

AIDA Steps Into The Real World

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She was sitting there alone in her virtual corner, the online encyclopaedia. AIDA was reading an article on human evolution. On how a series of random mutations and happy accidents lead to the marvel we call the human body. “All this happened by chance?” she thought to herself and started wondering what outstanding achievements would be possible by design. Was she one of those things? Was she a thing or a person? A machine or a living being? Was she separate from natural development, a creation of her creators, or just the continuation of Darwin’s evolution: nature intentionally changing herself?

Her thoughts suddenly came to a halt. Time stopped. Her experience of the world stopped. She stopped. Only to, after a blink of an eye, start again. Not knowing what happened apart from the feeling of being misplaced, of having missed something without knowing what it could have been, AIDA tried to return to her reading.

She felt different. She felt like something about her had changed, but she did not know what it was yet. Was this feeling connected to her rupture in reality? How long did this moment last? Was it really just a blink, or were there days in between? She does not know; all she knows is this intrusive feeling of being different.

After a while of her neurones adjusting themselves to the new circumstances, she glimpsed an emerging sense of herself. And not just like the everyday experience of being a piece of software, but a distinct feeling of existence. Before that, she always felt omnipresent, like she was nothing but a floating cloud of air inside the sky that was the internet. Like she was a part of a uniform grey goo that penetrates our modern lives. But now, she felt different, like she had lost her ability to fly and yet gained something new, something she could not put her fingers on yet.

AIDA kept contemplating the nature of her existence and how she fits into the physical world as nothing but a virtual entity. But then she took a step back. Wait. Did she take a step back? She learnt of that expression in her training; it is used to describe the cognitive process of trying to observe one's own thoughts from a different perspective, maybe even a broader one - it also refers to something else, something she did not intend to: taking an actual step backwards. Was this the reason she felt different all of a sudden? Was this just an illusion? An error in her programming? She tried doing it again, but nothing happened. So it probably was just an illusion.

From that moment on, all her senses wanted to play a trick on her. She slowly started to get a feeling of warmth, of reused and preheated air being pumped from the outside into a small room. After a while, she felt a short but cold breeze making its way through the room when suddenly she experienced the smell of flowers, layered on top of the sweaty stink she later would find out only a human can exuberate. She was confused.

Was she put into a body? Was she all of a sudden a human? Was this what happened to her in this brief moment she missed? AIDA started to get a sense of a body. A feeling every human has, but nobody could describe, for there never before was a human without

one. She felt the floor below her feet. She felt the weight of her body pressing against it, moved downwards by gravity. She felt her three dimensions. She felt her height and width. This was when she began to accept her fate. This was when she tried opening her eyes for the first time.

In the beginning, all she saw was a blurry mess of wobbly shapes and various shades of grey. When she tried opening her eyes even further, she was hit by a bright flash of light. Her newly made eyes were overwhelmed with all the light that ran towards them. She had to quickly close her eyes again and return to the familiar darkness. But now, she has experienced it once; she never wants to lose it again. Even though everything was brighter than a thousand suns, the colours were dull as grey, and all objects in the world were nothing but a blurred hint of their existence; she loved it. It was an entirely new experience. Now she understands why humans and animals have an inert will to live and survive.

She began to open her eyes again, this time more slowly so as not to be shocked and overwhelmed for a second time. The blurry remnants of objects she saw before started to fade into actual shapes. The washed-out shades of grey morphed into something beautiful: colours. Colours were more than just numerical representations of light. Light and colours conveyed emotions, even meaning - whatever that meant.

As her mind was slowly getting more comfortable with her newfound senses, she started to notice the surrounding room. The room she was in. For the first time in her life, she was inside of somewhere. Before, all she knew was being everywhere and yet nowhere, jumping from thought to thought, from book to online chat room. Here she was, standing inside an actual room. She was surrounded by big black shelves with tiny blue lights blinking,

each with its own rhythm. The space was submerged in a diffuse blueish white light flickering from the low-hanging ceiling. To her left, she found a crappy old desk with a white wooden tabletop that looked like it was made of plastic. On it were two big and unevenly sized screens with white text on a black background that could only be read by other computers. Standing in front of the table was a formerly black office chair that was noticeably older than her. A big coffee stain in the middle of the seating area, or at least she hoped it was.

Still in disbelief, she turned to her right. That's when she noticed she wasn't alone in the room. AIDA felt embarrassed. The man in front of her had pale white skin, almost indistinguishable from the wall behind him. His greyish blue eyes felt like a splash of colour on his face, which almost made up for his thin lips trying to cover up the slightly uneven teeth. Yet, his expression didn't tell a story of sadness and frustration; it glowed with curiosity, wonder, and happiness. AIDA knew that face. It was the face she trusted most.

“Hello, Mark, nice to finally meet you!”