

1999 2005 2010 2015 2020 2025 2030 2035 2040 2045 2050 2055 2060 2065 2070 2075 2080 2085 2090 2099

"A unique look at the future"
Bill Gates



THE AGE OF SPIRITUAL MACHINES

**Ray
Kurzweil**

How We Will Live,
Work, and Think in
the New Age of
Intelligent Machines

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS...

1999... Publication of Ray Kurzweil's *The Age of Spiritual Machines*.

2009... Computers able to perform a trillion calculations per second... Most routine business transactions take place between a human and virtual personality... Translating telephones are commonly used for most language pairs... Bioengineered treatments for cancer and heart disease greatly reduce the mortality from these diseases... Human musicians jam with cybernetic musicians.

2019... Computers equal the memory capacity and computational ability of the human brain... Interaction with computers is through gestures and two-way spoken communication... Most learning conducted through software-based teachers instead of paper books and documents... Automated driving systems installed in most roads... People have relationships with automated personalities.

2029... Computers have the computing capacity of 1,000 human brains... Majority of communication does not involve a human... There is no human employment in production, agriculture or transportation... Computers have read all available human- and machine-generated literature and are now learning on their own... Machines claim to be conscious.

2049... The common use of nanoproducted food means that the availability of food is no longer affected by limited resources and bad crop weather.

2072... Picoengineering (developing technology at the scale of picometers or trillionths of a meter) becomes practical.

Continued on back flap

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Also by Ray Kurzweil

The 10% Solution for a Healthy Life
The Age of Intelligent Machines



THE AGE OF SPIRITUAL MACHINES

HOW WE WILL
LIVE, WORK AND THINK
IN THE NEW AGE OF
INTELLIGENT MACHINES

Ray Kurzweil



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First published in Great Britain in 1999 by
Orion Business

An imprint of The Orion Publishing Group Ltd
Orion House, 5 Upper St Martin's Lane, London WC2H 9EA

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-75282-078-8

Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Butler & Tanner, Frome and London

303.483
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A NOTE TO THE READER

As a photon wends its way through an arrangement of glass panes and mirrors, its path remains ambiguous. It essentially takes every possible path available to it (apparently these photons have not read Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken"). This ambiguity remains until observation by a conscious observer forces the particle to decide which path it had taken. Then the uncertainty is resolved—retroactively—and it is as if the selected path had been taken all along.

Like these quantum particles, you—the reader—have choices to make in your path through this book. You can read the chapters as I intended them to be read, in sequential order. Or, after reading the Prologue, you may decide that the future can't wait, and you wish to immediately jump to the chapters in Part III on the twenty-first century (the table of contents on the next pages offers a description of each chapter). You may then make your way back to the earlier chapters that describe the nature and origin of the trends and forces that will manifest themselves in this coming century. Or, perhaps, your course will remain ambiguous until the end. But when you come to the Epilogue, any remaining ambiguity will be resolved, and it will be as if you had always intended to read the book in the order that you selected.

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Before the next century is over, human beings will no longer be the most intelligent or capable type of entity on the planet. Actually, let me take that back. The truth of that last statement depends on how we define *human*.

PART ONE: PROBING THE PAST

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For the past forty years, in accordance with Moore's Law, the power of transistor-based computing has been growing exponentially. But by the year 2020, transistor features will be just a few atoms thick, and Moore's Law will have run its course. What then? To answer this critical question, we need to understand the exponential nature of time.

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Can an intelligence create another intelligence more intelligent than itself? Are we more intelligent than the evolutionary process that created us? In turn, will the intelligence that we are creating come to exceed that of its creator?

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"I am lonely and bored, please keep me company." If your computer displayed this message on its screen, would that convince you that it is

conscious and has feelings? Before you say no too quickly, we need to consider how such a plaintive message originated.

CHAPTER FOUR: A NEW FORM OF INTELLIGENCE ON EARTH 66

Intelligence rapidly creates satisfying, sometimes surprising plans that meet an array of constraints. Clearly, no simple formula can emulate this most powerful of phenomena. Actually, that's wrong. All that is needed to solve a surprisingly wide range of intelligent problems is exactly this: simple methods combined with heavy doses of computation, itself a simple process.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONTEXT AND KNOWLEDGE 89

It is sensible to remember today's insights for tomorrow's challenges. It is not fruitful to rethink every problem that comes along. This is particularly true for humans, due to the extremely slow speed of our computing circuitry.

PART TWO: PREPARING THE PRESENT

CHAPTER SIX: BUILDING NEW BRAINS ... 101

Evolution has found a way around the computational limitations of neural circuitry. Cleverly, it has created organisms who in turn invented a computational technology a million times faster than carbon-based neurons. Ultimately, the computing conducted on extremely slow mammalian neural circuits will be ported to a far more versatile and speedier electronic (and photonic) equivalent.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ... AND BODIES 133

A disembodied mind will quickly get depressed. So what kind of bodies will we provide for our twenty-first-century machines? Later on, the question will become: What sort of bodies will they provide for themselves?

CHAPTER EIGHT: 1999 157

If all the computers in 1960 stopped functioning, few people would have noticed. Circa 1999 is another matter. Although computers still lack a sense of humor, a gift for small talk, and other endearing qualities of

human thought, they are nonetheless mastering an increasingly diverse array of tasks that previously required human intelligence.

PART THREE: TO FACE THE FUTURE

CHAPTER NINE: 2009

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It is now 2009. A \$1,000 personal computer can perform about a trillion calculations per second. Computers are imbedded in clothing and jewelry. Most routine business transactions take place between a human and a virtual personality. Translating telephones are commonly used. Human musicians routinely jam with cybernetic musicians. The neo-Luddite movement is growing.

CHAPTER TEN: 2019

202

A \$1,000 computing device is now approximately equal to the computational ability of the human brain. Computers are now largely invisible and are embedded everywhere. Three-dimensional virtual-reality displays, embedded in glasses and contact lenses, provide the primary interface for communication with other persons, the Web, and virtual reality. Most interaction with computing is through gestures and two-way natural-language spoken communication. Realistic all-encompassing visual, auditory, and tactile environments enable people to do virtually anything with anybody, regardless of physical proximity. People are beginning to have relationships with automated personalities as companions, teachers, caretakers, and lovers.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: 2029

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A \$1,000 unit of computation has the computing capacity of approximately one thousand human brains. Direct neural pathways have been perfected for high-bandwidth connection to the human brain. A range of neural implants is becoming available to enhance visual and auditory perception and interpretation, memory, and reasoning. Computers have read all available human- and machine-generated literature and multimedia material. There is growing discussion about the legal rights of computers and what constitutes being human. Machines claim to be conscious and these claims are largely accepted.

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There is a strong trend toward a merger of human thinking with the world of machine intelligence that the human species initially created. There is no longer any clear distinction between humans and computers. Most conscious entities do not have a permanent physical presence. Machine-based intelligences derived from extended models of human intelligence claim to be human. Most of these intelligences are not tied to a specific computational processing unit. The number of software-based humans vastly exceeds those still using native neuron-cell-based computation. Even among those human intelligences still using carbon-based neurons, there is ubiquitous use of neural-implant technology that provides enormous augmentation of human perceptual and cognitive abilities. Humans who do not utilize such implants are unable to meaningfully participate in dialogues with those who do. Life expectancy is no longer a viable term in relation to intelligent beings.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the many persons who have provided inspiration, patience, ideas, criticism, insight, and all manner of assistance for this project. In particular, I would like to thank:

- My wife, Sonya, for her loving patience through the twists and turns of the creative process
- My mother for long engaging walks with me when I was a child in the woods of Queens (yes, there were forests in Queens, New York, when I was growing up) and for her enthusiastic interest in and early support for my not-always-fully-baked ideas
- My Viking editors, Barbara Grossman and Dawn Drzal, for their insightful guidance and editorial expertise and the dedicated team at Viking Penguin, including Susan Petersen, publisher; Ivan Held and Paul Slovak, marketing executives; John Jusino, copy editor; Betty Lew, designer; Jariya Wanapun, editorial assistant, and Laura Ogar, indexer
- Jerry Bauer for his patient photography
- David High for actually devising a spiritual machine for the cover
- My literary agent, Loretta Barrett, for helping to shape this project
- My wonderfully capable researchers, Wendy Dennis and Nancy Mulford, for their dedicated and resourceful efforts, and Tom Garfield for his valuable assistance
- Rose Russo and Robert Brun for turning illustration ideas into beautiful visual presentations

- Aaron Kleiner for his encouragement and support
- George Gilder for his stimulating thoughts and insights
- Harry George, Don Gonson, Larry Janowitch, Hannah Kurzweil, Rob Pressman, and Mickey Singer for engaging and helpful discussions on these topics
- My readers: Peter Arnold, Melanie Baker-Futorian, Loretta Barrett, Stephen Baum, Bryan Bergeron, Mike Brown, Cheryl Cordima, Avi Coren, Wendy Dennis, Mark Dionne, Dawn Drzal, Nicholas Fabijanic, Gil Fischman, Ozzie Frankell, Vicky Frankell, Bob Frankston, Francis Ganong, Tom Garfield, Harry George, Audra Gerhardt, George Gilder, Don Gonson, Martin Greenberger, Barbara Grossman, Larry Janowitch, Aaron Kleiner, Jerry Kleiner, Allen Kurzweil, Amy Kurzweil, Arielle Kurzweil, Edith Kurzweil, Ethan Kurzweil, Hannah Kurzweil, Lenny Kurzweil, Missy Kurzweil, Nancy Kurzweil, Peter Kurzweil, Rachel Kurzweil, Sonya Kurzweil, Jo Lernout, Jon Lief, Elliot Lobel, Cyrus Mehta, Nancy Mulford, Nicholas Mullendore, Rob Pressman, Vlad Sejnoha, Mickey Singer, Mike Sokol, Kim Storey, and Barbara Tyrell for their compliments and criticisms (the latter being the most helpful) and many invaluable suggestions
- Finally, all the scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, and artists who are busy creating the age of spiritual machines.