



XL

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

Julien Prévieux
What Shall We Do Next? (Sequence #2) (2014)
21 September - 12 October 2020
INBTWN Chapter III
Curated by Claudia D'Alonzo
XL - Centrale Fies

Why do we move the way we move? How will we move in one, ten or a hundred years? Who do our gestures belong to?

Multidisciplinary artist who has long been interested in the human-machine relationship, Julien Prévieux has begun an almost ten-year research intertwining technological innovation, bodies and copyright. The work *What Shall We Do Next? (Sequence #2)* arises from the gathering of sources on a little known aspect of technological innovation. When coming up with a new device, a tech company also designs how people will use it, through sequences of gestures that describe the ways to interact with it. By filing patents companies become owners of gestural scores, rules that will be learnt and performed by billions of bodies, through the use of smartphones and other everyday devices. Prévieux has brought together sources related to such kind of research, building what he defines as “an archive of future gestures, for they are programmed and owned by firms long before the users who will actually perform them. From such collection the artist has created a series of reenactments of the patents and of other sources, reinterpreted as scores of movements by both real and non-real bodies, through animated film, dance performance and video.

INBTWN presents the second project born from this research: the video *What Shall We Do Next? (Sequence #2)*, in which gestures from patents and other sources from the archive of future gestures are enacted by six performers. The abstract space and the rupture of linearity

builds a different context for such actions, freed from their disciplinary power and economic value. By transforming them into a choreographic score and de-contextualised from their bonds with devices, the work enables bodies to reappropriate them and defuses what Prévieux defines as the “prescriptive role of technology”.

For INBTWN the video is supported by a database, designed in collaboration with the artist, bringing together and presenting for the first time part of the original documents he has collected, sourced from the USPTO archive (United States Patent and Trademark Office). Through making the database of patents and original documents from USPTO available for download from the website, INBTWN presents part of the research and studies that lead to the creation of the video artwork. Within it, traces and images of the scores enacted and appropriated by performers, can be found. Furthermore, a kind of technological knowledge that is little known to most people can be accessed. Browsing through the files or downloading and reading the original patents, we might recognise some of the actions and gestures that we perform daily, and find out who they belong to. Or maybe we could get to know some new ones which we will perform in a few years.

The voiceover of *What Shall We Do Next? (Sequence # 2)* is a collage of different sources narrating examples of devices based on both historical and contemporary interfaces, ideas being tested or stillborn, real or imagined. Devices of the past - such as the Theremin, a 1928 sound synthesizer controlled by gestures suspended in the air; pathologies due to the prolonged use of certain equipments, such as the 'glass arm', a paralysis caused by the continued strain of the first telegraphers; controllers described in science fiction novels, such as those in Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy* (1979). Drawing techniques at the threshold of the physical and the digital used by artists and designers, such as *tape drawing*. Prime examples of legal cases that blend the history of copyright with that of contemporary dance, such as the Martha Graham case. In 2002, a judge ruled that the rights to the choreographer's dance pie-

ces belonged to Martha Graham Dance Company. In the video the legal case becomes a sort of meta-dance performance. Or a quote from Giorgio Agamben's "Note sul Gesto", in which he writes that after being diagnosed thousands of times back in the 9th century, certain diseases involving bodily compulsions, such as Tourette's syndrome, have ceased to be identified. According to him, ataxia, twitches and dystonia have progressively become the norm, explaining why we no longer notice them.

"A transparent interface should be able to delete itself, so that the user is not aware of the fact that he is dealing with a medium, but rather finds himself in an immediate relationship with the contents of such medium." In many of the patents or in the actions of the performers we might recognise familiar gestures, or surreal ones. The voice and the bodies in the video narrate a story in a non-linear way: that of interfaces called *Natural User Interface*. Unlike control systems based on the use of a keyboard or mouse, natural user interfaces are based on intuitive and coherent gestures, or ones that are similar to codes and languages that our bodies have already learnt. This is why it is also said that they are –or can become– invisible: the gestures are so 'natural' that they gradually become automatic, invisible and incorporated by users. They become part of a language shared by millions of bodies. We make them ours. At least apparently, because they actually belong to the companies that have invented and registered them. Through gestures, firms program and trick our bodies' behaviours. Speaking about the history of interfaces means dealing not only with technological development, but also with the histories of thought and knowledge. Because interfaces transform and shape our ways of thinking and structuring the world. Part of this transformation is inscribed in our bodies and gestures, such as leafing through the pages of a book or pinching with finger and thumb to enlarge an image.

Claudia D'Alonzo

Julien Prévieux (1974, Grenoble, France): Lives and works in Paris. His work has been exhibited in France (Musée d'Art Contemporain, Marseille; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Jeu de Paume, Paris; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, FRAC Basse-Normandie, 2012; Galerie Jousse Entreprise, Paris; Galerie Edouard Manet, Gennevilliers), the Netherlands (Witte de With, Rotterdam), Austria (Kunsthalle Krems), Taiwan (Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts), United States (RISD Museum of Art, Providence, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery), and at the 10th Istanbul Biennale, Turkey. He was one of the nominees for the 2014 Prix Marcel Duchamp. www.previeux.net