



## Who Killed God Pan?\*

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translated from the Italian by Taina Rajanti

### abstract

Pan is a Greek God who lives on the zone between nature and culture, between beasts and humans. He inhabits the space that is neither that of history or community nor that of pure nature: the fields and meadows just outside the city walls are his dominion. He is two-formed and two-natured, human and animal, a man and a goat. When humans live inside the house and beasts in their dens or in their nests, Pan like a herdsman sleeps in a cowshed. And the herdsman is big, tall and a good warrior. He is a messenger between the city and the fields. Plato equates Pan with language; like Pan, language has a snake's tongue; it is good both in lying and in saying the truth. Pan declares all things and he is the perpetual mover of all things. Panic and the disorder that leads to panicking are due to the growing distance between the Gods and men. They destroy or deny communication between the Gods and the human community and between men and lead humans back to bestiality. Pan transforms human being into a gregarious animal and lets the herd instinct proper to humans free so that it is possible to reorganize the community using 'human nature' as a tool in the reorganization. Panic, like terror, has been a privileged instrument in modern politics because it spreads fast without discussions and it is impossible to contest or go against it.

Historically panic functions as a factor of hoarding on a planetary scale. But, despite the gravity of the crises that have punctuated the coming of the New Economy, one cannot avoid being stricken by the weakening of this panic factor.

Let us ask the question then: in the era of the New Economy, what is Pan (God-goat of nature) to which the experience of panic refers, the experience of that occasion of strong anxiety generated by a fear so intolerable as to obstruct the organizing of thought and action, capable of depersonalising, of inducing impersonal behaviour and mass mimetism? What is the 'herd instinct' that produces, *brings to light* the instinct of 'everything or nothing' that 'liberates' the latent anxiety? "If Pan is the God of nature 'within', then he is our instinct."<sup>1</sup>

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1 Hillman, J. (1972) 'An essay on Pan', in Hilman and Roscher, *Pan and the Nightmare*. New York: Spring Publications.

Already the fact that Pan – notwithstanding his mythological ‘naturalness’ – is a creature that does not exist in the natural world (he is, in fact, half human and half animal), that he is a creature totally *imaginable*, permits us to define the ‘herd instinct’ that is within us and that feeds our instincts as a *metaphor*. As Jung explains, if instinct acts and *at the same time* forms an image of its action (produces that which is its representation), then ‘to be at the mercy of’ the depersonalisation that panic brings about constitutes the experience of a behaviour that is simultaneously primary *and* intelligent. There’s a method in panic.

We have come to this paradoxical conclusion studying the genealogy of financial crises, in particular the crisis of 1929, as the explosion of the same *rationality* of speculation, the activity that, as Keynes has written, consist of foreseeing the psychology of the market, of ‘outwitting the crowd’.<sup>2</sup> “Knowing that our own individual judgment is worthless” – writes Keynes – “we endeavor to fall back on the judgment of the rest of the world which is perhaps better informed. That is, we endeavor to conform with the behavior of the majority or the average. The psychology of a society of individuals each of whom is endeavoring to copy the others leads to what we may strictly term a *conventional* judgment.”<sup>3</sup>

The *mimetic relation* between the individual, economic subject and the others (the aggressive ‘crowd’ of investors/speculators) has its rationality in the deficit of information about each. When conventional indicators, which represent average values, do not reflect the logic of the functioning of the economic system any more, when the opaqueness typical to financial markets induces behaviour whose rationality is by now in dissonance with the ongoing economic transformation, mimetic behaviour amplifies the crisis: it reveals the contradictory logic that sustains the economic process, the immanence of the crisis within the development. The procedure of the functioning of panic is thus presupposed by the panical crisis.

As long as we can trust that the convention, however arbitrary, shall be upheld, mimetic behaviour is quite rational. “But it is not surprising that a convention, in an absolute view of things so arbitrary, should have its weak points.”<sup>4</sup> The explosion of panic, the insensate rush to the counters to return to one’s possession, in the form of money, the propriety considered ‘at risk’, is nothing more than a revelation of the panic nature of capitalistic production, its intrinsic precariousness. The contradictory nature of the market economy is manifested in the panic demand for money: each returns to his propriety and, simultaneously, finds himself closer to others because of mimetic effects, because of the contamination and reactions it provokes.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Keynes, J.M. (1973-89) *Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes* Vols. I-XXIX, D.E. Moggridge and E. Johnson (eds.) London: MacMillan for the Royal Economic Society. Vol. VII ‘General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money’, Ch. XII, Part V, §4.

3 Keynes, J.M. (1937) ‘General Theory of Employment’, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, February: 209-22.

4 Keynes, J.M. (1973-89) *Collected Writings* Op cit. ‘General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money’ Ch. XII, Part V, §4.

5 Orléan, A. (1988) ‘Per una teoria delle aspettative in condizioni di incertezza’, in *Moneta e produzione*. Torino: Einaudi.

The violence of the crisis, instead of reflecting the irrationality of the ‘herd instinct’ within us, represents the fear of the inadequacy of the conventions and institutional powers in knowing how to manage the altered social conditions of economic development. At the same time, the ‘enthusiastic’ use of ideas emerging from the ongoing processes of transformation by individuals or groups represents the concealed desire to be rid of every authority, to emancipate from the slavery of the past. “Is not the Terror of 1793 at the same time the culmination of sacred terrors and the proclamation of their death? Even if the religious spirit still inspires all the facts and acts of the Revolution, it is also dying, as is shown by the failure of the revolutionary feast organised by Robespierre.”<sup>6</sup>

The ambiguity of meaning in the concept of panic, the confusion between the true name and false alarm, has brought Colonel Chandessais, researcher of catastrophes, to conclude categorically, that ‘panic does not exist’. Also, at Hiroshima “the panic that caused some Japanese to throw themselves in the lake is doubtful.”<sup>7</sup> There are only images of panic and the fascination brought about by these images. The origin of panic thus always depends on a *procedure* of alarm and on an *interpretation* of the signs of danger. In this resides properly the *linguistic dimension* of panic; that panic is a ‘word play’. Considered simultaneously as the essence of the Crowd and the image of its dissolution, as the origin of the Crowd’s being and its destruction, panic is the image of the disarticulation of language and representations. To be at the mercy of panic, much more than heavy sweating, pallor, palpitations, dyspnea and tremors, means *losing the ability of speech*. The fear is such that one cannot concentrate on any object of reference from which to defend oneself, which is the same as *not being able to produce representations anymore*.

The disarticulation of language defines the coordinates of panic experience in post-fordist society.<sup>8</sup> Also, in it ‘the herd instinct’, the God Pan – who, according to the Jungian principle of synchronism, connects the nature ‘within’ to the nature ‘without’ – is defined as a form of manifestation of the world in general. But in post-fordist society the world in its totality, the context in which it is connected to every being, where all facts happen and all discourses resound, is a primarily *linguistic* world. Language, the communicative and discursive presentation that encloses like a great text the world in its totality, is the ‘herd language’ with which we perceive the material context and have our experience of the world. Language *in general*, language as *faculty* or capacity to communicate, is what we fear to lose. In a post-fordist context in which language has actually become a means of production of goods, and thus the *material* condition of our very lives, the loss of the faculty of speech, of the ‘faculty of language’, means loss of belonging to the world as such, loss of what unites the many who constitute the community.

At the moment when panic displays itself as the loss of the use of the word, as disarticulation of language – as physical incapacity to denominate or remember objects

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6 Dupuy, J.-P. (1991) *La Panique*. Paris: Laboratoire Delagrangue.

7 Jeudy, H.P. (1997) *Panico e catastrofe*. Genova: Costa&Nolan.

8 Virno, P. (1994) *Mondanità. L’idea di mondo tra esperienza sensibile e sfera pubblica*. Roma: Manifestolibri.

(aphasia or dysphasia) – it is the capacity of language, language as possibility of existence that we fear to lose. Aphasiac experience, described by Jakobson as “escape of identity towards contingency”, as an escape from the referentiality of language towards contextuality, is precisely about the relation between language and the world.<sup>9</sup> When one is at the mercy of panic one escapes towards nowhere, towards anywhere: one seeks refuge in the world in its totality. It is this mass-escape towards a world without form that blocks the exits and exposes thus how narrow the space becomes when everybody belongs to the same linguistic context, when everybody has the same fear of being deprived of the same property, of the same faculty of language. As Virno has written, “panic fear is not the result of a rupture between the individual biography and the impersonal powers that sustain the society, but, to the contrary it stems precisely from the magnetic adherence of the individual to the general intellect. Or rather, from an adherence that is magnetic because it lacks a spatial regulation”.<sup>10</sup>

In a panic situation, for instance, a fire in a movie theatre, the other becomes suddenly a real enemy; in the middle of the risk of being trampled, suffocated, each gesture is an attempt to assassinate my body. The *private* use of the *general intellect*, so to speak, clashes with its *social* nature; the individual body that incorporates the linguistic division of labour sees the bodies of the others as an obstacle. Apparently the cinema was a space through which the many exercised their linguistic faculty.

Researchers of catastrophes claim that the more one refuses to believe that the danger is imminent and is reluctant to abandon one’s property, the more one prevents the likelihood of a risk, and thus a possible catastrophe. In a context that is for the best part linguistic, where one works by communicating, the resistance that prevents the occurrence of a risk is possible if one is able to distinguish the false alarms from the real ones. The capacity to interpret the indicators, the *benchmarks*, which in the form of simple figures summarize a set of complex variables that can be interpreted on the basis of a shared rationality, is possible only if the resistance of one is at the same time the resistance of many, only if the interpretation of the signs of a catastrophe happens through the use of language that unites and *preserves* the multitude.

In a context that has high systemic risk (the linguistic is global, like the post-fordist system of production and circulation of goods) the *linguistic resistance* is powerful. The linguistic resistance is rational and autonomous of false signs if it succeeds in challenging the dominant language without reproducing another totalising language, that is, if it functions as a ‘war machine’ that does not reproduce as a negative what it is opposing, a catastrophic confirmation of individual actions, but rather the implosion of the realm of meanings, of correspondences and identities. The community as a people is catastrophic, mentally ill, the community as multitude is in good health “even if all goes wrong”.<sup>11</sup>

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9 Jakobson, R. (1968) *Child language, aphasia and phonological universals*. The Hague: Mouton.

10 Virno, *opt cit.*

11 Deleuze, G. (1997) *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. D. Smith and M. Greco. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

But in what way in the post-fordist society – characterised by an elevated systemic complexity which the indicators in common use do not by definition succeed in representing to the full – the rationality of mimetic behaviour succeeds in protecting the community of the multitude from false alarms and the stereotypic representations of panic that the mass media keeps transmitting? How does one protect oneself from panic when all seems to contribute to creating optimal conditions for mimetic behaviour which risks to produce actual catastrophes?

The question is not meant to be taken as an implicit repression of the history of social, cultural, economic and ecological damage produced in the course of time by irresponsible political choices, *concrete* choices which have created and spread the impression that an imminent disaster could destroy the world in which we live.<sup>12</sup> It is on the contrary necessary to demonstrate how it were possible to avoid the social injustice and natural disorder within the same logic that turns anxiety into panic, the action of multitude into behaviour that is uniform and thus catastrophic.

The Asian crisis, the ‘millennium bug’ at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the very crisis of the New Economy demonstrate that the scenarios of a financial collapse and ICT catastrophe, repeatedly advertised by the mass media, *have not provoked panic behaviour*. For instance, during the Asian crisis analysts were surprised by the wisdom of the millions of savers who, even though assailed by signs of systemic risk, did not rush to withdraw their possessions from pension or investment funds. The climate of imminent catastrophe created by the syndrome of the ‘millennium bug’ did not create the contagious behaviour one could rightly expect, and which, independently of the truth or falsity of the danger, would *indeed* have provoked the catastrophe, would have made it inevitable and certainly destructive for well-being.

The euphoria of the stock-markets depicted the possibility of a world-wide financial collapse. The economic and financial indicators and a comparison to the advancement of the stock-market in the 1920s gave reason to be afraid of a collapse of vast proportions. In such situations the reasoning of those who, as the stock values increase, see reflected not the irrational excitement of speculation but a real increase of social productivity, indeed isn’t enough to protect one from the risk of a catastrophe. Nobody wins against the crowd, and the examples of those who succeed in winning against the logic of the ‘reasonable expectations’ of the market are rare indeed.

The problem does not even concern anymore the relation between objectivity and subjectivity, between an analysis of the real economy and the financial system corresponding to it on the one hand, and on the other, the change of the ‘semantics of risk’. The social contagion of the orientation towards risk – the compulsion to risk in a monetary economy in which the ‘growth without inflation’ forces to divert capital directly in the enterprises quoted in the stock market – makes it ever harder to tell the Luhmannian difference between risk and danger, system and environment, operation and observation.<sup>13</sup> He who exposes himself to the elevated risks derived from his own decision to invest in stocks ought, according to the Luhmannian sociology of risk, to

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12 Davis, M. (1999) *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*. London: Picador.

13 Luhmann, N. (1993) *Risk: a sociological theory*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.

react in a completely different manner towards the danger of damage to his portfolio resulting from the euphoria of the stock market and the mimetic logic underlying it. If that were the case, the manoeuvres of the Central Bank for reducing the dangers in a contaminated stock climate ought to contribute to reducing the risks orientation of individual participants in the stock market game.

The problem is that, even if it wants to fix a different proportion between real values and financial values, an increase in interest rates by the Central Bank doesn't seem to be enough to convince investors to change their minds, to move their savings into stocks that render less but are more secure. To re-establish the relative autonomy of monetary authorities (the State, that is) it is necessary for the multitude to open itself to the *uniqueness* of monetary indicators. To 'normalize' the market, to regulate them from above by central authorities, it is necessary to *provoke* a catastrophe, to generate a panic that is capable of unifying the behaviour of the many, capable of transforming the multitude into a people united by the same logic.

The *crisis* of monetary *sovereignty*, the incapacity of the Central Bank in affecting monetary associations, does not reduce the role of the State to its function of contributor of legal money 'in the last instance', but subsumes it to processes of financial valorisation making monetary politics a variable that depends on the stock markets. The architecture of production and exchange of post-fordist riches has constructed *in* language the *space* of the multitude. The multitude is the figure of money, the form of its sovereignty. Having killed the God Pan, the multitude must learn to protect itself from the Gods of the moment who, as spirits, haunt the chance of events.

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