

Written by Gary Suarez

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Imagine an uncomfortably warm and seatless room in the bowels of New York City's progressive PS1 gallery, an unintentional recreation of how it must have felt amidst the sweaty, awkward fanatics in attendance for this afterthought over two years ago.

For those unaware, RE-TG was originally meant to be a monumental post-industrial music event, a multi-day festival featuring such fine intergenerational acts as Merzbow, Matmos, Thighpaulsandra, and Pan Sonic, with the astoundingly reunited Throbbing Gristle as the previously unimaginable headliner. For one reason or another, depending of course on the reliability or personal stake of the source, the original concept fell through, and refunds processed to those who had hoped to be part of what could have been an extraordinary happening. However, according to the "pandrogynous" Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, on hand for this U.S. debut screening, Throbbing Gristle as a unit, though perhaps reluctantly as individual members, still wanted to play. So, much to the apparent delight of those who had already purchased nonrefundable airfare to the United Kingdom, a "recording session" was set up in London, one in which only ticketholders would be invited to attend. Somewhat like the event documented on the *Heathen Earth* record, though on a much larger and less intimate scale, this type of concert was far more suited for Throbbing Gristle than some bloated, countercultural Woodstock.

In introducing the film to the small, diverse group assembled Friday evening, Genesis requested that the concert be viewed in an unusual context; this was a performance by four people who don't speak to each other. As the music began, this became apparently obvious, with each member distanced from one another more than just physically. Though the dress code was strictly black for boys, red and black for girls, none of the members seemed aware of each other, at least at first. Cosey Fanni Tutti sat solemnly with her guitar on her lap, surrounded by effects on the floor and a laptop, while on opposite sides of the stage Chris Carter and Peter "Sleazy" Christopherson stood intently behind computer screens, keyboards and gear racks. Alone in the middle was Gen, appearing technophobic on bass, playing the instrument with a Psychic TV branded beer bottle. Save for some very playful inaudible banter between Cosey and Sleazy during the performance, most interaction seemed either technical or borderline hostile.

The setlist consisted of material from *TG Now*, made available to purchase for the first time that very night, as well as what could be considered classics if such terminology qualifies when discussing the work of Throbbing Gristle. My familiarity with the new songs perhaps differentiates my experience from those hearing them for the first time that evening in London, as the audience's expectations must have been so varied. As with any concert from an established act, the excitement felt upon recognition of reconstituted versions of "Persuasion" or "Convincing People" was palpable, though a hit parade this was not. "Hamburger Lady" was perhaps the closest to the original in execution, with Gen playing what had to be the same brass item used on *D.O.A.*

Brainwashed - "RE-TG: Astoria, London" screening, 12/01/06, NYC

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Although not exactly of the same production quality as the live DVDs of Throbbing Gristle labelmates Depeche Mode or Erasure, part of what makes the recorded content so enjoyable is the variety of audience reactions documented in the film. Of note is the joyfully disruptive appearance of John Balance, bearded and dressed like a prisoner in some vaudeville act, his most human moment being when he ran up to engage Sleazy mid-performance like an excited child. While easily the only person who could have gotten away with such a stunt without being forcibly removed, the rest of the audience were equally bursting with energy and emotions. There were tears, spasms, seizures resembling dances, and other indescribable behavior. While some of this comes off as retrospectively comical, particularly with the way the film was edited to spotlight some of the more unintentionally clownish types, I could relate to it, recalling the way I probably look seeing Whitehouse or Suicide. For the audience, Throbbing Gristle's performance was a catharsis, a release of energy pent up in the twenty-something odd years of dormancy of the foursome. By the time the closing "What A Day / Discipline" completed, the crowd hardly had anything left in them.

After the screening, Gen stood in the dark room, lit only by the video screen, fielding questions from the adoring though somewhat shell-shocked attendees. S/he took the opportunity to speak candidly about Mute/EMI and the delay of the new album, now slated for a March 2007 release, as well as to all but defame the three absent conspirators. After so many years apart and a rocky reunion full of logistical and, conceivably, personal challenges, one should expect nothing less from a wrecker of civilization.