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MARE INCOGNITO: POETIC RESONANCE BETWEEN DEEP SLEEP AND THE COSMOS

Abstract

Mare Incognito is an interdisciplinary project directed by media artist Daniela de Paulis and culminating in the film recording of a live performance during which the brain activity of deep sleep is transmitted into space in real time. The project explores the moment during the sleep cycle while awareness seems to dissolve and while the self gradually minimises and detaches from the continuous life narrative. The perceived loss of consciousness during sleep is the only moment in daily life when the thinking process and self-awareness gradually shred into an unfathomable void, an experience possibly similar to the moment of dying. Mare Incognito thus poetically explores and draws reflection upon the process of dying as a daily experience in human life. The performance conceptually links the dissolution and symbolic death of the self as experienced during deep sleep with the darkness, coldness and vacuum of outer space and explores how such immeasurable forms of space and emptiness might poetically resonate with each other. The title of the work hints at a journey into the obscure oceans of inner and outer space. The project crosses various fields of research, including radio astronomy, neuroscience, performance art and cosmology. Mare Incognito is a collaboration bringing together and stimulating intellectual exchange among researchers from renowned international institutions. The film recording shows the live performance with the artist transmitting her brain activity into space while sleeping amongst the radio antennas of the Square Kilometre Array at the Mullard Radio Observatory in Cambridge. The project brought together neuroscientists specialised in sleep and consciousness studies from the Donders Centre in the Netherlands and the University of Cambridge in the UK. It also allowed the neuroscientists to collaborate with the radio astronomers at the Mullard Radio Observatory and a cosmologist from the Max Planck Institute. The performance has been filmed by Dutch film maker Mirjam Somers and photographer Bas Czerwinski.