

# **Alienation in Subjective Interaction within Virtual Practices and Strategies for its Resolution**

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**Abstract:** Virtual practice refers to the interactive and sensuous engagement between virtual subjects and virtual objects within a digital environment, driven by specific objectives. It is characterized by virtual reality, a high degree of freedom, and open-ended creativity. However, within virtual practices, human relationships are increasingly becoming alienated. This alienation manifests in the distortion of the subject's identity, communication behaviors, and existential experience. The primary causes of this alienation include insufficient digital literacy among virtual practitioners, the unchecked expansion of instrumental rationality, and the absence of effective oversight and regulation in virtual spaces. In response, several strategies are proposed to mitigate these issues, such as improving participants' competence in virtual practices, promoting ethical values and rational discourse, and reinforcing moral and legal regulations.

**Keywords:** Virtual Practice; Subject; Alienation in Interaction; Causes of Alienation; Resolution Strategies

## **1. Background**

In virtual practice, individuals transcend the limitations of time and space, significantly expanding their living space and broadening the choices and possibilities in their existence. The virtual subject represents an indispensable and irreversible aspect of human identity, showcasing the progress of history and society. However, the journey from modern humanity to the future is not without its challenges. As Marcuse stated, "Technology, as a tool domain, can enhance human capabilities while also amplifying human vulnerabilities. Currently, humans might be less able to control their devices than ever before." [1] In virtual practice, the subject has yet to achieve

complete freedom and personal liberation, nor has it fully embarked on the right path toward the comprehensive development of human freedom. When creating tools, humans did not realize that these tools would eventually become adversarial forces, turning into alien entities. Humans, entangled by their creations, have fallen into a state of alienation. Alienation "primarily refers to creations made by self-aware and proactive individuals that become external, independent forces opposed to humans, not subject to human will, distancing and estranging from them, and even turning to dominate, constrain, oppress, and enslave them." [2] In the context of virtual practices, the phenomenon of alienation in subjective interaction has emerged.

## **2. Manifestations of Subjective Interaction Alienation**

### **2.1 Alienation of Subject Identity**

In virtual practice, the identity of the "human" as the subject of practice has undergone new changes.

On one hand, the subject has transitioned from a "social being" to a "human-machine" interactive system. Heim once noted, "Virtual reality is the first technology inherently predisposed to social self-criticism. It has sparked public debate from its inception, with criticisms even emerging during its embryonic stage." [3] In the real world, there is a unity between human thought and existence, soul and body. However, in virtual practice, the unique status of humans as the singular social practice subjects becomes uncertain. One cannot simply participate as an individual human in virtual social practice; instead, they must integrate with internet information technology, utilizing devices such as computers and mobile phones. Through specific software systems or virtual practice platforms, individuals create personalized

virtual practice avatars to engage in particular virtual activities. These avatars are characterized by virtuality, anonymity, multiplicity, and hyperreality. Furthermore, virtual subjects can transcend existing spatial and temporal limitations, which allows them to continue functioning even when their real-world counterparts are unable to engage in practice due to illness or other reasons.

On the other hand, the decentralized environment of virtual practice grants subjects the freedom to break free from real-world social rules, such as social status, age, gender, and occupation, along with interpersonal relationships. The virtual practice field becomes an ideal venue for secretly challenging societal norms, shedding the shackles of real-life identities, and venting various negative emotions. This scenario can often lead to a weakening or even a loss of individual identity, causing discrepancies and misunderstandings when balancing real life with virtual existence, resulting in unclear and chaotic self-perception for individuals.

## **2.2 Alienation of Interpersonal Interactions**

Firstly, virtual practice subjects experience atomization. To understand a person, one cannot abstract them as an isolated individual, considering them detached from their social context. Instead, individuals must be viewed within the framework of their specific nation and the world, in relation to their social connections. Without being part of any social structure or forming any social bonds, one cannot truly be considered a "human". Lukács, in *History and Class Consciousness*, introduced the concept of human atomization, highlighting that people become indifferent and estranged from each other, severing connections mechanically, and thus, turning into isolated, passive atoms. [4]

Moreover, the complexity of interactions among virtual practice subjects has increased. "Our private spaces are no longer stages for struggles and performances between subject and object. We no longer exist as playwrights or actors but as terminals in a multimedia network." [5] Unlike real-world interactions, virtual practice subjects create diverse and mysterious avatars, assuming multiple identities that can easily confuse and mislead others. These avatars can even be used unethically or illegally, leading to crises in

real-world interactions.

Furthermore, there is the issue of transparency in the interactions of individuals within virtual practice environments. Ordinary users, who engage in virtual practices, are constantly monitored by the practice platforms and controlled by the "search engine effect". For those at the apex of the virtual social pyramid, who possess and manipulate network data and information technology, it is effortless to exercise "data hegemony", leaving the information of ordinary users exposed and easily accessible. This technological bullying and data hegemony exacerbate the alienation and estrangement between individuals in virtual practice, further leading to the atomization of users.

Lastly, the stratification of interactions among virtual practice subjects intensifies. The disparities in status within the virtual society, resulting from technological and informational divides, enable virtual subjects to easily find "like-minded individuals", fostering stratified social circles. Under the influence of these groups, individuals may descend into collective irrationality, engaging in a series of irrational acts. The conspicuous, erratic behavior of large fan groups in these online cliques vividly illustrates this phenomenon.

## **2.3 The Alienation of Subjective Existence**

On one hand, there is the alienation of digital existence. As Heidegger suggested, modern technology is no longer "neutral"; it exerts control over every facet of contemporary life, becoming the historical destiny of modern humans. [6] Some have referred to virtual practice subjects as "masses controlled by algorithms". Ordinary subjects of virtual practice merely operate software platforms and heavily depend on algorithms and data, leading to a gradual loss of their agency and an increasing objectification. They become passive entities. Moreover, within the hierarchical structure of virtual practice societies, ordinary virtual participants find themselves in increasingly complex, unequal, passive, and lower social strata. This further deteriorates their digital living conditions, exacerbating the crisis of digital existence.

On the other hand, there is the alienation within real-world existence. Firstly, extensive involvement in virtual social practices diminishes the space for real-world life. Some

virtual practitioners spend so much time in the virtual world, satisfying their material and spiritual needs there, that they disregard their real-world existence. Secondly, a profound reliance on virtual identities and relationships inevitably undermines solid social connections and interpersonal bonds in the real world. This weakening of social ties not only jeopardizes the security of real-world social structures but also hinders virtual practitioners from quickly detaching from the virtual realm and reengaging with real-world society.

### **3. Analysis of the Causes of Alienation in Subjective Interaction**

#### **3.1 The Lack of Virtual Practice Literacy among Subjects**

Firstly, the current labor conditions of real-world subjects significantly influence the social interactions of virtual practice subjects. The division of labor under industrial capitalism has led to the alienation of real-world subjects. As society's reliance on human labor decreases, traditional production workshops are replaced by automated factories, and the disparity in human abilities continues to narrow. In this context, the existing specialized division of labor seems to lose its relevance. For digital laborers, virtual practice subjects face not only the digital divide but also the looming walls of technological barriers, leading to more severe forms of exploitation.

Secondly, these identity characteristics in real life directly impact the performance of virtual subjects in virtual practices. Due to varying capacities in information acquisition, knowledge and technical mastery, data and information ownership, as well as personal preferences, virtual subjects are inevitably placed within different spheres of activity. This leads to a paradox where, while virtual subjects may escape the stratification of real-world society, they simultaneously become ensnared by the new hierarchies of the virtual world. Many virtual practice subjects often misjudge their status and importance within the virtual society, becoming absorbed in virtual interactions and practices. This not only disrupts the stable social relations in the real world but also risks destabilizing the virtual social connections they establish.

Lastly, when real-world life fails to meet the

needs of the subject, virtual practice offers an escape from adversity, a means to release stress, vent dissatisfaction, or simply indulge in entertainment. Due to limited cognitive capacity and a lack of self-discipline, virtual subjects often struggle to draw clear boundaries between virtual practices and real-world engagement. They find it difficult to balance their identities as real-world and virtual subjects effectively, unable to manage these dual identities with the necessary discernment.

#### **3.2 The Extreme Expansion of Instrumental Rationality**

Within the blind worship of technological omnipotence and the adulation of instrumental rationality, virtual practice subjects have marched towards the path of interactional alienation.

Firstly, under the profound influence of instrumental rationality, people have come to believe that through reason, they can grasp the truth, particularly that they can conquer the world through technology. Human behaviors and norms seem to be required to adhere to technological standards and demands, and various social activities are quantifiable through technology. Technologists view technology as a mere tool, detached from the context of human existence, resulting in a separation of technology from ethics. [7] In the exclamation of technical worship and instrumental rationality, mankind has embarked on the road to alienation. Instrumental rationality not only creates one-dimensional individuals but also objectified beings. Humans no longer act as agents of social practice but become mere tools, subjects of certain practices. For example, ride-hailing drivers and food delivery workers operate within a network platform, executing tasks almost entirely without communicating with colleagues.

Secondly, virtual practice subjects exhibit addictive reliance on technology, where technology usurps its place and governs all aspects of their lives. People's subjective initiative wanes; they relinquish thought and choice, wholly entrusting tools and technology to manage their affairs. Minds become numb, free from self-reflection or change, with no erroneous beliefs, just a lack of finding like-minded individuals. Beyond this, technological

domination engenders new forms of inequality among people.

Lastly, when technology becomes intertwined with commercial capital, virtual practice subjects not only turn into objectified tools and free labor but also end up paying for surplus commercial products and irrational consumer culture. With technological assistance, capital rapidly gathers data on user preferences, consumption levels, and habits, enabling precise targeting of products users are likely to buy or information they enjoy browsing. Through deliberate embellishment, it fosters a culture of universal jubilation and entertainment supremacy online. Many virtual practice subjects fail to resist temptation, accumulating debt from overconsumption, radicalizing certain beliefs through repeated confirmation, or engaging in irrational collective behaviors under group influence.

### **3.3 The Lack of Regulation in the Virtual Practice Field**

From its inception, the virtual society has operated under its own distinct rules of interaction. These regulations are not imposed by subjects onto the network society but are formed by the technological foundations and the creators' value preferences during the creation of the virtual society.

Firstly, under the influence of these existing rules, the binding force of ethical and moral standards in real life on virtual practice subjects is significantly diminished. In the internet era, the proliferation of moral and private information in the public domain actually stimulates moral communication, thus elevating moral standards and increasing moral responsibility. [8] However, the traditional ethical systems often lack applicability and enforcement strength in the context of internet practices. Many prevailing values in the online world are established through breaking, challenging, and attacking traditional ethical systems. This leads to a situation where real-world ethics and morals struggle to constrain the actions of virtual practice subjects, while the virtual society itself lacks effective ethical standards. Consequently, virtual practice subjects can frequently exhibit cognitive and decision-making biases in their interpersonal interactions and lack rational moral evaluations of their online actions.

Secondly, there are several issues in the

process of legal regulation within the virtual society. One issue is the absence of comprehensive legislation and institutional frameworks. Although China has implemented laws and regulations such as the Cybersecurity Law of the People's Republic of China, Provisions on the Administration of Computer Information Network International Connectivity of the People's Republic of China (Interim), Measures for the Security Protection of Computer Information Networks Linked to the Internet, and the Internet Security Law, many of these laws are primarily departmental rules with relatively low legal efficacy, focusing on framework provisions and lightly penalizing virtual social violations with "penalties" and "warnings". Another issue is the unclear division of enforcement responsibilities and inadequate enforcement strength. Currently, virtual social law enforcement in China is primarily managed by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, public security departments, and specific corresponding departments. Although each department has its own roles and responsibilities, issues such as overlapping functions, poor coordination, and weak joint efforts persist. Lastly, judicial disputes are numerous and challenging to resolve. The ever-evolving nature of virtual social crimes, their varied forms, and their intermingling complexities present significant difficulties for the judiciary. Issues such as information leakage, online fraud, cyberbullying, and online account theft are often difficult to accurately classify and adjudicate under current laws.

Lastly, the instability and volatility of virtual social rules profoundly impact interactions among virtual practice subjects. Although the virtual society has its self-regulating guidelines, these guidelines are constantly at risk of being broken, altered, threatened, or infringed upon. The virtual environment provokes the latent desire within subjects to challenge authority and defy social norms, often leading to more reckless and uninhibited behavior among virtual practice subjects.

### **4. Strategies for Overcoming the Alienation of Subject Interaction**

The resolution of the alienation dilemma faced

by subjects can be considered from the perspectives of the subjects themselves, value concepts, and virtual society governance.

#### **4.1 Enhancing the Virtual Practice Literacy of Subjects**

To escape the predicament of subject interaction alienation, the primary task is to strengthen the subjectivity of virtual practice subjects and comprehensively enhance their literacy and capabilities in engaging with virtual practice.

Firstly, it is crucial to guide virtual practice subjects in transforming their views on labor and improving their practical abilities within the virtual society. By correctly viewing and actively addressing the phenomenon of subject alienation in virtual practice, subjects must recognize that the alienation of virtual subjects in virtual practice is an irreversible trend. They should proactively counter the negative effects of this alienation by linking personal goals with societal progress, re-examining personal spiritual pursuits in the context of societal development, and deeply understanding that only in unison with societal realities can individuals realize and create value.

Secondly, enhancing the autonomy and creativity of virtual practice subjects is essential. On one hand, strengthening subject awareness and establishing a correct view of virtual practice is necessary. Through education and guidance, virtual practice subjects can develop a sense of network and information awareness, enabling them to autonomously discern and select from the vast array of online information according to their needs. By fostering a proper perspective on online practices, they can fully manifest their subjectivity and underscore their prominence as individuals. On the other hand, it is imperative to promote learning and improve subjects' innovative abilities through rational thought and specialized education. By incrementally enhancing their proficiency in utilizing virtual practice technologies, subjects from various age groups and professional backgrounds should be encouraged to actively partake in diverse virtual practice activities. This positive empowerment can magnify the beneficial impacts of virtual practices on users. Lastly, a balanced approach to the relationship between virtual practice and real-world practice must be adopted. Virtual practice,

with its transcendent openness and expansiveness, further enriches the social lives of individuals. The virtual society is an extension of the real society within the network space. By engaging in virtual practices and creating virtual practice outcomes, individuals can creatively address and resolve real-world societal dilemmas, facilitating the transformation and application of virtual achievements to the real world, thereby engendering substantial and positive influences on society.

#### **4.2 Promoting Correct Values**

Firstly, it is essential to remain vigilant against and prevent the ideological risks induced by the negative interplay of capital and technology within the virtual society. Guiding the diverse ideologies in virtual practice through the promotion of proper values is critical. Erroneous beliefs must be corrected, and positive, uplifting ideas should be vigorously propagated to cultivate and maintain a healthy ideological value ecosystem within the network society, thereby steering virtual practice subjects towards making sound value choices.

Secondly, it is imperative to uphold human-centric principles and value rationality. There should be a call to return to a focus on humanity, emphasizing value rationality, where individuals are viewed as the ultimate purpose of virtual practice, not merely as tools. Meanwhile, it should be acknowledged that virtual practice is merely a segment of broader social practice. Individuals, as subjects, should remain grounded in reality, returning to real-world contexts to effectively manage various social relationships and foster the inherent nature of humanity within the real society.

Lastly, fostering the integration and symbiosis of instrumental rationality and value rationality is crucial. Maintaining a balanced tension between these two forms of rationality is necessary: instrumental rationality should lay the foundation for value rationality, while value rationality should guide the direction of instrumental rationality. In virtual practice interactions, achieving a harmonious synthesis of instrumental and value rationality is paramount. Continuous innovation in virtual practice technologies should be pursued to establish virtual practice platforms that prioritize service orientation and public



welfare. This will help create positive interaction models and fulfill the legitimate interaction needs of virtual practice subjects.

#### **4.3 Strengthening the Institutional Regulation of Virtual Practice**

To mitigate the adverse effects of existing virtual interaction regulations, it is essential to leverage both moral and legal frameworks, utilizing regulation to effectively prevent and dissolve the alienation of virtual practice subjects.

Firstly, enhancing the construction of ethical norms for virtual practice is crucial. This can be achieved by transforming the concepts underpinning virtual ethical standards, increasing the applicability of real-world ethical norms within the virtual society, and elevating the professionalism involved in establishing these ethical guidelines. By crafting a discourse system for virtual ethical norms and fostering a favorable environment for their development, the construction of ethical standards for virtual practice can be strengthened, thus heightening their binding force.

Secondly, reinforcing the legal regulation of virtual practice is necessary. The primary step towards the legalization of virtual practice includes forming consensus through intensive study of virtual practice law theories, integrating existing legal codes to clarify the direction of legal construction, and outlining the framework for virtual practice law [9]. Additionally, efforts should be made to intensify law enforcement by detailing responsibilities, enhancing enforcement strength, summarizing judicial experiences and lessons, and bolstering judicial authority.

Lastly, integrating the moral and legal frameworks between virtual and real worlds is essential. By coordinating activities between virtual and real practices, unifying identity perceptions in both realms, enhancing effective communication among practice subjects, and purifying the virtual practice environment, the effectiveness of moral and legal regulations in virtual practice can be heightened. For instance, adhering to coding standards has significant implications for the software lifecycle, prompting programmers, including algorithm designers, to exercise strong self-discipline in following coding guidelines. [10] Furthermore, by increasing legal awareness campaigns,

virtual practice subjects can be educated to discern right from wrong, understand the law, and comply with it.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The essence of virtual practice in the network society remains an activity centered on human subjectivity, reflecting human existence and development within another temporal and spatial realm. In this domain, the identities, roles, modes of thinking, methods, purposes, and objects of practice of virtual practitioners undergo transformative changes. The interaction between individuals in virtual practice has become alienated. To break free from the constraints of this alienation is no easy feat and is a long and arduous journey. This path is fraught with thorns, temptations, and obstacles.

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