

It used to be that whenever I was on holiday abroad I'd always get a yearning to seek out a shop selling British newspapers. Something to do with wanting to know what was going on back home, combined with a fear that if I returned to the UK without hearing the news that someone like Tommy Cooper had died or Jack Straw had had a sex change then my life would be strangely incomplete.

Then one holiday, I wandered into the hotel shop and saw a bank of three-day old British newspapers all barfing out grotesque photographs of grotesque people called things like Blip and Man-Boy from grotesque TV shows like Big Brother's Little Jock-Strap and How Thick Is My Arm. The headlines on all these papers merged into one, massive composite headline, spanning four metres across the shop and shouting something like GROW YOUR OWN JORDAN BABY ASBO DIET FOR A POUND!!!!

It was a deafening roar. It was like a collective scream in print. I haven't read a newspaper abroad since, but I came home thinking that there is now a constant and increasingly loud background noise to all our lives, a thrum turning into a scream, that spills out of the media, the establishment, our bosses, the workplace and even from schools (how many schools have screaming headlines like FURTHERING YOUR CHILDREN TOWARDS A BRIGHTER FUTURE as you negotiate the gates?).

THE AUDACITY OF HYPE is my response to this noise. It's a sequence of thoughts, stories, diary entries and essays all prompted by the noise the world makes. The messages on greetings cards that portray middle-aged men as nothing better than slobby, drunken messes; the credibility-muddling rationale MPs give us for justifying their purchase of a 40-mile section of private motorway on their expenses; the trumpeting atheism of Richard Dawkins; the swelling parp of Obama's oratory; the snarky name-calling of David Cameron; and the profound gush of torrid television shows such as Anne Robinson's Trapeze Arena, are all funnelled into one book and blown back at them.

There's also a useful dictionary of new words to describe contemporary conditions, such as

Standroid: A rail commuter who knows precisely where to position himself on the platform so the train door comes to a halt right in front of him.

And

Gloomabeebies: The cloud of depression that hits a children's TV presenter the day he turns 27.

It's my hope that, if you read *THE AUDACITY OF HYPE*, you will be better equipped to go up to the world and tell it to keep the noise down.

Armando Iannucci    September 2009.