

Berlin, 1st January, 2006

Dear Eilidh,

I'm writing to you on the off-chance that this address is still functional. Considering the many years since we were in contact, I'm not sure.

I think of you often, and feel that you must know this.

Now in the early hours of the New Year of 2006, I am in my study. My wife and kids are still out celebrating, but I came straight back home, and I feel you very close, I have you in my nose. That mix of body heat, powder and the faint smell of urine (how you often lost control when we were together). My evening has taken me back to the private space that we made together – isolated, like Winston and Julia, you said. I am there with you again.

Before you told me otherwise, I assumed that in Scotland you saw Throbbing Gristle on *Top of the Pops* every Thursday. In East Berlin we thought all your shops looked like Harrods and all the great bands were on TV constantly. Only when I finally made it over to visit did I learn otherwise; I saw that the Gorbals were not much less of a shithole than Pankow. But back before *you* (in my pre-*you* mind) I see the band clearly, the four of them in a 1970s television studio, with silly, colourful, abstract shapes and the star filter making the lights twinkle. On stage: Cosey with her *Legs & Co* showgirl's figure. Sleazy, with his Geography teacher at a boy's school look. Chris is elfin in a colourful velour sweatshirt beside a bank of analogue synths, and Genesis up front, staring directly down the camera at us all.

They are surrounded by awkward teenagers bopping around, their inarticulate hips wiggling in ill-fitting nylon, trying to catch themselves being filmed. A few diehard fans up the front pogoing! That would have been me.

Do you remember Karl? The friend who always had good cassettes. His parents could tune into West German TV and they often played British music clips on *Star Parade*. Those *Top of the Pops* performances contained so much information to decipher. Cartoonish characters with their arms around the girls in the audience. But that's why I imagined Throbbing Gristle there too. They would have been like a solarised photo; a carefully orchestrated inverse. Their darkness becoming the sunshine. Saying "look". Or demanding "come and see". Living in East Germany

we knew instinctively that it is in the daylight, in the public realm, where the sadists and the maniacs prowl.

You and I were in bed when you explained that no, Throbbing Gristle had never been on *Top of the Pops*. You laughed at me too for taking their album covers at face value. You said you expected that when you played them for 'your girls' in class. I felt embarrassed by my lack of understanding of Western pop. For me, TG were so pop. I always felt on shaky ground when it came to the rules of mass culture, but that didn't stop me wanting more. And I thought of that tonight because I saw them perform live finally.

Renate doesn't like them, but we went to the gig as a family. New Year's Eve is always a folkloric reenactment of The Fall of Berlin here in Kreuzberg, with fireworks going off as soon as it gets dark, flashes over the rooftops, bangers in the street. Screams, screeching tires.

It was at the Volksbühne theatre – which you will remember from your '77 trip. Perfect venue for Throbbing Gristle. Rebuilt after the war in the Stalinist style of the Frankfurter Allee. Classicism meets '50s Modernism – monumental proportions but with simplified ornament. Inside lots of cut glass, wood panelling and red velvet. A cross between the Soviet and Nazi pavilions that faced off one another at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1937 in front of the Eiffel Tower. And Throbbing Gristle have a new logo that fitted the evening very well, a kind of Celtic knot, or a Rorschach test. Perfect for vertical banners on a stone colonnade façade.

Renate took a bottle of champagne for us and the kids to celebrate midnight. And before going in we buried it in the snow beside the playpark on Rosa Luxemburg Platz to keep it cold.

You know what I still have? Do you remember on my visit over in summer '78, those posters we saw everywhere for the theatre near your parents? The Citizens Theatre, you called it 'The Citz'? Stark images of desolate streets and bruised boys? We peeled some off corrugated fences and I took them home with me. I found out they were designed by Sleazy!

And I just came from the basement, brought up all my old copies of *Sound on Sound* magazine to look at Chris Carter's synthesizer reviews – they're still incredibly useful.

There is this feeling I get when I listen to and think about Throbbing Gristle that reminds me of you, and not just because they were 'our band'. And not because of your high tolerance for bad vibes. But because I feel the same softness that flourished in the hard space of our fucking. It's simultaneously close and far in the best way possible. Us, on the rough dirt of the waste ground by the abandoned shipyard. On the filthy mattress in the flat with the broken windows. In the

toilets of the Volksbühne with the choir singing Robert Burns down the hallway. Rusty blood in underwear, shit under fingernails. Hidden bruises and visible stains.

You were close but also far, because you never lost your sovereignty. Your body was already careworn from a lifetime of drudgery and service, devoted to your pupils and to your aging, ailing parents. But alive. You fully inhabited yourself when your grey hair came free of its pins, your glasses were flung into whatever corner, and you writhed and rode my cock like a demon.

To be different; to be autonomous while part of a whole, where collective desires imbricate. I always find that so soothing about Throbbing Gristle. Four collaborators standing back-to-back, looking out as a unit, more than the sum of their fragmented parts. Dissonance is the point, and becomes comforting. The conflict is built in, fuelling the feedback.

Which is why it was so satisfying to experience the concert in that grand room, full of people, all of whom are individuals. I rarely go to see live music anymore, so all I have is my private relationship to the music and a sensitivity to physical space. The Volksbühne is not a Neoclassical building, but its design shares some key aspects of that style. Neoclassicism is useful as both a container of, and counterpoint to, subversion. Because its edifice, its authority and its proximity to power turbocharges everything marginal. Not that Throbbing Gristle's presence felt abrasive there: the friction felt reassuring. Classics like 'Slug Bait' and 'Convincing People' felt ... logical. And another 'Neo', this time Neo-noir; brushed snare, muffled trumpet and club piano in 'Rabbit Snare'. Gen, the chanteuse, filled the Imperial auditorium with a leisurely flat-toned echo.

If you didn't know already you will be happy to hear that Cosey is a publicly recognised artist these days. You had all the press clippings from the ICA *Prostitution* show in your scrapbook (the one with The Osmonds on the front). At that time there was no way I would have been able to understand that what she did was 'art', when the rhetoric I was used to was all about political fitness and the expression of leftwing ideology. But now I can appreciate the audacity of inverting the shame of sex work, giving it status by placing it in a gallery. Understand that it exposed other kinds of ideologies. I was so young then, learning heuristically. It was still shocking to kiss a smiling face and taste cum. You said you liked the taste of your own cum because it was 'the taste of the absence of shame'.

Your dogged pursuit of erotic redistribution was to invert the grey poverty and insignificance you experienced in your daily life: I found that noble. So I was sad about the defensive tone of your final letter. Censoriousness did not suit you. I want to tell you now, in a way I could not back

then, that I was looking for someone to show me something, feel anything, at an age when I was an empty vessel for experiences. We met at a very specific times of our lives. We brought to each other different needs, but they were coterminous.

I paid a price, after your final letter. And I paid a price tonight, as my lizard brain reacted to the familiar, hypnotic music. Muscle memories flickering between the 1977 theatre toilets and the 2005 auditorium. I felt profound nausea, but ever the family man, I wore my usual mask.

After the concert Renate and the kids were energised and carefree, ready for whatever the rest of the night would bring. Outside we found our hidden champagne buried in the snow and at midnight, with the accompaniment of firework explosions, we joined other concertgoers in turning the Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz playpark into a pitched battle between Berliners and invading armies. I gained the little wooden fort with the slide and defended the high position. The kids pelted me with snowballs and insults. I returned volleys until I couldn't take it anymore and vomited into the snow. I could pretend it was the exertion that caused it. But it was not. It was the memory of my maniac predatory life shortly after you. The confused girls with whom I tried to reenact our sex together. Their bodies going rigid in revulsion at a word, at a touch. Nice, local girls for whom sex is about romance, not annihilation. I didn't understand then that the chaos we had made was an image that only made sense seen from a specific vantage, like an anamorphic mirror tube.

I'll stay up till morning, keeping the concert, and you, close to me until sleep breaks the bond. Will you get this at your parents' address? They must be long dead, maybe you too. My dear Eilidh.

Your,

Deiter