The Empty Chair:  
an interactive music video performance  
by  
G.E. Lewis  
BERNARD MIXON  
actor, voice  
as  
a prisoner  
DOUGLAS EWART  
actor, musician  
as  
aspirit  
DON RITTER  
real-time, music-driven,  
computer-controlled animation  
(left video screen)  
RAY EDGAR  
real-time, music-driven,  
computer-controlled image processing  
image processing  
(right video screen)  
G.E. LEWIS  
real-time, music-driven,  
computer-controlled music performer  
(all loudspeakers)  
STELLA VERVERIS  
DANIELA ZEHNDER  
camera performers  

this version completed February, 1990  
G.E. Lewis, general direction

All performances dedicated to Stephen McCall IV

The Empty Chair is a performance work whose subject is the experience of incarceration. The performers and the listeners are invited to enter the mind of a composite "model" prisoner (not necessarily a "model . . ."), where what we see and hear is a kind of living exploded diagram of this mind.

My own approach to the design, construction and operation of a performance work is aimed at immersing everyone present, performers and listeners, in an interactive environment optimized for contemplation. Multiple streams of consciousness are manifested through the juxtaposition of media and modes of imagery.

No one person, therefore, should expect to be able to "see everything", in part because the plethora of images and directions, irony piled upon irony, can seem a bit overwhelming, even to the performers. Frankly, I have no trouble at all with this multiplication of imagery. Our real-life experiences are certainly not spoon-fed to us; therefore I see no reason to provide "the official" road-map. As humans living in the world,
we have all proved ourselves more than capable of finding the way
for ourselves.

Moreover, the improvisatory character of the piece demands
that each runthrough of the work be unique. This does not mean,
however, that the work lacks a character of its own. Rather, the
working-out of the structures present in the work allow for many
different possible performances—as if all of a sudden, we decide
to take a different route to the ice-cream shop.

For me, a piece is very personal, and the interpersonal
environment in which I perform and compose must feature trust as
an outstanding component. Posed against this assertion is the
seemingly contradictory notion that the relationship between
computer programs and live performers is central to my work.

Once again, I feel privileged to be able to make a piece for
a small group of uniquely gifted individuals whose lack of fear,
and their insight into new areas of expression, have led them to
actively explore and break the big and little tabus that seem to
hold artists back. And as for the computer programs, it must be
said that nonhumanity need not be equated with inhumanity. We'll
need to remember this fact when the SETI eventually succeeds.

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to pull it all together.