

## MY HIVE MIND

DJ TANTILLO

Childbirth is easy. That's our most effective marketing pitch. And it's true – has been since the motion carried, the one to distribute all pain.

If only mothers weren't forced to watch the insertion, knowing that their little ones will feel the pain inside their skulls. We all know that it's necessary to invade their brains to implant the device, but the vicarious pain of seeing it is not diluted by distribution. And most understand why the device must be implanted early but lay dormant for years, why the children must suffer in the absence of cognitive readiness.

"Mom, they're broadcasting the final arguments now." Time to let the memory go and focus on the job. And time to listen to the history again, one both personal and shared by all, as much of life is now. "Okay, I'm coming."

Today, it is an oral history, delivered with scorn by the Minister of Interconnectivity.

"Respected leaders. We mustn't forget our journey to the present. How our ancestors first experimented with distributed computing in the service of citizen science, the First Leap. The sharing of processing power, otherwise idle, over the network allowed for many discoveries: the design of new proteins through games with stated but ignored goals, the location (and only nominal pillaging) of lost treasures by analysis of satellite data, the discovery of extrasolar life we will never see, and the creation of the blueprints for the Second Leap.

"When those designs were realized, the network was brought into our bodies, plugged into our brains. The number of world citizens without invasive neural links plummeted and few complained. Why would they? Donating the unused processing power of our brains was simply the next step in the empowerment of progress, our duty as global citizens. And it didn't hurt, not much, after the first month.

"And then the Third Leap, when the human computational network discovered how to remove the passivity, how to give back to the donor nodes by allowing them to communicate with each other, consciously. When soulless computation was augmented with thought sharing, all hell broke loose.

“We could have shut it all down, stopped invading skulls, but the citizenry wouldn’t have it. So we imposed limits and enforced Distribution Plans. All citizens were connected to the Relief Network and the perception of pain was diminished by dilution. It turned out that, on average, humans experience nearly no physical pain at any given moment.”

The Minister is always eloquent, but I wish she would drop her rhetoric and make her point. We all know the history.

“Now we face the realities of pain-free living. Many self-mutilate, many die for not realizing they are burning or freezing or impaled. We should have known. A genetic disorder in which sufferers do not feel pain has been known for ages. But we did not realize we were infecting everyone with an equivalent condition through bioelectronics innovation. Natural genetic mechanisms had only ever inflicted the absence of pain on a vanishingly small fraction of humanity. No remedy was ever found for the disorder, but we can remedy our error.”

Ah yes, she comes to it at last.

“The distribution of pain must be limited. Surgery – yes. Childbirth – yes. Neurochemical pain – yes. Toe-stubbing – no. Yes, we have seen a near disappearance of the abuse of addictive substances, but as the fear of pain has disappeared, we also have seen a rise in joy-riding and associated vehicular homicide, in violent altercations ending in death, in war. We, as leaders of the world’s nations, must regulate the network for our citizens.”

The rest of them agree. It makes sense. They will vote to regulate and restrict. But, as always, oversight by the chosen few will heighten social inequities. They claim that military use will cease, but while it will be prohibited it will continue unacknowledged, out of fear that another nation might be doing it. This is not the first time in history that a universal right has been created only to be transformed into a privilege.

And the underground networks for pain relief will no doubt grow. And I will get rich.

“Mom, we have nearly 12,000 new volunteers, just since the broadcast began.”

Volunteers. Parents willing to sell space in their children’s heads for profit. Sure, children are an untapped source of pain dilution, a particularly effective one in that they do not suffer from the chronic pain most will feel

later in life – if the early interconnection does not do permanent cognitive damage.

I suppose someone must mediate between the aspirational and sickly rich, both desperate. I am the best because I am both. I developed the tech, used my son to do so, to create a new industry, but I damaged him, from the inside. I turned him inside out. He's out of luck and I can't let the memory go. But I am pain free.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DJ Tantillo loves to study the complexity associated with his young children and with the mechanisms of chemical reactions. He does both in Northern California, where he is a professor of chemistry (<http://blueline.ucdavis.edu/>). He publishes flash fiction and poetry because he has many strange ideas and peer-reviewed chemistry journals aren't interested in all of them.