

The Big Problem with You and Your Thing

(Or: Sad/Funny Intellectual Comments Bingo)

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Here are some sad/funny things that writers, intellectuals, scholars, and artists say in response to other people's work in written comments or workshop settings that, for some reason, sound to them like valuable, incisive engagements.

- 1) "The problem with your thing is the *kind* of thing it is, and I don't like that kind of thing, so that is a big problem for you and your thing."
- 2) "Your thing brings to mind this *other* thing, which I don't like, so I don't like your thing."
- 3) "Your thing is misguided, badly executed and a waste of time because it's not what I'm doing, which is what you should also be doing, if not as well."
- 4) "Your thing left me feeling weird (unsettled, angry, afraid, etc.), and I can't say exactly why, but my feeling weird is a big problem for you and your thing."
- 5) "Your thing is clear enough, but I still found it hard to engage with, which is a big problem for you and your thing."
- 6) "Your thing is substantive and significant, but it did not amuse me as much as it needed to, so I didn't pay attention to it, which is a big problem for you and your thing."

7) “I can tell your thing is expressed well, but I still couldn’t understand it, which can only be a problem for you and your thing.”

8) “Apart from the question of the merits of your thing, people like you aren’t allowed to make this kind of thing; who do you think you *are* making such a thing?”

9) “Your thing is not what the people I pay attention to are doing right now, and that is a huge problem for you and your thing.”

10) “Your thing is irrelevant and meaningless because it doesn’t speak directly to present-day realities as I define them.”

11) “I fully acknowledge that I have no knowledge at all about your thing, what kind of thing it is, or what your thing is trying to do, so here are my very strong opinions.”

12) “Your thing is elitist and pretentious because it is not fully and easily comprehensible to every single member of society, especially me.”

13) “Your thing is different from *other* things you’ve done before; I *know* you, and this isn’t *you*, and it’s annoying that you are implicitly asking me to keep track of the different kinds of things you may be doing.”

14) “If you squint hard enough, I’ve done *exactly* the same thing as your thing, but you haven’t acknowledged that enough in your thing, and you also probably got it from me.”

15) “Your thing doesn’t centrally address subjects, themes or issues that I care about, so the thing is worthless and badly done.”

16) “I can’t tell you where exactly to cut or trim your thing, but I didn’t make it to the end because it didn’t hold my attention relative to lots of other, shinier things, so that is a big problem for you and your thing.”

17) “Your thing seems to remind me of some other things, which means it is derivative of those things, and that probably you are a plagiarist.”

18) “I find it intriguing that your thing did not draw on, cite or quote [obscure, fancy-sounding reference that no one else here will know enough about to be able to appropriately dismiss it as totally irrelevant.]”

19) “Even though your thing didn’t say x explicitly, the thing still seems to *imply* x, and since I don’t like x, I’m just going to reply to that instead.”

20) “Your thing clearly knows who it is speak to, but those people are not important, relative to the people that I speak to and identify with. So if your thing is going to be a success, it first has to directly speak to us and our concerns, in terms that we might understand.”

21) “I couldn’t help but notice that you haven’t addressed the counter-argument that nobody is actually making and/or that is not very strong, but I’m going to treat this absence as a damning admission that your thing could not withstand its force.”

22) “This comment is really less about your thing and more about publicly reminding myself and everyone here that I am an expert/the expert on either your thing, or some threadbare but hopefully plausible linkages to your thing, which I will now establish at length.”

23) “What I’m about to say about your thing is what I always say in any given context, so I’m going to find a teeny, dangling, insignificant fringe of what it seems like you are talking about, that seems to relate—even loosely—to the thing I always say, and I’m going to grab hold of that fringe and shake it *really hard*, and maybe the fact that I am shaking it really hard, with great passion and conviction, will not only manage to convey to everyone how much I know about this completely different thing, but it may manage to convince them that this ludicrous trifle is somehow less irrelevant to your thing than it obviously is.”

24) “If *your* thing is right, then *my* thing can’t be right, and then that’s going to discredit my thing in the eyes of people whose opinion I care about, and that is going to make me and my thing look bad. And if I pay attention to your thing and take it seriously, I get the sense that there’s a slight chance that it might require me to rethink my thing—and maybe *other* things, or even *everything*—and that is just all super annoying.”

If commentators restrained themselves and spared others these insights, it would theoretically open more time for actual observations. This would also mean that most intellectual, artistic, and scholarly commentary as we know it would vanish from the earth.