

DATA SMOG

Surviving the Info Glut

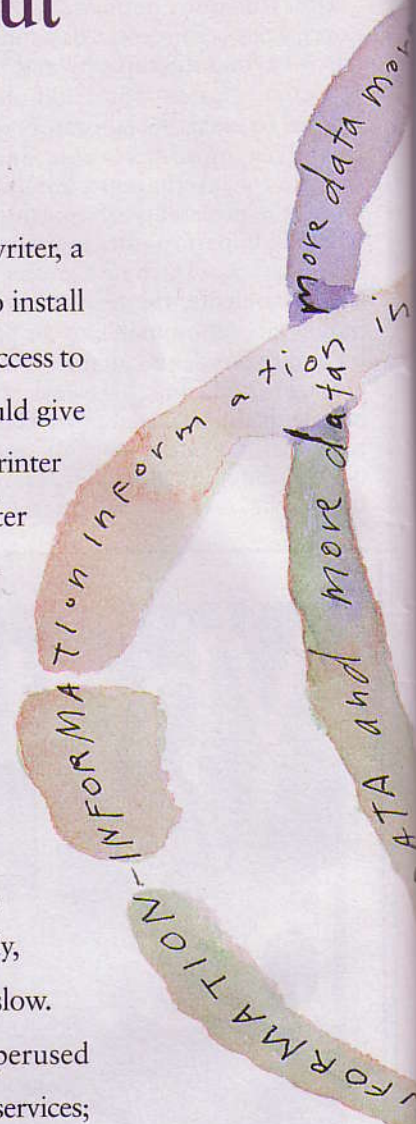
BY DAVID SHENK

DURING the infancy of my career as a freelance writer, a man came to my home in Washington, D.C., to install a prolific new appliance. The machine gave me access to the Federal News Service, which I felt sure would give me a leg up. Every day, morning, noon, and night, the printer spat out interviews from talk shows only moments after

they had been broadcast, major speeches from senators, ambassadors, and other Washington heavies, and absolutely every utterance from the White House. Without ever leaving my home office, I felt plugged in.

The installation resulted from my decision to confront the rushing tide head on, to try to keep pace with the new and speedy, and to more or less disregard the old and slow. As part of this approach I doggedly perused numerous newspapers, magazines, and wire services; I continually checked my e-mail; I watched Cable News Network; I stopped spending time with books and other cumbersome material that felt more like yesterday.

The ability to churn out ever greater volumes of information in a variety of formats has exceeded our ability to process it. Fortunately, firm action, both personal and political, can help clear the air.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY BLAIR THORNLEY