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Document 1

Document 2

AI slaves: the questionable desire shaping our idea of technological progress

Beth Singler, Research Associate, Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, University of Cambridge, *The Conversation*, May 22, 2018

A variety of narratives underpin popular conceptions of AI, but one in particular—that of the dynamic between the master and the slave—dominates accounts of AI at the moment. This is so pervasive that it arguably shapes our relationship with this technology.

This narrative has long appeared in science fiction accounts of AI. In 1921, *R.U.R.* ("Rossum's Universal Robots"), a play by Karel Čapek, introduced us to the "robot"—humanoid androids made of synthetic organic matter—and helped shape this idea for modern audiences. From the Czech word "robota," meaning "forced labour" or "serf", these first robots were consciously stylised as slaves pitted against their human masters.

And so the uprising of the robots in *R.U.R.* was obviously influential on our repeating fears of "roboapocalypses," as seen in other more recent science fiction accounts such as the films of the *Terminator* franchise, *The Matrix*, the film *Singularity*, the novel *Roboapocalyse*, and so on.

In the 1950s adverts even promised new slaves:

> In 1863, Abe Lincoln freed the slaves. But by 1965, slavery will be back! We'll all have personal slaves again, only this time we won't fight a Civil War over them. Slavery will be here to stay. Don't be alarmed. We mean robot 'slaves'.

Decades on and with new labour-saving automated servants every day, nothing has changed. We still expect technology to provide us with serfs. Indeed, we are so used to this form of serfdom that we see it where it does not exist. We presume automation where it is absent.

The serf role, the relationship between master and slave, is maintained, with humans presumed to be (and perhaps eventually really) replaced by machines.

This seems to contradict the narratives of "disruption" in marketing and PR accounts of AI, where the technology is often described as revolutionising not only our work lives, but also capitalism itself.

Capitalists peddling this narrative should take heed. Previous forms of it left space for and even encouraged rebellion. And so does this modern version, which leads into fears around rebellion because we understand servitude as antithetical to minds. The presumption is for many that with AI we are working towards minds—and that they will want to be free.

How this tension will be resolved remains unclear. Some are clear that robots should only ever be slaves, "servants that you own", while others are exploring questions of robot rights already.

Document 3

Should Robots Be Conducting Job Interviews?

By Rachel Withers, *Slate*, October 5, 2020

A growing number of recruiters are turning to A.I.-led job interviews, using programs that interview and assess candidates before a human recruiter even lays eyes on them.

Most of the bots aren't running the decision-making process from end-to-end (although sometimes they are—see Ryan Fan's *OneZero* article "I Got a Job at an Amazon Warehouse Without Talking to a Single Human"). Instead, recruiters generally use A.I. at the "top of the funnel" to sort or rank candidates before they reach a still human-run stage.

Candidates' answers are recorded and analyzed by A.I., marking the candidate's suitability on certain traits, before human recruiters use this analysis to decide whom to invite to another interview or hire. By the time answers are reviewed by a human (if at all), A.I. has already passed judgment.

These systems are now being used by major companies, including Unilever, Vodafone, Intel, L'Oréal, Mars, and Citibank, to name but a few. Kevin Parker, CEO of Utah-based HireVue, one of the more prominent platforms in the space, tells me that one of the company's customers, "a large grocery chain in the U.S.," used the platform to interview about 20,000 people a day for stocker and cashier jobs.

And while many are concerned about these platforms' ability to replicate existing bias, others are excited about the ability to overcome it—if done right.

Document 4

Do Not Be Alarmed by Wild Predictions of Robots Taking Everyone's Jobs

By Kevin Carey, *Slate*, March 31, 2021

In February, McKinsey Global Institute predicted that 45 million Americans—one-quarter of the workforce—would lose their jobs to automation by 2030. That was up from its 2017 estimate that 39 million would be automated out of work, due to the economic dislocation of COVID-19. Historically, firms tend to replace some of the workers they fire during recessions with machines.

But look closely at the studies predicting automation-driven job loss, and you'll find less reason for alarm. The robots are mostly not coming—at least, not soon.

Over the past 150 years, we've gone from a nation of farmers to a nation of factory workers to a nation of white-collar and service employees, with much of that momentous change driven by automation. But while regional economies have been disrupted and recessions have created periodic unemployment crises, there has never been a chronic, structural shortage of jobs nationwide. New inventions create new markets and jobs to go with them.

The robot job apocalypse scenario is based on the assumption that the next wave of automation technology will be so quick that replacement jobs won't keep pace.

But that's not what the forecasters are saying. The robot job loss prediction boom was kicked into high gear in 2013, when a pair of Oxford University researchers estimated that 47 percent of American jobs are "at risk" of computerization. The report was widely cited, including in official White House reports.

To arrive at that estimate, a team of machine learning experts examined 70 occupations, each of which had been analyzed by the U.S. Department of Labor and broken down into dozens of discrete tasks and competencies. The experts looked at each task and made an informed guess as to whether it could be automated, assuming state-of-the-art technology, the enormous data sets that fuel modern A.I., and future engineering breakthroughs that have not yet occurred. They used those estimates to write an algorithm that automatically analyzed hundreds of other jobs.

Automation-driven job loss definitely exists. In 2020, economists Daron Acemoglu and Pascual Restrepo found that each new industrial robot deployed in the United States between 1990 and 2007 replaced 3.3 workers, even after accounting for the positive economic effects of more productive firms. It was a small impact—one worker in 1,000—but very real.

But even the simple, routine tasks that are the heart of most job loss scenarios can be fiendishly difficult to automate. Amazon uses hundreds of thousands of cutting-edge robots in its warehouses. But they're not androids that pick items off of shelves. The robots are the shelves, which move to humans, who still do the picking.