Why I'll be kicking you off this blog

Date: August 9, 2012



It's time to seize back the comment thread from the troll armies.

***Well, with 500 published comments and 80+ rejects it's probably reached a point where every possible viewpoint has been canvassed. It's now time to step away from the keyboard and return to real life. Comments have been closed. JB***

Here's an uncomfortable coincidence. In a week when I'd normally be piling onto Tony Abbott for wanting to let racists and bigots run off at the mouth again, or putting the old boot leather to Facebook for their disgusting 'Aboriginal memes' page, instead I'm going to step back and clean up my own house.

We've spoken recently about [**the increasingly unpleasant tone**](http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/opinion/blogs/blunt-instrument/what-are-we-all-so-angry-about-20120620-20noy.html) of internet speech, of how comment threads in particular are becoming open sewers for no good reason beyond a few misanthropes deciding they quite enjoy dropping pants and taking a crap out in the open.  
  
I've come to understand, through messages at other sites, through e-mails, comments on my personal blog, conversations with friends, through all manner of channels, that increasingly many people are not enjoying *Blunt Instrument.*

Specifically, they are not enjoying the comment threads.

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Herein lies a problem, because for me the discussion which rolls out through a long comment thread is the beating heart of a blog. Not the stuff I write. But the stuff *you* write in response.

For an example of this, have a look at the comments on [***The Avengers* entry**](http://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/opinion/blogs/blunt-instrument/finding-the-perfect-avenger-for-you-20120425-1xl9b.html). With only one or two exceptions, the replies and responses, the interplay of genuine wit there was, in my 'umble opinion, the best thing published across all of Fairfax that day. Or at least the most entertaining.

Compare that with the response to the Mars landing. One of our regular trolls, Treeman, was sin-binned more than 30 times for attempting to post comments that were so crazy, abusive, or wildly off topic that there was no way I could justify adding them to the discussion.  
  
Unless of course I was merely after the traffic. We do loves us [**some good traffic stats**](http://theconversation.edu.au/how-to-measure-influence-using-twitter-to-rate-australian-news-sites-8123)hereabouts, but at what cost? If people like turning up just to watch a shitfight, in the end the only people who will turn up are those who come for the shitfight. Everybody else will be driven away in disgust.

Some of the finest, funniest contributors to *Blunt Instrument* have gradually drifted away over the years because of the increasingly stupid and ugly tone that has come to characterise the comment thread.

It's not just an issue here, and for me, it's an issue across the entire digital media landscape. We are all grappling with the problem of comments. Some sites have simply given up on them and shut down the facility. Others spend big on expensive moderation regimes. Others still have simply thrown up their hands and let the armies of ignorance run wild.  
  
These armies attack from both the left and the right flank. Neither side of politics has any claim to the moral high ground. A stupid left wing troll is just as stupid as a stupid right wing troll. Just as boring too.

And I've had it. I can't face it anymore. A sickness of the soul descends on me when I think about having to moderate some of the filth *some* of you write in.

It's not a matter of whether we might agree or disagree on a particular topic. Blogs work best when enlivened by disagreement and contention, but only so long as everyone agrees to keep it civilised. And yes, I know I can muck in with the best of them. But there's a difference between unloading on somebody like Tony Abbott or Andrew Bolt, both of whom are more than capable of taking it and fighting back, and pouring a boiling cauldron of pus over someone just because your sad little life is drowning in hot pus and you're looking to get rid of some.

So, things are gonna be different around here from now on.

I'm gonna be swinging the mighty Ban Hammer and rejecting a lot more comments for reasons of ill-mannered tone, outright abuse, straying pointlessly from the topic and general lameness. It doesn't mean you can't disagree with people or with me. But you'd better be witty and on topic when you do.

You can start yer bitchin' now.

If you dare.