

## **Marching Against Currents: The Hand-Crafted in the Age of Artificial Intelligence**

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### **Abstract**

Evolution in human societies maybe regarded as similar to evolution in the natural world, for human beings are as much a part of nature as forests, mountains, rivers, deserts and plains. If indeed, as physicists would have us believe that everything started with a big bang, it is reasonable to propose that we carry within us, a little of star-stuff and a little of the vast inter-galactic emptiness. Our actions and policies are often concerned with the present and the immediate. At times when we dwell into the distant past or the distant future, we do so with a degree of incredulity, for certainty in such matters is close to impossible.

We do know that human societies have tended to move from the tribal and animistic; to the agrarian and religious – and from there on to the industrial and scientific. All of these societies may still be found today, but there is a movement in the urban spaces of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century towards an intelligence that is artificial. This is the intelligence of machines created by human beings that are capable of learning from their own mistakes – much as human beings do. After moving away from the very hard labour of hunting and gathering to the hard labour of farming, tilling the land, making pots and weaving; to the making of machines that could till the land, make pots and weave, the contemporary human being sought to escape drudgery and create leisure so that living was easier and enjoyable.

A more careful examination however reveals that while living in urban spaces might be more desirable, it is not evident that such living is actually healthier. Congestion, pollution and stress in many of the cities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, invite us to look more carefully at the imagination that created the industrial landscape. When we do so, it would be wise to remember the cautionary wisdom of not using the same imagination that has led us to where we are today – we must look at contemporary issues with a new imagination.

This essay seeks to describe some intuitive responses to our environments today – it describes initiatives of engaging with urban and non-urban environments that attempt to understand the relevance of the hand-crafted in the age of artificial intelligence. Implicit in these initiatives is a perspective that acknowledges the impact of artificial intelligence but seeks to understand the role of hand-crafted in future societies. Such a perspective draws its basis from the conflicts that contemporary societies witness. Much in this conflict arises from an excessive emphasis on the mental and the neglect of the manual; the privileging of the word over the world; of the intellect over the hands, the feet and the ground beneath the feet.