



## A.I. consolidates a world of excess!

*"Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?"*

*"My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends!"*

*The throaty tones of Janice Joplin rang out loud and clear, lamenting her plight in the materialistic world of '60s America. Joplin died in a sea of drugs and alcohol, soon after recording the Mercedes prayer for posterity. In truth, the song was a wild cry for help, against the excesses of those times.*

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Scroll forward fifty plus years, and Joplin's lament seems almost child-like, considering our world of today. Her singular death would have no effect on what was to come.

For many years I've been a fan of the German environment guru E.F. Schumacher, renowned for his famous quotation, '*Small is Beautiful*'. In keeping with that philosophy, I have a small house and no car. I try to do my bit - to limit my environmental footprint - but like Joplin, I feel I'm up against a tsunami: a mountainous wave of greed and excess, ridden by a privileged few, to obliterate the impoverished many ... and our planet!

Recently I visited the home of an acquaintance; a retired doctor from Europe. At first sight I was astonished! His house was towards the other end of the spectrum from mine: a two-storied apartment with five bedrooms and five bathrooms, along with a plethora of living areas, inside and out. There were three large pools and a multitude of staff to wait on his every need.

My first thought was: '*why on Earth do you need all this space ... this wild abundance of rooms to live in?*' Secretly I mused, that perhaps he sleeps in a new bedroom each night of the week, utilising the many different toilets and bidets, just to add spice to his life! I'm slightly ashamed to invite the guy back to my humble two-roomed affair, but I shouldn't be really; it would make the point that the rich need to limit their most outlandish desires, so those not so fortunate can enjoy a slightly bigger slice of the cake ...and also, of course, to help preserve the planet we all share.

My little tale is a tiny example of the stratification of our present-day society. I sit in the very crowded middle of an enormous triangle, with Musk, and Zuckerberg, and Bezos, hovering near the pinnacle - along with a myriad of Russian oligarchs, corporate CEOs, and African politicians, etc., etc. ... the 1% of the eight billion! – surfing that towering tsunami on to the beaches of the poor, which stretch to the horizon!

Of course, we've come to expect autocratic societies to inhabit this sort of graphic, where the Putins and Xis muscle their way to the top, to subjugate their millions of minions below. But it seems our much-vaunted democracies are creating a similar scenario: untold riches and power for a few in the limelight; poverty for the billions beneath! Is this what our market-driven economy is all about; our unending search for monetary growth; our capitalist model?

If we go back to *Bretton Woods*, establishment of the UN, and beginnings of a European alliance soon after, we can assume those leaders - who pushed for a *New World Order*, based on democracy and equality - did not have anything like today's divided and stratified world in mind. Now, with capitalism supporting an increasingly unequal populace, the UN becoming largely ineffective against the might of some single nations, and *The Far Right* rearing its head, both in Europe and across the global stage, those horrific memories from the 1940s, which some people are still alive to remember, are beginning to re-surface.

It's also plain to see that the enormous technological advances made over recent decades, now drive the exponential forces of 21<sup>st</sup> Century inequality. The digital revolution began as a platform for parity (exemplified by creation of the World Wide Web in the 1990s); but now seems to be doing the opposite, supporting an ever-increasing gulf, at both inter and intra nation levels. To extrapolate from this, it now seems feasible that our technological barons of today could be the hidden rulers of tomorrow; that in a very much revised world order, the likes of Musk and Zuckerberg could govern us from the backdrops, with their all-consuming digital power driven by fake news and false information, underwritten to a large extent by A.I. technology. The frightening end-result looms of a transformed world, governed by lies and dishonesty; something completely different to the relative truth and morality that prevailed after World War Two.

The purveyors of Artificial Intelligence of course tend to focus on the positives – and there are many – the advance in medical science driven by A.I., for example, offer huge benefits. But the downside of the ledger is one which gives power to the wealthy few, and could ultimately take power away from humans altogether - in favour of machines – potentially, an even scarier final solution!

There's no doubting the abilities and foresight of those individuals at the forefront of the technical revolution: Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, and the Google twins, along with many others. But it's as if they've released a monster, and now that all-pervading

ogre is intent on enabling many others to seriously disrupt our long-established ways of living; a *King Kong*, intent on pulling our structures down and terrorising society. And perhaps the worst of all that disruption, is that this digital era has fostered a greater partition within our human society, so that we've become more divided than ever. Thus, in many ways this Artificial Intelligence, this end-product of the technical revolution, can be viewed as a substantially invisible, but extraordinary formidable force, which underpins and consolidates our world of growing excess.

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