

# 1 Article

## 1.1 Charlie Brooker: 'Too much talk for one planet: why I'm reducing my word emissions'

This is an article from the *Guardian* newspaper by Charlie Brooker, the English satirist and broadcaster. He has worked in television, radio, print and online media.

### **Too much talk for one planet: why I'm reducing my word emissions**

#### **I've been overwhelmed by the amount of jabber in the world – it's a vast cloud of blah**

**E**agle-eyed readers may have spotted I haven't been writing this column for a while. Roughly two people noticed its absence, until the other day when a paragraph in *Private Eye* claimed I'd asked Alan Rusbridger, editor of the *Guardian*, to switch off the reader comments underneath my articles (not true), and that he'd refused to do so (also not true), so I'd quit (not entirely true). This led to an intense flurry of activity, by which I mean four people asked me about it.

Although the *Private Eye* story wasn't completely wrong – I have stopped doing this particular column for a while, for reasons I'll explain in a moment – I was all set to write to their letters page to whine in the most pompous manner imaginable, something I've always secretly wanted to do, when I figured I might as well respond here instead, for money.

Incidentally, I'm aware this is Olympic-level navel gazing, but you're a human being with free will who can stop reading any time. Here, have a full stop. And another. And another. There are exits all over this building.

Anyway, I haven't quit the newspaper, but I have, for the meantime, stopped writing weekly, partly because my overall workload was making that kind of timetable impossible, and partly because I've recently been overwhelmed by the sheer amount of jabber in the world: a vast cloud of blah I felt I was contributing to every seven days.

If a weatherman misreads the national mood and cheerfully sieg-heils on BBC Breakfast at 8.45am, there'll be 86 outraged columns, 95 despairing blogs, half a million wry tweets and a rib-tickling pass-the-parcel Photoshop meme about it circulating by lunchtime. It happens every day. Every day, a billion instantly conjured words on any contemporaneous subject you can think of. Events and noise, events and noise; everything was starting to resemble nothing but events and noise. Firing more words into the middle of all that began to strike me as futile and unnecessary. I started to view



myself as yet another factory mindlessly pumping carbon dioxide into a toxic sky.

This is perhaps not the ideal state of mind for someone writing a weekly column in a newspaper. Clearly it was time for a short break.

Reader comments form part of the overall wordstorm described above, and it's true I'm not a huge fan of them, but that's chiefly because I'm an elderly man from the age of steam who clings irrationally to the outmoded belief that articles and letters pages should be kept separate, just like church and state. I guess conceptually I still think I'm writing in a "newspaper", even though the reality of what that means has changed beyond measure since I started doing it. So now I'm sitting grumpily in a spaceship with my arms folded, wearing a stovepipe hat. Ridiculous.

These days most newspaper sites are geared towards encouraging interaction with the minuscule fraction of readers who bother to interact back, which is a pity because I'm selfishly uninterested in conducting any kind of meaningful dialogue with humankind in general. I'd say Twitter's better for back-and-forth discussion anyway, if you could be arsed with it. Yelling out the window at passersby is another option.

When it comes to comments, despite not being as funny as I never was in the first place, I get an incredibly easy ride from passing wellwishers compared with any woman who dares write anything on the internet anywhere about anything at all, the ugly bitch, boo, go home bitch go home. Getting slagged off online is par for the course, and absorbing the odd bit of constructive criticism is character-building. The positive comments are more unsettling. Who needs to see typed applause accompanying an article? It's just weird. I don't get it.

But then right now I don't "get" most forms of communication. There's just so much of it. Everybody talking at once and all over each other; everyone on the planet typing words into their computers, for ever, like I'm doing now. I fail to see the point of roughly 98% of human communication at the moment, which indicates I need to stroll around somewhere quiet for a bit.

After my break, and a rethink, I'll quietly return later in the year, to write something slightly different, slightly less regularly (probably fortnightly). In other words, I'm reducing my carbon emissions. And whatever the new thing I'm writing turns out to be, it'll appear both online, still accompanied by the requisite string of comments, and in the newspaper, which is a foldable thing made of paper, containing words and pictures, which catches fire easily and is sometimes left on trains.

Now get out.

## 1.2 Ian Birrell: 'As gay people celebrate, the treatment of the disabled just gets worse'

This is an article from the *i* newspaper by Ian Birrell, the former deputy editor of the *Independent* newspaper. He is a columnist, foreign correspondent, campaigner, and co-founder of Africa Express.

### **As gay people celebrate, the treatment of the disabled just gets worse**

With more spending cuts looming, are we content to leave one minority locked out of society as second-class citizens?

They were clearing up the confetti, nursing hangovers and disappearing on honeymoons yesterday after the first batch of gay marriages in Britain. It was a remarkable moment as the contented couples celebrated their unions with the traditional kiss. Within my lifetime, homosexuality has been first legalised, then embraced into everyday normality. ...

The ceremonies mark a milestone in the bumpy march towards tolerance and equality. We should rejoice at the speed with which people who were once jailed, mocked and used as a political football have taken their correct place at the heart of society. Politicians of all hues deserve praise for displaying courage in confronting the misanthropes who sought to stop lesbian and gay people from enjoying rights that the rest take for granted.

Problems remain with homophobic bullying in schools and bigotry abroad. But the reform shows how quickly attitudes can change. ...

We have seen a similar rapid shift in attitudes on gender and race, for all the hurdles that still exist for both women and ethnic minorities. Yet, amid all the discussion of diversity and self-congratulatory talk of tolerance, one minority remains stuck in the shadows of society. Indeed, many members would argue that their life is getting worse, with hostility growing.

These are people with disabilities, a group growing fast in our ageing society. ...

Not only are people with disabilities far less likely to be in work despite being the most loyal employees, but almost two-thirds of those who develop a disability have lost their job within two years. ...

Reported hate crime is rising, with stories of awful abuse commonplace... You can multiply all these damning statistics – the terrible stories of routine harassment – for people with learning difficulties. Just imagine the rightful outcry if this was happening to people because of their gender, sexuality or skin colour.

So why is this happening in the wake of the Paralympics, with all that optimistic talk of transforming attitudes? ...

One reason is the lack of social and workplace interaction, such a crucial motor in changing attitudes. So instead of invitations to drinks after work and weekend dinner parties, there is befuddled British embarrassment at best, coldness at worst, towards people with disabilities. As a consequence comes a failure to understand their hopes, fears and desires.

Then there is the lack of political power – one more legacy of the poverty and woeful support endured by many disabled people. Digital technology has helped but the idea of seeking a seat in Parliament is a joke for people who struggle to obtain a seat on the bus. At the last general election, more than two-thirds of polling stations had significant barriers to accessibility. ...

It is great to see Britain become more tolerant. But, with more spending cuts looming, are we content to leave one minority locked out of society as second-class citizens? Just as with gay and lesbian people, disabled people want only the same rights as everyone else. And remember that only one in six people with disabilities was born with them; one day this minority might include you, whatever your colour, gender or sexuality.