

## IS GOOGLE MAKING US STUPID? WHAT THE INTERNET IS DOING TO OUR BRAINS

Over the past few years I've had an uncomfortable sense that someone, or something, has been tinkering with my brain, remapping the neural circuitry<sup>1</sup>, reprogramming the memory. My mind isn't going – so far as I can tell – but it's changing. I'm not thinking the way I used to think. I can  
 5 feel it most strongly when I'm reading. Immersing myself in a book or a lengthy article used to be easy. My mind would get caught up in the narrative or the turns of the argument, and I'd spend hours strolling through long stretches of prose. That's rarely the case anymore. Now my concentration often starts to drift after two or three pages. I get fidgety,  
 10 lose the thread, begin looking for something else to do. I feel as if I'm always dragging my wayward<sup>2</sup> brain back to the text. The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle. [...]

[M]edia are not just passive channels of information. They supply the stuff of thought, but they also shape the process of thought. And what the Net  
 15 seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation. My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of particles. Once I was a scuba diver in the sea of words. Now I zip along the surface like a guy on a Jet Ski. [...]

[A] recently published study of online research habit, conducted by scholars from University College London, suggests that we may well be in the midst of a sea change<sup>3</sup> in the way we read and think. As part of the five-year research program, the scholars examined computer logs  
 20 documenting the behavior of visitors to two popular research sites [...] that provide access to journal articles, e-books, and other sources of written information. They found that people using the sites exhibited “a form of skimming activity”, hopping from one source to another and rarely returning to any source they'd already visited. They typically read  
 25 no more than one or two pages of an article or book before they would “bounce” out to another site. Sometimes they'd save a long article, but there's no evidence that they ever went back and actually read it. [...]

Thanks to the ubiquity<sup>4</sup> of text on the Internet, not to mention the popularity of text-messaging on cell phones, we may well be reading more today than we did in the 1970s or 1980s, when television was our  
 30 medium of choice. But it's a different kind of reading, and behind it lies a

different kind of thinking – perhaps even a new sense of the self. “We are not only *what* we read,” says Maryanne Wolf, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University. [...] “We are *how* we read.” Wolf worries that the style of reading promoted by the Net [...] may be weakening  
 40 our capacity for the kind of deep reading that emerged when an earlier technology, the printing press, made long and complex works of prose commonplace.

*Source:*

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**Annotations**

- 1 neural circuitry – Vernetzung des Gehirns
- 2 wayward - eigensinnig
- 3 sea change – radikaler Wandel
- 4 ubiquity – Allgegenwärtigkeit, ständige Verfügbarkeit