

(Just like) Starting Over...

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There's a long history of artists, musicians, politicians declaring a year one, year zero, or clean slate/new beginning. A New Age! But what becomes of this strategy, when we look at certain of these historical examples, in no particular order:

Once upon a time John Lennon and Yoko Ono shaved their heads and declared 1970 as "year one for peace" Despite their great symbolic efforts for peace, did it accomplish anything in real terms? Even the tragic death of John Lennon by a mad gunman doesn't affect gun legislation in US one iota. But countless new wave and punk bands owe much of their sound to Ono, and Lennon is even cited by many punks as very much a-ok such as this quote from Penny Rimbaud of the long time British punk collective Crass:

"What the Beatles did was to confirm the political element. John Lennon made me realize you could be a voice in your own right. Up till then you had to have a university degree or have studied philosophy to have an opinion, and I always had opinions and had been shouted down. What Lennon helped me do was to realize that my own opinions were as valuable as anyone else's."

We will glorify war — the world's only hygiene — militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman: the Futurist manifesto This hygiene certainly sounds a bit dodgy in light of the eugenic policies of the Nazis or the so-called "ethnic cleansing" spoken of during the Bosnian War of 1992-95, in which over 100,000 people were killed.

1968-1980 Film director Jean Luc-Godard immerses himself in his Maoist/Revolutionary period making nearly unwatchable films steeped in the rhetoric of the day, breaking with his previous films for many years. Estimates of deaths under Mao's 26-year regime approximately: 40 million.

It's well known that at the same time as the Cabaret Voltaire, Lenin was in exile in Zurich. Yet the political revolutionary had no interest in cultural revolution going on nearby consisting of nonsense poetry, singing, masquerade, and heavy drinking. Tens of millions died under Stalin's regime, Lenin's immediate successor.

Cambodian dictator Pol Pot declares himself brother number one and that 1976 becomes Year Zero, genocide ensues, claiming at least 1.5 million victims.

American cult figure Charles Manson who brutally killed at least nine people once declared that: I have X'ed myself from your world you have created the monster. I am not of you, from you, nor do I condone your unjust attitude toward things, animals, and people that you do not try to understand...I stand opposed to what you do and have done in the past...You make fun of god and have murdered the world in the name of Jesus Christ...My faith in me is stronger than all of your armies, governments, gas

chambers, or anything you may want to do to me. I know what I have done. Your courtroom is man's game. Love is my judge...

Despite his grisly murders Manson becomes a sort of buffoonish comic character in Raymond Pettibon's illustrations that initially grace punk rock flyers and albums by the LA band Black Flag, a symbol of hippie idealism gone wrong. And Manson was only a few steps removed from so many musical figures still lionized today, including Neil Young and the Beach Boys, the former who wrote songs in response to British punk, and the latter whom could be considered proto-punks especially if you consider their influence on the Ramones. Speaking of the Ramones, it's said one of the many tensions in the group, including artistic differences, love triangles, and major substance abuse was that singer Joey Ramone was a left wing spokesman for many causes, while guitarist Johnny Ramone was adamantly right wing backer of Ronald Reagan among other political figures. (Neil Young come to think of it was a Reagan backer also in the 80s as well as a Manson backer in the 60s. Go figure.)

in 1975 the Clash singer Joe Strummer became mightily irritating to his old friends one imagines by no longer answering to his actual name (John) or nickname (Woody) and insisting he now be known by his new stage alias. (BTW he was once quoted as saying the reason he played music was the Beach Boys) The Clash then uneasily tried to reconcile being once a punk band with a "political" conscience, that was becoming more a pop band with conflicted ideas to say the least.

And I think of another punk year one a song by the (to my mind) severely underappreciated LA punk band X: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cPxhWKVKIk>

Another LA punk band the Minutemen was arguably the most overtly political US punk group with really evocative lyrics about militarism, racism, class war, wage slavery, colonialism. But the reason people (mostly punk kids and rock critics) liked them is that they rocked and were even funky for white boys. One of their most interesting songs Corona talking about the "dirt, emptiness, and scarcity of our south [of the border=Mexico]" was later appropriated (apparently without paying members of the band properly (or their estates, singer D. Boon died in a 1985 car crash) for the "Jackass" tv series and films, never cited as a political work, to my knowledge, tho probably pretty relevant to those interested in certain strands of performance art!
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=206f0dLjtds>

Punk forefather Richard Hell (b. Richard Lester Myers) is enjoying a ripe oldish age (63) after becoming famous for his 1970s style (which influenced Malcolm McLaren, the Sex Pistols manager) such as wearing a t-shirt reading "please kill me" His papers were recently acquired by the archives of New York University and his memoirs have recently been published, likely to try and compete with his contemporary Patti Smith

Basically all this boils down to is some free associative remarks on how I believe punk and politics to be irreconcilable. Idealistically I love to think of the Clash as political or the Sex Pistols as challenging the monarchy, but that's really bullshit. Only thing political stemming from the work was a bit more circulation of challenging ideas in unlikely

places, mainly teenagers bedrooms. Politics when it speaks of new eras, rules, ethics, slogans, manifestos—look out! Real damage might be likely to occur, maybe not genocide but at the very least unfair working, housing, welfare, and economic practices. Same shit with punk bands, who cares? It's fun! future what future? As the t-shirts used to read "Fuck art let's dance" or as US Marxist Emma Goldman purportedly once said: *"If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution."* And the venerable Bob Dylan once said, "What's so political about standing up for what you believe in?"

But I think punk wilfully tried to ironically satirize a lot that was going wrong in the world, with humour and energy, but it exists (and with great significance) as a resoundingly joyful cultural commentary rather than actual revolutionary activity, thank goodness. And ultimately I am at odds with some of that irony in the real world setting because it can help become a shield to empathy, which is a much more difficult and challenging goal in terms of interpersonal relations. Without empathy, one could say the kind of outlandish things that British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, a great foil for punks would say: "There is no such thing as society." Thus every person an individual, taking care of his/herself. Fuck everyone. No future indeed.

PS most of the "research" here is really pretty shoddy and based on unreliable sources, all factual data could be incorrect! ☺