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CRAFT: A DISCOURAGED HUMAN TRAIT

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Was there actually an age once when people took pride in their work? We see structures from ancient cultures and the historians tell us how much effort it took to bore a hole through a rock, seal two stones together that a piece of paper cannot get in between them, cut grooves in granite that even our best machinery today could not do, medieval writings that are so filled with artistry that it seems it would have taken a lifetime to do, or medieval cathedrals that seem so delicately structured but have endured hundreds of years. Sometimes this work is so detailed that it is as if human beings could not have accomplished it, but in fact, they did. Take a look at late nineteenth century architecture and the details it had, so much so that to us it was as if those old buildings were each masterpieces. Now look at today's architecture and behold the buildings of "the busy"... square, glass, without much detail if any at all. What has happened to us?

There is nothing wrong with technology if technology was looked at as a way to give people time instead of forcing people to work harder and faster to keep up with it. Technology was meant to save us the time of the mundane tasks so that we could focus on the other more "human" aspects. It is "craft" that has disappeared from us. "Craft" is the beauty and refinement of whatever the creation is. It is the result of the mind being able to contemplate, consider, and make better. It is what makes a creation worthwhile. Inherently, craft cannot be rushed without it losing its potential. If you pressure craft, you immediately start to lose it. Nowadays, every human is pushed, rushed, hurried along so that they can barely think. We are encouraged to multitask which is wrecking our minds leaving us struggling to remember things, organize things, keep track of things, and be able to finish a task correctly. If you think about it, we are being expected to become machines that work right along with the growing technologies. We are not allowed to be human anymore. We are not allowed the craft anymore.

I am a computer programmer as my day job, and I so much admire the early mainframe programmers. Why? Because the computer programs they built back then were so well thought-out and put together that some of those programs are still in use today. The modern computer programmer is made to code and maintain a large collection of programs at once, and they are not given time to make proper fixes to those programs. As a result, today's programs are buggy, unstable, and not efficiently coded. Think of how many times the applications on your computer crashed on you unexpectedly. Think of how many times those programs had to be updated. Then, think of those old mainframe programs that are still running.

Even music has lost some of its craft. The music companies put multiple songwriters together to turn out songs faster. There is a formula that is used to build music by anyone. Take a listen to a song on the radio and listen for the formula: Introduction, First Verse, Chorus, Second Verse, Chorus, Bridge, Chorus, and Exit. We are so used to this formula that sometimes older music that doesn't follow the formula sounds strange and unexpected to us. The shame of it is that music is meant to be mostly craft and almost completely free of barriers. When I compose my

music for my own projects, I allow myself time to enjoy the craft in my creative process. I compose each measure as if it were equally important as the climatic measures in the score. I notate each instrument as if it were an individual musician wanting to make sure his part added something special to the overall work. I record the audio with great concentration making sure no flaws get into the mix. The mix I approach like an artist to a canvas making each track the best it can be while holding together the combined structure. Not too much and not too little... just enough so that the structure does not fall. This is the true craft, and the results of this patient effort shows in the final work.

All of us have a passion that we are born with or are inspired to do. It is part of our own being and we apply our passions with the greatest respect for what they are. We know that any force applied to our passion spoils it to some extent. Our passion makes our craft, and our craft is what it is to be human.

Now let's look again at the modern world. We are herded into jobs that for most of us, we do not enjoy. There we are made to spend most of our waking hours hurrying along under intimidation to get tasks accomplished. Any extra effort added for detail is discouraged. As I said before, we are trained to be machines.

Perhaps, posting such a message as this means nothing. I mean, what ability do I have alone to do anything more than recognize the loss of craft? Surely all of us have noticed something. Business teaches us that efficiency out ways craft, but what does it lead to other than a bland world and farms of workers? I wonder what would happen if all of us just said "no more". What would happen? Would technology and progress slow down? No, it would not. Technology would actually develop much more strongly because people would be able to think problems through better. The ability to do craft would return again and would lead to more stable and productive results in the things we do and create. And, things would be a lot more "human" again.