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Language Learning and Teaching

The Ideology of Inclusion: Scrutinizing DEI's Implementation in Japanese Education 7

John Spiri

The Ghosts of Huddersfield: Neo-Luddism and the Ethics of AI in the Human-Machine Era 14

Lee Romain

Reconfiguring the Poster Presentation as Interactive Exchange Through Dialogical Artefact: An Homage to Marín-Viadel and Roldán 24

A. R. Woollock

Exporting Creativity: Visual Artefacts and Mark-making for Creative Thinking and Problem Solving in Business Management, a Case Study 35

A. R. Woollock & Mariana Bogdanova

Experiences

Bells within Two Buddhist Temples in Mito City: Gionji and Tentokuji [水戸市の2つの仏教寺院、祇園寺と天徳寺にある鐘] 47

Jeroen Bode

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The Ghosts of Huddersfield: Neo-Luddism and the Ethics of AI in the Human-Machine Era

Lee Romain

University of Tōkyō Affiliated Secondary School

Abstract: This paper explores the ethical and pedagogical implications of generative Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the second language (L2) and TESOL classroom through the theoretical lens of Neo-Luddism. Drawing on the historical events of the 1812 Luddite movement in West Yorkshire, the study dismantles the "machine-breaker" caricature and repositions Luddism as a rigorous, pro-human political critique of technological inevitability. Using a "Media Mirror" methodology, the author compares industrial-era reports on the power loom with modern discourse on AI, exposing a persistent "ruse of inevitability" (Marcuse, 1964) that threatens to automate the "soul" of the learner and displace the master-craftsman: the teacher.

The investigation identifies a critical "Creativity Gap" where human linguistic innovation outpaces the stochastic mimicry of machines. This gap is evidenced by a multimodal analysis of "hollow" text and speech: first, through the word salad produced by the BABEL Generator in automated writing evaluations; and second, through a replication of Hahn (2004), which demonstrates how automated speech recognition often prioritises acoustic conformity over human intelligibility.

To bridge this gap, the paper proposes a "Pro-Human Praxis" termed the UTōkyō Blueprint. This pedagogical model repurposes the Jigsaw reading method for high-stakes testing environments, transforming AI from a surrogate instructor into a producer of raw "Spider-work" that requires human "hand-shearing" and critical mediation. The paper concludes that the preservation of the "Human Throughline" is not a rejection of technology, but an essential democratic requirement for a resilient and meaningful community of inquiry in the Human-Machine Era.

本稿では、ネオ・ラッダイト (Neo-Luddism) の理論的枠組みを通じ、第二言語 (L2) 教育および TESOLにおける生成人工知能 (AI) の倫理的・教育的意義を考察する。1812年にウエスト・ヨークシャーで起きたラッダイト運動の歴史的事実を援用し、本研究は「機械破壊者」という短絡的な描写を解体した上で、ラッダイト運動を「技術的必然性」に対する厳密かつ人間中心的な政治的批評として再定義する。「メディア・ミラー」の手法を用い、産業革命時代の力織機に関する報道と現代のAIに関する言説を比較することで、学習者の「魂」を自動化し、熟練の職人である教師を排除しようとする執拗な「必然性の策略 (ruse of inevitability)」を明らかにする。

本調査では、人間の言語的革新が機械の確率的模倣を凌駕する「創造性のギャップ」を特定する。このギャップは、自動記述評価におけるBABELジェネレーターが生み出す「ワードサラダ」と、自動音声認識が人間の了解度よりも音響的一致を優先することを証明したHahn (2004) の追試という、多角的な分析によって実証される。

このギャップを埋めるため、本稿では「東大附属ブループリント (UTōkyō Blueprint)」と称する

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「プロ・ヒューマン・プラクシス (人間中心の実践)」を提案する。この教育モデルは、AIを代替教官としてではなく、人間の「手作業による剪定

The Ghosts of Huddersfield: Neo-Luddism and the Ethics of AI in the Human-Machine Era

Lee Romain

University of Tokyo Affiliated Secondary School

(hand-shearing)」と批判的な介入を必要とする生の「スパイダーワーク (Spider-work)」の生成者として位置づけ、高負担の試験対策におけるジグソー法を再構築するものである。結論として、「ヒューマン・スルーライン (Human Throughline)」の維持は技術の拒絶ではなく、「人間と機械の時代」における強靱で有意義な探究の共同体にとって不可欠な民主的要求であることを論じる。

キーワード： ネオ・ラッドライト、生成AI、TESOL、教師のエージェンシー、創造性のギャップ、自動評価、ヒューマン・イン・ザ・ループ

The Ghosts of Huddersfield

The history of the Luddite movement is often reduced to a simplistic caricature of “machine-smashing” by those resistant to progress or innovation. However, in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, this history is not a distant academic concept; it is etched into the very geography of the town. In 1812, the Luddite uprisings reached a violent crescendo in this region, driven by skilled croppers who saw their livelihoods and dignity threatened by the unregulated introduction of shearing frames. The most prominent figure of this era was William Horsfall, a defiant mill owner who famously declared he would ride “up to his saddle girths in Luddite blood.” His assassination by Luddites on Crosland Moor (the area I also lived in) became a defining moment of the industrial struggle, marking the peak of a conflict that was fundamentally about human agency, not an irrational hatred of tools.

A Personal Intersection with the Past

For me, this history is deeply personal. Growing up in Huddersfield, the narrative of the Luddites was not just a chapter in a textbook; it was part of the local lore. I was taught these accounts at school, learning about the desperation of the workers and the rigidity of the mill owners. My daily reality was physically connected to this legacy; the street where William Horsfall was murdered was the very street I walked on every single day to get to school. Walking that path, one cannot help but feel the “temporally cyclical” weight of the industrial revo-

lution. This proximity to the site of such a profound clash between labour and technology has shaped my perspective on progress and technology itself. It serves as a constant reminder that every technological shift has a human cost and that the “smashing” of machines was, in reality, a desperate demand for a dignified seat at the table of the future.

The Unvetted Experiment: The Genie and the Bottle

Today, we find ourselves in the midst of a contemporary crisis that mirrors the unrest of 1812. For over twenty years, society has been part of an unvetted experiment with digital technology, moving from the dawn of the internet to the ubiquity of smartphones and social media, and now to the precipice of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). The rhetoric used by modern Mill Owners, the tech corporations and educational administrators frequently utilises the “genie is out of the bottle” trope to frame AI as an unstoppable, inevitable force. By framing the technology as “inevitable,” these stakeholders often bypass critical ethical discussions regarding surveillance, data privacy, and the erosion of autonomy. To navigate this “AI-infused world,” we must pivot toward a Neo-Luddite sensibility. As contemporary scholars suggest, Neo-Luddism is not a call to retreat into the past, but a sophisticated political critique that questions the social and economic relations managed by technology. It is a demand for accountability in the “Human-Machine Era,” ensuring that the tools we adopt serve to enhance human life rather than diminish the human



Figure 2. A street sign on William Horsfall Street in Huddersfield, UK. Photograph by the author (2024).

throughline.

Project Scopes and Objectives

This paper explores the intersection of historical resistance and modern educational technology through the lens of Neo-Luddite agency. The structure moves from theoretical foundations to practical implications. This paper begins with a review of current literature on AI ethics and Neo-Luddism, grounding the discussion in the ethical “perils” of algorithmic bias and teacher autonomy. This is followed by a comparative analysis of industrial-era and modern media reports, examining how the rhetoric of efficiency and inevitability has remained remarkably consistent over two centuries. Finally, the project concludes by exploring the implications within the language classroom, specifically focusing on learner autonomy and the Creativity Gap, the boundary where algorithmic detection fails to recognise the unique spark of human linguistic innovation.

Literature Review: Theoretical Scaffolding

To understand the modern “Machine (replacement) Question”, we must move beyond the binary of technophobia versus technophilia. This review synthesises the historical roots of resistance with modern critiques of algorithmic power, establishing the “Neo-Luddite” framework as a diagnostic tool for educational agency.

The (Re)turn to Luddism: From Sabotage to Epistemology

The historical Luddite movement is frequently mischaracterised as a mindless rage against progress and emerging tech; however, as Sale (1995), as reviewed by Rowe (1995), notes, the 19th-century croppers were “rebels against the future” only insofar as that future prioritised corporate profit over

human craftsmanship. This sentiment has found a modern resurgence in what Nichols et al. (2025) termed “epistemological Luddism.” Rather than advocating for the literal destruction of hardware, this framework demands a critical interrogation of the power dynamics inherent in technology. It views AI not as an autonomous, unstoppable force, but as a deliberate choice by modern “Mill Owners” to mediate human interaction. By reclaiming the Luddite label and reforming under the title of Neo-Luddites, educators transition from passive consumers to critical “craftsmen” who question whether a tool expands or erodes the “Human Throughline.”

Algorithmic Peril and the Neutrality Myth

The integration of AI in education is often presented as a neutral, “objective” advancement. However, Noble (2018) exposes this as a “neutrality myth,” arguing that algorithms are often “engines of oppression” that reinforce existing societal biases and racial hierarchies. This algorithmic peril is further detailed by Salloum (2024), who identifies a significant erosion of autonomy when AI is used for predictive analytics or automated feedback. When teachers and students are subjected to the black box of AI, they are not merely using a tool; they are being processed by it. This “Spider-work” of data extraction creates a sterile educational environment where the unique, creative agency of the individual is sacrificed for the statistical efficiency of the machine.

This neutrality myth is further complicated by what Steffensen (2025) identifies as a ‘Northern Monopoly’ on linguistic technology. By treating language as a sterile set of abstract rules to be automated, these systems often erase the ‘biocultural’ diversity of the Global South, effectively colonising the digital landscape with a single, Western-centric worldview.

Agency and the Fallacy of Democratisation

Promoters of Generative AI often claim the technology will democratise education by providing every student with a private tutor. Wieczorek (2025) dismisses this as a critical pragmatist fallacy, arguing that AI-driven democratisation often masks the further commodification of learning and the widening of the digital divide.

Young, McLeod, and Brady (2018) corroborate this empirically, finding that digital literacy competencies require deliberate pedagogical cultivation rather than mere exposure to technology—the mere provision of tools does not constitute democratic education.

In this landscape, the role of the teacher as a mediator becomes paramount. Li (2017) emphasises that technological mediation is never a replacement for pedagogical agency; rather, the instructor's role is “crucial” in ensuring that technology serves the social ecology of the classroom. To reach the SAMR Redefinition stage, the teacher must remain the “Human-in-the-loop,” transforming AI from a tool of substitution into a site of social negotiation and creative play.

This demand for active mediation over passive consumption finds psychological grounding in Kozyreva et al.'s (2022) concept of critical ignoring, the disciplined, cognitively active choice to selectively filter information from one's environment, rather than engage uncritically with every algorithmic output that demands attention. For the Neo-Luddite educator, this is not passivity but mastery: a form of professional agency that the attention economy is specifically designed to prevent.

The Media Mirror, 1884-2026

To navigate the Human-Machine Era, we must recognise that the rhetoric of progress is often a mask for the rhetoric of extraction. By placing the media coverage of the 1812 Luddite revolts alongside modern commentary on Generative AI, we uncover a “Media Mirror” or a cyclical recurrence of rhetoric that reveals the strategies used by Mill Owners to bypass ethical vetting and sideline the craftsman.

The Ruse of Inevitability

In February 1812, an editorial in *The Leeds Mercury* dismissed the Luddites' grievances by framing the power loom as an unstoppable force of nature, asserting that resistance was “as futile as attempting to stem the tide of the ocean.” This

“Ruse of Inevitability” persists today. A 2026 Guardian editorial mirrors this exact sentiment, arguing that because the “AI genie is out of the bottle,” society must focus on adaptation rather than regulation (How can we make sure AI delivers, 2025).

This linguistic strategy serves a specific purpose: it shifts the burden of proof from the developer to the user. By framing technology as an autonomous, inevitable force, the Mill Owners (then and now) effectively silence the “Human Throughline.” If the machine is “the tide,” then the craftsman's expertise is merely an obstacle to be washed away. Reclaiming the (Neo-) Luddite label means rejecting this fatalism; it is an assertion that every inevitable technology is actually a human choice that requires human accountability.

Spider-work and the Extraction of the Soul

The most visceral connection between the two eras lies in the 1812 croppers' petition against “Spider-work”, their term for the hollow, inferior cloth produced by automated shears. The croppers argued that while the machine could mimic the uniform appearance of hand-sheared wool, it lacked the structural integrity and “soul” of master-craftsmanship (Huddersfield Croppers, 1812).

We see the digital ghost of Spider-work in the modern critique of Generative AI. Naomi Klein (2023) describes the current AI surge not as a creative revolution, but as a “heist” of human labour and culture. Just as the power loom extracted the skill of the cropper to produce Spider-work, large language models (LLMs) extract the collective output of human writers and artists to produce stochastic content. In the TESOL classroom, this manifests as automated feedback that looks statistically correct but is humanly hollow. When we substitute the mentor for the algorithm, we aren't just gaining efficiency; we are mass-producing Spider-work that fails to see the student's unique creative spark.

Discussion:

Reclaiming Digital Agency in the Human-Machine Era

The Human-Machine Era is not a futuristic concept; it is the climax of an unscripted, twenty-year social experiment. To navigate this landscape, we must move beyond the Ruse of Inevitability and reclaim the role of the master-craftsman. This section synthesises the implications of AI for the TESOL classroom, using the

Neo-Luddite framework to move from the mechanical Substitution of labour toward a creative Re-definition of pedagogy.

The Creativity Gap and the Stochastic Parrot

The primary peril of modern Generative AI is its fundamental nature as a ‘stochastic parrot’ (Bender et al., 2021). While the “Mill Owners” of Big Tech promote these tools as creative partners, AI is inherently retrospective; it predicts the most probable next word based on a static dataset. It cannot feel the emotional weight of a student’s poem, nor can it navigate the “zeitgeist” of evolving language.

In the TESOL classroom, this manifests as a Creativity Gap. AI consistently fails to grasp the nuances of modern slang, cultural memes, or the pragmatic “spark” that defines human communication. When we allow AI to substitute for the mentor’s feedback, we are producing digital Spider-work: content that is statistically uniform but humanly hollow. Reclaiming our agency requires us to protect this gap, ensuring that the student remains the primary author of their linguistic future.

When we allow AI to produce an essay without the intent of a writer, it perfectly illustrates the stochastic mimicry that defines current AI output. This ‘Creativity Gap’ is empirically grounded in a multimodal failure of machine intelligence, where the semantically hollow ‘word salad’ produced by the BABEL Generator in writing evaluations is mirrored by the inability of automated speech recognition to prioritise human intelligibility over mere acoustic (and accented) conformity.

A small-scale replication study (Romain, 2025) involving five EFL teachers at a Tokyo secondary school corroborates this gap empirically. Using a pre-test/training/post-test design adapted from Hahn (2004), participants listened to short academic passages delivered with either correct or misplaced primary stress. Results consistently showed that correctly stressed speech improved comprehension scores, while misplaced stress—even when grammatically flawless—reduced listener accuracy. Crucially, a brief

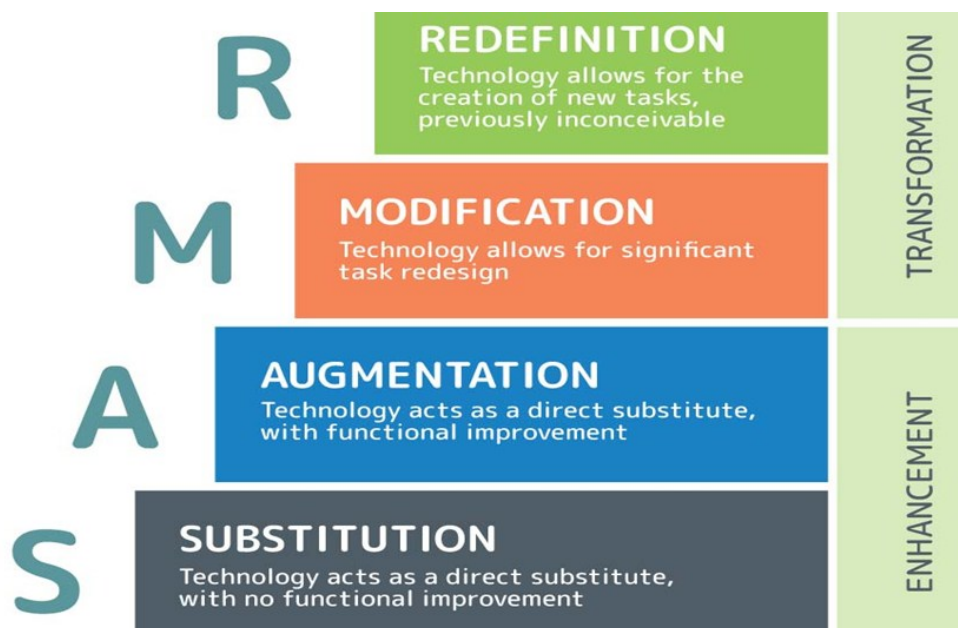


Figure 3. The SAMR model. Reprinted from Puentedura (2006).

awareness-raising intervention produced measurable perceptual gains, suggesting that human attunement to prosodic meaning is trainable, while automated speech recognition systems remain tethered to acoustic conformity over communicative intent.

Sidelining the Craftsman: The Xennial Diagnostic

For the Xennial bridge generation, the transition from the analogue to the hyper-digital has been a lived reality. We are the last cohort to remember the “before times,” giving us a unique vantage point to critique the passive drifting toward uncritical adoption of progress forced upon society by corporate interests. This unscripted experiment has often sidelined the expert in favour of the algorithm (Stankorb, 2014).

My own professional journey and reflections illustrate this “Sidelining of the Craftsman”. In 2009, my pitch to the Prince’s Trust to use video games as educational tools was dismissed as “mere entertainment”. I was “right too early” simply because my vision of human-centric, gamified innovation did not fit the established profit models of the era. Today, we see a mirror of this in AI: teachers are often treated as technicians managing a “black box” rather than master-craftsmen wielding a tool. To move forward, we must step back from unreflective technology use and demand that technology serve the Community of Inquiry rather than substituting for it

(Crawford, 2009).

True innovation rarely comes from the “intended use” of a tool; it comes from the craftsman’s ability to exploit it. In the Fighting Game Community (FGC), the “Combo System” began as a technical bug in *Street Fighter II*. Players—the craftsmen of the arcade—discovered they could cancel animations to chain attacks, transforming a machine error into the core dynamic of the genre (Rose, 2013).

We must apply this Emergent Agency to the TESOL classroom. While the “Mill Owners” designed neural translation tools for Substitution (SAMR Model; Puentedura, 2006), we can repurpose them as “Metalinguistic Mirrors.” By having students analyse where an algorithm fails to translate cultural nuance or Spider-work biases, we transform a tool of extraction into a site of social negotiation.

This is the Social Turn in action: the technology is not the teacher; it is the buggy ecology where human interaction takes place. Students exercising this kind of selective, critical engagement with machine output are, in Kozyreva et al.’s (2022) terms, practising critical ignoring—choosing which algorithmic outputs warrant hand-shearing and which deserve to be set aside entirely.

This project began with the “Ghosts of Huddersfield”, the 19th-century craftsmen who stood at the precipice of an industrial revolution that threatened to automate their skill and erase their autonomy. By bridging the 200-year gap between the power loom and the “stochastic parrot,” this research has demonstrated that the “Machine replacement Question” remains the defining ethical challenge of our era. The struggle for Digital Agency is not a fight against technology itself, but a fight for the right to remain the primary author of the educational experience.

Reclaiming the Human Throughline

The core finding of this 20-year experiment is that innovation is a human act, not an algorithmic output. Whether it is the exploitation of a bug in a fighting game to create a new combo system or the repurposing of a translation tool to teach pragmatic nuance in a TESOL classroom, the most transformative advancements occur when the craftsman asserts control over the tool. As we move further into the Human-Machine Era, we must reject the substitution of human labour and

demand the redefinition of our roles.

The Creativity Gap—that space where slang, memes, and social intuition reside—is where the social and humanistic core of education lives. To protect it, we must ensure the “Human-in-the-loop” makes AI serve as our diagnostic tool rather than our inevitable replacement. This is the true legacy of Neo-Luddism: it is a proactive defence of the Community of Inquiry, ensuring that the social ecology of the classroom remains a space of shared human meaning.

This commitment to local agency is now finding its macro-level echo in the global political landscape. The Ruse of Inevitability is being systematically dismantled as international regulatory frameworks finally move to bring the unchecked expansion of Big Tech to heel (Without effective regulation, 2026). This shift from passive consumption to active accountability suggests that the Human Throughline is no longer a solitary act of resistance, but the foundation of a new global standard for technological engagement.

Beyond the Ruse of Inevitability

As we have seen through the “Media Mirror” of 1812 and 2026, the rhetoric of inevitability is a strategy used by “Mill Owners” to bypass accountability. By framing AI as an unstoppable force, corporate entities attempt to absolve themselves of the responsibility for the “Spider-work” they produce; hollow, biased, and unvetted content that diminishes the learner. Reclaiming the Luddite label is a way to break this spell. It is a declaration that the “Genie” is not an autonomous deity, but a tool that must be governed by an ethical framework and a moral code.

The UTokyo Blueprint

To move beyond the theoretical, this “Pro-Human Praxis” must manifest in the daily rhythms of the classroom. The following blueprint represents a redefinition of the traditional Jigsaw reading method, a staple of my current practice, repurposed for the high-stakes environment of *Kyōtsu Test* [Japanese Common Test for University Admissions] preparation. Here, AI is utilised not as a surrogate teacher, but as a producer of Spider-work, material that requires the human “hand-shearing” of critical analysis to be made useful.

The preservation of the Human Throughline must therefore evolve into a Global Throughline.

A classroom application of this framework might treat ‘language’ not as machine-generated output, but as a diverse, human act of resistance against algorithmic homogenisation. By moving from ‘substitution’ to a transdisciplinary engagement with all global voices, we ensure that the classroom remains a site of genuine human agency rather than a hollow site of ‘Spider-work’ extraction.”

Target: Senior High School (Kyōtsu Test Preparation)

Method: AI-Augmented Jigsaw Reading

Theme: Moving from Stochastic Mimicry to Human Intelligibility

Stage 1: The Expert Phase (AI as “Spider-worker”)

Students are divided into expert groups, each assigned a different section of a complex Kyōtsu-style reading passage. Each group is given a “Spider-work” summary of their section, generated by an LLM.

The Task: Students must use the AI as a Functional Literacy tool to quickly decode vocabulary and syntax.

The Neo-Luddite Twist: Students are instructed to find the “hollow” parts of the AI summary: identifying where the machine has prioritised “token frequency” over the actual “human throughline” of the author’s argument or nuance.

Stage 2: The Teaching Phase (The Human Throughline)

Experts return to their home groups to teach their section.

The Task: Instead of reading the AI summary, students must synthesise the information into their own words.

The Goal: To prove that human communication is a “social contract.” Students must ensure their peers actually understand the content, navigating the “Creativity Gap” by using metaphors or local context that the AI, as a stochastic parrot, could not provide.

Stage 3: The Shearing Phase (Critical Assessment)

The final group task is to “shear” a collective mock-test answer generated by the AI for the entire passage.

The Task: Using their combined expert

knowledge, the group identifies “shoddy” logic or “hallucinated” facts in the AI’s response.

The Outcome: Students rewrite the answer, bridging the gap between the machine’s “Hollow Cloth” and a high-quality, human-validated response.

This framework aligns with the vision of the University of Tokyo’s central leadership, which has recently emphasized that the genuine innovation required to overcome algorithmic limitations depends entirely on ‘human users themselves possessing agency and creativity’ (Fujii, 2026).

The Ghosts of Huddersfield are no longer mere spectres of a bygone industrial age but active participants in the modern classroom, reminding us that technology is a choice, not an inevitability. By transforming the Spider-work of generative AI into a site of critical “hand-shearing,” we move beyond being passive consumers and reclaim our status as master-craftsmen of the English language. The UTokyo Blueprint serves as a localised testament to this pro-human praxis, demonstrating that even in the highest-stakes environments, the Human Throughline can be preserved.

This commitment to local agency is now finding its macro-level echo in the global political landscape. As of March 28, 2026, international regulatory frameworks have finally moved to bring the unchecked expansion of Big Tech ‘to heel’ (The week, 2026). This shift from passive consumption to active accountability suggests that the Human Throughline is no longer a solitary act of resistance, but the foundation of a new global standard for technological engagement. We are moving from the ruse of inevitability toward a restored era of the master-craftsman. We must continue to reject the ruse of inevitability and refuse to be “captive test subjects” (Klein, 2025) in a corporate experiment that prioritises efficiency over the “Automation of the Soul.” As we navigate the complexities of this Human-Machine Era, our duty is clear: we must not smash the machine, but we must never let it replace the soul of the learner. In doing so, we ensure that the future of education remains a shared social contract—one that is resilient, critical, and profoundly human.

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About the author: Lee Romain is an educator at the University of Tōkyō's Affiliated Secondary School (*Tōdai Fuzoku*) and a Master's candidate in TESOL and Applied Linguistics at Temple University Japan. His current research focuses on phonetics, specifically primary stress production and its impact on learner intelligibility. He is also actively exploring the ethical implications of AI in education and the effects of automated evaluations on student identity.

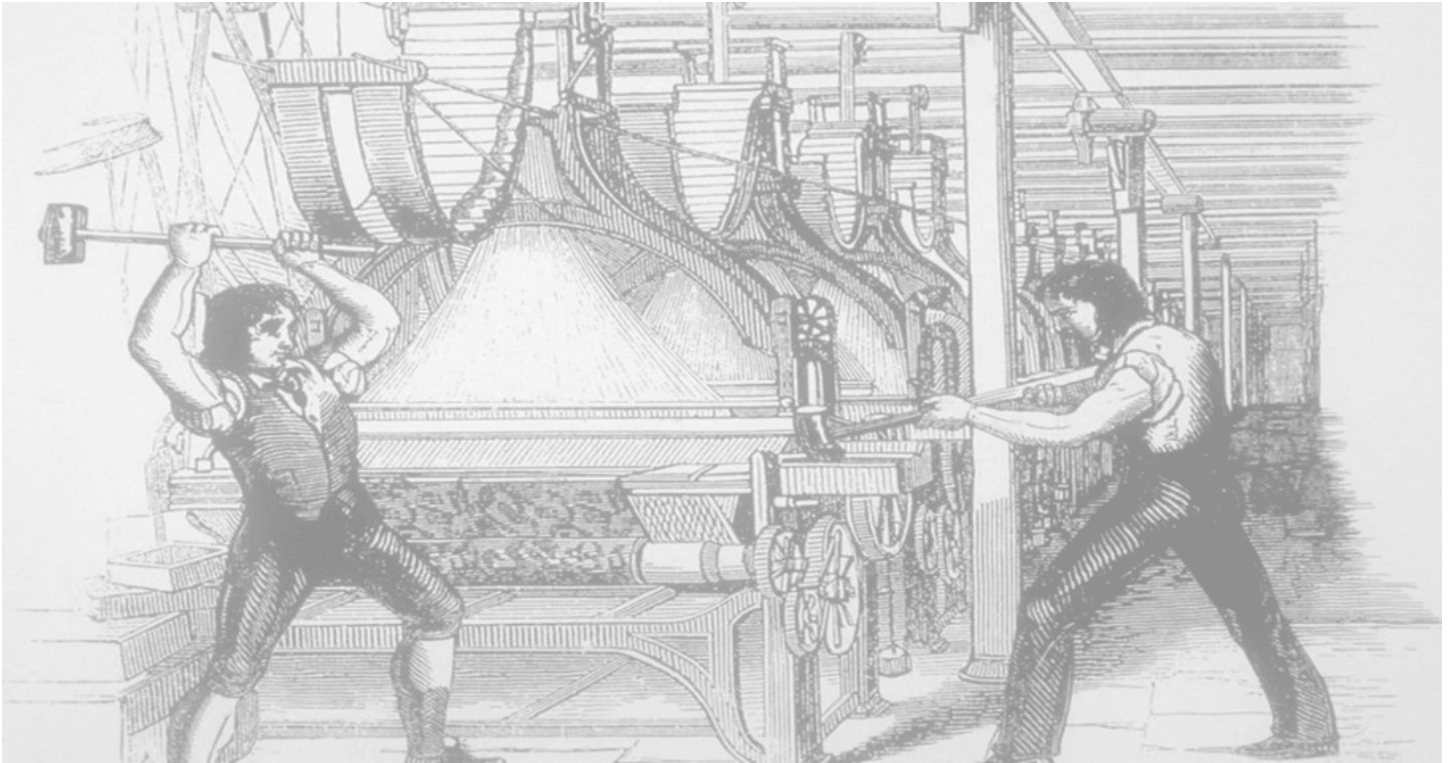


Figure 4. The frame-breakers: Structural resistance in West Yorkshire. Image courtesy of Knitting Together: Heritage of the East Midlands Knitting Industry (<https://www.knittingtogether.org.uk/industry-timeline/in-the-doldrums-1810-1850/luddite-frame-breaking/>).

