview with Luca's widow. And I would invite other French or Romanian experts on Luca if translation into English were not an issue;*[4] *there is only so much I can do in that regard. Of course, Julian mentioned a previous piece on Luca you had written for City Lights and I know your text that introduces Julian and Laura's translation of Luca. Given the journal's desire for original text, perhaps there is something you might wish to say that you have not.*[5] *"In its way, this is a tribute to a man and a poet that very few people recognize or know about on these shores. It is a small counterweight to the opacity that confounds and confuses."*[6]

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[1] "Eminent" means "to mine," or in American, "to dig." I dug (dig) Luca. (AC)

[2] Was anyone ever excommunicated by the Surrealists for meeting "deadlines"? The line, whether verse or drawing, was left open for others by exquisite corpse makers, so that a corpse was never finished, never quite dead, hence no "deadlines." Luca's timeless meandering about *erotopia*, planting phallic cubes with Balkan leisure, had no personal deadlines, but history drew some anyway, both around Luca and around his *phallocubes*. Luca's objects eventually sprouted out of history's barbed wire deadlines, as evidenced here, in a third wave of Luca flowering. (AC) *And so why are you rat bastards now bothering me about deadlines? I was in* Ai-a-was-ka, *journeying*…To be an exquisite corpse maker is to be a dead line.

[3] People who did not elect to contribute, I do not know who you are: but you will get warts! Elephantiasis of the genitals. (AC)

[4] Why should it be an issue? Publish in Romanian, or any other languages. Especially online! There are no foreign languages. Luca's texts are written in what would be a "foreign language," if there were any. English is not only foreign, it's expensive. An object made from any other objects that cost more than a 1938 *leu* (10 cents) is not a Luca object. (AC) The editor never said the material must be in English. You were in a surrealist haze that day. *Sans lucidité. I testicoli sono scesi.*

[5] Yes. I wish to say that one of the unslaked desires of the long New York night Luca and I spent on the streets was our inability to keep the female company we started with, past four a.m. (AC) What kind of erotic poets are ya?

[6] *Of Luca we shall make a bridge*
between Pont Neuf and Brooklyn Bridge

On October 4, 2012, at 1 PM, Andrei Codrescu snail-mails Graubard a Luca object, followed by an e-mail the same day at 2 AM:

Dear Allan: You clearly understand both the object and the symbol, which are unrelated — that is, the pretzel-fragment in the box is only ironically a "symbol" for "free enterprise," while the actual symbolic charge is that everything Before and After December 1989 in Romania stands in for something that was and wasn't. The only "thing" present in both the Before and the After 1989 is a Ghérasim Luca cubic objet, a cigar-box with a "history"-pretzel inside. Luca would have found an erotic charge in it because

between the Dimbovitza's sluggish flow
and our Niagara of go-go-go." (AC)

vii To hell with the revolution, unless you mean turning myself into and out of that pretzel. You want the cash, Luca, come and get it! Doesn't matter if you're wet or Ariel dry. I'll be waiting… in a cigar box… Don't take too long now… (AG)

the pretzel was bought warm while waiting in a line of excited humans who couldn't wait to lay their greedy fingers on a privately produced food item! And a pretzel at that! A twisted, perverse, Escheresque, surrealist Pretzel, which in the surrealist object-hierarchy would come right after the Man Ray spiked iron and just before a curled pubic hair between a lover's teeth, who is trying desperately to remove it before he has to answer his wife's question: "Where have you been?" The Pretzel is the Naked Pompier dreaming. (Dreaming Francis Crick in Central Park!) The origin of the box is obscure — I first thought that it came from Cuba where I was working in 1996, but then I have a collection, so maybe not — but a box is a box is a box as Freud said. Luca may not have been amused at having to stand symbolically behind any future objet, but that's his problem, isn't it? The dead have problems, too. Cheers, Andrei

On Wed, Oct 17, 2012 at 9:39 PM, Allan Graubard responds:

Despite myself, from who knows where, your "first free enterprise" pretzel fragment with inscription precisely placed in an H. Upmann *petite coronas* box slips in again, pirouettes, vanishes, reappears and begins, as if muffled by distance, a Strauss-ian waltz. I know it's a waltz and I know it comes from Strauss if only because I staggered out of his massive *Alpine Symphony* several days ago and still confuse my hands with my feet and my eyes with my knees. And as much as I prize the box and its contents, I now know that it, along with the symphony, will never allow me to reorient myself as I was. If I were younger I might take that in the pejorative and rush out to a grassy knoll near the Central Park Lake where I have, on two previous occasions, defended my honor with only the moon above and no one around me. But since I no longer have need of peremptory passions, and since your pretzel is both thing and metaphor, along with its resonant "muffled" melody, I can enjoy it for what it

is, *sans symphony*, and why you sent it. Of course, you didn't include a *petite corona*, which I can understand. Cigars like that are smoked between friends who have known each other long enough to know they can smoke it, perfectly happy as the tip burns and the lips balance that light, hand-rolled cylinder with its tight brown leafy casing.

On the same day, at 10 PM, Codrescu returns:

Luca would spit, then laugh. I can see his toreador + toro head at 5 am at the Central Park entrance across from the Plaza, slightly disappointed that we had stayed up all night only to see the night leave us and go to sleep, even as we, full of night, wanted so much more of it. Strands of the perverse run through the name "Luca": the good Christian "Luke" who wrote a gospel no one mentions much, the Latin "Lucian," light, the French "Lacan," and as you say, the wolf (Lup), and the wolf-dens (*lupanaires*, brothels) and the magnifying glass, "lupa." So "un lup vazut prin lupa" is a wolf seen through magnifying glass (lupa), which is an anagram for "pula" (cock). The man was a tangle of potato shoots. Or, for our purposes, a bag full of pretzels. Yes, the dead are ours to do with as we please, provided that we don't not disconnect them from their name. Andrei

At 4:36 AM Graubard is back:

Agreed but I may have something more to say about this pretzel, and perhaps you will, too... Yes, of course, the dead have problems: us. We do what we like with them, or as much as we can with fragments, ciphers, sentiments, memories, private and public. Would Luca laugh or spit? Who knows? The questions multiply then disintegrate. And all that ash is so much cream for a dry dawn face. Sometimes I don't even know what "Luca" means, a synthetic

pretzel of a name that curves one way and another… all that space and silence captured there… Captives of capture, the *lupanare* where Luca lived…

▪

At 6 PM later that day Codrescu becomes paranoid:

Say I say it, send it, you say, I send it back — we go a few rounds, but I'll have the last word. Agreed? My long collab experience has me ask for "the last word."

At 6:05 PM Graubard returns:

A few rounds... In time... And of course your word is last, first, what have you… I've been in a pretzel of late seeking whatever salt I can find but curves and twists, in concrete or crust, entice and aspire. All I want are petrified pretzels! What a hoot, compounded by a late 1938 Laurel & Hardy film,

which I'm watching, Hollywood-ized into pabulum but still with their poignant commedia...! I'll be sure to send this link to my friends in Lafayette, too, who run Cité des Arts, there off Jefferson St. The area is my second home, my wife being Cajun from a little hamlet called Richard, near Eunice, perhaps you know the area.

▪

Codrescu: Here's to petrified pretzels!

Graubard: From the terrestrial to the Martian...

Luca: You owe me three hundred francs. *Vive la révolution*![vii]

January 23, 2013, 10:53 AM

Andrei Codrescu & Allan Graubard, "Epistolary Hypercube"
Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VII, No. 3 (fall 2013) 79–85.

[vii] Deliberately empty footnote? *Et alors vous pensiez avoir eu le dernier mot…*

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Something About This Thing: A Memoir Luca

Mary Ann Caws

Paul Delvaux, *Les ombres* (1965)

When I first started translating Ghérasim Luca's *La proie s'ombre* for Contra Mundum, we were, my husband and I, in Martinique. It was our first time, and I remember so well looking out over the sea from our super-modest hotel and thinking about how in the world to render such an impossible text, with the so extraordinary workings of letters and constructions — it was complicated beyond belief, with the *pli* or the fold, to cite his (and everyone's) great ancestor in verbal configurations, Stéphane Mallarmé's, and then, nearer to us, Gilles Deleuze. That very *com-pli-cation* is just as folded into itself as anything I had ever known in my early days of translating surrealism, or later. Every single repetition was irritating and haunting and inescapable: you can't, I fear, simplify something already wanting to be doubling itself. I hadn't experienced

such a stuttering text before, not ever in my days, months, years, of translating surrealism. You kept wanting to say: so enough already! And it was never done, page after page of repetition — now, because of previous encounters with the litanic mode (not Peguy exactly, this face, this precious face, this very precious face, but still, say it again, Ghérasim, and he would and did. Again and again: you had to like this, and I definitely did not, but I had promised to do it and did). What is essential to remember in working with Luca is his intense visuality, clear in his passionate repetitions with slight changes each time, and super-clear in his manuscripts. This is precisely why it was, at once an idiotic idea to take on this text — there are others of Luca's I could have tackled with greater, what, intelligence, but I chose this one uniquely because of its title, about which more in a moment. I had already translated some of his unfathomably stretched-out texts, but this one was L-O-N-G.

So, what an enterprise it was to take a stab at what was a thing impossible-to-translate, as every one of my French friends had said. OK, but I first "went" into surrealism for two reasons: the first was André Breton's face, I wanted to talk to, about, that face, and whatever could be behind it and the second, because I was convinced I would and could find SOME way of talking about the way the rational would merge with the irrational, actually preferring the latter, if it came down to it. Proof positive: I had spent time and years with attempts to render Tristan Tzara in his surrealist period, as in *L'Homme approximatif*, André Breton in his pre-surrealist, surrealist, and sort of mystic surrealist moments, Robert Desnos in any moment I could seize him, and so on…

I would try out something vaguely Luca-esque in English, and send it by email to Rainer, who would offer suggestions for revision, or raise questions about certain word choices, and then I would return with further revisions and so on: how it continued! When I was able to get to Paris and pore over the manuscripts, I felt totally folded into the way in which the changes modified an entire way of confronting, say, a forest with the branches hanging and alter-

ing, and perhaps someone hanging from them, or perhaps not. All the decisions, undecisions, and redecisions are super-remarkable. Those branches branched out all over the page:

Au coeur du mot AR*B*RE
la tête du mot *B*RANCHE
tranchée

Tête perdue
coeur errant

Loin de tomber au pied du mot AR*B*RE
la tête du mot *B*RANCHE monte

La tête du mot B*R*ANCHE
monte à la tête du mot *A*RBRE
et le BARRE

Le barre de la surface du mot TERRE
qui, ivre de bois, ERRE sans T
dans la tempête du mot *V*ERRE sans tête

La forêt pendue à un arbre
cache l'arbre au pendu
et le pendu dans l'arbre

The words crawled up and down the page, I missed the beginnings of meals, I was exasperated with myself for having accepted to do this thing (because I was, and remain, unconvinced by why we are playing with this capitalization-italicization-rhyming *vers*/*verre*, this verse as glass, words I had played with many times before, but relating to texts which made, frankly, far more sense)…. But finally I did it, am glad it is done, and feel cured of word play in my own texts as I never had been, or could have been before. Of course I remember Breton's going on about "the words aren't playing, they are making love," and had gone on about it myself for years. This was love enough, and play enough.

I had to confront, whenever I could, that so elusive prey shadowing itself. Here was this brilliant title: *La proie s'ombre*, and I cared greatly about getting the darkness into it, the somber-ness. The publisher, CMP, suggested: "Self-Shading Prey," said it was more mellifluous, Shakespearean, and I insisted that "shading" was too positive, it was what we have to do in the south, and in the south of France also, trees do it — that is why we plant them there — and we are GRATEFUL. There is sun there; this text feels sunless. Now, no one is grateful for being shadowed (as in stalked), and I thought, and think, the "s'ombre" was catching just that fear and that darkness, and is responsible for its own darkening, it shadows itself, whereas the briefer and more giving kind of shade was not what Luca was about. Where there can be complication, he enjoys it: so, not just the "ombre" or shade, but the "s'ombre" or somber, and the prey does it to him or herself — it is of course the feminine, this "proie" — as the victim is feminine in French, so is this "prey." Now I had, of course, read Luca's five suicide notes, published in the very grand Black Widow Press translation, and had read his notes scribbled in smaller and smaller and fainter writing in the manuscripts, before he actually jumped off that Pont Mirabeau, just where Paul Celan had, and I was not about to make lighter what was a truly dark text.

In the manuscript, I was totally drawn into the way in which Luca had sketched out exactly how he wanted the lines to be set in print, how the margins should surround them, how it would all look and be. The ultra-frequent repetitions functioned like a series, and the entire experience felt like one long and remarkable venture inside the words and their paths. It was now a very long path.

Happily, and it was indeed the happiest thing about this whole translation, the former director of the Doucet, Sabine Coron, asked me if I would like to meet Micheline Catti, Luca's' widow. I had phoned her at once, if very shyly, when I was so involved in the manuscript, but had not been able to meet her, since I was leaving the next day.

This wonderful time, these some months later, Sabine drove me over to meet this truly delightful person, whom I immediately liked. There is something about faces I instantly take to, or not. I first wrote on and translated André Breton, as I said, because of loving his face, and I wrote on Glenn Gould not just because of a passion for Bach, but also his own impassioned face. And I greatly liked Micheline Catti's face and her home and her art and — to sum it up and stop there, which is here — her warmth.

Now that is what you feel in Luca's *oeuvre* — this kind of passion for words and expressions that manage to change the "*s'ombre*" not only to "somber," but to the ongoing action, as the word actively takes its shadow into itself. That, now, seemed, and continues to seem, positive to me. Nothing about Gherasim Luca's work or those around him can leave the reader cold or passive. It is an impassioned statement that engages and ennobles, albeit unconsciously, the poetic act. And that is worth repeating, worth rePEATing.

New York, January 2013

Mary Ann Caws, "Something About This Thing: A Memoir Luca"
Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VII, No. 3 (fall 2013) 86–90.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Smuggling, Surrealism, & Sympathetic Magic: On Translating Gherasim Luca

Julian Semilian and Laura Semilian

Sometime during the late fall of 2003, my (Julian's) childhood friend R---- called me from Bucharest. Guess what I'm holding in my hand, he said. His tone was gleeful. R---- was gloating over the accuracy of a prediction I had made earlier that year as he and I were leaving the Romanian Academy Library, me grasping my trophy, a photocopy of Gherasim Luca's *The Inventor of Love*, predicting gleefully — and somewhat spitefully — that within six

months an edition of Luca's entire Romanian oeuvre would be published in Romania, for the first time in its entirety since the original publication, in editions of 300–500 exemplars, in 1945.

A few hours earlier R---- and I had trekked to the Academy in order to attempt what R---- warned me would be impossible: to obtain a photocopy of the entire 100 or so pages of the *Inventor of Love*. The book was, indeed, there, in the catacombs of the Academy, at least according to the Academy's file systems. I don't recall now the entire process we were forced to undergo, but the old communist bureaucracy, thirteen years after the fall of Ceausescu's regime, was still alive and well. R---- reiterated before we ventured into the cigarette smoke-filled rooms where the file cabinets were, from where you could easily gaze at the rows of readers and researchers poring over best-forgotten tomes and even spot a few famous Romanian writers aiming at indicting the past, that my attempt would meet with failure. This being my first time in Romania after my departure in 1965 for Israel (where I never arrived) and the USA (where I have lived since), I hoped to showcase my American-learned skills in optimism and derring-do. R----, himself a veritable adventurer, had supported his wife and child, before the fall of Ceausescu, selling pirated VHS copies of American films to America-hungry Romanians. The ways of Romania yet circulated in his blood, as they circulated in the hallways and file rooms of the academy.

No, I was told, you cannot have a photocopy of Luca. Why do you need it? What do you want to do with it? Why do you want to translate it? In vain I mentioned I was the published translator of the Romanian poems of Paul Celan, that the reason I was in Romania was to meet the most celebrated Romanian novelist, Mircea Cartarescu, whose novel *Nostalgia* I was translating for New Directions. It's a big American press, I finally said, to impress them. That got me into the office of the director of the Academy. Like everyone else upon the ladder of the Academy's hierarchy, Mr. Director (the fact he was no longer Comrade Director made no difference, although I noted to myself that

Andrei Codrescu's personal history, that is, *Comrade Past and Mr. Present*, had now become everyone's history) did not seem to know who Luca was. I do not remember exactly how many cigarettes Mr. Director smoked before he signed the necessary document of approval, but it was not before I bribed him or at least flashed him a copy of my Celan translations in order to prove my credibility (he didn't seem to know who Celan was either; perhaps it was the gloss of the book, in print, in English, bearing the stamp of an American press that got him), when he contemptuously told me that this photocopying business was going to cost me because "you Americans are rich." Yes, it would cost me… half a million; half a million Romanian *lei*, that is, amounting to the sum of about sixteen dollars!

The rest was routine: a frail and yellowed copy of the original 1945 edition of *The Inventor of Love* was released to me along with directions to the basement of the Academy. I held the book gingerly, like a holy relic, between the tips of my fingers, and carried it through the hallways of the catacomb-like basement, incensed with the smoke of cigarettes, to the cramped office where two matrons, who had, or maybe had not seen better days, but had heard about them, more cigarettes dangling from their lips, stared at me with mocking smiles and told me to come back in a half an hour.

As we were walking away to celebrate I told R----, "I'll bet you anything that the entire Romanian works of Luca will be published in Romania in six months. Because the Americans want it! I bet you the director is on the phone with someone right now. And I am willing to bet he was only pretending he didn't know who Luca was." And indeed, now, exactly six months later, R---- was calling me from Bucharest to inform me that Luca was out.

It is worth noting that although R---- sent me a copy of the book, edited by Ion Pop, and indeed containing the entire Romanian oeuvre of Gherasim Luca, my wife, Laura, and I translated entirely from photocopies: the one I obtained, and another that my friend Sean Soloway, on his own visit to Romania and at my request, managed to get from the Academy, again after a

direful series of distressful trials, a couple of years earlier at the same said Academy.

I first encountered Luca in conjunction with the other great Romanian surrealist poet, Gellu Naum. The two were the leaders of the Romanian surrealist group during the nineteen thirties and forties, when the activities of the Romanian surrealists, it is said, surpassed those of their French confreres. Naum's works, banned for many years after the communist regime took power, with Naum himself imprisoned for a time during the nineteen fifties, were published (or re-published) in Romania during a short period of easing of restrictions in the early seventies.[1] Gellu Naum, unlike most of the other Romanian surrealists, chose to remain in Romania, because he felt close to the Romanian language and did not wish to write in another. Although I translated Naum into English, both by myself and together with Laura, I must say that only when the ear is finely attuned to Naum's subtle use of Romanian, mixing magic and the marvelous with the intimately familiar tone of colloquial speech, can the translator successfully render his poetry into English. So many times translations can mirror the exact words into the translated language but miss the poetry. Although Laura does not speak Romanian, her enlarged scope of affinity for uncertain borders curling in accordance with the unique essences of the languages in question helped to make Naum's poems sound perfectly natural in American English, retaining muance, innuendo, cultural reference, rhythm. This is probably due to her experience as a musician, as a singer. She would say that musicians and poets share a common origin, *lautarii*, traveling evocateurs and communicants, sensitive to alliteration, to pitch, to snap of consonant, color of vowel, tone and overtone. But although Naum's work was available for transmission then, Luca's wasn't. And Luca intriguingly demands the test of spoken performance, as he himself exemplified in his own incantatory performances.

[1] Neruda, after a visit during the 1950s to the East European socialist bloc countries, stated to interviewers that the artists there were permitted to create in perfect freedom.

The days following the Second World War were days of creative submission to the state. Luca saw this clearly and in order to save himself as a poet, he left in 1952, first for Israel, and from there to Paris. Thus, there was no possible way for him to be re-printed in Romanian, other than a few entries in an anthology edited by Ion Manolescu and published during the short period of the easing of restrictions. My curiosity and desire to read more of Luca went unsatisfied until the early 1990s, when my friend Sanda Agalidi returned from Bucharest with a recently-published anthology of the Romanian avant-garde. It contained the beginning fragment of *The Inventor of Love* and some of the prose poems from what would come to be called in English *The Praying Mantis Appraised*. We shall discuss later how Luca's "wolf" became a "praying mantis."

In order to sound Luca in English as he sounds in Romanian, English must be honed in an uncommon fashion. Translated directly from the Romanian into English, *mot-a-mot*, Luca often falls flat, losing qualities mentioned above—nuance, innuendo, cultural reference, musical tone and overtone, rhythm—in other words, the poetry. From the outside, English seems a language of efficiency and precision; Romanian not so. Perhaps this is so because for centuries Romanians suffered from malnutrition. Rahter than remaining inactive, the tongue found other means to entertain itself. Words became longer, more engaging to pronounce. From the outside, Romanian language seems to retain freshness, while words in American English usage have lost their tang and texture. For example, the word "love" has become indistinct, distracted; the Romanian "dragoste" implies palpable experience no longer living in "love." Thus, the "love" of translated Luca renders at times as "rapture." "Carry" invigorates, intactiles to "hoist" or "haul," muscles at work. Luca's "eye" demands empotation, must become "eyeball." "Walking" must become more aware, an "ambulation." Magnified details hone the whole, words summoned for their rhythm and tonality. "Covered with flowers" transmutes, specifies into "layered with lilies." *Head* becomes *cranium*, an enriched lingering linguistic

journey demanding anatomical consciousness int eh convulsive manner of the Romanian original.

We must discuss how "*Un lup văzut printr-o lupa*" (literally, "a wolf seen/observed through a magnifying glass" became "*The Praying Mantis Appraised.*" Advised originally by a Romanian surrealist that Luca's pun was merely an alliterative play on words, my "*Periwinkle Perused through a Periscope*" seemed a happy and witty choice, and this was the title for a number of years while seeking a publisher for the book. Then, with publication in sight, Petre Raileanu (the leading Romanian/French interpreter of Luca) told us that nothing was arbitrary in Luca's choice of words, and went on to explain the meaning of the title: "*Lupa*," while maintaining the core meaning as "magnifying glass," can be stretched to imply "female wolf" ("lup"/"lupa"). In this light, of male perused (pursued!) through/by the female manifested as magnifying glass, lupa suddenly acquires multiple meanings: the peruser/pursuer becomes the perused/pursued. In addition, the word "lup" is also Romanian slang for a man who is constantly pursuing (perusing) women, or frequents whorehouses (the Romanian slang for whorehouse is "lupanar").

Faced with this apparently impossible dilemma, Laura and I spent months wracking our brains and coming up with unsatisfactory solutions until, one afternoon over cappuccinos and unrelated small talk, Laura uttered: The Praying Mantis Appraised. Oddly enough, neither of us knew at the time of the title of another of Luca's books, this one in French, to be translated by Mary Ann Caws as *Self-Shadowing Prey*; nor were we conscious at the time of a historical Surrealist fascination with this insect, nor of any evocation of poet-prophet's mantle. Laura had simply been thinking about the rapacious lady-bug, whether it is preying, or praying, or both, and about praying being praising, appraising being preying and/or praying, etc. After such the rest of the translation flowed smoothly in a similar manner, Luca's puns and word play finding easy passage into English. Although at times translation is not exact, his incantatory urgencies remain and resonate.

I had long admired the tough, uncompromising, take-no-prisoner's quality of Laura's psyche, in which I sought to see my own. I saw in Luca the agitation of my own psyche. Laura, however, in a process she describes as codependency with the dead, a ghostwriting, excavated and emphasized Luca's vulnerability, a quality I had never seen or sought in his work. Her historian's sense discerned this vulnerability, a vulnerability all too real during years of compelled isolation during a time in Romania when it was unsafe for a Jew to walk the streets of Bucharest, when all Jews were perused and pursued, snatched and sent to labor or death camps. Laura empathized with Luca's sequestration in his small room, his extraordinary libido necessarily stifled and outraged, displaced through pen onto paper, phantasizing objects of desire: opera hats, monocles, objects of refinement he craved even while wishing to destroy the world that produced them. Keenly aware of these historical circumstances, she transported the original speaker; faced with a choice of words, she intuited those words of most resonance in their new language.

> …where I preserve the pressed rose, the ribbons and the bows, the perfumes of the women over which we committed suicide so many times, so many times I waited for you by the side of the sidewalk, by the side of the ship, my shoes shining especially for you. How many times didn't I die? How many times nine times nine?

Laura knows how difficult it would have been to obtain shoe polish during wartime, as so many marching feet competed for it; to desire someone so much that one *must* obtain shoe polish and *must* apply it, invested in desire, *must* polish an object, make it shine, to lure the bird. It is the very act of desire, rubbing shoe polish on shoes (the shoe itself an erotic object, as Freud knew), the rubbing of the shoes a sensual act, dark glaze applied to reflect light, tactile technique manifesting chiaroscuro so prized among singers and painters. It is the very act of desire, to attempt to procure this black-market concoction, plotting and process to procure themselves erotic acts, this polish,

this leather polish, in wartime, to insist upon its application, the tiny tin in which it comes a fetish. In translation emerges the shining "I" vowel, again and again; a skilled singer would sense this fortuition and shape (shift) it to incant: "How many tImes, bI the sIde of the sIde walk, mI shoes shIning.... nIne tImes nIne," each I the will re-membering itself, in wheedling, drawling strain, penetrating conceived spans between places, time, tongues. There is no doubt as to Luca's intention in his articulated phantasy, one of objects of desire and their sympathetic magic, necessitating the acquisition of the tiny tin, the opening of it, the scooping out of the dark paste, to slather it upon leather which likely had seen better days. Each rub a recall, an investment, an intention to attract. Then the waiting, the compulsive counting. How many times? Luca incants. Nine times nine? The second nine-word being repetition, both emphasis and empowering multiplier. This is Luca's Desire, a true Desire not of nebulous cerebral statement, but of committed staining of the fingers, in shoe polish or translator's ink.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: We would like to express our thanks to Andrei Codrescu. Luca, like so many other great Romanian poets, first made his American debut in the pages of *The Exquisite Corpse*, which Mr. Codrescu edits. It is also because of Mr. Codrescu's efforts that *The Inventor of Love and Other Works* found a publisher at Black Widow Press.

Julian and Laura Semilian are the translators of Gherasim Luca's *The Inventor of Love and Other Works*.

Julian Semilian is a moving image artist, teacher, poet, translator, and novelist. He was born in Romania and has been teaching film editing and experimental cinema at the University North Carolina School of the Arts, School of Filmmaking, for the last 15 years, following a career as a film editor in Hollywood, where he worked on more than 50 movies and TV shows.

An innovative, interdisciplinary artist with a passion for performing unusual concert repertoire, Laura's translations of Hungarian folk songs arranged by Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály were featured in the January 2013 issue of *Hyperion*. Her original musical compositions include vocal settings of Will Alexander's poetry, performed in collaboration with the author on piano, as well as soundscapes for Julian's films. She holds graduate degrees in both history and opera performance. A first place winner of the southeastern region's Metropolitan Opera competition, her leading orchestral and operatic performances have ranged in repertoire from Orff to Verdi to Wagner.

Julian Semilian and Laura Semilian, "Smuggling, Surrealism,
& Sympathetic Magic: On Translating Gherasim Luca"
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HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

CIRCUMSTANCES OF INVENTION
Notes on Some Early Texts

John Galbraith Simmons

Henry Fuseli, *Oedipus Cursing His Son, Polynices* (1786)

The early texts of Gherasim Luca are silently infused with the social, political, and psychological catastrophes of the interwar years and the war-ravaged 1940s. Although nearly invisible in the naked prose itself, these contexts are powerfully evident in the reverberant circuitry that embeds the raw physical imagery in a tightly structured weave of self-reflection, rage, and black humor. But the texts are not merely broadly

weighted by the disintegration of Europe and its full-scale retreat into barbarism. Operative too, and most potently, are the extreme circumstances of Romanian politics, culture, and social paralysis. Read against this background, *The Inventor of Love* finds contemporary anchor in the wider world; its texts are revelatory, vibrant, and prescient.[1]

To explore the social and poetical interplay in early Luca, I discuss below his "non-Oedipal" formulations and should add that the approach here is *de novo* in the sense that I don't take into account the subsequent adaptation of the term by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guttari.[2] Dominique Carlat records Luca's reservations vis-à-vis *Anti-Oedipus* and his preference that his own "analytic fable" retain its "unwonted power of protest."[3] Now more than forty years old, *Anti-Oedipus* should be read, suggests Sylvie Godme-Séguret, as a "comedy deriding capitalism and glorifying a schizophrenia invented and amplified through the joint writing of a philosopher and a psychoanalyst engaged in critical reflection designed to challenge the bourgeois ideology of their era."[4] In his original use of "non-Oedipal," one should add that Luca drew upon the work of Otto Rank.

One need know only a little — it would be easy to know too much — about political and social life in Romania in the wake of the First World War. In that country, reconfigured and enlarged after Versailles, there returned as leader a late-born Hohenzollern monarch in the person of King Carol II. While cosmopolitan Bucharest was known as the "Paris of the East," the King struggled to implement modern reforms in a still largely agrarian country, and for the most part he failed. He failed owing to both his own incompetence and the scale of the problems he faced. King Carol, writes Stanley G. Payne, was "the most cynical, corrupt, and power-hungry

[1] Gherasim Luca, *The Inventor of Love & Other Writings*, tr. Julian Semilian & Laura Semilian (Lanham, MD: Black Widow Press, 2009).
[2] Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).
[3] Dominique Carlat, *Gherasim Luca l'intempestif* (Paris: Jose Corti, 1998) 29.
[4] *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. In A. de Mijolla, *International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis = Dictionnaire international de la psychanalyse*, 3 vols (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005).

monarch who ever disgraced a throne anywhere in twentieth-century Europe."[5] The history of "Greater Romania" was to prove short, perfused with exceptional brutality and locomotive-bound for a bad end after the king abdicated in favor of a pro-fascist military dictator. Ineluctably, a half-century of chronic misery was to follow under communism and megalomania.

Mystical and militaristic nativism nourished the rise of fascism in Romania during the 1930s. Carol tried to compete with, but could not keep in check, the vaunted aspirations of an ever-growing number of obsessive Christian fascists who comprised the Legion of the Archangel Michael and its successor, the Iron Guard. These movements, writes Michael Burleigh, were "sui generis in their fusion of political militancy with Orthodox mysticism into a truly lethal whole."[6] Their unique brand of anti-Semitism, which was at once idealistic and murderous in intent and targeted all communist-leaning elements (effectively all Jews were considered Bolsheviks), appealed to a good many of the polyglot country's young intellectuals. In words that he would later regret, a young E.M. Cioran wrote in *The Transfiguration* that "The Jews are *unique* in every single way; like no one else, they live with the crushing burden of a divine curse. If I were a Jew, I would instantly kill myself."[7] It is fair to suggest, incidentally, that Cioran's frequent reflections on suicide belong to a larger conversation in the culture that also accounts for Luca's remarkable "The Dead Death," his "Five non-Oedipal Suicide Attempts" that represent an extended exercise in — make no mistake — black humor.

Luca was born into Romania's conflicted social and political environment, and a certain ambiguity pervades accounts of his early life. As the son of a Jewish tailor who died when he was just a year old, he is said to have grown up with the status of a war orphan; and for two years was able to attend the university, where he studied

[5] Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995) 278.
[6] Michael Burleigh, *Sacred Causes: Religion and Politics from the European Dictators to Al Qaeda* (London: Harper Press, 2006) 270.
[7] Marta Petreu, *An Infamous Past: E.M. Cioran and The Rise of Fascism in Romania* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2005) 133.

chemistry.[8] Already politically engaged as a teenager, he learned about Marxism and the class struggle during some days he spent in jail in 1934 after he and friends signed and sent a highly provocative screed, *Pula* (which translates as "cock") to Nicolae Iorga, a prominent right-wing author, intellectual, and politician. Luca was not only a youthful provocateur and poet. Ion Pop records that, in addition to powerfully engaged verse written in the late 1930s, Luca was also "decidedly present in the left-wing press… His articles, highly critical of the state of things in Romanian society, concerned the condition of the oppressed worker and […] firmly rejected the fascist ideology as incarnated in the Iron Guard, and put into question the troubled state of mind of the 'younger generation' of intellectuals at the time."[9] Over time he appears to have moved from militating in favor of "proletarian" poetry to a full-scale rejection of socialist realism and embrace of surrealism; by 1938, when he journeyed to Paris, his sensibility must have been pretty fully formed.

Luca spent the war years in Bucharest, like other Jews who escaped massacre and were spared deportation, in a kind of suspended animation. Romania had the third largest population of Jews in Europe, about 750,000 in 1940. When it joined with Germany, blessed by the Orthodox church (Hitler and Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu were God's "archangels on earth"), in invading the Soviet Union in 1941, the Romanian military slaughtered some 60,000 Jews in the Ukraine.[10] But the government balked at deporting Jews to the death camps, both to preserve independence from Hitler and in great part because it became clear that Romania could not afford wholesale loss of its professional intelligentsia; their absence would have more than decimated what remained of an educated class.[11]

These were the years during which Luca composed *The Inventor of Love* and other texts, including *The Passive Vampire*. In later life, he maintained a "distance he

[8] Luca's status as a war orphan, however obtained, could explain a good deal. Carlat and other sources state his father died about 1914, but Romania only entered World War I in 1916. Nevertheless, war orphans were many after World War I, and some Jewish children without parents were baptized, which later could spare them the depredations to which anti-Semitic measures subjected many others, as early as 1921.

[9] Ion Pop, "L'avant-garde littéraire roumaine et la politique," *Arcadia* 41, No. 2 (2006) 325.

[10] Burleigh, ibid., 271–73.

[11] Ibid., 274.

judged necessary between his poetical work and biographical events," writes Dominique Carlat.[12] In retrospect, despite questions that arise about his life during the war, he allowed the texts to speak for themselves. In retrospect, that reticence has served him well.

The concept of the "non-Oedipal," which Luca developed in the early 1940s (including a lost manifesto), offers a key to the unique texture of his early writings. Begin by noting that, when detached from the texts themselves, it seems at first to be a totalizing concept and nothing of great substance, untethered from psychoanalysis and suggestive of a trans-historical critique of modern rudderless conventionality. In *The Inventor of Love*, Luca writes of "the axiomatic man of Oedipus …[,] the castration-complex man, the man of the natal trauma, upon which you prop up your love affairs, your occupations, your neckties and your purses, your professions, your arts, your churches."[13] This man "deserves his destiny." Luca and Dolfi Trost also made clever but more youthful than illuminating use of the idea in their 1945 pamphlet, "Dialectic of the Dialectic," with several grandiose applications, including the idea, for example, that revolution requires the "extension of the non-Oedipal attitude to a general level."

But by stark contrast, the extension and constant elaboration of the concept within Luca's poetic texts lend them power and internal cogency. His "non-Oedipal" stance individualizes the voice and actions of the poet himself, the first-person narrator whose phrasings create a tight weave of angry assertions. In the texts that comprise *The Inventor of Love*, the "non-Oedipal" creates context and connects disparate images and overarching concepts — for example: "[t]he fact that the Lover's body is covered with scars" and "the millennial mystery of man." The Oedipal and non-Oedipal open the door to a collation of images that lend substance to allusions to destiny, constant references to love, and preoccupation with death. In "I Roam the Impossible," Luca notes that he is forever "confusing the sense of life with the sense of love." In terms of his poetic texts, he clearly enough uses "non-Oedipal" to point both inward to the psyche and outward to the larger culture.

[12] Carlat, ibid., 19.
[13] Luca, *The Inventor of Love & Other Writings*: 19.

The concept of the "non-Oedipal" did not appear to Luca full-blown as some revelation after reading Freud; rather, his reference to "natal trauma" clearly suggests that he was conversant with the work of the Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank. Famous as Freud's early disciple and author of *The Trauma of Birth* (1925), Rank was the first psychoanalyst to locate the origins of neurosis and intra-psychic conflict in earliest infancy. He wrote extensively about art and the artist, and to him may be owed, in fact, the very concept of the "non-Oedipal." It is interesting to note that in a late essay — he died in 1939 — Rank wrote that "there is … in the child a tendency one might designate as 'anti-Oedipean' because, in contrast to the Oedipus complex, it aims at a bringing together of the parents instead of a separation of them."[14] The context here is Rank's implicit rejection of the hypothetical innate determinants of the original Freudian conception of the Oedipal complex — a stance, moreover, that Luca and Trost adopted in their manifesto, with their explicit rejection of biology. Whereas Freud and early psychoanalysts regarded the theory of the Oedipal conflict as biological and universal, Luca was determined to view it as a social and cultural artifact.

More pertinent still to Luca's texts was work by another Austrian analyst with whom the poet was probably not familiar. Melanie Klein, in the late 1930s, essentially extended Rank's concept of the birth trauma to assert that the Oedipus complex itself begins in infancy, not in later childhood — not at six years of age but at six months. Her theories caused major dissensions in psychoanalysis and entailed splits that have never healed. Indeed, while Luca was enduring wartime Bucharest, Klein and fellow analysts in London were holding a long series of "Controversial Discussions" that ended in 1946, resulting in a three-sided Mexican standoff in the British Psychoanalytical Society amongst Freudians, Kleinians, and Independents.[15]

Key to Klein's theory, and its relevance for *The Inventor of Love*, are the two central "defense mechanisms" that she identified and claimed infants and young children use to contend with overwhelming fantasies and emotions. These are

[14] Otto Rank, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964) 297–98.
[15] Eli Zaretsky, *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2004). See ch. 10.

"splitting" and "projective identification"; and they were to become of immense importance in psychoanalysis because they are non-trivial, not obvious, and resonate in the real world. Whatever psychoanalysts of any stripe thought of Klein's unusual theoretical leaps and unique speculations, these concepts would become accepted by all sides in some form because they helped explain regularly observable phenomena associated, most visibly and helpfully but not exclusively, with severe psychopathology. So, too, would aspects of Klein's development of "object relations theory" find wide acceptance and, it is worth noting, this theory also owed in its foundational form to Otto Rank.

As aids in evaluating psychopathology, one calls them defense mechanisms; but in poetry these sorts of fantasy productions serve protean aims. Splitting and projective identification as deployed in thought and language can provide paths to sensual experience of insight into the operations of the larger world. In Luca's poetic texts they might be compared to William Blake's ersatz use of mysticism: they nourish and strengthen what Mark Schorer described as that poet's "politics of vision" — with "vision" defined as "not a delusive power to observe phantasms but the ability to visualize psychological facts."[16] Luca's early short texts are all invested with these maneuvers, readily discernible as sudden violent eruptions, expressions of sexual rage, and descriptions of body parts separate from bodies.[17] There are "the lips that kissed, the brain that reasoned"; "this exquisite blood-boat I kiss with an open mouth"; there is "my adored lover's head, the head of my tentacular, unborn lover, whose supreme evidence is the immense umbilical cord through which I suck out her heart"; and, "inside this perennially invented lover you can find all those live fragments found in the biological ruins of long-vanished humanity, fragments of bodies, of aspiration, of love's fossils, but not a complete female body…"

Such imagery — including detached body parts and effusions — corresponds with the kinds of fantasy productions that Klein claimed arise in infants owing to intolerable frustration. The aim of primitive defenses like splitting & projective

[16] Mark Schorer, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision* (New York: Vintage Books, 1959) 88.
[17] The quotations that follow are all from *The Inventor of Love*.

identification is to contend with such fantasies by expelling them or by separating the "good" from the "bad" (in terms of pleasure/non-pleasure) & locating the former in some idealized object (most simply conceived as the psychological representation, however distorted, of a person). "Splitting is linked with increasing idealization of the ideal object," writes Hannah Segal in her nearly canonical explanation, "in order to keep it far apart from the persecutory object and make it impervious to harm."[18] (*The unborn woman of my heart*, writes Luca — and nothing, you might say, more surely safeguards one from harm than not being born in the first place.) As for projective identification, to Segal, it has "manifold aims" & "may be directed toward the ideal object to avoid separation, or it may be directed towards the bad object to gain control of the source of danger."[19] (*Upon her angelic flesh I endlessly project my convulsions, my fury.*)

This is all to say that, because he was writing under *extreme conditions*, Luca advanced in *The Inventor of Love* a poetic defense — not merely of self or the other, but of the workings and substance of love itself. His intention was in effect to preserve commitment to poetry as aligned with the surrealist project that exalted love and eroticism as a force for the transformation of everyday life. He did not take refuge, like Louis Aragon of "Zone Libre" — any number of similar contemporary instances might be cited — in manufacturing "poetry of the resistance." In place of Aragon's "sound of the broken heart" and "fragrance of tears," Luca would imagine bestowing supreme homage upon the author of his five objects of love by *"impaling her thorax of black marble with a knife in order to snatch her heart in my teeth for the rest of her life."*

But what, beyond generalities, were these dire and consequential conditions under which Luca was operating during World War II? Were they really so singular?

In fact, Luca came of age and allied himself with surrealism during a period that is scarcely exhausted by reference to the "rise of fascism," much less by the onset of the Holocaust. Far right-wing ascendancy in Romania was notable for excessive

[18] Hanna Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) 27.
[19] Ibid.

violence. There was, to be sure, a murderous anti-Semitism, anti-communism, and religious mysticism. But events transpired to transform the country into an exceptional political pressure cooker, especially for an educated left-wing Jew. Historian Norman Davies, recalling black stallions brought to the graveyard and peasant tales of trapped souls and reanimated corpses, noted that political scientists "have concluded that Romanian Fascism was just a nasty variety of the genre, with special interests in anti-Semitism and necrophilia. The anthropologist would conclude that it mobilized deep-rooted religious and folk traditions."[20] And the poet's conclusion — that would be Luca's.

The charismatic Cornelieu Codreanu, as the son of a politician, was reactionary and an anti-Semitic activist virtually from cradle to grave. He founded the Legion of the Archangel Michael in 1927, and it attracted both rural elements and young middle-class urbanites. The Legion's goal was to create a "new moral man" — *pace* a man to be newly invented — and to that end its members developed rules and rituals associated with secret sects and death cults.[21] At communal gatherings they sliced open their arms and spewed their blood into communal cups from which they then all drank. They filled little bags with Romanian soil and wore them tied around their necks. By 1941 it was known as the Iron Guard and its members orchestrated a pogrom in Bucharest, notable for its ferocity, that put to death at least 120 Jews (some recorded the number as high as 600). One group of thirteen they murdered at a local slaughterhouse. They disemboweled the corpses, which they adorned with neckties made from intestines, and set them on hooks to display as "kosher meat."[22]

The Legion and Iron Guard also promoted a whole culture of assassination, carrying out multiple murders. In 1934, the same year Luca spent days in prison for obscenely insulting Iorga, Codreanu learned that he was himself the target of a plot.[23]

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[20] Norman Davies, *Europe: A History* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 969.
[21] Burleigh, *Sacred Causes: Religion and Politics from the European Dictators to Al Qaeda*: 270.
[22] Burleigh gives the number as 630 (p. 271) but most sources suggest 121 dead and possibly many more missing. Cf. http://www.nizkor.org/hweb/people/c/carmelly-felicia/bucharest-pogrom.html. See also http://www.romanianjewish.org/en/cap2.html
[23] Roland Clark, "European Fascists and Local Activists: Romania's Legion of the Archangel Michael (1922–1938)" (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2012) 323.

Some ten Legionaries soon went after the would-be assassin, Mihai Stelescu, and pumped 120 bullets into his body. They took to his head with an axe, all the while singing revolutionary hymns. They killed his supporters and eventually instituted a rule whereby "punishment teams" were to take care of all who betrayed the movement. Martyrdom came to the rescue in 1938, when Codreanu, who had been imprisoned by King Carol, was with thirteen other prisoners taken from jail by government operatives. They were garroted, shot, stripped, and their bodies dissolved in acid before being interred under seven tons of concrete.[24]

Not surprisingly, Codreanu remains to this day an icon and hero of the contemporary European far right.

To understand how freighted with significance was Luca's "non-Oedipal" stance vis-à-vis the disciplined madness of the immediate world around him in the early 1940s, consider that a great many productions from the first generation of surrealist artists and poets may be described, by contrast, as "Oedipal." Consider an example from the plastic arts: Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare* (1915–23). It too is about the invention of love. But the subject is a "bride before possession," not an unborn lover. There are the "Standard Stoppages" and the "Wilson-Lincoln system" of articulated voyeurism. "The bachelor grinds the chocolate himself." The metaphors are mechanical and the bachelors are doyens of everyday life: gendarme, policeman, priest, etc. "[W]e find ourselves in the presence of a mechanistic and cynical interpretation of the phenomenon of love," wrote André Breton, who noted: "Basically, the Bride is a motor."[25] From a biographical standpoint, we might add: Duchamp was a determined and dedicated chess player; and chess – this should be no surprise – is a powerfully Oedipal game of kings and queens and the children who are their pawns.[26]

[24] Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945*: 289.
[25] André Breton, "Lighthouse of the Bride" in: Robert Lebel and Philip Lamantia, *Marcel Duchamp. With chapters by Marcel Duchamp, André Breton & H.P. Roche* (New York: Paragraphic Books, 1959) 92.
[26] Reuben Fine, *The Psychology of the Chess Player* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967).

Just as revealing would be, say, Antonin Artaud's 1925 letters to the Dali-Lama and the Pope, together with the scabrous missive of 1946 that he addressed to Pope Pius XII. Whether merely openly disdainful ("O Pope confined to this world, neither Earth nor God speaks through you.")[27] or obscene (the 1946 letter), rebellion takes aim at foolish figures of authority. With Luca, by contrast, his propulsive but controlled voice creates pristine, tightly constructed texts that are, in effect, robust carapaces studded and emboldened with violent imagery whose aims, in the end, are to preserve love — unwedded to the fatherland, unencumbered by the absurdities of mystical fascism. His work was at antipodes with, say, that of Mircea Eliade — later to become the famous scholar of myth and religion. Eliade wrote of his commitment to and belief in the future victory of the Legion of the Archangel Michael. Why? "Because I believe in the destiny of the Romanian people … because I believe in the victory of the Christian spirit… Because I believe in love."[28] Love.

From Archangel Michael to the disemboweled corpses of victims of the Iron Guard dangling from meat hooks, Luca does not reveal his sources. How could he? Even if it were not to risk life and limb, why would he? With respect to the author of "The Dead Death," consider completed suicides from the same epoch — the almost mythological demise of Walter Benjamin or, more poignantly, the suicide of Stefan Zweig. Not: what did they leave us besides their work? But: what more do we need?

Luca makes few explicit references to the Second World War, or the raw circumstances of his clandestine existence in Bucharest, either in the Romanian texts or in the long-form and quasi-autobiographical *The Passive Vampire*. But there is at least one clear and straightforward exception. In 1942, grain shortages brought about wheatless days in the country that was once Europe's breadbasket. In the fall the proto-fascist dictator Antonescu stepped up arrests in what he called an "energetic purge" while cementing a "cordial understanding" with Hitler.[29] Earlier in the year the police arrested teenagers in a tavern for singing objectionable songs. A court sentenced

[27] http://bazookapoetrymagazine.blogspot.com/2011/06/address-to-pope.html
[28] Quoted in: Clark, "European Fascists and Local Activists: Romania's Legion of the Archangel Michael (1922–1938)" 293.
[29] *The New York Times* (September 24, 1942).

a sixteen-year-old girl to twenty years hard labor for "illegal political activity"; another youth, a chemistry student as it happens, received twenty-five years.[30] On October 24, Luca completed a text he titled "The Kleptobject Sleeps."

> [I]t is not by accident that my room's windows open directly out onto the military tribunal where each night I hear the sobs of the confined and convicted, alone in my room, always alone, even when my sex, in perpetual state of erection, magnetically lures from a distance a woman's skirt, even when the woman's skirt perpetually caresses me, indulgent, allowing, I still cannot hold back my agonized howl and even this howl that I emit furiously, desperately, whose resonance I feel must reach all the way to the farthest distances, all the way to humans, seals me ever more hermetically in my room, in my forest, where only the echo announces morning for me because the howl in the middle of the night collided with the mountaintop in the distance, rent a slice of rock and a ton of snow only to return between my teeth, my futile ferocious teeth, touchingly savage.[31]

Luca concludes with the hope that his lines would be read by a "king of thieves" — both a reference to gypsy Romanians, criminalized under the fascists, and a provocation to Antonescu, who was known to be viciously anti-ziganistic. Luca hoped he would be received "among his peers, a band of civic thieves, civic assassins." With whom, he added, "I would like to spend the rest of the days remaining till the end of the war."

To contextualize *The Inventor of Love* in terms of wartime Romania and its ultra-reactionary political currents, long after the fact, is not to parochialize the contents of those poetic texts, or to trivialize their aims or reach into the receptive reader's own psyche. On the contrary, the absence in them of either local imagery or explicit political discourse is a reminder that Luca's work contributes forcefully to the chronicle of catastrophe and world war that was at the human center of the twentieth century and, at the same time, to the persistent vision of what he understood to be convulsive beauty as an instrument of liberation.

John Galbraith Simmons, "Circumstances of Invention: Notes on Some Early Texts"
Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VII, No. 3 (fall 2013) 100–111.

[30] *The New York Times* (March 8, 1942).
[31] Luca, *The Inventor of Love & Other Writings*: 133–34.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Love According to Luca

John Taylor

Paul Delvaux, *L'Eveil de la foret* (1939)

"... LOVE, mad and lucid, real and virtual, living and dead like Déline's hair." — The Passive Vampire

The theme of love is omnipresent in the oeuvre of Ghérasim Luca (1913–1994). More precisely, not only a *theme*, but also often a *theory* or *project* of love already takes shape in the early French and Romanian writings of the author of *Le vampire passif* (1941) and *Inventatorul iubirii* ("The Inventor of Love," 1945). The poetic prose texts of *Un loup à travers une loupe* (l998), first written and published in Romanian in 1942, also often stage love scenes. The much later *Héros-limite*

(1985), with its dizzying prose text "Aimée à jamais" based — like the title — on puns and on permutations of the words "aimer," "amant," and "amour," continues to explore the question. The same is true of the bizarrely vivid long-poem "La Fin du monde," in *Paralipomènes* (1986), which, by transforming nouns into verbs that are not normally verbs in French, evokes a bodily confrontation — "copulation" would be too specific here — between two lovers that apparently brings on the "end of the world":

> I flora you
> I fauna you
>
> I cowhide you
> I door you
> and window you
> you bone me
> you ocean me
> you audacity me
> you meteorite me …

The last project on which Luca worked, before his suicide, was the French translation of *Iventatorul iubirii*, which appeared the very year of his death as *L'Inventeur de l'amour*.

Whereas the poem excerpted above gives an indication of Luca's unbridled practical philosophy of love, the clearest outline of his ideas is found in *The Inventor of Love*, which is a long didactic poem, even a sort of manifesto. As the title suggests, Luca posits that love must be invented or, more specifically, "reinvented," a project announced early on: "Everything must be reinvented / there is nothing left in the world / [...] Not even a beloved woman / that supreme certainty." In its simplest version, reinvented love is equated to a vigorous sense impression: "I smell my beloved's hair / and everything is reinvented." But Luca's originality hardly lies in such declarations, which are commonplaces used by poets realizing that they have been swept away, usually by the very language of poetry, too far from reality, here represented by a salient aspect of the beloved's flesh and bones. Slightly further on, Luca enters more deeply into the challenge of reinventing love: "I voluptuously erase / the eyes that have already seen / the lips that have already kissed / and the brain that has already thought / like matches / that can be used

only once." Reinventing love is therefore no mere matter of receiving the full thrust of sense impressions and thereby of re-connecting with reality, but also demands self-transformation, a return to a primordial, somehow virginal state: here, that of a match before it has been lit.

Isn't this imagery also rather conventional? Breaking out of routines — here perceptual and conceptual, elsewhere social or religious — and re-establishing within oneself a kind of innocence or purity ready to receive the Other fully, has often been put forward by writers as the necessary, if not sufficient, condition for attaining genuine love. Similar ideals circulated among the European Romantic poets, whom Luca in fact disparages by means of his own ideals, sarcastically dismissing, in *The Inventor of Love*, for instance,

> that ideal woman, unchanging, remote,
> whom the Romantics made
> almost accessible to us
> in their lyric opium den
> and whom we seek in vain
> at the four corners of the earth
>
> [...]
>
> Gradiva or Cinderella
> once encountered
> cease being one
> with their own fragrance
> and become two mere wives
> and model mothers
>
> [...]
>
> that ideal woman to whom we aspire
> only with the desire not to find her
> or, once she is found, to lose her...

In contrast, at the end of *The Passive Vampire*, recently translated by Krzysztof Fijalkowski, the character Déline, a "young woman of 21 [who] has the experience in love of a 40-year-old and the mind of an initiate," is Luca's ideal portrait of an anti-"ideal woman." Note the nouns and verbs that the name "Déline" connotes: *délice* (delight), *délier* (to untie, to free), *délinéer* (to outline), *délire*

(delirium), *délit* (criminal offence), *déliter* (to cleave, to disintegrate), *délivrer* (to set free).

To return to *The Inventor of Love*, Luca spends time warming up and progresses by means of logical steps as he systematically clears the table. The *tabula rasa* that he envisions, in order for genuine love to become possible, also implies that he can be "in love with his beloved / only after refusing / the axiomatic condition of existence / by denouncing the authors of my days / in the same way that I have killed the Creator." "I give myself the freedom of not loving," he adds, "an image fashioned by the Creator." Being in love thus presupposes being free not to love, at least not to love as a mere consequence of mindless conformity to social mores, to religious dogmas, to trite romantic ideals and presumably also, in this same context, to spontaneous sexual drives deriving from the same mental and bodily habits. Adopting this vantage point enables Luca to see, at least in theory, the "sudden appearance" (*apparition*) of his beloved with the same astonishment that he would feel if he spotted "a distant planet emerging from chaos."

However, the miraculous arrival of a beloved woman has also often been stated, even staged, in countless pieces by other poets, albeit usually without the preparations requiring, as here, such a violent renunciation of one's parents and the Creator. Luca is essentially defining the same conditions, or rather the same lack of inhibiting conditions, that allow "love at first sight" to occur. "Coup de foudre," literally "struck by lightning," the common yet bolder and more graphic French equivalent of the English expression, has somewhat the same cosmic intensity as Luca's amorous amazement at his lover surging forth like a planet from the teeming details of daily life. In *The Passive Vampire*, he once again conjures up chaos while describing his first encounter with Déline,

> the kind of woman whose approach suddenly flings me into the most nebulous regions of my being, the place where desire is simultaneously ash and flame, at whose approach I forget everything I once knew, since everything was to be rediscovered and invented. Nothing was familiar to me any longer, nothing was repeated, not a single fact was put to me or a single premise; we are buffeted in a universe bereft of reference points, forms, or solid bodies, where even among the most basic ideas and elements nothing has yet emerged from the chaos...

Luca's originality, in regard to a theory of love, becomes more obvious, in *The Inventor of Love*, just after the rather meticulous exposition of prerequisites enabling an authentic love to take place. The beloved woman who is always and constantly invented (*cette aimée toujours inventée*) is defined as a "rendezvous" of all sorts of "living fragments / found beneath the biological ruins / of vanished mankind // fragments of bodies / of aspirations / of fossils of love." The beloved woman is not — possesses not — a unique body, a whole body (*un corps entier*), but rather is a gathering place of "women, bodies of women" who "leave behind the door / like useless mortal remains / all that is known / their preconceived ideas about love / what they expected / to find in my bedroom."

Luca emphasizes the psychoanalytical and, especially, ontological consequences of this vision of a woman as a "rendezvous." Such reinvented — and not, apparently, self-reinvented — women lose some of their "stable individualism" by rejecting their traditional wish "to be loved / for what they are"; yet in exchange they acquire

> . . . the freedom to surpass
> the nefarious limits of the initial complex
> that makes them seek in me
> the same lugubrious
> thousand-masked
> character who is the father
>
> These bodies of women dynamited by me
> fragmented and mutilated
> by my monstrous thirst
> for a monstrous love
> at last have the freedom to seek out
> and find outside of themselves
> the marvels at the depth of their being
>
> and nothing will make me believe
> that love can be anything else
> than a mortal entryway
> into the marvelous
> into the lascivious dangers
> into the chaotic aphrodisiac
> underground passageways
> where the never-encountered and the never-seen
> have the constant character trait
> of continual surprise...

Luca calls this "entryway" the "nerve center / of existence"; it is the point where "life / begins to be worth the trouble of living." More generally, Luca, as early as 1945, points to a paradox that will subsequently inform much philosophically oriented French poetry in the decades to come: the notion that one must get out of one's self in order to find the world and thereby, sometimes at the end, find oneself once again. Luca's late texts, in which the phonetic and semantic wordplay becomes so intense that language becomes an autonomous, disembodied, "de-selfed" organism, can be read in this light as well. The very title, *Héros-limite*, comprises untranslatable puns and could, arguably, be transposed into English as something like "(H)éro(s)-limit," which even at that would neglect another possible pun: "limite" = "L'imite" = "imitates him." Here is a single sentence from the hilariously exhausting "Aimée à jamais," whose own title means both "[my] beloved forever" and "to love forever": "My beloved ... loves loving not loved love but loving love, magnetizing love, lovingly magnetized by her lovingly loved lover." The process of reinventing love is here represented by a joyous lexical chaos.

Another key idea for Luca is that love and death are intertwined. In one of the prose textes of *Un loup à travers une loupe*, whose title literally means "A Wolf through a Magnifying Glass" yet with a near-pun on "louve" (she-wolf), he notes: "I like to make love at the edge of a pit in order to watch, from the depths of my excitement, the gravedigger who, when he spots me, remains nailed to the spot at the corner of a row where he continues on his way while remaining nailed to the spot — but now more of a philosopher." In the same piece ("The Red-Painted Echo"), Luca asks whether love might not be the only certitude between life and death — a thought contradicting his above-mentioned observation (in *The Inventor of Love*) that even "that supreme certainty," a beloved woman, no longer exists. Be this as it may, his deconstruction of love — through the various styles employed in his poems and prose texts — seems ultimately aimed at deriving a new, reinvented, form of love as if it were a sort of solution. Along with the wordplay, sarcasm, and gallows humor, a sort of mathematical demonstration often seems underway.

There is another element in his proof. Luca links not only death but also violence to love. Mouths appear frequently, but also knives. In his assault on Romantic ideals, the last rampart to pull down is that of prolonged sensuality and

tenderness. The same key story, "The Red-Painted Echo," concludes when the narrator, "with a quick, violently invisible movement," stabs his knife into his beloved's stomach, which he is "apparently caressing." Whereupon the story ends in a burlesque scene that is also typical of Luca: "The woman whom I love as if I had always been dead, or as if I had not yet come into the world, delivers her sublime cadaver over the ruins of a cemetery where the guard, taking me from afar to be a hyena, fires several rifle shots in my direction."

In many prose texts, which could almost be termed "personal essays" were the American version of the genre not so far removed in tone and contents, Luca often begins by telling a story in order to illustrate his ideas or to introduce a philosophical expatiation. This literary quality is most blatant in "Quelques machines agricoles" (Some Farm Machines), which begins vividly enough with the narrator wandering through the streets of his hometown, keeping close to the walls, his face covered with a "lugubrious toad." But when passersby feel "a bit of the wall grazing them," the narrator's "mask, or rather hood of tears," erects between him and them "the bars of a cage." The narrative evolves into one of Luca's most extensive expositions of his theory of love:

> What sort of sick thinking, what sort of dull and foul mind would be brazen enough to associate the kind of love that has long ceased being, for me, merely a red thread running through us, a love that has become a vast network linking up the contents and the containers of all that burns and throbs — my breathing, my revolution, my ellipse — with that casual, partial, occasional, superficial, spermatozoa, and sentimental preoccupation that is the love of a man and a woman within the human species? [...] If people call "love" the meeting of two stupid hearts and of two rudimentary sexual organs, if they term "love" the fusion into a single being (or into a third being, how horrible!) of two weary bodies, two mindless states, two excitations, two sentiments, two excrements, if people dare to entitle "life" the existence on earth of a parish priest, a farmer and Arthur Rimbaud, and "death" the disappearance of an officer and Saint-Just, I then prefer [...] to open the Larousse Dictionary at random and term "horse" their love, "fork" their death, "sugar candy" their freedom, "potato peeler" their embracing, "thresher," "ball" or "trigonometry" everything that matters to them and not at all to me, and if a man who is riveted to a machine or to a wheat field from morning to night, and who undergoes existence as a malediction, can still love, then why not believe that god exists, that good and beauty exist, that

> the gentleman running across the street is a real person, that this coffin is real, and likewise those quick to gather and weep all around it...

While searching for love, for a beloved woman, Luca searches even more for a sort of absolute freedom. In *The Passive Vampire*, he mentions the nine days spent with Déline as a period "during which [his] freedom had exceeded even the hopes [he] placed in poetry and revolution, a limitless, total, infernal freedom." Yet this very duality, love and freedom, raises questions. To what extent is the Other, the beloved woman *en face*, capable (according to Luca) of "self-reinventing" herself or of being a potential impetus for amorous reinvention? In other words, as being not only the lightning bolt, as it were, but also the person who carries out the project of reinventing love? Is the Other merely an object and never a subject? And by ascribing so adamantly a goal of total freedom to love and by defining love as authentic if and only if such freedom is obtained, is Luca perhaps passing over something essential? Is the price of attaining absolute freedom, via this not less idealized form of absolute love, perhaps the murder — think of all those knives and daggers in his oeuvre — of the mystery of love? That is, "mystery" not in the sense of a "mysterious" ideal woman (or man), an enigmatic, unreachable Other, but rather "mystery" as an integral — though hardly the only — ingredient in amorous attraction and interaction.

Of course, Luca's writings on love are often essay-like and thereby mostly rational in construction and expository in form, even when they have been written in verse and involve bold illogical imagery. Luca is producing ideas and analyzing emotions more than he is poetically *evoking* emotions without necessarily naming them; and his poetics are anti-poetic, indeed. Amorous vagueness, ambiguity, and "mystery" are excluded from the onset by his stylistic and intellectual game rules. A piece such as "Aimée à jamais" is programmatically playful in its punning and concerned with the subtleties of love only to the extent of making fun of them; the text brilliantly re-creates the "head over heels" atmosphere of infatuation. Yet what emotion is also ultimately more nuanced, more complex, and subtler than love? What emotion gives us such a strong impression of at once overwhelming and eluding us, all the while stubbornly remaining inside us like a tantalizing

kaleidoscope once we have been struck by the sight of that planet whirling out of chaos? Or is this multifaceted "mystery" that I detect as ultimately eradicated from Luca's theory of love just another Romantic sentimentalism that I should have thrown out long ago? ...

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Ghérasim Luca: Fulminate Inscription As Shadow

Will Alexander

Jacek Malczewski, *Błędne koło* (1895–97)

Luca erupted in this life as the shadow of a given body, as a free lone traveler insidiously confronted with the round of human tedium. In the midst of this innate tedium he found language as identity and identity as language. As an adolescent, as Salman Locker "looking for a new place to emerge in life other the accident of birth," he "encountered the news of the death of 'Ghérasim Luca, Archimandrite of Mount Athos and illustrious linguist'." Paraphrasing

Romanian literary critic Petre Raileanu, it was for Luca the generating of life out of death. Thus, Luca was born in such a manner that he eluded biology. At this instant he leapt conventional neurology and was immersed in a language that overthrew the vernacular as grip via alchemic homeopathy. He then employed as his regimen a carnivorous subtext voracious in his employment of the wayward. It was staggering misuse made palpable by his impenetrable linguistic current, where not only was his grammar distended, but each letter of each word grappled with itself by ceasing to know itself, thereby broaching a new frontier of consciousness. It is what Deleuze cited as a "prime example of stuttering in language, which for him represented the highest poetic function."[1] For me, I call it a fulgurant transmission, with an intensity not unlike a lahar rushing down a darkened pockmarked lava hill. Two words seem to apply to this language: velocity and danger. In fact, Luca says to himself that "I fasten myself to my own disequilibrium."[2] He babbles by means of his own carnivorous substrate, like a hellish centaur, or perhaps a speckled Taurean ram evolved from cataleptic ciphers. One susurration evolved into another until a non-Euclidean flatland was evinced. Within these random hillocks of language, monsters hissed, condors flew round and round until a whole conjoinment of menace transpired… an existential cacophony as though Luca himself were still plying his weapons. Not a writer who theoretically tested his position, Luca never angled out his circumstance by means of meticulous neurosis. Like the Taurean that he was, he continually broke beyond limits through the fury of maniacal expression. There was never blockage by detail or horizontal rejoinder concerned with quotidian particulates. Instead, he enacted the bravery of despair, by always kinetically bounding beyond its limits, corroded as they were by daily entanglement.

At this point it seems appropriate to chronicle his first five suicide attempts and their attendant documentation. It was as though he was

[1] Sean Strum, "The Objectively Offered Object," *Te Ipu Pakore: The Broken Vessel*: http://seanstrum.wordpress.com
[2] Ibid.

responding to the void in his blood. His first attempt was conveyed by the one line missive: "I can no longer bear this life full of privation."[3] He writes in his second missive of extremis: "causes of my death not to be looked for; there are no guilty, not even myself. I forsake life without any regrets. I ask for restraint at my funeral, cremation if possible, flowers not to be bought." His third attempt codified by the words "O my darling." At his fourth invasion of death he exclaims that "A nervous illness never incurable never which never tortures me for many years never forces me to end my days. I pay never with my life for the sins of my parents, never my heredity never was burden. If I never did no one wrong I never ask forgiveness." And at the fifth attempt he states, "If it is true, as the errors claim, that after death man continues a phantomatic existence, I will let you know. If you do not hear from me for one month, you will know that death is no different than the putrefaction of an onion, a chair, a hat. I commit suicide out of disgust."

These are haunted prolegomenas, various proto extinctions. With the glaring exception of Artaud, no one's spirit has been so suffused with drifts into surcease as was Luca's. The writing was soaked with its uncanny babble, with its syllables of a wakeless cadaver, always rife with termination. It was in this way that he led by tremor and seepage. He gave us hints, he beckoned from the other side, by means of a body virile with the angst of glossolalia. Neither fine-tuned China, nor an unspotted spoon dipped in sorbet, Luca continued to hiss as a restless property; his verbal gales were not unlike the towering global winds on Saturn. I think Codrescu is right when he points out the influential energy in Luca's work just at the point when Breton returns to Europe from exile facing a state of lessened influence. When I say this I am not keeping a debit sheet or adding up shadows, but acknowledging Luca and the Romanian Surrealists as enacting an occult empowerment of International

[3] Gherasim Luca, *Inventor of Love & Other Writings*, tr. by Julian and Laura Semilian (Lanham, MD: Black Widow Press, 2009) 51. All of the following quotes in this paragraph are from this book: 53, 55, 57, 59. I wish to note my special thanks to Julian and Laura Semilian for their translation of this book.

Surrealism throughout its imaginative diaspora circa 1947. It was during this period that *The Passive Vampire* appeared, a text which Petre Răileanu deemed "Luca's first properly surrealist text,"[4] for in it Luca allows "displacement without impediments," and the radical vivacity of the subconscious spirit where "the Possible replaces the Real." During the same year (1945) that *The Passive Vampire* appears, Luca, along with fellow surrealist, Dofi Trost, co-authored *Dialectics of the Dialectic*, "the capital text... for the Romanian Surrealist Group," which "affirmed unshakable fidelity to Breton," to "objective chance" while also intoning an organic critique of surrealism, warning the French group of a phantom tendency just to become another "artistic style."[5] On this latter point, Artaud voiced similar concerns to Breton during this same period when he rejected the latter's conscription of his drawings for gallery display. Never was his energy trumpeted through concealed posture. He was always racing against psychic self-engulfment composing at the scale of frenzy, his violation of grammar being a natural progression of his poetic lahar. He was a master of the indecipherable; he possessed no inclination to compose from imported slates, to list literary influence as a mode of retreat. Luca — always roaming as a neolithic wolf searching for the prey of the unanswerable. His instinct was none other than words that equated with visceral diamonds, which then transmuted to erotic declarations, moist, venereal with contagion. His language remains a circulatory immersion always tainted with treason, with the ravenous as its triumphant genetics of being.

Will Alexander, "Fulminate Inscription as Shadow"
Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VII, No. 3 (fall 2013) 121–124.

[4] Michael Leong, "Surrealism In a Minor Key: Recent Translations of Gherasim Luca," *Hyperallergic* (2012). Last accessed October 14, 2013: http://hyperallergic.com/54928/surrealism-in-a-minor-key-recent-translations-of-gherasim-luca/

[5] From Krzysztof Fijalkowski's intro to Gherasim Luca's *The Passive Vampire* (Prague: Twisted Spoon Press, 2009).

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

GHERASIM LUCA

THE ORGIES OF QUANTA

A SELECTION OF FOURTEEN
NON-OEDIPEAN CUBOMANIA
FROM THE ORIGINAL THIRTY-THREE

SELECTED AND TRANSLATED
BY SASHA VLAD

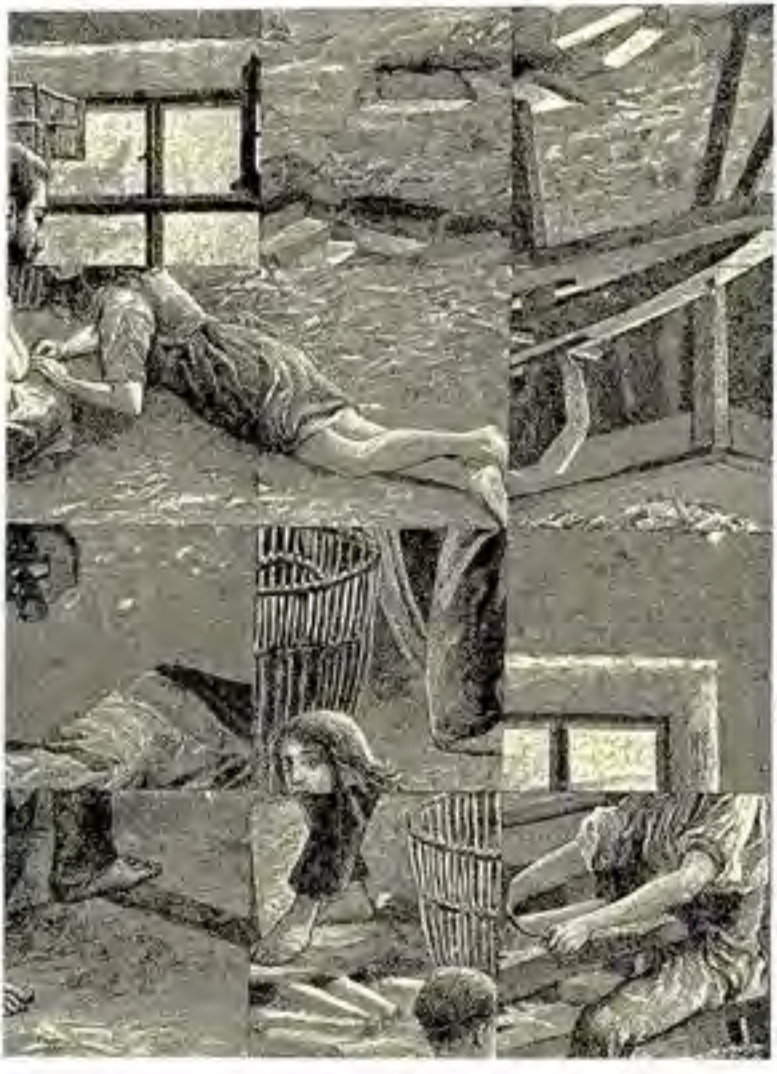
It is well known, for example, that if a tree is turned upside down, with its roots in the air and its boughs and branches planted in the ground, the former will sprout leaves, buds and flowers, & the latter will become roots. — HEGEL

Pedants, executioners, clerks, legislators, tonsured scum — what will you do when we prevail? What will become of your laws, your morals, your religion, your gallows, your paradise, your gods, your hell, when it is demonstrated that a certain flow of liquid, a certain kind of fiber, or a certain level of acidity of the blood or animal spirits are sufficient to make a man the object of your punishments or your rewards? — SADE

I. Indeterminism of a love.
II. A meeting, sweet and penetrating. *
III. She is never finished. *
IV. Lakes, forests, seas, cruelty, chance, colored by their own substances. *
V. Calorific image of my childhood. *
VI. The impossible dragged into a total energy.
VII. To think about perpetual mediumnity.
VIII. Flying with one's tongue.
IX. Woman with pedals, where are your gloves?
X. Escape-objects (vertigo-chair, flame-mirror, asphyxiating fan...)
XI. My certainty, my shirt: shipwreck. *
XII. The *never seen* as a particular case of *I love you.*
XIII. Encountering no obstacles.
XIV. Probabilistic interpretation of a forgotten dream. *
XV. At the slightest lycanthropic impulse.
XVI. The bloody mimicry of walls. *
XVII. The famous reason for being.
XVIII. Shock measured after being tested by a violent objectivity. *

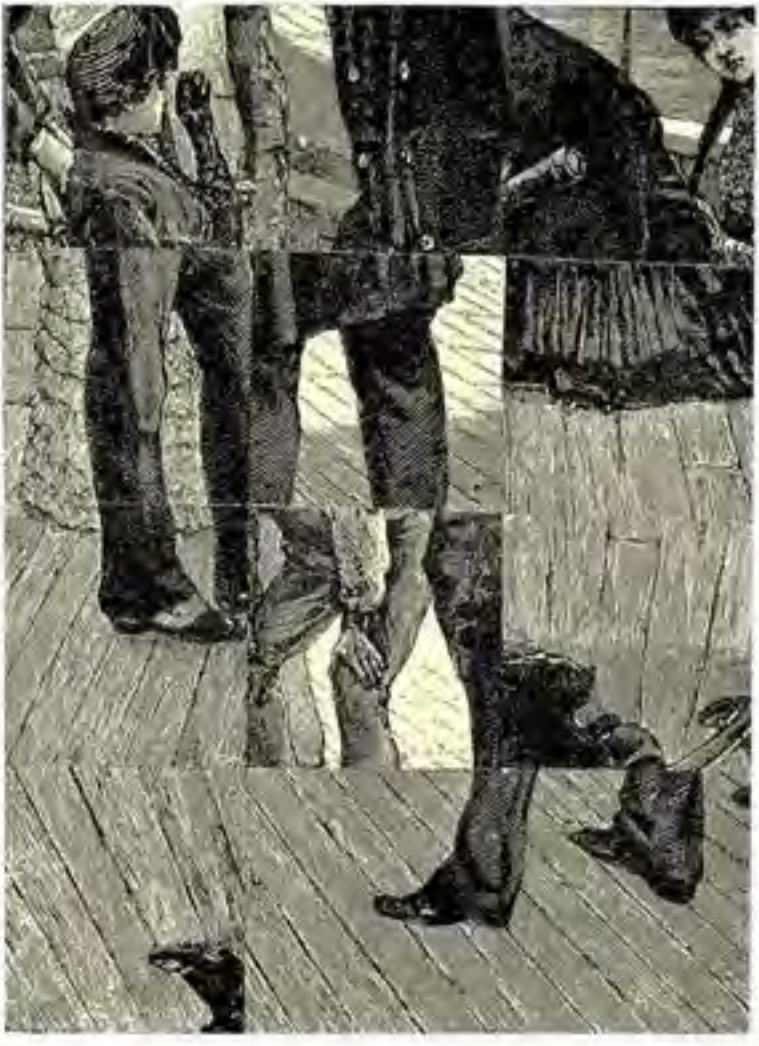
XIX. Who are you? XX. Grafted onto the back of a wolf. *
XXI. We bet on the infrared.
XXII. The space-time on the scale of smell. *
XXIII. The operator's hair pointed to midnight.
XXIV. As if awakened by the muteness of her own dream. *
XXV. Abandoning oneself to the Non-Oedipus in a spectroscopic manner. *
XXVI. Fur and message made relative by thought.
XXVII. Insensitive sensations.
XXVIII. Vast mass grave devoured by a negative hunt.
XXIX. Follow me with your eyes shut. *
‘XXX. The kiss in its forbidden aspects.
XXXI. The radiant lust.
XXXII. Doubling the real. *
XXXIII. If by chance you would accept the idea of your despair.

N.B. An asterisk after a title indicates that it is included in the selection that follows.



Douce et pénétrante rencontre

Elle n'est jamais finie



Lacs, forêts, mers, cruauté, hasard, coloriés par leurs propres substances

Image calorifique de mon enfance

Ma certitude, ma chemise : naufrage

Interprétation probabiliste d'un rêve oublié

Le mimétisme sanglant des murs

Choc mesuré après avoir subi les preuves d'une objectivité violente

Greffée sur le dos d'un loup

L'espace-temps à l'échelle de l'odorat

Comme réveillée par le mutisme de son rêve

S'abandonnant à Non-Oedipe d'une manière spectroscopique

Suivez-moi les yeux clos

Doubler le réel

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

IN PRAISE OF MALOMBRA
THE SHADOWS OF ABSOLUTE LOVE

GHERASIM LUCA, GELLU NAUM, PAUL PÄUN, VIRGIL TEODORESCOU, TROST

TRANSLATED BY RAINER J. HANSHE

GHERASIM LUCA, GELLU NAUM, PAUL PÄUN, VIRGIL TEODORESCOU, TROST

IN PRAISE

OF

MALOMBRA

THE SHADOWS OF ABSOLUTE LOVE

S

SURREALISM

1947

Malombra or love and nothing else.

The convulsion of beauty, the feebleness of memory, the color of regret, the charm of life, the mediumship of gesture, the rarity of love, the madness of the senses, the beauty of madness, the sorrow of lakes, lunar pressure, life after death, the nobility of lust, the ardor of a gaze, the memory of madness, the future of the past, somnambulist thought, the death of the landscape, action from a distance, dozing, the lived dream, the pride of sacrilege, the lust of hysteria, the refusal of life, the exhibition of life, the beauty of hysteria, the beauty of the beauty: in Malombra.

The challenge of raising the revolution to the height of poetry ever stupefied us, beguiled us. Never has it been more apparent to our eyes that the thunderstruck beauty of the woman destined for love is the concentration of the most agitated dialectical moments of the universe. Never, finally, has the thread that connects people seemed thinner to us, more fragile than in the past when it ran through those laces, those gestures, those glances, where the same power that animates the world came to reside in the irony of passion.

— Do you remember that evening, Renato? the lake, the lamps, the distant sounds... What comes to me is strange; I don't belong to this world. You didn't understand, you don't understand me, because you don't know. I am leaving today for an unknown fate, farewell, unknown reader.

So abruptly that the eye was blinded, still nervous as a scorpion, the shadow passed through the grey light of day like a wound, like a wreck, like a sleeping waterfall. The air, full with terrible animals and violet seas stretching far beyond the reassuring limits of the earth, swayed their passionate excrescences; the madness of bilocation was broken in an instant, in that time so favorable to the triumphs of the imagination, and with her, the moorings that fettered reason.

Dinner on a lazy-Susan, killing without injury, the hypnotic waterfalls, the mystery of 11, the bed boat and lilies beneath the storm, storms everywhere, parks without limits, suspended conversations.

The scenes when Malombra gives herself, at night, to her lover, on the lake edge, where she crosses the waters with hostile coldness toward he who waits, where she passes through lucid hysteria under the grey winds that extinguish the torches, are the triumph of what we agree to deem absolute love.

Burns searching for passion.

A character, a bloody hand, leaps into this immense pallor and below the melancholy sex fodder, plants are breaking, as fragrant as the ocean mollusk's visit to its regular habitats, among so many superstitions, determinisms, errors and sources, among many accusations and all symptoms of fury. This hand is the burned lymph, the Nordic sand materialized in an instant by the magic lines of mirrors, in their conversations about the stars.

— Do you remember, everything? Everything. I don't remember anything. But I know that this moment would arrive, Cecilia. In the world you live I suffocate. Only from the left wing of the castle can we see the lake.

In the object Malombra: interrogations at the lake edge, feeble movements in the dark, games like symptomatic provocations, disgust with all that is not love, the meeting of the present in the past.

And unable to move, to speak, she lay on a bed, covered with lace and veils. On the vast arena were hypnotized horses that surmounted obstacles and lakes spread over thousands of miles; they made their throats transparent; so close to the fires of our nerves, the woman touched them with the ends of her lashes: they entered into her eyes and fled in tears.

— Cécila, my Cécila, I came with my lover to see you dying, to see you dying, to see you dying. There is so much darkness in my soul, so much sadness. I'm about to become stone, colder than stone.

Besides the love of the heart, the love of the senses, relative love, there's still this kind of love where everything folds and concentrates, where life is just the auxiliary wave of this invincible passion. After Nadja, Dora, or Matilda, in turn, between the eternal regions or desire, poetry, Malombra risks making the passage from life to absolutely dialectical life, necessarily perceptible.

Before the tomb's curtain, the obscure oppression was to announce its return: but the irreducible atheism of every hysterical horror of living rejects the idea of religion, (he tries vainly to smuggle in passion), — previously reduced to dust.

Pure love for the absolute essence is consciousness estranged from itself. It remains to be seen more closely how to determine what is the other, and that other must be considered only in connection with this other. At first glance, he appears to have pure love toward himself rather than toward the world of usefulness, but he is itself the flight of this world, and also having the opposite resolve, he wears this usefulness in its midst.

Tiger Lily can only work on a perfectly level floor, ideally on a sandy beach. Her laterality is both twisted and inferior; her loving thoughts emphasize the striking homology of the Serpent and the hemlock. Her pulse is elusive, her nails blue; she usually lies on her back, head thrown back and eyes closed. When out of moral torpor she opens her eyes, she blasts those around for their clever indifference. At the point where, according to the violence of desire, the separation of things reaches the black secrets of alchemy, the gaze of the woman — whose rare incarnations still guide us to shaggy precipices — struck love and its invariable appeal.

The sharp nerves, the cat's sparks, the solar migraine, the cries, the twisted arm, stumbling on the waves of crystals, explosive stammering, sharp cries, groundless sighs, occult rage, the horror of living, hoarse cries, bloodstained hair, dresses cut with a razor, the exhibition of suicide, the speed of mad gazes, arrogant deception, the murderous scandal, lost cries, voluptuous spasms — all that and the pallor and the silence can never express the intractable challenge of all that is only crossed by the magnetism of eternal love.

O Malombra, evil shadow.

THIS TEXT
INSPIRED BY THE UNINTENTIONALLY
SURREALIST FILM MALOMBRA
WAS PRINTED IN FIVE HUNDRED COPIES
BY THE SOCEC PRESS IN BUCHAREST
PRINTING COMPLETED 25 MAY 1947[1]

Gherasim Luca et al., "In Praise of Malombra: The Shadows of Absolute Love"
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[1] First reprinted in *L'Âge du cinéma* 4–5 (August–November 1951) 34–36.

HYPERION
On the future of aesthetics

Metamorphosis of a Moorish Nude Postcard

Richard Waara

Note to the Reader: *Richard Waara, a surrealist artist and poet who lives in the San Francisco Bay area, offers his view of how Gherasim Luca's cubomania inspired a series of new works rooted in the spirit of the original.*

Ghérasim Luca's brief but compellingly enigmatic *Les orgies des quanta* (*The Orgies of Quanta*) was first published in Bucharest in 1946. Luca, a founding member of the Romanian Surrealist group, which seemed at times to exist "on the delirious scales of space and time," if I may borrow this phrase by Luca that can be found in the recent English translation of his book *Le vampire passif* (*The Passive Vampire*), is primarily remembered today in France and Romania

as an extraordinary yet difficult poet, and perhaps secondly as a theorist. Luca is then sometimes recalled as an astute technician of words and as an astounding oral performance artist. It is less known that Luca, besides being a creator of unique visual images and sculptures, was also an inventor of at least one thought- provoking visual technique and his own "objectively offered objects," or O.O.O.'s.

It was with the nonpareil example embodied by *Les orgies des quanta*, however, that Luca introduced to the world his invention of cubomania, or *cubomanie*, as Luca first coined the term in French using his newly adopted language. In the "classic" technique of cubomania, which Luca put into service in *Les orgies des quanta*, he cut up a previously printed image, in this case sourced from possibly late 19th to early 20th-century engravings, into squares of the same size and then reassembled them on a grid consisting of three horizontal rows by four vertical rows, which form, as a whole, an upright rectangle of twelve squares.

Later on Luca experimented with the total amount of squares and different configurations of squares. By definition, a cube is a three dimensional shape, contained by six equal squares. Pictorially any side of a two-dimensional square can be attached to another square on any of its four sides. Another constant of Luca's cubomania is that the newly arrived at image always appears to derive all of its elements exclusively from the same source image.

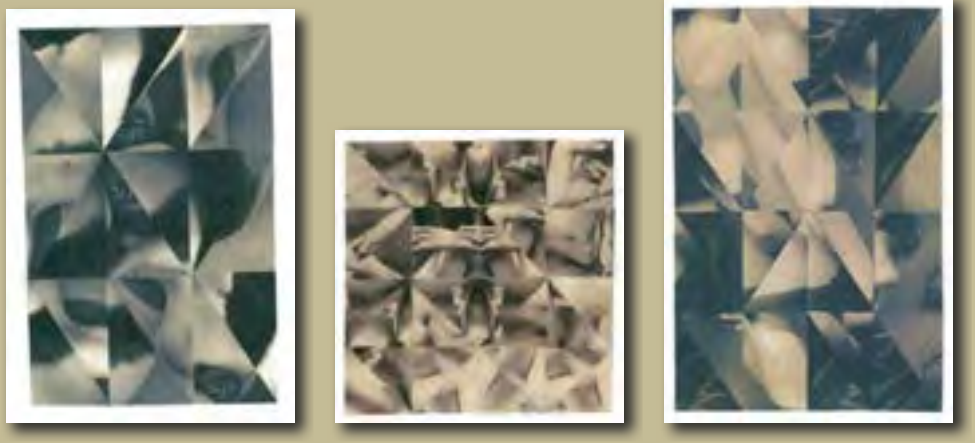
Whenever I have revisited *Les orgies des quanta* over the years, I find myself experiencing it for the first time. It never fails to inspire or provoke me. It seems to contain hidden portents that have yet to be revealed. This rather diminutive book, more akin to a booklet, has become one of my most reliable touchstones. Under its influence, I have over time continued to experiment with the technique of cubomania with varying results.

Gradually I began to transgress some of the parameters that Luca had originally established, and yet, truthfully, the most complete example I had of cubomania was manifested in *Les orgies des quanta*, which admittedly provided evidence of a given place and time. My most extreme transgression, which I look back at with some misgivings, was regularly substituting rectangles instead of squares. I also used elements from different original images. I mixed elements that were both in color and in black-and-white. Eventually, having exhausted my own ideas, I reached a stalemate in which I perceived that the technique, to the degree that I could comprehend and apply it, could no longer inspire me.

I still felt that there was something inherent within cubomania's anti-matter poetics that could provide a way for me to excavate new discoveries. It was at such a moment, as I hesitated before either repeating an endless pattern for the *nth* time, or before abandoning my association with cubomania forever, that I preceded to look through a stack of visually related material — cutouts, loose random pages, and the pilfered shipwrecks of assorted picture books.

I discovered the cut-out corner of the bottom of page 234 from a reprint of *The Crystal Palace Exhibition Illustrated Catalog, London 1851.* It displayed an inlaid flooring pattern — "a star upon a ground of dark wood." I then had to ask myself, why had I deliberately cut out this scrap of paper and saved it for future reference? I knew that I had not intended to use it as just an element in a collage. This is verified by how I had preserved the detailed description beneath the pattern. Clearly there must have been an idea associated with saving it that I had since forgotten.

As I puzzled over the diagram, the all pervading grid, which I had encountered underlying all cubomania, and which I had become so familiar with as I prepared the squares in the beginning by drawing lines with a pencil and a ruler on the back of the selected image and then cutting the squares out, superimposed itself in my mind's eye over the flooring pattern before me on the scrap of paper I held in my hand. What could still be added? A diagonal cut obliquely across each square, or a slash. Thus was born what I would later anti-christen "*slash cubomania*," or when shortened, "*/cubomania*."



When I was a young child I remember being taken by my stepfather, who was then in the U.S. Army, to the Presidio where he and other enlistees were about to paint a mural on the side of a large tan adobe building. I can seem to recall some random scaffolding placed against the wall. We were standing some distance away from the building, so I don't remember how I became aware that a huge grid had been drawn upon the wall. I can vaguely visualize someone showing me a sheet of paper which had a facsimile of the grid on it, and that there were lines within the squares indicating how the squares were to be filled in. I can't recall ever seeing the finished mural. I can evoke only a frozen still taken of a wall, unblemished except for the grid, about to have its squares inscribed upon. Years later I saw some erotic drawings by Hans Bellmer that happened to be drawn upon grid paper. Somewhere between those two occurrences falls the enigma of the role of the grid in art history. When you first begin to place a grid over an image and then begin to dissect the image into separate components, you may never regard the integrity of the original image in the same way.

I should perhaps say a word or two about how my practice of /cubomania diverges from Luca's apparent implementation of cubomania. Somewhere around the time I chanced upon /cubomania I had begun making mirror copies of the image. Normally the minimum amount of copies I would print

before getting started would be four copies of the original image and four copies of the mirror image. I would then draw a grid of squares behind all the pages. After that I would draw diagonals though the squares, being careful to do two sets of two each of the original image and of the mirror image, in which the diagonal was drawn from the left or from the right. If I had printed over eight copies I might put a grid askew over what I had determined were intriguing areas in the image. I would then, guided by my penciled lines, cut all the sheets with a paper cutter.



Ghérasim Luca may have intended that the definition of cubomancy, "divination by throwing dice," would spill its meaning over his new term when he coined it for his invention of cubomania. In French there is only an added lower case "c" that distinguishes one noun from the other (*cubomancie / cubomanie*). It is as if cubomania by means of its own divining magic surreptitiously un-cubed itself. Later Luca would famously proclaim: *"La cubomanie nie"* — "Cubomania negates."

Stéphane Mallarmé, the other great negator and the most famous dice-thrower in all of French letters, only had his magisterial work *Un coup de dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* (*A Throw of the Dice Will Never Abolish Chance*) finally published in 2004 in the manner that he intended, with its original layout and typography. It was after all Mallarmé who had ended *Un coup de*

dés in 1887 with the line: "All thought emits a throw of the dice." The thought of Ghérasim Luca, as manifested in his poetry, in his theories, in his sculptures, in his objectively offered objects, and surely in his invention of cubomania, "emits a throw of the dice" in order to sustain the source of divinatory power and to thereby perpetuate the future.

IMAGE LIST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

collage derived from a Moorish postcard
/cubomania derived from a Moorish nude postcard
2 "anti-Oedipal" collages
/cubomania derived from a Moorish nude postcard
3 early examples of /cubomanias
/cubomania derived from Moorish nude postcard
3 Moorish nude postcards
Estranho Esperanto /cubomania

Richard Waara, "Metamorphosis of a Moorish Nude Postcard"
Hyperion: On the Future of Aesthetics, Vol. VII, No. 3 (fall 2013) 150–158.

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On the future of aesthetics