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**Andrei Codrescu: The Posthuman Dada Guide**

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THIS IS A GUIDE for instructing posthumans in living a Dada life. It is not advisable, nor was it ever, to lead a Dada life. It is and it was always foolish and self-destructive to lead a Dada life because a Dada life will include by definition pranks, buffoonery, masking, deranged senses, intoxication, sabotage, taboo breaking, playing childish and/or dangerous games, waking up dead gods, and not taking education seriously. On the other hand, the accidental production of novel objects results occasionally from the practice of Dada. During times of crisis like wars and plagues, some of these objects can be truly novel because they sabotage prevailing sentiments. At other times, Dada objects are merely interesting, by virtue of an added layer of irony, an extra punch line, or a new twist to an already-consecrated object. In such times Dada objects amuse everybody, and since these objects are (mostly) made collectively, they are a strong community bond. Amusement (of oneself and others)

and the making of art communities are the goals of Dada. Dada is a priori against everything, including goals and itself, but this creative negation is very amusing and is meant to be shared. For one whole century, Dada has delighted in uncovering and using contradictions, paradoxes, and negations, the most important of which are: 1. most people *read* signs, Dadas *make* signs, and 2. most people are scared of scary faces, Dada makes scary faces. No one should go Dada before 1. considering whether one would rather be *a*. amused or *b*. grim; one must weigh in the balance childishness and seriousness; both *a* and *b* have a history; both affect everyone in the world; both are possible at any moment, but the difference is that being childlike (*a*) is pleasing to creatures lighter than air (with or without wings), angels, St. Francis, and Candide, while being serious (*b*) is a weight, like the cross, and heavy as a lead ball (see **hugo, ball**) and iron chains; and 2. understanding that art is life and vice-versa and Dada is against both, except on the road to ecstasy when it stops for exceptions. It is the thesis of this book that posthumans lining the road to the future (which looks as if it exists, after all, even though Dada is against it) need the solace offered by the primal raw energy of Dada and its inhuman sources.

If you have any doubt as to whether you are posthuman or merely human, take a look at the following parts of your body: the city, the house, the car, the iPhone, the

laptop, the iPod, the pillbox, the nonflesh surround. If sixty percent of your body is now electronic or bioelectronic, living in space designed for efficiency, you will need Dada as a corrective to what will certainly be the loss of the modicum of liberty you still possess. The first Dadas lived in cities that contained the means for a thorough critique of the world: Zurich, Paris, New York, Vienna, Berlin, Bucharest, Prague, Zagreb, Budapest, Petersburg. They had virtual summations (libraries), revolution-planning centers (cafés), body-centering (or -decentering) loci (bordellos), hungry provincial student clusters (universities), geniuses (random selection), mass-media (printing presses, newspapers, the telegraph), the option of moving the body through space faster than the body could move on its own (trains, cars, carriages), models for imaginary worlds (cinema), the tools of propaganda (advertising, manifestos, podiums), memory (museums, statues, history books), sentiment (cabarets, songs, theater, carnivals), weapons (cobblestones), hope (money, God), social flexibility (learnable codes of manners, uniforms), ubiquity (the feeling that you know, or think that you know, everybody) and, most importantly, a sense that time was relative (some people had a lot of it and dreaded its immensity; others had only a little and dreaded its passing). The revelation of the *substance* of time preoccupied Freud, who saw it as a repository for repressed history, Carl Jung, who discovered (or thought he did) a

space inhabited by prehistoric *souffleurs* who dictated their nature to ongoing generations of human actors, Albert Einstein, who added time to the three known dimensions, Heisenberg, who denied time altogether, and a variety of artists who adopted one or another dimension of time (futurists, the future; simultaneists, simultaneity; Dada, all or no directions). These cities were concentrations of virtualities that offered the possibilities of creative reinvention of the world. Within these rapidly morphing intensities, the fixities of societal conventions that led inevitably to war became painfully apparent. The bright energies remaking human beings drew their force from everything and anything, but mostly from laughter. Nothing fixed by convention could withstand the Gordian-knot-cutting laughter of Dada, though resistance was not futile (see **lenin**).

Today, a century later, the merger of software and wetwear is ongoing and speeding up. Dada has nothing, or maybe everything, against doing well and doing good. Buy biotechs. The fondest wish of all well-wishers, and that includes many *dadas*, is that we will say hello to a green organism that is born by natural birth, will lead a carbon-footprint-conscious life, and will biodegrade without toxic waste. Planetary thinking in its most digestible form makes sense, and the future seems open to every individual initiative that is aware of the collective predicament. Living *aware* is the current desideratum, and if we

destroy non-renewable resources, we'll at least downsize or vanish with our eyes open. Dada is for all of that, but within (non)reason. For the majorities, profligacy is no longer desirable. In effect, desire is no longer desirable. If previous dada-minded people with nothing to lose (or so they thought!) could afford to be profligate, seminal, and ecstatic, this is no longer the case. Substitute "wishing" for "desire." Wishing accommodates acting, while desire is unpredictable. Posthuman life is based on the alleged awareness of all living connections, unlike the irrepressible and murderous peaks and valleys of human life in the past. The rational description of our posthumanity would have it that the societal mechanisms that were of such great concern to *thinkers* have been automated. Political structures larger than the family are projections of automatic economic systems. Borders are largely imaginary and will become wholly imaginary, soon to be replaced by aesthetic differences.<sup>1</sup> In other words, there will be privately constructed borders created by everyone everywhere, enforced by pocket nukes capable of eliminating entire cities or regions. Arbitrary moral systems will back up private aesthetic borders, making it imperative for everyone to receive the correct medication. Unmedicated people will not be allowed pocket nukes, which makes it necessary that they be naked and searched often by local militias of art students. In this environment, which is almost completely current, the simulations of

pleasure within zones of medicated liberty can be literally life-saving. These simulations will be a new medium (using all the media) for plotting escape routes and egress points that may or may not lead out of Eden. These potentially liberating simulations promise an escape into reality, but, reader beware, all realities adjoining present tightrope Eden may be virtual and not real at all. With that proviso, an alternative escape project called Dada is being made available here. Dada is the viral option to the virtual certainty. What the Dada life is will be explained in the following pages with a minimum of tedious reference, i.e., we will record only what can't be googled. In other words, only what hasn't yet been *captured*. Dada is the Western Now, a Zen that employs *fullness* instead of *emptiness*, so much fullness, in fact, that there isn't enough matter to fill its fullness, so it resorts to imagination in order to create ever more paradisiacal *objets*, better iPods made from shredded dreams.<sup>2</sup> Each imagination unit (IU) expanded here will be spent for your instruction, reader, but you will notice that each entry is constructed to self-erase as soon as it is understood, and to generate its own IU as soon as it disappears. The claim to the nongoogable is pretty huge and I'm making it lightly. The good available information googled either from Google or out of books written by Dada chiefs will be used here to its *utmost*, that is to say, used in order to extract or prolong the vital fluids, which are as yet ungooglified. (At least until this is

e-published). I know that Google, a mortal company, could go the way of Xerox, which used to be synonymous with copying, but in the grand collage that is Dada, past and future are equally usable. Look at the fragment from a newspaper inserted by Kurt Schwitters in his 1920 *Collage*:<sup>3</sup> the actual newspaper, with its oh-so-urgent events of the day, is long forgotten, but the section preserved in Schwitters's collage is immortal. I am not saying that this guide, a simple book, will outlast both Xerox and Google, but it is possible. If the 20th century has taught us anything, it is that we will forget everything except the box it came in. The substance of what it was, what it felt like, what could be usefully gleaned from it, was buried with the persons who felt and gleaned. Memoirs and history further dismember the past by articulating it: every articulated experience is as good as forgotten. Forgetting is a human specialty that was greatly refined by the recently deposed century. We've kept the wrappings, though: the styles, the anecdotes, the narratives (the sexy ones, not the academic), and we are using them to deposit new contents inside. The end of the 19th century put an engine in a horse, and, even though there was no more horse, literally speaking, the form of the mechanically-powered horse was marvelous to behold. Today, of course, there is hardly any need to remember why a mechanical horse needs to look like a living horse because most of us don't know what a horse is: even the horse-



form is being forgotten. As oblivion speeds up and facts store themselves in a memory stick, we are free to splash around in the funhouse of forms. Thank God for Dada, the engine of empty forms! This (or the next this) is a time to be human without the weight of history, beliefs, feelings, vendettas, or school grades. We are in a Dada state of grace. For the Dada Guide-users, you and me, there isn't even a point in the dated distinctions between "human" and "nonhuman," "remembered" or "forgotten," because the literature of those distinctions is ubiquitous and serves no purpose other than mutual accusation: those who think of themselves as "human" will claim that they have a "soul" and an indelible "history," while posthumans will claim to be part of everything and that everything has a soul, including the web they are presently setting to vibrating with their indignant thumping. This is a useless argument and if anyone feels uncomfortable about being called "posthuman," please call yourself whatever you want. My distinction is this: a posthuman is a human who has put nature (including her own)<sup>4</sup> between parentheses. (Or convinced herself that everything nonhuman is human and, therefore, human = nature. This used to be called "anthropomorphism," but lately it is known as a "user-friendly interface." In current popular discourse, nature has come to mean "nature," or "the nature channel," and thus is wilderness removed from it and its destructive *and* creative force neutralized. Putting the world between either parentheses

or quotes is an effective way to erase it, indifferent of how warmly we feel about it. We are replacing wilderness by self-reflection and are making huge (virtual) efforts to make the self-reflective sensorium look demiurgic and various like nature. If early in the 20th century only poets had the gall to conceive of themselves as “pequeños dios” in César Vallejo’s phrase, now everyone feels entitled to a god-degree because the tools for faking it are part of every body (see **e-body**). Dada intends to open the doors at night to let the wilderness back in. Dada is a tool for removing parentheses and removing the world from between quotes with the forceps of inspiration. Sometimes this will call for disruptive spontaneous action, creating and holding TAZ (Temporary Autonomous Zones), actualizing dreams, running with gangs, living with animals, and making peace with weather. Sometimes it will mean going after parts of speech, like “like,” or other rhetorical devices, but we will never discourage direct address, on the off chance that someone is listening. Historical Dada was a metaphor factory, but we will try to abstain and be as dry as a properly made Cabernet. Dada, like every living thing, has a problematic relationship with language, which is why it has employed it collectively, nonsensically, mystically, and in combination with other media, such as paint, pixels, bodies, couture, sex, sound, newspapers, advertising, and necromancy. Language has been slipping like a coarse blanket from humanity’s

nightmare-racked body for centuries, but 20th-century dadas like Ludwig Wittgenstein and George Steiner (who were not officially Dada) and Tzara (who was, see **tristan, tzara**) revealed that it had been yanked off by Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, and Mao (big yankers) and by myriads of smaller yankers who use language to poke holes in reality and to put nature between parentheses. Big and small yankers (language-users) have been fueling their enterprise with portions of liberty, mine and yours. The motor for creating posthumans runs on stolen freedom.<sup>5</sup> Now there are two entities: language, lying at the foot of the bed, as freezing thieves with a yen for power crawl toward it, and a flesh body that is quickly becoming a metaphor for all that used to be called “human.” The Dada project is to make the body warm by covering it with the blanket again and demetaphorizing it. This project requires abandoning all the humanities’ approximate definitions of “human,” because “the approximate man” (see, again, **tristan, tzara**) turns out not to be a man at all. Or a woman. Those lovely forms have vanished and can now be found only as skeuromorphs in media, including writing. The vague yearning for the “not human” is now no longer vague, it is pure efficiency. We look nostalgically at waste: there isn’t any. All is now open for Dada (as Nietzsche suspected) but not everyone knows how to live the Dada life, to press the “restore” button. In other words, nobody knows how to act when all knowledge seems available, and

claims to difference look like either reinventing the wheel or retrofitting the posthuman lump (“body without organs,” Antonin Artaud) with dated forms. Mysticism and metaphysics are the popular forms of Dada now in vogue, particularly in science fiction, the New Age, Oprah, churches, mosques, and pagan-trancing moonlit groves. There is a lot wrong with those practices, namely, that they are all about the consciousness of humans on their way to perfecting posthumanity. Most of them pretend to worship or at least acknowledge the nonhuman, but it’s only a cover, superstitious salt thrown into the eyes of whatever looks back at us, amused or annoyed, Nietzsche’s abyss with eyes. Dada, too, is a form of mystical currency, but it likes to think of itself as too radical for narrative and parable, and too agnostic to take itself seriously. We will see. We need a guide that is at once historical and liberating. Or just hysterical and tonic.

Nothing illustrates better the difference between the human and the posthuman than a chess game that took place in October 1916 at the Café de La Terrasse in Zurich, Switzerland, between Tristan “all thought is formed in the mouth” Tzara, the daddy of Dada, and V. I. (“communism = socialism + electricity”) Lenin, the daddy of Communism. These two daddies battled each other over the chessboard of history, proposing two different paths for human development. Dada played for chaos, libido, the creative,

and the absurd. Communism deployed its energy for reason, order, an understandable social taxonomy, predictable structures, and the creation of “new man.” The Dada man was an actor and a performer, a clown, and a drunken fool, a mystic. The “new man” was a well-behaved worker who would eventually be so well served materially that he would become posthuman, a being to whom all nature, refined and motorized, would pay homage. Dada was born onstage from satire, disgust, angst, disgust, terror, improvised materials, and channeled snippets of verse, while Communism came out of books of philosophy and economy, terrorism (with its technologies of disguise, conspiracy, and homemade explosives), and church-inspired forms for synthesizing dogma. Who won the game? After the collapse of Soviet-style communism in 1991, it looked as though Dada had. But if it had, why do the non-Soviet posthumans of late capitalism feel such despair? Could it be that late-capitalism posthumans have arrived in the leninist future without communism? And if they have, is the game still going on, and does Dada still have work to do? Are languages (including programming e-languages), print, reason, the fear of nature, and the impulse to vegetate still in charge? Is performance today mainly palliative, validated by reviews? Was that game of chess a win for Tzara or Lenin or a draw? Why did the two men sit down to play in the first place? Obviously, it was cold and there were snow flurries, and the café was

full of people of intelligence and feeling, and some shady drunks and thieves, but beyond that, did either of them sense a metaphorical gravity? I doubt it. Chess is the game of choice for people who must think in a crowd: chess is the quintessential “meditation in an emergency” (Frank O’Hara) for people forced by circumstances (overcrowding, prison, a chattering roommate) to seek solitude in a crowd. The laws of chess (they are not called “rules”) have been designed over a millennial history to provide a maximum of thinking space within a small square, and a sense of movement and change by means of a number of symbolic figures. Even if Tzara and Lenin, alone or together, sensed the making of a metaphor, they would not have been interested because 1. it was other people’s metaphor, and 2. they were both animated by passion about injustice. Tzara: “But suppleness, enthusiasm and even the joy of injustice, that little truth that we practice as innocents and that makes us beautiful: we are cunning, and our fingers are malleable and glide like branches of that insidious and almost liquid plant: this injustice is the indication of our soul, say the cynics. That is also a point of view; but all flowers aren’t saints, luckily, and what is divine in us is the awakening of anti-human action.”<sup>6</sup> Lenin: “. . . the development of capitalism has arrived at a stage when, although commodity production still ‘reigns’ and continues to be regarded as the basis of economic life, it has in reality been undermined and the big profits go to

the ‘genius’ of financial manipulation.”<sup>7</sup> Tzara is talking about flowers, soul, the divine, and fingers, while Lenin explains how easily people are distracted and robbed while being handed “commodities.” Both passages proceed from the basic acknowledgment of the existence of injustice, but Tzara welcomes its cruelty and pushes its contradictions to where it will cease to function within language and, it is hoped, life, because it’s been sabotaged by poetry. Lenin has found the villain: sneaky, insidious capitalism robbing the workers while amusing them. There is also another difference: boredom. Tzara is fresh, Lenin is boring. Lenin is not boring just in retrospect, he was boring at the time he wrote that. As we know from Baudelaire, Boredom is the worst evil of all: “Among the vermin, jackals, panthers, lice / gorillas and tarantulas that suck / and snatch and scratch and defecate and fuck / in the disorderly circus of our vice, // there’s one more ugly and abortive birth. / It makes no gestures, never beats its breast, / yet it would murder for a moment’s rest, / and willingly annihilate the earth. / It’s BOREDOM. Tears have glued its eyes together. / You know it well, my Reader. This obscene / beast chain-smokes yawning for the guillotine— / you—hypocrite Reader—my double—my brother.”<sup>8</sup> Yes, but, *pace* Baudelaire, was Lenin *wrong*? Not really. At the start of the 21st century we are in an even better position to appreciate Lenin’s insight into the nature of capitalism. He goes on to

explain, by means of tedious citations from German economists, exactly how prices rise as a result of the formation of monopolies, and the subsequent impoverishment of the proletariat. Lenin is setting up his chessboard minutiously, preparing for what will be his real intention: plotting in detail the coming revolution. In addition to setting up the board, he needs to cleanse the socialist movement, which agrees with him on the analysis of capitalism, which only reiterates, after all, what Marx explained in equally tedious prose decades previous. Lenin does not even bother with Marx's preoccupation with the alienation of worker from product. For Marx, this alienation brought about by automation must be combatted in order for communism to be built. Lenin couldn't care less about how workers feel. Let's make the Revolution, then automate everything, and, in the end, everyone will feel better.<sup>9</sup> Tzara would rather be the object of violent ridicule than the cause of a yawn. "Every act is a cerebral revolver shot—both the insignificant gesture and the decisive movement are attacks."<sup>10</sup> That's invigorating, but is it true? The man he's playing chess with will make sure that it isn't, for a century at least. He'll leave a trail of corpses from Russia to Japan to Europe and beyond, to prove Tzara wrong. Not *every* act is *cerebral*: some acts, like a *real* pistol shot, are repetitious, monotonous, mindless, set in motion by a barked order. Tzara, the revolutionary poet, is playing chess with



Lenin, a mass-murdering ideologue. The winner will win the world, a prize neither is thinking about in 1916.

Their projects were as different as their game, but the feeling that the world was unjust was in both of them like a root. We will go back and forth in time to check various moves and consider some possibilities. Although our sympathies are with Dada, we are not all that sure about the outcome of the game. You will notice that we have retained the alphabet and ordered the Guide alphabetically. This is also a book, so pages are conventionally numbered. This may very well be the last (necessary or unnecessary) book, so we scrupulously observed all the conventions we could remember, typographical, grammatical, anal, oral, and chronological. With a tip of the hat to the kabbalah, we are working against (and for) time and amnesia. The waters of oblivion are rising, memory is as fragile and thin as matter in a black-hole universe, but as Tristan Tzara said, "Dada is against the high cost of living." Lenin was against that too, but since he thought he'd found the villain, he was going to do something about it. We can't do anything about it, so we will make this cheap and painless.

**1915, winter, Zurich:** Jan Ephraim, the Dutch ex-sailor who rented Hugo Ball the Meierei restaurant for a cabaret, asked him the following questions: 1. are you going to make me money? 2. are you going to draw

(continued)