



You've heard about that new book, *The Shallows*, by Nicholas Carr, right? You can't miss it; it's all over the Internet. I find that semi-ironic, too, because apparently, the book makes a pretty strong case that the Internet is dangerous – that it's redesigning our brains... and it's not necessarily an upgrade.

Here's what Donna Seam of *Booklist* has to say about *The Shallows*:

"Carr 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.'"

Did you make it all the way through that mini-review? If not – if you found yourself antsy and distracted – you might just be living proof that Nicholas Carr is onto something. And theoretically, I guess I might be, too. There was a time, not long ago, when I'd have read *The Shallows*, myself, before commenting on it in print. But why bother to read books anymore when it's so easy – and so much fun! – to read
about
them?

I'm kidding, of course. I still read books. Plenty of books. I *love* books. But I'm not planning to read Carr's book, because I don't buy the premise. If anybody's an Internet junkie, it's me, and yet my brain is just fine, thanks. No "rewiring" going on here. Uh uh. No way. The fact that I now think
wider than I used to doesn't
mean I no longer think

deep.

No sir! Sure, I spend hours a day grazing in front of screens (both large and small), snacking on one link, then another – nibbling a bit of info here, a bit of opinion there – but that doesn't mean I can't sit down and enjoy a nutritious intellectual repast when I feel like it. It doesn't mean I can't... um... that I can't concentra ... What? Hold on a minute. Somebody just poked me on Facebook. Be right back...

Okay, so where was I? Oh, right. Books. I love books. I love books so much, in fact, that I've been reading one *particular* book – *Pillars of the Earth* – for almost a year now. And I'm only halfway through! It's not that I can't focus for long periods of time, anymore. Certainly not. I'm just trying to stretch out the bliss... let the words caress my soul... savor the artistry. Have you read *Pillars?* By Ken

Something-Or-Other... (Starts with an F?) It's a wonderful story set in the Middle Ages...

And speaking of middle-age, what is *up* with Sandra Bullock's face? Did you see her at the Oscars? The Internet was going crazy: "What has she done to herself? Failed plastic surgery," commented one Twitterer. A blogger said, "The eyes and the bottom lip move, but not much else. Those cheekbones could have been carved out of Mount Rushmore. Her nose has lost its puppy fat and somehow she manages to keep the eyebrows entirely still." I guess it's just wishful thinking to hope a Hollywood actress might allow herself to remain *au naturale*

, but gosh, wouldn't a genuine middle-aged face – complete with laugh lines and crow's feet and a moveable forehead – be a refreshing sight on a movie screen?

And haven't the summer movies been kinda lame so far? "Shrek Forever After" (let's hope not!)... "Prince of Persia" (I might actually have liked it if I hadn't kept falling asleep)... "Sex & The City 2" (Ew... just ew...). The one exception, for me, was the new "Karate Kid," which turned out to be a good, old-fashioned family movie, the likes of which you seldom see anymore. That Jaden Smith is a cutie pie, and who knew Jackie Chan could act? Such a poignant performance; the guy deserves an Oscar nomination! The reviews should have been better, in my opinion. I didn't actually *read* any, of course, but according to RottenTomatoes.com, they were only 69 % positive. Some of my friends are "Karate Kid" purists and refuse to see the movie at all. One friend called the very idea of a remake "sacrilege."

Which reminds me, how 'bout that new Lady Gaga video? The one featuring our Lady reclining in a red nun's habit, sucking on a rosary, when she's not gyrating in her undies with a series of leather-clad models? So shocking! So subversive! So... Madonna circa early '90s.

Been-there/seen-that. Yawn. This is what happens when you've grown up in a pop culture where everyone's primary goal is to "push the envelope." Everything "edgy" becomes blasé. Ho-hum. Boring. (It occurs to me that maybe Gaga feels the same way, and is commenting ironically? Who knows, anymore?) You want to push *my* envelope, Entertainment Industry? You want to shock me to my core? Try offering me something wholesome and pure. (No, not sappy and sentimental. Wholesome and pure. It's not the same thing.) And if you want to *really* blow my mind, give me something beautiful and true. Something featuring real human beings struggling with real human problems, free of any political agenda or social stereotypes. Something like "Friday Night Lights." Now there's a truly ground-breaking TV show. Honest. Authentic. Dark and gritty, but infused with such grace. And nobody watches.

But you can, if you're interested. You can get all the recent episodes on Hulu.com. That's where I watch "Glee," too. And "Parenthood." Both quality shows, but not quite family-friendly. Hulu's great, because you don't have to watch the whole episode at once. Come on – these "hour" dramas are 40-something minutes long! Who can commit? And another bonus: When you're watching TV on your computer, you're only a click away from your email, Facebook, YouTube, and all your favorite blogs... which come in handy if your mind starts to wander.

For a couple of weeks there, I became ever-so-slightly addicted to a blog I don't even *like* – Fitsnews.com. It's run by that Will Folks person (he calls himself 'Sic Willie') who claimed he had an "inappropriate physical relationship" with GOP gubernatorial candidate Nikki Haley. I still don't know if he was telling the truth, but it sure was a compelling story... and I was compelled to hit the blog on an hourly basis. (It's important for responsible citizens to stay informed about politics, don't you think?) When I'm watching TV and reading blogs, I like to keep my iPhone nearby, too, because you never know when somebody might text...

Text... text... ? Oh, right. We were talking about books. Nicholas Carr's new book, *The Shallows*.

The one about our brains, and how they're being reconfigured by the Internet. No, it's not a *text*

book. But books *have*

text, get it? See the connection? I'm snappy like that. My mind is in top form. Sharp. Keen. Always making connections. Running like a fine-tuned machine. Spinning like a top. So, I don't know what Nicholas Carr is talking about with this "shallows" business. Clearly he's grasping at straws... just searching for the Next Big Idea. Trying to make a name for himself...

Speaking of which, did you know that Aiden and Ella were the most popular baby names in 2009? I saw it on Parenting.com...

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