

live

## Saying Hello to the Unsound Festival With Carl Craig and Andy Warhol's *Blow Job*

By Andy Beta, Monday, Feb. 8 2010 @ 9:30AM



A still from Andy Warhol's *Blow Job*

**Carl Craig and nsi.**  
**Unsound Festival**  
**Lincoln Center**  
**Friday, February 5**

The Thursday night opening ceremonies for the Polish Unsound Festival at the David Rubenstein Atrium at Lincoln Center confused and delighted an audience of both Upper West Side neighborhood folk and deep electronic music fans. Finnish electronic producer Vladislav Delay abstracted electronic splashes alongside Berliner VJ Lillevan's projections before producer Sebastian Meissner and Polish avant-garde classic quartet Kwartludium re-imagined Cali hardcore punk label SST as mesmeric classical music. No mosh pit broke out.

But it was Friday night's screening and live soundtracks (created by Detroit techno godfather Carl Craig and Berlin's nsi. duo) for Andy Warhol silent films *Blow Job* (1964) and *Kiss* (1963) that proved the festival's love of the long departed pop artist. One can easily imagine the entire festival moving over from Poland after seven years and bringing along Finnish, German, and Romanian artists just to host these events amid Warhol's old environs.

In a recent *New Yorker* piece unpacking Andy Warhol's skill as a provocateur, Louis Menand deduced that the "essence of Warhol's genius was to eliminate the one aspect of a thing without which that thing would...cease to be itself, and then to see what happened." For the films, it meant "movies that eliminated the cinematic." On Friday, however, some of the missing aspects were a bit more obvious: for instance, nsi.'s chief sound manipulator Tobias Freund, who was absent due to a visa mix-up. Vladislav Delay filled in to fiddle with the analog keyboard lines of other nsi. member Max Loderbauer for *Kiss*.

Peeking back over their shoulders to watch reels of 16mm film (approx. 3:20 each) of people making out, Delay and Loderbauer themselves were hesitant at first, less passionate and kinetic than the flickering tongue wrangling overhead. Right when a misplaced electronic skipping sound counteracted an otherwise slow lingering smooch, the packed auditorium itself experienced coitus interruptus as the film came off the reel entirely. A shouting match broke out in my row soon after. But such ruptures established a new edge for the night; when proceedings restarted, the duo refocused and morphed along with the lovers: playful, ruminative, endearing, even a tad sordid.

For *Blow Job*, a 35-minute study of theater director DeVeren Bookwalter's facial reaction in the grips of an off-camera set of lips, Carl Craig exacted a similar intimacy from his analog components. On-screen, the audience was subjected to Bookwalter, off-center and at times out of the frame, as his eyelids fluttered, neck clenched, and mouth grew agape. Warhol's film depicts both ecstasy and separation from its enacting; similarly, Carl Craig away from a packed dancefloor means tantalizing moments of old techno drops rather than full-on release, his sounds always dissolving back into indelible bass frequencies and sizzling cymbal high tones. Dipping into the low range to make the theater throb like a heart (or, since you're at a movie called *Blow Job*, a hard-on), the delicious play of frequencies meant you could be forgiven for shutting your eyes to the on-screen action/ non-action and just feeling it yourself.