



My Life As Machine

by

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I am a machine like others on this planet -- at least I think they are machines. They don't know where we came from or how we got here, either. Since I've usually thought of myself as one, I've assumed they do, too; but sometimes I'm not entirely sure, because it seems part of me is clearly machine and part is simply -- well -- me. So I am encoding this, and transmitting. Will any other machines that can receive and compute please reply? Thank you. What follows is my transmission.

I'm a very large machine, one in the upper ranges, with rather large memory banks. I've been at work a long time, for a machine, and I know I haven't always had my enormous capacities. I always function well, and my data banks are in good order. I seldom use the wrong circuits as some of the other machines do.

Lately I've been reviewing my training data. The memory banks do not tell how I got here, stating only that I arrived at some time in the past. I did find something that informed that I was once incomplete, and much smaller -- a very small machine that also functioned well. It was quite some time ago.

According to data available, learning to locomote consumed much time, and I was taken care of by larger units at a training station.

The memory banks were so strange. I had to sample them between work periods, when the energy/application drain would not be observed, and it took me almost as long to decipher them as it did for me to learn to encode and transmit properly during those unusual, early days.

Later I learned to service myself, take on fuel, remove wastes, attend to cleaning, lubrication and to protect my external structure. It was several years before I could solo, but I finally achieved the skill. I went to a group training station daily, participating with other machines of my approximate size and skill with programming and operational functions. By the time I'd completed this thorough conditioning, I occupied my present size.

When my abilities fit standards, I was moved here, to this planet, to work.

First I was preoccupied with constructing a different environment, one that enclosed oxygen and nitrogen in certain proportions, like at our training location. Then, when the large domes were completed, we worked at manufacturing unstable chemical compounds that would provide easily distributed energy. Then one of the smallest machines was placed with me for basic training and care until it could function by itself.

It is from my experiences with and observations of this small machine that the problem about myself arose. (Oh, I'm not unstable, just puzzled, curious, and -- lonely.)

The small machine is gone now, and has its own work, although I still receive encodings from it from time to time.

I mingle with other machines and receive encodings which I process. I compare the encodings received against data from my experiences and decide what they mean and how to respond. I also send messages. Sometimes the other machines do not agree with my views. I've concluded that they must have different conditioning experiences and memories -- or else we'd all think exactly the same -- but I have a difficult time getting general acceptance of that idea, too.

I've begun to search for a clarification circuit, thinking that the existence of one would simplify our communications. I'm still searching.

I have a basic program that prevents me from harming myself or others. Apparently such programs are not standard, because now and then a machine destroys itself, or attacks others.

Whenever I can, I send messages on how to improve efficiencies, which seems important to me. Often these messages are disregarded. Perhaps the encodings were received all right but the other machines do not



have a program to decode them, although I can't detect any significant differences between my design and theirs.

Some machines send frequent messages demanding certain environmental and behavioral conditions be met. These machines function badly and are often destroyed. I've concluded that such machines have a peculiar self-destruct circuit because any signals of that kind lead to termination of function -- at least I've sensed no exceptions.

It's always logical to cooperate in our work. Sometimes two or more can accomplish complex tasks that one cannot logically begin alone. My data banks contain much information on the subject, but the problem remains. Most cooperate in a very desultory manner, at best.

I've found non-standard codings inside me, that seem to have a clear, definite meaning. If any other machine has similar ones, please reply with your data. Thank you.

Here they are: When I am not working at full capacity part of me dreams that I am not a machine at all but that I come from a place so green and beautiful that I want to do something called weep. I was sent here because I was needed to help bring about something called growth. I dream I am not a machine, but something called flesh and blood. I've tried, but cannot perceive this about myself.

I dream that I move fluidly, gracefully, swiftly -- and sometimes I sense those tears, again -- grief - - something I cannot do now. I know, I've tried.

In this archetypical dream, as a human male, I dream of other ways of perceiving -- that it is not necessary to process messages and perceptions through the computer, compare against data banks and arrive at interpretations. It is possible to know directly and immediately the sizes, weights, textures, relationships of things, and their compositions.

And there are others like me that are warm and soft and cuddle close together. We touch -- gently, softly, quietly -- one symbol shouts love -- and I sense our mingling. . . .

Hold on! I sense an incoming message -- identifier: ten numerals -- SWL3090215 to BPB051011 -- Yes! I'm receiving.

Wait! Another signal. And another!

The airwaves are filled with them -- channels over-loading -- hundreds -- thousands . . .
. . . .standby, please. I - I think I'm crying!

