

What Intelligence and Insanity Have in Common

The brain's ability to make connections.

There are many forms of intelligence. But all of them I can think of have a lot to do with making connections.

Mechanical intelligence sees the connections between parts of a machine. Social intelligence sees connections between people. Physical intelligence makes connections between actions and re-actions. Creative intelligence sees connections between disparate ideas. Entrepreneurial intelligence sees connections between different goods or services, or a new nexus between supply and demand.

A low intelligence person takes the discreet items in the world individually at face value. A high intelligence person sees causal chains, analogies, parallels, and processes that bind the discreet items in various webs.

If you've ever witnessed a high connections person in action, it's fun and surprising. Where most people would see an umbrella over the lunch table, they'd see a wooden pole with canvas, think about their friend who sails boats, wonder about the material that makes sales vs. table umbrellas, then parachutes, then the different levels of wind-flow needed in each application. Before long they're working out how you might have a single supplier for each item, or a new kind of material. This is how theories and businesses begin.

Our brain dices the world into discreet units for a reason. Seeing connections is a super power, but it can also be a curse. If you can't unsee them, and your brain goes on a high speed runaway connection binge, you might lose your grip. Each event, object, and activity cannot be encountered and engaged discreetly if your brain is reeling six levels deep on connections.

There's a reason meditative or hallucinogenic states where everything feels connected and all is one cannot persist while you try to brush your teeth and go to the office. Most of life is encountered in bites. And most of it has to be.

I think conspiracy theorists and paranoiacs have a ton of connection intelligence, but not a strong enough dissection filter. They see too many connections too much of the time. Pretty soon, everything reminds of everything else. Hence things like the "Illuminati confirmed" meme, where every shape, color, name, and logo on every product and commercial gets quickly connected to some kind of other symbol with occult meaning.

People often accuse paranoid conspiracy types of being stupid, or failing to see the meaning of things. The problem is they see too much meaning. They can't stop seeing

meaning.

The trope of the mad scientist, or brilliant mathematician who descends into ravings with old age show the same problem. Too many connections.

But there's something interesting going on in there too. These are not stupid people, or people to dismiss out of hand. They see too many connections to handle, many of which aren't useful. But they see a lot of useful connections the rest of us miss in our fragmented world. There's insight to be found here.

I'm not sure exactly how to cultivate the ability to make connections and guard against connection overload at the same time. But I suspect most of us are in far more danger of making too few connections than too many.