



XL

“Not a festival anymore, but a shared training to thinking, to action and to the now”.

Pointing at a New Planet (2020) di IOCOSE

web based video loop | music by Albertine Sarges

25 June - 23 July | INBTWN

Media partner | Digicult <http://digicult.it/>

Pointing at a New Planet protagonist features is a three-dimensional model of the hand of the billionaire investor Elon Musk, realized using images and videos available online. Musk is one of the major actors involved in the NewSpace movement, that is the rush to privatized space-flight and planet colonization IOCOSE gathered video sources available online about Elon Musk’s public appearances as CEO of SpaceX.

Through an ironic interpretation of the body grammar used by Musk to make visible spaces that have never been seen, IOCOSE brings to light the absurdities of a space colonisation plan characterized by rather trivial economic interests, by variations of SpaceX stocks value and by concern for a planet – the Earth – that day after day is getting less inhabitable. Pointing at a New Planet, indeed, highlights how the NewSpace sets in space very earthly issues: who will be allowed to inhabit these ‘elsewheres’ and who is going to be excluded? What do the bodies of these modern entrepreneur, both leaders and gurus, tell us about present and future? Which inequalities of race, gender and economic status are they projecting in Space?

Talking hands speaking about the future

Within the frame of INBTWN, *Point at a New Planet* is presented as a web version. The home-page navigation experience has been specifically designed by IOCOSE. The space hosting the video is made of dynamic regolith fragments, the granular material that has become part of collective imagination since that first human footprint on the lunar dust. The visual representation of such material, deeply charged with references to the memories of past space flights, enters

a dialogue with the typical gestures of the web user: during the fruition on mobile devices, the physical touching of the index finger scours the space of the screen, on desktop graphic interfaces through its translation of the mouse pointer. On the basis of a set of conventions that have been included in our proxemics for some time now, this version of the artwork enables a relationship between the hands that will navigate it with that of the protagonist of the video. Through the hand, the body becomes the key subject of *Pointing at a New Planet*, as a field through which historical and contemporary tensions weaving together knowledge, technology and power emerge. IOCOSE's research has focussed on Elon Musk's gesture to give form to the invisible, to let us imagine and visualise worlds that no human being has ever experienced. The hand alone often tells a lot of a person's body language and intentions. As IOCOSE has pointed out: "hands have always had a role charged with multiple meanings: slight-of-hand techniques and magic are based on hand gestures; hands can deceive and conceal".

As stated already in the work's title, among several gestural codes IOCOSE has focussed on the act of *pointing*, which has already appeared in other works by the collective. A gesture that has a vast iconographic and iconological tradition: showing, seeing as both human and divine knowledge, but also command, power as tied to possession and to knowledge, between who knows and shows to whom does not know. In catholic iconography the pain that is shown is the real, visible, such as the one of the Virgin at the foot of the cross or of the saints that point at the evidence of the signs of martyrdom. Among the several meanings attached to such symbolism, IOCOSE is interested in the iconographic tradition of *the fortune teller* and in the relationship between the body and the narration of time, such as predicting the future through palm reading. A future that takes the form of a tangible body, though signs that run through the palm, thus becoming narration. A story telling that since its birth is marked by the ambiguity between magic and science, between forms of knowledge based on the body in both magical thinking and scientific knowledge, as well as in hybrid combinations between the two.

If until the 17th century reading the palm and the future it holds had been part of magic beliefs of popular folklore or of the diverse versions of *ars retorica* (the ability of persuasion through the discourse), within the frame of Enlightenment *chirology* has established itself as a pseudo-science, studying the system of gestures and their role in nonverbal communication. Some of the codes established during that period, mainly by British physician and natural philosopher John Bulwer, have laid the foundation for the modern sign language. During the 19th century circles dedicated to esotericism and the occult explored extensively hand gestures and their power. In the 1950s hand proxemics has been studied by comparative anthropology and kinesics for the implications of hand gestures in communication, cross-referencing diverse cultures

or investigating the proxemics of persons with peculiar habits in verbal language, such as bilingual ones. Since the '80s and in recent years the study of gestures has been pivotal in PNL - Neuro-linguistic programming, a modern pseudo-science based on methodologies to direct people's thinking and behaviour through both verbal and body language. The methods and approaches of PNL are variously involved in diverse fields of human communication, such as life coaching, self-help and counseling. Looking at the skills of Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, PNL techniques are widely used in management training, marketing and public speaking applied to politics.

How can we interpret the narrative held by Elon Musk's index finger, pushing our imagination towards unknown planets? His act of pointing deals with knowledge, with scientific and technological progress, or rather with the illusion of a magician, pointing only to deceive our attention while distracting the audience from the trick? IOCOSE situates the language of hands within the wider perspective of narratives on technological progress and how their aura to the quasi-divine dimension attributed to contemporary knowledge guru such as Musk; a role that has always been interpreted by men. As stated by IOCOSE: "Technological creation is compared to divine creation. The image of the genius who is able to create from scratch is still hard to debunk in collective imagination. An act of creating that, according to the historian David F. Noble, men have claimed for themselves to compensate their inability to generate life as women do".

Such largely unchanged relationship between knowledge and divinity embodied in western visual culture by white male hands calls into play a third layer of meaning, once again symbolised by the gesture of pointing: the act of domination. In this regard, on the contrary, it is possible to trace a potential transformation between history and the present, between the previous stages of capitalism and the current one, celebrated by accelerationistic entrepreneurs such as Elon Musk. The western laws define a society based on property and value, within which culture of having over being is expressed through ancient rituals and iconographies, assigning great symbolic and legal value to gestures: a grabbing hand declares its property or takes it away, it seals a pact and holds tangible goods and assets, it owns real "things" for they are tangibly 'in the palm of the hands' of those who own them.

Elon Musk's act of pointing differs from such tradition, borrowing instead his gestures from magic, from commanders and inventors, from knowledge and from deception. The grammar of his gestures narrates of space exploration, but also of a radical transformation in what produces value, from a notion of "goods" being tangible things to one of immaterial things. An imma-

teriality of what is or can be translated into economic value that can have simultaneously several diverse forms: knowledge, scientific and technological know-hows, experiences, flights in real or imagines spaces, data, images, words, gestures, communications between people, narratives that do not have necessarily to be real, they just have to work. Lastly, *Pointing at a New Planet* includes also a mashup of Elon Musk's speeches. They have been translated into a melody that captures our attention, is imprinted in our memory and keeps buzzing in our mind. Seduced by such melody, we might find ourselves singing it uncontrollably, allowing us to hear something is off-key in those words that we've made ours through our voice, through our body. And, as it has been suggested by IOCOSE, we might "question their reliability".

Claudia D'Alonzo

IOCOSE is a collective of four artists founded in 2006. Its research investigates the moments following the failure of technological and cultural development narratives. IOCOSE focuses its attention on the present moment when the future is being narrated. IOCOSE has exhibited its works in museums, institutions, galleries and national and international festivals, among which are MAMbo (2018), The Photographers Gallery (2018, 2016), Fotomuseum Winterthur (2017), Tate Modern (London, 2011), Science Gallery (Dublin, 2012) Jeu de Paume (Paris, 2011), FACT, Liverpool, 2012), MACRO (Rome, 2017, 2012), Transmediale (Berlin, 2013, 2015), Shift festival (Basel, 2010), The Influencers (Barcelona, 2010, 2013), TAJ and SKE gallery (Bangalore, 2014). The works of IOCOSE have been included in publications such as Wired, The Creators Project, Flash Art, Neural, Liberation, La Repubblica, Der Spiegel, El Pais, Adbusters, e Vanity Fair.

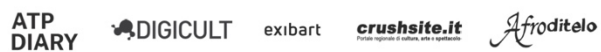
www.iocose.org

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Il festival è organizzato dalla Cooperativa Il Gaviale in collaborazione con l'Associazione Fies Project e Fies Core Hub Cultura grazie al sostegno di:



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