

“The place for people to share things they’re willing to do for \$5”. This is how Fiverr.com introduced itself in 2010, both intriguing and challenging its users. At the time, it might have seemed like a social experiment created specifically to stimulate the voyeuristic appetites of the web. Instead, in the space of a few years Fiverr has become the largest online marketplace for freelance services all around the globe. The site is now among the 100 most popular in the United States and among the 200 most popular in the world. Founded in Tel Aviv by Micha Kaufman and Shai Wininger, it also has offices in New York, Chicago, Miami, and San Francisco and coordinates nearly one million transactions a month.

Today Fiverr welcomes us with an invitation to pragmatism (“Don’t just dream, do”) and offers us freelancing services for the lean entrepreneur. What services are they? If you can imagine it, it’s probably there on Fiverr. Do you need a graphic designer to create your restaurant’s logo or a programmer to create its site? Are you tired of playing Fortnite alone? Want to increase your YouTube channel followers? Or even: Do you want Jesus Christ to personally send greetings to your best friend? Does your romantic relationship require a few counselling sessions? Might a fortune teller be the answer? Then, Fiverr is what you need. Besides the predictable sections dedicated to marketing or video editing, there is one called “Fun & Lifestyle”. This includes some of the wildest services, from the numerous Morgan Freeman imitators to the Indian guy in a “vegetable man” costume who’ll deliver any message you want. Not to mention the section dedicated to viral videos... Often introduced by general stock images, the offers in this section rely on a

dose of micro-entertainment, a bit like the old Chatroulette where, in a matter of clicks, you found yourself face to face with a random stranger who turned *to you* and started a conversation.<sup>3</sup>

The idea behind Fiverr is simple: a seller publishes a gig offer (a one-off job), a buyer buys the service and Fiverr keeps 20% of the profit. If the price is five dollars (the minimum allowed), Fiverr gets one. A small percentage also covers PayPal's commission fees. An evaluation and feedback system, similar to that of Amazon, helps buyers decide on sellers, who in turn get badges related to their services that act as both a guarantee and as access to a series of benefits. Fiverr gives a chance — or so it claims — to newcomers and rising talent as its search algorithm is programmed in such a way as to oppose a network effect that would put the commissions into the hands of just a few sellers. For those requiring high quality services, there is Fiverr Pro, a section of the site dedicated to certified professionals. This is how Fiverr tries to resolve the age-old question of the validity of practices not protected by a professional register, such as graphic design or copywriting.

### Productivising Services

Although Fiverr was founded by two people, it is Micha Kaufman, with three other startups behind him and a past as a lawyer, who waves the banner for the site. As Carmel DeAmicis explains on Pando, the fact that Kaufman helped create an online market that relocates

<sup>3</sup> Lately it seems that Fiverr is attempting to revamp its brand image by removing services that don't align with the idea of professionalism that the company wants to foster. This is how the company motivates the elimination of the services offered by the Indian Funny Guys, discussed later in this chapter: "Fiverr is consistently updating and evolving its marketplace to better suit our community and the needs of skilled freelancers and entrepreneurs across the globe. Therefore these kinds of services are unfortunately not in our editorial focus anymore and were sidelined from our marketplace."

freelance work is perfectly in line with his entrepreneurial past. Armed with an idea about a digital security product, the lawyer — who “didn’t code, but he had the vision” — came across a Russian site that offered a product similar to the one he had in mind. Shortly thereafter Kaufman founded his first start-up with someone he had never met in person, and so it was until the company was finally sold.

Subsequently, two parallel trends attracted the attention of Wininger and Kaufman, who is now the CEO of Fiverr: the increase in self-employment and that of unemployment. With 2008 not far away, the effects of what looked like a chronic crisis were there for everyone to see. For the two entrepreneurs operating in Israel, a country with hopes of becoming a start-up nation, there was clearly an opportunity to be seized. In an interview with Eric Pfeiffer for Yahoo in 2012, Kaufman stated that the idea of Fiverr was not just to connect individuals who already offer a service, but an opportunity to create new forms of employment. Given that at the time Fiverr only accepted services costing five dollars, the reaction of the interviewer was hardly surprising. He raised doubts about the economic sustainability of the work on Fiverr and noted that the site dispelled the myth that Americans (at the time the most active on the site) are not willing to work for low wages.

As soon as it was launched, Fiverr generated an immediate response from both press and users as dozens of publications, including CNN and Fox News, advertised the site by listing the strangest ways of “earning 5 bucks”. However, the first to be surprised by the quantity and variety of services were its creators. But why five dollars exactly? Although the limit has now disappeared, in it lay Fiverr’s main innovation. There was a

specific objective behind the choice of a set price for any service which was to ensure that hiring a freelancer was as easy and immediate as making a purchase on eBay, while avoiding the tedious process of estimates and negotiations. In other words, the goal was to “productivise services”. This was the whole point of the limit: the smart freelancer would then split their services up into 5-dollar sections (Kaufman talks about “slicing talent”), multiplying these for more demanding orders if necessary. For their part, the customer, attracted by the accessibility of the price (“the cost of a Frappuccino”), would not hesitate to risk the modest sum on Fiverr. The whole concept was completed by a formula that still survives today. Every gig is introduced by what looks like a line of code: *I will do X for X dollars*. The idea worked and by 2012 the platform had over 600,000 gigs. Productivisation of services is also what distinguishes Fiverr from the many competing markets based on hourly rates such as Upwork, Outsourcely or Freelancers.com. Fiverr’s effort seems to go in the direction of what Ivan Illich called radical monopoly, that is, “the substitution of an industrial product or a professional service for a useful activity in which people engage or would like to engage. A radical monopoly paralyzes autonomous action in favour of professional deliveries”.

Once a certain stability was reached (partly thanks to the 110 million dollars of financing raised in the course of several rounds) the five dollar limit was eliminated, although the name of the site still refers to the original concept. At this point, Kaufman began to define active users of Fiverr as microentrepreneurs, while celebrating the unrestricted access to labour made possible by the internet.<sup>4</sup> The co-founder therefore rejected the

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘microentrepreneur’ is often used in relation to the sharing economy. Debbie Woskow reports the words of the UK Business and Enter-

need for local entrepreneurship by fully embracing a fluid, globalist and stateless vision of the labour market in which immediacy and the absence of friction reign supreme. “We’ve turned the labour market into an e-commerce business” said Kaufman on TechCrunch, ready to hide the notorious reserve army behind the fixed price of a commodity; never mind what Karl Marx might think.

### **Manna from Heaven**

To get some idea of who the sellers are, let us examine a common type of service — text translation — which has the advantage of offering a clear metric in the number of lines. Despite all the talk of automation and artificial intelligence, we find hundreds of human translators on Fiverr. Among those who speak Italian is Fabio (the names have been changed), 18, currently living in Finland, who for just under five euros promises to translate a text of 3000 words, revision included. He has recently joined Fiverr and is happy because in less than a month he has earned 50 euros. Fabio, who considers Fiverr a sideline, aims to earn 100-200 euros a month. Then there is Michele, a Level 2 seller, who in addition to doing translations, writes songs, plans trips to Italy, transcribes texts from audio tracks, etc.; all on Fiverr. Michele introduces himself through one of those now ubiquitous explanatory videos, in which a hand draws silhouettes on a white sheet, a cartoon he probably commissioned from some other Fiverr user. After losing his job, the translator-songwriter made Fiverr his main occupation. He considers it a reliable site despite the fake negative reviews created by the competition, and the continuous

prise Minister Matthew Hancock: “The sharing economy [is] unlocking a new generation of microentrepreneurs — people who are making money from the assets and skills they already own, from renting out a spare room through Airbnb, through working as a freelance designer through PeoplePerHour. The route to self-employment has never been easier.”

updates that sometimes damage his visibility. However, Michele complains about Fiverr's high commission and the lack of communication with the website's operators, who deny him the highest badge without giving any clear explanation for it. Finally, Clara, a translator and editor with sixteen years of experience, translates 3000 words for about 30 euros over ten days. Active on Fiverr since 2014, Clara is a level 1 seller who can boast numerous feedbacks (all positive) and several regular customers. She underlines in her profile that her translations are done manually. In addition to this service, Clara designs the layouts of books and their covers. Although Fiverr is one of her main sources of income, she complains about some risky marketplace policies for sellers. She has in fact suffered several attempts at fraud, mostly ignored by the administration. She tells us of her latest troubles with Asian competitors:

Sometimes their messages are incomprehensible and I didn't waste time answering when I was too busy. I was penalised and sent back to the first level, because now (we only find things out when we are on the receiving end) you have to respond to everyone, always, even just with an emoticon or a spamming report. Otherwise you're downgraded. It's absurd.

Despite these complications, Clara has no doubts about the value of Fiverr, and talks about it in these terms: "For us Italian translators it's manna from heaven, especially if you are forced (like me) to work from home. Otherwise we'd starve".

A broader perspective on the diverse workforces populating Fiverr is offered by Elisa Giardina Papa, an Italian artist based in the US who hired and interviewed several

gig workers for her project *Technologies of Care*, which focuses on digitally mediated care labour. Papa spoke mostly with women, both from the Global South and the Global North, such as a video performer from Brazil who bursts balloons and throws pies in her face, an ASMR<sup>5</sup> artist from the US and even a virtual boyfriend bot. The artist also met a biology professor from Venezuela who does research, homework and translations for students as well as designing nail wraps. She teamed up with her daughter, who has also a profile on Upwork. They present themselves as one male freelancer since they are well aware that men make more money than women and can be more assertive without being described as ‘bossy’. Furthermore, they are Latin American, which means even less money. The professor told Papa that in order to get clients she has to “take on jobs that are pretty slave-like”. Another example is a Greek girl who, working as a social media fan (which means following and reacting to social media accounts), declares: “I am always looking on the Internet for new virtual jobs. I study management, but the situation right now in Greece, it’s awful. Economic crisis and unemployment.” Often these kinds of gigs require sensitivity, like that of the online dating coach (studying clinical psychology in the meantime) who had to “gently discourage a client from using the nickname ‘CunnilingusKing’ for a ChristianMingle profile”.

For the sake of completeness but also — I have to admit — to save time on a translation, I tried commissioning a gig on Fiverr. I chose the seller more or less at random, opting for an intermediate price among those available. In the end I hired an Italian-Australian girl for 35 euros to

<sup>5</sup> ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response) is a tingling sensation involving the scalp and the neck which can be triggered by specific auditory or visual stimuli. ASMR as a genre is made of videos displaying these stimuli.

translate 1500 words. Let's do a few calculations: a text of this length requires at least three hours' work, so the rate, excluding the percentage that belongs to Fiverr, is just under ten euros per hour, a figure that corresponds to the minimum wage in Australia, excluding taxes. A couple of clicks and my order was sent; two days later I was to receive my translation. From the dedicated app I could check the freelancer's local time and that she was active on the site. I also noticed a countdown to the delivery date. Shortly after placing the order, I received an email from Fiverr: "Congratulations on your first gig. You are now officially a doer". At this point I felt a bit guilty — ironically, offloading what was to me a tedious task had made me a productive being.

From this brief and incomplete survey we learn that Fiverr is not only populated, as one might expect, by young workers. The company's own statistics confirm this: while at the beginning young people dominated the platform, gradually adults and even the over-fifties started to arrive.<sup>6</sup> Whatever their age, sellers seem to embrace the idea that "doing one thing and doing it well" is not a winning strategy on Fiverr. Thus many users occupy various roles, implementing a sort of continuous professional A/B testing to identify the services that reach the widest audience.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, microentrepreneurship also means limited investment and therefore reduced risk. On Fiverr there is therefore an unwritten rule that comes from the world of business and investments: diversify your portfolio.

<sup>6</sup> As journalist Leonardo Castañeda reports, data released by Wonolo, a staffing platform for blue-collar and labor contractors, reveals that Baby Boomers surpass Millennials in terms of earning, amount of gigs and ratings.

<sup>7</sup> In web design, A/B testing means comparing two or more versions of a single interface element to determine which is the most effective according to the response of a group of users.



## Creative Self-Destruction

Sometimes diversifying one's offer means inventing a service that didn't exist before. As we have said, Fiverr features large numbers of oddities that replicate the logic of memes and seem borrowed from the Theatre of the Absurd and performance art. These post-situationist services make us reflect on all the others. After all, what is the difference between those who record their voice for a commercial and those who film themselves while talking to a banana on the phone?<sup>8</sup> Both are *performances*, levelled and abstracted by Fiverr's handy interface. The site is therefore a clear manifestation of what Federico Chicchi and Anna Simone call "performance society", in which the performative qualities of contemporary work can provide economic enhancement. Fiverr encourages people to incessantly invent services, a process that, to echo Schumpeter, we could call *creative self-destruction* and define as the recurring recombination of bodily expressions, skills, practices and initiatives tailored to the individual.

On Fiverr work often becomes spectacle, and this can lead to unexpected consequences. In 2017 Felix Kjellberg, aka PewDiePie, the youtuber with the most subscribers in the world, ended up in trouble with a video explaining how the site worked. In the clip PewDiePie discovers Fiverr and explains what it is. Firstly he orders a logo, amazed at the simplicity and cost of the service, but then unfortunately decides to test the ethical limits of the platform and of those who work there by commissioning a blatantly antisemitic phrase. Fiverr's Funny Guys, a trio of young Indian men, bare chested and wearing festive decorations round their necks, hold up the message while dancing against a tropical

<sup>8</sup> This is the main service offered by Old Man Steve, an 80 year-old "Top Rated Seller" from Texas.

background. It's hard to ignore the post-colonial implications: here the Western gaze exerts its power by putting a value on the exoticism of bodies, movements and settings. Kjellberg was promptly banned from Youtube and the same happened to the poor Indians who later published a declaration of apology, explaining that they did not know what the offending words meant.<sup>9</sup>

Setting aside the scandals, let's consider one of Fiverr's success stories. Among the 'killer gigs' are those offered by Joel Young, father of a family forced to move around the US because of his job as an ecclesiastical pastor. Using only his laptop and a microphone Young earned almost a million dollars by creating voice-overs on Fiverr. Reflecting on his career in a CNBC interview, Young explains how the key to his "rise to fame" has been to stand on his own two feet and make things happen. In contrast to this, the marketplace has many detractors too. Some consider Fiverr a scam and have created a site that says just that: Fiverr is a Scam. A scam for both buyers, who for example buy followers that disappear within a few days from their social networks; but also for the sellers, because the platform "pits desperate sellers from across the world against each other in the hopes of securing the precious four bucks". Fiverr, like numerous online services, generalises access to resources and services, but in doing so it homogenises the market regardless of the cultural and economic differences of the realities involved. A US graphic designer can be found competing with a Bengali colleague for remuneration that is equivalent on paper only. Some time ago, a story relating to Trump's presidential campaign caused a stir. One of the slogans constantly repeated by

<sup>9</sup> The platform makes visible other forms of bias and racial disparity that have a broader social origin. A case in point is the account of a black woman from the US that uses an image of a mildly sexualised white woman to promote her gigs.

the current US president was the idea of bringing work back to America. “Stop with the outsourcing!” Trump exclaimed. Well, it turned out that among the designers of the slides used by the then candidate was a teenager from Singapore, hired on Fiverr. When interviewed, the designer explained how she was using the service to put some money aside for her dental braces.

In a context such as this, whose side is Fiverr on? In other words, does Fiverr consider it more important to facilitate the work of the people selling or to help buyers take advantage of low-cost, unlicensed labour by offloading the expenses on freelancers? In this regard, the company's position remains somewhat ambiguous. A few years ago it published a sponsored post that asked: “why pay \$100 for a logo?” triggering the indignation of many graphic designers. In the press release section, Fiverr boasts articles with rather depressing headlines, such as “How one man uses Fiverr and creativity in a poor man's economy”, which declares enthusiastically that for five dollars you can now delegate entire projects to strangers. Fiverr is also promoted as the perfect tool for *bootstrapping* a start-up, i.e., setting it up with minimal financial resources. A testimonial from Fiverr explains on the homepage that the site allowed her to “delegate stress”, while another rejoices in the time saved thanks to it. Fiverr also provides resources to enhance the independence of its microentrepreneurs by offering tutorials and tools to manage their finances. One such example is Elevate, a sort of 101 for freelancers. Moreover, the site protects freelancers by making payment immediate and eliminating the prospect of having to wait thirty, sixty or even ninety days. The real question therefore seems to be: what is the difference between buyer and seller, since, as we have seen, the title of doer can be boasted by both. On Fiverr everyone seems to be someone

else's freelancer, a perfect Ponzi scheme that benefits the platform above all else.

### **“Incubators Are for Chickens”**

Some time ago Jia Tolentino wrote an article for the *New Yorker* entitled “The Gig Economy Celebrates Working Yourself to Death”. It was just one of the many reactions to an advertising campaign that made Fiverr jump into the headlines. A major source of indignation was a poster showing the close-up of a young doer with the somewhat sulky features of a Calvin Klein model. The portrait, by British photographer Platon, who immortalised Obama, Putin and Mark Zuckerberg, is accompanied by the stark characters of the following text:

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.

The poster appeared in the New York subway, where it attracted the attention of sleepy commuters who promptly vented their rage on Twitter against what is only a small part of Fiverr's advertising campaign. The #InDoersWeTrust campaign uses a slogan that mixes religious and economic references with the identity of the country (“In God We Trust” is the motto of the United States of America and appears on their banknotes).<sup>10</sup> A second variation is an ad in which we follow the doers' routine and watch microentrepreneurs communicating with the other side of the world (“Ni Hao Ma”) from a club toilet, or tirelessly promoting their business with their own relatives. Doers “get things done” and are

<sup>10</sup> The very concept of being a 'doer' has a religious undertone, as it resonates with the Puritan admonitions of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678): “It will not be said: did you believe? — but: were you Doers, or Talkers only?”

constantly available, even during sex. Those in question are mostly white women, although the cover of *Entrepreneur* magazine shows a young man. The frantic pace of the ad is reminiscent of angst-ridden films like *Birdman* and *Whiplash*, which both explore the dilemmas of personal success.

The always-on atmosphere of Fiverr, pervaded as it is by a subliminal anxiety and punctuated by the beating of an energy drink-fuelled pumping heart, looks like a managerial hijacking of *Trainspotting's* generational manifesto. In this case, however, 'choosing life' means neglecting the needs of one's own body. It means ignoring death, which makes its appearance in a short cameo. Doers couldn't care less about ideas ("my little sister has ideas...") because they are certainly not dreamers. Doers despise the high-tech industry and its prophets. It's time to "beat the gurus, beat the trust fund kids, beat the tech bros". No one believes in 'unicorns' anymore: fairy tales are for kids.<sup>11</sup> The financial sector bureaucrats — bankers, VCs, etc. — are (literally) sharks to the new entrepreneur's eyes. Not to mention the geek gangs with their silly gadgets. Forget brainstorming, endless meetings and all those company rituals that only serve to waste time. The ad recalls the 2014 Cadillac commercial, an open celebration of the American work ethic seen from the angle of someone who has made it to the top. The fundamental difference being that now all traces of luxury have disappeared.

The campaign was created by DCX Growth Accelerator, a Brooklyn-based agency that has no qualms about calling "ideology" what an ordinary advertiser would call a concept. The ideology in question is defined by cultural

<sup>11</sup> In venture capital jargon, a unicorn is a start-up with a market value of over a billion dollars.

tension between the lean entrepreneur and the bureaucratic elite. For the campaign's creators, the lean entrepreneur is nothing more than a small freelancer who works hard while the bureaucratic elite is not, as one might think, composed of lustreless managers, but rather the TED talk people, of those who get by on bread and disruption. The entrepreneurship celebrated by Fiverr is therefore of the type that is invisible to the media, which is all too busy pouring rivers of ink on the latest of Elon Musk's whims. Cited on the website Attn., Fiverr's Global Head of Digital, Chris Lane, does not hesitate to define the campaign as a celebration of the entrepreneurial spirit and explains its intentions: "We want people to get out of their comfort zones, challenge them to think about their lives and if they are doing everything they can to achieve success". If the purpose of the campaign was to turn Fiverr into a recognisable brand, slogans such as "Make America Do Again" (remember the girl from Singapore?) and "Nothing like a safe, reliable paycheck. To crush your soul", although causing media outrage, ensured this would happen. Fiverr means doing.

The campaign signals a change in the entrepreneurial ideal that echoes the political turmoil of the moment. Doers are not the typical entrepreneurs celebrated by the media for their sci-fi predictions. The new entrepreneur is neither a visionary nor a technology wizard. The new entrepreneur, the doer, is not, as in the American tradition, simply industrious, but *busy*. What Fiverr promotes is a kind of entrepreneurial populism, according to which the techno-financial elite of *do-nothings* will soon be demolished by the multitude of *doers*, the real ones. Could it be that the advertisers had a stroke of genius during their brainstorming, realising that there is no topic more viral than our perverse relationship with work? The campaign is a distorting mirror that magni-

fies the collective obsession with *busyness* and the guilt that goes with it. We get angry with Fiverr but in the end we are mad at ourselves and at our inability to find the right work/life balance. “If you’re not doing, then what are you doing?”, asks the doer inside of us all.<sup>12</sup>

Praise for doers, work ethic and competition are not the only values to define Fiverr’s narrative, just as advertising campaigns are not the only means. Another key concept is independence which, as we have seen, goes hand in hand with the celebration of self-employment. In this regard, Fiverr carried out a study which set out to demonstrate that micro-entrepreneurship leads to financial independence. The issue of independence also transforms the company’s managerial structure, given that Fiverr considers itself an organisation in which everyone is a CEO. There is no shortage of articles and infomercials in which Micha Kaufman personally speaks out in favour of the gig economy, which, as stated in *Wired*, is the “force that could save the American worker”. Another recurring theme is that of globalism. Freelance work does not need roots as it’s nomadic, fluid, spread out. It is no coincidence that the advertising campaign favoured the mobile infrastructures of informal work, such as turnstiles and underground stations. Fiverr launched a call to hire a Chief Digital Nomad, whose job would be to travel the world to document the life of freelancers. The successful candidate was the Nigerian Chelsy O, whose first trip was to Vietnam to celebrate International Labour Day. Finally, like any self-respecting tech company, Fiverr is not lacking in self-irony, and so makes fun of the universe of self-help (“You only need one habit to

<sup>12</sup> At the time of writing, Fiverr launched a new campaign in Berlin to promote its European expansion. Decidedly more sober than its American counterpart, the campaign emphasises the positive qualities of a temporary partnership between the buyer and the seller: convenience, trust, etc.

be effective”, in contradiction to what Stephen Covey claims<sup>13</sup>) and the entrepreneurial rhetoric and its fetishes, including an entrepreneurial gene, featured in what turned out to be an April Fools video.

## Do or Delegate

“When you need to delegate, you should,” writes Adam Dachis about Fiverr on LifeHacker. Delegate when possible, or when it is worth spending a modest sum rather than wasting your valuable time. Delegate tedious, stressful or thankless tasks. But when is it so easy, how far can one go? For example, a graphic design student who was not particularly interested in the programming course, confessed to me he had delegated the code writing part of the exam. “What matters is the idea to be developed, not its development,” he told me. Fiverr certainly didn’t give rise to the idea of passing the buck (people who write theses on behalf of third parties have been doing so since time began), yet the immediacy the network allows heightens the phenomenon, raising a series of questions. In affluent societies, will everyone just be an ‘art director’ who creates visions and ideas that are then put into practice somewhere else by someone else? If so, what will become of professional identity and skills... of one’s *trade* (a word that already sounds outdated). Roughly summarising the effects of the popularisation of digital technologies, we can identify three ‘revolutions’. The first concerns the advent of personal computers, which enabled access to tools. The second, that of the web, enabled access to distribution channels. Finally, the third, that of the gig economy (still in progress), ensures access to (cheap) labour. Fiverr, like many other online service brokers, incorporates all three of these revolutions in what could be called a

<sup>13</sup> Covey wrote the bestseller *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*.



partial *democratisation of delegation*. Even Fiverr jokes about it, posting a meme on Instagram showing a young man in pyjamas forced to outsource all his employees because he still lives with his parents.

The democratisation of delegation generates both paradoxical and deplorable phenomena. An example of the former is Wistand, an online service that allows you to pay “physical people” to represent you at public manifestations like protests; this is basically the new frontier of clicktivism, where the very flesh of ‘the social body’ is the product of outsourcing. Wistand reminds me of *A Crowded Apocalypse*, a project by Italian media art collective locose. In 2012, the group commissioned a panoply of conspiracy theories through crowdsourcing websites. The workers would cover their faces and show a sign with a common symbol and a conspiratorial one-liner. On the deplorable side, we discover that in France Uber Eats or Deliveroo gigs are sublet by the French legal owner of the accounts to undocumented migrants and minors, who keep only half of what they gain. Here’s how the sharing of the sharing economy works.

If everyone delegates, who does the doing? In an episode of the Silicon Valley series (a masterpiece by Mike Judge, author of *Beavis and Butt-Head*) some of the characters go to a supermarket where no one does their own shopping anymore, and the only ones left are the employees of various start-ups who do the shopping and home delivery for others. This scene lets us think of the gendered lineage of delegation, now partially displaced, as grocery shopping is a traditionally womanly task. In this respect, Melissa Gregg understands both contemporary productivity and delegation as the veiling of “the ongoing trauma arising from the death of the secretary”, and that of the housewife, we might add.

Silicon Valley's comic piece might not make us laugh. It is not out of laziness that the delegation society offloads its burdens elsewhere, but rather because it is too busy. A recent Amazon service seems to confirm this. Amazon Key electronically controls the door lock so that different tradespeople can gain access when the owner is absent. The introductory ad shows a young woman getting a parcel delivered and the house cleaned just in time for a visit from her parents, while she is stuck in the office. From there she can use a camera — or rather microsurveillance software — to check that the staff do a good job. According to philosopher André Gorz, who at the end of the 1980s argued against the limits of economic reason, the consequences of delegating include a sense of disorientation, the erosion of a feeling of belonging to the environment we live in, a sense that is heightened further when care and active participation are missing. The house ceases to belong to those who live in it in the same way that a car driven by a chauffeur belongs more to the chauffeur than the rightful owner; yet the vehicle does not actually belong to the chauffeur. And who knows, maybe they even need an Uber to get home.

Now that we have analysed the point of view of those who undertake, let us move on to the one of those who are *undertaken*. Are the sellers really as independent as Fiverr would have us believe? To understand this, one would need to know the average hourly earnings, the geographical distribution of capital flows, the degree of continuity of the gigs and so on. For obvious reasons, this information is not accessible and therefore it can only be guessed at. In 2012 Fiverr pointed out that for 14% of sellers the site was the primary source of income. However, the amount of this income is not clear. A search on the internet mostly turns up examples of survivorship bias ("Woman earns more than \$9000 a

month on Fiverr”) which certainly don’t help give us a clear idea. However, judging by the way Fiverr is considered by the press, a few doubts arise. The Wall Street Journal introduces the online marketplace by asking: “What do you get when you mix unemployment, frugal consumers and internet boredom?” Then there are those who talk about unemployed bankers who work until dawn on the site. And, if we consider the fact that certain creative professions are carried out in any case almost for free, the platform may even seem, to some, a sign of progressive professionalisation.

Fiverr, the social experiment turned global marketplace, is a user-friendly tool that multiplies the levels of entrepreneurial organisation of work. It organises the field of action and the microentrepreneurs subsequently organise one another. In order to do this, the work is fragmented into a large number of *microtasks*. Taken to its extreme consequences, this fragmentation takes the form of a sorites paradox: into how many microtasks can a piece of work be broken up before it is no longer considered such? If this sounds like science fiction, just think of the *meatware* described by Pietro Minto in an article for online magazine *Il Tascabile*, i.e. a type of labour that mixes the cognitive faculties of human beings with the repetitiveness typical of computers. On sites like Mechanical Turk (owned by Amazon) you can earn a few dollars by finding kittens in the photos or copying addresses printed on business cards. CAPTCHAs, little tests carried out online to prove that you are not a bot, work in a similar way. Some time ago, a US woman sued Google for her work done on CAPTCHAs. She lost the lawsuit, based on the fact that the solution of a CAPTCHA was too fast to be considered real work. Yet millions of solutions are crystallised in the online services we use; they are what make them intelligent and therefore profitable.

Although most self-employment is still carried out without using digital markets, it is possible to envisage a near future in which Fiverr or a similar site becomes as pervasive as Facebook, thus representing a compulsory stage for the growing number of global freelancers. In this case, the creative self-destruction of careers and the rapid prototyping of professional roles would become even more normal than it already is. Fiverr is clearly pushing in this direction, encouraging its users to put into practice what the German artist Sebastian Schmieg calls *survival creativity*, i.e. “doing whatever it takes to survive in a competitive environment”.<sup>14</sup>

Whether survival creativity is a necessity of the times we live in or rather an extravagant form of emancipation is open to debate. For certain, we don't need to project ourselves into the future to discover that many people resort to the most absurd — and sometimes humiliating — actions to make ends meet on the internet. Kaufman sees nothing new in this. In perfect Schumpeterian style, the macroentrepreneur considers the economic crisis to be an excellent opportunity to innovate. Referring to the Great Depression of the 1930s, he argued in his column in *Forbes* magazine that “desperate times force innovative thinking”. Fiverr is the ideal place to exercise this mentality because, as Lamar Morgan wrote on the *Examiner* blog in 2012, “in a crazy economy, Fiverr is a good choice for both sellers and buyers”.

<sup>14</sup> ——— Schmieg is the author of *I Will Say Whatever You Want in Front of a Pizza*, a speculative Prezi slide deck that, seen from the perspective of a cloud worker, explores digital labour and the amalgamation of software and humans. Schmieg has also discussed the disappearance of labour by means of fragmentation in his 2018 essay *Humans As Software Extensions*.