

JEFFREY SHAW *virtual world voyaging*

"HEAVENS GATE"

Felix Meritis 1787-1987, Shaffy Theater, Amsterdam, Holland 1987
sound composed by Harry de Wit

The conceptual and iconographic inspiration of this work came from the tradition of European ceiling paintings. Specific characteristics of these paintings are explored here:

- the tromp l'oeil and anamorphose techniques which directly address the spectator and draw him physically and emotionally into the illusionary space of the painting;
- the dissolution of the boundary between the material/architectonic space and the immaterial/painterly space;
- the fact that the spectator looks up to see the work, which is a psycho-physical orientation that associates with the sky and the transcendental;
- the image of the human figure seen from below and released from the constraints of gravity;
- the important role of music, not only performed live in those churches, but also in the recurrent iconography of musicians playing instruments in the sky, a reference to the notion of the 'music of the spheres' and celestial harmony.

For its presentation at the Shaffy theater, this work addressed itself to the meanings embodied in the architecture of that building - the upward flight of the central spiral staircase going up to the skylight beyond which originally was an observatory on the roof of the building. HEAVENS GATE extends this architectural conjunction of earth and heaven by its physical and conceptual location in this central vertical axis. It also does this in its iconographic form by interleaving two planes of imagery - quotations from Baroque ceiling paintings, satellite images of the world, and other conjunctions of images of 'above' and 'below'.

The installation itself consisted of a large (3m x 4m) video projection screen hung at the top of the stairwell. At the bottom of the stairwell a mirror of the same dimensions was placed on the floor, which reflected again the whole length of the stairwell with the video image now appearing far below. The spectator could thus look at the work both above and below, from any position on the staircase.

The video tape itself was created entirely by means of digital video processing of chosen images. The capability of such video processing equipment to manipulate the actual pixels of an image in a three dimensional space made it possible to create here a mode of representation that could evoke the traditional anamorphosis and tromp l'oeil of Baroque ceiling painting in new terms.

Harry de Wit's musical composition for this work extended the notion of an upward and downward image space - two separate stereophonic soundtracks were made, one emanating from above the projection screen at the top of the stairs, the other located at the bottom of the stairwell on the floor.

