



## Eduardo Kac, towards an anti-gravitational culture

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At a time when Elon Musk is eyeing a billion-dollar project to send humans to colonise Mars, others are investigating the same question... with a piece of paper and a pair of scissors. With his Inner Telescope, Eduardo Kac has given birth to the first extraterrestrial artwork, in collaboration with French astronaut Thomas Pesquet.

The work in question has no top or bottom, no front or back. It's an object that reproduces and interweaves the three letters of the word moi ("me" or "myself" in French). A poem, an object to read and observe from no one single viewpoint. Made up of two sheets of paper and several cut-out shapes, Moi started its levitation in space during Thomas Pesquet's inaugural performance, in April 2017. Its design is simple as economy of means was a critical factor for the European Space Agency's Proxima mission, with the artist's challenge being to develop a project by using materials readily available at the space station. The shape taken by the word moi recalls that of the space vessel itself, its tube suggesting the modules while its flat surface echoes the solar panels. At the Galerie Charlot, an exhibition presenting the project in July 2017 offered a mix of mediums: there were several editions of Moi in paper, a first-person video at the GoPro, presenting the performance, the object's levitation, with a superb shot of Moi floating in front of three windows that offered a glimpse of the blue planet, and Thomas Pesquet's hands, as well as drawings and embroideries, photos of the first tests, and artist's books following the project. A zero-gravity interview...

### **The roots of Inner Telescope can be traced far back in your work. Can you tell us about its origins?**

The project began in 2007, but its roots go back to the 1980s. I created my first digital poem in 1982, and the first holographic poem in 1983. Through these poems, that are based on language but extend to wider poetic creation, not aimed at books but other forms of expression and reading, I explored a deeper ontology for the poetic object.

### **Could you elaborate on this?**

The entire history of art, from cave art to contemporary art, has not escaped from the circumstances imposed by gravity. Artists have always implicitly accepted this restriction, and it has never been questioned in a deep manner. Pollock's paintings couldn't have been created in space... So it was natural for me to ask the question about what art would be like if we escaped from it, if there were no gravity.

### **How do you relate poetry to this?**

There is an internal dialogue between poetry and art. And writers have also been subject to the same restriction. In my research on the issue, I've never managed to find a system of social writing which is emancipated from the logic of gravity, whether Western Latin and German systems, along with Oriental, Hebraic, Arabic systems, or Asian ideographical systems... None of them escapes from top-to-bottom movement. I call this "gravitropism". Similarly, ink penetrates paper due to the force of gravity. So I asked myself: what type of poetry could develop if the restriction of gravity didn't exist?

### **How did you transcribe this in formal terms?**

My texts from the 1980s already responded to this question, but conceptually. I made words float, I changed the shape that they took in space thanks to holograms or digital tools. In terms of perception, light doesn't undergo the action of gravity. This is a form of writing that I call "antigravimorphic". Working free of gravity is an old dream... which came to life in April 2017.

**With Inner Telescope, we might be tempted to think that you perpetuate the movement of sculpture. Sculpture that steps off its pedestal or is suspended in the air, to conquer the gallery's space, before inhabiting zero-gravity space. But in the many documents presented at the Galerie Charlot, you refer to an "object" or a "poem", and never a "sculpture"...**

Emancipation from the sculptural language of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a fascinating process, and the practice of sculpture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is widening, and becoming increasingly hybrid. But I find the word "sculpture" too closed. The words "poem" and "art" are far more open, and I prefer presenting my work from a perspective of maximised openness... Inner Telescope is an ambitious project as it stands for a few things. It is both the first outer-space performance and the first work not to be created on Earth, conceived outside the framework of gravitational laws. It is a pioneering act in the establishment of a genuine space culture. Space culture is not what humans think about space, what they see from afar, from Earth; it is culture springing from life liberated from gravitational force, culture that emerges from the spectacular upheaval entailed by living in space. When there will no longer merely be astronauts in space, but also artists, creators and musicians, I'm sure that a new culture will develop. In space, we lose our sense of smell and when there's no gravity we don't cook in the same way as we do on firm land. This will give birth to a new anti-gravitational gastronomy. We won't play the same musical instruments, as remarked by Thomas Pesquet, who wasn't able to play saxophone during his odyssey - and this will bring about a new form of music. And also new fashions, with T-shirts measuring 10 metres long, for example! What culture will emerge from this new humanity with new conditions of existence? What type of theatre? What art? What poetry? We're talking about a change in paradigm, and I wanted to lay down the founding act of poetry in this new culture.

**The first artistic act traced by man in space is your Moi. How did your choice come about?**

Sending Moi into space is an invitation to inhabit it, and to reflect on a new humanity, to renew oneself. A rebirth, the start of something new. Moi didn't come from Earth, but it was born elsewhere, as an extraterrestrial. The first child to be born on Mars will not be an earthling, but he will be a human. There's also a whole poetic genealogy that comes into play. The "me" emerged with the Greek lyrical poetry of Sappho or Archilochus; it has been the basic particle in poetry for centuries. The birth of a new "me" in space represents a genuinely new departure. We won't be able to measure the scope of this gesture until a new extraterrestrial culture develops.

**Even if Thomas Pesquet led the performance, its sequence and the poetic object were limited by a specific procedure...**

Inner Telescope took place over several stages. First, the prototypes, then Thomas Pesquet's learning of the procedure. Next, he became the actor of the performance, and finally, the first reader of an anti-gravitational poem when the work became autonomous and began to levitate. The changing of the subject's position, from actor to reader, is part of the procedure. The object also bears an importance. Textual and objectual reading changes as it levitates. This is what I call a kinaesthetic reading: reading with the whole body.

**What is the goal of kinaesthetic reading? You've recently developed olfactory poems, "aromapoetry"...**

Giving the whole body over to reading. In the case of aromapoetry, it's a matter of recognising our own animality. It's an upset of the cultural hierarchy. As a result of evolution, we've become stereoscopic beings in that our vision has become focused. It's our way of capturing reality, it's what has given form to words and so on. But not all animals are like that. Dogs privilege their sense of smell, for example. For us, vision is what matters. Creating a work in which smell is of prime importance means overturning the hierarchy of our culture's approach to the senses. It's a question of lowering cognition and raising the level of less utilised, less noble senses... Aromapoetry allows perception of a sense that we possess, but which we don't know much about because of our cultural prejudices. It's an experience of animality, and I'm in favour of interspecies communication in art. I'm interested in the phenomenon of communication in its widest possible sense.

**All poetry requires a grammar, which may be transgressed, but which has a structure. What is the grammar of your poetic forms - holopoetry, aromapoetry, biopoetry?**

The themes of poetry are always quite similar: anguish, hope, sex, love, death, sensations, war... In short, the human experience. What changes is the form. All poets express their sensibilities by their syntax. Mine is a syntax of movement, turbulence, transformation, in which the text is never completed, stable, fixed. A syntax freed of book pages. In the way that gravity is an implicit restriction, the book is also an implicit restriction for poets. But it's not compulsory. This is my contribution to writing, this staking out of territory in relation to the book. We should be able to call on several registers of syntax and writing. Holograms and digital forms are also magnificent forms of writing. And breaking free from gravity is wonderful - it goes without saying!

