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Imagination ⇔ Computation

I shouldn't have chosen this topic—it gives me stress. At first, it was the writing that stressed me out, as I am a playwright—my way of thinking works in dialogues rather than article phrasing. And when I started to do research on the topic, I experienced more stress, as I realized computer scientists had invented new writing programs. People nowadays could ask an AI to write a screenplay and they had literally filmed it! How humiliating! Scriptwriters are cheap labor, yet people still try to find a way to replace us!

Feeling defeated, I spent a few days staying away from the desk, avoiding the deadline. I could not help but think an AI writer would not miss the deadlines like me. Poor Jahnavi is still waiting for my first draft for editing. The AI writer will not need such help because it does not make grammatical or spelling mistakes. It can even write in different languages. All you need to do is to press a button. In fact, it can imitate writing style too, from the writing samples people provided. I sat in my hotel room, eating chips, gaining more weight, imagining how AI Shakespeare would analyze the collection of plays and write like Shakespeare. Who does not want Shakespeare to come back to life? I think only living writers don't.

Do I have anything better than the AI writer? I wander aimlessly on campus. I look at the reddish leaves and think about my writing process. I am hardworking. I read, I think, and I do a lot of interviews before putting my pen on paper. I immediately envy an AI writer's huge database where it can pull out all useful information for any target subjects, in one second. Not to mention its good memory. I never record my interviews, I purposely let myself immerse in the conversation—so sometimes I will forget important words, leaving a thin layer of air that will vanish if I don't jot it down right after the interview. Suddenly a squirrel jumps out, reminding me of the big raccoon running into our way when Gabriele and I walked back after an evening swimming session. It's so chubby and makes me wonder how much food it has found from Iowa University's rubbish bin… But why does this raccoon pop up and how does its diet have anything to do with me? The AI writer will not be distracted. In fact, the AI writer does not really need a writing process.

Unlike me, I went through so many twists and turns before reaching anything meaningful. Yet suffering doesn't always bring good work. Most of the time the outcome is unpredictable. Audiences' response, unpredictable. Critics and reviews, unpredictable. But an AI writer can manage all these. It does calculations on the popularity of characters and plots. It has the formula. Right, formula. Researchers claim that they can install successful-script-formulas into future AI writers. Now, this is official, the AI writer is set on the right path. It has a higher possibility to be successful. It is made to win.

To win.

I don't write to win. I might dream of being successful, but I don't write to become successful. I think computation works better in the games they aim at winning. Like chess. Being distracted means giving the opportunity to your opponent; showing flaws might lose a point; A simple mistake leads to failure.

Writing, on the other hand, is a game that aims for sharing. In this case, stress could be good. Flaw could be good. Mistake could be good. Unpredictable could be good. Limitation could be good. Failure could be good. Because these are the things we went through in life, and the way we dealt with them have made our personalities. And our personalities give temperature, texture, depth, color—whatever you call it, to

our text. They can be imitated only to a certain extent. And they are not written to win or succeed, they are written to share, to communicate, to connect.

Sometimes when you read carefully enough, you will see the authors' experiences behind the stories. Some writers went through a lot to write—loneliness, depression, nightmares, anger, even war. When they are honest about their weakness and show you their brutal struggles—it is not to win anything, but to shed light on a stranger who has similar struggles. Inventors can install a general personality to an AI writer, but I doubt if they have the experiences and emotions, especially the intention that's equivalent to what we have—the willingness to shed light on someone.

Thank you.