

## Roaring 20s

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Somebody told me that *Les années folles* are the world's thirst for frenzy after a historical nightmare, a thirst caused not by the War, but rather by the Spanish flu. Maybe this is because the War itself had been brutally frantic, and the flu had toned down mankind, it had tamed it equally brutal. The modern man is a sedentary man, but he wants to live the city experience as if it were a boundless diaspora, because this is precisely what the city has always been, a place destined for domestic nomads, ever since the days of beardless Cain. The urban man, the *citizen*, leaves his home daily for a brief, few hundred meters expedition which nevertheless plunges into the core of foreignness and, the deeper the foreignness, the more intense the city. If one ties the citizen to their home and forbids them to be a nomad any longer or to dive into the foreignness of the city, one harms them similarly to how the war had ruined their homes. Hence, after a big fléu or flu – but one which holds citizens in their homes – follows a super-flu, which casts them in the most unknown recesses of a city which intensifies its own foreignness, diversity and exotism. We are told that this is how the 20s, the insane years of Europe, must have looked like, that is full of exotism and hedonism, and I believe it. I believe it because I like it. And I like to believe it, knowing that a culture is strong specifically because it offers its citizen two priceless gifts: the freedom of not oppressing their pleasures and the freedom for one to become a foreigner *within* their own culture. Both gifts are critical, noble, hard to bear, and equally seductive. If this is how the crazy years look like, then this is a cause for celebration and for seeing in the planetary flu which preceded them a tragic trigger of enthusiasm and splendor which make us cast a nostalgic glance upon Europe.

On the other hand, I'm also taking a glimpse into the arts of the 20s, and I'm having a super-flu-id amazement. Almost everything we feel was made in the insane years was, in fact, made only up until the First War. And what was made until the War foreshadows what is to be made in the 30s. It might be, perhaps, a good opportunity to notice



once again that ideas, arts, modernity don't line up chronologically and that novelty is in fact older, hell of a lot older, and especially trends frequently happen to be the already dried-up expression of some insurgencies which our great grandfathers had already experienced for us and which young people today continue experiencing like all wrapped grannies having forgotten how to spell cup, or auto-fiction, or ready-made, or pulp fiction. For example, Eric Satie was postmodern around 1890. Stravinski had already written his great stuff until the War. Schönberg's new and mathematic composition system had also been created before the War. Max Reinhardt was overturning theater grounds earlier than we might expect. Georg Kaiser, Richard Sorge or Walter Hasenlever are themselves older than the lovely mad era. It wasn't until the very end of the 20s that serious, intransigent, of higher intransigence towards scandal generations appeared, and only around 1929 Robert Musil begins writing his philosophical essay. But the interbelic arts' scandal had burst before the War. The 20s' dadaism appears to us as a gracious mannerism compared to the sublime cheekiness of the first two decades of the century. Breton's surrealism is a conformist game compared to Apollinaire's deliriousness. In Romania *Pula* magazine appears in 1931, but Duchamps had already said what was there to be said. Abstract expressionism or archetypes were already Constantin Brâncuși's in the 10s. So that, *Les années folles* are not so complicated, I believe, as spent on life and on frivolity as they are, spent on simple joys and on fascination towards the boiling and cheerful city. But frivolity shouldn't be much disregarded either: frivolity is a mark of wisdom and of estrangement from one's self. A powerful culture takes a deep and healthy breath if its citizens master the taste of frivolity.

I keep asking myself how is it that for the last 30 years, in Bucharest, a flat open city, seagulls have appeared and sparrows have disappeared. Because yes, sparrows have disappeared. And seagulls are here.

Meanwhile, frivolity is down the drain in world culture. Frivolity or the sin of having broken the rule without falling into rudeness or monstrosity. This is what is lost, dear colleagues, and I dare say it is lost forever in our day to day culture. There's nothing left to do. It's over. Se acabó. Instead, the „damn seriousness” is set, as a remarkable Romanian thinker, N. Steinhardt said, alluding to the totalitarian history of the previous century. So there was a scandal and it's coming back. That „damn seriousness” is also coming back. We are preached which words should be removed from language, in order to not call differences anymore, because difference is an act of power. As well as pleasure is an act of power. For what is it that complicates life if not access to pleasure, hence pleasure must be depreciated and thrown into a bureaucratic table of functional genres, according to which each individual blatantly shows their own membership to a box in the register. So the pleasure of subversion, its mysterious uniqueness, its irreducibility, its tragic thirst for inaccessibility and power but also for miracle must be killed. How can one replace subversion and the mystery of frivolity with political regard – this is one truly mysterious theme. And the „damn seriousness” is upon us.



But after this global flu of the year 2020, perhaps the 20s are coming, the insane years, *Les annés folles*. Rubbish.

Let us consider that *The Decameron* was written immediately after the plague of 1348. We might just have to wean from making any more deterministic operations regarding history. Even if a pattern repeats itself a thousand times, we must be brave and we must know that it shall not repeat itself a thousand and one times. The pattern would be that after a period of general fright and forced domestication of the nomad citizen, the tension of reclusion sharpens and refines an instinct of running away. The excitement of liberation, however, is not solitary, but it belongs to the lonely individual. And so, the individual learns to value their own interior contradictions. Perhaps it is precisely because of this understanding and this intuition of their internal contradictions that the individual believes the pleasure of living is served by venial sins which don't hurt the others, but on the contrary, invites them to a benefic subversive banquet. This instinct, refined in loneliness, summons the individual to live the immediate and contradictory joys of life and to discover their own vitality in touch with the concrete world. But the thousand and first pattern might not repeat.

But should it be as written above, then it comes in handy for me to prophesy concerning the 20s that lie ahead, after fright, frustration, and tying up the citizen to his home are all gone. It shall be as follows:

- people forget about the „damn seriousness” and taste a bit of non-morality juice;
- artists are fed up with making political and non-aphrodisiac pornography;
- video artists are fed up with video; they are fed up with installations and with political staging of ugliness; they go back to wrestling with matter, roaring with laughter, as Jacob did;
- musicians make music,
- writers are fed up with jargon and no longer want to write in the language of the typological thug; they no longer write filthy and empathetic, but demanding and bewildering; or with kindness and simply; or joyful;
- movie directors are joyful;
- at the university, teachers are joyful and students are vicious;
- the bears are having tail fights; the wolves are kissing lambs in sheepfolds; the flea is wrangling with 42 kilograms of steel at each of his legs; and it's all right.

I like to prophesy and I'm actually a prophet, why is that? Because an uttered word clings not only to the destiny of the one who uttered it, but it implants in everybody's reality. And, if words implants in reality, then the responsibility of the one who uttered them is overwhelming.