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Between Dada and Architecture: Marcel Janco in Zurich and Bucharest, 1916-1939

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

by

Adele Robin Avivi

June 2012

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The Thesis of Adele Robin Avivi is approved:

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father,

Ami Avivi ז"ל. *Toda'ba.*

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Introduction:

A mutual embrace of Dada and architecture

In 1957 former Dadaist Hans Arp wrote in praise of Marcel Janco and his contribution to the “fantastic world” of Dada: “In those works you predicted and prophesied so much. I, at the time, preferred pure geometry. It was you, you who were right, since, despite your architecture, you prophesied the era of complete and free fabulation in art.”¹ Hans Arp refers here with great approbation to the “frightful” masks Marcel Janco made for the Dada performances and to his early sculptures and paintings, so different, as Arp notes, from what he had seen in Paris. With this statement, Arp grants Janco a role as visionary among the Zurich Dadaists, noting that Janco’s creative liberation, what he refers to as “complete and free fabulation in art,” prefigured his own. Buried in this statement of praise, however, is a moment of hesitation signaled by the anomalous seclusion of the phrase “despite your architecture.” This phrase appears incidental to the overall message but is nevertheless revealing. It sections off Janco’s architecture to acknowledge a tension: his architecture is at odds with his “fantastic creatures” of Dada.² That Arp mentions the architecture at all and then segregates it alludes to the challenge of dealing with Marcel Janco’s seemingly contradictory roles as

¹ Hans Arp quoted in Marcel L. Mendelson, *Marcel Janco* (Tel Aviv: Massadah Publishing, 1962), 119. Arp's mention of his preference for “pure geometry” may be in reference to the grid format of his and Sophie Taeuber's *Duo-Collages*. In terms of form, I also associate it with modern architecture's self-imposed formal restrictions, which Arp implicitly sets in opposition to its inverse in the “free fabulation” of Dada.

² Ibid.

Dadaist and modern architect. Hans Arp's generous praise for his friend Marcel Janco may not have significant implications for a critical study of his work, but it suggests what in Janco's oeuvre has been most valued – his Dada over his architecture – and hints that these two constituent parts are mutually exclusive, a belief that this thesis will reconsider.

Marcel Janco (1895-1984) is best known for his co-founding of the Dada movement in Zurich at the Cabaret Voltaire in 1916. Additionally, what most of the authors writing on him, whether in a cursory survey or more in-depth scholarship, also never fail to mention is his concurrent study of architecture in Zurich. Rarely though is this intriguing incongruity more closely examined. His artistic practice and his architecture studies are often treated as discrete pursuits, if not as contradictory ones, as Arp delicately implied. This raises the question of how Janco perceived their relationship. He was the one equally engaged in both activities. Did he imagine a different relationship between them than did Arp? Could it be that this dichotomy is more nuanced, and if so, what is the element of compatibility that blurs the line of separation?

Before exploring these questions, it is necessary to first set out how to deal with these two categories. When comparing the objectives and methods of Dada and modern architecture, many more inconsistencies than correspondences emerge, and an attempt at their assimilation may seem arbitrarily motivated. And indeed, for Janco, it was. He came to Zurich to study architecture and happened only by chance upon the Cabaret Voltaire, bringing along with him (as the story goes) Tristan Tzara, its future 'impresario.'³ Besides the disparity between architecture and the tenets of Dada that Hans Arp implies

³ Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 50.

(between the severity and restrictions of “pure geometry” and the indeterminacy and lack of restrictions in “complete and free fabulation”), there are other contradictions inherent in linking architecture and Dada. Joan Ockman notes some of these when accounting for the career of Jefim Golyscheff, a “minor modernist” like Marcel Janco, who had connections to both the Arbeitsrat für Kunst and Berlin Dada:

There is no question of discontinuity between idealism and nihilism, between the anarcho-romantic dream of the tabula rasa signifying an end to history and the emancipatory but decisively anti-utopian science of a Nietzsche. It is this deep contradiction that underlies the momentary embrace between the “positive” and the “negative,” between architecture and dadaism.⁴

Janco, however, did not understand Zurich Dada as a purely nihilistic venture. Rather, as he perceived Dada, it had two alternative strains: its original nihilistic bent associated with its poets and its subsequent embrace of a more constructive purpose associated with a number of its visual artists. This particular view of the movement, echoed by fellow Dadaist Hans Richter in his book *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (1965), allows for an easier transition to architecture because it eliminates the contradiction between idealism and nihilism, both of which were present in the group. Janco’s definition of Dada will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter One.

The significance of place is also an important consideration for an analysis of Marcel Janco’s work because each of his seemingly discrete careers can be conveniently tied to a particular city, Dada to Zurich and architecture to Bucharest. In 1914, on the exhortations of his father “to learn something more practical” than painting, Marcel Janco

⁴ Joan Ockman, “Reinventing Jefim Golyscheff: Lives of a Minor Modernist,” *Assemblage* 11 (April 1990): 93.

left Romania and came to Switzerland with his brothers and in 1915 enrolled at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich [ETH].⁵ According to S. A. Mansbach, the Janco brothers chose to study in Switzerland instead of in Darmstadt, which had previously been a customary destination for Jewish youth from Eastern Europe interested in architecture, because with rumblings of World War I the brothers feared being drafted, as Romania at the time was still allied with Germany.⁶ In Zurich, Janco reconnected with Tristan Tzara, whom he had known in Romania from their collaboration on the short-lived journal *Simbolul* (1912), and he soon met Hugo Ball in early 1916 after stumbling upon the Cabaret Voltaire in search of work.⁷

In Zurich, he abandoned the spelling of his identifiably Romanian name 'Iancu' and replaced it with the phonetically similar 'Janco.'⁸ He likely modified his name to fit his new Western European locale. Likewise, when he returned to Bucharest in 1921 and began his career as a professional architect, he resumed the spelling 'Iancu.'⁹ These two names, linked respectively to Zurich and Bucharest, are accompanied by two distinct artistic identities, making for a rupture in his historical narrative. He is often either Janco the Dadaist in Zurich (1916-1919) or Iancu the modern architect and artist in Bucharest

⁵ Francis M. Naumann, "Janco/Dada: An Interview with Marcel Janco," *Arts Magazine* 57, no. 3 (1982): 80; Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 78.

⁶ S. A. Mansbach, "The 'Foreignness' of Classical Modern Art in Romania," *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 3 (September 1998): 552, n. 16.

⁷ Naumann, "Janco/Dada: An Interview with Marcel Janco," 81.

⁸ The spelling of his name as 'Marcel Janco' seems to have first appeared in the 1916 publication of Tristan Tzara's *La Première Aventure Céléste de Mr Antipyrine*, which Janco illustrated and in which he is listed as both "Marcel Janco" and "M. Ianco." See Tristan Tzara, *La Première Aventure Céléste De Mr. Antipyrine* (Paris: Dilecta, 2005).

⁹ Raffaele Bedarida, "From Iancu to Janco: The Balkan Seeds of Cabaret Voltaire," *Les Cahiers / Notebooks / Caietele Tristan Tzara* 15-17, no. 61-86 (2010): 781.

(1921-1939). The third part of his career unfolded in Israel from 1941 to 1984, during which he established the artists' village known as Ein Hod in 1953, where the Janco-Dada Museum was opened in 1983 and still remains.

In both cases of relocation, from Bucharest to Zurich and from Bucharest to Tel Aviv, external and intervening historical forces, the two world wars, compelled his departures, which resulted in the three separate periods of his career that are distinct because of the relationship of each to a particular site and set of circumstances. Even though the second and third legs of Marcel Janco's career account for a significantly longer period of time than the first (together adding up to more than sixty years) his reputation in art history hinges on the four year period from 1916 to 1919 in Zurich, disproportionately eclipsing the rest and perhaps justifiably so. His years as a Dadaist were the height of his aesthetic and political radicalization, catalyzing the rest of his career that was characterized by a steady and active engagement with the international avant-garde and a position of authority in his local sphere of influence. In Bucharest, this sphere was the artistic and literary avant-garde around the journal *Contimporanul* (1922-32), and in Tel Aviv, it was the group of artists affiliated with Ofakim Chadashim (New Horizons) and those living or working at the artists' village Ein Hod.

Because of the historical impact of Dada and subsequent scholarly interest, its development in Zurich has already received a great deal of critical attention, although the topography of the field continues to change. The breadth of existing material is sizeable, but specific materials pertaining to Marcel Janco are not quite as abundant. Primary texts

written by such figures as Hugo Ball, Hans Richter, and Hans Arp offer only brief, albeit condensed, statements regarding his personality, artistic inclinations, and specific works of art. And given the nature of these texts as diaries and retrospective writings, they often gloss the details. They touch nevertheless on the questions that this thesis explores and have proven valuable for trying to reconstruct how Janco was perceived in the group. To get a sense for Janco's own grasp of the movement and its history, I have turned to his written accounts from the 1950s and 60s which offer a more substantial view of his intentions, although these too are often veiled behind general statements. More recent critical examinations of Dada and its individual practitioners have helped to close this gap: in particular, the essays from the 2003 issue of *October* devoted to Dada, the catalogue *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* accompanying the 2005 exhibition at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the volume *Dada Zurich: A Clown's Game from Nothing*, which contains a chapter written by Harry Seiwert on Marcel Janco's early paintings in Zurich.¹⁰

Much less material is available in English on the subject of Janco's architectural studies in Zurich or his projects in Bucharest, and as a result this component of the thesis must rely on a smaller foundation of sources, mostly Janco's own essays on the subject translated in the catalogue *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist*, which accompanied the 1996 centenary exhibition of his work at the National Museum of Art of Romania. This catalogue also includes essays by Anca Bocăneț, which

¹⁰ *October* 105 (Summer 2003); Leah Dickerman, ed., *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2005); Brigitte Pichon and Karl Riha, eds., *Dada Zurich: A Clown's Game from Nothing* (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996).

offers essential information regarding the known buildings designed by Marcel Janco, including photographs and architectural plans.¹¹

Even if Dada and architecture do not cohere on a fundamental level beyond the scope of Marcel Janco's individual project, their intersections in his work warrant a closer examination. As such, this thesis proposes that although the two reside on opposite ideological and aesthetic poles, they were not fully independent practices in his case. A lecture that Janco delivered in 1918 at the ETH titled *On Cubism, Abstract Art, and Architecture* will be the key to linking them. In this lecture, he made the case that abstract art should be the agent to reconcile art and architecture. He believed that a reconciliation of the arts would lead to a reintegration of art and life, a typical goal for artists in the early twentieth century. As an example of the kind of abstract art that could enact this merging of genres, he gave his own abstract plaster reliefs. These plaster reliefs are commonly understood as iterations of Dada. By inserting them into a discussion of architecture in this lecture, he provided the opening we need to connect the two practices. This lecture then permits us to allow the paradox of their incongruity and explore his terms for their intersection in abstraction.

The organizing structure of the thesis will be chronological, with Chapter One focusing on Dada in Zurich (1916-1919) and Chapter Two on his interior designs in Bucharest (1922-1939). The first will outline a general framework for how to approach building a narrative around Janco's Dada practice. Following this will be a close look at

¹¹ Anca Bocănet and Dana Herbay, eds., *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist* (Bucharest: Editura Simetria, UAR and Editura Meridiane, 1996).

two examples of that practice: the famous masks worn in performances and the series of abstract plaster reliefs. Before placing the reliefs in the category of architecture, this chapter will reflect on what constitutes them as Dada, particularly in comparison to their counterpart in the more quintessentially Dada masks. The second chapter will follow Janco's move to Bucharest and will consider how his practice modified to fit this new location. After examining his theory more closely regarding the interrelation of the arts as first expressed in the 1918 lecture *On Cubism, Abstract Art, and Architecture*, this chapter will concentrate on two of his approaches to interior design, painting on walls and stained-glass windows, to see how they might be reappearances of ideas he articulated in Dada. Following Janco's career from Zurich to Bucharest, the two chapters will explore how his theories played out differently in each city, mainly looking at how his interior designs transferred and adapted elements of the plaster reliefs into realm of modern architecture.

My argument throughout will focus on critical occasions of intersection between Janco's Dada and architectural concerns. While it will not argue that there is a universal compatibility inherent between them, their juncture in his work and in his writing is a compelling reason to relate the first two legs of his career, examining how he exported the ideas he formulated in Zurich to his architecture in Bucharest. The goal is not to force the plaster reliefs or the later interior designs (which function under similar circumstances) forever into these categories. They can and should be variously interpreted. But the objective is to ascertain how Janco's goal of integrating art into

architecture, as expressed in the 1918 lecture *On Cubism, Abstract Art, and Architecture*, was productively applied in each of these cases.

Chapter One:

Seeking Constructive Principles, 1916-1919

The artistic production of Marcel Janco during the period of his affiliation with the Dada group in Zurich from 1916 to 1919 is characterized by variability, paralleling the collective heterogeneity attributed to Zurich Dada taken as a whole and its indeterminacy in terms of form and theory. Like his fellow Dadaists, Janco's dip into various mediums ranged widely and without a directed sense of order, ranging from paintings, sculpture, drawings, woodcuts, and plaster reliefs, to masks, costumes, set designs, performances, and lectures on art and architecture. He also moved fluidly between pictorial boundaries, shifting between the cubo-futurist style of his *Bal* paintings, the expressionistic lines of his jagged woodcuts, and the abstract mode of his plaster reliefs.¹² This complexity falls in line with the Dada rejection of systematic constraints, which allowed for Janco's diverse practices to coexist in unresolved tension, as maintained by the group's rhetoric of "continuous contradiction."¹³ Also playing a crucial role in Janco's early formation in Dada was his concurrent study of architecture at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich [ETH], where he was enrolled in the

¹² "Cubofuturist" is a term that Harry Seiwert uses to describe the style of Janco's early Zurich paintings, which will not be discussed here. Harry Seiwert, "Marcel Janco," in *Dada Zurich: A Clown's Game from Nothing*, ed. Brigitte Pichon and Karl Riha (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), 127.

¹³ Tristan Tzara articulates this position in the Dada Manifesto 1918: "I write this manifesto to show that people can perform contrary actions together while taking one fresh gulp of air; I am against action; for continuous contradiction, for affirmation too. I am neither for nor against and I do not explain because I hate common sense." He later reiterates: "I am against systems, the most acceptable system is on principle to have none." See Tristan Tzara, "Dada Manifesto 1918," in *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Dawn Ades, trans. Ralph Manheim (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 36-42.

overlapping years from 1915 to 1919. In accounting however for Janco's open-ended Dada production, it would be too reductive to shrink this multiplicity of mediums and genres down to a driving architectural concern. So it should be noted that while I explore ties to his interest in architecture, it is only one of the determinants guiding his practice.

Among these was his move to abstraction. Janco gradually shed what Arp called his style of "zigzag naturalism" [figure 1.1] and turned to a mode of non-objective abstraction, apparent in particular in a series of reliefs that he produced in plaster [figure 1.2].¹⁴ In this chapter, the relationship between his Dada and architectural goals will be explored through a study of this series of plaster reliefs made between 1917 and 1919.



Figure 1.1. Marcel Janco, *Bal à Zurich*, 1916, oil on canvas.

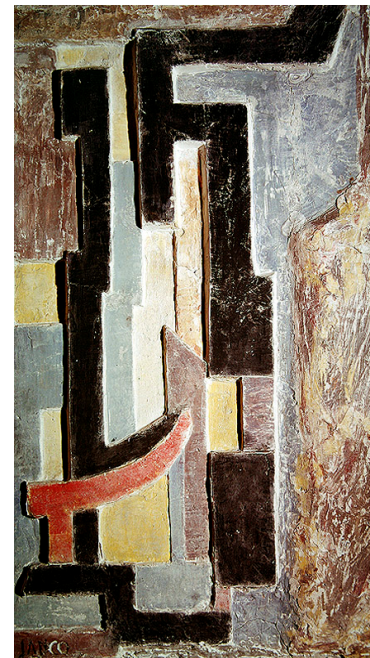


Figure 1.2. Marcel Janco, *Construction, Polychrome Study*, 1917, plaster relief.

¹⁴ What Harry Seiwert identifies as Janco's "cubofuturist" style is what Hans Arp calls his "zigzag naturalism." Jean Arp, "Dadaland," in *Collected French Writings: Poems, Essays, Memories*, ed. Marcel Jean, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974), 234.

They will be framed in terms of both: as dovetailing with the goals of Zurich Dada akin to the intentions behind the Dada masks but consistent also with his theories of interior architecture.

Embodying the heterogeneity of Zurich Dada

While the diversity of Marcel Janco's artistic production can be cast as the exploration of a young artist sifting through the styles of his predecessors (in 1916, he was 21 years old), his critical posture toward these styles should not be overlooked. The temptation to map this period – as Alfred Barr did in 1936 for the exhibition catalogue *Cubism and Abstract Art* – with lines of influence stemming from Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism and culminating in Dada, derives from this very recognition of Dada's eclectic nature.¹⁵ But the group's suspicion of dogmatic programs and its collective rejection of a unified style suggest a more complicated connection to these earlier movements. While the Dadaists did not conceal their debt to these previous “isms” in their work, they also did not offer their exclusive allegiance. Rather, the Dadaists raided their methods and subverted what might otherwise be seen as unquestioning embrace. In the words of Tristan Tzara, “We recognise no theory. We have enough Cubist and Futurist academies: laboratories for formal ideas.”¹⁶ The readymade materials, for example, that make up Marcel Janco's two documented *constructions* reference the

¹⁵ See the chart prepared by Alfred H. Barr, Jr. for the jacket of the exhibition catalogue *Cubism and Abstract Art* (New York; Museum of Modern Art, 1936).

¹⁶ Tzara, “Dada Manifesto 1918,” 37.

ordinary materials of Cubist collage and sculpture, but their intent and effect are markedly different [figure 1.3]. The materials of *Construction 3* (metal, wire, and a small metal rosette on a wooden base) are not redirected to stand in as recognizable representations. They are arranged in inexplicable combinations to form figures that prompt vague anthropomorphic associations; not quite enough, though, to allow the viewer to resolve it to a decipherable meaning. Janco's subversion of previous forms was less anarchic than others. He selectively integrated and reused what interested him, veering between these various movements but adhering to none of them. For instance, in his plaster reliefs, he combined lessons from Cubism and Expressionism. As he wrote, "[r]eliefs are organisms that take on life in the flatness of the surface. I have arrived at



Figure 1.3. Marcel Janco, *Construction 3*, 1917.
Photograph: *Dada* no. 1, July 1917.

this conclusion by a logical evolution, since Cubism is bound to the flat surface.” And he also connects it to personal and collective expression – to works of art that “act immediately....and speak to our innermost sensibilities.”¹⁷ The Dadaists by this point deemed irrelevant the obligation to cohere to one specific style. They were the first to fully turn their backs on it and focus instead on building an arsenal of formal strategies.¹⁸ Janco’s participation in this heterogeneity may well have determined the rest of his career, since after Zurich his work continued to be characterized by a resourceful versatility defying easy categorization.

Recent studies accommodate this interplay of conflicting forces in Dada through their definitions of the movement. The “primary revolution” of Dada, Leah Dickerman argues, was its “reconceptualization of practice as a form of tactics,” accomplished mainly by the methods of “abstraction, collage, montage, the readymade, the incorporation of chance and forms of automatization,” tactics which Janco employed to varying degrees in his own production.¹⁹ This understanding of the movement is consistent with assertions that Dada was a goal-less revolution, driven not by “preemptive conclusions” but by the “prismatic” potential of effects, and not aimed at a wholesale rejection of culture (as it is sometimes characterized) but rather aimed at confronting, infiltrating, and undermining the security of habitual structures of thought

¹⁷ Marcel Janco, “Vortrag Über Kubismus, Abstrakte Kunst Und Architektur,” in *Marcel Janco: Dadaist, Zeitgenosse, Wohltemperierter Morgenländischer Konstruktivist*, by Harry Seiwert (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1993), 535, translation mine.

¹⁸ Leah Dickerman, “Dada Gambits,” *October* Vol 105 (Summer 2003): 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*; Leah Dickerman, “Introduction,” in *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2005).

and perception.²⁰ Instead of prescribing specific goals, these artists embraced the open potential of disunity and simultaneity, generating attitudes that Brigitte Pichon explains were “geared towards flexibilization” in a “continuous state of liminality.”²¹

Significantly, at the time of the movement’s canonization in the mid-twentieth century, Marcel Janco had already questioned the dominant reading of Dada as anti-art nihilism. In his essays *Creative Dada* and *Dada at Two Speeds* he argued that alongside Zurich Dada’s more well-known cynical manifestations (its “farce of nothingness,” in the words of Hugo Ball),²² a more constructive side emerged in the visual arts.²³ Janco isolated these two impulses and separated out the intentions of the poets (Tristan Tzara, Walter Serner) who relished scandal and “proclaimed the death of art” from those of the visual artists who “had gone beyond negation, and no longer needed aggression and scandal to pursue [their] positive course.”²⁴ Zurich Dada, as he understood it, matured from the first step to the next:

[E]ach time the Dada flame flared again, burning somewhere, in milieux and locations everywhere, it began with the same purifying and scandalous force to consume the past and open up a new creative route. This spiritual violence of the first phase, which I call negative speed, very often remains in the same state, not

²⁰ For these definitions, see Dafydd Jones, “Introduction: ‘Der Holzweg Der Holzwege’,” in *Dada Culture: Critical Texts on the Avant-Garde*, ed. Dafydd Jones (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 9–33; Brigitte Pichon, “Revisiting Spie(ge)lgasse: Mirror(s) and Prism(s), Cultural and Political Stagings of Emigration and Liminality,” in *Dada Zurich: A Clown’s Game from Nothing*, ed. Brigitte Pichon and Karl Riha (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), 1–35.

²¹ Pichon, “Revisiting Spie(ge)lgasse,” 5, 23.

²² Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 65.

²³ Marcel Janco, “Creative Dada,” in *Dada: Monograph of a Movement*, ed. Willy Verkauf, Marcel Janco, and Hans Bolliger (New York: George Wittenborn, 1957), 26–49; Marcel Janco, “Dada at Two speeds,” in *Dadas on Art*, ed. Lucy Lippard (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 35–38.

²⁴ Janco, “Dada at Two Speeds,” 36–37.

having found soil fertile enough to expand into the positive, as was the case in Zurich.²⁵

This two-speed model was likely a way for Janco to explain why Dada did not last and dissolved soon after the war.²⁶ According to him, in Dada's other strongholds, only the negative speed took effect, which was unsustainable if it never advanced to the next phase. While recent scholarship does not refute Janco's claims, it complicates his scheme of 'negative versus positive' and 'poet versus artist' and understands the two not as competing trajectories but as parallel trends in a paradigm built to accept paradox. As Malcolm Turvey has shown, more nuanced positions existed within the group, which went neither to the extreme of "the nihilistic revelation of the meaninglessness of modernity" (associated with Tzara) nor to "the search for a mystical, meaningful alternative" (associated with Arp and Ball). Turvey contends that Hans Richter, who joined the group late in 1916, believed in the necessary *balance* of these two extremes, and it is very likely that for other Dadaists as well the line separating the two was more ambiguous than some of their retrospective writing suggests.²⁷ In fact, the problem with Janco's conception of the movement is its rigidity in separating out what is positive from negative, a binary that his own production belies. Drawing on Janco's characterization of the movement in *Dada at Two Speeds*, the following sections will show how he saw the masks he made for performances as embodying the "negative speed" and the abstract plaster reliefs he presented in Dada exhibitions as embodying the "positive speed," but a

²⁵ Ibid., 37–38.

²⁶ My thanks to Susan Laxton for pointing out that this model was likely Janco's way of accounting for why Dada was short-lived.

²⁷ Malcolm Turvey, "Dada Between Heaven and Hell: Abstraction and Universal Language in the Rhythm Films of Hans Richter," *October* 105 (Summer 2003): 15.

comparison of the two series will show that this model of categorization overlooks important correspondences.

Masks in performance: The negative speed, 1916-1919

Although not stylistically or programmatically unified, Zurich Dada was still a communal enterprise. The multinational group of artists that temporarily came together at the Cabaret Voltaire and subsequent venues expressed their collective disgust for the ongoing war and meaningless loss of life to which many had been witness. Marcel Janco comments on this: “to the stage of the Cabaret Voltaire we brought the protest of our generation against the failure and bankruptcy of European culture which led to war. This supreme crime against humanity was the reason for our fight to destroy previous art, *and* to build a new art.”²⁸ Disavowing the “eternal values” and moral absolutes touted by the nations at war as hypocritically exclusive,²⁹ they countered by forming an alternative community that was constituted by national and linguistic difference.³⁰ The core group, made up of Hugo Ball, Emmy Hennings, Hans Arp, Sophie Taeuber, Richard Huelsenbeck, Tristan Tzara, and Marcel Janco, inaugurated the short-lived Cabaret Voltaire in February 1916 initially as a venue for cabaret entertainment. For a sense of the “total pandemonium” of their evenings – described alternatively as “a playground for

²⁸ Naumann, “Janco/Dada: An Interview with Marcel Janco,” 81, emphasis added.

²⁹ “Who was still a believer? Common-sense – for the blind; good manners – a source of disgust; respect – for corpses; logic – without rhyme or reason; and aestheticism – nothing but perversity!” Marcel Janco, “Creative Dada,” 36–38.

³⁰ See T. J. Demos, “Circulations: In and Around Zurich Dada,” *October* 105 (Summer 2003): 154.

crazy emotions” and as bordering on ritualistic³¹ – we can refer to Hans Arp’s narrative impression of Janco’s painting *Cabaret Voltaire*:

On the stage of a gaudy, motley, overcrowded tavern ... people around us are shouting, laughing, and gesticulating. Our replies are sighs of love, volleys of hiccups, poems, moos, and miaowing of medieval *Bruitists*. Tzara is wiggling his behind like the belly of an Oriental dancer. Janco is playing an invisible violin and bowing and scraping. Madame Hennings, with a Madonna face, is doing the splits. Huelsenbeck is banging away nonstop on the great drum, with Ball accompanying him on the piano, pale as a chalky ghost.³²

While Janco was dedicated to the visual arts, he equally participated in these wild performances, demonstrating the very nature of the group as a collective undertaking. As Hans Richter notes, “no soiree and no reading took place without him.”³³

The masks and costumes that Janco made for these performances are his best known contribution to the Dada soirees.³⁴ The *Mask for Firdusi* (1917-1918) is a typical example from what survives [figure 1.4]. Made of cardboard and twine, it is folded and glued together in a deliberately crude manner of assembly, with the edges of the cardboard left rough, its creases showing, and the paint unevenly applied to its surface; all ways for the material to plainly disclose itself as ordinary scraps of cardboard. The most effective use of the material is the mask’s beard, which is torn up from strips of

³¹ Hugo Ball, *Flight Out of Time: A Dada Diary* (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 52; For more on the ritualistic nature of Dada’s early performances at the Cabaret Voltaire, see Cornelius Partsch, “The Mysterious Moment: Early Dada Performance as Ritual,” in *Dada Culture: Critical Texts on the Avant-Garde*, ed. Dafydd Jones (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 37–65.

³² Arp, “Dadaland,” 234.

³³ Hans Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-art* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 24.

³⁴ Janco had a sustained interest in theater. After Zurich, he was involved with set and costume designs in Bucharest and in Israel. For more on these, see Seiwert, *Marcel Janco: Dadaist, Zeitgenosse, Wohltemperierter Morgenländischer Konstruktivist*, 334–344; Raya Zommer, ed., *Marcel Janco: Harpatkah Ba-Te’atron (Marcel Janco: Adventure in Theater)* (Ein Hod: Janco Dada Museum, 2000).

corrugated cardboard and which gives the effect of clumped strands of hair in an unkempt beard. With his masks, Janco reformulated aspects of Cubism and Expressionism.



Figure 1.4. Marcel Janco, Untitled (*Mask for Firdusi*), 1917-1918, painted board and twine.

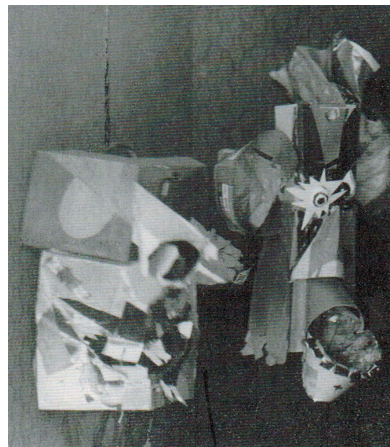


Figure 1.5. *Dada masks*, Zurich, 1916-1917.

Their materials match the cardboard and string of Picasso's maquette for *Guitar* (1912), and their schematic forms represent the human face as flattened and fragmented, which "made Cubism a dance on the stage."³⁵ The *Mask for Firdusi* also drew on the themes of the Oskar Kokoschka play *Sphinx and Strawman* for which it was produced.³⁶ It expresses

³⁵ Richard Huelsenbeck, "Collective Dada Manifesto (1920)," in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, ed. Robert Motherwell (New York: Wittenborn, Schultz, 1951), 245.

³⁶ According to its title, this mask was made for the character Herr Firdusi, a character played by Hugo Ball in Marcel Janco's 1917 production of the play *Sphinx and Strawman, An Oddity* by Oskar Kokoschka. Ball, however, describes his costume for that play as considerably larger than just a face mask. He writes that he wore a "body mask...so big that [he] could read [his] script inside it quite comfortably." The dimensions of this mask do not fit those specifications, but the straw-like quality of the beard suggests that it must have been made for this character (Herr Firdusi is the Strawman). Either parts of the costume are

the emotional state of its character in the play, the cuckolded and bewildered Herr Firdusi, conveyed through the mask's long sad face, upward slanting eyebrows, and two confused eyes pointing in opposite directions.³⁷

If the materials of the masks stand in as references to the familiar discarded products of modern culture, their distorted features allude to Dada's interest in primitivism and would have fueled an experience far from the ordinary. Tom Sandqvist proposes that the masks derived from Romanian peasant culture, with Romanians Janco and Tzara as their conduit to Zurich. He suggests that the *turca* masks worn for the *colinde* festival in Romania could be the iconographical source for the Dada masks.³⁸ The more common assumption is that they signify an obsession with non-Western cultures, as the masks appear to be exaggerated from African and Oceanic sources [figure 1.5]. Hugo Ball mentions that in addition to being "wholly modern" they are "reminiscent of the Japanese or ancient Greek theater," thereby adding to the collection of possible sources.³⁹ In fact it appears that the masks do not reference any source exclusively; they are generalized and drawn from eclectic traditions. In keeping with their general eclecticism, the Dadaists' appropriation of non-Western styles does not correlate to a direct interest in these cultures. As Leah Dickerman explains, "ideas about a primeval stratum of the mind,

missing or this particular mask was made in preparation for the one Ball describes. For the program of the Second Dada Soiree for which this play was performed, see Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 105–107.

³⁷ For the play, see Oskar Kokoschka, "Sphinx and Strawman, an Oddity," in *Plays and Poems*, trans. Michael Mitchell (Riverside, CA: Ariadne Press, 2001), 39–49. In this publication of the play, the character Herr Firdusi is called Hugh Avver, but the program for the Dada soiree for which this play was produced uses the name 'Herr Firdusi', see n. 36.

³⁸ Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*, 254–61.

³⁹ Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 64.

ancient ritual, psychic regression, and infantile states were often conflated, their differences collapsed into a general notion of the primitive, or ur-consciousness.”⁴⁰

As such, the Dadaists were not concerned with attribution but with using the mask to incite their audience. As Hans Arp recalls, the masks “were terrifying and usually painted blood red.”⁴¹ The idea behind creating this unsettling visage was to goad spectators out of passive absorption, engage them on a fundamental level, and prompt their self-awareness. The painting *Cabaret Voltaire* renders this antagonistic frenzy in action [figure 1.6]. Met with the chaos of the performers on the stage and the menacing grin of the mask on the wall, the spectators pictured on the upper left react by displaying signs of indignation, pointing and gesturing to the stage. The mask on the wall presiding over this confusion may be another manifestation of the figure that Ball mentions elsewhere: “The Gorgon’s head of a boundless terror smiles out of the fantastic destruction.”⁴²

The use of the mask to disengage the spectator from a complacent position of absorption is complemented by the mask’s reciprocal capacity to absorb the identity of its performer, an outcome more carefully documented by the Dadaists.⁴³ In a passage from Hugo Ball’s diary that has become emblematic of this effect, he describes how, once put

⁴⁰ Leah Dickerman, “Zurich,” in *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, ed. Leah Dickerman (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2005), 31.

⁴¹ Arp, “Dadaland,” 235. The masks that Arp had in mind must have been much more aggressive than the humorous *Mask for Firdusi*.

⁴² Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 56; Hal Foster, “Dada Mime,” *October* 105 (Summer 2003): 170. Hal Foster explains Hugo Ball’s “Medusan metaphors” in terms of a simultaneous threat and defense.

⁴³ Juliet Koss, in a discussion of Bauhaus theater, lays out two models of spectatorship, absorption and estrangement – useful terms for thinking about the intended effects of performance in Zurich Dada. Juliet Koss, *Modernism After Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 229–232.

on, the masks transported those who wore them into trance-like states that “demanded” movements “bordering on madness.”⁴⁴ In covering the face and sometimes the body of the performer, the mask mitigated inhibitions of seeing and being seen and allowed for the temporary suspension of individual subjectivity to make room for the assumption of anonymous personas, “not human...but characters and passions that are larger than life.”⁴⁵ The inspired dances, enhanced by the rhythmic drum beats of Richard Huelsenbeck and Ball on the piano, made for a communal experience of a quasi-ritualistic event.



Figure 1.6. Marcel Janco, *Cabaret Voltaire*, 1916, oil on canvas. Photograph of lost painting.

⁴⁴ Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 64–65. Expanded quote: “We were all there when Janco arrived with his masks, and everyone immediately put one on. Then something strange happened. Not only did the mask immediately call for a costume; it also demanded a quite definite, passionate gesture, bordering on madness. Although we could not have imagined it five minutes earlier, we were walking around with the most bizarre movements, festooned and draped with impossible objects, each one of us trying to outdo the other in inventiveness. The motive power of these masks was irresistibly conveyed to us....The masks simply demanded that their wearers start to move in a tragic-absurd dance.”

⁴⁵ Ibid., 64–65.

The purpose of unnerving spectators with aggressive gestures, as depicted in the painting *Cabaret Voltaire*, or generating an altered space of performance, as described by Hugo Ball, has to do with the Dadaist intent to circumvent the rational mind and activate the body. Ball noted the “motive power” of the masks in that they compelled certain gestures from the performer correlating to each mask’s visage.⁴⁶ Janco addressed this impulse by calling Dada a “bodily art, a force coming from physical instincts,” that privileged immediacy in a rejection of logical thinking and contemplative reflection.⁴⁷ They desired to impede the intercession of reason in favor of instinctual or self-generating alternatives. This was expressed in the visual arts as well, for example, in the “auto-hypnotic trance” through which Hans Richter painted his “visionary portraits,” the evacuated authorship in the grids of the “duo-collages” generated by Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber, and Janco’s arbitrary combinations of materials in his small constructions [figure 1.3].⁴⁸ They threw out rational thinking and engaged in spontaneously motivated or, conversely, highly structured procedures that yielded unexpected or mechanical results. Depending on the artist and the medium, this could be located in the use of aleatory techniques, a focus on the corporeality of the body, or it could take on a more metaphysical charge.

The masked performances, in a convergence of all three strategies, were an attempt at a collective catharsis. The visual assault of the mask was amplified when

⁴⁶ Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 64. Ball writes, “Their varied individuality inspired us to invent dances, and for each of them I composed a short piece of music on the spot.”

⁴⁷ Quoted in Tom Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006), 87.

⁴⁸ Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-art*, 55.

affixed to the body in motion, as the performers acted out the “horror of [their] time...made visible” by the masks through the “passionate gesture[s]” of their “tragic-absurd dance.”⁴⁹ Hal Foster identifies this use of performance as a mimetic adaptation serving as an outlet for their anxieties, explaining that the Dadaists parodied their dehumanization through hyperbole as a means of defense against it. Exaggerated mimicry through performance allowed them to assume and distance their dehumanized conditions and gave them a platform from which to condemn it. Then again, Foster contends that the performances could not effect a real release from their anxiety. They could only achieve a relative catharsis since the damage had been already wrought.⁵⁰ Perhaps because of this futility, Janco theorized this catharsis as an artistic rather than psychological purge. With the miming of anarchy at the Cabaret Voltaire came a rejection of inherited artistic conventions. As Janco writes, “Everyone was looking for a way out. Everything had to be destroyed, purged.”⁵¹ This purgative was extended across all artistic mediums, but performance was its chief means of expression and remained so until the opening of the Galerie Dada when the visual arts took on greater centrality in the movement.

In many ways, this purgative was most effective through performance, which may explain why Janco felt that these demonstrations were the place for Dada’s artistic demolition, while the visual arts were the place for a more constructive practice. This imbalance is well illustrated in the case of the simultaneous poem *L’amiral cherche une maison a louer*, which appeared both as a performance and as a published score. The

⁴⁹ Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 65.

⁵⁰ Foster, “Dada Mime,” 169, 175.

⁵¹ Janco, “Creative Dada,” 36, 42.

recital of the poem in three different languages at once – German, English, and French recited respectively by Huelsenbeck, Janco, and Tzara – literally purged language of its semantic function. The performers individually recited intelligible phrases but because of the simultaneous presentation – accompanied also by sounds from a bass drum, whistle, and rattle – they churned out an incoherent cacophony of noises in a sensorial barrage aimed at the spectators. The score for the poem, on the other hand, which was reproduced in the May 1916 publication *Cabaret Voltaire*, represents the other extreme. As T. J. Demos has pointed out, the score presents each speaker's lines in a clearly organized layout that is easy for the reader to follow, one speaker and one word at a time, which reveals none of the performance's indeterminacy and resulting incomprehension, reinforcing the sense that performance was the ideal medium for their antics.⁵²

Janco understood the dance and speech acts of the performances as a means to an end: the clearing out of static models of artistic convention for the purpose of starting fresh. According to his retrospective writing, he saw Dada as a two step process. Once the “negative speed” accomplished its purgative task, and in a way exhausted its purpose, then the “positive speed” could initiate art's rebuilding. The nihilistic edge of Dada, the propagation of meaninglessness declared to be “nothing but a joke,” was a “godsend” for the writers, he wrote, and a “delightful and novel” one at that, but their “diet of scandal” was not equally suited to last in the visual arts.⁵³ Hans Richter also alleges in his 1960s account, as he weaves between the concerns of ‘pro-’ and ‘anti-art’ Dadaists, that the

⁵² Demos, “Circulations: In and Around Zurich Dada,” 152. Demos posits that the visual order of the score was itself a critical parody.

⁵³ Janco, “Dada at Two Speeds,” 36–37.

visual arts had a separate and “independent evolution” in Dada.⁵⁴ The dominance of the negative over the positive vision was strongest during the periods of Hugo Ball’s absence when Tristan Tzara took over the role of leadership. Janco tells his readers that the positive side of Dada may be unfamiliar to them because it was written out of Dada’s history (by Tzara) and relegated to being an offshoot of the movement’s main pursuit.⁵⁵ This is why “people are surprised to find that the best Dadas...seem least Dada.”⁵⁶ Janco’s interpretation may offer an un-nuanced view of the movement by reducing it to a simple binary, but it is significant here because it shows how the plaster reliefs could exist outside the structures of performance and still be understood by Janco as part of Dada, just working in a different “speed.”

The plaster reliefs: The positive speed, 1917-1919

In early 1917, Marcel Janco started to experiment with abstraction in a series of plaster reliefs that he worked on until he left Zurich in December 1919. Although his use of plaster as a material recurs after this – particularly, in the still life paintings on gesso he made in France (1920-21) and his use of plaster as a construction material in his Bucharest architecture (1922-1939) – the carving of plaster in relief was specific to his

⁵⁴ Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-art*, 44–50.

⁵⁵ Janco accuses Tzara for this, scattering his allegations throughout the essay *Creative Dada* so as to not outrightly point the finger at him. But the essay as a whole suggests that Tzara, as Dada's archivist, manipulated its history to fits his agenda: “heaven help whoever dared to contradict [Tzara]...It was quite simple: his name was erased from history.” His unsympathetic characterization of Tzara is likely overstated due to their falling out. Hans Richter offers a different point of view, writing that “Tzara was no red-pencil dictator” as others may have reported. Janco, “Creative Dada,” 26, 30–32, 38; Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-art*, 80.

⁵⁶ Janco, “Dada at Two Speeds,” 38.

time in Zurich.⁵⁷ While nominally we can refer to these plaster reliefs as ‘Dada’ simply because they were made in that nexus of activities, it is important to identify their qualities that permit us to understand them as such. What constitutes the reliefs as Dada, and in what ways did they contribute to the dialogue on abstract art so central to what Janco called the “positive speed?” Additionally, how did Janco theorize a link from these Dada objects to architecture, making the reliefs capable of sliding between the two fields?

The plaster reliefs are a manifestation of the positive trend that, according to Janco, picked up after the closing of the Cabaret Voltaire. Janco names Arp, Taeuber, Richter, Eggeling, and himself as its main proponents in the 1966 essay *Dada at Two Speeds*. Their objective, he says, was to restore the sense of meaning that the negative mode had justifiably vacated. They drew inspiration from what they regarded as the uncorrupted expressions of pre-logical subjects and experimented in their work with a language of reduced abstract forms thought to be decontaminated. In the spring of 1917, just months after Janco had started working on the plaster reliefs, Paul Klee exhibited at the Galerie Dada. According to Janco, seeing Klee’s work was an important breakthrough for the group: “In his beautiful work we found all our efforts to unravel the soul of primitive man, to delve into the unconscious and the instinctive forces of creation, to discover the pure, direct, creative sources hidden in children. This exhibition was a revelation to all of us.”⁵⁸ Locating a direct and intuitive source of expression was

⁵⁷ Janco worked on a few plaster reliefs after 1919, but the bulk of them were made in Zurich. In France, he was more focused on the paintings on gesso and burlap. Reproductions of these can be found in Michel Seuphor, *Marcel Janco* (Amriswil: Bodensee-Verlag, 1963).

⁵⁸ Janco, “Creative Dada,” 40.

certainly present earlier in the 1916 performances at the Cabaret Voltaire and deploying it in the visual arts may well have been part of their initiative in 1917, confirmed as they were by their alliance to Klee and Kandinsky's parallel activities.⁵⁹ Alongside this, as news came to Zurich of the 1917 October and 1918 November Revolutions, this contingent of artists became increasingly interested in contributing to revolutionary causes. With this, the currency of art's social applicability grew. Hans Richter was the main influence of this politicization, in particular with the formation of the group the *Radical Artists* (1919).⁶⁰

Janco's embrace of abstraction was certainly informed by this mix of aspirations. For him as for others, abstract art was a means of exploring levels of communication unrestricted by linguistic difference, one that could bring together a traumatized Europe through a collective spirit. What he admired about the work of Hans Arp was its potential for such universal responses, writing in 1918, "Here *human* values find expression, so that before such an image a Chinese man and a child, with his untarnished soul, are on equal ground."⁶¹ His faith in the promise of meaning, even if intangible, gives further basis for his ultimate rejection of what he called "negative" Dada, which occluded efforts

⁵⁹ Cornelius Partsch, "The Mysterious Moment: Early Dada Performance as Ritual," in *Dada Culture: Critical Texts on the Avant-Garde*, ed. Dafydd Jones (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 57. Cornelius Partsch interprets the performances as the Dadaists' intention "to make dazzlingly present the conditions for an authentic, cultic experience and to restore a numinous quality to art through marvellous violence." Citing Walter Benjamin's model of the ecstatic state of *profane illumination*, Partsch claims that the ritual-like nature of the performances at the Cabaret Voltaire acted to dislodge it from ordinary experience in a manner to similar to an intoxicated state, which served as a means of escape from the outside world.

⁶⁰ Stephen C Foster, ed., *Hans Richter: Activism, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

⁶¹ Janco, "Vortrag Über Kubismus, Abstrakte Kunst Und Architektur," 534, translation mine, emphasis added.

at meaningful communication as for example in the simultaneous poem *L'amiral cherche une maison a louer*, the kind that Janco would characterize as “ineffectual babbling...superficial, empty, like a circus.”⁶² For abstract art to be effective in the way he hoped, he insisted that it had to “lead art back to life” and be applied to artistic mediums encountered on a daily basis, namely “handicraft and architecture” because, in Janco’s words, they “have...the deepest affinity to our world.”⁶³

In terms of Dada

To make the reliefs, Janco used a subtractive method in which he poured the plaster onto a plate and carved from it after it set.⁶⁴ He usually painted the resulting shapes in different colors, except for *White on White* (1917) in which the plaster was left bare in its uniform white color [figure 1.7]. He handled the plaster much in the same way he handled his other preferred medium: the woodblock print. In both, he took full advantage of the materials’ potential for rough hewn effects as the edges of their carved forms never appear artificially straight. The surfaces of the plaster reliefs, for example, are texturally irregular and often very coarse. The surface of *Flower Geometry* (1917) reveals that after Janco painted the forms he went back and scratched at the paint, scraping away bits of the pigment and leaving jagged grooves that exposes the white of

⁶² Janco, “Dada at Two Speeds,” 36.

⁶³ Janco, in the preface to the catalogue for the *Das Neue Leben* exhibition at the Kunsthaus Zurich in January 1919, quoted in Willy Verkauf, Marcel Janco, and Hans Bolliger, eds., *Dada: Monograph of a Movement* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1957), 111.

⁶⁴ Dorit Arad, “Marcel Janco, Beyond Dada” (Master’s Thesis, University of Miami, 1995), 20.

the plaster underneath [figure 1.8]. This unrestrained, violent act on the plaster amplifies the roughness of the surface, making the relief appear impetuously made. This tactile quality also establishes that this is a hand-crafted object; the “very opposite of the intellectual and mechanized art of the robots,” as Hans Arp recounted.⁶⁵



Figure 1.7. Marcel Janco, *White on White*, 1917, Plaster relief.



Figure 1.8. Marcel Janco, *Flower Geometry*, 1917, plaster relief painted in gouache.

The explosive sprouting forms of *Flower Geometry* signify organic life, and its bright colors reinforce the association. But the viewer is encouraged to call off the search for reference and focus attention on the heavy texture of the painted plaster, which in a sense becomes the subject of the work through its extreme haptic provocation. The modulations of the surface refer the viewer to the unconcealed hand of the artist in

⁶⁵ Hans Arp quoted in Marcel L. Mendelson, *Marcel Janco* (Tel Aviv: Massadah Publishing, 1962), 120.

shaping the object, serving as indexical traces that make explicit the conditions of its making. *Flower Geometry* thus alternates between indulging the presence of its individual author and staging a collective and anonymous content. Remnants of Expressionism linger in these works with Janco's unsteady and anxious line, but the emphasis rests not on an emotion expressed but on the tangible materiality of the plaster.

Tristan Tzara could easily have been thinking of Janco's reliefs when he declared, "The new artist protests: he no longer paints (symbolic and illusionist reproduction) but creates – directly in stone, wood, iron, tin, boulders."⁶⁶ Discourse around the direct creation and unmediated reception of objects – the way "a stone breaks off from a mountain, a flower blossoms, or an animal perpetuates itself"⁶⁷ – links back to the fixation in the Dada performances on cultivating similarly uncontrolled actions. The compositions of Janco's reliefs appear too calculated to have been produced by a quick impulse of the hand, but their scratched surfaces, exaggerated coarse texture, and abstract openness convey a sense of raw expression, intended to produce an immediate experience of "psychological shock" that he wrote resulted from the works' surfaces.⁶⁸

The masks and reliefs are not so different then in their intended effect. Each was meant to bypass the faculty of reason of both the artist and the viewer. The masks

⁶⁶ Tzara, "Dada Manifesto 1918," 38.

⁶⁷ "The goal of every art work is emotion, whose strength is greater in proportion to the immediacy of the reality represented in the work....The intercession of intellect, in order either to pose problems or give explanations weakens the emotions and makes them indirect, or even excludes their possibility." See Alexander Partens, "Dada Art," in *The Dada Almanac*, ed. Richard Huelsenbeck, trans. Malcolm Green (London: Atlas Press, 1993), 92-3. Alexander Partens was a collective pseudonym for Tristan Tzara, Walter Serner, and Hans Arp.

⁶⁸ "Alle Erschütterung des Psychischen erleben wir in der Fläche." Janco, "Vortrag Über Kubismus, Abstrakte Kunst Und Architektur," 535, translation mine.

liberated performers from their inhibitions and generated an experience akin to ritual through performance. For the audience, this encounter was more threatening; an aggressive antagonism heightened by the mask's unsettling human-like visage, not mounted on the wall but attached to the body of the performer and capable of invading their space. The relief can also be read as a sort of performance, or at least a trace of one. Because Janco removed all (or almost all) suggestions of illusion as Tzara noted, the viewer's attention is led to the physical properties of the relief and to the visible traces of the artist's mark, yielding an object that is secondary to the actual act of its production. In addition, the viewer's body is implicated. Of course, the reliefs could not exert an effect to same degree of intensity as the masks, primarily because the reliefs did not eerily resemble human features nor were they made mobile. Nevertheless, the gritty texture of the carved plaster was made to stimulate a "psychological shock," physically and mentally invading the space of the viewer in a similarly antagonistic manner.

There are also plaster reliefs that have a more smooth and subdued surface. In these, the directness that Tzara describes is foregrounded in the candor of the materials and the presentation of real and not illusory space. The relief *Lock* (1917) [figure 1.9], for example, manages its surface very differently than *Flower Geometry*. Rather than asserting its rough texture in order to emphasize its condition as an object and trace of a performance, *Lock* is more ambiguous about its status. It uses the position of the relief as somewhere between painting and sculpture as its point of departure. Accordingly, this work shows a greater sensitivity to the flatness of the surface. The plaster is more meticulously smoothed over and the paint is unscratched. *Lock* applies two different

representational modes, one pictorial and the other sculptural. The pictorial zones of the relief – particularly the lower middle portion and the segment along the top right edge – have a level height and are subdivided by different-colored flat planes, not by changes in elevation.

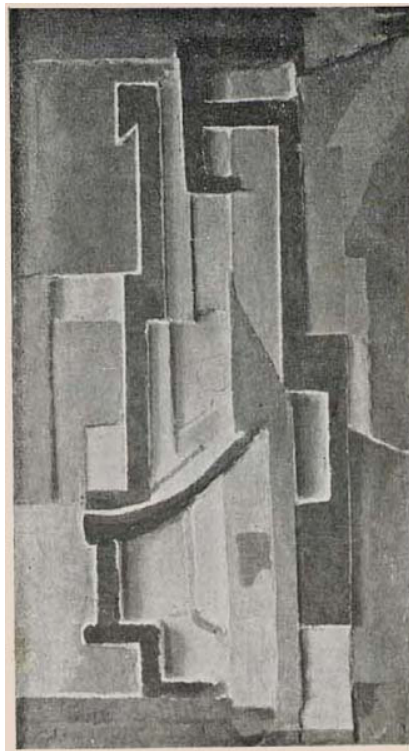


Figure 1.9. Marcel Janco, *Relief 3(Lock)*, 1917, painted plaster relief.
Photograph: *Dada* no. 2, December 1917.

The sculpted areas of the relief, on the other hand, have real depth and dimension. These sculptural portions – particularly the two vertical elements in the darker shade that meander up the relief – demonstrate space by the elevation of their forms, differentiating themselves as well from the surrounding elements by having specific colors correspond to them. In a refusal of pictorial illusion, the depth of the relief is literal but this real space

is extremely shallow. The elevation of the forms are only subtly articulated and stay cautiously close to the surface, making sculptural what could easily be perceived as flat.

The juxtaposition of the pictorial and sculptural modes sets hurdles for the viewer of the black and white photograph as it was reproduced in the *Dada 2* journal (December 1917). In the photograph, a light source shines from the left of the relief, which means that finding the faint shadows cast to the right of raised forms is the best way to distinguish between the two modes. Then again, the clue offered by the shadows may be deceiving because in the photograph it is difficult to distinguish between what is a shadow and what is a thickly painted contour. The stability of the work, expressed by the easy-to-follow interlocking geometry of the composition, is belied by the viewer's dilemma in attempting to separate out what exists pictorially and sculpturally. In a clever experiment, he tested the laws of perception by blurring the lines between these genres. He created real space which is flattened in the photograph, so that the viewer is constantly looping between them. This smoothed-out version of *Lock* generates a very different experience for the viewer than does another version of *Lock*, also dated to 1917 [figure 1.2], which more directly engages with the perception of palpable dimension and materiality, similar to the effect of *Flower Geometry*.

As a series and on an individual basis, the plaster reliefs stage tensions between opposing values that complicate the scheme I initially set out to interrogate in the introduction: the dichotomy of “free fabulation” and “pure geometry.” While evidence does not show that Janco ever attempted a *pure* geometry, his Dada works shuttle

between these poles. The plaster reliefs as a series is caught between two different compositional formats, either geometrical order or free-form compositions. The “pure geometry” manifests in the logically-arranged compositions like *Lock* (1917), while the “free fabulation” comes up in the unstructured and free-form compositions like *Flower Geometry* (1917). If examining only the first category (those that enforce a sense of order nearing a pure formal geometry), then the instability of this tension becomes more pronounced.

In the relief *Prière* (1916-18), for example, Janco blatantly muddies the simplicity of the relief’s clear compositional organization with the uneven surface texture of the plaster [figure 1.10]. The mechanically vacant forms of *Prière* bear little relation on their own to an organic origin, namely to the artist who carved them, and they threaten the role of artistic volition in the production of the work. But even though these reduced geometric shapes stage a sense of anonymity, the relief is far from depersonalized, particularly if compared to Arp and Taeuber’s collaborative *Duo-Collages* of the same year, which more radically rejected the responsibility of authorship by employing a strict grid format.⁶⁹ In fact, the irregularity of the plaster’s texture in *Prière*, in boasting its own hand-fashioning with an emphasis on the process required to make it, reclaims a place for creative expression and individual authorship, which a fully perfected geometry would unequivocally deny. *Prière* thus sets up a tension between the depersonalization of a machine-made object and the unique status of a hand-crafted object. It produces a mixed

⁶⁹ For this reading of Arp and Taeuber’s collages, see Demos, “Circulations: In and Around Zurich Dada,” 155–157.

message. Its simple geometry signals a surrender of artistic control to a predetermined vocabulary of form, while its rough surface indicates that the artist has taken back that control by emphasizing his role in its production. Hans Arp recognized this combination of elements when he described the reliefs as “tempered constructivism,” suggesting Janco’s ambivalence to severe, mechanical abstraction.⁷⁰

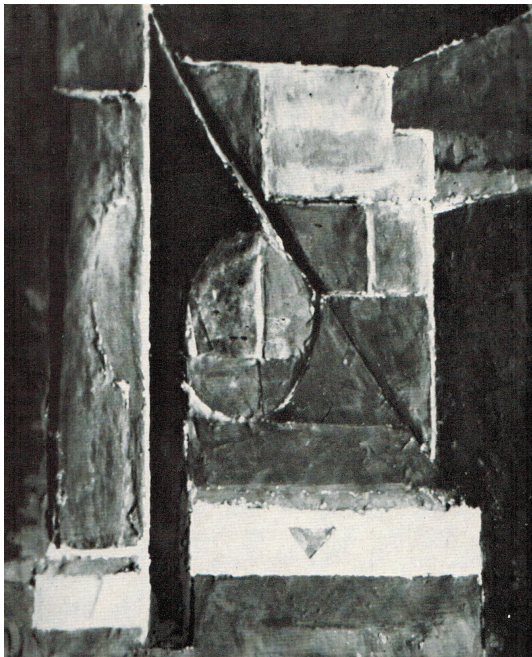


Figure 1.10. Marcel Janco, *Prière*, 1916-18, painted plaster relief.

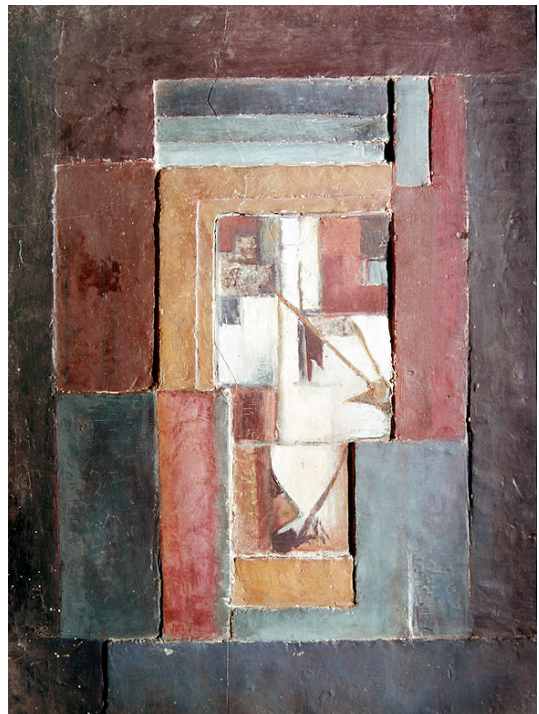


Figure 1.11. Marcel Janco, *Relief au Miroir*, ca. 1916-1917, plaster relief painted in oil, fragments of built-in mirror

⁷⁰ “This art remains oriental and tempered constructivism. The very opposite of the intellectual and mechanized art of the robots.” Mendelson, *Marcel Janco*, 120. Arp's mention of Constructivism is likely meant as a broad reference to the abstract formal vocabulary associated with it and not to the historical significance of the movement. In addition, the term “oriental” implies that Janco's work was associated, even by colleagues, with his being Romanian.

Another example of this phenomenon is *Relief au Miroir* [figure 1.11]. Like *Prière*, its composition follows a logical order that ties it to the category of “pure geometry,” particularly with the repeated unit of the rectangle that makes up the pattern. In this case, the link to “free fabulation” comes not from the exaggerated texture of the plaster, which here has a more meticulous finish, but from the inclusion of a broken mirror, fragments of which were originally attached to the center and have since fallen off. The pieces of the mirror were likely glued to the spots that Janco never painted – the white spots in the center that now show bare plaster and that suggest the outline of the mirror fragments once there.

Like *Construction 3* which is made of found materials [figure 1.3], *Relief au Miroir* introduced an object recycled from the street, in this case a mirror, perhaps found already in pieces or shattered by the artist. As Richter remembers, “Janco used whatever unregarded objects Nature happened to place in his path.”⁷¹ Certainly, finding this manufactured object on the street and adding it to the relief was a way to incorporate chance. But an additional element of chance could be supplied by the mirror. Its reflective surface gathers and displays in a similar manner “whatever unregarded objects” fall into its range – reflecting an image that cannot be anticipated or controlled in advance. This image, constantly in flux, would destabilize the static nature of the relief, adding an element of temporality that the masks had in performance and an element of

⁷¹ Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-art*, 55; For Janco's commentary on *Construction 2* and *3*, see Naumann, “Janco/Dada: An Interview with Marcel Janco,” 84.

extemporaneity that the category of “free fabulation” guarantees.⁷² Moreover, in relation to the viewer, the broken mirror reflects a representation of the self perceived as fragmented and as other; notably not an image of a coherent self. This would throw the viewer into a state similar to that of the “traumatic mime” described by Hal Foster. Because it is broken into small pieces and reflects a distorted image, the mirror (like the mask) can aid in the performance of a parodied dehumanization by visualizing, in Ball’s words, “dissonances to the point of self-disintegration.”⁷³

The formal opposition present in *Prière* and *Relief au Miroir* – the stability of geometry versus the instability of fabulation – corresponds to a more general paradox present in Zurich Dada, one that Malcolm Turvey addresses in his essay on Hans Richter’s *Rhythm* films. Turvey shows that Richter defined Dada as a balance between polar opposites, particularly between reason and unreason. Because Richter was reacting to the *dominance* of rationality in modernity and not to rationality itself, he believed that simply inverting this binary in the opposite direction would result in another lack of balance. As Turvey writes, this was the source of Richter’s unease “with the work of putative nihilists such as Tzara and Picabia,” who made the mistake of “simply replacing one type of dogmatic disequilibrium, the dominance of reason, with another, the dominance of unreason.”⁷⁴ In the conclusion to the essay, Turvey poses the question of

⁷² Thank you to Susan Laxton for pointing out the link between the mirror and the category “free fabulation.”

⁷³ Foster, “Dada Mime,” 169–170.

⁷⁴ Turvey, “Dada Between Heaven and Hell: Abstraction and Universal Language in the Rhythm Films of Hans Richter,” 21, 24.

whether Richter's definition of Dada was shared by any of his colleagues.⁷⁵ An analysis of Janco's artistic production seems to confirm that he did subscribe to the idea of Dada as a productive conflict between opposites. This is clear from the discussion of the formal elements of the plaster reliefs, which can be plotted between such clashing values.

Richter's definition, taken more broadly, is also a way to understand the incongruity between Janco's involvement in the performances and his individual practice in the visual arts. In his own version of Dada, Janco understood the two elements of this binary as contradictory, as two opposite strains that occurred in succession and not in Richter's model as necessary complements. Janco might have ultimately rejected the perceived manifestations of nihilism in his retrospective account, but he continued to participate in the performances until he left Zurich, only to officially sever ties with Dada with its relocation to Paris. This also may have been how Janco managed the irony of his activities in Zurich: by day an architectural student in an institutional university and by night staging anarchic masked performances at the Dada events. As Richter remarked, "We were all fated to live with the paradoxical necessity of entrusting ourselves to chance while at the same time remembering that we were conscious beings working toward conscious goals. This contradiction between rational and irrational opened up a bottomless pit over which we had to walk."⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Ibid., 36.

⁷⁶ Richter, *Dada: Art and Anti-art*, 61.

In terms of architecture

Early on, Janco extended the plaster reliefs beyond their place in the context of Dada and related them to his interest of integrating art into architecture. In his opinion, abstract art was the catalyst that would prime this reconciliation, which made the reliefs uniquely capable of achieving it because of their abstract nature. In the lecture titled *On Cubism, Abstract Art, and Architecture* that he presented at the ETH in February 1918, Janco boldly claimed that abstract art was *only* viable if it crossed the threshold into architecture, particularly residential architecture which was the subject of the lecture.⁷⁷ As Janco wrote, “Today's abstract painting returns to the intentions of pure painting, takes back the forgotten tradition, and *must be in architecture or disappear*.”⁷⁸ In his mind they required “the *eternal* rest of the walls.”⁷⁹ This lecture is evidence that Janco singled out the plaster reliefs for this task, because when he gives examples from his work, he discusses just the reliefs and not his paintings.

Prior to the 1918 lecture, an earlier intimation of this intention comes from a poem by Tristan Tzara dedicated to Marcel Janco. Given that the poem was published in July 1917 in the first issue of *Dada*, it establishes that Janco's theory for the reliefs –

⁷⁷ This text is from a transcription of Janco's notes, with annotations by Harry Seiwert. It is important to note that in the lecture Janco never references Dada by name, perhaps because his audience at the ETH would not have understood its attendant implications. That Dada was on his mind is however evident in his choice of examples when discussing the state of modern art, specifically Arp, Oskar Lüthy, and of course himself. See Janco, “Vortrag über Kubismus, Abstrakte Kunst Und Architektur,” 523–541 (as in n. 17).

⁷⁸ “Die heutige abstrakte Malerei kehrt wieder zu den Absichten der reinen Malerei zurück, übernimmt wieder die vergessene Tradition und muss in die Architectur zurück oder verschwinden.” Ibid., 537, translation mine.

⁷⁹ “Heute, wo die Bilder eigenes Leben und eigenes Gestalten haben, wo sie in der esoterischen Welt nicht Gegenstücke sind, brauchen sie die ewige Ruhe der Wände, nicht die Ausstellungen.” Ibid., 540, translation and emphasis mine.

disintegrating the boundary between art and architecture – developed contemporaneously with their earliest production in the first half of 1917, if not predating them. This makes it possible to conjecture that from their inception, Janco intended the reliefs as Dada works of art to be subsumed into the structures of architecture. The poem by Tzara titled *Marcel Janco* offers these clues about Janco's intentions mid-1917: "he makes reliefs to be constructed in the wall architectural totality / productive protest against the frame and the baroque."⁸⁰ In these two lines Tzara reports enough information to permit three conclusions about Janco's initial motivations, confirmed as well by the 1918 lecture a year later.

First, we can presume from Tzara's characterization of the reliefs as a "protest against the frame" that he meant Janco's protest against the medium of painting. The relief was an apt medium to challenge painting, and Janco's gravitation to it was likely motivated by ideas being advanced by architectural as well as Dada circles, each equally resisting the perceived autonomy and isolation of the medium. Arp, for example, rejected easel painting because it was too individualistic; in his words, "characteristic of a pretentious and conceited world."⁸¹ Not incidentally, Janco's reliefs appeared in the same

⁸⁰ Tristan Tzara, "Marcel Janco," in *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology*, trans. and ed. Dawn Ades (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 31–32. Three works by Janco are reproduced in this issue of *Dada*: an untitled woodcut (page 3), *Relief A7* (page 9), *Construction 3* (page 13). Tzara's poem references the latter two, calling out *Construction 3* by name.

⁸¹ Arp quoted in Dickerman, "Zurich," 36–37.

year that Hans Arp was making his brightly painted wood reliefs and may share this conviction.⁸²

The relief is an especially well-suited medium for a protest against painting; much more so than against sculpture, to which it could be seen as a weaker challenge. Contrary to painting, the relief foregrounds its carved surface and violates (depending on the depth of its elevation) the flat surface expected of a canvas. It thus occupies an unstable position in between painting and sculpture. But even with this, how does Janco's relief enact "a protest against the frame" when it *preserves* the frame's traditional format and avoids crossing its limits? Perhaps Janco designed the relief to appear close to painting. In fact, it maintains two of painting's conventional trappings – its rectangular bounds and its painted surface. But the relief keeps none of painting's essential elements. For Janco, the distinguishing trait of a painting was that it functioned as a "rectangular cutout of illusion."⁸³ The target of his relief, then, was not the medium itself but rather its conventional means of expression. In this case, might the frame have been left intact to serve as a signifier of the medium? Giving the viewer what is clearly an alternative *just to painting* and not to sculpture? I would argue that his reliefs' main violation of painting is its three-dimensional surface and its abstract representation, the ultimate refusal to do the job of painting; that is to picture something on a two-dimensional surface.

⁸² Images of Arp's wood reliefs can be found in Dickerman, *Dada: Zurich, Berlin, Hannover, Cologne, New York, Paris*, 66–67. Another artist whom Janco knew and also worked in wood relief was the Swiss artist Fritz Baumann, who co-founded *Das Neue Leben* and the *Radical Artists*. For those images, see Verkauf, Janco, and Bolliger, *Dada: Monograph of a Movement*, 125, 137.

⁸³ Janco, "Vortrag Über Kubismus, Abstrakte Kunst Und Architektur," 540.

The traditional category of painting, understood in this way, was equally anathema to Janco's notion of architecture. As he wrote in the 1918 lecture, "to hang something on the wall is a contradiction to the tectonics of architecture." Doing so added a superfluous element to the room cluttering and contaminating its "simple crystal shape."⁸⁴ The challenge then was to incorporate art into the space of architecture without adding another object to the room, yet another framed painting on the wall. To maintain the clarity of the space, he had to achieve as seamless as possible an integration of art into architecture. And to this end, he suggested recessing the work of art *into* the structure of the wall rather than hanging it on it. This solves the problem of the "frame." While the relief keeps its rectangular format, it loses its frame, replaced by the architecture itself.

Artists contemporary to Janco, particularly those in De Stijl, were also thinking about this question of how to combine art and architecture. Dutch artist Theo van Doesburg shared Janco's objection to having framed paintings in architectural spaces. He wrote in 1919 that "independent painting...was contrary to the architectonic idea" because of its "chiaroscuro and perspectival elements" (like Janco, he stressed that art needed to be abstract to fit with architecture, and have no modeling or perspective). The two artists identified the same problem, but Janco proposed a solution of embedding his reliefs into the wall and Van Doesburg proposed painting directly on the wall, keeping with its planarity: "a modern flat painting applied *in* an architectural plane breaks the plane

⁸⁴ "Trete ich in einen Raum, wo ich ohne Hindernisse die einfache Kristallform erfasse, so fühle ich mich wohl darin. Also ist die Klarheit die Ursache der guten Wirkung....Schwebende, wandernde Werte gehören nie einer Architectur. Der gedanke, auf einer Wand etwas zu hängen, ist ein Widerspruch zur Tektonik der Architectur." Janco, "Vortrag Über Kubismus, Abstrakte Kunst Und Architektur," 527, translation mine.

rhythmically according to the architecture in *height* and *breadth*.”⁸⁵ Writing much later in 1923, El Lissitzky also expressed a problem with painting. In an article explaining his objectives for the *Proun Room* (1923), he wrote, “New space neither needs nor demands pictures...This explains the painters’ hostility toward us: we are destroying the wall as the resting place for their pictures.”⁸⁶ In the following pages, the reader will notice more similarities between Janco and other artists circling this question of the relationship between art and architecture. These connections will be more thoroughly considered in Chapter Two with the shift to the 1920’s when it is clearer that these artists were in dialogue.

The second characterization that Tzara gives to the plaster reliefs in the poem *Marcel Janco* is that they were a “protest against...the baroque,” suggesting that Janco conceived them in opposition to the rich display of decoration distinctive of Baroque ornament on facades and in interiors. This must have come directly from conversations with Janco, who disapproved of the Baroque because, in his opinion, its skillful illusion was a “swindle.” He likened it to a deceptive game of painting a bowl of cherries to induce birds to peck it.⁸⁷ In the 1918 lecture at the ETH, Janco attacked Baroque architecture for introducing this deception into its interiors. In his mind, the key to integrating art and architecture was to purge interior ornament of this illusion so that it

⁸⁵ Quoted in Éva Forgács, “Definitive Space: The Many Utopias of El Lissitzky’s Proun Room,” in *Situating El Lissitzky: Vitebsk, Berlin, Moscow*, ed. Nancy Perloff and Brian Reed (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2003), 59, emphasis in the original.

⁸⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 60.

⁸⁷ “Kunst hat nicht mit Schwindel zu tun. Derjenige der Kirschen so gemalt hat, dass die Vögel daran picken wollen, hat dann kein Kunstwerk gemacht. Es war einmal ein Mensch, der malen gelernt hat, um Leute zu betrügen. Er wurde Reich und dann vergass er zu malen. Illusion ist Schwindel und Schwindel is Lüge.” Janco, “Vortrag Über Kubismus, Abstrakte Kunst Und Architektur,” 530.

could share a formal vocabulary with the architecture underlying it (similar to van Doesburg's statement above).⁸⁸ This was one of the aims motivating the abstract mode of his plaster reliefs, which he discusses in the second half of the lecture.

In a later 1925 article titled *Drawing board Architecture* written in Bucharest, he reiterated the benefits of working in three-dimensions as opposed to two, which connects back to the relief's challenge to painting. In this article, he complained that contemporary architecture in 1920s Bucharest was still dominated by a "cheap idea of decoration," in which architects continued to cover facades in "plaster fauna and flora," similar to Baroque ornament. He diagnoses the problem as architects who remained "idolatrously wedded to their drawing boards" and continued to "engross themselves in drawing miniatures, aquarelles, and perspectives...frantically copying obsolete styles." To remedy the problem, he suggests refocusing on the essentials of architecture:

The first truth in architecture is volume; the second one is the material. He who does architecture on paper has hardly any chance to know either the first or the second one. *Burn your drawing boards and build up models – this is the slogan of tomorrow's architecture.*⁸⁹

The point he makes here is the same one underlying the plaster reliefs from the decade before. The idea is to explore architecture in three dimensions rather than in two ("burn your drawing boards and build up *models*"). This is one way to interpret the reliefs that have the word "architecture" in their title [figures 1.12, 1.13, 2.5]. If Janco saw these as

⁸⁸ "Kein Ornament kann ohne organische Beziehung mit der dahinter stehenden Architectur bestehen! Der Barock hat uns gezeigt, dass Willkür sogar durch Formenüberfluss entsteht. So schön, so reich auch eine vom Ornament völlig zerfressene Grundform einer Decke oder eine Fensters ist, können wir uns doch mit dieser Welt nicht identifizieren." Ibid., 525.

⁸⁹ Marcel Janco, "Drawing Board Architecture," in *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist*, trans. Magda Teodorescu (Bucharest: Editura Simetria, UAR and Editura Meridiane, 1996), 223–224, emphasis in the original.



Figure 1.12. Marcel Janco, *Relief A7 (Architecture)*, 1917, painted plaster relief.



Figure 1.13. Marcel Janco, *Study for Brilliant Empire Architecture*, 1918, cardboard.

investigations of architecture, then the genre of the relief was ideal because it allowed him to study architecture, its volumes and its voids, in convenient three-dimensional models.⁹⁰ Two additional points that he makes in this 1925 article that relate to the earlier reliefs are an embrace of an aesthetic of reduced form (the rejection of “plaster fauna and flora”) and a structure based on a theoretical understanding of architecture focused on *volume* and *material* (the first and second truths of architecture). Significantly, Janco carried out these experiments in plaster and not in wood, which was Arp’s material of choice; plaster being familiar to architects, especially to those whose ornamentation of facades he was targeting.

⁹⁰ My thanks to Patricia Morton for pointing out that the plaster reliefs can be interpreted as architectural models and as stand-ins for an ideal architecture. This conclusion could be further supported by comparing the formal characteristics of the reliefs and the facades of his buildings in Bucharest. Unfortunately due to the length of this thesis, I will have to save this comparison for a future project.

Lastly, the plaster reliefs were seen as embodying both the visual arts and architecture, what Tzara identified in the poem as an “architectural totality.” Almost every discussion of the reliefs recognizes this alliance and expresses it through the designation “architectonic.” This association derives from the reliefs’ formal characteristics: their clear compositional structure of orthogonal lines (in the geometrically-ordered reliefs), the overlap of surface planes that project and recess, and the resulting shadows produced from the real as opposed to illusory dimension; all which refer to the structures of architecture. From the outset, as Tzara communicates and Janco later verifies, Janco also envisioned the plaster reliefs as potential architectural elements to be embedded into the structure of the wall – as “ornament,” a term Janco used often in the lecture, not yet with its pejorative connotation. As such, the reliefs both merge the concerns of the artist and the architect and appeal to the role of the applied arts in an additional challenge to the autonomy of painting.

As a portable work of art, the relief would only become an architectural element when actually fit into a niche provided for it in an architectural environment. Because Janco was not a practicing architect at this point but still a student, these works were conceived for spaces that did not yet exist, and so in this stage they maintained an identity more or less independent of architecture, as ‘homeless’ interior fixtures.⁹¹ Thus, we can speculate that Janco may have ideally wanted to carve the reliefs directly on the wall but did not yet have that wall on which to work, and hence the reason for his

⁹¹ Janco did exhibit some reliefs physically set into the wall in a 1919 exhibition at the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Zurich, but I have not been able to verify which reliefs were exhibited and how exactly they were displayed. For mention of this exhibition, see Francis M. Naumann, “Janco/Dada: An Interview with Marcel Janco,” *Arts Magazine* 57, no. 3 (1982): 83.

decision to work in plaster, perhaps in preparation for their future realization. If he were to directly apply the reliefs to the wall, then the distinction between the wall and artwork would be eliminated after all, making for art's full incorporation into architecture and emphasizing the idea of totality. The allusion to Renaissance frescoes, which Janco names as an inspiration for his paintings on gesso, is intriguing and directs us to another reason for his decision to both work in plaster and on the wall, but a more fruitful direction in which to proceed with this hypothesis is to consider these works as Janco's redeployment of the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.⁹²

According to Juliet Koss, the appeal for a unification of the arts became something of a "cultural cliché" by the turn of the twentieth century in Europe. It had been filtered and reinterpreted numerous times since its inception in the mid-nineteenth century.⁹³ The concept had always been best understood in relation to theater since performance is the most straightforward integration of visual, temporal, and spatial experiences that draws on the various arts. Naturally, because of the connection to performance, it found its way into the Dada agenda. The idea was a "favorite old plan" of Hugo Ball that he picked up from Kandinsky. Ball tailored it to the needs of the Cabaret Voltaire to achieve the desired heightened sensory experiences of the Dada performances through a multimedia overload of diverse stimuli.⁹⁴ If Janco was not already familiar with

⁹² Although the connection is better articulated in the gesso paintings, the fact that he worked on plaster and not on canvas relates the reliefs to Renaissance frescoes. Janco makes the connection himself: "In Zurich I occasionally had the time for vacations, which I sometimes took in Italy. There I was surprised to see the freshness and beauty of color in Giotto's paintings on plaster....It brought me to the idea of trying something like frescos." Naumann, "Janco/Dada: An Interview with Marcel Janco," 8–9.

⁹³ Koss, *Modernism After Wagner*, 95.

⁹⁴ Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 10, 104; Dickerman, "Zurich," 23–24.

this theory before coming to Zurich, he would have had an accelerated introduction when he joined Ball at the Cabaret Voltaire in February 1916. It appears that in 1917, beginning with the production of the plaster reliefs, Janco transferred the idea of the alliance of the arts from theater to architecture. It is probable, according to Harry Seiwert, that his professors at the ETH were major sources of influence guiding him in this direction and Seiwert singles out Karl Moser as the most likely source. Moser had studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in the 1880s, became a professor of architecture at the ETH in 1915, and taught thirteen seminars and courses in which Janco was enrolled. From these sessions, Janco would have been familiar with Moser's idea that architects, painters, and sculptors should more closely collaborate. And if Janco considered himself to be an artist and architect, then this may have been what inspired him to find a way to more meaningfully relate the two pursuits. His coursework at the ETH was also largely based in art and art history courses, the former which he took with Johann Jakob Graf, including sketching, watercolor painting, anatomy, and sculpture. With a curriculum devoted to architecture as well as to the visual arts, Janco's studies at the ETH may have reinforced these as equal priorities.⁹⁵

A similar iteration of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was also popular among European architects in the immediate period after World War I, when Janco's career as an architect began in earnest. Its pervasiveness is manifest in the writings of the Arbeitsrat für Kunst,

⁹⁵ Information on Moser and Graf can be found in Seiwert, *Marcel Janco: Dadaist, Zeitgenosse, Wohltemperierter Morgenländischer Konstruktivist*, 55–60.

the related Bauhaus program, and the De Stijl manifestos.⁹⁶ The motivations underlying their programs were different, but their common ground was the principle that architecture in its totality could subsume all the arts under the heading of “the complete building,” in the words of Walter Gropius. Architectural discourse prior to the war – the general objectives mainly of Jugendstil and similar movements to return art to life – combined with the utopian politics of the post-war period may be responsible for these related ideas cropping up independently in different cities. Because a dialogue contemporaneously linking them to Janco is apparent only after the war, his 1917 attraction to this idea appears mostly self-derived and an influence of his teachers. He learned of these other groups’ agendas at the latest in the spring of 1919.⁹⁷ This validation from other architects undoubtedly reinforced his own convictions to pursue the total work of art in architectural form. Because a direct connection prior to the end of the war does not tie these ideas to Janco’s conception of the plaster reliefs, this argument of the total building will be resumed in Chapter Two.

Evidence points to the fact that Janco regarded the plaster reliefs as manifestations of Dada but conceived them in direct connection to his pursuit of the interrelation of the arts as encompassed in the category of architecture. As opposed to the masks, which have an exclusive and by now iconic place in the history of Zurich Dada, the series of plaster reliefs are conceptually itinerant and can be deployed in either context. Chapter Two will

⁹⁶ These and other relevant writings can be found in Ulrich Conrads, *Programmes and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), 44–45, 49, 66.

⁹⁷ The minutes from a meeting of the Radical Artists Group on April 5, 1919 confirms that Janco was aware early on of the Arbeitsrat für Kunst because he brings up issues raised by the Berlin council at the meeting. For the meeting’s minutes, see Harry Seiwert, *Marcel Janco: Dadaist, Zeitgenosse, Wohltemperierter Morgenländischer Konstruktivist*, 563.

pick up in Bucharest at a point when Janco was no longer making the reliefs but still had not abandoned the rationale behind them, and will look at the various ways in which his production adjusted to fit a new agenda and a new location.

Chapter Two:

The Interiors, 1921-1939

With the end of World War I came the gradual dissolution of Zurich Dada and the scattering of its practitioners to various cities in Europe. Amid this dispersal, Janco left for France in December 1919. He refused to join the Paris Dadaists, citing his protest against their dissociation from radical politics and their offense of “pocketing” the artistic strategies of Zurich Dada as their own; his strained relationship with Tristan Tzara was also a likely contributing factor.⁹⁸ Instead, in June of 1920, he moved to Béthune where he found work as an architect reconstructing buildings damaged in the war. Restless and isolated in this small town and after having lived abroad for nearly eight years, Janco returned to Romania in the fall of 1921 with his wife and brother Jules. Back in Bucharest, he quickly resumed a protagonist position in the avant-garde, ending the brief hiatus that marked his time in France. He swiftly advanced to a position of authority and claimed a pivotal role in the progressive artistic movements. Together with Ion Vinea and Jacques Costin in June 1922, he introduced the inaugural issue of the journal *Contimporanul* (1922-1932), an enterprise promoting modernism in Romania. The journal was a versatile forum directed against the political and cultural establishment. Its first two years were characterized by strong political dissent, but in 1924 the journal’s

⁹⁸ “I quarreled with the Surrealists because they wanted to take over the ideas Dada had developed – automatism, the subconscious, etc. – and put them into their pockets as Surrealism. They couldn’t understand that direction in art could be given by anyone who wasn’t French....The Surrealists couldn’t admit our hegemony, so they tried to annihilate it.” See Naumann, “Janco/Dada: An Interview with Marcel Janco,” 86; Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*, 98–99.

focus narrowed to artistic concerns.⁹⁹ Its editors made an effort to partake in the discourses of international modernism and link the journal to avant-gardes enclaves abroad.¹⁰⁰ To establish these connections, the group organized an ambitious art exhibition in December 1924, *L'Exposition internationale du Contimporanul*, which boasted significant international participation. The exhibition displayed the works of Romanian and foreign artists, many of the latter being colleagues of Janco from Zurich.¹⁰¹ With the launching of the journal *Contimporanul* and its eponymous exhibition, Janco cemented his position in the cultural sphere of the city. From Dada, he had learned that the pages of the artist-journal were as crucial as the walls of the gallery in terms of exhibition and promotion. And in comparison to his role in Zurich, in Bucharest he took on a more active leadership position and was more attentive to his self-presentation. Through his various roles – as editor, architect, painter, graphic artist, organizer, and pedagogue – he broadcast his program of an engaged aesthetics, particularly through print media and architecture.

⁹⁹ This dissent was expressed through satirical drawings by Marcel Janco and through articles lamenting the policies of the new royal government, including restrictions on civil liberties, institutionalized persecution of minorities, and in particular rampant anti-Semitism. For more details, see S. A. Mansbach, “The ‘Foreignness’ of Classical Modern Art in Romania,” *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 3 (September 1998): 537–38.

¹⁰⁰ The contributors to *Contimporanul* over its decade long span include but are not limited to Le Corbusier, Theo van Doesburg, Walter Gropius, Fernand Leger, Joan Miro, Constantin Brancusi, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Pablo Picasso, Kurt Schwitters, Hans Richter, Tristan Tzara, F. T. Marinetti, and Hans Arp. For a full list of contributors who supplied articles and images to the journal, see Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*, 350.

¹⁰¹ The issue of *Contimporanul* published the month after the exhibition lists the exhibiting artists. Representing the Romanian art scene with the most works were Marcel Janco and M.H. Maxy, 29 and 19 works respectively. From abroad, the exhibiting artists included Hans Arp, Constantin Brancusi, Viking Eggeling, Lajos Kassak, Paul Klee, Hans Richter, Arthur Segal, and Karel Teige, among others. For the list of participants, see *Contimporanul* vol. 4, no. 51–52 (January 1925), and for more on the exhibition, see Krisztina Passuth, “The Exhibition as a Work of Art: Avant-Garde Exhibitions in East Central Europe,” in *Central European Avant-Gardes: Exchange and Transformation, 1910-1930*, ed. Timothy Benson (Los Angeles; Cambridge, Mass: Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; MIT Press, 2002), 235–43.

In 1922, Marcel Janco opened a joint architectural office with his brother Jules called *Birou de Studii Moderne* (Office of Modern Studies), and together they collaborated on the designs of more than forty buildings in Bucharest.¹⁰² That he imagined this range of activities as an extension of his project of Dada provocation against a culture mired in tradition is transparent in his and his colleagues' articles published in *Contimporanul*, particularly in a 1924 manifesto that resurrects the familiar language of Dada manifestos, "Down with Art – For it has prostituted itself!....Let us destroy, through the strength of disseminated disgust, the ghosts cowering under light. Let us dispatch our dead!"¹⁰³ Drawing on the social initiative he picked up from the *Radical Artists* with which he was affiliated in Zurich, Janco's objective was to provoke in order to unleash a new and modern sensibility onto the public. As he wrote in 1918, "We [artists] want to be recognized as a necessary factor in raising the spiritual level of the people."¹⁰⁴ The premise of this provocation – of practicing in a spirit of nonconformity and saturating the city with manifestos, articles, and built manifestations – was in service then of productive change.

¹⁰² It is difficult to determine Jules Janco's role in the works attributed to Marcel Janco. Jules is listed as a collaborator and partner but on the whole receives little credit for their buildings. Perhaps this is because, as Janco's daughter Josine Ianco-Starrels suggests, "Marcel was always the creative, dynamic moving force - the original thinker, the innovator. But Jules' contribution was enormous - he was the practical one, the one who took care of the details, who dealt with the construction crew, the contractors, the clients, the accounts etc." Harry Seiwert, *Marcel Janco: Dadaist, Zeitgenosse, Wohltemperierter Morgenländischer Konstruktivist* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1993), 393.

¹⁰³ The 1924 *An Activist Manifesto to the Young* was published in *Contimporanul* in May 1924 (vol. 3, no. 46). For the full translated manifesto, see Mihai Matei, tran., "An Activist Manifesto to the Young," in *Romanian Avant-garde: An Anthology* (Bucharest: The Foreign Languages Press Group "Romania," 1998), 62–63. A portion of it is also included in Mansbach, "The 'Foreignness' of Classical Modern Art in Romania," 538.

¹⁰⁴ Marcel Janco, "Dialogue entre le bourgeois mort et l'apôtre de la vie nouvelle," *Punct*, no. 11 (February 1925): 3; The majority of this text is translated in Seiwert, "Marcel Janco," 130–131.

The common thematic project of the avant-garde, the reintegration of art and life, motivated Marcel Janco's activities at these different levels of cultural production. The conceptual mechanism that he believed provided the means to achieve this project in an all-encompassing architectonic structure was the interrelation of the visual arts and architecture through a reductionist theory of form, a position he had advocated in Zurich.¹⁰⁵ In Bucharest, the achievement of this project is best exemplified in the abstract interior he designed for the editorial offices of *Contimporanul*, which implemented the aesthetics of avant-garde exhibition design and demonstration spaces, and in the stained-glass windows he incorporated into his design of residential homes, adding an element of function to the role as ornament of the plaster reliefs.

Marcel Janco had idealistic aspirations, but as a practicing architect he had to work within certain limitations to realize them.¹⁰⁶ Most of the building projects that he and his brother Jules took on, apart from a few exceptions, were apartment buildings and single-family residential homes commissioned by wealthy clients, often friends and colleagues who gave him a great deal of latitude with his designs. For example, as Janco

¹⁰⁵ Janco explained this agenda in the 1925 article *The New Architecture*, paraphrasing the 1922 *Creative demands* of De Stijl: "[t]o destroy the dualism between life and art, art becomes life." And he concludes that this could only occur with "a common conception for all the arts." See Marcel Janco, "The New Architecture," in *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist*, trans. Magda Teodorescu (Bucharest: Editura Simetria, UAR and Editura Meridiane, 1996), 219.

¹⁰⁶ Janco was a practicing architect but not a licensed one. He did not pass the final diploma examinations at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich and received the degree of "Ingeniur" but not "Diplom Ingeniur." Tom Sandqvist argues that Janco was distracted from his studies by activities in Dada. Regardless of the reason why, because they were not certified, he and his brother could not officially sign their plans when applying for building permits in Bucharest, and until 1933 they submitted their plans under the name of another architect. In 1933, the National Institute of Architects of Romania certified Janco as a recognized architect who by that point had ten years of professional experience. Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*, 81–84; Luminița Machedon and Ernie Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism: The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 43.

noted, he built the *Jean Fuchs Villa* (1927) “for a wine merchant who happened to read foreign art magazines and seemed to enjoy new architecture. He told me he had one million *lei* and a building lot and would give me a free hand. All he wanted was a modernist house.”¹⁰⁷ Although Janco built houses for clients attuned to progressive ideas, they were not “rigorous manifestos,” as Anca Bocănet has concluded.¹⁰⁸ Janco contended, for instance, that buildings materials were far less important than the image they ultimately produced. Although in his opinion reinforced concrete was a “supreme proof of progress,” he nevertheless urged architects not to use it as their main building material because in Bucharest it was “too expensive and difficult to handle.”¹⁰⁹ Photographs of his construction sites verify that he did in fact use more traditional materials like brick for the structure of his buildings because it was more cost-effective and convenient [figure 2.1]. Janco stressed the importance of this kind of practical thinking, writing that “[t]o maintain that a new house needs no roof or gutters is even more naive than to state that the Moderns will only build in crystal and reinforced concrete.”¹¹⁰ He also attended to the exigencies of human use and carefully considered both the inhabitant and the conditions of the site. For example, he adopted the idea of the open roof terrace called for by Le Corbusier in *Five points toward a new architecture* (1926), but he covered the terrace to give it shade and accommodate its use during

¹⁰⁷ Marcel Janco in an interview in *Rampa* (1933) quoted in Bocănet, “Marcel Janco-The Architect,” 36.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Marcel Janco, “Tomorrow’s Architecture,” in *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist*, trans. Magda Teodorescu (Bucharest: Editura Simetria, UAR and Editura Meridiane, 1996), 224.

¹¹⁰ Marcel Janco, “The New Style: Architecture,” in *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist*, trans. Magda Teodorescu (Bucharest: Editura Simetria, UAR and Editura Meridiane, 1996), 217.

Bucharest's hot summers, as one can see in the *Poldier Chapier House* (1929) and *Paul Wexler Villa* (1931) [figures 2.2 and 2.3].¹¹¹

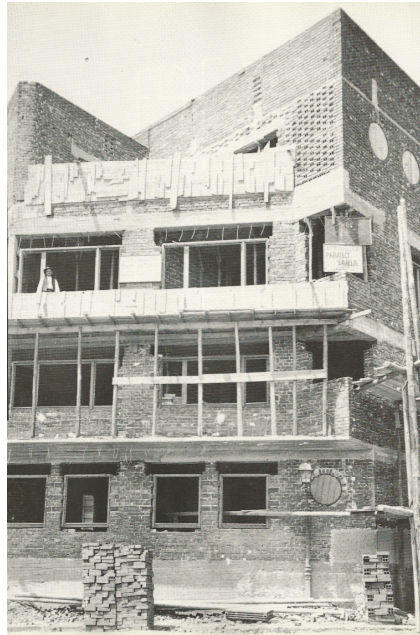


Figure 2.1. Marcel Janco, *Solly Gold Building* under construction, 1934



Figure 2.2. Marcel Janco, *Poldier Chapier House*, 1929.

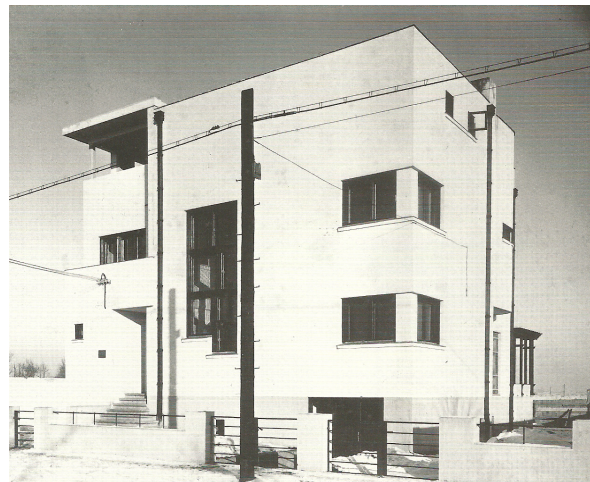


Figure 2.3. Marcel Janco, *Paul Wexler Villa*, 1931.

¹¹¹ Bocănet, "Marcel Janco-The Architect," 42; Le Corbusier, "Five Points Towards a New Architecture," in *Programmes and Manifestoes on 20th-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads, trans. Michael Bullock (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), 99–101.

Like the structural elements of his buildings, his interior architecture also takes a pragmatic approach to the objective of the ideal. One of the conclusions of the previous chapter was that, in terms of Janco's architectural concerns, the Dada plaster reliefs were 'homeless' architectural fixtures; synecdochic placeholders for a future architecture yet to be realized. Shifting our focus to Janco's 1920s and 1930s interior designs in Bucharest will then show how his initial plans formulated in Zurich – and expressed in the 1918 lecture *On Cubism, Abstract Art, and Architecture* and manifested in physical form in the series of plaster reliefs – changed when he began working in Bucharest and possessed the means, finally, to apply his ideas in buildings of his own design.

A continuous project: The integration of art into architecture

As co-editor of *Contimporanul*, Marcel Janco took full advantage of the journal as a platform to communicate his ideas on architecture. Over the journal's decade-long span, Janco contributed more than a dozen articles that reported on developments in architecture both in Romania and abroad, the intention being to cultivate domestic interest in modern architecture and participate in an ongoing international dialogue. The journal, which itself followed no particular program or medium, dedicated a special issue each to modern architecture and interior architecture in the first half of 1925. In these issues and in others, Janco promoted his own work by publishing photographs of his buildings as well as architectural plans and sketches.

The most striking instance of this practice of self-promotion occurred in one of his early essays on architecture titled *The new style: Architecture* (October 1924). In this article, Janco makes the extraordinary claim that Zurich Dada was a testing ground for the concerns of modern architecture. The article reiterates the call for the collaboration of art and architecture that he originally expressed around 1917-1918 in Zurich. And what is so remarkable about this statement is that he extends the attribution of this idea beyond his own Dadaist practice and ascribes it to the entire movement:

The Dada movement had protested against the unfailing recurrence of neoclassicism in architecture. The artists were the first to react. We launched the first manifestos in 1915; there we proclaimed: 1. The [collaboration] between abstract art and the rejuvenated architecture (isolation crippled them); 2. Against commerce with art and exhibitions (venality had indirectly led to [the alienation of the artist] and bohemian poverty); 3. Against frames for abstract paintings (they are not naturalistic sections any longer; architecture alone can supply the frame); 4. Against [the] artist's superhuman [arrogance], which has been fueled since the Renaissance (the new artist is the man who returns to society).¹¹²

The second and fourth numbered statements express, respectively, a resistance to the exchange value of art and the idea of artistic genius. Both are familiar tenets of Dada although are not necessarily specific to it. The first and third statements, however, apply exclusively (at least within Zurich Dada) to Janco's theories surrounding the plaster reliefs that involve the breakdown between art and architecture via abstraction. The statements are more in line with the program of De Stijl than to anything attributable to Dada, a connection that will be touched on later in the chapter. But by cleverly slipping non-Dada concepts into a broader definition of the movement, Janco retooled its history, capitalizing on its fame within the Romanian avant-garde. After all, who in Bucharest

¹¹² Janco, "The New Style: Architecture," 217.

would question him? Janco was one of the founders of the Cabaret Voltaire and therefore the local authority on Dada.

Also questionable in this passage is his antedating to 1915 of the unspecified manifestos that he mentions, the year *before* the assembly at the Cabaret Voltaire in February 1916. While the date could be a misprint overlooked in editing (the misprint is in the original 1924 publication¹¹³), the problem of these mystery manifestos remains. Perhaps he is not referring to manifestos per se but to conversations with other artists or architects regarding these issues. Even so, no document exists to substantiate this, which makes it difficult to determine the nature of his intentions. Were these claims benignly opportunistic or were they intended to deceive his readers? Or, as is also possible, did he believe the veracity of his statements? The tone of the entire article from which this passage is excerpted does not show signs of deliberate deceit. It equips readers of the journal with a short history regarding the development of European modern architecture and contextualizes the images they would see reproduced in the journal. Like other of Janco's articles published in *Contimporanul*, it has an earnest didacticism. But despite his intentions, the claim that Zurich Dada had a special interest in revolutionizing architecture is still unfounded. Because there is no evidence to support the claim that Dada *as a group* made any effort to take a stance against "neoclassicism in architecture," but Janco certainly did, it appears that he was tweaking its history so that his architecture would be directly linked in the minds of his readers to the avant-garde. This orchestrated continuity that Janco devises is importantly not equivalent to a claim that his buildings

¹¹³ Marcel Janco, "Stil nou: Arhitectura," in *Contimporanul*, no. 48 (October 1924).

embody a Dada sensibility. In contrast, perhaps the closest thing to being understood as ‘Dada’ architecture as such would be Kurt Schwitters’ *Merzbau*, which Schwitters created by gathering discarded debris and unrelated fragments into an organized chaos, concealing them in an architectural structure of wood and plaster.

Janco did however see his architecture and *his* Dada as part of a continuous practice, and the common factor between them, as the article suggests, is a shared language of abstraction (if focused on the first and third statements on the list). Where Janco’s terms are unrecognizable as Zurich Dada, they closely resemble those of the *G*-group which was active at the same time Janco wrote the article in 1924 and which also counted among its members a number of artists previously affiliated with Dada. Key figures contributing to the journal *G:Material zur elementaren Gestaltung* (*G: Materials for Elemental Form-Creation*) (1923-26) were Dadaists Hans Richter (its chief editor), Raoul Hausmann, and Viking Eggeling, and the architects Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig Hilberseimer, Theo van Doesburg, El Lissitzky, and Werner Graeff.¹¹⁴ The individuals collaborating on this enterprise were affiliated with a number of different artist groups and were thus united by a very broadly-defined set of principles. Janco’s own ideological eclecticism similarly captures this loose sense of cohesion. His was an outpost for modern art and architecture in general terms, as he often elided the differences of individual manifestations and focused on their continuities, perhaps on account of his geographical isolation.

¹¹⁴ Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings, eds., *G: An Avant-garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923-1926* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 4, 8.

Again, as in the preceding chapter, Janco is connected to Hans Richter. Around the years 1918 and 1919, both became interested in abstract art as an objective, democratic, and collective formal language, and they accordingly grounded their respective artistic practices in social and ethical convictions. Together with Viking Eggeling, Richter produced the pamphlet *Universelle Sprache* (1920), offering “the possibility of a language above and beyond all national language frontiers.”¹¹⁵ An interest in the expanded intelligibility provided by abstract art also galvanized Janco’s experiments with abstraction, and he expressed his enthusiasm in Zurich by joining the groups *Das Neue Leben* (1918) and the *Radical Artists* (1919) and later in Bucharest with the invention of his own “plastic alphabet” published in the journal *Punct* in 1925 [figure 2.4].

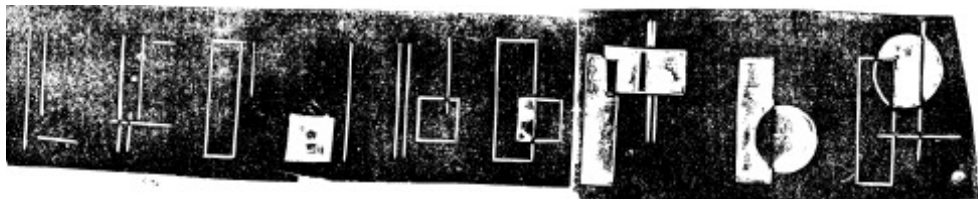


Figure 2.4. Marcel Janco, *Plastic Alphabet*, 1925.

This interest in elemental form underlying the hopes for an ideal society was also a special project of the *G*-group and was conceived in terms of a modern *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a concept that Janco assumed as well. Defining this concept will help to contextualize why Janco wanted to combine art and architecture before considering the

¹¹⁵ Turvey, “Dada Between Heaven and Hell: Abstraction and Universal Language in the Rhythm Films of Hans Richter,” 18–19; Viking Eggeling and Hans Richter attempted to systematize their formal vocabulary. For their collaborative *Universelle Sprache* (1920), see the version reproduced in Stephen C Foster, ed., “Demonstration of the ‘Universal Language’,” in *Hans Richter: Activism, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde*, trans. Harald Stadler (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998), 184–239.

theory he posited for how to combine them. The concept of the total work of art in the early twentieth century was understood on an aesthetic and political level. Not only was it a formal theory for the union of the arts but also “an aesthetic-social utopia” that looked “to the power of art for its expression and as the aesthetic means to a transformation of society.”¹¹⁶ In other words, it was a collapse of the boundaries dividing the arts and a merging of artistic categories, but it also had social implications, in this case to reintegrate art and life with the aspiration of achieving an element of social change and spiritual redemption for the individual as well as the collective. This combination of artistic and political imperatives, in which artists and more commonly architects took upon themselves the role of initiating sociopolitical change, had particular weight in Germany after the failed political revolution of November 1918. And more broadly in Europe, although the concept was potentially unrealizable and often vague in content, it offered artists a counter-model to the social crisis and devastation in the wake of World War I (similar to its conception in the nineteenth century as a response to the crisis of war¹¹⁷). In this way, the *Gesamtkunstwerk* countered political disenchantment and social alienation with restoration through synthesis.

For the *G*-group and for Janco, abstraction, or more specifically elementarization, guaranteed this unification of the arts and its companion social mission. As Detlef

¹¹⁶ David Roberts, *The Total Work of Art in European Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011), 7. Roberts builds on the definition of Roger Fornoff, which can be found in Roger Fornoff, *Die Sehnsucht Nach Dem Gesamtkunstwerk : Studien Zu Einer Ästhetischen Konzeption Der Moderne* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2004).

¹¹⁷ For a close reading of Richard Wagner's formulation of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* at the time of the 1848 revolutions, see Juliet Koss, “The Utopian Gesamtkunstwerk,” in *Modernism After Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 1–23.

Mertins has argued, the purpose in “grounding the culture of *elementare Gestaltung* in the epistemic regime of modernization” and “rationalizing the means of expression” was not to simply “reduce design to technocratic or logical construction.” Rather it was “a precondition for works to perform on the higher plane of spirit, producing effects traditionally associated with art.”¹¹⁸ This principle was consistent with Janco’s conception of abstract art as spiritually elevating. The short text *Dialogue entre le bourgeois mort et l’apôtre de la vie nouvelle* (1918), written while Janco was in Zurich, was his first emphatic call for abstract art to expand beyond the confines of the artist’s studio to exert a broader positive influence. The voice of this text, “the apostle of the new life,” declares that abstraction will “create anew the intelligence of the people through a liberated art” and “will decorate the streets, the monuments, and the houses of people,” infusing and enriching everyday life.¹¹⁹ The *Statement by the Constructivist Groups of Romania, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and Germany* that Hans Richter presented on behalf of Janco, Eggeling, and Fritz Baumann at the Congress of International Progressive Artists in Düsseldorf in May 1922 mirrors the same concept. Janco proved the significance of these ideas to his practice when he published each of these texts in Bucharest: *Dialogue* in the journal *Punct* in 1925 and excerpts from the Düsseldorf Conference’s collective statement in *Contimporanul*, also in 1925.¹²⁰ This commitment

¹¹⁸ Detlef Mertins, “Architecture, Worldview, and World Image in ‘G’,” in *G: An Avant-garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923-1926*, ed. Detlef Mertins and Michael W. Jennings (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010), 74.

¹¹⁹ Janco, “Dialogue Entre Le Bourgeois Mort Et L’apôtre De La Vie Nouvelle,” in Seiwert, “Marcel Janco,” 130–131.

¹²⁰ For *Dialogue*, see Marcel Janco, “Dialogue entre le bourgeois mort et l’apôtre de la vie nouvelle,” *Punct*, no. 11 (February 1925): 3. For the full Düsseldorf statement, see Timothy Benson and Éva Forgács, eds., “Statement by the Constructivist Groups of Romania, Switzerland, Scandinavia, and

explains why abstract art figured as such a crucial component in Janco's design of interiors and why he wrote in 1924 that "architecture alone can supply the frame." Not only was abstract art an anticipatory metaphor for social transformation, but it had the capacity, he believed, to shape people's worldviews in the present. This would make residential architecture the perfect setting for abstract art. In the domain of everyday life, this kind of art would be encountered by its inhabitants on a daily basis, amplifying the effect of its strong pedagogical charge.

Since both *Contimporanul* and *G* cross-reference each other in their respective July 1923 issues, we can assume that Janco owned copies of this journal and was aware of its parallel embrace of this idea.¹²¹ Another one of their shared aims was the theory of elementarization – the method of discovering the fundamental building blocks specific to a practice by means of reduction. This concept was the basis for Janco's theory on the compatibility of the arts, and Detlef Mertins recognizes it as one of the *G*-group's main pursuits as well.¹²²

In an article titled *The New Architecture* (1925), Janco explains how this theory was expected to work. To achieve their integration, painting and architecture had to

Germany," in *Between Worlds: A Sourcebook of Central European Avant-Gardes, 1910-1930* (Los Angeles; Cambridge: Los Angeles County Museum of Art ; MIT Press, 2002), 393; For Janco's excerpt and translation of the Düsseldorf statement, see Marcel Janco, "Constructivism and Architecture," in *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist*, trans. Magda Teodorescu (Bucharest: Editura Simetria, UAR and Editura Meridiane, 1996), 220–222.

¹²¹ Janco, in the July 1923 issue of *Contimporanul* (vol. 2 no. 44), notifies his readers of the first issue of *G* and continues to advertise it over the next few years. In the first and subsequent issues of *G*, *Contimporanul* is listed as well. See Mertins and Jennings, *G: an Avant-garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923-1926*, 104, 176, 182, 204.

¹²² For more on the emphasis in *G* on the "elementary" in relation to the fields of architecture, geometry, and technics, see Mertins, "Architecture, Worldview, and World Image in 'G'."

undergo a process of “shape reduction.” According to him, both were already primed for this in their “abolition of the eclectic idea of styles” (illusion removed from painting and ornament removed architecture). When painting and architecture were reduced to their basic elements, they were understood to share a common denominator of form since their constitutive elements were the same. This afforded them a mutual vocabulary which served as the means for their successful combination due to the ontological equivalence of their essential elements.¹²³ This compatibility on a formal level is how Janco moved from the solution of the relief to that of the stained glass window, discussed in the section below.

The concept of elementarization, while perhaps not original, was the consistent basis for Janco’s theories on interior architecture. Its prevalence in avant-garde circles may well have been part of its allure for Janco, because it validated his earlier theory regarding the inclusion of the Dada reliefs into a future architecture. And in fact, in a number of articles from 1924 and 1925, he drew consonances between his own theories and those of other artists working on elementary reduction, particularly those in De Stijl and International Constructivism.¹²⁴

One example of significance that he brings up is German architect Ludwig Hilberseimer, a contributor to the journal *G* who ascribed to the same logic as Janco regarding the interrelation of the arts. Despite their very different designs, the two

¹²³ Janco, “The New Architecture,” 219.

¹²⁴ In these articles, he links the aims of Dutch, German, and Russian artists and architects, outlining a chronology of their independent arrivals at similar conclusions. See the articles *Constructivism and Architecture* (1925), *The New Style: Architecture* (1924), *The New Architecture* (1925), and *Architecture* (1929).

architects had similar goals for their architecture, prompting Janco to quote a lengthy passage from Hilberseimer in his article *The New Architecture* (1925):

Like every discipline, architecture, too is confronted with the pressing need to define its fundamental principles and the means at its disposal. In this regard, painting has carried out a valuable preliminary task by focusing attention for the first time on *the fundamental forms of every art: geometric and cubic elements*, which represent a maximum of objectification. The simple solid bodies—the cube, the sphere, the prism, the cylinder, the pyramid, the cone—pure compositional elements—are fundamentals of all architecture. The exactness of their definition requires formal clarity and imposes order on chaos, in the most concrete ways.¹²⁵

Janco quotes Hilberseimer to support his argument that the welding of art and architecture is possible because they share the same formal vocabulary, one that for Hilberseimer started with Cézanne and developed through Cubism. Both agreed that the move from elemental art to elemental architecture required a process of “architecturalizing” simple geometrical shapes.¹²⁶ As Janco explains it, architects should first “compose within the abstract frame” and then “transpose [the composition] into a new kind of *reality* by fabricating the lively material.” One of the first applications of this exercise, he claims, was the “abstract relief that claimed a place within the wall,” referencing his own Dada works as an example for how to relate the forms and composition of abstract art to that of architecture.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Rather than quote the translation from Janco's Romanian, I am quoting an English translation found in K. Michael Hays, *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject: The Architecture of Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Hilberseimer* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), 255, emphasis added. For the Romanian-English version of this passage, see Janco, “The New Architecture,” 220. The Hilberseimer text may be one that Janco came across in *Der Sturm* in 1924. For a complex and in-depth discussion of Hilberseimer's conception of architecture, see Hays' book.

¹²⁶ Hays, *Modernism and the Posthumanist Subject*, 253–258.

¹²⁷ Marcel Janco, “Constructivism and Architecture,” in *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist*, trans. Magda Teodorescu (Bucharest: Editura Simetria, UAR and Editura Meridiane, 1996), 221, emphasis added.

The theoretical concept of transforming a composition from being flat in two dimensions to having volume in three dimensions is a process that can be illustrated in a visual comparison of Janco's *Petit Architecture lumiere* and Robert Delaunay's painting *La Fenêtre sur la Ville*, which Janco would have seen reproduced in *Dada 2* (December 1917) [figures 2.5 and 2.6]. The formal similarities are striking enough to assume some degree of connection. They share a similar pattern of angular intersecting shapes and have a corresponding diagonal that crosses from their bottom left corner to their upper right. Furthermore, they are both almost fully abstract yet vaguely referential, as views of city buildings. Delaunay was interested in the representation of light as color, but this objective was likely not so important to Janco because he was more interested in the study of form and substance and, as a result, he dispensed with the question of light and

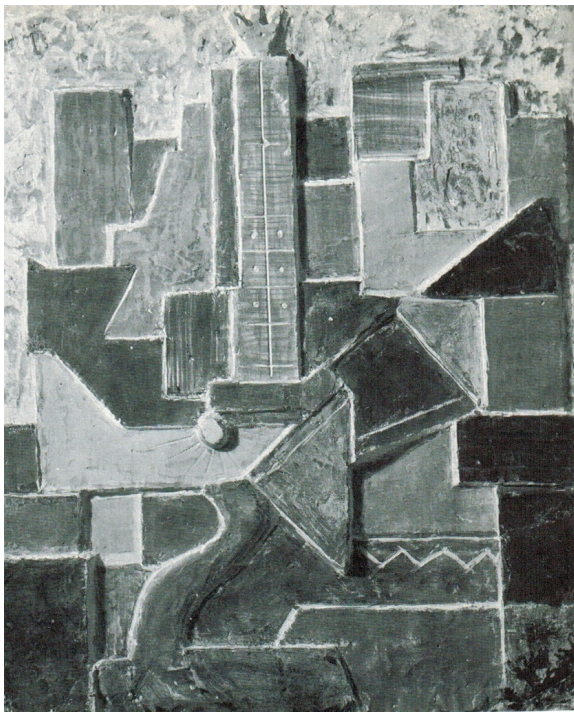


Figure 2.5. Marcel Janco, *Petit Architecture lumiere*, 1919, painted plaster relief.

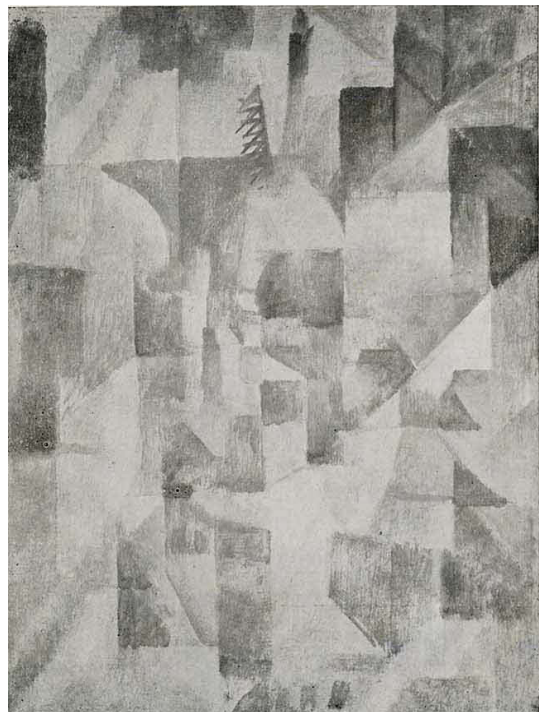


Figure 2.6 Robert Delaunay, *La Fenêtre sur la Ville*, Photograph: *Dada* no. 2, December 1917.

meditated instead in this relief on its formal composition (but the title is still telling: *Petit Architecture lumiere*). With this relief, it appears as if Janco gave literal dimension in plaster to the patches of Delaunay's color, in keeping with his later 1920s suggestion to start first within the frame of abstract painting and then convert the rendered composition to three-dimensional form.

As the comparison to Delaunay's painting shows, Janco was fully invested in exploring this relationship of art and architecture through form. This approach was very different from that of Theo van Doesburg, with whom Janco shared quite a bit. The two arrived at very different conclusions about what constitutes the common element of art and architecture. Van Doesburg defined it as the planarity of both the picture plane and the architectural wall, whereas Janco (and Hilberseimer) defined it as shared "cubic" forms.¹²⁸ That Janco insisted on this and quoted Hilberseimer at length to validate it demonstrates the centrality of the concept to his understanding of the modern project of integrating the arts and dissolving them into the total building.

In addition to defining the forms of architecture in terms of elementarization, he also identified the "essential values" of the discipline itself; an understanding of which will help frame what he ultimately produced with these theories. These he lists as: "the *interior*, the only purpose of [the] building process, *urbanism*, the social purpose of

¹²⁸ Yve Alain Bois explains that for De Stijl the basic element of painting was the color plane and for architecture it was the wall, both planar. Yve Alain Bois, "The De Stijl Idea," in *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1990), 111, 116. For more on Theo van Doesburg's particular understanding and exercising of this idea, see Nancy J. Troy, *The De Stijl Environment* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983), 108–114.

architecture, and *aesthetics*, understood in the functionalist-utilitarian sense.”¹²⁹ The interior was always important to his conception of architecture. For one reason, he objected to the preoccupation with exterior decoration – the kind of design that would cover every “spot on the wall” in “plaster fauna and flora” – and so he countered with a focus on the interior.¹³⁰ He urged architects to design from the inside out and focus on the volume encapsulated by the planes of the building – “There is the space bounded by the surface-planes: THE INTERIOR, and the result of this volume: THE EXTERIOR.”¹³¹ As follows, the interior space was theoretically the source for the exterior appearance of a building. Janco understood the second essential value, “functionalist-utilitarian” aesthetics, as a creative response to the demands of economy, hygiene, and comfort, and given that most of his buildings were residential homes, this aspect was important to his clients. As Milița Pătrașcu said, “The real discoveries of our time are the light, the bathroom, the kitchen, heating. I already congratulate myself for having all that in the new house Marcel Iancu will build for me.”¹³² Besides providing these amenities, Janco believed that if function dictates the form of a building, it will be “an overwhelmingly beautiful one.”¹³³

The other “essential value” of architecture that Janco lists, urbanism, became more important to him over the course of the decade, particularly as the utopian politics

¹²⁹ Janco, “The New Architecture,” 220.

¹³⁰ Janco, “Drawing Board Architecture,” 222–223.

¹³¹ Marcel Janco, “Interior,” in *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist*, trans. Magda Teodorescu (Bucharest: Editura Simetria, UAR and Editura Meridiane, 1996), 222, translation mine.

¹³² Milița Pătrașcu quoted in Anca Tomashevski Sandu, “Marcel Iancu and the Rumanian avantgarde: Tradition, modernity, and modernism,” *Do. co. mo. mo. journal* 10 (November 1993): 45.

¹³³ Janco, “Interior,” 222.

of the early 1920s faded. His rhetoric became increasingly radical starting in the late 1920s, writing in 1927 that “no one will ever stop the modern machine from its march to conquer life.”¹³⁴ But this enthusiasm was not strongly represented in his designs for residential architecture. Rather it was expressed in his support for urban planning. According to him, the “speedy development” produced by machine production required a “directed architecture” to accommodate it as “yesterday’s village form is incompatible with tomorrow’s town.”¹³⁵ In 1935, he advocated for the institution of urban planning policies in Bucharest based upon the guidelines of Le Corbusier’s Radiant City and CIAM’s Charter of Athens, specifically the idea of condensed and collective living in high-rise buildings. In a long essay called *Bucharest and its Utopia*, he explains the unique circumstances making Bucharest an ideal candidate for such policies because it was a relatively new city in terms of its urban development.¹³⁶ This shift in interest deserves a closer look, but for the purposes of this study of his interiors, I will address the two other points listed, namely the interior space and the idea of a utilitarian aesthetics, which will serve as the subjects for the following two sections.

¹³⁴ Marcel Janco, “Werkbug Exhibition: Die Wohnung,” in *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist*, trans. Magda Teodorescu (Bucharest: Editura Simetria, UAR and Editura Meridiane, 1996), 224.

¹³⁵ Marcel Janco, “Bucharest and Its Utopia,” in *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist*, trans. Magda Teodorescu (Bucharest: Editura Simetria, UAR and Editura Meridiane, 1996), 233–236.

¹³⁶ Florin Machedon, Luminita Machedon, and Ernie Scoffham, “Inter-war Bucharest: City in a Garden,” *Planning Perspectives* 14, no. 3 (1999): 249–275.

“The Interior”: The Editorial Offices of Contimporanul

In the 1925 special issue of *Contimporanul* on the subject of interior architecture, Janco contributed an article stipulating how the space of the interior should be managed: “New aesthetics, as elementary as any hygienic needs, recommends that wall-paper, curtains, carpets, and paintings be removed; it demands instead *painted walls* according to the given context and purpose.”¹³⁷ This article reaffirms the content of the lecture *On Cubism, Abstract Art, and Architecture* that Janco delivered as a student at the ETH, in which he insisted on the elimination of framed paintings and of free-standing furniture that measured more than a third of the wall’s height.¹³⁸

The best example of Janco’s realization of such “painted walls” is his design for the editorial offices of the *Contimporanul* journal (ca. 1923-25). This is the first verifiable instance of Janco employing a chromatic treatment like this in an interior, and because the approach was new and unprecedented for him, it was likely an influence from De Stijl. In each of these rooms, he covered the walls and ceilings with colored graphic elements, creating an abstract environment realized through a pictorial intervention into a three-dimensional space.¹³⁹ Compared to similar manifestations produced later, this was his most daring interior. As “the editorial office of an avant-

¹³⁷ Janco, “Interior,” 222, emphasis added; Dorit Arad rightly points out that his suggestion for the removal of framed paintings from architecture is belied by his large production of paintings in Bucharest. Arad, “Marcel Janco, Beyond Dada,” 53. A catalogue of those paintings appears in the cited exhibition catalogue *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania*.

¹³⁸ Janco, “Vortrag Über Kubismus, Abstrakte Kunst Und Architektur,” 527.

¹³⁹ Photographs of the office were reproduced in *Contimporanul* in the issue devoted to interior architecture, *Interiorul Nou* (New Interior), no.57-58, April 1925.

garde magazine, [it] was the ideal battle field for experiments.”¹⁴⁰ In the most practical sense, it was a setting for the editors of the journal to work; a literal backdrop to their activities. But it could also serve as a visual expression of their cultural program and particularly of their aesthetic doctrine. It follows that Janco would be bold in his approach. There was no client whose wishes he had to meet so he could exercise greater control, and this was the first time he was given an arena to put his ideas into practice that prior to this moment he could only visualize in models and in writing. When he applied this type of pictorial design again but to residential homes, its implementation was much more conservative. The only limitation for the *Contimporanul* offices was that he was working with a preexisting structure, not one he designed himself; an advantage that he had with his residential interiors.

From a reading of period photographs, we can attempt to reconstruct the editorial offices, although unfortunately the colors do not translate in the photographs nor are 360 degree views available¹⁴¹. To create the space, Janco treated the surface of each wall as a pictorial field, introducing an array of shapes made to run along the walls and ceilings independent of the structure of the room. Color is wedded to the surface of the walls, unhinging the binary relationship between the discrete framed painting and the wall as its support and collapsing the demarcation between what is pictorial and structural. This is in accordance with the anti-painting stance central to many contemporary artistic

¹⁴⁰ Anca Bocănet and Ana Maria Zahariade, “Architecture Projects (1922-1938),” in *Marcel Janco in Interwar Romania: Architect, Fine Artist, Theorist* (Bucharest: Editura Simetria, UAR and Editura Meridiane, 1996), 57.

¹⁴¹ According to Anca Bocănet, Janco was intensely interested in color and particularly interested in Bruno Taut's articles on color and architecture from 1921. Unfortunately, this connection is difficult to pursue without color photographs or descriptions. Bocănet, “Marcel Janco-The Architect,” 50, n. 47.

movements (including Dada with which he was most familiar) because it breached the bounded enclosure of the frame and broke the optical and structural limits imposed by architecture. As the design opens up to encompass the entire space, the vertical axis proper to easel painting is disrupted and every plane of the room, including the ceiling but excluding the floor, is utilized as a surface.

The shapes put into these patterns are either basic units like the circle, square, and rectangle or are more complex polygonal figures [figure 2.7]. One of the walls features a suprematist white square, but Janco did not allow it to float weightlessly in the pictorial field (“to sink in the middle of a formal nowhere,” as he describes Suprematism¹⁴²). Rather he anchors it with a black vertical line on its left side, and the tension of this asymmetry forms a dynamic composition that replays in various formulas on each of the walls [figure 2.8]. The composition develops in two modes, one ordered and the other unsystematic, making the distribution of planes appear to unfold somewhat randomly. In certain sections, the shapes are aligned in ordered and regular sequences forming clear relational patterns, for example with the string of repeated small dark circles that form a straight line along the top edge of the wall, or in a different spot, where narrow bands repeat up and down the room’s corner [figures 2.9 and 2.10]. This kind of clear pattern also plays out on a different wall with the horizontal bands that launch across it, traverse the corner, and clash with the vertically-oriented panes of the window to which they are

¹⁴² Janco, “Constructivism and Architecture,” 221.

set in a perpendicular orientation [figure 2.11].¹⁴³ At other points, constellations of rectilinear and circular shapes are arranged in clustered formations, so that they overlap and intersect without a consistent method of organization [figure 2.12].

Radiating from and connecting these different configurations of shapes are thin graphic lines that cross the walls and contrast the broad planes of color, inviting the spectator to have an itinerant experience of the environment. The spectator can follow the direction of these lines and bands as they move horizontally across or vertically up and down the walls and onto the ceilings, but the experience for the viewer entering the room must have been overwhelming because the range of permutations that unfold offers no particular route to follow.

So far, the date of the rooms' conception remains elusive. Some of the photographs were published in April 1925 in *Contimporanul* but the rooms were likely painted sometime between 1923 and 1924, making for a possible two year span in which they could have been produced. This makes it difficult to determine its relationship to other interior room designs with which it shares an affinity. But because his conception of the space closely parallels the contemporary concerns of other artists in the early 1920s working on exhibition design, demonstrates spaces, or artist studio environments, the connections merit closer comparison.

¹⁴³ The sequence of circles in a straight line is a motif that recurs in Janco's work. It first appears in the Dada works and is echoed in drawings and prints produced in Bucharest, as well as in the architectural designs, specifically his use of the porthole window and in wall perforations.



Figure 2.7. Marcel Janco, Interior of the *Contimporanul* Editorial Office, c. 1923-25.



Figure 2.8. Marcel Janco, Interior of the *Contimporanul* Editorial Office, c. 1923-25.



Figure 2.9. Marcel Janco, Interior of the *Contimporanul* Editorial Office, c. 1923-25



Figure 2.10. Marcel Janco, Interior of the *Contimporanul* Editorial Office, c. 1923-25



Figure 2.11. Marcel Janco, Interior of the *Contimporanul* Editorial Office, c. 1923-25



Figure 2.12. Marcel Janco, Interior of the *Contimporanul* Editorial Office, c. 1923-25

Similar rooms include Erich Buchholz's studio in Berlin (1922), El Lissitzky's *Proun Room* (1923) [figure 2.13], Theo van Doesburg and Cornelis van Eesteren's *Contra-Constructions* (1923), and Gerrit Rietveld and Vilmos Huszar's *Spatial Color Composition for an Exhibition* (1923).¹⁴⁴ It is not clear whether Janco was aware of Buchholz's studio or travelled to Berlin in the early 1920s, but a more convincing case can be made for the latter three because he published or discussed their works in *Contimporanul*.¹⁴⁵ With these artists, he shared the idea that "to hang something on the

¹⁴⁴ A reproduction of Erich Buchholz's studio can be found in Forgács, "Definitive Space: The Many Utopias of El Lissitzky's Proun Room," 64. Reproductions of the latter three works can be found in Troy, *The De Stijl Environment*, 108–110, 125–131.

¹⁴⁵ In *Contimporanul* 4, no. 53-54 (February 1925), Janco reproduced Theo van Doesburg and Cornelis van Eesteren's model for a Private House, along with the first six points of the De Stijl manifesto from 1918, embedded in one of his articles. Earlier, in *Contimporanul* 2, no. 35 (March 1923), Janco had published Theo van Doesburg's "Against the Artist-Imitators." He was also aware of Gerrit Rietveld's work and reproduced an image of his interior design in the issue of *Contimporanul* 4, no. 57-58 (April 1925) which was dedicated to interiors. And lastly, as we already concluded, Janco must have seen the July 1923 issue of *G*, which is the issue in which El Lissitzky's *Proun Room* was reproduced. But by 1925, Janco was

wall is a contradiction to the tectonics of architecture.”¹⁴⁶ To overcome the separation of painting and architecture and solve this “contradiction,” each of these artists sought to create an environment that fused architecture, painting, and sculpture in a harmonious whole. Their agreement, however, may have been coincidental. Janco articulated his stance in the February 1918 lecture at the ETH and most likely did not learn of these other artists until after the war, although it remains a possibility that he was aware of their ideas. More likely, as noted in Chapter One, is that Janco adopted this position from his professor at the ETH Karl Moser. Tom Sandqvist writes that “[a]ccording to Moser, the organic treatment of space is the *raison d’être* of architecture.”¹⁴⁷ So to avoid contaminating the organic clarity of a room that he learned to appreciate from Moser, Janco called for the removal of framed paintings from walls.

With these other abstract interiors, the *Contimporanul* offices share more on a level of form than ideology. As Éva Forgács has shown, despite their similarities in the use of geometrical abstraction, the motivations underlying these interiors were vastly different.¹⁴⁸ Janco’s pictorial treatment of the room aligns his design with van Doesburg’s use of color as a material, but the pattern and range of the composition appears closer to Lissitzky’s *Proun Room*. If we presume that Janco devised his conception of the offices after having seen van Doesburg’s and El Lissitzky’s designs (I make this presumption

undoubtedly aware of Lissitzky’s prouns (if not the room), because he mentioned them in the article *Constructivism and Architecture*: “Later, Lisitzky [sic] attempted to make the object (Proun) as a purely aesthetic standard meant to clarify the relations between volumes and materials (A pure architectural problem indeed).” This article was published in *Contimporanul* 4, no. 53-54 (February 1925).

¹⁴⁶ See n. 84-86.

¹⁴⁷ Sandqvist, *Dada East: The Romanians of Cabaret Voltaire*, 80.

¹⁴⁸ The differences between these groups’ programs and Lissitzky’s attempt to reconcile their competing ideas in the *Proun Room* are discussed in Forgács, “Definitive Space: The Many Utopias of El Lissitzky’s Proun Room.”

because nothing in Janco's Dada practice suggest that he might turn to these kinds of formal strategies), then it appears that his formal vocabulary is an undoctinaire embrace of the aesthetic programs of these other two manifestations, even if the matter of direct reception is inconclusive.

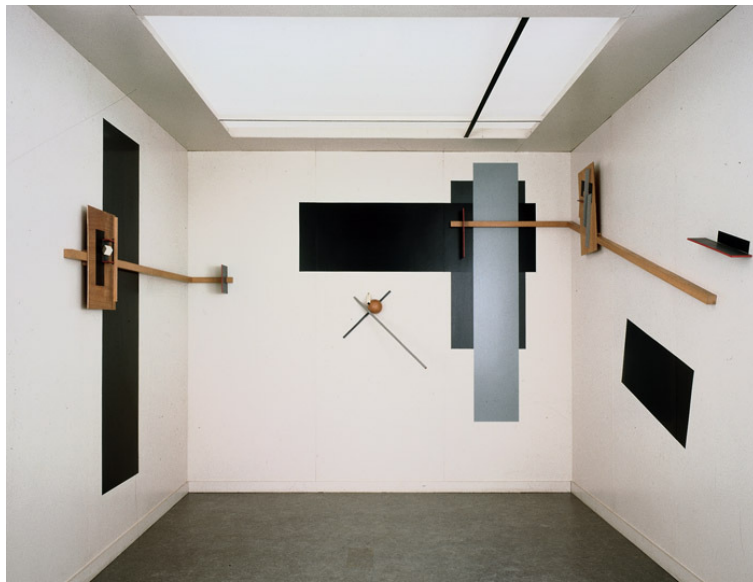


Figure 2.13. El Lissitzky, *Prounenraum* 1923, reconstruction 1971.

With respect to materials, Janco used paint with the same sensitivity to its flat application that van Doesburg insisted upon. But unlike the Dutch artist, he did not treat color as a “constructive element” equivalent to the plane it defines. The viewer in Janco's room is not meant to see color as a structural material. Rather, color is used as a “superficial addition” in a way that van Doesburg, according to Nancy Troy, was careful to avoid in the counter-constructions.¹⁴⁹ In relation to his previous work, Janco retained the conceptual solution of the Dada relief but not its form. Instead of recessing the work into the structure of the wall to perform as an architectural element as he intended for the

¹⁴⁹ Troy, *The De Stijl Environment*, 112.

relief, he applied the paint to the surface of these walls in the manner called for by De Stijl. Also, he smoothed over the raw and expressionistic texture characteristic of the relief and used flat and level coats of paint to make precise and clearly articulated shapes.

In contrast to Lissitzky's *Proun Room*, Janco did not bring tangible materials into play, but in terms of composition, his design is closely aligned with the *Proun Room* [figure 2.13]. Similar to the *Proun Room*, Janco arranged the composition as a balance of differently-colored rectilinear and circular shapes, which like Lissitzky's forms, develop across the surface of the walls, extend through corners, and reach to the ceiling. They both work to connect the discrete planes of the room and break the limits imposed by the space, which in Janco's case, is a more conventional room in the shape of a cube.

Also, as opposed to the *Proun Room* that Lissitzky intended as a "demonstration space" and emphatically "not a living room," Janco's rooms existed for a specific purpose outside of artistic display.¹⁵⁰ They were the headquarters for the *Contimporanul* journal editors. The published photographs of the offices testify to this practical function. They show the editors posing as if at work surrounded by office furniture, evidently designed by Janco, with papers and proofs scattered on their surfaces. This signifies that this is a utilized work space. The consequence of inhabiting this 'ideal' space, as these photographs demonstrate, is that it constitutes a threat to its integrity. In particular, the interference of the office furniture jeopardizes the impression of its otherwise unified space – the organic clarity that Janco called for in an interior. The photographs of the

¹⁵⁰ See Lissitzky's article reproduced in G, Mertins and Jennings, *G : an Avant-garde Journal of Art, Architecture, Design, and Film, 1923-1926*, 100.

interiors of the *Solly Gold Building* (1934) and the *Jean Juster Villa* (1931) show how in other projects he used shelving as structural elements to free up space [figures 2.14 and 2.15].

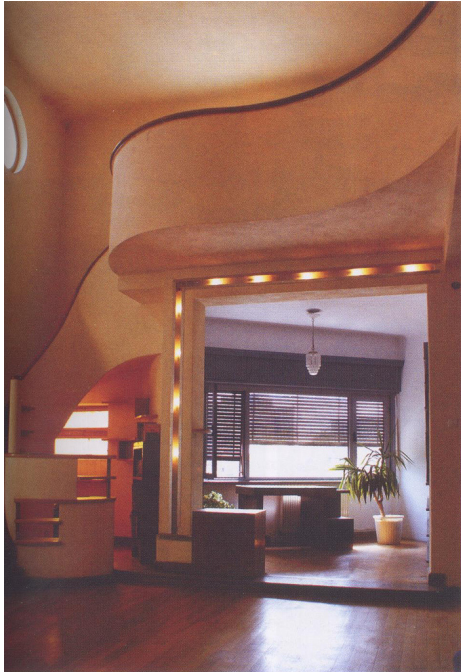


Figure 2.14. Marcel Janco, Interior of *Solly Gold Building*, 1934.



Figure 2.15. Marcel Janco, Interior of *Jean Juster Villa*, 1931.

But from what the photographs of the offices show, the placement of the furniture is not integrated into the overall design. The pattern on the wall does not unfold around the furniture but is visually interrupted by it. For example, the top ledge of the ornate armoire in the corner of one of the rooms awkwardly juts out and encroaches slightly on the space of one of the colored planes [figure 2.8]. In a different room, the shelves and bench along the wall act as more conspicuous obstacles, as they block a full view of the unfolding pattern, only parts of which can be seen through the empty spaces of the shelves [figure 2.9]. A number of these photographs were reproduced in *Contimporanul* in the issue on

interiors, and so the manner of their representation must not have been accidental but deliberately staged to appear this way. The papers strewn on the tables and shelves, for example, could easily have been tidied. It is unclear then whether Janco would have been bothered by the infringement of the furniture on the ‘totality’ of the space or whether he would have seen it as a negligible consequence of its value as an inhabited space. His intention could have been to show these spaces as occupied and in use, perhaps to make the statement that his ideal design could be practically realized.

“Functionalist-Utilitarian” Aesthetics: Stained-glass windows

The stained-glass window was another common element in Janco’s buildings from the interwar period in Bucharest. Just like the *Contimporanul* offices and the Dada plaster reliefs before it, the window was another way for Janco to fulfill the provisions he set out in 1918 for how to add a work of art to a room and still maintain a space “without obstacles.”¹⁵¹ Consistent with this theory, each of these three approaches offered a compelling solution for how to seamlessly merge the pictorial and structural elements of a given space. And when installed, each would become part of the architecture and no longer a foreign element in the room (for the relief, this remained hypothetical because they were never permanently installed as planned). On a formal level, though, the stained-glass window and the plaster relief are more clearly related. For one, the window and the relief were both made to be integrated into the structure of the wall, unlike the

¹⁵¹ Janco, “Vortrag Über Kubismus, Abstrakte Kunst Und Architektur,” 527.

painted design of the offices which rested on the surface of the wall less invasively.

Secondly, they can both be seen as segments of architecture, fragments of the whole, and distinctly unlike the unbounded pictorial environments of the *Contimporanul* offices that enveloped the given rooms. Given these similarities, the plaster relief and the stained-glass window can be regarded as close analogues. Did Janco see the window as a direct corollary to the relief? Probably not, but the many parallels that emerge when they are framed in this way nevertheless remain and deserve a closer look.

The two are extremely alike in form and theory, but each is confined to a particular city and period in Janco's career. Except for a few outliers, the series of reliefs is exclusive to his time in Zurich and its span of production is relatively short, from 1917 to 1919. By the time he was a practicing architect in Bucharest and could implement the proposals he had outlined for how to install the reliefs, he had already abandoned their production. Instead, he turned to the stained-glass window, which took the place of the relief in the wall. This lack of continuity is not surprising. After leaving Zurich, he graduated in a sense from his Dada period and was exposed to a new set of influences that opened up after the war.¹⁵² Significantly, artists in De Stijl and at the Bauhaus, two of these new influences, were also experimenting with stained glass.

This shift from relief to window could also be in part a consequence of his rejection by the 1920s of the "radicalization of uselessness" in the visual arts of Zurich Dada – the embodiment "par excellence of the end in itself, superfluity, play, frivolity,

¹⁵² Thanks to Éva Forgács for this pointing out.

parasitism, and provocation.”¹⁵³ Certainly this was grounds for being unwelcome in a building whose form was dictated by the “functionalist-utilitarian” aesthetics required by Janco’s tenets of architecture. It was the kind of provocation that was no longer a priority for him. He was not interested any more in “psychological shock”; the immediate circumvention of the viewer’s intellect and the resulting impulsive reaction that his relief was intended to induce.¹⁵⁴

The stained-glass window was made of translucent glass and possessed a utilitarian value that the inhabitant would naturally have appreciated: a physical barrier which filtered light and could be opened to ventilate the interior, as demonstrated by the opened windowpane on the bottom left of the window in the *Florica Chihăescu Villa* [figure 2.16]. The stained-glass window therefore not only satisfied Janco’s objective to incorporate abstract art into the space of architecture, but because of glass’s translucent property it also had a practical purpose in line with his polemics of functional design. The stained-glass window was thus not a mere substitute for the relief. Rather, it shows how Janco built on the theories he developed in Zurich by adding an element of instrumentality to it. The relief and the window, although they have different guises determined by their original contexts, can be seen as manifestations of the same consistent theory in Janco’s practice, which was to fuse the arts.

¹⁵³ Gundolf Winter, “Zurich Dada and the Visual Arts,” in *Dada Zurich: A Clown’s Game from Nothing*, ed. Brigitte Pichon and Karl Riha (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1996), 150.

¹⁵⁴ Janco, “Vortrag Über Kubismus, Abstrakte Kunst Und Architektur,” 535. See also n. 67. In Bucharest, this ‘shock’ may still have been a priority for Janco, but it no longer had the same rationale as before. With his architecture, he was wanted to shock the public with the novelty of his designs. He describes the sensation caused by the *Jean Fuchs Villa* (1927): “The house I built in that area was a sensation. The priest, the policeman and the people were convinced that I had erected a laboratory which was out of place in their neighborhood.” Marcel Janco in an interview in *Rampa* (1933) quoted in Bocănet, “Marcel Janco-The Architect,” 36.



Figure 2.16. Marcel Janco, *Untitled*, stained glass, Interior of *Florica Chihaescu Villa*, 1930.

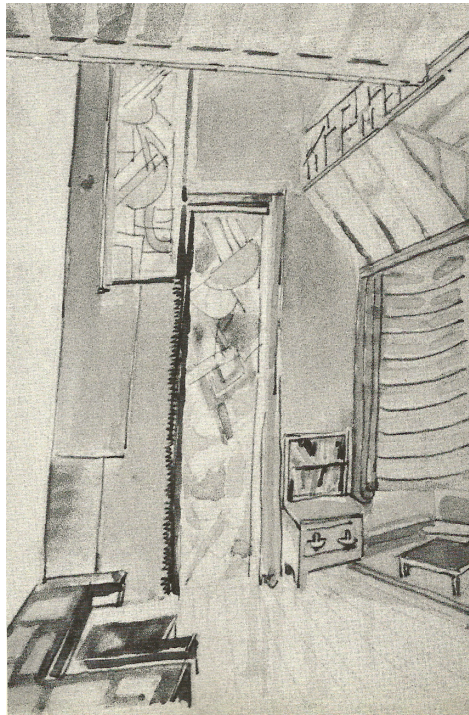


Figure 2.17. Marcel Janco, *Sketch for an Interior*, 1916.

Contrary however to expectations, the progression from plaster relief to stained-glass window was not chronological, even though the former dominates in his practice during the late 1910s and the latter follows starting in the mid-1920s. The reason not to

claim a linear sequence is because a 1916 drawing, *Sketch for an Interior* made prior to the first plaster relief, reveals an early interest in stained glass as an alternative to conventional windows [figure 2.17]. This sketch is a drawing and watercolor of an interior with elevated ceilings and minimal furniture, and on the back wall there are two vertical panels, adjacent but offset, that exhibit a patterned design made up of narrow rectangles and half-circles which are clearly outlined and colored in different shades of color.¹⁵⁵ That this is a representation of stained glass and not an opaque surface is clear from a close look at how Janco articulated the pattern on the panels. First of all, it has alternating colors, much like the mosaic effect of similar windows. But more convincing is the representation of light being diffused through them. This effect arises from the thin washes of watercolor paint so sheer to appear translucent. This is particularly convincing in the larger of the two panels that has distinct outlines separating the shapes toward the top of the panel (possibly representing strips of lead), but these gradually disappear in the middle of the panel and toward the bottom, as if dematerialized by the intensity of the light coming through. That the light is coming from outside the room is clear from the light cast on the side of the furniture shown directly next to the larger of the two panels. This sketch is important, for although Janco may have been interested in working with this material in Zurich, it would have been impractical to produce a window when he had limited access to the means of producing one and of course with no building in which to put it. Glass, like plaster, was a material that Janco experimented with in a number of

¹⁵⁵ The image is reproduced in black and white and its colors are not described in the text in which it appears. See Bocănet, "Marcel Janco-The Architect," 31.

different forms. He also used it as a surface on which to paint, evident in works from the early 1920s.¹⁵⁶

There are three good examples of stained-glass windows that Janco designed for residences in Bucharest that range from 1926 to 1931 (there are many more than just three, but these are the best documented).¹⁵⁷ All three were placed at the landing of a staircase. A photograph of the first window was reproduced in the December 1926 issue of *Contimporanul* [figure 2.18].¹⁵⁸ The glass of the window appears to have an undulating surface with ridges, indirectly relating it to his style of the reliefs. It displays a busy design with a variety of flattened geometric shapes, curved and rectilinear, that are evocative of Purism, which Janco was acquainted with from his time in France. Janco also made the surprising choice to inscribe text on the glass. The windowpane on the lower right shows the word “café” repeated four times. Only the bottom one is fully revealed; the rest are partially obscured by a descending motif of small circles, showing just “...fé”. At the bottom of the windowpane on lower left, the letters “oncert” appear, presumably standing in for the word *concert*. Both *café* and *concert* refer to common subjects of Cubist paintings and collages, the café table and musical instruments. Janco’s references makes for a playful composition quite unexpected in an architectural framework: a cubist painting rendered in glass.

¹⁵⁶ For the painting on glass, see Willy Verkauf, Marcel Janco, and Hans Bolliger, eds., *Dada: Monograph of a Movement* (New York: George Wittenborn, 1957), 129.

¹⁵⁷ Not a lot of information is available on these windows, particularly Janco's role in their production. All the information that is available on the windows can be found in Bocănet, “Marcel Janco-The Architect,” 46. A question for further research is: If Janco designed the windows, did he have the technical training to produce them? If not, who manufactured them? And what role did they have in their design?

¹⁵⁸ A photograph of this window, building unknown, is reproduced in *Contimporanul* 5, no. 71 (December 1926). The photograph was taken from a slightly oblique angle, suggesting that this window (like the rest) was placed in between two floors in a stairwell, a common place for stained-glass windows.



Figure 2.18. Marcel Janco, *Untitled*, stained glass, unknown building,
Photograph: *Contimporanul* 5, no. 71, December 1926.

The other two windows have far more reduced compositions and consist of ordered patterns based on a simple non-modular grid structure. The first of the windows is in the *Florica Chihăescu Villa* (1930) [figures 2.16 and 2.19]. Its monumental size takes up the entire expanse of the stairwell wall with two separate horizontal sections. Its colors are intense blues and yellows and muddier browns, grays, and blacks – perhaps chosen instead of primary colors to suggest a landscape, with blue for the sky and brown and yellow for the earth. Its base unit is the rectangle, which appears in various sizes, proportions, and depths of color. They are deployed in unbalanced configurations in each window. Although the two windows convey a sense of regularity because they use only this one shape, there is no symmetry or discernable pattern in their design nor a

relationship between the two windows, as is more apparent for example in Theo van Doesburg's *Composition IV* (1917) [figure 2.20].¹⁵⁹ Rather than a consistent pattern, Janco varies the size, proportion, color, and texture of each individual panel. And in addition, on select panels, the ones more lightly colored, he has etched onto the glass what appear to be basic representations of architecture. Shown are flat facades with regularly-spaced windows, essentially a simplified and idealized cityscape. Rather than having the inhabitant look out the window to see the actual buildings of the city, Janco pictured a model version of one onto its surface. Because this architectural representation is reduced to the point of abstraction, it does not clash with the unadorned panels, creating a seamless mix of representation and nonobjective abstraction.

Seldom did Janco produce a work in which a trace of the process was not made palpable in some way (the *Contimporanul* offices are an exception). With this window, the traces of Janco's process can be found in the varying textures applied to the panes that Bocănet says creates "an overall *collage* effect."¹⁶⁰ It appears that pigment was added to the glass by being brushed on in broad and loose strokes, making the direction of the brush and its movement across the glass visible. The strokes detectable on the glass produce an effect very similar to the modulated surfaces and scratches on the plaster reliefs, for instance *Flower Geometry*, indicating a recurring stylistic choice on Janco's part. The perceptible markings on the plaster and on the glass each point to a process, giving concreteness to abstraction by tying it to a physical event in the material world.

¹⁵⁹ For more on Theo van Doesburg's stained glass windows, see Troy, *The De Stijl Environment*, 23–28.

¹⁶⁰ Bocănet, "Marcel Janco-The Architect," 46, emphasis in the original.



Figure 2.19. Marcel Janco, *Untitled*, stained glass, Interior of *Florica Chihaescu Villa*, 1930.

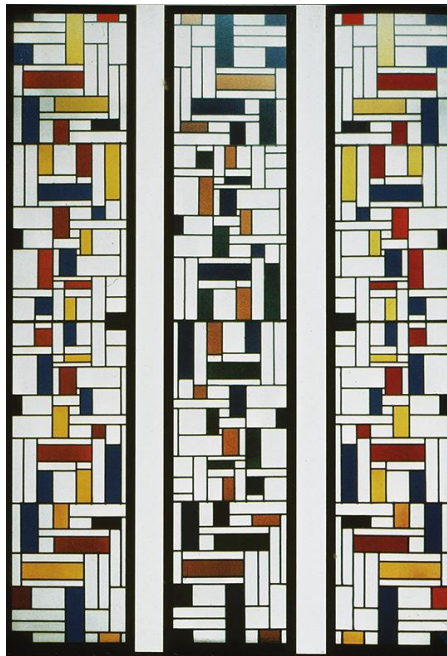


Figure 2.20. Theo van Doesburg, *Composition IV* (in three parts), 1917, stained glass.

With Janco's window, this is made clear when compared to Theo van Doesburg's use of color in *Composition IV*. His glass has a smooth surface and its colors have a consistent chromatic intensity implying the absence of the author's hand and serving to diminish the solidity of the glass and enhance the immateriality of the light coming through. Perception of them is thus anchored in vision. Janco's windows in the *Florica Chihaescu Villa*, on the other hand, reveal a strong emphasis on variation in color and texture. The blue panels, for instance, are not a uniform blue. The clarity of the color is interrupted by the transparent glass showing through in uneven patches, giving it a grainy visual texture very similar to the plaster reliefs, which were also engaged with texture but in a spatial exploration of it. Janco's heavy-handed treatment of the material, compared to van Doesburg's, adds a haptic awareness to the optical experience of the stained-glass window.

The tendency toward presenting his work as hand-made (a practice discernible in the Dada works discussed in the previous chapter) can be interpreted as a search for authenticity inherent in the process of making; an alternative to the artifice of the machine age.¹⁶¹ Janco's writing, predominantly in the first half of the 1920s, confirms that he was adamantly against an aesthetic obsession idealizing industrial technology, what he called "naive passion for the machine and a childish worship of its engineer," which he derisively recognized as a "ridiculous hypostasis of what it really [was]: a new romanticism."¹⁶² Eventually, he changed his stance and embraced the forms of

¹⁶¹ For more on this, see Jill Lloyd, "Expressionist Wood Carving: Ideals of Authenticity," in *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity* (New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1991), 67–82.

¹⁶² Janco, "The New Style: Architecture," 217; Janco, "Constructivism and Architecture," 220.

standardization and industrialization because they were capable of producing “healthier, more comfortable, cheaper... by far, more beautiful homes than those issued from modernist *individual* efforts.”¹⁶³ Nevertheless, neither his buildings nor interior designs show that he ever fully subscribed to a strict functionalist credo.



Figure 2.21. Marcel Janco, *Untitled*, stained glass, Interior of *Paul Iluță Villa*, 1931.

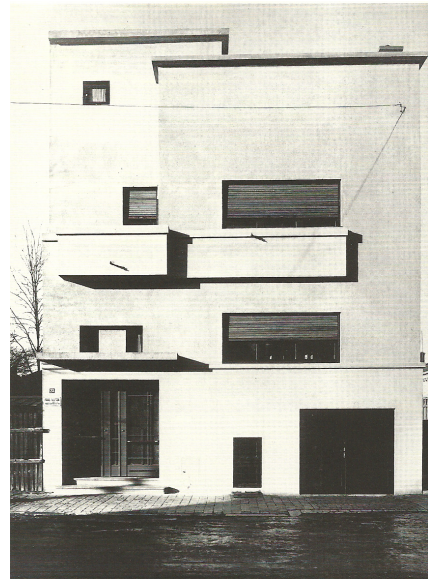


Figure 2.22. Marcel Janco, *Paul Iluță Villa*, 1931.

The stained-glass window in the *Paul Iluță Villa* (1931) demonstrates how Janco infused lyricism into even the most sober compositions [figures 2.21 and 2.22]. This window has a more pared-down grid structure in accordance with the austere exterior façade of the building, but on the surface of the clouded glass he engraved a composition on a musical theme according to Bocănet.¹⁶⁴ This mixing of contradictory approaches

¹⁶³ Janco, “Werkbug Exhibition: Die Wohnung,” 224.

¹⁶⁴ Bocănet, “Marcel Janco-The Architect,” 46.

was apparent to Janco's contemporaries. In a 1932 article on contemporary architecture, the critic Sandu Eliad praises Janco's creativity in the fusion of these two categories, describing his interiors, as follows:

[W]ell-composed, rationally partitioned, following a judicious use of space, displaying a sober, yet full-fledged fantasy in the colour decoration...An interior devised by Marcel Janco has something of the severity and 'everything in its place' atmosphere of a *factory*, and the joyful and festive air of a *theatre* scenery. The merging of these two contradictory yet complementary aspects forms the source of Janco's architecture, of his value and originality.¹⁶⁵

His interiors were marked by a similar tension that was identified in the Dada plaster reliefs – a formal simplicity and impersonality counteracted by the inventiveness of the artist. From Eliad's impression of the interiors as a mix between the sensibilities of a theater and a factory and from the effect of the reliefs as at once being subjective and collective objects, we find another similarity between his Dada and architectural practices.

What is most interesting about the relationship between his Dada and architecture is that because in Zurich he was simultaneously engaged in both, they became tangled around the same difficult questions. Without resorting to the explanation that his architecture is *Dada* architecture or that his Dada works are *architectural Dada*, we can still recognize the influence of one practice on the other. That the two together might have effectively realized a unity of the arts was the driving force behind works like the plaster reliefs and stained-glass windows. He did not feel, however, that he ever adequately worked this out, as he later noted: "Aware of the similitude of forms in architecture and fine arts, in creation and composition, I struggled all my life for a new

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 44, emphasis added.

synthesis of these arts. Unfortunately I could not fulfill this struggle in the country I was born, because of forced emigration in the best years of my activity.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Quoted in Sandu, “Marcel Iancu and the Rumanian avantgarde: Tradition, modernity, and modernism.”

Conclusion

Sparked by Hans Arp's subtle allegation that artist Marcel Janco's dual roles as Dadaist and architect developed despite each other, this thesis set out to understand what in fact constituted their relationship.¹⁶⁷ From the beginning, it seemed unlikely that the two could emerge simultaneously yet in isolation and the aim was to complicate the assumption that they were independent developments. In its complexity, Marcel Janco's work, particularly the theoretical hybridity of the series of plaster reliefs, itself acted as a challenge to the dichotomy that Arp suggested, proving that the two directions his production took in Zurich intersected along their conflicting trajectories.

While Janco's writing confirmed that the series of plaster reliefs was intended to bridge the two practices, the connections between the reliefs and the interior architecture in Bucharest was less straightforward. The idea was carried through but not the form. In Bucharest, under a new set of conditions and with an influx of novel ideas coming from journals like *G* and *De Stijl*, Janco's practice experienced a transformation, as shown by the *Contimporanul* office designs and the stained-glass windows. Although an overtly direct continuity did not form between the two legs of his career, the works examined from both sides nevertheless were extensions of the same often-repeated idea of Janco's to achieve a desired unity between the arts.

¹⁶⁷ "...despite your architecture, you prophesied the era of complete and free fabulation in art." Hans Arp quoted in Marcel L. Mendelson, *Marcel Janco* (Tel Aviv: Massadah Publishing, 1962), 119.

My interpretation of Janco's works concentrated on formal strategies and structural alliances through abstraction, but this is only one of a range of possible issues to consider. An alternative approach that remained outside the scope of this thesis but with potential to further complicate the already nuanced relationship examined would be to make a comparison on a more conceptual basis. For example, the strategies of fragmentation and disintegration that the Dadaists used in Zurich in their parodies, abstractions, montages, and forms of automatism negate the very synthesis that the total work of art in the form of the complete building would serve to enact. Despite their seemingly contrary goals, Janco theorized the reliefs (understood as Dada objects) as having a place in the total building. Perhaps incorporating the 'fragment' into the whole was part of his refutation of Dada's nihilism since the idea of demolition as a necessary prelude to construction is a fitting parallel to his definition of Zurich Dada as developing from a negative to a position speed. Prying open this idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in relation to Janco's definition of Dada would be an interesting angle for further research and could start with what kind of art theory and history Janco studied at the ETH.

Additionally, another potentially productive route to follow is the connection between Janco's aesthetic choices and his perceived Romanian and Jewish identities. While I acknowledged in the introduction his marginal role in scholarship, I avoided the issue of his identity (depending on his location, he was identified as Jewish or as "oriental")¹⁶⁸ to not overshadow the message of the thesis, which as stated above, was the

¹⁶⁸ For Hans Arp's use of the term "oriental" in relation to Janco, see n. 70. And for Hugo Ball's, see Ball, *Flight Out of Time*, 50.

formal characteristics of his work. All the same, Janco's perceived "foreignness," to use S. A. Mansbach's term, in Romania as a member of a predominately Jewish artistic avant-garde could be relevant to understanding his artistic choices, particularly in investigating how he engaged the anti-nationalist bent of Zurich Dada and whether he was attracted to abstraction and modern architecture because of the overtones of universalism and internationalism.¹⁶⁹

Approaching Marcel Janco's production from the point of view of its formal qualities with the intention of better comprehending how he internalized the separate aims of Dada and architecture not only broadens our interpretation of his career but enriches our understanding of those two particular fields. Revisiting these already well-scrutinized subjects, of Zurich Dada and modern architecture between the wars, can expand our understanding of their constitutions and more importantly their boundaries, hopefully now more blurred as a result.

¹⁶⁹ Mansbach, "The 'Foreignness' of Classical Modern Art in Romania."

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