

Hugs, hearts and histrionics



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## **I really fancy an ice cream.**

You sit there. Scrolling through post after post and by the time that you've reached the last thing you saw you're either homicidally wound up or ready to jack it all in. Moments of enjoyment are all too brief, whereas moments of existential despair at people's inanity come thick and fast.

Of course you could just turn it off – vote with the mouse as it were - but it's hard to do. There's an element of addiction about it and the moments of joy, though brief, form part of that addiction. Like a Jonesing junkie you keep going back, keep persisting in the vain hope that you'll hit that high, that instance where something genuinely uplifting will emerge. It rarely does though.

"What's on your mind?" it asks. That's a pretty open ended invitation to share your thoughts about whatever's taxing you at the time. And what do people think is worth sharing? The clue's in the title in this instance.

"I really fancy an ice cream," is precisely the sort of thing that seems worth sharing to some people. Indeed they may really fancy an ice cream. Who knows? They may have undergone life-threatening abdominal complications recently (been there, it might come up later) and been on a highly restrictive diet for the last six months. Under such circumstances they'd probably deserve one, but it's unlikely. Chances are they're struggling for something to highlight their continued existence to the world - online, at least – and thought that in the absence of anything profound, informative or, perhaps, entertaining 'really wanting an ice cream' fitted the bill perfectly.

And who's to say they're wrong? Some people may appreciate the naïve charm of the statement. It may have been the 'Phew What a Scorcher' season and therefore bang on-topic for whatever's trending. In a real-world situation it's the sort of thing we'd say while idly chatting. Maybe sitting in the park on a sunny afternoon, watching the trees, playing with the kids and sweltering in the heat. Maybe, to many people, that's what the medium's for - a vehicle through which to virtually natter away as if you were there in person.

We all do it. We all shoot the breeze, chew the cud or whatever, blather on regardless about what's on our minds - but we don't do it with an audience in mind – unless you're Lauren Laverne, of course. And that's the point, really. Even if the guff social media users share isn't intended for third party consumption, as innocent bystanders we're continually caught in the banal crossfire of its incessant barrage. We're all prey to its all-consuming white noise.

And in a way, it's kind of fascinating watching it happen. There's a certain irresistible draw to dropping in on the conversation of others – even if it serves only to make you feel smug about your own erudition and obvious intelligence.

I worked at a place recently, an 'education provider' - or peddler of No Value Qualifications as I liked to refer to it. The job itself was largely dull; in fact I went in there for two weeks and ended up staying nearly ten months. For the remaining four months, following a merger that was really a hostile takeover from an even bigger provider of BTechs in cocktail management and the like, I didn't actually do any work at all. Not a line, not an 'official' email, zilch, sweet FA and still got paid! But that's neither here nor there.

Throughout that period the highlight of the day was eavesdropping on the girls that worked in the call centre in the staff canteen. Lovely they were, but my Christ they talked some nonsense:

"Yeah I like beans but I hate that stuff that they come in."

"What stuff?"

"You know, the bean juice."

"Oh, the bean juice, yeah, I don't mind it myself."

Barely a day went by that they didn't come out with something along the same lines that would brighten my day. But would I log on to read their musings? I'm not sure that I would, despite their obvious charms.

On occasion I'd chip in to enlighten them a little:

"What's that you're heating up in the microwave?"

"It's a lamb terrine."

"What's that?"

"I dunno, tastes alright though."

From what I could see, what she was eating looked a bit like a lamb casserole to me.

"Do you mean tagine?" I interject.

"Oh yeah, it's a tagine."

But most of the time I'd just tune out the majority of the yabber about who said what, what so and so had posted online and the day-to-day gripes associated with working in a call centre, of which there were many. So in some small way a part of me gets a bit of a kick out of the little window onto the worlds of other people that eavesdropping affords, but there are limits.

Tuning out's much harder to do online though. It's always been the same for me. I see something and I can't stop myself from reading it – even if I know what it already says. Am I the only one, I wonder? Has everyone read all of the acknowledgements, appendices, author's notes, 'books by the same author that you might like quotes' tucked away at the back of books. Probably not, but I have. It's an obvious failing in me that I should have sorted out years ago. But like that predilection for being a fuckin' smart arse when the fancy takes me, it's something I haven't quite got round to amending from a behavioural perspective.

So I see something, I read it. You write it and put it in front of me, I'm gonna read it. This helps nobody really, least of all me. But it's a fact. I'm pathologically doomed to read whatever shite passes my eye. Given this affliction, facebook's a bit of a killer for me. All that stuff gets read – even if it serves only to irritate me even more than my normal level of baseline irritation with the world, which, as you might gather, is pretty fucking high.

Some 'friends' I've really had to turn off. The sheer mindless bollockery of it all just became too much. Shouting at the screen didn't help. Posting facetious, or 'snarky' as I believe is the de-rigueur online term, responses didn't help either as they invariably fell on stony intellectual ground. So that little 'hide' button has saved my social media sanity on more than a few occasions.

And let's be honest, the sloughed-off friends ain't missed. My life will be no emptier from being ignorant of the fact that Lucy "really, really ♥s her horse, well, ♥s all horses really, they give such unconditional ♥, u no." And my life won't be any less rich by missing out on pictures of the monstrous amount of shit-producing horsey cunts either, that's for sure.

Admittedly, those who have been turned off rarely, if ever, posted anything that I found interesting or amusing. And one or two have joined the ranks of virtual ex-friends because of the, frankly, offensive opinions they casually share and seem quite happy to be associated with. Islamo-homo-xenophobians and their like, for instance, really rile me. Each to their own and that, but when morons start to populate my reading space with their reactionary, ill-thought-out reflections on whatever's trending my heart sinks.

You know the sort of thing. 'Patriots who love their country' and love it so much that they'll merrily distribute outrageously offensive stuff on their feed without a thought for how it might be perceived by anyone who comes across it. The 'Hang 'em, it's all they're good for' numpties who's go-to response to the latest outrage is to scream virtually for the head of the tabloid's latest boogie man and subsequently abuse anyone who dares to question their interpretation of the morality of State murder. And, of course, the Animal Rights types with their incessant highlighting of acts of cruelty, injustice and exploitation of our furry friends.

And don't get me started on the inspirational-memers. Are they incapable of not seeing something banal and subsequently interpreting it as a maxim for life? "Treat every day as if

it's your last." "Look for the magic in your life." "Spirituality does not come from religion, it comes from our soul." 'Comes from arseholes,' more like. Who do they think they're helping with this unconscionable drivel? Do they think – there're people out there that need direction, need something uplifting to help them find the right track to fulfilment? They probably do, but they're wrong. None of us need this shit. None of us need inane platitudes to help us make sense of the word around us. And we really don't need to be constantly reminded that there are sad sacks out there that do.

So maybe you're cottoning on to the fact that facebook gets on my tits. Well, you're correct. It does, massively so. It destroys my faith in human nature. It paints my world in a beige emulsion of pointlessness and stupidity that does nothing for my well being and everything for my growing disaffection with my fellow man. It grinds my gears, sets my teeth on edge, does my sweed in and a whole load of other maxims for annoyance that I can't currently bring to mind.

It's all just so fucking facile. Surely I wasn't the only one who felt this way? Surely there were others out there that shared my frustration and weren't happy to just sit there and let it perpetuate without even taking the piss? I hoped that there might be other like-minded folk who would join me in my mission to highlight the facile, shine a light on the banal, elucidate the execrable, illuminate the insincere and point out the pointless.

To paraphrase: 'All that is necessary for the facile to triumph is for good men to do nothing.' I decided to do something about it – or at least turn the annoying into something approaching pleasurable. I decided to make a stand. Throw off the facile chains that bind us and call to account those worthless fools that darken our virtual doors with the jejune.

