

Our bodies haven't evolved much over the past 150,000 years, yet we've recently developed the ability to transmit our thoughts instantly across thousands of miles with a couple of hand motions. If we have a question we have split-second access to all of human knowledge, and if we're lonely we can reach out to a network of billions of minds. Technology is our evolution and the Internet is one of its quantum leaps. Filmmaker Tiffany Shlain has been marveling at this weaving together of humanity since the Internet's dawn in the mid-'90s, and her new film, *Connected*, is an ode to the age of interdependence. Shlain originally planned the documentary as a collaboration with her father, Dr. Leonard Shlain, a noted surgeon and author of books on the human mind. Yet when he was diagnosed with brain cancer, Shlain discovered a new perspective. The resulting work is an exploration of the vastness of our minds' reach and the importance of cherishing those closest to us.

"The idea of interdependence is an old one," Shlain explains, "but the new layer that has changed the game so completely is technology. It's almost like we've added this central nervous system on top of our world, a new technology where we can affect, be affected, and connect with people we love and people all the way across the world, in a very significant way. So the way I use the term 'connectedness' in the 21st century, it's through the history of connectedness that we already know, and then this new layer of connectedness that affects us personally and globally."

The director, who founded the Webby Awards back in 1996, posits that the Internet provides us with a new way of think-

ing that stimulates both the intellectual and artistic parts of our brains, and is steering us toward unprecedented cooperation. "We're going to see, in our lifetime," she tells us, "every mind on the planet connected online. The potential for people from different parts of the world all coming together to try to solve the world's problems is very exciting."

Shlain, who has lectured at Harvard and MIT, acknowledges the dangers of the new era but rejects the idea that the pitfalls are a deal breaker. "Every new technology has been very disruptive and everyone thought it was going to have all these horrible consequences," she relates. "Any technology we could talk about, I could tell you three great things about that technology, and three really bad things about it. But ultimately, technology is just an extension of us. Computers, the web, and the cloud, it's just an extension of our minds. We have created this extension. The technology is not this separate thing from us; it *is* us. Just like we're not separate from nature."

She does encourage mindfulness, however, to prevent the pull of blogs, articles, Facebook, chat, and email from supplanting the here and now. In her own household, for example, she has a weekly "technology Shabbat," a day to unplug. "I highly recommend the weekly unplugging," she counsels. "It's really been profound. It reminds you of what your day was like without it, and puts these protections around 24 hours in your week. I'm trying to tell everyone to try it. The other thing is not to forget to connect to the people right in front of you. Ultimately, humans are very social creatures, and I think that on our core level, connecting with our children and our parents and our lovers, those are all fundamental things that we need to keep going." ▼

Connected: An Autobiography About Love, Death & Technology hits theaters September 16th. For more information, visit www.connectedthefilm.com

Connected Tiffany Shlain's ode to the age of interdependence

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