

The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains

By Nicholas Carr

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Finalist for the 2011 Pulitzer Prize in General Nonfiction: “Nicholas Carr has written a *Silent Spring* for the literary mind.”?Michael Agger, *Slate*


“Is Google making us stupid?” When Nicholas Carr posed that question, in a celebrated *Atlantic Monthly* cover story, he tapped into a well of anxiety about how the Internet is changing us. He also crystallized one of the most important debates of our time: As we enjoy the Net’s bounties, are we sacrificing our ability to read and think deeply?

Now, Carr expands his argument into the most compelling exploration of the Internet’s intellectual and cultural consequences yet published. As he describes how human thought has been shaped through the centuries by “tools of the mind”?from the alphabet to maps, to the printing press, the clock, and the computer?Carr interweaves a fascinating account of recent discoveries in neuroscience by such pioneers as Michael Merzenich and Eric Kandel. Our brains, the historical and scientific evidence reveals, change in response to our experiences. The technologies we use to find, store, and share information can literally reroute our neural pathways.

Building on the insights of thinkers from Plato to McLuhan, Carr makes a convincing case that every information technology carries an intellectual ethic?a set of assumptions about the nature of knowledge and intelligence. He explains how the printed book served to focus our attention, promoting deep and creative thought. In stark contrast, the Internet encourages the rapid, distracted sampling of small bits of information from many sources. Its ethic is that of the industrialist, an ethic of speed and efficiency, of optimized production and consumption?and now the Net is remaking us in its own image. We are becoming ever more adept at scanning and skimming, but what we are losing is our capacity for concentration, contemplation, and reflection.

Part intellectual history, part popular science, and part cultural criticism, *The Shallows* sparkles with memorable vignettes?Friedrich Nietzsche wrestling with a typewriter, Sigmund Freud dissecting the brains of sea creatures, Nathaniel Hawthorne contemplating the thunderous approach of a steam locomotive?even

as it plumbs profound questions about the state of our modern psyche. This is a book that will forever alter the way we think about media and our minds.

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Editorial Review

From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

One of the major issues dividing the critics was whether Carr's claim that the Internet has shortchanged our brain power is, essentially, correct. Many bought into his argument about the neurological effects of the Internet, but the more expert among them (Jonah Lehrer, for one) cited scientific evidence that such technologies actually benefit the mind. Still, as Lehrer, in the *New York Times Book Review*, points out, Carr is no Luddite, and he fully recognizes the usefulness of the Internet. Other criticism was more trivial, such as the value of Carr's historical and cultural digressions--from Plato to HAL. In the end, Carr offers a thought-provoking investigation into our relationship with technology--even if he offers no easy answers.

From [Booklist](#)

Carr—author of *The Big Switch* (2007) and the much-discussed *Atlantic Monthly* story “Is Google Making Us Stupid?”—is an astute critic of the information technology revolution. Here he looks to neurological science to gauge the organic impact of computers, citing fascinating experiments that contrast the neural pathways built by reading books versus those forged by surfing the hypnotic Internet, where portals lead us on from one text, image, or video to another while we’re being bombarded by messages, alerts, and feeds. This glimmering realm of interruption and distraction impedes the sort of comprehension and retention “deep reading” engenders, Carr explains. And not only are we reconfiguring our brains, we are also forging a “new intellectual ethic,” an arresting observation Carr expands on while discussing Google’s gargantuan book digitization project. What are the consequences of new habits of mind that abandon sustained immersion and concentration for darting about, snagging bits of information? What is gained and what is lost? Carr’s fresh, lucid, and engaging assessment of our infatuation with the Web is provocative and revelatory. --Donna Seaman

Review

“A thought provoking exploration of the Internet’s physical and cultural consequences, rendering highly technical material intelligible to the general reader.” (The 2011 Pulitzer Prize Committee)

“A must-read for any desk jockey concerned about the Web’s deleterious effects on the mind.” (Newsweek)

“Starred Review. Carr provides a deep, enlightening examination of how the Internet influences the brain and its neural pathways. Carr’s analysis incorporates a wealth of neuroscience and other research, as well as philosophy, science, history and cultural developments ... His fantastic investigation of the effect of the Internet on our neurological selves concludes with a very humanistic petition for balancing our human and computer interactions ... Highly recommended.” (Library Journal)

“This is a measured manifesto. Even as Carr bemoans his vanishing attention span, he’s careful to note the usefulness of the Internet, which provides us with access to a near infinitude of information. We might be consigned to the intellectual shallows, but these shallows are as wide as a vast ocean.” (Jonah Lehrer - *The New York Times Book Review*)

“This is a lovely story well told?an ode to a quieter, less frenetic time when reading was more than skimming and thought was more than mere recitation.” (San Francisco Chronicle)

“*The Shallows* isn’t McLuhan’s *Understanding Media*, but the curiosity rather than trepidation with which

Carr reports on the effects of online culture pulls him well into line with his predecessor . . . Carr's ability to crosscut between cognitive studies involving monkeys and eerily prescient prefigurations of the modern computer opens a line of inquiry into the relationship between human and technology." (Ellen Wernecke, - The Onion A.V. Club)

"The subtitle of Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains* leads one to expect a polemic in the tradition of those published in the 1950s about how rock 'n' roll was corrupting the nation's youth ... But this is no such book. It is a patient and rewarding popularization of some of the research being done at the frontiers of brain science ... Mild-mannered, never polemical, with nothing of the Luddite about him, Carr makes his points with a lot of apt citations and wide-ranging erudition." (Christopher Caldwell - Financial Times)

"Nicholas Carr has written an important and timely book. See if you can stay off the web long enough to read it!" (Elizabeth Kolbert, author of *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change*)

"Neither a tub-thumpingly alarmist jeremiad nor a breathlessly Panglossian ode to the digital self, Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows* is a deeply thoughtful, surprising exploration of our "frenzied" psyches in the age of the Internet. Whether you do it in pixels or pages, read this book." (Tom Vanderbilt, author, *Traffic: Why We Drive the Way We Do (and What It Says About Us)*)

"Nicholas Carr carefully examines the most important topic in contemporary culture?the mental and social transformation created by our new electronic environment. Without ever losing sight of the larger questions at stake, he calmly demolishes the clichés that have dominated discussions about the Internet. Witty, ambitious, and immensely readable, *The Shallows* actually manages to describe the weird, new, artificial world in which we now live." (Dana Gioia, poet and former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts)

"The core of education is this: developing the capacity to concentrate. The fruits of this capacity we call civilization. But all that is finished, perhaps. Welcome to the shallows, where the un-educating of homo sapiens begins. Nicholas Carr does a wonderful job synthesizing the recent cognitive research. In doing so, he gently refutes the ideologists of progress, and shows what is really at stake in the daily habits of our wired lives: the re-constitution of our minds. What emerges for the reader, inexorably, is the suspicion that we have well and truly screwed ourselves." (Matthew B. Crawford, author of *Shop Class As Soulcraft*)

"Ultimately, *The Shallows* is a book about the preservation of the human capacity for contemplation and wisdom, in an epoch where both appear increasingly threatened. Nick Carr provides a thought-provoking and intellectually courageous account of how the medium of the Internet is changing the way we think now and how future generations will or will not think. Few works could be more important." (Maryanne Wolf, author of *Proust and the Squid: The Story and Science of the Reading Brain*)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Marisa Carney:

This *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* book is just not ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you receive by reading this book will be information inside this publication incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper a person read a lot of information you will get. This kind of *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* without we

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Miguel Penix:

The actual book The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains has a lot associated with on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of profit. The book was written by the very famous author. The writer makes some research ahead of write this book. This kind of book very easy to read you can find the point easily after reading this book.

Joseph Lafond:

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