The internet is shit.

It is vitally important that we all realize this and move on. People (eg Bloggers) go on and on about how wonderful it is. About how much information is out there in cyberspace. About the way that everything is within reach in just a few clicks of their mice.

For instance:

"If I can operate Google, I can find anything... Google, combined with Wi-Fi, is a little bit like God. God is wireless, God is everywhere and God sees and knows everything. Throughout history, people connected to God without wires. Now, for many questions in the world, you ask Google, and increasingly, you can do it without wires, too."

Alan Cohen, V.P. of Airespace, a new Wi-Fi provider, New York Times, 6/29/03

I can name 20 people from my old school class who aren't in Google. I can walk into any public library, no matter how tiny and underfunded, and find facts, stories, amazing information I would never touch in a month of webcrawling. I can go into a bar and hear stories Usenet hasn't come close to in its 22 years of waffle. "Oh but what about the stuff you CAN get on the web?" the netheads say. But they're missing the point.

The internet is not the sole basis upon which you can determine existence. It sounds simple but people are starting to forget. If it doesn't have a website, that doesn't make something low quality. If you can't Google your blind date, that doesn't make them a freak. If one website says something about anything, it's more than likely pure invention and shouldn't be taken seriously. Checking your sources does not mean finding another website that says the same. Fiction is self-perpetuating.

Let's say it another way. A URL is not a mark of quality. It's not proof of honesty or approval from the FDA. Sure, people say they know this already, that a lot of the internet isn't true and a lot of it isn't interesting, no matter how angst-ridden and attention-seeking its author. But still we praise the internet for everything, from mobilising global protests to creating the latest trends, while disappearing up its backside and discarding anything outside it as 'out of touch'.

While we ascribe every first-world miracle to the electronic age, there's something truly missing that we once had in our grasp: our sense of wonder. Back in 1995, we were surprised, agog when things appeared on the net. People starting going around saying 'wow, this could really become something'. Slowly (very slowly at 16kbps), strange websites, new information, odd diversions and discussions with people around the world appeared in this brave new world. Each time it was met with surprise and delight, even if some of it was deeply obscure and slightly dull. There was no doubting the potential of the medium.

And look what we've done with it. Food wrappers and soap operas now tell us to visit their websites. Money is pumped online by people who can't even spell HTML. All manner of pointless and irritating content is continually poured down the infinite hole of data, unfiltered and over-appreciated. In accepting freedom of speech, we can't hide from its consequences - which in this case is millions of terabytes of unreliable information, badly designed and clumsily written. We have failed our own creation and given birth something truly awful. We're just too busy cooing over the pram to notice.

We need to start again. We need to stop saying how wonderful things are. We need to openly, truthfully and respectfully admit that the internet itself, in almost all of what's been done with it, is

shit.

There's no point in undoing what has been done. What we need to do is to change our attitude. The internet isn't new any more. The evangelists have done their job. Everyone's heard of it even if they don't spend their lives logged on. Now its the job of the congregation to revolt. Chant it from the rooftops, spread it across your server, email it to your friends. The internet is shit.

And then what? Then we can move on. If we truly understand that the internet is shit then maybe we'll go back to looking elsewhere to check our information instead of just Google. Maybe journalists will do proper research again. If we remember that the medium isn't the message then maybe we'll stop aimlessly surfing for something amusing when we could actually be doing something fun. And, crucially, if the internet is just seen as occasionally unavoidable, maybe those websites that give us something special will be all the more amazing for it.

Give an infinite number of monkeys typewriters and they'll produce the works of Shakespeare. Unfortunately, I feel like I'm reading all the books where they didn't. I can't wait for the day when the internet makes me rejoice in its possibilities again. But right now, it's shit.