

Mihai ȚAPU
Babeş-Bolyai University
Cluj-Napoca, Romania
mihaitapu12@gmail.com

TRAVELLING THEORY-FICTION. A ROMANIAN CASE STUDY

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Abstract: This paper discusses the import of “theory-fiction” in contemporary Romanian culture, by analysing the textual and artistic output of the performance artists Alina Popa and Florin Flueraş. The first part introduces the key methodological concepts used in the text, such as Edward Said’s notion of “travelling theory”, and some considerations regarding “theory-fiction”, which is a hybrid discourse at the intersection of theory and fiction. I begin the paper by offering some background information about the works of the two above-mentioned artists. Then, I examine some of the most important texts and performances by Popa and Flueraş in light of an essential mechanism deployed by “theory-fiction”, namely “hyperstition”. Lastly, I return to Said’s concept of “travelling theory” and attempt to expand it by proposing a new notion, that of “travelling theory-fiction” based on Popa and Flueraş’s case. This latter term considers both the intermedial nature of the artists’ usage of “theory-fiction” and the autochthonous socio-cultural context in which they introduce this discourse.

Keywords: theory-fiction, travelling theory, performance, hyperstition, decolonialism, diagrammatology

Two distinct concepts overlap in the title and, implicitly, all throughout this paper. The first one is “travelling theory” and the second is “theory-fiction”. The new theoretical construction forged by combining the two, termed “travelling theory-fiction”, sets out to

accommodate a specific case of autochthonous circulation, namely the entrance of “theory-fiction” into Romanian culture. Contrary to the already existing “travelling theory”, which underlines the mono-medial changes undergone by different theories when they are implanted in different settings, “travelling theory-fiction” seeks to emphasize a type of circulation taking place between different mediums (for example, from a textual-theoretical basis to a performative output). I will sketch out some of the main characteristics of these two concepts in this introductory section, maintaining, for now, a clear distinction between them. After surveying how “theory-fiction” influences the textual and performative output of Alina Popa and Florin Flueraş, I will return, in the final section, to the implications and definition of “travelling theory-fiction”.

The concept of “travelling theory” was introduced by Edward Said in the 1980s and, since then, it has gained a considerable popularity among humanities scholars. By proposing this term, Said sought to emphasize the importance of particular cultural and historical contexts when analysing the transfer of theories across different settings. The movement of theories from one location to another “necessarily involves processes of representation and institutionalization different from those at the point of origin” (Said, *The World* 226). In order to distinguish the elements of a travelling theory, Said suggested a four-fold pattern applicable to most such theories: every theory starts from a “point of origin”, there is then a “distance traversed” to arrive in a new setting, as well as a “set of conditions” encountered in the new location, and, finally, the theory is changed, adapted to “its new uses, its new position in a new time and place” (Said, *The World* 226-7). These four elements will prove particularly useful for my attempt to construct the concept of “travelling theory-fiction”. I shall return to them in the final part of the paper.

Said first illustrated the concept of “travelling theory” through Lukács’s theory of reification and its later appropriation by Lucien Goldmann and Raymond Williams. Later, however, the author came to dislike the initial “orthodox” portrayal of “travelling theory” and, upon reconsidering the concept, he added another possible dimension to it, a subversive one, which turned it into “transgressive theory” (Said, *Reflections* 439). With this latter term, Said emphasized the possibility that some theoretical appropriations do not simply continue and endorse an initial theory, instead challenge or even contradict some of its elements, such as Adorno’s usage of Lukács’s theories when discussing Schoenberg. Although the possible transgressive character of travelling theories relates

directly to my understanding of “travelling theory-fiction”, both the initial and the reassessed conceptualizations of “travelling theory” are inherently mono-medial, they mostly perpetuate themselves through a textual medium.

Defining “theory-fiction” is a more challenging endeavour than it was the case with “travelling theory”. For one thing, “theory-fiction” does not have a clearly traceable origin, in terms of neither a particular author, nor a certain foundational text. Even though I assume, in what follows, that the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU) were the most important pioneers of “theory-fiction”, there is at least one mention of the term before the CCRU on the back cover of Arthur Kroker’s 1993 book *Spasm*, and other authors such as Deleuze&Guattari who severely influenced many aspects of the CCRU’s writings. I consider, however, that “theory-fiction” started gaining attention and could be conceived as a distinct discursive practice from the CCRU onwards because of the group’s programmatic and sustained project of pushing the boundaries between what is usually understood as theory and fiction.

Before approaching “theory-fiction” more conceptually, a few words are required to describe what the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit was, especially because research on the group is scarce. In their own sci-fi-inspired slang, the “Ccru retrochronically triggers itself from October 1995, using a UK university as a temporary habitat” (CCRU 7). The University of Warwick, specifically, was the place where the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit came together, a group comprised of several students and faculty members, first led by Sadie Plant and then by Nick Land. Although spanning a very wide range of disciplines and cutting-edge theories, from continental philosophy, genre fiction, occultism to natural sciences, such as “neurology, bacteriology, thermodynamics, metallurgy, chaos and complexity theory, connectionism” (Reynolds), the CCRU’s interests were very little, if at all, aligned to university standards.

Even though the practices extensively used by the CCRU were short-lived inside academia, they constitute the group’s most important legacy, and they aid in identifying some of the elements of “theory-fiction”. Besides the already mentioned disciplines which the CCRU coalesced, they were simultaneously attempting to “connect and cross-intensify with peripheral cultural processes”, be they electronic music such as rave and jungle, or various contemporary cultural approaches, like Afrofuturism (CCRU 9). These apparent contradictory fields and discourses are not appropriated in an “imperialist” fashion,

which would make them simple appendages subsumed to a larger argument, instead, the CCRU wanted to “think, theorize, and produce with rather «about» (or – even worse - «for») them” (CCRU 9). Another crucial dimension of “theory-fiction”, as exemplified by the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit, is multimediality or “polymedia presentations” (CCRU 11). Most of their output, either in an academic context or otherwise, was accompanied by a non-textual component, such as audio, video or, sometimes, even full-fledged performances (Mackay).

Up until this point, I have emphasized some characteristics of “theory-fiction” as seen in the works of the CCRU. Could we arrive, however, at a more general understanding of “theory-fiction”, starting from these previous ideas, but also taking into consideration the fact that different authors might opt to combine different discourses and mediums? Conceptualizing or formulating a more formal description of “theory-fiction” is challenging, in part, due to the subject matter itself, a discourse which thrives on bringing together diverse, sometimes contradictory concepts. That is why, with a notable exception, analyses of this phenomenon are rare, and my brief attempt at defining “theory-fiction” is not exhaustive, but more so tentative and incipient.

The exception to which I was alluding above is Mark Fisher’s *Flatline Constructs. Gothic Materialism and Cybernetic Theory-Fiction*, in which the author discusses what he deems as “cybernetic theory-fiction”, be it some of David Cronenberg’s films, Philip K. Dick novels or Baudrillard’s theories. Fisher’s text has a limited utility, mainly because it was originally written at a time when the influence of the CCRU had not yet fully spread, and the group was still active with Fisher as a part of it. Another reason is what might be deemed as a post-structuralist ambiguity deployed by the author when defining the term. For him, “what is at stake here [in theory-fiction] is more than the disguise of theory as fiction, or fiction as theory, but a dissolution of the opposition itself” (Fisher 155-6). On the one hand, although he makes somewhat convincing cases for all the texts and films he analyses as to why they could be seen as “theory-fiction”, most of them make use extensively of conventions pertaining to one discourse or the other (theory or fiction). On the other hand, Fisher approaches “theory-fiction” from a predominantly post-structuralist perspective, referencing mostly to Deleuze-Guattari and Baudrillard. As seen from the quote above, this makes his approach difficult to formalize and replicate in the case of other objects which could prove to be “theory-fiction”.

What I propose, instead, is a diagrammatic understanding of “theory-fiction”. Although this is not a paper on the possible benefits of diagrammatology, I will offer a few reasons for endorsing such a methodology, especially when defining “theory-fiction”. The most important characteristic of a diagram, at least here, is that it is not simply a textual representation or description of certain relationships between objects, it is also an enactment of those relationships, “its syntax is already a part of its semantics” (Gangle 6). Another feature particular to diagrams, which allows us to bypass the vagueness mentioned above regarding Fisher’s definition of “theory-fiction”, is their capacity to “communicate more formally” (O’Sullivan, Production 9). Thus, diagrams provide us with a visual aid and reinforce a formal understanding of certain phenomena. This is not to say that diagrams are rigid or definitive representations. On the contrary, they are continuously revisable and constructive tools which can be subjected to different changes. More so, this process of diagramming different concepts could “allow for the forcing of encounters and conjunctions and the production of surprising compatibilities” (O’Sullivan, Diagram 17). Therefore, the utility of diagrams in studying “theory-fiction” comes from their pragmatic, relational and multi-scalar capacities, plus an ability to formalize certain concepts while retaining a constructive and revisionist dimension to them.



Figure 1

I have constructed two simple diagrams to exemplify my current understanding of “theory-fiction”. These diagrams have considerably reduced the elements of “theory-

fiction”, gathering the different concepts and disciplines which gave specificity to the CCRU’s hybrid discourses under the two crucial components of “theory” and “fiction”. Figure 1 represents what I deem to be the common, institutionalized relationship between theory and fiction, and the main correlation “theory-fiction” seeks to dismiss. I believe no diagram can truly be exhaustive since that is not its purpose, so this diagram is far from exhaustively representing the relationship between all types of theoretical and fictional discourses, but it stages a general understanding of their interconnectedness. Both theory and fiction inform one another and constitute themselves based on the input received from the other. It is important to note that, in this understanding of theory and fiction, no matter how interdependent they are on one another, they are still clearly distinguishable discourses. Even though there are several convincing arguments regarding the intermediality of fictions and narratives, the preferred medium through which both theories and fictions have proliferated is, at least historically speaking, the textual one. Therefore, the relationship between the two is bounded, in the figure above, by a frame representing the textual medium.

There are multiple elements to modify in this first diagram, in order to construct a proper visualization of “theory-fiction” (figure 2). First, the distance between “theory” and “fiction” needs to be eliminated and, even more, the two terms must be joined into one. Although, in the “theory-fiction” diagram below, “theory” stands above “fiction”, no hierarchical significance should be given to this topological placement, as both terms bear, ideally, the same significance. A new relationship needs to be instituted as well, but now that “theory” and “fiction” are not separate entities, this is no longer the interdependence from figure 1. The arrow in figure 2 stands for a self-reflective consideration and instantiation of the concept’s own existence. More than anything, it is similar to a cybernetic feedback loop or “chain of feedback” (Wiener 131), which transmits and connects the output of a system to its subsequent input. This idea of feedback loop is more nuanced and more appropriate to describe “theory-fiction” because, compared to self-reflection, the former also captures contextual data from the different settings in which “theory-fiction” may instantiate itself and effect different alterations. Lastly, “theory-fiction” is not embedded in a single, monolithic medium, due to its capacity to effortlessly swap between or simultaneously inhabit different mediums.

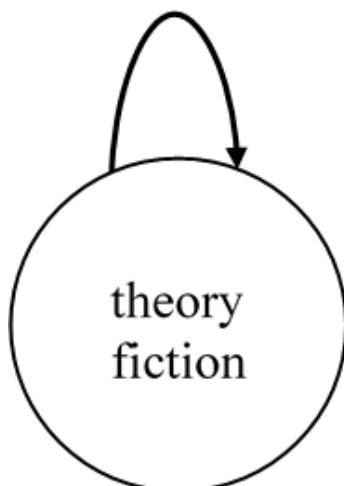


Figure 2

Performativity and “hyperstition”

This second section of the paper builds upon “hyperstition”, a crucial concept from “theory-fiction”, in order to provide an analysis of some texts and performances by the Romanian artists Alina Popa and Florin Flueraş. Popa and Flueraş started working together at the beginning of the 2010s, each of them being priorly involved in other artistic projects. Popa was a part of the Bureau of Melodramatic Research, alongside Irina Gheorghe, while Flueraş had started Postspectacle in 2008, with Ion Dumitrescu. Their habits of working together differ in various ways, compared to how they worked with their other projects. Most notably, they do not form a group *per se*, as in sharing a single, which is a common concept when performing or publishing their works. Instead, they develop separate works under the same conceptual frame (Popa & Flueraş, *Immateriality* 376-7). Over time, they investigated several concepts, such as “Unsorcery”, “Black Hyperbox”, “The Clinic” etc. and I will return to the last two in this section. In addition, “Artworlds” and “Esthetic Entities” are two other concepts of great interest to this paper and will help in linking “hyperstition” to the practices of the two artists.

“Artworlds” and “Esthetic Entities” are concepts developed separately by Popa and Flueraş, but which are interchangeable and largely carry the same meaning, as I will attempt to prove next. Briefly put, they are umbrella-terms which reflect the artists’ own theories regarding their general practice and projects. Their interchangeability is best exemplified by the fact that, even though Alina Popa writes to a greater extent about

“Artworlds”, it is Florin Flueraş who offers a concise definition of it, and, vice versa, she sums up in her writings Flueraş’s preferred term of “Esthetic Entities”.

In the latter’s terms, “Artworlds are mildly choreographed processes that are establishing as artworks not only products but production, research, curating, art making, forms of living” (Flueraş, *Esthetic Entities* 52). Two key aspects of “Artworlds” are revealed by Flueraş’s conceptualization: on one hand, their processual nature and, on the other, their possible, but not compulsory, immateriality. “Artworlds” do not seek to exhibit as artworks the finished products of an artistic labour and, to a certain extent, they are not interested in “exhibiting” as it is traditionally conceived. Instead, they want to highlight the multilevel processes that take place behind supposedly finished products and, in doing so, to stage how interconnected and influential are to one another all the different elements which compose the “art world”. This could sometimes mean that “Artworlds” have nothing to “show” explicitly which is also a concern voiced by one of the characters in Flueraş’s text “Life Programming”, 38-39. But this immateriality is justified, in part, by the impossibility to display or perform all the constitutive elements that play a role in conceiving an artwork. More than simply raising awareness regarding the different components of the art industry, Popa and Flueraş’s projects seek to modify the common understanding and limitations of the art world. This is done by what Popa calls “changing horizons”, moving beyond the commonly circumscribed domain of art and bringing together apparently contradictory fields, such as medicine like in their project “The Clinic” or occult practices like in “Unsorcery”). A change of horizons is not a change of perspectives, because different perspectives can pertain, in the end, to the same horizon. Switching between different horizons helps with “bridging discontinuous local fields”, which, in turn, “makes it possible to reveal new globalities, wherein the initial hybridity is imperceptible” (Popa, *Artworld* 59).

Many of the key elements I have underlined in the case of “Artworlds” overlap with the ideas behind “Esthetic Entities”. To offer a brief definition, these entities are “works that are worlds, unrepresentable, unexhibitable, because they are not visual, not employable as such to perform in museums, they are not spectacles to be programmed in the theatre, yet they are effective” (Popa, *Artworld* 59). An emphasis on processes is visible here as well, as “Esthetic Entities” go beyond the scope of simple museum exhibitions, due to their immateriality. They seek to “create conditions for new possibility

of thought and practice” (Flueraş, *Esthetic Entities* 43) and, to do so, “dislocate and transport an entire apparatus from one field to another” (Flueraş, *Esthetic Entities* 48). There are many similarities, if not a complete isomorphism between the two concepts, from their overall purpose of going beyond the constraints of the art world and constructing new spaces for novel artistic practices, to their methods of colliding divergent fields, this latter element already being reminiscent of the CCRU’s practices.

Both “Artworlds” and “Esthetic Entities” elicit a reference to another turning point in art theory and practice, namely institutional critique. However, whereas the latter sought to expose how “confined” the artists and their works are to the control mechanisms of the art world (Smithson 154), Popa and Flueraş create alternative art worlds. The main difference between these two approaches relates to their aim. Institutional critique deconstructs and criticizes the different elements impeding the artist’s complete freedom, from curatorial practices to the art world’s financial aspects, but it does not liberate art from these mechanisms. On the other hand, the proposal behind “Artworlds” and “Esthetic Entities” is a constructive one, of building art worlds separate from the already existing one, which could be modelled around different intents. These spaces should “no longer be based on critique, denunciation, exposure or acts of resistance from inside, but based on directly changing the structural ambience of their respective worlds” (Flueraş, *Esthetic Entities* 46). In this sense, “Artworlds” and “Esthetic Entities” share more similarities with “hyperstition”, than with institutional critique.

“Hyperstition” is a crucial component of the CCRU’s “theory-fictional” toolkit. It is so important that they named one of their websites after it, still accessible to this day (<http://hyperstition.abstractdynamics.org/>). If we only look at the CCRU glossary entry for the term, it can be difficult to make sense of its meaning: “Element of effective culture that makes itself real, through fictional quantities functioning as time-travelling potentials. Hyperstition operates as a coincidence intensifier, effecting a call to the Old Ones” (CCRU 363). Setting aside the second part of this quote, which is a direct reference to one of the fictional systems most quoted by the CCRU, that of H.P. Lovecraft, the first part sheds some light regarding some notable aspects of the concept. There is an interplay between a specific element which “makes itself real” and an operation involving “fictional quantities”, between reality and fiction, in other words. Robin Mackay offers the clearest

explanation of this interplay: “hyperstitions” are “fictions that make themselves real through collective practice”.

An entry on the Hyperstition blog, written by Linda Trent whose (in)existence I have a firm belief is a hyperstition itself (see Ireland 14), helps to unravel the two-step process through which “simple” fictions turn into “hyperstitions”, already hinted at by Mackay’s quote above. First, the fictional system needs to be “collectivized”, opened to a wider involvement from different people. “Hyperstitions” can never belong to a single author. Even though their fictional infrastructure originates from a certain author, such as Lovecraft’s *mythos*, multiple people must contribute to these fictions, so that they surpass their fictional status. The other step involves the “practical deployment of the fictional system” (Trent), meaning that people must actually believe in the “reality” of that fictional system and put it into practice. “Hyperstitions” require an engaged act of belief from the people who seek to bring this system into reality, thus, finally, blurring the boundaries between what is normally considered real or fictional. These fictions-turned-realities extend the theory-fiction’s project of blending different discourses and making the difference itself redundant, and thus, they underline the constructed, fictional nature of objects we consider to be “real”.

Popa and Flueraş’s concepts of “Artworlds” and “Esthetic Entities” can be grasped as “hyperstitions” who act in a specific domain that is the art world, but sometimes have a wider scope, such as in “The Clinic”. Their practice can be directly associated both with the overall intention of “hyperstition”, and with the latter’s two-step implementation. Through their projects, the artists seek to create “new environments” (Flueraş, *Esthetic Entities* 46), alternative art spaces, which could, ideally, constitute not a hegemonic art world, but multiple “Artworlds” functioning according to their own rules. Insofar as every artistic project is subsumed, to varying degrees, to the existing mechanisms of the art world, Popa and Flueraş are trying to instantiate, inside of this machinery, fictions that do not obey the “real” rules. They perform and project their “Esthetic Entities” similar to how a “hyperstition” takes a hold in reality. First, they avoid single ownership of a particular “Artworld”, making them open to participation for several persons. Most of their performances require an active participation from the “spectators”, but, more importantly, they develop the various “Artworlds” in collaboration with other artists (for example, “Black Hyperbox”, “Art Opening” etc.). The second “hyperstitional” requirement

is also met, that of “critically deploying the fictional system”. Probably the best example of practicing ideas commonly described as fictional is “The Clinic”, a project that sought to create a clinic based on heterodox types of healing, avoiding allopathic medicine and taking inspiration, among others, from indigenous therapeutic practices.

A larger sense of fiction is envisaged by the concept of “hyperstition” which relates to the acceptance of the non-distinction between fictional and real elements. This term does not simply refer to science-fictional, fantastic, or occult elements that could be made real, although some artists might use tropes from these areas, but, more concretely, involves ideas that go against the accepted and naturalized norm. That is why Popa and Flueraş’s construction of other “Artworlds” can be subsumed to “hyperstitional” practices. As I mentioned above, contrary to the ossified mechanisms of the current art world, they want to propose more fluid and extra-artistic spaces which could still function and be presented as art worlds. I prefer the term “hyperstition” when it comes to Popa and Flueraş due to its relation to the CCRU and, implicitly, with “theory-fiction”. As I will demonstrate in the following, an applied analysis of some of their projects can highlight how the two artists practice a “juxtaposition of antagonist concepts” (Popa & Flueraş 380) highly reminiscent of the “theory-fictional” overlap between apparently excluding discourses.

“Artworlds” and “Esthetic Entities” are the main frameworks behind the practices of Alina Popa and Florin Flueraş, and give an overall “hyperstitional” dimension to their projects. However, there are other ways too in which “theory-fictional” ramifications run throughout their works and which I attempt to elucidate starting from two “Artworlds”: “Black Hyperbox” and “The Clinic”. I will base my analysis mostly on the accompanying texts of each project, referencing to a lesser degree the performative outputs. This is due, in part, to the theoretical and conceptual aim of this paper which is not meant to be read as art criticism. Furthermore, in order to specifically emphasize the “theory-fictional” elements of their projects, I will mainly refer to the different discourses the artists merge together.

“Black Hyperbox” primarily addresses the idea of space in contemporary performance art, specifically the physical and conceptual confines of these stage. On the one hand, Flueraş draws attention to the “black box” quality of performance spaces, their capacity to “produce anomalies that shake the established reality” (Flueraş, Black Box 83).

However, performers should not be limited by the “official” spaces where they are invited to perform and should, instead, reconfigure other spaces through their artistic outputs. In one of his performances from the “Black Hyperbox” project, the artist seeks to put into practice this latter idea, bringing “unexperiences”, “deviations from pre-packaged affectivity” (Flueraş, *Unexperiences*), in places not usually conceived as fit for performances, such as airports, supermarkets etc.

A need to redefine the space of performance is also taken up by Alina Popa, but whereas Flueraş seeks to take performances out of their familiar spaces, into non-art places, Popa wants to conceptually hybridize the “black box” of performance with the Amazonian jungle. For Popa, although apparently contradictory, these two spaces are important examples of places which instantiate different understandings of space and time, “where spatiotemporality buds away from the grids of linear perspective, and representation is on the run” (Popa, *X Horizon* 99). With this in common between the two, a “fictional overlapping” of these spaces can lead to a “dynamic, conceptual double-seeing, a double horizon («X»)” (Popa, *X Horizon* 103). This “X”-perspective, crossing the boundaries and bridging opposing elements, creates a productive alienation, both for the actual performer, who can shift between different perspectives and “horizons”, and for broadening the conceptual or physical confines of the stage (for the latter, see Popa’s performance “Point of Indifference”).

There are strong decolonial influences in Popa’s repeated references to the Amazonian jungle and other various indigenous ideas, coming especially from Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s writings. Probably the most important concept taken from the latter’s decolonial anthropology is that of “perspectivism”, namely the way Amerindian people see the world as “composed of a multiplicity of points of views” (Viveiros de Castro 55). These different perspectives are not something inherently and exclusively human, but are particular to various animals and other non-human entities. More important than this, especially for Popa and, to a certain extent, Flueraş, is that these perspectives are not something pertaining to rationality, to the mind. Instead, the points of view are somatic, they arise from and are elements of the body. In this Amerindian ontology, what differentiates between human and non-human animals is not the former’s “mind”, with the different Western prerogatives associated to this term, but the specificity of each body: “animals perceive in the same way as us but perceive different things than we do, because

their bodies are different than ours” (Viveiros de Castro 72). This valorisation of the somatic dimension, specific to perspectivism, is especially important for Popa and Flueraş’s artistic practices because, when it comes to performance art, the body is most of the times the main medium through which the artist works. Perspectivist elements already appear in “Black Hyperbox”, from the capacity of the performer to alter their affective states through somatic processes, highlighted in Flueraş’s “Unexperiences”, to Popa’s “X”-perspective, a double point of view which transcends common unidimensional perspectives, much like shamans can do in Amerindian societies (Viveiros de Castro 60).

Decolonial ideas also constitute an important component of the second “Aesthetic Entity” I discuss, “The Clinic”. If “Black Hyperbox” aimed to challenge contemporary ideas regarding performance spaces, by applying certain decolonial concepts to them in order to revise and bring alternative art theories, “The Clinic” is built mostly on non-artistic concepts and seeks to address elements from the medical field. Initiated after Alina Popa was diagnosed with a chronic disease, “The Clinic” wanted to create a space where alternative healing therapies could be performed and enacted efficiently. In their attempt to defy the “consensus fiction” of Western medical views (Popa, Square 21) and allopathic medicine in general, the artists draw inspiration from indigenous conceptualizations of disease and symptoms. Instead of seeing symptoms and diseases as “random accidents to get rid of” (Flueraş, Life Programming 21), non-Western perspectives embed them in a larger, lifestyle related system, which conceives healing as a multi-level process unable to be fulfilled simply through “chemical” solutions (i.e. pharmaceutical products). There are various performative therapies which took place at “The Clinic”, from Popa’s “Heal the Line”, which asked people to touch a line drawn on the floor and imagine they are healing the artist or other sick people, to Flueraş’s “Unexist”, during which people were simply supposed to lie down “with the intention to unexist for a while”. Although the political dimension of these artistic projects and ideas falls beyond the scope of this article, it is important to briefly note the overwhelmingly anti-scientific discourses proffered by the two artists especially in “The Clinic”, which, after Alina Popa’s death and the COVID-19 pandemic, were instrumentalized by Florin Flueraş in a full-fledged reactionary discourse on his social media platforms.

As I have demonstrated in this section, “theory-fiction” appears in the texts and performances of Popa and Flueraş both directly, through its conceptual extension of

“hyperstition”, and indirectly, as a methodical convergence between disparate and apparently opposing discourses and mediums. The two artists’ overall project, summed up in their terms “Artworlds” or “Esthetic Entities”, display a “hyperstitional” aim of constructing alternatives to the institutionalized entities of the current art world. Insofar as these new, less rigidly defined, and inclusive art spaces are contrary to the naturalized view of the art world, they function as fictions which the artists bring into reality and collectively establish in the world. Popa and Flueraş have created several “Artworlds” over time, and most are constituted by merging and blending antagonist concepts, a method indebted to “theory-fiction” and the latter’s interest in weakening the discursive and disciplinary boundaries between different fields. Two of the main discourses they hybridize with the “theory-fictional”/“hyperstitional” one have also been relevant in the projects discussed above, namely art theory and decolonialism. Theories concerning contemporary performance art and a decolonial “perspectivist” worldview are juxtaposed in “Black Hyperbox” to create the premises for an extended meaning of art spaces, whereas “The Clinic” creates an overlap between a decolonial priority of the body as “bundle of affects” (Viveiros de Castro 73) and a “hyperstitional” investment of faith in the possibility of transforming reality.

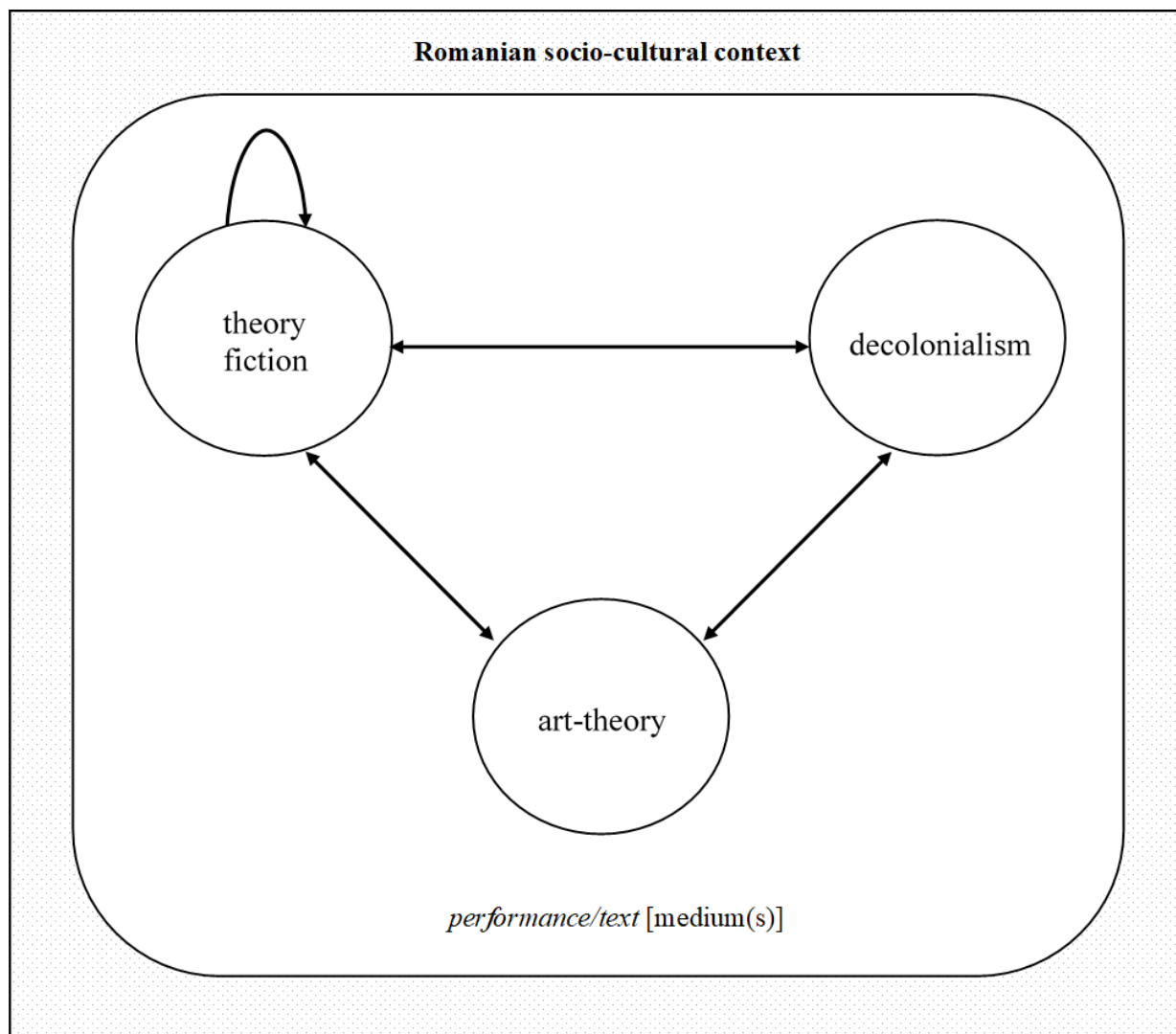


Figure 3

Remarks on the Romanian case of “travelling theory-fiction”

In this final section, I will discuss some of the particularities of “travelling theory-fiction”, especially as they appear in the Romanian context and relating to the artists analysed in the second section of the paper. To exemplify my current understanding of the autochthonous instance of “travelling theory-fiction”, I have developed the diagram in figure 3 that I will refer to in this section. There are two main discrepancies between Said’s notion of “travelling theory” and my proposal of “travelling theory-fiction”. The first is linked to the nature of the texts which are being transferred between different cultures and settings. If “travelling theory” is mostly based on theoretical texts as the terms

already suggest, “travelling theory-fiction” outsources “theory-fictional” texts. More important than the different textual material is the method and the overall goal of “theory-fiction”, which influences the second distinction between the two types of circulation. “Travelling theory-fiction” assumes the methodical dislocation and recombination of diverse and diverging concepts inherent to “theory-fiction”, but extends this approach to the medium through which these ideas are presented. Thus, performance is a particularly suitable medium to absorb and proliferate these ideas due to its “volatile”, almost unstable nature (Foellmer 17) and its ability to entertain a high degree of intermediality.

Besides these general considerations on the intermedial capabilities of “travelling theory-fiction”, there are two other hypotheses I will briefly address regarding the constitution of the Romanian case of “travelling theory-fiction”, which revolve around the “socio-cultural context” aspect depicted in figure 3 by the outermost frame. The main question addressed by these hypotheses is “Why has «theory-fiction» entered Romanian culture through performance and not through a textual medium?”, or, in other words, “What elements of the autochthonous socio-cultural context have limited the publication of «theory-fictional» texts in Romania(n)?”. My answers consider, on one hand, the differences between the art world and the literary or philosophical institutions, and, on the other hand, the lack of translations from foreign “theory-fictional” texts in Romanian.

In their two dialogues published in the *Euphorion* journal, Mihai Iovănel and Christian Moraru discuss the “conservative and ultra-conservative” politics of various Romanian cultural institutions (Iovănel & Moraru, Political Correctness 20) and the difficulty of importing cutting-edge theoretical concepts in outdated research environments (Iovănel & Moraru, Critical Cultures). Contrary to the antiquated model of the literary institutions, the art world has a rather more internationalized circulation system, in terms of biennials, residencies etc. This is not to say that the latter does not suffer from financial or other institutional problems, but it has more alternative ways to access the international art system. One example of alternative international artistic venues, referenced multiple times in Alina Popa and Florin Flueraș’s writings, is PAF (Performing Arts Forum), an informal institution for artists and theorists, where the two probably came in contact with some of the contemporary radical theories employed in their works. (PAF had a 2014 “summer university” dedicated to speculative realism and accelerationism.)

Besides the institutional delay of some fields which, theoretically, should be more interested in “theory-fiction” (literary studies, philosophy etc.), another issue that might work against this phenomenon’s broader reception in Romanian culture is the lack of translations of “theory-fictional” texts from foreign, mostly English language. Although there are sporadic translations from important precursors of “theory-fiction” representing mostly French Theory, such as Deleuze&Guattari, Baudrillard, Lyotard etc., there are almost no translations from the CCRU, either as a group, or from its individual members except for Mark Fisher’s *Capitalist Realism*, which, however, can be hardly seen as “theory-fiction”. This impedes a proper accommodation with and adoption of “theory-fiction”, because it conditions the contact with these texts and concepts to a knowledge of contemporary international theories¹.

Given these two contextual, socio-cultural conditions formalized by the outermost frame in figure 3, “theory-fiction” has entered Romanian culture through an artistic milieu, making it possible to call this circulation “travelling theory-fiction”. The intermedial nature of this phenomenon is transposed in figure 3 by a shift between two mediums, the performative and the textual one depicted by the rounded frame of the diagram. Finally, there are multiple discourses juxtaposed in the conceptual toolbox of Alina Popa and Florin Flueraş, the two main representatives of “travelling theory-fiction”. Besides actual “theory-fictional” mechanisms, decolonialism and art theory also play an important part in their projects. The two artists borrow different elements from these disciplines, combining and recalibrating their entire discourse and performances based on the interplay between these three areas represented by the circles in the middle of figure 3.

Conclusions

¹ I should briefly note some other, very few authors who have absorbed different “theory-fictional” elements in their writings. Some of them such as Ion Dumitrescu (*Pre*), Ştefan Tiron (*Cosmic Drift & Temporal Divergence*) and other authors who have contributed certain quasi-“theory-fictional” texts to numbers 24-25 (“Hybrids”) and 38-39 (“Art and Digitality”) to *Arta* journal (Anca Bucur etc.) have also an artistic background,. Probably the text most overtly assuming a “theory-fictional” dimension is Maia Şerbănescu’s *OikosLogia*, published in 2022. These texts were not directly discussed in the article because they represent isolated exceptions, whereas Popa and Flueraş’s projects have had a sustained adherence to “theory-fiction”.

This paper analysed a particular instance of the circulation of “theory-fiction”, its adoption into Romanian culture by way of performance artists Alina Popa and Florin Flueraş. I have chosen to conceptualize this transference as “travelling theory-fiction” because it brings in the intermedial aspect as an important upgrade to Edward Said’s notion of “travelling theory”. As I have shown in the analysis of the texts and performances of Popa and Flueraş, “travelling theory-fiction” not only takes up theoretical and conceptual elements from “theory-fictional” texts, but it also transports them into different mediums, such as performance art in this case. This import is ultimately conditioned by the larger socio-cultural context of Romania and the conservative politics adopted by some institutions which have made it difficult for a relatively classical, textual adoption of “theory-fiction”.

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