

F I V E

Are you intent on making it?

Maybe even faking it?

Do you believe in art?

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Do you believe in art?

Swell Maps

DAN MADE HIS OWN T-SHIRTS, ONE FOR EVERY PUNK GIG HE went to, with the date and line-up on the front and a relevant slogan on the back, all in gloss emulsion. By the time they dried they'd be stiff as a board. He couldn't sit down for fear of being badly chafed by his multi-coloured suit of armour. Dan, unlike Midge, was a Burnley Football Club fan, so we started going together to Turf Moor to see Burnley play on Saturdays. Every so often we got a bus or coach to an away game at Preston North End or Oldham Athletic or Bolton Wanderers. We went with a group of Burnley fans, all lads our age, who were known as the Football Thickies because they cared for little else apart from the match on Saturday. The Football Thickies hung around the same street corners as us, told the same jokes and ordered the same fish and chips, but in the Year Zero of punk they stuck doggedly to their baggy trousers and platform shoes. On the grey-paved junction between Manchester Road and Calderbrook Avenue, battles have been fought, histories unmade, over the width of a trouser leg. The Thickies, red-cheeked and spitting, fought like dogs constantly, bruising and tearing and twisting each other's arms playfully (and painfully). Their position within their own regimented hierarchy

was hard-fought and had to be continually protected. Those at the bottom, the pucker-faced lads who wanted to be accepted, who spat and smoked like the bigger boys but howled like small dogs when their wrists were being twisted, were the butt of all the jokes, laughing along with their own persecution. Which isn't to say this was some exceptional bunch of teenage sado-masochists; this was any dull and cloudy evening in the shut-up shop doorways and windowless bus shelters of England.

The Football Thickies christened us the Music Puffs. The Football Thickies and the Music Puffs would stand together on the Longside Terrace on Saturdays trying to start chants. The concrete slabbed terraces were hemmed in by head-high fences. Cheap beer in plastic cups (which could be satisfyingly crushed underfoot) was sold from a redbrick shed at the back. We gave lie to the low attendances by huddling in the darkest, most central spots, crushing like commuters against iron barriers. At first the Thickies and Puffs mimicked the chants everyone knew and sang every week but after a while we got clever and tried to invent our own. They'd be slightly weird and wouldn't often catch on, but we sang them anyway.* On the way home from the match, the Music Puffs would taunt the Football Thickies with chants of, 'TD and Woodwork!

* The football ground was one of the few remaining places where groups of people sang together without accompaniment or instruction; like in the pubs of old, someone would start a song and the rest of the crowd would quickly join in. After the introduction of all-seater grounds in the Nineties, this tradition of spontaneity and community struggled; it wasn't as easy to group together or move to the most vocal part of the crowd.

There were also the twin evils of piped music and supporters' bands that were both brought in to compensate for the lack of atmosphere following the all-seater change. Clubs would play celebratory music directly after a goal, making it clear that people were supposed to sing along to the Club choice. At Turf Moor we currently dance around to The Pirhanas' version of *Tom Hark* when the

TD and Woodwork!’ referring to the Football Thickers’ expected school exam successes.† The Football Thickers would reply with, ‘Does your Stereo know you’re here?’

On a train taking Burnley fans to a match at Blackburn, one of the heavier-set Thickers tried to impress everyone in the carriage—mainly Thickers, partly Puffs—by constructing a makeshift catapult out of his own braces, tying the ends across an open window. Proudly unscrewing a light bulb from the train’s ceiling, he placed it in the cradle of the catapult, waited until we were rumbling through a station, drew the elastic a full halfway across the carriage, and let go. Instead of soaring across the platform and exploding among a huddle of blue-scarved Blackburn Rovers fans, the bulb slammed against the window frame and shattered over the rest of the Thickers, peppering their spotty necks and feather-cuts with shards of glass.

Years later Dan went into a pub right across the road from The Street Corner Where We Met and bumped into a couple of ageing Thickers, well into their fifth pints. He said they looked like someone had blown them up with a giant bicycle pump, turning them into grotesque inflated caricatures of their younger selves. One had just come out of the army. Both were members of the National Front.

We had a mate at school called Nadeem Khan. He was one of only three Asian lads at Burnley Grammar; and one of those was Nadeem’s brother. Practically the whole school of teenage boys was racist, even if only on a casual basis. Bootleg Phil used to carry

Clarets score, which is infinitely better than those twin Queen staples which I’ve heard at various grounds: *We Will Rock You* and *We Are The Champions*.

At England matches there’s a supporters’ band sponsored by *The Sun* newspaper which blares out xenophobic songs from the War, sounding not unlike a German Thirties’ oompah band playing at a nazi rally.

† TD: Technical Drawing. Don’t ask me, I never did it.

round an embroidered *White Power* patch in his school blazer jacket. He wasn't quite racist enough to actually sew it onto his clothes and he didn't have much of an argument for carrying it around, but it somehow fitted the times.

So when we became friends with Nadeem, we suddenly found ourselves in a strange world which we'd never really understood before, a world where you're likely to end up in a fight at a gig because one of you isn't white (which happened at a Strangers concert in Blackburn). I had to rethink all the stuff I'd picked up in a lifetime of casual racism. My family were Mormons, I was brought up as a Mormon, and the Mormon church, for all its welcoming friendliness, had rules which didn't allow black people to take office within it. They believed that the transgressions of biblical sinner Cain were passed down through the generations in the form of dark skin.‡ Casual discrimination was endemic in the world I was brought up in.

I first met Nadeem during trials for school sports day. They were held at dinnertime, and someone came running over to us and said, "You have to come and watch the high-jump trials, the Paki lad's having a go!" It was a bright, windy day, warm enough for shirtsleeves and breezy enough to blow sand from the high-jump

‡ The Book of Mormon teaches that the Lamanites—Native Americans—attained their dark skin as a direct curse from God for sinfulness, and that dark peoples are 'shiftless and loathsome'. God's purpose, according to the Book, was to prevent intermarriage: 'Cursed shall be the seed of him that mixeth with their seed; for they shall be cursed even with the same cursing'.

In addition, Brigham Young, founder of Salt Lake City and second prophet of the Mormon church, said: "Shall I tell you the law of God in regard to the African race? If the white man who belongs to the chosen seed mixes his blood with the seed of Cain, the penalty, under the law of God, is death on the spot. This will always be so."

Pressure from both inside and outside the church led to the abolition of racist policy in 1977, though the teachings in the Book of Mormon remain as before.

pit into your eyes. Within the circle of grubby white shirts on the playing field were seven or eight boys and a teacher, and one of the boys was Nadeem. The other lads were all keen-looking and athletic and had on tiny shorts and vests. Nadeem was stocky, bumbling, wore a wide smile and a huge shock of black hair, and looked about twice the size of the rest of them. He had on his ordinary school clothes apart from a pair of outsize shorts, the ones that the gym teachers keep in a basket for kids who forget their kit. Every time it came to his turn to jump, a small cheer would go up from the growing crowd of onlookers. And Nadeem, with a run-up from the edge of the jump area, would hurtle towards the bar and throw himself straight into it. No attempt to make a jump. And he'd get up from the sand with a huge grin and trot back to the other lads to wait for his next turn.

And I was fascinated. Was he genuinely awful or a comic genius? The teacher was outraged but couldn't stop this wonderful spectacle: if Nadeem wanted to try out for the high-jump, who could stop him? And every time, he thundered across the run-up and crashed straight through the bar until his allotted attempts were up and he wandered off laughing, applauded back to the changing rooms.

I met him shortly afterwards and immediately realised that his one-man show at the high-jump pit (act one, scene one) was anti-authoritarian theatre: and no-one could play the buffoon quite like Nadeem.

I said, "What did you do that for?"

He said, "Because the teachers don't expect it."

I said, "What do you do when you're not doing the high-jump?"

He said, "I listen to rock 'n' roll music. And I'm building a 1957 Chevrolet in my dad's garage."

From then on, he was a *Music Puff*.

