

„maybe it is right to be nervous now“

(Howard Devoto, 1980)

Everybody feels the tension. It is a chemical thing, stress hormones on the rise. It is not just in the news, it is all around. Look at your friends, look at the neighbours.

I started to rebuild the painting machine during the pandemic. My electronic guy somehow got lost at an early stage – so I was finally on my own. With limited skills in mechanics, electronics and programming I created a rather nervous system. Something that reacts rather than executes.

On that specific afternoon I was running late again. I decided to start the machine anyway. It should paint the first layer of colour, a cerulean blue, on an empty canvas while I was away. Making sure that everything was working properly, I went away and came back late at night. The machine was almost ready, but the result had very little to do with the template:



Next day's tests proved that it had all been my fault. I had not tightened a screw connection correctly, causing the air pressure to fluctuate while the machine was moving.

In other words, the machine had translated my tension and my distraction into a beautiful pattern, a unique thing that can never be repeated.

This is what happens if you work in symbiosis with a dumb machine – and I prefer it to giving commands to AI. It feels more appropriate.

