

YEAR ZERO

by

VAPE SHOP

MMXXVI

YEAR ZERO

Sunday the 7th of September 2025

Good evening...

Dear Fellow Top Deck Passenger,

We love a Year Zero.

Or at least I do.

A moment in time where everything that has gone before is irrelevant.

I am addicted to Year Zeros.

But...

I can't make or manufacture or instigate or even predict when one of those Year Zeros might turn up in my life. Let alone yours.

The first that I remember is back in the late August of 1965, when we got back from spending three months living in the USA. As in when we got back to our wee town in Scotland and I was back into Primary Six at school, and everybody was talking about this thing called The Beatles. It was not just Elvis that had never existed, it was all popular music that had existed before we went to America, only three months earlier, now never existed.

And...

All haircuts had changed.

And...

All clothes had changed.

Or...

At least the clothes that we might want to wear had changed, not the actual clothes that we wore or the haircuts we actually had.

And...

Films about the Second World War and Cowboy films – all gone.

And...

That was my first Year Zero.

But back then...

I did not know about addictions.

I did not know that I needed another Year Zero to give life meaning.

I just assumed the changing seasons were enough to give life meaning.

Not that I knew that life needed to have meaning, it just did.

The years drifted down stream.

Maybe there were some minor Year Zeros, but maybe they were just days that felt different.

But...

Sometime in the late Spring of 1976, I became aware of the second major Year Zero in my life. I had just turned 25 and I was wandering down some streets in Liverpool, wondering what the rest of my life was going to do with me.

Or...

Maybe it was just what the rest of the afternoon was going to do with me, when I saw an open door. I like open doors where one is not expecting an open door.

So...

I walked through this open door into a building. And inside this building was a man called Peter O'Hallighan and a woman called Jayne Casey. And when I walked back out of this door, it was like The Beatles had never existed. When I got back to where I slept and ate, I put the kettle on, and while I waited for the kettle to boil, I switched on the radio and heard the six o'clock news about something happening in a place called Cambodia. There was a revolution happening in this Cambodia. I liked revolutions. I had always wanted to be part of a revolution. But I was

always either too young or too late for the revolution. And I warmed the tea pot. And I opened the lid of my tea caddy. And using the caddy spoon I spooned two spoons of tea into the warmed pot. Then I poured the freshly boiled water from the kettle into the tea pot. And as I waited for the tea to brew, I could feel things brew in me.

And I listened to the radio.

This revolution in a country on the other side of the world called Cambodia, was being led by a movement called the Khmer Rouge. This seemed like the ultimate revolution. The perfect revolution. All money was being banned. And cities were being emptied. And everyone had to wear the same clothes. And everybody had to grow their own food to eat. A revolution where no one was more equal than others. And if you thought you were more equal than others you were...

Anyway...

This is the revolution I wanted, not the give peace a chance one, where above was only sky. Or you stuck a poster of Che Guevera on your wall, or you could quote Trotsky or Marx. This was real. And this was now. The tea was now brewed, so I poured the tea into my cup. And I took my first sip. And then on the radio, they said two words that I had not heard used together before. Those two words were 'zero' and 'year'. And the voice on the radio explained that this Khmer Rouge in a place called Cambodia were proclaiming to the world that this was their and ours and everyone's Year Zero. And after taking a second sip on my tea, I went to my bookshelf and lifted all the books from it and went to the dustbin and put all my books in the bin. And then I went to my record collection and I...

But I didn't.

I knew then, if I was in Cambodia, I would be one of the ones they would have to be taken out into a field and shot, because I was decadent and I lived in a city and I had been to art school and I could quote Trotsky and Marx and had read Jack Kerouac and listened to The Beatles and...

So...

I decided that I would never change the clothes that I was wearing. But I had made this decision before I looked to see what clothes I was wearing. So I looked. And I was wearing my Levi Straus 501, button fly, red tab, shrink to fit jeans. And a pair of boots. And a blue shirt. Maybe this is what the Khmer Rouge wore. But I knew they would not be.

And time moved on, and the months fell from the calendar, and the years fell apart. And all revolutions fail. And we all fail.

And...

The thing is, I did not even know what Cultural Imperialism was when I was 25.

I mean I was so wallowed and soaked and drowning in American Cultural Imperialism, I had no idea that the jeans I wore, or the electric guitar that I played, or even the whole counter cultural thing was me and all of us not just bowing to the man but sucking his dick.

I thought I was raging against the machine, but I was just doing the job of the machine. I was just part of that commodified rebellion to keep the young folk buying the records or t-shirts or whatever it was in the aisle in the supermarket of Western Cultural Imperialism.

But somewhere in me knew.

I mean...

Every day I would wake up knowing that if I was in Cambodia, I would have to be taken out into that field and shot. And I should have been. I was living the ultimate entitled life. We all were. I mean I could sign on the dole. We had an NHS. I could catch a bus. I could phone the police if someone was breaking into where I lived. I could even catch a train to London and form a band and make records and say fuck you to the man, and the man would just applaud me for doing it by writing nice or angry or disapproving or dismissive things about me in the papers

and I could read what they wrote and nod my head or feel misunderstood, or even flattered. I mean how entitled could one man be. And not just me – all of us.

Yes...

I could point my finger at friends like Billy Bragg and say, 'But Billy, you are playing a Fender Telecaster, whatever words are coming out of your mouth, you are still doing the job of that American Cultural Imperialism. I mean everybody that has picked up and learnt to play an electric guitar is doing that job for American Cultural Imperialism.'

Or to throw the net wider – Western Cultural Imperialism. We could go on protest marches. We could chant Ban The Bomb. We could stick two fingers up to Thatcher. We could release charity records. We could blame our parents. I mean blaming our parents has got to be one of the easiest things to do. Rich pickings for the therapy industry.

We might all know the bits of history that back up our prejudices. I know what happened 1514. I know what John Knox stood for. Or for that matter Jenny Geddes. You might know similar things that back up your sense of self and your prejudices. I know about that enlightenment. Especially that Scottish Enlightenment.

And this is where I am getting closer to where I am attempting to go with these words on this pamphlet you might find on the seat on the top deck of a bus while you are going somewhere.

In my version of history, The Scottish Enlightenment is where Atheism is given birth – yes I know we are all born atheists, and atheism has been part of certain cultures since the dawn of God.

But...

For most of the history that I have known about, up until that Scottish Enlightenment, for the vast majority of people, God was a given, just like the sun rising and the turning of the seasons are a given. I mean there was no argument about whether the sun was real or just a figment

of our imagination. Of course there was a God. The only issues were how you saw and understood that God. And was that God on your side or their side. And all that stuff.

After that Scottish Enlightenment, in my version of history, it was only a few decades before Marx was explaining to us all that religion being nothing more than the opiate of the masses. And religion was invented to keep the people under control. And then it was only a few decades before every thinking person knew that God was just this made-up thing, and only stupid people went along with all this worshipping and praying and wearing your Sunday best, stuff.

But...

Sometime after I had attempted to have my very own Year Zero in 2003 with me doing this thing called The1z, when I was proclaiming that the era of recorded music was now over. And of course it wasn't, it was just the beginning of the Age of Streaming. The Age of Handheld Devices. And of course, The Age of Social fucking Media. The Age where every passing moment can be documented, except that actual moment itself.

But...

It gradually crept up on us. There was no actual defining moment of enlightenment. Maybe it was because I had given up on ever being able to walk on that road from Jerusalem to Damascus as Saul had attempted to do before he became Paul. I mean you do know your Bible stories?

But this creeping up was happening...

I kept trying to look the other way. Ignore the voices in my head. Try and convince myself it was just a passing phase. But the phase did not want to seem to pass. It just got more and more into focus. And the voices in my head got louder. My family wanted me to go and get a hearing aid. But I was, and I am still hearing too much. And it is not just the tinnitus. I can put up with the tinnitus.

Was this a New Enlightenment. Or was it the Total

Endarkenment.

So here goes...

Like God not existing Art does not exist.

Art like God was just something that man made up to give life meaning.

You might not like the same art that another person liked.

Or might not understand the Art that another culture embraced.

Or you might like to look down on someone's taste in Art.

Or you might even aspire to understand or at least own the Art that those above you understood or owned.

Or might rage against Arts commodification.

Or you might want to display it for all to see.

Or you might want to see your Art as a form of Activism.

Or your worth.

Or even your genius.

Or depth.

Or your mark on eternity, even though it will soon be forgotten.

But we never doubted that Art actually existed. In whatever its form.

But like God before, Art was just this other human fantasy.

Can I wipe the slate clean one more time?

Have my final Year Zero?

I will attempt.

Here goes.

It is not just that Art is dead, Art never existed in the first place.

Art is just mankind pishing on the wall, attempting like a tom cat to mark his territory.

But...

Even this attempt will be saddled with the vanity of man.

The Foot Note to this pamphlet that you might have found on that top deck, I hope will take the form of 52 weekly newspapers printed on physical paper. And each of those 52 newspapers will all become yesterday's papers. And the paper they are printed on will fall apart, disintegrate to scraps, crumble to dust. Those 52 will contain the distilled content of a website called www.penkilnburn.com. A website that will disappear like all of those other websites that have come into existence since that birth of the World Wide Web but before its death.

Yours, your fellow top deck passenger,

Bill Drummond

Post Script:

The first of the 52 editions of FOOT NOTE, might not be published until the first week of 2027 (if we get that far), but before then, I hope to use the aforementioned www.penkilnburn.com as a place to distil the content for FOOT NOTE to weekly sized chunks. As for Cambodia, I have never wanted to find out if the Khmer Rouge year zero worked or if it went the same way as all revolutions instigated by men, who want to change the world.

I don't want to be telling you what to do, or even not what to do.

But...

If I was to, I would be telling you to...

Never buy art.

Never make art.

Never look at art.

If you need meaning in your life, go and plough a field.

If you need beauty in your life, go and look at a tree.

Yours from the very edge of time...

The words contained within this pamphlet were written by the former Bill Drummond while he sat on the top deck of London busses, as they made their way to destinations he had never been to before. And might never go again.

pb

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PAMPHLET 35

MMXXVI