# From the Vault: Deep Craft Essay Series 1 Some thoughts Ian Read’s (IR) communique with his comments on his music, and weaving loom repair crafts. Comments by Paul Wildman (PW): 02-11-2024

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## Bio Ian Read (07-10-2024)

Ian Read spent 20 years as a soldier in the Australian Army, where he was an engineering surveyor, cartographer, photogrammetrist, trainer and leader, retiring from that life in 2005 as a Warrant Officer Class Two.  Serving a further 18 years in local government as a spatial information specialist, programmer, people leader, coach, mentor and manager, retiring from that life in 2022.

Since then, Ian has been pursuing studies in counselling, and volunteering in various activities such as bush care, grief and loss support, and youth mentoring.  Believing no skill is ever wasted, Ian ‘s interests include: playing trombone and bass guitar in community orchestras and big bands, song-writing and home recording, fibre arts and crafts, repairing spinning wheels and looms, making and mending.

## 1. Have you got anything you have written esp. on your point about our obsession with the abstract please (IR)

**IR comment:** I now notice more and more that people speak and perhaps even think, in a shallow layer of abstractions.  This is difficult to avoid as a human being, since thought is itself an abstraction of experience, language an abstraction of thought and higher organisations of concepts within and between people occur in increasing layers of abstraction.

Perhaps this is because our world is now almost exclusively supplied and curated by automations, and abstraction is what drives automation.  [PW agreed, and this generates for me a false verticality as culturally and macro-historically, we almost deify abstractions – we lose our ability to: (a) value, (b) undertake Praxis, and (c) express our agency in the ‘real world’. For Crafty Eccentrics this is a key aspect of our humanity and clearly includes agency].

To mass-manufacture a widget, one must abstract the materials from the factory, the process from the product, the marketing from the need (which may itself be manufactured) and tragically, the skills from the workforce.  In object-oriented programming, one defines abstract ‘Classes’ that share generic properties and methods, in order to create unlimited ‘Instances’ of those classes at runtime.   Money is another way in which humanity has abstracted the ‘value’ of goods from their ability to satisfy human need; such that the pursuit of wealth very quickly became an end in itself.

I see racism, bias and stereotyping as a problem of abstraction. The phenomenon of polarisation is driven by the automated abstraction of human sentiment about politics or social issues, then the concentrated feedback of distorted information based on the abstraction that best ‘fits’ the viewer profile.

This is not new to human cognition; indeed, it may be a very old mechanism, however we are social learners and now we are increasingly learning our thinking patterns from economic systems and automations, especially the generations of digital natives.   Reducing human beings and their needs to instances of an abstract class is one of the insidious ways in which vast numbers of people are manipulated and exploited.

For me the opposite of abstraction is direct experience in praxis.  When I have direct interactions with other people, it becomes increasingly difficult to abstract them in my mind as a class.  When I have been hungry, I value food differently.  I approach safety differently after having a mishap.  The pursuit of crafts and making things myself with my hands makes it impossible to abstract the product from the material, the imagination from the process, or the value from the effort of making and the utility of using.  Making and doing reconnects me to the essential experience of being human in a biophysical world.

**PW comment:** We are so busy consuming horizontally this item or that service that we fail to notice the curation of our vertical space. Gone is our craft, agency, self-reliance and mutual aid replaced by MyGov, bureaucratic compliance and corporations fronted by bots all ‘committed’ to excellence in service and bla bla.

In this environment craft, agency, praxis and mutual aid find it difficult to exist. So how can they do so will I suggest we need Intentional Craft Sanctuaries (ICS). Intentional communities that start from this realisation. Communities that are self-reliant, craft-friendly and ecologically aware. Such as PermaCulture communities, Eco-Retreats, EcoCommunities, Eco-villages, Crafter communities, craftivism inc. yarn-bombing and so forth.

## 2.    Anything more on your point about gatekeepers (IR)

**IR comment:** It follows on from the point about abstraction, that someone is doing the abstracting.  I have, for a while now, been fermenting a deep discontent with gatekeepers; who I loosely define as those who put themselves between a human need and its satisfaction for the expressed purpose of profiting from the control of access. (I need to put my hand up and acknowledge that I am making an abstraction here).  This has been the case for a long time with property owners, craft guilds and professional associations, which have some obvious benefits as well, but it seems that trend is increasingly pervasive and disturbing.

Paywalls on news and scientific journals, while rivers of trash are free.  Storage space and computing functionality on cloud platforms, not owned but rented in relationships of dependence that are very difficult to extract oneself therefrom.  Buying recorded music is discouraged in favour of streaming platforms that pay artists a pittance.   All this has been accompanied by the systematic dismantling of people’s agency to do, and value doing, things for themselves and each other.

For anyone wanting to have an experience as a free human being and have their needs met (an increasingly difficult thing to achieve in the last few hundred years), finding alternatives to curated relationships with gatekeepers is crucial.  By and large, if it's got a gate on it, it’s got nothing to do with freedom.

**PW comment:** Yes a key issue h-o-c has to face is the commodification of everything inc. relationships, people and Nature. This is particularly pronounced under NeoLiberalism with the emphasis on the market, money, platform oligopoly, and privatising the un-earnt increment in private property, and privatisation of basically everything inc. relationships. Platforms such as Software Defined Vehicles, eBay, Amazon, Google, AirTasker and so forth are on the rise and this I use one of these for small tasks and just found out the cut to the platform is 22.5%!!!!!!!!   
  
Yanis Varoufakis argues will lead to a ‘cloud capitalists’ then ‘platform capitalists’ and ultimately ‘techno-feudalism’ and thus new form of ‘techno-serfs’ - us. Pay-walls everywhere – horizontally and vertically. This is the definition of NewAge-Techno-Feudalist-Hyper-Capitalism – ruled by Algos, energised by Neuralink and thus denuded, of, nature. Everything will be a collection of services and as the WEF says ‘we will own nothing and be happy’.

## 3.    On your point about informal community networking (IR)

**IR comment:** One of the side effects of the huge scale that human societies have achieved is that our dealings with each other are less reciprocal ( as they were in small communities) and more transactional.  If I’m unlikely to have an ongoing relationship with a vendor, I want the deal to be done with no gaps in value that can be exploited later.

The problem is, all of our economic systems have built the value gap into the transaction, such that it is exploited at the point of sale.  With abstraction, automation and gatekeeping so pervasive on a global scale, it is incredibly difficult to avoid.  Informal community networks offer one way to subvert the enormous power and value imbalances that people are funnelled into.

Communities of makers, connecting with each other, forming reciprocal relationships, sharing skills, goods and goodwill is one way in which alternatives can be found.  Any such model though, would need to defend its ethics carefully to prevent the incursion of gatekeeping.   It is well understood that when economic systems collapse, they collapse quickly.  Perhaps informal community networks of makers, growers and services represent an investment against a possible future in which the gates are locked and the gatekeepers have fled the field with the loot.

**PW Comment:** In Capitalism, and especially NeoLiberalism, basically everything, including human-relationships are commodified and that means transactions: So as Ian says above this can be seen at the Point Of Sale when one adds ‘cash ban’ so each POS attracts a 2% charge as one HAS to use a credit card as cash is ‘banned’. Yet use of cash attracts no such exploitation occurs. Furthermore, the 2% goes to the banks – not the Government or   
  
So Gatekeeping here is automated with the Credit card algo-rithm becoming a algo-hymn or even algo-paean to the banks not the community or Government. So Ian’s point of Informal Community Networking (ICN) social-technologies such as LETS (a local currency system of which I am a member – Local Employment and Trading System) and cash itself are illustrations of hope that there remain some cracks in the uber-machine where the light can get in. Here please note the difference between ‘currency’ and ‘money’.

Abstractionism is now implicitly embedded in our Western cultures via. the uber abstraction – money. In many indigenous cultures, exchange is facilitated by backed exchange tokens that is backed by the real world whether it be shells or pigs. Our equivalent was Gold – the US$ was backed by Gold until August 1972 when President Nixon ‘temporarily suspended’ same.  
  
This has opened the floodgates for the massive increase in Money Supply through the banks viz. Derivatives and through Government via. printing and creating money from nothing!!!! Note the massive injections of same during GFC1 in 2008.   
  
So now we have the:

1. Psychological abstractionism of using unbacked symbolic fiat money
2. This abstractionism is at foundation level taught in kindy’s and schools
3. Enforced transition from (community) backed currency to (fiat) unbacked abstract money and
4. Rise, fall and rise of derivatives taking money supply outside the nominal control of the Nation State and into the domain of what I call ‘corpora’n’ations
5. Even more abstract the rise and rise of cryptos which as Shakespeare said ‘is much ado about nothing’ (blockchain excluded)
6. Rise of other ‘deep abstractions’ such as viewing consciousness and being such it can be digitalised – no meat here…… we’re scientists
7. Triumph of the abstract with fiat and cryptos having absolutely ZERO backing in the real economy. Yet,
8. Each ‘money’ dollar created DOES create a demand on that real economy. That is on the resources of Gaia. Already total money supply in these ‘created’ dollars is fifteen or so times Global GDP and already we are using resources at the rate of about three globes/planets
9. This abstractionism is most obvious in the developed West, esp. IMO in the Anglo-West and leads to ideas like ‘debt doesn’t matter’ and ‘we can just print our way out of this paper bag’ viz. MMT

4 IR point: the end of privacy   
This, for example, is a consequence of Mark Zuckerberg's actions re his Orion AI glasses <https://www.crikey.com.au/2024/10/04/mark-zuckerberg-meta-facial-recognition-privacy/>  
  
**IR Comment:** That's pretty much how I see it.  I do not see an overt grand conspiracy to do that, I agree that the social ills arising are likely unintended consequences of business as usual. Nevertheless, the reduction of a human being to a digital face-signature, and the tagging, profiling and targeting of the same for exploitation through Algo curated feeds is a scary loss of control for the person.  The algo-glasses means the person will spend more time exposed to curated feeds, and be seeing the world only through rose (or emerald) coloured glasses.

Insidiously, without the skills of critical thought (and I lament huge swathes of the population are probably below that threshold people will acquire the intoxicating notion (if they have not already) that their preferences matter. Under these conditions, I fear conflict, as well as the continued super-concentration of wealth and power.

**PW comment:** This for me are examples of Ian’s: ‘loss of agency’ and ‘gatekeepers’ and ‘gap’s points.  This sort of invisible and unconscious harmonisation of intent by the macro-system means we are led to believe by ourselves that our preferences are (a) ours, (b) the only valid ones and we are, (c) they are watched over by machines of loving grace.