Technologies of Knowing: A Proposal for the Human Sciences

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In this age of ever more powerful computers, our ability to collect and spread knowledge is growing at an exponential rate. Far from liberating humanity, our "information exasperation", as John Willinsky describes it in this pathbreaking book, has made our ability to reach conclusions about the world around us all the more difficult. With little order to guide us through the mountains of new information in the Internet, the public, as well the sciences that have amassed such knowledge, has little confidence in its potential to change the world for the better. For example, the overload of conflicting new findings in breast cancer research has so paralyzed progress that some researchers now recommend that women stop examining themselves to avoid the psychological burden of monthly searches for this deadly disease.While some critics have condemned computers and the Internet for putting us in this age of overflow and still others have praised them for their own sake, Willinsky takes a middle ground. Using the fictitious Automata Data Corporation as the vehicle for an ingenious thought experiment, he plays out what would happen if all information collected from social science research were centralized, catalogued, and processed by one company serving the public interest. Willinsky describes in great detail how such an entity could work to fulfill the promises of the human sciences and technology.

Sure to stir debate, Technologies of Knowing offers a starting point from which to rethink our understanding of our emerging "wired" world and adds new insight into how to make the uses of knowledge more democratic.

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