

I'm haunted by that scene in *2001*. What makes it so poignant, and so weird, is the computer's emotional response to the disassembly of its mind: its despair as one circuit after another goes dark, its childlike pleading with the astronaut—"I can feel it. I can feel it. I'm afraid"—and its final reversion to what can only be called a state of innocence. HAL's outpouring of feeling contrasts with the emotionlessness that characterizes the human figures in the film, who go about their business with an almost robotic efficiency. Their thoughts and actions feel scripted, as if they're following the steps of an algorithm. In the world of *2001*, people have become so machinelike that the most human character turns out to be a machine. That's the essence of Kubrick's dark prophecy: as we come to rely on computers to mediate our understanding of the world, it is our own intelligence that flattens into artificial intelligence.

WRITING STRATEGIES

1. What is the essay's thesis?
2. Explain how Carr uses a combination of support strategies to help readers understand and accept the thesis.
3. Describe the essay's opening strategy.
4. Carr draws attention to an assumption of Sergey Brin and Larry Page—that we'd all "be better off" if our brains were supplemented, or even replaced, by an artificial intelligence. Why does Carr think this assumption is unsettling? How is questioning the assumption important to Carr's point?
5. Identify a concession Carr makes and explain how it is important to his argument.

EXPLORING IDEAS

1. Explain how you have taken on certain qualities of an intellectual technology (a tool that extends one's mental capacities).
2. What is Taylor's ethic, and how is it beginning to govern the mind?
3. Why do you think companies get an economic advantage from consumers' distraction? In other words, why is distraction profitable?
4. What does Carr think we will sacrifice if we lose the "quiet spaces opened up by the sustained, undistracted reading of a book, or by any other act of contemplation"? Do you agree or disagree? What evidence can you provide to support your position?

IDEAS FOR WRITING

1. What besides technology has caused people's minds to function differently?
2. What particular aspect of the media has changed the way people's minds work?

If responding to one of these ideas, go to the Analysis section of this chapter to begin developing ideas for your essay.