

Was Marx Right?

A New Realm of Endless Possibilities or Existential Angst in a Digital World

by [John Henry](#) (January 2025)



Street Noise Invade the House (Umberto Boccioni, early 1900s)

We've got to be careful about it because it could just take over, and we don't want that to happen, particularly for the young composers and writers for whom it may be the only way they're gonna make a career. –Paul McCartney

The digital age has ushered in tools of extraordinary sophistication, promising convenience and innovation. Yet beneath this shimmering surface, the implications for labor, creativity, and social order are unsettling. AI advancements, once heralded as supplementary tools for human effort, now threaten to supplant humans entirely. Are we witnessing a revolutionary new economy or a digital unraveling of capitalism?

It begins small. You don't need a real model to promote products like clothing, makeup, or perfumes. AI-generated avatars, strikingly lifelike, effortlessly fill the role. *Human not needed.* Create a sleek website? A few AI prompts suffice, eliminating the need for web designers. A children's book can be outlined in a sentence; AI delivers the story, complete with vivid illustrations. *Human writers, editors, and artists not needed.*

The trend escalates. AI replaces chemists and researchers, synthesizing chemicals for life-saving medicines or solving complex scientific problems. Nobel-winning work now originates from computer hacks. Storytelling—the quintessential human craft—falls under AI's domain too. Give a plot idea, and software churns out a full movie script, structured and precise. Architects can input zoning parameters, and algorithms generate building designs faster than any draftsman of chief designer could dream of. *Human creators? Redundant.*

In entertainment, the transformation feels equally stark. AI tools can create songs that mirror the mood of an image. You can turn viral articles into videos, complete with AI

narrators and synthetic avatars, without a human voice or editor in sight. Entire movies, complete with consistent characters and scenes, are on the horizon. No need for actors, makeup teams, cinematographers, producers, or assistants—jobs that once made up an intricate creative ecosystem. Even propaganda has been revolutionized: AI-generated synthetic personas deliver speeches, spreading misinformation with precision unimaginable even a decade ago. *The implications for politics, truth, and human identity are chilling.*

AI has emerged as the great disruptor of capitalism. Unlike previous technological revolutions that fostered new jobs and industries, today's AI threatens the livelihoods of entire professions. CEOs pressure CTOs to implement AI-driven programs that trim their workforce by staggering percentages—a race to the bottom that leaves millions jobless.

And what are people doing in this new landscape? Many turn to platforms like YouTube, clinging to the promise of self-made success. Yet the cold reality is that only *6% of creators* earn any measurable income. Like gamblers at a casino, users pour weeks, months, even years into building audiences, only to be outcompeted by algorithms that work faster and produce content tailored to perfection. Meanwhile, billions of people wander through life tethered to their smartphones: entertainment devices, work tools, and sources of addiction, all rolled into one. Families sit at dinner, each member glued to their screens, navigating a digitally distanced world.

Beneath the facade of efficiency and convenience, capitalism—long fueled by human labor and creativity—finds itself in existential peril. AI programs, delivered cheaply in a rush to dominate the market, are now ubiquitous. In a globalized digital economy where the same tools are available to everyone, products and services lose value, driving wages downward and accelerating economic stagnation. The technology that promised to save time and uplift humanity now strangles the economy it was built to support.

This automation revolution creates an unprecedented chasm of inequality. As Zhenli warns, we risk an “extreme social stratification between a tiny handful of oligarchs vs. the vast majority of people who have no way to climb the ladder.” Job losses mount each month, signaling a future where large portions of society find themselves permanently unemployed, disempowered, and unable to contribute meaningfully. The capitalist structure, unable to reconcile unbounded automation with finite economic participation, may implode under its own weight.

Consider where we came from: a world where human interaction, creativity, and physical presence anchored daily life. We played outside with Tonka trucks, collected comic strips from newspapers, and rode bikes for the sheer thrill of it. Libraries were hubs of knowledge; handwritten essays reflected a personal, imperfect form of learning. Music wasn’t consumed passively but created actively by aspiring musicians with guitars, drums, and shared tapes. Dreams were shaped through education and hard work: to become scientists, doctors, or teachers. At its core, human potential drove value.

Today, the pendulum swings perilously. Billions have been invested into AI over the last three years alone—faster, cheaper, and more autonomous technologies that erode human contributions with alarming speed. What began as tools to assist workers have now made workers obsolete. Meanwhile, the human experience shrinks. In an era dominated by screens and algorithms, will people still paint, sing, build, imagine, and explore? Or will creativity—the force that once defined our humanity—be handed over to machines?

Karl Marx theorized that capitalism carried within it the seeds of its own destruction. He may not have predicted this precise technological turn, but the implications of our digital revolution align with his broader critique. When capital’s relentless pursuit of efficiency renders labor unnecessary, the system begins to unravel. A world where

humans are no longer needed to produce value poses a question not just about economics, but about existence itself.

AI promises a realm of endless possibilities, but it casts a long shadow over the dignity of work, creativity, and human connection. If we do not pause to carefully examine its trajectory, we may find ourselves obsolete in a world built by and for machines—a stark, existential reality that no algorithm can resolve.

[Table of Contents](#)

John Henry is based in Orlando, Florida. He holds a Bachelor of Environmental Design and Master of Architecture from Texas A&M University. He spent his early childhood through high school in Greece and Turkey, traveling in Europe—impressed by the ruins of Greek and Roman cities and temples, old irregular Medieval streets, and classical urban palaces and country villas. His Modernist formal education was a basis for functional, technically proficient, yet beautiful buildings. His website is [Commercial Web Residential Web](#). John has been a regular contributor to NER and has written about his profession and other topics such as history, music, technology, and politics.

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)