



Kurt Hentschläger

## FEED

*FEED* is a performance without people. It is in two parts: the first is cast by representations of primitive figures, both emaciated and faceless, projected on a screen at cinematic scale. These are animated in the Karma engine, the procedural part of *Unreal Tournament*. This engine produces animations that are not key-framed but rather unfold in “real” time, using dynamic simulations. In *Unreal*, dying characters will twitch and spasm when shot, to create a sense of a slow and perhaps painful death. In *Unreal*, however, the unavoidably serious subject of death is articulated without pathos, the result being camp or satire. Hentschläger instead customizes the engine to produce emotionally charged imagery, so that ethical judgment cannot be exorcised from it.

Further elaborating the expressive possibilities of the real-time 3D engine, Hentschläger has also turned it into the driver of a custom musical instrument made to his own design. In *FEED*, the moving limbs of his eight virtual bodies are tracked within the engine and are thus controlling software synthesizers. While the sound track evokes the clang of funeral bells, the imagery is Gothic, both suggesting the entry portal of a cathedral carved in high relief: identically a descent into hell and an ascent to a cloudy heaven. The resulting impression is synaesthetic, with sound and visuals apparently creating one another.

The second part of *FEED* is a truly immersive environment of flickering light in which the “real” physical world mutates into a primordial soup of pulsing sound, thick artificial fog and stroboscopic light. It is both overwhelming and transportive. We seem to experience the world of those writhing characters and to be similarly driven by an other-worldly physics “engine” in which our autonomic responses are beyond our control. This second part of *FEED* is actually “seen” by the visitor’s brain rather than through his eyes. We are in fact physiologically experiencing “sublime light,” a light that is truly psychedelic. This is the world as viewed by a dying robot clone from the inside of a Turner landscape painting.

As sound and light subside and the smoke ebbs away, we are gradually “reborn” from this unreal heaven or hell. *Feed* manages to be both a moral allegory and, at the same time, a supremely aesthetic experience.

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