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‘COGITO IN SPACE’: FROM THE EARTH-CENTRED TO THE COSMOS-WIDE PERSPECTIVE

Abstract

‘Cogito in Space’ is an interdisciplinary art project speculating on the creative and philosophical possibilities of exploring the cosmos by means of radio waves. The project allows participants to send their brain activity into space, as a symbolic action for shifting awareness from the Earth-centred perspective, to the cosmos-wide perspective. The project has been developed in collaboration with Frank White, author of ‘The Overview Effect’, a pivotal essay which studies the psychological and physiological changes on the astronaut’s mind, after experiencing the sight of the Earth seen from outer space. As part of ‘Cogito in Space’, a brain lab has been set inside the cabin of the Dwingeloo radio telescope in The Netherlands, in order to be used by visitors who wish to send their brain activity into outer space, while experiencing a video in virtual reality, created especially for the project and inspired by ‘The Overview Effect’. Each visitor is prepared for the experience by a neuroscientist, using a highly sensitive electroencephalogram (EEG) device. The brain activity is transmitted in real time across a large portion of the sky, without a specific target, highlighting the Earth’s rotation and our place in the cosmos while the experience takes place. Before entering the cabin and transmitting their brain waves into space, visitors are guided by an anthropologist and performer artist to explore the area surrounding the scientific facilities for experiencing the animal and botanical diversity of the Dwingelderveld National Park. The naturalistic visit is based on principles of Big History and aims at inspiring in the visitors a stronger sense of connection with the Earth’s habitat, before symbolically leaving the planet. ‘Cogito in Space’ is an interdisciplinary, collaborative project and the result of six years research at the Dwingeloo radio telescope and ASTRON (The Netherlands Institute for Radio Astronomy). The project is conceptually complex, however the main idea behind it is to create a connection between the mind of the viewer and his or her idea of ‘universe’. As cosmology progresses in the discovery of the universe, the role of the mind in the interpretation of the picture of ‘reality’ remains largely unknown. The way our mind works might be fundamental to understanding the universe, the mirroring effect between mind and matter might be essential to comprehend our very unique - and possibly arbitrary - notion of the universe and our life within it.