Journal of Education and Educational Research
ISSN: 2957-9465 | Vol. 4, No. 3, 2023

Play Labor from the Perspective of Marx's Alienated Labor

Shaotong Shen

School of Marxism, Zhejiang Normal University, 321004, China

Abstract: The play labor under Marx's alienated labor vision refers to the play as the purpose of the labor, this kind of labor is affected by consumer culture, street sports activities, electronic games and so on. This article through the analysis of Marx's alienated labor theory, and from the daily life of the selection of electronic games this case to explain the alienation mechanism behind the play labor, pointing out the new situation of players being exploited by capital. This paper analyzes Marx's alienated labor theory and makes an in-depth analysis of "play labor from the perspective of Marx's alienated labor". Through the analysis, it can be seen that play labor is a special form of alienated labor which is influenced by consumer culture, street sports activities and electronic games. It not only makes people feel "invisibly enslaved", but also affects the way of behavior and thinking in People's Daily life. In the current social environment, people are used to accepting the fast-food culture, lack of judgment and self-control, it is easy to become a free worker in the game industry chain under the cover of the casual meaning of online games. With the deep integration and development of platform capitalism and information capitalism, digital media technology has gradually erased the boundaries between reality and virtual, leisure and labor. Scholars have attributed this behavior of participating in online games for the purpose of entertainment and leisure and generating a large amount of surplus value for game companies to a new form of digital labor -- play labor.

Keywords: Alienated Labor; Play Labor; Players; Electronic Games.

1. Introduction

Under the influence of Hegel and Feuerbach, Marx put forward the theory of alienation, which is mainly a generalization of the relationship between labor and labor products in the capitalist environment. In his Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844, he pointed out that labor, as a productive labor of human beings, is originally intended to obtain material means of production, but under the exploitation of capitalist powers, the essence and purpose of labor have been alienated. This alienation refers to the phenomenon of people's material and spirit and their products becoming foreign or opposing forces and ruling people in turn. This alienation is manifested in (1) the alienation of the laborer from his own labor products; (2) the alienation of the laborer from his own labor activities; (3) Man is alienated from his own kind essence; (4) Man is alienated from himself.

2. Forms of Alienated Labor

The four alienation phenomena proposed by Marx are based on the fact that workers and their labor products are alienated in the capitalist environment. First, labor itself is happy for human beings, and human beings devote time and energy to productive labor in order to live a better life, but the material materials they produce do not belong to themselves in the end. But are owned by capitalists. Moreover, capitalists try their best to exploit the labor remuneration of employed workers. Since laborers are always in the state of employment and cannot change their passive position, they continue to work, which makes the life of laborers with a low standard of living even more difficult. And the product of labor that they spend a lot of time and energy to produce does not belong to them, but to the capitalist. In this sense, the product of labor becomes an alien force that in turn restricts the laborer and causes alienation. Second, labor itself is a way of material production and life of human beings, so laborers themselves should voluntarily participate in labor, and labor should also be a free activity that can bring people full feelings. Machines were originally created to replace human beings to do labor, thus liberating human beings. However, in the process of wage labor, capitalists try every means to exploit and exploit them. As a result, workers are oppressed for a long time, gradually producing painful emotions of resistance. They not only become tools of exploitation of capital, but also factory machines become a power that dominates laborers. The enthusiasm of laborers gradually disappears, and labor becomes a compulsory and oppressed activity, which alienates laborers from their labor behavior. Third, the reason why human beings can rule the nature lies in their subjective initiative shown in social practice. However, with the emergence of alienation, the machine, originally operated by laborers as a tool, turns into a power that dominates laborers, standardizing and restricting laborers' work, making laborers lose their self-consciousness. Over time, workers lose their independent creativity, labor behavior becomes mandatory, and the essence of human beings is alienated. Fourth, "When the laborer regards the product of his labor as the opposite of himself, then it is obvious that the product of labor no longer belongs to him, but to other laborers, resulting in an extreme feeling that the labor activity is painful for the laborer, and happy for the party that forces him to work." The process of production is painful, while the fruits of labor are happy, but this happiness is the special enjoyment of capitalists, but in this process, they do not pay labor, thus resulting in an unfair social phenomenon, capitalists become the dominators, workers become the dominated, social interpersonal relations are alienated, which will affect the harmonious development of society.

3. The Integration of Content Producers and Consumers on Game Platforms

In the capitalist economy, the alienation of labor makes workers subject to the domination and enslavement of foreign forces in the process, and cannot achieve comprehensive development. Labor itself exists as a kind of free activity of human beings. It is a means used by human beings to obtain the material needs of life and obtain the happiness of labor from it, and the products of labor produced by it should be given to human beings. However, under the capitalist system, the products produced by workers do not belong to workers, let alone have control over them. It gradually becomes dominated by money and does not care what products are produced. However, with the birth of commodities, the phenomenon of alienation in the field of production did not die away, but entered the field of Commodity Exchange, that is, the field of consumption, which Marx called the three fetishisms. After entering the field of circulation, if the commodity does not complete the exchange mission, it will be called an existence that threatens survival. Therefore, the "God" attribute propagated by this religion is given to the commodity, and people will still be affected by the field of commodity consumption after the alienated labor process is finished. Only through the exchange of commodities to satisfy the sense of existence, people gradually lose their subjectivity, become dependent on commodities in the field of consumption of capital circulation ancillary objects, further deepening alienation. In the post-modern society, the scope of alienation of commodities has gradually expanded, and a new form of alienation has appeared -- the alienation of symbolic consumption. Baudrillard divided the field of alienation into three levels of things, culture and service for demonstration and analysis, namely, the three kinds of consumer behavior symbols mentioned in the Consumer Society. First of all, he summarized the symbolization of things as a series of ways and the form of grocery store. Commodities associate different commodities through the symbolic meaning, so that consumers have complex motivations. Then, through the value meaning formed by the symbol chain, people are presented with a systematic and irresistible character. And symbolized people's value judgment. Secondly, Baudrillard summarizes the symbolic consumption of culture in five aspects. Finally, this kind of symbolic consumption is analyzed and summarized. However, the status of human beings as consumer subjects gradually disappears in this consumption system, resulting in materialization. Under the "symbolization", consumption creates an illusion of free consumption, which makes human beings who are reduced to objects identify with the market logic of this consumption symbolization, and thus produce a materialized interpersonal relationship. In this mode, the alienation of human is no longer simply to become a laborer exploited by capitalists and manipulated by factory machines, but to actively adapt to the alienation of symbols through their own alienation.

With the high integration of media capital and industrial capital, the boundary between leisure and labor is becoming more and more blurred. The time consumed by players in online games is no longer free time in the pure sense, and the discretionary time originally used by players for learning and entertainment is included in the process of capital accumulation. Traditional labor and games often occur independently as different modes and Spaces. However, with the development of digital technology, these Spaces are merged and the seemingly independent world of game and work is integrated. Since then, many scholars have regarded the Internet as both a factory and a playground, and the boundary between leisure and entertainment has gradually disappeared. Hu Bing, a lecturer of journalism and communication at Huaqiao University, once defined "play labor" in his paper: "Play labor mainly refers to a series of recreational activities carried out by users in order to obtain fun on the network, such as chatting, online games and film and television viewing". Therefore, under the consistent discussion of scholars, "play labor" is included in the concept system of digital labor.

Netizens unconsciously become part of the production labor of the game platform because of their low consciousness and lack of self-cognition ability, and they are blinded by the recreational significance of the game. On the one hand, as producers of game platforms, they participate in online games, create characters in online games and constantly create character data to produce information content for game companies; on the other hand, as consumers of game platforms, netizens originally register social platform accounts in order to establish their own interpersonal relationships, but game companies are associated with social platform accounts. Users share their social information with the game platform, including cognition, preferences and emotions, etc. After the platform collects the players' information, the analysis results are packaged and sold, thus producing user data for the game company.

4. Cheap Players under the Non-Employment System: The Labor Method is Normalized

First of all, recall the definition of labor in the philosophical sense, which is the essence of our human being different from other creatures on the earth, is a kind of productive labor, as Marx said: "labor is first of all a process between human and nature, is a process between human and nature to mediate, adjust and control with their own activities." Under the capitalist system, labor is oppressed by capitalists and becomes a compulsory activity to serve the process of capital appreciation. Therefore, in the context of capitalism, labor is not only for the creation of value, but is also included in the ranks of capitalist exploitation. In the same age of information capitalization today, game players invest a certain amount of socially necessary labor time in the game platform, creating a series of additional industries and a large amount of surplus value for game companies. In this process, "a labor with time as the cost and time consumption as the process of production" is formed. Therefore, games have already had the conditions to become a kind of productive labor. The boundary between entertainment and leisure gradually disappears, and "play" becomes a kind of labor.

With the integration of digital media technology and sports industry, the industrial model of digital economy breaks the time and space restrictions and begins to expand, making this kind of "play labor" with the blurred boundary between leisure and entertainment gradually become a means of capital accumulation. The platform extracts the entertainment behavior of game players and occupies a series of additional products created by players to achieve capital appreciation. With the rapid development of the Internet, the development of platform capitalism will inevitably lead to the "labor" of

leisure and entertainment, and the scope of digital labor will accelerate and expand. Marx believes that capitalist private ownership makes labor a relationship between employment and employment, alienates material production labor, and makes labor an oppressive, coercive activity serving capitalist exploitation. Labor produced by laborers, human nature, and relations between people are all opposed to laborers themselves as alien forces. With the deep integration and development of platform capitalism and information capitalism, the boundary between leisure and labor has been broken, and online game workers have been included in the ranks of capitalist exploitation. Since netizens have been included in the scope of capital exploitation, they cannot escape the fate of alienation.

(1) The alienation of leisure time and free time

The boundary between leisure and labor is becoming increasingly unclear, so alienated labor can no longer be measured by whether it is within the scope of the employment system. The alienation of players playing online games is first and foremost reflected in the alienation of leisure time and free time. On the one hand, from the perspective of time, the time invested by players in online games is no longer free time in the pure sense. The disposable time used by players to study and relax has been capitalized and used by the game platform as a means and way of capital accumulation, which results in the further alienation of the essence of human and human.

(2) The player's labor becomes unconscious

In the 1970s, western scholars regarded audiences as "people with specific needs" from the perspective of audiences, and believed that audiences contact media out of certain motives, namely "use and satisfaction theory". Therefore, this paper classifies online game players according to demand motivation. Social players are to meet the needs of socializing, self-satisfying players are to meet the needs of realizing their ideal selves, and conspicuous players are to meet the needs of being recognized. Moreover, it can also be found from the interview that some players use online games to relieve the usual heavy learning pressure, some players to find the ideal self in the game, and some players simply for leisure and entertainment. However, in this study, it is found that during the whole process of online games, players of online games show a state that they can't get satisfaction after using online games. Instead, they show a dissimilation phenomenon of frustration and depression.

As a group, players are minors, and they are in the stage of understanding the world and themselves, so their self-awareness is not strong, and they are easy to fall into the swamp of games and cannot extricate themselves. They engage in unconscious and endless fun activities in online games, contribute user traffic and produce user data for media and advertisers' day and night, and realize industrial value-added. However, online game players do not get any financial rewards. In the interview, it was found that online game players almost did not realize the purpose and motivation of their initial contact with online games.

(3) The alienation of labor products mutates into the alienation of online games

According to Marx, "Under capitalism, the object of labor, the product of labor, is an alien being independent of the power of the producer and opposed to labor." Online games build a virtual landscape world, making the game platform gradually lose its tool, and begin to influence and even bind the game players, becoming a kind of foreign power that rules the players in turn. Some scholars believe that players can release themselves to the maximum extent in the game, such as imagination, but some scholars believe that it is not so, after all, online games are just tools under mechanical manipulation, the rules of which limit the freedom of action of players and the creation of imagination. It cannot be denied that the unique design of the game seems to have a lot of room for players to play, so the players are active at the beginning to contact the online game, because in the online game can not only create their favorite likes, but also interact through the social platform of the online game, which completely brings the players into the virtual game world, so that many people are full of exploration desire for online games. Moreover, players are more likely to be deceived by the illusion of freedom on the surface.

(4) Alienation of gamers' interpersonal relationships

"Marx's theory of alienation points out that the direct result of the alienation of man from his labor product, his life activity, and his class essence is the alienation of the relationship between man and man." The expression of this alienation lies in interpersonal communication, that is, the alienation of communication between oneself and others in the big environment in which one lives. This is mainly manifested in three aspects: First, the alienation of workers and their own workers under the capitalist system, in order to obtain the opportunity to sell their labor, workers are alienated from others who belong to the working class; Second, the alienation between workers and capitalists. The labor products that workers have spent a certain amount of time and energy to produce do not belong to the workers themselves in the end. There is an obvious contrast between the painful feeling of workers in the labor process and the pleasure of capitalists in effortless possession of labor products. The relationship between man and man which is embodied in them is alienated. Third, the alienation of the relationship between capitalists. What the workers have to do is to fight for the remuneration of their labor, while what the capitalists have to do is to occupy more opportunities in the market, so the capitalists who share the same goal will inevitably form an antagonistic relationship and start to compete. Therefore, the capitalists

The relationship between capitalists is also alienated.

In the end, online game players play games with other players for entertainment. However, in the investigation process, it is found that some players say they play games because of their good game skills, so they will be respected and followed by other players, while some players think that because of poor game skills and have no right to speak in the group, so they want to catch up by studying hard. When playing games together, the people with a high level of the game have the absolute right to speak in the team, while the people with a low level of the game are generally excluded by the group, resulting in some players to play the game lost the original entertainment purpose.

References

[1] Tian Tian. Research on the Dissimilation of Middle School Students in Online Games. Shanxi University, 2021.

[2] Xu Guanqun. "Play Work" and "Play Labor": Game Forms, Consent Manufacturing and Value Exploitation in Digital Capitalism. Frontiers, Issue 6,2020.

[3] Hu Bing. Division, Reaction and Loss: Youth's Social Media Use Alienation from the Perspective of "Play Labor", [J]

Journal of Huaqiao University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition),2 (2019).

[4] Ye Suibing, Unpaid Labor from Voluntary Labor, Play Labor to Volunteer Labor.[J], Vocational Education Research, No.2, 2022.

[5] Cao Yinzhong, Liu Xiaolin. Game, Balance and Development: Network Ideological and Political Education in Mobile Games from the Perspective of Field Theory [J], Journal of Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications (Social Science Edition), 6 (2019).