

DICKON EDWARDS, born 1971

'*Is it just me?*' 2016

Projected display of live social media search.

'*Consum'd with that which it was nourished by...*' – Sonnet 73.

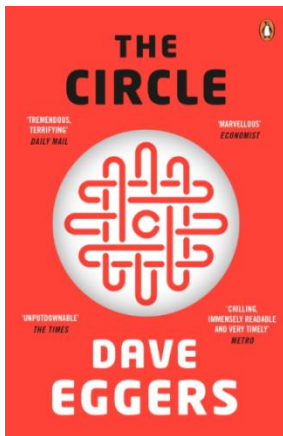
Every sixty seconds, someone in the world types the phrase 'is it just me' into Twitter.

What are the emotions behind this act? Does social media tease out our individuality, only to risk our public humiliation as being *too* individual, *too* different, or worse of all... ignored?

If a tree falls in the forest, and no one is around to live-tweet it, does it still make a sound?

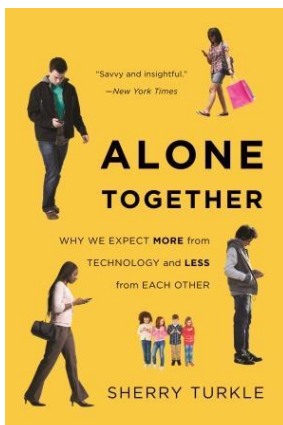
This installation displays a live Twitter search for the latest instances of the phrase 'is it just me'. Observations, reactions, jokes, and fears are all packaged with this same polite clause. On social media, however, this can hint at a deeper loneliness behind the intent.

Using the Visible Tweets software, each tweet's timestamp and user name is retained, highlighting how these are moments in unique human lives, freely offered up for public consumption. Issues such as context, copyright, and privacy are voluntarily sacrificed in the simple pursuit of feeling less alone. The software also animates any letters shared between consequent tweets, thus hinting that complete strangers are always more similar than they think. It *isn't* just us.



This year, one of the set texts for the **Contemporary US Fiction** module (an option on **Birkbeck's MA** programmes) was the Dave Eggers novel, *The Circle* (2013). Eggers's book is a satire on the rise of corporate social networks. Here, voluntary 'transparency' – the loss of privacy in any form – becomes an acceptable price for the sensation of meaning in an overly-connected world:

'I want to be seen. I want proof I existed. We all know the world is too big for us to be significant. So all we have is the hope of being seen, or heard, even for a moment.' – Mae, *The Circle* (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 485.



Another inspiration for this installation was Sherry Turkle's *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (2011; repr. New York, Basic Books, 2012):

'There is the risk that we come to see others as objects to be accessed – and only for the parts we find useful, comforting, or amusing' (p. 154).

'Technology [...] supports an emotional style in which feelings are not fully experienced until they are communicated' (p. 175).

'The only deliberate act is the decision to hand oneself over to the Net. After that, one is swept along' (p. 276).

'Sending implies being' (p. 302).