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COGITO: FROM THE EARTH-CENTRED TO THE COSMOS-WIDE PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

Recent experiments in physics seem to open important philosophical questions on the nature of matter. Also experiments in quantum physics suggest links between the matter of the mind and that of the cosmos, raising further questions on the nature of consciousness and perception. The theory on consciousness, called Orchestrated Objective Reduction, conceived by Dr. Stuart Hameroff and Sir Roger Penrose, unlike other theories that consider consciousness as generated solely by complex interaction among brain neurons, suggests that consciousness additionally requires some type of quantum physical process intrinsic to the universe. Inspired by the ongoing debate on the nature of perception and consciousness in relation to the cosmos, 'Cogito' ('I think') is a performance-installation speculating on the creative and philosophical possibilities of exploring the cosmos by means of radio waves, while communicating with extraterrestrial intelligence. The project aims at recording the 'cogito' (as EEG rhythms) of visitors in exhibition spaces, wearing a headset while walking in an empty, white space. The recorded brain waves are then sent into space as a beacon transmission by the Dwingeloo radio telescope in The Netherlands. The project will be further developed in collaboration with the 'Overview Institute', a group of researchers engaged with the study of the 'Overview Effect' (the effect of seeing the Earth from outside its surface) on the cognitive state of astronauts who had the opportunity to witness the sight of the Earth from space. A brain lab will be permanently installed inside the cabin of the Dwingeloo radio telescope, in order to be used by visitors who will transmit their thoughts into outer space, while experiencing, the immersive view of the Earth seen from space through a visual simulator. 'Cogito', the key word in the philosophical proposition by René Descartes, aims at linking my artistic practice to the ongoing debate on mind-body-consciousness, of which René Descartes was an important figure for his dualistic vision on the mind-body matter, that greatly influenced the development of modern Western philosophy. In the Western cultural tradition, the mind is still considered as the site of one's conscious existence. Sending thoughts into outer space is thus a symbolic action for questioning this tradition whilst communicating with intelligent extraterrestrial life, through a language that challenges logical reasoning and the conventional notion of intelligence. In 'Cogito', sending thoughts into outer space suggests a symbolic action for shifting our consciousness from the Earth-centred perspective, to the Cosmos-wide perspective.