

# Missoulian

## Bless me world, for I have sinned Anonymous confessions site reveals our common need to reach out, cleanse our souls

By BEN BLOCH for the Missoulian | Posted: Thursday, November 13, 2003 12:00 am

These days, as the Internet pumps more and more information through its rapidly expanding arteries, it's not unusual to discover new kinds of creative and/or connective forums emerging on the Web. From Napster to Friendster, techlogs to blogs, we're witnessing a flowering of expressive possibility that is just beginning, really.

Recently, I was struck when I happened upon group hug.us, a Web site devoted solely to anonymous confessions. On the homepage it states its purpose: The idea is for anyone to anonymously confess to anything. It actually feels kind of good to know that someone will read it.

This is completely confidential. No information about you or your computer is stored. In fact, nothing but the text you type, the current time, and a random number is stored. Period.

So, each personal confession is entirely anonymous - tagged with a random number, and posted online for the world to read. The things people deposit on this site can break a reader's heart.

One confessor writes:

"I lie. I lie more than anyone else I know. I lie about my name, what I do, things I know, things that have happened. I lie to women at bars. I make up mental conditions I don't have. The strange part is that it feels better than anything else in my life. It's like I have no emotion anymore. I don't really think I care about anyone or anything, but I pretend to for the sake of society. I could be lying right now. I'm not, but I could be. I don't know why I lie, but I lie every single chance I get. I lie."

Lying, along with a predictable suite of "immoral" acts and desires, make up the majority of the site's confessional content, but each confessor has his or her own way of putting it down, and so even while the subject matter gets redundant, getting bored as a reader is next to impossible.

Another confessor writes:

"I'm having an affair with a married man who also has a little child. I don't love him anymore, but I still want him to leave his wife and child for me.

"I just want to win & I don't feel guilty."

And another:

"Whenever I hear about somebody who I used to know at school or university who has done well for themselves in some way, I want to kill myself."

There are also confessions that fuse humorously banal tales with a certain associative weight:

"I ordered a bunch of parts to build my friend a PC, then I used the parts to upgrade my own system and gave him the older stuff from my machine."

Or:

"I sold a 32mb video card on ebay and I said it was 64mb one. The guy never found out but I got his money."

Or:

"I live in a house with 5 other people, and the bathroom is always a commodity in the morning. Once or twice I've really really had to go when it was occupied ... and found no other out than to urinate in one of my roommate's favorite beer mugs and then empty it out later when the bathroom was free."

Self-hatred and feelings of laziness and futility are also a common theme:

"I am afraid I will never have to will to fulfill my potential because I am plagued by inertia. I am deeply embarrassed at how banal this confession is. But it keeps me up at night, and I worry I that by the time I get a handle on it, it will be too late."

Or, even more extreme:

"Sometimes I lay in bed at night next to my husband and see that there is really nothing to live for and I want to die. Then I'm afraid to commit suicide because I have a feeling I'll go to hell and my penalty would be to feel the same for eternity."

What strikes me as most interesting about group hug.us, and other Internet arenas like it, is that it pronounces how much of our experience on the Internet can feel like goings-on in a realm that occupies some harmonious junction between life and art. We are aware of the very real stakes and lives that feed the network at the same time as we experience it as a screen media.

Many of the confessions at group hug.us are so pure in their honesty, comedy, lust, distrust, self-hatred and tragedy, that after a few minutes one feels a certain novel-like profundity setting in. But we begin to understand that group hug.us is neither the Jerry Springer show nor a Dostoevsky book; that this experience doesn't present the same distancing barriers that let us tell ourselves, "Hey, that's not me."

Thanks to the interconnected format, it is something entirely more inclusive; something that, in the fervor and frenzy of anonymous admissions, we are secretly - if not instinctually - compelled to join. For, like art, and even more powerful than art, group hug.us reveals ourselves to ourselves, and also how the "Internet" - right down to the literal definition of the word - can truly amplify the similarities that bind human beings.

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