



# REEL CULTURE

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## Our Interdependent World Tiffany Shlain's "Connected"

Tiffany Shlain's new film *Connected* begins with a familiar scene: she's enjoying dinner with an old friend and, while the company is good, the topics of conversation plentiful, she caves to her desires, sneaks into the women's room, pulls out her cell and succumbs to texting and emailing. She asks, "What have I become?"

Indeed, what WE have become is the central concern fueling "Connected." Shlain asks, "When did things begin moving so quickly?" What has the historical surge of technology meant for human beings? How has the increased interconnectedness of the world impacted us physically, socially and, globally? As her father, the author and surgeon Leonard Shlain once advised; when you want to know about something, go to the past and look for patterns. That's what Tiffany Shlain does in this documentary exploring the internet, the synthesis of left and right brain hemispheres and, our increasingly interdependent world.

Woven throughout this documentary is the very personal account of Shlain's father; his work, his life, and his eventual death to cancer while she was simultaneously experiencing a high-risk pregnancy and working to complete this film. Shlain relies on the writings of her father as she probes the modern era (check out his work [here](#)). Zipping across the time line,

past the dinosaurs, after the earliest of humans with their fancy opposable thumbs, literacy was invented as a way to accumulate knowledge. It was right about here, Shlain argues, that a balance of power shifted. As we cruised into the age of enlightenment, science and reason stimulated the left hemisphere of our brains, leaving our right hemisphere, the one prone towards beauty and empathy, to play a less vital role in modernity (make sure you check out hers and her father's interesting argument that patriarchy was born out of this brain hemisphere split).

The micro and macro elements of modernity collide in this film. Shlain juxtaposes her personal encounter with science (her pregnancy and her father's brain cancer) with the macro repercussions of technological achievement. While we can appreciate the "pros" of modern manufacturing, global work forces, the internet, cell phones, hand-held computers and the like, we must also take note of the less glamorous consequences including increased pollution, the superfluity of sweat shops involving vulnerable communities, global warming and, a curious decline in honey bees which trigger a loss of food. Moreover, on the meso-level, as Shlain explains via the story of her cell phone craving, our social lives are deeply changed due technology and, in particular, our increased connectivity.

Shlain advances an interesting argument regarding the internet's ability to synthesize the left/right brain split described above. As we peruse the internet, she asserts, clicking on massive amounts of text information, we are stimulating our left brain which

craves logic and reason. At the same time, the images and videos we access satisfy our right brains. In sum, the internet, a product of scientific thinking -- the same approach to knowledge which led us to value left brain over right brain thinking -- has the ability to synthesize our formally "split" brains. The internet can, quite literally, change the way we think. We can create a global village with increased empathy, collaboration and collectivity.

While I like the overall tone of Shlain's argument that everything is attached to everything else and we are part of something larger than ourselves (this is, after all, good news for we sociologists and job security!), I am left with an underlying concern. For instance, as we celebrate the connectedness that allows us

to glimpse into other cultures (potentially inciting cultural compassion and relativity), we might be inclined to assume that the plethora of images we consume via the internet are implicitly "true."

As we know, even as the internet allows us to reach across the world, often times we grab considerably more fried Twinkies before our hands come to rest on something a bit healthier. Facebook, as we've witnessed, can serve as a vital tool in the organization of social movements. Simultaneously, it can suck up a significant portion of our day as we scroll along, riveted by the news of our "friends'" choice (and photo) of a lunch entrée. Shlain, let me add, does not suggest such naiveté concerning the paradoxes of technology. Watching the conclusion of the film, I felt my sociological hairs rising on my neck (the impulse that makes many folk avoid us for fear that we suck the fun out of everything) reminding me that indeed, the internet CAN give rise to global empathy. Unfortunately, it can also be utilized as a tool to further drive a wedge between the haves and the have-nots.

While other films have considered modernity and technology, in *Connected* Shlain explores the topic by weaving the personal, the political and, the biological. While at times it feels like she has two distinct films, one personal the other more historical, the significance of her observations come through. We ARE an increasingly interdependent world. Ideas do have the potential to cross-pollinate. The connectedness that the internet provides does mean that we are a changed people. Regarding what these changes might mean, Shlain gives us plenty to chew on. ■

“Examining everything from the big bang to twitter... a cinematic clickstream...touching”  
-The New York Times

“Incredibly engaging! Like high-tech Terry Gilliam... so lively and so fun I could not take my eyes off of it!”  
- Bits: Tech Talk, The New York Times

“with humor and creativity all her own” - Al Gore

**connected**

an autoblogography about love, death & technology

“An intensely personal exploration of what human connection means in our modern technology-obsessed world.” - The Atlantic

“Remarkable and daring” - Tech Crunch

“It will change your thinking” - Paste Magazine

“bright and electric” - The San Francisco Examiner

“highly energized romp through a myriad of ideas” - The Hollywood Reporter

“Touches the heart... Provokes the mind.” - Cine Source Magazine

“ostensibly a film about technology, but it’s really about human beings.” - NPR Marketplace

@jenmyronuk: profound + brilliant - a love letter to humanity + our shared potential.

@JakeWitz: @tiffanyshlain is the @Malcgladwell of film

“Beautiful, provocative, and deeply personal.” - Boingboing

“Brilliantly questions everything” - Pamela Alexander-beutler, The Examiner.com

@mathesgrant: this film changes the world.

@julietanne: simply the best film I’ve watched in years.#cannes

“The kind of movie Buckminster Fuller might have made.” - Infinite Regress

“Laugh out-loud funny...” - J Weekly

connectedthefilm connectedthefilm.com @tiffanyshlain

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