

# The parable of a sculptor

*Note: I dictated the essay and used gemini to polish it. Hopefully it doesn't read like AI slop*

The basic premise is the analogy of a sculptor. A sculptor has a business making sculptures, and he uses various tools to create them. Let's say he's been doing it generationally, his dad was a sculptor, his granddad was a sculptor. They just like the craft of it.

Obviously, tools change over time. Maybe his granddad used a very broad chisel, and now he uses a factory chisel. But the high-level directives are the same. The sculptor can still deal with the low-level details of how to model the clay. His own imagination can be brought to life easily by his own hands.

But there are two sides to this: the artistic side of making a sculpture, and the business side of shipping art pieces to make a livelihood. The sculptor has to make a trade-off. He can't just focus purely on the art; he has to care about the business. So he finds a good enough balance: I'll do this artisanally, but I'll cut some corners where I can to make a living.

But at some point, machines arrive. Let's say they are 3D-printing sculpture machines. Now, he just needs to input a wish, and with some fidelity, the sculptures are made.

Suddenly, his job is to manage these machines. He gives them instructions, looks at the output, refines it, and tells them what else to do. The job has changed from actually targeting and making things with his own hands, to managing a bunch of things to create something. It has shifted from creating to managing.

It's not a great feeling. Earlier, the thing you made actually happened by your hand. Now, the low-level details don't matter as much. What's lost is that symbiotic relationship. It used to be: I can have fun doing artistic things, and it also has economic value. Now, there's a split. The economic activity has shifted to something else—managing—which a lot of people aren't really excited about.

Of course, I'm talking about the craft of programming and the rise of LLMs. That is the parable of the sculptor.

I think the exact same thing happened with physical labor. In the past, if you had a job lifting heavy things, being physically fit was economically rewarded. But at some point, machines took over that labor and the economic incentive split. In fact, it reversed. Now, you actually have to pay to do physical labor. You pay a gym to lift heavy things just to get the benefits of the effort.

Because of this current state, I hope we are going to see "cognitive gyms" where people just pay to keep their minds sharp—paying just to have fun thinking through puzzles and doing the object-level work that machines now do for free. That seems very likely to happen.

People argue that this is just the natural ladder of abstraction. They say, "Arithmetic used to be done by human computers, and now it's automated. We're just scaling up." But I think they're missing the point. They are missing the fundamental difference between individual contribution and managing.

In managing, you're not directly contributing. You're setting high-level intentions and directing resources, while something else does the object-level work. Right now, a lot of individual contributors are suddenly realizing, Oh shit, I have to be a manager now. And even if they have the skills to do it, they just aren't interested.

There is going to be a huge cognitive dissonance. It's funny how people will warp their worldview to fit their narrative just to make sense of what's happening. They look at the past, but they don't look at the temporal trends of where things are heading. They aren't comparing the answers they gave a year ago to a year's worth of new data today.

It's sad. Most people won't really notice, or they just have other things to worry about. But it is a very volatile time to be alive.

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