

Paul Păun's *Brevet lovaj*: Unpacking the Moment – June 1945*

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The year 1945 was a watershed for the surrealist group of Bucharest (Gherasim Luca, Gellu Naum, Paul Păun, Virgil Teodorescu, Trost), active mostly clandestinely throughout the 1940s and publicly for a mere two years (1945-1947). It saw the publication (in French and in Romanian) not only of several major texts by each of the five members of this tightly-knit group, but also of multi-authored manifestoes, which are at the core of the divide that had formed by then within its ranks, and is the backdrop to this article. It witnessed two key exhibitions, a first one by two of its protagonists, Gherasim Luca and Trost, and immediately afterwards a second by Paul Păun alone (see below, the section titled "Visual expression"), before the five members reunited and reemerged together through a series of collective manifestations under the sign of the "infra-noir" concept (discussed briefly below). These included, in 1946, an exhibition by the three plastic artists of the group accompanied by a text signed by all group members, and in 1947, two sets of *plaquettes* authored by each except Naum, as well as two other texts signed by all. I focus here on Paul Păun's muted intervention in the 1945 rift, which encapsulates his stance at that time and points to subsequent developments in his art. This intervention revolves around the concept of *lovaj* and the modest text that introduced it, *Brevet lovaj*.

Context

For three weeks in January (7 to 28) of that year, in "Brezoianu Hall," on the first floor of 19 Brezoianu Street in Bucharest, an exhibition showcased works by Gherasim Luca and Trost accompanied by a thirteen-page catalogue titled *Présentation de graphies colorées, de cubomanies et d'objets*. It was followed in short order by *Dialectique de la dialectique: Message adressé au mouvement surréaliste international*, a 34-page publication authored by the same, which has come to be known – somewhat erroneously – as the manifesto of the entire group. Certainly

* Material for this article has appeared in some of my preceding publications: "The Surrealist Group of Bucharest: Collective Works, 1945-1947," as well as "Introduction: Un et multiple" and "Paul Paon ou le 'hurle-silence'," in my edited volume "*Infra-noir, un et multiple* 1-32 and 151-98.

the other three members of the group, who did not sign it, nevertheless shared many of its fundamental ideas, in particular the agreement with the basic tenets of André Breton's vision of surrealism, as well as the determination to surpass these tenets while remaining faithful to the spirit of the vision. The choice of the French language allowed these writings to circulate within an international arena. But this very choice was not met with equal approval by all, although eventually the three works signed by all five members of the group were written in French,¹ like all the subsequent literary output of Trost, Gherasim Luca, and Paul Păun (who eventually changed his signature to Paul Paon).²

For their part, Gellu Naum, Paul Păun, and Virgil Teodorescu co-signed another manifesto, in Romanian, *Critica mizeriei* (The Critique of Misery), which included an annex titled "Mizeria criticeii" (The Misery of Critique), composed of quotes from noted critics;³ their running head reads, "Toată apa mării nu ar ajunge să spele o pată de sânge intelectuală" (All of the sea's waters would not suffice to wash away an intellectual blood stain).⁴ The main thrust of this work is to take aim at the conservative literary criticism prevalent at the time, produced by critics unable or unwilling to understand avant-garde writing and in particular to

¹ Editors' note: See, in this journal number, Toma, "Bucharest, Capital of Automatism."

² This change, to the French version of his pseudonym, occurred subsequent to his 1961 emigration from Romania. In this article, I will use each version of the pseudonym as appropriate for the period discussed.

³ The Romanian 'critica' means both critique (as understood in the context of social thought) and criticism (as applied to the literary field), thus allowing for an interpretation of 'misery' as both a deplored socio-economic condition (of poverty) and a deplorable quality of literary criticism (traditionalism), both themes being indeed present in the main text, the second alone in the annex. Thus, beyond the chiasm effect of the two titles, the main text could also be translated as 'The Critique of Wretchedness,' and the annex's title as 'Abject Criticism.' Together, these titles probably contain a triple allusion. The most readily and widely recognizable is the mid-nineteenth century confrontation between the socio-economic and political theses of Proudhon's *Philosophie de la misère* (*The Philosophy of Misery*, 'misery' standing here for 'poverty') and Marx's *Misère de la philosophie* (translated as *The Poverty of Philosophy*). The second is Breton's 1932 tract *Misère de la poésie*, where the leading figure of the French surrealist movement starts to articulate the position he would eventually fully develop in the tract co-written in 1938 with Trotsky, *Pour un art révolutionnaire indépendant*: supporting an art that can address social issues without sacrificing its autonomy of expression, which is precisely what the soon to be implemented social realism and Jdanovist doctrine in Romania would no longer allow. Lastly, the three authors were most certainly aware of Paul Éluard's poem "Critique de la poésie," published in *Unu* in 1932, a scathing critique of any poetry that does not engage with social and political issues.

⁴ Borrowed from Lautréamont, this quote reads, in the original, "Toute l'eau de la mer ne suffirait pas à laver une tache de sang intellectuelle." See "Poésies I" (1870) (*Œuvres complètes* 314).

appreciate the innovations of surrealism, considered a main road to the liberation of mankind and of man's means of expression. In addition, in an important footnote (n.1, p. 5 of the main text) severe criticism also targets earlier domestic literary and artistic movements and journals – *Unu, 75 HP* – for having limited their action to verbal innovation (rather than, it is implied, operating a radical transformation of life, as authentic surrealism aimed to do). But in another footnote (n. 2, p. 6), from among their own group Gherasim Luca is singled out and harshly criticized for two aspects of his thought: his “non-oedipal” view of love (said to be perhaps close to Dada but entirely foreign to surrealism) and the so-called “mysticism” of his conception of social change. In short, the entire local intellectual and artistic scene comes under fire, from the perspective of surrealism but under the larger umbrella of social critique, while the inner divide of the group of five also comes to the fore.⁵

In fact, the first of Gherasim Luca's criticized positions consists (in part) in the expression of an extreme rebellion against the traditional view of love and the couple (potentially matrimonial, fecund, and thus implicitly oedipal) – a paradigm for endless situations based on similarly flawed personal, social, political relations; the second position is the assertion that without inner, “infra-psychique” (22) liberation, the “proletariat” would not be able to achieve true freedom because a simple, non-dialectical negation of the bourgeoisie as class would fail to free the working class from “odious” bourgeois values which it would unwittingly reproduce. In other words, the revolution would have to come first and foremost from within before it could become, in the more pedestrian sense of the word, political.

Given that it is Gellu Naum who would further develop these accusations against Gherasim Luca (and also Trost, as co-author of *Dialectique de la dialectique*), in *Inventatorii banderolei* (The Inventors of Banners),⁶ the annex to his *Teribilul interzis* (The Terrible Interdiction), it is possible that note 2 in *Critica mizeriei* was penned by him. It is therefore not certain whether that note reflects the precise views held by Păun or Teodorescu. Be that as it may, the fact remains that the latter two had not signed *Dialectique de la dialectique* either, and that Păun, the only other acknowledged visual artist in the group, did not participate in Luca and Trost's

⁵ Editors' note: Cf., in this volume, Catherine Hansen's analysis of the Naum-Gherasim Luca rift approached from another perspective.

⁶ The Romanian 'banderola' has multiple connotations: the wrap on a newly-published book, the banner people carry at rallies, the sleeve wrap that displays one's function in an organization or one's political colors; all apply to some aspect of Naum's critique. The title is also a likely allusion to Gherasim Luca's *Inventatorul iubirii*, also published in 1945, which Naum targets several times. Păun's reservations toward the notion of “invention” are clearly not in reference to this text but only to aspects of *Dialectique* and *Présentation*, as I show below, in the section titled “The Meaning of a Neologism.”

exhibition. The nuances of each of the three players' respective reservations regarding the tenets, tone, or timing of *Dialectique* and *Présentation* can best be deduced from their individual pronouncements and acts.

Păun's reply was more implicit than explicit, and when explicit it came in a minor key. Besides a certain understanding he may have had, as he stated many years later,⁷ of the motivation of his two friends' twin publications – i.e., the urgency they felt given the nature of the historical moment (the end of the war, the change of regime) – his silence itself was a reply to their loud pronouncements. Although the notion of “infra-noir” would not come to the fore in the group's writings until the following year, his stance is consonant with, perhaps even announces, the quieter, more hermetic facet of the group's ethos, its “infra” dimension.

The “infra” in “infra-noir,” as it emerges through the group's publications of 1946 and 1947, stands for attitudes and modes of expression that are below the threshold of the obvious. Elusive, not easily graspable yet capable of seismic or rhizomatic impact, they are eminently capable of resisting superficial modes of appropriation or instrumentalization. We could say that, although the term may not quite stand in opposition to “supra,” the group having made ample use of the prefix *sur* (in the sense of ‘beyond,’ of surpassing), it does stand in opposition to the notion of “ultra” (in the sense of ‘extreme’ and obvious).⁸

In addition to signing *Critica mizeriei*, Păun provided a frontispiece to Naum's *Teribilul interzis* – perhaps because the “interdiction” of the work of imagination, the latter so dear to Breton,⁹ was one way of reading certain aspects of Trost and Luca's two 1945 manifestos, aspects that Păun, as we shall see, wished to nuance. More importantly, he also provided four illustrations to Teodorescu's *Butelia de Leyda* (The Leyden Jar), published in July of that year. The latter gesture can be read as an endorsement, in an eminently inimical universe, of a poetic stance akin to the explosive, electric potential compressed in a Leyden jar, which, when

⁷ Correspondence with the author, October 1985.

⁸ For a deeper understanding of the term “infra-noir” and the ethos it expresses, specifically what obscurity, a degree of hermetism, and even disappearance meant for the group, see Eburne. Eburne highlights not only the textual expression of this ethos but also its political dimension. The original English version of his text (published in French translation) reads: “The Bucharest surrealist group, I argue, adopted the study and practice of this obscurity as its guiding imperative; . . . their ranks remained closed, their practices clandestine, and their writings obscure – a strategy later adopted by the Situationist International movement in the 1950s and 60s” (34).

⁹ “La seule imagination me rend compte de ce qui *peut être*, et c'est assez pour lever un peu le terrible interdit” (“Manifeste du surréalisme” 15) ‘Imagination alone offers me some intimation of what *can be*, and this is enough to remove to some slight degree the terrible injunction’ (“Manifesto of Surrealism” 5).

transmitted, produces a shock. (Hadn't Breton stated that "beauty will be convulsive or it will not be"?)¹⁰ Writes Teodorescu:

Dar dacă ne dăruim brațele cascadelor
dacă putem suporta brațele
buteliilor de Leyda
instrumentelor chirurgicale
alfabetului morse

....

înșelați mereu de omul cu ochiul plesnit
într-o continuă abluțiune

....

plimbându-și pe sub arbori
exasperanta lui frumusețe
El te poate ucide oricând rupând o cheie
te poate schimba în nisip

....

pentru că niciodată nu știm
pericolul extrem care ne înconjoară (*Butelia de Leyda* n.p.)¹¹

But if we gift our arms to cascades
if we can support the arms
of the Leyden jars
of surgical instruments
of the Morse code

...

ceaselessly deceived by the one-eyed man
in a perpetual ablation

...

¹⁰ The concept of "convulsive beauty," which appears in the last sentence of Breton's *Nadja* (1928), is further developed in *L'Amour fou* (1937). Its meaning exceeds, however, the reference to intense psychological and physical connection within the couple; rather, it expands the understanding of the beautiful to include the jolt, the emotional shock. In Teodorescu's "Leyden Jar" poems, his form of convulsive beauty may suggest one way for poetry to have implicit political impact.

¹¹ *Butelia de Leyda* is a collection of poems. This passage is excerpted from the poem "Norii gîtului" (Neck's Clouds). *Butelia de Leyda* was reprinted in 1969 in Teodorescu's *Blănurile oceanelor*; the passage is on pp 85-86.

who walks under the trees
his exasperating beauty
He can kill you anytime by breaking a key
can turn you into sand
because we never know
the extreme peril that surrounds us¹²

The Meaning of a Neologism

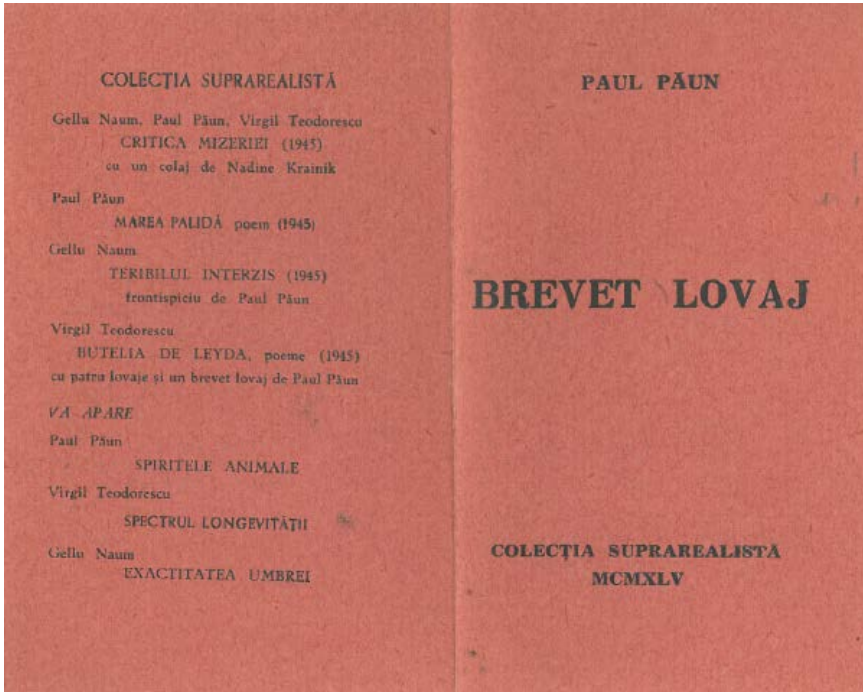


Figure 1: Paul Păun, *Brevet lovaj*, recto © Paul Păun/Paon & SDGL. Bibliothèque D. Moscovici, Paris.

“Cu patru lovaje de Paul Păun” ‘With four lovaje by Paul Păun,’ spells out the cover of Teodorescu’s *Butelia de Leyda*. But what exactly is a *lovaj* (plural *lovaje* in

¹² This and all other translations are mine, unless otherwise indicated. Unfortunately, the identity of the one-eyed man mentioned in this poem, who may or may not be the same as the one that figures on the cover of *Critica mizeriei* in a collage by Nadine Krainic, escapes me. Regardless, he does embody the “extreme peril that surrounds us,” i.e., the political context of mid-1940s Romania, when a pro-fascist regime was being replaced by an increasingly coercive communist regime, one in which avant-garde art was considered a crime and punished accordingly.

Romanian)? The answer is to be found in a simple insert to Teodorescu's book (fig. 1), printed on a single, reddish, slightly heavier sheet of paper which is meant to be folded in two, so as to display on the front right half, like on the cover of a book, the name of the author at the top, the title of the work in the center, and the series and year at the bottom: PAUL PĂUN, BREVET LOVAJ, COLECȚIA SUPRAREALISTĂ, MCMXLV. (The left side lists forthcoming works, as do all other publications by members of the group.) The verso is printed in two columns, mimicking the facing pages of a book, dated and signed at the bottom of the right page *Iunie 1945* (June 1945) and PAUL PĂUN. The meaning of the elliptic title (normally, the Romanian would require the connective preposition 'de' as in 'brevet de lovaj')¹³ is 'Lovaj patent,' but the term *lovaj* itself is a neologism created by Păun for the occasion, that is, for this single statement he ever made, verbally, to address the issues that agitated the group at the time. A few months earlier, however, he had made a more substantial statement of another nature, although hard to reconstruct today: his one-man exhibition at the same location as that of Trost and Luca, which it immediately followed. Whereas their earlier exhibition was accompanied by the catalogue text *Présentation de graphies colorées, cubomanies et objets*, Păun's exhibition (discussed below) was, by contrast, devoid of any verbal pronouncement, being accompanied only by an invitation flier (see fig. 3).

Oddly, the five-paragraph, 258-word text of the *Brevet lovaj* places in parentheses the definition of the "mic procedeu, tehniceste vorbind" 'small device, technically speaking' featured in its title, as if to stress its unimportance. It reads: "pune trei poze pe o hârtie albă și stabilește între ele prima relație formală care se impune" 'place three images on white paper and establish between them the first formal relation that imposes itself.' "Imposes itself," meaning, whatever relation unconsciously – that is, automatically – emerges from the pen's nib. In examining the *lovaje* that illustrate Teodorescu's book (the first of which does incorporate and evolves from and around the form of a Leyden jar), one sees that they are a mixed-media genre that shares part of its technique with collage, but distinguishes itself from the latter by the fact that the "images" borrowed from external sources constitute only a fraction of each work's surface. The rest of the surface is partly left blank and partly filled with black ink hatching, a drawing technique that Păun consistently used before and after this point, although the overall effect here is substantially different from the rest of his oeuvre.

This text, and in particular its modesty, can only take its full meaning from a closer look at that to which it responds. Gherasim Luca and Trost's *Présentation*, the manifesto-like brochure that was also the catalogue of their January exhibition, develops in great detail the impressive list of techniques the two authors invented for the creation of new forms of art. Their approach is not simply that of ekphrasis; rather, it is the process and theory involved that are foregrounded, more so than

¹³ In an earlier piece ("The Surrealist Group of Bucharest"), I erroneously used the term "Brevet de lovaj."

the actual works produced. A one-page declaration opens their text, which by means of anaphoras and a stream of asyndeta conveys a sense of energy, protean creativity, and provocation:

Nous sommes d'accord avec le rêve, la folie, l'amour et la révolution.
Nous rejetons sous tous leurs aspects l'art, la nature, . . . la peinture, la séparation entre le rêve et la vie, . . . la mémoire, les restes diurnes dans le fonctionnement onirique, . . .
Nous sommes d'accord avec les inventions délirantes, . . . , le fonctionnement réel de la pensée, . . . , le concret, l'absurde, la négation de la négation, le désir, . . . , la dialectique de la dialectique, la quatrième dimension, . . . , le hasard objectif, . . . (271)

We agree with dream, madness, love and revolution.
We reject in all their aspects art, nature, . . . , painting, the separation between dream and life, . . . , memory, diurnal remnants in oniric functions, . . .
We agree with delirious inventions, . . . , the real functioning of thought, . . . , the concrete, the absurd, the negation of negation, desire, . . . , the dialectics of the dialectic, the fourth dimension, . . . , objective chance, . . .

Next, under the heading of "Graphies colorées," Trost defines a "surautomatisme des lignes et des surfaces" (272) 'surautomatism of lines and surfaces' that goes above and beyond the automatic writing procedure described by Breton in the first "Manifesto of Surrealism," precisely because it explicitly considers artistic the very process of production, rather than the resulting images ("en considérant artistique l'opération nécessaire à leur production même" (272) 'considering artistic the very operation involved in their production'). For example, the method of "hypnagogic movements" entails painting with closed eyes on an already colored piece of cardboard in an effort to elude any unwitting reproduction of pre-existing images (273-74). In the same vein, the "mancies indéchiffrables" and the "vaporisations" attempt to bring about the convergence of the automatism of the hand or breath, respectively, with external chance (274-76). In turn, Gherasim Luca focuses here on the making of two of his inventions: cubomanias, a type of collage composed of square fragments (which today is perhaps the best-known facet of his art (277-82)), and objects of two types, the "objets objectivement offerts" 'objectively offered objects' that have the capacity of "établi[er] entre les hommes des relations fondées sur un inconscient collectif actif" 'establish[ing] among men relations based on an active collective unconscious' and the "objets construits à distance à l'aide d'un médium" (283) 'objects built from afar with the help of a medium,' both of which are, therefore, predicated on extrasensory perception. Two other publications – Luca's book of cubomanias, *Les*

Orgies des quanta, and Trost's more theoretical *Le Profil navigable*, complete this ensemble of publications devoted to visual art.

From the above we can gather that the common thrust of Luca and Trost's attack on painting, representation, and more broadly on art in its common acceptance, was directed against composition, mimetic representation, including the representation of dreams as in much surrealist art of the interwar period, the "eye" and the "hand" of the artist, or anything approaching skill, inspiration, or imagination involved in the process. And the profusion of ever-renewed techniques had a well-defined goal: it was meant to guard against the danger of turning surrealist art into a mere, frozen style. If in 1924 Breton could write, "Je ne crois pas au prochain établissement d'un poncif surréaliste" ("Manifeste du surréalisme" 53) 'I do not believe in the establishment of a conventional surrealist pattern any time in the near future' ("Manifesto of Surrealism" 40), by 1945 this danger of clichés had increased. At the same time, Luca and Trost remained conceptually close to French surrealism in view of the importance accorded to automatic and aleatory processes,¹⁴ which they took to new heights with "scientific" rigor (*Dialectique* 26), that is, through a self-imposed set of strict rules within which experimental processes were to take place objectively, all subjectivity in check: "La peinture surréaliste, acceptant en général, jusqu'aujourd'hui, les moyens reproductifs picturaux, trouve la voie de son épanouissement dans l'emploi absurde des procédés applastiques, objectifs et entièrement non-artistiques" (*Dialectique* 26-27) 'In generally accepting until now pictorial reproductive means, surrealist painting will find that the way to its blossoming lies in the absurd use of aplastic, objective and entirely non-artistic procedures' ("Dialectique" 40).

Păun's response in his brief *Brevet lovaj*¹⁵ is two-pronged: it offers a contribution to Luca and Trost's typology, thus answering their call for innovation, but it does so in a muted tone; and it gently but squarely criticizes what must have seemed to him as too sharply prescriptive in their claims. Having pointed out from the start of this small text the discrepancy between "[c]aracterul activității inventive" 'the character of inventive activity' which is a "salt permanent" 'perpetual leap,' and the inventor's tendency to focus on his own "intervenți[e]... manifest[ă]" 'manifest intervention' in this ongoing process of

¹⁴ Breton, in the first "Manifesto of Surrealism," writes: "Les moyens surréalistes demanderaient, d'ailleurs, à être étendus. Tout est bon pour obtenir de certaines associations la soudaineté désirable" (53) 'Surrealist methods would, moreover, demand to be heard. Everything is valid when it comes to obtaining the desired suddenness from certain associations' (41).

¹⁵ See, in the "Documents" section of the present volume, the transcription of the Romanian original of the *Brevet lovaj*, followed by its English translation under the title *Lovaj Patent*. Cf. facsimile and a French translation in "*Infra-noir*," *un et multiple* 285.

renewal, Păun concludes, paraphrasing Lautréamont, by stating that “invention” should be pursued “de toți nu de unul” ‘by all, not by one.’¹⁶ This implies a denial of authorial authority and consequently also of “patenting”; indeed, he states in an earlier paragraph (but in the conditional mode) that the *lovaj* “nu ar merita . . . nici gloria, nici gluma patentei” ‘would not deserve . . . either the glory or the joke of a patent,’ if it did not afford a particular “satisfaction.” Namely, the satisfaction of operating a salutary intervention within the surrounding “abrutizare artistică generală” ‘pervasive artistic obtuseness’ by contributing a “component” of thought and expression to André Breton’s philosophical definition of surrealism, “le fonctionnement réel de la pensée” ‘the real functioning of thought,’ which automatism reveals. (Even though Breton is not quoted verbatim in the text, the allusion in the phrasing “încă o componentă a mecanismului real al gândirii umane” ‘one more component of the real mechanism of human thought’ is abundantly clear.)

Of course, Păun never patented anything, the patent being a concept that belongs to the world of business and profit, not of art and the gratuitous, and is used obliquely here. The claim that he did patent modes of visual expression, which appears on some Web sites today, is false, although it acquires a certain savor when played against Păun’s text, infused with humor throughout. “Patent,” here, is a gently ironic take on Luca and Trost’s claim to multiple “inventions,” and by extension on any claim of single authorship and ownership of an artistic technique or idea, particularly those based on chance, as is the case with those imagined by each of them. Such a stance potentially opens up the discussion to questions of origin and originality in art, inspiration, and talent, versus the circulation and permeability of ideas, affinities, and collective authorship. Ultimately, however, as we shall see, Păun cannot be firmly pegged on one or the other side of this divide.

The last paragraph of Păun’s text contains a series of subtle, no doubt conscious slippages between and among terms, leading to an expansion of meaning in several directions: between *lovaj* and invention, through which the former gains the status of invention, alongside poetry and love; and from the invention of artistic techniques, which was ostensibly the topic of the text up to this point, to the invention of an “inhabitable world.” Such a world, just like “poetry or love,”

¹⁶ It can be assumed that Păun’s interest in Lautréamont went deeper than this allusion to one of Lautréamont’s well-worn formulas might indicate, if we consider Păun’s translation into Romanian of the long and strange poem dedicated to the ocean in *Les Chants de Maldoror*, as early as 1938. This translation, together with other Lautréamont translations by Virgil Teodorescu, accompanied an article by Gherasim Luca on this poet (so important to the surrealists), in the newspaper *Reporter* 6.3 on 16 January of that year, p. 4. My thanks to Iulian Toma for sharing this information and these texts. They carry more than a topical interest, since they may point to the formation of a nucleus or embryo of the group, or at least to elective affinities that existed at a much earlier date than previously thought, beyond Luca’s and Păun’s participation in the *Alge* group in the early 1930s.

which it subsumes, would support and excite “our desires” – a statement that fully resonates with the positions of Trost and Luca. This convergence notwithstanding, the unnamed inventors’ “minor megalomania” is seen as the flip side, indeed the “tragic face” of their positions. That this critique is aimed at his trusted but for a moment inimical friends is inscribed in the designation of “the few beings” capable, ““on this meridian,”” of “reinvent[ing]” the world through the transfiguring power of desire. The geographical indication set in quotation marks in Păun’s text points, no doubt, to the motto of *Dialectique*, which, in “address[ing]” itself to “our surrealist friends, dispersed throughout the world,” locates its authors, and by extension the group as a whole, “as with major great shipwrecks,” by giving their precise coordinates on the globe: “45°5’ latitude north and 26° longitude east” (“Dialectics” 32). And so, to complete the answer to our initial question, the *lovaj*, although de facto an invention, will not be claimed as such by Păun, because of a “purely reactive . . . modesty” (in Romanian ‘pudoare,’ in French ‘pudeur’) on his part.

Where does this neologism come from? It reads suspiciously as a pun. Could it be the ludic transcription of the English *lovage*, in Romanian *leuștean*, a flavorful cooking herb much used in local popular cuisine? Or a take on the French *lavage* (a wash), as in the colloquial “passer un savon,” to reprimand? But it also happens to include the root of the word “love”; in fact, at one point in the text Păun calls the *lovaj* a “formă a dragostei” ‘form of love.’ One way of interpreting the term is that Păun wished to envelop in a caring mode the disagreement his “patent” (which we’ve determined was in fact a non-patent) expressed. This reading is consistent with statements he made, when reminiscing later in life, to the effect that he greatly valued the collective activity and bonding within the group¹⁷; it is therefore not surprising that he used here a conciliatory tone. This stance foreshadows the attitude he took in the conflict that would eventually erupt, in the early 1950s, between Trost and Luca, as well as his life-long friendship with the latter and his faithfulness to both.¹⁸ Yet another, less ironic and less affective interpretation is also possible, suggested by art historian Raphael Neuville: *lovaj* as meaning “se lover dans l’image” ‘curling up in the image,’ a *mot-valise* (portmanteau word).¹⁹ The description that follows, of an actual *lovaj*, will lend particular credence to this interpretative layer.

¹⁷ See his 1977 interview with poet and scholar Stefan Baciu, “Salida super-anárquica hacia la poesía total,” reprinted in 1983 in *Mele* (22-23). This number of *Mele* was dedicated to Trost by Baciu and Paon. Among the illustrations that figure in its pages are a 1977 Paul Păun self-portrait (in ink) and a portrait of Trost by Paon (in pencil, after an enlarged, anonymous photograph of 1950).

¹⁸ On this topic, see my “Introduction: Un et multiple au fil du temps” (11–15, 20–21) and “Paul Paon ou le ‘hurle-silence’” (179n29, 198), both in “*Infra-noir*,” *un et multiple*.

¹⁹ Correspondence with the author, January 2015.

Visual Expression

Moving now beyond text and history, let us return to the actual *lovaj* as artwork, and to the exhibition that followed.

As can be seen in fig. 2, the *lovaj* organically blends illustrations meticulously cut out from old publications (here more than the three stated in the *Brevet*) with the artist's pen and ink drawing, to the point where the former blend almost entirely with the latter. In this piece, the discernable collaged elements are: at the

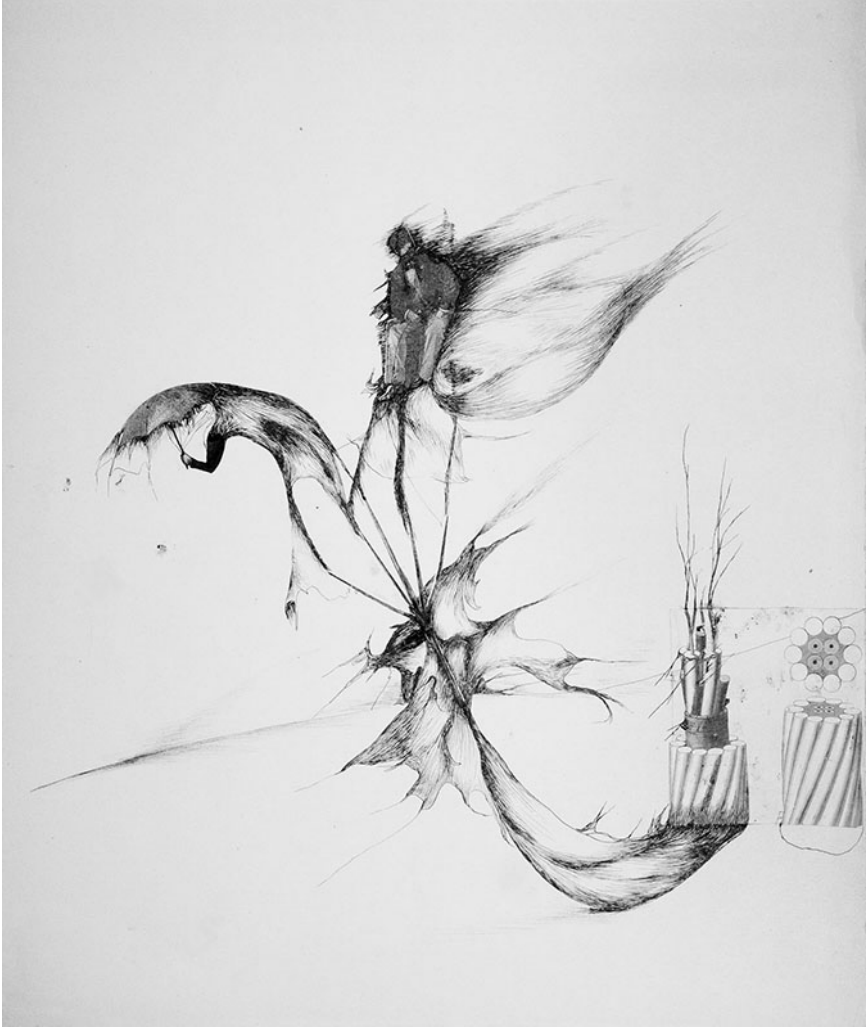


Figure 2: [Paul Păun], n.d., *lovaj*, ink and collage (45 x 34.5 cm), © Paul Păun/Paon & ADAGP.

top, a tiny seated man; at top left, an equally tiny arm holding the very slim handle of an umbrella; in the center, a thin axis from which branch out several slight spokes; and at the bottom right, two more substantial and more isolated elements, seemingly technical renderings of Leyden jar components. The imported elements and the work of the artist's hand are integrated to such a degree that it is difficult to discern if the open umbrella is drawn in ink or is a cut out added on and modified by hand (upon closer examination, the latter is the case); which of the spokes are collaged elements and which are drawn (slight displacements caused by the passage of time give away the answer in close up); whether the man's face has been tinkered with in ink, becoming masked or muffled (it has; in fact the entire head may have been drawn by hand). More importantly, it is unclear where chance occurrence starts and where inspiration or composition takes over, if at all. Although it appears that it is the initial disposition of the imported images on the page that triggers – in a way analogous to verbal free association – the shape and direction of the pen's hatchings, what triggers the initial gesture (the placing of these images on paper) remains unknown. The final work does not tell any story, even though it contains figurative elements, yet the observer is free to project a narrative into the work – granted, not a realistic or coherent one, but one that puts his or her imagination to work, and will differ from one viewer to the next, or will change in time.

Perhaps, we could “see” here that the components of one of the Leyden jars have sprouted a strange mesh vaguely recalling a plant, whose “pistil” has developed two excrescences: one, a floating two-pronged web in which is nested the seated man, and the other, the curved back of a creature somewhere between bat and human, holding an umbrella. Shall we further speculate that a development seems to occur from the inanimate via the vegetal to the animate, while the pronounced discrepancy of scale renders the inanimate ominous? And might the seated man with the frightful features and a commanding posture hold a whip in his right hand? Or is it only an innocent ink filament? In the meantime, the second set of collaged Leyden jar elements – a tri-dimensional, standing core topped by a floating circular section, which can also be read either anthropomorphically or just as a letter ‘i’ – seems in turn to have taken root in the ground, if we follow the light pen stroke just beneath it. Yet, looking at the work as a whole again after a pause, other projections may suggest themselves as well: erotic interpretations, for example. And other viewers, of course, might read the work quite differently.

One would presume that *lovaje* were displayed at Păun's 1945 one-man show – held, as already mentioned, at the same address as that of Luca and Trost (19 Brezoianu Street, “Prometeu Hall”) three weeks later, from 20 February to 11 March. There is, however, no indication to this effect, and, given that the *Brevet lovaj* dates from June of that year while the exhibition predated it by several months, it is equally possible that *lovaje* might have been displayed only at the

group exhibition the following year (29 September – 18 October).²⁰ This second hypothesis is corroborated by reviews of these exhibitions in the press of the time, since only in connection with the group exhibition are works mentioned whose description fits that of *lovaje*: “Păun este un desenator în negru. Trăsătura sa obicinuită ia forma unor filamente ce se învârtesc în fel de fel de curbe dând naștere la figuri stranii, unele fără semnificație, decât una ritmică, altele având ascunse în răsucelele lor, fragmente de ilustrații în negru, din vechi reviste” (Oprescu) (my emphasis) ‘Păun draws only in black. His pen strokes form filaments that swirl into curbs, creating strange figures, some whose only signification is rhythmic, others holding hidden in their webs fragments of black illustrations, from old journals.’

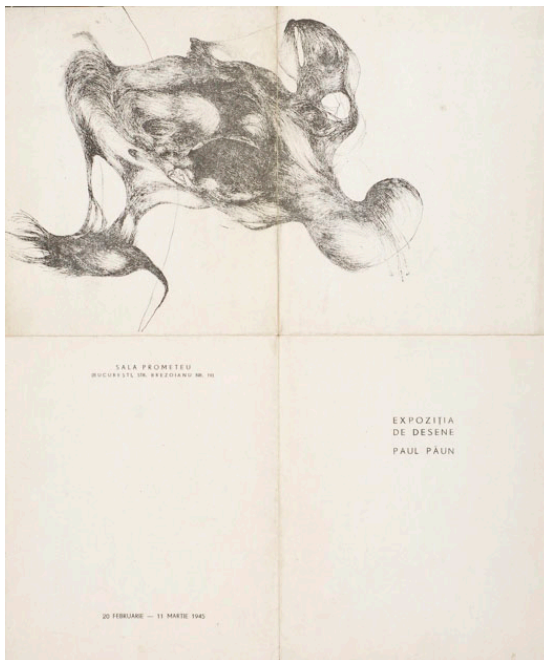


Figure 3: Paul Păun, 1945, exhibition flier, recto © Paul Păun/Paon & ADAGP.

That said, both Păun’s 1945 exhibition flier (fig. 3) and the background on which was printed the text of the catalogue accompanying the 1946 collective exhibition (fig. 4), made of reproductions of drawings by Păun (fig. 4a) – perhaps as a sign of reconciliation – feature only works resulting strictly from the artist’s “hand,” whether figurative or not, without recourse to any imported elements.

²⁰ At Căminul Artei, Galeriile Crețulescu, Calea Victoriei 45 (The Art Foyer, Crețulescu Gallery, 45 Victory Avenue). See exhibition flier, facsim. rpt. in Yaari, ed. “*Infra-Noir*”, un et multiple 301.

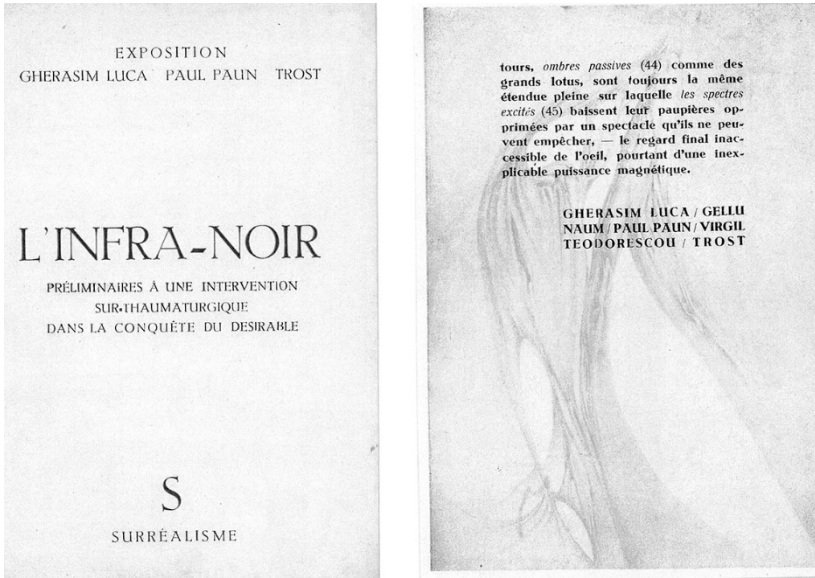


Figure 4: Gherasim Luca, Gellu Naum, Paul Păun, Virgil Teodorescou, and Trost. *L'Infra-noir: Préliminaires à une intervention sur-thaumaturgique dans la conquête du désirable*. [Collection] S Surréalisme. Bucharest, 1946. Cover and last page of text © Paul Păun/Paon & ADAGP.



Figure 4a: [Paul Păun, titled on back *La Conspiration du silence*, 1940s] n.s., n.d., pencil (17 x 24.5 cm) © Paul Păun/Paon & ADAGP.

The affinity that these types of drawings present with the *lovaj* in terms of method is that their point of departure is similar to that of the *lovaj*: no longer an illustration from some odd source, but rather the first stroke of the pen or even contact of the nib's tip with the surface of the paper, is what sets the process in motion. In fact, the same holds true for Păun's more complex abstract drawings, in ink as well as in pencil, that span the years 1946 to 1994 (fig. 5). In turn, the



Figure 5: Paul Păun 1946, pen and ink (19.1 x 17 cm) © Paul Păun/Paon & ADAGP.

kinship of his abstract drawings with his figurative or semi-figurative but never mimetic ones of the 1940s (fig. 6 and 6a) is the part played by aleatory processes resulting in webs of finely drawn threads. When a discernable motif is involved, the webs interconnect, form, and deform the figures and objects caught in the weft. Late in life, when returning more insistently to pencil drawing, a medium used sparingly early on, the artist took the notion of “infra” to the point of evanescence.²¹

²¹ We should note, however, that his work has never involved any medium or device other than ink or pencil on paper and the partial collage used in *lovaj*: he used neither *fumage* nor tools such as combs, as commentators have sometimes assumed. Confusion may have stemmed, on the one hand, from the fact that *fumage* was used on oil lamps for the décor of the group's 1946 collective exhibition, and on the other, from the unusual precision of the artist's pen stroke, which was aided only, at least later in life, by the use of a magnifying glass (see fig. 7).



Figure 6: P[aul] P[ăun] [19]43, pen and ink (26.5 x 36 cm). © Paul Păun/Paon & ADAGP.



Figure 6a: Paul Păun 1944, *Protège-moi*, pen and ink (22.5 x 31 cm) © Paul Păun/Paon & ADAGP.



Figure 7: Paul Paon drawing with magnifying glass, Haifa, anonymous photograph, 1970s. © Paul Păun/Paon & ADAGP.

A glimpse of this creative process is afforded by a notebook the artist kept four decades later and in which finally, but quite privately, he explains himself (perhaps *to himself*), retroactively²² – in fragmentary fashion, in the language he had adopted since the 1940s and in which he inscribed or titled some of his drawings. Here is a brief sample of these notebook entries:

1 point; concrètement: extrême concentration d'énergie avant
l'explosion prévisible-courbe. Géométrie courbe non euclidienne – sur-
lyrique. (4.ix.94)²³
Fond fondu dans la forme informelle. (3.vi.86)
Le [tableau] aurait pu être un autre, par le hasard d'une déviation
capricieuse,
... (20.xi.87)²⁴

²² One of the reasons why it was only late in life that he took the time to put these ideas on paper is that he was not only a poet and artist, but also a practicing physician and surgeon.

²³ Indeed, there are no straight lines in his work, other than, in the early figurative drawings, the few barely visible lines that allude to a tri-dimensional space in which are set or are floating figures and objects devoid of any realistic qualities.

²⁴ Manuscript notebook, quoted from the artist's archive, © Paul Păun/Paon & SDGL. I have referred elsewhere to this notebook as *Carnet* ("Paul Paon ou le hurle-silence" 192–98) but its cover bears no title.

1 point; concretely: extreme concentration of energy before the foreseeable-curved explosion. Curving, non-Euclidean geometry – surreal.

Background blended into the informal form.

The [picture] could have been different, through a chance, capricious swerving.

The fragment is another aspect of Păun's practice. Instead of assembling disparate elements into one (as in collage or *cubomanie*), he sometimes cut up larger pictures of his own making into smaller parts, treating these as independent works. Perhaps this is the origin of the small pencil pieces that form the background to the 1946 group exhibition catalogue (see fig. 4 and 4a),²⁵ as well as of the four postcard size drawings, dedicated to Victor Brauner (fig. 8): by arranging them in a larger square, the heart of a now destroyed larger drawing emerges.

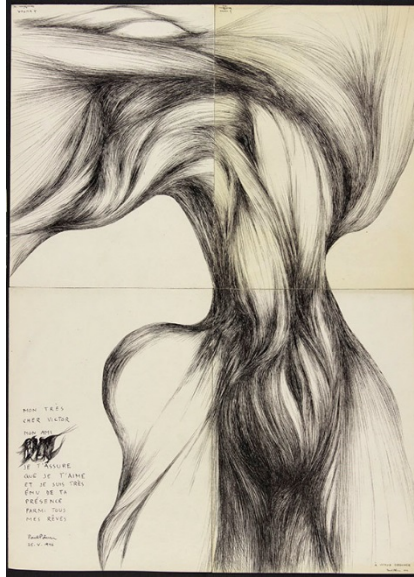


Figure 8: Paul Păun, “À Victor,” pen and ink, 1946 (four postcard size drawings).

© Paul Păun/Paon & ADAGP. Centre Pompidou, Mnam/Cci, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Fonds Victor Brauner, inv. 8818-1175/1.

²⁵ My thanks to D. Moscovici for this suggestion. These are probably also among the last known works that present clearly a sensual or erotic dimension, typically associated with surrealism (a dimension confirmed by the titles that figure on their back, but *not* in the collective exhibition catalogue, which follows the logic of the *cadaavre exquis*). I thank Gabriel Yaari for this observation. Cf. my “Paul Paon ou le hurle-silence” 183–84.

These remarks lead us, in conclusion, to a few synthesizing comments, which, however, will remain for now in need of further development. Contrary to Trost and Luca's insistence on a visual production that is "aplastique" (*Dialectique* 27), Păun does not renounce plasticity. On the other hand, in fundamental agreement with Luca and Trost's line of thought, his drawings not only challenge representation but they are also by and large automatic. Yet there is no sign that he endeavored to willfully block out the direction into which the "eye," or rather, an instinctive sense of composition, may have taken him – contrary to Trost, for example, who notes how hard he had to resist making chromatic choices. But the sense of composition and color is rebellious, and Luca's precisely structured *cupomanies* could hardly have been assembled entirely at random, just as one may wonder if Trost's palette was exclusively a product of chance.

Furthermore, while both figuration and abstraction had coexisted in Păun's work since the mid-1940s, with the former being dominant in the early part of the decade, he turned exclusively to abstraction since at least the early sixties. Perhaps more than with respect to his figurative drawings, the following reflection found in his *Notebook* is pertinent to his abstract work, clarifying that abstraction in his work was neither "retinal" nor intellectual: "L'oeil n'est plus le seul organe de la peinture. Il y a aussi la main (ou pied, ou bouche) et surtout les sens cryptesthésiques des postures (kinesthésie)" (20.viii.85). 'The eye is no longer the sole organ of painting. There is also the hand (or foot, or mouth) and especially the cryptaesthesia of postures (kinesthaesia).'

André Breton's reluctance to accept abstraction globally as a surrealist mode of expression is well known. But he did accept, *as* surrealist, those processes of abstraction that are based on automatism, even when complemented by subsequent interventions of the hand and eye of the artist – witness his writings on Arp, Ernst, Masson, Matta, Man Ray, Mirò, Tanguy, and Paalen:²⁶

Je soutiens que l'automatisme graphique, aussi bien que verbal, . . . est le seul mode d'expression qui satisfasse pleinement l'oeil ou l'oreille en réalisant l'unité rythmique (aussi appréciable dans le dessin, le texte automatique que dans la mélodie ou dans le nid), la seule structure qui réponde à la non-distinction, de mieux en mieux établie, des qualités sensibles et des qualités formelles, à la non-distinction, de mieux en mieux établie, des fonctions sensitives et des fonctions intellectuelles (et c'est par là qu'il est seul à satisfaire également l'esprit). Que l'automatisme puisse entrer en composition, en peinture comme en poésie, avec certaines intentions préméditées: soit, mais on risque fort de

²⁶ See *Le Surréalisme et la peinture*, which gathers in one volume Breton's writings on art from 1928 to 1965, in turn masterfully analyzed by José Pierre in *André Breton et la peinture*. See also Christopher Greene's *Art in France* 34 and 266–70.

sortir du surréalisme si l'automatisme cesse de cheminer au moins *sous roche*. (*Le Surréalisme et la peinture* 69-70)

I maintain that graphic and verbal automatism is the only mode of expression which gives full satisfaction to both eye and ear by achieving *rhythmic unity* (just as recognizable in an automatic drawing or text as in a melody or a bird's nest), the only structure that corresponds to the by now widely acknowledged non-differentiation between sympathetic and formal qualities, to the by now widely acknowledged non-differentiation between sensory and intellectual functions (which is the reason why automatism is uniquely able to satisfy the demands of the mind). I will concede that it is possible for automatism to enter into the composition of a painting or a poem with a certain degree of premeditation. But the converse holds true that any form of expression in which automatism does not at least advance *under cover* runs a great risk of moving out of the surrealist orbit. (*Surrealism and Painting* 68-70)

Whether the fusion of automatism and abstraction in Paon's work would have qualified in Breton's eyes as surrealist is unclear, but it is certainly as such that Paon understood it.

Finally, complementing the concept of automatism in Breton's thinking on the arts is the concept of "interior model," according to which, what is represented in a surrealist painting is not an exterior reality (as was the case with the "exterior model" of traditional representation) but an inner reality, subconscious or oneiric. Without rejecting or entirely departing from it, Paon seized upon this concept to take it one step further, stating what he saw as his own difference, or contribution, namely, the importance placed on what he called the "ulterior model," which is the product of the viewer: "*Transformation d'un modèle intérieur en un modèle ultérieur*" (6.iv.85) (his emphasis) 'Transformation of an interior model into an ulterior model.' I mean 'product' not in the sense associated with Duchamp (indicating the role of the critic, curator, and museum goer in determining what is art), but rather in the sense of projections made by viewers into a nonrepresentational image (akin to a Rorschach test). So that for Paon, his abstract "illiterate calligraphy," or "infra-noir" drawings²⁷ (see fig. 5), can change meaning from viewer to viewer, in time from moment to moment, and in space with each viewpoint.

²⁷ These are terms Paon has used to describe his abstract drawings. The first, noted in a conversation with the artist in Summer 1985, refers to the drawings' kinship to automatic writing; the second, which is also found in the title of his 1985 Paris exhibition, refers to his total rejection of color and his embrace of the *infra-noir* ethos, as explained above.

Maybe this is why for Ghérasim Luca, long after the rift discussed here was over, these drawings represented one of “the most eloquent” echoes “of universal transparency.”²⁸

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²⁸ “Mis à part les dessins de M [Micheline] et ceux de quelques rares déclencheurs d’énergie visionnaire que j’ai rencontrés, je tiens (tiens!) les tiens pour le résonateur le plus éloquent de la transparence universelle.” Manuscript note (n.d., n.p., but likely dating from the 1980s, when Paon started to travel to Paris and exhibit there); quoted by permission, private archive Ghérasim Luca, communicated by Micheline Catti.

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