

Painless learning through tanking

by Gilbert Bouchard

The most common reaction was a deep sense of rest and refreshed energy. This was supported by the electro-encephalographic evidence. The first phase was marked by a distinct, repeated pattern of change. Within minutes after the activating period, well-organized alpha waves of 40-50 uV, 11-12/sec, appeared in all regions.

After fifteen minutes, there was an increase in alpha amplitude, as much as 30-70 uV, predominately in the frontal and central regions. At the half-hour mark, rhythmical waves of 7-8/sec appeared, and then, suddenly, rhythmical theta trains (6-7/sec, 70-100 uV) began to appear. This EEG pattern was startlingly similar to that of Zen priests in meditation.

Paddy Chayefsky, *Altered States*

I'm a bubble floating aimlessly on the bottom of a warm heavy sea. Waves of sand drift over me, white and burning, like snow would drift over stones in a field. Then it happened, at first dim, no more threatening than a distant thunder storm, but it grew both in frequency and intensity. The shimmering white veil that held me steady at the bottom was ripped to shreds under this barrage. I flew and broke to the surface with a stutter.

I was lying in the perfect darkness of a sensory deprivation tank, an 8 foot, by 4 foot, by 4 foot fiberglass box, filled with a foot and a half of water heated to 94 degrees F, body temperature; since you don't not see the water the illusion is that of weightlessness.

I was told later that when Frank came to signal the end of my float that my breathing was deep and slow, and that he knocked and hollared in the air-hole quite a while before giving up.

I had spent a little over an hour in Edmonton's first commercial sensory deprivation tank.

None of this I remember, all I know is that I came to my senses suddenly and sat bolt upright. That last move wasn't so easy since I was sitting in a foot and a half of water saturated with 380 kilograms of salt; compared to the Pacific with 3% salt content, this water has over 20%, like the Dead sea.

I thrashed around a bit and managed to find one of the walls, a bit more thrashing, and I found the little handle that opens the shutter-like door.

Standing, shivering, dripping on the rubber mat in front of the tank, I look at the alarm clock on the coffee table; sure enough I

The floater of the 80's is more than likely to be an executive looking to unwind over his lunch hour.

had spent a little over an hour in Edmonton's first commercial sensory deprivation tank. It didn't feel like an hour, in fact it didn't feel like any time at all.

Wrapping myself in a towel I headed towards the shower, a little unsteady on my pins since I now felt like I weighed about 400 pounds.



Frank Grisdale, the proprietor of Relax and Learn, Edmonton's tanking centre.

Tanking has been around quite a while, developed by Dr. John C. Lilly in the 50's and 60's for his LSD and sensory deprivation experiments that inspired Paddy Chayefsky's novel *Altered States*. Dr. Lilly was an explorer of the mind, the tank allowed him to divorce the often distracted body from the overactive brain. The mind, floating free so to speak, deprived from any stimulation whatsoever turns within itself, time loses all meaning, and levels of relaxation and concentration soar.

In fact the only sound the mind can latch on to is the sound of your breath; concentrating on one's breath provides the floater with the lazy man mantra bringing on an easy yoga trance, low blood pressure, deep breaths, slow steady pulse. An hour of this tank-trance is worth at least 8 hours of regular sleep, and leaves you with a mild two day high.

Edmonton's only tanking center is called Relax and Learn (18061 - 107 Ave.) and is operated by Frank Grisdale, a young energetic entrepreneur, who is better known for having started the princess theatre, before leaving about a year ago to join the Inter-city cinemas. Attracted to the unique service he knew floating (tanking) would be, he saw it as a lucrative field. Easy to finance, a modest capital outlay, and Frank now owns his own business.

His Floatation center joins sister clubs in Toronto, Montreal, Calgary, and Victoria. Frank

One thing I still didn't understand was why the place was called Relax and Learn? Frank

explained that the tank can be hooked up to audio and video, and the floater with his

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concentration boosted up to 50 times his normal level can be taught a wide variety of skills.

The theory is the mind can't tell the difference between doing a movement or seeing a filmed demonstration. Just as long as the person has some prior experience with the skill being demonstrated he can improve, sometimes quite drastically. The Dallas Cowboy football team use a tank to teach their players better motor skills and complicated plays.

Within a few months Relax and Learn will be able to offer films on skiing, racketball, golf, and tennis in the confines of the tank. The learning process does not limit itself to sports, one can learn a new language within 30 days, or pick up 100 vocabulary words per hour. Within the year, tapes will be available for pre-med, and pre-law students, in fact almost any subject that demands rote learning can be tank-taught. Who knows what will follow, perhaps chemistry, physics, or even english lit? The tank has potential for painless learning.

But as far as I am concerned the tank's future lies in stress management. Tanking may well be the 80's meditation. It's quick, easy to adapt to and offers immediate results, sometimes within the hour. No texts, no fancy classes, no sitting staring at your navel, just your mind focusing on itself, and swirls of images floating before your dilated irises.

will soon branch out in tank manufacturing, for those tanking converts who want to own their own private tank.

His rates are lower than I expected, 20 dollars for the first float, 15 dollars for every one after. He also offers an introductory package of 3 floats for 30 dollars, as well as a three month membership for 175 dollars, which boils down to 2 dollars a float if you go everyday for the 3 months.

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