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WANDERING THROUGH THE SPACES OF THE SOUL

For the occasion of the Holland Festival Aorta is darkened. The whole building, a place run by artists in the very hart of the city of Amsterdam, effaces itself for the benefit of a sparkling painting. At closer view it appears to be the video-projection of data, gathered, processed and stored in a computer by Jeffrey Shaw. The 3 x 5<sup>m</sup> screen lies on the bottom of the many-storeyed open space. The audience looks down on it. The word "looks", by the way, expresses only very clumsily the complex experience caused by this audio-visual environment.

The changing images of Shaw's The narrative landscape are coupled with a cloud of sounds, in which the narrating voice is the most outstanding element. Sometimes the narrative has the character of a monologue intérieur, of an emotional effusion, sometimes one hears questions asked or advice given, then again a dialogue arises, or a hard-to-follow combination of parts of sentences. And while it is true that the contents of the spoken text at first escapes one's attention because of the prominent presence of the image, there arises nevertheless a friendly and communicative climate, in which the spectator feels appealed to and involved.

Jeffrey Shaw ( 1944, Melbourne) created with his computer a structure in which he gives a certain place to feelings, memories and images that fascinate him. A house with nine rooms, each of which has its own history and its own atmosphere. Now that it is completely furnished the door is unlocked and visitors are invited to an extensive visit.

The architect/decorator himself calls it a "landscape". The first picture in each of the nine compartments shows a part of the earth's crust seen from the air. A city-map, for example, or the pattern written in the fields by a farmer's tractor.

In addition, the basic image, to which one returns after every visit, consists of a satellite-picture of the earth - " A cliché", says Shaw, " but nonetheless one of the most beautiful images of our times". On this, Hebrew letters are

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projected , that refer to the signs of the zodiac. A rather ambiguous perspective, that may not make sense rationally, but gives no problem at all to the imagination. Red lines divide this basic picture in nine fields. The number nine (three times three) was chosen because of the repeating factor in which eventually a circle lies enclosed. Every ninth part in its turn is build up out of three pictures, that together make a "story". The uniting links are formed by texts, written by playwright Dirk Groeneveld. The first pictorial stage ~~Always~~ always refers to the landscape, the second to people, the circumstances in which they live or their feelings, and the last stage is the abstract transcription of the first two: a formal symbol. The relation between the three images, which in painting would be called a triptych, is intuitive. Associations on formal aspects can play a role. So the picture of patterns made by tractor wheels in a field is followed by a photograph of someone hiding his face behind his hands, so that his fingers form comparable ritmical lines. In this case the soundtrack is partly made up by a tango. The spanish song tells about a man in despair/who confesses a crime to the police. On this eventually is superimposed an illustration from a book about chiromancy. The lines in the palm are marked with symbols.

This work, the conception of which costed only a fraction of the time necessary for the technical realisation, presents some exciting innovating aspects. The most remarkable is the steering-stick, with the help of which the visitor can choose his own course through the house of Shaw's imagination. In this it is ~~is~~ different from the watching of a static work of art as , e.g., a painting, that often does not hold the attention much longer than a couple of minutes. The narrative landscape provokes in the spectator an attitude that is active as well as intense. It is a completely new experience to travel again through a territory already known. It gives the sensation that one can go back in time. Fascinating is the possibility to zoom in on the images with the help of the joy-stick. The detail then loses its structure and becomes more abstract as it is enlarged.

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Within any of the pictures the development of painting is repeated in a nutshell. A figurative representation changes into a glowing impressionist landscape and eventually becomes a constructivistic study of color.

The computer proves to be incomparably better in rendering fine details than video is. Out of the three primary colors blue, red and green (!), 254 mixed colors can be composed. The spectator at one moment feels he is the painter himself, then again he is contemplating a landscape and can put on spectacles, as it were, to study the details - which gives one a godlike sensation.

The language is also subjected to a complete proces of recreating, now that it proves possible to transform a monologue by computer into a dialogue.

What is presented now in Aorta is the first part of a series called The architecture of the body - the body of architecture. It looks like a new step - and that is a surprise in these times of regression and synthesis.