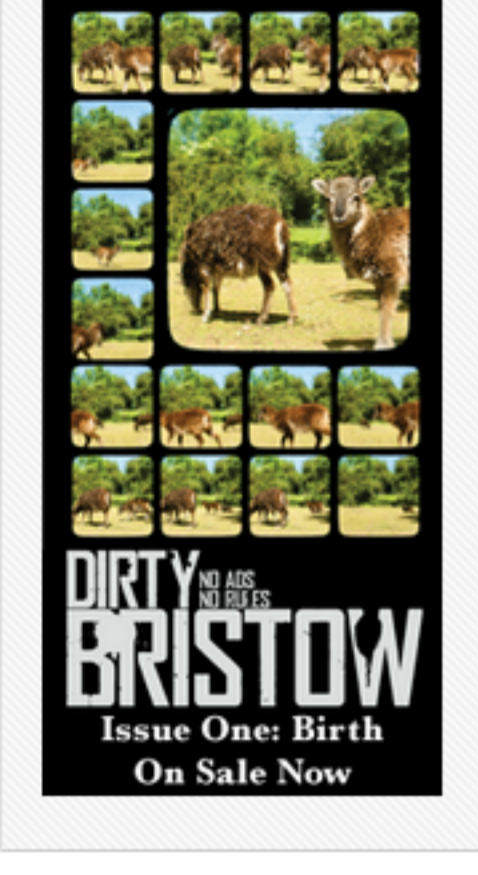
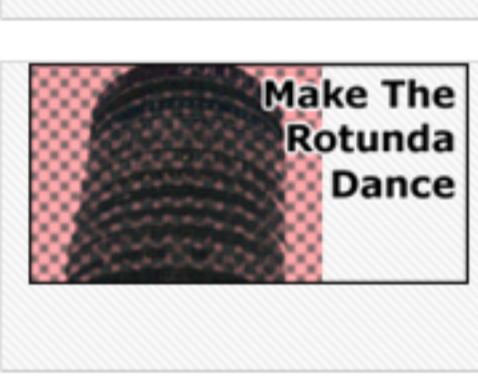


Birmingham: It's Not Shit loves Birmingham, its people, arts, animals, buildings, parks, grass verges, factories and bus stops. We've even got a soft spot for the Black Country.

BiNS runs The Brummie of the Year Award, Talk Like a Brummie Day and organises odd stuff like spending all day on the eleven bus.



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*Every ten seconds this site reads the 1000 latest Tweets from within a 10 mile radius of the centre of Birmingham and rates the words against a database.

How does this work?

Danny Smith: On the buses

9 November 2010

By Danny Smith

The opinions of Danny Smith do not necessarily reflect the views of the publishers of this blog, its affiliates, or any sane adult human beings. He currently lives in your cupboard, watching, always watching.

I am thirty years-old (-ish) and have lived in Birmingham all my life (except the times I haven't) in that time I have never learnt to drive. Consider this my favour to you. Seeing as I'm a notorious booze enthusiast, prone to bad decisions, and have somewhat of an impulse problem giving me a car would be like giving a toddler semi automatic weapon; hilarious but someone would get hurt. So I get around using public transport, more specifically the bus.

Now its easy to complain about the bus system in Birmingham, as you'll see in the next few hundred words. But I, as ever, have a point.

I suppose my biggest gripe about the buses is not the system itself but the people that use it, or the people that misuse it. I once got on the bus at seven in the morning only to be joined by a man in a string vest, Mr T jewellery and half lidded eyes he then proceeded to smoke the cheapest smelling joint in the whole of Christendom. This thing reeked of burning Kinder Egg toy and singed arsehole hair. What in the name of God could be so stressful in your day that you need to start smoking cheap headache-inducing soap before eight? The guy did not look like a high powered businessman.

The second? Pushchairs. Bulky SUV-type needless protection modules. My mum could collapse a flimsy double buggy with her mind while simultaneously corralling three children who, at a very primal level, hated each other, and take up no more than a double seat. Now the resource stealing breeders see nothing wrong with not only taking up eight square foot of real estate on a space-poor rush hour bus but also feel aggrieved when the allocated spaces have been taken and try to jam their pushchair into the front of the bus, not caring that they are blocking the entrance and exit.

I have a solution for this: a special service for pushchairs, a whole bus with no seats that runs hourly, collects only the pushchairs, and then drives them off a fucking cliff. Any environmentalist will tell you there are too many people in the world anyway, let alone selfish breeding types with no thought for anyone else.*

Another thing that boils my blood is the non-observance of queue etiquette. Now this happens on the 50 bus route more than any other. Some people will wait in line patiently, this is acceptable, weird and conformist, but acceptable. Some people will be aware of the people at the stop but wait a little away from the line and when the queue forms because the bus has arrived get into the line approximately where they should go. This is fine and, frankly, sane. And some people, let's call them scum, will pretend to be of the second group, but when the bus comes pile towards the front like pigs being called to dinner, turning getting on the bus into a thinly veiled rugby scrum. I'm normally against state involvement in peoples' affairs but if they bought in armed 'bus marshals' that had the power to taser and/or execute anyone who did that I would not only consent, but be filling in the application form tomorrow.

I have to say I don't mind the music playing on mobile phones. To be honest I've normally got my own soundtrack wired directly into my head anyway. Even on the days I forget, I've found that the quality of speakers have vastly improved. Having had the pleasure of working with the sort of kids that intimidate you on the bus for the last two years, I had the opportunity to ask them about it and they told me that if somebody asked them politely they would turn it down or off, and they were genuine, the only stipulation was that you treated them with respect when you did so, not subservience, respect. Imagine if a really old woman had their phone music too loud, blasting out Mario Lanza or a particularly kicking witch-house remix of a talking book of Catherine Cookson's 'The Rain-sodden Fucking Cottage', and say to them what you would say to her. Of course if they protest, insult or threaten you—phone the police. You would be surprised at the willingness of police to come and hassle a group of kids on the bus.

Playing music on public transport has been happening since the eighties and it's a symptom of a larger problem: that society marginalises and others races and subcultures. As when people would bring boom-boxes onto the subway, its a way of claiming a space as your own, being part of your environment in an environment that isn't necessarily friendly or welcoming, a sonic graffiti. The only difference between someone playing music now and in the eighties, is that if a old-school hip-hop B-boy got on a bus playing Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five on his massive two track Sony we wouldn't feel bad. Because we like Grandmaster Flash.

And once we agree that we're only arguing aesthetics—which no one can win. Whatever Kant or Plato tell you.

But, these are not issues with the bus service: the amount they pay bus drivers I don't at all blame them for not leaving their glass pods of safety. And being someone who has waiting two hours for a bus that advertises itself as 'every ten minutes' and someone who's tried to catch a night bus that has never come, and someone who's had a bus driver miss the stop I'm waiting at just because he was going to fast to stop, I know that the bus company can be at fault.

The system is old and shaky with no real ability to alter itself to traffic patterns or unusual circumstances, some Sunday service routes are a myth they tell foolish tourists despite the changing needs of the public they serve, and the some of the drivers they employ barely scrape through on conversing in English, let alone reflect they work in a point of contact service industry.

And despite all this, they do a terrific job: they facilitate 327 million journeys a year** and on the whole, on time and cheaply. A working knowledge of buses has given me the freedom to have jobs, explore my city and generally exist in a way I could not have if I lived in the countryside or Neolithic times.

One pervasive idea from the Neolithic age that has stayed with us until now is the idea of the sacred circle, the sacred circle is the delineation of space, a way of claiming an area as your own and is used to contain energy within it or keep out negative energy outside. Throughout the ages the idea of a protective circle has stayed with us, be it performers drawing a circle in the ground to delineate between societies norms and there performance space, or a boxing ring where controlled fury and brutality is contained. What the Merry Hill has this got to do with this article or BiNS? **Well our city is circled by the historic 11 route. I like to think that this website's 111111 day** is a way of drawing our own magik circle around the city, by being mindful on our journey around and visualising the the investment of energies (creative, physical, or spiritual) going into the event we can turn our city into our own sacred space.

*Okay, I only said this for shock value. I don't actually believe this.
**according to them, anyway.
*** incidentally in numerology 6 is the number of the musician, actor, teacher, healer, artist, or crafts-person.

Tags: [birminghamuk](#), [bus](#), [public transport](#), [travel](#), [West Midlands](#)

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Maria Harvey 6 months ago

Ah, you've taken words out of my brain, for the most part! I have less patience with the 'sodcasters' than you though; I see the imposition of one person's choice of music on a whole group of people as 'invading' space rather than 'reclaiming'. However, I will try to stop rolling my eyes in the future.

Like you, I don't drive and I believe I would have found out a lot less about Birmingham if I hadn't explored it by bus. I also think my monthly-direct-debit bus pass is very good value for money and that we do take our bus services for granted - I'm sure they're worse in rural areas (not that I would necessarily find out - the countryside scares me!).

Cheers Danny :)

Like Reply

PostHuman Pat 6 months ago

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 - Anonymous on "Strap on Jack / True Grit - Where are they?"

BiNS is mostly by Jon Bounds, a Birmingham based social web consultant, producer and writer. You can hire him to work on your stuff, or follow him on twitter. There's also the odd bit of stuff from Danny Smith.

Feel free to send us anything you're interested in - or think we might be. If you've got gigs to promote, best to chuck them on the talk board.