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Between Zurich and Romania:

A Dada Exchange

Amelia Miholca

Arizona State University

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Jewish-Romanian Identity

Why has the Jewish-Romanian identity of the Dadaists Tristan Tzara, Marcel Janco, and Arthur Segal been overlooked or critically unexamined in art historical discourse? Until recently, this significant and complicated identity warranted a brief mention in biographical and Dada studies, such as in those of Robert Motherwell (1951), George Hugnet (1971) Harry Seiwert (1996) and François Buot (2002), which gave prominence to the three Dadaists' ties to Switzerland, France, Germany. Romania, their country of birth, was mentioned briefly to indicate the international character of the Dada movement in Zurich, for besides the Romanians, the Dada group comprised of artists from Germany, Russia, Sweden, and France, among them, the main contributors Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Richard Huelsenbeck, Hans Richter, Hans Arp, and Sophie Taeuber-Arp. Their country of origin was also used in the description of Zurich and its international, intellectual scene during the war. Their Jewish upbringing and religious and cultural affiliation are even less acknowledged.

Tom Sandqvist's book *Dada East* from 2006 is the most comprehensive study of the Jewish-Romanian aspect of Dada. Sandqvist traces the Jewish and Romanian sources that he claims influenced Dada performances. My analysis builds on Sandqvist's

claims, but rather than presenting a coherent line of influence between the artistic practices of Tzara, Janco, and Segal, and their shared Romania and Jewish background, as Sandqvist attempts

to do, I would like to position the three elements of their Jewish-Romanian identity—Romanian folk culture, Hasidic ritual, and the Jewish Purim festival—within an ambivalent relationship that communicates Dada's paradoxical approach to primitivism, spirituality, and nationality. The three elements, moreover, exemplify the Dadaists' engagement in a cultural exchange between Zurich and Romania. The Dadaists transferred, across physical and political borders, the oral and visual traditions of Romanian and Jewish cultures to their Dada stage where they blended these traditions with the avant-gardist tactics of disrupting and subverting the status quo in Zurich. The city was a site of not only cultural exchange but of marked difference as the Dadaists, through their art and poetry, conjured their displacement from their country of origin and their alienation from their own multifaceted identities as Romanian Jews.

In his article "Dada and Mysticism: Influences and Affinities," Richard Sheppard (1978, p. 93) explains why the Dadaists were ambiguous about religion. He argues, "Dada sought to formulate its insights obliquely and in unfamiliar idioms precisely so that it might be harder for them to be assimilated and hence deprived of their subversive force." Applying Sheppard's understanding of Dada's affiliation with religion to Tzara's, Janco's, and Segal's intricate relationship with their Jewish-Romanian identity, we can understand their relationship as not one of assimilation wherein this dual identity is fused and assimilated in their Dada practice, but a relationship of distance and tension that retains its power to subvert nationality and the Christian, industrial, and bourgeois culture of Western Europe. In the words of Marcel Janco (1971, p. 36), the Dadaists "lost confidence" in Western culture—"everything had to be demolished." In their performances and visual works, Tzara, Janco, and Segal evoked the spiritual and mysterious Other while using folk and Jewish elements not in a personal manner, but from a distance. For them, the Other was simultaneously familiar and foreign.

Tzara's inner conflict with his identity, as a Romanian expatriate and a Jewish intellectual in Zurich and then Paris, is evident in his 1931 poem "The Approximate Man" (*L'homme approximatif*) in which he

expresses a sense of alienation and a search for his identity, in lines such as: “I speak of the one who speaks who speaks I am alone/I am only a little sound I have several sounds in me” (2005, p. 27). Perhaps in the latter line he is referencing his Dada performances of simultaneous poetry and manifestos from his Zurich days. Who is Tristan Tzara? He is an “approximate man...complete in the only element of choice your name” (p. 29). Although Tzara assigns this designation of “approximate man” to people in general, who are “like me like you reader and like the others ”(p. 29), who grapple with the mystery of the self and of life and death, it is undeniable that he is describing his own labyrinthine search to understand himself and to take control of his identity, like in his decision to change his name from Samuel Rosenstock to Tristan Tzara. But Tzara is not interested in one fixed identity. According to the poem, one true self does not exist: “facing others you are another than yourself/at each turn of the road you change into another” (p. 34). What one presents to others is not the same as what one is in private; similarly, Samuel Rosenstock, before Dada, is not the same as Tristan Tzara of Dada, and Tristan Tzara of post-Dada is not the same as the first two. Anxiety and melancholy plagues the approximate man, for he lives alongside “many parallel paths/those we could have taken/ and not have come into the world/or have already left it long ago so long ago” (p. 27), with death always around the corner. In the poem, Tzara does not refer explicitly his Jewish identity but remains under the surface, joining his other selves to form an approximate man in his endless journey. The poem’s evocation of pilgrimage and exile can be traced to the Jewish predicament of exile and wandering, as in the Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe to the United States and Western Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth-century.

The Dadaists of Zurich

Tristan Tzara was born in 1896, in Moinesti, Romania. His extensive promotion of Dada Zurich led to its heightened reputation in Europe and the United States. Marcel Janco, originally named Marcel Iancu, was born in 1895 in Bucharest, Romania. Janco worked closely with Tzara to develop Dada’s visual style. Arthur Segal, named Aron Sigalu, was the oldest of the three. Segal was born in 1875 in Iași, Romania. He exhibited his prints and paintings at Cabaret Voltaire and

Galerie Dada, though his role in Dada was less significant than those of Janco and Tzara.

The Dadaists of Zurich are most famously known for Cabaret Voltaire, located at the Meierei restaurant where the group staged performances and art exhibitions. Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings initiated Cabaret Voltaire on February 5, 1916. The first week of Cabaret Voltaire had a full schedule of absurd performances. Tzara picked random poems from his coat pockets and gave them to the audience. Four men walked on stilts in grotesque masks created by Marcel Janco, while they made bewildering hissing sounds (Sandqvist, 2006, pp. 31–32). It is believed that Marcel's two brothers Georges and Jules also participated. From the very beginning of Cabaret Voltaire, there was tension between the performers and the audience. This was one of the goals of the Dadaists—to set the onlookers on edge with unexpected, insurgent acts that veered on the irrational.

In his 1916 “Monsieur Antipyrine’s Manifesto,” Tzara (2011, p. 1) proclaims: Dada is “for and against unity and definitely against the future” and “we spit on humanity.” Tzara’s manifesto testifies to Dada’s inclination towards paradox, humor, and disruption. The act of spitting on humanity conveys the desire to dismantle Western humanistic thought that dates back to the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The Dadaists’ unified revolt against the dominant social values, among them morality and beauty, echoes Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s 1909 “Manifesto of Futurism.” However, Tzara and the Dadaists did not share Marinetti’s confidence in the triumph of war and the progressive future. According to Tzara’s “Dada Manifesto of 1918” (2011, p. 13), Dada aims “to respect all individualities in their folly of the moment.”

Moreover, the Dadaists were enthralled with the past, in the form of Egyptian and Byzantine art, and “primitive” African art. Tzara and Richard Huelsenbeck were particularly inspired by African poetry. They adapted the poetry into “Negro songs” for their Cabaret Voltaire performances. The art of the past goes hand in hand with Romanian folk culture and Jewish traditions. Although the two traditions are based on different religions, they both evoke a type of mysticism distinct from modern life, with rituals that connect the present with ancient spiritual forces. In a 1984 French interview with Francis Naumann (2005, p. 172), Janco states that the main purpose of Dada Zurich was “to destroy the past and invent a new artistic language,”

and in doing so, “maybe liberation among men could exist.” I would argue that Dada did not necessarily destroy the past; rather, the movement reinvigorated cultures, which Dadaists altered in their artistic experiments, with enduring traditions that did not prescribe to Western beliefs and values.

The Dadaists blamed Western nationalism for the catastrophic World War I. With a diverse group of artists whose home countries were battling each other, their Dada collaboration hoped to promote “friendship among people and countries” (Naumann, 2005, p. 165). The concept of international collaboration, to which Tzara, out of all the Dadaists, subscribed the most, was conceived in Tzara’s 1920 *Dadaglobe*—an anthology with images and text by fifty contributors, such as Man Ray, Hannah Hoch, and John Heartfield, across Europe and the United States that meant to showcase the extent of Dada’s reach, but was never published due to financial constraints (Sudhalter, 2016, pp. 41–50).

Homelessness and Trauma in Dada Poetry and Performances

Tzara’s poem “The Admiral Searches for a House to Rent” (L’amiral cherche une maison à louer) exemplifies a Dadaist concern with dislocation and displacement. Tzara, Janco, and Huelsenbeck performed “The Admiral Searches for a House to Rent,” which they termed a “simultaneous poem,” on March 30, 1916 to a baffled audience. In the words of Hugo Ball (1996, p. 57), this type of poem “is a contra puntal recitative in which three or more voices speak, sing, whistle, etc., at the same time in such a way that the elegiac, humorous, or bizarre content of the piece is brought out by these combinations.” Tzara, Janco, and Huelsenbeck manifest the state of uncertainty and anxiety of the homeless admiral with brusque words such as “schnell” (quickly), “le train” (the train), and “dwelling” spoken in multiple languages over each other (*Cabaret Voltaire*, 1916, p. 7).

The disorientation of the words, switching from German, to French, to English, back to French and so on, is poignant. In its chaos, the story of the admiral’s search is disjointed but not entirely obscured as the poem explains the reason for the admiral’s predicament: the apartment that he was renting was sold and, unlike in Bucharest where “one will depend on my friends,” he has nowhere to go and no one to help him.

The poem ends on the line, sung by all three Dadaists, “the admiral found nothing.” Rather than a linear, comprehensible recitation, the simultaneous poem relies on the repetition of sounds to create what T.J. Demos (2003, p. 13) calls a “fractured phonetic experience.” This phonetic experience, however, is lost in the printed version of the poem that appeared in the Dadaists’ *Cabaret Voltaire* magazine after the March 30 performance, despite the inclusion of the onomatopoeias “ooooo” and “rrrrrrr.” The poem’s performance highlights the cacophonous sounds that break into disorder, which disassemble any attempt on the audience’s part to piece together the national identity of the admiral and his story because the Dadaists speak, yell, and sing too quickly for the audience to comprehend what is happening, not to mention the clattering sounds of their instruments that accompany the performance.

Homelessness and trauma intertwine in Dada. After *Cabaret Voltaire*’s closure, the Dadaists organized several big soirées in Zurich, with larger audiences of up to 300 people for each event. During the July 14 soirée, Tzara read his first Dada manifesto “Monsieur Antipyrine’s Manifesto.” But the main act, one that would resonate throughout the art world years later, was Ball’s bishop episode, in which he read the poems “Karawane” and “Gadji beri bimba.” Demos (2003, p. 8) interprets Ball’s poems as an expression of Ball’s trauma incurred when he visited the war front in 1914. The repetition of words parallels the repetition of the traumatic event in the victim’s memory. The poem escapes coherent meaning as the nonsensical words dissolve into sound, in a way that the traumatic event hides in the dark recess of one’s memory, leaving behind only its affect.

Jill Bennett’s theory (2005, pp. 34–37) of affect defines the traumatic memory in artmaking as “embodied sensation . . . not anchored by character or narrative.” This embodied sensation is outside the realm of speech and even emotion and is connected to both the body of the viewer, who physically feels the traumatic wound represented in the artwork, and the body of the artist, who physically engages with the artwork’s medium. Ball, inhabiting a white cylinder contraption resembling a straitjacket, i.e. the bishop costume created by Janco, encapsulates the embodied sensation of trauma through the inter-dependent relationship between sound and body. Without the costume and its materiality, his recitation would not be nearly as

affective in transporting the listener from the realm of the stage into the realm of the unknown, where intelligible words are unnecessary, or downright detrimental, to experiencing the lingering affect of trauma.

Neither Tzara, Janco, or Huelsenbeck wore costumes in their performance of “The Admiral Searches for a House to Rent” but the materiality of the poem, its unsettling sensation, is conveyed through the transference of disjointed sound from one speaker to another. The poem gains its materiality not on the written page, but in the overlap of words and in the varying voice frequencies. Homelessness and trauma are, therefore, joined in a performative poem, which non-linearly communicates the jarring repetition of trauma and the dislocation of identity caused by trauma, in a format that reverberates in the ears and minds of the viewers long after the performance has ended.

Romania, Switzerland, and Anti-Semitism

The sense of homelessness speaks to Tzara’s, Janco’s, and Segal’s hesitant acceptance of their Jewish identity. Janco, Tzara, and Segal came from Jewish families in Romania, but their embrace of their Jewish identity varied between the three. Janco emigrated from Romania to Israel in 1941. He was instrumental in advancing a distinct, modern Israeli art at his Ein Hod artist colony in Israel. Tzara’s family was not very religious but the town of Moinesti where they lived had a large population of Hasidic Jews. According to Marius Hentea’s Tzara biography (2014, p. 7), he maintained a “mysterious aura about his origins.” His non-committal position regarding his Jewish identity and Jewish faith is comparable to Arthur Segal’s weariness of attending the synagogue and of speaking Hebrew and Yiddish in the town of Botosani where he grew up (Sandqvist, 2006, p. 292). Although Romania did not grant its Jewish population full citizenship until 1923, it still required military conscription of Jewish men. The Dadaists, thus, fled from Romania’s military conscription before Romania entered the war in 1916. And they relocated to a more modernized country with new names that assigned them Western identities in keeping with the French and German colleagues of Cabaret Voltaire.

Anti-Semitism in Romania at the start of the new century manifested itself acutely in the Peasant Revolt of 1907, which was partly directed towards Jewish farmers and business owners whom the peasants blamed for their poor conditions. The Nationalist-Democratic Party, established by A.C. Cuza and N. Iorga, and its inquest into the “Jewish problem” fueled the peasants’ animosity towards the Jews. The party’s program of 1910 demanded the “elimination of the Jews” in all spheres “over which we (non-Jewish Romanians) alone have ethnic and historical rights of possession” (Iancu, 1996, pp. 147–163). But anti-Semitism in Romania did not gain extensive ground until the rise of the Iron Guard in the late 1920s. Burdened by discrimination and economic immobility, many Jews emigrated to places like New York in the first decade of the twentieth century. The wealthier Jews who stayed in Romania sought assimilation or participation into the Social Democratic Party that was initiated in 1910.

Tzara, Janco, and Segal, in keeping with the Dada’s politically uncommitted agenda, did not address anti-Semitism in their work during their time in Zurich; however, the three artists’ left leaning political beliefs, manifested in their political and artistic associations before and post-Dada, were related to the vocal criticism of Romania’s alarming anti-Semitism among all classes of society. Many Jewish artists—the initiators of modernism in Romania— either supported the socialist ideology or were part of the Communist Party, which diverged from the Social Democratic Party in 1921 (Enache and Iancu, 2010, pp. 25–28). For instance, artist Iosif Iser and Arthur Segal developed German Expressionism in Romania in the years prior to World War I and concurrently published in leftist magazines: Iser with *Facla* (The Torch) in Bucharest and Segal with *Die Aktion* (The Action) in Berlin (Sandqvist, 2006, p. 184). In 1922, Marcel Janco and Ion Vinea, with whom Janco and Tzara collaborated on their *Simbolul* (The Symbol) magazine pre-Dada, founded the leading Romanian avant-garde magazine *Contimporanul* (The Contemporary). During the magazine’s run, between 1922 and 1932, articles and illustrations, including one illustration of police beating the oppressed, voiced the artists’ outrage and condemnation of the Romanian government’s treatment of Jews (Mansbach, 1998, p. 552).

In No. 30 of *Contimporanul*, Ion Vinea (1923) penned the article “Culture and Anti-Semitism,” in which he deplored the government’s closure of universities as “a high morality lesson for minorities” and

the “de-intellectualization” of students, particularly Jewish students, as a “defeat of culture,” meaning a deterioration of Romania’s higher education system that contributes to the creation of Romanian culture. This hostile, anti-Semitic environment in Romania differed from the intellectually thriving community in Zurich where Janco had easy access to a university education, during the 1870–1914 period when Jewish students were permitted to attend universities in Zurich, Berne, and Geneva (Mahrer, 2013, p. 15). Steven Mansbach (1998, p. 536) argues that, in response to how Romanians viewed Jews as non-citizens, Romania’s Jewish artists “advocated a culture whose very experimental and cosmopolitan cast would affirm their outsider status.” The “experimental and cosmopolitan” avant-garde owned a great deal to Dada Zurich. By working on the Dada magazines, Janco learned how to manage a critical review and how to capitalize on his Jewish/foreigner status to critique the dominant political system and its social structure from the outside. With their anti-establishment cry, the Dadaists fought against modernity in the same manner that Romanian Jewish artists then fought against a changing country that, with its burgeoning nationalism, strove to align itself with Western modernity while hanging tightly to an unwavering Romanian identity.

Even in Zurich, though, Tzara, Janco, and Segal still retained their outsider status; Zurich was not the intellectual and refugee safe haven that its image deceptively evoked. By 1917, the majority of Jewish people in Switzerland lived in Zurich. Stefanie Mahrer (2013, pp. 13–19), in her study “Les Russes: The Image of East European Jews in La Chaux-de-Fonds and Zurich,” depicts an indubitable cultural and economic division between the Jewish communities who settled in Zurich in the nineteenth century and new Jewish arrivals. The 7,997 East European Jewish immigrants in Zurich were of low economic status and more religious compared to the bourgeois Swiss Jews. The third Jewish group, Jewish students such as Tzara and Janco, tended to be anti-bourgeois regardless of Jewish background but unlike the Jewish immigrants, their residency in Zurich only extended till the end of their university years. The Swiss Jews, already established in Switzerland since their emancipation in 1862, looked down on immigrant Jews and their poor status, and on the non-conformist students. Meanwhile, Swiss society, as a whole, exhibited anti-Semitism in response to incoming Jewish immigrants whom they thought “unfit to assimilate.”

Because the Dadaists did not belong to the poor Jewish refugees, nor to the Swiss Jewish bourgeoisie, they would have had a difficult time assimilating and remaining in the country after the end of Dada, had they so wished to do. In his memoir, Huelsenbeck (1969, p. 12) declares: “I was a foreigner, and I wanted to remain one.” Tzara, Janco, and Segal undoubtedly shared Huelsenbeck’s resolution to maintain their foreignness. The Dadaists had no intention of making Zurich their permanent home or of turning themselves into Swiss citizens. For three years, the city was a launching base from where Dada was dispersed to other geographical points across the globe. Timothy O. Benson (2014, p. 20), writing on “Dada Geographies,” designates “Dada’s relation to other locations that might themselves be construed as Dada” as a “social geography” through friendships with other artists, such as Tzara’s collaboration with Barcelona and Parisbased Francis Picabia, or the Dadaist’s relocation from Zurich to Berlin, as in the case of Richard Huelsenbeck.

However, in the midst of war, Zurich had the most suitable conditions for Dada to materialize. Its society was predominantly conservative but with a foreign, youthful segment. This dichotomy gave the Dadaists something to rebel against while finding an enthusiastic audience for their insurgent overtures. The Swiss police did not shut down Cabaret Voltaire; yet, the Dadaists were unable to keep it open late into the night because the Swiss law at the time prohibited public establishments from staying open past ten in the evening (Naumann, 2005, p. 171). The Swiss law’s restriction, in a city where citizens were not entirely welcoming of strangers, contributed to the Dadaists’ urgent need to create an alternative way of life that would accept those misunderstood and ostracized.

Modern Jewish Theater and Purim

In addition to simultaneous poems, Tzara translated poems from Africa and Oceania. Writing about Tzara’s translations of *poèmes nègres*, Cosana Eram (2015, pp. 2–3) contends that Tzara experienced a “double process” of becoming a Western European while extending his identity to distant places where he never traveled or lived. Tzara’s involvement with African and Oceanic poetry and art is beyond the scope of my analysis; but his French translations of *poèmes nègres*, from their already translated German format, testify to his ability to

mold distinct cultural and artistic elements into a Dada product. His translations, which are translations of translations, are far from accurate to the originals. Instead, they accentuate the performative quality of the poems.

Eram (2015, p. 3, p. 12) equates his translations with Torah incantations and Romanian oral blasphemies. Sandqvist (2006, p. 316) also posits that Tzara's simultaneous poems, such as the "L'amiral cherche une maison a louer," with the "emphasis on the oral sound values of the words" and "use of endless repetitions," originate from the Jewish song tradition in Romania. These repetitive songs of Hasidic rituals, along with dances performed by the Jewish community, mocked the righteous with comedic and absurd text, and evoked the ecstatic devotion to God and its divine presence. The comedic undercurrent is likewise present in the Jewish theater of the absurd of the 19th century. Avrom Goldfaden founded the modern Yiddish Theater in the city of Iasi, Romania in 1876. Goldfaden could be considered a predecessor to Tzara and the Dadaists. He wrote books of Yiddish poetry, and he combined song and text in his plays, which ranged from tragedies based on Jewish history to vaudevilles and burlesques plays (Berkowitz, 2004, p. 12).

Modern Jewish theater developed from the Purim festival. During the Purim festival, performers would dress up in costume and enact plays in Yiddish. The Purim holiday celebrates the Jewish Queen Esther and her protection of the Jewish people from the extermination plans of the Persian vizer Haman. In his essay "Ritual Space as Theatrical Space in Jewish Folk Theater," Ahuva Belkin (2009, p. 19) describes the theatrical celebrations of Purim during the Purim festival as comprised of several temporal and spatial phases. First, the performers, disguised in masks and costumes, would sing and dance, and ride hobbyhorses on village streets. Next, they would relocate to individual homes, where the performances were centered more on text than the visual and musical. Within the homes, "actors deliberately created chaos as if to emphasize the inverted world of the festive play," with the spectators actively participating in the performances (Belkin, 2009, p. 20).

Although the Dadaists did not recite religious text, nor did they produce historical tragedies like Goldfaden's, they did blur the roles between performer and spectator. For example, on the first night of Cabaret Voltaire, the spectators' loud outrage almost drowned out the

on-stage productions. During the Dada Soirée on April 9, 1919, the spectators formed a mob and marched on stage. Furthermore, the Dadaists continued the Purim festival tradition of combining music, dance, and text to shake one's stupor of ignorance through a disruption and questioning of everyday life.

Janco's Masks, Primitivism, and Romanian Folk Culture

The resemblance between the Purim festival and Romanian folk festivals is not surprising, considering the close proximity of Jewish and Christian communities and their cultural exchange. I would argue that Dada, from the standpoint of the three Romanian Dadaists, is at the center of this exchange. Tzara provided the theatrical text-based performances at Cabaret Voltaire and at the Dada soirées, in keeping with the Purim festival's text-based enactments; meanwhile, Janco underlined the visual value of the folk festivals.

At first glance, the formal qualities of Janco's masks, *Untitled (Mask for Firdusi)* and *Untitled (Portrait of Tzara)*, resemble those of African masks: the narrow form of the elongated face further abstracted by the angular nose and distorted eyes. Similarities also exist between Janco's masks and the mask-like faces of the women in Picasso's painting *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)*. African masks certainly inspired Picasso's formal experimentations and the same could be said of Janco's grotesque masks when placed within early twentieth-century primitivism.

Decades after the end of Dada Zurich, recalling the Dada collages, reliefs, and sculptures, Janco (1971, p. 37) acknowledged that these artworks were created "through an understanding of prehistoric art, children's art, primitive art, folk arts, through long nights of discussion about abstract art," which led to the epiphany "that the crusade for the return to the Promised Land of creativity was Dada's most important discovery." Besides the Dadaists, modern artists exalted the "primitive" art of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas and borrowed its abstract forms in their effort to revolt against Western culture and its aesthetic traditions through a reversion to what they thought was a more spiritual, archaic, and hence, nature bound, artistic forms. But, as Kirk Varnedoe (1999, p. 209) reminds us, "Primitivism is first and foremost a story about us, not tribal peoples." Artists, such as Picasso, Matisse, and Brancusi, used objects from indigenous people to

formulate new artistic styles and techniques, which advanced their art to the forefront of high modern art. Primitivism also constitutes a transformation of an artist's identity through the appropriation of indigenous cultures and exploration of the Other. Janco, for instance, engaged with the ritual, folk masks of Romanian peasant culture, which arguably signified the Other for him on account of the division and hostility between the major peasant culture and minor Jewish one. In the process of working with the folk masks, not only did his art change but also his relationship with his Romanian identity may have strengthened, albeit still remaining unstable.

For the Dadaists, peasant folk culture was familiar and foreign, given their Jewish upbringing in a country whose folk culture of was widely celebrated as representing the Romanian nationality. By the end of the 19th century, widespread anti-Semitism operated on the belief in national culture safeguarding “the traditions, customs, and racial individuality of the nation” (Razvan, 2007, pg.357). For the Romanian intellectuals, national culture was “rural, communitarian, agrarian, idealist, conservative, rooted in country soil, Christian, endangered by the expansion of modern society” (Razvan, pg.359)—all of which define peasant culture. The Jews were seen as a threat to the national, peasant culture. Regardless of the fact that Jewish communities existed in rural areas, the Jew became synonymous with the cosmopolitan, “atheist” foreigner whose modern lifestyle and “socialist” politics threatened the national culture rooted in the peasantry (Volovici, 1991, pg. 362). In the words of Romania's most celebrated poet Mihai Eminescu, Jews “are not, and cannot be Romanians” (Volovici, pg.13). University Professor I. C. Catuneanu reiterated Eminescu's hatred of Jews in his article on the “Fear of Jews” (1924, pp. 1–2), in the nationalist magazine *Acțiunea Românească* (The Romanian Action). Catuneanu compares the major Jewish problem to “an open wound in our nation's body” and divides and positions the “Israeli race” against Romanians.

Before Zurich and after his return to Romania, Janco, as a cosmopolitan, well-educated Jew active in the leftist, avant-garde circle in Bucharest, was a foreigner in Romania among Romanian intellectuals and particularly within peasant folk culture. With anti-Semitism taking a more dangerous turn in the 1930s and during Romania's wartime alliance with Germany, Janco moved to Israel in 1941 to “live on my own proper land” (Naumann, 2005, pg.174). That

Janco did not think of Romania as his “proper land” is indicative of his support of Zionism and also of his ultimate alienation from Romanian culture. If he indeed experienced such alienation in Romania, why did he integrate the aesthetic of Romanian folk masks into his art? I think that in primitivizing peasant folk culture and transforming it into the Other, he confronted his problematic Romanian identity, possibly for the purpose of coming to terms with the culture’s rejection of his Jewish identity.

Romanian folk art does not have African art’s ubiquitous presence in the history of early twentieth-century primitivism. Nonetheless, in Constantin Brancusi’s sculptures, arguably named the first modern sculptures, Romanian folk art prevails in their iconography and, most importantly, in their affinity to wooden gates and cemetery posts located in Romanian villages. Yet, Brancusi’s sculptures in wood are likewise associated, and rightly so, with African sculpture. Should one influence take precedent over the other or can both retain equal significance within an artist’s oeuvre? Eric Shanes (1989, p. 8) is of the latter opinion, arguing, “By assimilating some characteristic forms of African art, Brancusi was merely broadening a stylistic range that already encompassed Romanian, Egyptian, and Oriental sources.”

In “Dada Geographies,” Timothy Benson (2014, p. 29) only associates Janco’s masks with African masks. Benson interprets Janco’s masks, along with Tzara’s and Huelsenbeck’s Negro poems and performances, within an anthropological context wherein the Dadaists, playing anthropologists, dissected “surrounding rituals and artifacts to create new contextualizations.” According Michaela Oberhofer (2016, p. 32), in her article for the exhibition catalog *Dada Africa: Dialogue with the Other*, Janco’s masks elude categorization: his masks are “characterized more by a regional and stylistic pluralism,” comprised of Oceanic and African sculpture, the Lotschental masks that he may have seen at the Landesmuseum in Zurich, and Romanian folk masks.

While I believe these sources do have aesthetic and cultural significance in Dada and should not be neglected, Janco’s choice of material and technique of making his masks is what aligns him more with the ritual masks used in Romanian festivals. Although some African masks have pieces of fabric on the upper portion of their head, African masks are primarily made of durable wood. Janco, however, assembled his masks with painted cardboard, paper, and twine. Fellow

Dadaist Jean Arp (1971, p. 27) described Janco's masks as "terrifying...daubed with bloody red." The masks used in the Colinde festival, for example, likewise possess a terrifying quality, largely due to its crude materials: fabric of different colors specify round eyes, pointy nose, and a sinister smile, with fiber hair protruding from its chin. The Colinde festival is held in the winter, around Christmas and New Year's. The festival, dating back to pre-Christian days when peasants celebrated the winter solstice, is comprised of young men who parade through the village dancing and singing colinde (ritual hymns) while wearing devil masks, to scare away evil spirits, and animal masks, such as that of a goat, horse, or bear. In addition to symbolizing the close relationship between humans and nature, the masks represent the return of the spirits of ancestors (Senn, 1982, pp. 206–207).

The Colinde masks are often paired with body masks that envelop the entire body in sheepskin, such as the sheepskin coats worn by Romanian shepherds (Institutul de Istoria Artei, 1969, p. 638). When the Colinde participants dance, they move either the body mask or the head mask in rhythm with the music. The bells and tinsel that adorn the head masks make a clamorous sound, which, in addition to the sheepskin and facial features, activate the embodied animal spirit. The sound element, along with disguising the entire body, is present in Dada. Taeuber constructed her marionettes with brocade, bells, and feathers—similar, decorative materials ubiquitous in folk culture.

Joyce Suechun Cheng (2014, p. 292), in her analysis of Dada objects as toys, argues that Sophie Taeuber's marionettes, Ball's bishop costume, and Janco's masks evoke a "dehumanization" of the performer because they constrict the movement of the body and the performer's potential to express her or his identity. For example, Janco's mask of Mr. Firdusi, who was a character, played by Ball, in Oskar Kokoschka's play, is a big mask that glowed from the electric light that was embedded inside the mask. Comparable to Ball's Bishop costume, the Firdusi mask is "an edifice to be inhabited" (Cheng, 2014, p. 282). Moreover, Hugo Ball (1996, p. 64) describes how, upon donning the masks, the Dadaists began composing new movements because "the masks simply demanded that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance." In their delirium, they felt "the motive power of these masks." Thus, while Janco's big costumes and masks may have been overwhelming on the body, disguising the wearer's identity,

the masks also impelled the wearer to create new, unknown identities through the body's movements.

Colinde is not the only festival in Romania to utilize masks. In the regions of Moldova, Muntenia, and Banat, the Day of the Cuckoo is held on the last day before the Easter fast commences. Villages celebrate the day by donning "cuci" masks. These masks, resembling Janco's *Untitled (Mask for Firdusi)* and *Untitled (Portrait of Tzara)*, caricature human faces: they have rabbit fur, decorated with little mirrors, for the mask's beard, a long, exaggerated nose, and a bouquet of flowers of multi-colored paper that sits atop the mask (Institutul de Istoria Artei, 1969, p. 639). Dada's carnivalesque tendency for humor and outrage may also have its roots in the Căluș: a Romanian ritual that drives away the evil spirits from the peasants who are cursed with sickness for working on the holy week of Rusalii, when the spirits of dead family members, along with evil spirits, are believed to make contact with the living (Kligman, 1981, pp. xi–2).

A group of male dancers, called the Călușari, perform the Căluș, with the figure of the mute having great responsibility in the theatrical part of the ritual. Among the performers, only the mute wears a mask and only the mute is not permitted to sing and shout; he must converse through comedic gestures. Sociologist Gail Kligman (1981, 103) labels the mute "society's antiphilosopher par excellence." Like the Dadaist, the mute "takes the burden of society upon himself" and "explores the socially structured role sets and status sets by which everyday life operates and presents his findings to and for the benefit of all." The mute's two main responsibilities are to discipline the other Călușari for their mistakes during the ritual and to provide villagers with comedic relief when the Călușari take a break from the ritual. In this latter part, the mute acts as the "anti-Vataf"—the authoritative, straitlaced Vataf is the leader of the Călușari—by executing humorous scenarios that address taboo topics of sexuality, death, and disobedience of authority (Kligman, 1981, 85–87). One can easily imagine Tzara, in the role of the mute, reciting his manifestos in front of villagers, with the rest of the Dadaists prancing around in masks indicative of Colinde and Day of the Cuckoo. It is impossible to know whether Tzara was aware of the Căluș ritual, for there is no mention of it in his writings. With that said, he certainly would have been exposed to the folk culture and its folk rituals, if not one particular ritual, growing up in a provincial

environment where folk culture dominated religious and communal life, alongside Yiddish culture.

Conclusion

Marcel Janco, Tristan Tzara, and Arthur Segal incorporated their background of a Jewish upbringing in a country infused with a rich folk culture; simultaneously, they refused to identify solely with their Romanian nationality and Jewish heritage in favor of an international, free art practice that would surpass borders. Their complicated relationship with their home country and their Jewish identity is in keeping with the paradoxical character of Dada. The anti-Semitism of Romania and Switzerland in the first two decades of the twentieth century foreshadowed the more pernicious anti-Semitism of the 1920s and 1930s, which the Romanian avant-garde confronted, using Dada techniques. The anti-Semitism, and World War I, incited the sentiment of trauma and homelessness that I believe is evident in Tzara's "L'amiral cherche une maison a louer." In the spirit of Dada, traveling from one country to another in search of a permanent home and a concrete identity would plague the three Jewish-Romanian Dadaists well after Dada left the stage in Zurich.

Dada in Zurich ended with Tzara's move to Paris in 1920 to join André Breton for their Dada venture. Segal returned to Berlin and Janco returned to Bucharest to initiate *Contimporanul* and his architecture firm with his brother Iuliu Iancu. From Zurich, Dada crossed geographical borders to places like Germany, where it became an official movement, and Hungary, the Netherlands, and Croatia, where Dada-inspired magazines sprang up. In Romania, Dada fused with Constructivist, Futurist, and Expressionist literature and visual art that were influenced by Romanian artists' contact with foreign avant-garde ideas, as in the case of Janco.

Dada traversed geographical and cultural borders and transcended the East Europe-West Europe dichotomy. It may be easy to assume that Dada was predominantly Western European oriented, considering that the birth of Dada occurred in Switzerland, the Dada magazines were written in French and German, and the Zurich Dadaists continued their activities mainly in Berlin and Paris. But such a simple assumption overlooks Dada's Jewish and Romanian origins. Tzara and Janco resided between East and West, and merged the two,

demonstrating the inclusive intellectual exchange that occurred among avant-garde artists of different nationalities across the East-West divide. Furthermore, Tzara and Janco used the alienation that they experienced in Romania and later in Zurich to affirm their foreignness and outsider status, which heightened their experimental Dada work and placed Dada on the fringe of Western culture and among the most innovative of the avant-garde art movements.

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