



# WRECKERS OF CIVILISATION

THE STORY OF COUM TRANSMISSIONS &  
THROBBING GRISTLE *Simon Ford*



06

6.1

1976

6.2

PROST



Cosey Fanni Tutti in *Towards Thee Crystal Bowl*,  
Galleria Vittorio Emmanuele, Milan, 1976.



6.4

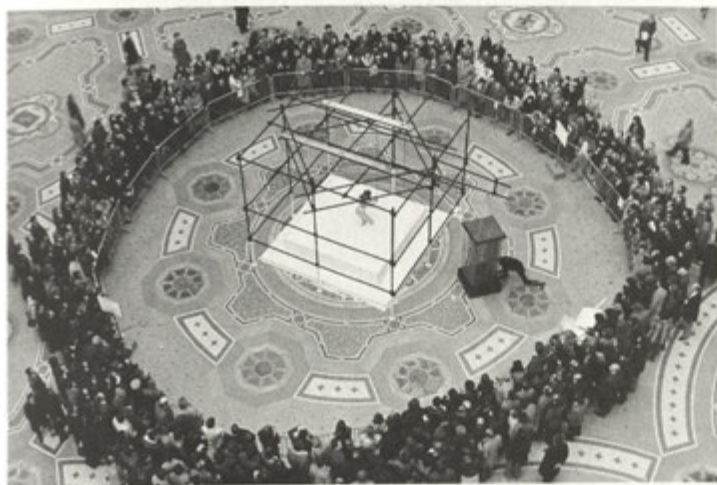
In January 1976 P-Orridge outlined, in a letter to *Vile*, two of what would become that year's main themes: 'alien rock' and prostitution:

We have made a new LP tape called DRY BLOOD TAMPAX and are starting our own record label called Inspid Records. Ready to release our first album of alien rock as 'Throbbing Gristle and thee Xerox Girls.' Buying an echo chamber next week. Then we are set to go. Should be pretty VILE racket and grovel amputee shuffle.... Cosey has been countinuing her Prostitution Actions to support our coum actions. Thee Arts Council have stopped our grant midway, say we are inaccessible (and obscene)... And what is nicest is we never act. Only problem is money and time. Now we are really underground again, finance is harder, we survive by prostitution in every form. Butter that's integral to our way of death anyway.

By the end of the year *Dry Blood Tampax* would be *The Best of Throbbing Gristle Volume 2*, Inspid Records, would be Industrial Records and Throbbing Gristle and the Xerox Girls would be just plain Throbbing Gristle. In October, Tutti's "prostitution actions" became the exhibition *Prostitution* with her and P-Orridge briefly becoming household names, infamous for their fifteen minutes.

COUM's notoriety reached its height just as the British economy hit an all time low. Was there any connection? Some newspaper editors thought so. With the economic and social crisis identified at the end of 1973 refusing to go away, commentators kept themselves busy looking for the latest signs of the Nation's declining standards. By the end of 1976 both COUM and the sinking value of the pound would be taken as proof of the near terminal condition of the once Great Britain. P-Orridge and Tutti did not have to look far outside their Hackney home to see decaying concrete evidence of Britain's desperate post-industrial condition. What they now sought was the aural equivalent to this condition.

In the art world, Gustav Metzger, a veteran of the British avant-garde, was preparing to go on art strike for three years [1977-1980]. Had the avant-garde run out of ideas? Was disappearance and silence the only radical option remaining? Such a strategy of retreat seemed prudent to some at a time when contemporary art was suffering from unprecedented public exposure and criticism. It started in February with Carl Andre's 'bricks', then Mary Kelly's 'nappies' and, the final straw, COUM's 'sex show'. Contemporary art became the subject of discussion in pubs and front rooms throughout the country. But making life comfortable for a troubled and panic-stricken British public was obviously not a high priority for the avant-garde, especially those involved in conceptual and performance art. Both



movements had received substantial funding from public bodies such as the Arts Council and both, because of the inherently anti-commercial nature of their work, depended on that funding to remain viable. Public interest in the antics of the avant-garde would remain high as long as public subsidy of the avant-garde remained high.

The main source of funding for British artists exhibiting or performing abroad was the British Council. COUM had received grants of £52.50 for their travel to the Stadfest in Rottweil and £273.58 for the Paris Biennale. Despite these previous awards it was still a welcome shock when they were invited by the British Council to take part in the major survey show, *Arte Inglese Oggi 1960-1976* (English Art Today 1960-1976) in Milan, during February and March 1976. For their services they were reported to have received £650.40.

Richard Cork described COUM's piece, *Towards Thee Crystal Bowl*, for the *Evening Standard* (4 March 1976): "[COUM] set up a scaffolding structure in the middle of the magnificent Galleria Vittorio Emmanuele arcade. Even before they began their performance an enormous crowd had gathered in this, the heart of Milan's public city life. While the two performers executed their restrained and remarkably balletic dialogue with each other, Cosey for the most part swimming through a 'bath' of polystyrene granules while Genesis moved through the scaffolding above her, the onlookers were all silent with awed concentration."


The 'bath' of polystyrene granules described by Cork, was actually a hastily arranged replacement for the gallons of milk COUM had originally intended to use. Such a provocative display of lactic excess had been banned because the British Council feared that it might have been controversially





Così Fanni Tutti and Genesis P-Orridge in *Towards Three Crystal Balls*,  
Galleria Vittorio Emanuele, Milan, 1976.





linked to the difficulties the EEC was then experiencing with milk quotas. They had also planned to do the action naked. Despite these compromises the action represented the purest expression yet of COUM's exploration of the formal characteristics of performance. "I was the shadow," P-Orridge says, "Cosey was the light and we were trying to mirror each other's body position. My task was to go from the metal 'shower' [a cubicle surrounded by metal chains] up to the sky [the roof of the scaffolding] where I had a camera already placed to take photos

straight down. Cosey's task was to come from the sky down into the milk. All of this was done very slowly and lasted for an hour. As she gradually sank into the white I took photographs." In this instance the relationship between the artist and audience was mediated by the framing devices of the scaffolding and the barriers that had been placed around their performing area. This separation was further extenuated by COUM's refusal of verbal exchange with the audience: the only communication being through movement or gesture.



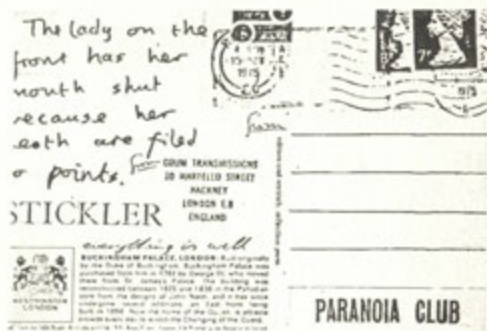
6.9

Ted Little, in his introduction to the performance art section of the exhibition's catalogue, felt it necessary to justify the inclusion of this relatively new art form. He reported that in 1976 at least 150 artists were working in performance art, and he contrasted them with the conceptual artists. The latter he believed had merely "extended the boundaries of what is commercially viable [whereas the] 'performance artist' has shifted the emphasis away from product and focused attention directly on to the actual process of creation itself." Performance artists also had the

advantage of being free to operate outside the conventional gallery space, such as in street performances like COUM's.

According to Little, COUM were concerned with the "large, central, universal issues such as sexuality, death, life, decay, definitions of space, and the nature of authority in society." They highlighted these 'universal' issues through the adoption of the 'non-universal' behaviour of the 'deviant'. COUM believed that examining the obscene—the obverse of the everyday and the familiar—

Genesis P-Orridge, postcard, 1975.



6.10 was vital, and its subject, as it would be for TG, was the return of the repressed. "We were interested in taboos," P-Orridge told Savage, "what the boundaries were, where sound became noise and where noise became music and where entertainment became pain, and where pain became entertainment. All the contradictions of culture."

### G.P.O. versus G.P-O

Such a strategy of antagonism was bound, once again, to bring COUM into conflict with the law. The confrontation came when P-Orridge's 'indecent postcards' case was brought before the court in April 1976. Much of the documentation and correspondence concerning the trial was published in the limited edition book, *G.P.O. Versus G.P-O: A Chronicle of Mail Art on Trial* (1976), from which I quote in the following passages. P-Orridge was facing charges under the 1953 Post Office Act, of sending five 'Postal packets' which had 'thereon an indecent design' or

'indecent words'. The relevant section of the Act read: "11.-(1) A person shall not send or attempt to send or procure to be sent a postal packet which-... (c) has on the packet, or on the cover thereof, any words, marks or designs which are grossly offensive or of an indecent or obscene character."

The case had begun back on 11 and 12 October 1975 when P-Orridge posted two postcards. On 21 November 1975 he, with Colin Naylor present, was questioned by the Post Office Investigation Division and invited to make a statement: "The two cards were sent to other artists and I did not expect anyone other than the addressees to read them, certainly not small type face which was put on for its visual effect."

The first of the two cards (each later reprinted in facsimile by Albrecht D. of Reflection Press in Stuttgart) had on the front a photograph of Buckingham Palace with a

Genesis P-Orridge, postcard, 1975.



portrait of the Queen in the bottom right-hand corner. In the centre P-Orridge had stuck the rear view of a woman wearing suspenders, her hands clasped between her cheeks, covering her crotch. To the left he stuck a cartoon figure in clogs, merrily sowing seeds. The hand-written text on the back read: "The lady on the front has her mouth shut because her teeth are filed to points." The card was addressed to Tim Poston in Geneva. The second card, addressed to 'Biggles' in Leeds, showed an entwined naked couple, leaning against a dungeon wall hung with chains. Stuck on the back was a text cut from a pornographic magazine: "I could hear Angelo breathing heavily, and after a couple of minutes his penis began to harden again... His lips closed around my labia, and he began to suck."

Detective Sergeant Anthony Hulment served P-Orridge with the first summons on 17 January 1976. The court case was originally set for 23 February at Highbury Corner Magistrates Court, but because P-Orridge was performing in



Milan at this time, it was re-arranged to 5 April. The delay did nothing to help P-Orridge's case though, because on 22 February he was asked to make another statement, this time to identify three more 'indecent' postcards, one of which carried a reproduction of the painting *Time Transfixed* (1939) by the Belgian Surrealist René Magritte. P-Orridge made manifest the hidden sexual symbolism of the painting—of a train [penis] exiting a fireplace [vagina]—by the addition of a copulating couple cut from a pornographic magazine. Text from a similar source was collaged on to the verso: "Suddenly her legs began to thresh the air and her fingernails bit deep into my shoulders... Only when I finally softened up did we lie breathless, knowing that our first adulterous fuck had been a tremendous success." P-Orridge addressed the card to Ted Glass, a fictitious artist (who incidentally, also appears in *Contemporary Artists* complete with bogus biographical information and an improbable personal statement).

In preparation for the case P-Orridge wrote to Burroughs for a character reference and advise about solicitors. Burroughs' reply read: "This is to certify that I have known Genesis P-Orridge over a period of four years and that I consider him a devoted and serious artist in the Dada tradition. The postal cards in question were certainly intended neither to titillate nor to offend, but to instruct by pointing up banality through startling juxtapositions.... P-Orridge is an artist and not a pornographer."

On 11 March P-Orridge filled out a Legal Aid form and described himself as an 'artist, editor and publisher' and stated that his present salary was just £1,576 and that he had no savings. The rent for Beck Road was £12.90 per month, with annual rates of £120, and the studio rent was £17.60 per month. Doris the van cost about £75 per year to keep on the road. Unfortunately P-Orridge's application for Legal Aid was refused on 15 March.

6.12

On 30 March P-Orridge wrote to Sir Norman Reid, Director of the Tate Gallery, asking for another character reference. Reid wrote back the next day, concluding that "It seems entirely consistent with his way of working that the use of the mail service should form part of his art activity, and from my own impression of his seriousness I would find it extremely hard to believe that his intentions could be interpreted as serving a pornographic end."

On the 1 April G. M. Forty, Director of the Fine Arts Department of the British Council, wrote in P-Orridge's defence that he was "a professional and wholly committed artist with a serious approach to his work, and if at times it has a mischievous and provoking quality, this is an essential element in an art which is designed to stimulate and to call into question many of our accepted attitudes.... He is... motivated by sincerely held and carefully considered views of his role as an artist in

society, and has shown courage and dedication in pursuing his career in the way he has, rather than opting for more conventional and perhaps rewarding alternatives."

On 2 April Ted Little, Director of the Arts Centre for the Institute of Contemporary Arts, wrote that P-Orridge's "work forms part of a central tradition which is concerned that art should not be seen as a purchasable commodity. He therefore uses performances which incorporate familiar every-day objects, and mail art using 'popular' images. His central ideology is very much concerned with our concept of 'total' art which attempts to closely integrate art and society.... He is, in my view, in no way involved with 'pornography'."

One of the main points in P-Orridge's defence rested on the validity of mail art as an art form. To substantiate this claim he wrote a statement explaining his work in this area: "I like to use an existing popular structure and examine it in a creative way. To extend what is already there and assimilated by society rather than try to impose alien ideas on them... I want to be part of popular culture, involved with everyday life and responses, not an intellectual artist, in an ivory tower, thinking I am special, revered and monumental."

Never one to miss a photo opportunity, P-Orridge publicised the trial as an art event complete with its own wedding-style invitation. He even later listed it as an 'individual show' and included New Scotland Yard as an institution with a collection of his work. Come the day, 5 April 1976, the courtroom audience included Tutti Christopherson, David Offenbach (Solicitor), Pauline Smith (artist), Emil Forman (artist), John Lacey (artist), Ian Breakwell (artist), Richard Cork (art critic and editor), Ted Little (ICA), Jill Bruce (artist), Bruce Lacey (artist), Colin Naylor (editor), Sheldon Williams (art critic), Housework (performance artists),

Collective Actions (founder of Art Meeting Place), and Barbara Reise (art critic and editor).

P-Orridge's wish for publicity materialised when Duncan Campbell described the courtroom scene for *Time Out* (16-22 April 1976): "There was the defendant, P-Orridge, resplendent in lurex suit, red socks, silver finger nails and with his hair just growing back on the crown of his head from where he had but recently shaved it. Facing him was the doughty magistrate, Mrs Colwell, in a twin set that matched her blue eye-shadow."

Other publicity included Ian Mather's 'The mischievous art of Mr. Genesis P.Orridge' for *The Observer* (11 April 1976). He wrote that P-Orridge was the first mail artist to be charged under the act: "The magistrates, however, dismissed the defence of artistic merit as 'irrelevant'... [P-Orridge] said: 'I'll now have to do my older type of abstract collages, or even put the postcards in envelopes. I don't find it the be-all and end-all to use nude ladies on postcards, but I resent the fact I can't do it.'"

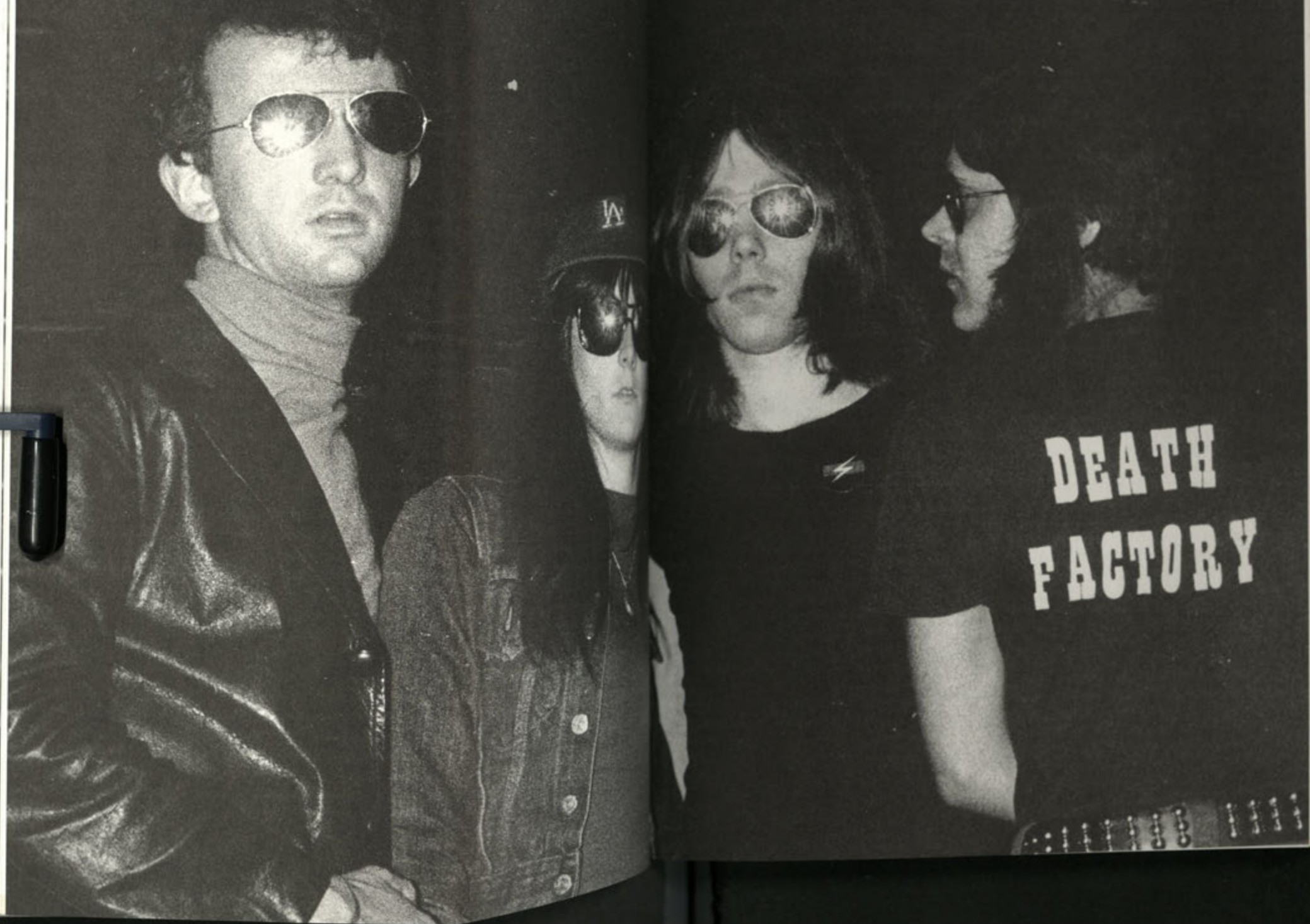
As Mather noted, after P-Orridge's main defence of artistic merit had been judged 'irrelevant', there was no surprise at the outcome of the trial. The court fined him £100 and ordered him to pay £20 costs. The charges from his solicitors Offenbach & Co. totalled £150. Offenbach's attempt, put to the Divisional Court, for an "Appeal to the High Court on the basis that it was a denial of natural justice for us not to be allowed to put our case as to why you wished trial by Jury" was turned down. They informed P-Orridge, and although he still had the option of appealing to the Crown Court, he decided against taking the matter any further.

One effect of the court case was that P-Orridge was now subject to systematic checks on his mail. Many of his letters went astray, or arrived at their destination having

obviously been tampered with. This attention from the authorities extenuated P-Orridge's feelings of being harassed and was just one of the incidents that led to him forming a new pseudo-organisation, the Paranoia Club. [The Club distributed cards with its name on the front and hand-written statements on the back, including 'E know you really hate getting our information' and 'E know you don't write back because you hate us'].

Ironically, P-Orridge's justification at the trial of mail art as an art form, came at a time when he was particularly disillusioned with the subject. Whereas P-Orridge and Tutti believed, according to the Sufi saying, that you should write every letter as if it were your last—thus spending hours creating handmade collages and writing personalised letters—in return all they often received were uninteresting photocopied collages. A characteristic COUM offering would consist of a unique collage (usually with some pornographic content), decorated with a variety of multi-coloured rubber stamp slogans. One work COUM produced in January 1975 for *Quoz?* [a magazine that gave each contributor a page to decorate as they wished] consisted of an altered page from a child's colouring book. 'Fill in the missing letters' it said, accompanied by a line drawings of a squirrel with 's...uirr...l', frog with 'F...og' and a penis with 'c...ck'.

The trial thus marked the end of COUM's whole-hearted commitment to mail art. P-Orridge's conclusion to the acknowledgements in *G.P.O. v. G.P.O* read: "What E am interested in now is that point where Art meets Life and fuses, dispersing art and enhancing life." The vehicle for achieving this aim in the immediate future would be TG rather than COUM.



Poster for *Crime Affirms Existence - High Crime is Like High Art*,  
Air Gallery, London, 1976.

# 'CRIME AFFIRMS EXISTENCE -- HIGH CRIME IS LIKE HIGH ART'

GRANT COOKE 'The blind feeding the blind'

COUM with THROBBING GRISTLE

ALAN HARVEY 'At Odds'

BROOKS, LOWE, ANDREWS, BASTO 'We thought...'

NIGEL ROLFE 'Underfooting' a sculptural perf.

GRANT COOKE  
COUM  
ALAN HARVEY  
BROOKS, LOWE, ANDREWS, BASTO  
NIGEL ROLFE

POST VIEW  
6th July 8-9

AIR GALLERY

6.16

## It's the death factory society

In July 1976 the organisers of the recently opened AIR Gallery, on Shaftsbury Avenue, invited P-Orridge to curate a series of performance art events. Drawing on the experience of his recent court appearance, he called the series 'Crime Affirms Existence—High Crime is Like High Art'. At one of these evenings, on 6 July 1976, in front of an audience of about thirty (and after Tutti's first solo performance, *Women's Roll*), TG made their debut appearance.

"No group had ever played music in that art gallery before," P-Orridge wrote to Almquist in January 1978. "Thee poster was done like a newspaper headline as if it was a Judge's summing-up speech quoted. That night we invented the song 'Very Friendly'... Thee rest was instrumental. We advised people to listen through thee wall from thee next room. Everyone we spoke to afterwards said that it

was very powerful, difficult, good etc. That doesn't prove it was." Indeed, excerpts from the concert, released later on cassette (IRC 3) caught the group still refining its improvisatory technique with P-Orridge's bass guitar and electronically treated violin, and Tutti's equally treated guitar, combining sporadically with the rough textures of Carter's pulsing synth and basic rhythms.

To publicise the event P-Orridge produced a press release describing a 'death factory society' in a state of 'post-civilisation':

### EVENT:

'MUSIC FROM THE DEATH FACTORY' live  
disconcert by THROBBING GRISTLE  
PERSONNEL:

The members of THROBBING GRISTLE wish  
to remain anonymous.

### SOUND:

Produced on Analogue Synthesiser,  
Minikorg synthesiser, Electric Violin, Guit



Guitar; Lead Guitar; Percussion; Prepared Tapes. Projected through 800 Watt Quadrophonic P.A. System.

"Imagine walking down blurred streets of havoc, post-civilisation, stray dogs eating refuse, wind creeping across tendrils. It's 1984. The only reality is waiting. Mortal. It's the death factory society, hypnotic mechanical grinding, music of hopelessness. Film music to cover the holocaust. Tantra of the subliminal, word falling, photo falling. In a nostalgia for feeling totally sterile endless tribal music. Three tribe of mutations, street gangs lobotomised in the Death Factory. It never ends. TV Children trying to prepare themselves, meditating on, cease to exist." First LIVE London concert of music by THROBBING GRISTLE to be released later this year on record. Disturbing, cruel, inexorable, yet calming if you hold on brief for life. The music of 1984 has arrived. Made up of various people from all creative areas, post-psychedelic trash, vanguard for thee Wild Boys, death seekers.

The soundtrack to this breakdown of society was 'hypnotic mechanical [and] grinding'. Now was the future, it was 1984, Orwell's dystopian vision of a totally administered society had become reality. The Hippy and Love Generation were a thing of the past; they had mutated into 'post-psychedelic trash' inhabiting a 'post-apocalyptic' landscape.

Before an audience of 170, TG's next gig at the Hat Fair Winchester on 21 August included three distinct pieces: 'Dead Ed', a screeching P-Orridge *tour de force* set against a crashing backdrop of noise; 'No Two Ways', a long feedback driven instrumental caught it seemed in the act of perpetual self-destruction; and 'Very Friendly', a not so friendly song about Ian Brady and Myra Hindley. On this evidence TG was not especially interested in wrecking

civilisation: how could you wreck something that had already descended into barbarism?

To complement 'Crime Affirms Existence' and TG's first couple of gigs, P-Orridge and Christopherson contributed an article to the foremost international art journal of the day, *Studio International* (July/August 1976). They took its title, 'Annihilating Reality', from a passage in Arthur Symonds's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899): "Vaguely conscious of that great suspense in which we live, we find our escape from its sterile, annihilating reality in many dreams, in religion, passion, art."

The article was constructed from short passages of original and borrowed text, arranged under the headings 'hearsay' and 'heresy'. Writers and artists quoted include the Marquis de Sade, the Actionists Mühl, Nitsch, Schwarzkogler, the 'happenings' pioneer Allan Kaprow, the performance artist Vito Acconci, the occultist Aleister Crowley, the Dadaist Hugo Ball, and the murderer Charles Manson. Accompanying the text were photographs of performance artists, mass murderers, body-piercers, fetishists, strippers, and concentration camp victims: a veritable cornucopia of the good, the bad and the ugly.

P-Orridge and Christopherson's aim was to consider the questions: "What makes a performance art?" and "What separates crime from art action? Is crime just unsophisticated or 'naive' performance art?" The speculative tone was easy to miss, perhaps too easy. People misunderstood them, P-Orridge later explained to *Dirt* (1978), "they think that if you refer to something then you're either glorifying it or agreeing with it and that's not true, you know, because if that were true then every newspaper that reported a murder would be saying 'We think that people should commit murders'."



6.18

'Annihilating Reality' somehow came to the attention of the *Sunday Mirror* and they reacted in a suitably outraged manner with a report on the subject entitled 'Moors Murder 'Art' Storm' (15 August 1976):

Lord Clark—famed for his TV art series *Civilisation*—dismissed views in the article as 'nonsense'. Writer David Holbrock denounced it as an 'anti-human piece of evil'. The article's authors are photographer Peter Christopherson and an artist who calls himself Genesis P-Orridge. They avoid expressing their own views. But Genesis, 26, said the aim was to start a discussion over violent trends in modern art. Magazine editor Richard Cork said: 'I don't believe the article is what Holbrock says'. Murder as art? Lancashire's top detective, Chief Superintendent Joe Mounsey, who investigated the Moors Murders, was aghast. He said: 'I can't make no comment you could print.'

The link made between crime and art and the identification of the artist with the criminal is actually quite traditional, and goes back at least as far as Thomas de Quincey's essay 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' first published in *Blackwood's Magazine* (1827), continuing on into the work of Baudelaire, Jean Genet, and even Duchamp with his self-portrait *Wanted \$2,000 Reward* (1923). Art can be criminal, just as crime can be artistic; they are not mutually exclusive categories. Crime, though, is defined in a court of law according to the law of the country, whereas art has no such clearly defined statutes. The other point P-Orridge and Christopherson were trying to make concerned the division between high and low culture. To illustrate this they speculated on whether Tutti's works for pornographic magazines could be viewed as art: "If this were framed and mounted in rows in one of our minimal galleries, with a fashionable artist's name given as its creator,

would that make it acceptable to you? Is the photographer then an artist? Is the model an artist? If the artist chooses to be the model is it then art?"

COUM, as the qualifying question marks attested, had yet to develop a fully coherent theory as to how "subliminal performance art" displayed in a popular cultural setting gets transformed into institutionally legitimated art. According to P-Orridge and Christopherson, COUM "use existing situations to actually affect society from the inside, to subliminally infiltrate popular culture... Cosey Fanni Tutti models for pin-up and porno magazines, in order to get magazines containing her image. The public buy them, see her, do not know her, do not have to know it's her performance art."

However, anything occurring in an 'existing situation' has to be re-presented in an art context for it to function as art. Therefore it was only when Tutti's works for magazines were named as "performance art" in the legitimating context of an art magazine (i.e. *Studio International*) that the work became art. Another way to legitimate something as art was to put it into an art gallery. COUM chose the ICA, London.

### **These people are the wreckers of civilisation**

The exhibition *Prostitution* took place at the ICA, between 19-26 October 1976. Although it ran for only eight days and filled just the main gallery, the coverage it received in the national press was out of all proportion to its modest size. It was the subject of at least 100 newspaper and magazine articles, questions were asked in Parliament, and 'Genesis P-Orridge' and 'Cosey Fanni Tutti' became household names. *Prostitution* caused a scandal chiefly because it featured used tampons and contained pages from pornographic magazines featuring Tutti in her

role as a photographic model. The exhibition brought under the spotlight the increasingly antagonistic relationship between the experimental arts and their chief source of funding, the Arts Council, and also provided evidence of the lack of understanding between contemporary artists and the general public, or at least the self-selected representatives of that public—the newspapers.

COUM were invited to show at the ICA by Ted Little, Director of the ICA Arts Centre. The four main elements of the exhibition consisted of: 1) framed pages from pornographic magazines featuring Tutti (available only on request); 2) 'props' used in past performances, including tampons, meat cleavers, anal syringes, chains, and Vaseline; 3) framed photographs of COUM in performance; and 4) photocopies of press cuttings on COUM.

The exhibition according to COUM had three aims: first it was intended to comment on methods of economic survival for artists; secondly it was meant to reveal how 'presentation' had become an end in itself; and thirdly it was meant to demonstrate the gap between representation and reality. COUM's press release concluded with the statement: "For us the party on the opening night is the key to our stance, the most important performance." The unusual format of the party subverted the 'high cultural' conventions usually associated with openings: in place of wine they had beer, and in place of speeches they had a stripper and a performance by TG and the Punk band Chelsea (playing under the joke pseudonym LSD).

The press release also explained that: "Cosey has appeared in 40 magazines now as a deliberate policy. All of these framed form the core of this exhibition. Different ways of seeing and using Cosey with her consent, produced by people unaware of her reasons, as a woman

Cosey Fanni Tutti, unidentified press cutting, 1976.



6.20 and an artist, for participating. In that sense, pure views." The photographs were designated 'pure' because they were taken by photographers unaware that they were participating in the making of an artwork.

The 'pure' image of Tutti used for the press release and private view card, was selected for its similarities with other artistic representations of prostitutes, in particular that key icon of modernism, Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863). The originality of COUM's contribution to the 'prostitutes in art' genre lay in the fact that it was artists who were now claiming the role of prostitutes. COUM rejuvenated the genre but were careful to jettison its romantic pretensions. Rather than merely being a comment on the act of supplying sexual services in return for payment, *Prostitution* was meant as a paradigm of general conditions under capitalism, for both men and women. Much like Marx's statement that "Prostitution is

only a particular expression of the universal prostitution of the worker." *Prostitution* presented a post-modern, mid-seventies, reading of this perennially fascinating intersection between sex, money, exchange and art.

It should be remembered, however, that although the exhibition was called *Prostitution* the main focus of attention for the press, and the centre-piece of the exhibition for COUM, were the images of Tutti from the pornographic magazines. This cross-reference within the exhibition—"for prostitution see pornography"—echoed the shift in the focus of moral concern from prostitution at the turn of the century to pornography in the post-war period. What prostitution was to modernism, pornography had become for the post-modern.

Through its dwelling on the theme of porn and prostitution, COUM not only attacked traditional family values but also traditional artistic values. However, the reaction to *Prostitution* went further than just a reaction to an assault on moral and artistic values. The affair cannot be separated from the political context of a Britain governed by an insecure Labour government with a small and ever decreasing majority. The main issue of the day was public spending, with spending on 'non-essentials' such as the arts being particularly closely examined. 1976 also witnessed the lowest point in the struggle to control the economy, with the government being forced to borrow \$3,900 million from the International Monetary Fund. The conditions of this loan required further public expenditure cuts leading to the questioning of the focus and extent of arts' funding. Lord Redcliffe-Maud was asked by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, a charitable trust, to produce a report, *Support for the Arts in England and Wales*, to explore these issues. The Arts Council welcomed his findings as they concurred with its policies on adult

## FEELING COSEY?

No, but no doubt our male readers would like to be (and perhaps one or two of the ladies too, huh?). Read all about her inside. We think—along with stuff about sex trends, facing lilies, part-time pros and the joys of taking Polaroid shots—that this is one of the sexiest issues we've ever put together. So, if stiffness or wetness is your game card show us one that's whose game it isn't. Here you go. Come again next month, please and tell your friends.

education and the devolution of community arts to the regions. Redcliffe-Maud also reiterated the need to keep political interference out of arts policy, the so-called 'arm's length' principle.

6.22 It was felt necessary to restate this principle because of the unprecedented media and political interest in contemporary art, sparked off in February 1976 by the controversy over the Tate Gallery's acquisition of Carl Andre's *Equivalent VIII* (1966), the so-called 'Tate Bricks'. The 'debate' over public spending had been further sensitised by Mary Kelly's exhibition of her work-in-progress *Post-Partum Document* (1973-1979), which took place immediately before *Prostitution* at the ICA in early October 1976. The controversy surrounding this exhibition centred on Kelly's use of soiled nappy liners. By the middle of October 1976 the conditions were perfect for a 'moral panic' as outlined by the sociologist Stanley Cohen in his *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972). These occur when an event, condition, person or group of persons becomes identified as a threat to social values and interests. The subjects of the moral panic are stylised and stereotyped and the moral high-ground is defended by socially accredited experts and opinion formers. In the case of *Prostitution*, the subject of the panic was multiple, involving prostitution, pornography, threats to artistic values, and fears over the economy and the rising cost of public spending. Such a media fuelled 'panic' fitted well with the overall theme of *Prostitution*. The exhibition was intentionally newsworthy and, accordingly, COUM and the ICA collected all the cuttings mentioning the show and displayed them as part of the exhibition. The cuttings represented the fruits of a deliberate self-presentational and self-promotional strategy and through them the show enacted its own proposition, that art and artists were 'misrepresented'.

The morning after the opening COUM and the ICA awoke to a deluge of press coverage. The most spectacular came from the *Daily Mail* (19 October 1976) with its photograph of Siouxsie and Steve Severin and its description of Tory MP Nicholas Fairbairn having to fight his way through Hell's Angels and young men with multi-coloured hair, lipstick and nail varnish. Fairbairn described what he saw as "a sickening outrage. Sadistic. Obscene. Evil.... Public money is being wasted here to destroy the morality of our society. These people are the wreckers of civilisation". It was his way of establishing himself as the leading voice of outraged opinion. The show, whilst unquestionably representing a serious threat to his personal values, was then universalised by him into a threat to society as a whole. In *The Daily Telegraph* (19 October 1976) he was even more vehement in his condemnation: "every social evil is celebrated... there were a few photographs which attempted to make prostitutes look like victims instead of the vultures which they are. Otherwise, there were sadistic exhibitions of used Tampax in abundance and bloody sanitary towels and sticks and flails."

*The Sun* (21 October 1976) believed that the show was not just attacking artistic standards, but also traditional 'British' values: "Even a penny of public money is too much to spend on this squalid rubbish. It has nothing whatever to do with the Britain we are proud to promote. Mr Orridge is prostituting Britain—and sending us the bill."

As well as a vehicle for Fairbairn and others to voice their fears of a breakdown in society's values, the show also represented an opportunity for right-wingers to gain political capital and claim the show was a threat to national identity (then currently under threat by humiliating negotiations with the International Monetary Fund). Due to the



prompting of Fairbairn, questions were asked about the exhibition in Parliament. Merlyn Rees, the Home Secretary, was asked if he had any plans to amend legislation on the law for obscenity and Brynmor John, Minister of State at the Home Office, came under pressure to censor the Arts Council. John countered by restating the official 'arm's length' policy which precluded open government interference with the distribution of arts funding.

There was little but ambivalent support for COUM in the press. *The Daily Mail* (20 October 1976) described *Prostitution* as part of the sickness of an already ailing nation, but although the show was "anti-social and unhealthy" it may have been just the poison that was needed to provide the cure for what they described as a "nut-ridden, sex-soaked, much conned society". *The Evening Standard* (22 October 1976) also thought the show had done some good by bringing to the fore debates about the purpose of contemporary

art, but wished that it had taken place elsewhere, away from the Mall, in some "obscure community centre."

6.23

As would be expected, it was the *The Guardian* (22 October 1976) that provided the most sympathetic account of the affair. Caroline Tisdall reviewed the publicity and set the record straight on the extent of COUM's public funding, which was minimal. She described Fairbairn's statements as a "crash course in the kind of prejudice such taboos arouse" and said that the show merely reflected contemporary values concerning sexual behaviour.

P-Orridge and Tutti, like the Sex Pistols two months later, appeared on television to discuss their work. Unlike the Sex Pistols, though, who refused to explain themselves, they argued intelligently about the issues raised. P-Orridge blamed the press for misrepresenting his intentions and misinforming the public.



- 6.24 The exhibition was meant as a critique of the media and the resulting controversy had confirmed his misgivings about its power to influence opinion. Tutti remembers how the initial thrill at being in the papers soon wore off: "By the time of the television interview we'd really had enough. We'd had journalists round our house, and also asking local shopkeepers about us. Gen was really at the end of his tether, more even than me. I think the television people wanted to trivialise the exhibition although the commotion it created was not trivial at all." P-Orridge was of the same opinion: "In retrospect," he told Savage, "if our TV appearance had happened at the beginning of *Prostitution*, I would have probably done what the Sex Pistols did. But after having had all that pressure for about ten days, I was just fed up with it all. I could see the lie of the land and it looked ultimately counter-productive. It would be like an initial thrill and then an awful lot of counter-productive bullshit afterwards."

Just as the press attention began to wane the exhibition was brought back into the public eye by an Arts Council press conference called to promote its latest annual report, appropriately titled *The Arts in Hard Times*. The events at the ICA could not have come at a worse moment. At a time of growing economic hardship it was trying to solicit as much public and political support as was possible, but the recent *Prostitution* scandal had spoilt its plans. *The Guardian* (23 October 1976) printed a letter from the Arts Council's Secretary-General, Roy Shaw, refuting the implication that he had interfered with *Prostitution* and that he was reacting nervously. Shaw wrote that he had questioned the ICA about the exhibition during its planning and had stated that it seemed in questionable taste and that it would be taken into account when assessing the ICA's next annual grant. Shaw's personal opinion was that it was both "boring and disgusting" and should not be funded by public money. He later stated in the *Evening Standard* (18 January 1977) that the "ICA was an example of the risks involved in supporting the experimental arts." These statements were interpreted by the arts community as a warning that the Arts Council would no longer tolerate potentially controversial work.

Out of all the COUM members it was Tutti who suffered most from the fallout after the exhibition. Her modelling career came to an abrupt halt when she was boycotted by the magazine editors upon their discovery that she had used 'their' images in *Prostitution*. The ICA also suffered after the exhibition as the Arts Council refused to advance any further funds until plans for radical cost-cutting had been submitted. To this end, the ICA council decided to close its controversial theatre. They were also forced into a comprehensive overhaul of their senior management when Ted Little and Robert Loder (Chairman of the ICA Council) both resigned at the beginning of 1977.



There are a number of factors that have to be in place for an event to generate a moral panic. It takes a convergence of general anxiety in society, the media searching for something that could be seen as confirming that anxiety, and an event that can be made to embody that anxiety. Prostitution fitted this crisis agenda perfectly. The exhibition became a focus of attention for four main reasons. The first was the genuine concern over money being spent, at a time of great economic hardship, on work that was not only alien to the general public's conception of art, but on work that also highlighted the duplicity of contemporary moral and artistic values. The debate over pornography was linked to the debate over the health of the nation; it was convenient to equate economic crisis with moral crisis. Secondly, COUM represented a soft target because, unlike Andre, they had few supporters in the art world willing to come to their defence. The third reason for the attention was simply because it was a good news story with plenty of opportunity for columnists, headline writers and cartoonists to make outraged and entertaining comment. The final and most significant reason for the attention was that it gave the Tory supporting newspapers an opportunity to discredit the Arts Council and the contemporary arts establishment, its liberal supporters and by association the Labour government, by connecting 'avant-gardism' with declining moral standards.

### The subtle abyss

Throughout the debate over the exhibition surprisingly little attention was given to its content. Within the performance art movement COUM's work was most closely associated with the category known as 'body art'. It was as part of this wide-ranging project to test the body's physical and psychological limits as medium, object and subject that Tutti's work for magazines should be situated. Women artists were often at the forefront of the 'body

## Cosey

Height 5'8  
Bust 37 Waist 26 Hips 37  
Dress 14, Shoes 6  
Hair Auburn Eyes Gray-Blue  
Cosey 172  
Classenite 14 Bond 66 Hatha 14  
Khalid 42 Schuhe 29  
Haare Kastanien Braun Augen Grau-Blau  
Photos by Coon Transaktionen



art' genre, but their specific contributions were often marginalised or misunderstood by male critics, or found to be problematical by feminist critics. In her book *From the Center: Feminist Essays on Women's Art* (1976), Lucy Lippard voiced her misgivings about the type of work artists like Tutti were producing: "A woman using her own face and body has a right to do what she will with them, but it is a subtle abyss that separates men's use of women for sexual titillation from women's use of women to expose that insult."

The problem for Tutti lay in how she could investigate pornographic imagery and present her findings without merely reproducing that culture's prejudices and values. In the context of the initial publication of the magazines themselves Tutti could not escape being 'reduced' to the role of an interchangeable fetishised object of private male sexual fantasy. But where Tutti's roles were multiplied, as in the public exhibition, to

become both subject and object, artist and model, viewer and viewed, the work became difficult to consume as pornography. It was this difficulty, for the male gaze especially, in 'fixing' Tutti, when she presented herself so openly to the gaze, that de-eroticised the imagery. The power conventionally located in the male gaze was undermined by the way in which Tutti combined artistic display with the sheer excess of pornographic spectacle. Tutti's works for magazines began to operate explicitly as critique when they were re-presented away from their 'original' context, and read according to the terms of another discourse.

6.26

Tutti's aim was to provide a critique of pornography and by extension the wider tradition of the aestheticised female nude and its power to define a feminine 'ideal'. Whilst artistic nudes and erotic photography were sanctioned because of their associations with a patriarchal high art tradition, pornography was demonised because of its association with a debased and illicit mass culture. One of the many taboos broken by Tutti and COUM in *Prostitution* was to exhibit mass cultural 'ephemera' as high art artefacts. The pages from the magazines were signed and framed behind glass and the selling price of each piece was suitably inflated to reflect their new status as artworks.

In the pornography censorship debate Tutti was obviously on the side of the anti-censorship campaigners. The freedom for her to deploy her body as she saw fit was perceived as a form of empowerment. The exhibition of her work for magazines was a means towards the repossession of an identity that refused to be tied to a feminine ideal or a 'true' self. Tutti saw this work as role playing, a form of acting and masquerade. Unfortunately, the work was never shown in its intended form.

COUM was persuaded by the ICA, The Crown Commissioners (who owned the ICA's lease), and the Arts Council, not to hang Tutti's work on the wall. Instead the 'offending' images were stored away in white containers and could only be viewed one at a time. Just what the public display of the massed ranks of images of Tutti would have looked like, and what kind of effect this would have had on the reception of the work, is now something that can only be imagined. Viewed in their intended form the works would have partly functioned as a critique of the industrialisation of sex and a subversion of the magazines' tendency to objectify the women appearing in their pages.

The repetition of images of Tutti, in a variety of roles, costumes, settings, poses and activities, would have destroyed the illusionistic principles and generic coherence necessary for them to function as pornography. By re-presenting the work for magazines as signed artworks behind glass, Tutti redirected the imagery's meaning as well as its distribution and consumption. Above all, though, it was Tutti's ability to draw on 'real' experiences as a 'real' model in the fantasy world of pornography that made the work so difficult to reconcile at the time. Today it is this explicit play on notions of authenticity and identity through a foregrounding of pornography as a signifying system, that marks out Tutti's works for magazines as a significant contribution to the feminist critique of an essentialised femininity.

### Over the ruined factory there's a funny noise

P-Orridge, Tutti, Christopherson and Carter, each considered *Prostitution* a retrospective of COUM. From now on the focus of attention would be TG. The art world, they concluded, was elitist, hypocritical and out of touch, and the music industry promised a more relevant context for their work. "My take on it,"

MUSIC FROM THE DEATH FACTORY



BY THROBBING GRISTLE

says Christopherson, "was that it was meaningless if we were not making a statement to people of our own age, people whose lives might actually be affected by what we were doing, rather than the arts establishment, who were not really interested. I still think today that the only point of making a creative work is if you are able to share your own vision of the world with someone to whom that knowledge may have an effect, not a shock effect necessarily, but in the sense of imparting some knowledge or experience that will help them see the world more vividly or in a different light. I was certainly influential in convincing Gen and Cosey that doing things for the art establishment was a waste of time. With TG we wanted to communicate our ideas and interests to people to whom it might mean something. We knew we could get gigs and groupies (which was one of my stated desires) but I don't think it was a carefully considered manipulation of the business as an art statement. It was just that we wanted to reach

more people and sell records and have some greater influence and use the mechanics of the music business as a facilitator."

6.27

P-Orridge's decision to drawback from the art world drew on some advice given by his mother. "It's what my mother told me to do!" P-Orridge told Savage in *Search and Destroy* (April 1978). "I said to her, 'I'm pissed off really with all this art crap' (and I said we'd gone to Milan and done all this stuff and I don't feel very pleased about it). And she said, 'Well sit back and think, *What do you really want to do?*' I told her I'd always liked music, and that's true—the only thing that's been continuous has been writing and playing... And also the only thing that always has a physical or an emotional effect on me is sound.... The art world is exactly the same as the rock scene, but much more pretentious and snotty—and it doesn't get through to the people! The reason we were performers as opposed to painters is that we met real people and did things directly to an audience."

If *Prostitution* represented COUM's retrospective, then the opening party on 18 October 1976 marked the launch of TG. According to various reports, there was between 600 and 800 people present. TG's set included 'Very Friendly', 'We Hate You', 'Slug Bait', 'Dead Ed', and 'Zyklon B Zombie'. The introduction by P-Orridge was suitably apocalyptic and touched on themes that would be highlighted by the media the next day: "We'd like to thank you all for coming tonight," P-Orridge said, addressing the audience. "It's nice to know there are so many pop fans in London. Tonight we're going to do a one hour set called *Music From the Death Factory*. It's basically about the post-breakdown of civilisation. You know, you walk down the street and there's a lot of ruined factories and bits of old newspaper with stories about pornography and page three pin-ups, blowing down the street, and you turn a corner past the dead dog and you see old dustbins. And then over the ruined factory there's a funny noise."

6.28

And that funny noise was TG, with P-Orridge on bass guitar, electric violin and vocals, Christopherson on tapes, trumpet and processing, Tutti on lead guitar, effects, and cornet, and Carter on keyboards and in control of the rhythms and the mix. The set was recorded on two Sony cassette machines: one recording via a microphone from the back of the hall and the other recording a 'live' version directly from the mixer. Christopherson and Carter later mixed the two versions together and transferred them on to a reel-to-reel machine, but found it almost impossible to synchronise the two recordings. "Eventually," Carter wrote to Paul Buck in 1976, "we all decided that even when it went out of synch it didn't sound too bad at all. So we divided the tape into tracks. Some are in synch and some we have let go slightly out. The balance isn't very good and you can hear people talking now and again. The synch is too loud and the vocals aren't very clear. Still that's Gristle."



The opening track, 'Very Friendly', combined the best of P-Orridge's storytelling talent with a typically atmospheric TG soundscape. Then there was 'We Hate You (Little Girls)', a song originally written for the 'little girls' in the front row of the audience at Winchester. Then, after a brief instrumental interlude came 'Slug Bait', its echoey, out-of-synch tracking adding to the claustrophobic atmospherics of the track's horrific subject matter. The psychotic and regressive theme was also unremitting throughout the next two tracks, 'Dead Ed' and 'Zyklon B Zombie'. ["Zyklon B, it's a bit like Coca-Cola but it's worse for your teeth," P-Orridge told the audience]. The set ended with a long drawn-out blast of feed-back. There was little applause.

The opening, like all good openings, was a packed and chaotic affair. It brought together an explosive mixture of strippers, MPs, journalists, art critics, artists and a



troupe of Punks, attracted by the inclusion of Chelsea on the bill (chosen because they were backed by COUM's old friend John Krivine). The Punks just three days previously had achieved national notoriety with a double page spread by Judy Wade in *The Sun* (15 October 1976). "We didn't take punk massively seriously," P-Orridge told Savage, "it was just something we thought was interesting and we went along with it. Because it was rebellious and it was antagonistic to the status quo." But P-Orridge had his doubts about the longevity of the movement from the very beginning: "They're doing something which should have happened years ago," he told *Melody Maker* (20 November 1976). "They seem to be trying to reflect life as it really is. But the only thing is, they're in this glass globe, which is the record business. They're pressing against the globe, but they're never going to break out of it. When punk dies out, which it will in about two years, people like us will still be going."

Resident Punk correspondent for the *NME*, Tony Parsons, went to the ICA gig and sensed the antagonism between the art set and the Punks. His review was published in the *NME* (30 October 1976) with the headline 'But mutilation is so passé...':

P-Orridge, had ratty shoulder length hair that was shaved bald up the middle of his head, as if he had been run over by a crazed lawnmower.... After Genesis finished his opening speech of doom and destruction, the band went into their, uh, music, which consisted of lots of weird psychedelic taped sounds rolling around random keyboards played plink-plonk style, lead guitar that Patti Smith would have been ashamed of and moronic bass on a superb Rickenbacker by old Genesis P-Orridge himself. I went to get a screwdriver from the bar and came back just in time to see the band start mutilating itself. Genesis seemed to be really enjoying himself but most of the

audience were bored. 'Oh, daaaaaahling! So passé! Nigel said at the party it would be *interesting and artistically fulfilling!*'... I went back to the audience to check out why so many kids decked out in punk outfits had come along to the ICA tonight. Surely they weren't interested in all this, uh, culture? 'NAH, MATE,' one of them told me while adjusting the safety pin in his carefully ripped tee-shirt. 'We've come to see Chelsea. They're on after the stripper.'

P-Orridge later upset the Punks by spitting stage blood over Debbie Wilson and spreading a rumour that Billy Idol was going to get hung by cheese-wire as a finale.

### **A means of deconditioning myself psychologically**

Despite all the talk about *Prostitution* being the end of COUM, almost immediately after the show had finished P-Orridge and Tutti flew out to America on a COUM performance art tour. The tour had been jeopardised by the media's attack on the British Council, who were paying COUM's travel expenses. According to P-Orridge, representatives of the British Council phoned him to say that the Foreign Office was concerned about COUM's intention to perform in Canada. If COUM chose to persist with this plan the British Council suggested to P-Orridge that he would, in all probability, be turned back at US immigration. Faced with such a threat to the whole tour and his first visit to America, P-Orridge reluctantly agreed to cancel the Canadian performances.

Eventually COUM received assurances and flew to America and entered the country without any problems. The tour itself opened in mid-November 1976 with *Cease to Exist no. 1* at the Marianne Deson Gallery in Chicago. COUM performed two more parts of the series, *Cease to Exist nos. 2 & 3*, over the next couple of days

at the Name Gallery, also in Chicago. COUM's next stop, on 23 November, was Los Angeles and the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), where they performed *Cease to Exist no. 4*. The next day they travelled to Santa Monica and at the IDEA Gallery concluded the series with *Cease to Exist no. 5*.

By sequentially titling the performances P-Orridge and Tutti implied that they carried a common theme. The title came from a Charles Manson song recorded and released by the Beach Boys on the LP *20/20* and on the B-side of their single 'Bluebirds Over the Mountain' [1968]. For the former, though, they changed the title to 'Never Learn Not to Love' and the line "cease to exist" was changed to the slightly more palatable "cease to resist". Manson's version went as follows:

Pretty girl, pretty, pretty girl / Cease to Exist / Just come and say you love me / Give up your world / C'mon you can see / I'm your kind, I'm your kind / You can see / Walk on, walk on / I love you pretty girl / My life is yours and / You can have my world / Never had a lesson / I ever learned / But I know we all get our turn / I love you / Submission is a gift / Go on, give it to your brother / Love and understanding is for one another / I'm your kind, I'm your kind / I'm your mind / I'm your brother / I never had a lesson I ever learned / But I know we all get our turn / And I love you / Never learned not to love you / I never learned.

The song's themes of death, submission and love were repeated in COUM's *Cease to Exist* series, although how intentional this was is open to question. COUM, as always, worked to no script. Each action was a specific response to a specific place and audience, and grew from and referred to previous performances in the series. "If we wrote a script we'd be actors, not artists," P-Orridge wrote to Harley Lond, organiser of part of the tour. "As we work in

particular with preconceptions, to say too much destroys our game."

This was P-Orridge and Tutti's first trip to America and they clearly wanted to make a strong impression. With their Manson references and their focusing on the extremes of sado-masochistic imagery and behaviour, this was exactly what happened: "I don't think there is any point in doing anything unless you push yourself," P-Orridge told Savage. "When in doubt—be extreme." The performances at LAICA and the IDEA Gallery were witnessed by Scott G. and his observations were later published in *Vile* (1977):

The act at LAICA was a ritual purification, involving both symbolic and realistic elements including bloodletting, defecation, urinary actions, and primitive body decoration. Perhaps one-fifth of the audience found some element of the act impossible to accept mentally, and their exit was recorded on film as an additional event (not part of the COUM action)... By contrast, the final act of 'Cease to Exist' at IDEA was soft and lyrical. The same props (twigs, syringes, mirrors, etc.) which were used in such an incredible manner at LAICA were here simply and slowly gathered together. The hanging columns (just string, really, but majestic all the same) were cut down with scissors and added to the neat stacks. Then Genesis and Cosey dressed in tandem before us, stood facing each other in silence, and waited. They kissed, and, with a glance at their arrangements of props, left the stage.

P-Orridge later wrote his own detailed account of *Cease to Exist no. 4* for Paul Buck's avant-garde journal *Curtains* (1977). Although characteristically lacking in any attempt to interpret the action, it still represents the form in which P-Orridge wanted the work to be documented. Although documentary in style (if

not in fact), it also constitutes another, almost independent, form of creative expression:

Our story begins with an attempt to erase security. If you decide to clutch at a straw you must expect COUM to try and tear it away. COUM are not trying to produce 'good art' as collectively agreed by critics and dealers.

1). Genesis stands holding a bottle of half milk half piss. He drinks it as fast as he can without breathing, if it runs through his clothes [it] does not matter. He tries hard to keep all his muscles so tense that they hurt.

2). Cosey begins naked. She has open wounds on her breasts. She also has a raw slash from her fanny to her navel. It is coagulating, about an hour old. She takes a needle & thread and sews up her breast cuts very neatly, just as if she is sewing a pair of trousers.

3). Small pools of blood collect on thee floor amongst thee yellow polenta shadows of arrows. Cosey takes a syringe and pushes thee needle into her sewn breast, filling it with blood. She injects thee blood slowly into thee top of thee cut from her fanny to her navel. It runs through thee cut into her cunt and onto thee floor. She sticks a second hypodermic right into her cunt filling it with a mixture of blood and milk.

4). Genesis removes his blood and milk soaked clothes. Under them he wears a saran-wrap jock strap over his testicle area. He takes a hypodermic syringe and stabs it into a testicle, fills it with blood, picks a black egg off thee floor, stabs thee syringe into it, empties thee syringe.

5). Cosey takes a rusty razor blade and cuts a rectangle into thee skin of her forearm. Carefully slicing under one edge she lifts up thee flap of skin and places a passport photograph of Genesis under thee flap, licking off excess blood.



6.32

6). Genesis takes another syringe of blood from his testicles and injects it back into his forearm. He does this repeatedly, also injecting a total of seven black eggs with his own blood. He is stood on a square of sharp black nails and ice.

7). Cosey opens three lips of her cunt wide and pushes in her fingers, masturbating.

8). Genesis fills a spinal syringe with milk, another with blood. He takes each in turn and injects all their contents in turn up his anus. He pisses into a large glass. As he squeezes out the last drop he farts and blood mingled with milk shoots out of his arse.

9). Cosey slithers through all the liquid towards him, lapping it up, rubbing it into her cunt.

10). Genesis vomits trying to swallow a 10 inch steel nail.

11). They meet in a pool of vomit and join together cunt to cock, legs entwined, on the wet floor.

According to P-Orridge's account the action involved the enactment of a catalogue of taboo acts using bodily fluids such as urine, blood, vomit and milk, combined with abject acts of defecation, urination, self-mutilation and masturbation. COUM focused attention on the body as bearer of pain and mutilation, a body the boundaries of which were violated by needle and thread and syringe. Like Tutti's work for magazines it was a public presentation of acts usually experienced, if at all, in private. Amongst those unable to stand the intensity of the show at LAICA, according to P-Orridge, was the performance artist Chris Burden and the conceptual artist John Baldessari. Apparently they left after just fifteen minutes saying "it's sickening and disgusting and it's not art."

Despite their supposed retirement from the art world after *Prostitution*, P-Orridge and Tutti continued to attract attention from the international art press. In the Italian based art magazine *Flash Art* (February-April 1978),



P-Orridge wrote about his personal attitude to shame, obsession, and fear, and the unclear distinction between 'real' and 'manufactured' pain. The text was P-Orridge's clearest statement yet as to his motivations for experiencing taboo acts and seeking out potentially dangerous situations:

My interest in putting myself into unpleasant or risk situations is various as is all my work in COUM. Firstly I use it as a means of deconditioning myself psychologically. I believe all bodily and all erotic functions of the human being, both male and female, are both natural and interesting. I hate shame. Anything I found myself thinking about, and which I am not sure I could do in public or private without feelings of embarrassment or self-consciousness, I put into an action to test myself. Doing these things in actions gives me a deadline at which I must face up to my obsessions and fears. So also in public I am giving witness to my beliefs. I believe it should be possible to make love in public (not necessary, but possible) therefore I make love in public, once I have done this once it holds no interest for me, I have proved I can do it. With pain and danger it's the same. I wonder about something, I therefore do it. I don't believe in voyeurism by myself so if a thing interests me I believe I have to do that thing in order not to be merely intellectually masturbating. I also like to always have an element of difficulty and the unknown in my actions or I get bored so I include risks, pain to keep me alert and increase the tension of a piece by the underlying feeling shared with spectators of minimal control. The other thing that fascinates me is the blurring of the definition between real and manufactured pain and horror created largely by TV and newspapers. We get bodies on the news in some distant war, riots, followed by

pretend bodies in a cowboy film, followed by adverts. It is all presented in the same dimension and is therefore very hard to perceive separately. In actions I initiate tasks of real pain that are overshadowed by theatrical tricks that look MORE real, more bloody. For example I drink a pint of milk, a pint of blood, a pint of urine that I have passed in front of spectators, my foot rests on a bed of nails which are sinking into my feet but these spectators have forgotten that because they are focused on the obvious taboo of drinking urine. I will insert unsterilised needles into my veins; this shocks but I leave them there so long that people forget they are real and causing pain, they see them very quickly as decoration. So I use real and trick to provoke a question of response and manipulation of response. I get NO masochistic pleasure from my risks, but I do get the satisfaction of facing up to my fears and relinquishing inherited, and to me false, taboos and neuroses in a way that offers a system of revelation and education to a percentage of bystanders.

6.33

P-Orridge's actions aimed to provide a form of deconditioning for himself directly, and for the audience indirectly. They provided a focus for him to test out the boundaries of his own obsessions and fears in a public situation. Once these boundaries had been reached and crossed, it then became a question of moving on to new experiences. It was this desire to experience new and unprecedented acts that precipitated P-Orridge and Tutti's move away from performance art back into music.