

Like A Little Disaster is honored to present “**And then an insurmountable tension, to the level of an incommensurability**” a collective exhibition involving twenty-six artists (**Isaac Lythgoe, Petros Moris, Giulia Essyad, Nicolas Lamas, Jaana-Kristiina Alakoski, Grace Woodcock, Susi Gelb, Jennifer West, Daniela Corbascio, Yein Lee, Adham Faramawy, Dorota Gawęda & Eglé Kulbokaitė, Lucia Cristiani, Cyril Debon, Agnese Guido, Leilei Wu, Mariantonietta Bagliato, Pauline Julier, Ludovica Gugliotta, Pinar Marul, Pedro Barateiro, Élie Autin, Elena Eugeni, Bruno Giacchetti**), gathered to create a scenario decolonized by humans, inhabited by hybrid objects/subjects, rebellious to any classification or definitive definition, nodes of network proliferating chimeras that question concepts of subjectivation, objectification and subjection, the classification of beings and the hierarchy of actors and values. The project takes the form of a panorama structured by multiple sprawling connections that are never completely closed, capable of setting unexpected consequences in motion.

The artists have created works that are not just the end or purpose of a production process, but means, or tools that enhance the ability to imagine a space of multiform co-evolution, through which seeking culture in nature and vice versa, the contingent in the permanent, identity in difference and in which experimenting with new alliances and secondary paths that may not always lead to distant places but shift our point of view, allowing us to consider other possibilities.

The works in the show question the binarism separating humans and their cultures, nature and non-humans, phylogeny and ontogeny, genetic heritage, and technological alterations. A confusion caused by the impossibility of recognizing the identity signs of these paradoxical objects: without contours, without antithetical terms, without residues. Objects such that they can no longer simply be given in opposition to the human subject, but among which the human is involved and with which they share the same mesh and the same destiny. These viscous, matted, tentacled, and rhizomatic systems question the relationship between humans and non-humans by bringing them into a circular system of reciprocity. A mesh made of liquid, decentralized, gradual and intersubjective entities, in which each organism can only be defined in relation (although not the relation itself).

Instrumental reductionism finds fertile ground in the bio-capitalist mud in which we are enmeshed, it is based on the notion of is based on a notion of "human exceptionalism", ethnocentric and speciesist and, from here, to the erection of a system founded on the opposition between nature and history, human and machine, male and female, identity and otherness, ecology and production, algorithms and neural connections, genetic heritage and technological alteration, rationality and instinct, mind and body, spirit and matter, real and virtual, true and false, organic and inorganic, biotic and abiotic, between a sense of responsibility and the idea of play, the environment in which we grow up and the genetic code, sharing and the sense of self, imagination and economy. In this game of doubles, each component of the “cognitive couple” is always dominated by its other, repressed and submissive half. The project thus offers itself as a space intended for the harmony that is in the meeting of opposites, as a device through which experiencing a conception of the individual and his way of relating to reality no longer characterized by an excluding logic, but which on the contrary tends to include all modes of expression and areas of action.

Within these formal and mental paths there is also a critical dimension towards internalised, acquired and consolidated cognitive models; criticism that allows you to radically redefine the rules of any functional system, in order to use the rules in a different way, ignoring their original purpose.

(x)morphism

The metamorphic dynamics occupy the agents and subjects of technological networks are nonhumans as well as humans, which then may both be termed, if circumstances warrant, hybrids, quasi-objects, or quasi-subjects. The x factor being the play of indifference between “subjects” and “objects” when it comes to the construction of socio-technological networks such as scientific laboratories, engineering projects, and the human and natural communities that now depend on them. Through the observation of quasi-objects, one recovers not a human/nonhuman stand-off but a “variable-ontology world [...] the result of the inter definition of the actors. The highly mobile concepts describe a neocybernetic vision of the necessary hybridity of symbiotic networks and system/environment couplings, and they describe equally well the daemonic landscapes of metamorphic narratives. The quasi-objects materialize and actualize the formal mediations that hold nature and society together.

“The quasi-objects raise what had been only a distinction, then a separation, then a contradiction, then an insurmountable tension, to the level of an incommensurability”

We can call the ontological condition of medial transformativity “morphism,” arriving at that term by deleting from “anthropomorphism” the humanist idealization of anthropos. If the human does not possess a stable form, it is not formless for all that. If, instead of attaching it to one constitutional pole or the other, we move it closer to the middle, it becomes the mediator and even the intersection of the two... The expression “anthropomorphic” considerably underestimates our humanity. We should be talking about morphism. Morphism is the place where technomorphisms, zoomorphisms, phusimorphisms, ideomorphisms, theomorphisms, sociomorphisms, psychomorphisms, all come together. Their alliance and their exchanges, taken together, are what define the anthropos. A weaver of morphisms —isn’t that enough of a definition?

To accept this definition is to allow the distinction between the human and the non-human to lapse: non-human metamorphosis always was a self-reflexive projection of the human. It is to see that the non-human situation of medial contingency remains a real allegory of the human, and that this allegory has now been heightened by the proliferation of scientific powers and informatic technologies. Transcendence without a contrary: or, society is maintained only through communication; we communicate only through media; therefore, we maintain without surpassing the medial contingencies of the construction of the human —and narrative systems perform this maintenance. The human is in the delegation itself, in the pass, in the sending, in the continuous exchange of forms, and this status is distributable to everything we touch or that touches us: human nature is the set of its delegates and its representatives, its figures and its messengers. In this post-Darwinian world, the human form is as unknown to us as the nonhuman; thus, it is better to speak of (x)-morphism instead of becoming indignant when humans are treated as nonhumans or vice versa.

The metamorphic transformations of bodies —both fictive and artefactual mixings of the human and the nonhuman— recur from archaic to contemporary times, taking daemonic shapes ranging from the magical to the technological. Textual metamorphs and technoscientific quasi-objects are both mediating transformers performing sociomythic sorting operations, negotiating the relations not of heaven and earth, but of nature and society. Quasi-objects, then, participate in a continuous production of ancient and current cultural mediators whose common attribute is a propensity to the metamorphic

transformation of given and normative forms. Viewed through the lens of Latour's network concepts, the recursive imageries of literary metamorphoses resonate with the operational evolutions, the mutations and occasional catastrophes, of natural and social systems.

If one allows the extension of sociality beyond human conversations to the communications of other living things—all of whom signal to their own in order to survive, and to the nonliving things that get swept up and redefined by natural

and social systems, then life and its evolution, including the emergence and networking of minds and societies across the living spectrum, is as much a social as a natural phenomenon. So neither nature nor society could remain in being without the translational mediations that course between them: All durability, all solidity, all permanence will have to be paid for by its mediators.

When the real and the daemonic are observed to emerge and merge in both technological and narrative constructions, classical human persons—the extra-environmental essences of selves, souls maintained by ideal bodily stabilities—become at once nonmodern and posthumanist, relativized actors performing operational functions and metamorphic transformations within natural/social networks and systems. This is not a demotion of the human but an elevation of the nonhuman into proper discursive representation.

IN/ANIMISM

One of the controversial issues in the discourse on climate change is the problem of material or bodily agency. Until recently, agency has been the privilege of human consciousness. We have seen ourselves as being ontologically different from nature, as spirit from matter. Such an ontological distinction justified people to use nature as a resource to satisfy their desires. Earth was nothing more than a mere background for human actions and prosperity; however, global warming and climate change, which has grown bad enough to threaten our very existence, has forced us to acknowledge that earth is agential in its own right. What is more alive and active than such a global catastrophe? If we bear in mind the current ecological crisis, then we must devise a new theory of agency for recognizing the active role of nonhumans.

It is one thing to decouple agency from consciousness; it is quite another to decouple agency from intentionality. We have to acknowledge that there is a nonconscious form of intentionality. Latour's mistake is in imagining intentionality in terms of consciousness. More original than our conscious intentionality is bodily intentionality that joins us to the world in our relationship with things around us. The body itself is intentional in that it directs at and affects others, associating or dissociating with them. At the background of conscious intentionality lies bodily intentionality. How can we think of animism without such corporeal intentionality?

The body is not inert matter but is the power to affect others and to be affected by them. Without such affectivity, a body would not have any agency (the power to act). To act is to "do" things. We should not confuse "do" with "function. If function is neutral and mechanical, then doing implies some form of desire, purpose, and intentionality. Spinoza named it *conatus*—an endeavor to persist in its being, whether human or nonhuman. But the agency should be decoupled from the criteria of intentionality, subjectivity, and freewill. To prevent such a human monopoly of agency, he proposed that agency is not a given quality but is that which modifies other actors through the course of action. We should not ask whether agency is human or nonhuman. Such a question is not only irrelevant but also detrimental

to our understanding of the exact nature of the agency. An attempt to explain agency in conjunction with intentionality is to presuppose the problem solved. It is necessary to think we do not know anything and to exclude all human preconceptions and start from ignorance. Even to imagine an intention behind a phenomenon interferes with our otherwise neutral and indifferent investigation. It seems that we have no reason to disprove his plea to decouple agency from intentionality. The only problem is that he betrays his methodological demand to begin our investigation without preconception. Agency, which can be defined as the body's capacity to affect or modify other bodies, neither distinguishes humans from nonhumans nor is in need of intentionality for its action.

Climate change demonstrates that the earth, which we defined as inert, is more alive than anything else. What agent is more animated, energetic, and unpredictable than, global warming, and sea level rise? The Earth is quaking! Now it has a subject once again. The agentic power of the earth is an undeniable reality, not a theoretical construction. We hit upon the Real of the earth really hard. The earth, which humans believed they de-animated and tamed, is animated again with more force than before. Animism is, then, not just an alternative to the modern worldview but is the only legitimate theory that can explain a phenomenon such as earthquakes.

Animism is a worldview that does not discriminate between animate and inanimate matter. We could define animism as a belief in personal souls animating even what we call inanimate bodies. All bodies, whether human or nonhuman, have life and will. Trought embracing such a vital vision of nature, we intend to substitute the concept of "thing" with "thing-power": because things have propensities or tendencies of their own. They do not passively succumb to human desire for control but resist subjugation. Animals, plants, and stones are bodies as energetic and intentional as humans, though in different ways. Whether human or nonhuman, animate or inanimate, all bodies endeavor to preserve their being.

All bodies, humans or nonhumans, are conatus in their essence. Conatus signifies the power of the body to act alone or in conjunction with other things to persist in its being. All bodies with capacities to affect or be affected tend to associate with or disassociate from one another to increase and intensify their conatus. Such embodied intention is not very different from the concept of plant and animal souls: a plant has a vegetative soul and an animal a sensitive soul. Their souls aspire to grow and propagate.

What all bodies do, affecting and being affected in alliance with others, has meaning in that it concerns their survival or extinction. Life or death is inseparable from their agency: the body with more connections to other bodies is more real and agentic than bodies with fewer connections or assemblages. The body is not an entity but a process of becoming more or less effective. As there is no individual body without assembly, so there is no assembly without the individual body. The body is not self-enclosed but porous and dynamic, and its boundaries can be crossed.

We do not know how to account for the animism present in an inorganic matter such as stones and machines. However, we need to take note that there is a significant difference in material intentionality between stones and animals. Although all bodies without exception equally strive to exist, there is a broad spectrum of differences in their conatus, and they are singular in their ways.

But can there be animism without bodily intentionality?

Bodily intentionality is one of many hybrids. The body is not only animated but intentional as well. It would be unthinkable to envisage animism without corporal struggles. Isn't it enough to dehumanize

agency by decoupling it from consciousness? We do not need to decouple animism from intentionality: to do so would be to conflate it with mechanism.

Like A Little Disaster

The exhibition is produced by Like A Little Disaster with the contribution of **Romano Exhibit** and the **Austrian Federal Ministry of Arts and Culture**. It benefits from the partnership of the **Pino Pascali Foundation** and the patronage of the **Municipality of Polignano a Mare**.

Title

“And then an insurmountable tension, to the level of an incommensurability”

Artists

Isaac Lythgoe, Petros Moris, Giulia Essyad, Nicolas Lamas, Jaana-Kristiina Alakoski, Grace Woodcock, Susi Gelb, Jennifer West, Daniela Corbascio, Yein Lee, Adham Faramawy, Dorota Gawęda & Eglė Kulbokaitė, Lucia Cristiani, Cyril Debon, Agnese Guido, Leilei Wu, Mariantonietta Bagliato, Pauline Julier, Ludovica Gugliotta, Pinar Marul, Pedro Barateiro, Élie Autin, Elena Eugeni, Bruno Giacchetti

Curated by

Like A Little Disaster

Dates

18 March / 10 June 2023

**Every Saturday and Sunday, 6/9 pm
and by appointment**

info@likealittledisaster.com

Opening

**Saturday 18 March starting at 7 pm
at Palazzo San Giuseppe**

Spaces

**Palazzo San Giuseppe, via Mulini 2
Like A Little Disaster, via Cavour, 68
Polignano a Mare**