

The Alphabet Versus The Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image

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Leonard Shlain is the Chairman of Laparoscopic surgery at the California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco and is an Associate Professor of Surgery at UCSF. He is also the author of two critically acclaimed, award winning books. *Art & Physics: Parallel Visions in Space, Time, and Light* was published in 1991 and is presently used as a textbook in many art schools and universities. It has also been translated into foreign languages.

His new book *The Alphabet Versus The Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image* was published by Viking in hardcover in 1998 and met with critical acclaim. After being on the national best seller list, Penguin distributed his book internationally in 1999 and it is now available in paperback. The **Washington Post** called it "Bold and Fascinating," the **London Observer** "Provocative and Innovative." **The New York Times'** Idea section discussed his provocative theory. David Gergen interviewed Dr. Shlain on PBS and Frank Stasio on National NPR.

Dr. Shlain lectures widely both here and in Europe. He has been a keynote speaker for such diverse groups as the Smithsonian, Harvard University, Salk Institute, Phillips collection Los Alamos National Laboratory, NASA, and the European Council of International Schools. In 1999, he was a contributor to Academic Press' *Encyclopedia of Creativity* edited by Steven Runco and Mark Pritzker.

Dr. Shlain has won several literary awards for his visionary work and also holds several patents on innovative surgical devices. He is presently working on a new work, *Iron Sex: The Origins, Politics, and Economics of Human Sexuality*, that explores the reasons why *Homo sapiens* evolved so far away from other animals in several key attributes. He lives and writes in Mill Valley, California.

This presentation proposes that the rise of alphabetic literacy – the process of reading and writing – fundamentally reconfigured the human brain, and brought about profound changes in history, religion and gender relations. Making remarkable connections across brain function, myth, and anthropology- Dr. Shlain shows why pre-literate cultures were principally informed by holistic, right-brain modes that venerated the Goddess, feminine values, and images. Writing, particularly alphabets drove cultures toward linear left-brain thinking. This shift upset the balance between men and women, initiating the decline of the feminine and also ushered in the reign of patriarchy and misogyny. Examining the cultures of the Israelites, Greeks, Christians, and Muslims, he reinterprets many myths and parables in light of his theory. Shlain traces the affect of literacy on the Dark Ages, Mary, Gutenberg, the Reformation and the Witchcraze.

Shlain ends with an optimistic appraisal that the proliferation of images in film, TV, graphics and computers- is once again reconfiguring the brain by encouraging right hemispheric modes of thought and bringing about the reemergence of the feminine.

A provocative, inspiring, and visually arresting presentation filled with startling historical anecdotes and fresh compelling ideas. It is a paradigm-shattering work that will transform your view of history and the mind.

This multimedia power point presentation will contain over 400 images drawn from art. These images will complement a fascinating 45-min review of right and left brain differences and how the introduction of literacy reconfigured the brains of the individuals who learned this technology. A review of historical developments serves to illustrate the theoretical points. His thesis also is used to explain the implications for our current society of the changeover from text to moving images (film, TV, and the Internet.)