

MARICICA MUNTEANU

**HOW STYLE MAKES SPACE.
REFLECTIONS ON THE FORMS OF LIFE
IN THE LITERATURE OF *VIATA ROMÂNEASCĂ*
CIRCLE**

The question of “style” in the literature of Moldavian authors such as Mihail Sadoveanu, Ionel Teodoreanu, and Al. O. Teodoreanu is tricky and complicated since it has to be confronted with another important issue, that of spatial identity. The sirens of the past, the statute of former political and cultural capital, the present abandonment of the city, the aristocratic, now decadent, families lure these authors to rethink the marginality as a counter-identity that can be successfully opposed to the Centre (the city of Bucharest, the modernist canon, the occidental culture, the new social classes), always a space of domination. Therefore, is it possible to conceive a Moldavian style? How can this labile contradicting notion of “style” be integrated in the unified discourses of the local identity? The spatial clash between Centre and periphery, the distribution of power between dominant and dominated spaces seem to kill the project of the Moldavian style right from the beginning. Still, the things are not that simple as they appear to be.

Bertrand Westphal considers that space is characterized by transgressivity, a quality that implies an endless task of describing and imagining which enables “to map possible worlds, to create plural and paradoxical maps”¹. Space is a dynamic tensed order, which escapes classification into types of space or into hierarchies of geopolitical power. Referring to the philosophy of space proposed by Deleuze and Guattari, Bertrand Westphal states out that space is a continuous process of *detrterritorialization* and *reterritorialization*², by that meaning it can never be fixed between frontiers and that it implies a struggle of representation, a division between real and fictional, material and metaphorical spaces.³ The definition of space as a fluid transgressive, never fixed, reality enhances the chances to transcend the limits of identity and to reach at the discussion of “style”.

The theoretical reference of this analysis is the notion of *style de vie* proposed by Marielle Macé in her latest study, *Styles. Critiques de nos formes de vie*. The French researcher states that “style”, *style de vie*, is a dynamic process of differentiation (*un acte de différenciation*) that always implies an axiological

¹ Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism. Real and Fictional Spaces*. Translated by Robert T. Tally Jr., New York, Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, p. 73.

² *Ibidem*, pp. 51-56.

³ See also Edward W. Soja, *Thirdspace. Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1996.

decision, a risk, and a struggle of choice. Therefore, the forms of life are educated or abandoned, they are used to create distinctions, or, contrarily, to seek the plurality of the world, to imagine alternative ways of life, to embrace some of them, and to combat others. This means that the forms of life do not have an *a priori* value, because their values are always to be created⁴. If this is the case, marginality is not a value *per se* to whom everybody can relate, but a question of *how* it can be practiced, negotiated, imagined, and used. Further on, I examine three ways of thinking the Moldavian style: style as conflict which postulates a radical distinction between Centre and periphery in the name of the spatial identity; style as practice that implies a struggle of investment and seeks the possibilities of space; and style as contestation that mines and inverts the existing order of the system through a creative detour, though without oppositions.

Building Walls: The Fear of Contact

Sadoveanu's novel *Strada Lăpuşneanu* [*The Lăpuşneanu Street*] stands out the collision between the Centre and the periphery, between the city of Bucharest and the city of Iaşi. The story takes place in 1917, when the German troops invaded Bucharest and determined the population to seek refuge in Moldova, the single unoccupied Romanian territory. Symbolically, this invasion of Bucharest marks the beginning of an age of transition favored by the First World War and the end of the illusory provincial idyll. This archaeology of change, present in a series of Sadoveanu's writings, unfolds two ways of thinking the Moldavian style as a conflict of values: on the one hand, the perception of the new forms of life brought by the refugees triggers a need of enforcing the marginal identity, and, on the other hand, it alienates the familiar space by violating the borders and imposing a non-characteristic style. For Sadoveanu, the values are divided between Centre and periphery, they are irreconcilable, always distinctive and in conflict, with no door for interaction and contamination, the contact has tragic consequences, it disintegrates the local values and replaces them with imported forms or, even worse, with a lack of value. Marielle Macé shows that the need of a frontier, the "phobia of the contact" is the result of a distinctive and positional thinking, meaning that the forms of life are approached as markers of identity and place that battle for supremacy. Quoting Georg Simmel, the author states that this semiotic and topological understanding of style has a double effect: the assertion of belonging to a distinctive class, small group, place, taste, or to put this differently, belonging to distinctive properties (which also enforces the idea of ownership), and the statement of separation from the others, from that which is radically

⁴ Marielle Macé, *Styles. Critiques de nos formes de vie*, Paris, Gallimard, 2016.

different and menacing⁵. In Sadoveanu's novel, the representation of space lacks the imaginary possible cartography I was pointing at in the introduction. It is replaced with an unequivocal topology, with an explicit spatial distribution of power. According to this logic, Moldova is defined as the space of traditional and family values, the space where the "organic community" is still present, always in relation to an ideal past and close to the prior social harmony, while Bucharest is a destructured space, an imitation of the Occidental fashion, with no hierarchies and no centrality.

The Plopeanu family is exemplary for Sadoveanu's perception of the peripheral identity: the father, Dimitrie Plopeanu, belongs to an old aristocratic Moldavian family whose fortune has been ruined by the new social classes, and the mother, Leonora Ciumara, is the prototype of the home vestal, always caring for her house and children. The family idyll along with the social idyll are represented as an ideal space which filters and excludes every element coming from the outer dominant space. The father's death and the beginning of the war disorganize the family cell confronting it with a new way of living, that of the modern values brought by the Centre. The response to this tensioned conflicting situation is to reassure the frontiers, to re-erect the barricades in a deterritorialized space. The first impulse Leonora Plopeanu has when she arrives in Iași is to reach her property, an archaic house she inherited from her father. Facing the ruins of what used to be an imposing fastidious mansion, she is still impressed by the aristocratic appearance, but this is a fake impression as the present is filtered through the imaginary of the past, a past which can no longer create effects, which is no longer relevant:

The house appeared, beyond the fir trees, with blackened and rainwashed walls. But at a glance, lady Leonora thought it was still solid, and had a feeling of intense joy. It was a villa with tall, arched windows, stone terraces crowned with climbing roses and a square tower in a corner, from the windows of which, long ago, in the August sunsets, the old landlord Ciumara used to look at Mount Ceahlău through the spyglass⁶.

Contrarily, the interior of the house destroys the impression of the lasting walls: vetust mothly furniture, an "oval mirror with golden frame and numb

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 140-141: "La 'distinction' implique donc une pensée de la limite, où une chose, une classe, un être, se définissent avant tout par une séparation d'ordre statutaire d'avec un autre, impliquant une possibilité de classement et un travail de positionnement, dans un double effet d'attachement (à des propriétés et à des places qui les incarnent) et d'arrachement (aux autres)".

⁶ "Casa îi apăru deodată, dincolo de brazi – cu zidurile înnegrite și roase de ploai. Dintr-o ochire însă cucoana Leonora o socoti încă tare, ș-avu un simțimânt de mare bucurie. Era o vilă cu ferestre nalte, arcuite, cu terase de piatră încununată de trandafiri acățători, și c-un turnșor pătrat la un colț, pe ferestruicile căruia, demult, bătrânul Ciumara se uita cu ochiana la Ceahlău, în amurgurile de august." Mihail Sadoveanu, *Strada Lăpușneanu [Lăpușneanu Street]*, Iași, Viața Românească, 1921, p. 103. When not specified otherwise, the English translations from Romanian are mine.

gloomy paintings”, two photographs of some anonymous persons, a piano and a green lamp is the decor of what used to be an aristocratic drawing room. The house, currently occupied by Vasilică Gușilă, a representative character for the new class emerged in the conditions brought by the war, is not a mere object of use, but *a property* in a very strict sense, that of identity and axiological property. Leonora Plopeanu’s struggle to recuperate her home at any expense is, in fact, a way to reunite her dispersed family by securing the boundaries and excluding the foreign elements. Therefore, the house is a form of inclusion and exclusion, of belonging and separation, as Macé would say: it means belonging to a certain family, to the aristocratic class, to a cultural space (Moldova), to a certain rhythm of life, to an ethos, and separating from what is radically distinctive, such as the *tiers état* class, or from the modern space of the capital, or from the speeding rhythm of modernity. It is interesting that the family’s encounters, the relationships built on traditional values are always placed behind the walls, never outside, in the mundane society of the others. For example, Paul’s arrival is celebrated with a dinner inside the lodging where the family is temporarily housed. The members of the family and their friends are gathered around the table, which is animated by a strange amusement on the account of their misfortunes that involve Vasilică Gușilă as the main actor. The positions at the table, a symbol of the aristocratic order, the joyful fellowship, the solidarity and the empathy as foundations for human relationships point out at a very solid and united community that lives according to a well-defined set of rules. The obsession of the “wall”, *i.e.* of the identity as property (“our space”, “our family”, “our taste”), is always present in the novel, especially when the author is trying to emphasize the distinctive features of the Moldavian way of living. It is not a mere coincidence that the invasion of the Centre into the periphery, the destruction of Plopeanu’s family (marking also the end of the “organic community”) reiterates the metaphor of the “wall”: “The wall the deceased father had built against the world fell down. A chilly wind was sending inside the passionate voices of the crowd and the alarming fragrances of a new life”⁷. Therefore, the “new life” attests the end of the “old life”, configuring two distinctive untouchable manners of life; a possibility of contact is out of the question, because the supremacy of the one denies the existence of the other. In the novel *Lăpușneanu Street*, there is no reconsideration of tactics (Macé beautifully relates the word *tact* to *touch*⁸), the forms of life never interfere in a creative way, and they always exclude each other. The engagement of

⁷ „Zidul pe care cel mort îl ridicase împotriva lumii căzuse. Un vânt iute aducea glasurile pătimășe ale mulțimii și mirezmele neliniștitoare ale unei vieți nouă.”, Mihail Sadoveanu, *Strada*, p. 251.

⁸ Marielle Macé (*Styles*, pp. 143-144) uses the concept *tact* as an ethical alternative to the ideal of « vivre coté-a-coté sans se toucher » which is a fear of contact. Contrarily to this radical distinction, the *tact* encapsulates the difficulties of adjusting the distances which implies a question of moral responsibility, namely that of engaging a style without annihilating the other forms of life. It is a responsibility for the vulnerability of the others, for their right to difference.

the new forms of life leads to destruction: Mary elopes with a man that has no intention of marriage, Paul Plopeanu loses his innocence with a frivolous woman, and Adrian Plopeanu commits suicide.

The import of modern forms of life defamiliarizes the space by attaching to it properties which are distinctive from the traditional values of calm and quietness of Moldova. The intrusion of the refugees into the city of Iași, a space still enchanted by its past, is represented by Sadoveanu as an expropriation of space:

In the Lăpușneanu Street, a narrow bent and short street, they found an unexpected effervescent crowd. There were chiefly a lot of young women dressed up in elegant vivid toilets. Officers in dolmans were swarming around them, as well as young men with shaved beards and exemplary English attire: large coats and elegant trousers. Mary couldn't hold back a slight cry of surprise. The entire city of Bucharest was there, all the cheerful and merry people from Calea Victoriei, whispering, greeting, and spying each other with highlighted eyelashes and oddly shiny monocles⁹.

The new relationships established between men and women, the English fashion and the ride with the automobile, as signs of hyper-modernism, the emancipation of women who allow themselves to stroll without being accompanied by their husband or to work as nurses for the Red Cross (Mary Bolomir, Tina Vulcănescu), the gambling as a war entertainment are sensed as menacing forms of life that replace the old aristocratic lifestyle. Madam Lazaridi's reception room, as compared to the Plopeanus' gatherings, is illustrative for this change: the men gamble while their spouses flirt with other men in a mutual consent, the ritual of the table is transformed into a "tea dance", the open cheerful conversation is replaced by the small talk and gossip. The opposition is quite visible in Sadoveanu's novel: on the one hand, there is the aristocratic family living in an enclosed and highly hierarchized space with general values and, on the other hand, the chaotic lifestyle of the capital that is perceived as an absence of codes and values. The contact between the two spaces is understood as a collision generating social violence, the forms of life are thoroughly classified between acceptable and unacceptable, between good values and non-values. This high awareness of identity and sense of belonging also speaks about the vulnerability of the style in general as long as the barricades always come with the fear of the foreign. The novel *Lăpușneanu Street* brings in front of the readers not only the question of identity, but it also reflects on the loss of style, on the ineffectiveness

⁹ „În strada Lăpușneanu, o stradă îngustă, cotită și scurtă, găsiră un viermăt neașteptat de lume. Erau mai ales foarte multe femei tinere, în toalete elegante și vii. În jurul lor roiau ofițeri cu dolmane și tineri cu fețele rase, în corecte straie englezești: paltoane largi și pantaloni cu dungă. Mary nu-și putu stăpâni un ușor strigăt de uimire. Era întreg Bucureștiul aici, toată Calea Victoriei, vioaie și veselă, murmurând, salutând, observându-se pe subt gene încondeiate și prin monocluri cu luciri ciudate.”, Mihail Sadoveanu, *Strada*, p. 122.

of the forms of life and on their abandonment in the new context brought by the First World War.

Numb Identity, Vivid Forms of Life

The tension between the Centre and the periphery is also the theme of Ionel Teodoreanu's novel, *La Medeleni*, but the dichotomy brought to attention by Sadoveanu is here relativized. Of course, it is pertinent to admit that the two spaces are represented in opposition reiterating a common place in the literature of *Viața românească* circle: Moldova is the place of traditions, marked by melancholy and reverie while Muntenia is the place of progress and energy. Although the battle of identities is still present (as in Herr Direktor's speech¹⁰), the positional thinking analyzed by Marielle Macé is no longer central for the issue of style. The Moldavian identity is treated by Ionel Teodoreanu in order to reconsider the marginal and fragile spaces such as the street, the room or the family's objects.

The city of Iași appears to be a dead space, very poetical but with no administration, and which has rather the aspect of a rural household than that of a metropolis. It is an abandoned city that has lost its prestige in the competition with the capital of Bucharest and takes pride only from its glorious past. Ionel Teodoreanu deconstructs the fetishized symbols of the city such as Ștefan cel Mare Street, Eminescu's linden tree or Copou Park, in order to emphasize the ineffectiveness of the past, the lack of functionality of some *lieux de mémoire*¹¹ in the present. His irony is pushed to caricature in the description of the house in Popa Nan Street, that is organized in conformity to an imagined Moldavian identity in the middle of Bucharest: madam Catinca reads only *Viața românească* journal and appreciates Pătrășcanu and Hogaș because they are "Moldavians of our number", the dog is brought from Iași, and the cat is also Moldavian by its features and birthplace; it is a place where one can eat, speak and live only in a Moldavian manner. All the actions, all the attitudes of the Balmuș family are practiced "in a Moldavian manner", but *the manner* does not point out to an engagement of style, being only a superposition (or rather imposition?) of identity to the lifestyle; the

¹⁰ Herr Direktor, a Moldavian who has been disciplined by his German education, tries to convince Dănuț's parents to let their son go and install in the city of Bucharest. In his persuasive discourse, the character describes the two spaces (Bucharest and Iași) in opposition: while Bucharest is the space of virile energy and revolutionary thinking, and a proper environment to accommodate to the new historical circumstances, Iași remains the conservative enclosed space, unable to adapt to the future progress.

¹¹ Ann Rigney ("The Dynamics of Remembrance: Texts Between Monumentality and Morphing", in Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning (eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co, 2008, pp. 345-353) shows that the so-called *lieux de mémoire* can maintain their functionality as long as the remembering community invests them with significance for the present, defining memory as process and dynamics, and not as finality.

Moldavian forms of life are practiced as symbols of a certain space. The Balmuş spouses decided to move to the capital in order to profit from a well-paid job and to provide a better future for their son, but the financial advantage is unable to compensate the lost peacefulness of the Moldavian space. Mircea Balmuş's hostility against Bucharest is rooted in this feeling of *displacement*, which is compensated by an imaginary artificial space able to generate a sense of place (it is probably the reason why Ionel Teodoreanu "punishes" his character at the end of the novel by placing him into a comfortable Moldavian marriage at the expense of his ideals). Indeed, displacement is a more adequate concept to describe the house in Popa Nan Street than that of style, because the space, here, is the equivalent of *site* and not of *place*¹², meaning it is rather a symbol than an investment of form. Ionel Teodoreanu is not hazardous to consider Bucharest only a place of degradation in opposition with the Moldavian space as represented by his character, Mircea Balmuş. The phobia of the big city, the Moldavian's "allergy" to Bucharest, is denounced by Olguţa who fraternizes with the city: for her, the accusation that Bucharest is just a "corrupted vulgar filthy *style-free* place" (my emphasis) is unfounded as it "sings, vibrates and is alive". Therefore, Bucharest is not a site; it is a place to be practiced, occupied and lived. The perception of an absence of style is only the result of a preconceived thinking that tracks down symbols and properties of identity, while, in fact, the style is a process, a dynamics, and an adventure.

Accordingly, the spatial representation of Iaşi does not follow the same logic as in Sadoveanu's novel, that of enforcing frontiers and building walls, focusing rather on the question of "how" a place is occupied, and a form of life is experienced. "Occupying a place", as Marielle Macé puts it, must not be read as a confiscation of space, but as a way of investment, by that meaning it always implies an effort, a "task of habitation" (*une tâche d'habitation*). Instead of some wasted canonized emblems of the city, Ionel Teodoreanu prefers to investigate the peripheral places and the ways they are lived, experienced. Studying literature in Paris, away from her beloved one, Monica remembers the city of Iaşi by association with some domestic objects: the kitchen clock, the dining-room cuckoo clock, and the ancient pendulum of the drawing room. Even though all these objects are used to measure time, their description gives away the impression of frozen temporality, because what is important is not their practicality but the way they are "occupied", converted into family practices. Hence, the domestic objects chosen by Monica's memory are qualified as modes of being a child, a bourgeois, a lover, or a family member. The objects become "forms that matter", a

¹² I use here, for analytical purposes, a tripartite distinction between *site*, *place* and *space*: "site" is confined to topological data, defined by its frontiers, and has a highly degree of symbolization; "place" is practiced humanized space, articulated by the individual needs, attitudes, and emotions; "space" is a mobile reality, an intersection of diverse points, real and imaginary.

way of commitment, a bias, and a source of value. Accordingly, the city is imagined as a reiteration of the domestic universe encapsulated in the interior of Deleanu's house: "they started to stroll in Iași as if it were a familiar chamber with stars in the sky like melilots on the armoire, with the dark silhouettes of houses like some walnut and oak furniture, with gentle mild lights as candles underneath the icons"¹³. It is no longer a space self-sufficient due to its past monumentality, but a "practiced" space, a possibility of experiencing space, a creative cartography. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau, also quoted by Macé, distinguishes between two ways of approaching the city: the panoptic view enabled by looking down at the city from a lofty position, and the pedestrian's view who does not have access to a pre-existing knowledge, but "writes" the city in the same time he/she wanders around its streets. These "spatial practices", as de Certeau affirms, undermine and manipulate the "spatial organization" from within by generating ambiguities and nuances, a sort of "crack" into the system that leans on the so-called "art of making a *coup*". This means that the spatial distribution of power is not absolutely compromised as the spatial practices are always dependent, but just deviated from its course in a creative manner of usage¹⁴. The city is no longer reduced to a simplified well-placed image, "a brand", to speak in words of publicity, it becomes a "spatial practice", a "task of habitation" implying a perpetual investment, a force of imagination. Dan Deleanu's novel can be analyzed as well as a cartographic project, meaning that the textual strategies, its aesthetics, are also spatial practices, not in a metaphorical sense ("writing like walking"), but in a very concrete sensible, even corporal, way. For Ionel Teodoreanu, the book is not only an intermediary between the reader and the text, but a living experience, an object to be felt, not an environment but a medium, a *milieu* in Macé's view¹⁵. The book as *milieu* transcends the prejudgment of the aesthetic autonomy to an ethical engagement as it leads to the coincidence of image and usage, of form and practice becoming a place to be occupied, invested. Relevant to this problem is the episode when Dănuț reads the novel *Robinson Crusoe* in the attic of the house, just before leaving for Bucharest. What calls the boy's attention is not the message of the text but the chromolithography on the cover that slowly inserts itself into the real space:

¹³ „și porniseră prin Iași ca printr-o odaie familiară cu stelele pe cer ca o sulfină pe dulap, cu siluetele caselor întunecate ca niște mobile de nuc și de stejar, cu luminile potolite și blăjine ca luciri de candelă subt iconare.”, Ionel Teodoreanu, *La Medeleni [Medeleni]*, III, București, Cartea Românească, 1925-1927, p. 19.

¹⁴ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2010.

¹⁵ For Marielle Macé (*Styles*, pp. 180-186), the *ethos* is defined as a total coincidence between the self-image, the manner of living and the medium. It is a moral response to the problem of living into the world, occupying a place without annihilating it. This means that the insertion of a body into a medium calls a responsible and ethical care for that particular medium, or, to put this differently, "the usage of the self" is equivalent with "the usage of the world".

The dog had run away from the cover and was snoring in the attic at Dănuț's feet. It was named Ali. Also, in the attic, a parrot was watching over, similarly to the one from the cover, only stuffed. Robinson's island was all there, in the attic, with its feeling of merry reclusion suggested by the chromolithography. Dănuț was Robinson Crusoe in Robinson Crusoe's island¹⁶.

The image on the cover becomes territory; it alters the reality creating those "possible worlds" and "paradoxical maps" Bertrand Westphal is talking about. The space of the attic, where the family's old useless objects are banished out but still kept as markers of identity, is animated by the image in the book. This generates a *va-et-vient* between literature and reality¹⁷. It is important that Teodoreanu's novel is not only a book about the writing process but also about the engagement of reading with the surrounding world. The exposure of the textual strategies is not a deconstruction method similar to postmodernist writings but a code of comprehending reality, a possibility of mapping and dwelling the space. Mircea Balmuș foresees the coming of Dănuț's novel in a dream, an episode that functions as *mise en abyme* but also as a projection of space: "He was so tensed while reading that he didn't even mind the letters. He *saw* everything very clearly and vividly, as facing a real landscape, with relief and perspective. The letters, intermediary in a book, dissipated away"¹⁸.

It is almost an epidermal contact with the book, a struggle for possession and habitation an unknown territory, with uncut pages, meant to be explored and occupied. Reading, and Marielle Macé would almost certainly agree, is a practiced form of life in the sense that it stays in touch with the world, carrying about and addressing the world by creating, in this particular case, possibilities of space, altered realities, "other spaces". The experience of the city as an intimate place or the imaginary cartography configured by Dănuț's novel are meant to transform the image of the abandoned metropolis preoccupied of its past identity into "spaces that matter", spaces that demand attention and consideration.

The National Lifestyle

Another important aspect of the Moldavian style is the relation between history and the forms of life, which will be further addressed in the analysis of Al. O. Teodoreanu's novel, *Hronicul măscăriciului Vălătuc* [*The Chronicle of the*

¹⁶ „Căinele fugise de pe copertă și sforăia în pod la picioarele lui Dănuț. Se numea Ali. Tot în pod, veghea și un papagal – aidoma cu cel de pe copertă – numai că era împăiat. Insula lui Robinson, cu vesela sihăstrie a cromolitografiilor, se mutase în podul cu vechituri. Dănuț era Robinson Crusoe în insula lui Robinson Crusoe.”, Ionel Teodoreanu, *La Medeleni*, I, p. 285.

¹⁷ See also Marielle Macé, *Façons de lire, manières d'être*, Paris, Gallimard, 2011.

¹⁸ „Începu să cetească atât de încordat, încât nici nu mai lua în seamă literile. *Vedea* tot, clar, viu, ca o priveliște reală, cu relief și perspectivă. Literile – intermediare într-o carte – dispăruseră.”, Ionel Teodoreanu, *La Medeleni*, I, p. 216.

Jester Vălătuc]. The novel fictionally recreates the atmosphere of the 18th and 19th centuries undermining some great events of the Romanian national history and proposing instead an alternative history funded on sensational events, scandals, anecdotes and gossip. In this equation, Moldova becomes a *space of contestation*¹⁹, not in that particular sense of “distinction” as in Sadoveanu’s novel, but rather in de Certeau’s acceptance of the creative usage. The national history and its myths are not totally eradicated, but just kept *en garde*, manipulated and inverted. Marielle Macé also highlights this issue with reference to de Certeau’s theory and isolates its key-concept in the phrase *politique par l’usage*, which implies an imaginary component in the making of history. The de-sanctification of history is followed by the intensification of the particular fragile existences, which become an active force despite their dependence on the historical background. Style is agency, as Macé puts it, meaning it gambles on the circumstances and seeks moments and occasions to interfere with those circumstances; it is a detour from history to micro-history, from the essentialist discourses to the phenomena of life. The politics of identity, the sense of tradition, the emancipation of the nationhood, all directives of the 19th century intellectuals, are no longer invested with an intrinsic value in Teodoreanu’s novel. They seem to address this controversial and complex question of “how”: how is nationhood, an absolutely new concept and feeling, experienced in the 19th century? How is history “practiced”? Where is the converging point between aesthetics and ethics?

The great events of the national history are nothing more than background noise in the novel, and it is the anecdote, the surprising events, the “beyond the curtain” stories that make history. The references to the historical moments are exact and easily traceable, but they are always disqualified as “the chronicle” is not written by an authority in the matter but by the king’s drunk jester who, in his turn, collects the stories from unreliable witnesses such as alcoholics, gossip courtesans, old deaf generals or historians that adjust the truth according to their talent. The “heroes” of this upside-down history always fail their mission as patriots and saviors of the Romanian nation: Costake Zippa is rescued from the persecutions of Mihail Sturdza against the 1848 revolutionaries because he falls asleep and misses the meeting; Dumitrașco-Vodă’s rage finds Costakelū in the woods in quest of love-affairs with the woodsmen’s wives. Every “national” impulse is generated by

¹⁹ I use here the term *space of contestation* with reference to Michel Foucault’s acceptance of *heterotopia* (“Of Other Spaces”. Translated by Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics*, XVI, 1986, 1, pp. 22-27) as a “simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live”. The difference between heterotopia and utopia is that the former one is always in touch with the existing sites, with the “space that remains” which is “simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted”. Neither real nor mythical, or maybe both at the same time, heterotopias contest all the living spaces seeking their functionality and creating effects. Moreover, heterotopias are dependent vulnerable spaces, interpretable according to the needs of a certain epoch or culture.

oblivion, accidental actions or personal interest. Marghiolița is not so much an agent of modernization that brings in Moldova the European habits but rather a protagonist that fights her way into the high-life society of Iași. Her goal is, on the one hand, to fool Todiriță, a naïve and less intelligent but extremely rich boyar, and, on the other hand, to become visible by scandalizing the public's opinion and "turning the borough upside down": she rides the horses with her legs spread out as men do, she swims in Prut wearing a tiny red skirt, and dances cancan. Marghiolița's Parisian attitude is not a way to reflect on the consequences of the Occidental influence upon the Moldavian space as in Vasile Alecsandri's playwrights starring Chirița (most certainly one of the role models for Teodoreanu's prose), but to isolate a particular *modus vivendi*, reflected in the fashion style and behavior. Likewise, Costake Zippa's incursion in the territory of Bessarabia, occupied by the Russians, is not so much animated by national feelings as by the will to reclaim three bottles of cognac hidden in the cellar of his father's mansion, or the anti-ottoman fight lead by Trașcă Drăculescu is a consequence of his unstoppable sexual potency, and Kostakelū's patriotism is, in fact, a code of virility. The Great History, the heroism, the acts of bravery are superseded by this intimate domestic chronicle, which drives the attention to the performances of life: all the protagonists are erotic and drinking performers, "jesters" of the national history. This means that style is neither a value in itself, an art and self-performance (which Marielle Macé denounces as a confiscation of the stylistic struggle), nor an alternative for authenticity, but a creative detour from the mainstream and supersaturated systems. To live is also to know how to live, to find "forms that matter", and this is the ethic engagement of Al. O. Teodoreanu's novel. Toader Zippa, to give an example, is not just a pleasure seeker but a *bon viveur*, in almost a literal way, who lives according to a code of honor, according to a science of pleasure that forbids to mix up wine with water, to taste exquisite wines in an advanced state of drunkenness, or to drink the Uricani wine on other music than Lully and Rameau's. Therefore, to live means to live accordingly, to embrace and choose a certain manner, a certain way of being but without reducing it to a formula of life. What drives the ethical stance here is the belief that the cliché, the commonplace, the traditions, the usage have an imaginative kernel. It is not a mere coincidence that the short story, and not the novel, is the genre that Al. O. Teodoreanu prefers, as the *savoir vivre* always encounters a *savoir dire* postulate, which sutures the gap between action and discourse, appearance and value, form and practice. Storytelling is confined to a pre-existing order, to a certain frame that marks its frontiers, but it is again the creative shifting of the commonplace that is important here. Teodoreanu modestly testifies that the models for his novel are Balzac (*Contes drôlatiques*) and Anatole France (*Contes de Jacques Tournebroche*), without taking credit for the invention of the genre. The brutal novelty, the literary experiment, the radical originality are all claims of a modernity that programmatically refuses the models. Contrarily, for Teodoreanu, a

good reader of the classics, creativity does not consist in eternally reinventing the wheel but in the exercise of the already consecrated forms, which also implies a fertile relation between creativity and anonymity. Michel de Certeau grasps the creative possibilities hidden in the story, as the story is an occasion, an incision into reality, similar to the performance of a ropewalker that is capable to manipulate the circumstances of place and time and find the most suitable “tactics” in order to maintain his equilibrium. The story, continues the French theoretician, is inscribed into a concentric movement: the existing order is troubled by the memory of a detail in “the right moment”, which alters the set of rules and generates a new space²⁰. Therefore, the attention to details and nuances, seconded by the knowledge of “tactics” (what details to choose, and when to insert them in the discourse) makes the force of the story. The footnotes inserted in the text by an ambiguous author-editor who might or might not be the Jester Vălătuc function as a subterfuge of a deviant imagination that does not threaten the economy of the story (the reader is free to ignore them). In these ingenuous divagations, “the author” is able to imagine, for example, academic polemics regarding the authorship and the authenticity of a fictional manuscript, or to create discords between literary historians with respect to an obscure writer, or to mimic a sapient tone. He is a chameleonic nature that plays a multitude of roles changing face after face, from nostalgia (“Where are the fountains of the old Iași?”²¹) to unstoppable mocking (“An idiot superstition that only proves the lack of taste”²²), from hyper-erudition (“Here, the captain could have given examples from Rabelais, but, as it will be shown latter, he was ignorant”²³) to dissimulated stupidity (“The literary historian might prove with indisputable documents of the epoch that people didn’t use to write this way at the time of the action. So what?”²⁴), from scientific rigorousness (“The fact is rigorously exact. It has been proven nowadays in the same region with wine stemmed from Pineau, from Alfred Winkler’s winery and preserved in Nicu Nanu’s cellar”²⁵, etc.) to self-contradiction (“Had it not burn, this village has never existed”²⁶). This “right to imagination” is also the right to stay anonymous, in the sense that anonymity is an alternative way of making yourself visible, a mode of dissimulation, and not a retreat from the scene. There is

²⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice*, pp. 80-89.

²¹ „Unde-s cișmelele vechiului Iași?” – Al. O. Teodoreanu, *Hronicul măscăriciului Vălătuc [The Chronicle of Jester Vălătuc]*, Bucharest, Cartea Românească, 1928, p. 91.

²² „Superstiție neroadă, doveditoare de grosolanie în gust”, *Ibidem*, p. 64.

²³ „Aici căpitanul ar fi putut da pilde din Rabelais, dar după cum mai jos s-a scris, era ignar.”, *Ibidem*, p. 49.

²⁴ „Istoricul literar mi-ar putea dovedi cu documente zdrobitoare din literatura epocii, că pe vremea când se desfășoară acțiunea nu se scria așa. Ei și?”, *Ibidem*, p. 77.

²⁵ „Fenomenul este riguros exact. A fost controlat în zilele noastre în aceeași regiune, cu vin provenit din «Pineau» alb, viile domnului Alfred Winkler și conservat în pivnița domnului Nicu Nanu.”, *Ibidem*, p. 69.

²⁶ „Dacă satul acesta n-a ars, atunci e sigur că nici n-a existat.”, *Ibidem*, p. 98.

a constant mining of the institution of “authorship” in Teodoreanu’s novel: who tells the story and what role does it have? The jester might supply this absence of authorship but there are no indices besides the title and the rhyming “Foreword” that he is actually the collector of these stories, each of them having its own narrator. On the front page, right after the title, it is stated that the book is “published and edited by Al. O. Teodoreanu” but this still does not represent a guaranty of authorship (is it a coincidence that Al. O. Teodoreanu preferred his nickname, Păstorel, instead of his full name?), reduced to a humble role of editor. The anonymity is marked at every level of the text: graphically, by placing the author’s comments at the bottom of the page, literarily, by choosing a “minor” genre such as storytelling, and ethically, by weakening the instance of authorship. The intersection of the narrative voices and the idea of anonymity as creativity have a moral implication that asserts “the right to speak out” in the name of the trait every existence has. The anonymity is further speculated by Teodoreanu as fall into anonymity. The historical events, the way they are postulated in the beginning, are left aside as being ordinary and incidental, and replaced with anecdotes and fictional scandals. Still, this does not mean that the world in Teodoreanu’s novel is projected into a mythical temporality, away from the collisions of history. Contrarily, it is this dependence of the forms of life, their vulnerability and incertitude that continues the ethical debate of the novel. After being the actors of the moment, the protagonists end up humiliated and ridiculed: Iancu Durău retreats to a remote mansion after discovering his lover’s affair with the bishop; Costache Zippa, the heir of the “Golden Book”, dies in a duel and leaves the legacy of a stained rename and a drinking song; Trașcă Drăculescu falls in love at old age and he is the helpless testimony of his fiancée’ death; Manolache Albescul is condemned to mix up the wine with water because of an incurable disease.

The national awareness, consequence of the French Revolution, the emergence of the new class of boyars praised for their abilities and not for their genealogy, the development of a new rich class are the effects of the *Zeitgeist* that “makes people go mad” as general Corban says. The entry in History crushes the individuals, their habits, relationships, attitudes, emotions, and it is not the great shifts of history that counts here, but the change of the existential regimes, the domestic disasters, the disappearance of a generation into anonymity. While Mihail Sadoveanu deplores the abandonment of the forms of life as a loss of the Moldavian identity, and Ionel Teodoreanu reinvents the marginality by detouring its irrelevant identity to a creative way of practicing space (walking and reading), Al. O. Teodoreanu detaches from this obsession of identity by watching the forms of life of the Moldavian space in their fragile dependent and anonymous aspects.

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HOW STYLE MAKES SPACE. REFLECTIONS ON THE FORMS OF LIFE
IN THE LITERATURE OF VIAȚA ROMÂNEASCĂ CIRCLE
(Abstract)

The purpose of this paper is to rethink the spatial representations of periphery from the perspective of the theories of style. Space is redefined, according to Bertrand Westphal, as a task of representation, which transcends the notion of territoriality that classifies space into types and hierarchies and becomes a fluid transgressive order at the frontier between reality and imagination. These spatial dynamics questions the manner of practicing the marginality, the mode of relating and interacting with the space. Therefore, the marginality becomes a counter-identity that distinguishes itself from the Centre (Mihail Sadoveanu), a creative practice that replaces an inefficient local identity (Ionel Teodoreanu), or a space that detours the dominant discourses through the politics of usage.

Keywords: style, marginality, transgressivity, spatial practice, *Viața românească*.

CUM STILUL CREEAZĂ SPAȚIUL. REFLECȚII DESPRE FORMELE DE
VIAȚĂ ÎN LITERATURA CERCULUI DE LA VIAȚA ROMÂNEASCĂ
(Rezumat)

Scopul lucrării de față este de a reconsidera reprezentările spațiale ale periferiei din perspectiva teoriilor formalului. Spațiul este redefinit, potrivit lui Bertrand Westphal, ca un proces de reprezentare, care transcende noțiunea de teritorialitate ce clasifică spațiul în tipuri și ierahii, și devine o ordine fluidă și transgresivă, la granița dintre realitate și imaginație. Această dinamică

spațială interoghează maniera de a practica marginalitate, modul de relaționare și interacțiune cu spațiul. Astfel, marginalitatea este, pe rând, o contra-identitate ce se opune Centrului (Mihail Sadoveanu), o practică creatoare ce înlocuiește o identitate locală inefficientă (Ionel Teodoreanu) sau un spațiu ce contestă discursurile dominante printr-o politică a uzului (Al. O. Teodoreanu).

Cuvinte-cheie: stil, marginalitate, transgresivitate, practică spațială, *Viața românească*.