



The Enigma of Survival: The Concept of “Alienation” and Its Cultural Interpretation

Jing Zhuang

International Institute of Chinese Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China.

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***Corresponding author:** Jing Zhuang, International Institute of Chinese Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China.

Abstract

“Alienation” is an important concept in the field of Marxist philosophy. With the rise of cultural studies in the late 20th century, it became a frequently borrowed term in the field of literary theory, used to explain contemporary society. From the continental philosophers in the 17th and 18th centuries to classical Marxism in the mid-19th century, and then to sociology in the late 19th century and Western Marxism in the 20th century, the concept of “alienation” has evolved within various disciplines and historical contexts, shaping its developmental trajectory. Since the 20th century, as a key term in cultural studies, “alienation” has inherited the intellectual legacy of political science and sociology, while opening up critical perspectives in cultural studies. This has made it an essential topic in the realms of literature and culture. By employing the method of conceptual history, one can examine the changing meanings of “alienation” in classical Marxism, especially Western Marxism. From a diachronic perspective, this approach can further clarify the implications of “alienation” in the social and historical changes of the 20th century, enhancing the understanding of classical concepts.

Keywords

Alienation, Conceptual history, Classical Marxism, Western Marxism

1. Introduction

“Alienation” is a concept that is an important part of Marxist philosophy. In 1932, the academic community published all of Marx’s unfinished *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (from now on referred to as *Manuscripts*) and extensively discussed the concept of “alienation” mentioned therein. Although the *Manuscripts* exhibit obvious transitional and immature characteristics, a series of new perspectives expounded around the core and foundation of alienated labor have significant significance in the history of Marxist development (Gu, 2009, p. 52), especially the humanitarian terms used therein, which are highly praised by many scholars advocating the critique of alienated labor theory. In contrast, later theorists, such as Louis Althusser, downplayed the status of Marx’s early works, believing that there was an “epistemological rupture” between Marx’s ideological theory in his youth and his scientific theory in his mature period, and the *Manuscripts* were on the eve of this rupture (Sun, 2014). This article does not discuss whether “alienation” in the *Manuscripts* is a genuine work of Marx but rather treats it as the starting point for exploring the concept of “alienation”, attempting to examine the development and evolution of its connotations in the chronological dimension of classical Marxism and Western Marxism. Meanwhile, using “alienation” as a pivot point, returning to the historical scenes of its development in different historical periods, exploring the early Western Marxists represented by Lukács, the theorists of the Frankfurt School such as Horkheimer, Adorno, as well as Freud, and Marxist theoretician Marcuse’s expansion and transcendence of the concept of “alienation”.

“Alienation” in German is the word “Entfremdung”, which can also be translated as “Estrangement”. From an etymological perspective, alienation involves different disciplinary categories, including political science, theology,

and religion. Early thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and sociologists Max Weber and Émile Durkheim offered various interpretations of it. Marx's innovation lies in linking the concept of "alienation" with the labor production of capitalist society at that time, emphasizing the "inevitable connection between capitalism and alienation" (Wang, 2007, p. 433). In Marx's works such as the *Manuscripts* and *Capital*, we can see his inheritance and transcendence of Hegel regarding the issue of alienation. Despite the controversy in academia regarding whether something is truly Marxist or not, it cannot be denied that Western Marxists of the 20th century upheld a strong Marxist hue, which is characterized by the critical, practical, and humanitarian aspects of their theories, giving "alienation" a new connotation rich in historical context.

2. From Labor Alienation to Commodity Alienation: The "Alienation" Theory of Classical Marxism

In the history of philosophy, Hegel was the first to systematically expound the concept of alienation (Luo, 2006, p. 65). In Hegel's philosophy, alienation is closely related to its core concept—absolute spirit and thus carries a strong idealistic coloration. In 1843, Marx encountered the dilemma of "material interests" during his time working for *The Rheinische Zeitung*, which led him to shift from Hegel's idealistic philosophy to the study of political economy. The *Manuscripts* represent the transition of alienation from idealism to materialism, based on the critique of Adam Smith's political economy. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx first contrasts human labor with the activities of animals. He believes that while animal activity is merely instinctual and aimed at satisfying basic needs. While human labor not only addresses material needs but also allows for the expression of human agency, leading to happiness and the realization of both material and spiritual freedom. However, the mode of production in capitalist economic society leads human labor toward alienation in pursuit of maximizing profit.

Marx delineated four levels of human alienation. Firstly, there is alienation between individuals and objects. Objects appear to workers as "belonging to someone else, and the things I desire are inaccessible, owned by others; it also appears as though each thing has turned into its opposite, my activity is something else, and finally—this applies also to the capitalist—it appears as if some inhuman power rules over everything" (Marx, 2009, p. 233). In other words, alienation manifests as the domination of objects over everything. The products produced by humans do not belong to them but to the capitalists, yet to sustain their existence, producers must continue to invest in production, leading to alienation at the level of producers. For capitalists, objects are merely means to pursue greater profits, and capitalists themselves become subject to alienation by objects. Secondly, there is alienation within the labor process, where "through alienated, externalized labor, workers produce a relationship to this labor that is foreign to and separate from themselves" (Marx, 2009, p. 166). Thirdly, there is the alienation of human essence, where labor power in the market is attributed not to human qualities but merely to the qualities of objects, to the attributes of commodities. "Production not only produces man as a commodity, as commodity man, as a man in the grip of a particular commodity relation; it also produces him as an object degraded to the level of a commodity both physically and mentally" (Marx, 2009, p. 171). These two points abstractly illustrate how human alienation manifests in the process of production, with the production of commodities leading to the alienation of human essence, deepening the degree of alienation. The final level is alienation between individuals, where "human alienation, in general, finds its reality and expression in the relationship of man to other men" (Marx, 2009, p. 164). Alienation in the relationships between individuals is the development and extension of alienation based on human essence, spreading from individual subjects to other individuals.

In addition to discussing the four levels of human labor alienation, the *Manuscripts* also delve into the subjective emotions of individuals. When discussing the sensuousness of the subject, Marx considers the objectification of human essence as the basis for establishing oneself as a social being. In other words, for individuals to realize their essence, there needs to be a sensory correspondence between the self and the objective world. As Marx states in the *Manuscripts*, "Because the object of my desire can only be the confirmation of my essential powers... it can only exist for me in the same way that my essential powers exist as subjective capacities for me because the significance of any object for me (it only has significance for the sensation corresponding to it) precisely coincides with the extent of my sensation" (Marx, 2009, p. 191). The path to realizing one's essence lies through the sensory experiences of individuals, and literature and art, as expressions of sensuousness, can serve as a way out of alienation. "The discussions in the *Manuscripts* about various senses are closely related to literature and art, as art mainly relies on imaginative thinking, and the foundation of imaginative thinking lies in the various senses governing sensory cognition" (Zhu, 1980, p. 92). This demonstrates how later Western Marxist theorists inherited and transcended the relationship

between art and alienation.

The study of alienation in the *Manuscripts* broke away from Hegel's idealistic philosophical categories, shifting the focus to concrete realities of individuals within the production process and initiating discussions on alienation from the perspective of human essence. Marx's discussions on this concept in the *Manuscripts* represent immature studies in political economy, still entrenched in the framework of German classical philosophy. However, the publication of *Capital* in 1867 marks a mature Marx critically analyzing the process of capitalist production, building upon the critique of political economy. From the *Manuscripts* to *Capital*, alienation progresses from "the control of objects over people" to "the frenzied pursuit and obsession of people with objects", with the concept of alienation now manifesting as commodity fetishism. "The worship of capital is the most alienated and concealed form of commodity fetishism, concealing the exploitation and injustice brought about by the capitalist mode of production" (Kong, 2023). While classical Marxism, based on the *Manuscripts* and *Capital*, focuses on the relationship between individuals and objects and individuals and capitalist society in discussing alienation, Western Marxism begins to explore human alienation in technological society from a cultural perspective. Here, we can see the spiritual legacy inherited by Western Marxism from Max Weber, apart from Marx. In his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber offers an alternative interpretation of the development of capitalism from a religious and cultural perspective, distinct from Marx's analysis.

3. Transitioning from commodity alienation to universal reification: Georg Lukács' theory of "reification"

After the end of World War I, the victory of Bolshevik communism in the Soviet Union and the failure of the proletarian revolution in Western countries led many Western Marxist theorists to reflect on their positions. The first three important theoreticians of the post-1920 generation—the real originators of the whole pattern of Western Marxism—were all initially major political leaders within their own parties: Lukács, Korsch, and Gramsci (Perry, 1979, p. 29). What they had in common was their involvement in party organizations and their approach of reflecting on and guiding theory through social practice. Georg Lukács, a prominent figure among early Western Marxist theorists, represented the transition from classical Marxism to Western Marxism. In the 1920s, while exiled in Austria, Lukács was a leading member of the Hungarian Communist Party, eventually serving as its general secretary in 1928 after a decade of factional struggles within the party. Lukács re-evaluated Marxism based on the social conditions of Western Europe at the time, "with the starting point of his reflections being the victory of revolution in relatively backward Russia and its failure in relatively developed Western Europe" (Gu, 2009, p. 358).

In his work *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács inherits Marx's analysis of the structure of commodities from *Capital*. He argues that in capitalist society, social relations between people become relations between things, leading to reification, which manifests as a universal phenomenon in the social sphere and influences people's consciousness. "A man's own activity, his own labour becomes something objective and independent of him, something that controls him by virtue of an autonomy alien to man. There is both an objective and a subjective side to this phenomenon" (Lukács, 1971, p. 87). This concept of reification by Lukács expands upon Marx's notion of alienation. For the two main classes in capitalist society—the bourgeoisie and the proletariat—reification occurs at both the objective and subjective levels. Lukács distinguishes between the ways the bourgeoisie and the proletariat perceive the world, demonstrating how the proletariat can recognize the social reality of reified consciousness, thus awakening class consciousness and imbuing it with a strong class character.

In Lukács' view, the reason why the bourgeoisie in capitalist society cannot perceive the phenomenon of reification lies primarily in their mode of cognition, which is characterized by immediacy and lacks the category of mediation. As to the concept of mediation, Lukács believes that "Thus the category of mediation is a lever with which to overcome the mere immediacy of the empirical world and as such it is not something (subjective) foisted on to the objects from outside, it is no value-judgement or 'ought' opposed to their 'is'. It is rather the manifestation of their authentic objective structure" (Lukács, 1971, p. 162). Immediacy and mediation possess the same dialectical nature. Both "are therefore not only related and mutually complementary ways of dealing with the objects of reality. But corresponding to the dialectical nature of reality and the dialectical character of our efforts to come to terms with it, they are related dialectically" (Lukács, 1971, pp. 155-156). In other words, immediacy and mediation are both ways in which people understand the world and grasp objects. The former is the way the bourgeoisie understand the world, while the latter is the way the proletariat relates to the objects of understanding. The bourgeoisie's mode of understanding the world through immediacy leads to a one-sided and atomized worldview in their consciousness. In contrast, the proletariat's

mode of cognition transcends immediacy and, with the assistance of the category of mediation, achieves a comprehensive, holistic, and dialectical understanding. This is the pathway through which the proletariat can recognize their reification. However, this self-awareness only occurs when the amount of labor time greatly exceeds the proletariat's tolerance limit, reaching the cruel form of unlimited enslavement.

Lukács' transcendence of the classical Marxist concept of "alienation" not only extends commodity fetishism to the concept of "reification" indicating the self-awareness ability of the proletariat but also involves extending the consciousness of "reification" to encompass the entire phenomenon of bourgeois society. He believes that modern bureaucratic politics, like the capitalist mode of production,

The formal standardisation of justice, the state, the civil service, etc., signifies objectively and factually a comparable reduction of all social functions to their elements, a comparable search for the rational formal laws of these carefully segregated partial systems. Subjectively, the divorce between work and the individual capacities and needs of the worker produces comparable effects upon consciousness. (Lukács, 1971, p. 98).

Here, Lukács analogizes the "reification" in the economic domain to the political-ethical domain, where the detailed division of the state apparatus mirrors the specialization and one-sidedness of the production mode of the large machinery, emphasizing the absolute obedience of professionals to their respective functions.

4. Alienation Enters Culture: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's "Alienation" in the Culture Industry

The rapid advancement of production methods and the drastic changes in the global landscape of the twentieth century have made people's living conditions increasingly complex. The theorists of different schools of Western Marxism have expressed their different perspectives on the social situation from their standpoints, reflecting distinct imprints of the times. Representatives of the Frankfurt School, such as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, critique the societal reality of enlightenment turning into anti-enlightenment from a historical perspective, demonstrating "tendencies which turn cultural progress into its opposite" (Horkheimer, 2002, p. xiii). In their co-authored work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the essay *The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception* exposes the spiritual "alienation" brought about by forms of cultural propaganda such as film and broadcasting, portraying the enlightenment of the masses as "calculation of effects and in the technology" (Horkheimer, 2002, p. xviii). It is important to note that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was completed in 1944 and first published in 1947, at a time when World War II had not yet ended, and the socio-political context serves as an important basis for interpreting their critique of the culture industry.

Movies emerged as a cultural form in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with sound films appearing in the 1920s. When Horkheimer and Adorno were working on the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, they based their analysis on American society in the 1930s and 1940s. By that time, American cinema had become a mature art form, supported by a sophisticated set of technical forms that dominated people's leisure activities after work. Although people seemed to have the freedom to choose their entertainment, they fell into the trap of the culture industry. Horkheimer believes that "even during their leisure time, consumers must orient themselves according to the unity of production" (Horkheimer, 2002, p. 98). The "technical rationality today is the rationality of domination. It is the compulsive character of a society alienated from it" (Horkheimer, 2002, p. 95). In the process of watching movies, people unwittingly accepted the ideology conveyed by this cultural form, often based on their identification with it. From this perspective, people under the domination of the culture industry could not resist because they were unaware of their subjugation. Technology had triumphed over subjectivity and dominated everything. Horkheimer revealed a common problem "in monopolistic capitalist societies, namely, that the freedom granted to contemporary consumers by technological progress often comes with emotional and moral sacrifices resulting from the complex reality of state industry" (Dong, 2020). Ultimately, frequent moviegoers blurred the boundary between the external world and the movies, believing that the external world was merely an extension of the film. With its precise calculations and predictions, the culture industry further controlled people's expectations and responses to life, tightly enveloping them in its logical framework, and erasing their individuality and imaginative power. Entertainment is the prolongation of work under late capitalism. It is sought by those who want to "escape the mechanized labor process so that they can cope with it again" (Horkheimer, 2002, p. 109). The so-called entertainment was just a freedom-illusion brought by the culture industry, a preparation for better labor.

The analysis of the culture industry by the two scholars who fled to the United States during World War II also involved criticism of contemporary fascism in Germany, as reflected particularly in the seventh part of the article. Horkheimer and Adorno discussed the cultural form of advertising, arguing that they achieve their commercial goals through indoctrination and deception in content, and mechanical repetition in form, mirroring the tactics employed by fascism in Germany. Whether it's political slogans or advertising propaganda, they operate as forms of language in public discourse. "For the more completely language coincides with communication, the more words change from substantial carriers of meaning to signs devoid of qualities; the more purely and transparently they communicate what they designate, the more impenetrable they become" (Horkheimer, 2002, p. 133). Consequently, in the process of repetitive operation, language loses its original expressive ability and volitional function, and the words spoken become shores unreachable by meaning.

Horkheimer and Adorno developed a broad theory of alienation arising from the intrusive social control and manipulation of demand through mass media (Xie, 2016). If the classical Marxists and early representatives of Western Marxism, like Lukács, focused on the capitalist production process and described the alienation and commodification of labor in capitalist society, then the Frankfurt School, as a branch of Western Marxism, took a completely different theoretical path based on social change and their historical context. They placed significant emphasis on the cultural industry brought about by technological progress. In simple terms, alienation for the Frankfurt School manifests as people unknowingly losing their rights to pursue their selves freely under the indoctrination of the culture industry.

Comparing the analyses of alienation by Marx, Lukács, and Horkheimer, several striking similarities emerge. Firstly, their theoretical critiques are closely intertwined with the development of social reality. The publication timelines of their respective works not only mark the evolution and refinement of their theories but also reflect the historical progression of society and technological advancement. From manual labor in handicraft production to mechanized mass production, and then to the rapid development of electronic technology in the 20th century, their theories have consistently critiqued and reflected upon social reality. Secondly, despite the theoretical disconnection from practice being a reason later theorists criticized Western Marxist theory, they all grounded their analyses in various relationships, revealing the underlying logic behind the evolution of societal phenomena. Lastly, they all focused on studying concrete individuals within the context of real social life, demonstrating a strong sense of humanistic concern.

It's worth noting that although both classical Marxism and Western Marxism focus on studying concrete individuals within social reality, subtle differences arise when discussing the uniqueness of individuals. This can be illustrated by examining the discussions of individuals and classes in the *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In the *Manuscripts*, Marx places individuals within the category of species, aiming to define the essence of humanity and highlight individual uniqueness. He states, "Man is a species-being, not only because in practice and theory, he adopts the species—his own as well as those of other things—as his object; but also—and this is only another way of expressing it—because he treats himself as the actual, living species; because he treats himself as a universal and therefore a free being" (Marx, 2009, p. 161). Firstly, the concept of "species" is used to establish oneself as the object of humanity. If the species is humanity, the relationship between individuals is depicted as identical; if it is animals, the relationship with humans is depicted as different. Secondly, humans, like the species of other entities in the world, are free beings. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, while the logical deduction of the relationship between individuals and species remains unchanged, the conclusion takes a different direction from Marx's perspective. Horkheimer and Adorno argue that "the culture industry has sardonically realized man's species being. Everyone amounts only to those qualities by which he or she can replace everyone else: all are fungible, mere specimens" (Horkheimer, 2002, pp. 116-117). Here, the class is no longer a standard that individuals can use to affirm themselves but rather a collection of impersonal individuals, among which individuals can be replaced interchangeably.

5. Alienation and the Control of Thought and Consciousness: Herbert Marcuse's One-Dimensional Man and the Counterculture Movement

In the 1960s, the Frankfurt School's analysis of alienation shifted from the social environment to the individual himself, particularly in Herbert Marcuse's 1964 publication, *One-Dimensional Man*. If *Dialectic of Enlightenment* analyzed how the culture industry paralyzes people's search for transcendent thinking in their leisure time, focusing on the alienation in the social environment, then in Marcuse's work, he elucidated a "profound reflection on the modes of existence and existential crises of individuals in Western capitalist society, reaching the pinnacle of Western

Marxist humanism” (Liu, 2022). Namely, alienation is not only manifested in the technological authoritarian society, the alienation of the living environment but also in the alienation of people’s ways of thinking. The analysis covers a wider range of issues, including politics, language, and philosophy. Consequently, individuals nurtured by a one-dimensional society seem to have no way out of their existential predicament.

Marcuse comprehensively analyzed the interaction between social conditions and individual existence from both social and ideological perspectives. Society, mediated by technology, becomes an “iron cage” that oppresses and confines people’s lives. The technological society utilizes automation equipment, mass media, advertising, and other means to establish new systems that control people’s labor and lives, with politics playing a crucial role in this process. “Culture renders everything into labels, schemas, and classifications, producing them in bulk according to pre-established patterns. In this process, individuals are unable to achieve subjective liberation; instead, they become controlled by ideology, forming a cultural industry” (Yang, 2020). The state machinery of political governance serves as both the driving force behind the comprehensive control of society by technological means and the beneficiary of a technocratic authoritarian society. Proclamations of policymakers or sellers, logically consistent with technological power, prevail in society, and individuals’ choices are not free but judgments made under the influence of external social forces. In the process of unconscious “forced choice”, the gradual loss of inner freedom leads to the ultimate stage of being engulfed by alienation without self-awareness. The collision between politics and technology is evident not only in the lack of freedom in people’s choices but also in the dominance of advanced automation in labor. In classical Marxism, there was an expectation of material production methods bringing about a better world, with technology invented to master nature and increase production efficiency, thereby liberating people from mechanical labor to achieve a state of freedom. However, by the 20th century, despite significant leaps in labor production methods, workers failed to escape from the repetitive mechanical labor processes. Instead, they became immersed in material satisfaction brought about by technological progress, being both controlled by technology and engulfed by the allure of materialism.

The close intertwining of technology and political economy has also delegitimized the once transcendent high art, leading to the loss of artistic value, which has repressed people’s search for spiritual solace and become another explanation for their spiritual alienation. Back in the 1920s, Freud explained the close connection between art and the human psyche:

Art offers substitutive satisfactions for the oldest and still most deeply felt cultural renunciations, and for that reason it serves as nothing else does to reconcile a man to the sacrifices he has made on behalf of civilization. On the other hand, the creation of art heighten his feelings of identification, of which every cultural unit stands in so much need, by providing an occasion for sharing highly valued emotional experiences. (Freud, 1927, p. 14)

Building on Freud’s insights, Marcuse analyzed high art in authoritarian societies. Like most Western Marxist theorists, Marcuse revered the sacredness inherent in literature and art, believing that “they were a rational, cognitive force, revealing a dimension of man and nature which was repressed and repelled in reality” (Marcuse, 2002, p. 64). The pre-technological society, unlike the world dominated by technological rationality, was “a world in which man and nature were not yet organized as things and instrumentalities” (Marcuse, 2002, p. 62). In this context, the function of art is to provide people with a sense of rupture different from everyday life experiences, further guiding them to transcend the mundane daily life and negate it, which aligns with Marcuse’s assertion that “literary and art is essentially alienation”. At this point, the concept of “alienation” refers to the deviation of art from the spontaneous rules of everyday life. As society transitions from a pre-technological society to a technological one, high art is captured by sharp capitalism and assimilated into the operational system of the technological society, unable to provide people with alternative satisfaction beyond daily life as it did in the pre-technological society. The loss of the dimension of transcending and negating daily life in art confines people within the technological society, preventing emotional catharsis. This not only reflects the end of the utopia of art but also the loss of human values and subjective consciousness.

If the first part, *The One-Dimensional Society* explains the alienating environment in which people live from the perspective of the collusion between politics and technology, then in the second part, the author employs philosophy and language as tools to analyze the closure of people’s thinking by technological society. This is the change in human thinking caused by the promotion of material production processes in a technological society, and it is also an expression of alienation where people deviate from their most fundamental selves.

In Marcuse's view, the intermingling of philosophy, science, and politics intensified instrumental rationality in a technological society, which became the social background for changes in people's thinking. Firstly, science supported by the logic of philosophy, especially mathematics and physics in the scientific field promotes technological development. These scientific fields were neutral before being applied to production and technological development, merely representing discoveries about the natural world for human survival. When science, originally without practical purposes and neutrality, was employed by certain social organizations, it began to incline toward value judgments. To maximize various interests, science "freed nature from inherent ends and stripped matter of all but quantifiable qualities, society freedmen from the 'natural' hierarchy of personal dependence and related them to each other in accordance with quantifiable qualities—namely as units of abstract labor power, calculate in unites of time" (Marcuse, 2002, pp. 160-161). It can be seen that science is no longer about understanding the laws of the natural world for humanity but has become an integral part of technological rationality, abstracting humans into units of labor.

Secondly, as philosophy, supported by science, often faced criticism from non-philosophical readers due to its abstraction. Marcuse believed that the abstraction of philosophy is necessary for integrating fragmented experiences of daily life, enabling the transcendence of thought. The abstraction of philosophy stems from its separation from material practice. It is important to note that this abstraction is also historical and always closely connected with the historical conditions of society, inseparable from the social-historical conditions that gave rise to it. When social and historical conditions change, philosophy also changes and thereby affects people's ways of thinking. The transformation of "the way in which men have organized their societal labor" (Marcuse, 2002, p.148) is a turning point in the change of historical conditions. The aforementioned use of science for practical purposes is the basis for the change in historical conditions. Advanced technology supported by science has fully occupied society, altering the relationship among humans, pre-technological society, and nature. Then "the society which projects and undertakes the technological transformation of nature alters the base of domination by gradually replacing personal dependence with dependence on the objective order of things" (Marcuse, 2002, p.147). In other words, the relationships of human attachment between individuals become the relationship between human labor and external objective economic laws and market laws.

Finally, the changes in historical conditions have led to the dominance of empiricism and linguistic analysis in contemporary philosophy. The thoughts embodied in empiricism and linguistic analysis philosophy are in the same dimension as reality, controlling the spiritual production of people in a technological society, where thinking no longer possesses transcendence and negation. At this point, alienation invades people's spiritual domain from the external reality of survival. Empiricism philosophy emphasizes the dual precision of formal logic and empirical description, excluding "those elements of thought and speech which transcend the accepted system of validation" (Marcuse, 2002, p. 189). Linguistic analysis philosophy reflects the changes in the analysis of objects infiltrated by technology into daily life. Like empiricism philosophy, linguistic analysis philosophy only seeks the precision and clarity of the language of the analysis object, which is the precision and clarity permitted for people living in a technological society. These new social historical realities are manifested in the gap between what people say and what they think in daily life, where genuine thoughts are suppressed in the subconscious and unable to be expressed.

Marcuse thoroughly analyzed the causes and consequences of societal and spiritual alienation, going beyond Horkheimer's concentrated critique of the culture industry in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* making his analysis more comprehensive and profound. Additionally, Marcuse expressed dissatisfaction with Western Marxist theory's focus on criticism and detachment from practice, labeling it as a "regression". He believed that Western Marxists regressed "from a theory joined with historical practice to abstract, speculative thought: from the critique of political economy to philosophy" (Marcuse, 2002, p. xiv). This dissatisfaction is inseparable from the social environment in which Marcuse was working. The publication of *One-Dimensional Man* in 1964 coincided with the countercultural movement of the 1960s in the United States, while Marcuse was teaching at the University of California, San Diego, making him a witness to this upheaval. The rise of this movement was not only due to obvious reasons like racial discrimination and the Vietnam War but also because the United States was transitioning from an industrial society to a post-industrial society, facing structural adjustments (Zhao, 2000). The youth involved in this movement included dropout hippies and radical students who blurred class distinctions and aimed their criticisms at the predominantly technological industrial society. "In their view, the soil for the emergence of modern authoritarianism lies in the industrialization or technological alienation of so-called modern capitalism... The technologically dominated society demands that every member of society live in the same way" (Zhao, 2000). Individual uniqueness needs to be suppressed, while the immense material wealth brought by technological society erodes everyone's desire to seek

transcendence and negate the present.

6. Conclusion

As a keyword in the fields of philosophy and culture, “alienation” has already produced many results, and it seems that whenever daily life encounters shocks or significant historical changes occur, “alienation” becomes a frequent topic of discussion. If literature represents the sensory experiences of people’s living conditions, then theory is the process of weaving and reorganizing these sensory experiences, ultimately returning to the text. By extension, philosophy concerns the higher-level abstractions and logic of people’s specific existential situations. Since the beginning of the new century, although some scholars believe that the theoretical concept of alienation has become exhausted, and there are even claims that “theory is dead”, the academic field has also witnessed a turn towards post-theory and post-humanities theories. However, whether it is questioning oneself as a subject or discussing social and cultural changes, “alienation” will continue to undergo internal updates along with the changes in social history. As a path of reflection, “alienation” while shaping humanity in the external world, can also provide a mirror for individuals to reflect on themselves. This is of significant importance in how self-preservation can be achieved in the current context.

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