

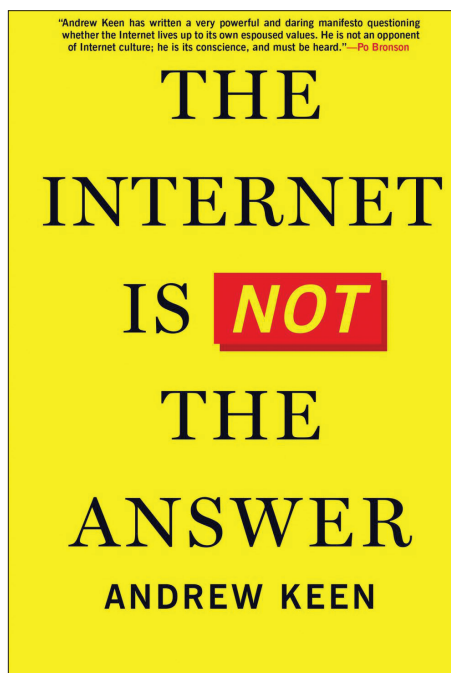
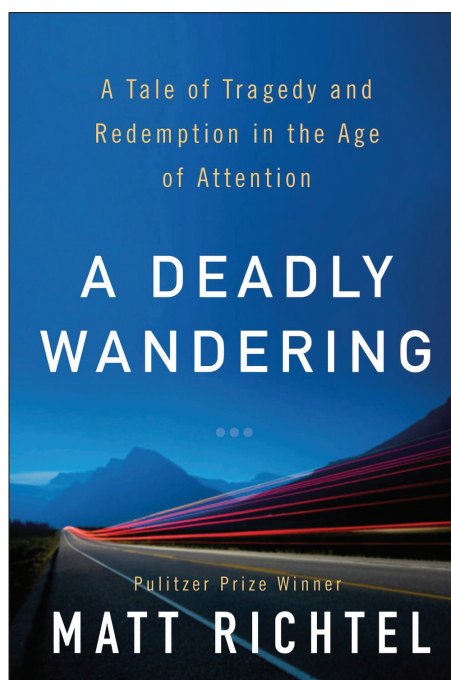
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everyday occurrence, despite laws created to prevent it. Woven into the narrative is well-documented research by neuroscientists showing that the brain, for most of us, is ill-equipped to handle multitasking: "...the brain is limited, lacks bottomless capacity, and isn't particularly fast relative to computer technology."

All-round and well-liked high school student Reggie Shaw texts his girlfriend multiple times while driving to work early one morning, and crosses the median, resulting in the death of James Furfaro and Keith O'Dell, scientists building rocket boosters at ATK Systems, also on their way to work.

The tragedy took place in 2006, at a time when there was little legislation against distracted driving and might have gone without much investigation except for State Trooper Rindlisbacher's conviction that hydroplaning, Reggie's explanation of the accident, could not have been the cause. Years went by before he finally admitted that he was at fault because of his texting.

On the bright side, however, was that much came to light about the brain's (in)capacity to multitask, including research done by Dr. David Strayer, scientist and psychologist, on attention, information processing and how people become overwhelmed with information. "In whose interest was it," Strayer asked, "to discover that there was a risk to this thing that everyone loved doing, and that was one of the most culturally celebrated activities, multitasking?" In the beginning stages, cellphone and automobile companies, the pushers of



gadgets, were among the top opponents of Strayer's research.

Other findings, based on the work of Dr. Anne Treisman, 2009 recipient of the Grawemeyer Award in Psychology, and the 2011 National Medal of Science, show that human attention is limited because of a clash inside the brain between bottom-up and top-down attention. We need top-down attention for focus on activities such as driving and reading, but bottom-up attention is instant and beyond our control when, for instance, we hear a siren or see a plane flying by. We can be so easily distracted, our brains can be overloaded, and there is a marked decline in productivity when we try to multitask: too much information, the brain is quickly overwhelmed, and humans, just as quickly, lose focus during complex tasks.

The brain needs to be connected to pursuits other than those linked to technology, such as nature, an idea which runs counter to the current "glorification of multitasking" and digital socialization. For suggestions, try www.wisdom2summit.com, with a focus "on living with mindfulness and wisdom in the digital age."

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Of great interest to students, parents and educators interested in technology, economics and social justice

From the "Christopher Hitchens of the