

Dadaism as Political Installation and Language for Revolutionary Imagination: The Importance of Being Tzara and Lenin

ILEANA ALEXANDRA ORLICH*

Abstract: The cultural fervor that ensued over the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich 100 years ago seems quintessentially contemporary. Having entered the stage of WWI Europe with a bang, Dada and the Dadaists brought along creative interventions seen today in continuing adaptation and cultural appropriation. Using the porous dramaturgy of Tom Stoppard's *Travesties* and the rich politico-cultural commentaries embedded in Andrei Codrescu's *The Posthuman Dada Guide: Tzara and Lenin Play Chess*, I rely on the interaction between Dadaism and Bolshevism as an instrument of cultural analysis, with Tzara's relational engagement tapping into our fascination with a world out of kilter.

Keywords: Communism, Dadaism, Trumpism, approximate man, manifesto, earnest.

Dada and Communism occupy a singular place in Romanian culture and in the shaping of today's politics. Their foremost representatives, whom Andrei Codrescu calls the "daddy of Dada" and the "daddy of Communism,"¹ were, respectively, the Romanian-born Tristan Tzara and the Bolshevnik V. I. Lenin.

Tom Stoppard, himself no stranger to identity games, brings together these two avatars in *Travesties*, a play conceived as the staging of a moment in time when Lenin's expression of an incipient communism appropriated the political installation of the left modernist project which the Dadaists were

* Arizona State University, e-mail: orlich@asu.edu

¹ *The Posthuman Dada Guide. Tzara and Lenin Play Chess*. The Public Square Series, Princeton University Press, 2009. 104. All quotations are from this edition.

preparing in a special, bohemian laboratory. Rented to Hugo Ball for a cabaret in the winter of 1915, this laboratory that witnessed a spontaneous irruption of Dada performance was the Meierei restaurant in Zurich, the city that had become the center of the world's artistic avant-garde and world revolution.

First performed at the Aldwych Theatre in London on 10 June 1974, in a production by the Royal Shakespeare Company, *Travesties* is a palimpsestic play constructed on the dramatic form of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Beyond the deliberate attempt to mimic the cadence of Wilde's classic and the obvious similarities between the two plays which are, each in its own right, a "Trivial Comedy for Serious People" (*The Importance*) and "a masterpiece of serious wit" (*Travesties*), Stoppard relies on an incident explained in the Introductory, "Henry Carr" section of *Travesties*. Using information from Richard Ellmann's *James Joyce*, Stoppard builds *Travesties* around Joyce's documented quarrel with Henry Carr, the obscure diplomat who played the part of Algernon Montcrieff in Joyce's dramatization of Oscar Wilde's masterpiece in Zurich and who later sued Joyce.

Although James Joyce's fictional innovations that marked the height of high modernism in *Ulysses* are particularly significant in Stoppard's play,² my discussion here focuses on Tzara and Lenin, the other two protagonists, whose concepts of aesthetic and political action allow for an intriguing merging and extraordinary travesties.

Framed with insolent intellect and provocative wit and filled with absurdities and clever *pastiches* that methodically invert normal expectations *Travesties* dramatizes a brief moment in the early WWI days when Zurich was the place where politics, ideology, and innovation in art and language ran a parallel course with the counterfeit reality of the space behind the war zone. Germans, French, Russian, Polish, Italian and Romanian artists and exiles, and future Dadaists like the three Janko brothers (Marcel, Jules and George), Richard Huelsenbeck and Francis Picabia, and, most notably, Tristan Tzara were playing out the games of the artistic avant-garde.

Departing from artistic reiterations, the opening night of the Meierei restaurant, renamed Cabaret Voltaire, challenged all previous norms of standardized art. Featuring prominently among the shocking evening's

² See Ross Wetzsteon, "Tom Stoppard Eats Steak Tartare With Chocolate Sauce," in *Tom Stoppard in Conversation*. Ed. Paul Delaney, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997, 80-4. Also, Stanley Eichelbaum, "So Often Produced He Ranks with Shaw," in *Tom Stoppard in Conversation*, 103-06. In these interviews Stoppard affirms Joyce's leading role in particular, and of literature in general, in cultural transmission.

productions, Tristan Tzara recited his own poems in Romanian, with instant translation in heavily-accented French, and shouted Romanian bawdy folk songs, known as “strigături.” The highlight of the evening that also included Emmy Hennings’s lascivious performance, Hugo Ball’s piano playing of wartime music, and a Russian balalaika band, was the grand finale with Tzara reappearing on stage dressed in tails and white spats to recite nonsense in French and unroll toilet paper with the word *Merde* scrawled on it.

Capturing such outrageous nonsense in *Travesties*, Stoppard underscores Tzara’s earnestness and portrays him by attaching insolent humor to his larger-than-life figure and obnoxious proclamations, such as the claim that Dada is “demanding the right to urinate in different colors”³ – a declaration that humorously calls to mind the outrageous demands of Tzara’s own character, Monsieur Antipyrine who demands with characteristic Dada fervor: “...from now on we want to shit in different colors so as to adorn the zoo of art with all the flags of all the consulates”⁴.

While showcasing Tzara’s ability to laugh at himself and his strident Dada personality, *Travesties* also whispers the horrors of communism derived from the narrative excerpts of Nadejda Krupskaja’s *Journal* and the brief proclamations of Lenin’s earnestness that shapes a new political doctrine during his exile in Zurich, precisely the same time as that of the gatherings at Cabaret Voltaire.

In Stoppard’s play, as in life, Lenin had no regard and could find no use for art, an inability well documented in the Soviet archives. According to official records, Lenin tried to shut down the Bolshoi and the Mariinsky theatres several times, reasoning that the opera and ballet “were a piece of purely bourgeois culture, and no one can argue with that!”⁵ In *Travesties* Stoppard reknits what may appear as an inexplicable controversy between such facts and Lenin’s reputed fondness for the Beethoven’s *Appassionata* as yet another instance of the cultural salt and sweetness of Dada’s dialectics. Thus, Lenin’s musings about the *Appassionata* bring to the fore his appetite for disturbing meditations on art turned into alibis for tyranny:

³ Stoppard. *Travesties*. New York: Grove Press, 1975. 61. All quotations are from this edition of the play.

⁴ *Seven Dada Manifestoes and Lampisteries*, with illustrations by Francis Picabia, trans. Barbara Wright. London: John Calder; New York: Riverrun Press, 1981.

⁵ A. Rylov, *Vospominaniia* “Reminiscences” Leningrad, 1997. 193.

Amazing, superhuman music. It always makes me feel, perhaps naively, it makes me feel proud of the miracles that human beings can perform. But I can't listen to music often. It affects my nerves, makes me want to say nice stupid things and pat the heads of those people who while living in this vile hell can create such beauty. Nowadays we can't pat heads, or we'll get our hands bitten off. We've got to hit heads, hit them without mercy, though ideally we're against doing violence to people... Hmm, one's duty is infernally hard... (*Travesties*, 89)

Outside such chilly reminders of Lenin's reluctance to feel appreciation for art and Tzara's strident proclamations, there is no serious plot in *Travesties*, and, as in *The Importance*, witticisms are, for the most part, not comic, but serious relief. They are in ironic counterpoint with the absurdities of the protagonists' visions and with Tzara's hazardous mix of the language that undercuts communication while promoting a sense of movement and change in art and politics. The play opens with Tzara reading words one at a time out of a hat:

Tzara: Eel ate enormous appletzara
 Key dairy chef's hat he'lllearn oomparah!
 Ill raced alas whispers kill later nut east,
 Noon avuncular ill day Clara! (*Travesties*, 18)

Like Wilde, Stoppard uses a dialogue that combines clever satire and *joie de vivre*. The insertion of absurdity and ridiculous action is marked by Tristan who waltzes in and expresses himself theatrically in agile outbursts. The importance of being Tristan plays along Lenin's cruelty in a multi-identity dynamics that most powerfully illuminates and moves beyond theatricality into Dada and political earnestness.

The little joke in Wilde's play, the importance of the name Ernest for matrimony, remains slightly altered and extraordinarily charged in Stoppard's play. To the bisexual man it was deliciously comic that a man should have one name for his wife and female relations, and another for his male friends, for trips and "lost" weekends; to the refined spectator of *Travesties*, the importance of the name Tristan is pointed and comprehensive. In the play, as in life, Tristan Tzara's character is both Tristan, the Dada artist whose aesthetics demand radical changes, and Jack, the revolutionary whose role was "to guide the Dada revolution" (*Travesties*, 60) as the self-proclaimed "natural enemy of bourgeois art and the natural ally of the political left" (*Travesties*, 45).

Stoppard's implicit claim that the pursuit of new modes of expression in art is entirely compatible with revolutionary aims stems from the Zurich Dadaists' view that pointed out Lenin as the greatest Dada on earth.⁶ A Russian Marxist, to use the famous label of Leszek Kolakowski, Lenin absorbed and institutionalized Marxism as the scientific foundation for the Bolshevik Revolution and its aftermath, but based such appropriation on the utopian radicalism of the Russian nihilism and narodnicism of Nikolai Chernishevsky and Piotr Tkaciov. Further, he not only led a revolution that changed the world, but also created a new political system, Sovietism, that forged the institutions of totalitarianism: the secret police, one-party political platform, censorship, propaganda, five-year plans, the Gulag, etc.

For Stoppard, a refined and keen observer of the twentieth-century cultural panorama, Dadaism's political aesthetics is closely related to the program of Leninist ideology formulated in opposition with the bourgeois establishment and aiming at a certain social end. According to Stoppard's claims in *Travesties*, the two emerged from the same street (*Spiegelgasse*) in Zurich:

Truth of the matter, who'd have thought big oaks from the corner room at number 14 *Spiegelgasse*? – now here's a thing: two revolutions formed in the same street. Face to face in *Spiegelgasse!* *Street of Revolution!* *A sketch...* *Spiegelgasse!* – narrow, cobbled, high old houses in a solid rank, number 14 the house of the narrow cobbler himself, Kammerer his name, Lenin his tenant – and across the way at Number One, the *Meierei Bar*, crucible of anti-art, cradle of Dada!!! (*Travesties*, 24)

Having arrived on the scene as a reaction to WWI of radical leftist and anarchist intellectuals of different nationalities, Dada quickly became "the high point of Western European culture" (*Travesties*, 25) as it carried to an extreme the unrestrained collective will to mock the bourgeois comfortably cocooned in his morality. Arguably more militant than aesthetic in attaining their professional goal, Dadaists sounded the same note of social protest and demanded the same political changes that Lenin's brutal genius claimed unequivocally. Aiming for the creation of a purely novel society that buries the corpse of European bourgeoisie and tramples on its sanctimonious morality,

⁶ For more on this subject, see Vladislav Todorov's *Red Square, Black Square: Organon for Revolutionary Imagination*. SUNY, Albany 1995. 14.

both Tristan Tzara and Lenin presented themselves as daring interventionists who would cure humanity of bourgeois dementia. One was a Romanian poet of Jewish origin who had formally petitioned the Romanian government in 1929 to change his real name, Samuel Rosenstock, into Tristan Tzara; the other was Vladimir Ilych Ulyanov, the artisan and leader of the Bolshevik Revolution better known under the *nom de guerre* Lenin, which he had acquired in Siberian exile in 1917.

As radical projects, both Dadaism and communism create their own genre: the manifesto, which in the case of Dadaism is meant to change radically the life/art relation and to transform the figure of the artist into a brutal activist attached to (not detached from) life. As Vladislav Todorov points out, Dadaism was active politically and charged with ultra-leftist (read Bolshevik) intensities that also fueled the communist movement in countries outside Russia, such as Germany. There the Berlin Dadaist Huelsenbeck, whose name Stoppard mentions in *Travesties* and from whom Tzara tries to dissociate himself in the play, proclaimed himself Commissar of the Arts, while Huelsenbeck's colleague, Hausmann adopted the pseudonym of "Dadasov" ("Dadasophe"). According to Todorov, "a large part of the [Dadaist] Berlin wing got direct political assignments from the communist government"⁷. In that context, Berlin Dadaists organized political attractions, such as mounted centaurs of bodies and machines in order to make a show of the magic of the endless proletarian feats of labor. Substantiating these endeavors, an exhibition of Soviet Avant-garde art arrived in Berlin in 1922, complete with constructivist Lissitzky who started publishing, along with Yerenburg, the magazine *Veshch* (Object) that introduced the West to modern art in Soviet Russia. Promoted by the Soviet Constructivism, the concepts of new objectivity and new materiality were embraced by the Berlin Dadaists. And even though the proletarianization of the visual and objective world and the industrialization of the artistic performance died out among the Dadaist circles in Paris, where Tzara had arrived after leaving Zurich, they still favored the direction of the proletarian body positioned to attack the complacency of the sterile, decrepit world of the bourgeoisie through political scandal and crass tactics.

While such occurrences cast a certain political light on the Dadaists' intercultural projects, one is tempted today to look at Dada in another fashion. Deliberately scraping the border between artistic and political action, Dada

⁷ *Red Square, Black Square: Organon for Revolutionary Imagination*, SUNY. 17.

was an art whose professed goal was to crash the monsters of imperialism, Victorian morals and prejudices, and classical art, and, while dismantling the system, to prepare for the new reality that would bring the radical cohesion and merging of aesthetics and politics, ideology and reality, patriarchal and political structures. In *Travesties*, as in life, Tzara's exalted speeches turn the artist into a knight fit for a hammer-and-sickle crusade that mirrors Lenin's militant ideology:

Now we need vandals and desecrators, simple-minded demolition men to smash centuries of baroque subtleties, to bring down the temple and thus finally to reconcile the shame and the necessity of being an artist! Dada! Dada! (*Travesties*, 62).

In striking ways similar to Lenin, a hard-liner who was convinced, like Marx before him, that history worked dialectically and that it advanced through the clash of opposing forces and not through negotiation, Tzara displayed a high consciousness of the necessity of class struggle alongside his sublime affectations. In *Travesties* his exaltations and determination "to hang up his hat/ for the proletariat" (*Travesties*, 92) seem to supply the goods that aggregated throughout the communist space: the grandiose marches, parades and mass campaigns, historic congresses and, above all, the equipment of bold metaphors, banners, sickles and five-pointed stars that formed Lenin's and the Bolsheviks' arsenal, later projected through a wasteland of communism sweeping through the countries behind the Iron Curtain. In his address at the *First All-Union Congress of the Soviet Writers*, a speech that was accepted as the manifesto of the new Socialist Realism genre, Maxim Gorky seemed to echo Tzara's views when he declared that "Bourgeois society completely lost the ability to invent in art. Bourgeois romanticism does not excite imagination, does not sharpen the thinking."⁸

For Tzara, the Dada artist, armed with indefatigable scissors and a saw, insolently trespasses the spaces of objective reality. In Romania, a stronghold of Dadaism, the chief representatives of the Dadaist Avant-garde, the poets Ilarie Voronca and Benjamin Fundoianu (Fondane), both friends of Tzara, embraced the new materiality and new objectivity resting on montages and collages, on cutting and pasting up pictures of everyday life. In Voronca's

⁸ Maksim Gorky. "Speech at the First All-Union Convention of Soviet Writers, 17 August 1934," in *Preobrazhenie mira*. Moscow: Sovetskaiia Rossia, 1980.

Ulise (1929), a descriptive poem of urban life, complete with the woman green grocer, the hospital, the mirrors, the boulevards, and the poet who visits them all at various times during the day, the poetic impressions derive from an extraordinary number of objects and beings, evoked by the poet Ulise with ecstatic voluptuousness: straw-mattresses, linen, quinces, furs, oranges, tea, bread, milk, peas, potatoes, bananas, and so on. *Ulise* was in fact a reflection of what the poet Fondane had urged his friends to accomplish in their pursuit of pure poetry. "A poem," Fondane had decreed echoing Joyce's famous view of the artist in relation to his work, "is conceived as an autonomous universe, with its arbitrary laws, with its unforeseen hazard. A kind of Morse code"⁹.

The reporting of events through the collage principle of disparate views induces the impression of autonomy and causal interdependence, assembling documents and reports, interpretations, news, and photos that mimic media reporting. Thus Dada is a dynamic constellation of a multitude of political designs and interests, an art defying the sacral continuity and causality of events in the world. Its collage structure generates a new intuition of authenticity similar to the Soviet filmmaker Serghei Eisenstein's "montage of attractions" ingeniously accomplished in *Potemkin*, *The Old and the New*, or *October*, and in the enthusiasm of Vsevolod Meyerholds' innovative staging as a manifestation of the contemporary political flux, leading sadly but inescapably to totalitarian control.

Flamboyant and memorable as Tzara must have been in life, he emerges from the fantastically elaborate *Travesties* as the new psyche that invigorated for a brief moment the intellectual life of the twentieth century while showing (perhaps) that to be an artist is to be a revolutionary.

While holding in his hands the strings of ideology, art, and politics, Stoppard seems to pull their ends and turn the gigantic body of twentieth-century culture into a formidable marionette. Its stunning movements, which feverishly consume the century's entire cultural reality, move toward Dadaist fervor and the sclerotic end of the communist endeavors. In ways that carry Stoppard's *Travesties* into the next to the last decade of the twentieth-century, Lenin's communism came to a peculiar demise, fading from center stage as a mere political accident that dismantled the bourgeois structure but failed to form a new one that could last and gratify class-consciousness. Having

⁹ Benjamin Fondane. "Câteva cuvinte pădurețe" ["Some Wild Words"]. In *Poeme/ Poems*. Bucharest: Minerva, 1974. 6. Romanian: "Poemul era conceput ca un univers autonom, cu legile lui arbitrare, cu hazardul lui prevăzut. Un fel de alfabet Morse."

become obsolete, Lenin's ideology, which had usurped the center of power in the Soviet states, disintegrated into a society of mass affectation chanting conjuring slogans and total submission to communist power.

Unlike the Red doctrine and the proletarian dictatorship that came to expose the dead end of their specific history, the self-authorization of Tzara's scintillating genius empowered art and molded contemporary politics. With its effervescent, witty dialogue and clever, provocative exchanges uttered most frequently by Tzara, *Travesties* upholds the clever trappings of a seemingly inconsequential Dadaism. It is tempting to speculate whether Stoppard's Czechoslovakian origin (he was, after all, born in Prague) is in any way relevant to his concern for the world that was behind the Iron Curtain and to his recurring interest in the duplicitous nature of theatre and politics. But to the extent that what happens on the stage can validate Wilde's famous claim that "Life follows Art," *Travesties* makes Dadaism's survival and the extraordinary events of 1989 in Eastern and Central Europe appear as an ongoing battle between "the two daddies," Tzara and Lenin, battling each other over the chessboard of history (Codrescu, 11), a battle that requires a socio-political re-contextualization of Dada in contemporary time.

Tzara was an author of many genres, an artist of unique sensibility, an influential theorist and public figure whose fame did not reside within geographical borders. He lived and worked in Romania, Switzerland, and France, but always preserved an acute sense of cultural identity expressed in his chosen nom de plume. Thus Romania always occupied a site of ongoing negotiation in Tzara's imagination and was at the center of discussions of identity that engage with a plethora of views regarding such concepts as home, nation, state, people, language, and artistic sensibility.

He made a point of qualifying his Romanian-ness and stressed the importance of specific circumstances in being Romanian. His adoption of a pseudonym that means "motherland" in Romanian has to be taken seriously in the case of the poet who confesses in *Approximate Man*: "On all the curves of the earth I've skated elegantly free/pressing to my bosom my destiny in monogram"¹⁰. Even after 1920, when he settled in Paris and was already famous, Tzara continued to write in Romanian and to send poems to be published in the "motherland."

¹⁰ Tristan Tzara, *The Approximate Man*, IX. In *Œuvres complètes*, tome II 1925-1933, Edited by Henri Béhar. Paris: Flammarion, 1977. 114. Original: "sur toutes les courbes de la terre j'ai patiné élégamment gratuit/ pressant à ma poitrine le destin en monogramme".

The approximate man, with his vague yearning, opens Dada to its new life. Dada is now once again in vogue as it was for Samuel Rosenstock (1896-1963), the later Dada theorist born in Moinești, Romania who changed his name to Tristan Tzara, wrote while still in his teens, “life is sad, but it’s a garden still”¹¹, and proclaimed himself to be the man “sad in the country” of uncertain geographical territory. The country may have been Moinești, the little town in Eastern Europe, or Bucharest, or Romania, or the Balkans, a Levant on the margins of Europe, neighboring Russia and just freed from Turkish domination. And like his country, this man was equally uncertain of his ultimate identity, approximate at best. He was a man of Eastern Europe but also a man buried in the Montparnasse cemetery in Paris, near Baudelaire, Dreyfus, Huysmans, Ionesco, Brancusi, Kiki, and other cultural luminaries of an illustrious gallery.

Tzara’s elaborate Dada project requires then a new scrutiny by going back to the approximate man whose origin and vague yearning call for what the Romanian-born Andrei Codrescu calls the “not human” or “post-human.” Defined in the *Dada Guide*, the post-human identity retrofits itself to suit the new trends available to the latter-day Dada by pressing the restore button. Among the forms now in vogue are vegans, gluten-free advocates, even extraterrestrials, all attempting to perfect “post-humanity as a form of mystical currency that must be both historical and liberating” (Codrescu, 11).

Commemorating 100 years since the launching of the Dadaist Manifesto in Zurich in 2016 and 120 years since Tzara’s birth, a new premiere at Bucharest’s National Theatre entitled *L’Om Dada* proposes to demonstrate that “we are all Dadaists. We deconstruct, throwing a piece of us on stage and in life.” The play’s director, Gigi Căciuleanu, explains that his play, which brings together the word *om*, meaning man in Romanian, and *dada*, meaning universal, uses Tristan Tzara’s “l’homme approximatif as the text which is sublimely poetic, not at all absurd, beautiful, whole, complex and filled with significance, of the highest currency even 100 years later.”¹²

¹¹ As quoted by Andrei Codrescu (Codrescu, 208). See also Tristan Tzara, *Primele poeme / First Poems*. Translated by Michael Impey and Brian Swann. New Riverside Press. 1975.

¹² “...toți suntem dadaști. Defragmentăm, aruncăm ceva din noi pe scenă și în viață. De ce L’Om DAdA? Pentru că am vrut să alătur aceste cuvinte, „om” în limba română, cu „dada” – universalul, explică Gigi Căciuleanu. Am pornit de la *L’homme approximatif*, textul lui Tristan Tzara, teribil de poetic, deloc absurd, frumos, nefragmentat, stufoș, plin de semnificații, foarte actual chiar și după 100 de ani.” Hotnews.ro, Culture. Interview with Gigi Căciuleanu. Thursday, March 3, 2016. (My translation)

Adding to this perspective, the dancer Lari Giorgescu, Căciuleanu's partner in the play, states that the opportunity to work on Tristan Tzara's text came with his shocking discovery of "our closeness to the Dadaists: sometimes unwittingly. I hope that this is also the public's belief shared by the audience at the end of the performance"¹³.

Dada underscores the limits of our understanding for otherness and proposes to be a signal for cultural missteps and social displacement. With a surplus of Dadaist perspective, Tzara, the approximate man, plays for otherness – a Romanian Jew whose first language was not French but who made French his personal playground, whose given name was not Tristan Tzara but whose radical impertinence produced *poèmes simultanés*, cut-ups, nonsense lectures, outrageous attire, and theatrical props. Like his fellow Dadaists, Tzara cherished collaboration as the chief principle and engaged in the collective showcasing of various manifestos, such as Huelsenbeck's *The Communist Manifesto*, which proposed changing the slogan "Workers of the World, Unite" to "Workers of the World, Go Dada."

In his signature monocle, Tzara read his play-manifesto, *La première aventure céleste de Monsieur Antipyrine* (named after Aspirine, the headache remedy) offering Dada to the world as revolution, crude satire, a new art of primitive images and filthy songs, etc., in ways that mimic Communism's creation of the new man whose act bridges politics and culture in the political installations and unwavering revolutionary imagination Lenin engineered.

There is little doubt that Tzara's and Lenin's revolutionary projects were as different as their strategies. Tzara was a flamboyant poet, with a style that could easily be the object of violent ridicule; Lenin was a Russian Marxist and a mass-murderer. In tails and signature monocle, Tzara proclaims that "Dada is against the high cost of living"; Lenin is against that too, but he finds the villain in capitalism and instigates the revolution. Here he is, in Zurich in early 1916, when he wrote the essay that appeared in St. Petersburg in 1917 as "Imperialism, the Highest Level of Capitalism:"¹⁴

¹³ Lari Giorgescu confesses at his turn: "... propunerea de a lucra pe un text de Tristan Tzara este cu atât mai binevenită cu cât descopăr, cu uimire, cât de apropiați suntem cu toții de curentul Dadaist; de cele mai multe ori, fără să știm. Cred că acesta va fi și sentimentul publicului, la sfârșitul spectacolului". Hotnews.ro, Culture. Interview with Gigi Căciuleanu. Thursday, March 3, 2016. (My translation)

¹⁴ See *Essential Works of Lenin, What is to be Done? And Other Writings*, Ed. Henry M. Christman. New York: Bantam Books, 1966.

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 the genius of financial manipulation.

Lenin's proclamations, assembled within a political machine, died out after killing millions and liquidating the Proletcult that included potential Dadaists like the poets Yesenin or Mayakovsky. Turned into toiling gladiators these dashing poets advanced the circus of communist aesthetics with boring readings from Lenin and Gorky, mass-meetings of the proletariat, May-Day parades and what Mayakovsky in his suicide note called "the daily-routine," until reaching precisely the threshold where politics turns into a digesting machine that consumes life.

Dada, which was at birth a powerful political art that scraped the border between artistic and political action, continued by contrast to be a form generator of the 20th century art, culture, and politics. Today, when circumstances are not much different from 1916, with Europe's fields turned once again into pools of mud beneath the tents sheltering the flow of refugees from war-ravaged countries like Syria and Irak, Dada has entered its global context in the form of Facebook and Twitter, which are appointed to be the machine of revolutionary language and have replaced the revolutionary leaflets as a major conscious and self-oriented activity aiming at the definite political effect. The proclivity to scandalize people in quick articulate declarations constitute the audible manifestations of Dada's advancement of the word that has smashed and crashed Lenin's political armor and has rallied the iconography of the selfie and of online aphorisms to produce shocking and politically appointed visual or linguistic provocative devices carried forward through digital and media platforms.

In the United States people feel entitled to wear their hair in different colors, established poets like William Burroughs, echoing Tzara's outrageous "Dada is a virgin microbe," proclaim that "Language is a virus" (Codrescu, 51), and Instagram and Snapchat are the new Dada poetics aiming to reorganize the structure of the contemporary psyche and to push the consciousness of the masses. Ever expanding the political aesthetics of modernization, the new Dada has prompted its users to acquire new, digital lives captured in videos of themselves doing something weird or funny, something spectacularly stupid in the Dada vein.

What Codrescu compiles as a post-human Dada guide requires then an insertion of the new political Dada stunts, complete with the dramatic change in tone, countenance and ethos of the new Potemkin – village language and politics that use only the façade of word-engines and gave rise on the American scene to Trump or the Trumpism of incendiary and reckless rhetoric. Turned into opportunistic populism that favors crass and cruel insults and debates of the cage match, such political displays and demagogic figures indicate that Dada, having taken on a new, earnest sort of meaning today, will not go gently into the good night.

References

- CHRISTMAN Henry M. Ed. *Essential Works of Lenin, What is to be Done? And Other Writings*. New York, Bantam Books, 1966.
- CĂCIULEANU Gigi. *Hotnews.ro, Culture*. Interview Thursday, March 3, 2016.
- CODRESCU Andrei. *The Posthuman Dada Guide. Tzara and Lenin Play Chess*. The Public Square Series, Princeton University Press, 2009.
- DELANEY Paul. Ed. *Tom Stoppard in Conversation*. Ed. Paul Delaney, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997.
- EICHELBAUM Stanley. "So Often Produced He Ranks with Shaw," in *Tom Stoppard in Conversation*.
- GORKY Maksim. "Speech at the First All-Union Convention of Soviet Writers, 17 August 1934," in *Preobrazhenie mira*. Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossia, 1980.
- RYLOV A. *Vospominaniia "Reminiscences"* Leningrad, 1997.
- STOPPARD Tom. *Travesties*. New York: Grove Press, 1975.
- TODOROV Vladislav. *Red Square, Black Square: Organon for Revolutionary Imagination*. SUNY, Albany, 1995.
- TZARA Tristan. *Primele poeme / First Poems*. Translated by Michael Impey and Brian Swann. New Riverside Press, 1975.
- WETZSTEON Ross. "Tom Stoppard Eats Steak Tartare With Chocolate Sauce," in *Tom Stoppard in Conversation*.
- WRIGHT Barbara. Trans. *Seven Dada Manifestoes and Lampisteries, with illustrations by Francis Picabia*. London: John Calder; New York: Riverrun Press, 1981.

Ileana Alexandra Orlich is President's Professor and Professor of English and Comparative Literature, as well as Director of Romanian Studies at Arizona State University. Her books include Silent Bodies: (Re)Discovering the Women of Romanian Short Fiction (2002); Articulating Gender, Narrating the Nation: Allegorical Femininity in Romanian Fiction (2005); Myth and Modernity in the Twentieth-Century Romanian Novel (2009). All from Columbia Press, New York. Also: Avantgardism, Politics, and the Limits of Interpretation: Reading Gellu Naum's Zenobia (2010); Staging Stalinism in Romanian Contemporary Theatre (2012). Among her translations into English are Mara (Slavici), Hanu Ancutei (Sadoveanu), Tache de Catifea (Agopian), Patul lui Procust (Camil Petrescu), trilogia Hallipa (Papadat-Bengescu), and Ciuleandra (Rebreanu). Her book, Literary and Dramatic Adaptations: Staging Stalinism in Hungarian, Romanian, and Bulgarian Theatre is forthcoming from CEUPRESS, New York and Budapest.