

NIM XXVI February 16, 2006

www.nimmagazine.it
<http://www.nimmagazine.it/node/54>)

Francesco D'Orazio

FEED

An ob-scene performance

Kurt Hentschler's performance is one of the most powerful and invasive performances I ever experienced. It is definitely one of the most intelligent implementations of the idea of immersive communication.

Why is FEED that good? It stresses the visual, audio, olfactory and tactile limits of human perception telling us a story about the evolution of media and the evolution of our sensory experience of the world. Let's start from the very beginning.

We sit in a completely dark environment, with a black screen and a soundscape interwoven with low indistinguishable frequencies that slowly grow and define themselves. As the sound assumes barely identifiable shapes the black screen starts showing first one, then many identical 3D human body models, sexually ambiguous, with no face and completely naked. The bodies fluctuate in the black liquid space of the screen, only moved by sound frequencies that force them into periodical spasmodic contortions. The movements are "procedural", i.e. not manually animated but constantly generated by a video-game graphic engine. The power of sound, the number of bodies and of the convulsions grows progressively in rhythm and intensity until reaching an extreme peak... when the system suddenly shuts down. We're all again immersed in darkness... but what kind of darkness?

Many smoke jets suddenly start flooding the room until it's completely saturated. The fog is so thick that one can neither see one's body, nor one's hands. It's about completely losing perception. All is touch, hearing and smell. Now our real, analog bodies begin fluctuating to the tactile stimulations of massive bass sounds, noses are filled with the smell of dry ice, strobe lightning and colored lamps illuminate the space, evenly spreading through the thick white air. Visual stimulations become so fast and violent that the retina can't even process them and so generates transformative fractals of various colors and shapes. The fog is so dense it feels like touching light.

Thick fog, visual and audio hyper-stimulation shatters the frontal dimension of theatrical spectacle and give an uncanny, oppressive and sacral sensation all at the same time: we are actually inside the liquid blackness of that screen, totally at the mercy of a powerful flow of sound and light. The audience's bodies have replaced the asexual 3D models. Or, better, the screen has wrapped up the physical space through a genial amputation of sight, which has completely reshaped the audience's "sense-ratio". The fog cuts out sight and transforms any visual stimulation into a tactile stimulation. But this is exactly the way media environments evolve, dulling some senses to the advantage of others. This is why FEED is not only a performance but a story of the evolution of media from a *screen paradigm* to an *immersion paradigm* that's no longer based on the detachment of sight but on the *ob-scenity* of touch which destroys the "*scene*" distance between the sign and the audience. In short - we witness the history of media from the age of spectacle to the age of experience in fifty minutes. Absolutely McLuhanesque!