



# Don't Read the Comments

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Aaron Swartz told us not to read the comments.

He was right. The comment section of the early-to-mid internet was a place where nuance went to die and bad faith went to thrive. "DON'T READ THE COMMENTS" became a survival heuristic for anyone who published anything online.

I've always had a hard time following that advice.

I read the comments. I lurk on Hacker News threads about my projects, scroll through Reddit posts about Python packaging, find the GitHub issues that are really personal grievances disguised as bug reports. I rarely respond. I just watch. I know you're not supposed to. I do it anyway.

There's something in me that wants to know what people think. Not in an approval-seeking way (or maybe partly), but more in a "the conversation is the interesting part" way. The thing you build is a starting point. What people do with it, how they react, what it makes them think about. That's where it gets interesting.

## The Clean Quiet

For all that, I've enjoyed not having comments on this site.

This site has been a quiet place. You come here, you read something, you leave. The writing exists on its own terms, without a peanut gallery appended to the bottom of every piece. The essay is the essay. It doesn't have a reply section slowly accumulating opinions underneath it like sediment.

There's a reason a lot of writers keep their sites comment-free. It changes the energy of the writing when you know there's a response section waiting at the bottom. You start anticipating objections. You start hedging. Without comments, the page is yours.

So why am I adding comments?

## The Old Web

Because I've been thinking a lot about the old web lately.

The web I fell in love with had comment sections. It had blogrolls and trackbacks and people responding to each other's posts with their own posts. It was messy and sometimes hostile and often wonderful. It was a web where you could write something and someone across the world could respond, and suddenly you were in a conversation with a stranger about something that mattered to both of you.

Social media ate that web. Twitter became the comment section for everything. Then Twitter ate itself. The writing lives here, the reactions live over there, and the connective tissue between them is gone.

I keep [building things](#) that try to recapture some of what the old web felt like. This is another small step in that direction.

## The Experiment

I've added [giscus](#) to the site. It's a comment system backed by GitHub Discussions. You authenticate with your GitHub account, your comment becomes a discussion on the repo, and it renders inline at the bottom of the post. No anonymous drive-bys. If you have a GitHub account, you can leave a thought.

Here's what I want to be clear about: this is an experiment, not a commitment.

If it adds something, if interesting conversations happen, if people share perspectives I hadn't considered, then the comments stay. If it turns into noise, or changes the energy of the writing in ways I don't like, I'll pull it out. The toggle is easy.

## The Contradiction

I'm the person who enjoyed the quiet, adding a megaphone to the bottom of every page. I'm the person who knows better than to read the comments, installing infrastructure specifically designed to generate comments for me to read.

Maybe that's okay. I want the quiet and I want the conversation. Both things are true. The comment section at the bottom of this post is me trying to hold both at once.

Aaron Swartz was right. Don't read the comments.

I'm going to read the comments.

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If you want to test it out, there should be a comment section just below this. Say hello. Or don't. The silence was nice too.