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## Panic Merchants: Prophecy and the Satyr

[T]here are strange Ferments in the Blood, which in many Bodys occasion an extraordinary Discharge; so in Reason too, there are heterogeneous Particles which must be thrown off by Fermentation.

Anthony, Earl of Shaftesbury (14)

For where panic is, there too is Pan.

James Hillman (33)

The Greek god Pan is one of western culture's most enduring and ubiquitous trickster figures. Half-man, half-goat, Pan dwells in forests and glades trying to seduce nymphs, despite his grotesque demeanor. Born in Arcadia, he has thus become an icon for those who lament the Fall into civilization.

Pan's relationship to both Dionysus and Bacchus has become so confused that it is now difficult to distinguish one from the other. This is hardly surprising, considering their shared characteristics, and their inherently fusional-orgiastic function within classical philosophical and literary fables. As signifiers, "Dionysus" and "Pan" are free-floating archetypes, confused through various interpretations—Friedrich Nietzsche's being arguably the most influential. This is not necessarily a matter of historical blurring, but rather a sign of the almost Rorschachian ambiguity of his metaphysical presence (or absence) in modern times. As a trickster figure, Pan continues to elude us, and to enthrall the imagination for this very reason.

In her literary history of *Pan the Goat God* (published, significantly enough, in 1969), Patricia Merivale traces the evolution of

this myth into the twentieth century. She concludes that his symbolic status as a sexual figure is “only a recent literary characteristic” (226), initiated by Robert Browning’s vision of Pan as lurking within us, rather than roaming the landscape. This radical reassessment of Pan’s “essential” character forever altered our perception of his mythical status. Consequently, the goat-god—rather like millenarianism itself—is “not exclusively sexual, but largely so” (90).

Beginning with Nietzsche’s question—“what does the union of god and goat . . . really mean?” (226)—Merivale explores the general rekindling of interest in Pan during the previous fin de siècle, categorizing different species of literary Pans, and identifying genealogical overlaps between Pan and Dionysus. She reveals that Nietzsche’s famous dialectic between Apollo and Dionysus had many precedents, many of which placed Pan in the antagonistic position. William Hazlitt, for instance, in his *Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth* (1820), saw the contest between Pan and Apollo as a critical metaphor, given the “repeated claim that Apollo is envious of his sweet pipings” (ibid.: 60). Lyly’s *Midas* (1592) states that “Pan is a God, Apollo is no more!” (ibid.: 48), while Buchanan’s 1885 poem, “The Earthquake” proclaims,

Woe to the land wherein the Satyr reigns,  
And Pan usurps Apollo’s throne!  
(ibid.: 110)

There was an enormous resurgence of interest in Pan as an ideological icon at the beginning of the twentieth century. According to E. M. Forster, the Pan-effect had not only continued but *accelerated* into the modern world, which is why in *Howards End* (1910) “panic and emptiness” accompany the life of “telegrams and anger” (ibid.: 190). Technology is thus identified as a compatible environment for the previously agrarian Pan.

Pan’s sardonic laugh was heard across the battlefields of Europe by writers documenting that conflagration of Enlightenment ideals by horrific technologies, the First World War. Osbert Sitwell described the carnage allegorically: “Pan and Mars had broken loose together and had set out to conquer the man who wound and set the clocks that regulated civilized living” (ibid.: 221). Here Pan is presented as an inherited blood-lust in an age of mechanical production.

Indeed this guilt by association is directly connected to the literary motif of panic as a destructively sublime communion with the Infinite. The undefined “mystical fright” of sensitive nineteenth-century souls such as Fyodor Dostoevsky, prompted the emergence

of the medical condition of “Panophobia,” for which the popular term would soon become *panic attack* (Nordau 226). Moreover, one character in Arthur Machen’s “Man Who Went Too Far” (1912) declares that “Pan means ‘everything,’ and to see everything would be clearly more than one could stand. And so to see Pan means death” (Merivale 168).

To feel the presence of Pan, therefore, means death and/or fulfillment. In fact this “and/or” provides the crucial pivot on which libidinal millenarianism rests, ever-suspended between orgasm and extinction. For if Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari are correct in claiming that “it is by headlong flight that things progress and signs proliferate,” then we can also concede that “Panic is creation” (73). Moreover, such theoretical mobilizations serve to add an extra dimension to Pan’s subtextual role in biblical accounts of the Last Judgment, and specifically Matthew’s description of the division of sheep from goats (Matt. 25.31-46).

Pan’s figural flexibility, therefore, is evidence of his catalytic force. For it is he, according to such narratives, who is responsible for the fire in the loins: the same loins that Norman O. Brown has identified as the site of the Last Judgment. Those who succumb to this libidinal fever are thus cast into the pit by the Christian God whose chief adversary is variously named Satan, Pan, or Dionysus.

Ever since Plutarch recorded the story of the death of Pan (*Moralia*, V 419), this deity has been invisible or “transparent,” in Jean Baudrillard’s terms. Yet like various charismatic figures—God, Nietzsche, and a steady stream of suicidal rock stars—Pan created a power-effect that increased after his death: “Pan is dead: long live Pan.” Consistently, Pan has been situated outside of and *against* the Christian metaphysical tradition, yet parallel to it. If Nietzsche had ever thought that Pan/Dionysus was dead, he would certainly have believed that resuscitation was not only possible but imperative. In mythology, psychology, and philosophy, Pan lives on to haunt the invisible membrane between sexuality and textuality.

Pan can be understood accordingly as having metamorphosed into the flux and flow of language, and reincarnated in the notion of “Pan-ic.” Indeed the very word *panic* expresses the contagious spread of fear through the herd. In his eighteenth-century polemic, “A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm,” the Earl of Shaftesbury recounts an origin myth for this phenomenon:

We read in History that PAN, when he accompany’d BACCHUS in an Expedition to the Indies, found means to strike a Terror thro’ a Host of Enemys, by the help of a small Company, whose Clamors he manag’d to good advantage among the echoing Rocks and Caverns of a woody Vale. The hoarse bellowing of the Caves, join’d

to the hideous aspect of such dark and desert Places, rais'd such a Horror in the Enemy, that in this state their Imagination help'd 'em to hear Voices, and doubtless to see Forms too, which were more than Human: whilst the Uncertainty of what they fear'd made their Fear yet greater, and spread it faster by implicit Looks than any Narration cou'd convey it. And this was what in after-times Men called a Panick. The story indeed gives a good Hint of the nature of this Passion, which can hardly be without some mixture of Enthusiasm, and Horrors of a superstitious kind. (14-5)

Shaftesbury goes on to emphasize the “social and communicative” aspect of panic, before linking it specifically to religious manias:

One may with good reason call every Passion Panick which is rais'd in a Multitude, and convey'd by Aspect, or as it were by Contact or Sympathy. Thus popular Fury may be call'd Panick, when the Rage of the People, as we have sometimes known, has put them beyond themselves; especially where Religion has had to do. And in this state their very Looks are infectious. The Fury flies from Face to Face: and the Disease is no sooner seen than caught. (15)

Leaving aside the revolutionary potential of the “Rage of the People,” we can acknowledge the viral rhetoric that depicts Pan’s power. Shaftesbury’s crucial move is to link the prophetic function of Pan with religion, and to remember that the pronouncement recorded by Plutarch—“Pan is dead”—was a reaction to the perceived failure of the oracles after the birth of Christ. “Enthusiasm,” for Shaftesbury, is a commodity peddled by “Vendors of Prophecy.” Consequently, panic is “easy to be carry’d away with every Wind of Doctrine, and addicted to every upstart Sect or Superstition” (28). It would be hard to think of a more relevant comment in the era of Waco, Heaven’s Gate, and the Japanese Aum Shinrikyo cult.

After locating the germs of panic in the imagination, Shaftesbury goes on to describe the somatic signs of infection. In post-Freudian times, these are easily interpreted as manifestations of sexual eruptions. As with certain mystical experiences, the fine line between sacred and profane experience can be erased by the scorching fire of passion. “I learn from holy Scripture,” Shaftesbury explains, “that there was the evil, as well as the good Spirit of Prophecy. And I find by present Experience, as well as by all History, Sacred and Profane, that the Operation of this Spirit is every where the same, as to the bodily Organs” (45). The spirit of Pan—described alternately as “the Blaze” or “the Extasy”—is described in sexual terms: its outward manifestations are “Quakings, Tremblings, Tossings of the Head and Limbs, [and] Agitation.” When bodies are “labouring with Inspiration,” “Eyes glow with the Passion” (45, 50) and breasts heave.

The Pan-effect thus continues in the form of the panic instinct. In his monograph on *Pan and the Nightmare*, James Hillman echoes Shaftesbury's belief that Pan thrives best in the imagination. "Pan is still alive," he writes, "although we experience him only through psychopathological disturbances, other modes having been lost in our culture" (1988;18). Since Pan never died (he was merely repressed) he has been savoring the potential power of his Return. This power leaks into culture via these psychopathologies, most notably "the nightmare and its associated erotic, demonic and panic qualities" (25).

By associating Pan with nightmares, Hillman evokes both an explicitly Jungian unconscious and the Freudian theory of repression. If we are to believe the founders of psychoanalysis, and the subsequent absorption of their ideas into popular knowledge (especially in the 1960s), then Pan shares this murky terrain with Eros. The nightmares that emanate monstrously from the fertile excrement of the unconscious are thus rooted in a suppressed sexuality and a primal sense of fear: "The poles of sexuality and panic, *which can instantly switch into each other or release each other*, exhibit the most crassly compulsive extremes of attraction and repulsion . . . . Pan, as ruler of nature 'in here,' dominates sexual and panic reactions, and is located in these extremes" (27—my emphasis).

In the 1960s, when the sexual revolution cannot be distinguished from the fear of nuclear Armageddon (as I shall argue in chapter 5), the iconic resurgence of Pan signaled uneasy anxiousness as well as hedonistic promiscuity. Because "anxiety and desire are twin nuclei of the Pan archetype" (31), it is impossible to determine which is cause and which is effect.

Symbolizing the paroxysm of erotic fear, Pan is the quintessential figure of libidinal millenarianism. Messianic figures from Zoroaster to David Koresh are all indebted to the proleptic powers of Pan. If it is true that "Apollo wheedled the art of prophecy" from Pan (Graves 1960;102), we can appreciate the complicated role played by Pan in apocalyptic discourses.

Because Pan is elusive as a symbolic figure or "metaphysical pattern," he represents different concepts to different schools of thought. All of them, however, connect his latent influence with the vengeful power of "Nature." In Tom Robbins's novel, *Jitterbug Perfume* (1990), Pan is portrayed as an almost transparent figure, disappearing into the ether due to his archaic status in a modern era. Nevertheless, this vanishing act does little to mask his musky stench, which is still powerful enough to coax the libido out of even the most prudish of souls. From Plutarch via Pascal to Robbins, Pan is depicted as a casualty of civilization. Nevertheless, he man-

ages to harness a kind of amorphous sexual power that challenges the fragile laws of society.

In his weighty polemic against what he sees as the viruslike influence of Nietzsche's thought, Geoff Waite engages with the figure of Pan-Dionysus:

In Greek mythology and in the German intellectual tradition, Dionysus is the proleptic god par excellence. He is "the coming god," not merely in the sense that his coming is anticipated in the future—for example, every destructive-creative springtime—but also in the strong sense that his primary attribute . . . is defined in terms of coming and recoming, not actual arrival. The true essence of the demigod consists in perpetually coming toward humanity from the future but not necessarily ever arriving. (134)

This offers a crucial insight into libidinal millenarianism, relating to both Jacques Derrida's concern with the sexual undertones of "coming" as an eschatological concept, and to the implicit identification of Pan with the apocalypse itself, as an end that never comes: the always deferred Terminal Orgasm. Since Pan is the phallic goat-god, it is no surprise that he can be appropriated by heterosexual narratives based on historical climax.

According to Hillman, Pan invented masturbation, which he describes as "a way of enacting Pan" (36). Autoerotic activities are also associated with the biblical figure of Onan, who was struck dead by God for his nonprocreative (i.e., proto-Sadean) behavior. Other than providing yet another fusion of sex and death, this moral fable illustrates the matrix of "panic phenomena" whereby the taboo is completed through transgression. By "enacting Pan" we thus dissolve the distinction between the natural and the (allegedly) unnatural.

The isolation of Des Esseintes in J.-K. Huysmans's *A Rebours* (1884), is a monastic-cum-onanistic response to the decadent orgy articulated through the main character's fondness for artifice. So too was Nietzsche's, whose falling out with high society is said to have begun with Richard Wagner's description of him as "an onanist." The solitary who surfs the Internet in search of porn is also responding (albeit "positively") to the orgiastic excess of a decadent society, expressed through technology. All these scenarios speak of a hypermediated form of alienation.

Pan thus straddles both the instinct to survive (the "lust for life"), and the "necro-porn" or "sacrificial sex" of certain romantic, decadent, and postmodern subcultures. According to those scandalized by such behavior, the Apocalypse will surely come when God decides to smite both the Onans and the libertines of our own

decadent Western society. Hillman asks why we expect prophecy to “come with a long beard and a thunderous voice,” when it could just as easily manifest itself as “a jet of desire” (53). Ejaculation both mimics and mocks the coming of the Lord. But if Terence McKenna is right, and “Western Civilization has shot its wad,” then the apocalypse must have already happened.

### The Goat in the Machine

There is something inherently subversive about taking all this incredibly expensive technological equipment and putting a naked woman on it.

Richard Kadrey in *Wired for Sex*

I felt really sad for the panic buttons, because panic seems like such an outdated, corny reaction to all of the change in the world. I mean if you have to be negative, there’s a reasonable enough menu of options available—disengagement—atomization—torpor—but panic? Corrrrrrrny.

Douglas Coupland, *Microserfs*

Cybersex is a thriving industry in the *fin de millénium*. The user is able to interface with two-dimensional representations of his or her (although usually his) fantasy, stroking the screen while “enacting Pan.” Mark Kingwell explains that because new technologies mobilize sexual imagery in sophisticated advertising strategies, we now “soothe ourselves with our candy substitutes. In erotica everything is promised and nothing delivered; consuming it, we subsist on a sugar diet of pure stimulated desire” (200).

This scenario was eagerly anticipated in the 1960s by Marshall McLuhan, who believed that the electronic media had a pan-sensual potential for transfiguring sexuality in such a way as to make “Henry Miller’s style of randy rutting old-fashioned and obsolete” (Neville 70). While many would regard such obsolescence as wholly positive, it has become increasingly clear that the old phallogocentric power structures have merely been encoded in the digital future. Kadrey’s claim that there is something “inherently subversive” in digital representations of female nudity rests on a severely compromised definition of subversion, for it fails to take account of the adman’s exploitation of libido.



Pixis Interactive is based in Silicon Valley, and is one of the biggest producers of digital pornography (or erotica, depending on how you see it). It releases computer games in which the lust-object stares out from the screen and addresses players in first-person mode. Such games are “interactive” because they offer players several options by clicking on a command linked to a particular operation (i.e., undress and turn around). One option, always available in an erotic emergency, is the Panic Button.

Arthur Kroker—who affixes the word “panic” to any buzzword of the day—has described the apocalyptic effects of this ultramodern technology as *panic sex*, a term that maps the simulated terrain covered so thoroughly by Jean Baudrillard. Perhaps Hillman, however, describes the situation most clearly: “Let us say that the world of nature, Pan’s world, is in a continual state of subliminal panic just as it is in a continual state of subliminal sexual excitation. As the world is made by Eros, held together by that cosmogonic force and charged with the libidinal desire that is Pan . . . so its other side, panic . . . belongs to the same constellation” (29-30).

As we have seen, this “continual state of subliminal excitation” also saturates the technological. In millenarian terms (and I explore this matter more thoroughly in chapter 3) the divine dwells inside or alongside technology, so that artifice creates a new “metaphorical pattern . . . incorporating anxiety and sexuality” (ibid.: 32).

According to Hillman, panic is not to be treated with Valium or suspicion, because it is a natural—even ethical—response to the technological sublime: “We must follow the path cleared by Nietzsche, whose investigation of kinds of consciousness and behaviour through Apollo and Dionysus can be extended to Pan. Then panic will no longer be regarded as a physiological defence mechanism . . . but will be seen as the right response to the numinous” (30).

In William Gibson’s cyberpunk novel, *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1988), there comes a point when technological acceleration is referred to as either the Rapture or “When it Changed.” Like a vacuum sucking in oxygen, the new realm of cyberspace attracts new electronic deities, and the matrix finds itself populated by sentient, even sacred, creatures. Gibson refers to these gods as the Loa, from voodoo mythology. One could, however, propose Pan as the goat in the machine—a lustful ghost-god, overseeing virtual orgies with digital nymphs who are mere vapors of data.<sup>6</sup>

If Dionysus-Pan is indeed the proleptic god par excellence, then we must take the next step and acknowledge his presence in technological terms. “Prolepsis,” Waite tells us, “has also to do with the mechanical reproducibility—fast-forward (anticipation) and



fast-reverse (memory)" (132). Pan is no longer the god of nature, but of technology; or more accurately, the god of nature *in* technology. Indeed, as I write, there is a World Wide Website known as "Pan's Online Grove": dedicated to literary works inspired by the horny one, it also sells T-shirts imprinted with his image. Thus Pan has left the hidden spaces of both the forest and the psyche in order to inhabit the shadows of cyberspace.

Michel Maffesoli has thought long and hard about the legacy of Pan and its relation to both technology and sexuality. In *The Time of the Tribes* (1996), he continues to work self-consciously within "the Dionysian thematic," celebrating the "panvitalism" of the people. Maffesoli—who is "confident in the fact that certain 'outdated' considerations may be perfectly adequate to their time" (2)—identifies an "organic" explosion of microgroups that establish a creative and conflicting notion of the masses. His faith in the future depends on the atavistic power of Pan/Dionysus, which celebrates the "pagan fibre which . . . has never entirely disappeared from the masses" (41).<sup>7</sup> This tendency to seek a carnivalesque continuity relates to a familiar millenarian motif, namely, an imminent transcendence spawned by the orgiastic aura of "these closing days of the modern era" (1).

The lifeblood of Maffesoli's Dionysian sociology concerns those mushrooming affinity groups that make up the social fabric of the *fin de millénium*, from populist subcultures to elitist secret societies. Stressing the kinship between proximity and promiscuity, he claims that such allegiances are at root erotic, and nurtured by a shared space or territory, whether real or symbolic. "We have dwelled so often on the dehumanization and the disenchantment with the modern world and the solitude it induces," he writes, "that we are no longer capable of seeing the networks of solidarity that exist within it" (72). Consequently, Maffesoli has no patience with those theories of hyperalienation that are promoted by Baudrillard and his disciples:

A tendency to see life as alienation or to hope for a perfect or authentic existence makes us forget that daily routine is stubbornly founded on a series of interstitial and relative freedoms. As has been seen in economics, it is possible to demonstrate the existence of a *black-market sociality*, which is easily tracked through its diverse and minuscule manifestations. (21)

One such is the Minitel computer network in France, which, by anticipating the veritable plague of Internet fever, qualifies as one of Shaftesbury's contagious enthusiasms. The Minitel was an early electronic bulletin board, which allowed like-minded people

to communicate across geographic frontiers. It was thus the latest technological evolution—after the printing press, the telegraph and the amplifier—capable of fostering a sense of community. By creating a network that eluded governmental regulation (for a time, at least) the Minitel anticipated Hakim Bey's notion of a Temporary Autonomous Zone: socialism with an interface. Both Pan and Dionysus dwell in such a symbolic space, because

the growth in urban tribes has encouraged a “computerized palaver” that assumes the rituals of the ancient agora. We would no longer face the dangers, as was first believed, of the macroscopic computer disconnected from reality, but on the contrary, thanks to the personal computer and cable TV, we are confronted with the infinite diffraction of an orality disseminated by degrees. (25)

Technology is thus one of the key vectors of Maffesoli's orgy, encouraging new articulations of the “social divine.”

Some of his claims are far-fetched: that we are moving from an “optical” period to a “tactile” one, for instance, or that alternative movements such as astrology and naturapathy are “in the process of overturning the social configuration.” Nonetheless, the notion that postmodern society is in some sense reinventing archaic values is compelling. Tattooing, body-piercing, branding, scarification, and other rituals of the “new primitivism” are spectacular manifestations of such cyberatavism. Whether experienced on the street or in books like Adam Parfrey's *Apocalypse Culture* (1990), the subliminal Pan-ic of the “popular-secular apocalyptic” can hardly be denied. Indeed, only those who have not witnessed the ecstatic ritual of the “rave” could dismiss Maffesoli's prophecy that the “confusion of the dionysian myth has produced significant effects of civilization,” and that perhaps “our megalopolises are the site of their rebirth” (129). Fleshing out this insight into our neo-decadent period, Maffesoli sees evidence of a spiritual renovation in

beaches crammed with holiday-makers, department stores thronged with howling consumers, riotous sporting events and the anodyne crowds milling about with no apparent purpose. In many respects, it would seem that Dionysus has overwhelmed them all. The tribes he inspires demonstrate a troublesome ambiguity: although not disdaining the most sophisticated technology, they remain nonetheless somewhat barbaric. Perhaps this is a sign of postmodernity. Be that as it may, the principle of reality, on the one hand, forces us to accept these hordes, since they are there, and on the other, urges us to remember that time and again throughout history it was barbarity that brought many moribund civilizations back to life. (28)

Maffesoli's attraction/repulsion concerning "the masses" exhibits the patronizing nostalgia that marks this particular school of thought from Baudelaire to Baudrillard. And like the latter, Maffesoli preempts allegations of snobbery by stating that although "the founding being-together may never in fact have existed . . . it remains nevertheless the nostalgic basis" of his inquiry (128-129). That the aristocratic elitism of the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* could mutate into the anarchic populism of the 1990s—and *still retain a direct lineage* – is one of the historical wonders of millenarian scholarship.

As a timely negotiation between the archaic and the futuristic, *The Time of the Tribes* almost succumbs to a sentimental form of utopianism. It believes that the mortal fragility of the orgy provides the key to social behavior, unlocking "a sign of the future in that which is ending" (78). This vision of the future as a "succession of 'presents'" not only preoccupied Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra, but has also inspired popular culture's nihilistic energy from the Ranters to the punks. Moreover, Maffesoli's project consistently hinges on the "ambience of the moment" (145), prompting the question, "Does not each great caesura in human evolution—revolution, decadence, and the birth of empire—see the rise of an array of new lifestyles?" (96). The surfeit of new subcultures that emerged in the 1990s certainly suggests that culture is evolving according to some kind of dionysian directive. The question is, toward what?