

Gherasim Luca, « le désir désiré »

Krzysztof Fijalkowski

[Author's note, June 2018: this is the original draft of a book chapter from Monique Yaari (ed.), « *Infra-noir* », *un et multiple: Un groupe surréaliste entre Bucarest et Paris, 1945-1947* (Oxford: Peter Lang 2014); my sincere thanks here to Monique Yaari for her invaluable advice in completing this essay. It was written in English, but since it was destined for translation into French, in this version all French language quotations were left in the original.]

Of all of the names of the members of the surrealist group of Bucharest, that of Gherasim Luca will be without doubt by far the best known to readers of this volume. Yet, like his co-conspirators in the group, most of whom rewrote their given names, this name itself opens onto a questioning of identity and belonging. Born Salman Locker into a Bucharest Jewish family in 1913, Gherasim Luca took his pseudonym from a newspaper story at the outset of his career as a poet and author in the 1930s, electing an identity marked with chance and ambivalence in choosing, in his own words, 'un nom et un égarement'. Having come to reject any idea of nationality and to despise his native city, he would abandon them both, finding a home but seeing 'stateless' status as his destiny.¹ Faced with the intolerable political situation in Romania after the Second World War (itself prolonging years of curtailed liberties both during and before it), Luca would leave Bucharest in the autumn of 1950, first for Israel and arriving at his intended destination of Paris in the spring

¹ The first part of the poet's chosen surname (retaining but ignoring his first name, Salman) is generally agreed as 'Gherasim' (with no accent) in his Bucharest years, 'Ghérasim' in the latter part of his life in his Paris, while those closest to him knew him simply as 'Luca'. I shall retain the former here, except where appropriate for bibliographic reference to works published in France, and for simplicity use 'Luca' in the main text. Two complementary sources are recommended for an understanding of Luca's life and work: for the biographical details and textual analysis of his years in Bucharest, Petre Raileanu, *Gherasim Luca* (Paris: OXUS 2004), the first chapter of which describes in detail Luca's background and his name; and for a sustained critical reflection on his work focused principally on his later writings, Dominique Carlat, *Gherasim Luca l'intempestif* (Paris: José Corti 1998), in which the 'Ouverture' also follows and analyses these origins and choices. The third, most recent and very comprehensive key source on Luca's life and work is Iulian Toma, *Gherasim Luca ou l'intransigeante passion d'être*, Paris: Honoré Champion 2012, who sums up the questions of Luca's name in a note on p.31, while a wider discussion of the Bucharest group as a whole is to be found in Monique Yaari, 'The Surrealist Group of Bucharest: Collective Works, 1945-47', in Anne Quinney, ed., *Paris-Bucharest, Bucharest-Paris: Francophone Writers from Romania* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi 2012), pp.95-136.

of 1952, where he would establish himself for the rest of his life. Gradually, but above all after his death (once again chosen by Luca himself) in 1994, Luca's standing in France has come to be that of one of the foremost, most challenging and distinctive poets of his century. Critical appreciations of his life and work are now more widely in circulation (particularly on the Internet), centred above all on the intricate experiments in language of his later texts and public readings, an enquiry bordering on philosophy and the interpenetration of modes of knowledge, and in which play, a dark humour and above all a kind of shuddering of the word from one sense to another are conjured together. The result was a body of work that is intense and playful at the same time, resistant to translation even as it is already in dialogue with transpositions from one 'native' tongue to another (so that Luca's *œuvre* as well as his biography have worked against an assimilation into other languages, and he has until now remained far less known outside Romania and France) and striking in its integrity.² Luca's public standing in this latter, Parisian period tended to be that of a magnificently solitary *poet*, independent of any movement though inheritor of a broadly surrealist tradition (though in fact one can find personal links in this period to tendencies as diverse as Fluxus and the Beats).³ But this perspective occludes Luca's importance in three ways that will be central to what follows here: his activity not only as a poet but also a writer of major prose and theoretical works (though arguably none of these three, poetry, prose and theory, can legitimately be disentangled from each other); his distinctive and until now largely ignored activity as a visual artist; and above all his participation in the collective adventure, corresponding with the formation and rapid development of his mature work, of the surrealist group of Bucharest.⁴

² Luca's writings are only now beginning to be circulated more widely in translation, notably into English and Spanish, and concentrating precisely on the earlier prose work, though at the time of writing a translation of *Self-Shadowing Prey* (trans. Mary Ann Caws, New York: ContraMundum Press, 2012) has ventured into terrain that was hitherto considered all but impossible to render in English.

³ See the exhibition catalogue *Ghérasim Luca*, special issue of *Cahiers de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix*, no.110, les Sables d'Olonne 2008, p.36 for a work made in collaboration with Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso and Peter Orlovsky; Luca was a participant in the *Festum Fluxorum*, Paris December 1962.

⁴ Once established in Paris from 1952, Luca would take his distance from both organised surrealist group activity (no doubt partly because his closest friend there Victor Brauner had recently been expelled from the Parisian group), and by the early 1960s arguably from surrealism as a whole, though he would maintain close but individual relations with many surrealists.

An active young member of the small but fertile Bucharest avant-garde of the 1930s, Luca's initial context was the older, more established generation around journals such *Unu* and writers and artists such as Sasa Pana, Geo Bogza and in particular the painter Victor Brauner. A marked tendency of the circle in which Luca first participated as an author, around the journal *Alge*, for confrontation and risk – including a short spell in prison for the authors of one provocation – in a culture that was growing increasingly hostile to freedom of expression, indicated his willingness to see his work in the context of an absolute commitment to freedom and desire. Like several elements of the 1920s and 1930s Bucharest avant-garde, *Alge* displayed affinities with the surrealism incarnated in the group around André Breton in Paris, while keeping its own distinct identity. But an extended sojourn in Paris from winter 1938 to the autumn of 1939 would be the context of Luca's increasing proximity to surrealism – mediated above all by his friendship with the painter Victor Brauner, who had been a participant in the movement since 1933 – which if anything would only be intensified by the outbreak of the war, forcing Luca's return to Bucharest in autumn 1939.⁵ In the company of Gellu Naum, on the Orient Express somewhere East of Trieste, heading back towards a Romanian border at which Luca would immediately be arrested (though then released again) under the anti-Semitic regulations already in force, he and Naum took the decisive step of initiating their own surrealist group.⁶ It would thus be as a founder member of the surrealist group of Bucharest, perhaps in fact its most committed and intensely-driven participant (in a group that would itself draw attention for being among the most intense incarnations of the surrealist spirit in the movement's international history, at the very moment when groups everywhere else were threatened with silence), and eventually its best-known collaborator, that Luca's work during the 1940s should be seen. The nature and activities of this group, as part of its complex but still little-understood internal history, appear almost from the outset to have been fostered within a re-negotiation of the very nature of group activity, and it is hard to reconcile or decide between testimony such as Luca's on the one hand, suggesting in a letter to Brauner in 1946 that the group was characterized by a factionalism that produced at least two groups within it – perhaps even four (from its five

⁵ My thanks to Monique Yaari for helping to establish key dates and facts around Luca's biography, based in part on her conversations with Luca's first wife, Antonia Rasicovici.

⁶ Raileanu, op. cit., p.96.

members!); and Trost's on the other, asserting in a letter to Breton only a few years later the 'tendance à unifier les participants dans un groupe absolument homogène, collectif jusqu'à l'identification'.⁷ Whatever the case, it is clear that Luca's contribution to the group's specifically *collective* activity was as committed as any, given the quantity and quality of his collaborative participations (and it might be noted, on this theme, that close collaborations are a specific feature of Luca's output in this particular period of his work above all others). While the group lacked that collective focus that perhaps most characterizes surrealist activity, a journal (which, from the available evidence, seems not to have been felt as either desirable or possible for the Bucharest surrealists), collaborations and exchange lie at the heart of its activity, and Luca's influence is felt and his name is present in almost every collective and collaborative text (all of those in French, to be specific), manifesto, publication venture and exhibition the group completed.

Impossible writings

By the time of the founding moment of the surrealist group of Bucharest, Luca had still only a few publications to his name, and those generally limited in circulation: two books, *Roman de dragoste (Le Roman d'amour)* and *Fata Morgana*, some poems, plays and articles.⁸ While Luca's stay soon afterwards in Paris seems not to have resulted in any published writings, a testament perhaps to the sense that this was an experience of initiation and confirmation rather than production, the period immediately following the commitment to surrealism and the founding of the group suggests an explosion of written (and as we shall see, plastic) activity that no doubt reflects the dual impetus of Luca's new-found assertion of his adhesion to surrealism, even if it is one already born under the sign

⁷ Luca, letter to Victor Brauner, 30 June 1946, in Camille Morando and Sylvie Patry, eds., *Victor Brauner: Écrits et correspondances 1938-1948*, Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou 2005, pp.220-1; Trost, letter to André Breton, July 1946, Breton archives www.andrebretton.fr section 'Correspondance et textes'. It is perhaps significant that the group, like its constituent members, showed some ambivalence about its very name. Unlike most other international surrealist groups, this one shied away from designating itself by a specific title, let alone one that might translate some wider national status and international ambition, and tended to sign documents with lists of individual participants' names rather than assume a group identity. Given the specificity of this set of collaborators in one particular time and place, I have here followed Monique Yaari's lead and designated it as the surrealist group of Bucharest, and take this opportunity to thank her for her advice and historical details incorporated into this text.

⁸ The most complete bibliography for the writings of Luca's Bucharest period is found in Toma, *Gherasim Luca ou l'intransigeante passion d'être*, op. cit.

of an exile from the movement's Parisian centre, and the burgeoning life of the new constellation of Luca, Naum, Paun, Teodorescu and Trost, along with their most intimate friends. These works would not be published until after the war, and this first period of surrealism in Bucharest, in the midst of life in a fascist state (and personal peril for its members, several of whom were Jewish), would be one inevitably consigned to a clandestinity that would at least have the benefit of throwing the emphasis back on experiment, reflection and the secret life of a band of conspirator-poets rather than on public outcomes or even dialogue with other surrealist groups and individuals. In a sense, then, all of the products of surrealism in Bucharest start out as impossible writings.

More than this, however, Luca's entry into his surrealist work is accompanied by question marks, possibility and uncertainty. *Inventatorul iubirii* (*L'Inventeur de l'amour*; the story of its transition from Romanian to French is recounted below), written in 1942 and published in 1945, the same year as a many of the group's wartime works finally saw the light of day, contains an impressive list of works 'by the same author': five previous books, and then a long list of eight works 'in preparation'. But of these eight, no fewer than six of the works listed (whether these might have been books, pamphlets or essays) seem either never finally to have appeared, have been lost or perhaps only emerged in another form, while a seventh was a French translation of a previously published work that also never came to fruition (another list gives a further two unpublished and presumably either lost or abandoned titles in collaboration with Trost).⁹ Their titles alone, some of them in the French that in this period was becoming Luca's chosen language as a writer, set one dreaming of a body of missing thought, of a fuller testimony to a period of fervour and anxiety that is lost to us now: *Ochiul magnetic* (*L'œil magnétique*); *În mijlocul fruntii* (*Au milieu du front*); *Două femei invizibile bat la ușă*; *O muribundă le offeră din partea mea un plic* (*Deux femmes frappent à la porte; une moribonde leur offre de ma part un enveloppe*); *A oniriza lumea* (*Oniriser le monde*); *Initiation voluptueuse*; and a crucial missing document to which we shall return later, the *Premier Manifeste Non-Oedipien*.¹⁰

⁹ The two titles are *La loi de gravitation* and *L'invisibilité d'un rêve*, cited in the list of works 'Des mêmes auteurs', Gherasim Luca and Trost, *Dialectique de la dialectique* (Bucharest: Surrealisme 1945).

¹⁰ As Raileanu points out, some of these texts are specified in other publications as existing as manuscripts dating from 1943-44, while he suggests that others are unrealized projects. See pp.122-24 for his discussion and chronology.

Equally intriguing, however, is the third of the titles listed as already published, *Quantitativement aimée*, which was effectively the first of Luca's works of the surrealist period, and indeed the first by any of the Bucharest surrealists since 1940, to see the light of day, as early as 1944.¹¹ To specify this book as 'published' is both significant and problematic, since this is not only a work that has only ever existed as a unique copy, but that also tests the boundaries of what might constitute a book at all, lying somewhere between a manuscript, an 'artist's book' and an object.¹² Large in format, on grey pages, brief stencilled poems of troubling, fetishistic encounters between a man and a woman – a kind of *Kama Sutra* redrafted to outdo Krafft-Ebing - face diverse arrangements of a total of 944 pen nibs sewn to the paper, each nib apparently different, a combination of the inebriation of desire and the mathematical proliferation of the object that would prove to be a feature of Luca's writings from the 1940s to the Parisian poems of the early 1950s. One may imagine this book being passed from hand to hand within the group, a work whose resonance was simultaneously intimate and collective, and in it the gamble of poetry as at the same time a secret and a communication, an idea and a tangible thing, guides the resonance of Luca's writings in their group context over the years of surrealism in Bucharest.

PART I: ON THE THRESHOLD OF COLLECTIVE ACTIVITY

Le Vampire passif : Luca and the object

Completed in November 1941 and usually seen as the first of the trio of major texts Luca published in 1945 – the first moment at which all the members of the group were at last able to circulate works completed during the war to a wider public – *Le Vampire passif* is arguably the single best-known work to emerge from Bucharest surrealism, even if until comparatively recently it has remained as infrequently read as any other.¹³ The book has

¹¹ The bibliography provided by Luca's final publisher in Paris, Corti, begins with this work. See www.jose-corti.fr.

¹² The book, which remained in the poet's possession, has been displayed in exhibitions but was apparently never documented until issue 17 of the revue *Empreintes*, published by l'Usine gallery in Paris that has also exhibited both Luca and Paun's visual work since the 1980s ('Un inédit de Gherasim Luca: Quantitativement aimée', *Empreintes*, no.17, spring 2011). According to this source, a second section of the work is held in a private collection in Switzerland.

¹³ Parts of the following section are developed from my essay 'Luca the Absolute' which introduces the English version of the book, *The Passive Vampire* (Prague: Twisted Spoon 2008).

something of the status of a key text for Luca's thought, not only as the culmination of his journey into surrealism through the 1930s and into the 1940s, but also as a substantially more elaborate and extended work than many of the writings in French by the Bucharest group of the time. Published in 1945 by the fictitious (and significantly named) Éditions de l'Oubli, supposedly in Paris - in fact of course in Bucharest – its colophon announced a print run of only 460 copies plus another 41 in deluxe format. Though examples seem to have circulated with reasonable liberty in France during the following decade, its rarity until its reissue by José Corti in 2001 had made it something of a lost legend within surrealist literature, rarely referred to and found only in jealously guarded private libraries. Illustrated throughout with eighteen photographs of Luca's object assemblages and *trouvailles*, and describing events during the year or so before its completion, in other words the period immediately following Luca's return from Paris (a visit the book alludes to more than once) and the decision to begin the adventure of surrealism in Bucharest, *Le Vampire passif* is a deceptive book, veering from direct accounts of Luca's experiences in the realm of desire and the object to apparently hallucinatory narratives and insights in which the distinction between the subject and the world, between the firm ground of logic and the quicksand of enchantment, blur and refocus repeatedly.

Just as Paris is a principal character of so many French surrealist texts, Bucharest is curiously present in *Le Vampire passif*. But the Bucharest of late 1941 has a very particular status for its author. Most obviously, it is a city under effective occupation, controlled by the Iron Guard whose rise to power in autumn 1940 (the period when at least some of the action described in Luca's narrative took place, in particular a major earthquake) signalled a definitive end to the distinctive avant-garde activity of the already repressive 1930s. Luca's membership of that avant-garde but above all his Jewish status (a pogrom took place in Bucharest in January 1941) would have made his position doubly precarious in a city that here feels poised on the brink of a disaster (during this period he had been made to carry out forced labour as a street cleaner and labour camp worker, and obliged to clear away rubble and bodies after enemy bombardments).¹⁴ Luca, it is clear, had not only like all surrealists always detested any idea of national identity, but the city

¹⁴ Nicoleta Manucu, 'Luca ou l'invention du soi', in *Ghérasim Luca, Cahiers de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix*, op. cit., pp.9-16 (p.14).

and inhabitants of Bucharest as well. Forced by the global conflict to leave France, an expulsion experienced by him as a kind of trauma, his heart nonetheless remained there; in February 1940 he had written to Jacques Hérold that 'je ne peux pas oublier un seul moment que je ne me trouve plus à Paris. C'est ma seule idée fixe qui marche très bien avec ma manie de persécution'.¹⁵

But for all that it is a singular, in places even delirious text, there is much in the tone and ideas of *Le Vampire passif* that would situate it firmly within the traditions and canon of surrealist writing. Stylistic homages and direct references to Sade, Huysmans or to clinical textbooks, for example, are consistent with the interests of French surrealist authors. But above all as the book progresses its elements of a deranged logic, of the lurch from a frantic cataloguing and collaging of irrational ingredients to a dispassionate, even quasi-scientific accuracy, and finally the clear use of unacknowledged borrowings from other sources, all point to Lautréamont and *Les chants de Maldoror* - perhaps the single most cherished text among the first generation of surrealists - as the black genies of *Le Vampire passif*, whose appeal to the archetypal figure of the vampire probably owes more to the manic gothic of *Maldoror* (or perhaps, in the latter's spirit, to the case of the so-called 'Vampire of Düsseldorf', a serial murderer whose exploits were a subject of fascination for international audiences at the turn of the 1930s), than to the popular currency of legends from Luca's part of Central Europe.

In contrast, however, *Le Vampire passif* is also at the same time a meditation on the writings of the French surrealists themselves, and most particularly those of André Breton whose books such as *L'Amour fou*, *Les Vases communicants* and above all *Nadja* (specifically referenced in *Le Vampire passif*) stand as ghost correspondents for Luca's text, a sense emphasised by the fact that Luca, like the majority of the Bucharest surrealists from this period on, deliberately selects French as its language, as though in dialogue with its true audience on the other side of Europe instead of in Romania.¹⁶ *Le Vampire passif's* grave tone, its adoption of a first-person confessional that insists on

¹⁵ Letter to Jacques Hérold, Bucharest 22 February 1940, cited in the sale catalogue *Collection Jacques Hérold*, Paris Druout Richelieu, 13 November 1998, lot 186.

¹⁶ We know that by 1941 Luca was already writing letters to his compatriots Brauner and Hérold in French (though presumably this was in part to avoid drawing attention to their nationality during wartime), and it seems reasonable to suppose that published texts, too, were composed directly in this tongue rather than translated.

narrative as fact, however much credulity is stretched, its meticulous accounts and dissections of the smallest events, supported with photographic evidence, and the pursuit of a love that might also be a form of haunting, all recall Breton's signature style, and it is to the absent poet that much of this book seems dedicated.¹⁷

The recurring themes of an encounter between psychoanalysis, psychosis and the object, on the other hand, witnessed for instance by the book's recurring specialist scientific and medical vocabulary, is explored above all in the form of its 'Introduction sur l'Objet objectivement offert' whose description forms an initially disorienting prologue (nearly a third of the book in length) to *Le Vampire passif* and then infects the entire text with its secret exchanges. Luca's approach, however, would have appeared familiar to readers of the French surrealist group's journal of the early 1930s *Le Surréalisme au service de la Révolution*. In its pages Salvador Dalí had first masterminded a game of *Objets à fonctionnement symbolique*, fragile constructions of often workaday found items put together apparently at random by invited players, to then be subjected to analysis.¹⁸ The objects of *Le Vampire passif*, photographed by Théodore Brauner (brother of the surrealist painter) would seem to have been lost or abandoned on Luca's emigration from Romania, but both their documentation and their scrupulous interpretation gives them clear membership of the category of the 'surrealist object' that was to play such a prominent role in surrealism from the 1930s onwards.¹⁹

¹⁷ I personally remain convinced that everything in this book happened, though there does seem to be one significant exception to the claim of *Le Vampire passif* as an entirely faithful account. It would appear that the woman named in its closing section as Deline, the presiding enchantress of the book's conclusion, did not in fact bear that name; she was the group's friend Nadine Krainik. My thanks and homage are offered here to Micheline Catti and the late Antonia Rasicovici, who helped me to understand a number of *Le Vampire's* mysteries as well as supporting my interest in Luca's work with great kindness.

¹⁸ One of the ways in which Luca's text might be seen in a collective context, then, is in its dialogue with the Parisian surrealists – at a distance and in the face of the silencing of a Parisian group that had largely evaporated with the outset of the Occupation. *Le Vampire passif*, one might argue, overtly attempts to create a dialectic from surrealism's own potentially divergent and divisive views exemplified by the positions of Breton and Dalí, and crystallised around the theme of the object that was a key feature of its debates of the 1930s, an argument interrupted within the Parisian group by the advent of war and never to be recommenced with the same fervour thereafter. The French *Main à plume* group's contemporary interest in the object – including a never published special journal issue – would of course not have been known to Luca.

¹⁹ I have written more extensively on this subject in 'From Sorcery to Silence: The Objects of Gherasim Luca', *Modern Language Review*, vol.88, no.3, July 1993, pp.625-38. A few elements of the current text are taken from this source.

Finding, making and interpreting objects form the heart of Luca's text, in ways that also begin to suggest the material and affective life of the Bucharest surrealists. The origins of the *objet objectivement offert* (0.0.0.) lay in the *Jeu de la décoration réciproque*, a group game based on psychopathological evidence in which players assembled absurd medals for each other, awarding these decorations with all due ceremony, accompanied by lengthy speeches to qualify each distinction.²⁰ Luca's interest in the 'manifestation symbolique contrastant avec une manie générale de la persécution' led him, however, to develop his own ideas on the giving of symbolic objects in tandem with this game; their offering to individuals could use the game as a pretext for the working out of desire, and so could any other accidental event or occasion (*Vampire passif*, pp. 9-10). But while the social giving of gifts, Luca observes, even in the context of intimate relationships, has been stripped of all its erotic and symbolic powers, neutralized by custom and habit, these new objects are situated beyond the laws of economy and exchange, taking on the quality of oneiric forms where the real and habitual world is denied in favour of desire. In the second half of the book ('Le Vampire passif' proper), these objects begin to take on a life of their own, in an obsessive or delirious contact with *trouvailles* assembled together whose discovery or fabrication was determined by chance as the means by which to reconcile the internal and the external worlds through Breton's notion of *hasard objectif* (p. 9).

While Luca's status today rests on his reputation as a poet, his importance for the Bucharest group (as we shall see more than once) also lay in his investigation of plastic expression. His objects would be documented again in another of the key works published in 1945 (*Inventatorul iubirii*), and probably featured in both of the two exhibitions organized by the group in 1945 and 1946 (as well as they no doubt would have in its unrealized international exhibition proposal, sent to Breton in 1947). As later statements would clarify, however, this is an activity explicitly situated in opposition to any claim for artistic status, and with its origins in collective games and the frequent sense in *Le Vampire passif* of the object as gift or messenger between Luca and his friends (group members, Luca's partner

²⁰ The *Jeu de la décoration réciproque* is one of a small number of group activities that enables us to gain a sense of the collective life of the Bucharest surrealists, particularly during its early years. It would appear (from a group letter of 1947 held in the Breton archives signed by all members except Naum) that the *Jeu du sable nocturne*, which formed the basis of a proposal and catalogue text for the exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947* in Paris was another. Described as a game 'que nous faisons nous-mêmes avec des objets-personnages vivants', it consisted of a darkened room in which participants would explore through touch alone objects of an erotic and fetishistic nature.

and other male and female individuals), the sense of objects, representatives of the uncharted reality of the external world, as hidden emissaries between individuals, situates them firmly within a social and collaborative rather than sculptural context.²¹

Photographs of Luca's objects, all of which would appear themselves to have been lost, recall the informality of the *Objets à fonctionnement symbolique*, rather than the more polished surrealist assemblages of the mid-1930s. The result of chance encounters or near-mediumistic choices, the results seem, as the text acknowledges, closer to ritual or magical items than artworks, often referencing the body and juxtaposing (in the manner of many *objets surréalistes*) heterogeneous materials and functions (the assemblages reproduced to accompany Luca's later text *Parcours impossibles* of 1945 seem even more informal and ambiguous, combining hard-to identify scraps and pieces of broken tools) Often made from everyday forms – household items, dolls, balls, pen nibs, velvet, pictures or pieces of found metal – their function is above all revelatory and mediumistic, messengers across time and space: 'Entre moi et les objets que je fabrique il y a une distance de quelques milliers d'années, je les invente et les découvre en même temps, je les enterre et les déterre simultanément, à l'échelle délirante de l'espace et du temps du désir, nous sommes vivants et fossiles, comme une main sur la plaque du radiologue.' (p.49) The stories of their making and unravelling of their implications are clearly more important than their final form or their success as plastic expression. Objects, 'ces mystérieuses armures sous lesquelles nous attend, nocturne et dénudé, le désir, ces pièges de velours' (p.57), acted in Luca's eyes (as they did for Breton) not only as the harbingers of desire in their role as its lure but as the exponents of an active search for love, unmasking erotic relationships in their discovery, assembly, and transmission, even controlling the action of these relations. The final section of the book describes events around Luca's passionate and mysterious encounter with Deline, mediated by exchanges of objects and their giddy enchantment. Although *Le Vampire passif*, like *Nadja* or *L'Amour fou*, describes real events, Luca would later suggest that it is also in a sense a poem, one

²¹ A letter from the group to André Breton around 1946, for example, refers to 'notre activité accidentellement artistique' (Luca, Paun, Teodorescou and Trost, undated letter to André Breton, www.andrebretton.fr). The recipients of Luca's objects in *Le Vampire passif* are identified only with an initial; see the endnotes to the English edition, *The Passive Vampire* for some suggestions of the identities to which these refer.

whose principal actors are its objects rather than individuals, while finally the ultimate 'object' in question is that of the book itself.²²

Un lup văzut printr-o lupă

Written in October 1942 and once again published in 1945, under the group's own imprint Editura Negația Negației, Luca's *Un lup văzut printr-o lupă* (*Un Loup à travers une loupe*) presents 14 intense prose texts, each no longer than a few pages, and signals Luca's contribution to a wider engagement among the group as a whole with its key themes of eroticism, dream, chance and the object, explored in the group's games and writings of the early 1940s. Written in Romanian – though some of its texts would resurface in Paris after the war, 'Ce château pressenti' in 1958 as a *plaque*, 'Minéral, ô statue du désir' in the journal *Réalités secrètes* in 1960, and 'Je t'aime' in the pages of the surrealist journal *La Brèche* in 1964, before the entire book (with one of its texts integrated into another to create 13) would appear in French in Luca's own translation after his death – *Un lup văzut printr-o lupă* thus harks back to earlier texts and an earlier period; perhaps some of it might even date from before Bucharest surrealism? The collection's title on the other hand, with its play on the close homophony that brings together two unrelated but now forever conjoined objects in a logic that recalls both the word play of Raymond Roussel and the first surrealist Manifesto's description of the surrealist image, points forward to a concern for games with written and spoken language that, as we shall see, would soon develop into a major aspect (and eventually the predominant register) of Luca's writing. More than just a play on words, however, as Raileanu points out, the title's shift from masculine to feminine nouns – the male principle literally seen through the female²³ – announces the presiding presence of love, desire ('le désir désiré') and woman as the guiding lights of these writings.

The prose poems' titles already point to a realm in which states, properties and things are unhooked and re-coupled in a perverse, obsessive and sometimes sadistic new reality: 'Les volcans intérieurs des plantes'; 'L'écho peint en rouge'; 'Le décolleté du sang et de la mémoire'. While the documentary tone and theoretical tenor of those texts

²² Gherasim Luca in conversation with the author, Paris, 22 November 1988.

²³ Raileanu, p.147.

published immediately before and after this book are pushed into the background, the theme of intense, erotic love here takes its definitive place as the central obsession steering Luca's work throughout the period of surrealism in Bucharest, a love that can detonate the world or animate the tiniest objects:

Quelques objets tendrement hétéroclites tels que le bouton de corsage ou de sonnette, une toile d'araignée entre les dents du peigne, un savon à côté d'un inconnu ou d'une bague, et la mythologie de l'orgie s'avance vers la signification voluptueuse moderne des fétiches, des choses qui se passionnent et s'entretiennent pour les choses et, puisqu'on sait que l'eau aime se noyer dans la flamme, la voix s'entretenir avec l'écho et que vivre en effigie comme l'entend l'acier ou évanouir comme la plante n'est finalement qu'une façon de vivre, je pénètre dans un nuage de gestes immobiles, respire le brouillard parfumé exhalé par deux objets enlacés, écoute les cris d'amour des atomes [...] ²⁴

Breathless, often extending its sentences across entire paragraphs (in this case across its entire text), the prose poems catalogue an encyclopaedia of things, states and emotions saturated with dreams, hallucinations, altered states, violence, night and sorcery. In the course of the narratives other figures, and sometimes palpable events, come and go, though they have the ambiguity and shape-shifting qualities of the unconscious; more inwardly-focused, more private and compulsive than the experiments and accounts of *Le Vampire passif*, in these writings the only real intruder on the world of objects, interpenetrating with the inner reality of the poet, is the nameless figure of the woman who stalks, haunts and provokes his desire. Together *Un lup văzut printr-o lupă's* texts give the sense of one entire train of thought caught at different moments in its flow (and so harking back to Breton's characterization of the automatic voice capturing the 'le fonctionnement réel de la pensée'). Written, like several of Luca's texts of this period, in an endless moment of despair and demoralisation, the places, objects and events these texts describe reveal an experience that erases the boundaries between inner or outer reality, that seeks to cancel oppositions against each other, or that seems to shiver between them until they can no longer be distinguished, and begins instead to make out the outlines and the gamble of a destiny that lies both beyond and within being:

²⁴ Ghérasim Luca, 'Je t'aime', *Un loup à travers une loupe*, Paris: Corti 1998, p.42.

Plus question de désir en quête du plaisir, ce que le désir cherche c'est le désir même, et le plaisir n'est que la couleur des yeux du désir, son frisson permanent, ses multiples parures, ce que le poids est pour la bille et celle-ci pour la roulette tournant autour de nos têtes, alors que nous misons tous sur le rouge, sur la bouche qui n'est qu'une façon de gagner la langue qui nous lance sur la piste de la peau qui nous fait glisser lentement vers la haut des cuisses où surgit le couteau qui appelle le sacrifice où le temps et l'espace s'anéantissent où la mort est vivifiante et vivante la vie, ce flux et reflux simultané d'un éternel acte d'être.²⁵

***Inventatorul iubirii* and non-Oedipal theory**

Seemingly the last of Luca's major texts of this period to have been elaborated during the war but not published until its end, yet again *Inventatorul iubirii* (*L'Inventeur de l'amour*) came out in the watershed year of 1945.²⁶ Given its elaboration from several distinct texts, cross references to other manuscripts, and its sometimes despairing subject matter suggesting the invisible presence of the war, it might seem reasonable to suggest that its constituent parts were written at different times but all around the period of 1944.²⁷ It would be the last of Luca's major works to be written and published in Romanian, and though projects to bring sections of it out in French date from early on, it would not be until the very end of the poet's life that he would prepare a French version of the book, in significantly different form.²⁸ Structurally the most complex of Luca's Bucharest works, what we know now as *L'Inventeur de l'amour* consisted in its Bucharest incarnation of three distinct texts: 'Inventatorul iubirii', 'Parcurs imposibiliul' ('Je parcours l'impossible'), 'Moartea moarta' ('La mort morte'), plus an appendix – writings with intertwined destinies, rather than necessarily made to accompany each other; each of the three main sections

²⁵ Luca, 'Le désir désiré', *Un loup à travers une loupe*, pp.82-83.

²⁶ Elements of the following section first appeared in the article 'Gherasim Luca: Reinvent Everything', *Phosphor*, no.3, winter 2011, pp.3-11.

²⁷ As Raileanu specifies (op. cit., p.122), one of *Inventatorul iubirii*'s components cites an unpublished manuscript which is itself dated as 1944.

²⁸ While the Romanian edition (Bucharest, Editura Negația Negației 1945) presented its texts as prose pieces, like most of Luca's other writings of the time, the late French edition, translated by Luca himself (Paris, José Corti 1994) would present its text in broken lines of poetry, without punctuation (omitting one section, 'Parcurs imposibiliul', altogether). That *Inventatorul iubirii* should be presented as prose where *L'Inventeur de l'amour* emerged as poetry thus makes it more readily readable as a theoretical rather than purely poetic work (indeed, at one point *L'Inventeur de l'amour* derisively points out that even 'le poète le plus illuminé me semble une excroissance tout aussi purulente que le banquier cupide'). This deliberate change in format has the effect of reclaiming and reintegrating a 'lost' Bucharest book of the 1940s back into the body of poetic work elaborated in Paris from the 1950s onwards, as well as of underlining a dialectic between poem and theoretical text, but it tantalizingly suggests as well that we might now also want to try re-reading his later poems as prose manifestoes.

was followed by five illustrations, of *cubomanies*, objects and facsimile letters with commentaries respectively. The publication was originally also envisaged as including Luca's 'Premier Manifeste non-Oedipien', repeatedly promised elsewhere in his writings as a key work but which appears never to have been published.²⁹

These writings form one of the most powerful publications by any surrealist group of the period, and together they can be seen as an incandescent poetic manifestation and extension of the polemics of more didactic group statements, in particular Luca and Trost's key 'message / manifesto' of 1945 *Dialectique de la dialectique* (discussed in detail in the following section). *Inventatorul iubirii*, however, is itself also a polemical and theoretical text, alternating conceptual considerations with both the delirious reverie they incite and (in 'La mort morte') accounts of resulting concrete actions. Indeed, it is tempting to see *Inventatorul iubirii* as Luca's definitive manifesto, one that reconciles poetic insight with desperate revolutionary ardour, bridging the concrete / imaginative reverie of *Le Vampire Passif* and the diamond-hard statements of *Dialectique de la dialectique*. But *Inventatorul iubirii* is not a manifesto like any other: violent and lucid, it is also utterly despairing and confounding, threatening its own collapse: 'En effet,' Luca writes in the Appendix, 'une solution favorable ne pouvait surgir que de l'intérieur d'une position extrême là où la confrontation dialectique est poussée jusqu'à la manie, jusqu'à la plus invraisemblable, la plus délirante des vérifications' (p.103).³⁰ In correspondence two years later, Luca would qualify his book as a radical reconciliation of love and revolution containing 'le schéma d'un appareil théorique et *pratique* de délivrance TOTALITAIRE par l'amour'.³¹

²⁹ The list of Luca's works given in *Dialectique de la dialectique* promises the work to come as the 'Premier Manifeste non-Oedipien, précédé de "l'Inventeur de l'Amour"', where the book that emerged was eventually titled as *Inventatorul iubirii, urmat de Parcurg imposibiliul și de Moartea moarta* [*L'Inventeur de l'amour* suivi de *Je traverse l'impossible* et de *La Mort morte*]; and the French edition as *L'Inventeur de l'amour* suivi de *La Mort morte*. Thus the relationship between the four texts – the fourth, the appendix which one is tempted to see as standing in for the missing Manifesto, is never cited in the title – keeps shifting between editions; only *L'Inventeur de l'amour* is common to all. The Corti edition was, perhaps not coincidentally, one of the very last texts to be worked on by Luca, shortly before his death; inevitably until recently, and the publication of an English translation from the Romanian (*The Inventor of Love and other writings*, translated by Julian and Laura Semilian (Boston, MA, Black Widow Press 2009)) it was this edition which has enjoyed the widest circulation and attention. The book has also been translated into Spanish (2007) and Italian (2011), making it currently Luca's most widely distributed work.

³⁰ I am using the later French edition of *L'Inventeur de l'amour* for quotations, translated as we have noted by Luca himself, but reinstating the original Romanian prose format and punctuation of *Inventatorul iubirii*.

³¹ Letter to Sarane Alexandrian dated June 1947, cited in Raileanu, p.143.

Inventatorul iubirii presents, in order, the intellectual problem of how to escape the prison of Oedipal relations by the cataclysmic deconstruction of the self through love; a critical reflection on mediumistic love experienced through objects; a physical confrontation with the death that still cheats us of freedom despite the promise of this erotic liberation; and a summation that both reflects critically on these experiences and demands that we push despair and rejection to their very limits, as the only way to denounce and transform the world. Presumably the key text of the book (since its name gives the volume its title), 'Inventatorul iubirii', proposes an 'invention' that is in fact more properly an endless re-invention of desire, of its object in the loved individual, and thus of the self and of the world, one that is real and spectral at the same time, constantly in flux. In it, all promiscuities and perversions are justified, but they are just the beginning of the reinventions to come. Here the object of desire takes on an ambiguous being: now an actual woman, now a bewitched and exploded body in pieces to be reassembled, now just an echo of the real object of desire, 'une femme non-née', a devastatingly ideal but forever elusive other 'dont la raison d'être est de n'être jamais rencontrée' (pp.29-30). But above all, it is in the freeing of the individual from the tyranny of Oedipal relations - the castrating shadow of the father, as well as the paralysing memory of the trauma of birth - that the 'desire for desire' can finally be realised. Nature (biology) and memory are the motors driving this Oedipal paralysis, and they must be rejected at all cost, as *Dialectique de la dialectique* would clarify:

La nécessité de découvrir l'amour, qui puisse bouleverser sans interruption les obstacles sociaux et naturels, nous mène à une position *non-oedipienne*. L'existence du traumatisme natal et des complexes oedipiens, tels qu'ils ont été découverts par le freudisme, constituent les limites naturelles et mnésiques, les plis inconscients défavorables qui dirigent, à notre insu, notre attitude envers le monde extérieur. (pp.20-21)

This unleashing of desire aimed not only at the self-realisation of the individual, but was also, *Dialectique de la dialectique* would affirm, an integral part of the actualisation of revolution; without the radical move to a non-Oedipal position, Luca and Trost argued, the proletariat can never free itself from the deep-rooted complexes that will always make its victories illusory. A reading of 'Inventatorul iubirii' starts to indicate how this might be

achieved at an individual level, and even if it is not clear how they proposed to enact such a liberation on the social plane, it seems obvious now that the Bucharest surrealists intended their central, repeatedly reaffirmed notions of desire, objective love and the eroticisation of the proletariat as concrete (rather than simply imaginative) aims.³²

In contrast to the paroxysm of 'Inventatorul iubirii', 'Moartea moarta' offers up quite a different kind of reinvention. Where the first is social, transformational, boundless, the second is intensely individual, confined (in it the author refuses all contact with the world outside his room), opening onto the abyss: a confrontation with death. After an introductory section, Luca presents the reader with five successive daily suicide attempts: by strangulation, by firearm, by stabbing, by poisoning, by not breathing. Each terse account consists of a suicide note, along with an enigmatic handwritten message written with the left hand during the attempt, while watching himself in a mirror, and notes taken immediately after the attempt had failed.³³ The experiment is not without its humour (though it is hard to imagine a blacker kind), but the text is also not only ruthlessly self-critical, it is also haunted by an attitude of anguish and despair, pushed to their limits. Death, Luca writes (and despite the ecstatic liberation promised by 'Inventatorul iubirii'), is the ultimate obstacle that haunts our desires and the objects around us, the space of black magic and of terror, and its problem is not an intellectual one - the mystery of its 'dimension philosophique' (p.59) - but its real, physical existence: the fact of one's own disappearance. It is the death promised to all, even more dreadful than the birth and paralysing complexes that already makes life under the sign of Oedipus fatal, and only through the transformation of this necessary death, not by its denial but by its dialectical negation, can a first victory be won over this 'Paralytique Général Absolu' (p.77). As the text's title had promised, the solution of the negation of negation is the only means not so much to cheat death as to transform it into a place of liberty and endless desire.

³² The pamphlet accompanying the group's exhibition *L'Infra-Noir* (Bucharest, September 1946) would launch an enquiry ('Une question') on the possibilities to 'conquérir les moyens de faire l'amour avec le monde', reaffirming that 'La poésie, l'amour, la révolution ne font qu'un'. One can imagine that in 1946 the responses to this challenge would be few, but a letter from Luca to Georges Henein in 1947 (reprinted in *Le puits de l'ermite*, nos. 29-31 (1978), p.164) makes it clear that the group had hoped for constructive answers from international surrealists to this central question.

³³ Once again, everything we know about Luca suggests that this is not a set of fictions, and we should agree with Sarane Alexandrian that these are genuine, and genuinely dangerous, experiences (*Le surréalisme et le rêve* (Paris: Gallimard, 1974), p.228).

PART II: THE COLLECTIVE WORKS

Luca and Trost, *Dialectique de la dialectique: Message adressé au mouvement surréaliste international*

Hitherto this account of Luca's writings from the period of surrealism in Bucharest has focused on texts with an emphasis on his individual work, notwithstanding that they can only be understood with reference to both their wider surrealist and collective contexts, and that they are already suffused with exchanges between their author, his peers and his others.³⁴ Now, however, the focus shifts to works with a more clearly collaborative or collective context, beginning with a key text, this time both published and most probably written in 1945, that specifically aims to present and contextualise in a more dispassionate, less elaborated form the writings, research and ethical position of its authors, one that sets out both an overview of what, for Luca's writings, had come before and a theoretical framework from which to understand what comes after.³⁵ Not quite substantial enough to call a book in the usual sense of the term (though it was published in both standard and deluxe versions, 534 in all), a little too big to constitute just a tract or a pamphlet, it describes itself on its colophon as a '*cahier*', as if to emphasise the sense in which it is a work in progress, a dossier as much as a statement. Often taken as the closest one might come to the manifesto of the surrealist group of Bucharest (who came together to sign joint public statements on other occasions, but rarely as programmatic as this), *Dialectique de la dialectique* nevertheless belongs to just two of the group's five members, and indeed its publication would prompt a serious rift between its authors and their three comrades, one

³⁴ The move from individual to collective works precisely at the moment when the end of the war made public manifestations possible marks a revealing shift: during the war, an intense but, for us now, largely invisible collective life among the Bucharest group, glimpsed now and then for example through accounts of games and meetings, but accompanied by writings made seemingly in solitude (and no doubt shared with the group in manuscript form). After the war, the advent of collective works and public joint activity; and yet divisions between the group's members (which must surely have already been brewing earlier), and so some fundamental questions about the group's cohesion at the very moment of its emergence into daylight, begin to be felt...

³⁵ The themes and references of *Dialectique de la dialectique* suggest its status as a kind of summation of the collective and individual activity of its authors during the previous years of clandestine activity; no doubt its ideas, therefore, date from before 1945, but the work itself has the feel of a piece of writing elaborated specifically for immediate publication as a first and urgent message to surrealist comrades now that the war was over.

that we might imagine simmered before its publication.³⁶ From 1945 until their own, apparently violent falling out in Israel in 1951, Luca and Trost worked together perhaps more closely than any of the other group members, producing in this case a text in which passages clearly relating to one or other of them are counterposed with sections where the writers cannot be distinguished, and resulting subsequently in publications, writing projects and an exhibition, as well as them later living for a while what might be described as a precarious collaborative existence in Tel Aviv.³⁷

Already from the evidence of its subtitle, the function of *Dialectique de la dialectique* seems to be to contact, inform and critically engage surrealist comrades across the boundaries of Romania and the rapidly redrawn map of Europe – above all those members of the Parisian surrealist group (and in particular it names André Breton), who by this point formed a diaspora scattered around the globe and who (unknown to Trost and Luca) for the most part had either not yet returned from exile or had decided to settle in newly adopted homes for good.³⁸ Written at a moment when its authors had received no word in five years of the survival of surrealism elsewhere in the world, *Dialectique de la dialectique* was at the same time a mayday signal from a band of poets marooned in Eastern Europe, a reaffirmation of fidelity to André Breton, dialectical materialism and

³⁶ Naum, Paun and Teodorescu would soon afterwards sign the tract *Critica mizeriei*, a settling of scores apparently written mainly by Naum and which amongst other targets attacked Luca's alleged 'mysticisme grandissante' (see Raileanu, p.100). As we will see below, the group, significantly minus Naum, would subsequently have occasion to agree on a joint text that restates many of the critiques expressed in *Dialectique de la dialectique*. Luca and Trost's joint statement in their exhibition catalogue *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d'objets* (Sala Brezoianu, Bucharest 1945, unpaginated) would present an even more succinct manifesto of their position during this period – see below.

³⁷ On the breakdown of Luca and Trost's working partnership, see the letter from Trost to André Breton dated Tel Aviv August 1951, asserting Luca's position as 'absolument opposé à mes thèses, qui a culminé par une attaque physique'; André Breton archives, www.andrebretton.fr, dossier 'Correspondance et textes'. This dossier lists a range of primary source material by Luca, Trost and Paun from the period 1951-52 (the archive elsewhere documents significant manuscripts, letters and publications relative to the Bucharest group dating from 1946 onwards), but we might note that even in July 1951 Trost and Luca were still co-signing statements; the rupture would appear to have come rapidly to a head soon afterwards.

³⁸ Breton, for example, would not return to Paris until May 1946. A notable exception to this international dispersal of the surrealists was the case of the Bucharest group's principal contacts with the Paris group, the artists Brauner and Hérold. Both would remain in France, unable to leave, in isolated and difficult circumstances, and return to Paris more promptly. Luca's postwar correspondence with Brauner survives (reproduced in in Morando and Patry, *Victor Brauner*, op.cit.) and indicates how, along with the intermediary of Nadine Krainik, who emigrated to France and frequented the surrealists there after the war, Brauner was to form the Bucharest group's principal link to Paris. The Bucharest surrealists would be likely to have known nothing at this time of the activities of the French wartime *Main à plume* surrealist group.

objective chance, and a challenge to the continuing existence of surrealism as a revolutionary course of action rather than the comfortable (and recuperable) artistic rebellion it had sometimes threatened to become in the 1930s. Like a distress call, the message begins with a literal statement of position: 'Nous nous adressons à nos amis surréalistes, dispersés dans le monde entier et comme dans les grand naufrages, nous leur indiquons notre position exacte, à 44° 5' de latitude nord, et 26° de longitude est.'

The text begins with a blunt expression of the authors' rejection of the disastrous and dispiriting intellectual conditions of the immediate past and present (the end of the pro-fascist wartime Romanian regime had come in late August of 1944, but any suggestion of a straightforward 'liberation' would be problematic given the continuation of the conflict into the autumn of that year, followed by Russian occupation, a period characterised by the chaos and desolation familiar to all Central and Eastern European territories in this period). But having first identified surrealism as the sole intellectual current capable of offering some hope in this climate, Luca and Trost then set out their intention to submit to the movement their own fresh theoretical initiatives developed 'pendant ces dernières années de solitude' within the context of a surprisingly firm reprimand and call to order. They warn the international movement against the dangers of turning into just another style, particularly in the arena of what they characterize as 'déviation artistiques' in painting and poetry, consisting of artistic opportunism, the turning of new discoveries into means of production, the unquestioning propagation of established surrealist techniques, and perhaps above all the congealing and recuperation of set notions of surrealism's intellectual and revolutionary development into mere revolt (pp.8-13).³⁹ 'Un état continuellement révolutionnaire', Luca and Trost write, 'ne peut être maintenu et développé que par une position dialectique de *négation* et de *négation* de la *négation*, position qui puisse prendre toujours la plus grande extension concevable, envers tout et envers tous' (p.14, authors' emphasis).

Maintaining surrealism in a state of continual revolutionary change and development, a global rejection of histories and limitations, and a dialectical coming to

³⁹ This position, rejecting both surrealism's past strategies and its tendency to turn discovery into recipe or history, is perhaps one answer to the problem posed above as to why the Bucharest group seemed disinterested, over and above any material difficulties, in developing a more permanent forum for their activities such as a journal.

being of desires are the positions the text advocates, and to this end Luca and Trost propose a list of means to reignite the surrealist imagination. Some of these reaffirm, in freshly reappraised ways, surrealism's key tenets: the 'real functioning of thought', Leninist conceptions of materialism, Breton's notion of *hasard objectif*. Others are new: the critical approach to dreams (linked above all to Trost's ongoing research and publication in the field), a catalogue of newly-instigated artistic procedures (about which more will be said below and elsewhere in this volume), the poetic appropriation of science and quantum physics, all contributing to the perpetual reevaluation and reinvention of surrealism, 'une opposition continuelle envers le monde entier et envers lui-même' (p.15). Above all *Dialectique de la dialectique* lays emphasis on the central role of desire and the 'désir de désirer', including the promotion of eroticism as a concrete solution to class divisions, and with it the ending of servitude to Oedipal impulses, rejecting all errors 'qui [...] pourraient nous éloigner de notre désir fondamental, dont le premier degré connu est la transformation du désir en réalité du désir' (p.7). This identification of the supremacy of eros, and with it the notion of desire as a revolutionary, objective lucidity that leads from concrete action to inner or hidden reality, and vice versa, relates specifically to Luca's theory of non-Oedipal being that will be the cornerstone of his writings in this period. Surrealism's claim over this 'objective love' is to be seen as a material, revolutionary engagement, subjecting love and eroticism themselves to a dialectical process capable of acting on the laws of nature and culture alike, with the aim of overthrowing their oppressive, castrating logic through its non-Oedipal position. '[T]oute révolution de classe doit être *doublée* concrètement,' Luca and Trost write, 'd'une révolution contre la nature' (p.20). Enshrined in *Dialectique de la dialectique*'s title, its proposed methods, to be tested at length in Luca's writings for the rest of his life, was thus a dialectic taken to its logical conclusion - just as all desires and questions had to be taken to their very limit before a solution was possible: the means finally to defeat humanity's helplessness in the face of the tyranny of its social, emotional and intellectual condition and the crushing inevitability of death, through the negation of negation.

The final pages of *Dialectique de la dialectique* are given over to a detailed catalogue of Luca's and Trost's plastic and especially written works, providing a critical commentary for the works the Bucharest group would continue to send by post (often with

no certainty that the contents would ever reach their addressees) to surrealist comrades around the world and especially in Paris, giving these texts the distinctive fate of being written in a city and a culture never really intended as their audience, whilst being sent to another in which their reading was equally uncertain.⁴⁰ While it is hard to gauge the reception of these texts in Paris, and the re-formation of surrealism in Paris during the second half of the 1940s was both slow and fraught with difficult debates of its own, the Bucharest surrealists would – this time as a more coherent group – continue to initiate and extend a dialogue begun by *Dialectique de la dialectique* in such a way as to affirm their desire to contribute to the international movement's ethical and philosophical debates, suggesting that most of them would continue to share the text's essential position. All but Naum signed a collectively drafted letter sent to Breton, probably dated 1946, which laid serious charges at his feet (it is small wonder that Breton seems not to have replied) of the movement's stagnation, of the emphasis on the careers of its artists and writers, and of its retreat from desire towards pragmatism, liberalism and predictability; together they warned the movement against abandoning its quest for the incommunicable in favour of a historical 'possible' and turning it into 'un agent de progrès idéologique et artistique'.⁴¹ What the movement needed, the Bucharest group's letter would propose, was to abandon any stable positions and return to surrealism's 'conquête pratique du hasard objectif', to embrace 'la conspiration de l'amour et du silence, [...] leur redoutable complicité', and 'la magie pratique du désir' in a movement that would stress collectivity, anonymity and revolution. But characteristically, *Dialectique de la dialectique* had itself already ended on a note (in what one senses is in Luca's hand) that inflects this reasoned internal debate with a vivid disorientation that could only be that of the Bucharest surrealists:

Traversé jour et nuit par une suite infinie de négations de plus en plus irritantes, de plus en plus précieuses et dévorantes, l'inégalable instrument de conquête qu'est la

⁴⁰ See for example the personally dedicated copies of many of Luca's works from this period in the Breton collection, www.andrebretton.fr. Letters in the archive, and to Brauner, express frustration at the lack of response from Breton to the group's missives and publications.

⁴¹ Undated typescript (presumably c.1946) signed by Luca, Trost, Paun and Teodorescu amongst the papers received by André Breton on his return from America, www.andrebretton.fr. The effect of this statement is in part, unwittingly perhaps, to personalise the position adopted by *Dialectique de la dialectique* and organise the dialogue around Breton's authority alone, rather than to address the Parisian surrealists as a group or international surrealism as a movement.

matérialisme dialectique exalte follement notre insatiable faim de la réalité, et mord féroce­ment la chair noire et captive de l'homme.

Couverts de sang, ses os palpitants paraissent maintenant de longs cristaux suspendus. (p.30)

In theme and tone, *Dialectique de la dialectique*'s closest affinity is perhaps above all with a much shorter publication by Luca and Trost, their *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d'objets*. Written to accompany an exhibition of the same name, the small booklet once again marries political, theoretical and poetic registers, and the function of text and exhibition alike were precisely a framing of some of the practical visual techniques *Dialectique de la dialectique* had sketched out in a necessarily brief manner. But first, however, in order to understand Luca's contribution to this work, we must examine his development of the cubomania collage technique so as to locate its content.

The Cubomanie, *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d'objets* and *Les Orgies des quanta*

Dialectique de la dialectique and *Inventatorul iubirii* offer a context for one of Luca's most significant and interesting contributions to Bucharest surrealism, the invention of the *cubomanie*, apparently dating from around 1944 and practiced for the remainder of his life. A collage in which source material is sliced into precise squares and reassembled in small grids, its formal economy masks a conceptual framework that makes it one of the most theoretically-driven instances of surrealist representation; as we have noted, two exhibitions (1945 and 1946) and a pair of small publications (one, *Les Orgies des quanta*, devoted exclusively to the *cubomanie* and the other accompanying the 1945 exhibition Luca held with Trost) presented the results.⁴² An apparent departure from his writing, the *cubomanie* stalks Luca's contemporary texts: while *Le Vampire passif* features one on its cover, viewed from an angle and obscured by an object, *Inventatorul iubirii* was illustrated with five of them, underlining the play between poetry, collage and thought. Identified as a key example of his theory of non-Oedipal relations, Luca located the *cubomanie* as a

⁴² This latter publication (Luca and Trost, *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d'objets. op. cit.*) featured works and writings by both artists/writers, including in Luca's case a list of objects – a defining feature, as we have seen, of *Le Vampire passif*. Trost's book *Le Profil navigable, négation concrète de la peinture* (Bucharest: Les Éditions de l'Oubli 1945) may be seen as another key contribution to the debates around visual practice at this time.

model critique of the alleged objectivity of social conditions, exemplifying the violent rejection of the tyranny of Oedipal forces:

La cubomanie est le correspondant oculaire instantané de notre comportement vis-à-vis du monde extérieur, comportement qui consiste dans le refus de regarder comme une réalité objective l'axiomatique condition humaine, même dans ses aspects apparemment immuables. Après notre rencontre avec la géniale découverte de Marx [et] la sublime activité de Breton [...], nous complétons notre lucidité théorique et pratique en dénonçant la condition oedipienne de l'existence dans son retour biologiquement réactionnaire vers le passé dans les vestiges castrants, traumatiques et horribles de la naissance [...] qui empêche l'homme de trouver les voies exactes de sa libération et après les avoir trouvées, de les maintenir.⁴³

The status of the *visual* poses interesting questions for the reception of Bucharest surrealism, and if the group has generally been so little acknowledged in studies of the international movement, one answer lies in its apparent lack of major artists – its friendships with Brauner and Hérold, both in France during the group's lifetime, remained necessarily distant, interrupted and resulted in no direct collaborations.⁴⁴ On the other hand whilst, as we have seen, Luca and Trost adopted a highly critical stance towards the establishment and application of visual styles and techniques, and explicitly qualified their own activities as 'aplastiques, objectifs et entièrement non-artistiques',⁴⁵ the fact that the group arranged three exhibitions and attempted to contribute to the 1947 *Exposition internationale du surréalisme* in Paris; that a number of its publications bore illustrations; and above all that Luca, Trost and Paun would all develop inventive bodies of visual work all point to a significant role for visual practice in Bucharest surrealism, one occluded so far by a frustrating lack of documentation.⁴⁶ The exhibitions nevertheless indicated the group's

⁴³ Luca, 'Cubomanies', in *ibid.*, unpaginated.

⁴⁴ The third artist who had collaborated with Luca and the others before the founding of the group, Jules Perahim, had left for Moscow in 1940; his status as a communist functionary precluded any possible collaboration between him and the group following his return to Bucharest in 1944. Finally, Victor Brauner's brother Théodore, as we have seen, contributed to *Le Vampire passif* through his documentation of Luca's objects. A photographer, Brauner had been a member of the *Alge* group in the 1930s, and was clearly on friendly terms with the Bucharest surrealists before leaving Romania in 1942, so it is interesting to speculate on his possible contribution to the group's activities.

⁴⁵ Luca and Trost, *Dialectique de la Dialectique*, p.27.

⁴⁶ The dissemination and study of visual works by Luca, Trost and Paun from this period have been hampered by the loss or dispersal of the works themselves, and the fact that for a long time the few

desire to publicise this activity for a domestic audience. Trost and Luca's *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d'objets* of January 1945 featured Trost's automatic experiments and, on Luca's part, one hundred *cubomanies* and an unspecified number of undocumented *Objets Objectivement Offerts* and *Objets construits à distance à l'aide d'un médium*; this was followed a month later by one-man exhibition of Paun's drawings. The final exhibition, *Infra-noir: Préliminaires à une intervention sur-thaumaturgique dans la conquête du désirable* featured work by Luca, Paun and Trost, but through its collective catalogue was effectively presented by the whole group (September-October 1946). Its precise contents are as yet unknown, just as the accompanying collective prose text, incorporating unattributed titles of works, confounds its authors' identities.⁴⁷

The *cubomanie* adopted a disarmingly simple principle: found printed source material – photographs, engraved illustrations or reproductions of paintings – would be sliced into small, precise and regular squares. Squares from one or more of these sources (or several copies of the same image) would then be re-assembled into regular grid structures, initially square ones of 3 x 3 or 5 x 5 elements, then (in *Les Orgies des quanta*) rectangles 3 units wide and 4 tall.⁴⁸ Bearing affinities with the surrealist collages of Max Ernst, or earlier Dada propositions by Jean Arp or Tristan Tzara (though also reminiscent of children's nursery puzzles and traditional games using squares or blocks), the *cubomanie*'s rigid grid format nevertheless suggested a significant departure from existing collage practice. In contrast to classic surrealist collage, it is not ordinarily possible to grasp the *cubomanie*'s distinct original components (indeed, the first impression is often of a single reassembled image), giving the sense that difference and conflict are already present *within* each original; every representation contains the possibility of its own explosion. Dismembered pictures find their meanings and hierarchies dissolved, while the

reproductions of them were often of poor quality. Almost no documentation seems to have survived of the group's exhibitions.

⁴⁷ This latter exhibition was initially intended as an international survey of surrealist art, an ambition frustrated by the precarious situation of communications in Europe at that moment (see the correspondence between Luca and Brauner charting attempts to include international artists in the 1946 show, in Morando and Patry, *Victor Brauner*, op.cit., pp.217-20), and there is a sense in which the works on display, and the *cubomanie* in particular, not only had to stand in for those from the absent international movement, but already to start the work of their inevitable critical *dépassement*. See also the chapter on the *Infra-noir* exhibition by Jonathan P. Eburne in this volume.

⁴⁸ Works made later in Paris adopted more varied configurations. The fullest range of the cubomanias from across Luca's career can be viewed in the exhibition catalogue *Ghérasim Luca, Cahiers de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix* (op. cit).

seamless joining of squares gives no quarter to context or anecdote; distinctions between inside and outside, edge and centre are set in play, everywhere is a border or a rupture. Where collage such as Ernst's works with scissors for an intuitive re-crafting of the image, Luca's adopts a colder, systematic process, and *Dialectique de la dialectique*'s promotion of 'aplastic' works recommends the use of mechanised tools, 'la machine à couper le papier' in the case of the *cubomanies*.⁴⁹

For all its modest format, Luca saw the *cubomanie* 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; 'La *cubomanie* nie. La *cubomanie* rend le connu méconnaissable,' Luca affirmed.⁵⁰ The text of the slim catalogue Luca and Trost published to accompany their 1945 exhibition, also containing Luca's main theoretical statement on the *cubomanie*, opened with this joint declaration:

Nous sommes d'accord avec le rêve, la folie, l'amour et la révolution.

Nous rejetons sous tous leurs aspects l'art, la nature, l'utilité, la séparation de la société en classes, la loi de gravitation, l'idéalisme, la thérapeutique, la peinture, la séparation entre le rêve et la vie, la psychologie, la magie blanche, la misère, la mémoire, les restes diurnes dans le fonctionnement onirique, la géométrie euclidienne, les chiffres défavorables et la mort.

Nous sommes d'accord avec les inventions délirantes, les larmes, le somnambulisme, le fonctionnement réel de la pensée, l'élixir de longue vie, la transformation de la quantité en qualité, le concret, l'absurde, la négation de la négation, le désir, l'hystérie, les fourrures, la magie noire, le délire d'interprétation, la dialectique de la dialectique, la quatrième dimension, le simulacre, les flammes, le vice, le hasard objectif, les manies, le mystère, l'humour noir, la cryptesthésie, le matérialisme scientifique et les taches de sang.⁵¹

Titles of the *cubomanies* listed in the catalogue suggest an intersection of the scientific and the ethical - *Tenter l'impossible; L'analyse des hasards et le jeu de la vérité* - with several apparently sourced from the captions of a popular science manual: *Expérience sur la chute des corps, Demonstration de la pression exercée de bas en haut par les liquides*; non-Euclidean geometry, non-Newtonian mechanics and non-Pasteurian biology are all

⁴⁹ Luca and Trost, *Dialectique de la dialectique*, op.cit., p.28. In English the name for this machine is explicitly loaded with revolutionary (not to mention anti-Oedipal) overtones: a guillotine.

⁵⁰ Luca, 'Cubomanies', op. cit., unpaginated.

⁵¹ Luca and Trost, *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d'objets*, op. cit., unpaginated.

invoked in his Luca's presentation.⁵² The *cubomanie*'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 *cubomanies*, *Les Orgies des quanta* (*The Quanta Orgies*) of 1946 featuring reproductions of 33 works, whose only text consisted of just two quotes from Hegel and Sade.⁵³

The sources of the *cubomanies* vary, but with few exceptions each features elements of the human figure. At times this presence is explicit (the *cubomanies* 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 fetishised ritual. The aggressive erotic psychopathology outlined in *Dialectique de la dialectique* and *Inventatorul iubirii* is inscribed here too; like the latter's ecstatic and disorienting erotic reveries, the *cubomanie* is a form with no gaps or pauses, an endless vision whose equivalents in love, Luca would state, are 'les images pensées dirigées vers la bien-aimé dans les longues rêveries passionnelles'; those in sexuality are 'le fétichisme, le sadisme, la myxoscopie, l'antropophagie, les attouchements dans l'obscurité.'⁵⁴ Like many of Luca's texts of this period the *cubomanie* - its name already suggestive of a clinical condition - stresses a compulsive repetition and manic operation, reminiscent of the stuttering of many of Luca's subsequent poetic texts.⁵⁵ The echoing and uncanny doubling of many of the *cubomanies* figures here as a summoning of repressed desires, as though this collage form were part magic ritual, part psychiatric case study. Above all, the *cubomanie* 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 'l'image tentante de cet objet à aimer qui cesse, enfin, d'être un

⁵² Luca, 'Cubomanies', op. cit, unpaginated. On Luca's later poetry as a form of atom-age science in which phenomena of language are subjected to laboratory testing, see Alain Jouffroy, *La Fin des alternances*, Paris: Gallimard 1970, pp.109-12.

⁵³ Gherasim Luca, *Les Orgies des quanta*, Bucharest: Surréalisme 1946. See the discussion on the use of the Hegel quote and Luca's 'carnavalesque' dialectics in Carlat, *Gherasim Luca*, op. cit., pp.100-1.

⁵⁴ Luca, 'Cubomanies', op. cit, unpaginated. Five 'cubomanies non-oedipiennes spécialement érotiques' are listed on the following page (I have retained the no doubt wayward spelling of *mixoscopie* and *anthropophagie*).

⁵⁵ It is tempting to open a parenthesis here on a reading of the erotic cubomania in terms of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, as representations of deterritorialized desire. The echoes between Luca's non-Oedipal thought and the work of Deleuze and Guattari remain to be fully explored; Deleuze, while aware of Luca's work (which is cited in *Anti-Oedipus*), and indeed hailing his post-war poetry elsewhere in the highest terms, makes no mention in print of this startling precedent (see the two letters from Deleuze to Luca, September and October 1972, asking for information on Luca's non-Oedipal manifesto, reproduced in *CCP*, no.17, 2008, pp.73-74).

objet tout fait [...] pour devenir le perpétuel aphrodisiaque d'un objet à faire, à refaire, à tout faire [...]. La *cubomanie* n'est qu'une démonstration par l'image de mon comportement courant vis-à-vis de la femme-aimée.⁵⁶ A letter to Hérold five years later, outlining Luca's long-term project for 'l'objectivation de l'amour', is even more radical: 'Ma femme a été pendant plusieurs années une sorte de 'cubomanie' vivante faite de plusieurs corps de femme (irréductible à l'image maternelle, charnellement et passionnément aimée dans son unité transfiguré-transfigurante)'.⁵⁷

As an expression of non-Oedipal theory, Luca's descriptions and contextualisations stress the *cubomanie*'s will to liberation: 'le mouvement perpétuel, le désir de désirer, la négation de la négation et la superbe nécessité surdéterminante d'inventer notre destin'.⁵⁸ In its widest sense, then, the *cubomanie*, in its ruining and destructive strategies, in its enactment of a violent (Sadeian) eroticism, is to be read as a political act. Modest as it might appear as a tangible first step, the *cubomanie* functions as a manifestation of this will to revolution that could operate as an aggressive dismantling of cultural values and biological truths. Limited for the moment to an operation on the image, Luca would see the *cubomanie*'s non-Oedipal logic as not just an expression of an attitude to the concrete realm and lived experience, but as itself capable of extension to the rest of the world:

Leçon pratique de cubomanie dans la vie courante : choisissez trois chaises, deux chapeaux, quelques pierres et parapluies, plusieurs arbres, trois femmes nues et cinq très bien habillées, soixante hommes, quelques maisons, des voitures de toutes les époques, des gants, des télescopes, etc.

Coupez tout en petits morceaux (par exemple 6/6 cm) et mélangez-les bien dans une grande place de la ville. Reconstituez d'après les lois du hasard ou de votre caprice et vous obtiendrez un paysage, un objet ou une très belle femme inconnus ou reconnus, la femme et le paysage de vos désirs.⁵⁹

Notations followed this recipe for the *cubomanie*'s equivalents in love, sexuality, architecture, painting, dream and magic. Couched in an ironic, darkly humorous tone, in absurd and excessive lists of objects, Luca's promotion of this logic into the realm of things

⁵⁶ Luca, letter to Victor Brauner, 30 June 1946, in Morando and Patry, *Victor Brauner*, op. cit., pp.220-1.

⁵⁷ Luca, letter to Jacques Hérold, Tel Aviv 5 April 1951, in *Collection Jacques Hérold*, lot 188.

⁵⁸ Luca, 'Cubomanies', op. cit, unpaginated.

⁵⁹ Luca, 'Cubomanies', op. cit, unpaginated.

and experience gives the *cubomanie* collage the flavour of an action, potential but at the same time already lived out everywhere in a world collapsing around the poet's ears.

Luca and the 'Infra-noir' *plaquettes*: *Amphitrite* and *Le Secret du vide et du plein*

Luca's last major texts published during the lifetime of surrealism in Bucharest form a pair of twin texts, for once a non-dialectical couple even if dialectics are at the heart of their operation, and they share enough to argue that they are two attempts to frame the same underlying shift in direction of Luca's writing, anticipating the turn confirmed six years later with the publication of *Héros-limite* in Paris in 1953. *Amphitrite* and *Le Secret du vide et du plein* formed two of the eight *plaquettes* of the *Infra-noir* collection, for which each member except Naum contributed a pair of texts and which, together with the group's joint texts *Eloge de Malombra* and *Le Sable Nocturne* (the latter their contribution to the catalogue of the 1947 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris), form both a crowning moment of collective expression and the group's swansong – after this year the worsening political climate would render any public expression from the group impossible.⁶⁰ Luca's texts adopted, as did all eight *Infra-noir plaquettes*, the same format of a single folded sheet from which a large eight page pamphlet could be cut (though no doubt few of its owners would carry this out, adding the pleasure of manipulating the sheet to chase its confusing succession of pages to that of reading its contents), including a title page and colophon in a format standard to the whole series featuring a simple, rather formal typographic layout. In contrast to the rest of the series, however, both *Amphitrite* and *Le Secret du vide et du plein* featured a more complex three-part structure, one that itself hid additional layers of interactivity: both began with an apparently theoretical presentational text set to fit precisely onto a single page. This text was in both cases organised around illustrations (one for *Le Secret du vide et du plein*, two for *Amphitrite*) centred within the page. Finally, the main body of each *plaquette*, pages 3-7, were devoted to what appeared to be its principal intended content: a suite of poems in the case of the former, a prose text and poem for the latter.

⁶⁰ Though Naum was to sign the group's joint statements *Eloge de Malombra* and *Le Sable nocturne*, probably both written in the spring of 1947, his absence from this collection and from two joint letters from around this period to André Breton and held in his archive would seem to indicate that his desire to participate in the group was beginning to waver.

Published in February 1947, *Amphitrite: Mouvements sur-thaumaturgiques et non-oedipiens* consists of an illustrated presentation text, four pages of prose narrative, and finally Luca's signature poem, perhaps his single best-known work thanks to the magnetic performances and recordings he would make of it in later life, 'Passionnément'.⁶¹ While its title would place the text in the domain of myth – in ancient Greek mythology Amphitrite was the goddess of the sea, wife of Poseidon and mother of Triton – its subtitle diverts this mythology to the world of spirit (albeit reclaimed for the realm of surrealism by its 'sur-' prefix): thaumaturgy refers to the ability to create miracles or magic, associated with hermetic and sixteenth century occult traditions of secret knowledge. If thaumaturgy might signal a move away from the concrete and the conventionally political (the criticism made two years earlier of Luca and Trost by the rest of the group had been of their alleged sympathy for mysticism), it is nevertheless in sympathy with the turn towards magic and hermetic knowledge in the Parisian surrealist group during the same period, and while 'interventions sur-thaumaturgiques' would also be explicitly invoked in the presentation text of *Le Secret du vide et du plein*, it is also specified as the goal of the group's *Infra-noir* exhibition and catalogue (subtitled *Préliminaires à une intervention sur-thaumaturgique dans la conquête du désirable*) of late 1946, putting this term at the heart of Luca's thought and that of the group as a whole in this late moment of its existence. But as we are about to see, the magic knowledge *Amphitrite* specifically evokes emerges from the world of nineteenth century spectacle and display, the phantasmagoria of trick staging that places us at a crossroads of science, technology and belief operating in the domain of early modernist developments such as mediums, spirit photography, the panorama and the dawn of cinema.⁶² From its title page and opening text alone, then, *Amphitrite* propels its thought from the ancient world, to the Renaissance, to the late nineteenth century at dizzying speed.

The tone of *Amphitrite* makes it one of Luca's strangest texts. While the stammering diction of 'Passionnément' signalled a new and intense engagement with language that over the next decade would become the poet's signature style, much of the main body of

⁶¹ 'Passionnément' would be reprinted in Luca's *Le Chant de la carpe* (Paris, Le Soleil noir, 1973), and thus enter the corpus of his post-war Parisian work.

⁶² For an extended discussion of these intersections, see for example Marina Warner, *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors, and Media into the Twenty-first Century* (Oxford, Oxford University Press 2008).

the *plaque* was written in a steady, descriptive tone that stepped back from the ecstatic prose of his previous writing, and its opening essay reads so ‘dispassionately’ as to make the reader wonder at first whether, along with the two figures, which appear to have been sourced from a nineteenth century book on staging optical illusions, the opening text as well has not been borrowed.⁶³ It begins with the raising of a curtain on a scene where a spectator sees a circular muslin screen behind which is staged the sea and sky; at a signal, the figure of Amphitrite, dressed as a theatrical nymph, appears. Her body, flying through the air, twists and circles, her limbs waving, before she eventually dives into the waters; next to this text, indeed, is the slightly naïve line engraving, bordered with dark theatrical curtains, showing Amphitrite flying through the air above the waves, her back arched in a position reminiscent of Charcot’s classic ‘arch of hysteria’, the setting or rising sun glowing in the corner staging Amphitrite under the signs of air, water and fire. Figure 2 below, and the section of the text that follows, reveal the illusion, observed in the image by a top-hatted gentleman with a cane: Amphitrite is in fact lying on a circular mobile podium, illuminated from above and reflected in a two-way mirror (‘La Glace sans tain’ was the opening text of Breton and Philippe Soupault’s *Les Champs magnétiques*, the first surrealist text, with its ‘crépuscules marins’ and ‘cinéma magnifique’) giving the appearance that her body floats in the air when in fact it is supine. Only in the final paragraph, introducing the ‘trois objets-mouvements qu’Amphitrite et ses partenaires essayent de décrire’ does Luca’s language begin to open up the resonances of Amphitrite’s secret, found in the fun-fair ambience of popular entertainment but hinting at the rituals of Eros, hysteria and the dawn of cinema:

Chair, silence et magnétisme, leurs corps évoluent dans l’espace-temps. Substance des actions. Transmutation du désir. La femme aimé, jusqu’aujourd’hui simple objet perdu et vainement trouvé, est devenue dans notre manière d’aimer, la perpétuelle boîte à surprise du monde à changer, l’inépuisable agent du dérèglement de l’esprit et de la matière désirante. (p.1)

⁶³ Supplementary note, June 2018: in fact, the first image – the picture of Amphitrite – would appear to have been copied from the *Dictionnaire abrégé du surréalisme* which acted as a catalogue for the 1938 International Surrealist Exhibition in Paris (p.73), to accompany the dictionary entry for Amphitrite along with a quotation from Charles Cros.

There follows, forming the main body of *Amphitrite*'s text, three meticulous descriptions of increasingly dream-like and complex scenes (evoking Raymond Roussel's ambitious and baffling scenarios of wondrous mechanisms), in which, confined to a single room, Amphitrite and her attendants stage intricate and disorienting rituals; props, materials and apparitions inter-penetrate, the violent disintegration of her body might be theatrical illusion or a mesmerising vision, and 'Passionnement' begins to be announced, first as a word written on the wall, then as a poem recited by 'la Fameuse tendance de réconciliation de l'eau avec le feu' (p.5).

'Passionnement', then, appearing on the final page of *Amphitrite*, is the secret incantation of these obscure games. Driven by the circularity and repetition of language itself, it stammers through and across words so as to send a shudder through language, unlocking through homophonic association the secret links between terms and meanings. Proceeding through a patient, painful surgical/dialectical operation on each word so as to undo the chains of meaning enacted by language (and, if we are to believe Jacques Lacan's claim that the unconscious, too, is structured through linguistics, then the mechanisms of the inner self, its desires and Oedipal dramas, are also exposed and exploded), the poem moves painstakingly from negation ('pas pas paspaspas pas') through each of its multiform disguises (*pape*, *papa*, *pipe*, *passe*, and dragging into its slipstream a whole vocabulary of oppression and desire) to the apotheosis of love: 'je t'aime passionnement'. Another poem, also published as a single-sheet *plaquette* in April 1947, *Niciodata destul (Jamais assez)*, breaks language down even more drastically – this time Romanian (for example wearing away at the word 'popor', people, in the sense of a nation), though the collapse of its words into chains of phonemes seems to send it back to the beginnings of all utterance – following the logic and discovery of 'Passionnement' even further,⁶⁴ and Luca's work – his poems, performances and recordings, perhaps the *cubomanies* too – would all henceforth be haunted by this dislocation, incantation and liberation of the word.

Le Secret du vide et du plein follows the same multi-part structure as *Amphitrite*, consisting of an essay, an illustration and poetic texts; it is dated April 1947 and its title

⁶⁴ Gherasim Luca, *Niciodata destul*, Editura Suprarealistă Negația Negației 1947. The copy in Breton's archive is inscribed to him as being a 'tract' (www.andrebretton.fr). My thanks go to Monique Yaari for suggesting readings of this work from the Romanian.

already signals the dialectical structure and intent that drives Luca's thinking and writing during this period.⁶⁵ Devoted less explicitly to the ecstatic expression of passionate attraction in the texts written during and immediately after the war, no longer woven through with a sense of actual events or experiences, its contents feel more abstract and ambitious, both in the sense of its grappling with fundamental – the most fundamental – problems of philosophy and being, and in the relentless breaking down and re-casting of language and meaning pointing in the direction of Luca's post-war *œuvre*. As we have already noted, its opening single-page presentation essay seems to set up a theoretical context for the poetic texts to follow, though since none of these bear a subtitle, and since as we shall see the distinction between theory and practice in these constituent sections immediately starts to waver, the reader must assume that each, and the whole, belong to the notion of the *Secret du vide et le plein*, a secret that is never ultimately explicitly revealed. At this first text's heart, literally, is apparently the one exemplification of the *plaque*'s theoretical and poetic content, though it is itself also already an engagement with writing; identified as an *échographie* and given the opaque title *Nécessairement belle*, it appears to show a fragment of a larger sheet of frenzied calligraphy, its eccentric scripts and scattered alignments just on the verge of legibility (only individual letters, such as the tantalizing beginning *L*, can be discerned) suggesting automatic handwriting made either in a state of semi-trance or with the eyes closed.⁶⁶ 'Reversed out', as a designer would say, in white text on black, the reproduction appears either to imply chalk on a board – ready to be written, effaced and rewritten again – or a photographic process of negative reversal that literalises Luca's recurring theme of the dialectical negation of negation.

⁶⁵ The work should not be confused with another, better known poem by Luca, 'Autres secrets du vide et du plein', published in *Héros-limite* (Paris, Le Soleil nor 1953, p.49), although given that, as we shall see, another of the poems in this section of *Héros-limite* dates from Luca's time in Bucharest, it is not unreasonable to guess that all of them did, and thus that the two works are more or less contemporary. 'Autres secrets' presents the core paradox at the heart of the dialectic in an altogether more lapidary form, more concentrated if equally ambiguous ('le vide vidé de son vide c'est le plein', etc.). As noted by Monique Yaari ('The Surrealist Group of Bucharest', op. cit., p.114 n.23) the reader should be aware of the mis-dating of the reissued version of *Le Secret du vide et du plein* (Paris, La maison de verre 1996), one of several parts of the facsimile *Infra-Noir* portfolio to bear the wrong date.

⁶⁶ The letter 'L' clearly had a specific resonance for Luca (beyond the obvious allusion to his name): one of the key objects described by *Le Vampire passif* (p.20 ff) is entitled *La Lettre L*. It was an object made in homage to André Breton, whose *First Manifesto* had recommended that in the event of 'writer's block' in composing an automatic text, 'posez une lettre quelconque, la lettre *l* par exemple, toujours la lettre *l*.' (*Manifestes du surréalisme*, Paris: NRF 1963, p.43).

Specifically cited in Luca and Trost's *Dialectique de la dialectique* as one of a series of graphic techniques 'poussant l'automatisme jusqu'à ses limites les plus concrètes et absurdes' (p.27), *échographie* (not to be confused with the more recent invention of medical ultrasound techniques but perhaps sharing something of the latter's instrumentalization of sound, reflection and an inner vision), along with *stéréotypie* are identified as 'procédés pathologiques', and thus given an ambivalent status as clinical or psychiatric documents or experiments in a domain beyond rationalised thought. Here, the essay pairs these two techniques again, characterising each as a 'méthode sur-automatique de méconnaissance et d'action, essayant de particulariser la chasse aux oublis'.

The presentation text's content, on the other hand, occupies the domain of absolutes, of fundamental terms, many of them given an initial capital to underline their status as core principles (*Désir, Pensée, Esprit, Cicatrice, Signe*) – indeed of so many fundamental terms that the text's possibility of laying out a philosophical premise soon begins to stagger under the weight of its ambition, and what presents itself as theory soon merges with the domain of poetry. Operating on the dialectical principle of paired oppositions, their tensions and *dépassements*, each of these shift, return and shiver through the essay, short-circuiting in ways that resonate with the reflective and repetitive associations of 'échographie', seeming to offer both a programmatic strategy for the liberation of the self from the trammels of pain and restraint, and a list of key terms – a kind of ethical 'genome mapping' – of the human condition.

Désir et pensée. Blessure projetée Désir et Pensée, Pensée et Désir se jettent sur Blessure. Miroir et mur. Réciprocité-balançoire. Déterminisme de la corde et du pendu.

Désir caché ou apparent, c'est toujours le donné. Désir et Pensée, le déjà-là, trésor et secret. Minéralogie de l'Esprit. Sondage et Découverte. Mais il faut désirer les désirs, il faut inventer les découvertes, changer le monde découvert, changer le Monde.

Strong echoes remain of Luca's earlier texts and concerns ('désirer les désirs'), but now the voice and its message seem both more insistent and harder to grasp, reduced to terse statements of paradox or bipolarity (in both the figurative and the clinical sense) that give

the text the sense both of a strategy for an impossible but inevitable freedom, and of its lying somewhere beyond critical thinking and the shackles of language.⁶⁷ Thought – even in its ‘fonctionnement réel’ as revealed by automatism – is linked and thus constrained by the forms dictated by the primal *Blessure* of humanity, a wound that institutes a void and an absence at its heart; ‘dérégler ce mécanisme, le pervertir, le ruiner dans ses fondements mêmes, c’est faire sortir le Réel de l’ovale de son Nombre.’ For the text the negation of this zero is operated both at the level of the relentless, almost mechanical incantation of its naming (‘les Non, les Non, les Non-Blessures’), and at language’s and thought’s magical ability to bring each concept face to face with its necessary opposite, a paradox exemplified by the apparition – described without being named – of Lichtenberg’s knife: ‘Remplacer le Réel par le Possible et anticiper leur confusion. [...] Oublier l’oubli, tripler le double, vider le vide, c’est inventer le plein dans son mouvement, le plein-mouvement, dont un «couteau sans lame, auquel manque le manche» n’est que la désespérante séduction’.⁶⁸

The poetic text that follows and constitutes the main body of *Le Secret du vide et du plein*, on the other hand, is all in lower case script, without punctuation, and divided into five distinct sections (whether each is to be considered a poem or only a part of one longer text). Each of these has its own character, and marks a progressive loosening of ‘logical’ syntax, spelling and meaning, so that while the first begins with a figure recognizable from the universe of Luca’s prose poems of the mid-1940s, brandishing a dagger echoing

⁶⁷ Perhaps the closest empathy one might find to this text is not in the domain of poetry but Theodor Adorno’s notion of Negative Dialectics (1966), with its movements of disassembly and non-identity, its arrays of constellations and objects and above all its indispensable-impossible character. Considering Adorno, the critic Fredric Jameson writes: ‘For insofar as dialectical thinking is thought about thought, thought to the second power, concrete thought about an object, which at the same time remains aware of its own intellectual operations in the very act of thinking, such self-consciousness must be inscribed in the very sentence itself. And insofar as dialectical thinking characteristically involves a conjunction of opposites or at least conceptually disparate phenomena, it may truly be said of the dialectical sentence what the surrealists said about the image, namely, that its strength increases proportionately as the realities linked are distant and distinct from each other’ (‘T. W. Adorno’, in Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks, eds, *The Jameson Reader* (Malden, MA, Blackwell 2000), p.73).

⁶⁸ The figure of Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742-1799), whose work crosses science, satire and philosophy, would appear to be an overdetermined one for Luca. Discoverer of the principles and fascinating organic forms of electrical discharge – the complex fissures, not unlike an automatic drawing, on the skin of someone struck by lightning is known as a ‘Lichtenberg scar’ –involving procedures anticipating photo-reprographic techniques, his playful but philosophically challenging notations on imaginary objects anticipated the research of René Magritte and was celebrated in André Breton’s *Anthologie de l’humour noir*.

Lichtenberg's just-cited ghost object ('une femme échevelée / qui porte sur l'épaule gauche / un large poignard dont la lame est couverte de perdrix', p.3), the poems soon lose their grip on the fixed identities of words and situations. Each section is presided over by a central term that either infects its surroundings or follows a complex morphology of linguistic shifts and play. The first section's noun *perdrix*, repeated to the point of absurdity – a word that might have been chosen by Mallarmé, neither singular nor plural, evoking its loaded homonyms *perdre*, *paire*, *père* – is supplanted by the third section with the banal generic 'propos de' which stammers first into neighbouring terms (*pot*, *poteau*, *pot à eau*) and then into new configurations from which any new meaning might be derived (*propopot*, *proposart*, *propos de mort*). The final section conjures its 27 lines, the first third of which are almost nothing but a hiss, from just the four letters that inexorably, inevitably align themselves into the name 'de sade', that genius of desire as dialectics who stands behind much of Luca's work from this era.

Present absence, the absent presence, *Le Secret du vide et du plein* is amongst other things a meditation and setting in motion of the endless, never resolved logic of plenitude facing lack, rhyming with Luca's obsession with negation, silence, the void and their inversion that seems to have been shared by the Bucharest surrealist group as a whole. In correspondence with the Parisian surrealists around plans for the international exhibition *Le Surréalisme en 1947*, and in the group's text for its catalogue, 'Le Sable nocturne', the idea of objects both there and not there, palpable but dematerialized, is explored through their proposal (based on a group game) of 'une salle de grand silence noir' in which the dialectic of the full and the void suggested a completely dark space around which visitors should feel their way so as to find and explore unknown erotic objects.⁶⁹ For Luca and for the group around him, nothingness seems only apparent, is just a blank screen or a register of knowledge as yet without a name; a dreadful but fertile absence waiting to be filled with a new, unthought-of mode of desire.

⁶⁹ Luca, Paun, Teodorescou and Trost, undated letter to Breton (c.1947), www.andrebretton.fr; Gherasim Luca, Gellu Namm [sic], Paul Paun, Virgil Teodorescou, Trost, 'Le Sable nocturne', *Le Surréalisme en 1947* (Paris, 1947), pp.56-58 (p.56); see the discussion of this exhibition proposal and text by Jacqueline Chénieux-Gendron in the present volume. The group's proposal for fetishistic objects to be experienced through touch instead of sight would be a direction taken up again three decades later by the Czech surrealist Jan Švankmajer's tactile experiments and games.

Coda / passage: 'Ma déraison d'être'

le désespoir a trois paires de jambes
le désespoir a quatre paires de jambes
quatre paires de jambes aériennes volcaniques absorbantes symétriques
il a six paires de jambes aériennes volcaniques
sept paires de jambes volcaniques
le désespoir a sept et huit paires de jambes volcaniques . . .

'Ma déraison d'être' is the poem written in red ink on blue paper by way of a letter to Victor Brauner, 27 March 1948; published in *Héros-Limite* (1953), Luca's first collection after his move to France, it nevertheless belongs not to Paris but to the Bucharest surrealist group.⁷⁰ Facing the poem on the page, in an 'aerial volcanic' calligraphy, its words in crescendo bursts across and down the sheet, is the distressed message: 'Cher Victor / QUE FAIRE / QUE FAIRE / QUE FAIRE / QUE FAIRE / que faire / que faire / QUE FAIRE / QUE FAIRE / que faire / que faire / QUE FAIRE / ton ami, Luca'.

What to do? Part frantic Lenin,⁷¹ a dialectical negation of negation (what should we do with what is to be done?), part the shudder of language towards which Luca's writing had turned in the aftermath of war, part cry for air in '[le] monde de la suffocation' that was Bucharest (as Luca would write to Brauner, *en route* at last to Paris via Tel Aviv).⁷² These and other letters to the painter, written mostly in French as if in defiance of accidents of birth and reproduced in the Pompidou Centre's anthology of Brauner's writing and correspondence, give a sense of fervour and desperation in the aftermath of surrealist activity in Bucharest, the stifling, unbreathable air of the city Luca had grown to detest, longing for communication but powerless to leave or even sustain contact with the outside world.

Despair and its insect legs: Bucharest at the war's end, continued exhaustion, unbearable and relentless oppression, even if the period 1945-47 had at last been the hour for intense, sometimes fraught activity for Luca and his friends. The stammer of nature, elemental, from already excess (never just two legs, never enough or too little) to

⁷⁰ Luca, letter to Brauner in Morando and Patry, *Victor Brauner*, pp.230-31; Luca, 'Ma déraison d'être', in *Héros-limite*, pp.43-4. As noted above, the fact that this poem can be dated to 1948 suggests that perhaps all of the seven poems in this section of *Héros-limite* (given the collective title 'Le Principe d'incertitude' and including the poem 'Autres secrets du vide et du plein') might also date from this period. Elements of this section were first published in *Phosphor*, no.3, winter 2011, p.13.

⁷¹ V. I. Lenin, *Que Faire*, February 1902.

⁷² Luca, letter to Brauner 30 October 1950, cited in Morando and Patry, *Victor Brauner*, p.215.

accelerating escalation, annihilation and then back again. The crystal exactitude of mathematics as a Sisyphean task, and each number in the progression with its secret significance; the naming of despair, catalogue of its seething growth, its wicked absurdity. And the mantra of what comes next, the ritual of endless re-beginning. What to do, what to do, what to do...

What to do, for Luca - and for Trost too, though soon enough even these conspirators would quarrel violently and for good – was to find a way out, and a way back to Paris: leaving for Israel in the autumn of 1950 and arriving in Paris most probably at the beginning of March 1952.⁷³ This period, like the one immediately before it following the apparent collapse of the Bucharest surrealist group in the second half of 1947 (its last collective manifestations would be *Eloge de Malombra* in May, and the catalogue essay 'Le Sable nocturne' for the Parisian International surrealist exhibition in July) and the definitive establishment of a Communist Romania by the beginning of 1948, a period one might well imagine to be a time of disillusion and exhaustion, seems not to have resulted in any major work on Luca's part, though some manuscript material is in evidence and his letters of the time testify to a continued body of research. Luca's arrival in Paris would mark the start of a new story, one no longer to be told in the context of a surrealist group since he would retain a cordial independence from the Parisian surrealists, as though something about the rending experience of Bucharest, and of Israel, had broken a link with the past. The streets of Paris offered perhaps not yet the desire he desired, but at last a freedom, fresh air. In August 1952, in a looping, uncharacteristically joyful calligraphy, and drawing in a bouquet of flowers for his wife Elisa, Luca wrote to Breton:

Après un assez long silence, je me suis remis à travailler un peu. Sous le titre 'contre-action de l'autrui' et dans un esprit d'exaspération revendicatrice, j'ai écrit un poème hanté par le spectre de la nutrition. Mais la plupart du temps je le passe dans les rues qui gardent encore pour moi toute la fraîcheur du jour de mon arrivée.⁷⁴

⁷³ Biographies generally indicate that Luca and Trost spent only a few months in Israel, in 1952, but Luca's correspondence with Paun gives his arrival date in Haifa as 15 October 1951 (my thanks to Monique Yaari for this detail); Luca's letter to Jacques Hérold, Jaffa, 24 February 1952 puts his departure for Paris as a few days away (*Collection Jacques Hérold*, lot 188, final item), making Luca's stay in Israel at least 16 months.

⁷⁴ Ghérasim Luca (already 'Ghérasim' with an 'é'), letter to André Breton 15 August 1952, André Breton archive www.andrebretton.fr.