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ON ARTWORKS AND SPACE TRAVELLERS

Abstract

This paper explores the implementation of works of art into future space habitats and their possible benefits for the astronaut. It hereby outlines intersections of artistic and scientific interrogations appropriate for concerted research. Within this frame, the paper questions the potentials of artworks to help spacefarers cope with physical, psychological and socio-psychological constraints they are likely to experience and which are described in the literature about humans in extreme environments.

The five headings covered are Limitlessness, Placelessness, Sensorialness, Homelikeness, and Closeness. The first category presents the 'Artwork of Limitlessness', a supportive aid for human cognition under conditions of weightlessness and multidirectionality. The newly designed forms in this artistic prototype aspire to release the individual from his/her internalised search for bodily orientation. The 'Artwork of Placelessness' compensates for enormous interplanetary distance through comparisons between the 'here' and 'there'. These are triggered by depictions of earthly places which are meaningful to the cosmic recipient and provide a virtual closeness. As a third category, the 'Artwork of Sensorialness' transfers elements of Earth's natural environment into the space habitat, thus stimulating the space traveller's senses. The 'Artwork of Homelikeness' structures daily life onboard and distracts crew and spacefarers from their isolated and monotonous living situation. This artwork offers social activities that enable normality despite isolation in an extremely dangerous situation. Finally, the 'Artwork of Closeness' stimulates self-entertainment. Effective artworks will give the individual privacy and contact with the self.

The result of the paper shows that on the foundation of the identified categories artworks can become effective aesthetical tools. These novel works of art can provide astronauts with relaxation and meaningful occupation. They follow human needs and can counteract spatial disorientation, sensorial or social under-stimulation as well as the Earth-out-of-view phenomenon. In addition to these benefits, artistic applications will provide the cosmic recipient with objects of reflection and in so doing they connect the astronaut with Earth and its unique phenomena, qualities that are interpreted as beneficial while being off the planet.