

‘Thinking Critically’ About the Web

Most of us use the Internet rely on the free offerings of Google Inc. We are using it for blogs for this class. Some writers and thinkers have thought carefully about Internet technology and how it might influence the way we think.

Nicholas Carr’s provocative article “Is Google Making Us Stupid?” (pp. 187 -194 in the Course Pack) asks if using the Internet—and particularly Google’s search engine and overall corporate mission—is changing the way we think.

As we discuss this article, try and make sense of Carr’s argument. This is a ‘personal essay,’ in which his own personal experience (with technology) is used to make a wider point.

In order to build a vocabulary of terms we can use together for this class, today will introduce several terms that describe different attitudes toward **technology**.

3 DEFINITIONS

• **technology** Systematic study of the methods and techniques employed in industry, research, agriculture, and commerce. More often the term is used to describe the practical application of scientific discoveries to industry.

"Technology." *World Encyclopedia. Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 8 May 2013 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t142.e11413>>.

• **Luddite**

→ *noun*

a member of any of the bands of English workers who destroyed machinery, especially in cotton and woollen mills, which they believed was threatening their jobs (1811–16).

• (*derogatory*) a person opposed to increased industrialization or new technology: a small-minded Luddite resisting progress.

- DERIVATIVES **Luddism** *noun* **Ludditism** *noun* .

- ORIGIN perhaps named after Ned *Lud*, a participant in the destruction of machinery, + [-ite](#)¹.

"Luddite *noun*." *The Oxford Dictionary of English* (revised edition). Ed. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson. Oxford University Press, 2005. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 8 May 2013 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e45245>>.

- In groups of 2:

Look over the first two pages of the essay (on pp. 197-198).

1) **Choose a sentence that could be Carr's thesis statement or main argument about Internet technology.** Be ready to read it and explain his position on Google (and related search engines). Write down the page number for the class.

From the rest of the essay....

2) **What kinds of evidence does Carr use to back up his idea that Google might be changing the way he (and other people) read and think?** Choose two examples of evidence that seem convincing or effective to you. Is this evidence solely based on his personal experience? (Does that make this evidence more or less convincing to the group.)

3) Throughout this essay, Carr uses some 'allusion' (literary name dropping) to use examples from other writers (even a film). **Choose one example of a quote from another writer that seems challenging (or even hard to understand or even confusing or incomprehensible).** We will work through to explain some of these examples as a group.

4) The beginning and ending of this essay use an example from film history to illustrate Carr's point about technology (perhaps) taking over from humans. (We will view a short clip from a famous science fiction movie called *2001* by a twentieth-century filmmaker named Stanley Kubrick.) **Based on your viewing of the clip and Carr's use of this 'allusion' to the film, is this example positive or negative about new technology like Google?**

5) **Challenge Question:** Based on this essay, is Nicholas Carr a **technology optimist** or an extreme **technology pessimist** (even a **Luddite**)? How can you tell? Does his engagement and everyday reliance on the Internet make his argument more or less convincing to you? Also, are the arguments (or advertisements) by **true technology optimists (like Steve Jobs)** or **Luddites** less convincing than people who weigh both the advantages and possible disadvantages of technology (like Carr)?

- We collect some answers from the class. Choose a reporter from your team to present your team's answers.

(~20 min.)