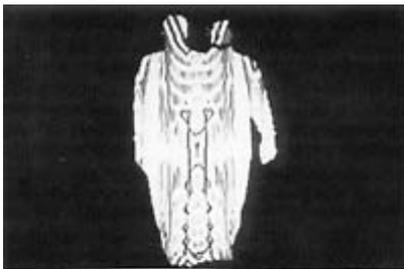


Electronic Purgatory
Kristi Allik / Robert Mulder



Electronic Purgatory. Video Image
Foto: Robert Mulder



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A digital music-theatre composition for performers, interactive theatre, and electro-acoustic music.

Electronic Purgatory is a Digital Music-Theatre composition. Digital Music-Theatre is a form of multidisciplinary theatre in which traditional staging agents have been augmented or replaced with electro-acoustic instruments and computer generated / controlled visuals.

All the constituents of the production are generated and / or controlled "live" by the performers / creators (interactors) on the stage by means of an interactive multi-computer network. Consequently all elements, both visual and aural, are generated, realized and manipulated in real-time.

The piece was started in the fall of 1989 and was completed in December 1991. A short version of Electronic Purgatory was first performed at the ISCM "World Music Days" in Oslo, Norway, on September 24, 1990.

Synopsis

Essentially Electronic Purgatory is an audio-visual essay which is inspired by modern quantum physics, and the fact that many of the current mathematical answers in that brand of science appear to have an almost metaphysical quality. The artists cast the physical development of their performance along a structural form first designed by Dante Alighieri for his Divine Comedy. The "many worlds" principle, which suggests that multiple realities can exist on different dimensions, all at the same time, was taken from Stephen Hawking. The name for the piece is a description of the emotions which overcome the performers on the stage, where their role and level of control ranges from the sublime to that of total domination under the electronic forces. Electronic Purgatory is loosely constructed in four movements, the first of which has a Genesis-like flavour and probes the development of the entropy-defying forces of life. In this section the almost god-like gestures of the performers shape a primordial "soup-of-all-possibilities" into increasingly more intricate and perdurable aural and visual forms. In time, these congealing formations reveal the evolution of recognizable physical phenomena. The section concludes with the gradual dissolution of the delicate interdependent layers, leading to a mechanistic, B. F. Skinner-inspired reality. Here Electronic Purgatory struggles with the basic contradictions associated with the state of human awareness: the interactors are confined to an existence where the human spirit is separated from the body, and simultaneously tortured in a "mindscape" sired by its own intellectual limitations, while the corporeal remains are chained to a landscape wrought by the body's own hands.

The work concludes with an exploration into the dynamics of interactive music-theatre, loosely inspired by the idea of parallel relationships encountered in multiple layers of reality as found in the work of Dante Alighieri and Stephan Hawking.

The Staging

Much of the "otherworldly" quality in the work may be attributed to its unique staging design. The "magic" for example, is achieved by superimposing the two interactors electronically on life-sized video screens (VideoWorlds), placed on either side of the stage. For the duration of the piece the interactors are confined to a relatively small stage area, which is completely devoid of any set-like contraptions. A light-absorbing black floor and a black velvet backdrop makes the stage appear even more empty and dark. During the performance, the interactors move in a very slow and deliberate manner, shaping and initiating a multitude of aural and visual phenomena.

In certain sections, the Video Worlds utilize the interactors as "movement generators", which results in dynamic textural displays abstracted from the physical movements of the interactors on the stage. Other sections utilize the physical outline of the body of the interactor as a collage tool, superimposing the body shape on the computer graphics as a shadow-like outline. The "cybernetic choreography" encompasses all levels and elements in the piece; often objects or events that are created or destroyed in one Video World will immediately affect visual elements in the other world.

Technical Information

To achieve a truly interactive and integrated performance, the artists designed a multicomputer network. Each computer in the network is assigned a specific task; for example, each VideoWorld is controlled by an independent computer. A MIDI interface connects each Video World to the network, and via this network receives and sends information to the other computers.

The original concept for Electronic Purgatory called for ten independent Video Worlds, eight-channel sound generation capabilities, and complex multi-image projections, all controlled by a network of Amiga computers.

The physical staging of the piece is extremely flexible, many performance variations are possible, all of which are taken from the original multi-video world staging configuration.

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