

## Eduardo Kac's *Télescope intérieur*

Eleanor Heartney

One could write the history of western science as the story of humanity's efforts to free itself from external constraints. From Copernicus to Galileo to Newton to Einstein, the picture has evolved from a fixed world guided by Divine Law to one in which matter, space and time are shifting entities mutually interpenetrating and reforming each other. In this narrative, gravity has been one of humankind's most powerful constraints – exerting not only a physical force, as it literally holds us on the ground, but also a metaphoric one that determines the limits and direction of what is possible. Take for instance, our standard map of the world – it has a top and bottom, normally aligned from North to South, as if our suspended globe really had a correct and incorrect orientation. Or look at written language, unfolding in fixed frames of space and time, again with a correct and incorrect orientation.

But what if the constraints of gravity could be lifted – as they actually are in deep space? A radical experiment in human perception is currently being carried out in the International Space Station, where astronauts from many nationalities conduct a variety of scientific experiments. Operating in a gravity free zone, the Space Station creates an environment in which it is possible to shed physical, geopolitical and disciplinary limitations. In the process, it makes it possible for the first time to pose such questions as: Are new kinds of human experience possible? Would a humanity without gravity escape certain divisions long thought to be inevitable?

Eduardo Kac's *Télescope intérieur* [Inner Telescope] addresses such questions. An extension of his long time concern with what he called Space Poetry, this is a work that was realized by Thomas Pesquet in the space station in 2017. The work is radically concise in form – consisting of two sheets of paper that were cut and shaped in space to create the three-letter word MOI (French for *me*). The M is created from the first piece of paper that has been folded and cut so that, from one perspective, it suggests the shape of that letter. From the other (or “upside down”) perspective, the form suggests the image of a human being. A hole cut in the middle of this sheet of paper becomes the O and is also the opening in which a cylinder formed from the second piece of paper is inserted. This becomes both the I and the eye—forming a telescope through which different vistas can be glimpsed. Seen from the other (or “upside down”) point of view, this cylindrical form resonates with the human form, evoking an umbilical cord cut off, thus making *Télescope intérieur* also a sculpture. Created in deep space, the MOI has no up or down and can be focused in any direction. As such it provides a model for a gravity free consciousness, a radically new and different sense of subjectivity.

*Télescope intérieur* combines a number of Kac's ongoing preoccupations. These include his longtime interest in the visual and kinesthetic aspects of poetry. Here, floating freely in space, this poem addresses both earthbound and celestial audiences. As such, it draws on the artist's works that facilitate communication between species and between organic and inorganic life forms. It also follows his previous works transmitted to outer space that attempt to communicate with extra terrestrial beings. And in its escape from narrowly prescribed frames of reference, the work advances Kac's dream of a networked reality where mutuality replaces relationships of hierarchy and power. *Télescope intérieur* thus expresses a utopian vision that points beyond the apocalyptic mindsets that currently constrain our thinking. Instead, it offers the hopeful vision of an expansive future made possible by a reconditioned human race.

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Eleanor Heartney is a New York–based art critic and Contributing Editor to *Art in America* and *Artpress*. Among her books are *Art and Today*, *Postmodernism*, and *Postmodern Heretics*. She is a co-author of *After the Revolution: Women who Transformed Contemporary Art* and *The Reckoning: Women Artists in the New Millennium*.