

Random Thoughts on Sardinia Island

August 8, 2024

My Confusion:

What is the role of nature, civilisation, and technology,
In relationship to modernity, progress, and humanity?
As technologists,
Should we shout for attention to mark our existence,
Or should we ask where are we heading with our tools?
Perhaps, technology is merely a tool.

Is technology an advancement for civilisation?
Or is it an advancement towards the end of
civilisation.

“Developing technology to make a positive impact in
the world”

This is what they teach us at MIT.
But wait, is “impact” ever “good”?

Impact and Power:

Impact –
Change, make a difference, marking our existence,
leaving a trace.
Is it out of altruistic pursuits in the name of
progress of civilisation, or rather, is it out of
egoistic pursuits?
Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg, Jeff Bezos, Sam Altman,
The “techno gods” of our era.
Precisely though, they are more “technology
monopolists”,
But why are we entrusting them with “god-like” power
to steer the direction of civilisation?

This morning I went for a swim in the coast of
Sardinia,
And made friends with three fish.

They are probably confused and entertained by me –
a clumsy big fish.

As I looked back onshore,
Our hotel is unrecognisable in the bare stony
Sardinian landscape,
Blending into the surroundings, almost in in-
existence.

What a contrast to Frank Gehry–esque buildings,
where pieces of metal planks are shouting for your
attention.

Attention and Addiction:

For a retail business, revenue = avg price * volume
For apps, revenue = avg time spent * users.

I was catching up with a former classmate who works
at Meta,

Whose performance is measured by increasing seconds
users spent on the app,

It's not hard to see why Instagram, TikTok, Twitter
are so addictive,

And why people stop reading books or watching movies,
but instead turn to TV series that never ends.

When was the last time I checked my phone?

Seconds ago.

Buzz, there comes a notification,

A new "like", a breaking news, a sell–order was
executed,

How do I feel?

Happy, sad, surprised... or actually, stressed?

And when was the last time I smiled to the child
sitting on the next table curiously looking at me?

Or when did I stop to notice the blossom of a street
flower, or the passing of a horse–shaped cloud?

Why are we so governed by a piece of black metal box,
Thanks Steve Jobs, but no thanks.

How about an electronic–free zone?

Philosophers Says:

Philosophers tend to think that us, homo sapiens, have a special place of existence in nature:

Consciousness.

But are scientific methods really the only way to define existence?

What if we are merely drawing a box for us live in, Defined by the boundary of our knowledge, Justifying for the sake of our peace of mind – After all, it always feels nicer when you live in a better house than your neighbour, or so you thought.

“万物有灵” (All things have spirit),

As Buddhist teaching goes.

What if we could connect with fish, ocean, trees, wind, mountains, sunlight,

Or anything that has or not has a heartbeat?

What if we simply let go of the notion of “me” and “them”,

Let go of the boundary of the box we draw,

Let, go.

In Ancient Greece society,

They rank craftsmen (equivalent to engineers) after artists, after priests, after soldiers, after politicians, after philosophers.

In Caste system of India,

Merchants are the third caste, after warriors, after priests / scholars.

In ancient Chinese society under Confucian values,

The ranking goes: scholars, farmers, artisans,

merchants. 士农工商

In the upcoming 2024 US election,

Trump, a businessman-turned-politician,

Teaming up with a VC-turned Vice President candidate,

Elon Musk, an engineer businessman, will donate 45 million a month to support.

Being a Fish:

“It’s easier to be happy when you are stupid”

My father said.

I went down a rabbit hole of dictionary searches:

Happy: feeling pleasure or contentment.

-> Feeling: an emotional state

-> Contentment: a state of satisfaction

-> State: the particular condition at a specific time

-> Satisfaction: fulfilment of one's wishes, expectations or needs.

He is probably right.

So I opened Instagram, and quickly checked how many likes I got from my last post.