

GigWatch

Studiecirkel via ABF – del 1

Innehåll

- Callum Cant (2020): “The Job”, från boken *Riding for Deliveroo – Resistance in the New Economy*.
- GigWatch (2019): [”Vad är gigeekonomi?”](#)
- Mossugglor (2016): ”En marxistisk analys av arbete”
- Alexandra Mateescu (2017): [”Who cares in the gig economy? On-demand models are changing domestic work”](#)
- Sveriges radio (2019): [”Vad säger gigföretagen?”](#), från serien *De nya daglönarna*

Introduktion till materialet

Till det första tillfället har vi valt ut texter som vi hoppas kan ge en bra introduktion till gigekonomin och till hur vi från Gigwatchs sida ser på den.

Callum Cants text "The Job" är hämtad från boken *Riding for Deliveroo* (2020), som skildrar arbetet som cykelbud för matleveransappen Deliveroo och de stora strejker som skedde bland buden där 2017. Kapitlet fokuserar på författarens egna erfarenheter av jobbet och ger en inblick i ett cykelbuds vardag.

Vi har också tagit med Gigwatchs egen text "Vad är gigekonomi?", som kort introducerar gigekonomin, samt begreppen gigifiering och falska egenanställningar.

Texten "En marxistisk analys av arbete" är en omarbetning av en text från den nu nedlagda bloggen Mossugglor, som sammanfattar den marxistiska syn på arbete som delvis ligger till grund både för Cants och Gigwatchs syn på gigekonomin.

Mateescus text "Who cares in the gig economy?" fokuserar på de jobb inom gigekonomin som sker i en mer hushållsnära kontext, exempelvis städning och barnpassning.

Till sist har vi också valt att ta med studiematerial i ljudform: ett avsnitt av SR-dokumentären *De nya daglönarna* från 2019. Avsnittet ger en inblick i vad gigföretagen själva säger och tänker kring sina affärsmodeller och kritiken mot dem.

Frågor att fundera över

- Enligt introduktionen till marxistisk syn på arbete är det den som äger produktionsmedlen som har makten över arbetet. En gigarbetare som är tvungen att köpa sin egen cykel kan sägas äga sina produktionsmedel, men

ändå har han/hon inte särskilt stor makt. Finns det några andra produktionsmedel involverade i gigjobben? Vad är det som ger makt över arbetet?

- Vilka skillnader finns det mellan att vara en arbetare och att vara anställd? Varför menar gigföretagen att de som utför arbetet inte ska ses som anställda? Vem är det som bestämmer det?
- På vilket sätt är olika gigarbeten könade? Spelar det någon roll för hur man ser på dem i samhället? Vilka likheter och skillnader kan du se mellan arbetsvillkoren som cykelbud och andra jobb som inte anses ingå i gigekonomin?

The Job¹

In the summer of 2016, I watched the London Deliveroo strike from behind a desk. At 8.15 a.m., I would cycle the 3 miles to the University of Sussex campus from Brighton, lock up my bike and sit down for another day as a policy and research assistant at the students' union. In my down time, flicking through social media, I saw friends sharing things about the strike. I saw a video, recorded on a worker's phone, of a strike convoy of hundreds of mopeds snaking through the streets, horns blaring. I watched it over and over, waiting for the day to end.

Two weeks after the Deliveroo strikes had first exploded, UberEats workers decided to follow their example and strike for better conditions. One lunch break, towards the end of the month, I went outside to call Petros Elia, the general secretary of the United Voices of the World (UVW) union. The UVW, much like the IWGB, is a small militant union which supported the strikes. We spoke for about twenty minutes, and he described how the internal dynamics of the strike movement seemed to be very unorthodox. It wasn't like standard trade unionism, there was something else going on. I wrote up our conversation in an article for Novara Media. I used one quote from Petros at the heart of it: 'The totally spontaneous and autonomous nature of this action is what makes it so exciting.'

1 From Callum Cant (2020), *Riding for Deliveroo: Resistance in the New Economy*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 19–40.

It's not really organising as we know it – it's something else entirely. They're not following any of the strategic rules. They do what they want, and it works.¹ This dynamism was a theme I'd soon be seeing in practice.

For the time being, however, I left the sunshine and went back to my desk with one question: why hadn't the strikes spread? I knew Deliveroo was in Brighton too, I saw mopeds with the trademark turquoise boxes passing below the windows of my flat every evening. If these conditions were national, why had they only caused a strike in London? It was impossible to tell without knowing what was actually going on in the city, and you couldn't know what was going on from the outside. Part of what made these strikes so interesting was the impenetrability of the organizing processes that generated them. Marx wrote about the way that, in capitalist society, the market, where commodities are bought and sold, is a public sphere ruled over by the ideals of Freedom, Equality and Property. But the workplace, where value is actually produced, is more like a 'hidden abode', with an entirely different set of rules.² That was how it felt to me, trying to understand Deliveroo: I could read all I wanted about these flexible market disruptors, but the reality of production was a mystery.

Searching for news on the strike had brought me to the attention of the algorithms. On every website I visited, I was now being served with adverts encouraging me to start working for Deliveroo. They showed me pictures of young

people in colourful uniforms leaning on nice bicycles and promised me £12 an hour and total flexibility. They were inviting me into the hidden abode. Eventually, I took them up on the offer.

Getting the Job

I thought of working for Deliveroo as an experiment. It would let me understand what the work was actually like, see how I could support workers who decided to take action, and make some extra money at the same time. My students' union paycheques weren't that great, after all. I was working 8.30–5.30, but I was allowed to be flexible with my time, so if I could make up the hours elsewhere and left at 5, I reckoned I could get an evening shift in, a couple of days a week. So, in mid-September, I finally clicked on one of the ads, signed up, and got a call the same day. I arranged to do my 'trial ride' the next week.

The trial ride was not a great success. I wangled working from home so that I could be in the city at midday. We were meeting at the Level, a park in the centre of Brighton. I got there a little early and met another prospective worker. He was a student at the University of Sussex, new to the city, and looking to pick up some extra work. He reckoned starting with Deliveroo would be easier than trying to compete with the thousands of other students in the city looking for 15 hours a week at a pub or cafe. A few minutes later, the worker leading

the trial showed up. He was just doing trial shifts to supplement his normal delivery work, and his role basically seemed to be to make sure we could cycle without falling off our bikes. The trial involved cycling from the Level down to a side street near the sea front. It all went okay until we got into the north Laine, an area of small streets with a complicated road system. We ended up about to ride the wrong way down a one-way street. Aware that there wasn't any time limit to complete the trial, but that you probably couldn't break the highway code and still get a job, we got off our bikes and walked part of the way there. When we got to the designated street, the trial leader demonstrated how the app functioned and gave us some advice on what hours were good to work. I was all set to start as soon as I completed some online training and picked up my kit. After the trial, I never saw either of them again.

The next step was to pick up my equipment at an 'on-boarding session'. I was expecting to be invited to an office, but instead I was told to go to a storage unit one evening next week. The unit was part of a large warehouse, run by a chain. At a guess, I'd say the other units were mostly rented by landlords and small businesses. There I met three other recruits and waited for the closest thing to an actual manager that I ever met. We didn't know where to go, so just stood in the small reception area, hoping we were in the right place. The almost-manager we were waiting for turned up ten minutes late, spilling out of

an elevator filled to the brim with brightly coloured Deliveroo stuff. He promptly began to turn the reception into a distribution centre. He gave us a code we needed to install the app on our phone, and then began to hand out a huge load of kit: waterproof trousers and jacket, a t-shirt, a cycling jersey, a battery pack, a cheap phone mount, some even cheaper lights, a helmet, and finally the thermal backpack. For the privilege, we would have 50 per cent of our first £300 earned deducted to pay a £150 deposit. We were supposed to be able to get this back when we finished working for Deliveroo and gave the kit back. Most of the stuff he gave us would turn out to be useless, apart from the battery pack, backpack, and jacket.

Deliveroo, he explained, was split into zones, about 2.5 miles across. In some cities, you could have multiple zones, but in Brighton we just had one. The pay structure of Deliveroo varied from city to city, and for us it was a pure piece wage. We'd get £4 per delivery, with no hourly rate at all. We were told that, sometimes, when demand was high, we might get a 'surge' text, offering a variety of pay increases, ranging from an extra 50p or £1 per drop to a bonus £10 after you completed ten orders. Brighton was what was called a 'free login zone', meaning that there was no formal shift system. We could turn on the app and work at any time between 11.45 a.m. and 11 p.m. Monday to Thursday. and 9 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday to Sunday. The almost-manager told us that we had to work a minimum of two weekends a month. I was confused – wasn't

Brighton a free login zone? I thought we could work whenever we wanted? Apparently not. He said we had to work for at least two shifts of 4 hours between Friday and Sunday twice a month or we would be deactivated. This rule was never written down, but the instructions were very clear. Flexibility, it seemed, had its limits.

The three other recruits were all students, two at university and one at college. We chatted a bit about why we were starting the job. All of them had been applying for other jobs in the city but had been unsuccessful. It was a real challenge getting part-time work, particularly in September. at the start of the academic year. I'd had the same experience as a Masters student at Sussex. I ended up working a few cash-in-hand shifts on a crepe stall until the owner finally gave up on teaching me how to flip pancakes. We had a laugh about it – hopefully I would be better at delivering food. We exchanged numbers and agreed to let each other know how the job went, but then after the on-boarding I never saw any of them again either. As I was cycling home, I wondered how representative these first four recruits I'd met were: all students on bicycles, all struggling to find work, three men and one woman. I'd later find out that I was in fact joining Deliveroo at the start of a massive wave of student recruitment.

An Average Shift

I was keen to get going and do my first shift. I decided I'd start work after my day job that Thursday. I got changed, pumped up my tyres, bolted down some food, filled up a water bottle, checked my phone was fully charged, and headed out. It was later than I intended, almost 6 p.m., but no matter. I clocked on and logged in to the app, then got my first order almost immediately. It was for a pizza restaurant, five minutes away.

The labour process at Deliveroo is simple and repetitive. You open the app, log in, and select 'available for orders'. As soon as you do that, your location and availability begins to be factored into the order allocation process, and the app tells you to go to the 'zone centre'. The zone centre is a central point in the city, near the busy restaurants. Workers are told to wait there in order to make sure there is a pool of labour available and in position for when demand picks up. For us in Brighton, there were actually two zone centres, one for the cyclists at Jubilee Square and one for mopeds a few streets up at Spring Gardens, both in the north Laine area of the city. After a wait, varying in length between seconds and hours, you would get an order notification. The app would tell you which restaurant the order was for and where the restaurant was. You would then swipe 'accept' or wait two minutes for the order to auto-decline. If you accepted, as most of us did most of the time, then you'd cycle/drive to the restaurant, lock up

your bike, and swipe on the app to confirm your arrival. The app would then show you the details of the order you had to collect, and a unique four-digit order code.

Then you would go inside the restaurant, tell the kitchen workers that code, and get the order – sometimes after another long wait. The restaurants were meant to call a worker on their app just before the food was ready, but some did it earlier in an attempt to reduce their delivery times. The only actual impact it had was annoying us. Some restaurants were funny about you coming in the customer entrance and wanted you to go around the back, some always made you wait for ages, some were very friendly. It often depended on whether the manager on duty was in a bad mood. If they were, you were the perfect person to take it out on – you didn't even work there, so they could be as rude as they liked. If you talked back, they could immediately report you via their version of the app.

Some couriers were very chatty with kitchen staff, and there were advantages to being nice. One evening, I got talking with a Polish waiter whilst waiting for an order. After that, he always gave me a free Coke when I went in his restaurant. One busy Indian restaurant a few hundred metres from the zone centre had a belowground kitchen accessed through a parking garage, and their habit of calling riders too early, plus the enclosed space, created another informal space to meet workers. One Italian restaurant forced you to wait, backpack

and all, behind a door in a busy kitchen, with chefs shouting and waiters coming past at high speed. You were obviously in the way, but the managers wouldn't have you cluttering up the restaurant. When you were given the order, you were meant to check every single item was there and tap on the app to confirm. In reality, the paper bags we were given were often stapled shut, and there was no way of knowing if we were delivering the right thing or not. That part of the job was functionally impossible. Once we'd tapped all the items, we could swipe to confirm we were ready to go deliver the food.

The customer's location would then be revealed. Particularly for cyclists, this could really suck. If the customer was nearby, great: a quick £4. If the customer was farther away but the route there was flat, I could live with it. But if the customer was up a big hill, that was a real kick in the teeth. Brighton is a very hilly city, and the zone centre is almost at the bottom of a valley. Most routes involved some kind of steep incline. But seeing a route which involved any of Albion Hill, Edwards Street, Southover Street, or Elm Grove made my heart sink. Some of Brighton's roads are so steep that, back in the day, walls were built half-way down the worst culprits in order to stop runaway carts from killing people. Not only did getting up these hills hurt, but each big hill you did reduced the potential length of your shift. A decent two-and-a-half-hour evening shift would involve 20-plus miles of cycling, up and down hills. If you were working at a weekend, you typically wanted to stay

out for 5 or more hours – and by the point you got to 4 hours it was difficult to get up a steep road without walking. Working for Deliveroo was physically difficult.

Once you knew where you were going, you'd begin to think through the route in your head as you went through the motions of unlocking your bike and setting off. When you arrived, the app would prompt you to swipe to confirm arrival and swipe to confirm delivery. At the end of that process, you had earned £4. Now to do it again. You'd start by turning around, rolling back down whatever godforsaken hill you'd just killed yourself to get up, and go back to the zone centre. If it was busy, you might pick up another order immediately. If it was really busy, these orders tended to be from restaurants farther away. The order allocation of the app would sometimes drag you from Brighton into Hove, and keep you doing orders on one side of the zone for hours, and sometimes it'd keep sending you back and forth. But having the app tell you to cycle half-way across the zone to pick up your next order was better than waiting, unpaid, in the cold.

The story of one typical delivery in November gives you an idea of how an evening would go. It was about 6 p.m. on a weeknight. I had just arrived at the zone centre and turned on my app. There was a bench attached to the outside of a chain sushi restaurant that we all sat on when we were waiting, which we called the 'Roo bench'. I was sat there with my bike leaned up against the wall and my backpack by my feet. I was

worried whether my lights were well enough charged, because I'd forgotten to plug them in during the day. I had my phone in my hand, in its waterproof case, and was chatting with a couple of the riders I knew vaguely. Then my phone buzzed, and I saw I'd got an order. I swiped to accept, told the other riders I would see them later, put my backpack on, mounted my phone on my handlebars and got on my bike. The order was for a Mexican restaurant at the bottom of London Road. The journey there would take a minute without traffic lights, or two with them. I had a choice to turn right at the top of the road and go along the main road that led up from the pier or continue straight-ish and cut through the small streets of the lanes, avoiding traffic lights.

I chose the second option. Topsy pedestrians almost got in my way going around a tight corner, but I swerved to avoid them. Then I turned left back onto the main road after the lights. The road surface here was in really bad condition and I had to weave to avoid the worst of it. Traffic was queued up to the next set of traffic lights, so I filtered through until I reached the restaurant on my left. There I faced a problem: the only locking-up spot for about 15 metres in either direction was a lamppost, which someone else was already using. There was outside seating at this restaurant, so I decided to be a bit cheeky and ask the people sitting there to make sure no one ran off with my bike whilst I went inside to pick up the food. It was a risk, but the alternative was wasting two minutes

walking, locking up, walking back and then repeating the process once I'd picked up the order. I left my rear light on, and then I went inside.

I could see the flashing red light through the misted-up window, and as long as it didn't move I knew the bike was safe. I swiped on my app to say I'd arrived and gave the kitchen staff my order number. The order was for a burrito, and they never made them ahead of time at this place because they were worried about sogginess. That was fair enough, but it did mean I had to wait for five minutes whilst the chefs did a few orders for customers in the restaurant before getting around to mine. Whilst I waited, I sent a couple of messages on a group chat and checked my Twitter, keeping one eye on my flashing red light all the time. There was no space for me to sit down, so I stood awkwardly in the middle of the aisle between two small tables, acutely conscious of both being in the way of the waiting staff and looming over two couples having dinner. I always developed a paranoid fear in these situations that I would clumsily hit someone with my backpack.

Eventually, the order was ready. I put it into my thermal bag and went back outside. I got on my bike, said thanks to the customers who had kept an eye on it, and tapped and swiped to confirm everything. Then I saw the customer location. It was up Southover Street, which rises off the Level park and goes pretty much straight up to the top of the Hanover hill at a steep gradient. I had a friend who lived on an adjacent street,

and he had joked with me before that he liked to watch how far Deliveroo riders could get up the road before giving up. I cut across the Level and started to climb it, getting into my lowest gear pretty much from the start. I did mean to get off and walk at some point in order to save my legs, but as I got to the first kick up in gradient, I got out the saddle and started climbing. It felt pretty easy, and I got the idea that I should just climb the whole thing out of the saddle, like some kind of Tour de France pro. It wasn't the best idea for maximizing my earnings, but it was fun. A taxi coming down the road and navigating between the cars parked on both sides passed me with barely 6 inches of room to spare. I carried on sweating my way up before turning left onto the street I was delivering to and finding the terraced house I was looking for. I leant my bike against a wall, rang the bell, handed over the food out of my backpack, wished the customer a good evening, and swiped to confirm. I didn't get another order immediately, which was a pity. I was kind of hoping it would be drop-to-drop. But anyway, I had no choice but to roll back down Southover Street, shifting my weight back as far as possible on the bike and avoiding catastrophe whilst cutting around the speed bumps. Repeat that process between four and twelve times, and you pretty much had a shift.

There were all sorts of potential disruptions and variations on this basic work sequence. The most common of these was a double or triple order. That meant that you completed

deliveries to multiple customers from one restaurant and got paid £4 per drop for each. Obviously, this was a better system for us, but it really left the customer in the lurch. If you were the third person on a triple order, your food would have to spend, on average, about half an hour being bumped around in a backpack and going cold before it got to you.

If you ever had a problem, like a puncture or a crash, you could ring Deliveroo's call centre. One recurring issue was inadvertent calzone: if someone ordered a single pizza, it had a lot of space to bang about in your bag, and when climbing or descending a hill could easily get folded. You'd arrive and take the box out your backpack, only to find tomato sauce soaking through the cardboard. The call centre workers responded to this by reordering the pizza (at the company's expense) and telling you to offer the pizza to the customer. Sometimes, however, the call centre workers would tell you to give it to the homeless. I suspected that some call centre workers were going off script in an effort to help people out, or maybe the company just changed its tune in order to get some good publicity. Either way, I didn't struggle to find a homeless person to give it to. During almost every shift I worked in April, I passed a homeless encampment by St Peter's church. About ten people were living there in tents and shanties. There was a banner hung from the trees: 'This Land is Ours!' But by the end of the month, the camp had been cleared to make way for a temporary theatre venue.

All sorts of weird stuff could happen during a shift. One Saturday night, I was going down to the seafront to pick up some fish and chips, when a young guy, about 18 years old, leaned out the passenger window of a silver van that was driving slightly ahead of me. He looked straight at me and shouted: 'your mum's a fucking c***!' People think they can be rude to delivery workers just because you've got a big thermal backpack on. I really didn't like it when they did that, so I shouted straight back – 'your mum's a fucking c***!' We went back and forth a few times, then he got the driver of the van to change lanes, pull in front of me and slow right down. I overtook and went ahead to the traffic lights, about 10 metres farther on.

Now, these traffic lights are at a junction right in the centre of town, slap-bang between Brighton's two most famous landmarks, the pavilion and the pier. The city's central police station is about a minute's drive away, and there is CCTV everywhere. I thought the whole thing was over.

Then I heard the passenger door slam shut. The passenger walked up behind me and started shouting again. 'What did you say about my mum?' At this point I started to get a bit worried. He was clearly acting out. But I was angry, so I didn't do the sensible thing and de-escalate. Why should he have the right to scream in my face for no reason? So, rather than pointing out that he had started the whole mum thing, I just repeated what I'd said. He threatened to break the bottle of

cider he was drinking in my face. I called him a weirdo and, as I went to ride off, he tried to push me in front of a taxi. Fortunately, the driver saw it coming and slammed on his brakes. I just about stayed upright and cycled away, shaken. The lack of respect paid to delivery workers meant that people felt they could have a go at you without any consequences. On top of that, we were often working in the drinking hubs of the city on Friday and Saturday nights, on our own. It was a dangerous combination.

There were certain performance standards we were meant to reach during our shifts. Apparently, we were meant to accept 90 per cent of orders and deliver them within a certain time. I say 'apparently', because for some reason I never got the 'service level assessment' emails which gave me the stats on how fast I was delivering and what percentage of orders I accepted. Other workers got irregular updates on their position relative to the average, minimum and target speeds and rates. Failing to meet these standards could lead to your 'supplier agreement' contract being terminated immediately. Experienced workers sometimes refused orders during busy periods if the restaurant was too far away, in order to try and maximize their hourly wage, but that rarely amounted to 10 per cent of total orders. For slower riders, these emails could be a constant source of anxiety. We were all under time pressure, and it was hard to forget it.

Payment could be inaccurate and/or late; Deliveroo would sometimes pay riders for fewer orders than they had actually completed and would often do so a day or two after we were meant to be paid. Because, as 'independent contractors', we weren't on PAYE, payday wasn't set in stone any more. Instead of a payday, we had 'fee payments' which were received at the end of a 'fee cycle', just as if we were private companies. Only we didn't have the cash flow of small businesses, we had the cash flow of employees. The two didn't match. So, some workers would have to email and call to correct and chase up on payments in order to guarantee they could pay rent and put food on the table.

Over my time at Deliveroo, I got used to getting surge texts. What I hadn't fully understood when we were first introduced to surges during the on-boarding was that they were a fairly frequently used way for management to alter the piece rate in order to increase the labour available to the platform at short notice. Because there was no formal shift system, Deliveroo had to use payment incentives. Whenever you got the text, you'd immediately check the weather. Usually you'd make a calculation: was the weather that bad? I knew riders who didn't make that calculation, though. If it was a boost, they were working, end of.

The boosts had another strange effect. This meant we knew that a higher piece rate was possible – if they could afford to pay us £5 a drop during peak times, there was no clear reason

to reduce it to £4 during less busy times, when we would be doing fewer deliveries per hour. But we also knew that labour undersupply was forcing Deliveroo to increase wages, and that it might not last for ever.

In late 2016, just after I started, these surges were quite common. Probably a third of the shifts I did over that period were partly or fully covered by surge delivery rates. As a result, my wages were pretty high: I was going from drop to drop, never going back to the zone centre, always busy. I was earning an average of something like £12 an hour, before costs. But Deliveroo had already begun a strategy to reduce their labour costs and cover peak times without paying premium rates. This strategy was simple and brutal. In order to increase the number of riders available, they would recruit large numbers of students. The resulting labour oversupply didn't hurt them: if there were 300 orders to be done in an hour, they paid $300 \times £4$ in labour, regardless of whether those orders were done by 100 workers or 300 workers. In fact, if there was a large pool of available labour, their delivery times went down, because there were workers always ready for a new order, thereby improving their customer service. But, for the workers, that was the difference between £12 an hour and £4 an hour. In late 2016, new workers were starting every day. I was one of them, but for at least two months after I started work more and more people were signed up. This strategy,

and the changes it produced, would eventually lead to the first overt conflict in Brighton between workers and management.

During my first few shifts, I wanted to speak to other workers whenever I could. Because those early shifts were so busy, this mostly meant having quick chats in restaurant kitchens. These passing interactions were often not much more than exchanging names and a smile. Everyone was going drop-to-drop and wanted to make the most of it. When I was out on the road, I made an effort to smile and wave at other workers at traffic lights or when I passed them, and 90 per cent of the time they'd do the same. Over time, I found that midweek evening shifts were easier for me to fit into my life, even if they weren't always so busy. On these shifts, whenever the pace of work slowed down, a group of us would start assembling at the zone centre. At first, we talked about bikes – about chains, brakes, pedals, tyres, and gears. It was the one thing absolutely everyone at the cyclist zone centre had in common. Some people were bigger bike nerds than others, and they tended to dish out advice to those of us with less of a clue. Somebody helped me align my back brakes so that the brake blocks lasted longer, and I helped somebody else tighten their cables.

We weren't the kind of couriers who wore odd-shaped cycling caps and rode fixed gear bikes. All the previous examples of successful organizing I knew of, such as the IWGB courier branch, or those who organized with the Industrial Workers of

the World (IWW) in Chicago in the early 2000s, had relied on a subcultural courier community to create a sense of solidarity.³ Workers knew each other because they had all participated in these mad cross-city courier races, gone to the same pubs, used the same bike shops, and been part of a common social scene. But that wasn't the case for us. We were an undifferentiated mass of deskilled labour. Small groups of workers did have things in common, but it was rare you found something apart from bikes and working conditions you could all chat about. Trade unionists involved in the original London dispute told me that the groups which had started the strike there met outside of work in one of two places: either Gabber raves or Friday prayers. Gabber is a genre of dance music, originating in the working-class neighbourhoods around the container port of Rotterdam in the Netherlands in the 1990s. Describing it as 'aggressive' is an understatement. It's at least 180 beats per minute, and most people find that in order to enjoy it you need to consume large amounts of drugs. Not really the same vibe as Friday prayers at East London Mosque.

Gradually, over the course of a couple of shifts, I moved on to talking about work with the faces I recognized. I heard about why they were working for Deliveroo: the father who was working sixty-hour weeks, no matter how low his hourly rate went, because he was earning more than he would on Jobseekers allowance and he had to support his baby boy. The migrant worker who couldn't find other work because his

English wasn't good enough. The musician who was struggling to make a living on bar work alone. The student whose loan wouldn't cover his rent, let alone his food bills. The graduate who couldn't stand the manager in his old lowskill low-paid job. The 17-year-old who cycled 4 miles to Brighton before he even started his shift because he needed to be bringing in extra money and the Education Maintenance Allowance (a £30-a-week subsidy for college students from low-income families) had been cut during the first round of austerity in 2010. They were all keen to talk about why they did the job, how long they'd be doing it for, what they liked, and what they didn't.

Some had been working at Deliveroo since it started in Brighton. Back then, it had been an hourly rate of £7 plus £1 per delivery and relied on a more formal scheduling system. One worker told me about how the order volume was so low that he used to get himself put on the quiet midweek afternoon shifts and switch on his app whilst lying on his sofa watching TV. It wasn't like that anymore. The switch from an hourly rate with a per-drop bonus to a pure piece rate had infuriated everyone. Apparently, at the time, there had been some discussion of going on strike or joining a union, particularly when the workers saw what happened in London. But nothing had come of it, and as Deliveroo had refined their process, the cushy sofa-job had disappeared. The transition

from hourly wage to piece rate had led to a serious increase in the amount of work you had to do.

After a couple of months spent just talking to as many workers as possible, I began to understand that Deliveroo workers were already well organized. Stupidly, I'd bought the myth and believed we would be totally disconnected from each other, just atomized individuals scattered across the city. Even though the London strike had been evidence to the contrary, it hadn't sunk in. Now, however, I was coming to understand how wrong I was. Deliveroo workers had well-established channels for communication and organization already on the go below the surface. In person, these channels were the two zone centres. Groups of mopeds and cyclists knew each other well and would meet up there when it went quiet. The online channels were various WhatsApp and Facebook groups which had been set up well over a year ago by long-term Deliveroo workers in the city. Following a few conversations in person at the zone centre, I got added to them. The group chats consisted of workers from Brighton talking on a daily basis about their working conditions, whether it was busy or not, helping each other navigate Deliveroo's online processes, keeping track of when payday was, organizing five-a-side football games, giving advice on how to register as self-employed and work out their expenses/taxes, and cracking jokes. These networks were completely hidden to everyone but the workers, but they played an important social function.

If you needed an Allen key, they could fulfil a very practical function too. Sometimes, however, that practical function was altogether more serious.

In early 2017, a rider started messaging the chat. He was sitting by the side of the road, confused. He felt sick, his heart was racing, and he'd started to experience severe abdominal pain. He'd been working all day, and now he just couldn't go any farther. It was immediately clear something was badly wrong. Other riders started messaging him, asking whether he was okay, trying to help. Someone told him to share his location. A couple of workers cancelled the orders they were doing and headed straight for him. When they arrived, they realized he was freezing cold. He had been working for hours in sub-zero temperatures with only a couple of layers of cheap cotton clothes under his jacket. At the start of his shift he'd sweated a lot, soaked his clothes, and then become increasingly cold. They flagged down a taxi, paid for it to take him to hospital, and locked his bike up. Later, the rider messaged the chat again. He said thank you for the help. At the hospital, they'd said he was experiencing the first stages of hypothermia. The group chat had managed to get him help in a few minutes.

Sometimes these group chats had to function as a selfdefence mechanism for workers. For moped riders, bike theft was a real risk. For cyclists, it tended to be mugging that was the biggest worry. Either way, chats became a way to warn about

recent hotspots and potential threats. In Brighton, the situation got so bad that some moped riders started carrying improvised weapons in case anyone tried to jump them. I knew one worker who had a hammer with him at all times. At first, I just assumed he was being irrational – if someone was so determined to nick your moped that you had to defend yourself with a hammer, surely you should let it go? After all, losing a bike was better than getting stabbed. One evening, at the moped zone centre, I probed for more details. ‘If I lose the bike, I lose everything’, he said. The bike was on a hire-purchase agreement: if it was stolen, he’d lose the ability to work but still have monthly instalments to pay. Workers knew they couldn’t rely on the police. If they called to say a bike was getting nicked, a patrol car wouldn’t turn up for twenty minutes, if it turned up at all – by which time the bike was long gone. In most cases, once a bike was stolen, there was no chance of recovering it.

In summer 2017, London workers became the victims of a series of acid attacks. This brought home the grim reality that it wasn’t just the bikes at risk. Workers in London started refusing to work in certain zones after 8 p.m. At traffic lights, they kept their head on a swivel, watching for threats. In July, they organized a demonstration against acid attacks. Hundreds went to Parliament Square to demand safer working conditions. But they didn’t just demonstrate. Some riders took more direct action. Bike thieves weren’t given an easy time.

Riders wouldn't always call the police if they saw someone trying to get at another worker's bike. Sometimes they'd go after the thief themselves. I have seen video footage of five workers steaming out of a restaurant into a wannabe bike thief and kicking him up and down a London high street. These workers trusted each other implicitly when faced with a threat. Similarly, whenever an immigration raid was going down, workers would rapidly forward messages from group to group to prevent workers with questionable status getting caught up in it. The memory of the Byron Burger deportations went deep.

Over time, I gradually became integrated into the Deliveroo community. I would check the WhatsApp groups once a day at least, and when I waited at the zone centre there would usually be a few workers I knew. When I started the job, I'd felt alone. As I was charging around the city at night, stressed to the eyeballs, that isolation was pretty unpleasant. I had been hyper-aware that something could go wrong very easily, and that I wouldn't have any support if it did. But now I was starting to feel part of a community, one which could help me out if needs be. I'd found out that there was a significant underlying solidarity linking together a large portion of the workforce on a daily basis. It was this solidarity which we'd later rely on.

Notes

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Vad är gigekonomi?

Du kanske har stött på termen gigekonomi när appar som Uber, Foodora eller Tiptapp kommit på tal. Ordet gig kommer från musikbranchen, där musiker oftast saknar fast anställning och istället får ta ett jobb i taget, vilket kallas gig. Begreppet gigekonomi syftar ofta till att beskriva en rad företag vars affärsmodell går ut på att anlita folk på uppdragsbasis med obefintliga eller osäkra anställningar. Dessa anställningsformer marknadsförs ofta som fördelaktiga på grund av deras ”flexibilitet” jämfört med fasta anställningar.

Gigekonomin kallas ibland missvisande för delningsekonomi, som om förare för Uber delar med sig av sin bil eller att AirBnBs användare delar med sig av sina bostäder. Men ”delningsekonomi” har egentligen ingenting med delning att göra. Att till exempel leverera någon annans mat, på sin egen cykel, åt ett företag, är inte att ”dela med sig” – det kallas arbete, och bör ses som så. Företagen i gigekonomin delar nämligen inte med sig av någonting.

Vi får höra att gigekonomin är framtidens moderna jobb, men vad är det egentligen vi förväntas ställa upp på? Den påstådda flexibiliteten innebär en stor otrygghet och argumenten för gigekonomin bygger på felaktigheter och myter. Gigwatch vill granska premisserna för gigekonomin, och vem som egentligen gynnas av den.

Här är några gemensamma nämnare för apparna. Känner du igen dig i några eller flera av dessa punkter? Då arbetar du antagligen inom gigekonomin.

- **Du tilldelas arbete genom en app**

Det finns ingen fast arbetsplats, och du har sällan direkt kontakt med företaget eller dina kollegor. Istället kopplar företaget ihop dig med en privatperson eller ett annat företag i appen som beställer en tjänst av dig, till exempel en matleverans eller flytt av en möbel.

- **Du har inga garanterade timmar**

Eftersom lön betalas ut per utfört uppdrag finns det inte någon garanti på hur många timmar du kommer att arbeta under en vecka eller månad. Det finns sällan någon fast timlön.

- **Du är inte anställd av företaget du jobbar för**

Företagen räknar ofta de som arbetar för dem som egenanställda. På så sätt slipper de förhålla sig till arbetslagstiftning som gäller för en vanlig arbetsgivare, och kringgår ansvar för vad som händer på jobbet. Därmed finns det varken sjukdagar eller någon semesterersättning. I vissa fall anställer gigföretagen de som arbetar för dem, men det sker sällan direkt utan ofta genom bemanningsföretag som underleverantörer. Därmed räknas de fortfarande inte formellt som anställda av företaget, utan har en liknande situation som andra gigjobbare.

- **Du behöver stå för dina egna redskap**

Många gigföretag kräver att du har tillgång till dina egna redskap, så de slipper tillhandahålla sådant. För att kunna jobba som Uberförare måste du ha tillgång till en egen bil, och om du jobbar för Foodora måste du använda din egen cykel. Du själv står för underhåll, reparation och service.

- **Arbetet marknadsförs som ett extrajobb**

Typiskt för företag inom gigekonomin är att de vill framställa sig själva som extraknäck, för de som vill tjäna en extra slant vid sidan av annat jobb eller studier. Faktum är dock att väldigt många blir tvungna att livnära sig på dessa jobb. Snarare än extrajobb är det arbeten som ungdomar och nyanlända måste ta för att kunna överleva då de inte kan få en fast anställning.

- **Flexibilitetsmyten**

Flexibilitet och effektivitet är en stor del av gigföretagens marknadsföring. Om du jobbar inom gigekonomin bör du vara beredd på att få tillbringa en stor del av din tid i ”standbyläge” medan du väntar på chans att få jobb. I praktiken kan detta standbyläge ses som en form av obetald arbetstid.

Gigföretagen har ingen skyldighet att tillhandahålla en enda betald arbetstimme för sina arbetare, eftersom de inte har någon officiell status som arbetsgivare. Arbetet sker dessutom ett gig i taget, utan någon vidare garanti för framtida arbete. De arbetande förväntas på olika sätt konkurrera om arbetspassen, genom att svara snabbast eller på olika sätt utmärka sig för uppdragsköparen (exempelvis genom att erbjuda lägst lön).

Gigifiering och falska egenanställningar

Listan är så klart inte fullständig, och begreppet gigekonomi kan göras mycket bredare än så. Det finns ingen tydlig linje för var gränsen går för vad som räknas som ett gigarbete. Gigekonomin syftar inte bara till att beskriva existerande

företag, anställningsformer och arbetsmodeller, utan beskriver också en större tendens i samhället där allt fler sektorer och jobb *gigifieras*.

Det är alltså svårt och sällan relevant att dividera i exakt vilka arbeten som kvalar in som gigarbeten. I gränslandet mellan gigekonomi och fasta anställningar finner vi även anställningsformer såsom timvikarier och anställda vid bemanningsföretag. Oavsett om du jobbar som timvikarie eller som cykelbud så är du bekant med att behöva vara tillgänglig hela tiden, att sitta och vänta på att tacka ja till pass som du i slutändan inte vet om du kommer få. I praktiken har dessa arbeten mer gemensamt än vad som skiljer dem åt.

Vi har myntat ett begrepp som vi tycker ringar in mycket av problematiken – vi kallar det *falska egenanställningar*. Vi definierar det som ”*att uppenbarligen jobba för ett företag men ändå inte räknas som anställd*”. Begreppet falskt egenanställd kan ses från två perspektiv. Det handlar dels om att det inte räknas som en regelrätt anställning, trots att man lyder under och arbetar för ett företag. Samtidigt är det också en falsk egenanställning i bemärkelsen att det finns väldigt lite insyn i arbetsvillkor, löner och hur många det egentligen är som arbetar inom dessa områden. Ingen information finns tillgänglig för allmänheten, och de uppgifter som framkommer i media om ersättning och arbetsvillkor kan variera kraftigt. Den avsaknad av offentlighetsprincip som redan råder inom näringslivet lyser ännu starkare med sin frånvaro.

För att få oss som rekryteras till gigekonomin att finna oss i att arbeta utan rätt till schema, inkomst eller skydd när vi blir sjuka eller skadade så framhävs ofta att det ändå bara är

tillfälliga jobb, extraknäck som man bara har när man är ung och som hjälper en att bygga upp sitt CV. Det finns dock ingenting som pekar mot att det här är tillfälliga jobb. Vi menar att dessa arbetsformer snarare cementerar utsatthet än tar folk ur den.

Gigekonomin är här för att stanna och breder ut sig till fler och fler branscher. Det är en utveckling som innefattar hela arbetsmarknaden. Den innebär å ena sidan att nya gigföretag tar över marknaden men även att företag som tidigare erbjudit traditionella anställningar väljer att använda sig av liknande affärsmodeller och anställningsformer. Jobbar du inte redan inom gigekonomin finns risken att du inom en snar framtid kommer att göra det, om vi inte gör något åt det nu.

I länder som USA, Storbritannien och Tyskland ifrågasätter i dag allt fler människor hur positiv den upphajpade gigekonomin egentligen är. Krav börjar ställas på garanterade timmar, större trygghet och att bli erkänd som anställd. I Sverige är det betydligt mer tyst. Det vill vi ändra på.

En marxistisk analys av arbete

Grundtanken i marxismen bottenar i vad som kallas för materialism. Ordets innebörd är i det här fallet inte "besatt av prylar", utan materialism är motsatsen till idealism. Idealism är en filosofisk ståndpunkt som innebär att du tror att det är primärt åsikter, meningsutbyten, samtal och idéer som ligger till grund för utvecklingen av samhället och politiken. De flesta liberaler är i någon mån idealister, därav deras besatthet av att ha debatter och samtal om allt mellan himmel och jord var femtonde minut. Enligt en idealistisk syn på politik går det till ungefär såhär: jag tycker någonting, lyckas sprida den åsikten, alla håller med mig och sedan förändras samhället.

Marxister är alltså tvärtom materialister och menar att samhällsutvecklingen drivs framåt av materiella faktorer, alltså organisering, vem som har makten över ekonomin, hur resurserna fördelas och vem som fördelar resurserna. Materialister ser de idealistiska sakerna såsom debatter, ideologier, samtal och normer som symptom på de materiella förhållandena, inte tvärtom.

Marxister brukar prata om detta som bas och överbyggnad. Basen, det materiella, ligger till grund för överbyggnaden, det idealistiska. Som exempel på detta kan vi ta en person som först blir miljonär och som efter sin klassresa börjar rösta på moderaterna. Även utan en marxistisk analys så förstår vi kanske att personen har anpassat sina åsikter efter sin nya status i samhället. Förmögenheten är i detta fall basen och de moderata åsikterna är överbyggnaden. Anledningen till att personen blev moderat är inte att hen blev övertygad av en debattör (även om hen själv hävdar och t.om. tror det), utan det egentliga skälet är snarare att hen upplevde sig ha en annan position i samhället efter att ha tjänat sin förmögenhet.

Klass

Men vad är detta materiella? När marxister pratar om materiell makt så pratar de, som i exemplet ovan, oftast om ekonomisk makt. Så hur, om vi sätter på oss våra materialist-glasögon, förstår vi vad ekonomi och makt är? Hur hänger de ihop? Vi kan börja med att kolla på en helt vanlig arbetsplats, ett callcenter till exempel.

Vi har folk som jobbar på tim/prov/sms-anställningar, de som har lägst rang så att säga. De har oftast sämst lön på hela företaget, de har ingen anställningstrygghet och de har ingen makt över sin arbetsplats. Gillar de inte läget så kan de i princip dra. Högst upp i företaget däremot, på toppen, har vi företagets ägare. De har fasta anställningar, de har oftast väldigt bra betalt, de har makt över sin egen och andras arbetsmiljö. De bestämmer allt från vilka som anställs till vad företaget överhuvudtaget ska ägna sig åt. Hur förklarar vi att en så stor del av samhället är ordnat på detta rent ut sagt odemokratiska sätt?

Normkritik är ju bra och legitimt i många sammanhang, men här finner vi att det är otillräckligt. Vill vi förklara det här tillståndet behöver vi en annan analys. Visst, normer kan säkert hjälpa till att förklara varför vissa individer hamnar i timanställningspoolen och varför andra blir ägare, men de förklarar inte maktförhållandet mellan dessa grupper i sig. Angela Davis sa en gång *Being radical simply means grasping things at the root* och det är just vad marxism handlar om, att identifiera och angripa själva ojämlikheten.

Rötterna Davis pratar om är oftast materiella. Så vilka är de materiella rötterna, eller orsakerna, till att arbetsplatsen är uppdelad på det här sättet? För att komma vidare behöver vi förstå de här olika gruppernas materiella ställning i samhället, alltså deras ställning i den kapitalistiska produktionen och deras beroende av varandra. Vi kan också kalla dessa grupper för klasser.

Vi har ju ett ekonomiskt system som heter kapitalism och en av de viktigaste ingredienserna i detta ekonomiska system är en så kallad "fri marknad" där vi utbyter varor och tjänster med hjälp av pengar. Arbetsmarknaden fungerar på precis samma sätt! Fast istället för att sälja en vara för att få pengar så säljer många sin arbetskraft. Det här är den stora skillnaden mellan de två grupperna i vårt imaginära callcenter ligger: de förstnämnda säljer sin arbetskraft för att kunna köpa mat och betala hyra, de andra (ägarna) köper arbetarnas arbetskraft för att skapa en tjänst eller en vara. Varför behöver arbetarna då ägarna? Kan de inte skapa den här tjänsten/varan på helt egen hand? Nej, för ägarna har ju det som behövs för att driva callcentret: de har telefonerna, datorerna, en växel med vilken de kan vidarekoppla stora mängder samtal, kontor och så vidare. De har helt enkelt produktionsmedlen - de materiella förutsättningarna som behövs för att arbetet ska gå att utföra. Arbetarna har inte råd att skaffa de här resurserna för egen del. På så sätt så kontrollerar ägarna arbetsplatsen och produktionen av varan/tjänsten och arbetare tvingas söka upp ägarnas arbetsplatser för att sälja sitt arbete och få lön.

De som tvingas sälja sitt arbete till ägarna är arbetarklassen. I och med att ägarna sitter på makten över företaget så kan de helt enkelt bestämma över det ekonomiska överskottet (alltså de pengar företaget tjänat) och vad detta överskott ska gå till utan att arbetarna har något att säga till om överhuvudtaget. Det brukar av naturliga skäl bli så att ägarna får den största delen av kakan.

Värde och pengar

Vi gick nyligen igenom en hur en arbetsplats brukar se ut och kunde redan då se ett tydligt maktförhållande mellan ägare och arbetare. Men många skulle nog ändå vara beredda att acceptera den ordningen. Det krävs ju bara att företagets ägare inte är hemska människor och ser till att betala ut bra löner och erbjuda bra förmåner, right? Om arbetsmarknaden fungerar som den vanliga marknaden så borde arbetarna kunna "rösta med fötterna" och bara gå till ett annat företag som erbjuder dem bättre arbetsvillkor: hitta en bättre arbetsköpare helt enkelt! Konkurrens om arbetarna! Problemet såhär långt tycks ju helt enkelt vara att makt korrumpierar och att ägarna måste lära sig fördela resurser på ett sjysst sätt.

Men så enkelt är det inte. Även om ägarna skulle vilja driva sina kommersiella företag som om de vore mysiga hippiekollektiv så går det helt enkelt inte. Det beror inte på att ägarna och överklassen är dåliga människor (även om de kanske ofta är det) utan det beror på att utsugningen av arbetarna är inbyggt det kapitalistiska systemet. Detta ser vi först i nästa steg av vår analys.

Vi måste nu fråga oss hur värdet i ekonomin skapas och framförallt vem som tillför värde till ekonomin. Värde är i marxistisk teori inte samma sak som priset på varan/tjänsten. Priset på en produkt eller tjänst beror ju såklart på saker som utbud och efterfrågan på marknaden men prisets utgångspunkt är ändå alltid värdet av varan/tjänsten. Även innan kapitalismen så hade ju saker ett värde för användaren och det är detta värde som priset i kronor och ören baseras på. Värdet är pengarnas materiella grund.

Vad är då detta värde? Vad är det som gör att en vara/tjänst överhuvudtaget är värd någonting? I en kapitalistisk ekonomi så är värdet inte lika med hur användbar varan/tjänsten är, utan värdet på en vara bestäms av mängden arbete som krävs för att tillverka den. Då kanske ni säger Men andra faktorer då,

som råvaror och produktionsmedel? De sakerna kostar ju för ägarna att köpa in och måste väl påverka priset?

Men dessa råvaror och produktionsmedel kommer ju någonstans ifrån från början: de är också skapade av arbete, och priset ägarna köpte in dessa saker för var i sin tur baserat på värdet av arbetet som gick åt för att skapa dessa. Produktionsmedel och råvaror är, rent värdemässigt, samlat arbete.

Alltså: Ekonomins egentliga värde skapas av arbete, sedan översätts detta värde till pengar. Det låter kanske krångligt, men det här är egentligen inte en särskilt märklig tanke: att en H&M-tröja tillverkad av ett underbetalt barn i ett fattigt land har ju uppenbarligen ett samband med att den också är billigare än en skraddarsydd och designad tröja från ett "finare" klädesmärke, det greppar nog de flesta. Företag letar hela tiden efter billigaste möjliga arbetskraft, de flyttar sina fabriker till fattigare länder med svaga fackföreningar, allt för att de då kan skapa mer värde när arbetet är billigare. Det skulle gå att skriva hur mycket som helst om detta, men jag nöjer mig här.

Motsatta intressen och klasskamp

Det är här det blir intressant. Om alla företag betalade ut i lön den summa som motsvarade värdet på varan, alltså det egentliga värdet på arbetet som de anställda utför, då skulle ju företaget gå med plus/minus 0 i vinst. Men företag måste ju göra vinst för att överleva då de tävlar mot andra företag som ständigt hotar att ta deras plats på marknaden. Ett självförsörjande företag kan alltså inte gå med 0 vinst för då blir det till slut utkonkurrerat av andra företag. Företaget måste alltså ta en del av det värde arbetarna skapar och dela ut till ägarna. Ett företag som vill göra vinst kan alltså inte betala arbetarna vad deras arbete egentligen är värt. Systemet tillåter det helt enkelt inte. Hela länder tävlar ju mot varandra i sin strävan efter högsta möjliga tillväxt.

Dessutom, ju mer ägarna lyckas sänka eller hålla tillbaka arbetarnas löner, desto mer kan de plocka ut i vinst till sig själva och sitt företag. För ägarna är det rationellt att försöka hålla tillbaka arbetarnas löner men också deras arbetsförmåner! Att kunna avskeda någon och direkt anställa någon annan som jobbar billigare eller effektivare är gynnsamt för företaget. Genom att ställa arbetarna som jobbar på företaget mot varandra och låta dem konkurrera om t.ex. arbetspass (den som är mest effektiv på callcentret får fler pass och liknande) så kan ägarna få färre arbetare att göra mer arbete och på så sätt betala ut mindre lön vilket ger högre vinst och bättre ställning i konkurrensen.

Även "snälla" ägare kan tvingas göra de här sakerna för att rädda sitt företag från konkurs och det är därför menlöst att moralisera över enskilda företagare som behandlar sina arbetare som skit. Felet är inbyggt i systemet, inte i enskilda ägares personliga karaktär. Om vi ska anklaga någon så borde vi anklaga de som förespråkar och försvarar kapitalismen överhuvudtaget.

Dessutom så ska ägarna ha lön och oftast mycket högre lön än arbetarna. Men vilket reellt värde tillför ägarna egentligen till ekonomin? Inget. Det är klart, en chef kanske jobbar jättehårt och sysslar med massa administration och dylikt: hen kanske köper, säljer och ser till att reparera produktionsmedlen, anställer nya arbetare och fixar med löner och ekonomi men ägaren tillför ju inget konkret värde till företagets ekonomi i form av skapande arbete. Så vart kommer ägarnas privata pengar egentligen ifrån? Än en gång, från arbetet som deras anställda utför. Att arbeta åt någon annan innebär verkligen inte bara att vara anställd, du arbetar verkligen för någon annan som omvandlar din tid och arbetskraft till egna pengar. Nu slås vi följaktligen av insikten: arbete är inom kapitalismen en form av utsugning.

Arbetarna å sin sida har ju såklart ett motsatt intresse, intresset av att inte bli utsugna. Arbetare vill naturligtvis ha saker som anställningstrygghet, en skälig lön, sjukförsäkring, många raster, mm. Men som vi just gick igenom, alla dessa förmåner skadar företagets vinstmarginal och ägarna kommer därför att motarbeta dessa rättigheter. Det finns alltså en motsättning mellan ägarnas och arbetarnas intressen, det den ena klassen vinner på förlorar den andra på. Dragkampen mellan dessa olika intressen är vad som kallas klasskamp.

Denna syn på värde och arbete går dessutom tvärtemot den borgerliga föreställningen om att det är entreprenörer och företag som skapar arbete. Enligt marxistisk teori är det precis tvärtom. Arbetsgivare kallas ofta av marxister arbetsköpare då de inte ger eller skapar något arbete, de köper och organiserar arbete utan att tillföra värde till ekonomin. Arbetarklassen skulle alltså egentligen inte behöva ägarna och företagen om det inte vore så att de råkade sitta på makten i det här ekonomiska systemet. Ägare och företag behövs egentligen inte för att skapa arbete, hur mycket de än vill att vi ska tro det.

Arbete och kapital

Jag tänkte inleda inlägget genom att reda ut ett vanligt missförstånd, alltså att klass skulle handla om inkomst, det vill säga att den som tjänar mycket per definition skulle vara överklass och den som tjänar mindre arbetarklass. Detta är alltså felaktigt. Visst, överklassen, de vi benämnt som "ägarna" fram tills nu, har nästan alltid högre lön än arbetarklassen men det som definierar klasserna är deras ställning i produktionen. Arbetarklassen tvingas sälja sin arbetskraft, det är därför de kallas för just arbetarklass. Denna förståelse av klass hjälper oss också att se de riktiga motsättningarna i samhället: klasskampen står mellan arbete och kapital, alltså mellan arbetarklassen som säljer sin arbetskraft och överklassen som sitter på den ekonomiska makten: kapitalet (överklassen är alltså som ni kanske förstått kapitalister).

För att arbetarklassen ska kunna förbättra sin position och få fler rättigheter såsom högre lön och bättre bostäder så är det kapitalisterna de måste angripa, inte varandra. Att arbetare inte blir ännu mer exploaterade är mycket tack vare fackföreningar och liknande sammanslutningar. När arbetare samarbetar och använder sin enda styrka, att de är många, så kan de ställa krav på överklassen och företagen.

Om du till exempel är arbetslös så är det inte de som råkar ha ett arbete som står i vägen för ditt välstånd, det är överklassen. Att arbetare angriper varandra och därmed inte organiserar sig mot överklassen är något som överklassen tjänar på. Det är bland annat därför till exempel rasism och sexism upprätthålls och förstärks i en kapitalistisk världsordning: de här strukturerna hjälper till att rättfärdiga de underliggande orättvisorna. Företag kan betala rasifierade personer och kvinnor mindre lön för deras arbete på grund av den strukturella rasismen och sexismen. Kvinnor kan dessutom tvingas utföra en stor mängd obetalt (men för kapitalismen viktigt) arbete i hemmet på grund av patriarkatet.

Kriser och motsättningar i kapitalismen

Slutligen tänkte jag nu redogöra för varför kapitalismen är dödsdömd. Jo, men det är sant! Vi backar bandet, tillbaka till kapitalisternas vinstjakt: Vinsten måste bli större och större för varje dag som går vilket innebär att mer faktiskt värde måste tillföras till ekonomin. Pengar har inget värde i sig, trycker vi upp mer så blir det inflation och om vi genom spekulation och belåning skapar pengar som inte backas upp av faktiskt värde så bildas en finansbubbla som riskerar att utlösa en kris. Ägarna/kapitalisterna har alltså följande alternativ för att tillväxten ska kunna fortsätta:

1. Sänka arbetarnas löner så att företagen kan betala mindre för det värde som skapas genom arbetet och på så vis öka vinsten till sig själva.

2. Höja priserna på varorna och tjänsterna de tillhandahåller eller få människor att konsumera mer.

3. Öka arbetets effektivitet med hjälp av bättre teknik eller omorganisation, så kallad produktivitetssökning, vilket gör att mer värde kan skapas med samma eller mindre arbetsinsats (som när ägarna lät callcenterarbetarna konkurrera om arbetstillfällena).

4. Införliva nya områden i ekonomin som tidigare varit gratis och få folk att betala för dessa. Detta sker genom privatiseringar. (Tänk dig att regeringen t.ex. skulle privatisera vägarna så att företag skulle kunna ta ut vägtullar av de som körde på dessa.) Exploateringar av tidigare skyddade naturresurser kan även räknas in här.

5. Se till att fler människor inkluderas i den kapitalistiska ekonomin (gärna lågavlönade) så att fler arbetar och skapar värde som kan bli till vinst, alltså industrialisering av icke-industrialiserade länder.

Om vi nu ser på dessa punkter så upptäcker vi snabbt att det finns en stor motsättning. Punkt 3 går inte att göra i all oändlighet, inte heller punkt 4 då det bara går att sälja vår välfärd en gång och punkt 5 blir också helt uttömd efter att hela världen industrialiserats. Då återstår bara punkt 1 och 2. Företagen vill att arbetarna ska tjäna så lite som möjligt samtidigt som de vill att arbetarna ska konsumera och betala så mycket som det bara går. För att företagen ska göra vinst måste lönerna alltså ständigt sänkas samtidigt som folk bara köper mer och mer. Problemet här är självklart att människor till slut inte kommer ha råd att köpa varorna som företagen producerar, eller i alla fall inte i den takt eller till de priser som krävs för att företagen ska gå med vinst. Detta utlöser en kris i kapitalismen, mer specifikt en överproduktionskris.

Detta är inte direkt science fiction då kriser, av just de anledningar jag tagit upp, är återkommande och oundvikliga inslag i kapitalismen. Kriser har vi sett med jämna mellanrum genom hela 1900-talet och de har lösts på lite olika sätt: genom att krossa fackföreningar och försämra arbetarnas villkor, genom privatiseringar och utförsäljningar och genom belåning och krediter. Lösningen ligger i att kapitalisterna snabbt måste hitta en ny källa till värde för att kunna återuppta tillväxten. Men även om kapitalismen bevisligen har klarat av kriser tidigare så kvarstår de grundläggande motsättningarna som skapar kriserna. Det är till och med felaktigt att säga att kapitalismen löser sina kriser, den skjuter snarare sina problem framför sig.

Om vi tar oss ur en kris genom att sänka folks löner för att ge företagen mer vinst så är det fortfarande bara en tillfällig åtgärd, för företagets vinst måste ju fortsätta att öka även efter detta! Kriserna kommer alltså att återkomma om och om igen och slutligen så når vi en kris som inte kommer gå att lösa. Detta kommer innebära slutet på vårt nuvarande ekonomiska system, förmodligen under kaosartade former och i samband med en ekologisk katastrof (se punkt 4).

Who cares in the gig economy?

On-demand models are changing domestic work

By Alexandra Mateescu

“Doers” and domestic workers

Like many on-demand companies, Handy, an app that sends a housecleaner to your door at the tap of a phone screen, relies on a workforce of independent contractors. Takarah, a black woman in her thirties who lives in Harlem, began relying on the app full-time to find gigs after the cleaning company that was her main source of income suddenly, and without warning, stopped giving her hours. I interviewed Takarah (a pseudonym) as part of Data & Society’s ongoing [research](#) on the gig economy. While she liked that the Handy app gave her time flexibility to more easily care for her young daughter, she found many of Handy’s rules to be routinely stressful.

When a client is absent or non-responsive when a cleaner shows up, Handy mandates that its cleaners wait in the immediate vicinity (tracked by phone geolocation) of the client’s home for a full thirty minutes before Handy will compensate them for a cancellation. Takarah told me that Handy’s wait policy meant standing for half an hour on a sidewalk with a cartful of cleaning gear, sometimes in harsh

winter weather. But she also found the experience particularly uncomfortable because, she added, as a black woman, she “stood out” as she waited outside the homes of her wealthy, usually white clients in neighborhoods like the Upper East Side:

“I felt like I was making other people uncomfortable because I was there, and they didn’t know why I was there.”

Sometimes, she added, the looks she got from passersby prompted her to explain her presence, assuring them that she was a housekeeper waiting to be let in. Occasionally, she preferred to cut her losses and leave before the half hour was up, even though it meant time wasted and lost pay for the client’s error.

Handy, which launched in 2012 and now operates in 30 cities throughout the U.S., is a company that, together with online caregiving marketplaces like Care.com and UrbanSitter, has entered an industry, domestic work, with a heavily skewed demographic: 95% of housecleaners, nannies, and caregivers are [women](#), over half of whom are women of color and, in [states like New York](#), nearly 40% of whom are non-naturalized immigrants.

Recently, a series of ads put out by Fiverr, an online gig marketplace, drew [public ire](#) for brazenly laying out what critics perceive as the race to the bottom pushing workers in the gig economy towards ever more dismal working conditions, in exchange for mostly symbolic rewards. One ad shows a close-up shot of a young white woman gazing wearily outward, lidded eyes connecting with the equally tired

commuters that face the ad in the packed trains of cities like New York. Overlaid is the tagline: “You eat a coffee for lunch. You follow through on your follow through. Sleep deprivation is your drug of choice. You might be a doer.” But the lighting is glamorous, evoking fashion photography. Her hair has been tousled into a semblance of disheveled. Her tired gaze doubles as the jaded expression of a cover model.

As Caroline Jack [points out](#), stories about what on-demand platform companies do, both as business ventures and as drivers of cultural transformation, play a role in binding together these disparate industries and forms of labor: cheap, convenient, and fast services made possible through the empowerment of entrepreneurial, independent contract workers who benefit from the scaling of these industries via digital platforms.

Women who do housekeeping or care work, though, are generally not the people placed at the forefront of these narratives. And they’re not placed at the forefront of the critiques either:

Much of the fascination value of the gig economy as a phenomenon is in the imagined figure of the *downwardly mobile*, middle-class (often white) person who seems to have unfortunately “dropped” into the labor pool of the service industry and started treading water.

Rather, it is usually the “doers” of the Fiverr ads, who are “[doing what they love](#)” who become the subject of analysis and think pieces. The riskiness and caffeine-driven frenzy that

Fiverr's ad takes for granted is glamorized in a way intended to signal a status more akin to that of a professional, creative class freelancer than that of a housecleaner or caregiver — that is, labor that has traditionally been devalued and treated as “unskilled” and low-status by society. This has little to do with actual skill or value, and very much to do with race, gender, and history.

Context and the need for ethnography

The specificities and histories of different industries matter, because they mean the experiences of gig workers in one sector can't be substituted with those in another. And they matter because they shape our society's relative measures for understanding what “fair” and “good” work looks like — and who “deserves” better. While glamour is the consolation prize offered to the newly precarious, companies bringing on-demand services into historically low-wage, low-status work may be banking on an advantage of low expectations.

Discourses about the gig economy often emerge from the generative gap between oversold promises and patchier realities. In some places, that gap is narrower, and on-demand businesses may be beginning to produce or reinforce existing inequalities across workers within a given industry. Ethnographic approaches are well-equipped to surface these changes.

Data & Society is currently working on a [project](#) that looks at how domestic workers experience their work under increasingly technologically mediated conditions, and how

they weigh decisions about these platforms. Currently, there is little existing ethnographic research on on-demand domestic work, whether for caregiving or housekeeping. One recent [report](#) by the Overseas Development Institute uses the South African context as a case study for the “Uberization” of domestic work. Based in interviews with workers themselves, the study found that on-demand domestic work models have not necessarily been empowering for the women who use them. On the one hand, the research found, work through mobile apps enabled workers to generate documentation of time spent and money earned in an industry where wage theft is common. But on the other hand, the on-demand apps merely reinforced many existing power relations such as racial discrimination. Apps provided only limited autonomy and flexibility to workers and created bigger hurdles for domestic workers with less technological literacy and access.

In our field research conducting interviews with domestic workers within the U.S., we’ve begun to see similarly conflicted dynamics. Our work also builds on that of Data & Society researcher Alex Rosenblat’s [past three years](#) of field research on Uber drivers, finding that workers in the ride-hailing sector [vary widely in their motivations](#) for working in the gig economy.

As on-demand companies like Handy and online marketplaces like Care.com enter the space of domestic work, a range of questions emerge: what are the [risks and challenges](#) of signing up for platform-based work as an immigrant? As a non-native English speaker? How are experiences of work different for individuals with strong professional identities as caregivers or

housekeepers, versus more casual workers who may also be finding other kinds of work via Postmates or Uber?

Domestic work in the United States is already skewed against certain workers: a [2012 survey](#) of U.S. domestic workers conducted by the National Domestic Workers Alliance found that black and Latina domestic workers around the country are paid less than their white counterparts. But there are also important, less quantifiable dimensions beyond just aspects like pay or benefits that matter to people in their work — like dignity, well-being, and respect. Takarah’s frustrations with being pushed into uncomfortable and difficult situations by an app’s hard rules need to be accounted for in thinking about the consequences of technological transformations of labor. Where seemingly “external” conditions of racial and class inequalities come into play, on-demand platforms are not neutral parties in meaning-making.

Is a babysitter a gig worker?

While we puzzle over what counts as part of the gig economy, domestic workers have long been fighting to be seen as part of the economy at all. Domestic work entails a wide range of working arrangements, legal/classification statuses, and often informally-designated employment relationships. Often, though, they are simply “off the books,” in which case we know far less about their work arrangements or even how many of them there are.

What domestic work does share with the wider gig economy is flexibility, precarious access to work and hours, and little

regulation of working arrangements. Ai-jen Poo, the director of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, [has pointed out](#) that domestic workers are “the original gig economy workers,” in particular because they “have experienced its dynamics, struggled with its challenges, and most importantly found some solutions to survive as a vulnerable workforce.” Housecleaners, moreover, have long been fighting labor battles in a layered terrain of third parties deferring responsibility for workers’ rights and well-being. From Harvard’s recent [efforts to deflect ownership](#) of a DoubleTree by Hilton hotel’s union-seeking housekeeping staff, to workspace startup WeWork’s conflict with its cleaning staff. In 2015, WeWork’s third-party cleaning company [fired all its workers](#) when they tried to unionize, and came upon the “solution” to directly hire a new staff of cleaners. WeWork then refused to re-hire its union-seeking and now jobless former cleaners, despite their pleas to get their jobs back. Domestic work may be starting to look even more like the rest of the gig economy, or vice versa.

And yet, this sector, in particular caregiving work, is often ignored in mainstream conversations about the gig economy. Part of this is because on-demand companies like Handy or online marketplaces like Care.com project a “softer” image of the gig economy. Lauren Mansell, the CEO of on-demand babysitting app Hello Sitter, [explicitly distanced](#) her startup from the “bad connotations” of companies like Uber — presumably not only its reputation for evading regulation, but also its machismo-laden rhetoric and aesthetics of risk-taking entrepreneurship. Housecleaners and babysitters are not being courted with the promises of fervid independence that Uber pitches to its “driver-partners” or Fiverr to its “doers.”

The invisibility of gendered gig work

Traditionally a part of the “gray” economy, domestic work has often been characterized as “invisible” labor. That invisibility is also being reproduced in how we study and understand how work is changing. For one, conversations about the gig economy have not paid much attention to [race, gender, and class dynamics](#), which are incredibly salient in this sector. Moreover, domestic work itself resists visibility to platforms through quantification or tracking in ways typical to other on-demand business models. Additionally, researchers have limited access to what goes on behind the closed doors of the private home that doubles as a workplace for many people.

The first point is partly attributable to the fact that Uber as a company has become a symbol of the gig economy as a whole, and its [86% male workforce](#) is becoming a stand-in for the rest of gig workers’ experiences. By contrast, a 2016 [report](#) on “Gig Work, Online Selling and Home Sharing” put out by Pew Research found that women make up 55% of gig workers. When discussions of gender and labor *do* enter the picture, it is online selling platform Etsy, with a perfectly flipped gender balance ([86% female seller base](#)), or white collar freelance work that is the go-to representative for women’s experiences — sometimes accompanied by [declarations](#) that “flexible work is the future of feminism.” But this is hardly helpful for understanding the experiences of women doing traditionally low-wage, “pink collar” work, particularly since the women doing the work are less likely to be white.

Finally, domestic work itself is just not amenable to the same kinds of surveillance as Uber or Postmates. The ways that Uber leverages its technologies to indirectly manage, sort, and control an otherwise “independent” driver population do not work so well with “soft skills” that to a large extent resist quantification and algorithmic control. While emotional labor (such as empathetic conversation), the staple of female-dominated service work, may help an Uber driver get a five-star rating, it isn’t intrinsic to the work in the same way as it is in intimate care. Handy can and does use geolocation to monitor when its workers arrive and leave a client’s home, but scrubbing a stovetop (or looking after a toddler) is too small a gesture for the planetary gaze of satellites.

Yet despite these limitations, the market for in-home care services is moving onto online labor marketplaces like Care.com, UrbanSitter, and SitterCity. Care.com, the largest of the three, provides both care and housekeeping services and boasts more than 24 million memberships across the globe. These larger companies are also branching out to offer more directly on-demand options: Care.com, for example, has recently launched its [Care@Work app](#) for employees of Care.com’s corporate clients, which allows employees to “find, book and manage family care needs as they arise on a 24/7 basis.” SitterCity likewise offers an on-demand app called Chime, and various babysitting apps like Sittr are becoming more common. On-demand elder care is likewise [becoming a reality](#). Housecleaners, if they are not working under a traditional employer or running their own business, often use a combination of on-demand apps like Handy, platforms like TaskRabbit or Care.com, and online job boards like Craigslist.

Beyond being case studies on gig work, these trends need to be thought about seriously because despite talk of automation, many of the jobs of the future are those that involve [“humans looking after humans.”](#)

The visibility of gendered gig work

The specificities of domestic work as an industry underscore the fact that generalizations about the gig economy and its relation to the “future” of work are limited in their usefulness. We need more research on how people are experiencing changes to employment *on the ground*. A good example of this need is the often-ambivalent relationship that people doing domestic work have with different kinds of technology-enabled visibility.

While companies like Uber have become known for evading labor regulation through worker misclassification, platforms for caregiving and housekeeping are doing the normative and legal work of providing payroll software, online templates for nanny contracts, performance evaluation through rating systems, and providing guidance to households on adhering to labor laws. There are various advantages to being “on the books” in these ways, but there are also disadvantages; and platforms don’t necessarily provide the kinds of visibility that caregiving workers want or need, in particular visibility to *other workers* in the form of a community of support.

Importantly, our project’s early field interviews are finding that much of the normative work that guides trust, reputation, and access to work still resides in more informal channels

embedded in social networks, word-of-mouth, and less tangible judgments based on “intuition” or features like profile pictures, rather than ratings, reviews, or background checks, which is what these platforms are foregrounding as most important for “trust” between workers and clients.

There are numerous and active Facebook groups, email lists, and other forums that caregiving workers rely on, *outside* of online marketplaces. They are a good example of the ways caregiving workers have found to leverage technology to create solidarity and community despite their often hidden, isolated, and precarious work.

At least for the more digitally networked, Facebook groups serve as spaces where caregivers keep an ear out for work, build their reputations, warn about bad employers or participate in “[nanny shaming](#),” and importantly, discuss what a fair employment relationship looks like.

Like Uber drivers [posting dash cam footage](#) on driver forums to shame bad passengers, caregivers often share screenshots to mock unreasonable or illegal requests from prospective employers. For example, parents on sites like Care.com will sometimes list one hourly wage and description in a job posting, but will then private message prospective caregivers with an offer of a (much smaller) lump weekly payment and entirely different work demands. In these situations, caregivers often turn to Facebook groups as a kind of court of opinion to determine whether what the parent is offering is fair. Sometimes it is not, and commenters on a post will collectively do the math only to find that that weekly lump sum pay averages out to \$4/hour, or that, yes, it is illegal to bank hours,

or no, it isn't fair to demand that a sitter be perpetually available on short notice.

This kind of validation is especially important in work that is routinely treated as invisible, low-status, precarious, and with few legal protections, and where it has taken a long time to build organized institutions of support and advocacy like the [National Domestic Workers Alliance](#).

It is also important because this work has often been viewed within a binary that places the home within the private sphere, which in turn is presumed to be *outside* of political and economic life. Transportation and housing, which have notably been affected by the rapid expansion of Uber and Airbnb respectively, are, by contrast, more easily regarded as issues that are squarely in the public sphere. Critiques of these companies and of the gig economy as a whole often make appeals to the public good, whether over the [ills of gentrification](#) or the widespread consequences of [privatizing transportation](#).

Domestic work, meanwhile, gets relegated to a “private” matter to be settled between household and worker. In some capacity, platforms may be unsettling this tacit covenant by making a lot of this relationship more public, standardized, and documented. Through fieldwork and interviews with workers ranging from Handy and TaskRabbit cleaners to nannies and other caregivers who depend on online marketplaces, we want to ask: who benefits from these transformations, and who gets hurt or excluded? The fact that there are few available answers confirms that we need to better ground narratives about the gig economy in their historical and lived contexts.