

## **A Gigantic Unplanned Experiment ... on You**

**Bruce Damer, April 18, 2004**

You sit in front of your computer eight, ten, twelve hours a day. Your eyes dart about the screen, to emails, instant messages, web pages, flashing banners, tasks... then your machine crashes and you have to reboot. You find yourself attuned to every incoming note, your emotions compressed into the spaces between nano-bursts of instant gratification or frustration. Your consciousness unites in lock step with the machine's processes. Then you scroll down a long list and your eyes blur for a moment... overload! You get up and walk around but your mind is still spinning. You can't look anyone in the eye but luckily everyone else is in their cube. You grab a cup of coffee and sit back down with it. Now you are back in synch, emails come and you bat them right back with succinct replies, you feel that queue diminishing somewhat, you feel mastery over the stack. You are wired! You hold your breath, too much going on to breathe, too much to miss if you take your attention away. You start to feel a bit dizzy and lean back. Breath returns. You feel a little buzz, but now there is also a low level sense of unease in your body.

It is 3 o'clock and you feel a sag in your energy. You grab another coffee and remember that you have almost missed the afternoon meeting. Nobody sent an email so maybe it is not really happening. You dread the meeting; you can't take the lack of stimulus. You wonder if you can sneak a magazine in like the guys in Dilbert do. You steel yourself and go to the meeting, which turns out to be agonizing. You still can't look anyone in the eye and wonder "why are we here when we could be getting work done"? You can sense the queue of email growing, tick, tick. You fake an incoming call on your cell phone to be able to leave the meeting for a while.

As you drive home, waves of cars ebb and flow in front of you. Nothing seems real. You swing between a completely neutral, dull sense of reality and frustration over the slogging queue you are stuck in. You curse the designers of the road system. You curse the inefficiency of the other drivers. You fantasize about driving your big SUV over the top of the cars in front of you, crushing them flat to the roadway as you go. You would have no feeling for those drivers. A little voice finally says "you are not here; the car in front is real; it is 2,000 pounds of real metal; real bones and flesh will be crushed if you don't get back here right now." You pause for an instant and then start coming down from the day.

Next comes the default spousal conversations, the meal (did that have a taste?), the TV, and you are finally blanking out. You sleep, but you know you won't feel rested in the morning. You remember one day maybe two months ago when you awoke with a sense of peace and a slight euphoria. Got to get back to the gym, you think, yes, maybe that will make me feel more alive, gotta breathe, maybe driving out into the desert this weekend, maybe anything else?

**Congratulations**

Congratulations, we don't even have to tell you to take the red pill for it to now be revealed to you that you are part of a gigantic unplanned experiment. ***This experiment is systematically altering the function, development and structure of human brains and bodies in hundreds of millions of people around the world.*** Where this experiment is going to take us nobody is certain. What is certain is that it will have a profound impact on personal lives, the viability of families, extended work and living communities, and on the governance of nations. The United States of America is the place where the experiment is the farthest along. In a nation like ours, where we take only a few days of vacation after surviving serial 80 hour work weeks, grinding commutes, and unhealthy consumer habits followed by numbing hours of media consumption, our population is already fully embedded in the experiment like a population of eager lab rats.

### **Do the rats recognize the maze?**

If you listen carefully, there are words being whispered that describe this experiment, most of them describing its symptoms. Some call it the quickening, others refer to it as burnout, some diagnose it as "adrenal fatigue", some perceive the arrival of a condition of "emotional neutrality", and for most of us we think of it as being wired or multitasked. We start our children in the experiment at a very early age, with Gameboy-like devices, and on into the harder core 3D visual system stimulants. Each generation becomes more obese and therefore most comfortable before a visually stimulating display. When our young fidget in school we diagnose them with "ADHT" and slip them drugs to boost their cognitive abilities in the hopes that they too will become wired, like us.

### **The terrible discovery**

A terrible discovery, terrible in the truth of it, but also terrible in its ramifications, has just been made. It is that the brain seems to be wired to operate at two speeds: cognitive (fast gear) and emotive (slow gear). You can make logistical calculations in milliseconds and hand-eye coordinated movements in just a little longer, this is what millions of years evolving in trees and then later on the savanna evolved you to be able to do. But emotional and body memory take much longer to sink in, and is slower to be recalled. Recalled emotion and the sense of the body give you all those important intuitive skills for healthy group social behavior, body and spirit health, and connection to other living beings. ***As we increasingly become creatures of cognition and stimulus-response, emotion and the sense of the body are being factored out of our life equation.***

It is a terrible irony that as beings we are perfectly built for this experiment. Brain researchers are only now documenting this two-speed system and tracking the decline of test subjects' emotional and body memory markers. When people get into states of low emotional and body-sense, and substitute cognitive and speed-sense they enter into a dangerous realm described by these researchers as "emotional neutrality".

### **What does it mean to be emotionally neutral?**

If I am a husband and emotionally neutral, can my wife or kids ever reach me, can I ever truly know them or grow old with them? If I am a company boss and see ways to cook the books and walk away with millions (and I am emotionally neutral) I won't fear consequences as much and certainly won't care about the poor employees or shareholders or destroyed natural landscapes left behind by my disaster. If I am another kind of criminal on the street or just a frustrated driver, I know that my emotional neutrality saves me from any immediate feeling if I happen to knock someone down and kill them right then and there. If I am the president of a country I can dispatch armies, spin stories and lie to my electorate if my cognitive brain says "yes it will all work out" and my emotional brain does not even surface to paint a picture of how I will feel when I am found out or when I see the dead soldiers' bodies returning. And if I, as a human being, live my life in emotional neutrality, I may not feel my body, my heart or my soul, and never find my true calling on this Earth.

### **There is nothing like a crash**

And what if I eventually have an accident, hurt someone, contract cancer, cause my own marriage to break up, end up having my misdeeds found out, or land in prison? Well, for the emotionally neutral, there can and will be a sudden return of the agony of unexpressed and underdeveloped feelings and bodily pain. And this will come on with such force that it can be hard to imagine surviving it. Nothing in the efficiencies of daily living, in multitasking, in being wired, will prepare you for that sudden crash. The fast spinning cognitive gearbox simply explodes into pieces. Those who have survived these crashes always reboot into a new reality, a reality of valuing friendship, love, family, nature, sensation and time. Those who can remain emotionally neutral in spite of a crash may never again be in a fully alive state as human beings.

It may be that telling the stories of the casualties of this experiment is the best way to report its results to us. These people are our society's canaries in the mine. They are all around us, and you know some of them.

### **Lab rat America**

America and its people are entering the Twenty First Century with a growing set of maladies and bad behaviors we can't explain. Why is America always right and lashing out at the world? Why is America's media abusing the mental peace and sanity of its own people? Why do America's voters seem so passive about candidates, the political process and the radical changing of rights and laws? Why is America consuming ever more and becoming even sicker? How did America lose track of its roots, its history and its purpose as a nation? Why do most Americans not seem to care about any of this?

In the experiment, America and Americans have the privilege of being first. I fear, however, that we may also be the first to no longer be truly *whole human beings* and the whole structure we have built may be headed for a crash that will darken the face of the whole world.

Isn't it time to shift down into that slower, safer gear, people?

[Bruce Damer may be contacted at <http://www.damer.com/forms/comment.html> ]

## References

1. For the more on the two-speed brain and emotional neutrality see the work of brain researcher Antonio Damasio at:  
<http://www.uihealthcare.com/depts/med/neurology/neurologymds/damasioa.html>
2. Interviews with Dr. Damasio:  
<http://hcs.harvard.edu/~husn/BRAIN/vol8-spring2001/damasio.htm>  
[http://www.harcourtbooks.com/authorinterviews/bookinterview\\_damasio.asp](http://www.harcourtbooks.com/authorinterviews/bookinterview_damasio.asp)
3. Damasio's books on this subject are:  
Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain,  
and more recently, The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness.  
<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/anthony.campbell1/bookreviews/r/damasio-2.html>
4. For background on "Adrenal Fatigue", see Dr. James L. Wilson's site at:  
<http://www.adrenalfatigue.org/drwilson.php>  
and his books on the subject:  
<http://www.adrenalfatigue.org/products/index.php>  
This syndrome has also been witnessed by acupuncture pioneers Mark and Warner Seem.

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