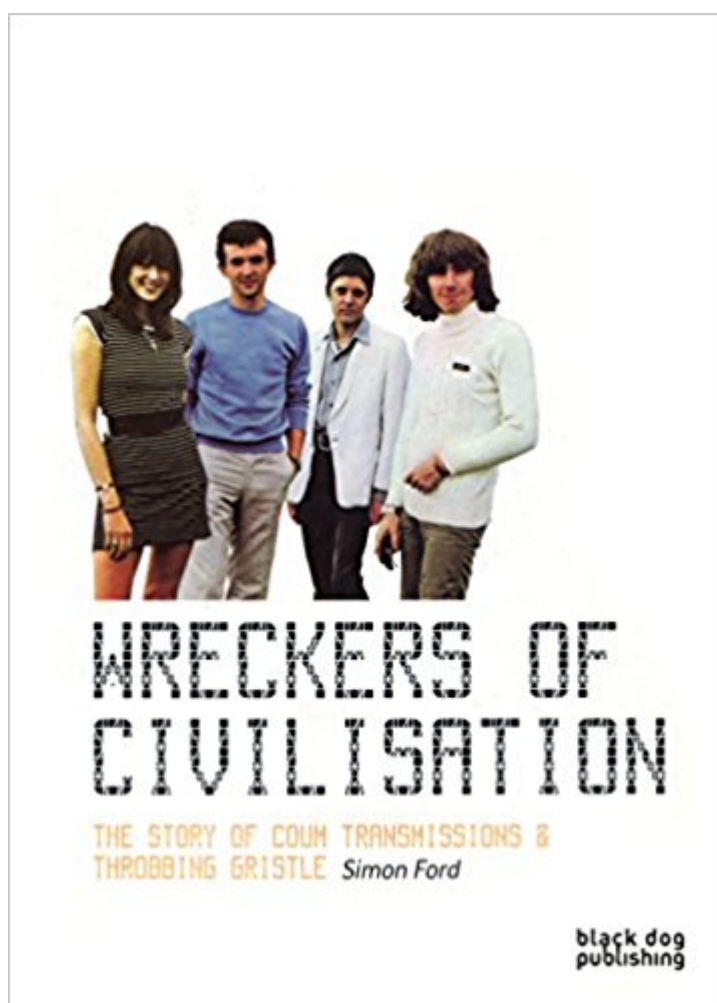


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Wreckers Of Civilisation: The Story Of Coum Transmissions & Throbbing Gristle



Synopsis

"These people are the wreckers of civilisation", exclaimed the conservative Member of Parliament Nicholas Fairbairn in 1976. His outburst was meant to describe four artists and musicians - Genesis P-Orridge, Cozey Fani Tutti, Peter Christopherson and Chris Carter. What "these people" had done to deserve such an epithet, and what they were about to do, is the subject of this book. *Wreckers of Civilisation* recalls a time which despite volumes of print remains occluded, obdurate, even intimidating: that moment before the conservative reconstruction. To be awake in London in the late 1970s was to be plunged into turmoil: externally manifest in riot, internally within various forms of damage and depression and, if one felt brave or driven, extreme aesthetics. COUM Transmissions and Throbbing Gristle mark the furthest reach of that impulse: even more so than Punk, they plunged into a technological and personal examination of the dark side - the forbidden, the taboo, the dystopian future on the doorstep. Today this might seem like science fiction or deliberate shock tactics, but then it seemed like reportage, front line dispatches from a convulsed country.

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Customer Reviews

Beware of post-postmodern types name-dropping COUM and Throbbing Gristle™ as the proud parents of industrial music and industrial bands like Nine Inch Nails; that's the half-assed version to expect from people who think they invented black. Here, Ford shows the patience and respect of an extragenerational fan while detailing the frenetic evolution of COUM from a hippie freak-out band to a performance art troupe to TG, an anti-rock, anti-high art missionary. Although TG's attacks on social, political, sexual, musical, and artistic mores were brave, they often bordered on the hypocritical. A.e.g., TG desired intimacy with its audience but used halogen lights and P.A. barricades to alienate people at live shows. Using his interviews with Chris Carter, Peter Christopherson,

Genesis P-Orridge, and Cosey Fanni Tutti, Ford convincingly defends TG on every front including its use of fascist album imagery and proves that COUM and TG elevated civilization more than they wrecked it. A dense but enlightening work; for larger public libraries. Heather McCormack, "Library Journal" Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Simon Ford is a freelance writer and art historian. He was previously Research Associate in Craft and Design and Curator of the Design Council Slide Collection at Manchester Metropolitan University, as well as being a curator at the Victoria and Albert Museum. He received his PhD in the History of Art from the Courtauld Institute of Art in 2000. He is the author of *Wreckers of Civilisation: The Story of COUM Transmissions and Throbbing Gristle* (1999, 2017, Black Dog Publishing) and *Hip Priest: The Story of Mark E. Smith and The Fall* (2003, Quartet). His most recent book is *The Situationist International: A User's Guide* (2006, Black Dog).

This book will provide plenty of insight for any enthusiast who desires more context in which to understand the motives behind TG. Plenty of back story illuminates the early adventures of a couple of nutty kids in love as they parlay their penchant for mischief into successful anti-careers. Join two art damaged acid-heads as they learn how to navigate the sexual/socio/political spectrum of 1970s England while utilizing confrontational happenings in a bid to transcend physical and mental hang ups; all the while petitioning the British arts council to fund their next performance art piece which sought to provoke enough outrage to dismantle the very system that kept Genesis in Porridge. When the authorities finally had enough they took him to court and withdrew funding for his Cotex chewing exhibitions. Once the arts funding dried up Cosey Fanni Tutti turned to pornography to pay the bills and Gen decided to form another band with the guy that did record sleeves for Pink Floyd. In the end it was plain old relationship issues - jealousy - that precipitated the decay. These guys were the Fleetwood Mac of Industrial Noise. God bless 'em.

If you really like TG and want to learn as much as you can about them, then this is the book for you. Great! Not for the faint-hearted....

This book was a great introduction to the artistic exploits of the controversial performance group Coum Transmissions. Although I was familiar with Throbbing Gristle since high-school, I had not heard of Coum before. It was fascinating how Coum transformed into the pioneers of industrial

culture:Throbbing Gristle. T.G. stood out even amongst the explosive punk scene that was born as a reaction to the grim and gritty Thatcher years. They were even too radical for most punks. Well written and compelling, it contains some amazing background information into their method and madness. If you are interested in industrial culture, analog technology, art or music of the seventies, magick, or simply have a morbid curiosity then this book is for you. One of the best art/music books that I have read in a long time with lots of great and rare photos. One particular side effect of reading this book was that I developed a fascination for front man Genesis P. Orridge and I encourage everyone to investigate and acquaint themselves with this cultural engineer who played a major role in introducing not only 'industrial' music but also body modification, rave culture, and magick to the public. As a result of reading Wrecker's I am now totally absorbed in Gen's Psychick Bible which I also highly recommend.

Tony Menzies AKA Brook. I was the kid in the 'Fab and Kinky' poster. It says 'Gen' underneath my pic. Like Foxtrot Echo and Fizzey Paet I too was in Coum Transmissions playing guitar. I even get a short slot on TG's first LP The Second Annual Report. This is a great little book and I would recommend it to anyone who has an interest in this period. I still hear from Fizz at times. He is alive and well.

It took me all of 1999 to get hold of this book, and finally .com sold me a slightly damaged copy for \$32. People are waiting for a second printing and/or a US edition. The cover looks cheap, white with a cut-out and rearranged photo of TG members from the '20 Jazz Funk Greats' album cover. But that's about the only negative thing I could say about the book. This will stand as the definitive work on the subject for a LONG time. It's incredibly thorough, and with many pictures and illustrations never or rarely seen before, including many photos of the pre-TG hippie version of Genesis P-Orridge. It tells the full story from GPO's birth in 1950 up to the split of TG in 1981. While TG has been the subject of quite a lot of writing before, in two of the RE/Search books and many music mags, the performance art COUM period has had very little attention and critique. This is fully rectified here. When TG put out their first LP, you're more than halfway thru the book. Ford's unfolding chronological work is strong on both personal biographical detail and assessment of COUM/TG's place in art history. I see TG/GPO as much stronger conceptualists than actual artists, much like their mentor William Burroughs. But as such, they have wielded an extremely strong influence on others, and sown the seeds of whole new genres of art and music. The unorthodox use of synths, 'industrial' noise and cut-ups are now

commonplace, while in the 70's it could cause riots when presented to an audience most used to the popular music of the time. The COUM group's extreme use of bodily fluids and food in performance could be viewed as a continuation of the ground-breaking work of people like Hermann Nitsch and Otto Mühl. Coum did some far out stuff, but were in my opinion not as much pioneers in their field as TG was. But the scandalous 1976 "Prostitution" show at the ICA in London must have been a lot of fun. Backed by tax-payers' money, Cozey Fanni Tutti tore out nude pics of herself from men's magazines she had posed in, and presented them as art. If it's in a gallery, it must be art, right? Not quite. The exhibition created a massive moral outrage. For record-collecting geeks, a full discography listing ALL releases (official, semi-official and bootlegs) is included in the back of the book, but in the book itself only the recordings released while TG was active are discussed. Which is a perfectly valid decision, as these are the original "manifestos" authorized by all TG members. An indispensable book for anyone with an interest in 20th century art and music history.

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