

HEAVEN CAN WAIT: THE REVOLVING RESTAURANT AS HYPERCINEMA

Bull.Miletic

The cinema is an idealistic phenomenon. The concept men had of it existed so to speak fully armed in their minds, as if in some platonic heaven ...

—André Bazin, *The Myth of Total Cinema*¹

In the early 1960s cities around the world raced to build revolving restaurants atop hotels, office buildings, and communica-

tion towers, considering them to be unequivocal symbols of modernity and progress. These venues attracted customers with the spectacle of a dramatic “moving view,” while ensuring uninterrupted access to that view over the course of a visit. From a purely technical standpoint, the revolving restaurant can be characterized as a form of kinetic architecture invented in the wake of postwar progress and technological optimism in Germany in 1959. This patented invention soon enjoyed widespread popularity during the Cold War 1960s, thanks in part to unprecedented technological progress on a global scale. Today there are more than two hundred such restaurants spinning around the world, and their elevated “revolving views” continue to attract and impress patrons across generations.

Our first revolving restaurant experience in Top of the World, located more than 200 meters above the Las Vegas Strip in the Stratosphere Tower, sparked the idea for *Heaven Can Wait*, an art project that evolved into a lifelong endeavor to record on video the “rotating views” from all the editions worldwide. Built in 1996, Top of the World represents what we recognize as a possible revival of the 1960s phenomenon, whose glorious promise had by the 1980s already deteriorated into a faded symbol of consumerism and an awkward reminder of naive expectations about the future in the West. When one views the exterior scenery from a revolving restaurant rotating at a snail’s pace, perceiving it as a cinematic spectacle is almost inevitable. Just as traveling on a train or in a car can recall watching moving images on the silver screen, the concentric journey in the revolving restaurant’s magnificent panoramic view inspires ponderings on mediated movement and time in film and video. In our project, we are profoundly intrigued by the intimate connection between the genealogy of moving images and the revolving restaurant experience.²

This text represents the groundwork in taking a firmer grasp of a more theoretical investigation to which the process of resolving our ever-expanding art project has led us.³ In what follows, we will reflect on the origins of viewing practices inherent in the revolving restaurant by revisiting accounts of protocinema as well as early film. We are primarily interested in how the panorama and other visual entertainments of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries foreshadow the fundamental qualities of early cinema and provide a historical base for understanding the nature of moving images. We will commence by providing a few historical facts about revolving architecture and the development of the revolving restaurant. As we proceed into the histories of immersive environments, view aesthetics, and the significance of mechanical motion, an area of research pioneered by Tom Gunning and Giuliana Bruno, among others, we hope to answer some questions related to the cinematic spectacle that dominates the revolving restaurant experience. Our goal is to discover whether the revolving restaurant can be seen as the *ultimate* hypercinematic interface, which inverts the paradoxes of cinematic spectatorship.



Bull.Miletic. “Heaven Can Wait” (2001-ongoing). Installation view.
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