Paolo Borghi, Annalisa Murgia

Struggling for alternative social imaginaries. A focus on Italian organisations representing food delivery platform workers

Ente di afferenza:
_()_

Paolo Borghi and Annalisa Murgia

Struggling for alternative social imaginaries

A focus on Italian organisations representing food delivery platform workers

Abstract

This article focuses on contemporary social imaginaries emerging in the specific context of food delivery mediated by digital labour platforms (DLPs) in Italy. How can the dominant imaginary constructed by DLPs be challenged? Are there alternative imaginaries to the celebration of individual autonomy and extreme flexibility that can open up the possibility of emancipation for platform workers? After introducing the theoretical framework on social imaginaries, technological changes and possible paths of liberation within and from work, the article explores how the studied organisations – trade unions, grassroots groups, and cooperatives – define themselves and the workers they refer to, as well as the different social imaginaries they foster in contrast (or sometimes in agreement) to those promoted by DLPs. By proposing the concept of a «struggle for alternative social imaginaries», our findings – based on a multi-sited ethnography study – show how the initial dominant imaginary conveyed by DLPs is progressively challenged by the multi-vocality of the counter-social imaginaries promoted by the collective actors representing platform workers.

Keywords: social imaginaries, platform work, multi-sited ethnography, collective representation, trade unions, grassroots groups, cooperatives

1. Introduction

This article investigates the alternative social imaginaries on platform work developed by Italian organisations currently representing platform workers, and

how they pave the way for possible paths of emancipation. We take the case of both traditional trade unions and emerging organisations – grassroots groups and cooperatives – focusing on how they manage (if they do) to challenge the dominant imaginary conveyed by digital labour platforms (DLPs). Based on a multi-sited ethnography conducted between 2018 and 2021, we investigated how organisations define themselves and the workers they refer to, also exploring their position in relation to the social imaginary constructed by DLPs. DLPs can be defined as «a set of digital infrastructures that mediate interactions between consumers and workers: bringing together the supply of and demand for labour» (Ferrari, Graham, 2021, p. 815). Platform work can be performed mainly in two ways: in a particular place, such as food delivery or driving, or online, as in the case of cloud work, which can be requested and conducted from anywhere (Woodcock, Graham, 2020).

In attempting to show how the tensions between alternative social imaginaries of platform work can result in emancipatory perspectives, we analyse the emergence of multi-vocal social imaginaries and the current efforts made by the organisations studied to challenge the dominant imaginary promoted by DLPs and – echoing the words of André Gorz (1989) – to create possible forms of emancipation «within work» and «from work». Drawing on the debate on social imaginaries and emerging technologies (Castoriadis, 1997; Gorz, 1989; Straume, 2011), we show how the forms *instituting* the conditions of social life – in this case the social imaginaries around platform work – are confronted with the already *instituted*, but are also shaped through a «struggle for alternative social imaginaries» fostered by collective actors representing platform workers, who are currently fighting to gain visibility and legitimacy.

The article is organised as follows. First, we discuss the theoretical debate on capitalism and social imaginaries, with a focus on the role of technology. Second, we illustrate the research context and methods. The third section presents the findings which focus, on the one side, on the self-representations of the organisations studied – also considering how they represent the workers they would like to organise – and on the other, on the emergence of social imaginaries about platform work as an alternative to the dominant one promoted by DLPs. Finally, we discuss our findings and conclude.

2. Social imaginaries in global capitalism

The debate on social imaginaries involves different disciplines, such as sociology, philosophy, and psychoanalysis, with the common aim to understand, on the one hand, the relationship between individuals and their social worlds, on the other, the dynamics underpinning the social reproduction of ideas, meanings, and power relations. The articulated debate on capitalism has also discussed its pervasiveness, going so far as to question the existence of autonomous spaces and imaginaries. In particular, Straume (2011), leveraging the work of Wagner (2008), underlines how global capitalism imposes its ideology up to the point of colonising all the thinkable. Therefore, in this perspective, the social imaginary of capitalism goes far beyond an economic project and extends to

shaping language, as in the case of the neoliberal version of the concept of «sharing» (Cockayne, 2016; Murillo, Buckland, Val, 2017; Stemler, 2017). Indeed, through the instrumental use of rationality and the concealment of history in its economic theoretical foundation, capitalism shapes society around the myth of competition, which colonizes the entire lives of individuals, in a world where the political dimension disappears and the social order becomes a pure matter of rationality, effectiveness and efficiency. This means to conceptualise capitalism as a «form of life» (Wittgenstein, 1953), which implies the «appropriation of our own wishes and deeds» (Fraser, Jaeggi, 2018, pp. 135-137) defining «normative criteria of appropriateness» and creating imagined futures (Beckert, 2016). In this approach, then, the pervasiveness of capitalism, along with the promise of a perpetual growth in which individuals are free to move and choose in a depoliticized world, makes it complicated, if not impossible, to think outside the «matrix» (Straume, 2011).

The recognition of the pervasiveness of capitalism also forms the basis of Taylor's theoretical approach to modern social imaginaries (Taylor, 2002; 2004). Along with the growth of the public sphere and the implementation of democratic rules, the central role of the economy emerged as one of the pillars of modern society. Thus, to understand how different imaginaries interact and how they contribute to shape society with different results and in different places, the interaction between imaginaries needs to be explored. This perspective embraces the thesis of multiple translocal modernities (Appadurai, 1996), according to which general processes like industrialisation, bureaucratisation, and technological and scientific improvements affect society at the global level, interacting at the same time with cultures and contingencies at local level. This, therefore, opens up the possible appearance of different imaginaries. To summarise, if Straume's perspective provocatively questions the possibility of thinking outside the matrix, Taylor's approach instead implies the existence of different social imaginaries within a general convergence toward common macro-frames.

Chakrabarty (2009) overcomes the debate on thinking within or outside the matrix by drawing on Marx's thought, according to which the reproduction of capital relies on relationships which can (or cannot) contribute to its reproductive intent. This then implies a multiplicity of histories:

> Marx recognizes the possibility that money and commodity, as relations, could have existed in history without necessarily giving rise to capital. Since they did not necessarily look forward to capital, they make up the kind of past I have called History 2. [...] History 2s are thus not pasts separate from capital; they inhere in capital and yet interrupt and punctuate the run of capital's own logic. (Chakrabarty, 2009, p. 64)

The multiplicity of modernities, histories and imaginaries, therefore, also includes multiple possibilities embedded in the social construction of reality, ranging from the reproduction of capital to its opposition. The variety of voices makes the social context complex and worth studying, focusing on the conversation between many voices (Borghi, 2019), in the attempt to recognize eman-

cipatory perspectives, which configure the possible in the real. The perspective of an emancipatory social science reflects on both the subject studied and who studies, urging a «sociological reciprocity» that also affects the «how» of studying (Pellegrino, 2020). Moreover, the focus on the variety of voices also implies an active role in reframing «the condition of visibility and the possibility of expression of social actors left historically and politically on the margins, highlighting [...] the profound charge of resistance to domination and experimentation with new forms of citizenship» (Massari, 2020, p. 51).

Cornelius Castoriadis (1991; 1997) was one of the main authors who explored the idea of society as being open to create (and re-create) itself through social imaginaries, conceptualising societies themselves as «imaginary institutions», since each society is, in a way, a creation of the system of meaning that is recognised valid. Castoriadis' work is characterised by a concern for the possibility of a different form of society (Smith, 2009). From this perspective, he theorises an unresolvable tension between what is new, i.e., the instituting society – also defined as «the social imaginary in the radical sense» (Castoriadis, 1991, p. 84), «the history in the making» (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 70) – and what is given, i.e., the instituted society – using his words «the history made» – which is continually transformed by the instituting society. Castoriadis therefore supports an «ontology of creation» against an «ontology of determinacy» that has for a long time dominated the Western tradition, claiming that it is precisely through a process of imagination that the transition from the old to the new can be instituted in a given society (Komporozos-Athanasiou, Fotaki, 2015). However, one of the main criticisms concerns the fact that this debate rarely engages with «the question of how change and difference are produced locally through the workings of the social imaginary's significations at specific social-historical conjunctures» (Gaonkar, 2002, p. 9).

Our article aims to contribute to filling this gap by focusing on how social imaginaries are shaped in a specific context and historical moment. Moreover, by conducting a multi-sited ethnography, our approach also makes it possible to compensate, at least partially, for the lack of micro-sociological studies on social imaginaries. Indeed, we take as a reference point the idea that social imaginaries are rooted in specific places and people (Taylor, 2002; 2004), who play a relevant role in the hermeneutics of everyday life, shaping the social surroundings through images, stories and legends. The emphasis on ordinary people implies that social imaginaries are a privileged path through which individuals and organisations build a connection to what they perceive as social reality. More specifically, in this perspective, social imaginaries can be defined as «the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations» (Taylor, 2004, p. 23).

3. Social imaginaries and emerging technologies: platform work and emancipation

The increasing and pervasive effects of technology in people's lives have stimulated public opinion as well as academic debate. Based on an analysis of the literature of different disciplines, such as philosophy of technology, science and technology studies, and the debate on sustainability, Kerschner and Ehlers (2016) offer a map of different attitudes toward technology. The authors show an articulated range of positions, from enthusiasm (further refined into technophile, technocrat, and entropy optimism) to scepticism (simple, technophobic, entropy pessimism), passing through determinism and romanticism. Technology is also a central theme for classic authors, such as Castoriadis (1997) and Gorz (1989), who express their doubts about the governance of technology and its benefits, mainly directed toward the dominant classes. Castoriadis emphasises technology's capacity to increase the power and control of some social groups and decrease that of others. Similarly, Gorz (1989, p. 68) points out how capitalism exploits technological development for «the disintegration of the working class, the trade union movement and what remains of social solidarity and cohesion». In the current context dominated by information technology, the capital gains space for action and decision on social forces and the state, imposing its ideology. When Gorz started his reflection on the unbalanced relation between capital, social forces, and state in the post-Fordist era, the digital revolution was already taking place supported by the then-emerging Californian ideology (Barbrook, Cameron, 1996).

> In liberal ideology […] entrepreneurs are creators of society and of culture: they have «the genius of discovering in their contemporaries the "latent need" for an object or a service that, in our everyday round, we would not have imagined»; their enterprise «represents and fulfils a cardinal value which we perceive as materializing freedom itself, namely innovation». (Gorz, 1989, p. 129)

In a similar way, the most recent evolution of capitalism – so-called *platform capitalism* (Armano *et al.*, 2017; Srnicek, 2017) – relies on digital labour platforms (DLPs) as revolutionary tools able to build the future of work and consumption (Cockayne, 2016; ILO, 2021). The narrative promoted by DLPs celebrates flexibility, efficiency, direct access to customised services, choice, and cost-effectiveness for clients, at the same time exalting autonomy, flexibility, and the talent of those who offer their professional services through them (Pasquale, 2016; Zanoni, 2019). «Be your own boss! Enjoy flexibility, freedom and competitive earnings» reads the invitation on the homepage of a well-known DLP. In this way, DLPs reproduce an imaginary that portrays the single worker, be it a manager or a rider delivering food, as the only person in charge of their own success or failure. The management of social and business risks is therefore increasingly transferred from employers to individuals, in a process recently described as the «radical responsibilisation» of the labour force, which becomes

solely responsible «for all the costs and benefits associated with being an economic actor» (Fleming, 2017, pp. 692-693).

This article focuses on the social imaginaries on platform work conveyed by organisations that are currently representing platform workers in Italy, and how they can lead to possible paths of emancipation. This allows a reconsideration of Gorz's critics (Gorz, 1987), applying them to the contemporary working scene. In particular, the research was conducted in a highly dense urban context such as the city of Milan. Indeed, urban contexts especially are witnessing a rapid increase in robotically delivered services that conceal human labour with little or no protection (Macrorie *et al.*, 2021). The case of automated logistics is emblematic in this respect, posing new challenges to both traditional trade unions and other alternative actors who aim to protect and represent emerging categories of workers (Borghi *et al.*, 2021; Cant, 2019; Cini, Goldmann, 2020; Joyce, Stuart, 2021; Leonardi *et al.*, 2019; Marrone, Peterlongo, 2020; Massimo, 2020a; 2020b; Moore, Joyce, 2020; Nizzoli, 2021; Tassinari, Maccarrone, 2019).

The meaning, role, and position of platform work in the production system and its influence on social imaginaries is what is at stake for different collective actors, with similar interests but divergent visions and strategies. The instituting society under construction, resuming Castoriadis' perspective, depends on the role that people imagine for themselves, as stated by Gorz. Therefore, the shape of the emerging «platform society» (van Dijck, 2018) depends on how both individual and collective actors imagine it, and thus also on how locally produced social imaginaries can challenge the dominant ones conveyed by DLPs and transform them into spaces of emancipation. Our study therefore investigates how, with respect to platform work, it is possible not only to «think about» alternative imaginaries to the dominant ones, but also to «act in» the world with the aim of changing its dominant logics. By focusing on the possible in the real (Borghi, 2019), we have thus tried to grasp the tensions, the sensemaking effort, and the struggle behind different social imaginaries, conceived as fluid belief systems that also guide people's lives, giving shape to the conflicts between different social groups, organisations, or their aggregations.

4. Research context and methods

The technological infrastructure governing DLPs is conceived for managing thousands or even millions of interactions at the same time, with isolated and competing platform workers. However, since the appearance of the first DLP in 2005 – Amazon Mechanical Turk – different forms of mobilisations and collective organising have continued to emerge. The first and most quoted case is Turkopticon, a website with specific plugins created in the US by two researchers, Irani and Silberman (2013; 2015), that facilitates the communication between crowd-workers to evaluate clients' reliability. Over the years, different organisations, such as traditional unions, as well as grassroots groups, cooperatives, and union-affiliated guilds, have tried to offer proper representation to platform workers by adopting various strategies. Unfortunately, a lack of systematic empirical material impedes an exhaustive review (Vandaele, 2018). Neverthe-

less, recent studies, also conducted in the Italian context, are shedding light on specific contexts wherein self-organised platform workers and organisations, including unions, are fostering the creation of online and offline communities (Borghi *et al.*, 2021; Chesta *et al.*, 2019; Cini, Goldmann, 2020; Cini *et al.*, 2021; Leonardi *et al.*, 2019; Marrone, 2019; 2021; Tassinari, Maccarrone, 2019).

This empirical research, which is positioned within this emerging debate, was realised in Italy within five different organisations focused on platform workers' representation: the three main Italian unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL), plus one grassroots group (Deliverance Milano) and one cooperative (DocServizi). Access to the field was negotiated with the five organisations thanks to previous contacts of the authors. The depth of access to the fieldwork varied in different contexts and required specific empirical research strategies. As far as trade unions are concerned, the most active actors with respect to the representation of platform work are scattered throughout Italy among different regions and union branches. Within the CGIL, observation of meetings and events, as well as interviews, were carried out with unionists belonging to NIDIL (non-standard work), FILT (transport sector), FILCAMS (services and trading), and Agenquadri/Apiqa (executives, managers and self-employed). Within CISL and UIL the focus was instead mainly on the branches dedicated to services and trading (FISASCAT and UIL-TuCS). As far as the grassroots group was concerned, the level of involvement was particularly deep. Indeed, the ethnographer (one of the authors) negotiated his regular presence at the weekly internal assemblies as well as public events and demonstrations, both physically and online, also being included in several online groups (WhatsApp, Telegram) at local, national, and international level. Finally, interviews were conducted within the DocServizi cooperative, and it was possible to participate in their events and annual meeting days with members from all over Italy. All the organisations studied were informed at the beginning that the fieldwork would be conducted simultaneously within the other organisations.

From a methodological point of view, we position our study in the research tradition of ethnographies of work (Bottalico, Piro, 2020; Brannan *et al.*, 2007; Burawoy, 2013). We conducted a multi-sited ethnography (Hannerz, 2003; Marcus, 1995) that began in the city of Milan in July 2018 and was completed in December 2020. The activities of the organisations studied were then also followed online during 2021. More specifically, a first fieldwork was carried out between July and December 2018, and a second was supposed to be conducted between February and July 2020. However, due to the Covid-19 health emergency, only in February it was possible to conduct the fieldwork, which then continued remotely in March. At the end of March 2020, the data collection phase was suspended and postponed to the second half of 2020. The research activities were mainly based in Milan, but interviews and participant observations were also conducted in other cities, to follow the key actors belonging to the organisation studied. Using multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995), we firstly *followed the people* as they moved to, from and through multiple sites or their multiple local events. Secondly, we *followed the conflict*, participating in assemblies, demonstrations, and events, as well as in collective discussions

on some newsletters and WhatsApp/Telegram groups. This meant, for example, conducting several interviews in Rome with the most active unionists at the national level on platform work or participating in assemblies in other cities when rider activists met with other grassroots groups.

In conducting the fieldwork, different research tools were combined: observing (internal meetings and public events), conversing (formal and informal interviewing), and documentary sources (Ybema *et al.*, 2009). Specifically, in addition to ethnographic work, 42 interviews lasting between 70 and 110 minutes were conducted during which the research participants were asked how platform workers were addressed by their organisations, how they were framed and were then invited to report any actual practice of collective representation, drawing upon recent events and collective actions.

Fieldnotes, interview transcripts and collected documents were subjected to thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), following an inductive approach. Therefore, the texts were coded into categories and sub-categories for each organisation and then connections were made both within the same organisation and between different organisations with the support of the ATLAS.ti 8 software.

5. Findings

5.1. Self-representation of the studied organisations: who are we and who are platform workers?

In the last few years, platform workers' representation has gained the interest of both emerging and well-established organisations. In Italy, the most visible type of platform work, both physically and in the public debate, is food delivery. Along with grassroots groups and independent unions, which first started organising food delivery riders in 2016, trade unions also progressively played a role in the following years. Similarly, some cooperatives have also taken part in the public debate, promoting initiatives on «platform cooperativism»[1] (Scholz, 2014; 2016) addressed to riders but also to freelancers of different sectors. Taking the floor in the public debate, the organisations studied, defined and positioned themselves in the field of action they wanted to tackle. This contributed to stratifying and diversifying the social imaginaries of collective actors, displaying specific images, identities, intentions, and strategies. The recent evolution of DLPs, in general, and food delivery platforms, in particular, triggered the internal debate of different organisations on strategies and approaches to workers' organising and representation. As one trade unionist explained:

> We are first and foremost a place where workers can be heard. And I think this is now visible in several cities where we are approaching riders. We should

[1] Platform cooperatives are businesses that use a website, mobile app, or protocol to sell goods or services. They rely on democratic decision-making and shared ownership of the platform by workers and users (https://platform.coop/). Platform cooperativism is the movement which fosters the creation and growth of platform cooperatives.

be interpreters of what the workers want to do. It's an old idea of the trade union and, at the same time, very current. We need to listen to understand the workers we want to represent, to start talking about rights. (CGIL, interview, 22/10/2020)

Platform workers in general, and riders in particular, proved to be a challenging target both for traditional unions as well as for new collective actors. The definition of the union as «a place where workers can be heard» described a trade union that tries (or at least would like) to listen and understand. The proximity with workers actually emerged as a wish rather than an established practice. According to our observations, it was a late attempt to gain legitimacy among workers – and through them with public institutions after the approval of the national law on food delivery (Act 128/2019) – rather than an original interest in organising a labour force that was not unionised. The approach of unions, at least at local level, configured the intent to reduce the distance from a labour force that was often sceptical about being part of a trade union.

On the contrary, the grassroots group studied claimed a pioneering role in riders' representation since 2016, when it organised the first protests in Milan following the very first riders' protest organised in Italy, which took place in Turin. The grassroots group promoted protests and initiatives in Milan with the aim of shedding light on the growing precariousness among workers of the service sector, including platform work:

> We started organising riders when trade unions were not even interested in them. At that time nobody, except us and the activists in Turin, was on the street trying to dialogue with riders, nobody means nobody at national level. (Co-founder Deliverance Milano, interview, 5/10/2020)

The self-definition of one of the founders shed light on the long and complex process which led to the definition of a «we».

> We are a metropolitan union, dealing with the precarious labour force of the urban economies. Our informal structure is a choice; it makes us quicker in facing workers' requests. We are a union for workers, but also a political group recognised both locally and nationally. We did the same since the beginning, acting as a union but the consciousness of this arrived later. When it happened, we started calling ourselves metropolitan union. (Co-founder of Deliverance Milano, interview, 16/07/2018)

The self-definition «metropolitan union» marked both a difference from traditional unions and a specific area of action: the urban on-demand service economy where a growing number of unrepresented workers was involved with short-term contracts or piecework, as in the case of food delivery. The creation of a union and a political group emerged mainly through daily attempts to organise food delivery riders, through practices developed day-by-day instead of a clearly defined pre-existing idea. From the beginning, the grassroots group perceived

its action as something that was urgent and disregarded, in their view, by well-established unions. Organising riders therefore became the strategic field to challenge the narratives of food delivery DLPs, which, as mentioned above, used to recruit workers by inviting them to become their own boss, enjoying flexibility, freedom, and competitive earnings. At the same time, organising riders was also a pragmatic way to challenge the inertia of traditional unions.

Another case study concerned a cooperative that played a relevant role in the public debate on platform work in Italy. Even in this case, the self-representation emerged as an attempt to subvert the dominant narrative on digital platforms. The metaphor of the platform became a narrative tool to reframe the cooperative itself:

> We are a digital platform cooperative because the digital infrastructures connect people. Our implementation model aims at supporting members professionally, maintaining their independence and improving their business, giving them the access to social protection measures as employees. At the same time, it answers clients' requests with high quality standard services provided by our network of cooperatives and companies; in this way we also innovate the market. (DocServizi, interview, 20/12/2018)

During our fieldwork and beyond, the label «digital platform cooperative» became a recurrent mantra mentioned in several public meetings where members of the cooperative were invited to discuss DLPs. This was the case at a public debate we attended, when the president of DocServizi and the national CEO of Deliveroo, one of the main players in food delivery at global level, discussed the principles underpinning the two platform models. The term «platform», from the cooperative's perspective, evoked horizontal networks composed of professionals, services, and clients, where interaction and cooperation create value and guarantee – as declared by the interviewee – more rights and social protection for workers, *de facto* the opposite of the model proposed by DLPs, beyond the slogans with which they try to attract workers. The mimetic use of the language was indeed part of a strategy of *détournement* (Debord, Wolman, 2006), and this supported the position of the cooperative, which aimed to play on the same ground of platform capitalism, challenging its exploitative logic through similar technological tools.

The ways in which organisations represented themselves were closely connected to how they represented the platform workers they wanted to target. Despite different perspectives, all the collective actors studied underlined the unbalanced power between DLPs and platform workers. In particular, well-established trade unions described platform workers as an elusive labour force:

> We are facing an urban subculture with its own language, practices, and specific ways to manage work and life. At the same time, these workers also experience common conditions, maybe different from standard workers. This is not necessarily incompatible with the trade union. We should find a common language and ways to interact with them. (CGIL, interview, 12/03/2020)

According to the interviewee, platform workers in general – and riders even more so – could hardly be classified using the Fordist categories to which trade unions traditionally refer. Thus, food delivery riders appeared as a «different species» of labour force, and the gap with trade unions required a common language (and reciprocal recognition), which at the time of the fieldwork was still in the making.

The complex picture of riders also emerged in the interviews conducted with the activists of the grassroots group studied:

> They are an extremely fluid labour force. It can change very quickly due to the high turnover. The number of migrants who often live outside the city has increased, as well as the number of Italians in their 50s who have lost their jobs. Someone else needs this as a second job to earn enough to survive. It's hard to fix an image of this labour force. It changes quite fast and with the pandemic even more people, including many migrants, became riders after losing their jobs. (Member of Deliverance Milano, interview, 21/12/2020)

The fluidity of the labour force – and to a certain extent the impossibility of outlining a defined image – was a concrete obstacle in the interaction and everyday attempts of organising workers, as frequently emerged in the internal meetings we attended. Nevertheless, instead of framing platform workers as a subculture that was therefore difficult to approach, the activists of the grassroots group focused on common difficulties, vulnerabilities, and risks, and on the power relations between riders and DLPs:

> If they run all the time competing for getting a job, if the rating system of the platform determines every single action they are doing, how can you expect attention by these workers? This is the hard side of our job: finding a way to raise consciousness, offering at the same time our help in the everyday working life. (Member of Deliverance Milano, interview, 9/12/2020)

A different perspective emerged from the studied cooperative, which was founded as a cooperative for artists and technicians, but progressively included members of different employment sectors. Platform workers, including riders, were in their view part of the grey area of workers experiencing a hybrid working condition, between employment and self-employment:

> Our members have an indeterminate physiognomy, oscillating between the dependent work and the independent work […]. To this grey area belong artists, musicians, actors and, in general, all those figures who have always been linked to an intermittent and discontinuous work activity, but also the start-ups, and freelancers as translators, graphic designers, platform workers, and so on. (DocServizi, interview, 23/10/2018)

The workers addressed by the cooperative referred to different sectors; platform workers appeared as the last and most recent case of the new genera-

tion of «on demand» workers to whom the cooperative could offer better working conditions. Becoming members meant becoming an employee of the cooperative, instead of being self-employed and permanently exposed to market flows. Moreover, according to the data collected, the narrative on membership meant becoming part of a collaborative network where the interests of the labour force were not opposed to those of clients and employers, as seemed instead to happen in DLPs. In this frame, the labour force was not conceived as a sum of individuals in competition, but as a collective entity with specific traits and interests, which collaboratively interacted with the other players in the same business.

5.2. Organisations representing platform workers: what social imaginaries?

In the previous section, we showed how the organisations studied define themselves and the workers they aim to represent. Here the focus turns to the social imaginaries they conveyed as challenging or reproducing the dominant imaginary promoted by DLPs. Despite a shared concern about the side effects of the platformisation of work, the positions of the organisations studied differed in relation to the role DLPs play both in the market and in the labour market. The combination between how organisations described themselves, how they imagined the labour force they referred to, and how they interpreted DLPs allowed us to understand the types of social imaginaries they constructed and circulated. In some cases, social imaginaries directly emerged in the public debate at large, in other cases they were performed and implemented through the everyday activity of the organisations. It is worth emphasising that given the processual and relational nature underlying social imaginaries, this picture was partial and constantly changing during the fieldwork. Nevertheless, it allowed us to shed light on the variety of alternative social imaginaries, which aimed to counterbalance the incumbent ones conveyed by DLPs.

As far as trade unions are concerned, one of the interviewees compared the description of the labour force made by DLPs and the everyday labour force they met on the street:

> The platforms tell the story of a young labour force, largely made up of students who earn some money in their spare time for their holidays. The image we have, working on the street, is very different. It is a composite labour force, there are young migrants but also Italians who have lost their jobs, they live in the suburbs supporting their families working as riders, the only work they have. Showing this in the public debate is part of our work, it means countering the uplifting narratives of the platforms. (UIL, interview, 7/12/2018)

The public image of the labour force emerged therefore as a contested field, colonised from the beginning by DLPs. The struggle was mainly played through narratives in the public sphere, augmented by the digital environment. At the time of the fieldwork, the website of Deliveroo Italy recruited riders inviting them to enjoy the freedom to choose «where and when to work» (see Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Deliveroo website banner.

Source: Authors.

«You will receive delivery proposals, but it is always up to you to decide which to accept and which not to accept», reported the Deliveroo website. However, the ranking system required workers to accept orders as quickly as possible and to carry out as many as possible to continue receiving new tasks. To counter the edifying narrative, which in our study was found not to relate in any way to the experiences of food delivery riders, trade unions fostered a counter-imaginary aimed at debunking actual working conditions and circulating a different story about platform workers: not free and happy workers who enjoy flexible working arrangements, but a precarious and low-paid labour force without social protection and exposed to a toxic working environment:

> The precarious working conditions we are facing now, are fostered by the «winner-takes-all» mechanism implemented by digital labour platforms. An undefined and changing minority of riders manage to work continuously and even make good money (of course, albeit working with rhythms outside the classic 40 hours per week). Meanwhile a variable majority of riders compete, climbing the ranks to have an advantage over others getting more slots for working, as in Glovo. (UIL, public document[2], 15/01/21)

The unions were thus trying to remodel their central role in regulating work, fostering the idea of an instituting society where the interests of capital should be re-embedded in a socially regulated dimension, also thanks to their proactive role. The trade union CGIL, after early attempts to organise riders at local level in 2018, oriented its activity towards the construction of an alternative imaginary to that of DLPs, carried out in particular through the campaigns *No Easy Riders* (July 2019) and *No Easy Riders 2* (July 2020) (see Figs. 2-3), the first national information campaigns focused on riders[3].

---

[2] Available at: https://sindacato-networkers.it/2021/01/rider-perche-a-qualcuno-piace-il-cottimo/.

[3] The campaign started in Rome, then moved to other Italian cities.

FIG. 2. No Easy Riders flyer.
Source: Authors.

FIG. 3. No Easy Riders 2 flyer.
Source: Authors.

In this perspective, the struggle of food delivery riders against DLPs symbolically configured the part for the whole, the synecdoche through which the boundaries of regulated work can be reaffirmed.

Nevertheless, this was not a homogeneous position among trade unions. During an internal meeting we participated in with CISL, DLPs were indeed presented as innovative and positive players of the labour market:

> The discussion around DLPs touched the need to implement minimum social protections for riders, at the same time a general agreement emerged on the idea that the DLPs business model combines employment opportunities, flexibility, and income for workers, ensuring efficient services for consumers at affordable prices. (CISL, fieldnotes, 15/10/2018)

CISL, which was also the least active union in the representation of platform workers, was the one most inclined to recognise the possibility of opening a dialogue with DLPs to foster what they called «good flexibility» for platform workers. This position of being friendly and open towards DLPs was reflected in a controversial attempt to sign an agreement – through its federation focused on service and trading – with a DLP specialised in supermarket goods delivery[4]. The attempt was immediately denounced by grassroots groups who were part of the national network Riders X Rights, of which Deliverance Milano was also part, as well as by the other two confederal trade unions, CGIL and UIL.

Having failed to reach an agreement, shortly afterwards the same DLP signed another agreement with a so-called «yellow trade union». The fake union was indeed created *ad hoc* to accomplish the interests of the platform, by signing a contract that was profitable for the platform and unfavourable for the workers. The contract was appealed, and the Court of Milan dismissed it, recognising clear anti-union conduct[5]. These events were widely commented on social media and newspapers as they happened just a few weeks after the national strike organised by the national network Riders X Rights on 30th October 2020. The strike involved riders of more than twenty cities across the country, and in Milan it was spontaneously extended for five days – renamed by Deliverance Milano as «The Five Days of Milan», evoking the five days of insurrection that in 1848 started the first war of independence against the Austrian empire. The strike was organised to fight the agreement made in September 2020 between Assodelivery, the association representing the main food delivery DLPs in Italy (Just Eat excluded), and the right-wing trade union UGL. The agreement was conceived to formally comply with the recent law on food delivery (Act 128/2019) that forced DLPs to sign a collective agreement with the most representative trade unions. This agreement, which aimed to maintain piecework, was immediately contested by the Ministry of Labour (Communication No. 29/2020) and declared illegal by the Court of Bologna in July 2021.

These events reinforced the possibility to build an alternative imaginary about DLPs by reaffirming a new legal frame – strongly advocated by riders' organisations – against the attempts of DLPs to circumvent the law. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic made the working conditions that riders were forced to accept even more visible. From this point of view, the grassroots group that we followed during our study strongly denounced the misbehaviours of DLPs

---

[4] The attempt was also reported by national newspapers, for example: https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/in-edicola/articoli/2021/01/09/retromarcia-cisl-gli-shopper-bocciano-il-contratto-il-sindacato-non-puo-firmarlo/6060009/.

[5] A summary of the case can be found here: https://www.collettiva.it/copertine/italia/2021/03/30/news/everli_condannata_condotta_antisindacale-967804/.

towards riders (arbitrary lowering of fees, failure to distribute safety equipment, incorrect calculation of fees, unfair dismissal, disconnection from the app), also debunking the DLPs' corporate communication, as in the video *All you can shit*[6] (see Figs. 4-5)*, posted on social media on 1st May 2020.
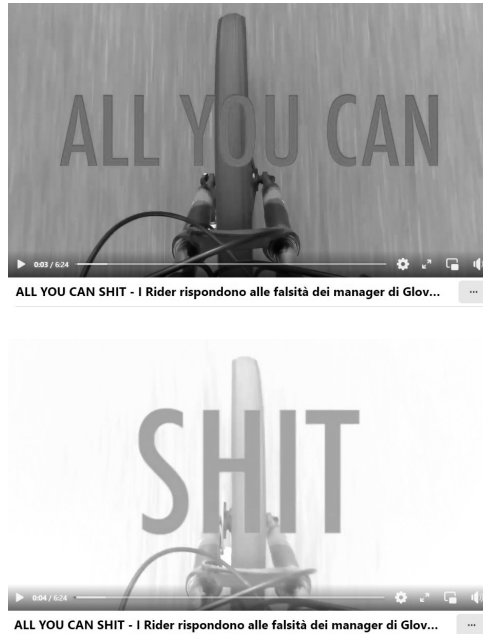
4-5. All You Can Shit video cover.

Source: Authors.

In response to the celebratory videos in which the managers of Deliveroo, Just Eat, and Glovo pointed out the social role DLPs played during the pandemic, riders tried to shift public attention to shortcomings on health and safety measures implemented by DLPs.

Another effort made by Deliverance Milano was to build alliances with other struggles. For example, on 1st May 2019, the activists symbolically connected the fight of food delivery riders with that of agricultural workers, thorough the claim «siamo braccianti metropolitani» (we are metropolitan labourers), therefore claiming their right to the city, in connection with the urban precariat and trans-feminist struggles. In this way the grassroots group reframed the fight of food delivery riders in a wider imaginary composed of different social groups experiencing precarious working conditions within and outside the metropolitan area. In doing so, on the one hand, they fostered a social imaginary based on the idea of liberation «within work», denouncing the real working conditions of

---

[6] The video is available here: https://www.facebook.com/deliverancemilano/videos/1097779483908789.

platform workers and fighting for their rights. On the other hand, they also fore-shadowed an ideal liberation «from work», claiming the right to the city, con-ceived as the right to live in the urban space with full access to its resources, op-portunities, and services without being marginalised, therefore building bridges with other organisations fighting against gentrification processes, claiming a universal basic income, and supporting migrant and LGBTQ+ struggles.

From a different perspective, the studied cooperative also challenged the imaginary conveyed by DLPs, although it was neither part of the activities or-ganised by grassroots groups and trade unions nor in the bargaining process with DLPs. The efforts of the cooperative mobilised a mythological counter-ima-ginary in opposition to the so-called «unicorn companies», an expression used in the mainstream debate on digital start-ups to celebrate the rarity of successful DLPs valued at over one billion dollars. Through public debates, the cooperative promoted the idea of «Pegasus companies», which are based on cooperative principles:

> The choice between unicorn and Pegasus does not just represent a choice among legendary creatures, but metaphorically reflects different ways of rea-soning guided by completely different goals and ideals. If the unicorn is a metaphor of the statistical rarity of a high breakthrough of the market by a start-up, in a Pegasus company the reference to Pegasus, the winged horse of Greek mythology, wants to be an allusion to the European origins of coopera-tion. It indicates both the loyalty to the knight (the person) and the freedom of the poet to reach the highest peaks of thought (the seven cooperative prin-ciples)[7]. Moreover, Pegasus is also a constellation. A Pegasus company is then a cooperative that brings together professionals, making them come out of isolation and connecting them. (DocServizi, Public document[8], 25/01/2021)

The narrative based on the opposition of two mythological figures – Pegas-us and unicorn – suggests a choice between opposing values. Pegasus repres-ents the cooperative values based on solidarity, as well as a collective idea of work in opposition to individualism and speculative market logics powered by unicorn companies. At stake was the choice between different work cultures, also alluding to an opposition between the European cooperative culture and the unbridled liberalism of the American DLPs.

This approach idealistically configured, therefore, a different perspective in comparison to those identified above. On the one hand, an alternative idea about what the market could be; on the other hand, a counter-imaginary where the liberation found «within work» was a promise that passed through the

---

[7] Cooperatives operate according to the same core principles and values, adopted by the International Co-operative Alliance: open and voluntary membership, democratic member control, members' economic participation, autonomy and independence, education, training, and information, cooperation among cooperatives, and concern for community.

[8] https://www.pandorarivista.it/articoli/unicorno-o-pegaso-sharing-economy-e-piatta-forme-cooperative/.

re-appropriation of work democracy and the collective ownership of means of production. Moreover, at the time of the fieldwork, the cooperative promoted an articulated debate between the two main national networks of cooperatives (Legacoop and Confcooperative) to support the start-up of a local cooperative of riders – Food4me[9] – which eventually emerged as an official initiative of Confcooperative without the formal involvement of DocServizi.

6. Discussion

By positioning our work within the theoretical debate on social imaginaries, in this article we examined the case of food delivery DLPs, in which technological changes play a key role in shaping emerging labour imaginaries. In this field, indeed, contemporary capitalism imposes its social imaginary presenting DLPs as an easy earning opportunity and a work activity that allows to enjoy total freedom and autonomy, while offering customers on-demand services tailored to their needs at reduced costs and creating opportunities for business partners. In particular, the communication environment proved to be one of the significant battlegrounds where the social imaginary was built through a sweetened storytelling. At the same time, alternative imaginaries have gradually emerged over time to challenge the dominant one. Our findings specifically showed how the collective actors representing food delivery riders started challenging the dominant imaginary on platform work through a variety of discourses and practices enacted by the five organisations studied: the trade unions CGIL, UIL, CISL; the grassroots group Deliverance Milano; and the cooperative DocServizi.

To analyse how alternative visions of platform work contributed to shaping alternative social imaginaries, and how they interacted and contaminated each other, we focused on how the organisations studied contributed to shaping «the history in the making» and challenge the so-called «instituted society» (Castoriadis, 1997). Indeed, the contested role of DLPs slowly and progressively became a social issue after the emergence of new collective actors engaged in the representation of platform workers and the gradual engagement of traditional trade unions. We first focused on how the organisations represented themselves by highlighting the main commonalities and differences. Second, we showed how they described the labour force they aimed to represent. We then illustrated how the combination of these elements represented the base for challenging the monolithic social imaginary on platform work offered by DLPs and opening alternative spaces for multivocal social imaginaries.

As far as trade unions are concerned, while CISL tended to adhere to the dominant imaginary promoted by DLPs, CGIL and UIL instead positioned themselves in open opposition to it and shared similar objectives to the grassroots group, although alternating phases of conflict and phases of cooperation with the activists of Deliverance Milano. Therefore, CGIL and UIL, not always in a coherent and coordinated manner, and Deliverance Milano, since its foundation, implemented a strategy based both on building an alternative public discourse

---

[9] https://www.food4mevr.it/.

on DLPs and on organising collective actions at the local level, with the aim to tell the real story on platform workers' conditions and show the dark side of DLPs. In doing so, they debunked the old in the new, by bringing back the supposed exceptionality of platform work into a well-known story of precarisation and exploitation and claiming a regulated frame where existing rules can also be applied to platform work. By emphasising the symbolic role of platform workers' representation, at the time of the fieldwork, trade unions were then attempting to frame technology as a tool whose rules must be transparent and negotiated, and not as an unrestrained abstract entity, therefore re-establishing their social role of guardians of labour rights, being open (or eager) to listen to workers' needs and to transform them into collective claims. Deliverance Milano, instead, played the role of *avant-garde* in representing a hitherto unrepresented precarious labour force by maintaining relations with the trade unions that were, depending on the occasion, cooperative or confrontational. Therefore, although through sometimes divergent discourses and practices, CGIL, UIL, and Deliverance Milano shared the aim of dismantling the edifying narrative of DLPs and denouncing that they were more concerned with investors' interests and clients' satisfaction than with ensuring decent working conditions. On the one hand, two of the studied unions fostered a social imaginary where platform work should be brought back to a regulative framework. On the other hand, the grassroots group shaped a social imaginary that was not only related to the regulation of employment relations, but also represented a terrain in which the struggle between capital and labour could be renewed. The discrepancies between the two perspectives created continuous tensions that have not prevented, however, significant episodes of coordination during both protests and the bargaining process with DLPs.

Through different and quite parallel paths, characterised by few interactions with trade unions and grassroots groups, the cooperative studied positioned itself as an alternative platform, able to overcome the conflicts between workers, market, and clients. In particular, DocServizi gained visibility in the public debate on DLPs by opposing two mythological figures, in terms of values and meaning. On the one hand, the unicorn, which represented the start-ups that are exceptionality rewarded and exalted by the capitalist system; and on the other hand, Pegasus, bearer of collective interests, including employees, customers, and society as a whole. In this case, the challenge to the dominant social imaginary was performed by proposing an alternative to platform work based on decent working standards, democratic participation processes, and re-appropriation of the means of production. In terms of public discourse, this proposal was highly evocative and opened up a social imaginary where platform work can be managed according to the principles of cooperation. This also showed that the same technology can produce exploitation but also foster the active participation of workers, precisely through the re-appropriation of the means of production.

7. Conclusion

The rise of a plurality of counter-imaginaries among the collective actors representing platform workers has proved to be the building block for discourses and practices deviating from the dominant matrix shaped by the neoliberal ideology (Gorz, 1989; Straume, 2011) embodied by DLPs. In doing so, the collective actors struggled in different ways and with different purposes to foster the emergence of what Chakrabarty (2009) calls «history 2», pointing out that alternative scenarios are always possible, even when power relations are totally unbalanced. Through this struggle of imaginaries, therefore, the instituting society (Castoriadis, 1991; 1997) takes shape, also creating the conditions to think what seemed unthinkable, that is to say, platform workers' rights and collective representation.

In this frame, our study also contributes to understanding how alternative social imaginaries can shape forms of emancipation and liberation «within work» and «from work» (Gorz, 1989; 1999; Leonardi, 2017). The former implies an active role of workers, «more exacting about the nature, content, goals and organization of their work» (Gorz, 1989, p. 3). This is the pre-condition for fighting the oppression of control and hierarchical structures at work. The latter instead implies the overcoming of the economic rationality leading to save labour time in favour of time for life. According to Gorz, the technological revolution should not help to rehabilitate the Fordist work ethic, but rather it should broaden the field of non-work activities.

According to our study, we can identify at least three different possible paths of liberation within and from work. First, an idea of liberation «within work», evoked mainly by the social imaginary conveyed by trade unions, which calls for the implementation of a regulatory framework as well as regulatory practices through collective bargaining. Second, a liberation both «within» and «from work» evoked mainly by activists, who actively participate in the collective bargaining processes, while claiming the right to the city and to meaningful social relations, foreshadowing the right to live before and beyond economic and capitalistic logics. Finally, a specific form of liberation «within work» can be identified in the re-appropriation of the means of production proposed by the cooperative model, where the collective and social value of work is recognised and valued, in contrast to the exploitative and individualising logics of capitalism.

While the exploration of alternative social imaginaries on DLPs reveals a multivocal vitality of workers' organisations in framing possible paths of liberation, the unbalanced power relations between the DLPs and the collective actors representing platform workers remain an open issue. This was evident in the case of Assodelivery, which was able to skip the prescriptions of the law on food delivery (Act 128/2019) and sign an agreement with a conniving trade union. At the same time, after the agreement, the riders were able to mobilise on the basis of a different imaginary from the dominant one promoted by DLPs being also motivated by a favourable ruling. Therefore, although power relations are

certainly not symmetrical at present, the rise of alternative imaginaries is in any case a crucial element in the construction of forms of resistance.

To conclude, what we have defined as a «struggle for alternative social imaginaries» results in a common and strategic field in which spaces of action can be imagined and performed to challenge the current dominant «instituted society» (Castoriadis, 1997), where technologies are conceived as neutral tools free to act and produce economic value without shared rules and democratic control.

References

Appadurai, Arjun
1996   *Modernity al Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Vol. 1), Minneapolis-London, University of Minnesota Press.

Armano, Emiliana, Annalisa Murgia, Maurizio Teli
2017   *Platform capitalism e confini del lavoro negli spazi digitali*, Milano, Mimesis.

Barbrook, Richard, Andy Cameron
1996   «The Californian Ideology », in *Science as Culture*, 6, 1, pp. 44-72.

Beckert, Jens
2016   *Imagined Futures*, Cambridge, MA-London, Harvard University Press.

Borghi, Paolo, Annalisa Murgia, Mathilde Mondon-Navazo, Petr Mezihorák
2021   «Mind the Gap Between Discourses and Practices: Platform Workers' Representation in France and Italy», in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 27, 4, pp. 425-443.

Borghi, Vando
2019   «In the real: infrastructures of experience, cosmopolitanism from below and sociology», in *Quaderni Di Teoria Sociale*, 1, pp. 35-59.

Bottalico, Andrea, Valeria Piro
2020   «L'etnografia del lavoro e il lavoro dell'etnografia», in *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*, 1, pp. 5-29.

Boyatzis, Richard E.
1998   *Transforming Qualitative Information: Thematic Analysis and Code Development*, Thousand Oaks, London-Delhi, Sage.

Brannan, Matthew, Geoff Pearson, Frank Worthington
2007   «Ethnographies of Work and the Work of Ethnography», in *Ethnography*, 8, 4, pp. 395-402.

Burawoy, Michael
2013   «Ethnographic Fallacies: Reflections on Labour Studies in the Era of Market Fundamentalism», in *Work, Employment and Society*, 27, 3, pp. 526-536.

Cant, Callum
2019   *Riding for Deliveroo: Resistance in the New Economy*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

Castoriadis, Cornelius
1991   *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, New York-Oxford, Oxford University Press.
1997   *The Imaginary Institution of Society* [1975], Cambridge, MA, MIT Press.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh
2009   *Provincializing Europe* [2000], Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Chesta, Riccardo Emilio, Lorenzo Zamponi, Carlotta Caciagli
2019   «Labour Activism and Social Movement Unionism in the Gig Economy. Food Delivery Workers Struggles in Italy», in *Partecipazione e Conflitto*, 12, 3, pp. 819-844.

Cini, Lorenzo, Bartek Goldmann
2020   «The Worker Capabilities Approach: Insights from Worker Mobilizations in Italian Logistics and Food Delivery», in *Work, Employment and Society*, 35, 5, pp. 948-967.

Cini, Lorenzo, Vincenzo Maccarrone, Arianna Tassinari
2021   «With or Without U(nions)? Understanding the Diversity of Gig Workers' Organizing Practices in Italy and the UK», in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, online at: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/09596801211052531, visited 28/12/2021.

Cockayne, Daniel G.
2016   «Sharing and Neoliberal Discourse: The Economic Function of Sharing in the Digital On-Demand Economy», in *Geoforum*, 77, pp. 73-82.

Debord, Guy, Wolman, Gil J.
2006   «A User's Guide to Détournement» [1956], Les Lèvres Nues, 8, from the *Situationist International Anthology*, online at: http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/detourn.htm, visited 10/05/2022.

Ferrari, Fabian, Mark Graham
2021   «Fissures in Algorithmic Power: Platforms, Code, and Contestation», in *Cultural Studies*, online at: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09502386.2021.1895250, visited 28/12/2021.

Fleming, Peter
2017   «The Human Capital Hoax: Work, Debt and Insecurity in the Era of Uberization», in *Organization Studies*, 38, 5, pp. 691-709.

Fraser, Nancy, Rahel Jaeggi
2018   *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, Cambridge, MA, John Wiley & Sons.

Gaonkar, Dilip Parameshwar
2002   «Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction», in *Public Culture*, 14, 3, pp. 1-19.

Gorz, André
1987   *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism* [1980], London, Pluto Press.
1989   *Critique of Economic Reason* [1988], London, Verso.

1999   «A New Task for the Unions: The Liberation of Time from Work», in Ronaldo Munck, Peter Waterman (Eds.), *Labour Worldwide in the Era of Globalization*, Houndmills, Basingstoke, MacMillan, pp. 41-63.

Hannerz, Ulf
2003   «Being There… and There… and There! Reflections on Multi-Site Ethnography», in *Ethnography*, 4, 2, pp. 201-216.

ILO
2021   *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2020*, Geneva, International Labour Office.

Irani, Lilly, Marc Silberman
2013   «Turkopticon: Interrupting Worker Invisibility in Amazon Mechanical Turk», in *Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, ACM*, pp. 611-620.

Joyce, Simon, Mark Stuart
2021   «Digitalised Management, Control and Resistance in Platform Work: a Labour Process Analysis», in Julieta Haidar, Maarten Keune (Eds.), *Work and Labour Relations in Global Platform Capitalism*, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 158-184.

Kerschner, Christian, Melf-Hinrich Ehlers
2016   «A Framework of Attitudes Towards Technology in Theory and Practice», in *Ecological Economics*, 126, pp. 139-151.

Komporozos-Athanasiou, Aris, Marianna Fotaki
2015   «A Theory of Imagination for Organization Studies Using the Work of Cornelius Castoriadis», in *Organization Studies*, 36, 3, pp. 321-342.

Leonardi, Daniela, Annalisa Murgia, Marco Briziarelli, Emiliana Armano
2019   «The Ambivalence of Logistical Connectivity: A Co-Research with Foodora Riders», in *Work Organisation, Labour & Globalisation*, 13, 1, pp. 155-171.

Leonardi, Emanuele
2017   «Omaggio ad André Gorz nel decennale della morte», in *Etica & Politica*, XIX, 3, pp. 81-84.

Macrorie, Rachel, Simon Marvin, Aidan While
2021   «Robotics and Automation in the City: A Research Agenda», in *Urban Geography*, 42, 2, pp. 197-217.

Marcus, George E.
1995   «Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography», in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24, 1, pp. 95-117.

Marrone, Marco
2019   «Rights against the machines! Food Delivery, piattaforme digitali e sindacalismo informale», in *Labour and Law Issues*, 5, 1, pp. 3-28.
2021   *Rights against the machines! Il lavoro digitale e le lotte dei rider*, Milano, Mimesis.

Marrone, Marco, Gianmarco Peterlongo
2020   «Where Platforms Meet Infrastructures: Digital Platforms, Urban Resistance and the Ambivalence of the City in the Italian Case of Bologna», in *Work Organisation, Labour and Globalisation*, 14, 1, pp. 119-135.

Massimo, Francesco S.
2020a   «A Struggle for Bodies and Souls: Amazon Management and Union Strategies in France and Italy», in Jake Alimahomed-Wilson, Ellen Reese (Eds.), *The Cost of Free Shipping: Amazon in the Global Economy*, London, Pluto Press, pp. 129-144.
2020b   «Des coopératives au syndicalisme de base: la citoyenneté industrielle dans le secteur de la logistique en Italie (1990-2015)», in *Critique Internationale*, 2, pp. 57-78.

Massari, Monica
2020   «Violenza, memoria e pratiche di emancipazione sociale», in Monica Massari, Vincenza Pellegrino (Eds.), *Emancipatory Social Science. Le questioni, il dibattito, le pratiche*, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes, pp. 41-51.

Moore, Phoebe V., Simon Joyce
2020   «Black Box or Hidden Abode? The Expansion and Exposure of Platform Work Managerialism», in *Review of International Political Economy*, 27, 4, pp. 926-948.

Murillo, David, Heloise Buckland, Esther Val
2017   «When the Sharing Economy Becomes Neoliberalism on Steroids: Unravelling the Controversies», in *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 125, pp. 66-76.

Nizzoli, Cristina
2021   «Italie. Le rôle des collectifs auto-organisés dans la représentation des livreurs à vélo», in *Chronique Internationale de l'IRES*, 173, 1, pp. 63-74.

Pasquale, Frank
2016   «Two Narratives of Platform Capitalism», in *Yale Law & Policy Review*, 35, 1, pp. 309-320.

Pellegrino, Vincenza
2020   «Le scienze sociali emancipatorie: reciprocità e demonumentalizzazione della ricerca», in Vincenza Pellegrino (Ed.), *Emancipatory Social Science. Le questioni, il dibattito, le pratiche*, Napoli-Salerno, Orthotes, pp. 29-40.

Scholz, Trebor
2014   «Platform Cooperativism vs. the Sharing Economy», in *Big Data & Civic Engagement*, 47, pp. 47-52.
2016   *Platform Cooperativism. Challenging the Corporate Sharing Economy*, New York, Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung.

Silberman, Six M., Lilly Irani
2015   «Operating an Employer Reputation System: Lessons from Turkopticon, 2008-2015» in *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal*, 37, pp. 505-542.

Smith, Karl E.
2009   «The Constitution of Modernity: A Critique of Castoriadis», in *European Journal of Social Theory*, 12, 4, pp. 505-521.

Srnicek, Nick
2017   *Platform Capitalism*, Hoboken, John Wiley & Sons.

Stemler, Abbey
2017   «The Myth of the Sharing Economy and its Implications for Regulating Innovation», in *Emory Law Journal*, 67, 2, pp. 197-242.

Straume, Ingerid
2011   «The Political Imaginary of Global Capitalism», in Ingerid S. Straume, J.F. Humphrey (Eds.), *Depoliticization: The Political Imaginary of Global Capitalism*, Norra Vallgatan, Sweden, NSU Press, pp. 27-50.

Tassinari, Arianna, Vincenzo Maccarrone
2019   «Riders on the Storm: Workplace Solidarity Among Gig Economy Couriers in Italy and the UK», in *Work, Employment and Society*, 34, 1, pp. 35-54.

Taylor, Charles
2002   «Modern Social Imaginaries», in *Public Culture*, 14, 1, pp. 91-124.
2004   *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham-London, Duke University Press.

van Dijck, José
2018   *The Platform Society*, New York, Oxford University Press.

Vandaele, Kurt
2018   *Will Trade Unions Survive in the Platform Economy?*, Brussels, ETUI.

Wagner, Peter
2008   *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation*, Cambridge, Polity.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig
1953   *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford, Blackwell.

Woodcock, Jamie, Mark Graham
2020   *The Gig Economy: A Critical Introduction*, London, Polity.

Ybema, Sierk, Dvora Yanow, Harry Wels, Frans Kamsteeg
2009   *Organizational Ethnography Studying the Complexities of Everyday Life*, London, Sage.

Zanoni, Patrizia
2019   «Labor Market Inclusion Through Predatory Capitalism? The "Sharing Economy", Diversity, and the Crisis of Social Reproduction in the Belgian Coordinated Market Economy», in Steven P. Vallas, Arno Kovalainen (Eds.), *Work and Labor in the Digital Age*, Bingley, Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 145-164.