

Pandi noir

Description

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Pandemic and *panic* look a bit the same. A *pandemic* is a characteristic shared by everyone, in this case a disease or its threat. *Panic* pertains to Pan, the god of wild nature. To panic is to go wild. According to etymonline.com *pan* can be taken to mean â??allâ?• in both cases â?? i.e. all people, and nature as a whole, a unity. The graphics on the cover of Slavoj Zizekâ??s new book: *Pandemic! Covid-19 Shakes the World* tortures the word *Pandemic*, with something like Pan[dem]ic! The book is not in print yet. Iâ??ve included a list of recent relevant op-eds by philosophers such As Zizek in the bibliography below.

At times like this, streamed movies divert attention to normal life, unless you go with the apocalyptic. This week I watched the film *Contagion* on Prime Video, directed by Steven Soderbergh with actors Matt Damon, Kate Winslet, Jude Law, etc, and released in 2011, just after the H1N1 pandemic. It plays through a fictional scenario not unlike the current Covid-19 pandemic. But in the film the mortality rate is about 100%, there are riots as people try to get food and medicines, and eventually, the vaccine. Mercifully, the US President goes into hiding in a secret bunker and isnâ??t heard from. Other than that the scenario is current: massive emergency hospitals in convention centres, fake cures, profiteering, warnings about face touching, social distancing, lockdowns, and mass quarantining.

Judging by the filmâ??s success, pop culture at least was prepared for the unfolding of a global pandemic, and there are other films ranging from vÃ©ritÃ© to very weird. Techradar lists â??The top 10 best pandemic movies you can stream right now,â?• including: *The Crazies* (1973), *Outbreak* (1995), *Twelve Monkeys* (1995), *Last Man on Earth* (1964), *It Comes at Night* (2017), *The Host* (2006), *28 Weeks Later* (2007), *Day of the Dead* (1985), *Zombieland* (2009).



Pan-isolation

The current isolation scenario reminds me of another piece of fiction, EM Forsterâ??s short story *The Machine Stops.* That was published in 1909, ten years before the great influenza pandemic after WW1.

In Forsterâ??s story the culprit is not a disease, but peopleâ??s dependence on the life support of the ubiquitous *machine*, as people live underground, isolated in air conditioned pods. The reader is to assume itâ??s the failure of the air conditioning that eventually kills everyone as they gasp for breath lying strewn across the corridors of their underground labyrinth. But its peopleâ??s unquestioned acceptance of isolation that disturbs the most: â??People never touched one another. The custom had become obsolete, owing to the Machineâ?• [9].

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Like now, people made contact through audiovisual communication channels. But the maverick son in Forsterâ??s story longs for contact with his aloof mother: â??I want to speak to you not through the wearisome Machineâ?• [2].

The back cover of Zizekâ??s book includes the sentence: â??We live in a moment when the greatest act of love is to stay distant from the object of your affection.â?• Our global pan-quarantine contravenes two components of a full and healthy life: the restorative benefits of direct communion with nature as we are required to stay at home, and direct sociability that makes touch possible â?? or it makes us value them even more.



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- Images above: aquarium in Hull, England; reflection of a sculpture by Antony Gormley standing in the Water of Leith, Edinburgh.

Category

1. Film and media

Tags

1. covid-19
2. machine
3. pandemic
4. quarantine

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