

Becoming an Oikos

M. Turšič¹

¹*Waag Society, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, miha@waag.org*

1. Introduction

Space exploration has shown that the Cartesian human in association with techné lacks the capacity to enliven abiotic environments outside of Earth. Ecological thought understands that only oikos, the interconnection between numerous living agencies and the environment, can meet the challenges of pioneering into extreme habitable worlds. Thus, an exploration of hybrid ecological, technoscientific and anthropological epistemes applied to extraterrestrial environments is necessary to assist functional but earth-bound categories of knowledge in their becoming out-of-the-cradle systems of thought. With *Becoming an Oikos*, we research different epistemic modes of being human in non-terrestrial conditions.

Although natural sciences and humanities have been considered separate domains for over four centuries, we are beginning to realize it is not possible to understand the human condition as separate from the living environment that shaped it. This insight is clearest when studying the human condition in the abiotic surroundings of outer space, which comes as a novel challenge for humanities. Thus one of the big frontiers in humanities studies is not just the question of relations between humans, technologies and the environment, but the very epistemes within which observations, perceptions and appearances take shape.

2. From techné to Oikos

Outer space is an extreme living environment, but it appears so especially from an anthropocentric perspective that seeks to establish human materiality outside its natural habitable zone. At the moment the capacity of terrestrial life that is most represented in outer space is space technology. Techné (technology in the widest sense) historically emerged as an extension of the human body with which oekonomus (ancient Greek meaning the manager, housekeeper) managed the oikos (ancient Greek meaning the family, the family's property, and the house). With oekonomus reaching into outer space, Earth's oikos extends beyond terrestrial living materiality. Satellites, probes and rovers are not merely human prostheses; they are also extensions of terrestrial life. They are not just human-made, they are the product of "more than human" efforts.

Contemporary economic models, in general, take resources as a given and have a blind spot for material processes that established and continuously replenish the capacities used by humans in the production process. Since humans are not isolated entities but share existence and body with non-human organisms [1], taking credit for all production in a closed (biological) system (i.e. Earth as such) is an ideologically biased perception. However, it is true that the ecology of life [2] has evolved from simple forms into more complex cultural forms that start to compete with natural forms.

Human reach into outer space is thus not just human; it's also non-human. For example, the "less than human non-human" [1], the microbiomes are confronted with outer space conditions in intimacy with the astronauts' bodies dwelling on the space station. Another example is the "extended non-human", where techné is the mode with which we observe and sense outer space materiality. However, if we aim to reach outer space embodiment [3], an emancipated and self-sustainable life system has to be established. Life does not begin here or end there, or connect a point of origin with a final destination, but rather keeps on going, finding a way through the myriad of things that form, persist and break up in its currents [4]. Life is not self-contained form, it's formed together with living environment, or more precisely, the living environment is produced by living entities through their life [2]. Existing techné has proven to lack Spinoza's capacity to act [5] or Morton's essence [1] with which it could form a sustainable living environment. To achieve that, a more complex system is required, one like Earth's ecosystem or experimental closed biological systems. We can understand extreme environments as other-than-human living environments, where humanness can be extended with its non-human extensions and counterparts.

If we seek to establish a living environment outside the Earth, we should consider doing that not with techné but with oikos. And that is another paradigm, where the contemporary dominant technoscientific episteme would have to evolve towards an ecological episteme, as British philosopher Timothy Morton describes the ecological thought is a thought about ecology, but it also thinks ecologically. Thinking the ecological thought is part of an ecological project [1]. German philosopher Erich Hörl goes even further with environmentality as a new contemporary condition, discussing how we must take into account our environmental becoming, not only of

technology, but also of power, thinking, and the world itself [6].

We can conclude, that if we aim to establish a sustainable human presence in outer space, emancipated from the Earth, then the oconomus has to become one with the oikos.

3. References

[1] Morton T.: *Humankind, Solidarity with Non-Human People*, Verso Books, 2017.

[2] Ingold T.: *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, Routledge; Reissue edition 2011.

[3] Braidotti R.: *The Posthuman*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.

[4] Ingold T.: *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, Routledge, 2011.

[5] Spinoza B.: *Ethics*, 1677.

[6] Hörl E., Burton J.(eds.): *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013.