In summary, Marx attributed the deskilling of industrial workers and their reduction to mere machine appendages to the capitalist system, which valued profit and efficiency over human well-being and development. This devaluation and alienation of workers formed a cornerstone of Marx's broader critique of capitalism.

The core argument posits that an individual's relationship with herself, her human essence, and her social interactions are intrinsically mediated by her productive activities. It is at this juncture that Marx's theory falters. Marx's analysis may have missed a crucial point: machines are not intrinsically deskilling. Technological advancements have led to monotonous and deskilled labor in some contexts, but not in others.

A significant critique of Marx's conceptualization of productive activity and alienation is its failure to adequately account for the role of technology in shaping the nature of labor. Marx was writing in the context of the Industrial Revolution, a period marked by transformative technological innovations that altered the landscape of work in ways he did not fully foresee.

Historically, humans have gained and lost complex skills, only to replace them with different forms of expertise. Roman soldiers, for instance, were adept at crafting functional caligae from leather and nails, a skill now virtually extinct. Likewise, the intricate navigation skills of Pacific Polynesian sailors, honed through a deep understanding of celestial bodies and oceanic patterns, have largely vanished, along with the rich knowledge base they represented. The shift from a craftsman to an industrial worked was not by any means unique.

While it is not my intent to trivialize the emotional toll of skill attrition, which can indeed be devastating for those heavily invested in now-obsolete expertise, it is crucial to recognize that technological shifts have not universally eroded human dignity. On the contrary, these advancements have often led to liberation and opened up previously unimaginable possibilities. This trend is likely to persist, even as automation encroaches upon professions once considered secure, such as writing. While some may face job loss and experience genuine, distressing alienation, others will adapt, learning to collaborate with AI in writing and thereby creating new professional avenues.

Marx's framework, seems to neglect a fundamental human inclination: the drive to avoid labor, especially tasks that are tedious or physically demanding. This instinct, arguably more compelling than the desire to see one's labor benefit others, fuels technological innovation. It raises questions about the extent to which Marx, in his theoretical deliberations, considered the lived experiences of those engaged in manual labor, such as his washerwoman. These considerations add layers of complexity to the relationship between labor, technology, and well-being.

2 Liberatory alienation

This paper introduces the concept of "liberatory alienation". It captures the nuanced relationship between technology and human skills, a relationship that is both freeing and disorienting. This duality is not merely a theoretical construct but a lived experience, where the emotional weight of loss is counterbalanced by the exhilaration of newfound possibilities. In this context, it is crucial to scrutinize the nature of the labor or skills from which one is being alienated. Marx astutely observed that not all labor is created equal; some forms of work are more fulfilling and humanizing than others. His error lay in attributing alienation to technological advancements and the rise of industrial capitalism, implying a deterministic relationship that is neither necessary nor inevitable.

Expanding on this, it is worth noting that the phenomenon of "liberatory alienation" is not confined to the realm of labor. Life itself presents multiple instances where loss serves as a catalyst for growth or liberation. The transition from childhood to adulthood, for example, involves the loss of certain freedoms and innocence but also bestows greater autonomy and self-determination. Similarly, the end of a relationship, while painful, can offer invaluable insights into one's own needs and character, paving the way for more meaningful connections in the future. Even disruptions caused by natural events, such as a pandemic, can force a reevaluation of priorities and lead to a more intentional life.

It is important to acknowledge that the process of training AI systems often involves labor from the Global South, where workers are paid minimally for tasks such as manually tagging pictures and text. As AI tools become more powerful and accurate, the demand for this type of work may increase, potentially leading to the exploitation of these workers. While AI may be liberating for end-users in the Global North, it is crucial to consider the potential negative impact on those involved in the training process. This raises the question of "Cui bono?" or "Who benefits?" when discussing the liberatory potential of AI and other technologies.

In sum, the concept of "liberatory alienation" offers a more nuanced lens through which to view the impact of technology on human skills and labor. It challenges us to consider the quality of the skills or labor being lost and gained, and to recognize that alienation can coexist with liberation. This perspective allows for a richer understanding of the complexities involved in the interplay between technology and human experience.

In Marx's critique of alienation, there is an implicit ideal of human essence that alienation purportedly tarnishes. Phrases like "Let us suppose that we had carried