

## Knowing

When an electrician traces the path of a cable behind the plaster, he is in effect recovering the design document for the building, so that he can change the wiring confident that he won't wreck anything.

In the past few years the human genome project has been completed. Scientists have been mapping the genetic structure of ... us — recovering the design documentation so we can modify the product with confidence. Humanity has become a subject of the information industry. Ours is indeed a world dominated by knowledge. We speak about knowledge workers, knowledge-based industry, the knowledge economy. Education has been reduced to the pursuit of knowledge.

Often our relationship with knowledge is that we do the knowing — or we are forever striving to know. The search for knowledge is about a ceaseless reaching out to grasp and understand and master (control?) more and more of the world around us.

We get more troubled when the quest for knowledge is directed inwards. Perhaps that is at first why there was such a mixed reaction to the human genome project. People aren't quite comfortable with the idea of knowing all there is to know about the blueprint that decides whether we have tufty eyebrows or fair hair or a tendency to plumpness or are particularly vulnerable to some particular disease. We are happy that an increase of medical knowledge is a good thing because it enables doctors to treat us when we are ill. But some people are nervous about our having access to, and exploiting, knowledge of human biology that is contained in every cell of our bodies, invisibly directing the growth and replacement — and eventually the death — of muscle, blood cells, tears and hormones.

Some would wonder whether we haven't gone information mad, codifying everything, naming everything, understanding everything. We seem determined to strip the tree of knowledge bare. Yet some would say we seem to have taken leave of our senses. Wisdom has gone out of the window. Someone has reminded us, however, that knowledge is less important than wisdom. The endless craving for knowledge has all too often left an empty darkness within. In our social interactions we have been carefully schooled to ignore what is going on within us. As employees we sometimes feel we are being treated as units of production, tools of the business rather than as people.

T S Eliot put it wonderfully well in his Choruses from the Rock, 1934.

Where is the Life we have lost in living?

Where is the Wisdom we have lost in Knowledge?

Where is the Knowledge we have lost in Information?