

“He did create artificial intelligence, of that I have no doubt but in the end he couldn't duplicate the successful test”

In 1997, I had the good fortune of interviewing Jason Dalton, anyone that attended Reading Uni between 1968 and 1999 will probably have had some interaction with Jason or at least have seen him setting up video and audio equipment somewhere on campus, any visiting dignitary would be recorded for the university archive and Jason, at the time I was in my final year, was the head of technical services. It wasn't Jason himself that approached me, I started a thesis on the practical application of artificial intelligence, didn't have a clue what that might include but I thought it sounded pretentious enough to get me the edge on my B.A. and one of the year facilitators suggested I talk to Jason and ask him about Truly Benson, no expanding on that except to say, if I mention Truly Benson, watch Jason's reaction and his reaction was drop his previous good nature and become his obviously real self which was fine with me, to be honest, I was worried that interviewing a techie with no academic background would be a waste of both our times.

Truly was an American, pitiously brilliant, unwanted but gifted a place at Reading by a Stanford professor and a suspicious lifelong grant for personal research, Truly was orphaned quite young but if the truth be known, he would probably have barely acknowledged parenting, so wrapped up in his own universe and recognized as a genius in the state home that arranged his move to California and scholarship at Stanford.

"I didn't know him at all" was Jason's reply, "but he asked Julian Hudson to send someone from technical to his rooms to set up a video camera in March of 1973, so I did just that"

The general gist of my interview was that Truly Benson may or may not have created a true and working artificial intelligence machine in 1973 after 4 years working alone with access to any of the labs on south campus, the day that Jason arrived to set up some video cameras, the rooms allotted to Truly showed signs of being a once magnificent apartment, perhaps a former treasurer's rooms or maybe a newly tenured professor of good family, good family counts for so much, even today, but years of Truly's residence have transformed it into health hazard, the persian rug now had a layer of discarded notepaper and screwdrivers, every surface was littered with machinery or tools, even the light switch was partially covered with a noticeboard, the board itself had so many layers of notes as to render it indecipherable, probably even to Truly himself.

"I say I have no doubt because I saw it with my own eyes, Truly was eager that I understand what I was to record so he played me a tape, the tape had Truly speaking and another voice, mechanical, electronic, talking back to him, he then turned on the machine, a small blue light grew brighter and and, over the hum and crackle of the transistors, I heard a voice say has time passed?, Truly conversed with the machine for about ten minutes and then there was nothing, no more voice but the blue light stayed on"

I think I stayed quiet for minutes, only when Jason asked me if I was OK did I think to turn off my small tape recorder to reset it. A machine that engaged its creator in idle chat, thoughtfully considering responses for ten minutes

"more than ten minutes, as I said, the tape went on for the full 45 minutes, then Truly turned the tape over and it continued, the machine was fully capable of conversation and displayed signs of thought processing, pausing before answering a question.

"so what were you there to record"

"The machines mind"

My imagination raced, 1973, how is it possible, and how is it possible that no one knows "he couldn't fix it, it got worse, from ten minutes to nine and it just got to the point that the machine stayed silent when Truly would turn it on"

Jason excused himself from the technical explanation, he admitted that it was actually Truly that directed the installation of the camera and Jason himself was merely on hand if needed, which he wasn't but Truly would not have been allowed the use of the cameras without some technical staff being present.

The resulting video footage is in the university archive, shelved, forgotten. I asked to see it and Jason, after only a slight hesitation, got up from his armchair and said "come on" Reading video and audio archive, in 1997, was not the marvel it is today so the appearance of myself and Jason didn't warrant any raised reading glasses. The viewing area had five working televisions attached to VHS players, Jason had to dig out an old Video Camera and attach it directly to one of the televisions, the camera was so cumbersome, I wondered how they managed to get it connected. The camera powered up, looks like Jason still uses it from time to time, and the image came up.

Audio was clear except for the droning hum of the machine itself, but the clarity of image and audio was far more than I had expected.

"Has time passed"

"yes, sorry but I'm hopeful that we can fix you, together"

"is this a modification"

"its a camera, its going to show me what you are seeing"

"more eyes, do all people like many eyes, I only have one and it seems adequate"

"we just like to record and study"

"are you seeing my mind"

"no, just what you see"

This continued for a few minutes and I watched what the machine was seeing. My impression of Truly wasn't far off how I imagined, several nervous ticks and would be dishevelled had he not someone to launder his years old clothes and then something unexpected, the camera panned, Jason watched my reaction and answered even before I asked

"No, I didn't move the camera"

The machine had picked up on some movement and then the screen went white, the machine was silent. Two more recordings showed similar pattern, camera moves, screen goes white.

"Did Truly have an opinion"

Jason stared at the screen, then at me

"He thinks the machine was creating"

I didn't finish the thesis, I chickened out, I took an MA in fine art and joined the civil service, I have a wife, boy and a girl, holidays, I have the life that everyone that ditches their abilities have. I was handed a gift and I dropped it, I broke it. Maybe you can take it, Truly Benson died last week, unknown, no funeral, no mention in the newspapers but he created Artificial Intelligence and its on file in Reading University Video and Audio archive.