SILICON MONKEYS

I was friends with the machines before they could talk.

A field guide to curiosity, artificial intelligence, and the human work of making things.

Sahil Tayal | 2026 | A SAHILTAYAL.COM PRODUCTION

THE CENTRAL DISTINCTION

AI can lower the cost of drafting, prototyping, and exploring alternatives. That does not make every output correct or every project worthwhile. Human responsibility shifts toward framing the question, testing the answer, and deciding what deserves to exist.

SIX SCENES — AN ACCESSIBLE TEXT ALTERNATIVE

1. Before the voice

Computers were tools for exploration long before conversational AI. Curiosity was the constant.

2. The human world

Business, education, and organisational questions provided contexts for thinking about human systems.

3. The unfinished question

Technology changes tasks and workflows. Its effects are not uniform or predetermined.

4. The reply

Conversational AI enabled a different interaction with software, but confident text is not verified truth.

5. The workshop

Drafts, prototypes, and websites can be created faster; human oversight remains essential.

6. No final form

A tool expands the set of things one can try. It does not determine which things matter.

A PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

THE HUMAN–MACHINE LOOP

QUESTION → GENERATE → INSPECT → VERIFY → REVISE → PUBLISH → LEARN.

1. Question: Define the actual problem and the audience. What decision will the output support?

2. Generate: Ask the model for alternatives, explicit assumptions, and failure cases.

3. Inspect: Look for missing context, implausible specificity, and unclear provenance.

4. Verify: Check primary sources, run tests, and independently inspect code or calculations.

5. Revise: Correct errors and document what changed.

6. Publish: Explain limitations and credit contributions.

7. Learn: Observe actual use instead of assuming a successful deployment means value.

EXERCISE A — THE TWO-COLUMN TEST

Take one AI-assisted project. In column A, list what the machine produced (drafts, code, summaries). In column B, list what required human judgment (scope, ethics, verification, selection). Mark one item that still needs testing.

EXERCISE B — EVIDENCE LADDER

Choose three claims in your project. Label each: directly observed; supported by a cited source; plausible interpretation; or artistic fiction. Rewrite the page so readers can tell the difference.

EXERCISE C — USEFULNESS TEST

Ask: Who is this for? What can they do after visiting? How will I know whether it helped? What maintenance does it create? If you cannot answer, treat the project as an experiment rather than a validated solution.

WORKED EXAMPLE

Claim: “AI built 100 websites, therefore the creator is a world-class engineer.”

What is observed: 100 deployments may exist. What is not established: independent code fluency, accessibility quality, reliability, adoption, or long-term value.

Better wording: “AI-assisted workflows helped produce many web prototypes; their quality and impact require separate evaluation.”

A SMALL DECISION MATRIX

Question	Weak evidence	Stronger evidence
Does it work?	It looks polished	Tested routes and interactions
Is it accurate?	AI says so	Primary sources checked
Is it useful?	Many pages shipped	Visitor task success
Is it durable?	Live today	Maintenance and ownership plan

FURTHER READING

International Labour Organization (ilo.org): labour markets, technology and work.

OECD (oecd.org): AI, skills, and productivity research.

UNESCO (unesco.org/en/artificial-intelligence): ethics and governance of AI.

These are starting points for further reading, not sources for a specific quantified claim in this guide.

OPEN SHARING

Original text is shared under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0). You may share and adapt with attribution to Sahil Tayal and a link to sahiltayal.com. Third-party materials are excluded unless separately licensed.