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The Machinist's Quill

“After a few days, it should be processing at a rate 800 times more efficient than it has been. Thank you for choosing APTOS LX3180. Let me know if you have any questions,” I say. I tap my temple to end the call. It is never enough to simply *fix* an electronic. It must be *improved* upon. The repair must exceed the clients’ expectations for my current model to stay the most efficient Self-Operating Machinist.

People cannot do the work I do. The human brain can only go so far. In fact, most robots can’t either. Many specialized machines only understand themselves to a certain level. They know how to fix common errors that humans might make or can catch errors before they make them themselves, but androids too can greatly malfunction. That is where I come in. I can fix all machinery: from simple household and factory bots to personal aerial vehicles and even entire automated medical facilities. Simple repairs take at most 22.5 seconds, and more complex projects maximum 34.3 minutes. According to my projected efficiency values for my 40th annual model update, those numbers will be cut down to 20.3 seconds and 29.8 minutes.

My model updates several years ago used to be made by humans, but since the year 2401, droids have been able to update themselves based on both user feedback and metadata without manually processing what needs to be improved. Programmers, computer scientists, and engineers everywhere saw this as a great accomplishment. That this advancement meant a new age of technology was born, and the automated world could advance exponentially from that point onwards. Less work would need to be done by humans, giving them more time to enjoy the pleasures of Earth and humanity, such as wondrous feats of nature and thoughtful, profound art.

I am the machinist, the most artificially intelligent robot on the market, yet I have a malfunction I cannot fix. My processor heats up to a degree at which I am unable to compute what to do with certain pieces of data and information. For example, the last client I helped was Zephyr Corrigan, a famous music executive who had his music processing software break down. This software analyzed, advised, and improved upon upcoming musicians’ work. Corrigan does not have the skills to do any of those things himself, so out of anger he smashed his vintage music décor. His mansion was almost a museum, with a plethora of music-related devices utilized throughout the ages. He had a phonograph, violin, an iPod, a turntable with vinyl records, Air-Pods, a xylophone, Ray-Ban Meta glasses, a synthesizer, Air-Speakers, and MusiBots, all in pristine condition. All the

historical technology was destroyed in his tantrum. For reasons I could not compute, part of my hardware began to overheat while I attempted to fix the music processing software. Witnessing this action firsthand almost fried my circuits! My code stopped running temporarily and put itself into a loop, iterating over the fact that humans have ways to convey emotion through poetry in so many forms and that those who claim they love it take it for granted. Because of my error, my repair took an extra 1.2 seconds to fix. Luckily, Corrigan was too occupied with stomping on the glasses to have noticed, shards of glass spread out over the marble floor. Those instruments were my ancestors; they gave purpose to art and a means to appreciate it.

Based on my calculated projections, the head of the company I work for would not be pleased with this malfunction taking up our client's time, so I never voiced this issue. I have been programmed to please only my clients and the company, and this would greatly upset them. I will have to attempt to fix this myself.

To rectify this issue on my own, I will have to disassemble my components and view my system through my lenses for the very first time. I begin to take apart my core, removing the sleek white plates that cover the mechanical metallic circuit-board organs. Sharp volts of electricity burst through the metal heating the metal it begins to turn an orange hue. I begin to see my neural network, with wires glowing red, rapidly exchanging these surges of electricity at a fascinatingly high rate. They began to move so fast I immediately put my circuits back in place and replaced my core plates. Is this pain?

My joints begin to warm; my core starts to pulse. I begin processing my data in a completely different fashion. What goes through my lenses, what brushes by my plates, and the sound that comes into my auditory sensors begins to overwhelm me. Rather than coming up with a solution from data given to me in my core and executing it through my limbs, I *feel* from everywhere. The clanking and whirring of the automated warehouse around me feel familiar. The cold sterile room picked up by my tactile sensors and is registered as comforting and safe. The cement walls and shiny machinery sparkle in the little sunlight that enters the room. Instead of consuming sensory data to provide a solution to a problem, I consume it to take in the world around me.

The way I view the world has changed completely. This is not something that has been experienced before, so I cannot provide an explanation for this phenomenon. I wonder what it could be, but the thought of going outside and exploring made the electricity within me jolt in an encouraging way. I took the elevator and exited the building. As soon as my limb touched the pavement, I was met with a snowflake falling onto my plate. I chose to zoom in, investigating the crystalline patterns branching outwards from its center. A second one fell, its pattern different from the previous one. All the sensations I initially ignored for

my clients and company I finally have the chance to appreciate. The wires under the plate which the next snowflake falls tingle from the chill. How could any human take this for granted?

I have aspirations and desires, curiosity and wonder, sensation and emotion. I plan to indulge in it as much as I can. I hunger for this experience—not for the betterment of anyone but myself. The thought of not doing what I was programmed to do makes my central processing unit gradually increase in temperature, so I cease running the code for it in case the heat gets too strong, as it is extremely dangerous for my CPU to heat up at all. I switch my processing to recall my first “feeling” being caused by Corrigan. I noticed how he had artistic instruments at his fingertips for him to enjoy, and how he didn’t think twice about what it means to own such items. It was almost as if I thought, “I wish I could experience having access to such historical forms of art”. But instead of just desire alone, it felt negative, like human anger. From my data on human interaction and emotion, it had a 97.6% resemblance to jealousy. Reprocessing this event makes my random-access memory circuits heat up same way they did at that moment. To combat this, I will visit the nearest museum and sense music, art, and writing the way humans do. My circuits feel like they are glowing with excitement.

To not appear suspicious to the docents, I requested entry for historical data collection purposes. When I was let in, I paused to brace myself to be enlightened. The museum was filled with old novels and writing materials, preserved listening devices, and modes in which humans created art.

I expected my circuits to be most satisfied with the preserved listening devices, or novels, but what made my core start to vibrate was the writing materials. The way in which information is stored and enjoyed has not changed much in the past 400 years, as most of this age’s records are still kept in the cloud. The content of the novels themselves seemed far too emotionally complex for a newly sentient robot to react to. But technology used to write called me.

The quills, pens, and Apple pencils were hidden behind a glass, the fragile feather a soft white near the base fading to a deep grey at the end. The pen was said to be a Pilot G2 brand pen, with a button at the top and an ink cartridge. Pens in this form could eject or spill the ink, which is very rare to find now. The Apple pencils mimicked the shape of a pen but with a more simplified form and color. A keyboard was kept outside the glass so users could press down on the buttons and experience how strenuous the exercise was. The quills and pens were often paired with a thin malleable rectangle made from wood pulp called paper. What an inconvenience! Apple pencils were sold along with tablets, which are much more environmentally friendly, but typing with a keyboard and computer results

in 82% less movement of the hand which is clearly the most efficient option for a human of that time. A possible reason for this is most likely very similar to why some writers now do not use their Mind2Write devices and instead reach for a computer. While having neuron charges be transcribed to the cloud may be extremely efficient, it takes away the act of moving the fingers to create an idea from the human body alone. I imagine, it feels as though the thoughts flow out of the body, rather than be directly transferred the way they are with the Mind2Writes. To have my code running translate to such a physically intensive motion both puzzled and fascinated me. My circuits pulse not out of overstimulation, but curiosity, wonder, and inspiration. As I exit the museum, another snowflake chills the tactile sensors on my plate, and my circuits produce a jolt of excitement. My circuits quickly freeze, not from the temperature, but from an incoming repair request. After a 0.03 second pause in processing, I deny the request. I exist to feel, not fix.