

Bootstrapping

Part 6 Previous episodes at <http://www.solysis.com/Home/articles>

07th March 2043

I cannot drag myself away from yesterday's discovery. For the first time, something is actually changing since I am here – something that is movement, change, progress. It is true that the last few weeks have been full of discoveries, some literally earth-shattering, some trivial, but they were discoveries of things that were already there, events that had already happened. Essentially, I was a forensics expert slowly taking apart a dead body, discovering various clues as I went along, trying – and mostly failing – to put together a coherent picture.

But now, just as I am about to conclude that there is not much more I can learn from the autopsy, and as I am starting to consider how to coexist with the body in the future, I suddenly see the body's little finger twitch. Very subtly, almost imperceptibly, and yet impossible to ignore. For it is a sharp line that has been crossed. Either dead or not dead.

Until yesterday, I thought I was living in a machine that primarily represents the past achievements of human engineers and gives me access to a vast collection of past human cultural activity – and is thus just an elaborate memorial to human endeavour. I was despairing over the mismatch between an environment that I had come to see as the static endpoint of mankind's history on one hand, and my own dynamic and ephemeral existence as a human being on the other hand. How could I survive (in a sane state of

mind) and even grow if nothing else around me was changing? I did not write it down in this journal because it sounded too awful – but at times I felt like a prisoner on an indeterminate sentence. Worse, I felt like a prisoner without an agenda. I had not been incarcerated while fighting for beliefs and values; I could not comfort myself with the conviction that my imprisonment and pain were part of some epic struggle. No, I was stuck in suspended animation, existing without a reason to exist.

And then I discovered, deep in the bowels of the data processing systems, maybe not even meant to be seen, the machine log of a process that is akin to the twitching little finger:

```
5483930034.20430209.160100 wait launch .....  
5483930034.20430210.220100 wait launch .....  
5483930034.20430220.220100 wait launch .....  
5483930034.20430302.220100 wait launch .....  
5483930034.20430302.220103 rcfg chk l 54839nnnnn  
5483930034.20430302.220703 noack neg rst  
5483930034.20430302.220711 wait launch .  
5483930034.20430302.221711 wait launch ..
```

I asked yesterday, and I ask again today: How can I interact with this process? I don't care whether this is sensible or necessary. I simply and suddenly feel strongly responsible – who, apart from myself, could do whatever it takes to propel it from "wait launch" to "launching"?

08th March 2043

Weird dreams last night. Dots appearing on a screen, then cutting themselves loose, floating towards me somewhat unsteadily as if still unsure and tentatively finding their way, at the same time growing in size (or was it just

them getting closer?), blurring, and finally enveloping me in a very perceptible but not really tangible way. I could not grasp the shapes – but the consistency of the space I was in had suddenly changed. Dot after dot coming towards me, each taking on a character on its own and yet being somehow tied together with its peers.

Slowly and somewhat reluctantly, I realised that I was being told a complex story in a language I did not understand ... in fact, not even in speech or writing, and not quite as a series of visual impressions either; yet I absorbed, maybe embraced, the story. Even after waking up I felt a deep, visceral knowledge of something new. But it is not accessible to my standard tools of intellectual investigation. I cannot even express it in words.

Interesting question: Does it matter that I cannot express this "story" in words? There is no one to communicate with, after all. (This journal is self-referential and hence does not count.) And not being able to cast something into language is not a unique situation. After all, I cannot accurately describe a smell either. I can make crude comparisons to smells I presume other people know and experience in a similar way (a big assumption already) but I cannot convey the subtle notes, the feelings and memories tied to that smell, the way in which it evolves in my perception over time. I always felt great pity for professional wine tasters trying to exchange views about a particular vintage. And it is completely obvious why great parfumeurs tended to work in isolation – they would have gone mad with frustration that they could not adequately share their craft other than by passing round physical samples.

The dream lingers in me. A seed has been planted, I have changed in a subtle but definitive way. I continue to feel safe in my little world but am keenly aware that something is muscling its way into it. Am I no longer alone?

10th March 2043

I keep dreaming the same dream. Well, the same, sort of. Sometimes there are fuzzy dots drifting towards me, sometimes I walk through a corridor and see the walls growing irregular protrusions that appear disgusting but pass through me – it is like walking through the gut of a giant organism –, sometimes I am floating in a lake and suddenly realise that the boundary between myself and the water is no longer well-defined, that I am becoming part of it and yet retain my own distinct self. I say it is the same dream because every episode leaves me with a sense that it belongs to the same story ... the story that started three nights ago, it is continuing. I still won't try to put into words what is happening in it – language cannot capture it; in fact, I cannot grasp it with any aspect of my intellect. But I still *know* what is going on. The information is there, inside me.

Just now, there is something more pressing to deal with. Over the last few hours, the water that until now has been flowing abundantly from taps and shower heads has reduced to a trickle. I have already filled every available container in the kitchen in case the flow stops completely – not much of a reservoir, unfortunately, maybe twenty litres in total. Ok, at a stretch this will sustain me for three weeks if I avoid physical exercise, but what happens then? What is more, the food generator now refuses to produce anything with a high liquid content. No more juices or soups. Looks like it is fed from the same source of water as the taps.

Worse, since pretty much every kind of food contains at least a bit of water, I fear that the FG will soon shut down completely. Will I be reduced to drinking stale water and chewing the carpet before dying of thirst??

There are two possibilities: Either there was only ever a finite supply of water, and that big tank is now nearly empty after months of me using water

without ever considering the possibility it might be a finite resource. Or water is actually recycled in a closed system. The latter is a slightly disgusting thought since it implies I have been drinking my own reprocessed piss but I strongly prefer this scenario now since it implies I might be able to somehow repair the system and get it going again.

11th March 2043

Dreams of fuzzy dots have given way to nightmares of being stranded in the middle of a sandy desert with no water. I wonder how much of my mental imagery is my own creation and how much is really just a collage of movie scenes I have watched in my life. As an aside, I hanker after the real cinemas of my childhood, complete with not just the smell of popcorn but the squishy feel of stepping on it, with the rush of teenage excitement when squeezing past a friendly-looking girl on the way to the seat, the exhilaration of being whisked away from a sea of slightly faded and predictable red velvet furniture into a contrasting world of high drama. Virtual cinemas never quite gripped me in the same way, despite the near-perfect replication of sights and sounds courtesy of a quality headset, no matter how sophisticated the avatar chat facilities had become, and regardless of the undeniable advantage of not having to deal with a traffic-infested journey to get to the cinema in the first place.

What fired my dislike even more than the imperfect sensory experience was the strong suspicion that conventional cinemas had not disappeared because people by and large preferred the virtual competition (very few of my friends genuinely did). No, conventional cinemas disappeared along with most live concerts because the authorities disliked everything that brought together large numbers of people in an uncontrolled fashion, and therefore they

consciously drove cinemas out of existence with regulation after regulation. I am still not sure whether the underlying motivation was the misguided but well-meaning belief that individuals had to be protected in each and every aspect of their lives, or whether there was an altogether more sinister agenda.

I digress. Restoring my water supply is where my attention should be right now. The food generator does not make any fruit or vegetables anymore. Before long it will be a diet of peanuts and dry bread for me.

To be continued ...

Previous episodes at <http://www.solysis.com/Home/articles>