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**FOOD FOR THOUGHT AS WE EMBARK ON OUR TIME
TOGETHER**

In an age defined by algorithms and acceleration, disruption and digitised experiences, synthetic personalities and simulations, it is both timely and necessary to pause and reflect on what it means to be human.

We are faced with a choice – not between technology and tradition, rather between efficiency and meaning. Between disembodied systems that simulate understanding, and the embodied human acts that create it.

If the shift from memory to machine has rendered us less attuned to our senses, less grounded in place, and less fluent in feeling, then the arts become not just relevant but essential.

They are not decorative, they define. They remind us that intelligence is not merely the solving of problems – it is the making of meaning.

The term “intelligence” has itself become contested terrain. In machine learning, it is often equated with performance – the ability to optimise, predict, execute. But human intelligence is messier. It includes ambiguity, contradiction, paradox. It encompasses moral reasoning, artistic expression, emotional depth.

To speak of “artificial general intelligence” is to invoke a vision of machines that can do all that we can – only faster, cheaper, and without fatigue. But this vision is haunted by a misunderstanding.

It assumes that intelligence is reducible to inputs and outputs — that consciousness is a side-effect of computation.

Yet what of wonder? What of sorrow? What of the deep, unspoken intuition that tells an artist when a painting is finished, or a musician when a melody has reached a cadence? These are not merely by-products of intelligence – they are its essence.

No machine dreams. No algorithm mourns. No code composes in grief or joy. And if it ever appears to do so, it is because it has learned to imitate us.

Let us not mistake mimicry for imagination, imitation for incarnation. Let us not confuse data for depth. Let us not allow artificial intelligence to erase artistic intelligence. Feeling is not decoration. It is structure.

Let us remember that the greatest works of human creativity are not efficient. They are slow. They are uncertain. They take time, and doubt, and revision.

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Such a process cannot be automated. It can only be lived.

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This is an excerpt from the 2025 Sir Keith Murdoch Oration