

# Reflection on the Value of Labor and Leisure in Playing Labor

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**Abstract:** In the digital age, digital technology represented by the Internet, big data, artificial intelligence, etc. is deeply integrated with social production and life, and a new digital survival pattern and labor form is derived. "Play labor" is not only the typical performance of labor behavior in the digital age, but also a brand-new interpretation of the value and relationship between labor and leisure in the digital age. On the basis of Marxist thought of labor and leisure, this paper analyzes the essence of playing labor, namely, the evolution form of alienated labor in digital capital and digital technology, the hiding and distortion of labor subject, value of labor and leisure, and the relationship between labor and leisure in the practical development of playing labor, and proposes the corresponding clarifying strategies of value goal dimension, value identification dimension and value practice dimension of labor and leisure to clarify the relationship between labor and leisure, understand the intrinsic value of labor and leisure, guide and regulate "play labor" and promote the liberation of digital labor. the digital life quality of people is improved, so as to realize the freedom and all-round development of people.

**Keywords:** digital age; play labor; labor; leisure; value guidance

## 1. Introduction

With the appearance and quick development of digital technology tools such as computer, internet and artificial intelligence, the social division of labor scope presents the development trend of combination of network and socialization. The social economic activities manifest the remarkable characteristics of all-round informationization, networking and intelligence. Traditional industrial production pattern is transformed to digital production pattern, information age changes to digital age. In the digital scope, the platform integrates all individuals and segments within its own scope in a purely abstract approach. The user-generated content on the platform becomes the key to the value increase of digital capitalism. Capital binds the free time and space of the subject to the unconscious labor scope, which results in the confusion of the boundaries between production and consumption and between labor and leisure, prompting the generation of the digital labor form of "integration of production and consumption" [1]. This paper attempts to analyze the value of labor and leisure and the alienation of their relationship under the context of play labor on the

basis of Marxist thought of labor and leisure based on the critical theory of Marx's political economy, so as to find a method for transcending the unequal relationship of production, clarifying the value of labor and leisure, defending the digital justice, and providing a realistic mirror for the value of labor and leisure to guide the development of digital economy and the all-round development of laborers.

## 2. Play Labor: the Concrete Expression of Labor behavior in the Digital Age

In the Manuscript of Economics and Philosophy in 1844, Marx rejected the alienation phenomenon of the separation of object activities and human beings in the capitalist production relations in the era of industrial capital, and pointed out that the products condensing the workers' vitality became external existence, "becoming an independent force opposite to him, which signifies that the life he gave to the object is opposite to him as a hostile and different thing"[2]. Hereof, Marx holds the opinion that labor of workers became alienated labor for conducting slavery and oppression of people. With the transition to the era of digital capital, the subordination relations of labor is still subject to the logic of private ownership. Control and exploitative behavior for labor by capital becomes more and more covert, degree of exploitation is deepening gradually. In the tide of digitalization, the data and information with the characteristics of multi-dimension, timeliness, availability, easy transmission and commonality have become the key factors of production in the digital age. In order to collect and capture the surplus data to the maximum extent, the capitalists privatize the digital platform and master the ownership of the platform data, and the surplus value created by the workers is quietly occupied by the capitalists free of charge. Driven by the digital capital, the data generated by the users in the network behavior are commercialized, and the leisure time beyond the daily necessary labor time of the users is integrated into the digital capital cycle, the users unconsciously fall into the scope of digital labor in the Internet surfing relaxation and leisure entertainment, and the extraction of the labor subject by the capital spreads from the labor scope to the leisure scope.

The origin of the concept of "play labor" is traced back to the audience commodity theory proposed by Dallas Smeiz in the traditional media era. In his opinion, the real commodity generated by the media is the audience. Under the appearance that the audience watches the free

content for leisure entertainment, the audience is sold to the advertisers in the form of audience viewing rate data and bears the free labor [3]. In the environment of digital media communication, the labor production logic is increasingly expanded. With the quick development of information and communication technology and the increasing number of Internet users, Tizner Terranova focuses on the fact that digital media users undertake productive work in order to acquire free online services on the digital platform and create economic benefits for the platform enterprises free of charge. Therefore, he put forward the concept of "free labor" [4]. Inspired by him, Cookridge first put forward the concept of "play labor" to describe the unpaid labor behavior of game module enthusiasts who modify or supplement the game design for the game platform on the basis of their interests in the experience game [5]. Under the deliberate propaganda and guidance of the ideology that digital capital regards the game module as the leisure activity or entertainment extension, the fact of this form of "unpaid labor" is hidden in the leisure entertainment. In the process of playing labor, players play multiple roles in the social reproduction system. They not only take part in game research and development and game industry innovation by means of game modules as producers, but also promote game brands by making game strategies, creating game expression packs and the like as propagandists; the numerous user data formed in the game process are sold to advertising, personalized recommendation and the like as commodities, and they purchase a large amount of virtual digital products as consumers, thereby forming a closed cycle of production and consumption. The most striking difference between play labor and traditional labor is the integration of production and consumption. When paying attention to the discussion of play labor in Digital Labor and Marx, Christian Fox indicated that when play is commercialized as productive labor, it will be incorporated into the exploitation system of capital and become the source of accumulated surplus value [6]. The essence of play labor is the evolution form of alienated labor in digital capital and digital technology. "Play labor" is just to name labor as game, and extend and strengthen the logic of capital's exploitation of labor by means of conducting game driving, confusion and whitewashing. Jonathan Clari indicated that the planet in the era of capitalism has been re-imagined as a never-ending industrial site [7]. Time has become a new type of control approach in the era of digital capitalism. People infinitely extend the time of using digital media, namely, digital labor time, and human life is generally wrapped into a continuous state without interval, which demonstrates that the digital media age is still like Smeiz's theory that "monopoly capitalism has no leisure", and the division between leisure and labor is increasingly blurred. It is urgent to see through the leisure and entertainment illusion of playing labor, to reexamine the labor behavior in the digital age, and to clarify the value of labor and leisure.

### 3. Phenomenon of Shading: Value Deviation of Labor and Leisure in Play Labor

As a specific expression of labor behavior in the digital age, "play labor" is a typical sample of exploring the value of labor and leisure and their relationship in the digital age. In the practice of playing labor, the deconstruction and anti-construction of the subject, labor and leisure value are permeated by the ideology of digital capitalism, and the exploitation of the labor subject and surplus value by digital capital is also hidden, therefore, the value deviation between labor and leisure appears in the playing labor.

#### 3.1. Entertainment of Playing Labor Hides the Origin of Labor Value

The playing labor often occurs in the leisure time of the subject, namely, the non-working time in the traditional significance, and the game process itself has entertainment, and the subject spontaneously execute the game module on the basis of the interests and hobbies, and enjoys freedom and pleasure in the game module. Under the false package of "all the activities related to digital games are leisure", the entertainment-based play labor behavior results in the concealment of the origin of labor value, which is prominently reflected in two wrong cognition: one is that play labor is subordinate to leisure and entertainment, but not productive labor, namely, the understanding of the labor essence of play labor is not clear; the other is that play labor belongs to leisure and entertainment, and entertainment creates value, namely, distorts the principle that labor creates value. Whether differentiation under capitalist system is the key of productive labor lies in whether labor can create surplus value. Play labor is an indispensable productive force in the social reproduction system in the digital age and productive labor that can create social use value. On the one hand, the data products created by individuals by means of conducting play labor have the use value to meet the digital consumption demand of people, and on the other hand, the process of play labor and the results of the formed behavioral data have the use value to meet the social communication needs of people [7]. However, in the rise of the entertainment industry such as games, there is a trend of thought of pan-entertainment in the society. Playing and labor are the unified category of leisure entertainment and labor. The phenomenon that "play" becomes "labor" creates an illusion that entertainment creates wealth, which results in the abandonment of labor value and spirit as well as the entertainment tendency of labor choice. The essence of play labor is a kind of productive labor behavior in the form of entertainment. It is not entertainment but labor itself that creates value and wealth. Labor has origin and labor is the only source of value.

#### 3.2. The Repetition of Playing Labor Weakens the Transcendence of Labor Subject

Repetition and fragmentation are the two main characteristics of the process of laborer's production of goods. Marx holds the opinion that this kind of

production process makes it difficult for the laborer to form a sense of job satisfaction and generate a sense of alienation. In the virtual game world, the repetition of labor has not been eliminated, and the players still often implement mechanical repetition in the game, such as the repetitive elimination behavior in the Xiaoxiaole game and the repetitive daily tasks in the game rule setting [8]. Players can enjoy better platform resources only if they strive to fulfill the standards and tasks set by the game platform capital in the process of the game. The ideology of game capitalism achieves the shaping and soft discipline of the game players by means of conducting the repeated setting, realizes the cultural identification, the value identification and the behavior standard identification of the subject to the game, thus integrates all the labor behaviors of the players into the body of capitalism, and completes the "substantial absorption" of the capital to the labor. Players hold the pass to unlock the next chapter plot, get scarce game equipment, improve their own game ranking and other goals, continue to repeat work, self-exploitation without intervals. In this kind of repetitive labor and hidden discipline, the labor subject gradually loses the transcendence of the individual, compromises and submits to the game rules formulated by the platform, and gradually loses the ability to reflect and criticize the unreasonable rules. This kind of repetition not only consumes the free time to realize the self-perfection and self-realization of the individual, but also involves the subject which belongs to the employment labor in the capitalist production relations again in the virtual world. The labor subject should realize the confirmation of self-life and value and give full play to human's essential strength in free and conscious labor. In the process of playing labor, the life meaning and ability dimension of the labor subject can be revealed in the pattern of symbolization and digitalization under the processing of data system. In this kind of virtual game experience, the labor subject seems to meet the needs of individual life experience and perception of different situations. However, the labor subject is confronted with the spiritual void after withdrawing from the virtual world and returning to reality, and finally results in the intensification of one-sidedness and atomizing of human being in the repetitive unconscious labor as well as the absence of transcendence.

### 3.3. Dissimilarity of Play Labor Dissolves Creativity of Labor and Leisure

Marx holds the opinion that, under the employment labor system in the era of large machine industry, the free and conscious "living" labor, which should be the most fundamental pattern of existence and essential activity of human being, is alienated into the compulsory "dead" labor which is controlled and exploited by the capitalist, and the labor product, labor behavior, human nature and human relations all serve as dissident forces to keep the labor subject in bondage. The alienation and exploitation mechanism of traditional labor continues in the new play labor behavior in the digital age. The laborer and the

labour product are alienated, the laborer only has the right to use the labour product and the data commodity created by the game module by means of the transformation of the game design and other labour behaviors, but has no ownership; the laborer and the labour object are alienated, and the platform capital utilizes the information cocoon house to modify and mold the real information data to control the idea of the laborer implicitly; the laborer and the conscious and purposeful labour are alienated, and the platform capital logic realizes the exploitation of the laborer by robbing the digital life time of the person. The laborer belongs not to him but to the platform capitalist in the labor which consumes his own digital life. In the era of platform economy and digital capitalism, when play labor is brought into the capital logic of realizing surplus value increment, the boundary of labor and leisure tends to merge gradually, the leisure time which belongs to the free leisure outside the working time of laborers has suffered from capital invasion, and the alienation phenomenon of leisure scope appears, which is highlighted in the consumerism tendency of leisure scope. The leisure and entertainment is alienated to a means to satisfy vanity, to show off wealth and to escape the pressure of reality, which means that the alienation of "human labor" is deepened. Under the guidance of consumerism, people judge the value of leisure on the scale of external objects, rather than the abundance of thought and spirit as the standard to assess the quality of leisure. In the game, the player's unrestrained, wasteful and spending money behavior actually reduces the happiness and the sense of acquirement in the leisure process. In the process of playing labor, the player only experiences superficial and illusory perceptual happiness and leisure becomes a tool for people to acquire pure sensory stimulation and physical pleasure and a showy morbid life style. The alienation of playing labor dissolves the creativity of labor and leisure. In the context of Marxism, labor is a positive and creative activity, and labor creates man himself. By means of labor practice, man transcends the nature of species life, realizes the free and creative possession, and completes the creation of environment, society and history. To realize the free and all-round development of people is the intrinsic stipulation and fundamental value orientation of leisure. Leisure logic itself implies the enthusiasm and creativity, namely, the self-generation of the all-round developing individual.

### 3.4. The Contradiction of Playing Labor Distorts the Dialectic of the Relationship between Labor and Leisure

Labor and leisure are historical categories, and the relationship between labor and leisure develops and evolves with the development of history. In the era of industrial capitalism, factory employers restrict and discipline workers to work continuously for a long time in the process of working hours by means of distinguishing the boundary between work and leisure. In the era of digital capitalism, the relationship between labor and leisure presents a new development trend [9].

Play labor is a labor form combining leisure and labor in the digital age, which does not mean the dissolution of the opposition between labor and leisure. The contradiction precisely lies in the seemingly coupling of labor and leisure categories. Actually, digital capital realizes the expansion from labor scope to leisure scope by more secret means. Players implement unconscious labor activities within the limited freedom defined by the platform capital, but mistakenly hold the opinion that they control freedom and themselves completely in the virtual world. Labor and leisure are both the pattern of existence and the paradigm of life. There is no opposite relationship between them in an absolute sense. But under the logic of capital, labor and leisure are alienated into the compulsory means of exploiting the main body of labor and surplus value. Labor and leisure conduct dialectical unification on people's free activities and free all-round development. When labor and leisure abandon alienation and return to freedom, the essential relationship between labor and leisure will be revealed: labor is the premise and foundation of leisure existence, leisure confirms the significance and value of labor, and the mutual proof between them is the realistic path to realize freedom.

#### **4. Clarifying Strategy: Insist on the Guidance of Labor and Leisure Value in the View of Marxism**

From the perspective of Marxism, the labor with real freedom implies the harmonious unity of labor and leisure logic, which is the only approach to liberate, realize and develop people. The "play labor" in the digital age is abundant in the positive aspect of "leisure" of labor, which provides the possibility of releasing people's potential, creativity and self-fulfillment in the process of enjoying labor. To solve the problem of hiding and distorting the subject of labor, the value of labor and leisure, and the relationship between labor and leisure in practice, we must promote the value target of labor and leisure to realize the free and all-round development of human beings, give play to the value identification and cohesion on the basis of the Marxist concept of labor and leisure and the labor spirit of the new era, and strengthen the value practice promotion on the basis of labor education and leisure education.

##### **4.1. Value Target Inspiration: Realizing the Free and All-round Development of People is the Integration of Labor and Leisure Value Goal**

To realize the free and all-round development of human being is the fundamental value goal pursued by Marxism and also the fundamental characteristic of communist society. Marx emphasized the far-reaching significance of free time in the dimension of people's free liberation. Free time refers to "the educational time of individuals,, the time of developing intelligence, the time of performing social functions, the time of social activities, the time of free use of physical strength and intelligence, even the time of Sunday rest" [10]. Free time is the space for the free and all-round development of each individual. The picture of people who are

liberated and free in the communist society depicted by Marx has long connoted the meaning of leisure, "hunting" and "fishing" are all metaphors of leisure labor or labor leisure, and this kind of life style between labor and leisure indicate the specific direction for realizing the free development of human beings. To realize the free and all-round development of human beings is the integration of the value objectives of labor and leisure. The people who truly realize their liberation and freedom should be those who can control their own labor and leisure at the same time, namely, those who can determine the type, form, content and quantity of their own labor in accordance with the scale of leisure life they are willing to enjoy, that is, those who can reasonably enjoy labor and leisure [11]. In the era of industrial capitalism, free time has not become a reality that the majority of laborers generally enjoy, the fruits of free time on the basis of working time have also been stolen by capitalists, the workers cannot control their own labor and leisure, and gradually become one-sided and atomized in alienated labor. With the high-speed development of production efficiency and the increase of free time, the economic development in the digital age has set up new historical conditions for realizing the free and all-round development of people. Play labor contains the implication of "Lesheng" and the possible path of labor leisure, so as to guarantee that the labor subject can truly enjoy its own labor achievements, so as to leap the logic of capital, affirm the pleasure and creativity of labor and leisure, and show the transcendence of labor subject.

##### **4.2. Value Identification Cohesion: Marxist Labor Leisure View and New Era Labor Spirit are the Basis of Labor and Leisure Value Identification**

The Marxist labor leisure view praises the free and conscious labor and leisure is the value practice activity of human seeking and creating "truth, goodness and beauty", and is an essential part of Marxism. The spirit of labor in the new era takes Marxist labor value as the logical starting point, which is the continuation of the essence of its thought. A correct understanding of Marxist concept of labor leisure and the spirit of labor in the new era can assist people in basing themselves on the background of digital age, combining the new labor form "play labor", scientifically grasp the scientific connotation of labor subject, value of labor and leisure, and the relationship between labor and leisure, and condense people's recognition of the value of labor and leisure. For this purpose, firstly, we should respect the subject status of the laborer, guarantee the legal right of the laborer to leisure, highly recognize the subjective initiative, independent creativity and reasonable possession of the labor achievement, and focuses on the self-fashioning and self-growth of each working individual; secondly, fully affirm the origin of labor, the value of labor and leisure and the relationship between the two, labor is the source of wealth and the source of happiness. Labor and leisure are the pattern of existence of human beings and the basis for the survival and development of human civilization. The two categories

are not totally opposite scope. Genuine labor is the overcoming of alienated labor, and leisure and genuine free and conscious labor are interconnected. Finally, we should inherit and promote the spirit of labor and model worker, cultivate people's sincere emotion of advocating labor, loving labor and honest labor, overcoming the wrong ideological tendency of loveliness and loathing labor, arrogance, luxury, laziness and pleasure-seeking, realize value, show grace and feel joyful in hard work. Work together to set up "labor glory, the beauty of labor, Great Labor "is a good social custom."

#### 4.3. Value Practice Driving Force: Labor Education and Leisure Education is the Practical Path of Labor and Leisure Value Practice

In the digital age, the pace of work is speed up, the pressure of city life is obviously increased, the labor appears in a brand-new form of digital labor, and the multi-trends such as pan-entertainments and consumerism cross emerge, leisure time and leisure patterns are increased and enriched, and the importance of high-quality labor and leisure is more and more prominent. It is urgent to let labor education form subjective labor consciousness, labor spirit, and new labor skills as well as leisure interest, leisure self-control ability, and leisure aesthetics of the main body of leisure education cultivation Labor education is the core of the talent training pattern of "five-education", and leisure education is also an important sector to realize the personality and modernization of people. Therefore, one is to correct the biased idea of leisure education of labor. Leisure is not equal to playing things and losing one's mind, but not to superficial sensual pleasure. In the idea of leisure education, the correct world outlook, life outlook and value outlook should be clarified. The second is to enrich the lack of labor leisure education resources, labor and leisure education scope lack of specialized curriculum, full-time educators, and professional research institutions. The third is to realize the integrated development of labor and leisure education. Labor and leisure education are important components of people's life. The functions and contents of labor and leisure education are complementary, and their educational scopes are common. Only by means of conducting the cooperation of labor education and leisure education can the generation of free people and the implementation of labor and leisure value be better promoted.

#### 5. Conclusion

In the age of digital economy, digital labor has become an important new type form of labor. The generation of play labor is the significant performance of human entering the digital existence in the digital age. On the one hand, it highlights the new changes of labor pattern, labor object and labor content in the digital age, on the other hand, it indicates the dismemberment of digital

technology and digital capital to the real value of labor subject, labor and leisure and the relationship between them. This kind of deconstruction is embodied in that the recreation of play labor hides the origin of labor value, the repetition of play labor weakens the transcendence of labor subject, and the alienation of play labor dissolves the creativity of labor and leisure. The contradiction of play labor distorts the four dimensions of the dialectical relationship between labor and leisure. Only by giving full play to the correct guidance of the value of labor and leisure, clarifying the dialectical relationship between labor and leisure, and comprehending the subjective power of human beings, can we open up the path for the digital existence beyond the logic of capital and the realization of technological disenchantment and goodness.

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