"They treat us as machines"

The gig economy and the value of labor in Berlin.

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<u>Abstract</u>

In the last few years, the so-called gig economy and what I will argue to be its transformed form of labor, has become quite a popular platform for users, i.e. both clients and consumers, as well as independent workers. Its form of labor, often called "gig work," is integral to a platform where workers, in theory, can take control over their own lives. This commonly marketed idea of individual control is one of the motivating aspects of why one should participate in this new economic and labor structure, focusing on liberty and independence. With these profound and transformational shifts within the field of labor and economy in mind, this thesis delves into how so-called gig work alters or wholly transforms common and anthropological understandings of work/labor. Based on fieldwork among gig workers in Berlin, this thesis asks: What does work and labor entail in this new configuration? What do shifts in economic value do with the value of the human?

To answer these questions, the thesis maps and analyses five inter-connecting fields which are all related to human value and the value of work. Firstly, by looking at the gig economy and the labor within this, I am arguing for *humans having become machines*. Following this analysis of machinic subjectification, the next chapter will follow this thread by expanding to look at the urban society in Berlin as a whole and look into how the gig economy crucially transform the urban order. In this chapter, the thesis will particularly explore the possibilities that the novel configurations of urban space and time inherent to this form of economy, point towards something like *a ghost town*. Moving further into the value of labor and humans, I will present several cases of *folklorification and dehumanization* to show how ethnicity, gender, and identity are instrumentally treated within the gig economy. The two last chapters will exemplify and analyze forms of *labor resistance* against the companies – both in the form of everyday forms of resistance, as well as establishment of worker's councils and activist work. Drawing on these five fields, the concluding chapter where the thesis will portray how the gig economy *might* further develop in the future.

Overall, this thesis will reflect on how the gig economy influences the daily lives of the people involved. I want to gather the perspectives of people who work on these platforms, the participants, as well as their users to understand how it affects their lives. All this, with the view of understanding the current phase of capitalist transformation exemplified by the gig economy.

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It is impossible to do such a project all by myself, and I want to thank all of you who have contributed and given me this opportunity. First and foremost, I want to thank my advisor Bjørn Enge Bertelsen, who guided me and showed the same enthusiasm for the project. This project would also not have been possible if there were not for the amazing people who agreed to be the interlocutors of this project. They opened up their life for a scared and timid student – aka. Me – and guided me through life in Berlin as well as believed in my fieldwork and me. Without my advisor and interlocutors/friends, I would never get the opportunity to delve into the topics that interest me most. You all have inspired me to do my best, and I have learned so much that I will bring with me for the rest of my life.

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Again, thank you for the support and for believing in me.
This is something I will keep close to my heart.

- Ida Marie Aakerholt

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Figure X.1: Picture outside one of the restaurant streets in Friedrichshain. In the picture one can see four different riders from three different brands waiting to collect food from the restaurants.

INTRODUCTION

Figure 0.1.: Demonstrating against workers treatment outside ALEX warehouse.

"We want to wish everyone a fantastic day out in the sun… Well, everyone except for all the city managers and company chiefs responsible..."

– @gorillasworkers

On March 10th, 2022, people congregated outside of the ALEX warehouse, a soon to be closed Gorillas warehouse – Gorillas being one of the main gig work operators in Berlin during my time of fieldwork. I was present there as I had been asked by one of the activists to show up to what was described to me as a press conference which the Gorillas' working collective was organizing. When I showed up, some people were assembling outside of the warehouse, looking at me with a side-glance, trying to figure out if they were supposed to know who I was. I asked them if this was the place for the press conference. The reply I received was a silent nod before turning their backs on me. After a while, a few journalists showed up, as well as some activist supporters. When the conference started, the Gorillas workers flocked together in front of us, and huge microphones hung over the speakers.

Speaker: The managers treat us unfairly. Many of us are still waiting for our payment, and we have been for months. They are now closing this warehouse without giving the workers a warning or a new job offer. They have the opportunity to give us a job at the other warehouses, but they won't. Instead, they fire us at the same time as they hire new workers. We don't want to go quietly about this, and we will take this to court. They don't care about us, and now they have tossed our livelihoods out on the street.

As the speeches went on, the other journalists flocked together to get the best pictures and catch every word that was said on their recorders. I was standing alone in the background trying to soak the situation in. Everyone else seemed to know someone and were standing together in groups whispering as the speeches went on. Nervous to talk with anyone after the welcome I got when I showed up, I kept to my phone taking notes. Two girls standing behind me were talking in English about what happened, and instinctively I turned around facing them and asked them if they could tell me more of what was happening. They initially looked a bit shocked but then both gave me a warm smile as they explained the whole situation unfolding in front of us.

Figure 0.2.: "87 WORKERS tossed/ 87 livelihoods lost/ Gorillas gets rich/ while WE pay the cost". As this picture was taken the workers collective advocate were telling the press why this situation is illegal and needs to be treated as a court case.

I stood talking with them the rest of the press conference as I did not understand the rest of the speeches, which were held in German. One of the girls – I will call her "Girl 2" – told me she had showed up since she found protests such as these interesting. She also knew the other girl standing next to her who had invited her to join. The girls seemed eager to talk with me and I told them about the project I was doing. The girl standing furthest away from me – "Girl 1" – told me she wanted to keep in touch with me to talk more on the topic. I gave her my e-mail, glad to meet someone who wanted to talk with me. After a while I thought I needed some pictures and said "bye" to the girls and walked to the front. As I was taking pictures, people began murmuring and turning around looking down the street. Two police cars pulled up by the sidewalk and seven policemen stepped out. Confused, I saw Girl 1 walking down to the police officers. She stood by them for a while, talking and pointing to the crowd, before she turned around to listen to the ongoing speeches. It all seemed to be wrapping up as one of the speakers took a step forward to give the crowd some more information:

Speaker: We have now presented all the cases, but we will stand behind for some more time if any of you have some more questions. You're free to talk with any of us workers. After that's done, we wanted to go and have a meeting between us workers to figure out what we want to do with our situation as we are getting fired. This meeting was supposed to be happening in private inside our warehouse, but as it turns out, corporate [Gorillas corporate headquarters] has showed up with police force to prevent us from having this meeting. It is our right to talk between us workers, what do you have to say to that …

As he called out Girl 1's name, everyone turned around facing her. She stepped forward to give her answer.

Girl 1:   You are allowed to hold meetings, just not in the warehouse as you then will disrupt the workers that are still having their shifts. In the office we do have rooms you can sign up to gather meetings like these. This many of you are not allowed to be in the warehouse at the same time, and you're not supposed to be in the warehouse if you're not there for work.

Speaker: This is our space, and we don't want to meet up at the office where all of you can keep an eye on us as the meeting goes on. I suggest that every worker who wants to join this meeting follow us in the backyard of the building. Gorillas can't control that space or prevent us from standing there.

Figure 0.3.: Standing outside of the soon closing Gorillas warehouse, one can see police officers guarding the warehouse doors while the group of workers hold their meeting in the street, standing in the background.

Stepping into the field

At that moment I became aware that the girl – Girl 1 – I had been chatting to, was working as an HR (Human Resources) advisor at the office of Gorillas, Berlin. Corporate – as my interlocuters termed the headquarters or the office workers of their company – had contacted the police to make sure none of their rules were broken, and Girl 1 had showed up to manage this as well. I was glad I had talked to her, and that she wanted to keep in touch with me. It made me think I finally had one foot on the inside of the corporation. It was also during this conference I met Sebastian, the guy who introduced me to the rest of the activist community. After the conference was over, I stood back waiting to see what happened. That is when I heard Sebastian talking to another friend of his. They were chatting about last year when Sebastian and a group of other workers took Gorillas to court and won. My instant reaction to what I heard was to interfere in the conversation and ask for his number so I could talk with him again. From that moment, the rest of my fieldwork unfolded into this thesis.

However, you might notice that I have not named Girl 1. The reason is that I never got to meet her again. My analysis in this thesis will therefore be drawing mainly on the workers' perspective as this was available to me during fieldwork. For, I never did get in touch with any other of the people working within the corporation, except for Girl 1. I also believe as she saw me reaching out to workers, she decided I was not worth talking to. She therefore used the common phenomenon of 'ghosting' as she broke the contact without giving me any reason. Nonetheless, I will argue that this seeming omission will not affect my thesis as I will also include the data gathered from how the companies present themselves online. Furthermore, the tension between the workers and corporation is very pronounced, and I therefore also suspect that the workers would have kept a distance to me if I were in touch with anyone working in the office.

This case was the first public event during my fieldwork after I came to Berlin in February 2022. After weeks of nothing happening, this press conference gave me a new belief that my research was something worth looking at. The main focus of this thesis is the working conditions and value within the gig economy stationed in the urban environment of Berlin. With this I will look deeper into what the gig economy does to the understanding of labor. As a particular form of an economic system, platform capitalism is based on digital platforms offering services and goods online. The gig economy branches out from platform capitalism, as the gig economy takes part of the more physical world offering services such as food delivery, cleaning services, and taxi driving. I will ground the theoretical framework of platform capitalism and the gig economy from the work of Vallas and Schor (2020), and Stark and Pais (2020).

In its pure form every platform is their own monopolies as each platform have "the capacity to control and manipulate markets, both established and new" (Peck and Phillips, 2020 in Stark and Pais, 2020 p. 50). Meaning: each platform produces their own markets where goods and/or services are offered by the workers within the platform. The platform producers define the rules to be followed as well as the value of the product/service. Furthermore – and as I will show in subsequent chapters – the social interaction within the platform economy does seem to move back towards the traditional labor systems which do, as we know, exhibit linear and hierarchical features.

Within – from what I have seen and will present further in the empirical presentation throughout this thesis – the management of the platforms are structured by Taylorist features of labor control. Both Vallas and Schor (2020), and Stark and Pais (2020) indicate how algorithms

have arguably taken over the main task of tracking the laborers. Within the early industrial times clocks and timesheets were used to make work more efficient, an idea called scientific management – or Taylorism – developed by Frederick Taylor. Within platform capitalism this similar technique is used in the control of algorithms. However, algorithms have not entirely reduced the human control exerted by managers and producers: As Alexandra J. Ravenelle (2019) exemplifies throughout her book *Hustle and Gig: Struggling and Surviving in the Sharing Economy*, her interlocuters often strive to please the ever-changing commands of the platform. By *ever-changing commands,* I am referring to Stark and Pais's pointing to the "frequent changes in terms, conditions and protocols" that are the main factors of the workers uncertain condition (2020, p. 55). The effect of this is explained by Ravenelle:

> [S]ome of the Strugglers were reasonably successful – even believing themselves to be Success Stories – until the platform they were on preformed a "pivot", techspeak for a mission change and policy overhaul. Much like automation led to the wholesale layoffs of automotive workers, pivots lead to Strugglers trying to reinvent themselves. But unlike automotive workers, sharing economy workers generally receive little to no advance notice of major workplace changes, and they have no unemployment safety net to fall back on (Ravenelle, 2019, p. 11).

Stark and Pais (2020) argue that the concept of platform capitalism follows a non-hierarchal system (p.50-2). In the context of my own research, I seek to further develop this. Stark and Pais illustrates this cooperation between the platform producers, the platform workers, and the platform users, resembling it to the Möbius strip, explaining that neither of the actors can be said to be on the inside or on the outside of the platform: Everyone circles around on both sides and is equally important to the economy.

Throughout my stay in Berlin, my interlocuters made it rather clear that in the existing hierarchy, they were based the bottom of this pyramid. To then believe that the platform capitalist companies do not have any social hierarchy would therefore – according to my own findings – be misleading. Rather, what Stark and Pais show are a non-hierarchical system of function rather than social position. Both articles by Vallas and Schor, and Stark and Pais fragment the economy into several different actors all participating in the platforms function. There are, as I see it, several layers of actors within the economy where everyone has both a

specific but also a generalized role. As a starting point, I will divide the actors into three main categories: the producers, the laborers, and the users. These categories are rarely permanently set as the actors within each of these categories often move between each other's spaces and also overlap. But while ethnographically fuzzy, such a distinction is analytically useful and may serve to provide an overview of important components of the system as such.

My category of *the producers* is chosen to compliment Vallas and Schor's first category whom they define to be "the architects and technologists of the platforms, who are founders, highly skilled employees, and independent contractors" (Vallas and Schor, 2020, p. 275). The producers are the main base of the platform and make it possible to function. By *the main base of the platform*, I am referring to their job of establishing the platform. It is then safe to say: there would not be any platform without the producers.

Moving on to the second category, *the laborers*, are inspired by Vallas and Schor's next four categories. These include those offering professional services online; those offering offline services either as a profession or not (also called gig-workers who I focus my data on); micro taskers; and influencers (Vallas and Schor, 2020, p. 275-6). These people are offering the goods to purchase, whether it is products or services. They are defined as independent contractors, but are still dependent on following the often-changing rules developed within the platform. Stark and Pais summarize this in the term 'command' as to the non-existence of formal labels as 'owner' and 'worker', and the hierarchical positions following these.

Both the laborers and my last category, *the users*, may be categorized, as Stark and Pais do, as platform 'members'. The users are simply those who use the platform and purchase the goods offered. I consider them as a part of the platform as they are just as important members of the platform making the value of the economy. They are also feeding information to the algorithms to streamline the platform. Also bound to the terms and conditions of the platform, the users have less obligations or risks of being excluded from the platform, which, conversely, is the case for the laborers – as also hinted by the opening ethnographic example.

Before moving on to establish this thesis theoretical framework of work and labor I want to cite a description of platform workers written by Ravenelle (2019). This description is included as an illustration of the workers' situation that I found highly relatable regarding my own interlocuters situation.

Just like the workers in company towns, where the loss of one's job could also result in the loss of one's home and the social safety net was nonexistent, today's sharing economy [–the platform economy–] workers are on their own in many ways. Workers pay their transportation between gigs and while on tasks or rides; they (or taxpayers, through Medicaid) provide their own health insurance; they must calculate and pay payroll taxes such as Social Security/Medicare; and they must personally finance any time off (owning to illness, vacation, or a lack of work). Workers are also financially responsible for any workplace injuries […]. While workers can utilize online discussion boards to chat about their experience, they remain much more isolated than other low-income workers, such as Caribbean nannies (Ravenelle, 2019, p. 74).

With this thesis focusing on precarious work, I will now establish the theoretical perspective of work and labor that will be followed further. Both *work/worker* and *labor/laborer* will be used within this thesis, however, reflecting different but sometimes complimentary perspectives. Following Weil's (2015) review of the anthropological perspectives of work, the term work could be seen as the collective characterization for doing a productive activity. Within this characterization, *labor* "contextualize work socially", meaning that terms as "*employment* is a condition of labor rather than work" (p.662).

Within her book, Ravenelle (2019) consequently makes the position to use the term *work* as her focus group is not employed, laborers. As platform capitalism mainly uses contractors as workforce the workers are not bound to the platform as employees – as explained in the introduction of platform capitalist theory. In assessing the usefulness of the labor/work distinction here, it is also relevant to appreciate that German law requires employment for workers protection, therefore most of my interlocuters are employed as laborers. This thesis will therefore use these connected terms as work as and labor with its social positioning understanding. However, the people presented in this thesis are employed, Tod – a laborer for the courier brand Gorillas – told me that their employment belonged to a different, but connected, company which the legal demands belonged to. This gave the platform company the opportunity to function in their traditional way, reducing the responsibility for their workers.

This thesis also wants to contribute to the anthropological theory of value as I would like to analytically juxtapose "the value of work" with "the value of human". In the context of gig work, I asked my interlocuters their perspective on the value of their job both from their own perspective but also how they experienced the view by the management of the platform and the

consumers benefiting their labor. The depth of their answers will be in focus throughout the chapters following, however as a summarization I want to refer to the thesis title "They treat us as machines" which Sandra – a warehouse worker of the grocery delivery platform Gorillas – told me in our first conversation together. I chose this as the title as I found this quote to represent the rest of my findings and representing my fieldwork as a whole. My interlocuters – the workers and laborers of the courier platforms – showed me how their life was minimized to parts of a machinery as they were all treated as such.

As a starting point for understanding anthropological value theory, I follow Graeber's (2001) analysis. Other anthropologists have looked into value as systems of structural order – such as the theory of kinship (Levi-Strauss, 1969) or marriage and the Indian caste system (Dumont, 1983; 1998) – focusing on the individual value within the world. While challenging these earlier perspectives on value, Graeber gives the reader of his book *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value* (2001) a summary of the transformation of anthropological theory of value through time, he also points to what – in his perspective – value theory is missing: "to bring together society and human purposes, to move from meaning to desire" (2001, p. 21).

The thesis is taking the perspective of labor value and therefore the value of life and human action. As money and materialistic payment will be mentioned as a way of valuation by my interlocuters, I want to state here that it is not so much about the money as it is about the value money symbolizes, and how this form of value takes part of defining how my interlocutors are treated as less then human.

Introducing my interlocuters and their gig platforms

Moving on to introduce my interlocuters and as also stated above, this thesis will mainly take the perspective of the so-called gig riders – meaning those working as contractors for a platform delivering goods using a bike as transport. I was advised by Mira Wallis, a social scientist introduced later in this thesis third chapter, to get in touch with riders working with grocery delivery as they were the least involved in other ongoing research projects in Berlin. While heeding this advice, I found the project starting to unfold itself, leading to the scenario unwrapped above. With one foot inside the activism happening around the platform workers, I gradually got invited to several other gatherings, similar to the one mentioned above. In these I was introduced to several new people who found interest in my project and shared with me their everyday struggles. This was exceptionally generous as it also was clear that they had had previous bad experiences with other academics and journalists presenting their stories in ways

they were uncomfortable or disagreed with. Hearing I was there to do anthropological fieldwork focusing on workers' values and rights, they chose to trust me and gave me a chance. However, this was not without skepticism and initial resistance to my presence. Further, at all times my interlocuters tested my stands and perspectives, and carefully chose what I could observe and not. This was unsurprising as the people I got to meet and hang out with were all open about the vulnerable situation they were in. They told me about the circumstances they came from, what they had hoped to achieve in Berlin, and the psychological strain this form of labor had given them.

Every single one of my interlocutors had diverse backgrounds: some had moved from England; some came from India, and then various parts of the social class system; and some came from countries struggling with local conflicts and warfare. With its high immigration rate my German friends told me that Berlin does not function as a representative of Germany. Karen E. Till rather explained Berlin as: "a cosmopolitan city"; and "a *Kosmos* (world) attracting people, ideas, and investments from other places" (2005, p. 52). The city is rather a merger of different cultures living together into a diverse and set community. And it is within this community this thesis has gathered its information from.

During fieldwork as well as after, I have been acutely aware of my interlocutors' often unstable situation when it comes to income and labor, and that this makes them quite a vulnerable group. But, at the same time, I have also experienced their passion for what they perceive to be their rights – especially those related to labor rights. This aspect is something I will go further into in the fourth and fifth chapters of this thesis where I am looking into the workers resistance, but for now I want to underline that the ethical challenges of a project working with a group that may be described as vulnerable, is something I have thought about. Hopkins writes about issues she faces while writing about immigrants in America. I want to quote her reflection as: "the people whom we work often cannot really comprehend the method of participant observations or understand the consequences for themselves of the outcomes of our research" (Hopkins, 1993, p. 128).

In my fieldwork on gig riders, I did not focus on one specific brand mainly because, as I would argue, the forms of conflict that I am interested in does not unfold merely in relation to a singular brand: Rather, it is the feature of the platform capitalist system itself – at least in terms of how this was ethnographically available to me during fieldwork. Given the systemic nature of these dynamics, to name the companies my interlocuters' work for will not therefore pose any danger to my interlocuters' anonymization, both because there are too many people

fitting the same description I will give of them, but also as they probably will not be working for that brand at the time this thesis will be finished. This latter point reflects the precarious nature of their work and the high turnover in these companies – a feature I will also explore.

To ensure their anonymity, I cannot guarantee that all the conversations will only stem from the people I decided to include in this thesis. Following my interlocuters during their working hours, or as activists, I met too many people to include them all with their own personas within such a short ethnographic text. To mesh these people into my main interlocuters will not only make it possible for me to include all the valuable information I gathered, but also confuse the characters' real personas and hopefully give them a stronger form of anonymization. While ethnographic fieldwork is a privilege to do as one gets the opportunity to gather data in the eyes of those truly involved, it is also important to respect this privilege and show respect to the interlocuters sharing bits of their lives with the researcher. Anonymization is an important factor to make sure that the gathered information will not do any harm to any of the participants involved with the fieldwork (O'Reilly, 2012, p. 68-9).

This thesis relates to several platform economy presences in Berlin during the time of fieldwork: the café and restaurant courier brands Lieferando and Wolt; and the grocery courier brands Dropp (who went bankrupt the 16th of December 2022 and was bought by Gorillas), Gorillas (who went bankrupt and was bought by Getir), Getir, and Flink. Because of the fluctuation and volatility of different types and brands within this industry, I chose, as I was advised, to focus my studies on the grocery courier brands. Although, as I followed the activist work, I did also meet other gig workers from several different fields.

My data will mainly be presented from the worker's perspective, as mentioned above. Still, this thesis will then again look into the gig economies transformation of value and the worker, and I therefore see it as more relevant to maintain the communication with the workers rather than the company itself.

A methodological reflection, and why I was not a rider
Entering the field, I thought it would take me about two weeks to establish connections with interlocuters. My plan was to talk with riders passing me on the streets or getting hold of couriers outside of restaurants and cafes. Two weeks passed and I had not gotten the opportunity to get in touch with any couriers yet. Some of the things I had not taken into consideration were the couriers' busy lives and a lack of a common language basis with me. I found it frustrating

to see potential interlocuters all the time passing me in the streets or running in and out of the cafes and restaurants I used for observation. Not wanting to run after the riders while they were working to give them my contacts, the only thing I could do was to observe their movement from the sideline while I figured out another way into their lives. My other tactic was to publish an abstract of my project on social media, as well as distributing it to other ongoing projects stationed in Berlin, hoping someone would reach out to me.

While waiting for a response I used the time to observe city life and the movement within it, both as it came to gig workers and for other citizens. After several weeks and months of sending out emails and messages, I finally made a breakthrough as one of the persons controlling the gorillas' workers council Instagram account answered my reach out to them informing about the Alex warehouse situation which opened this thesis. Generally, social media became my most important tool to get into the community of laborers. I was advised by fellow students to keep my social media private, but as I am studying the field of platform capitalism and how it integrates with our everyday life, I found it weird not to use these platforms actively while doing the research. I could have constructed a new profile for myself to use while doing my research. However, I decided not to, as accepting my interlocuters into my private Instagram showed a mutual openness to them from my side of the social investment. Still, I would not recommend this to everyone, as it may be quite revealing of one's private life.

Throughout my stay in Berlin, I did not get the opportunity to work as a gig worker. Sandra explained to me at an early stage of my fieldwork how this was difficult:

Sandra: So, what are your plans? How are you doing your fieldwork, how are you gathering your data?

Ida: I think I will conduct most of the data thorough observations and follow interlocutors around. I do also hope to be able to work as a rider to kind of get the experience of it.

Sandra: Where are you from again? Germany has some strict laws about this, but I think it might be easier for you to get a permit if you are from an EU country.

Ida: Hmm… no Norway is not part of the EU. But I think we are part of a trade deal with the EU countries. Does that count?

Sandra: Probably not. You need to have insurance within an EU country to apply for working allowance to show you are insured if you get in an accident or something. It took me quite some time to get my permission. The struggle is that you need to have a job to get German insurance, but you need insurance to get a permit to work. It is a lot of paperwork, and I'm not sure you will make it in the time you still are in Germany.

Not giving entirely up on the idea of experiencing the life of a gig courier, some of my interlocuters tried to help me find someone to shadow through their workday. However, this was unsuccessful and mainly so for two reasons: The first was that the laborers did not want to get in trouble with the managers to allow anyone to follow them. The second reason will be more thoroughly explained in the fourth chapter whereas sharing a worker's account was a way the laborers used to boost their account's value. This technique made the job as a courier even more unreliable when it came to organizing a time schedule, and therefore also more difficult to find someone to shadow. Those who collaborated on sharing an account switched between one another, and to give me an exact time of work beforehand was therefore difficult.

Therefore, my ethnographic material is based on what my interlocuters have told me, what I observed living in the city center and also participant observations (in reference to Jenkins, 1994) following my interlocuters on the work I was allowed to join, the digital material available to me, as well as the press conferences and protests happening throughout my stay. In collaboration with my interlocuters I hope this thesis follows the same pattern as Ingold (2018) refers to when he writes: "it is a never ending and collective process of figuring out how to live" (p. 2).

The object of the thesis

As also stated above, this thesis' main focus is to provide an anthropological analysis of the development of the gig economy in urban society. With a focus mainly privileging the laborers' perspectives, I will use the material I collected throughout my fieldwork in Berlin to answer the research question of this thesis: What does the gig economy do to the understanding of the value of the human and the value of labor?

I found the perspective of value interesting in light of the gig economy, as platform capitalism has in many ways changed our lives into digital platforms. While most parts of the urban life

are being commodified, the formality of labor is also reduced – as the labor takes the role into the precarity standard. As I provided in the theoretical overview of platform capitalism and the gig economy above, laborers inadvertently reduce their workers' rights by accepting the terms and conditions of the platform as contractors. As all users of the platform have to agree to the platform's terms to be a so-called member, both the consumers and the workers agree to follow the rules set by the platform itself (Stark and Pais, 2020 p. 55). While this is concealed by a promise of 'freedom' and 'independence' (Mulcahy, 2016), Ravenelle's (2019) work on the gig economy shows workers who strives to make ends meet and users dissolving community into individualism. Throughout this thesis I want to take part in this conversation and present my own analysis to possibly contribute to understand the development of a transforming digital age.

To do this, I have included six separate – however, also highly connected – aspects of the gig economy and urban life within this thesis, which also takes the form of my following chapters. The first chapter will look into a theory of humans as machines and as parts of the urban infrastructure focusing on the gig workers. A lot of gig workers' labor is categorized as non-professional, even though they might do the work that is seen as professions in other situations, such as taxi-drivers or cleaners. This categorization is mainly done by the workers themselves in their explanation of the work they are doing, but also in the advertisement of the jobs done on the platforms (see example in Figure 0.4.).

Why Deliver With Wolt?

As a Wolt Courier Partner, you can earn money by delivering orders to local customers. You set your own schedule, so you deliver when and where you want. It's easy to start earning - no previous delivery experience is required!

Figure 0.4.: With a short description Wolt shows how easy it is to become a courier. Screenshot taken on Wolt's webpage: https://explore.wolt.com/en/nor/couriers (Taken: 08.05.2023)

The jobs are explained as small 'gigs' easy enough to be done by anyone. Such a strategy of *simplification* or *casualization* of gig work is, I will argue, *both* reducing the value of the job as well as the laborer *and* how the gig workers evaluate their own labor. Such a reduction of the value of gig work shows clear similarities to the industrial era and the work done by the conveyer belt. Within the gig economy I will expand on this reduction, arguing that the gig workers, and then especially considering couriers, has transformed to be the conveyer belt carrying the products to the users. While portraying the laborer's consideration of their own value within society, I will analyze my material drawing on theory of work and labor mainly conducted from Graeber's theory of 'bullshit jobs' (2018). Even though 'bullshit jobs' do not focus on platform jobs, but rather blue color work, I use this theory to explain the valuating perspective the laborers put upon themselves and how others might perceive the work they are doing.

Moving further into the transformation of urban life, I am expanding the focus in the second chapter as it explores the time-space of urban life. Building on the theory of the Marxist perspectives of Giddens (1995) and Harvey (1989) on time and space, I want to engage as well as challenge their influential theories of capitalist configuration by contrasting these with the development of platform capitalism. This chapter aims to provide an insight into the mental life of urban sociality and community in the context of capitalist development. By including the theory of a sleepless age and loneliness, I want to challenge the dystopic perspective many academics within the social sciences seams to take (referring to Vallas and Schor, 2020, p. 278). Vallas and Schor (2020) refers to the Digital Cage of algorithmic surveillance. To expand this, I believe the Digital Cage does not only affect the platform worker, but everyone attached to the platform in any way. By challenging this dystopic perspective, I am not neglecting their work but rather want to nuance their perspective of urban life. Within this chapter I am arguing that contemporary urban development show tendencies to advance individualism. At the same time, I do also argue for the wary reason many of my interlocuters chose to move to the urban life of Berlin: to find a global community giving an open space to unfold themselves and establish their own community.

While the previous chapter took an expanded perspective to look at sociality and community as a whole, the third chapter will narrow the angle focusing on the gig workers and again how they are dehumanized by the platforms. The third chapter's main argument is that the gig economy and platform capitalism strategically use minorities in order to market their own branding – for instance as inclusive and diverse. While looking into this form of rainbow capitalism and

advertisement, the chapter will contrast such an analysis with different experiences of my interlocuters being harassed at work because of gender and ethnicity – in stark contrast to the brand promising inclusion and diversity.

While the three first chapters to establish who the workers are, how the urban community is transformed, and how laborers are treated within this economy, the fourth chapter will move the thesis into looking at the forms of resistance exerted by laborers against the companies. The fourth chapter will draw on Scott's theory of everyday forms of resistance and make this relevant for the digital age, showing for instance how the workers strategically use algorithmic forms of surveillance to increase their own workers value. I will also exemplify and analyze more classical forms of resistance, namely through theft and through gossiping.

The fifth chapter will move the analysis of the gig economy into the political field of workers' rights movements and assembling workers councils within what I will have then shown to be an increasingly fragmented and individualistic form of economy. As the theoretical framework of platform capitalism are set in context of German law, I want to investigate the practicality of this economic form, and how it functions in context of the external factors. Other studies of platform capitalism and the gig economy have shown that it operates differently depending on the laws of the location of operation. I will set it to the German context as I am portraying the work people set down to establish proper workers' rights and how the companies do what they can to keep their actions in the shadow form the law and oppress their laborers.

In summing up the main findings and discussion, I will attempt to establish some ideas of what the future of the gig economy and platform capitalism might bring. To predict the future is impossible, and something most social scientific academics will take a stand away from. However, to try to peak at the path that the economy has followed so far, I believe it is plausible to highlight these factors to give a picture of what *might* come. This will summarize the work done so far and answer this thesis' main object to answer: What does the gig economy do to the understanding of the value of the human and the value of labor?

Figure 0.5.: After the press conference the protesters hung their slogan outside of the closing warehouse but were told by the police to take it down since they did not have allowance from the building owner.

Chapter 1.

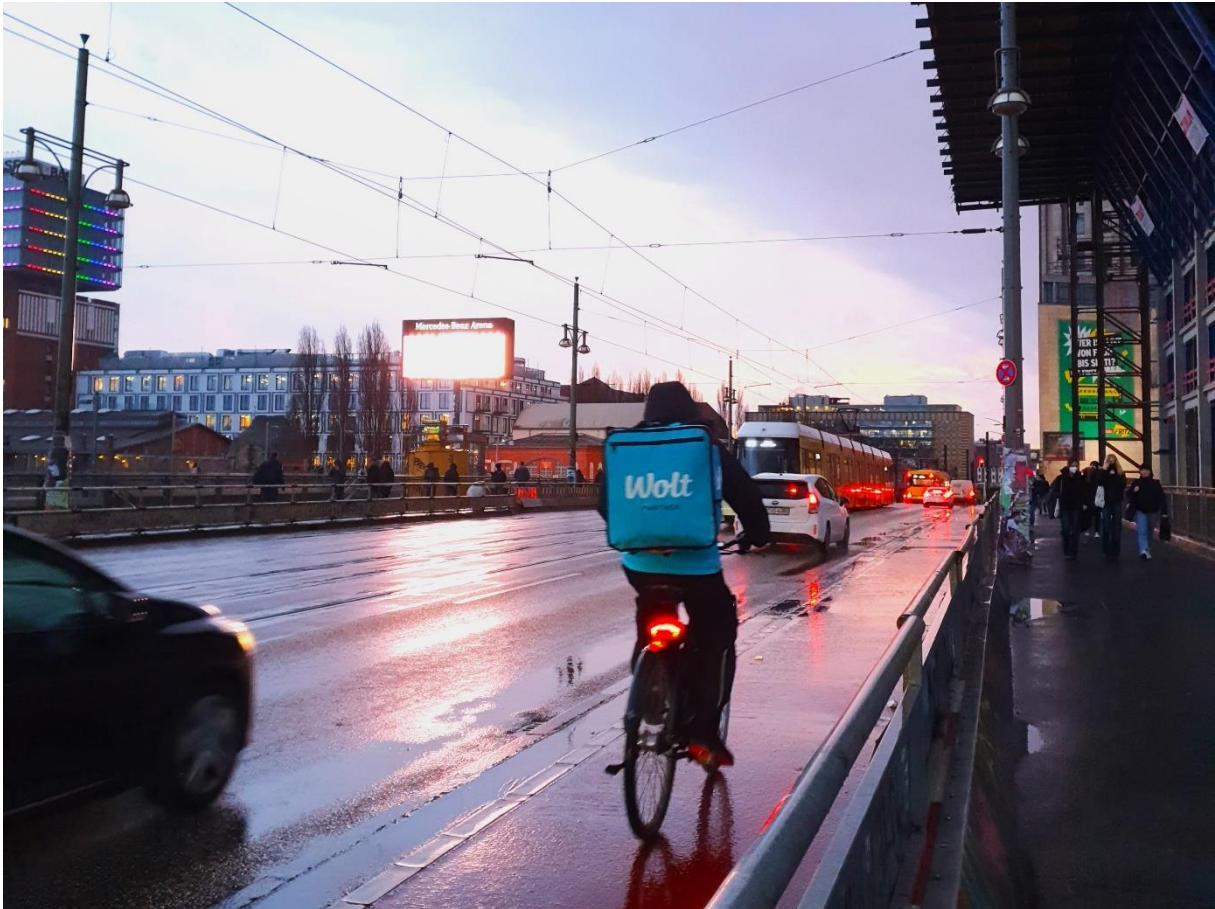# THE GIG ECONOMY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF HUMANS INTO MACHINES

Figure 1.1.: Wolt courier riding on the narrow bike path by the busy main road.

"You should know that they do treat us like we are machines. They don't see us as humans or living beings, and they do not care."

– Sandra

Starting this first chapter of my thesis I want to quote the philosopher Gerald Raunig on his analysis of the film *The Third Policeman*. While referring to the films' theory that everything touching exchanges atoms, Raunig points to the example: "the more time a person spends on their bicycle, the more their personalities mingles with the personality of the bicycle" (2010, p. 8). I found this quote fitting to this exact chapter as I want to further discuss the dehumanization of my courier interlocuters. Through an analysis of my empirical material on the gig laborers, my main argument will be that through this form of labor, the human is subjected to processes which entail being objectified into a machine. Such a process, as I will show, includes the loss of human features – both in the relation to managers, the consumers, and to themselves. The examples I will provide in this chapter will sustain such an argument by presenting the everyday life of a gig rider.

Drawing on theoretical readings of Marx, Deleuze and Guettari, Raunig (2010) puts the industrial laborer in the state of a mechanical conveyer belt that leads the laborer throughout their day. This same illustrating example is something I will proceed to follow as I am setting machine-theory in the context of platform capitalism and the gig economy. As stated in this thesis' introducing chapter, platform capitalism draws on the same values as Taylorism and the early industrial era. Contributing to a theory of the human as machines, I want to further look into what this does to the value of the laborer. To analyze the value of labor in the light of my empirical examples I will use Graeber's (2018) framework on *bullshit jobs*. Even though Graeber clearly states that his drawing of bullshit jobs extends from blue collar jobs – whereas some positions within the office are purely made for the sake of having the position – I find it relatable to the gig economy from when it comes from the feeling of the employee having the job, but also how others treat the position.

In making such an analysis here, I want to stress two aspects. For one, I would like to underline the burden the platforms place upon a rider on a daily basis. Second, I also would like to show that the value of their work is not recognized by the riders themselves. While this will be dealt with in different ways through the thesis, this chapter will open such a discussion on how platform economy – often hailed as post-industrial, innovative and cutting-edge – in some ways take us back in time to the early industrial era. I also therefore ask here: How can we understand the question of value when it comes to the gig workers? How are they treated, and how do they value themselves? Answering these questions, I will contextualize my observations and the stories I have been told with theories of value and labor.

Objectifying the human: The process

First, I want to examine how a laborer, from the point of view of the gig companies, is objectified as part of a machinery. When establishing the grounded theory of humans as machines, I must also reflect on my view of defining humans. As I will show empirically below, I have observed a strong dehumanization by the managers of their workers. In the context of this analysis and as a starting point, I define the mechanic ways of laborers very broadly as the lack of the ability to think and act for oneself. While stating this I am referring to Graeber's (2018) theories of labor within his term bullshit job which I will further analyze later in this chapter. Connecting this thought to Mbembe's reflections on dehumanization and climate change within his work of *Futures of Life and Futures of Reason* (2021), one can envision the impact development of technology has on human life. Within this article Mbembe points to the algorithmic structure of today's everyday life within the urban structure. As Mbembe shows, the algorithms are tracking and forming society, as it does for the laborers I'm focusing on throughout this thesis. Concretely, I will argue that the workers are treated as parts of industrial machinery, transporting goods to the customer in a string-like fashion. They lose their human features when cycling around, following orders, and risking their lives as it is not worth much more than the food in their backpack. A similar connection is made by Gerald Raunig (2010) as he unfolds the symbols of society and machines in his book *A Thousand Machines*. In the eyes of Raunig, Karl Marx makes the connection of laborers as the cognitive parts of machine production, illustrating the machine as the fabrication as a whole. I want to draw this line to include the gig platforms and their workers (Raunig, 2010, p. 21-3). The system of gig riders seems more or less like a conveyer belt rolling automatically during heatstroke or blizzards. I am stating this in its literal sense since it became clear for me during my time of fieldwork that no external situations stopped the demands of the gig workers to continue their job. This was the case in the summer of 2022 when the reported temperature went up to 38 degrees. Shockingly the app riders were just as busy out in the streets as if it would have been a typical day.

On the other hand, it was not just business as usual as there was an explosion of laborer complaints through social media during and several days after. Information about how the office workers got time off work to get away from the heat and had a pool party (see Figure 1.2.) to celebrate their work spread while the riders still had to push themselves through the overheated streets of Berlin.
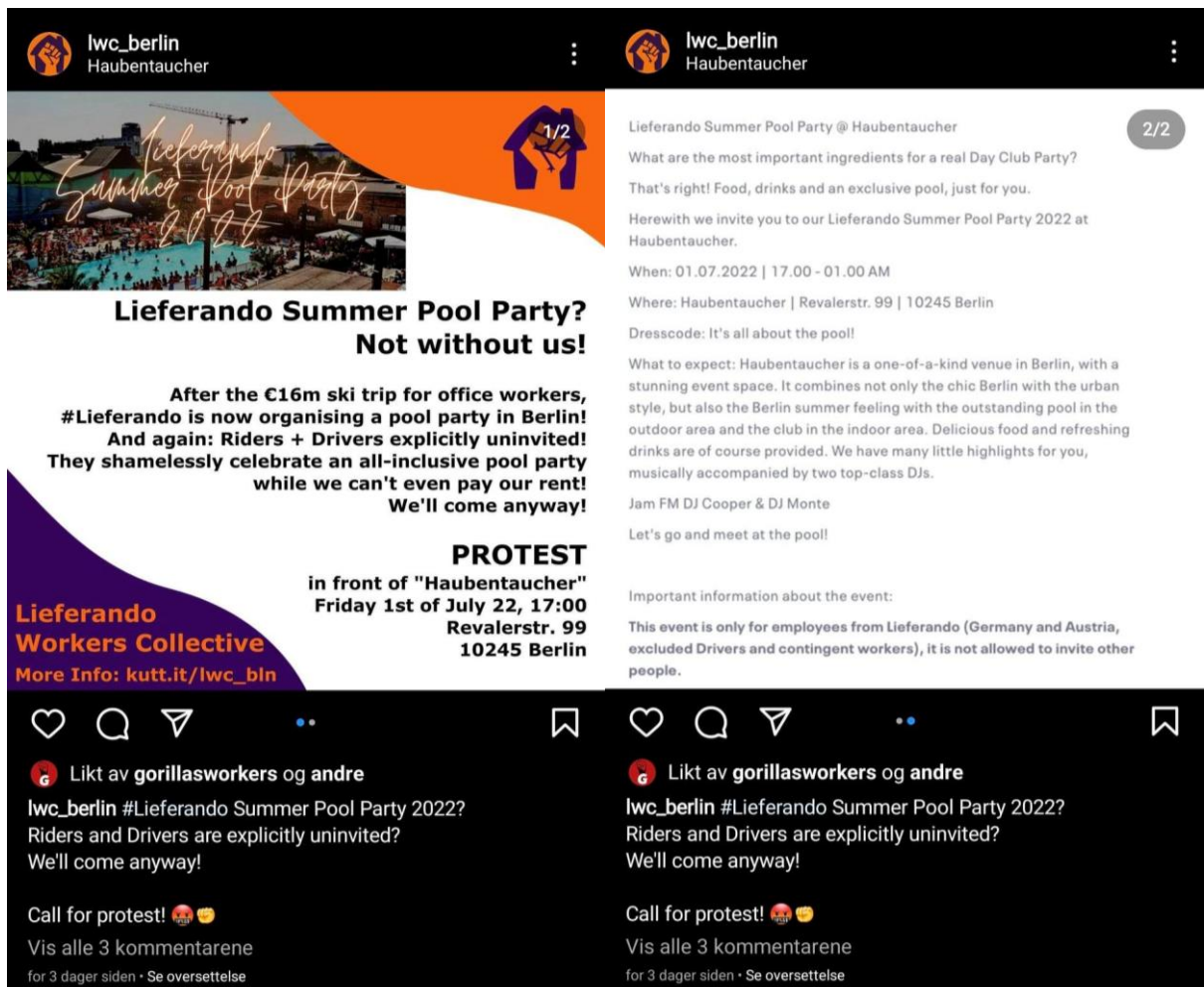
Figure 1.2.: Instagram post by @lwc_berlin (the official Instagram page of Lieferando workers collective) sharing the information about the headquarters pool party at the same time as they are calling out for a worker's protest.

This resulted in increasing turmoil within the relation between the laborers and the headquarters. The mail seen below (figure 1.3.), depicts one of the many turbulent situations spread around during this period when it was too warm for people to care to wear a helmet. This mail was sent out to all Gorillas workers:

Figure 1.3.: The mail sent out to all couriers. Highlighted text: "if you do not like this rule the answer is simple, please find another job" and "If you choose to not wear a helmet, I can assure you, your time with Gorillas will end very soon".

As a reaction, the Gorillas Workers Collective followed up by posting this Tweet (Figure 1.4.):
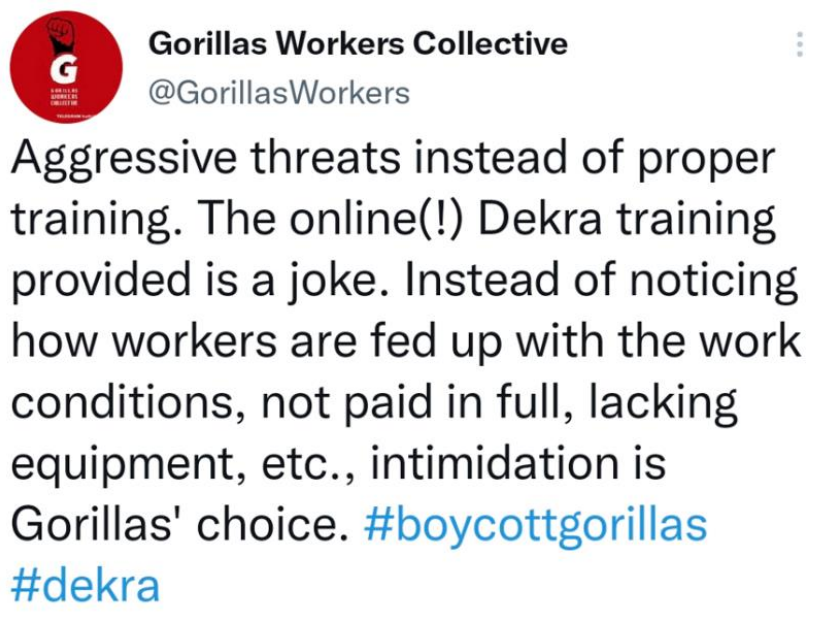
Figure 1.4.: Gorillas Workers Collectives reaction to the mail (Figure 1.3.)

The sent mail (Figure 1.3.) illustrates how the managers shift the responsibility over to the laborers, demanding them to do as they are told or lose all their rights and be terminated. One could argue that there is frustration behind this mail, and I believe that the mail resulted from several bad cases of workers having near-fatal accidents. It is, therefore, possible that one *can* also see this as an act of care, sending out this threatening mail. Nevertheless, many people working within these platforms are non-English speakers. Casper – one of the Getir riders presented later in this thesis – was the one who made me aware of the problem with how the

managers often sent out information with only German and English translation. He told me that the workers took care of translating the information for the non-German nor English speakers in their circle. However, there was no certainty that every rider or warehouse worker received the same message or any message at all. The same goes for the tweet (Figure 1.4.), however, the tweets were often translated and reposted in other languages on other channels as well as circulated within the laborer's communication between each other.

Furthermore, this email was circulating at the same time as the company withdraws its responsibility to ensure their workers if they do not follow the rules. The tweet shows the workers' stands against how they are treated by the management. My interlocutors told me that instead of being acts of care, the measures like this helmet demand are something the company undertakes to cut costs: It is expensive for the company to pay for employer's insurance, but it is not enough equipment for all the workers – such as helmets, bikes, reflective vest, and other mandatory equipment for the job – which makes it problematic to follow.

Sadly, this is not the only example I have to show regarding the treatment of workers and how seemingly disposable they are to the platform. Throughout this chapter, I will present conversations and examples I had with: Sandra the warehouse worker presented in this thesis' introductory chapter who also will be presented further below within this chapter; Casper, the Getir rider mentioned above; and Jose a Gorillas rider who will be presented further in this chapter. They are all workers for digital platforms and are some of my primary interlocutors throughout this project. This sums up the end of my conversation with Sandra and this chapter's introductory quote:

Sandra: You should know that they treat us like machines. They don't see us as humans or living beings, and they do not care.

Sandra told me this at the end of our first chat. We were finishing up our videocall after she had delved deeper into stories about the lack of respect she had experienced from her managers and co-workers.

Sandra: It's better now that I work here in Gorillas, even though it's not the best. I understand that our rights are limited, but I know they need me because I know

how to speak English fluently. A lot is happening within the Gorillas company in Berlin, but nothing of whatever they get through there helps our situation.

She looked at me through the computer screen with a tired look. With everything she had told me, I understood that the work had worn her out psychologically, and I also knew she was just one of many.

Sandra: They [the managers] won't ever treat us as we are at level with them. We are a resource that is fully disposable and replaceable. So, if we do anything that can cause them trouble, we are not valuable to them. It's just as easy as that. But at the same time, the job doesn't have value to us either; it's just an easy way of income in a country where it's difficult to be an outsider.

Reflecting these statements and also other ethnographic material to be presented, I must stress my analysis of the gig economy as seemingly aligning closely with the particular type of jobs referred to in Graeber's term: Bullshit jobs. With a common perspective of gig work as what Sandra defines as "not a proper job" and "temporary," I feel the urge to explain another view of how one could value this type of labor. Therefore, I will contextualize Graeber's theory of bullshit jobs (Graeber, 2018) with gig work to see if his definition of labor also relates to this new way of economic labor structure. This is how Graeber defines his term a bullshit job (Graeber, 2018, p. 11):

[A] form of paid employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence even though, as part of the conditions of employment feels obliged to pretend that this is not the case.

In line with the conversation I had with Sandra, I asked most of my interlocutors what they thought about their job and whether the job had any value to them and to society. They answered with a clear 'no' but simultaneously told me the delivery was practical within the covid restrictions in operation at the time, in Berlin and elsewhere. Now that society had opened again – the time when I entered fieldwork – they believed that the popularity would decrease.

Moreover, it did, for sure. Many platforms have to cut down on their investments and are firing people at a high rate. I will go further into how the gig economy transforms itself within the urban space in the next chapter, but this is still a sign of less popularity for the platforms.

Back to Graeber's theory of bullshit jobs, I want to state a clear distinction between his and my own work when analyzing the aspects of work. Graeber is straightforward in underlining that the aim of his analysis is to explore the effect of "the secret belief that our jobs lack social utility or social value" (2018, p.63). Further, Graeber wants to show how specific jobs are taking up more resources than what they bring to the workers and the society and how that affects the workers knowing this. This is also relatable to this thesis, where I cannot deny that my interlocutors do not see any value in their job – as Sandra also expressed above. I thus agree with Graeber that people's feelings about the social value of their job are usually accurate (2018, p. 63).

Nevertheless, the term 'bullshit job' does not fit the description of a gig workers labor. I would instead emphasize the 'bullshitness' as integral to the brands and platforms. This implies that it is the platforms itself which do not provide any necessary resources to society. Some examples to my analysis are: There is no need for a platform to provide delivering of food, as the restaurant often provided this service themselves before; there is no need for a platform where people to offer cleaning services, as there already are several professional services who provide this; and the same goes for taxi-driving. All services provided offered on these platforms were already accommodated by professional services with better working ethics and better guarantees for the consumers. So, with that in mind, I will, within Graeber's terms, define *gig work* as a 'second-order bullshit job' (2018, p.62). From a value to society point of view, delivering goods is a job exceedingly more necessary than the platforms are. This last aspect is something I will explain further in the next chapter, but as a final argument, complementing Graeber's point, it is notable that the valuation of work does affect the worker.

Making a worker into a machine

Sandra: My first job as a rider was for Lieferando. They deliver food from restaurants and cafes. I thought it would be a decent job since I like to be active, and it is not a job that requires much brainwork, so I could listen to music and podcasts while

working. Also, I'm only doing it part-time as I'm taking German classes, so I also liked the thought of scheduling my working time.

Sandra told me this while we sat opposite each other and talked through a zoom meeting. Unfortunately, she was not located in Berlin but in another German city. As the only person who reached out to join my project after I published my abstract on Facebook, she was eager to answer all my questions about being a gig worker.

She laughed at me when I used the term gig worker and told me that no one used that term among the workers: "We call ourselves riders." The whole conversation started in a light mood where neither of us was sure how this conversation should end up. From the start, it seemed like she enjoyed the job she had. At the time we spoke, Sandra worked as a Gorillas warehouse laborer while taking German classes. Eventually, she wanted to work as a cook but did not have the language skills to work in the kitchen with other German speakers. Earning some money while she kept herself active through an already busy day seemed like a 'win-win situation' at that time.

Sandra:	This is, of course, something temporary for me. I cannot see myself doing this for a long time. My boyfriend also thinks my German is good enough for me to take a real job, but I do not feel secure enough about it.
Ida:	Do you think other workers feel like that? Is this just something temporary?
Sandra:	Yes, for sure. I haven't met anyone who plans to do this as a long-term thing. They work as riders until they can get a proper job.
Ida:	What do you mean by 'a proper job'? Don't you think being a rider is?
Sandra:	Hmm, well, it is a job for sure, and a tough one too. But it's not something anyone sees themselves doing as a profession if you know what I mean. It's just something temporary. So, if the companies want people to work here long-term, they should improve their working conditions.

The beginning of our conversation made me wonder if the working conditions were better than I thought. Sandra talked so fondly about the job; it did not seem as bad as I had gotten the

impression of through my research. Maybe the examples presented in Ravenelle (2019) or similar literature on gig work and platform economies were outdated already? Maybe the situation was quite different in Germany than the examples I heard from France and the US (Walsh, 2020). However, as soon as Sandra mentioned the working conditions, other issues unfolded:

Ida: What was the most challenging part of the job you had as a rider? How were your working conditions bad?

Sandra: So, how I was treated depended on the restaurant. You see, some of them were quite happy about the work we were doing and gave us some leftover food, let us use their restroom, and let us wait inside until the food was ready. Others treated us as a liability. They usually shouted at us, denied us using their restroom, and made us wait outside in the backyard in the rain so the customers wouldn't see us. I had to wait outside in the rain for about 30 minutes before the food was ready. You see, the restaurants and cafés rarely prioritize the deliveries over the people who are there to eat, so we usually had to wait for quite some time until the food was ready. It resulted in us being shouted at by stressed-out restaurant employees and impatient people who shouted at us for delivering food later than expected.

Ida: Oh, wow, that doesn't sound the best. It's like a chain reaction of shouting.

Saying that, Sandra smiled and looked up into the air. It seemed like what I said had touched into something that had troubled her, and that for a long time. She took a deep breath before continuing the conversation.

Sandra: Yeah, those days are not the most motivating. I have had some tough times when coming home from work, where people were mad at me for things I couldn't do anything about. It is frustrating because you cannot tell people you're just the person who delivers the food. We can't do anything about things missing, being too late, or not finding the address when it hasn't been specified enough. And it is those experiences one remembers the most, too. And it breaks you down in

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the long term. My boyfriend knows how much this has affected me. I'm glad he has been there all the times I have come home crying after a tough day. It really wore me down.

I watched her swallow to compose herself. Then, Sandra looked back at me on her screen. Hearing about this was hard to process when I saw how this got to her. Further, she told me that she had developed mental issues because of the treatment she got at the job. For me, this sounded unavoidable, thinking about how it must have been to always get the blame for the smallest of issues. This goes especially for the situation of Sandra, as the only thing she does is to work hard to deliver the food.

Ida: What is the company's role in this? Don't they get the complaints?

Sandra: No, I don't think the company cares much about these things. Of course, they work on problems that are related to the app. But when it comes to us riders, it seems like they don't take any responsibility. I guess they care if the food gets delivered, preferably on time, but nothing else.

Ida: Okay, isn't that a bit weird for you?

Sandra: Well yeah, and that's why I quit that job. It didn't work for me. As a rider for Lieferando, you cannot communicate with those sitting in the office. They are probably down in India, just working on the technical stuff. They can't know if we, here in Germany, have a snowstorm we have to work through. They only see and care about the numbers.

Ida: Yeah, that's the people working with the technology, but what about the managers? Where are they?

Sandra: Honestly, I don't know what they do. We have nothing to do with them. We only get offers for gigs, and we take one and another one when we are finished with the first.

Sandra told me further that she had no problems differing between the time she was working and resting. I had to ask about this because I had heard about their algorithm system within the

platform, where you get more money per job if you increase your work. That had made people push their working limits to an edge where they wore themselves out. I was glad to hear Sandra tell me she was not one of those who did this, but at the same time, it was evident that she brought her work struggles with her when she came back home. Analyzing my conversation with Sandra, she tells me about her perspective of the job's value by describing it as "not a proper job" and, at the same time, describes other people's views when telling me about all the times she has gotten the blame. She works daily on a job that no one values, nor herself, and it 'wears her out.' These aspects shown by Sandra are something I noticed with several of my other interlocutors in the next months that followed.

Therefore, I see it as necessary to look deeper into the transition of a worker's state of mind. For in the platform capitalist system, when does one assume the role of a worker, and when do you transfer back to an everyday person? And is it possible, analytically or empirically, to distinguish? The reason this question is important goes into the valuation of the worker and how the worker values themselves in that state of mind. The last aspect is that it is not as difficult for some of my interlocutors when they work within a warehouse. They have a place to check in that puts them into a working state of mind, as well as a place to leave when they are done for the day. However, their shifts are rapidly changing, and demanding their work even though they were meant to have that time off. So, is there a line between when one is a worker and when one becomes a private person? Therefore, I believe and will argue that one takes the private persona into work and the working persona back home afterward.

This exact thing is what Sandra shows, saying that the job wore her out that she came home crying after work, and that she still struggled with mental issues after she left the job she had. Even though she told me she did not work over the time Sandra had scheduled for herself, she did take the experiences from work with her after the working hours were over. Wanting to go deeper into this, I explained my fieldwork to Sandra and why I wanted to look into the gig economy and work. I explained to her the theoretical part of how the gig economy treats its workers as objects, not humans. Furthermore, that is when we got into what it meant to be a gig worker. As Sandra shows with her experience, they are the only part of the gig economy system that is physical in the open and, therefore, the ones who get all the blame for anything wrong.

In his book *Toward an anthropological theory of value. The false coin of our own dreams* Graeber refers to Strathern's definition of value. In her perspective, value is something ascribed to the object by others. This also goes for the case of humans: "[W]e are […] what we are perceived to be by others" (2001, p.39). This cite given by Graeber illustrates one of

Stratherns concepts of 'partible' or 'multiple' personas; meaning that a person has different sets of meaning and value dependent of the situations and the people observing. In this situation with gig workers, I want to draw a connection between Strathern's statement and how their uniform defines how we (non-gig workers) see the riders. With their colored workwear, the riders are visible to everyone in the streets (see Figure 1.5., 1.6. and 1.7.).

On the other hand, their *subjective visibility* is not as prominent as their *clothing*, i.e. a brand attire. That makes others see them only as riders because we connect the bright colors to the brand. By yelling at the workers, the consumer might feel like they are complaining to the brand but as made clear in the example above, their words only reach the so-called independent contractors disconnected from management. Only ratings on the app will reach the platform management, and also affect the workers algorithmic value. To me this conflation of a brand or company with the rider is a clear instance of the dehumanization inherent to the gig economy.

Figure 1.5.: Lieferando rider   **Figure 1.6.:** Flink rider   **Figure 1.7.:** Wolt rider

Analyzing what both Sandra and my other interlocutors illustrate when presenting their perspective of their job one can see the reflection of the consumer's and managers' views of them. It is the negative scenarios affecting the rider's perspective of themselves, and it is this opinion that evaluates the job of a gig worker. When mentioning the working conditions, Sandra also tells us how the platform structure affects and transforms her.

Moreover, the erasure of the personhood and, in a sense, humanity that workers are subjected to, is especially the case with couriers. To exemplify this, I want to draw on a conversation I had with one of the German friends I made in Berlin, Cassandra. This case is far from rare as many of the people I chatted with starting my field, and then specifically non-gig workers, were not aware of the working conditions of the gig workers. Cassandra started as one of my interlocuters but ended up rather being my Berlin-mentor and close friend as the focus of my research changed. The conversation happened in one of the parks in the 'kiez' I lived in. we were sitting on a bench as we had bought ourselves a beer and watched two people training their dogs out on the fenced grass:

Cassandra: So, what are you actually doing in Berlin. The first time we met you mentioned something about a study?

Ida: Yes! I'm studying social anthropology back in Norway, and I'm currently doing my fieldwork.

Looking at her as I spoke, I saw her confusion about the terms I was referring to. I therefore decided to explain what social anthropology is, and what I do when I am out on fieldwork. I will not include that part here, but rather move on to further into the conversation where I presented the aim of my research.

Ida: So, what I want to do here in Berlin is to look into the economy that is based on providing work and services on digital platforms online. And that's why I wanted to talk with you since you work at a café where the café cooperates with these digital platforms, such as Wolt, to deliver their food.

Cassandra: Okay? I don't know much about that system though. I'm not sure how much I can be of help to you, but I will try my best to answer your questions!

Ida: Ahh no, that's okay! I mean I want to hear the perspective of what café and restaurant workers are thinking about these platforms and services. Like, how is the communication between you working in a café and those who come to collect the food etcetera. You see, I want to look into the value of this type of work, so I need the perspective from any angle and from everyone attached to their work.

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Cassandra: Okay, yes, that makes sense. However, if I can ask you a question: how did you end up wanting to look into this?

To answer her question, I decided to retell some of the situations brought forward within the documentary *The gig is up* (Walsh, 2021). One of the scenarios I explained to Cassandra was the steep hill incident portrayed further in this chapter's next segment. Cassandra listened closely to what I told her as the two dogs training on the grass next to us started to get aggressive with each other. After I had given a few examples of documented situations gig workers easily got into, we sat silent and watched the dog owners arguing about which dog was at fault. Cassandra started silently to translate the argument to me, as they yelled in German. After the dogs and their owners left the park, we looked at each other. Then Cassandra continued our conversation.

Cassandra: Unfortunately, I didn't know that their [– the gig workers –] situation where this bad, as you are telling me now. I thought they were only cycling around delivering the food as they pleased. I always pictured them as a bit lazy since every time they enter the store they just stand there until their [food] is ready, and sometimes they even ask where they are collecting the order while they are standing there right in front of the packages. They [– the gig workers –] ask us all sorts of questions even though they see how busy we are with the costumers. But we try to be nice to them when they come in. Even though most of them don't meet us with a smile.

After this, Cassandra and I stayed close throughout my stay in Berlin. She helped me to understand Berlin and guide me through the difficulties of the German bureaucratic processes. Above, I explained to her the reason for my choice of fieldwork and how I was not aware of the gig worker's conditions beforehand. I had not considered the digital platforms to be any different from other brands. As the digitalization went on, I noticed how new platforms were developed to make consumption and work faster and easier. Therefore, before working on this thesis I did not notice the gig workers and were part of those subjecting them to their work without noticing their environment. I only saw the bright pink clothing that passed me at high speed in the streets, irritated that they did not consider the people they passed.

When the machines break down

These dynamics of dehumanization also came to the surface in slightly different fieldwork contexts, for instance when I talked to Sebastian and Jose. Both worked for the same warehouse platform, Gorillas. I met up with them to help with guarding the entrance to the building where the Drops council vote was held. This situation happened near the end of my stay in berlin, and in a period many of the gig workers wanted to gather workers councils for themselves within the brand they were working for. We all – meaning gig workers, other activists interested in their work, their lawyer, and I – showed up to make sure that the meeting successfully went on without any disruption and [in this case safe to say] attacks. These situations are something I will go into more detail of later in this thesis' fifth chapter. Here, I want to bring forward another example of Jose which compliments what Sandra told me about the relation between the managers and the workers. We were sitting outside on the stairs of the building as a group of ten people had gathered to help with keeping the Drops managers entering.

In the beginning, Sebastian and I were joking back and forth about how he used sick leave as a way of getting time off work:

Ida: Haha, I give you the creds for using it as a smart way out of work!

Sebastian: Thank you! But it's not like I don't have a reason for it, though, I did actually have an accident at work. That is the reason for my sick leave now.

Ida: What happened? Are you okay?

Sebastian: Yeah, I'm just fine. It wasn't a huge accident, only some boxes that fell on my foot the other day, so walking right there and then hurt. But now I'm using the leave for other reasons.

Ida: Okay, do you actually get time off when you get hurt during working hours?

Sebastian: Of course! It's our right, but it's not like the manager is happy about it. They need us to work, so we have to fight about it.

Ida: So, the managers don't care about you if anything happens?

After I asked this last question, Jose started laughing in the background. Until then, he had only been sitting with us, listening to the conversation, and nodded as he agreed to what Sebastian

was telling me. Now, he leaned into the conversation, telling us about a situation that had happened to him just a few weeks ago:

Jose: No, the managers don't care shit about how us workers are doing. I can tell you that with certainty.

Ida: Why, what happened?

Jose: You see, not long ago, I was doing a quite heavy delivery, and on my way there, I was hit by a car.

Ida: WHAT!?

Jose: I'm okay now, but the leg hit by the car still hurts. But it's nothing too bad and I have painkillers for it. But the accident wasn't a pretty sight. Luckily, I was still conscious. You see, if anything happens, we have to fix everything ourselves. So, I called an ambulance to get me. Of course, I also had to notify my manager about the accident, so I did. The only thing he asked me about when I was calling him from the hospital was if I had been able to deliver the order. Like, the only thing he cared for was the order. So, of course, I had to tell him "No," and he was not happy to hear that. He made it sound like that it was my fault the order wasn't delivered. Therefore, I had to fix it so it, in the end, would [be delivered]. I was in the hospital for a week without the manager caring to check in on me. And I had to work immediately when I came out of the hospital. If not, they would probably fire me.

Ida: So, you're still working even though your leg hurts? It would be best to rest then, or your leg could worsen.

Jose: Yeah, I know. But I can't afford to lose the job, so I have to be working.

Ida: That's crazy.

Sebastian: Not really, not for us.

Jose: Right.

After hearing this, I had the strange sensation that something you have watched in a movie is thereafter coming true. For, I had seen an analogous situation happening in the

documentary: *The gig is up* produced by Shannon Walsh (2020). The setting is France, where we meet a female rider talking about her friend's accident. In the scene, the female rider walks down a steep hillside road. She showed the camera team that it was down this road that she had lost her friend. The rider was doing a delivery for Uber Eats and was late for delivery. He had taken as much speed as he could down the hill without knowing that the turn at the end was too short for him to make. As a result, he smashed into a brick wall at the end of the road. Filming the wall now, one could still see how broken the wall had been after the rider's accident. His bike was smashed to pieces, and bricks from the wall had fallen or were severely broken. Seeing this, one could only imagine the rider's state, who had crushed his body and left these marks on the wall. Sadly, the rider died a week later because of this accident, and the company was cleared of all responsibility. I see this situation: he was only another machine now out of order. From the experience I am left with after my fieldwork, his shift was probably quickly occupied by another lucky rider who was offered more gigs to work.

Jose's situation was not as bad as the example in that documentary, but it could have been. In my observations of the riders doing their jobs in the busy streets of Berlin, I have seen a lot of close-calls, accidents about to happen where the riders jumped a red light and only just avoided being hit by the passing cars. Moreover, it also shocked me how calmly the guys talked about this. However, after a while, when Jose went to talk to another group, Sebastian turned to me to finish the conversation.

Sebastian: You must know that Jose is acting like an idiot working with his leg as he does. We don't support that. The more people who don't fight for their rights, the harder it gets for us who do. He is right about the company probably firing him, but then he should sue them and get money for it. It's the only way we could work ourselves out of this crap.

It was hard for me to grapple with the seriousness of everything they told me. A reason for this was the tone of voice they used, i.e. talking about these things so casually and calmly that they were, and at other times, visibly fuming at the system they were working within. As shown in the example with Jose, the manager had clearly lost his human view of Jose. Getting mad for losing one delivery but also losing a worker for a brief period affected the manager more than realizing that Jose had gotten hurt in this accident. The workers must follow the companies'

rules or be fired. Even though, Sebastian probably is right about his remark that they have to do what they can to stand their ground.

The lost opportunity to control your life

As parts of the introductive chapter show, there is a paradox to this kind of work in that a laborer simultaneously works in subordinate position, i.e. under manager, but also for themselves, independently. This latter aspect – the promise of self-employment – is often tempting for gig workers and many of my interlocuters also expressed this as an (initially) attractive part of the work. For they are presented as being their own boss and having the power to schedule their day and time. So, what does independence mean within the gig economy? Do the workers experience that they have the power over their own time as promised by the often-marketed definition of gig work? These questions take a considerable step into the humanities and social science, including philosophy. So, in my work analysis, the thesis also needs to look deeper into the aspects of freedom. In line with David Graeber argues in his book *Bullshit jobs* (2018), I see this as an instance when as a laborer, one has the mindset of being on others' time (p. 84-92). Graeber argues that one can see this from the perspective of slavery, which I agree with regarding my interlocutors. In this notion Graeber draws on the idea of buying other people's time. Time, according to Graeber's analysis, is not something bought. He makes the example that it is possible to buy a person's work, or buy the person to 'own', however time still belongs to the individual. The idea today as the workers on the time of others then accept this idea of being owned, more or less subconsciously.

To illustrate this, I will introduce my fictional interlocutor, Jose. Jose is Brazilian and identifies themselves as they/them and are based on some of my interlocutors to illustrate the situation for the typical worker. The reason behind Jose's identification as they/them is the platform's conscious use of minorities in their branding and marketing campaigns. I will elaborate on this in the third chapter of this thesis but wanted to signal these aspects as significant already here.

Jose moved to Berlin to study because the program was better there than what they could do in their home country. Unfortunately, they could not learn German before going to Berlin. Now Jose is studying to be an engineer and taking a German language course. Jose struggled to find a job in Berlin because they lacked German knowledge, so they took the job as a Gorillas rider. In a conversation with Jose, I asked them if it was better to work as a gig worker since they were studying full-time daily. They answered:

Jose: No, actually not. I don't have much time to study because they set my working hours for my classes.

Ida: Why? I understand the idea of gig work that you're supposed to control your own time, like being your own boss.

Jose: Yeah, that might be true. But in reality, it doesn't work that way. You see, we have this app where we get our working hours. [Showing me the app] Here you can see where they have scheduled my time. When I applied for the job, I put myself up for the fewest hours, but it didn't take long before I got more work than I requested. But I need the money anyway, and I must show up for work.

Ida: Do you, though? Can't you just find a job somewhere else where you can schedule your hours?

Jose: Haha, where? Nah, it doesn't work like that. Anyway, I have to finish my German classes before I can apply for any other work. It's not many places you get hired if you don't speak German fluently.

I do not know why my conversation with Jose shocked me. I knew at that point that gig work did not necessarily follow the rules of the workers' rights stated in the German law. However, I thought they followed the idea that the worker was a contractor controlling their hours. So, I told Jose this, and their answer was:

Jose: They might be based on that idea, but they certainly don't follow it. I don't think they have enough workers to follow the idea you're telling me. Everyone is working overtime, it's not just me. And if I'm not showing up for my schedule, it will affect all the others. The most important thing is that the food gets delivered.

Ida: So, you're telling me it's more a collective-based reason that you work more than you should?

Jose: Both yes and no. I do need the money. And if I turn down job offers, they will phase me out and replace me with someone else. But for the collective part, we

had this guy at work who just showed up, but he barely delivered anything. He just was there and read his book. I think he had some underlying problems, but some of us got really mad at him since we had to work extra. As I said, the office doesn't care much about us who works there as long as the groceries get delivered.

Ida: But why did you have to take over his shifts? Couldn't it be this other guy's problem that he didn't work?

Jose: No, of course we couldn't! Some of us will probably get fired if we don't earn enough for the warehouse. And we couldn't say for sure that it would be him who got fired. The mad thing was that he earned as much as the rest of us since he, in a sense, was at work.

Ida: Why didn't he get fired if everyone knew he's not doing shit? while the rest of you are working your asses off?

Jose: Well, he works when the manager is in. It will only be his words against ours. And, as I said, the manager doesn't care as long as the groceries get delivered.

Ida: Aren't you all individually working through your apps? How does he manage to get away with it?

Jose: Well, technically he's at work, just not working. And as he has the same shifts as others, the managers won't notice it is long as we are pushing our own work to the limit.

This example of Jose illustrates Graeber's point of the feeling of being on others' time. Graeber quotes modern morality as "You're on my time; I am not paying you to lounge around" and "A worker's time is not his own" (2018, p. 88). This quote is more accurate than the quote probably is intended. For, in the context of the gig workers, none of their time is their own; the working hours decide the rest of the worker's day. Even though Jose went to Berlin to study as a full-time student, they became full-time workers, steadily balancing all the working hours with their studies. This perspective of being on others time goes into the theory of commodification of time, which Giddens (1995) links to the development of capitalistic society. He states that:

The commodification of time means that time is drawn into the 'double existence' which is the predicating quality of every commodity. Time as lived time, as the substance of the lived experience of *durée* of Being, becomes accompanied by the separated dimension of time as pure or 'formless duration' (Giddens, 1995, p. 130-1).

Going on, Giddens argues that this temporal configuration within the capitalist society is forming the day-to-day social life of the inhabitants, as well as how "the central phenomenon of the organization of production processes" (p.131), is defining how the daily life is experienced. I will further explore the effect of space and time within capitalist society in my following chapter, but I still see it as relevant to introduce the idea of space and time in the concept of capital production while elaborating on the treatment of the laborer. To only connect time to capitalist commodification and control would be wrong, as Giddens argues and I agree, since the organization and configuration of time was central to social order long before the industrial era and its regulated times. Building on Lewis Mumford, Giddens points to the production of the clock: "Mumford sees the clock, rightly enough I believe, as vital to the co-ordination of machinery and labor-power." (p.133) Giddens goes further in this elaborating on physical time to say that "the clock is the very expression of the commodified time" (p.134).

This reading of the importance of such regulated time to industrial society is central to the production of labor and I find this interesting. However, this notion of physical time might not be as relevant to the gig economic labors. To explain this shortly, as this is something I will discuss further also in the next chapter, I would like to underline that linear and sequential time may be vanishing within the urban community. Time, as I see it, would need some external definition to be notified, as the 24/7 city always has lights, activities, and sounds, day and night merge together into an everlasting time. This is something I will take a further look into when moving on to this thesis' second chapter as I set the context of Jonathan Crary's (2013) analysis of 24/7 urbanism today in an historical transformative transformation from the industrial age.

The transforming idea of time does also have consequences for gig workers' experience of being on other people's time – as I elaborated above in the part of my conversation with Jose where he talked about their annoying co-worker. Again, this draws on Graeber's portrait of the worker/manager relation as well as the example of Jose and illustrates that the perspective of time is under a process of change. The urge to make the most out of the time you get from others was not in any presence through my many conversations with my interlocuters. Also,

time has seemed to get lost in the sleepless hours of the city, which I'm going to argue in the following chapter.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have shown the everyday life of my interlocutors working as riders within the gig platforms, especially focusing on their relationship to managers and the platform. While exploring the gig economy's objectifying and dehumanization of their laborers, these examples all support such a reading while at the same time it is changing our perspective of the valuation of a laborer and the laborer's valuation of themselves. In sum, I am arguing that these transformations in the labor market bears a clear resemblance to how the managers, and society, valued the laborers during the early 1900s Fordist era of industrial production – a time characterized by laborers being replaceable and exchangeable. This is not only the perspective that the managers are holding over their laborers but something concrete that the laborers are aware of. I will come back to how this further will transform in the future in the last chapter of this thesis, but for now, I would press the thought about how the gig economy is transforming the society we live in. This is what I am going to explain further in the next chapter as I move on to the conversation of space and time within the urban life.

Figure 1.8.: Picture of a Flink rider on their way to deliver groceries.

GHOST TOWN: THE SPACE-TIME OF GIG ECONOMY

Figure 2.1.: Picture of Lieferando rider in Friedrichshain in late March. With this picture I want to illustrate the empty streets, and the riders visibility, within the urban landscape.

"[T]he infrastructure of community […] has been severely neglected at best and at worst

actively destroyed."

– Noreena Hertz (2020, p.11)

I moved down to Berlin during the late winter season of 2022. As it was common that time of year, it rained a lot. With low temperatures and wind, the rain made most people stay inside, leaving the streets dead empty. My friend Cassandra told me I should look forward to spring and summer as the city woke up from its winter sleep. One could speculate whether the general idea for many Berliners during this period would be as follows: "It's too cold outside. Can't we just order a delivery instead?" If this is right and reflects a common conception, I would then argue that the riders have merged to be part of quite an important infrastructure for the citizens of Berlin. Using the word 'important,' I do not refer to the meaning of a necessity but rather a luxury service or commodity the consumers have made themselves dependent on.

My many conversations with Cassandra drove this point home: She made me aware that people's dependence on couriers was something I needed to take a closer look at as she told me that she, herself, and most of her friends used the apps to get through the winter weeks. Cassandra was also quite right when it came to the changing of the seasons in the spring, which was inaugurated when there was a visible change of activity in the streets. While this change came as suddenly as a summer storm, the visibility of gig riders in the urban landscape was simultaneously reduced.

Given the waxing on and waxing off the presence and visibility of gig riders according to season, this chapter will approach the riders as a key form of urban infrastructure, reflecting Simone's influential reading of people as infrastructural elements in urban formations. With his term 'people as infrastructure' Simone (2004) wants to "extend the notion of infrastructure directly to people's activities in the city" (p. 407). He draws on this notion within African cities and his work in Johannesburg. Infrastructure, according to Simone, is something developed by a "complex combination of objects, spaces, persons, and practices" and therefore is "a platform providing for and reproducing life in the city" (p.408). In this chapter I want to put the concept of people as infrastructure in the context of local time and space transformed in the age of platform capitalism which also acts in the global and digital sphere. Sullivan et al. (2016) point to a necessity to further reflect upon the psychological effects of time and space development within a capitalistic urban city, which is what this chapter will do. In the Marxist thinking of time-space compression (Harvey, 1989) and its following theory of time-space distanciation – earlier mentioned in the thesis' first chapter – (Giddens, 1995; Sullivan et al., 2016), this chapter will continue the conversation of urban development in light of the gig economy.

Looking into this, I will explore, through the paraphernalia and logic of the platform and the gig economies, how humans transform into parts of the urban infrastructure. I will also build

on my previous chapter, where I approached gig economy's way of transforming humans into machines. As this chapter zooms out of the individual perspective onto the urban community as a whole, including both the workers and the consumers, I will look into the argument about the fragmentation of urban community that both Robert D. Putnam (2000) and Noreena Hertz (2020) argue for in their previous works. While both Putnam and Hertz write from an American urban development perspective, I still find them relatable to my findings in Berlin.

Further, what aspects of Berlin lives changed following the incursion of the gig economy? Answering this question, I will build on a theory of ghost towns and loneliness to analyze the Berlin urban order. A theory of ghost towns might imply that the gig economy exacerbates societal fragmentation, which might isolate us. Approaching Berlin in light of the ghost towns perspective, I want to explore the dystopia of an urban community where civilization dissolves into singular subjects co-existing but not communing. I am drawing this dystopic picture to set a contrast to the romanticization of a city that never sleeps. Here I am referring to the opportunistic perspective within advertisement – such as Figure 2.2. and 2.3. – and the portrait within the song *New York, New York* by Frank Sinatra. In the time of ghost towns, I will explore the gig economy within the theory of a sleepless century. While this forms a particular dark portraiture of urban life, I will later include a seasonal aspect showing the transformation of the urban streets affected by the weather. This chapter will show a transformation through time that will be further analyzed in this thesis's concluding chapter.

The idea of a ghost town inspired me throughout the winter season of Berlin. I would not go as far as to say that there were no people in the streets of Berlin, but still, there were visibly more individual subjects rather than communion. In contrast to these observation I made in Berlin contrasts my experience from my home town, a smaller city in Norway where I am used to people stopping to talk with each other, walking in larger groups together and taking their time as they crossed the streets of the city center. In Berlin, on the other hand, people walked alone at a high pace and passing others without noticing each other. I noticed that I gradually did the same within my stay in the urban environment. Simmel (2006[1903]) captured this same phenomenon in his analysis of the urban city. People were passing each other, living in their bubbles, and moving in the same way as Giddens explains as becoming "matters of habit or of 'dull economic compulsion'" (1995, p.11). Examples of this will be presented while looking into the community and loneliness of the urban city.

When and where is Uber available in my city?

Uber is available in many cities around the world. With an Uber account, you can request a ride in any city where Uber operates, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Figure 2.2.: Uber explain their concept of riding within "A guide to Uber: Getting Started" on their official webpage: https://help.uber.com/riders/article/when-and-where-is-uber-available-in-my-city?nodeId=558929fa-b991-4810-b6db-8c823862d7d4

Why use the Uber app?

🕐 **Rides on demand**

Request a ride at any time and on any day of the year.

▭ **Budget-friendly options**

Compare prices on every kind of ride, from daily commutes to special evenings out.

👤 **An easy way to get around**

Tap and let your driver take you where you want to go, worry-free.

Figure 2.3.: Advertisement of the Uber app on the official website of Uber: https://www.uber.com/us/en/ride/

The evolution of capitalist time and space

It is safe to say that urban life is becoming increasingly dependent on technology. Everything is getting more accessible every second throughout the day. This also goes for the development of the gig economy and food delivery apps. While the statement "the city that never sleeps" first became the famous nickname of New York, it has later been used to illustrate other urban cities, such as Berlin (Jansen, 2017). In this segment, I will start the discussion of time and space, as I want to look into if one could see a change in how time and space act, or possibly do not act, within the urban city. Furthermore, how does technological development affect urban citizens?

In his book *24/7: Late capitalism and the end of sleep* (2014) Jonathan Crary writes that "Sleep is an uncompromising interruption of the theft of time from us by capitalism" (p.10). Following this site, Crary lists other human necessities, such as hunger, thirst, and community,

saying all these have been commodified by capitalism, except for the necessity to sleep. I bring this as an example to show how fast every feature of human life has been commodified into something that can produce a capital increase. Since the time Crary wrote his book in 2014, sleep has been transformed from being something that Crary states: "[t]he stunning, inconceivable reality is that nothing of value can be extracted from [sleep]" (p.11), to have been commodified through the development of technology. While writing about the 24/7 society, Crary says that the average sleep time has decreased from the normality of ten hours to the present six-and-a-half-hour sleep (p.11). Insomnia has become an increasing problem in large parts of the world, and a recent study (Forthun et.al, 2023) in Norway showed that almost half of the participants qualified for the diagnosis. However, it is approximated that around ten percent of the population suffers from insomnia. This increase in people experiencing some type of sleeping disorder has also made it possible to develop a market that benefits from it, circling back to my statement that sleep has also been commodified.

While technology might be some of the reasons there is an increase in sleep problems, technology has also been developed and commodified to solve this issue. I want to argue that as capitalism has tried to lengthen the waken hours, it has also made it possible to make a product out of sleep. Further, I will explore the possibility that time and space no longer matter in urban society in light of David Harvey and Anthony Giddens's time-space theory.

Within Giddens's (1995) theory of time-space distanciation, he "refers to the modes in which such 'stretching' takes place or […] how social systems are 'embedded' in time and space" (p.4-5). He connects this to non-capitalist communities, which Giddens defines as agricultural communities, which form their communion on the ground of tradition. In the urban scenario, Giddens argues that "the routinization of day-to-day activities is stripped away from tradition. In the 'everyday life' of capitalist urbanism, large tracts of activity are denuded of moral meaning: they become matters of habit or of 'dull economic compulsion'" (p.11). From what I understand in his vision of the urban city, time-space distanciation does not occur. Therefore, the development of the community is fully connected to the development of the capitalist state power. I will leave my analysis about this perspective for later, as I will first gather other relevant theories.

As I also pointed out in the previous chapter, Giddens (1995) argued that the experience of time and existence with time had changed into something formless. Furthermore, he said that capitalist development and production defined the human experience of life and then directly pointed to the clock as the main reason. Giddens worked on this analysis from David Harvey's

(1989) theory of time-space compression. While Giddens worked with a theory that capitalism and globalization distanced time and space, Harvey rather showed the shrinking effect the capitalist and neoliberal development affected world community:

> I use the word compression because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us. […] As space appears to shrink to a 'global village' of telecommunications and a 'spaceship earth' of economic and ecological interdependencies […] and as time horizons shorten to the point where the present is all there is, […] so we have to learn how to cope with an overwhelming sense of compression of our spatial and temporal worlds. (Harvey, 1989, p.240)

While taking us through the development of the map, Harvey explains how mapping became part of the valuation of time and space, leading us to capitalistic urban life. Objectifying space through the map made it possible for more efficient traveling and made the world smaller in time. This point is similar to the form of objectification which Mumford, and thereafter Giddens (1975), argue about the production of the clock and how it affected the perspective of time, mentioned in the previous chapter. In short context, the compression and distanciation of time and space facilitated capitalist functionality and efficiency to be incorporated into our daily lives. While time and space became objectified, at the same time as they shrunk in consistency and grew apart in independence from each other, time and space became more irrelevant to life within the urban environment.

This reading of capitalism is relevant also for understanding Crary's analysis of the 24/7 society as he brings forward the effect of how a day is no longer reduced by the hours of a clock. I see time, as well as space, as something vanishing within the urban community. As I see it, time would need some external definition to be noticed in a physical aspect. However, as the 24/7 city always has lights, activities, and sounds, day and night merge into an everlasting time. Space also vanishes as urban development seeks a general formation with a goal for a global community and international economic activity. What I mean about this is that it is possible to buy the same coffee at the same coffee house, either stationed in New York or Berlin (Thompson and Arsel, 2004).

The gig economy: The intensification of the lonely city?

When moving to a global city, one is not looking for the presence of a large community but rather to get away and drift into the crowd. An urban city is at best described as it "will bestow the gift of loneliness and the fit of privacy […] The capacity to make such dubious gifts is a mysterious quality […] It can destroy an individual, or it can fulfill him" (White, 1949, p. 9 in Coleman, 2009, p.756). Even though this description is based out of New York in the 50s, I find it just as relatable to life in Berlin today. To confirm my observations, I confronted Cassandra with this analysis. She told me that "[l]iving in Berlin can be frustrating, and people can get swallowed if they don't take care of themselves". To illustrate this, I want to present a fictional character of mine, Jaime, a non-binary person living in Berlin and the *kiez* (district area) where I lived, in Friedrichshain. Jaime is based on my observations of people passing me in the streets, living nearby, some of my interlocutors, and my city experience.

> *Jaime locks themself into the shared apartment, hoping not to meet others. They cannot bear the thought of talking with anyone at that moment. Jaime rushes into their room and closes the door behind them. Throwing themself onto their bed, Jaime pulls out some of the white powder they use to calm themself down. Luckily, their next shift will not be until Friday, which is still three days away. Jaime could be in their room, drifting away on a cloud of drugs until then.*

This description might seem dramatic for some, as I present Jaime as a worn-out drug user. To clarify, neither of these is far from any normality in Berlin. The following discussion of urbanization and loneliness will regularly describe a worn-out mind. However, this is something I will explain further below. Berlin is a city known for drug use, even though it is not legal. While some people (non-Berliners) I have talked with reacted with uncertainty to this description, Cassandra complimented my observations by telling me, "Pfffffff…maybe they don't think that so many people do drugs here". I got pretty used to the whiff of weed as the scent of Berlin. It had a calming effect on me, even though I did not smoke the drugs myself. This was more due to what I related to the scent, as the whiff of weed often was present at the times of a pause of any kind: During breaks outside of the cafes, in the parks where groups of friends were chatting, or on whichever terrace or out any of the windows surrounding the backyard of my apartment.

Georg Simmel discusses the social dynamics in a global city in his article about *The metropolis and the mental state* (2006 [1903]) – originally published in 1903. Referring to "the city as the blasé outlook" (2006 [1903], p.55), Simmel argues that the metropolis's overwhelming social stimulation makes the citizens numb to their surroundings as an act of defense for the inner self (2006 [1903], p.53). This perspective complements Giddens's (1995) statement: "In the 'everyday life' of capitalist urbanism, large tracts of activity are denuded of moral meaning: they become matters of habit or of 'dull economic compulsion'" (p.11). Looking at this with the trending use of digital platforms, one could argue that they produce an escape room for citizens to do the necessary chores without exposing themselves to metropolitan noise. In the safe space of one's home, it is possible to order clothes, food, medicines, craftsmen, etcetera. Social interaction is unnecessary when ordering any of these goods as one sends the order through a message. This might evolve into a problem within the urban landscape because it disturbs the social space and changes the social infrastructure.

The example of Jaime shows how this again isolates the lonely citizen. I saw them wait a few times in our block's common area for their food to be delivered there.

> *Jaime sat by the open door, looking at people hurrying to their next task for the day. It was fascinating to watch, as Jaime themselves had all the time in the world. Leaning back in their chair, they inhaled some form of the joint in their hand and exhaled. They saw the food courier closing in toward where Jamie was sitting. Sighing, Jamie then stood up to collect the food from the rider before walking back up to their room.*

People in our block barely used this room or spoke to each other when passing in the common area or the hallways. It was the perfect place to wait for food deliveries as the common room was on the ground floor with tall windows reaching from the roof to the floor. This narrative of Jamie exemplifies Simmel's argument of the blasé look of the city. Even while observing the streets, it would be impossible to notice every single person. Therefore, all the activities will end up in a blur, like watching a trail of ants running around.

By using the example of Jaime, I want to point to a type of urban inhabitant that is becoming more normal these days, reflecting how the twenty-first century is what Noreena Hertz portrays as 'the lonely century.' As Hertz argues throughout her book *The lonely century: Coming together in a world that's pulling apart* (2020), loneliness is incorporated into our

society as neoliberal ideology and its individualistic values transform into our daily lives. I will agree with this but also show how the gig economy contributes to this further transformation. For: Is Hertz correct in arguing, at a general level, that an overwhelming amount of 'freedom' produces the feeling of loneliness (p.12)?

Hertz begins her book with an example from her life and a first meeting with a girl from the digital platform 'Rent-a-friend.' Meeting this over-friendly girl, they talk about why she applied for this type of job, renting out herself as a friend through the digital platform, and what the girl thought about it. Struggling to get a stable job after her education, she saw it as necessary to take up some contractor jobs. Throughout their time together, Hertz explains that she starts forgetting about the payment that keeps her new 'friend' in her company. Talking about the girls' customers, she describes them as "[t]he kind of people who work long hours and don't seem to have time to make many friends" (2020, p. 2-3).

Reflecting on Hertz's example, aspects of that description struck me as also possibly fitting several people inspiring the character Jamie: 'the kind of people who do not seem to make many friends.' Hertz sets this in connection with a transition to a contactless society as we, people within the society, no longer have the feeling of community or the knowledge of how to make one. At the same time, Hertz points to humans as dependent on a sense of belonging, and any absence of this will have severe consequences for society (p.20). If anywhere, freedom is something I find essential within the society of Berlin. From previous history, they know what it means to lack that privilege (Borneman, 1992). Referring back to the question of whether freedom has an overwhelming sensation where everything is within reach and will therefore make the decisions even harder, I find several of the literature used in this thesis to complement this as well as my data: As Jaime lives within a global city that never sleeps, and at all times could go out and be around others; and Cassandra's cautioning that a city as Berlin might swallow you.

According to Hertz's statement above, and probably most Marxist writers agree, the capitalist environment benefits from an individualistic society. One example brought forward about this is our bodily reaction to our lack of belonging and what Hertz categorizes as 'lonely bodies'. Loneliness provokes a stress response that is scientifically unhealthier than having poor eating habits and is just as harmful as smoking fifteen cigarettes a day (2020, p.6). At the same time, one has "a 64% higher risk of developing clinical dementia" (2020, p.17). These are just two examples taken from a long list of problems that follow the life of loneliness, but they are still relatively small, looking into the overall effect. Loneliness also provokes a term called

'death of despair.' Losing one's meaning to live because of the lack of community was something brought to the attention of sociologist Èmile Durkheim (Durkheim, 2004 [1897]). Throughout his work, Durkheim shows how the suicide rate could say something about society. Arguing that the phenomenon of suicide belongs to the psychological science when it comes to the individualistic level, he also proceeds to inform that people's mental state could be affected by reasons coming from the society as a whole (Durkheim, 2004 [1897], p. 65-66). In the light of Durkheim's work compared to the information Hertz forwards, there is an alarming tendency for social development within the urban city. If one defines *suicide* as the act of killing oneself due to a lack of will to live, then one also needs to look at the circumstances leading to this action. According to Durkheim, looking at communal functionality and the sense of belonging is vital to explain the action of suicide. The reason this is important to have in mind is then to see the damage an individualistic society could do to humankind.

My point is not to discuss how to define suicide but merely point to what Durkheim showed us several years ago and recognize the influence of the individual's surroundings. Also, Putnam (2000) notices this as he refers to James House, who "concluded that the *positive* contributions to the health made by positive integration and social support rival in strength the *detrimental* contributions of well-established biomedical risk factors" (p.326-7). This is a similar argument to Hertz who underlined the physical damage loneliness has to the body.

To give some more texture to these positions woven together above, I want to highlight and also stand by Putnam's argument that we cannot blame the lost connection within society purely on the capitalist and neoliberal development: "America has epitomized market capitalism for several centuries, during which our stocks of social capital and civic engagement have been through great swings. A constant can't explain a variable" (2000, p. 282). This is, for sure, far from anything this thesis will attempt to demonstrate. Still, like Putnam, I find the connection between capitalist development interesting when comparing it to the individualization of the social environment.

In my interlocuters description of the consumers, I found several traits illustrating the citizens' tendencies for individualization. I heard riders talking about the consumers at several points, and therefore decided to ask Sebastian and Jose about their impression of the consumer as we sat outside of the Drops council vote mentioned in the chapter above – which also will be brought on more into detail in chapter five. For instance, Sebastian and Jose gave me the impression they were in some ways irritated at the consumers and called them lazy for not

caring about getting their own groceries. While keeping guard of the voting hall, we started to talk about who the gig consumers were:

Ida: Do you have a general idea of who the consumers are within the industry?

Sebastian: Yeah, they are rich, lazy, young people who don't have the time or energy to get their asses out in the streets to get the food themselves.

Ida: What do you mean lazy? How do you know that?

Jose: Well, we usually have to carry the food up [the floors] to their apartment, and they are standing there stupidly in the doorway with their joggers on. So, it's not like they try to help us in any way. They paid for the delivery and maybe feel it is their right that we have to make all the effort to bring the food to them.

Sebastian: Some people seem also to have quite busy lives and don't have the time to fix themselves food in any other way. Still, most people are the same age as us, healthy, and all good, just finding it easier to order takeout.

Ida: But doesn't that feel like what you're doing is a bit unnecessary, delivering food to people you identify as lazy?

Jose: Well, the job would have a whole other meaning if we delivered goods to people who needed help, like the elderly. However, I believe that it's already something the healthcare system provides for them. So, they don't need us for that.

Figure 2.4.: Meme posted on @gorillasriderlife Instagram page. The meme is illustrating the rider's frustration over the consumers they are serving. I find this meme to also represent my point showing how attached the urban citizens are to their apartments. In the picture you can see a grocery store right next to an apartment block.

This conversation with Jose and Sebastian on the stairs of the Drops voting day reminded me of Jaime. They were young adults living on the sixth floor, making the food courier climb the stairs waiting for them in their joggers. They barely said anything to them, and if they did, it was nothing more than a "thanks, ciao" before they locked the door behind them, rushing into their room. As Hertz argues, humans "default towards what's easiest", and hearing her previously mentioned new 'friend' say that her consumers told her that they found it easier to rent a friend than bother to bond a proper connection with anyone (2020, p.68) gives a rather negative prediction to the social development. The same goes for my interlocuters and their consumers. They serve people who have the physical ability to do their chores themselves but would rather buy other people's services so they can stay at home without having to go out to meet others.

However, this is not the only reason Jaime caught my attention. I noticed they ordered a lot of food and groceries from different gig platforms. Something I observed with interest was trying to figure out who the typical people using these platforms were. When I got to know Jaime better, I understood they also worked as gig workers, delivering groceries to people's doorsteps. In my approach to this economy, as it unfolded, Jaime started as a prime example of a gig consumer but ended up being both the consumer and the worker.

The sense of belonging

Although the city lights do not seem to shine so brightly within the arguments presented above, I also want to contend that people, including myself, feel a particular pull toward the opportunities the city's social structure can offer. For example, Cassandra told me she had moved to Berlin because she did not belong to her hometown. There, she both felt and was treated differently:

Cassandra: I don't feel at home when traveling back to my hometown. There are too many toxic memories there. I wasn't allowed to be myself, and it still feels wrong when I go back. But, you see, the good thing about Berlin is that the community here is so different from a small town. Everyone is accepted here, and no one cares about whatever you do. So, it's easy to find people you belong with and people you have the same value as.

Ida: So, you feel a stronger sense of belonging to Berlin, then?

Cassandra: Yes, for sure! I love the diversity that exists in this town. But I think the German people have a general love/hate relationship with Berlin. Either you love Berlin and can't stand the small towns, or you hate Berlin and prefer the smaller cities. Germans think Berlin is dirty and messy, and they prefer to rather travel to Hamburg instead. It matches more of the traditional German culture. So even though Berlin is the capital, it doesn't represent Germany at all.

Berlin, like other global cities, has more diversity, and acts more as a center for the world culture to merge (Borneman, 1992; Till, 2005; Berlin.de, 2023). Cassandra explains what I have heard many of my interlocutors tell me throughout the fieldwork. The urban city allows individuals to find their space and be accepted by others. At the same time, the new economy diversifies them further apart from the possibility of finding a community. By intensifying individuality, the economy is transforming the urban city into a space where citizens merge into a summation representing diversity simultaneously with individuality. Their commonness acts in the way they co-exist within the same environment, which is most visible in the meeting with otherness.

Drawing on theory of *groupism* (Brubaker, 2002) and *imagined communities* (Anderson, 2006) I want to illustrate the effect of contrast between the feeling of belonging. When I first moved to Berlin, I got this feeling of being out of place, not fitting in with the flow of people in the streets. I was dependent on my phone guiding me through the streets and had to search for the information I needed to know the social codes. In this context, I am referring to the others as temporary citizens, tourists. It is easy to separate the citizen from the tourist within the city, as the tourist is taking a stroll looking up and around, inserting the experience of merely being in the environment. On the other hand, we have urban citizens hurrying from place to place, looking at their phones as they push away obstacles that might be in their way. They walk without looking as they have passed this same route so often that they know exactly what surrounds them. They do not need to look up except when passing the street, but only as a reflex to look out for cars, not caring about any traffic lights.

On the other hand, the tourist desperately looks at the others to see what they are supposed to do, unable to flow with the rest of the people around them automatically. In this way, the tourist is the disturbance of the conveyer belt that illustrates the city flow. One is not recognized as a Berliner before one has reached a consistent habitation of five years. At that point, the citizen may have experienced enough to merge into the city as a proper citizen would

have. They embedded themselves into the everyday flow of the city enough to not be any part of disturbance for the human infrastructure.

These examples above were something I quickly observed throughout my stay in Berlin. My Berliner friends also mentioned their opinions, explaining the difference between a proper Berliner and others. I see this as a type of bodily interaction. People know how to collaborate and produce a steady flow of the human movement without being told how to be part of the infrastructure and streetscapes. When analyzing my own experience as I too embedded myself more in the city flow of social movement, I found the others – the tourist – to be a disturbance to my normality. To walk behind a tourist's uneven stroll required more of my concentration than walking in the pace of a Berliner. In the light of communion feeling I saw how the individuals moved together, and it validates Raunig's (2010) point to the film *Themroc*. Moreover, this reflects the citizens' way of distancing themselves from the hyper-social stimulation produced within the city.

Circling back to Giddens theory of time-space distanciation I want to challenge Giddens idea of the urban environment. As Giddens distances himself from Marx's theory of capitalist society, he argues that time and space cannot be separated by looking into social interactions. This forms his theory of time-space distanciation, where the community is grounded in tradition and community. In this way space distances itself through time and vice versa. While moving on further Giddens makes the statement that this does not count for urban life as there are neither any traditions nor communities within this environment. Like I have established above, I will rather disagree to this and say that the time and space distanciation also are incorporated by the people moving into the space bringing with them their old traditions as well as developing new ones within the urban space. In my analysis above I show how the urban citizens have transformed themselves with a specific pattern of movement, only disturbed in the meeting with otherness.

Conclusion

As summer drew closer in Berlin, there was a drastic change to city life. Within a week, when I was back home in Norway, the restaurants went from almost empty to having to set out extra tables. Outside the same restaurant where I had counted 30 riders waiting to collect an order within the fifteen minutes I observed them, the numbers dropped to four riders within the same approximated time. In the previously dead empty parks, the feeling of spring had filled each square centimeter of grass with people playing games, listening to music, chatting, drinking,

and eating. Some also enjoyed the lively activities surrounding them on their own, reading a book or resting in the sun's warmth. It was evident that city life had moved out in the streets again, just as Cassandra promised me during winter. To conclude this chapter, I will follow this brighter end to answer the questions presented in the introduction: What aspects of our lives changed following the incursion of the gig economy?

Throughout this chapter, I have explored a perspective of ghost towns as a prism to summarize other relevant urban theories others brought forward, such as those of Hertz, Simmel, Giddens, Harvey, Crary, and Putnam, who also inspired this chapter. It was made clear to me that the urban community's development darkened with the capitalist development perspective. I will not deny that it might develop a more isolated life within the urban context, rightly what I called 'the ghost town.' Within this chapter I have shown how people have found comfort in digital platforms providing life necessities such as friendship and food delivery. My observations of the flow of people also gave me a clear reference to the same illustration of the conveyer belt, as people merged into a singular wave only disturbed in the meeting of otherness. However, in light of my observations within Berlin, I believe people seek the city to get the space they need for community. In his article, Simmel portrayed a community that I interpreted as a civilization dissolving into singular subjects co-existing but not communing. Nevertheless, I could not picture it as black and white as in Simmel's description.

Chapter 3.

ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND IDENTITY: FOLKLORIFICATION AND DEHUMANIZATION WITHIN THE GIG ECONOMY

Figure 3.1.: Gorillas advertisement poster of a person of color drinking from a baby bottle, with one white arm belonging to a child, and one colored arm belonging to a baby. The poster says: "You're always on the bottle. You feed your offspring 2x more liquid food than solid food. Anything you want. Delivered in minutes."

"In some of Getir's warehouses, they strategically fired every worker with a western ethnicity. The managers preferred Indian workers since we work the shit out of our lives."

– Casper

Cassandra and I took an evening stroll around the streets of Friedrichshain on a hot spring day in May. The warm sun shone at us as it slowly descended behind the building, rising into the skies. We saw rainbow flags hanging from apartment windows and posted in the streets. People supported Queer History Month, and Cassandra told me eagerly about the festivities in June. Then, turning a corner, a Gorillas rider passed us with its notably black and red food bag, now decorated with rainbow colors. Seeing this, Cassandra scoffed at the sight of the decorated bag:

Cassandra: Of course. As soon as it becomes a trend, all these big corporations get interested in showing their support. It's what we call pink capitalism, right? They just want to brand themselves as supportive at the same time as they, in reality, don't care.

I glanced after the rider as he passed us. I knew what she talked about, but I also knew that this did not just occur to the queer. From my experience, certain celebrations seem to color most brands and institutions differently. One example is big brands – like Adidas with their pride collection, or H&M with their "Beyond the rainbow" campaign– during June, or in July for the case of Berlin, and the celebration of the queer community changing their logo in the color of the rainbow. Countries also use this way of 'washing', to cover other ethical dilemmas. Israel is one example, written about within Sa'ed Atshan's (2020) book about queer Palestinians. Another example is that institutions like the University of Bergen are doing the same. This also goes for other situations like the war between Russia and Ukraine and how the blue and yellow flag of Ukraine is portrayed around to show support. Therefore, I will emphasize that the brands within the gig economy are not the only ones branding themselves as inclusive and diverse. However, the examples that will be presented throughout this chapter of the treatment of these minorities illustrate the doubled standard to this way of so-called support. While observing the courier brands, I found Gorillas one of the most active to do so, asking representatives of minorities to step forward to be the face of their company. I will explore the general tendency for large corporations to capitalize on various values – and the paradoxes this creates – both in their marketing and practice.

Power structures have led to commodification and subjectification of people categorized as the 'other' before. While leading the reader through an analysis of the 'Black' history through colonization and slavery, in the light of today's distinction of 'black reason', Achille Mbembe (2017) show how the perspective of Blackness still upholds oppression. Colonialism was the

leading reason for the way we think of non-western societies today. In this chapter I will introduce the ways the gig economic platform still upholds these similar dehumanizing features as used within colonial times. This does not only go for the case of race, but every categorization of abnormality from the straight white male.

More specifically, this chapter will therefore focus on the social categorization of gender and ethnicity in relation to the gig economy. Continuing the conversation of the worker's value that was commenced in this thesis first chapter and in which I argued that the digital platforms treated the laborers as machines, this chapter will show how workers' ethnicity, identity, and gender are simultaneously both suppressed and used to benefit and 'washing' the companies. Firstly, the chapter will show why migration is essential to the labor market of the gig economy. Second, I will investigate gender and reflect on how suppressed genders are treated in the workplace. Lastly, in light of my argument above, I want to look into how these categorizations are used strategically in commercials and branding to color the brands. In general, this chapter aims to argue that the gig economy capitalizes especially on minorities with weak positions within society.

Migration and gig work

Tod: It is an easy job to take when you first move to a foreign country. There are few requirements, and the most important part is that you are able to deliver the food. So, if you can ride a bike, you're good.

Tod and I sat at the opposite corner from one of the Getir warehouses, waiting for Casper to meet up with us. We were supposed to help Casper, and the other Getir workers, to inform the warehouses about their election the following week. It was part of the activist work as some Getir workers had asked for our – the activists' – help. As Tod and I waited, we ate snacks and talked about everything happening with the Getir vote and how things went on within the Gorillas workers collective. Then, moving on to the topic of this chapter – as this thesis's fifth chapter will dive more into, namely the election of the Getir workers collective – Tod answered a question of mine, asking why it seemed to be quite a few non-western people working as riders. Answering this question, Tod explained the strategic categorization of ethnicity within the economy.

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Tod: It's not only because it's practical for migrants to work within these companies that's the reason for this skewed employment. The company earns a lot on unaware workers. You see, foreigners won't complain when their rights are neglected. Mainly it's because they are unaware of their rights within this country. If they do, they don't want to make a case about it, fearing it will cost them their job.

Ida: When you mentioned the workers' rights are neglected, you said 'when' and not 'if'…

Tod: Haha yes. Because it's not a question of *if* the company will ignore the workers' rights; instead, it is a question of *when* and *how soon* it will happen this time.

Tod worked in the workers' council at Gorillas with Sebastian. He also filed a lawsuit against the Gorillas company in 2020 when the company attempted to deny the workers an independent workers council. As Tod was Indian himself, he could talk with most of the workers in their mother tongue, making it easier to give out the information and make the workers take the time to listen to him.

Tod: It's both positive and negative that you are following me today, actually. On the negative side, you make the workers unsure of talking with us since you are white and blond. You look as typically western as possible.

Ida: What? Am I making this more challenging because of how I look?

Tod: Hmm, yeah. You're not used to be hearing that.

He looked at me and laughed. He was amazed by my unawareness of how much I stuck out in the crowd of gig workers. Looking through the pictures now, I can see what he refers to.

Tod: Anyway, as I said, it's also a positive side of having you follow me. Not just because you're keeping me company as I have to do this, but I can tell people you're studying law and are helping us.

Ida: Does it work?

Tod: Mmm… maybe. It can't be damaging to show them that we have your kind on our side either, though. It's also good for me because your presence makes the managers keep their distance from us.

Ida: What do you mean about that?

Tod: We have had a few unpleasant experiences of managers pushing us away from their workers, yelling at us that we are not allowed to be around, and talking with them. They are wrong, though. We can inform the workers about their rights, especially when not working. And if they are working, it's still their right to gather a worker's council and be informed about it.

Looking back on this conversation with Tod made me realize more of ethnicity's differences in society. While I am representing the white, western, and wealthy in the eyes of others, I am not used to meeting this type of social definition having a massive effect on my life. There were several situations in which my naivety blinded my understanding of my interlocutor's experiences. I cannot put myself in their position as we – my interlocuters and me – do not look alike.

Trying to reduce our differences, I tried to dress up as they did, but then again, without any luck. Since I was not working within any of these companies, I did not own any of their bright-colored gear. Dressing up in black jeans and a black hoodie was the best I could do, but as summer drew near, I could not hide behind dark-colored clothes and was again exposed. This had, of course, an effect on my position as an anthropologist out in the field, where I am supposed to adapt to the life of my interlocutors. Julie Zahle reflects upon the different ways of participant observations and difficulties which may follow these. Referring to Malinowski's work on this method he stated that the goal of participant observation was "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize *his* vision of *his* world" (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25 in Zhale, 2012, p. 22). In light of this I believe one needs to reflect upon at which level this is possible. I might follow my interlocuters, hear their stories, and talk about every and each perspective. However, I could never adapt to the external or internal difficulties my interlocuters are going through, simply because I can never take fully part in the world they face just because they are who they are or look like what they look like. I could not experience the life of my interlocutors as they were, but hearing about their lives and observing how people

behaved differently while I was around, made it clear of the acting racial differences. Still, I would argue that these experiences, like Tod pointing out our differences, have only made me more aware of the difficulties of trying to fit in with others in situations that make it impossible. This can be seen as a critique of the method of participant observation, but I would rather make this reflection as a contribution to Zahle's examples of "How things may go wrong" (2012, p. 59-62). To believe it is possible in today's world to fully adapt to other people's situation is as naïve as I felt when Tod pointed out my unawareness. I would therefore recommend notifying these differences and asking the interlocutors about their reflections upon this.

Tod telling me about how ethnicity had a considerable role in the employment of gig workers was not the first time I heard about it. Mira Wallis, a researcher from the project *Digitalisation of Labor and Migration*[1] stationed in Berlin, had informed me about this beforehand when we had a zoom meeting to discuss the different projects.

Mira: Are you looking into migration as you're doing your fieldwork?

Ida: No, I want to focus on the human value and labor when it comes to every worker. Not one specific group.

Mira: I think you will find out that it is inevitable. They form the majority of the workers within this industry. Our project focuses on migration and gig work, and of course, you don't have to do the same. However, you could consider including it in your work as it takes such a massive part of the economy.

When reading this, bear in mind that it was still the early days of my fieldwork. I did, however, come to realize that Mira was right about her statements, and there are several reasons why this type of job suits the migrant's new life. As Tod told me, it is difficult for migrants to get hold of jobs because of their lacking knowledge of the language and the culture. The gig work as a rider does not require much except transporting the food by bike or car. The companies provide most of the equipment the workers need, and they are (supposed to be) able to schedule their work. While working, they are therefore (supposed to be) able to take language courses or study on the side to find 'better' jobs in the future. This was necessarily not the case, as for the case

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[1] http://www.platform-mobilities.net/en

of Sarah, one of the very few non-western people working as a warehouse manager within Gorillas.

Sarah told me she had not been able to get a job in another place because of her lack of skill when it came to the German language. My meeting with Sarah happened right before the scenario presented above. On our way to meet Casper, Tod and I stopped by one of the Gorillas warehouses, as it was one of Tod's duties to check how they were doing. Sarah was the warehouse manager then and one of the few managers who were optimistic about the council's work. After meeting her there, I asked Tod to help me get in touch with her to talk with her more. Unfortunately, when I got her information and reached out to Sarah, she had already been fired. However, we still met before a press conference to discuss her experience with the company. I waited for her outside a café holding three hot baked bagels in my hand. Because of a misunderstanding, we did not have the time to eat before the press conference, so I ordered some food for us to eat while we walked there. She walked smiling towards me. It was late afternoon but still a warm evening in the busy streets of Friedrichshain. Thankful for the bagel, she hugged me before we went down the streets. Then, I started asking her how she ended up as a warehouse manager, unaware of her current unemployment situation.

Sarah: I first took the job as a rider because it was the only possibility since I don't speak German fluently. I didn't know a word when I moved here.

Ida: Yeah, I've heard many of the workers take the job while they also do language courses so they can find other jobs later. Is it the same for you?

Sarah: I hoped it would have been like that, and my plan was to take a language course. Unfortunately, the company didn't want me to take any courses on the side, so I haven't been able to. After a while, I was offered a promotion to become the new warehouse manager. When I took that promotion, it was too much to do, so I didn't have time for anything else.

Ida: The company didn't allow you to learn the German language on the side? That doesn't make any sense.

Sarah: I know, but I just did as they told me because I was afraid they would fire me. But it doesn't mean anything now since they fired me anyway. Now it has all gone to waste.

Hearing Sarah tell me this, I had to stop and look at her. It was only a few weeks since I had last seen her. At that time, she told Tod and me she believed she would be fired at the end of the next month, as that was when her contract ended. Tod told her that he could help her with the paperwork as the company owed her lost payment and that they had the time to file a complaint before the end of her contract. However, now that she had already been fired, there would not be much more that Tod could help her with if not making it into a lawsuit.

Ida: You've been fired already? Why? How are you doing?

Sarah: It happened last week. I'm okay, luckily, I can borrow some money from my boyfriend and since I live in his apartment, I have a place to stay.

Ida: Okay, that's good. But why did they fire you?

Sarah: I guess it's so I can't do anything more in the warehouse. In theory, I'm still employed since I have three weeks' notice, but they don't want me to be there as much. So, I'm taking some sick days and going in twice a week.

Ida: But they owe you money, right? Will you get them?

Sarah: Probably not, so I'm using this time to apply for other jobs. However, the problem is that I still don't speak German fluently since I couldn't take any courses.

Later, Tod explained that she got fired because she was one of the few warehouse managers who cared more about the workers than the company itself.

Tod: She dared to file complaints against the company on behalf of the workers when their rights weren't prioritized. Sarah didn't let the workers work more than they were supposed to, so they lacked a workforce within the warehouse.

Exclusive treatment of warehouse managers

How does this relate to ethnicity and the treatment of the workers? In the introduction quote, Casper says that management strategically employs non-western people as it is more common

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not to report any violation of their rights. Tod underlined a similar point, namely that it is mainly because they are unaware of their rights but also because many see this job as temporary – as mentioned in this thesis's first chapter. In Sarah's case, she could not learn the language, and when we – Tod and I – talked with Sarah outside her warehouse, she seemed nervous when Tod told her that he could help her file a complaint on her behalf. Sarah seemed unaware that the workers' council – or the HR – were supposed to protect her as a warehouse manager, and that their protection did not only imply the riders. Leaving Sarah, Tod explained how most of the workers were afraid to talk with them – as workers' collective employees – in case anyone noticed it.

Tod: Sarah is one of the few good warehouse managers, but she is probably right about believing the company won't sign her a new contract. Gorillas want to get rid of another warehouse with good working conditions.

Ida: How are most of the warehouse managers?

Tod: White, spoiled, newly educated young people who don't know how it feels to do some hard work. Kind of like you.

Tod looked at me, smiling, trying to tease a reaction out of me. By then, I was pretty used to his many tests of my patience, so I just let it hang in the air while I continued the conversation.

Ida: Ah, so they [the warehouse managers] kind of don't fit in with the workers either then?

Tod: Nope, they relate more to the office workers and are more obedient to the company's wishes.

Ida: So, in a way, it's ethnic segregation between the people in command and the people working on the ground. Isn't that a bit old-fashioned?

Tod: Yes, but it works for the company, though. By suppressing suppressed groups, they don't have to worry as much about workers' rights and other stuff.

Tod's irritation with the white supremacist – meaning the belief that white-people are superior to people of color – often became the topic of our conversation, but I still believe it was not without reason. In a conversation with Sebastian, it was clear that he also was used to people's judgment of ethnic Indians. Sebastian had once called out a guy for behaving disrespectfully to Tod because of his ethnicity. Tod was just as used to this as I was not used to being called out for being white. So now – moving on to a group I am more able to relate to – I am going to present the treatment of gender within the gig economy, starting with the treatment of women.

Women as gig workers

Within a labor structure that offers less contact with co-workers and managers, there is still a considerable difference between the genders. In the 90's, Babb (1990) wrote an article about how woman's work had not been prioritized enough throughout the years of research, and that men's work had been positioned as a normality. Within her analysis of Peru's informal sector, she argues "that analyses are incomplete and often distorted when they disregard gender" (p.293). A lot has happened since the 90's when Babb wrote this, but her arguments are still as relevant today, especially as the collective term of gender has expanded to include a third gender. In this thesis' first chapter I presented more generalized experiences I heard from people of all genders. Within this segment I want to focus on presenting how women are treated within the gig economy, and then specifically focusing on workplace harassment against women.

Several of the women I talked to has been harassed during working hours. To illustrate this, I will circle back to my conversation with Sandra – the warehouse worker mentioned in the thesis' first chapter. While talking about how the job was treating her, Sandra mentioned an experience she had with another male co-worker:

Sandra: Regarding disrespect on the job, I worked with a guy who sexually abused me during working hours.

Ida: What?

Shocked and unsure of how to respond, I could not get anything else out but instead just looked at the computer screen and her face. Not waiting for me to respond, Sandra continued to explain what had happened.

Sandra: A guy I worked with in the warehouse commented on my gender and body quite a few times, and then he tried to come onto me. It was weary and uncomfortable, and I felt unsafe working with him. So, I reported him to the management, asking if they could put us on different shifts, so I didn't need to work with him anymore.

Ida: But still, that is terrible that you experienced that!

Sandra: Well, yeah, I told my manager the whole situation, believing she would understand how uncomfortable it was for me to work with him since she was a woman herself.

Ida: Absolutely!

Sandra: She didn't, though. I didn't hear about the case for a while and still had to work with the other guy. One day my manager took me aside to talk with me. Apparently, she met with the other guy to hear about his side of the story. She could not see why I wanted to make such a huge deal about it and that the whole situation was something I had made up myself. My manager told me that it would only complicate things if they had to schedule the working hours on behalf of my comfort and that if the situation had happened, it was probably because I had caused it myself and led the other guy on.

I could only sit in silence, listening to what Sandra told me, struggling to comprehend as she went on to talk more about her experience.

Sandra: Hearing this made me doubt myself, and it really struck me. At that point, I almost believed my manager told me it was probably my fault. At the same time, I felt this discomfort whenever I saw this other guy on the same shift list. The warehouse is not big enough for me to avoid him, and sometimes I had to be alone with him. The whole situation is just crazy.

Ida: So, what you're telling me is that your manager gaslighted you to believe that another employee did not sexually harass you because it would lead to something the management would have to deal with?

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Sandra: Yes, that whole situation was so surreal, and it really affected my mental health.

While listening to Sandra's experience in her workplace, I only hoped that this type of situation was not common. However, this would not be a part of this thesis if that were the case. Several months later, at a demonstration outside one of the Lieferando offices, I met Kiara, an Indian woman who worked at Getir. Casper introduced us, helping me to talk with someone as he was busy talking with their lawyer and other workers. I introduced myself as an anthropologist doing fieldwork on their jobs. Hearing this, Kiara started to talk about several things she had experienced during her job. As a side note, she mentioned that she was treated differently than the guys she worked with. This gave me flashbacks to what Sandra had told me, and I had to ask her what she had experienced on this topic.

Kiara: I think every woman working in the warehouse has experienced this. Men comment on what we are wearing, judging us for working, harassing, and suppressing us as less than what they are. I don't think I know anyone who hasn't experienced this as a woman. We get just as heavy deliveries as the guys and are expected to deliver as fast as the guys are. I have done many orders that are way overweight and have hurt my back. We are often set to work in the warehouse to prepare the groceries instead because we are weaker than the guys, but when it is hectic, they have to let us deliver some of the bags too.

Most of what Kiara told me was about this theme: how other workers treated each other and how male workers treated female workers. Then, I told Kiara about Sandra's situation and how the management had treated her case. Hearing this, Kiara only shook her head and told me:

Kiara: It doesn't help to tell the warehouse management about this or anyone else. It's only your word against someone else's, so it depends on what is easiest to believe for the person you're telling it to. It will always be easier for the management to brush it off, so they don't have to act on it.

Another guy had shown up beside Kiara and stood by her, listening. After Kiara had said this, she looked at the guy standing beside her, who was nodding to what she had told me.

Kiara: To have some kind of safety I usually tell my friends I work with about the situation, and they will watch over me and make sure I feel safe. They got my back.

Sandra had told me the same thing, that her only option was to cope with working with this guy harassing her. She had talked with some other co-workers about her situation. They had watched over her ever since, and she felt safe as long as others were in the same room. Still, the management had not done anything to care for the situation, and Sandra had nothing to prove that it was happening, as the guy had behaved nicely to her every time the manager was present. Lopez et.al (2009) writes about harassment in the workspace and mentions similar examples such as what Kiara told me, about men commenting women's sexuality and looks. In their article, Lopez et. al. concludes their analysis writing:

Generalized harassment and sexual harassment are often elements in a larger process of social exclusion and closure. In this process of closure, mocking, barriers, and sometimes blatant threats are used to exclude certain groups (even potentially forcing them out of the workplace), or to keep members of these groups "in their place". These processes involve both the defense of identity and the defense of jobs (Lopez et.al., 2009, p. 23).

The examples also show how the management handles – or does not handle – situations happening in the workplace. According to Sandra and Kiara, the management treats these situations as a burden for the company rather than a breach of their values. Management seems to ignore or downgrade the situation in a way to maintain a feeling of control over the workplace. By doing so the managers take part in the harassment, purposely or not. Moving on to how the companies treat the queer genders, one will notice a shift in the company's interest. While women's problems are a liability to the company, queer suppression is something they want to take a stand against.

Rainbow capitalism/pinkwashing and advertisement – advertising diversity

"It's weird, every year when we come to June,
Gorillas suddenly get so interested in us queer people."
– Jose, Gorillas rider.

In the introduction, Cassandra mentioned 'pinkwashing,' also called 'rainbow capitalism,' referring to a phenomenon in which the queer symbolizes the corporation or institution's purity. By coloring their logo in rainbow colors, posting pictures of people of the same gender kissing, or using hashtags like #queer #loveislove #empowerment, etcetera. While writing about queer Palestinian activists, Sa'ed Atshan (2020) presents the usage of ethical *washing* within Israel. In the discussion between pro-Israel and pro-Palestine activist Atshan present them both by comparing their arguments and put them into their situation of perspective because:

> to not reproduce the logic of pinkwashing, we must identify what specific regimes of power these institutions and individuals are in, so that we can think about Israeli homophobia and Palestinian homophobia in their own contextual manifestations rather than reducing them both to a transhistorical homophobia that enables us to gauge which community is "better to its gays." (Atshan, 2020, p.111)

Within such a discussion it is important to distinguish between what the argument represents. In the case of Israel, the politicians have been applauded for their openness to queer community. However, the activist in which Atshan presents argues that this openness is taken to cover for other ethical dilemmas:

> The pinkwashing examples illustrated here exemplify the larger pattern that is on display in many pinkwashing campaigns. The hegemonic reach of pinkwashing discourses has the potential to produce both effects and affects and has implications for how we read history. Although pinkwashers do not always intend to have these effects,

the operation of power lies in effects, not intentions. Just as Gayatri Spivak problematized the "white men are saving brown women from brown men" discourse that became part of colonial dynamics, I identify the same fallacy with regard to much of pinkwashing — which is that "white men are saving brown homosexuals from brown heterosexuals." (Atshan, 2020, p.111).

Atshan starts this quote by saying that the pinkwashing he exemplifies throughout his second chapter are a good representation to other pinkwashing campaigns, which also is the reason why I wanted to draw his analysis into this thesis illustration of advertising diversity. Supporting diversity is seemingly a trend for companies – and politicians – to show they are following the development of time. Pinkwashing is a way of illustrating their forwardness and good values to cover the ethical dilemmas happening – such as will be illustrated throughout my examples following of Gorillas Pride campaign.

Here I need to press that this does not only go for genders as I have noticed how race is also carefully chosen to represent diversity – like this chapter's front-page picture. Every time a courier is presented on the company's social media, they have chosen a person of color, and when posting pictures of social events – as advertisements for their food – the companies choose to include a variety of people representing different ethnicities. Aware that I am representing the categorization as a white woman – something Tod made me aware of earlier in this chapter – I cannot be the one to define what is offensive to the groups this occurs to. However, the use of such profiles in these advertisements are not based on coincidences regarding who is presented in the pictures. Here is an example of an Instagram post by @gorillasapp's (Figure 3.2.) during June, followed by a reaction within an Instagram story posted on @gorillasriderlife account (Figure 3.3.).

Figure 3.2.: Instagram post by @gorillasapp: "Sexuality is everything else then grey. Show all your colors."

Figure 3.3.: Instagram stories were posted as a reaction to @gorillasapp's post supporting the queer community. The first picture refers to the @gorillasapp post, and the second picture shows a message sent out to the warehouse managers in June 2021 asking Queer riders to be the face of the brand during the month.

In the original post from 2021 by @gorillasriderlife (Figure 3.3.), were a following text reacting to the message:

> You shouldn't target your employees, especially those who are a minority. Are people comfortable there is a "list of queer employees" without having asked for it? At the same time, WTF does it mean a "good fit or not"? Lastly, making a video to "share their stories" sounds poor. It looks like the company just wants to take advantage of people's image and identity in order to "pretend to be cool". If you want to support your queer employees, do it all the year, and not by asking them their story, but by actually doing things that will help them and their community, causes, etc.
>
> @gorillasriderlife

The post encouraged its followers to comment their opinions and reaction on the topic:

> Fuckers! Learn how to treat your employees first, and protect them instead of exposing them further to incidents that have targeted them in their own workplaces! What a joke…

> This is really problematic! I welcome the fact that we are a company with people from all walks of life and I encourage those from the LGBT* Community to make their voice heard throughout the organization. But this is just no fucking way to do it.

This example complements my above arguments that companies consciously use minorities for advertising themselves as diverse. The two comments I included are only two out of twenty-one, but every single one of these comments articulates the same kind of critique and anger as the two above. Sebastian and Jose told me that people of the LGBTQ+ community had been targeted at their workplace by other workers and warehouse managers, as the first comment above implies. However, from my understanding of what they told me, none of these incidents

were appropriately treated by the company, as it also goes for the incidents happening to women.

Then again, this does not only go for gender but rather the popular opinion of the time. For example, the war between Russia and Ukraine started during my time in Berlin. Several people, companies, and institutions wanted to support Ukraine and take a stand against Russia's attack—the gig economy companies were no exception. However, as the popular focus of society shifted and June – Pride month – came, the advertisements shifted to support the Queer, hence the following post (Figure 3.4.) illustrated.

Figure 3.4.: Instagram post by @gorillasriderlife illustrating how Gorillas follow the trends of support. On the picture Gorillas are illustrated as the car who have now taken with them Pride as they are tossing out their support for Ukraine.

Conclusion

Looking back at my time in Berlin, I learnt a great deal about others' impressions of me based on looks and gender. Knowing this will not affect my life in the same way as my interlocuters makes it valuable to reflect upon in a thesis like this. Because, undoubtedly, it is a reason I met them as a researcher looking into their life of suppression. By this, I am not implying a form of hierarchy that I construct for whatever purpose. However, with the hierarchy acting within social differences, this is something inevitable. In many ways, I look back fearing that my research had the same Western condescending perspective as the fields of the first anthropologists.

Rather than contributing to the division of social categorization, I want to clarify how this is done within the global community and, specifically, I have presented how the gig economy treats diversity in a highly instrumental fashion. This chapter, reflecting the thesis's focus on value, has therefore mapped and analyzed the value the gig economy instills on its worker through its selective focus on ethnicity, gender, and identity. By both benefitting from their workers' strengths – such as diversity and value of the popular opinion within the general society – and the workers' weaknesses – such as social oppression, lack of collective knowledge, and their need for a job – the gig economy is following a path to avoid breaches of ethical dilemmas. Or, rather, they are trying to do so. To succeed in this, their workers would have to be silent about the oppression they are subjected to. The Instagram screenshot above is just a taste of what is following in the next chapter as the following two chapters will further show the acts against the companies.

ACTS OF REBELLION: THE EVERYDAY FORMS OF RESISTANCE WITHIN THE GIG ECONOMY

Figure 4.1.: Instagram post @gorillasriderlife saying: "This creature has adapted to the crushing pressure and oppressive darkness".

"The company owes me money anyway, so technically they owe me the food I take from them."

- Tod

While wanting to supplement the findings of resistance, James Scott (2015 [1989]) saw a lack of consideration for the fact that minor, more individualistic and fragmented acts of resistance were as effective as collective actions. Therefore, he defined *everyday resistance* as "the nearly continuous, informal, undeclared, disguised forms of autonomous resistance by lower classes" (2015 [1989], p. 4). Scott then argues that considering this everyday-based resistance as political, these actions open a massive wave of resistance that, in its collectiveness, will have an overwhelming effect. Hidden by its individualistic presence its strength therefore comes with its continuity, at the same time as it lacks a formalized structure. When there is no consolidated collective force, the superior power – a class or state – could fight against, the everyday forms of resistance will continue their acts in the shadow of the law (p. 6). The following examples will explore Scott's theory and put it into the context of modern social practices.

So far, throughout this thesis, I have presented how the gig economy treats its workers, as well as exemplified and analyzed how gig workers incorporate themselves within the urban landscape and affect its consumers and the urban citizens in general. In this and the following chapter, I will shift the perspective to inquire about the laborers' value and analyze how laborers react when facing what they perceive to be labor-rights-related injustice. These two chapters will therefore look into the different forms of resistance used against the structure of the gig economy. Resistance is the form of action that I will argue expresses the value the workers see in themselves and the company. By resisting the various forms of power exerted upon them, the workers reform their value as they reject the gig economy's valuation of them.

Before elaborating on the collective action against the companies, presented in the following chapter, this thesis will first go into the more minor action done to perform resistance on an individual level – inspired by Scott's previous work on everyday resistance. The laborer's resistance towards management has been illustrated throughout this thesis when describing the workers' relation to their work. Within this resistance the laborers are showing a substantial dislike for the company and its values, as communicated, and illustrated in this thesis' introduction chapter.

Stealing – "The company owes me"

Tod, Casper, and I were on our way to a Getir warehouse. On this day we were helping Casper inform the Getir workers about their election. During this walk, Tod asked us to walk by his old workplace from when he worked as a rider. We would be passing it as we walked, and he needed to get some food for lunch. I did not notice the warehouse, and as Casper and Tod

stopped by the entrance, I kept walking and chatting until they called out for me to stop. Confused, I looked at the building with the black-covered windows. There were no apparent signs that it was a warehouse as it blended into the rest of the street. Then I noticed the bikes parked outside and some Gorillaz riders walking out with their giant black backpacks. Casper and Tod stared back at me, silently laughing, as I walked back to where they stood waiting for me.

Tod: Do you need anything? Do you want some food?

Ida: No, I'm okay. I don't have any money to pay for the food. But do you think I could borrow the toilet, or am I not allowed inside?

Tod: You don't need to pay for the food, I will take it for you. I have to check with the manager if you are allowed inside or not.

Ida: You're just going to take the food?

Tod: Yes, of course.

Ida: So, you're stealing food from your old warehouse?

Tod: The company owes me money anyway, so technically, they owe me the food I take from them.

Ida: Well, in a way, that's true. It sounds like you're doing this often, though.

Tod: Normally, I'm taking the food that's expiring. Most of the workers do it. I'm not the only one.

I looked at Casper to see his reaction to hearing this. He stood beside me, nodding silently to what Tod said as he expected this. Noticing the unsure look on my face, Tod continued explaining:

Tod: A while ago, workers were allowed to take food that was about to expire, but for no reason, they stopped allowing it. No one cares what the managers say, so we still do it anyway.

Ida: And the managers don't notice?

Tod:	Most warehouse managers only care so much. They will just say that the food was thrown out or something. But it depends on the warehouse. We only go to the warehouses we know it will go unnoticed. So, do you want anything?
Ida:	No, I'm okay. I have enough food at home. But I still need to borrow the toilet.

Luckily, I was allowed inside to use the toilet. I believe it was because Tod was on good terms with his old warehouse manager. Tod showed me where the toilet was and went straight to the food storage area. The warehouse looked like a small grocery store, with a few shelves stocked with everyday groceries. In front of the shelf stood a row of tables, some with computers, where the manager and other workers sat looking at orders coming in. Between the shelves, people walked around, picking down groceries and placing them in paper bags. When they finished, they sat the filled bags on the front tables for riders to collect and deliver. The warehouse seemed disorganized, as boxes and bikes were lying around. The bathroom was dirty, and there was water on the floor. From what Tod had told me, and from what I have seen in multiple pictures, this is quite common when it comes to the conditions of a Gorillaz warehouse. However, I also believe the warehouse I visited was one of the good ones. From the pictures Tod had showed and told me about, as well as what has been illustrated on the Instagram account @gorillasriderlife, the conditions in other warehouses were worse, as they had rats, nonfunctional bathrooms, and mold problems.

When I returned from the bathroom, Tod introduced me as one of his friends helping him while he was working. Tod asked some of the workers how they were and gave them some information about their workers' council and the workers' rights. He also explained to the manager that the workers' council protected warehouse managers after hearing the manager explain some of her frustration with the company. Since we still had a lot of Getir warehouses to visit, we had to go on, so we said bye and went outside to Casper.

Ida:	You didn't tell them that I was doing research.
Tod:	No, it would only complicate things, and you wouldn't be allowed inside. Non-workers aren't allowed to go into the warehouse, so it's enough of a problem that you're just a friend of mine.
Ida:	I didn't have to go inside if it would cause anyone problems.

Tod: It won't be a problem if no one tells the office about it, and I doubt anyone would do that.

I had experienced Tod talking about stealing from the company before this. He and Sebastian had offered me some office supplies on our first meeting. They had told me that the stuff they got from the management was rubbish anyway as an explanation to why they could give the stuff away to others. This scenario happened in the Gorillaz workers' council office. Illustrations and writing implying their disgust toward the company decorated the cold white cemented walls. In the middle of the room where a circle of tables the council used during work time. I was sitting by the table and looked at Tod as he, irritated, tried to find some ink for their printer.

Tod: This is kind of the way the company tries to sabotage the workers' council. They never give us the right stuff we ask for. And if they do, you can be sure that it's not functional in some way.

While explaining this, Tod looked at the description on the printer ink and shook his head before continuing:

Tod: Do you need some printer ink? We don't need this one. It doesn't fit our printer.

Ida: Haha sorry no, I don't have a printer. I discovered that it's more common to use print shops than privately owning a printer here in Berlin.

Sebastian: That's true, but if we ever get the correct printer ink, you could use ours if you need to print anything.

Tod: Yes, I'm here all the time as I live here anyway.

Ida: You live here? In the office?

Tod: Yes, I don't have the money to rent since they haven't paid me yet. The room up those stairs is our lunchroom, but we use it more as a living room. And I sleep there. Other workers have also crashed here as they have been kicked out of their

apartments. Is there anything else you need? A pencil, some batteries? I usually take them myself.

Considering this conversation as well as what I heard from Tod and Casper on our walk, I figured that stealing was a small act of resistance towards the company. Tod explained that they did not care for the company, as the company did not care for their workers. For me, it resembled the tale of Robin Hood stealing from the rich and giving to the poor, where the workers represented the poor.

Comparing this to Scott's analysis of everyday resistance, I will bring forward his example of poaching and Scott's analysis of Michel Foucault's theory of 'state-created crime' (p. 9-10). Poaching becomes illegal when the object is considered to belong to a specific person/group, and/or if the government considers the act illegal. Scott underlines how something that is a person's way of living – like gathering herbs, fishing, or hunting for meat – can be changed into something illegal in the change of regime. With the decision to ignore the changes and keep up their everyday practice, the act of everyday resistance gets performed. This example of poaching shows a similar case to how Tod justifies their practice of stealing. His statement of "they owe us this" and "I'm not the only one doing it" implies a joint action against the power that stands above the laborers. The workers do not earn enough to afford the food they need and take some of the food from their warehouse. At first, management allowed this, but after a while, the managers restricted this food distribution. They wanted the workers to pay for the food they needed with their usual discounts. To show their dislike for this change, the laborers kept up the practices as usual, taking food without paying.

The following example shows another situation where laborers stand against the ruling system. In opposition to the thought that the worker's time belongs to the manager, mentioned in the thesis's first chapter, the workers have found a way to take back control over their own free time.

Controlling free time with sick leave
Tod, Casper, and I kept walking through the streets of Berlin on our way to the next Getir warehouse when the ongoing conversation shifted its path, going into how the guys had so much time on their hands. Technically, they were supposed to work sometime within the hours we walked around the city.

Tod: For me, this is part of the work I do. Except I'm not supposed to work for other companies though. However, as long as we walk by some of the Gorillas warehouses too, it's fine.

Ida: What about you, Casper? You're not working for the council yet.

Casper: Haha no, that's true. Right now, I'm on sick leave, so I don't work for the moment. I don't have the time to work at the same time as I'm working on the workers' council, and I had an accident at the warehouse the other day, so I'm using that as an excuse.

Ida: So, you can just say that you are ill and then have time off work?

Casper: Well yeah. I need a prescription from the doctor, but it's not too difficult to get. You only have to say that you need it.

Ida: Haha, okay that sounds too easy. You said that you had an accident in the warehouse, what happened?

Casper: It wasn't anything crazy. A box with some groceries fell on my foot, so walking hurt. However, I'm all fine now, but my manager doesn't need to know that. The easiest way to get time off is to ask for sick leave for your mental health. Then, if your manager sees you outside in the streets, you will still have a good reason for it.

Ida: What do you mean by that?

Casper: You know, if you have mental health issues, you are recommended to go outside and do things you think are fun and good for you. So, if you meet your manager when you are out hanging with friends, you are just doing what you have to do to get better, right?

Ida: Yeah, that's true.

Casper: And it's not like we don't all struggle with something, so they cannot deny us to take time off either. This job is making us ill anyway.

Thinking back on what I had learned about how this economic system treats its workers, I fully understood what Casper was saying. However, I also learned that he was not the only one using

mental health issues as an excuse to take time off work when he needed time to do other things. For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Sarah took sick leave within two months' notice to have the time to find another job while she still supposedly got paid.

These examples are just two of several other cases where sick leave is strategically used to get away from work. As I see it, the workers would rather keep the job and get time off as they see fit, so they do not get fired. They do not want to work more than what they see fit their treatment. The first chapter of this thesis explains that gig workers are not highly valued by the companies and the consumer, and not themselves. However, at the same time, as the workers do not value the work they are doing, they also decrease the companies' value. The workers are doing the same as the companies are doing, following the area between the strict rules, and using it to resist the power forced upon them. With their network of sharing experiences, the workers know about a few doctors that are willing to hand out notices as the workers need them. Faking sick leave is a misuse of the company's trust in its workers. Nevertheless, this trust seems to be limited from both the workers', and the company's, perspectives.

In his work of everyday resistance, Scott points out that it is a form of collectiveness within individualistic acts. This is visible in my examples of Casper as he tells me that this technique of getting time off is not something he considers to be rare, as most workers do the same. The same thing was also said in the previous example with Tod. Resistance is not only performed by the people doing the act. It also involves all the others surrounding the acting person, that know what is going on and are still not telling anyone about it (2015 [1989], p.8).

Using sick leave as a form of resistance is, of course, complex, making it difficult for the managers to prove it as a willed act of resistance. The following example demonstrates another way for the workers to use the company's oppression to benefit themselves.

Sharing work accounts

Late in May, during one of the heat strokes that hung over Berlin, Casper and I was standing at one of Friedrichshain busiest restaurant streets looking for Lieferando riders to pass us. Casper helped the Lieferando activists to inform about their workers' collective council vote. Since Lieferando is a platform offering restaurant and café deliveries, the only option to get hold of workers where to stop them at a red light or interact with them after they had picked up food from a restaurant. At this point, I had been excluded from the activist group as some of them were no longer comfortable with me hanging around. Casper had felt bad for this happening to

me and had offered to try helping me get in touch with some other workers. I had asked him if he knew of someone I could shadow during their shift, and he had asked around. Casper told me the result of this while we waited for Lieferando riders passing us in the street.

Casper: By the way, I was not able to find anyone you could follow during their work time. I'm so sorry.

Ida: No, that's okay, don't think about it. It's nice that you tried. I bet people are not eager for someone tailing them during their working hours, especially if they don't know the other person.

Casper: Yeah, maybe. However, I don't think the problem is that they don't know you. It's more about not wanting to get in trouble with the company or anything.

Ida: What do you mean?

Casper: The company would not be too happy if they got to know that you followed some of their workers, and it probably would go wrong for the worker to allow you to follow him.

Ida: Yeah, I can see that. And the last thing I want to do is to cause problems for others. So, it's okay.

Casper: Many people didn't care about that either. However, they didn't know when they were working.

Ida: They didn't know when they were working? Didn't they have their schedule?

Casper: Well, yes, of course they do. But many of the workers share their work charts. So, they don't know when they work because it depends on the other people they share their work with.

Ida: I doubt that is something the companies are a fan of.

Casper: No, that's also why they don't want anyone to follow them.

Ida: But why do they do that, sharing their work charts?

Casper: When sharing their work charts, they can get more value from their work. They all work as one person, and as this person works a lot, the algorithms give this worker a higher value.

Ida: That is so clever! So, they will earn more per delivery, then?

Casper: Yes. They get extra points the more they work, so they boost their earnings per delivery.

One could say this method is a way of cheating the system, but still, a smart way to get extra credit. The workers are grouped to do more work and get extra points. I am unsure whether this practice would analytically conform to a form of resistance – also as I have not talked with to anyone using this technique. Still, sharing the same work charts seems more like a way to earn more money per job instead of misusing the company benefits to harm the companies. Even though those using this technique might benefit from it, it will still cause more harm to the workers as the algorithms will increase their expectations of the workers. Therefore, the more workers that cheat on the work charts, the harder everyone else must work to get a reasonable payment.

Social media – spreading gossip

The last example of everyday resistance I will include in this chapter shows what I will argue is the modern form of gossip through social media referring to what Scott defines as "symbolic or ideological resistance" (2015 [1989], p. 8). Activists within the gig economy are active on digital media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter. During my fieldwork, I followed multiple sites belonging to the gig platform companies and activists who work against the companies. One of these sites is @gorillasriderlife on Instagram, which regularly posts 'memes' that are relatable for workers and expose the company's actions. Even though 'meme' is a commonly known term today, I still see the necessity to define it to understand its effect.

According to a New York Times article (2022) written by Axel Benveniste, is the Webster's New World College Dictionary definition of a meme is: "a concept, belief, or practice conceived as a unit of cultural information that may be passed on from person to person, subject to influences in a way analogous to natural selection." The term originates from the French word 'memê,' meaning 'same,' and the Greek word 'mimoúmai,' meaning 'to imitate.' Quoting linguist Jennifer Nycz, saying that memes "is really no different from any other process of communication or knowledge creation," and the Instagram meme creator Saint Hoax "It has the ability to capture insight in a way that is in complete alignment with the zeitgeist." Memes are then a form of communication, and, as I have observed, the @gorillasriderlife account also

forms a way of community feeling. @gorillasriderlife functions as a site to post relatable content, share information, and mock the platform management. To illustrate the material posted on this account I have decided to dedicate some examples of Instagram posts and memes on the following pages.

Figure 4.2.: Instagram post by @gorillasriderlife illustrating the discussion why the riders wanted their own workers unions. The company found it unfortunate as they wanted to have direct communication with their workers. The meme illustrates how the workers find this communication functioned before the unionization.

Figure 4.3.: Instagram post by @gorillasriderlife illustrating a theory that Gorillas had created fake accounts (also called bots) to boost their likes as well as creating more disturbance on the workers created accounts.

Figure 4.4.: "The CEO and his boys" is the workers common name of the company owners. This meme was posted as it became more known that Gorillas would end up in bankruptcy.

Figure 4.5.: This meme illustrates the frustration the riders have when it comes to how their safety is prioritized by the company. The company promises to give the riders the right equipment to stay safe during their work hours, but for the riders this is an empty promise.

Figure 4.6.: Instagram post by @gorillasriderlife posting an illustration showing what motivated the gig riders, and reposting a comment made to the illustration.

Figure 4.7.: Instagram post by @gorillasriderlife illustrating the situations going on the 1st of July, mocking the different brands and their managers.
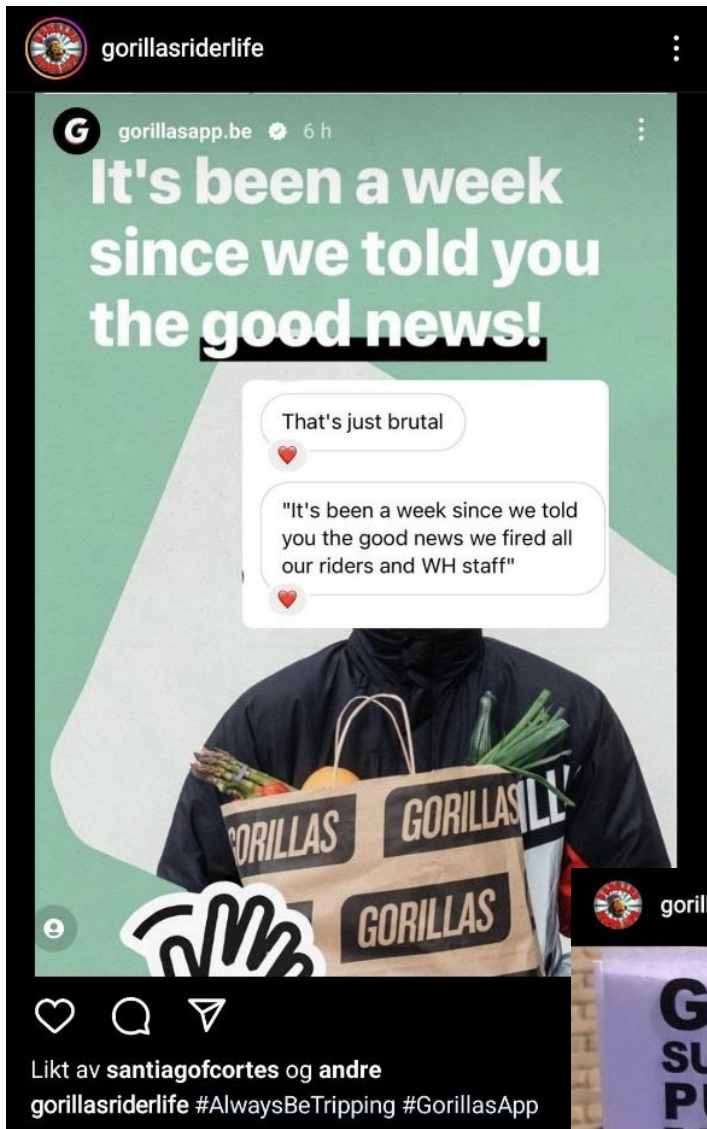
Figure 4.8.: At the same time as Gorillas slowly went to bankruptcy, the company kept on showing a positive attitude on their social media, acting as if nothing were going on. Workers saw this as disrespectful as they were brutally fired from their jobs while lacking payment and without any other reason than the company's own downfall.

Figure 4.9.: Instagram post by @gorillasriderlife portraying a flyer saying: "GETIR SUPPORTS PUTIN'S WAR. Getir's global expansion is fueled by the money of Putin's 'ice-hockey buddy', the billionaire Oligarch Vladimir Potanin. When you order form Getir, you are supporting Putin's Ukraine Bloodshed!"
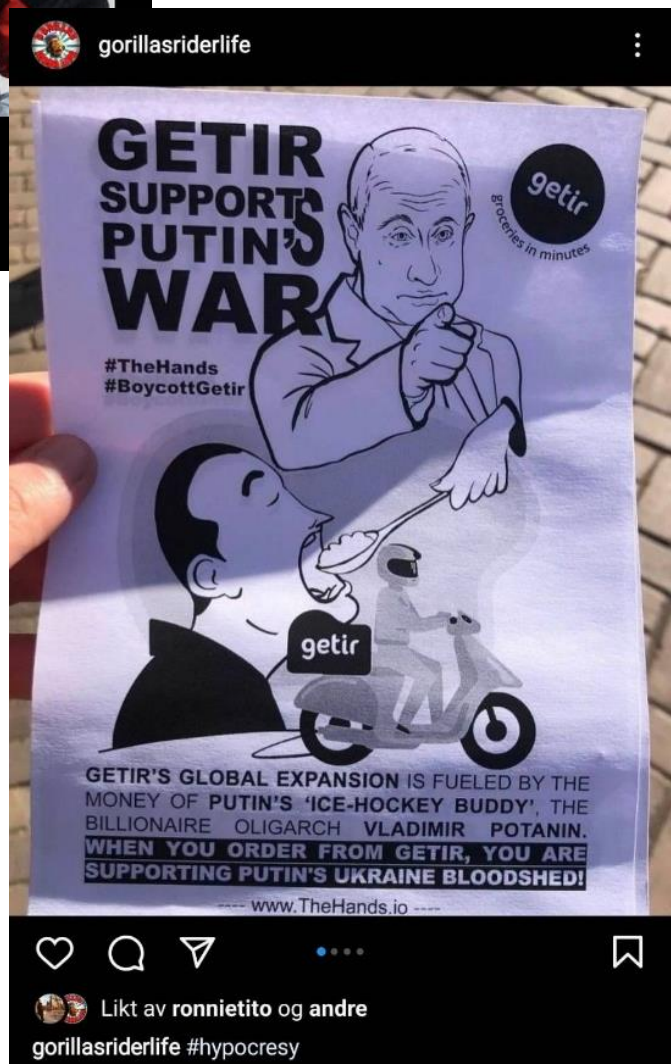
I find these memes to be a portrait of the situations that has occurred, and in some cases still are relatable today. This Instagram page is also an opportunity for riders to share their experiences. Riders send DM's (direct message) to the page owner, who anonymously share their stories on the page for people to see and react to (such as Figure 4.10.).
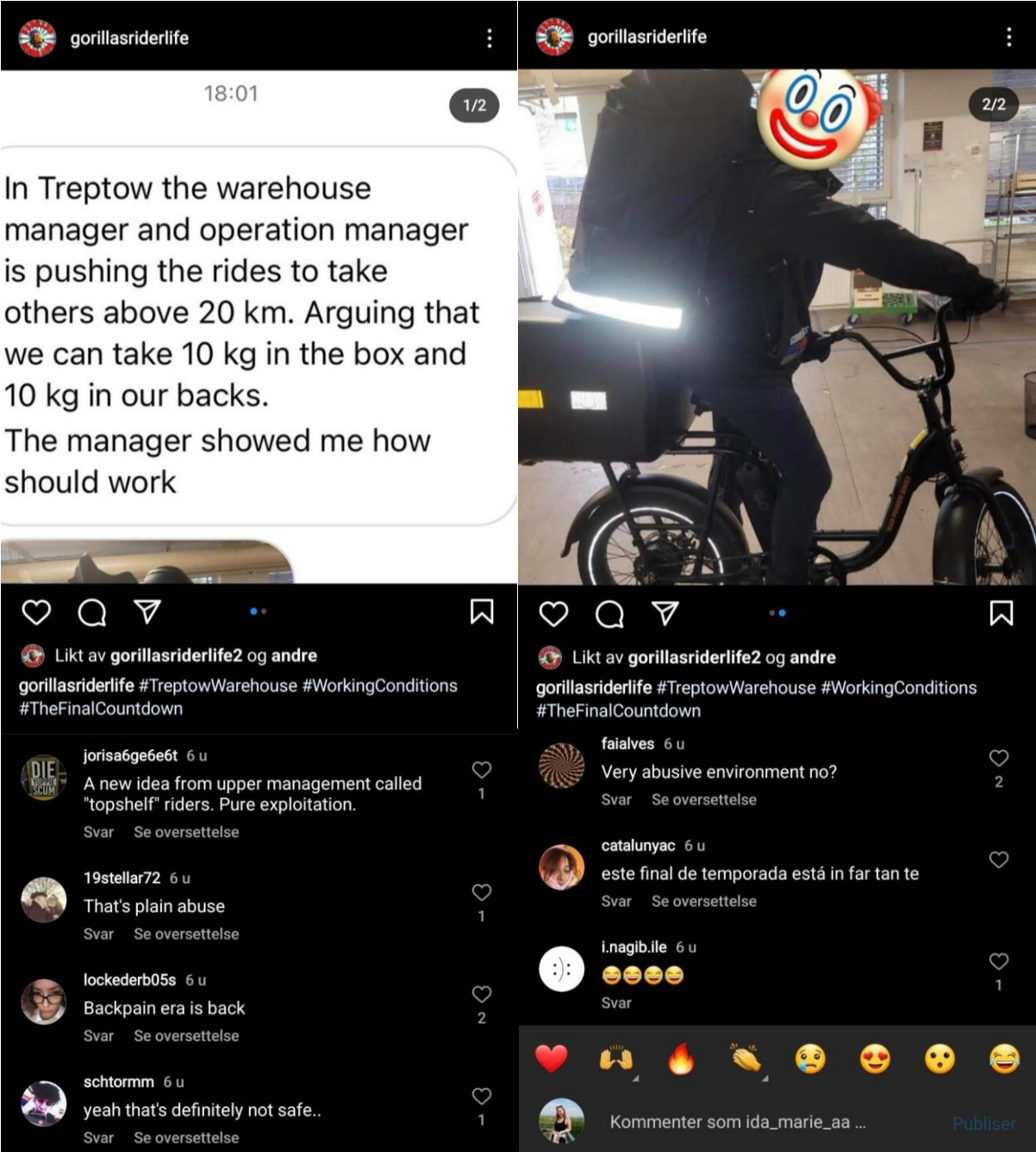

Figure 4.10.: The Instagram post by @goriallasriderlife exposing a message sent by one of the warehouse managers showing how they want the riders to more effectively carry their bags.

The @gorillasriderlife allows the workers to see they are not alone in the difficult times they face and that others are being treated the same way. By doing so, the account illustrates that all the issues the companies treat as individualistic are more about the company's functions than any of it has to do with the workers. The three illustrating pictures below (figure 4.11) are examples of how the account is used as a communication platform. People react to the account owner's post and send the person DMs with their reaction. This reaction will then be posted on the accounts storyline so others can join the conversation.
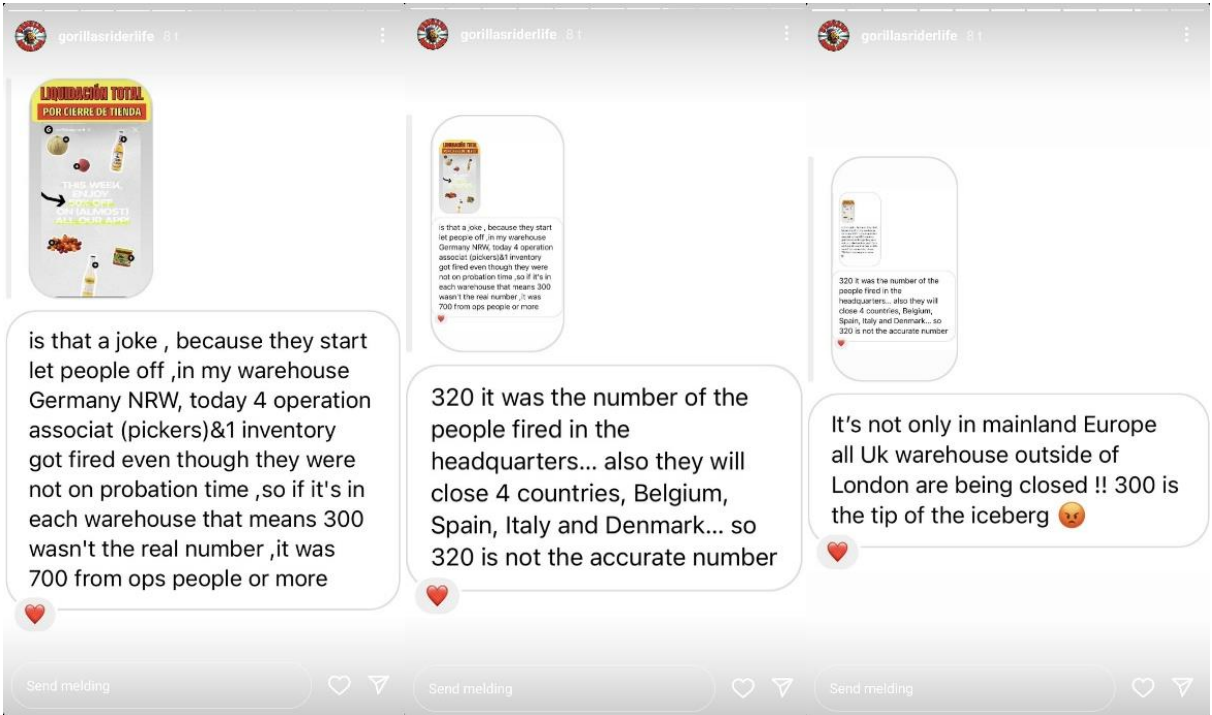

Figure 4.11.: These three pictures are screenshots of the @gorillasriderlife's storyline on Instagram. The first picture shows a screenshot of a DM sent to the @gorillasriderlife account. The next pictures show a DM that reacts to this first story where a second person shares some complementing facts. The third picture is a screenshot of a DM reacting to the second story. One can see the first picture in the second picture, and the first and second picture in the third.

It seems likely that the company Gorillas would try to get rid of an account like this, provoking disturbance within the company. With the possibility for others to report another account on Instagram, the account could eventually be temporarily shut down with enough reports. This would be the reason for the existence of three @gorillasriderlife accounts (illustrated in Figure 4.12.).

Figure 4.12.: The three different accounts made as Gorillas got the others shut down. One of the profiles was always active.

Conclusion

While presenting the different and seemingly small actions done outside of the arranged resistance against the gig economic system, this thesis has showed how the gig workers fight against the injustice they meet. Scott argued that even such innocent acts such as faking a constant limp would have consequences for the corporation in the long run as it slowed down production. Throughout this chapter I have brought out the examples of: stealing food and supplies with excuses such as "the company owes me the money" and "everyone else does it"; using the opportunity for sick leave as a way of getting out of working hours in a strategic way to make sure they get time of without getting fired; sharing a workers account to speed their accounts value, and collaborate with other workers within an economy which benefits the most from individuality and competition; and the different social media accounts voicing anonymously the voices of the workers from all over the world, sharing confidential information from the brand and in general mocking the platforms and brands. It was clear the company was irritated by this behavior, sending out warning memos and reporting the social media pages, such as the example with @gorillasriderlife showed above (Figure 4.12.). These small acts of resistance gave the brand many small notches, but to state that these actions were the reason for some of the platform's bankruptcy might be a bit farfetched. Still, it kept the moral of resistance up, and the memes made it all a bit more fun.

Figure 4.13.: An Instagram post by @gorillasriderlife showing several news posts about the Gorillas strike in France.
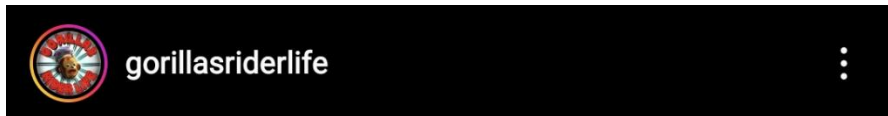
Figure 4.14.: An Instagram post by @gorillasriderlife illustrating Gorillas as a sinking ship where rats, referred to as the warehouse managers, jumping of in hope to save themselves.
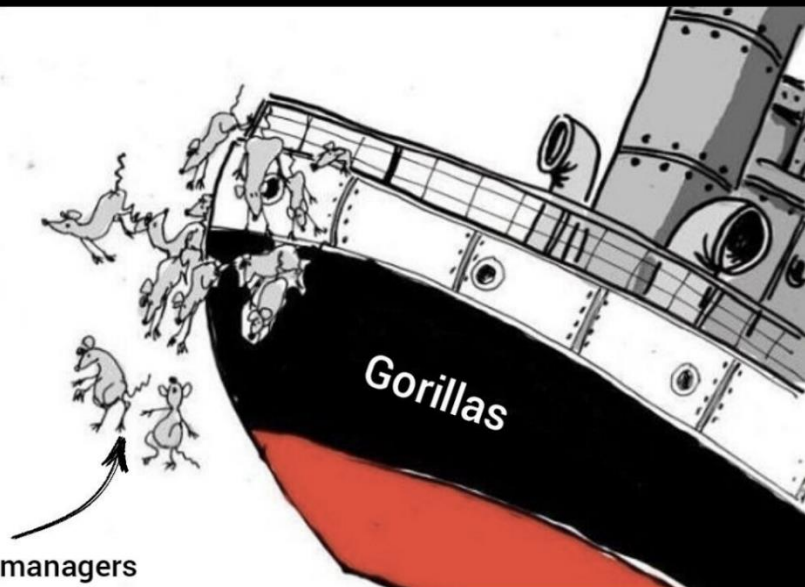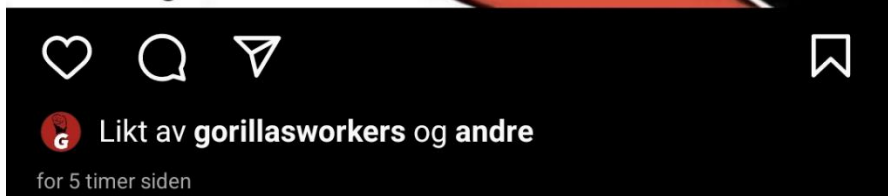
Chapter 5.

THE GIG ECONOMY AND MOBILIZATION FOR WORKERS RIGHTS

Figure 5.1.: Break the chain: We are not expendable. Labor rights for sale? Stop union busting.

"We are fighting this because we have to. If we don't, no one else will do it. But the hardest thing within this job is to make the workers care for their rights."

– Tod

Most of my interlocutors did not get their pay, and everyone I met from Gorillas had lost some of their payment. It is also not just a lost paycheck for one month, but in several cases, there had been months since they last had received any money for the job they did. One of the first things Tod talked about when I first met him was the economic situation Gorillas were in. We; Sebastian, Tod and I, sat inside the Gorillas workers' collective office and chatted about the workers' conditions. I sat nervously in one of the office chairs next to Sebastian as this was my first proper meeting with any potential interlocuters and concentrated on everything happening around me. Sebastian on the other hand laid back in the chair next to me watching Tod as he was ranting about the treatment they got from Gorillas:

Tod: I haven't received any payment yet. I think I received my last paycheck sometime last year. They haven't paid me since I took the offer to join the workers' collective. Actually, Gorillas are not far from bankruptcy, so I don't think they have the money to pay anyone. That's probably why they don't prioritize to pay us within the council. I haven't seen any money in my bank account since last autumn, so they [Gorillas] owe me a lot of money for all this work I do for them. It's not like they respect the work I do though, they would rather prefer that I wasn't here disturbing their violation of the law.

After a while, as I ended up sitting in their presence for five hours straight, I understood how lucky I was running into Sebastian that first time on the press conference. Sebastian and Tod were both positioned in the eye of the storm when it came to the work of mobilizing laborers' action against the platform companies. As both Sebastian and Tod were working for the Gorillas workers' collective, they were also aware of most things happening within the company. Most of the work Tod, Sebastian and the others in the council did were to receive complaints from the warehouse managers or the workers about working conditions. It was their responsibility to forward it to the management and see that it was taken care of.

Tod: We do this job more of a principle to make it difficult for the company. It's not like we believe they will survive for long anyway. But we also want to make sure that the workers are treated right. Most of them are scared for their jobs and

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don't dare to do anything. It's quite a difficult job to explain to them how easy it is to win a court case if they just dared to show up.

The gig workers want to talk to workers about their issues with the company, they want to talk to other people who have experienced their situation, rather than people hired by the company management to force the management's opinion upon the workers.

This chapter will present how the workers strive to form a workers' collective against the companies' will, and explicit actions to sabotage such a form of organization. By illustrating three different examples, this chapter will showcase scenarios that happened through my interlocuters' attempt to gather "a fair workers' collective". They, the gig workers, define a fair workers' collective as a collective represented by former workers themselves. From what I heard about the platform companies it seemed like HR, as well as their warehouse managers, are the ones supposed to take care of the workers working out in the streets. My interlocuters told me that they did not get any fair treatment as the HR worked for the management, and therefore followed the management values neglecting the workers' rights. This motivated the establishment of the workers' collective.

I came to understand this when listening to Sebastian and Tod's conversation about what they had to go thorough to form the Gorillas workers' collective. In this segment of the chapter, I will portray three different scenarios that happened when workers from three different companies tried to form their collective. The first scenario will show the forming of the Gorillas workers' collective that begun in the autumn of 2021. This situation led to people being fired and several lawsuits against the company. The next example will illustrate what happened during the ensemble of the Getir's workers' collective, which happened during the spring of 2022. This example did almost end up in a lawsuit, but the workers did not have enough facts of the managers sabotage to go through with it. The last scenario is about Drop's workers collective council vote. I was not able to follow how this situation unfolded towards the end, as it was close to the end of my fieldwork, and I did not get to know any of their workers. Still, this example will conclude the other examples above. These three examples will show a form of progress where the workers as well as the companies evolved their knowledge about each other in their fight to get hold of some power for the workers' rights.

Taking the forms of resistance further from the previous chapters individualistic – and in some way collective – action, this chapter will bring the focus to the collective and more structured

forms of resistance. Throughout my stay in Berlin, I was more involved – as mentioned in most of the chapters above – in the activistic milieu. Having Sebastian as my gatekeeper into the field, I got to meet several others working for the Gorillas workers collective, who had faced Gorillas in court the previous year. While building on collective thinking, togetherness, and solidarity the workers were able to jointly confront an economy that valued individualism. Before I'll present this, I will first present some of the previous work done on labor unionization.

Labor unionization

Looking at earlier anthropological work done on labor unions, Durrenberger and Reichart (2010) defines unions as a "form of collective action to achieve shared goals" (p. 3). Within the introduction chapter of their book *The anthropology of labor unions* (2010) Durrenberger and Reichart explain that labor unions necessity only appears in the presence of the skew relation between those who hire others to increase their own value, and those hired. The unions are formed as the hired labor "organize to identify, promote, and protect their interests" (p. 1). Most of the ethnographic work presented throughout this book is positioned in the US context. Durrenberger and Reichart point to the difference of labor laws from the situation in USA. They exemplify Germany as one of the countries "more supportive of working-class organizations" (p. 2). In the book's seventh chapter Lydia Savage argues that without communication between the head of the companies and the laborers/workers there will not be any possibilities for change (2010, p. 133). As shown above throughout the chapters it is obvious that communication within the companies is not the best. The example that I will present below with the Gorillas will support Savage's argument, as the workers' collective hardly get anything done.

To have a workers' collective within the workplace is forced by law within Germany. However, in the context of the gig economy where the labor force is based on contractors or precarity, the companies can lurk in the shadows of the law. While explaining "the history of American labor", Ravenelle (2019) argues that workers' movements is a natural reaction to labor injustice. Through the development of labor through time it becomes obvious how the entrepreneurs try to cheat their way by saving resources on labor treatment, leading to massive strikes by the workers unionizing to better their value (p. 64-71). The same goes for the time of the gig economy:

Today, many workers benefit from policies fought for by early unions and their striking workers: the minimum wage, a forty-hour work week, and even the simple recognition of unions as representing workers. But for workers in the sharing economy, it's as though none of these labor battles were ever fought, much less won (Ravenelle, 2019, p.71).

Also, as established in several cases above, most of the laborers are migrants or students coming from abroad. They are not aware of the rights they have, or see the job as something temporary, and therefore do not exploit the benefits that are rightfully theirs.

Gorillas had already fought their battle to establish a workers' collective and felt it beneficial to use their experience to help guide workers from other companies to establish workers' collectives of their own. This was the reason for establishing the activist group– to collaborate on the work against the different companies. I will now present the situation for the Gorillas workers' collective – current of the time of my fieldwork.

The Gorillas workers' collective

In 2021 Gorillas had a huge worker protest. They wanted to form a collective, something they were denied by the office. As a reaction to the protest, everyone engaged was immediately fired. The workers stood their ground and brought the company to court and won. They were offered a position in the council, or a huge amount of money to let it go. Most of the workers took the job, but one took the money so he could take the company to court further and global. The rest of the protesters formed the Gorillas workers' collective and hoped for a better future.

Tod and Sebastian told me that the collective started at a great pace, but shortly after they were put in the position of the council, they understood that there wasn't much they could do. The office did whatever they could do to make the council work difficult. All paperwork, office supplies, and general information got late replies. Required office supplies took months to reach them, and when it arrived it was usually not what they had asked for. In my understanding, it seemed like a silent war, where the office sent the wrong supplies, and when they reached the office the council members gave them away for free to others instead of sending them back.

With all the smaller and larger difficulties the collective met, people gave up. They started with 15 motivated council members, but when I was there, only 2 people were at work:

Tod and Sebastian. They were quite good friends, with respect for each other but at the same time had quite different world perspectives. Asking them about the collective was a bit of a sore spot, which led to a verbal fight between the two guys. They got quite mad at each other even though it was clear that the reason behind the frustration was the work they were doing. Or meant to be doing but couldn't do.

At this point, I think I had sat in the office for about three hours listening to everything Sebastian and Tod had to tell me. We were all quite tired and the hours since my last meal started to reach its limits. Still, I did not show any signs of leaving, as I felt bad for Sebastian and Tod and their situation. Their fight had burst out as I asked them how they worked within the council. After however long their argument lasted, Tod left the room to get some air. Sebastian sighed down in his chair and tried to explain everything to me in a better way than through their fight.

Sebastian: The thing is that we have been stuck in this situation for so long now. It has been a year since our last breakthrough, and the only thing that we have seen is people giving up and leaving the council. And I don't blame them for it. I think about it several times myself. It would just be so much easier for our personal lives to just leave. But then again, who will do the work we are doing now. Someone has to look out for the workers because the company is treating them so badly. And I know how it is. I have fought so hard to reach this goal as to form a collective.

I looked at Sebastian and saw how the months of constant struggle had worn him out. We sat for a few minutes just taking a breath and digesting every emotion which had just been unfolded. Sebastian sat up straight in his chair again and continued:

Sebastian: I don't think it's the best thing for Tod to live here either. He is here all the time, constantly in reach for the workers to rant about their problems. And he has quite a few of them himself. He is constantly working, and I don't know if he actually knows how to take some time off. We; me and the others, do it. I can't handle to be in this environment all the time. It wears me out and tears me down. But I feel bad when I take a vacation from work because I know the others have more to do when I'm not here.

Sebastian was right about Tod. As Sebastian stopped showing up for work a few days after this conversation I ended up spending most of my time with Tod. It worried me to see him work as much as he did, never taking breaks nor getting enough sleep or food. While we hung out, Tod and I affected each other's situation. Tod introduced me to the workers of different brands, and activists helping forming collectives. I felt my way of repaying him was to make sure he sometimes could chat about other stuff than the platforms and his work, as well as eating more food.

My observations of those I met from the Gorillas workers' collective showed a group where everyone was burnt out and frustrated at working against a stream of sabotage by the company. The only one eager to continue the council work seemed to be Tod, who tried to take upon himself the work of everyone else. It had been more than half a year since they won the court case against Gorillas company and were able to exercise their rights to establish the collective. If they were not the first one in Berlin, they were certainly one of the first to manage this. And as they struggled to get through with their council work, the Gorillas collective members helped other workers from other companies to get a workers' collective of their own. An example is the work we did to help the Getir workers establish their fair workers' collective.

Recruiting voters for Getir workers' collective council vote

Figure 5.2.: Picture showing Casper talking to some of the Getir workers informing them about the council vote outside one of the Getir warehouses.

Within the gig economy it's difficult to establish a workers' collective because of the constant movement of workers. This is also something the management wants to avoid:

Tod: They lose some of the power over us if we are able to inform the workers about their rights.

Tod told me this while we were helping the Getir activists to go from warehouse-to-warehouse informing workers about the Getir election. At this point, Getir was about to establish a workers' collective, and Tod explained that it was easier for us to find workers to talk to by showing up at their warehouse.

Tod: At the same time, not every manager is happy about us doing this. We had a recruiting tour yesterday where this one manager didn't let us stand outside the warehouse talking with his workers. He was acting up and yelling at us and denying people to communicate with us. It wasn't the best day, and it happens quite a lot.

I did believe him when he said it, but I didn't think it possibly could be that bad. Either way I found out how tense a situation could be when we came to the first warehouse. We; Tod and me, noticed that people weren't happy about our appearance straight away. When Tod walked around talking with the workers, everyone kept an eye on us. First, he walked up to a guy standing next to his scooter, talking with some other workers. Tod introduced himself and why he was there. At first, the guy had a friendly impression, but after hearing about the reason for the visit he became distant from the conversation. Tod continued explaining why a workers' collective was important even though the guy actively tried to not seem interested, saying things like "I don't want to engage in this", "I'm not interested in political stuff", etcetera.

While I observed this weird situation, I noticed the guy looking upwards at someone standing some meters apart from us. The other person was the warehouse manager. The manager talked with a girl and two other boys, and his body language didn't seem happy. He looked at us several times, pointing his arm at us while talking with the others. Tod didn't seem

to notice this. Afterward, during our break, I asked him about the situation where he hadn't seen the manager. It shocked him that the manager was so negative to our appearance because they had categorized him as one of the kind managers. On our second round the situation was even more tense. At that point Casper had joined us.

It wasn't much more we could do there after we had talked about the election with as many as we could. The manager had walked past us several times and talked with his workers. At that point both Tod and Casper noticed their unwelcomeness.

The time went on and the voting day came close. Unfortunately, I fell ill the day that the voting happened, but I was told everything by Tod some days later in the Gorillas workers collective office.

Tod: It's okey that you weren't able to show up, the whole day was only chaos.

Ida: What do you mean? What happened?

Tod: There were a lot of people showing up to vote, and we felt good about the situation as it comes to the election. The election went down fine, and Casper was elected to sit in the committee. The wrong thing we did then was to allow a break before handling the rest of the election. When we started the election again, several of the managers had snuck in and crashed the election. They claimed a revote and unfortunately, we allowed it. We held a second vote, but because of the managers' appearance many of the workers didn't dare to vote for the people we wanted to sit on the committee. It led to that people, like Casper, where voted out of the committee and that the companies favorites ended up with the most votes. You can say that we lost the vote.

Ida: What, did everyone turn their vote because the managers were there?

Tod: Yes, they are afraid to get fired even though the company is not allowed to do that. This is a democracy after all. But, it is not fair to say that everyone turned their vote. It still was some votes to Casper. We also noticed that the second vote had more hands raised than the first. Meaning we counted more voters the second time than the first. We have also heard rumors about people observing non-workers within the voting room. We therefore believe the managers brought

some other people to save their winning. We are trying to find some straight evidence of it and bring them to court in hope for a new election.

Several weeks later I was invited to attend a meeting with several of the workers who had attended the council vote. The meeting was held by their lawyer, to talk about what should happen next with any lawsuit. I saw that some of the guys who had distanced themselves from us, during our rounds talking about the election, had showed up at the meeting. This time it was made obvious that the workers were positive to make a collective, and they engaged themselves with questions to both the voluntary activists, co-workers and the lawyer. The workers were still a bit on edge looking after their manager since the meetings were held on the streets – a block away from their warehouse. These two completely different observations of the same people at various locations show the power the manager has over their workers.

After an hour-long chat, it became clear that the few people who claimed to have observed other than company workers attending the vote dared not to stand up during any court case. The evidence they had would then fall short and it was too much of a risk forward. In just a few weeks after this, Casper was fired because he were no longer a good fit for the company.

The Dropp collective council vote

The last example I want to illustrate is of the council election of Dropp. I had been called out to meet up with Tod to take part in the Dropp workers' collective council voting day. With some lack of motivation, I managed to get outside of the building where the voting happened. I got there after the meeting had started. Thinking it would not make a huge difference I did not bother too much with it, but when I reached the location, I had missed out on some action. Several of the other activists were surrounding the doorstep eating pizzas and wearing reflective vests. About twelve of them sat on the doorstep chatting with each other or patrolling around the area. Seeing a familiar face, I walked towards Sebastian who was chatting with Jose by the door. They greeted me with a smile and Sebastian jumped straight to the point.

Sebastian: You didn't show up before now? You missed out on some really good action!

Ida: No, I'm sorry. I didn't feel too good today, so I ran a bit late. What happened?

Sebastian:	We had to barricade the door as some of the managers tried to crash the vote, like with the Getir vote.
Ida:	What, for real?
Sebastian:	Yes! I'm glad we were as many people as we are now, or they would have broken in.
Ida:	Like, they got physical?
Sebastian:	Yes, they tried to push through us. But we stood our ground. One of the managers got really mad and started to shout that it was his right to get in there. It didn't work for him though because we didn't budge. I have called out for some more help in case the managers also bring some more people and try again.

Hearing this, I came to realize that the Drops workers had mobilized the activist group to help block the entrance for non-workers, and especially the managers or company employees. As I stayed at the stairway, we saw some of the managers lurking around the corners watching to see if we were still standing guard at the door. Also, the activist group's lawyer was there to see that everything happened according to the law. The rest of the day remained calm until the vote was done and the Tweet (Figure 5.3.) below illustrates how this election ended:

Figure: 5.3.: Tweet posted by Dropp workers organization about their successful election for a workers' collective.

By showing up at the election to help guard the door, I got the chance to have some long chats with Sebastian and Jose that has been mentioned several times throughout the thesis. It had also later been beneficial as I was able to mingle with several of the other activists whom I later hung out with at press conferences and gatherings in general.

Conclusion

These three examples each show different scenarios related to the struggle of assembling a fair workers collective within the gig economy. The workers within Getir – as well as the activists who helped – put down a lot of work to spread the word and secure votes for Casper. Seemingly this period of time gave the company's management the opportunity to prepare themselves and crash the vote to make sure that they had people who followed their regime ending up leading the council. The activist groups learned from the mistakes made within the Getir election and came better prepared the next time as the Dropp workers organized their election. Gorillas illustrate the potential future for the coming workers' collectives. As they have had the workers' collective for over half a year, they have a lot of experience with the company's constant attempts to make their work difficult.

The previous work done on labor unionization argues that it is a necessity to keep a hold on the power arrangements within the workplace. Labor unionized is the most reasonable way to do this, to establish the ground of communication. The workers need a voice as they meet the people who – in refence to Graeber's (2018) analysis mentioned in the thesis' first chapter – own their time. Within this skew power structure, the workers do what they can to make it as difficult as possible for the companies to thrive off them. However, as this way of resistance is visible to the company, they do whatever they can to suppress their unionization.

THE GIG ECONOMY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE FUTURE

Figure 6.1.: Picture showing the Wolt headquarters in Berlin. The building is positioned in the gentrified street beside Spree – the canal running across the center of Berlin, in some parts being the border splitting Berlin into east and west sides.

"Do we want to live in a world where work becomes a luxury good […]?"

– Ravenelle (2019 p. 17-8)

For my fieldwork in Berlin, I found it highly beneficial to walk by myself. It allowed me to soak in all the impressions the city could give, and it also let me digest all the situations I experienced, including those in the presence of my interlocutors. On one of these many walks, I decided to go to the river Spree and follow it southeast down a newly built alley of modern buildings of apartment housings, hotels and bars, and large corporations, such as Universal Studios. It was such a summer's day, with the sun heating the air and luring people out into the streets. I was not the only one motivated to walk down the banks of Spree, and several people were sitting outside on their balconies, in the bars, or just strolling, as I was doing. In the hope of getting something valuable for my thesis during this walk, I brought my camera in case I saw something of interest. I had walked along this path before and had been impressed by the modern architecture breaching from the other concrete buildings in Friedrichshain. I reached a point where I had not walked before and suddenly saw a familiar sign informing that I stood next to the Wolt headquarters. Shocked that I had lived only 15 minutes away from this building for three months, I decided to sit on the stairs outside the building to observe the movement.

As it was a weekday, people were at work inside the building and taking breaks outside, bathing in the sun. Looking inside, I saw they had a room for merch where riders could collect their provided gear. Later on, I also looked this up on Wolt's webpage, which confirmed my observation. From what I understood, others than the Wolt workers were resting and eating outside on the building's stairs. Seeing this made me feel calmer, as I had a sense that my behavior looked suspicious. I got the feeling I was in the enemy's territory after all the months I had followed my interlocutors' work, describing their hate for the company's treatment. Now, I was sitting beside them, observing how those working within the company's management spent their day.

After sitting outside the building observing, eating, and enjoying the sun for a couple of hours, I decided it was time to leave and walk back to my apartment. As I started to leave, I saw several office workers strolling in and out of the building, looking for someone or something. I decided to wait to see what happened, and around 5 minutes later, I saw a Wolt rider rolling down the alley. He stopped outside the back door – where I sat – and the first thought that crossed my mind was that the rider probably had shown up to change some of his gear. He stood outside checking his phone as one of the office workers walked out. The Wolt rider turned to his backpack and gave the office worker two bags of food before the rider continued to his next delivery. The office worker who had collected the food shouted inside to the others working, who came to join the meal. All the office workers sat outside their fancy building (portrayed in

Figure 6.1.), eating their restaurant-made lunch as they chatted and enjoyed the weather. I am unsure if it was because of all the stories my interlocuters had told me – some of them have been presented throughout this thesis – of how they felt a skewed and problematically differential treatment of those working in the office as opposed to those working 'on the ground' as riders or warehouse workers. However, for some reason, I felt I had witnessed this hierarchical system in its action.

I wanted to start this concluding chapter with this empirical observation I witnessed at the end of my period of fieldwork to illustrate the contrast between these two different types of laborers within the gig economy. In contrast to all the other empirical data presented in previous chapters, I did not know the office worker or the rider delivering food to them. The representation of this situation is purely based on the observation I made watching the scene unfolding before me and the experiences and savviness of this particular field I developed throughout my stay in Berlin. Throughout this thesis, my aim has been to illustrate the gig workers' environment in terms of working conditions and the urban space. Now, I tie together the data I have presented and summarize my analysis established in this thesis as I will look at the further development of platform capitalism and the gig economy. As stated in the thesis's introduction chapter, I will not venture into the muddy terrain of attempting to predict the future – as this task has always been, and will certainly also be, in this case – impossible. Instead, the goal in this concluding part of the thesis will be an attempt to outline a path that the gig economy is leading to. Is such a path leading to a precarious future of work itself? Also, what happens to society if every interaction is mediated through or happens on digital platforms? I want to look into these questions further at the same time as I would like to provide a response to this thesis' central question: What does the gig economy do to the understanding of the value of the human and labor?

The value of the human labor

In recent times – as I am concluding this thesis in the spring of 2023 – the gig economy has appeared more rapidly within academic work and in the media, and all this with relevance worldwide. *The Routledge handbook of the gig economy* edited by Immanuel Ness is one example of a book released during spring of 2023. The gig economy has also received more attention from other media such as the YouTube documentary *Hell of a ride: The unique story of Gorillas* (OMR, 2023) based of the Gorillas entrepreneurs and their work available on YouTube since the 9th of June. Furthermore, as the situation of the gig workers has become

known in media, more has also happened in the gig workers' fight to improve their rights. In their attempt to look into the future of the gig economy, Jamie Woodcock and Mark Graham (2020) argued the gig workers needed more attention in the media to succeed with their activist work: "[G]ig economy workers need visibility" (p. 136). At their time of work Woodcock and Graham said that activist work done by the gig workers rarely happened with any coverage in the media. From my observations I would argue that this has changed now, such as my empirical example presented in the thesis' introducing chapter where journalists flocked around the protesting laborers. A lot has happened within the field of the gig economy, and, therefore, it is safe to say that the object of my thesis is relevant to the time that unfolds in front of us today. With this thesis I have demonstrated how the gig economy bases itself on a workers valuation descended from the industrial times. Regarding this Ravenelle asks her readers if we want to live in a world where work is "a luxury good" (2019, p. 17-8). In contrast to this, Diane Mulcahy argues that the gig economy introduces a new way of working. She goes as far as to indicate that the gig economy will help people regain their freedom and control their own lives. All this is written in her bestselling book *The Gig Economy: The Complete Guide to Getting Better Work, Taking More Time Off and Financing the Life You Want* (2016). The book is based on a university course Mulcahy was the first to present in the US academic circles. Reflecting the genre of North American self-help books, in this work she presents steps to succeed within the platform economy and the precarious work form. The book's introduction takes examples from this course, as several of her students had followed and succeeded as gig workers, to underline the success that might happen if you follow the guidelines correctly. At the same time, she also specifies that neither she nor anyone else participating in producing this guide has any responsibility for what might happen to those who follow the guidelines.

I started to read this book before going to do my fieldwork as I wanted to attain perspectives both from those critical to this particular type of economic system and those who see this as a largely positive transformation, replete with opportunities as the case of Mulcahy shows. However, in this latter case, I had difficulty not feeling tricked when the book began by a disclaimer in a small textbox.

However, despite this tendency in Mulchay's book (and there are others similar toting the gospel of the gig economy) and despite that the above chapters have largely been critical towards the gig economy, I do *not* want to argue that the whole gig work system *only* provides negative outcomes – understood broadly – as there are, of course, some who are lucky enough to make it work to their benefit, great or small. These are what Ravenelle (2019) calls 'success

stories.' They do exist, but there are few of them. Also, as Ravenelle points out, so-called success stories can be unstable. This goes for the example Ravenelle gives of Ryan, an Airbnb entrepreneur who constantly walks on eggshells in fear of one day being kicked out of the platform. Short-term renting is illegal and has a twenty-five hundred dollars fee if broken. If Ryans business get noticed, he will be left with a twenty thousand dollars rent for the six New York apartments he then owns. This leads to a quite unstable situation Ryan must keep for himself. So, will the future labor market follow the same guidelines as gig work and platform capitalism?

In their concluding chapter of the book *The Gig Economy: A Critical Introduction* (2020) Woodcock and Graham argues that "the processes that define the gig economy could come to transform almost every type of work" (p. 144) as they recommend people to take action and support workers' fight for better rights. Looking at the past and the result of the industrial revolution and the transformation of Taylorism – given the history of labor transformation, it is clear that wage labor will be transformed again and again, also in the future. And in this regard, it is ominous to see non-gig work corporations drawing inspiration from the structural logic of the gig economy, including how to treat their employees – or precarious laborers. For instance, during my fieldwork, I saw several of the same ways of treating my interlocutors working as gig workers also done to my friend Cassandra and her colleagues and friends working within one of the local café brands in Berlin. Let me elaborate empirically: A few days before this situation unfolded, Cassandra had told me she had been called into a meeting by the manager; she had worked in the café for quite some time and thought she might finally get full-employment status. When she showed up to the meeting with her boss, it was made clear that this was not the case. As her temporal contract only had three weeks to go, they decided to suspend her because she was 'not a good fit for the company.' Cassandra was fuming as she called me and asked me to come and hang out in my apartment until she had calmed down. When she showed up, she told me everything that had happened:

Cassandra: They just fired me! Can you believe it, after all the work I have done for them?

Cassandra sat on my bed, holding onto a bottle of beer I had given her to cool down. She had tears streaming down her chin and breathing heavily out of stress and frustration. I sat on a chair facing her, trying to digest the situation that had just happened.

Ida:	I'm so sorry for you, I really can't believe it. Did they give you any reason why?
Cassandra:	Yes! Apparently, I'm no good fit for the company or whatever. And you know why that is! It is because I'm the only one with enough courage to stand up to them when they treat us badly. It is so unfair! I have done such a good job for the company because I loved their values and their idea. I have no idea what I'm going to do now. What do I do?
Ida:	But they can't just fire you, you have to get paid for the weeks you have left of your contract.
Cassandra:	They suspended me. I guess I'll get the minimum payment, like we do during sick leave, but I won't get extra for working-hours.
Ida:	Okay, but I meant you can use the time to search for a new job. I'm sure you'll find another job. And hopefully they will treat you better there.
Cassandra:	You're right. I just feel like shit at the moment. I was so angry at them, I mean, I *am* angry at them. And how they treated me! You know, when they told me I was suspended and that they would not give me another contract, I asked them why. I asked for an answer for what they felt that I had done wrong, so maybe I could explain myself. Or at least give me a chance to change the things I did wrong. The only answer I got from those bitches was that I wasn't a good fit for the company. I tried to ask them what they meant about that and the only thing they gave me as an answer was that I had no rights to know anything more. The shit I have! I have a right to know why they fire me!

Cassandra stopped, looked out of the windows, and drank more beer. Worried for her, I asked her to take a deep breath. Then, listening to me, she laid down on my bed. We sat silently for a couple of minutes before she continued:

Cassandra:	They didn't even let me walk out by myself. I wasn't allowed to say goodbye to my co-workers. They followed me to the door where I told them that I was able to walk out the door myself. They told me that they would make sure I didn't gossip to the others and make any drama. So, they walked me out of the door and looked after me as I walked away. I'm not sure what drama they were talking

about, I was only going to tell the others I was fired. It's not like they won't understand it. I'm also going to meet them when their shifts are over and tell them everything.

Cassandra never got a proper reason for why the manager decided to fire her. However, she had an idea that the reason was that she was one of the few who talked to the manager when they acted improperly, like contacting the workers' doctor and asking for private information about their workers, as well as installing cameras only pointing to the workers' area inside the café.

Are the examples from the sacking of Cassandra and her workplace indications of a future 'new normal' when it comes to labor treatment? I certainly hope not; however, before fieldwork while it became known the topic of my thesis, family and friends told me all kinds of bizarre stories of employers and managers mistreating their laborers. Surveilling employees, holding back payment, and demanding them to work are seemingly something that most people – especially considering students and migrants – must go through before finding their permanent job. According to Franco "Biffo" Berardi (2011), this change in labor value came about with the financial crash of 2008. A critical thinker of the value of the human and the transformations of labor and politics, Berardi's predictions for the future are summarized well here:

> If the workers will not find the means to change direction, we are heading toward a growing destruction of the material and immaterial structures of civilized life, a barbarization of the social landscape (Berardi, 2011, p. 124).

It has been more than ten years since Berardi wrote this, and in retrospect of the data analyzed within this thesis, it is difficult to predict what is about to happen. Nevertheless, – and here I concur with Berardi – it seems evident that something is about to change within the labor market, but we can only wait to see whether it is the managers or the laborers who will end up in the succeeding end. I find Berardi's perspective relatable as an image of the data presented within this thesis. While some aspects of my analysis point to dystopic prospects regarding the labor market and urban development, I do still have a hope for change looking at the multiform practices of resistance workers perform vis-à-vis the system. The gig workers are indeed working on taking a stand against the unfolding situation. However, their work is problematic

within a labor market desperate for income, which makes it possible for companies to change their employers rapidly. I, therefore, find Mbembe's quote relatable in the conversation about the future of the labor market:

> The globalization of corporate sovereignty, the extension of capital into every sphere of life, and technological escalation in the form of the computational are all part of one and the same process (2021, p. 20).

The meaning of this is also shown through my data as I have presented and analyzed how digitalization has introduced a new way of employment and commercialized most parts of our daily lives. Looking back to this thesis analysis of machine theory, I argued that the laborers had been made into machines; however, in the following chapter on urbanization and social life, I showed how these same assumptions could be drawn to the other aspects of urban life. As Raunig (2010) argues, people become what they are connected to as the cyclist and their bike (p. 8). I referred to this in the thesis' first chapter while looking into making the workers into a part of machinery. However, what about the dependence on technology within the urban city? I will draw the same comparisons towards the urban citizens merging into their smartphones and digital gadgets. While living in Berlin, I depended on bringing my phone for everything, such as metro tickets, ordering food, and communicating with people. Since I stayed in Berlin during the Corona pandemic, I needed my phone for the documentation for my corona pass to go into shops or cafés. Neither of the examples was a necessary dependence as I could buy physical metro tickets to bring with me, I could order food at the cafes and wait for the food to be made outside on the streets, and I did not need to be available for people to get in touch with me all the time. When it came to ordering food, I did try to take the stand to not order food on any of the digital apps as I did not have the conscience to support these brands. However, when I did go to the restaurants to order food, I made the waiter use the app to order the food for me as they did not use other ordering systems. My point of with this example is connected to the argument of this thesis' first chapter, illustrating a produced necessity made within the urban life.

What does all of this have to do with the gig economy? The gig economy and platform capitalism are based on digital platforms and digitalizing everyday needs into these. I will here agree with Woodcock and Grahams possible prediction saying: "Platforms are not going away"

(p. 144). That is something I believe will continue in the future development of urban life. Whether it will end up as Woodock and Graham see it, as an opportunity, making it into a civic utility (p. 139-140), I am unsure of. In the hope of not sounding too critical, I think the gig economy's toxic features are difficult to avoid as long as it is based on its traditional tendencies of contracting.

The unpredictable future labor market

The gig economy and platform capitalism has provided an unpredictable labor market, that is in constant change. With pivots constantly changing the rules all members – either user or worker – have to work hard to keep themselves updated on the new rules. There is also a lot happening between the companies. Several companies are now owned by others who not long ago were their competitors on the market. One example is the case of Gorillas that have now "joined forces" with Getir (Figure 6.2.):
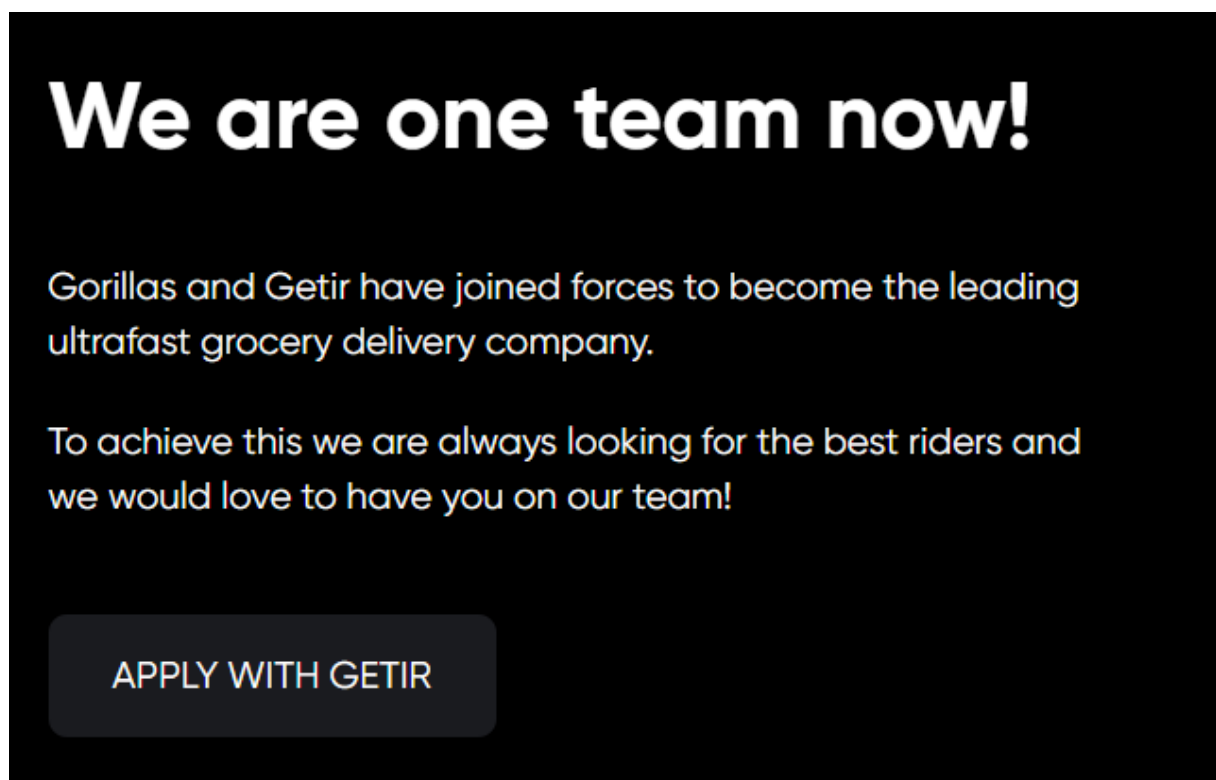

We are one team now!

Gorillas and Getir have joined forces to become the leading ultrafast grocery delivery company.

To achieve this we are always looking for the best riders and we would love to have you on our team!

APPLY WITH GETIR

Figure 6.2.: Screenshot of Gorillas webpage: https://gorillas.io/en/ride-with-us (taken: 08.05.2023).

In an attempt to present all the different aspects related to the laborers within the gig economy, I have portrayed the life of gig riders. My leading interlocuter group has been riders or warehouse laborers working within the grocery platforms. By presenting the stories told by my

interlocutors and by analyzing their circumstances, I hope also to contribute to anthropological discussions about urban development and take part in further analyzing how the value of work and the value of humans transform within this domain. As I have also attempted to indicate in this concluding chapter – with the spillover effect from gig work into the non-gig work domain with the example opening this conclusion – a lot is about to happen. Further, more research is also being published at this moment, as I am writing this thesis. The interest in the gig economy and precarious labor have risen dramatically through the last year. We are now only seeing the beginning of the workers' resistance toward this reinstallation of future workers' value.

Nevertheless, I will not write off the possibilities in Figure 6.3. which *may* illustrate the future supermarket and indicate that the groceries *might* only be delivered in boxes, driven in a car, and placed by our door to collect – some years from now. For, the industry within the gig economy is changing. Several companies are going bankrupt as the surviving thrive on their failure, merging into monopolistic systems offering the consumers efficiency at a low cost, making it difficult for the local shops to survive.

Figure 6.3.: The picture shows a soon-to-open Wolt grocery warehouse. Is this the future of grocery stores?

However, I do not want to end this thesis in such a dystopic portrait as discussed in this thesis's second chapter. The only thing I *can* predict with some certainty, is that if this era should not lead to a domestic hierarchical system between corporations and laborers, and a society living on digital platforms, there needs to be a change among consumers and urban citizens in general. Hopefully, labor laws will improve the conditions for precarious workers and prioritize the workers' rights before economic growth. *Maybe* the future holds a plausibility where gig work and the sharing economy will reinforce the urban community and establish new social connections. Only time will tell, but I do not believe there will be an end to gig work soon. Therefore, it is best to better the conditions we face today.

Figure 6.4.: "I think the ape is loud". This picture is taken of one of the many street art walls in Friedrichshain. The artwork is not related to the gig platform Gorillas; however, I find this to be a relatable illustration in many ways. Reflecting upon my thesis I want to dedicate this illustration to my interlocuters and hope their loud chanting for justice one day will reach out and be heard.

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