

# Critique of Alienation and Reconstruction of Practical Philosophy in the Digital Age

## -- A Perspective Based on The German Ideology

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### Abstract

As the foundational work of historical materialism, *The German Ideology*, centered on the material production practice of "real individuals," critiques Feuerbach's abstract materialism and the Young Hegelians' idealistic illusions, revealing the historical law that "social being determines social consciousness." This paper, based on the practical philosophy of *The German Ideology*, analyzes the technological upgrading of digital labor alienation and the ideological manipulation behind "amusement to death," attempting to reconstruct the Marxist critique path of technological capitalism. The study shows that digital technology has not liberated labor; instead, it has intensified human "dehumanization" through platform algorithms, data monopolies, and the entertainment industry. Only by returning to "revolutionary practice" can the dual shackles of technological alienation and entertainment illusion be broken. The paper unfolds from three dimensions: philosophical critique, realistic analysis, and liberation paths, combining digital labor cases and entertainment industry critiques, proposing a dual practical strategy of "technological democratization" and "cultural resistance."

### Keywords

The German Ideology, Digital Labor, Practice.

### 1. Introduction

When Silicon Valley algorithm engineers debug code to optimize user stickiness, data annotators in Ghana are labeling road images for autonomous driving systems at an hourly wage of \$0.9; when TikTok users are immersed in 15 seconds of sensory stimulation, their behavioral data has quietly transformed into "data fodder" for training recommendation models—digital capitalism is using the rhetoric of technological inclusivity to upgrade Marx's criticized "alienated labor" into global-scale digital discipline. This new type of alienation is no longer confined within factory walls but, with the help of platforms, algorithms, and data capillaries, permeates every inch of human existence: labor is broken down into calculable "task flows," emotions are quantified into tradable "traffic pools," and subjectivity dissolves into discrete data points in the carnival of the entertainment industry.

Nie Yang profoundly points out in his research that "digital labor alienation means that capital power, with the help of digital technology, more covertly infiltrates social relations and life processes, deeply regulating the reproduction of human desires and personalities"[1]. This observation reveals a new feature of alienation in the digital age—it is no longer simple physical coercion but deep control achieved through technological means. Luan Yimei and Zhang Yaqi, in analyzing the phenomenon of live-streaming e-commerce, found that "the audience becoming 'digital laborers' is mainly manifested in two levels: cognition and action. At the cognitive level, the audience's 'misjudgment' of time leads to their inability to escape and gradually lose their 'labor subjectivity'; at the behavioral level, it mainly refers to the alienation

of the audience's consumption behavior in the live broadcast room, that is, the audience seemingly voluntarily sells their 'digital labor products' at low or even no cost in a seemingly equal dialogue space"[2].

At the theoretical level, Xiao Xiang, through a review of domestic digital labor research, found that "domestic digital labor research mainly adopts the 'exploitation-alienation' paradigm, which can be further divided into two forms of theoretical 'transplantation.' The first can be called 'vertical transplantation,' which directly applies relevant labor theories from capitalist industrial production methods to current digital labor research. The second belongs to 'horizontal transplantation,' which applies relevant concepts and conclusions proposed by contemporary Western scholars to study China's digital labor, without considering the complexity of digital labor and its particularity in China"[3]. The problem with this theoretical transplantation is that it ignores the unique nature of digital labor.

From the perspective of historical development, Chai Qiyang traced the theoretical origins of digital labor research, pointing out that "research on digital labor can be traced back to the 1970s, when Canadian communication scholar Dallas Smythe, in his article 'Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism,' proposed the 'audience commodity theory,' arguing that mass communication media produce audiences as commodities, which is one of the early theoretical foundations of digital labor research"[4]. This theoretical lineage indicates that the problem of digital labor alienation is not a new phenomenon but an upgraded version of traditional media alienation in the digital age.

Facing this technological conundrum, traditional critical theory falls into a double dilemma: postmodernists attribute alienation to symbolic games, falling into the nihilism of relativism; technological determinists indulge in utopian fantasies of "metaverse liberation," ignoring capital's absolute control over technological mediation. This paper attempts to return to the practical philosophical foundation of Marx's *The German Ideology*, revealing that the essence of digital alienation is not a spontaneous consequence of technological progress but the reproduction of capitalist production relations through technological mediation. By dissecting the "triple chains" of platform capitalism—data production controlled by algorithms, commodification of immaterial labor, and ideological anesthesia of the entertainment industry—this paper will argue that alienation in the digital age is a deep colonization of "sensuous activity" by capital logic, and the possibility of liberation lies in the inherent contradictions of technological practice.

## **2. The Practical Philosophy in The German Ideology: A Revolutionary Reconstruction of Historical Materialism**

The *German Ideology* marks a revolutionary breakthrough in Marxist philosophy. In this unfinished work, Marx and Engels, through a systematic critique of classical German philosophy, reconstructed historical materialism with "practice" as its core category, ending the metaphysical imagination of traditional philosophy regarding humanity and history.

### **2.1. Reconstruction of Philosophical Foundations: A Paradigm Shift from "Sensuous Intuition" to "Sensuous Activity"**

Marx's reconstruction of historical materialism began with a critique of Feuerbach's intuitive materialism. Although Feuerbach brought philosophy back to the sensuous world from Hegel's "Absolute Spirit," his theory of "sensuous objects" had fundamental flaws: on the one hand, he regarded humans as biological beings passively receiving natural influences, abstracting human essence into eternal attributes like love and reason through the concept of "species-being"; on the other hand, he viewed history as a simple extension of "natural history," falling into a dualistic opposition between "naturalism" and "humanism." In response, Marx sharply

pointed out in Theses on Feuerbach: "The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism (that of Feuerbach included) is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the object or of contemplation, but not as sensuous human activity, practice"[18].

In the context of the digital age, Xu Xiaofeng and Wei Zesheng's research reminds us that "the problem of digital alienation is no longer a simple technical issue, but a problem that human existence and survival may face in reality and the future"[5]. This judgment echoes Marx's emphasis on practical philosophy—we cannot view digital technology as a neutral tool but should understand it as a practical activity carrying specific social relations.

This critique developed into a thorough philosophical revolution in *The German Ideology*. Marx proposed: "The object is human sensuous activity itself." This proposition contains a dual subversion: first, it shifts the philosophical foundation from the ontological question of "what is being" to the practical investigation of "how being is created." For example, the understanding of "labor": Hegel regarded it as a stage of spiritual externalization, Feuerbach only saw its natural attribute of maintaining physical existence, while Marx revealed labor as "the material exchange process between man and nature," a practical activity that shapes social relations. Second, it negates any trans-historical presupposition of "human essence," emphasizing that "individuals express their lives, they are what they are. Therefore, what they are coincides with their production—both with what they produce and with how they produce"[19]. This dynamic generative theory completely dissolved Feuerbach's static humanism, defining "real individuals" as the sum of social relations formed in material production activities.

Xiao Xiang, in his analysis of contemporary digital labor research, points out that "currently, there are two main paradigms in digital labor research: "(capital) exploitation—(subject) alienation" and "gift (economy)—reciprocity (mutual aid)." Both paradigms have certain applicability, but neither can reflect the complexity of digital labor, nor are they consistent with the particularity of digital labor in China"[3]. This observation precisely illustrates the contemporary value of Marx's practical philosophy—it requires us to start from specific historical conditions, rather than applying ready-made theoretical models.

## **2.2. The Driving Mechanism of Historical Development: The Dialectical Movement of Three Practical Dimensions**

Marx, taking material production practice as the origin, constructed the dynamic system of historical materialism. This system includes three interacting practical dimensions:

### **2.2.1. Material Production Practice: The Material Premise of History**

Marx pointed out: "The first historical act is the production of the means to satisfy these needs (eating, drinking, dwelling, clothing)," [20] which is "the basic condition of all history." But material production is by no means a simple use of tools; it involves a dual relationship: the relationship between humans and nature (productive forces) and the relationship between humans and humans (relations of production). Taking the 18th-century British Industrial Revolution as an example, the invention of the steam engine (progress in productive forces) promoted the transformation from handicraft workshops to large-scale machine industry, and at the same time gave rise to the class opposition between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (transformation of production relations). This contradictory movement constitutes the fundamental driving force for the evolution of social forms.

Ding Yan, in her visual analysis, found that "in the digital information age, digital labor as a new form of labor has become a focus of attention in academia"[6]. This phenomenon indicates that the development of digital technology is reshaping the structure of productive forces and relations of production, becoming an important driving force for contemporary historical development.

### 2.2.2. Communication Practice: The Reproduction of Social Relations

Production activities inevitably involve the creation of forms of communication such as language, institutions, and ideas. Marx emphasized: "The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men, the language of real life." [21] For example, the guild system in medieval Europe was both a technical norm for handicraft production (material practice) and shaped hierarchical ideology through apprenticeships and religious rituals (communication practice). In the era of digital capitalism, platform algorithms not only organize the labor process (material production) but also reconstruct labor-capital relations through rating systems and data surveillance (communication practice), forming a new type of control known as "digital Taylorism."

### 2.2.3. Revolutionary Practice: The Lever of Historical Leap

When the contradiction between productive forces and relations of production intensifies, "revolutionary practice" becomes an inevitable choice to break free from shackles. Marx pointed out: "Revolution is necessary, therefore, not only because the ruling class cannot be overthrown in any other way, but also because the class overthrowing it can only in a revolution succeed in ridding itself of all the muck of ages and become fitted to found society anew." [22] The French Revolution, where the Third Estate, under the banner of "liberty, equality, and fraternity," overthrew the feudal system, precisely confirms the dialectical unity of ideological struggle and the transformation of material forces.

These three dimensions constitute the three-dimensional structure of "practical dialectics": material production provides the objective basis for historical development, communication practice shapes social consciousness, and revolutionary practice promotes historical leaps through subjective agency. This dynamic model completely transcends Feuerbach's naturalistic explanation of history and corrects Hegel's idealistic view of history as the "progress of free consciousness."

## 2.3. Methodological Revolution: From "Interpreting the World" to "Changing the World"

The reconstruction of historical materialism brought about a fundamental shift in methodology. Marx declared in the Theses: "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." [23] This shift includes three methodological principles: social being determines social consciousness, the principle of historical specificity, and the framework of class analysis.

### 2.3.1. Social Being Determines Social Consciousness

Marx systematically expounded for the first time in *The German Ideology*: "It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness." [24] Taking law as an example: the concept of property rights in Roman law did not originate from the spirit of natural law but was a product of land privatization in the slave economy; the expansion of contemporary intellectual property law corresponds to the demand of digital capital for the appropriation of immaterial labor. This analytical method anchors ideological critique in material practice, providing a sharp tool for deconstructing the myth of "universal values."

Xu Xiaofeng and Wei Zesheng, in examining digital alienation, point out that "the algorithmic logic and affirmative narrative embedded in digital technology obscure the transcendence and critical principles of practice. In essence, digital alienation has not transcended the framework of alienated labor as described by Marx; the coupling of algorithmic logic and data alienates human species-being based on practice" [6]. This analysis reflects the contemporary application of Marx's methodology—seeing the essence of social relations behind technological appearances.

### 2.3.2. Principle of Historical Specificity

Marx opposed simplifying history to a "general path of development," emphasizing that very similar things occurring in different historical environments can lead to completely different results. For example, the enclosure movement in England achieved primitive accumulation through violent dispossession of peasant land, while German Junker landlords transformed feudal estates into capitalist farms through the "Prussian path." This specific analysis requires researchers to delve into the internal contradictions of specific modes of production, rejecting dogmatic historical teleology.

### 2.3.3. Class Analysis Framework

Practical philosophy views class struggle as the direct driving force of historical development. Marx revealed: The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. In the contemporary context, this analysis still has explanatory power: the "digital divide" between Silicon Valley tech giants and gig workers is essentially a projection of the contradiction of data ownership in labor-capital relations; the global climate crisis reflects the conflict between monopoly capital's predatory practices towards natural resources and the demand for ecological justice.

The revolutionary reconstruction of historical materialism through practical philosophy in The German Ideology lies in its nature: it is neither a purely theoretical interpretation of the world nor a utopian moral outcry, but a scientific methodology that "discovers the new world in the critique of the old world." In the era of digital capitalism, this theory still shines with critical sharpness—when platform algorithms alienate labor into data streams, and when consumerist ideology obscures people's true needs, Marx's practical philosophy reminds us: only through the struggle to transform material production relations can the alienated shackles of "sensuous activity" be broken, and the free and comprehensive development of humanity be reconstructed.

## 3. Digital Labor: Technological Upgrading of Practical Alienation

The rise of digital capitalism has not eliminated the labor alienation described by Marx; instead, it has pushed it to more hidden and pervasive dimensions through technological mediation. From the finger swipes of social media users to the algorithmic frenzy of food delivery riders, from the mechanical operations of data annotators to the global chains of the gig economy, digital labor is reshaping the exploitation system in the form of "immaterial labor," extending practical alienation from factory workshops to virtual spaces. This technological upgrading of alienation is both a result of capital logic taming digital technology and a new challenge facing the cause of human liberation in the 21st century.

Feng Yanfang, through in-depth analysis, found that "the four manifestations of labor alienation analyzed by Marx are all specifically reflected in today's digital labor, and are even more severe"[7]. This judgment reveals the continuity and upgrading of alienation in the digital age. Wen Xu further pointed out that "digital labor shifts from a material logic to a digital logic to construct the overall architecture of digital society, thereby promoting the establishment of digital capitalism"[8]. This logical shift marks a fundamental change in the form of alienation.

From the perspective of academic research, Chai Qiyang emphasized that "as an important component of the modern economic system, the study of digital labor is of great significance for understanding contemporary work patterns, labor relations, and socio-economic structures"[4]. This understanding provides an important perspective for us to understand the systemic impact of digital alienation.

### 3.1. Alienation of "Immaterial Labor" in Platform Capitalism

#### 3.1.1. Exploitative Logic of Data Production

Platform capital incorporates users into its exploitative network through the ideological packaging of the "prosumer" concept. When users post updates on Facebook, browse products on Taobao, or create short videos on TikTok, their clicks, dwell times, and interactions are captured in real-time by the platform. This data, after algorithmic cleaning and reorganization, is transformed into "data fodder" for training artificial intelligence or "user profiles" for precise advertising. According to the "2023 Global Digital Labor Report," TikTok users contribute an average of 90 minutes of attention per day, yet the platform controls the content creators' advertising revenue share to less than 15%, with the remaining value being appropriated by capital in the form of "data rent." The hidden nature of this exploitation lies in the fact that laborers (users), under the illusion of "free use" of the platform, gratuitously surrender their emotions, time, and creativity, becoming "living raw materials" for digital production.

Chai Qiyang pointed out in his research that "digital labor has become an indispensable part of the modern economic system, having a profound impact on the labor market, employment structure, and social policies"[4]. This observation reveals the systemic nature of digital labor exploitation—it not only affects individual laborers but also reshapes the entire economic structure.

#### 3.1.2. Algorithmic Control and Practical Discipline

The "digital Taylorism" of the gig economy pushes alienation to its extreme. The labor process of food delivery riders is broken down into a set of data instructions like "accept order - pick up - deliver." Meituan's "superbrain" system, through real-time route optimization, delivery time calculation, and negative review penalties, compresses laborers into "human terminals" orchestrated by algorithms. A field survey by Nanjing University showed that riders' traffic violation rates reached 98% to meet the system's 28-minute delivery deadline, with their bodies and time precisely quantified into performance indicators such as "on-time rate" and "order volume." A deeper crisis of subjectivity lies in the fact that laborers, facing the algorithmic black box, can neither understand the dispatch logic (e.g., why long-distance orders are prioritized for new riders) nor can they change the rules through collective negotiation. This "technological unconsciousness" shifts practical alienation from external coercion to internal self-discipline—Didi drivers voluntarily extend their working hours under the service score system just to maintain the algorithmic rating of "gold driver."

Chen Yingjie profoundly analyzed the essence of this phenomenon, pointing out that "the cognitive emotions, autonomous creativity, and social interactions of digital prosumers are uniformly formatted into cold, pulsating byte codes by ubiquitous digital platforms. Digital labor's working hours, excluding necessary living and leisure time, consciously or unconsciously become hidden working hours that continuously produce data raw materials for capitalists under the 'discipline' or 'inducement' of digital technology"[9]. This analysis reveals the temporal dimension of digital alienation—the boundaries between working time and living time are completely blurred.

#### 3.1.3. Paradox of Immaterial Labor Alienation

Hart and Negri pointed out that labor in the digital age has shifted from material production to the reproduction of emotions, cognition, and relationships. Online streamers weave virtual intimate relationships to gain tips, esports coaches act as "emotional containers" in games, and online education tutors are forced to standardize their teaching creativity into reproducible course templates. The alienation of this "emotional labor" lies in the fact that laborers sell not physical strength or skills, but personality traits and social capital. Bilibili UP hosts' self-mockery of "generating power with love" exposes the reality of creative labor being alienated

by platform traffic logic—content creation degenerates from self-expression to an algorithmic data competition.

Lan Jiang, in his theoretical analysis, points out that "labor in the digital age is not only material production but also the production of emotions, cognition, and relationships, which makes alienation more hidden and complex"[10]. This judgment reveals the deep mechanism of immaterial labor alienation. Feng Yanfang further analyzed the specific manifestations of this alienation, "regarding the alienation of digital laborers and labor products, some digital laborers cannot own the copyright of digital products, and digital capitalists gratuitously appropriate the data of ordinary users"[8].

### **3.2. The Invisibility of Alienation: From Material Deprivation to Spiritual Suppression**

#### **3.2.1. Symbolic Alienation and False Freedom**

Platform capital creates the illusion of "personalization" through algorithmic recommendations, achieving a deeper colonization of consumer subjectivity. Amazon's collaborative filtering algorithm traps users in an "information cocoon" of "products you might like," and TikTok's recommendation mechanism polarizes political views into an "echo chamber." This "precise feeding" makes free choice a mere illusion of algorithmic manipulation. Baudrillard's criticized "symbolic consumption" has been fully upgraded in the digital age: Xiaohongshu bloggers pursue "Instagram-style" home decor not out of genuine need but as a symbolic discipline of "middle-class life" defined by algorithms. A more hidden alienation is that laborers actively participate in self-exploitation under the illusion of consumerism—programmers buy online courses to "improve competitiveness," effectively transforming their leisure time into human capital investment for capital appreciation.

Yang Qiulin, in analyzing the new characteristics of digital capitalism, points out that "digital capitalism changes both the body and soul of human beings, mainly manifesting new forms of alienation in human body, communication, and labor"[11]. This comprehensive alienation marks a fundamental change in the human condition in the digital age.

#### **3.2.2. Digital Panopticon and Spiritual Crisis**

Foucault's "disciplinary society" evolves into a "control society" with the aid of digital technology. WeChat Work's "read receipt" function creates continuous anxiety, and DingTalk's "DING" notification breaks through the boundaries of private time, trapping office workers in a digital existence where "online means present." A 2022 report by the World Health Organization shows that 34% of global digital laborers experience anxiety or depression, with algorithmic pressure becoming a core cause of new occupational diseases. The root of this spiritual alienation lies in capital internalizing labor alienation into individuals' "survival instincts" through technological means—Foxconn workers voluntarily accept 12-hour shifts to earn overtime pay, just as gig riders actively challenge physiological limits for order bonuses.

Lan Jiang, in his critical dimension analysis, points out that "in the digital age, the mediation of body, communication, and spirit profoundly changes the relationship between humans and the world, and also brings new forms of alienation"[12]. This analysis reveals the comprehensive nature of digital alienation. Ding Yan, in her research outlook, mentions that "in the future, it is possible to explore real-world issues such as social security for digital laborers in new forms of employment and self-exploitation of digital laborers under algorithmic control, combined with the background of the times"[7].

#### **3.2.3. Escalation of Exploitation in the Global Digital Divide**

The spatial expansion of digital imperialism exacerbates the unequal distribution of alienation. In Ghana, Africa, data annotators label road images for Google at \$1.2/hour, their labor contributing to training autonomous driving systems, yet their communities lack basic network

infrastructure. In Bangalore, India, Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) gig workers process 5,000 data entries daily, earning less than \$0.5/hour, while bearing the psychological trauma of AI ethical review. The essence of this "digital colonialism" is that the Global South provides data raw materials and physical labor, while the Global North monopolizes algorithmic patents and capital gains, with technological hegemony reshaping the "center-periphery" exploitation order revealed by Marx.

Lan Jiang and Wang Huan, in re-reading Empire, point out that "digital imperialism, through its monopoly on digital technology and data, has achieved a new type of exploitation and control over the Global South"[13]. Yang Qiulin further analyzed the hidden nature of this exploitation, "compared to the era of financial capitalism, this alienation does not adopt naked, obvious forced exploitation and enslavement, but wears sheep's clothing, using big data and the internet to 'hide,' making it difficult for people to detect or even 'willingly' fall into the trap"[13].

### **3.3. Transcending Alienation: Reconstructing Practical Philosophy in the Digital Age**

Facing the technologically upgraded cage of alienation, liberation politics needs to break through in a dual dimension: first, direct the critical tools of historical materialism towards digital modes of production, exposing the surplus value transfer mechanism of algorithmic exploitation; second, reclaim the subjectivity of "sensuous activity" through technological democratization movements. The "data cooperative" experiment advocated by Spanish scholar Ribera attempts to allow laborers to collectively manage personal data and participate in algorithm design; Germany's IG Metall union promotes "algorithmic transparency legislation," requiring companies to disclose automated decision-making logic. These practices show that only by liberating technology from capital logic can human dignity and creativity in digital labor be reconstructed—and this is the mission call of Marx's practical philosophy in the 21st century.

## **4. "Entertainment to Death" as Ideological Practice: From False Participation to Revolutionary Potential**

In the era of digital capitalism, "entertainment to death" has evolved from Huxley's predicted future scenario into a core mechanism of contemporary ideological rule. Platform capital, through algorithms, gamification, and pleasure economics, reshapes entertainment into "non-violent violence"—it both numbs the public's perception of exploitation and provides a technological vehicle for the awakening of class consciousness. This paradoxical tension constitutes the focus of contemporary ideological critique: entertainment is both a tranquilizer manipulated by capital and a potential weapon for proletarian resistance.

### **4.1. Illusion Manufacturing and Subjective Numbing by the Entertainment Industry**

In the evolution of digital capitalism, entertainment has transformed from Adorno's "culture industry" into a more pervasive ideological shaping system. The three-dimensional coupling of platform algorithms, neuroscience, and capital logic constructs a new form of "control society" predicted by Deleuze: through the biopolitical manipulation of dopamine circuits, the behaviorist domestication of gamified interactions, and the ideological concealment of entertainment narratives, the technology-capital alliance is implementing a colonization of the subjective cognitive structure. This colonization is not only manifested as the "systemic stupidity" warned by Stiegler but also develops, on the basis of the "false needs" criticized by the Frankfurt School, a digital alienation paradigm rooted in neurobiology. When entertainment is no longer merely a pastime but a political technology that reconstructs human perception, value systems, and even historical memory, we must ask: In this cognitive revolution conspired by code and neurons, where is the possibility space for liberating practice?

Huang Zaisheng, in his in-depth research, reveals that "entertainment in the digital capitalist era, through technological means, achieves a deeper level of control and discipline over people, making it a new type of ideological tool"[14]. This analysis provides an important perspective for understanding the political function of entertainment.

#### **4.1.1. The Spiritual Opium Effect of Pleasure Mechanisms**

Platform algorithms, based on neuroscience principles, transform entertainment into a physiological addiction, a "digital drug." TikTok's 15-second short videos stimulate dopamine secretion with an average scene change frequency of 2.5 seconds, trapping users in an endless loop of "swipe - watch - forget." Cambridge University experiments show that after 30 minutes of continuous video watching, subjects' short-term memory capacity decreased by 40%, and the metabolic rate of the critical thinking active area (prefrontal cortex) decreased. This "cognitive atrophy" causes the public to indulge in instant gratification, losing the ability to reflect on structural contradictions.

Gamified design further alienates social interaction into a data competition. WeChat step rankings alienate healthy behavior into a symbol of comparison, and Twitter's "retweet, comment, like" system quantifies opinion expression into traffic indicators. When a white-collar worker in Beijing injures their knee trying to reach the "King tier" in the Keep fitness community, entertainment has degenerated from a tool for diversion to a shackles of self-exploitation. Marcuse's criticized "one-dimensional man" takes on a new form in the digital age: users are both consumers of entertainment and digital laborers on the entertainment production chain.

Li Dan, in analyzing digital labor alienation, points out that "digital labor alienation is not only reflected in the control and exploitation of the labor process but also in the loss of laborer subjectivity and spiritual suppression"[15]. This observation reveals the inherent connection between entertainment alienation and labor alienation.

#### **4.1.2. Entertainment as "Inverted Practice"**

The entertainment industry, by creating false participation, co-opts political consciousness. Weibo hot searches occupy public discourse with topics like "celebrity divorce" and "cute pet photos," and the heat of the 2022 Henan rural bank collapse was suppressed by "Wang Xinling's resurgence" for 72 hours. This agenda-setting is not accidental; platform algorithms regulate traffic distribution based on capital interests, diverting public attention away from essential contradictions such as wealth disparity and labor alienation. Zizek points out: "When we indulge in mocking Trump's tweets, we are already participating in the reproduction of the neoliberal order."

Historical nihilism, through entertainment narratives, deconstructs class memory. Jinjiang Literature City's "domineering CEO novels" beautify workplace sexual harassment as "sweet pet interactions," and the carnival-like interpretation of "workers' guide to slacking off" in *The Legend of Zhen Huan* bullet comments dissolves the cruelty of feudal oppression. A more hidden ideological operation is that Bilibili's *The Age of Big Capital* series uses "guichu" (a type of meme video) editing to deconstruct Marx's theory of surplus value, turning serious political economy into a joke. This "entertainment-based demystification" constitutes a symbolic murder of collective memory.

Xiao Xiang, in his research, keenly observed that "'playing labor' conceals the underlying reality of exploitation and is a phased sign of capitalist development"[3]. This judgment reveals the essence of gamified labor—it is not true liberation but an upgrade of the form of exploitation.

## **4.2. The Possibility of Awakening for the Digital Proletariat**

As the algorithmic entertainment cage envelops the digital continent, a silent revolution is budding in the cracks of the code. On GitHub's protocol battleground, programmers forge open-

source code into shields against overtime exploitation; on Kuaishou's construction site poems, migrant workers use bricks and phone screens to write obscured class narratives; under the virtual neon of *Cyberpunk 2077*, players modify game code to make NPCs raise anti-capitalist banners—these practices of the digital proletariat, like fireflies in the dark night, illuminate the trajectory of awakening amidst the platform's surveillance grid. They are no longer traffic slaves disciplined by algorithms but are turning blockchain into a forge for democratic contracts, transforming short video platforms into megaphones for class discourse, and making game worlds into training grounds for ideology.

Zhang Yixiu, in his theoretical investigation, emphasizes that "practice is the activity of human beings transforming the world, and it is also the basis for human beings to understand the world"[5]. This basic Marxist view provides theoretical support for our understanding of the awakening of the digital proletariat.

#### **4.2.1. Practical Exploration of Technological Resistance**

The digital proletariat is reconstructing resistance fronts through technological means. On GitHub, the world's largest open-source community, programmers launched the "Anti-996 License" movement, prohibiting employers from using open-source code for overtime work projects by modifying software licenses; the Spanish "Data Workers' Union" demanded Meta disclose its content review algorithms and provide psychological trauma compensation for reviewers. These actions indicate that an alliance between tech elites and digital laborers could dismantle platform tech hegemony.

Blockchain technology provides an experimental ground for decentralized collaboration. Although such practices have not completely escaped capital logic, they open up paths for "algorithmic democratization."

#### **4.2.2. Weaponization of Entertainment Tools**

Short video platforms are becoming enclaves for the dissemination of class discourse. Kuaishou's "construction site poet" Li Xiaogang wrote excerpts from *The Ordinary World* with bricks, and his video garnered over 100 million views, leading to numerous migrant workers sharing their experiences of unpaid wages in the comment section; TikTok streamer "Delivery God" showcased overtime fines and traffic accident scars through live broadcasts, prompting riders to form a national rights protection alliance. Such "anti-algorithm creation" embeds narratives of resistance within platform rules, achieving "using capital's tools to tear down capital's walls."

Game mods (Mod) have become a hidden line of ideological struggle. *Cyberpunk 2077* players created a "strike mod" that makes NPC workers occupy Arasaka Tower and hang "Fight Capitalism" banners; *The Sims 4* "proletariat expansion pack" adds features like rent strikes and union formation. These secondary creations transform games from consumerist utopias into training grounds for class contradictions. As Benjamin said: "Revolutions are not the locomotives of history, but the emergency brake on that train." The politicization of game mods is precisely the emergency brake pulled by the digital generation.

The more precise the ideological rule of "entertainment to death," the sharper its internal contradictions. When TikTok dance challenges become mobilization tools for workers' strikes, and when virtual idol live streams are rewritten as cooperative propaganda windows, entertainment reverses from a numbing tool to a medium of awakening. This dialectical nature reveals that the liberation of the digital proletariat neither relies on a complete rejection of entertainment nor falls into the illusion of technological determinism, but rather, through "appropriating existing civilizational achievements" (Marx's words), reconstructs entertainment tools into a productive force for class consciousness. Only by implanting revolution in algorithms and forging critique in entertainment can the "sensuous activity" of

the digital age break through the cage of alienation and open up a new theater for human liberation.

## 5. Liberation Path: Returning to "Revolutionary Practice"

The more precise the alienating rule of digital capitalism, the more urgent the need to reconstruct "revolutionary practice." This practice is no longer limited to street protests or violent revolutions but, through a dual path of institutional reconstruction and cultural subversion, implants the genes of liberation into the deep structures of technology and social relations. Marx's practical philosophy of "changing the world," emphasized in Theses on Feuerbach, takes on a new meaning in the digital age: it is necessary to both illuminate the light of democracy in the algorithmic black box and cultivate the sprouts of new sensibility on the ruins of entertainment.

### 5.1. Institutional Practice: Technological Democratization and Data Public Ownership

As Silicon Valley's server forests devour the last inch of the data commons, new institutional blueprints are emerging in Iceland's medical databases and Kenya's legislative texts. Engineers are forging Meta's algorithmic black box into a transparent glass house, African developers are carving cracks in Google's imperial walls with the code of AfriSearch, and the transnational strike commands of food delivery riders are flowing like encrypted viruses through the platform's capillaries—this is the dawn of the battle for digital means of production: privatized bytes are beginning to riot, and monopolized computing power is defecting.

Li Jianhua, in his political economy analysis, points out that "digital capitalism, through its monopoly on data and algorithms, has achieved a re-centralization of the means of production, exacerbating the digital divide and class differentiation"[17]. This analysis provides an important perspective for understanding class struggle in the digital age.

#### 5.1.1. Breaking Technological Private Ownership: From Algorithmic Black Box to Public Governance

The technological hegemony of platform capital is rooted in the private monopoly of algorithms and data. The key to breaking this hegemony lies in promoting institutional reforms for technological democratization:

**Algorithmic Publicization:** The EU's Digital Services Act (DSA) requires large platforms to disclose their recommendation algorithm logic and allow third-party audits of discriminatory parameters. For example, Meta was forced to disclose how Instagram's "appearance preference algorithm" marginalized minority content, which provided the basis for a \$2.6 billion fine from regulatory agencies. But democratization needs to go further: the Spanish "Algorithmic Transparency Alliance" advocates for the establishment of a public algorithm database, with scientists, labor representatives, and citizens jointly participating in algorithm design to ensure that technology serves the public interest rather than capital appreciation.

Ding Yan, in her research outlook, mentions that "in the future, it is possible to explore real-world issues such as social security for digital laborers in new forms of employment and self-exploitation of digital laborers under algorithmic control, combined with the background of the times"[7]. This suggestion provides important ideas for the specific path of technological democratization.

**Data Public Ownership Experiments:** Iceland's "data trust" model defines citizens' medical data as a public asset, requiring any corporate use to be approved by an elected committee, with profits invested in the national health insurance system. This "digital publicization" practice confirms the contemporary transformation possibility of Marx's "socialization of the means of production." In 2023, Kenya passed the Data Sovereignty Act, requiring multinational

corporations to store local user data on domestic servers, with 30% of data revenue used for digital infrastructure construction, initially curbing Silicon Valley's "digital colonialism."

Chen Yingjie, in his analysis, emphasizes that "under the conditions of capitalist private ownership, and under the inevitable effect of capital logic, digital capitalists, by virtue of their possession of the means of production, gain 支配 power over digital laborers. Private ownership is still the root cause of digital labor alienation today"[11]. This judgment reveals the fundamental significance of data public ownership reform.

Nie Yang, in his research, points out that "to sublimate digital labor alienation in contemporary capitalism, one can neither abandon the application of digital technology nor achieve it through technological acceleration. Instead, it is necessary to organically combine technological governance and capital governance"[1]. This view provides important inspiration for us to think about the path of technological democratization.

### 5.1.2. Class Struggle in Global Digital Governance

Technological democratization needs to be embedded in the reconstruction of the global power structure:

**South-South Cooperation Against Data Colonialism:** The African Union signed the Data Sovereignty Agreement in 2022, prohibiting member states from selling user data to Silicon Valley companies without permission and jointly developing a regional search engine, AfriSearch, to break Google's information monopoly. Latin American countries, through the "Digital Southern Bank," share computing resources to reduce their dependence on Amazon AWS. This "digital non-aligned movement" is rewriting the power distribution of the global data value chain.

**Platform Worker Internationalism:** On May 1, 2023, food delivery riders from 20 countries launched a "Global Strike Day," uniformly turning off their order-taking software for 12 hours, forcing Uber Eats and Deliveroo to promise to improve their algorithmic dispatch rules. The Indonesian "Online Ride-hailing Union" and the Brazilian "Gig Worker Front" established a transnational data exchange network to share evidence of platform exploitation, promoting the International Labour Organization (ILO) to pass the Digital Labour Rights Convention.

These practices show that the solidarity of the digital proletariat is breaking through algorithmic isolation and rebuilding transnational class fronts.

## 5.2. Cultural Practice: Constructing Resistant Entertainment and New Sensibility

As capital wraps ideological cannonballs in the sugar coating of entertainment, the awakened are retrofitting Bilibili's guichu engine into an ideological assault rifle. Here, the fines of food delivery riders become the notes of a digital-age Internationale, the voting machines of virtual communities rewrite the interactive program of The Communist Manifesto, and cyborg laborers raise strike banners in American TV series—these cultural guerrillas use memes to break through the information blockade of algorithms, implement cognitive decolonization with game mods, and forge new weapons of sensibility with sci-fi allegories. When Jack Ma's "996 is a blessing" theory becomes a joke in mashup videos, and when metaverse landlords are exposed in animated deconstructions, the anesthetic of entertainment is reversed into a stimulant for awakening.

### 5.2.1. Critical Content Production: Ideological Guerrilla Warfare

Resistant culture, by deconstructing the myth of technological neutrality, awakens the class consciousness numbed by entertainment:

**Breakthrough of Independent Media:** The podcast Random Fluctuations, with its special episode "Food Delivery Riders Trapped in the System," exposed the hypocrisy of platform algorithms, with a single episode exceeding one million plays, forcing the Ministry of Human

Resources and Social Security to launch an investigation into gig worker rights; the YouTube channel Philosophy Tube, with its animated deconstruction of the "metaverse freedom" capital narrative, revealed how virtual land speculation replicates real-world class differentiation. This content breaks through algorithmic filter bubbles, opening up a critical public sphere in the entertainment desert.

Ironic Resistance of Subcultures: Bilibili users mashed up Jack Ma's "996 is a blessing" theory with scenes from *Modern Times*, gaining 2.5 million views in the form of "guichu," and promoting the "lying flat" discourse from subculture circles to mainstream media discussions. This "symbolic guerrilla warfare" deconstructs entertainment with entertainment, making capital ideology lose its sanctity in laughter.

### 5.2.2. Aesthetic Revolution of "New Sensibility": Reconstructing Human-Machine Relations

Marcuse's predicted "new sensibility" is beginning to take shape in digital art: Intervention of Participatory Art: Artist Cao Fei built a virtual socialist community in RMB City, where players can allocate virtual resources through collective voting and experience algorithm-supported democratic decision-making. The project sparked heated discussions at the Venice Biennale, proving that digital technology can simulate rather than reinforce the logic of private ownership.

Ethical Critique of Sci-fi Narratives: The American TV series *Pantheon*, depicting "uploaded intelligence" laborers resisting cloud capitalists, received a Douban score of 9.2, stimulating widespread discussion among viewers about AI ethics. Such works shift the human-machine relationship from "control-obedience" to "symbiosis-liberation," injecting a class dimension into Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto."

## 6. Conclusion

The practical philosophy of The German Ideology provides a theoretical coordinate system for diagnosing alienation in the digital age: when labor is reduced to data streams and entertainment is alienated into spiritual opium, humanity faces an existential crisis of "practical poverty." The paradox of technological capitalism is that it creates unprecedented material abundance while exacerbating human fragmentation and reification. Returning to "revolutionary practice" requires not only institutional technological democratization and data public ownership but also the reconstruction of human subjectivity through cultural resistance. Only under the vision of a "free association of producers" can digital technology transform from a tool of capital into a medium of liberation, and entertainment elevate from a numbing illusion to an aesthetic revolution. This is both the historical mission of historical materialism and the inevitable path for humanity to transcend alienation.

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