concepts of information

introduction (2)

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definitional traps

"to purify the dialect of the tribe"
"The logic of definition is nowhere more crucial than with respect to the name of a field of scholarly enquiry ... The name of the field maps out essential characteristics ..."

Alvin Schrader,
"In Search of a Name,"1984

"the mud and slime of verbal imprecision"
"laxity in the use of the term"

Kenneth Sayre,
Cybernetics and the Philosophy of Mind,
1976

unifying concepts?

"For national decision makers, no better alternative is at hand than to accept the unifying concept of *information* and to undertake the planning of communication policies by doing resource analysis."
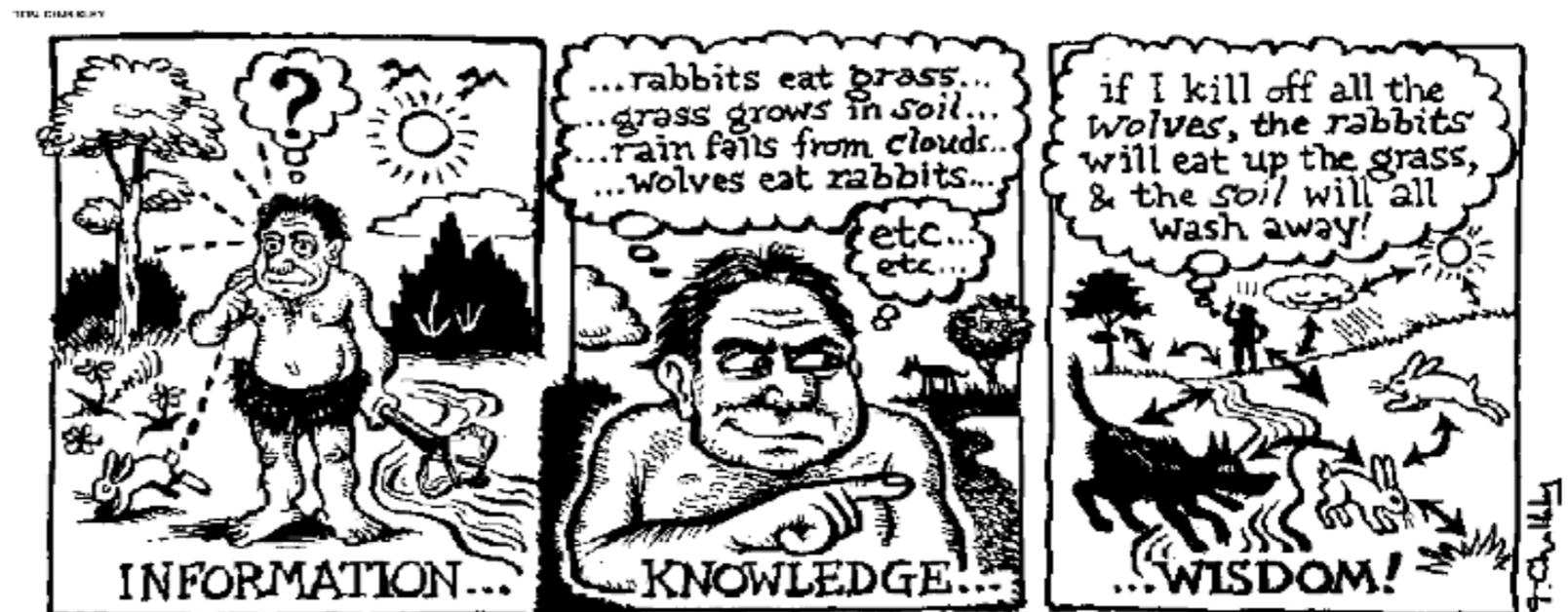
William H Read,
"Information as a National Resource," 1978

immutable mobile

"Information is information, not matter or energy. No materialism which does not admit this can survive at the present day."

Norbert Weiner, *Cybernetics*, 1948

"On an average weekday, the *New York Times* contains more information than any contemporary of Shakespeare's would have acquired in a lifetime"

information's progress

The endless cycle of ideas and action
Endless invention, endless experimentation
Brings knowledge of motion, not of stillness
Where is the life we have lost in the living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

T.S. Eliot, "Choruses from 'The Rock'"

[v. Daniel Bell, 1979, Harlan Cleveland, 1985 ...]

"Ars longa, vita brevis, occasio praeceps,
experimentum periculosum, iudicium difficile"

Hippocrates, 460 bce

"Such data may add considerable
useful information to our knowledge"
Science, 1981

information's progress

"A crucial distinction is made by Mr. Roszak [in the *Cult of Information*] between information, or data, and knowledge, that semantic embarrassment which computer zealots at best ignore and at worst disguise, calling it by such misnomers as 'knowledge systems.' Computers may excel at processing data. But, unlike humans, they are incapable of the original thought of which knowledge is created."

New York Times, 1987

information's process

"Mr. Lee, the South Korean Defense Minister, appeared before a National Assembly committee today and offered what some Koreans took to be an indirect apology for the episode. 'A lot of difficulty is involved in producing reliable information out of initial data or knowledge,' he said, pledging that the military would be more careful in the future in 'processing "information."'"

New York Times, 1987

coming into the language

hard words

Information, (lat.) an informing, telling, or making known.

Informatus non sum, a formal answer, made by an Atturny, that is commanded by the Court to say what he thinks good in defence of his Client

Edward Philips, *The New World of English Words or a General Dictionary: Containing the Interpretations of Such Hard Words as are Derived from Other Languages ...,* 1658

get over it

"I propose we get rid of the duplication of "knowledge and information." There are those who insist on distinguishing "information" from "knowledge" ... The specialist in "information theory" [ie Shannon] uses the word, as he frankly admits, in a "rather strange way" ... but it is not what is commonly meant by "information." ... *Webster's Dictionary* defines "information" as "knowledge communicated ...." Hence, in the ordinary uses of the word, all information is knowledge"

Fritz Machulup, *Production and Distribution of Knowledge*, 1962

pragmatism

"the science of management [comprises] organization, communication, and information" and information is "recorded communication"

Henry Varnum Poor,
American Railroad Journal c1849

cp Alfred Chandler & James Cortada
A Nation Transformed by Information, 2000

change and change agent

"information is a pattern or design that rearranges data for instrumental purposes, while knowledge is the set of reasoned judgments that evaluates the adequacy of the pattern for the purpose ...

"if as Paul Valery said, electricity was the agent that transformed the second half of the nineteenth century, in a similar vein the computer has been the "analytical engine" that has transformed the second half...

"knowledge and information are becoming the strategic resource and transforming agent of the post-industrial society

Daniel Bell, "Social Framework" 1979

causal theories?

"A more general diffusion of accurate knowledge regarding the state of public affairs would tend to check that excitement and party spirit which has often been created by misrepresentation or exaggeration, and has produced an annoyance to the government and at least a temporary disaffection of the public mind."

William Jacob, "Observations and Suggestions," 1832

18th century
Habermas & the public sphere?

19th century
century of the "fact"

John Sinclair, *A Statistical Account of Scotland*, 1791-99

George Porter, *A Manual of Scientific Enquiry*, 1849

conceptual change

historical change

Raymond Williams, *Culture & Society,* 1958

Raymond Williams, *Keywords,* 1976

John Brewer & Susan Staves,
Early Modern Conceptions of Property, 1996

conceptual change

"Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc. —
real, active men, as they are conditioned by a definite
development of their productive forces and of the intercourse
corresponding to these, up to its furthest forms.
Consciousness can never be anything else than conscious
existence, and the existence of men is their actual life-
process. ...
In direct contrast to German philosophy which descends from
heaven to earth, here we ascend from earth to heaven. That is
to say, we do not set out from what men say, imagine,
conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined,
conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh. We set out
from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-
process we demonstrate the development of the ideological
reflexes and echoes of this life-process. Morality, religion,
metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding
forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of
independence."

synchronous change

disciplinary wanderwörter

community

network

information

Fritz Machlup & Una Mansfield,

The Study of Information: Interdisciplinary Messages, 1983

the road ahead

Conception of Information syllabus