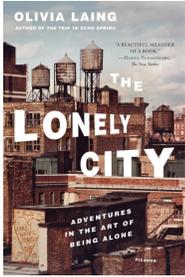


Books by the Stack



The Lonely City: Adventures in the Art of Being Alone by Olivia Laing

A roving cultural history of urban loneliness, centered on the ultimate city: Manhattan. What does it mean to be lonely? How do we live, if we're not intimately involved with another human being? Does technology draw us closer or trap us behind screens? Olivia Laing explores these questions by traveling deep into the work and lives of some of the century's most original artists.

Why you'll like it: *Life stories. Thought-provoking. Compelling.*

About the Author: Olivia Laing is a writer and critic. Her first book, *To the River*, was published by Canongate in the United Kingdom to wide acclaim and shortlisted for the Ondaatje Prize and the Dolman Travel Book of the Year. She has been the deputy books editor of the *Observer*, and writes for the *Guardian*, *New Statesman*, and *Granta*, among other publications. She is a MacDowell and Yaddo Fellow, and the 2014 Writer in Residence at the British Library. Her critically acclaimed book, *The Trip to Echo Spring: On Writers and Drinking*, is published by Picador.

Questions for Discussion

1. Olivia Laing writes of loneliness in a large city – New York, specifically – and after a relationship break-up. If you don't live in a metropolitan area, however, does this book resonate with you? Is the urban loneliness that Laing dissects in her book different than loneliness felt elsewhere...or under different conditions?

2. Laing talks about loneliness in these terms:

What does it feel like to be lonely? It feels like being hungry: like being hungry when everyone around you is readying for a feast. It feels shameful and alarming and over time these feelings radiate outwards, making the lonely person increasingly isolated, increasingly estrange.

What do you make of this particular passage? In reading it– or others in the book – were you consoled to think that others have a deep sense of isolation, that you are not alone in your loneliness? In other words, did you become less lonely reading this book?

3. Laing writes about feelings common to loneliness: what we're unattractive or sexually undesirable. Is that a cause or an effect of loneliness?

4. Talk about your own loneliness and isolation – the times when you felt cut off, ashed. Were there (are there) specific times or events in your life that have brought on loneliness?

5. What is Laing's take regarding our online lives? How does the internet contribute to a sense of isolation? Do you agree?

6. Did you end up overlaying your experiences onto the book? If so, where?

7. Are there any other artworks or images that make you think of loneliness?

8. How does knowing the story of an artist change how you view their works? Does it make them more personal? Less lonely? More lonely?
9. Is being lonely a positive or a negative?

(Questions provided by LitLovers.com)



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