

# Research on Digital Labor Alienation from The Perspective of Digital Capitalism

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**Abstract:** In the Economic and Philosophical Manuscript of 1844, Marx put forward the theory of "alienated labor". According to Marx's analysis, the process of labor alienation is actually the process of workers from formal subordination to actual subordination to capital, and it is also the process of workers' losing their subjective status, which is a vicious circle. In the era of digital economy, as a new form of labor, digital labor, while greatly improving labor efficiency and liberating productivity, is still dominated by the production system dominated by private ownership of the means of production.

**Keywords:** Digital labor, Alienation, Digital capitalism.

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## 1. Introduction

Digital labor comes into being with the development of digital technology. With the help of digital platforms, capital has absorbed digital labor into the capitalist production process. In fact, digital labor is still in the shackles of the production relations of capitalist private ownership, which inevitably leads to alienation. Compared with traditional labor alienation, it is only different in specific forms, but also includes four aspects.

## 2. Alienation Between Workers and Digital Labor Products

Under the condition of private ownership of the means of production, "the more objects a worker produces, the fewer objects he can possess, and the more he is governed by his own product, namely capital". The labor products of workers are a kind of alien existence for workers. Here, Marx mainly refers to the alienation of workers and their labor products during the capitalist industrialization period. However, in the digital era, digital labor is still under the control of capital logic, and digital labor products still exist as an object of alienation, an independent force, and an antagonist to workers.

In the era of digital economy, most digital workers participate in labor spontaneously under the attraction of digital platforms. From the appearance, workers can freely control their own labor behavior and obtain their own labor products. Therefore, this alienation between workers and their products is vague. But in essence, once digital workers enter the digital platform built by capital, the attributes of their labor products will change qualitatively. In the age of big data, the labor products created by digital workers with physical and mental efforts, that is, data, will be collected, processed and used by digital platforms, and eventually occupied by capitalists. These digital workers will not only not get labor remuneration, but will also be "controlled" by their own labor products after being processed by digital platforms. They will become a kind of alien force against workers. The more they produce, the more they lose, The proliferation of data is in direct proportion to the depreciation of digital workers, that is, the more content digital workers browse, the more their spiritual world becomes scarce; The more data they create, the

more they are standardized and even constructed. Therefore, as in the era of big industry, digital labor in the era of big data is still unable to get rid of the prison of capital exploitation, and digital workers and their labor products are still unable to get rid of the situation of opposition and alienation. However, the difference is that labor in the digital era presents a series of new features, such as more flexible labor relations, more diverse subjects, more free time and more abundant products.

## 3. Alienation Between Workers and Digital Labor Process

The alienation path of digital labor also exists in the production activity itself, that is to say, digital workers and their labor process are also alienated, which is reflected in the dissimilarity, compulsion and non freedom behind the essence of the labor process. In the era of capitalist big industry, workers are still the main body of labor. The alienation of the labor process is more obvious. The current situation of workers being enslaved and exploited, such as prolonging working hours and increasing labor intensity, is completely different from the free and happy behavior of workers. This big contrast can be easily perceived.

However, in today's digital labor era, the progress of science and technology makes a lot of work can be completed on the virtual digital platform. Digital labor is more free from time and space constraints. There is no so-called rest day, and digital labor can be carried out anytime and anywhere. Digital workers are often willing to participate in the process of digital labor, and obtain a certain illusion of pleasure in this process. Therefore, in the digital labor era, the alienation of the labor process is not easily perceived by digital workers, and the capital exploitation of digital labor is more secretive. Digital labor under the rule of digital capital logic is the same as the capitalist application of machine factory production during the industrial revolution. There is still an inevitable problem of alienation between workers and their labor process. Marx pointed out: "Workers do not affirm themselves in their own work, but deny themselves, not feel happy, but feel unhappy." On the one hand, the labor intensity of digital labor is greater. On the other hand, digital labor has a longer working time, and the opposition between labor and leisure is becoming increasingly acute. The development of

information technology continues to create more and more advanced working conditions. The time and space constraints of traditional labor are constantly broken through. Digital labor is no longer limited to a certain time and a certain place, leading to the blurring of the boundary between labor and leisure.

#### **4. Alienation Between Workers and Their Own Kind Essence**

The essence of human beings is that compared with animals, human productive labor is conscious, and it is purposeful, free and conscious participation in productive labor under the control of consciousness. In the digital era, various digital phenomena have a certain obscurity to the vision of digital workers. For example, the guidance of digital media to the values of digital workers has made them lose their true understanding of themselves in the face of the complex world, and they are often immersed in the virtual environment created by digital technology. In this virtual environment, digital workers' understanding and understanding of the world is unreal. Under the control of free will, digital workers explain their self-consciousness by following the logic of the digital platform. However, this expression of self-consciousness is first based on digital workers' recognition of the operation logic of social networks, and then, under the strong temptation of the unique charm of digital platforms, they lose their true enjoyment of watching dramas, microblogging and other pleasures. However, digital workers are also potentially dominated by digital social platforms when they follow the logic of digital labor and enjoy the pleasure brought by digital platforms. This is reflected in the fact that digital workers are unable to express their true thoughts due to the deep consciousness invasion of the big data ideology of the digital platform, such as what kind of goods they buy and what kind of entertainment activities they engage in. And this phenomenon is vividly displayed in the age of big data. People's lives are connected with digital information all the time; Digital devices are used for daily travel, meal booking, navigation, social networking and other activities; When walking, taking the subway, or sleeping, you will always stare at the screen of the intelligent device; If people leave all kinds of digital media platforms of these digital technology architectures, they will become embarrassed. Therefore, the productive labor in the digital era, that is, the essence of class, is not free, just like the traditional commodity economy era.

#### **5. Alienation Between People**

The alienation of people, as the deepest level of alienated labor, is the inevitable result of the alienation of workers from themselves and tools of labor. Because of the particularity of digital labor and the characteristics of the times, the alienation between people is not only the confrontation between

capitalists and workers, but also the corresponding alienation between workers. On the one hand, every online crowdworker is eager to obtain a higher digital reputation and hierarchical status, so as to get more job opportunities and expand their influence. However, the subjectivity and controllability of reputation and grade make it easy to distort in the evaluation process, leading to adverse phenomena such as reputation flooding or false grade. In the long run, there has been a clear "digital hierarchy" among workers, which has widened the gap between workers in employment opportunities, income and other aspects. On the other hand, in the audience work, people's heavy reliance on social platforms makes their online time much longer than face-to-face communication time. The dynamic release and likes comments and other behaviors on the platform seem to be a way to prove their existence. However, this kind of social relationship based on virtual space is extremely unstable. Once the social platform is stopped, the self seems to become "transparent", users often show an alienated "self" on the network. It is difficult for people to understand the real other party through the screen, and the relationship between people is gradually alienated into a false state.

#### **6. Conclusion**

Marx profoundly revealed that the essence of capitalist alienation is the alienation of production relations, and the relationship between capital and labor is the core of production relations. Although the labor subject, labor form, labor scope, and labor time in contemporary western digital capitalist society have undergone tremendous changes, and the "reference frame" of alienation has shifted from material labor to digital labor, and tried to cover up "hidden exploitation" in digital space, the theory of Marx's alienated labor is still full of explanatory power, and the old contradiction between capital and labor in capitalist society has not changed, The production logic of alienated labor is still based on the contradictory relationship between capital and labor.

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