

VEDA

EMILY JONES TILT-ELK-LUCK-WARM

SEPTEMBER 11 - NOVEMBER 7, 2020

THE END OF POLITICAL HERD IMMUNITY
text by Hendrike Nagel

This exhibition is one of the many events that were postponed because of Covid-19. When Emily and I first spoke about this accompanying text, the pandemic was still in its infancy. While most countries like Germany, and at the very forefront Italy, committed themselves to a total lockdown, Boris Johnson in the UK still believed in the opposite: “herd immunity”. Herd immunity describes the idea that allowing a virus to spread will eventually build up sufficient resistance in a population. The belief in this path was abandoned only when it became clear that the British National Health Service would be utterly overwhelmed and hundreds of thousands of Britons could conceivably die.

I guess one must speak of belief here as the pandemic confronted and confronts us with a situation which, except for the few specialists (if at all), exceeds our tangible understanding – attested not least by these unhinged authoritarian manoeuvres. While scientific evidence became political events and the observation of the number of infected people preceded the reporting on the stock markets, the people social distancing at home were left alone only with a certain faith or better obedience to whom or what was emotionally perceived more trustworthy. Religion, like the virus occurred as something beyond human comprehension, as something that led to the surrender of almost any form of self-determination involuntarily affirming a very dystopian view of human beings: you/we are not able to act reasonably on your/our own.

Just like this disastrous situation is obviously not a new state of affairs, but rather an escalation of a long lasting state of crisis which again and again has discharged and will discharge itself in shocking events like wars, coups, radicalisations, market crashes and natural disasters, this looming human dependency isn't a novelty either. Although neoliberalism's individualising imperative spawns a narcissistic subject whose dependence on others is supplanted by a defensively overblown fixation on the autonomy and grandiosity of the subject itself, a subject that has been brought to the point of apathy, detachment and self-government, the virus has served as the most powerful metaphor revealing interdependency. Amidst all these chanted neoliberal self-'s (self-interest, self-optimisation, self-analysis, self-care...), condemning a codependent and vulnerable human as a failed human while praising autonomy, the virus has uncovered a long internalised “political herd immunity”. By this I mean a collective immunity towards any sociopolitical consciousness

VEDA

and intersubjective responsibility, towards any avowal of a natural (and valuable) vulnerability and dependency. Furthermore, it has made unmistakably clear that this interdependency doesn't solely concern human-to-human relationships but also nonhuman and that it must, therefore, be extend to all life, and even the cosmos whose processes influence our lives and vice versa.

Following Naomi Klein (who is probably one of the most referred to authors in recent months), moments of cataclysmic crisis manifest a turning point which can lead backwards or enable the previously unthinkable to become reality. In recent decades, that change has mainly been for the worst, enabling the rise of a reactionary and narcissistic "disaster capitalism" – but it need not continue to be in the future. So, as an "evolutionary leap" (how Klein calls it), let's make use of this collective awakening from our political herd immunity and take on our collective responsibility – and vulnerability – to systematically implement this awareness of universal interdependence into our image of humanity, or better, into the correlation between the ecosystems and humans. Let's find new proactive crisis-management strategies which do not bounce back, or passively capitulate, but bounce forward into sustainable and thus more resilient societies. Let's look for potential and yet unthinkable measures that can change the narcissistic status quo of our time and establish new dynamic relationships based on a new approach to the public and its limited (!) resources, and to the care for the environment. These should be measures that focus globalisation not on the privatisation of the world and the accumulation of power and capital, but on the world we all share, on – international and interspecies – solidarity and on the equal distribution of wealth – less economic more ecologic. Let's take responsibility for the marks humanity has already left and seize the chance that is in this crisis to create a new and less selfish understanding of the – vulnerable and dependent – subject, state, and world: more equal, more decentralised, more sustainable, more transparent, more participatory, more humble.