

Lund University

Department of Sociology

# **From Platforms to Feudalism: Rethinking Power, Labour, and Value in Gig Work**

An exploratory inquiry into the relational dynamics and organisation of gig work



# LUNDS UNIVERSITET

Author: Andreas Diego Kindblad Henriquez

Master's thesis SOCM05, 30 credits

Spring semester 2025

Supervisor: Tobias Olofsson

Word count: 20,681

## ABSTRACT

Author: Andreas Diego Kindblad Henriquez

Title: From Platforms to Feudalism: Rethinking Power, Labour, and Value in Gig Work

Master's thesis SOCM05, 30 credits

Supervisor: Tobias Olofsson

Department of Sociology, spring 2025

This thesis explored the possibility of a techno-feudal reframing of gig work. Previous researchers and theorists have frequently framed gig work within capitalist frameworks, like platform capitalism and piece rate wages, despite gig work's odd similarities to the feudal organisation of work. Scholars like Durand have pointed out similarities between the digital economy and feudalism without engaging much in gig work as a digitalisation of labour. The aim of this thesis has been to explore how a techno-feudal reframing of primary research on gig work could be achieved. I used the concept dominium as power over labour and platform, and predation as an appropriative allocation mechanism where the appropriator is detached from the process of production. I also employed mode of production as a conceptual schematic to highlight differences between gig work and the capitalist mode of production. The reframing of primary research showed that gig companies' ownership and control of platforms allow for powerful methods to maintain and control labour as a value-creating supply of independent producers, from which companies appropriate value. Viewed as a mode of production, these relational dynamics and their qualities analytically resemble the feudal organisation of work, contrary to the capitalist framing of gig work. Future research is suggested to confirm these results by conducting empirical studies with these concepts.

Keywords: gig work, power dynamics, value extraction, mode of production, feudalism, platforms, labour relations

## POPULAR SCIENTIFIC SUMMARY

In this thesis, I invite stakeholders and curious readers to an exploration of how research literature on gig work can be reframed in a manner that resembles the organisation of work usually associated with Europe's medieval period. This form of work is known as a feudal mode of production.

I have focused on and found how power relations in gig work and the way companies take a share of workers' value are similar to the feudal organisation of work. These are not two equal systems, but they are similar in several respects. Previous researchers and theorists have argued that gig work is and should be understood as a capitalist variation of work. It is here that I have disagreed due to the common similarities between gig work and the feudal way of organising work.

Therefore, I have explored these similarities, through primary research literature, to convince researchers and stakeholders that gig work represents a trend within a larger societal movement towards a system that reminds us of that feudal part of history. If this is true, it means that we need to rethink some of what we know. How do we ensure gig workers enjoy flexibility and autonomy while also enjoying a fair and sustainable working life? Do we extend ideas of labour rights, or should we look to history for advice? Researchers also say that some traditional forms of work are becoming "gigified". They increasingly resemble gig work as they are digitalised. This also poses more questions for anyone interested in or partaking in gig work. How should unions approach workers and companies? How can the companies themselves maintain social responsibility? The purpose with this thesis being exploratory is to contribute with an idea that sparks more questions and conversations.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have many to thank for their support in every possible way. I am especially thankful to my mother for supporting me emotionally and mentally throughout this entire project. I am also incredibly thankful over having such an amazing and understanding family, and I am sorry for having been so busy and failed to hang out with you. My love and gratitude go out to my mother, sister, brother and my nephews.

I am also incredibly thankful for my loving, caring and understanding friends. Thank you, Fabian, for all those beers and quaint whimsical discussions. Thank you, Linnea & Philip, for providing me with support, listening to my erratic monologues and just being generally great friends always ready with guidance. Thank you, Maryam, for being a patient and loving friend and always ready to talk nonsense with me. Additionally, thank you so much for your willingness to support me during this thesis. Thank you to my new friend Creidne whose music has in many ways fuelled this writing process, and also for showing interest in my project. Lots of thanks go out to Alice, who has provided me with patient and unconditional support in my many struggles. I also thank the magpies, squirrels, bumblebees and other bugs that have brought me inner peace when visiting nature.

Finally, I am unsure if I should thank academia or my supervisor for bringing me the greatest and most understanding supervisor. I apologise for my many confusing ideas and long emails. I greatly appreciate how you have helped me and provided me with guidance every time I've needed it. Thank you, Tobias, for your unwavering support and dedication.

Additionally, I want to thank the research community for dedicating their entire lives to the pursuit of knowledge and problem solving.

# Table of contents

Introduction .....	1
Research aim and questions .....	2
Literature Review .....	4
A brief introduction to techno-feudalism .....	4
Research on gig work .....	6
Research gap in feudal framing.....	9
Method and Material .....	10
Research design and analytical method .....	10
Reflections on methodology.....	13
Theoretical framework and conceptual means .....	19
Mode of production as a general conceptual schematic of work .....	19
Dominium and the three-dimensional view of power .....	20
Predation as a relation of value appropriation, in distinction to capitalist exploitation .....	23
Results and analysis .....	26
Introduction to the definition of gig work and its diverse composition of workers.....	26
Power over labour through decision making.....	27
Power over the platform through the exclusion of labour from setting the agenda .....	34
Shaping the necessity of labour dependence on platforms.....	36
Predation: value appropriation in gig work.....	41
Summary of relations of dominium and predation in gig work .....	43
Feudal resemblance in the organisation of gig work.....	44
Discussion .....	48
Connecting the findings with previous literature .....	48
Limitations .....	49
Conclusions: the techno-feudal framing of gig work.....	50
Suggestions for future research .....	51
List of references .....	53
Appendix I.....	62
Appendix II .....	65

This page is intentionally left blank.

# Introduction

In the last four years, theorists have argued that the digital economy is reshaping relations in society. French economist Cedric Durand argues that a new system is growing out of the conditions laid by the development of new digital technologies. This system is qualitatively different from capitalism in its relations of power and methods for extracting value. Durand calls the system *techno-feudalism* due to its analytical similarities to feudalism. It is essentially the digital companies' monopolisation and monetarisation of data, control over vast territories of digital infrastructure and detachment from the processes of production that indicate the absence of a traditional capitalist logic (Durand, 2024). With the rise of new digital technologies, the last decades have seen the entrance of the gig economy with its platform-mediated work system where workers perform small-term work tasks, known as gigs. Substantial research has shown that gig work is in many aspects different from traditional work arrangements (Hägg et al., 2025; Stanford, 2017; Vallas & Schor, 2020; Wu & Huang, 2024). Yet, research and literature has only positioned gig work within capitalism (Dubal, 2020; Montgomery & Baglioni, 2021; Srnicek, 2017; Varoufakis, 2024), instead of attempting to understand it as something analytically different. Therefore, this thesis explores an alternative understanding of gig work by thematically analysing primary research on gig work, through the framework of techno-feudalism to illustrate gig work's analytical similarities to feudal social relations.

I use Durand's analytical concepts of *dominium* and *predation* as feudal relational dynamics to examine research on the conditions and dynamics of gig work. Predation is the concept outlining the social process of value extraction originally found in feudalism. It is defined as "an appropriative allocation mechanism" (Durand, 2024, p. 186), while dominium is a social relation defined as "a social relationship between the dominant and the dominated, in which the dominant simultaneously exercised power over men and over land" (Durand, 2024, p. 150; Guerreau, 1997, p. 2). In order to complement unclarities with power in this phrasing, I utilise Steven Lukes' *three-dimensional view of power* which emphasise *decision-making*, *agenda setting* and *ideological/hidden power* (Lukes, 2005). In this way, I respecify dominium as power over labour and platform and understand it through decision-making, agenda setting and ideology. Additionally, I frame my findings within the conceptual

framework of *mode of production* to illustrate the organisational similarities between feudalism and gig work.

This thesis provides a techno-feudal reinterpretation of gig work research that has generated various results. I expanded the concept of dominium with the three-dimensional view of power to operationalise the techno-feudal exploration. I also explore how value extraction in gig work could be reframed into the concept of predation. Lastly, I explore my findings through the conceptual framework of mode of production. With these three analyses, I conclude that the social relations surrounding the power dynamics and value extraction, understood with a basis in the organisational qualities of gig work as a mode of production, analytically resemble feudal work and relations.

## **Research aim and questions**

The research aim is to explore how research on gig work can be reframed within the wide theoretical framework of techno-feudalism in order to make the case that gig work is analytically analogous to feudalism. Within the theory of techno-feudalism, there are two useful analytical concepts, dominium and predation. I made some changes to the definition of dominium, from “a social relationship in which the dominant [...] exercised power over men and land” (Durand, 2024, p. 150; Guerreau, 1997, p. 2), to “power over labour and platforms”. I explore this in detail under “Theoretical framework and conceptual means”. Predation is understood as an appropriative allocation mechanism (Durand, 2024, p. 186). I also use the concept of mode of production to specify qualities associated with feudalism that also found in the research literature on gig work. I also fit my findings into an illustration of the concept of the mode of production. This highlights key similarities between gig work and feudalism.

I used a main research question with three operationalised research questions to make clearer the analytical steps associated with the main question. I first present the main question, and then the three supporting questions:

1. How can primary research on gig work be reframed through the theoretical framework of techno-feudalism?

- 1.1. How may research on power dynamics in gig work be explored and thus reworked as a relation of dominium?

- 1.2. How may research on value extraction in gig work be explored as predation, i.e. an appropriative allocation mechanism?

1.3. How could general conditions of gig work, as presented in research findings, be further explored as qualitatively similar to feudalism using the concept of mode of production?

I rely on primary research literature to explore power dynamics and value extraction as relations of dominium and predation. Findings are later fit into the concept of mode of production. In this way, I answer these research questions by illustrating relational and organisational similarities between gig work and feudalism.

### **Outline of the thesis**

This chapter introduced the reader to the entirety of the thesis and explained the research aim and questions. The next chapter introduces the reader to a literature review and identifies a need for reframing gig work as feudalistic. The third chapter, “Method and material”, provides a presentation of the research design and an evaluation of the research quality. The fourth chapter dissects the framework of techno-feudalism into manageable concepts. “Results and analysis”, presents the analysis of research on gig work. Thereafter, chapter “Discussion” discusses the findings in relation to the literature review and provide limitations to my argumentation. In the last chapter, I clearly answer the research questions and provide additional limitations and provide some brief suggestions for future research.

# Literature Review

In this section, I present a brief overview of the concept of techno-feudalism. I introduce it as a theoretical framework based on Durand's exposition and explore its previous uses and major proponents. Then I offer a brief introduction to the origin of gig work, the research topics within the subject, and argue that researchers have framed it within a capitalist framework. This leads to my academic justification of this thesis, where I identify a need for understanding gig work as analytically analogous to feudalism based on the techno-feudal framework.

## A brief introduction to techno-feudalism

### Definitional use

Techno-feudalism is a new concept in academic contexts and there is not a universal definition of the term. However, throughout this thesis, I adopt the analytical use of techno-feudalism employed by Durand. As a descriptive theory, it could be viewed as a new mode of production emerging from capitalism. Its resemblance to feudalism is illustrated by how digital companies' control of digital infrastructure amounts to an increasing synthesis of the political and economic domains, while also being increasingly detached from the processes of production. The former is associated with the concept of dominium, and the latter with predation (Durand, 2024, pp. viii–ix). This is a descriptive interpretation of techno-feudalism based on Durand's work. Techno-feudalism as an analytical framework could be understood as a configuration of the concepts of dominium and predation applied to contemporary contexts.

### Early uses of techno-feudalism and adjacent terms

The earliest reference to techno-feudalism in an academic context that I have been able to identify is from a book by George Landow in 1992. He uses the term to describe the consequences of a growing divide between the informationally rich and informationally impoverished (Landow, 1992, p. 199). The consequence of this is that the informationally rich have a privileged access to information in “electronic fiefdoms”. Adjacent terms like *neo-feudalism* extend back to 1962 (Ferry, 1962; Hobsbawm, 1969; Tonsor, 1979). Ferry likens the concentration of capital in the hands of the few as a form of neofeudalism (Ferry, 1962, pp. 1–2). Tonsor analyses historical recurrent systems of feudalism in agricultural settings as neofeudalism (Tonsor, 1979), while Hobsbawm does the same in Peru (Hobsbawm, 1969). So, the idea of neo- or techno-feudalism is still limited here. They are either connected to

agricultural settings as a return to feudalism, a critique of the concentration of wealth, or a critique of the concentration of information.

In 1995, Immanuel Wallerstein explored neo-feudalism as one future scenario of capitalism. A scenario of “parcellized sovereignties, [...] autarkic regions, of local hierarchies” (Wallerstein, 2003, p. 162). The focus is not as much on digital technology like Landow, which is presumably why Wallerstein opts for neo-feudalism instead of techno-feudalism. In 1995, Drahos explores *information feudalism* as a pattern of feudal traits within the growing information economy (Drahos, 1995, p. 210). He is primarily concerned with how companies’ ownership of immaterial objects increase their power over public matters (Drahos, 1995, pp. 218–219, 221). Later mention of techno-feudalism is found in 2017, where Grimshaw mentions that techno-feudalism has been used as a critique against digital society (Grimshaw, 2017). However, it is not clear who he is referring to. Mentions of techno-feudalism increase significantly around 2020 and after (Alexander, n.d.; Pitt, 2020). The idea of techno-feudalism as a broader critique and analysis of digital society does not solidify as a more detailed theory until Durand and Yanis Varoufakis publish their literature on the topic.

### **Contemporary major theoretical proponents**

Techno-feudalism as a theory on contemporary digital society has not been seriously used until recently, with exception for concepts in proximity such as neo feudalism. However, I will not further address the latter term here, as it is beyond the scope of this thesis. There are two major proponents of the concept of techno-feudalism, Varoufakis and Durand.

Varoufakis writes about techno-feudalism in his book with the same name. It is mostly an economic historical reading of the world economy, and how it came to replace markets and profit with platforms/digital fiefdoms and rent (Varoufakis, 2024). According to Varoufakis, cloud capital is the central driving engine of this structural transformation from capitalism to techno-feudalism. Cloud capital is the monetisation of data through enabling algorithms to powerfully curate desires for consumers (Varoufakis, 2024, pp. 65, 88). Simultaneously, markets take the shape of fiefdoms in how digital companies control market platforms and extract monetary and data rent (Varoufakis, 2024, pp. 86–87).

Varoufakis is influenced by Shoshana Zuboff’s *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (Zuboff, 2020). Zuboff conceptualises the digital economy’s model of extracting and monetising data for the sake of predicting and shaping consumer behaviour as surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2020, pp. 14–15). Another important source is McKenzie Wark’s *Capital Is Dead* (Wark,

2021). Her central thesis is that digitalisation of capitalism has generated a new class dynamic between *vectoralists* and *hackers*. Vectoralists own and control the digital infrastructure on which they capture, and extract information produced by hackers (Wark, 2009, 2021). The idea is that vectoralists monopolise immaterial assets like intellectual property and “the vectors of communication”, which is the means of producing information (Wark, 2009, para. 32). This is the foundation of a new class relation, where Wark stresses the need for hackers to unite with other workers (Wark, 2009, para. 134).

Durand, like Wark, similarly questions if new relations have emerged from capitalism. However, he challenges her notion that information is the chief mode of value production (Durand, 2024, p. 173). Durand hypothesises that digitalisation has led to the emergence of a techno-feudal system built on the foundations of capitalism. He supports this by claiming that there is a blurring of the divide between the political and economic realm, and an emergence of a predatory economic logic. These two traits are reminiscent of feudalism. The former is understood through *dominium*, and the latter through *predation*. Durand offers analytical concepts more useful for academic purposes, compared to Varoufakis’ more popular scientific exposition of techno-feudalism.

## **Research on gig work**

### **Background**

Gig work is a specific triangular organisation of work containing a labour mediator, a client, and a worker. This form of organising work has existed since the start of capitalism (Stanford, 2017, pp. 385–386). Gig work is mediated by the use of digital platforms able to match customers and workers. Its origin is found in the aftermath of the 2008 crisis that exacerbated the need for dismantling the welfare state. Countries instituted flexible labour market standards due to an increasingly competitive world economy (Kalleberg, 2018, p. 2). This flexibilization of the labour market was intimately connected to the neoliberal project (Stanford, 2017, p. 391). So, gig work emerged as a result of recent technologies, a fragile economic climate and within the political agenda of neoliberalism.

There is a wide body of grey literature attempting to measure the statistical composition of gig work. An early inquiry by McKinsey Global Institute estimated that 20-30% of populations in the US and EU had engaged in “independent work” (McKinsey Global Institute, 2016, p. 1) of which around 44% did it as their main income (McKinsey Global Institute, 2016, p. viii). Two years later, a report to the European Commission found that 8% of the European

population regularly did platform work, and estimated that 2% of the population did it as main income (Pesole et al., 2018, p. 3). From a pilot survey in 2022, Eurostat found that 23% of European platform workers made more than 75% of their income through platform work (Eurostat, 2024, p. 4). In comparison, a report from the Federal Reserve found that 21% of gig workers performed gig work as their main source of income (Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, 2025, p. 16). The numbers vary throughout the years. This is either due to the gig economy expanding its operations, or because researchers use varying definitions of gig worker/independent worker/platform worker. It is likely both. However, the point is to show the reader that available statistics indicate that the majority of gig workers do it as a side income. This will be important later.

### **Scholarly topics within gig work**

Scholars have been preoccupied with various aspects of gig work. One of these areas is how algorithmic management shapes workers' actions. An early study by Möhlmann and Zalmanson investigated how Uber drivers are managed by automated algorithmic software programmes, and the ways drivers evade and resist management (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017). Amir Anwar and Graham investigated how remote African gig workers utilise a multitude of methods to regain their agency against algorithmic management (Anwar & Graham, 2020). Similarly, Öborn, Mackenzie, Örnebring and Van Couvering found that workers, gig company personnel, and clients engage in practices to make up for the limitations of algorithmic management (Öborn et al., 2023). Scholars have also paid attention to the precarity of gig work, such as its on-demand work standard, payment systems, and more. Reuben Binns and others conducted a longitudinal study on payment conditions before and after Uber's dynamic price system. The researchers found that Uber drivers' pay was decreased while Uber's share increased (Binns et al., 2025, p. 1). Gig companies tend to avoid classifying workers as employees to avoid employer responsibilities. This topic is of great interest to researchers. For example, Ilsøe and Söderqvist investigated how gig companies manoeuvre the strict labour market of Denmark and Sweden. The Danish case showed more union integration while the Swedish case is fraught with regulatory evasion (Ilsøe & Söderqvist, 2023). These are examples of research areas within gig work. Researchers also suggest that the structural organisation of platforms is increasingly spreading into other sectors of society, a process known as platformisation (Poell et al., 2019, pp. 1–2). A wider platformisation process may have far-reaching implications for traditional employment and labour market relations. Thus, researchers have explored a process called *gigification*.

McKenzie explored how academic research departments turn to online labour platforms to access research participants (McKenzie, 2024), and Braganza, Chen and Canhoto investigated the impact of the implementation of algorithmic management in new areas of work (Braganza et al., 2022).

### **Dominant framing: gig work as a capitalist phenomenon**

Gig work has been viewed by theorists as situated within platform capitalism. Political economist Nick Srnicek coined the term platform capitalism (Gilbert, 2024, p. 568). A platform is defined as “digital infrastructures that enable two or more groups to interact” (Srnicek, 2017, p. 30). Platform capitalism is understood as a continuation of capitalism in which companies have optimised the process of monopolising, extracting and monetising data (Srnicek, 2017, pp. 28–29). The reason for capitalism turning to data is due to profit decline in manufacturing. Therefore, data becomes a fruitful resource that encourages growth (Srnicek, 2017, p. 11). In the gig economy, platforms are viewed as *lean platforms*, i.e., essentially capitalist platforms that outsource labour costs and thus position themselves as mediators of work (Srnicek, 2017, p. 43). Researchers Montgomery and Baglioni define the gig economy as a subtype of precarious work which is situated within platform capitalism (Montgomery & Baglioni, 2021, p. 1023). While Törnberg view platform capitalism as a continuation of capitalism that simultaneously conditions a discontinuity with capitalist trends (Törnberg, 2023, p. 2). In gig work, this discontinuity can be viewed in how workers are individualised and made into competitors (Törnberg, 2023, p. 8).

Further, researchers have framed gig work within capitalism by viewing its payment systems as piece rate wages. Veena Dubal explores the early women pieceworkers in the garment industries in premature capitalism and argues that today’s online gig workers are a continuation of those pieceworkers (Dubal, 2020, pp. 55–56). Alkhatib, Bernstein, and Levi make a similar case by using piecework as a historical lens to understand on-demand work (Alkhatib et al., 2017, p. 1). For them, historical piecework was characterised by workers being paid for each produced good, which enabled freedom and independence for workers and promoted the development of skills (Alkhatib et al., 2017, p. 3). In this sense, on-demand work, or gig work, is a contemporary version of piecework (Alkhatib et al., 2017, p. 10). Jamie Woodcock frames gig work as piecework to make the case that piece rates, along with algorithmic surveillance are used as means to make workers faster and more efficient (Woodcock, 2020, p. 86). Varoufakis does the same by describing gig workers as *cloud proles* (Varoufakis, 2024, p. 81). Prole is a shortening of the term *proletariat* (Oxford English

Dictionary, 2023). He refers to Marx who recognised piecework as “the most appropriate to the capitalist mode of production” (Marx, 2018, p. 486; Varoufakis, 2024, p. 82). The underlying theme for these researchers and theorists is that gig work is a continuation of the early piecework system, which effectively frames gig work as a capitalist phenomenon.

## **Research gap in feudal framing**

### **Techno-feudalism and gig work**

The field of techno-feudalism is sparse with empirical research. During the time of authoring this thesis, political scientist Jodi Dean released her book *Capital's Grave* (Dean, 2025). In one section, she uses Marx to compare Uber drivers with medieval serfs. Her argument is twofold. First, Uber drivers own and manage the instruments of production, i.e., the tools needed to produce. Items for consumption are turned into instruments for production (Dean, 2025, p. 39). Second, workers are positioned into a state of double dependence on markets and on Uber for access to markets (Dean, 2025, pp. 41–42). This is an intuitive idea, but this might only hold true for a minority of gig workers. Most gig workers use platform work as a side income, and never fully depend on it. Further, Durand makes a similar case arguing that the relationship between gig workers and the gig company is one marked by dependence, rather than the classic capitalist institution of subordination. According to Durand, this implies the absence of a waged relationship (Durand, 2024, pp. 108–109).

### **Academic justification**

These are some of the available literatures on the topic of using a techno-feudal perspective to understand gig work. While there are limitations to the existing analyses, there exist peculiar similarities between the idea of feudalism and gig work. Yet, academic research has centred gig work within a capitalist framework. This is the research gap that my thesis bridge by exploring a techno-feudal reframing of gig work.

## **Method and Material**

In this chapter, I present the exploratory approach of the research process. The exploratory approach is manifested in the flexible sampling of articles and the method of thematic synthesis analysis. In the next subchapter, I evaluate the research quality of the research design, ethical considerations, provide my preunderstandings of the subject matter, and limitations and delimitations.

### **Research design and analytical method**

#### **Theoretically informed exploratory research**

I followed an exploratory approach as outlined by Robert Stebbins. The exploratory approach is “a broad-ranging, purposive, systematic, prearranged undertaking designed to maximize generalisations leading to description and understanding” (Stebbins, 2001, p. 4). Stebbins emphasises an open yet partially structured research process by stressing the importance of flexibility in searching for data (Stebbins, 2001, pp. 10–11). The focus is on generating new ideas, and this approach is especially useful in new or understudied fields (Stebbins, 2001, p. 6). The exploratory approach enabled me to undertake gig work research with openness for reinterpreting the subject.

Exploratory research is not aimless, nor constrained by an overly structured research process. Rather, the researcher makes use of guidelines that point the research process towards the object of inquiry (Stebbins, 2001, p. 19). The researcher can use what Blumer calls *sensitizing concepts*, i.e., concepts that lack specificity and instead point the researcher in a general direction. In contrast, definitive concepts are specific and precise (Blumer, 1954, p. 7; Stebbins, 2001, pp. 19–20). The idea is that clear and definitive concepts in scientific contexts can bridge the gap between the empirical world and social theory (Blumer, 1954, pp. 4–5). I primarily used the concepts of predation and dominium to guide me in the right direction. The mode of production was later integrated into the thesis as I analysed my findings and found usefulness for that concept. Predation and mode of production are seemingly clear concepts in what they refer to. The former outlines a form of value extraction, and the latter is a set of relational qualities in a labour process. Dominium has an unspecific definition of power. I mitigated this by respecifying it with Lukes’ three-dimensional view of power.

While Blumer and Stebbins stress the importance of qualitative research (Blumer, 1954, p. 9; Stebbins, 2001, p. 7) because it implies the clearest way to observe the empirical world itself, I diverged here by analysing primary research on gig work. This enabled a broad examination

of gig work research in order to reframe it into the theoretical framework of techno-feudalism. Another point of departure concerned Stebbins' focus on generating new theory in exploratory research. Here, I did not aim to generate new theory. Rather, I aimed to explore how an alternative framing of gig work could generate new insights. This is the intended meaning behind my conducting of theoretically guided, exploratory research.

### **Sampling of research material**

The sampling of research articles was conducted in a flexible manner. I used purposive sampling, which is to strategically select cases based on a certain number of criteria (Bryman, 2016, p. 694). My first criteria for sampling research included studies published no earlier than 2015, which served primarily as a baseline.

The second criterion involved focusing on peer-reviewed research. I did this by nearly exclusively using Web of Science to find peer-reviewed research. In other cases, I used Google Scholar. There were cases where I collected and used grey literature and conference papers because they offered useful insights for my analytical endeavours.

Thirdly, research articles needed to be relevant to my research question. This was the hardest criterion to follow because relevancy can be difficult to estimate when starting out. To mitigate this, I first consulted systematic literature reviews to gain an overview of existing topics and themes. This then led to a degree of snowball sampling, a sampling method where one case leads or refers to another case (Bryman, 2016, p. 415), where I collected studies referenced by other researchers. It enabled an understanding of what research topics were relevant to my research question and concepts. This is also how I found useful grey literature from authorities like the International Labour Organisation.

The fourth criteria was a primary focus on qualitative studies. This is because qualitative studies contain rich and deep understandings of the social lives of research subjects. There are cases where I refer to quantitative and literature/theoretical research because they offered valuable insights in terms of nuance, statistical overview, and previous theoretical contributions.

I did not employ a searching method associated with systematic literature reviews. This method employs highly rigorous search methods based on a clearly defined research question, key words, exclusion, and inclusion criteria as well as critical examination of research papers. The aim is to gain breadth and depth of a field of study, while simultaneously having a

systematic method that is replicable and transparent (Brignardello-Petersen et al., 2025, pp. 538–540; Crocetti, 2016, pp. 3–4). This thesis employed a flexible theory-guided search for literature based on four sampling criteria.

### **Analytical method**

I utilised a method called thematic synthesis analysis which thematically analyse primary research literature within a certain subject (Bryman, 2016, p. 596). According to Flemming and Noyes, the method goes further than standard thematic analysis because it allows for the development of new insights and interpretations (Flemming & Noyes, 2021, p. 5). The potential issue here is that thematic synthesis may decontextualise findings and assume comparability between different studies (Thomas & Harden, 2008, p. 2). However, it is also a method recommended to novice researchers on the basis that it is a straight-forward method (Flemming & Noyes, 2021, p. 5). This is one reason to why I chose this method. The other reason is due to its stated focus on thematic synthetisation of primary research. It therefore offers the possibility for generating insights by reframing research to fit a larger theoretical framework.

Harden and Thomas present three steps in the conduction of a thematic synthesis analysis. The first and second step overlaps in certain regards. The first is to verbatim code sentences, usually line by line and may be hierarchically or freely structured in relation to each other (Thomas & Harden, 2008, p. 6). I did not strictly collect sentences verbatim. I first perused collected literature and noted anything interesting or relevant in my notebook. Then, I reread my notebook and highlighted notes as “repeated many times”, “useful”, “important”, and “interesting” with various self-created symbols. Then, I selected these notes and transferred them into an excel file so I could neatly assign descriptive and analytical themes (see Appendix I, table A1 for a non-exhaustive, shortened example).

The second step is to develop descriptive themes about what these codes say (Thomas & Harden, 2008, pp. 6–7). Here I found 29 descriptive themes, some of which did not make it to the final analysis. The last step is to generate analytical themes that are better suited to answer the research question (Thomas & Harden, 2008, p. 7). The focus in the third step is to understand the meaning of the descriptive themes. First, I questioned how these descriptive themes could be understood as general themes of gig work. I generated analytical themes of working conditions, algorithmic management, and platform control. However, these themes were quite descriptive. So, I questioned how the descriptive themes were examples of my

concepts dominium and predation. Thus, I categorised descriptive themes under analytical operationalisations of the theory. This made clear the meaning of and interconnectedness between the descriptive themes (see Appendix I, table A2 for a visual presentation).

## **Reflections on methodology**

### **Evaluation of research quality**

Yardley proposes four criteria for evaluation of research quality. They are useful here because they involve the interpretation of data, whether or not the data is empirical or theoretical. The first criterion is *sensitivity to context* which entails awareness of the social context of which the researcher finds themselves in, including previous research and theory (Yardley, 2000, p. 219). I mitigate this by including a comprehensive literature review of gig work and techno-feudalism, immersing myself in the theories of Durand and Lukes, and presenting detailed and thorough analyses of gig work research.

The second criterion, *commitment and rigor* signify the sufficient engagement with the research topic, utilising the necessary skills, and having an adequate sample (Yardley, 2000, pp. 221–222). It is difficult to say to what extent engagement with a topic, or adequate sampling, is required to fulfil this criterion. I have been engaged with the topic of gig work by flexibly approaching research literature and carefully examining each article. While this approach differs from a systematic literature review, I do not consider it a limitation, as it allowed for a flexible and exploratory engagement with the literature. Further, I have engaged with the research topic by using systematic literature reviews as guidance to relevant subject areas for my theoretical framework.

Continuing, Yardley's proposes the criterion of *transparency and coherence*. This is about producing an analysis that is coherent and persuasive as well as being transparent with the data collection process (Yardley, 2000, p. 222). I have presented the data collection process and the analytic method. I aimed at coherence by closely analysing the data in connection with my chosen concepts of dominium, predation, and mode of production.

Lastly, there is the criterion of *impact and importance*, which entails the development of ideas that are influential and relevant (Yardley, 2000, p. 223). The research aim was to explore how techno-feudalism as a theoretical perspective could lead to a reinterpretation of gig work research. It is expected that my findings are relevant and sufficient to be of use for the sociological research community.

The terms reliability and validity are usually associated with quantitative research (Bryman, 2016, p. 383). But I use these terms here to further make clear the strengths and weaknesses of the research design. Therefore, I find LeCompte and Goetz development of reliability and validity for qualitative methods useful here. Despite their qualitative purpose, they are useful for interpretive contexts. LeCompte and Goetz make a distinction between *internal* and *external* dimensions of validity and reliability. First, internal validity concerns different understandings of the meaning of concepts (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 43), which I mitigate by providing the use of the meaning of gig work, operationalising the power term in the definition of dominium, and providing additional explanations of concepts where needed such as the mode of production and its associated terms.

Second, external validity addresses the issue of generalisation, i.e., if findings can be generalisable. According to LeCompte and Goetz, this issue can be alleviated if research findings are transferable and comparable to similar contexts (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, pp. 50–51). This thesis is not meant to be generalisable. The intent was to provide a theoretical reframing of research on gig work with specific workers in mind. In this way, the theoretical reframing can be transferable to similar contexts. Even other types of gig work and workers not explored here could be viewed through the lens of techno-feudalism.

Third, internal reliability specifically refers to if various observers (researchers, participants, peers) agree on interpretations and analyses (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, pp. 41–42). In the context of this thesis, which risks decontextualising research and infringing on primary researchers' interpretive authority, it is difficult to mitigate this to the fullest extent. Secondary research has been presented as clearly and detailed as possible, within certain limits, to commit to justice and fairness to researchers' work and findings.

Lastly, external reliability is connected to replicability, i.e., the potential of replicating a study and achieving the same results (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, pp. 37–38). This thesis cannot be identically replicable due to its flexible and exploratory research design. However, I have been as transparent as possible with the methodological process in order to increase the thesis' replicability potential.

## **Ethics**

Because this paper does not employ direct empirical research methods, there are fewer ethical aspects to consider. Ethical issues arise in connection to the collection and use of primary research material in two ways. There is the ethical concern of infringing on primary

researchers' interpretative authority, as mentioned above. Secondly, an ethical issue that usually arises in conjunction with secondary data analysis, i.e., using archived qualitative or quantitative data, is that research subjects usually consent to one research project (Hughes & Tarrant, 2020, pp. 45–46). The problem is that there is no straightforward way for research subjects to consent to additional analysis of their statements and personal information like marital status, age, work, etc. I do not consult raw archived data, but I do quote empirical data from researchers. I see no way of mitigating this issue.

### **Hermeneutics and previous knowledge on the subject domain**

Here I briefly present the interpretive process of research and my previous knowledge on the subject of gig work and techno-feudal theory.

Hermeneutics defined as a method of interpretation involves understanding how to interpret phenomena and under what conditions interpretation is enabled (Gilje, 1995, p. 177). In the former, I take the position of Anthony Giddens who defined the concept of double hermeneutics which posits that the social scientist simultaneously study the lifeworld of actors and their own interpretation of the world as well as using and constructing theories that interprets the social life of actors (Schwandt, 2007). In this paper, I use other social researchers' interpretations, actors' own interpretations and frame this within my chosen theoretical concepts. Because I am not conducting an empirical study, I primarily rely on both the interpretations of other researchers and my own theoretical understandings of gig work, which forms the basis of my thesis being theoretically guided and informed.

The conditions of which interpretation is enabled for any actor is associated with their pre-understandings of the world. Pre-understanding involves all prior knowledge of the world that an actor uses to continuously interpret and interact (Gilje, 1995, p. 183). In this way, our understanding of the world is continuously affected by our prior knowledge. This becomes especially important to be transparent with in research endeavours, which I do below.

I first interacted with the theory of techno-feudalism when reading Varoufakis' book last year. It is mostly an economic historical reading of the world economy, and how it came to replace markets and profit accumulation with a logic of rent and dispossession (Varoufakis, 2024). Varoufakis mentions little about the gig economy and gig workers. He describes Amazon Mechanical Turk workers as cloud proles due to the algorithmic management (Varoufakis, 2024, pp. 81–82). I disagreed because prole, a shortening of proletariat, would imply that gig work is a capitalist phenomenon. It made me think about my prior firsthand experiences in

interactions with gig workers. Throughout several conversations, I learned that some workers have unconventional working schedules, some only work on the side, they complained about the pay, and the responsibility of using their own equipment. My initial idea was that gig work could be understood as feudalistic due to workers using their own equipment. So, I searched for additional literature to further understand techno-feudalism and how it may be connected to gig work. This is when I found Durand's book where he presented useful theoretical concepts that could allow me to understand gig work within the confines of a sociological master's thesis.

I had little knowledge of the research field on gig work before doing the thesis. Additionally, I carry a great deal of sympathy for the workers I have met. While my sympathy for workers have partially driven me to conduct this inquiry, I do not pursue a normative agenda. I am mostly interested in how gig work could be understood through a techno-feudal perspective. This is a conceptual matter. With that said, here I have presented the most relevant pre-understandings of the subject on gig work and techno-feudalism before the start of the research process.

### **Delimitations**

There are few delimitations in this thesis. Excessive delimitations would constrain the exploratory potential of this thesis. Existing delimitations concern material for analysis, study focus, and theoretical analysis.

Concerning empirical material, the collection of primary research literature was limited to research on certain types of gig workers. Vallas & Schor identify five categories of gig workers. These are architects of platforms who design the digital infrastructure, cloud-based consultants/freelancers, locally-based gig workers who perform food delivery, taxi services, cleaning, etc, remote-based workers who perform microtasks on online platforms, and influencers and content creators (Vallas & Schor, 2020, pp. 275–276). I explore these categories more closely under “Results and analysis”. Research on architects of platforms and influencers/content creators was excluded from the thesis. The thesis would risk becoming diffuse and overly complex due to the wide range of varying dynamics needing analysis. The exclusive use of micro task gig workers, cloud-based consultants/freelancers and locally-based gig workers suffices for a coherent and theoretically grounded analysis of power relations, value extraction, and general qualities in the mode of production.

Further, I have not aimed to make generalising statements on the empirical nature of gig work. The focus was on exploring alternative theoretical understandings of research on gig work in order to make a theoretical argument. This implies that I did not aim to prove that gig work is feudalistic. Rather, I explored how available research on gig work could be reframed into the theoretical framework of techno-feudalism. In so doing, I found analytical similarities between research on gig work and feudal social dynamics and organisation of work.

Though I cross into that dimension, I do not strictly analyse class relations. Such a thesis would potentially attempt to address gig work relations as a class relation of serfdom. This was not the aim of this thesis. I primarily focused on social relations concerning power dynamics and value extraction. Power relations and class relations in the context of work can overlap due to class's often inherent power dimension, but I have made no such reference to gig workers as serfs.

Lastly, I did not conduct a comparative analysis between capitalism and feudalism as mode of productions. Instead, I relied on Durand's concepts as concepts specifically designed to understand and encapsulate social relations found in feudalism. I offer brief distinctions between my chosen concepts fit for feudal contexts and other concepts fit for capitalist contexts in the theory section.

### **Limitations**

The absence of a systematic literature review method brings with lower replicability potential. An advantage with using a more rigid and defined systematic approach would be its strength in solidifying the claim that gig work is analytically analogous to feudal work relations. However, the point with the thesis has not been to define gig work as being feudal, but rather to argue that gig work relations could be viewed and understood as analytically analogous to feudal work relations. For this reason, there is not an obvious need for a replicable method because the use of relevant research material is enough to make a theoretical contribution, as long as the research method is properly transparent and presented.

Secondly, thematic synthesis analysis is designed for systematic literature reviews. I did not do the latter. Thematic synthesis analysis is an appropriate method for thematically analysing a diverse range of research articles within the same topic, especially for novice reviewers (Flemming & Noyes, 2021, p. 5). The fact that there was an absence of a systematic literature review method means that the thematic synthesis analysis was not used to its full potential.

Third, research on gig work is a moderately new field, and therefore there are risks of conceptual unclarity about the boundaries of gig work. Before the analysis, I offered a definition on gig work that I used in my analysis. Yet, the issue is that it may be difficult to know what a researcher's definition is, as that is not always clear.

Despite these shortcomings, the thematic synthesis analysis and the sampling methods has enabled a flexible research process for analysis of gig work through the lens of techno-feudalism.

## Theoretical framework and conceptual means

In this chapter section, I first present the mode of production as a general schematic of organising work and how it differs in feudalism and capitalism, my interpretation and operationalisation of dominium and its power dynamics and predation as an analytical tool for conceptualising value extraction. I also provide brief expositions on how the latter two concepts are specific to feudal dynamics.

### Mode of production as a general conceptual schematic of work

According to Durand, mode of production is a “way of producing on the scale of a given society” (Durand, 2024, p. 163). I do not use mode of production in my analysis on the scale of society. In other words, I use mode of production as a conceptual schematic for understanding the organisation of gig work. It is a divergence from the way Durand defines it, but it later provides a clear means of illustrating the dissection of gig work. Continuing, Durand presents a table that outlines comparisons between modes of productions:

	<b>Feudalism</b>	<b>Capitalism</b>
<b>Means of production</b>	Land owned by lords, instruments by dependents	Monopolised by capitalists
<b>Labour</b>	Unfree	Free
<b>Work process</b>	Independent, individual	Subordinate, cooperative
<b>Surplus extraction</b>	Separate from production	Takes place in production
<b>Productivity</b>	Weak	Dynamic

*Table adapted from Durand, How Silicon Valley Unleashed Techno-feudalism, page 170*

The table above offers an overview on how mode of production is used to encapsulate qualities in the organisation of work. My interpretation of the terms in the leftmost field, based on Durand’s use of them (Durand, 2024, pp. 165–167), is that *means of production* concern the assets needed to produce, *labour* signifies workers’ status of freedom, *work process* express in what manner work is conducted and decided over, *surplus extraction* entail in what part of production value is extracted, and *productivity* is rather self-explanatory. It is about how productive the production is.

In feudalism, there were lords and serfs. So, concerning means of production, serfs owned the instruments (livestock, tools) while lords owned the land (Durand, 2024, p. 165). So, serfs used their instruments to work on the land owned by feudal lords in exchange for a share of the harvest (Durand, 2024, p. 165). While in a capitalist organisation of work, the instruments

and land are monopolised by capitalists. Labour is unfree in feudalism, because serfs are tied to the land due to lords' coercion and violence. Compare this to capitalism where workers are contractually free to sell their labour power in a labour market (Durand, 2024, p. 165). The work process is structured autonomously and independently by single producers, while capitalists subordinate workers who work cooperatively (Durand, 2024, pp. 165–166). The surplus extraction is separate from production in so far that serfs produce goods, and lords appropriate it at the end of harvest (Durand, 2024, p. 166). Lastly, productivity is weak because wealth is not reinvested into production like in capitalism, rather feudal lords opted for increasing taxes or accumulation. Coercion undermined collaboration between lords and serfs, so there was little encouragement to invest in more effective production (Durand, 2024, pp. 167–168).

### **Dominium and the three-dimensional view of power**

The definition of dominium is “a social relationship between the dominant and the dominated, in which the dominant simultaneously exercised power over men and over land” (Durand, 2024, p. 150). Dominium encapsulates a specific relational power dynamic during feudalism. Durand uses dominium to highlight similar relational dynamics in contemporary society. There are some unclarities with the concept of power in the definition of dominium that I adjust by operationalising with Lukes' three-dimensional view of power.

In the context of feudalism, dominium as a social dynamic was visible in how power reproduced through the conspicuous consumption of feudal lords which, according to Durand, strengthened lords' power over men (Durand, 2024, pp. 149–150). This justified their power because wealth symbolised political authority. In this way, the relational dynamic was also territorial and spatial because power over land meant power over men (Durand, 2024, p. 150). So, the idea is that for a lord to increase their political authority, military conquest became a primary way to increase the total yield from workers for conspicuous consumption of luxury goods and other (Durand, 2024, p. 160).

Critics may raise the case that capitalists have power over men and land because (I) workers are subordinated to capitalists, and (II) land/property is owned and in the power of capitalists. However, workers under capitalism enjoy a type of *double freedom* in which they are not tied to the means of production like serfs, and they are free from owning means of production (Marx, 2018, p. 629). Workers freely enter into contracts with capitalists of their choosing. They become free to sell their own labour-power. Thus, capitalists could only have power

over workers when workers chose to enter into a contract with them. Serfs could not enjoy this double freedom. They lived under the lords' coercion and were not free to sell labour-power to whomever. In this sense, a social dynamic of dominium becomes unique to feudalism. This is the extent to which Durand defines dominium in feudalism. It has not made clear how power is exercised over men, only that it is coercive and reproduced through the consumption of luxury goods. To make it clearer, we now turn to Durand's method of utilising dominium to understand power dynamics within contemporary digital society.

Durand makes the case that the large-scale harvesting of data, i.e., information on internet users, amounts to a centralisation of power through creating digital ecosystems that condition user dependence (Durand, 2024, pp. 105–106). Simultaneously, there are sophisticated algorithms that are increasingly effective in turning users into consumers. Algorithms do this by predicting desires in internet consumers based on collected data. Durand means that algorithms have become powerful agents in themselves that have the power to anticipate and condition users to buy recommended goods (Durand, 2024, p. 72). The consequence of this is threefold. First, it leads to a type of territorial logic that is reminiscent of feudalism. To have more effective algorithms, digital companies strive to expand the quantity of original data capture points (Durand, 2024, pp. 75–76). In other words, digital companies expand the harvest of data used to train algorithms. Second, the large-scale data harvesting amounts to a centralisation of information, which also means a centralisation of power. Third, the need for continuous data harvesting means that digital companies have a need for locking users into digital ecosystems, effectively creating user dependence on digital spaces. Durand exemplifies this with Word, a writing software application with over 1.2 billion users. Using word for authorial endeavours is not forced, but it becomes the most useful tool for writing because it is used by everyone else, and using another writing software would mean logistical and transferral issues (Durand, 2024, p. 102).

Centralisation of information amounts to power over users, akin to power over men, and power over data capture points, akin to power over land. While it is clear that the relationship of dominium in the contemporary context entails algorithmic power over internet users and power over data capture points, it is yet not clear what meaning is given to the concept of power. True, Durand makes the case that algorithms achieve the power to anticipate and manufacture desire, and digital companies amass some kind of power when they lock users into dependence. But these are exercises of power that Durand has empirically found within the digital economy. How do we conceptually transfer dominium's analytical potential to the

more limited context of gig work? To achieve this, we now turn our attention to Steven Lukes' three-dimensional view of power. The idea is to complement and strengthen the analytical potential of dominium.

Lukes provides a comprehensive and detailed understanding of power. For Lukes, power has three dimensions and they are understood as varying views on the statement that "A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests." (Lukes, 2005, p. 30). Lukes also holds that power is a capacity, and an agent does not need to successfully exercise power to have power (Lukes, 2005, p. 12). Not acting is an act itself. Therefore, we could view power as "A has the capacity to exercise power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests". The capacity or exercise of power can be viewed through these three dimensions: (a) power over decision making, i.e., the power to decide what others do (Lukes, 2005, pp. 16–17), (b) power over setting the agenda, i.e. controlling the inclusion and exclusion of matters in a discussion (Lukes, 2005, pp. 20–21), and (c) power over ideology which Lukes' define as the power to "prevent people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order" (Lukes, 2005, p. 28). While (a) is the most visible form of power, (c) is the least visible.

Lukes further explores the concept of power by viewing different aspects of how power function and may be used by agents. Power can be understood as *potentia* and its sub-concept *potestas*. *Potentia* is a broad concept encompassing the power to exist and to be able to act, and *potestas* is having power over another person. In an asymmetric power relationship, A limits B's *potentia* through A's *potestas*. In other words, having power over another is to constrain their choices to secure their compliance (Lukes, 2005, pp. 73–74). This is how Lukes view power as domination. By impeding and constraining a subject's choices, the agent is hindering a subject from living as "their own nature and judgement dictate" (Lukes, 2005, p. 85). This is connected to what Lukes means by real interests. If a person were free from another powerful agent's constraints, they would be able to freely and autonomously choose how to act according to their own real interests. Of course, Lukes admits that determining real interests is highly difficult due to its value laden nature (Lukes, 2005, pp. 123–124).

Therefore, in order to understand when power as domination is happening and how it limits people's real interests, Lukes advises us to examine where the exercise of power furthers or, at least, does not harm the interests of the powerful while simultaneously negatively affecting

the interests of those subject to this power or, at the very least, constrains subjects' choices (Lukes, 2005, p. 86).

Power has three dimensions: decision-making, setting the agenda, and ideology. What power does is constrain the choices of subjects to secure compliance. What concerns the creation of user dependence on digital ecosystems, this attempts at constraining users by locking them into these digital spaces. Algorithms exercise attempts at deciding for users what to buy. Considering that they also attempt to manufacture desires for users, we may view this as the third dimension of power. In other words, they shape the cognitions of users through the constant recommendation of items which makes users accept and even appreciate user-specific content. Dependence on digital ecosystems cross into the dimension of decision-making by constraining the user's choice of other systems.

The three-dimensional view of power enables me to operationalise dominium into a conceptual tool that allows for a closer examination of gig work. First, dominium is defined as "power over men and land" and I updated the terms men and land to labour and platform. While "men" presumably denoted humans in a general sense, I find it awkward to examine research on gig workers as men. "Man" as a general term for humans is outdated. Land is changed into platforms as a digital space for finding work (Wu & Huang, 2024, p. 185). Second, the term "power over" now incorporates three dimensions for analytical purposes and these are decision-making, agenda setting, and ideology. Third, Lukes defines the third dimension as a form of ideological power that justifies the present order in the minds of subjects. I do not explore ideological themes in the political sense of the term, but rather the manifestation of hidden power exerted on gig workers that motivates their partaking in gig work. With all these three points in mind, I later set out to explore power over labour through decision-making, power over platforms through the exclusion of labour from participating in and setting the agenda, and hidden power over labour.

### **Predation as a relation of value appropriation, in distinction to capitalist exploitation**

Initially, in the context of feudalism, predation is defined as "an appropriative allocation mechanism supported by violence" (Durand, 2024, p. 156; Vahabi, 2015). In examining the digital economy, Durand excludes violence and uses predation as "an appropriative allocation mechanism" (Durand, 2024, p. 186). This differs from value appropriation under capitalism, known as exploitation. I explore these points in this section.

In the context of feudalism, my interpretation is that predation arise as a violent social dynamic due to serfs owning the tools, while the lords own land. Lords are in this sense disconnected from the process of production and, as Durand means, they rely on violence and coercion to appropriate a share of the value produced by the serfs (Durand, 2024, pp. 161–162, 157). Feudal lords functioned as predators by exerting coercive pressure on serfs to extract and maintain income, while simultaneously offering protection in times of crises.

Durand argues that the same type of appropriative mechanism is found in the relations between digital companies and ordinary internet users, as well as traditional capitalist manufacturing firms. He identifies four types of rental mechanisms. It would be beyond the purpose of this section to present these rental mechanisms. I recommend the reader find the presentation of these mechanisms in Appendix II. The point is that the common denominator for these rental mechanisms is the increasing disconnect between digital companies and the actual process of production. This means that digital companies merely transfer value from producers to themselves. The clearest example of this is the extraction of data. Internet users produce data as they move around the internet, and data is later transformed into value by either investing it into increasingly effective algorithms or selling it to third parties (Durand, 2024, pp. 89–90). Predation, then, is a relational dynamic where one party appropriates value from another without taking part of the process of production itself. Predation is the concept that encapsulates this relational dynamic of value extraction found in feudalism, and later in contemporary digital society.

Predation could be further understood through discussing its difference from its capitalist counterpart. In his interpretation of Marx's writings in *Capital*, Michael Heinrich explains that exploitation means that the worker in capitalism receives a lesser value, in the form of a wage, than what the worker actually produces in value (Heinrich, 2012, p. 96; Marx, 2018). The surplus value is the value extracted by the capitalist during the work process. This is in distinction to predation where surplus value is appropriated at the end of the labour process. These two relations of value extraction have their genesis in the qualitative structure of each mode of production. In the case of capitalist exploitation, this relational dynamic is contingent on the fact that capitalists have monopolised the means of production, and because the worker enters into a contractual arrangement to do labour, alongside other labourers, in exchange for a wage that is lower than the actual value produced. For predation, this form of value extraction was contingent on the fact that the appropriator of value (the lord) was detached from the process of production, which is independently conducted by individual serfs.

So, based on this distinction, predation cannot exist within a capitalist mode of production.<sup>1</sup> This is why I use this form of value extraction in the examination of research on gig work. If research on value extraction in gig work can be reconceptualised into predation, then it indicates that there is an absence of a capitalist organisation of value extraction between gig companies and worker. This is the conceptual value of predation.

### **Summary**

My interpretation here is that dominium and predation emerged as social dynamics from the unique feudal configuration of the mode of production. It is because labour was unfree, the means of production divided, and the work process individual and independent that enabled lords the power over “men” and “land.” Predation emerged as a social dynamic of value appropriation because the means of production were divided, making lords disconnected from the production process, and the surplus value extraction was separate from production.

In the contemporary digital economy, digital companies appropriate value without partaking in production and they extract data from other companies and single users of their services. They own and control data capture points and exercise power over users through algorithmic software and by creating dependence on digital infrastructure. So, instead of coercion, digital companies use soft power means of locking users into their value appropriation.

In exploring gig work research through the lens of dominium, I expanded the concept of power with the Lukes’ three-dimensional view of power in order to, more fittingly, use the concept for sociological purposes, which is to explore power relations in gig work found by primary researchers.

---

<sup>1</sup> I find it valuable to make clear that predation as a form of value appropriation can exist *alongside* a capitalist mode of production. But it cannot exist *within* a capitalist mode of production in the sense that it is the chief form of value appropriation.

## Results and analysis

In this chapter I present the analysis of the collected primary research findings. The first subchapter introduces the reader to the definition of gig work; its types of workers and the definition used in the analysis. The second, third, and fourth subchapters present and analyse research through the threefold operationalisation of dominium and find a dynamic power relation, exclusion of labour from setting the agenda, and hidden ways that power constrains workers. The fourth subchapter presents how value appropriation amounts to predation. Thereafter, I connect the relationship between the relational dynamics of dominium and predation. Lastly, I explore how the findings of gig work organisation can be addressed and viewed through the conceptual schematic of the mode of production.

### **Introduction to the definition of gig work and its diverse composition of workers**

Wu and Huang utilise an understanding of gig work that is broadly the combination of two viewpoints (Wu & Huang, 2024, pp. 184–185). The first viewpoint emphasise three characteristics that are general to all forms of gig work: (I) project-based compensation, i.e. only completed services or projects are paid, (II) gig work is temporary insofar that gig workers are never indefinitely hired by a client, (III) lastly, workers enjoy flexibility in deciding on when, how or where work is performed (Watson et al., 2021, pp. 334–335; Wu & Huang, 2024).

The second perspective emphasise four characteristics in gig work: (I) gig workers are not members of any organisations, they are individual producers, (II) temporality: gig workers change work and tasks often, (III) lack of a regular salary, paid by completed task or project, and lastly, (IV) workers sell their labour through intermediaries like platforms or staffing agencies (Cropanzano et al., 2023, p. 494; Wu & Huang, 2024).

The combination of these perspectives enable a broader understanding of gig work as paid by project, temporary, flexible, non-members of organisations and the sale of labour is mediated by platforms or staffing agencies (Wu & Huang, 2024, p. 185). This is the understanding of gig work adopted here.

While there are some general traits to gig work, the type of work and workers vary. Vallas and Schor identifies five distinct categories of gig workers based on spatial circumstances, skill level, and the work tasks. These are (I) the architects of the platforms who are highly skilled independent contractors that maintain and design digital platforms' infrastructure, (II) Cloud-

based consultants/freelancers are also highly skilled and usually specialised gig workers. They are remotely based, meaning that they work primarily online. They are users of online platforms like Upwork or Freelancer. (III) Locally-based gig workers who perform food delivery, taxi services, cleaning, and more. The researchers view these as low-skilled, while the high-skilled variant does home repair, creative performance, or care work. (IV) Remote-based workers who perform microtasks, typically low-skilled online labour such as describing images, editing computer-generated texts, transcription, etc. Lastly, (V) influencers and content creators. These workers are often unpaid until they attain a certain level of fame on the internet (Vallas & Schor, 2020, pp. 275–276). For each type, some individuals work full-time while others work part-time.

It should be noted that Vallas and Schor seem to categorise architects, cloud-based freelancers, microtask workers, and influencers/content creators as crowdworkers, and locally-based workers as gig workers. Crowdwork and gig work seem to be what Vallas and Schor view as platform work; however, I do not share this view. The term gig work implies the temporary temporality of work in gigs, which is common for all of five categories of workers. Platform work implies that work is mediated by digital labour platforms, which is not the case for locally-based gig workers who find work through staffing agencies. In this thesis, I consider all five types of workers to be gig workers.

Below I examine research literature on cloud-based consultants and freelancers who work online with more skilled tasks on platforms like Upwork and Freelancers, in distinction to microtaskers who work online with smaller, low-skilled jobs. I refer to these two groups as remote-based gig workers. I also examine research literature on locally-based gig workers ranging from the low-skilled variant, working on platforms like Foodora, Uber and Lyft, to the high-skilled counterparts found on platforms like Taskrunner. I refer to these two categories as locally-based gig workers.

## **Power over labour through decision making**

### **Definition and characteristics of algorithmic management**

Within the gig economy, there exist algorithmic systems that replace the middle manager in managing gig workers. This is known by researchers as algorithmic management, and it is defined as “oversight, governance and control practices conducted by software algorithms over many remote workers.” (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017, p. 4). Algorithmic management is further understood by five characteristics which are (I) constant tracking, (II) constant

evaluation, (III) automatic implementation of decisions, (IV) interaction with a system, rather than a human, and (V) little to no transparency in the internal workings of the system. The purpose of this kind of technology is to coordinate a high number of gig workers, while constraining their control over the working process (Herr, 2021, p. 44). How the algorithm works is usually not disclosed due to competitive reasons (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017, p. 5). This leaves some workers frustrated in their attempts to understand and navigate the system.

The system of algorithmic management has three management aims. This is to discipline and control workers to ensure compliance, boost performance with the use of customer ratings and incentives, as well as being justification for deactivation and termination of workers (Kaine & Josserand, 2019, p. 492). Researchers have also identified three management devices that are used in the delivery part of the gig economy. These are delivery fees, which are the payment that gig couriers receive after delivery. Usually, payment is calculated based on distance and the moment of delivery, though exceptions exist and vary across the broader gig economy depending on the type of work. Researchers also found a considerable gap between the payment preference of the gig worker and the platform pricing. Gig workers are not paid for the distance between themselves and the restaurant, only the distance between the restaurant and the recipient of the delivery. Gamification of gig work is a management device that ranks workers based on their performance, which is used to create competition for certain bonuses. Lastly, information about a delivery's route and fee is limited in order to prevent couriers from strategically declining work (Perrig, 2021, p. 76).

### **Limited autonomy at work**

Autonomy, the ability to control one's own working process, and flexibility are parts of gig work that are usually appreciated by workers (Myhill et al., 2021, pp. 4123–4124). But autonomy in gig work varies as some parts are off-limits. In a conference paper to the International Conference on Information Systems, researchers found that Uber drivers have limited autonomy in that they exercise control over work hours, vacations, time off, working areas, their own cars, and other equipment (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017, p. 1). Drivers are also responsible for the maintenance and repair of their equipment needed for work. Though for Swedish couriers, there are parts of the gig working process that are out of their control, such as the task allocation or the chosen routes (Weidenstedt et al., 2024, p. 1289). The algorithm also manages couriers' payment, which are based on the distance of the delivery route, a detail unknown to the workers, as one courier explains:

You don't know how much you are going to earn. It's totally dependent on the app, how it calculates and what the distance is. So we can't calculate every time if it [the fee for a delivery] is right or wrong. (Weidenstedt et al., 2024, p. 1290)

There are limits to the autonomy of the physical gig workers in courier and riding services. While they do have control over certain parts of the working process, such as their own vehicle, equipment, working hours, vacations, time off, etc, there are parts of the working process that the gig companies attempt to stay in control over through algorithmic management. In one study, researchers noted that drivers experienced loss of autonomy at most when the company did not share full or relevant information about the gig. This limitation of knowledge may be withholding full information on payment for a gig, the route and distance, and for remote gig workers, this may be clients withholding key information about work. This is to prevent strategic declines and thus maintain some kind of compliance, while simultaneously inhibiting workers' potential to plan their work in order to maximise value capture (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017, p. 9). Therefore, locally-based gig workers have a certain degree of autonomy over their work process, while other aspects are off-limits. This can be attributed to gig companies' control over knowledge, as they share only limited information with workers.

On the other hand, remote gig workers enjoy more freedom in how to plan their working day. Building on interviews with 107 remote gig workers from Africa and Southeast Asia, and a survey with 679 remote gig workers (Wood et al., 2019, pp. 62–63), Wood argues that control operates at the end of the labour process through the system of rating and reviewing. This means that as long as the end product satisfied client demand, resulting in a good review, then workers had a great freedom in choosing who to work with, when and how (Wood et al., 2019, pp. 64–65). The survey showed that a majority of remote workers enjoyed the freedom to decide over their working tasks, its order, and potential changes to the working process. However, in order to get and maintain a high ranking and to increase earnings, workers had to endure long and intense workloads with different clients (Wood et al., 2019, pp. 65–66). Long working hours during night was also connected to the fact that clients were usually based in US, UK and Australian time zones (Wood et al., 2019, p. 67). High competition between workers, due to an oversupply of labour, also led workers to undercut their own pay for work and to offer shorter deadlines. Remote work has its flexible advantages. Workers are free to choose whom to work for, how, when, and where. But the algorithmic management, based on client ranking and rating of workers and the high competition between workers, constrains

worker choices in their own labour process. The constraints may be the pay workers receive, deadlines, the amount of work taken, and the working hours. Workers are free to choose but are constrained in their choices if they wish to comply to the conditions of remote gig work.

I understand algorithmic management as an automation of power that constrains workers' choices to ensure their compliance within the work process. Wood argues that control in remote gig work operates at the end of the labour process, due to the fact that clients rate worker results. But, in locally-based gig work, control at the very least attempts to operate during the labour process as exemplified by how companies withhold information on pay, routes, and distance in order to secure worker compliance to work. In this way, gig companies use a limited decision-making power that workers are free to comply with, and companies withhold information about work in order to increase the probability of worker compliance. In the remote work section, we see that workers enjoy more autonomy. They are able to decide on more matters surrounding work. But the critical importance of maintaining a high level of ranking for workers generally means access to more work, and a high rank is maintained by complying with working conditions that workers otherwise wouldn't choose to have, such as shortened deadlines, long and unsocial working hours, and lesser pay. So, there is a relationship between workers' decision-making power over their own work and their compliance with the conditions shaped by the gig company. The more workers wish for increased earnings, the more they need to comply with unfavourable conditions. There exists a sort of self-constraining of own choices shaped by the algorithmic management system.

### **Disciplinary methods**

The algorithms managing workers use different disciplinary methods to punish workers that do not meet certain criteria or performance standards. Uber deactivates workers, essentially removing access to work for workers, while online labour platforms more typically filter work from workers instead of deactivating workers (Wood et al., 2019, p. 18). It is constant tracking, reviewing and surveillance of worker performance through indicators such as working time and customer review data, which form the basis for disciplinary action. Behaviour that is understood as undesirable by the algorithm leads to punishment, consider what an Uber driver says, "They are always testing you. If you are two or three minutes late, then you get a warning" (Weidenstedt et al., 2024). The feeling of being surveilled may create feelings of insecurity and stress seeing as deactivation may happen at any time for seemingly miniscule reasons. Some of these may be because of either not accepting enough work or receiving bad reviews. This kind of disciplinary action impedes the autonomy or control over

work (Myhill et al., 2021, p. 4125), which some researchers have linked to stress (Palm, 2019, p. 5).

Workers complain that deactivation is sometimes the cause of the company prioritising customers instead of workers (Myhill et al., 2021, p. 4124). Interestingly, one study compared workers who were managed with disciplinary methods to workers incentivised by algorithms and found that the former were more likely to view themselves as employees while the other group viewed themselves as autonomous entrepreneurs (Ravenelle, 2019, p. 280). Consider this quote from a 60-year-old Uber driver, “Whenever you punish people [...] that’s being treated as an employee.” (Ravenelle, 2019, p. 277). This offers an insight into how the limitation of worker agency and autonomy through punishment makes workers feel subordinated in a way that is traditionally associated with standard employment (Selberg, 2023, p. 612).

The function of disciplinary methods is another example of control and power being exerted at the end of the labour process. The company punishes unfavourable completion of tasks. It amounts to coercively securing worker compliance. A warning is first in order to align worker compliance, and deactivation or termination involves partially or permanently removing workers’ access to work. These are disciplinary acts that reminds workers about the power that companies hold. Warnings and deactivations are understood as attempts at securing future worker compliance by threatening a removal of access to work, while a termination is a permanent removal of access to work.

### **Workers engaging in non-compliance and resistance**

In keeping with some scholars who have stressed the importance of not overestimating the power of algorithmic management, meaning that such overestimation might undermine true insights into actual worker agency and methods they have to game the system or circumvent the algorithmic management (Öborn et al., 2023, p. 2), I present here some ways that workers circumvent the very system that try to manage their work.

In a research paper on the non-compliance among 34 Swedish gig workers (Öborn et al., 2023, pp. 3–4), the majority of whom did gig work as side income, researchers delved into how workers circumvent the limitations of algorithmic management in pursuit of individual advantages. They found that for these workers, the algorithmic management did not seem that persuasive because of frustration with a lack of work allocation. This encouraged some workers to gain competitive advantages in terms of getting work by physically visiting the

companies' offices and asking the administrators for work (Öborn et al., 2023, pp. 5–6). Workers also sought to form personal relationships with clients in order to secure future work, and in some cases, they even circumvented the company as a work mediator (Öborn et al., 2023, pp. 6–7). The researchers understand this as non-compliant behaviour instead of a resisting behaviour as it does not intend to challenge the relations surrounding platform capital, rather it is to gain competitive advantages for more effectively selling workers' own labour power (Öborn et al., 2023, p. 11).

Researchers Möhlmann and Zalmanson conducted a digital observation study in order to investigate how Uber drivers in forums utilise different methods of resistance against platforms. They found three variations of behaviours attempting to regain control: resisting the system, switching the system, and gaming the system. The first includes reported behaviours in which drivers simply do not comply with what they are told or supposed to do, such as turning off GPS, the system itself, or cancelling rides for passengers (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017, p. 11). Switching the system was found to be a strategy employed by Uber drivers, where they simultaneously used other gig apps for work. This was mostly done by utilising several cell phones. It spreads the risk of potential disciplinary measures and eliminated waiting for further gigs (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017, pp. 11–12). Lastly, drivers “gamed” the system by exploiting software weaknesses such as cancelling rides with angry, or undesirable, passengers to prevent them from leaving negative reviews, thereby protecting the rating. Drivers on the forum also collectively exploited the system by organising mass deactivations, which would shrink the supply of drivers and thus increase their pay (Möhlmann & Zalmanson, 2017, p. 12).

A study on African remote gig workers highlights strategies utilised by workers with the aim of regaining and exerting agency on platforms, thereby, in some cases, circumventing algorithmic management. The researchers found strategies of resilience, which generally aimed to maintain worker agency and survival on platforms. For example, the majority of workers report spending a large amount of time looking and applying for work without success, especially for new workers. This is usually due to an oversupply of labour or, for new workers, a lack of prior feedback. Ways of circumventing this was to share accounts with other workers and buying reviews and positive feedback from clients (Anwar & Graham, 2020, p. 1279). This allowed workers to circumvent deactivation of accounts, due to inactivity as a result of not getting work, or to gain credibility in order to access more future work. During the working process, workers shared that the company track time and take regular

screenshots of their laptops. For some, this leads to long working hours due to the fact that being caught not working could imply a cancellation of payment. Investing in a second monitor could rework and resist this problem, allowing for workers to more autonomously decide over their own working hours (Anwar & Graham, 2020, p. 1280). Workers with accumulated positive ratings and experience were found to be able to negotiate higher payments from clients, which the researchers understood as a type of reworking of platform conditions. Lastly, strategies of resistance included methods of resisting the conditions of platforms in order to exert and regain agency. These included filtering work, excluding clients and declining jobs from potentially exploitative clients. Some workers also threatened to cancel contracts with clients, which had the potential benefit of increasing payments. Another way was to withhold finished work until a client paid for it. Clients can cancel payments to workers if they aren't satisfied with the finished product. Workers could then refrain from delivering the finished product, and demand payment. Other forms of resistance included warning fellow workers on other forums from exploitative clients and leaving negative feedback and rating on the same type of clients (Anwar & Graham, 2020, p. 1283).

Here, I have presented some ways that locally-based and remote gig workers act that serve individual needs, and in some cases also collective needs. For most workers, it seems that the methods of gaming the system and circumventing algorithmic management are used in order to facilitate the sale of their labour power due to the persistent oversupply of labour. In some cases, workers resist by challenging the conditions of the system itself, as exemplified by the Uber drivers organising mass deactivation and the Upwork workers withholding their final products. Whether these methods aim to secure future work or challenge the system, workers use them to regain control over parts of the working process and assert autonomy against a company that tries to enforce compliance through algorithmic management. Thus, the balance of power between workers and gig companies remains dynamic. Company power is limited when it attempts to restrict worker choices, as workers creatively circumvent constraints to reclaim control over the labour process.

Dominium, as a social relationship in which companies exercise power over labour, is evident in this analysis through the ways companies attempt to impose decisions on workers. There is a dynamic relationship between gig workers' ability to decide over their working conditions and gig companies' need for securing compliance. This is a way in which gig companies exercise power over gig workers as labour. But, as we have seen, their power is far from complete, as exemplified by workers' creative methods of circumvention and resistance.

Companies can completely remove a worker from production, but they do not always exercise this capacity. Rather, they continuously use this as a threat to workers. This prompts certain workers to circumvent, resist, and lessen the risk of disciplinary measures or other algorithmic management measures. So, I view this as a relationship of dominium, companies having and exercising power over labour, by using algorithmic management and disciplinary methods to secure worker compliance, but a type of power that is simultaneously incomplete due workers find ways of regaining power over themselves. It is then a highly dynamic power relationship.

### **Power over the platform through the exclusion of labour from setting the agenda**

Setting the parameters of a discussion is the second dimension of power. It constrains persons' choices by not allowing them to discuss matters that would be beneficial to bring to light. Below, I illustrate how companies' terms of service and lack of human contact should be viewed as limiting the parameters of a discussion that ultimately limits the bargaining potential of workers.

#### **The bland but powerful terms of service documents**

Companies utilise long and complex documents that outline the terms of service for gig workers. These documents contain rules that regulate the payment of workers, evaluation of work, and what rights and responsibilities workers have (Berg et al., 2018, p. 22). Because terms of service documents are written and established by the company, it means that workers have no means or room to negotiate their working conditions. Rather, they have a choice to either consent or to seek work elsewhere (Berg et al., 2018, p. 23).

The International Labour Organisation investigated documents outlining terms of service and conditions for workers from 31 major digital platforms, 16 of which were remote work platforms and 15 locally-based platforms providing taxi and delivery services. Among the findings is how microtask platforms restrict workers' payment by making client or platform satisfaction a criterion for payment. Concerning taxi and delivery platforms, the report underlines how workers are given the freedom to accept work, but that rating and ranking systems discourages workers from freely declining work as that would risk future access to work (International Labour Organisation, 2021, p. 99). Some gig companies include different exclusivity clauses of which some stipulate that workers and clients in agreement are obligated to exclusively use the platform as a work channel for up to two years. To exit this arrangement, one must pay a percentage of the estimated earnings over the following 12

months. Other companies charge lower commission fees if clients are exclusively using the platform (International Labour Organisation, 2021, pp. 98–99). Furthermore, several of the documents analysed showed that companies try to inhibit the potential for workers to dispute platform decisions. PeoplePerHour and Upwork even provide dispute resolution services for a cost (International Labour Organisation, 2021, p. 100). While some other gig companies outline prevention of class action lawsuits in order to impede workers from fighting collectively for better conditions (International Labour Organisation, 2021, p. 201). Furthermore, companies prohibit payments and communication outside the platform, the use of subcontractors and automated methods, having multiple accounts, etc. and having low ratings, failing to keep up with platform standards, poor performance, periods of inactivity, and other, are behaviour that companies outline as reasons for deactivation (International Labour Organisation, 2021, p. 99).

Terms of service documents also state what data gig companies collect on workers and clients. Taxi platform companies collect GPS history, ratings, acceleration, and braking data, communications between users, and in some cases, information gathered from personal devices. For both locally and remote-based gig companies, collected information is used to enhance the abilities of algorithms to automate decisions concerning work filtering, deactivation, termination, pricing and payment confirmations (International Labour Organisation, 2021, p. 100).

The vast quantities of data required to automate decision-making in gig work amount to what researchers call an information asymmetry (Dedema & Rosenbaum, 2024, pp. 358–359). These decisions are usually final with little or no ways of appealing. One research paper highlights cases of where taxi and delivery workers expressed dissatisfaction over not being able to contest unfair measures. Workers complained about unfair negative ratings from clients and unable to voice those concerns with company personnel to avoid having an overall negative rating. Another worker was deactivated due to rejecting over 10 percent of work offerings because of physical limitations saying, “it seems like they’ve made it so that you can’t actually engage with them” (Duggan et al., 2023, p. 890). This is also the case with many remote-based gig workers, where an appeal may even take several months to be investigated (Berg et al., 2018, p. 78).

The limited potential to appeal perceived unfair decisions depends on the platform. It is either impossible to contact company personnel, or it becomes futile due to long waiting times.

What is understood here is that companies significantly limit the ability of workers to voice concerns and grievances.

These are some examples of worker obligations and prohibited behaviour that gig companies utilise in their terms of service documents. It's important to stress that terms of service vary depending on what country the work is based in, and obviously, what company it is. These terms of service documents outline regulations of many different aspects of the labour process. The documents are free for workers to read, but workers are not free to negotiate the content of these documents. Failure to comply with the rules and regulations results in deactivation or termination. Because of the essential dominance of work regulation by gig companies, I understand this as setting parameters of a discussion by fully dominating the agenda itself and restricting the ability of workers to appeal perceived unfair measures. The agenda, as outlined in terms of service documents, is not negotiable for workers. What the company decides is final. So, it leaves no room for workers to have an opinion on what matters are to be discussed or negotiated. Companies reserve the right to make decisions and constrain workers' potential to appeal.

The relationship of dominium as power over platforms is exemplified in the terms of service documents that are completely controlled and set by gig companies. There is minimal room for workers to partake in the negotiation of their working conditions. While workers have the power to decide over some aspects of their working conditions, as we saw in the previous section, others remain off-limits. The point being that gig companies exercise power over platforms through the near-complete exclusion of labour from voicing eventual concerns, as exemplified by the terms of service documents and the difficulties in contacting company personnel.

## **Shaping the necessity of labour dependence on platforms**

### **The conditioning of dependence**

Worker dependence on a gig platform is understood here as workers being dependent on a platform in order to make a living. The gig economy, as previously mentioned, is very diverse and there exist a multitude of different ways of being a gig worker. As we saw in "previous literature", the minority of gig workers seem to have gig work as their main source of income. Usually, this is due to a high dependence on gig work as a source of income. Some researchers have argued that gig work carries with it a risk of a lock-in effect, essentially meaning that workers who enter gig work full time have a difficult time exiting the gig

economy (Ciotti et al., 2025, p. 628). There are aspects of gig work such as low pay, difficult access to other work and scheduling issues that seem to indicate that a higher dependence on gig work, regardless of original reasons to joining, does lead to a maintaining of this dependence, which in turn severely limits the autonomy of workers.

### **How gig companies externalise costs onto workers**

Pay in the gig economy generally happens in accordance with a completed task. So, there is an absence of an hourly wage, and I have also pointed out earlier how, for instance, couriers are only paid for the distance between the point of retrieval and the point of delivery. The distances to the point of retrieval, and from the point of delivery are not accounted for in their pay. Aside from that, there is also the unpaid time and labour spent waiting for work, overtime, searching for tasks, work intensification, paying for tasks, and purchasing equipment (Pulignano et al., 2022, p. 3). By circumventing traditional employment arrangements, as we have seen earlier, gig companies are able to externalise labour costs onto the worker and thus only pay the worker for the completed task. Despite this, workers' pay is relatively low, and even lower when considering the unpaid labour. As we will see, these arrangements result in longer working hours per day in order to compensate for the low pay and hidden costs.

The UN agency International Labour Organisation (ILO) conducted a survey in 2015 and 2017 measuring the average hourly pay rate for remote gig workers. On a general basis, they found that the median and mean hourly pay for remote gig workers in 2017 were \$3 and \$4.43. When including the unpaid labour such as purchasing of in-platform currencies to bid on tasks, time spent looking for tasks, building an online reputation, communication with potential clients and reviewing, and rejected or unpaid tasks (Berg et al., 2018), researchers found that workers had a median pay of \$2.16 and a mean pay of \$3.31 (Berg et al., 2018, p. 50). These numbers are significantly lower than the payments received for the completion of tasks.

In another study on courier workers in France and Belgium, the researcher found that over half of working days for Deliveroo workers included unpaid working time (Pulignano et al., 2022, p. 4). This is due to a lack of work, or orders, which might be attributed to a saturated labour force. In other words, there are an excessive number of workers who compete for a smaller supply of work. This leads to workers' real pay being significantly lower than advertised, which for many proves unsustainable:

You're paid peanuts considering how long you had to wait before receiving an order and in between orders or how long you had to bike to reach the point you need to be (...) I earned €12.89 today but I had to cycle a lot. That's not enough to cover my basic needs. (Pulignano et al., 2022, p. 4)

A Swedish research paper on migrant gig workers doing cleaning, couriership food and parcels, programming, translating, teaching, and journalism found that these workers report a lot of time spent waiting for the next gig. This kind of waiting is unpaid and constrains workers from doing anything else because they need to be on standby for the next gig (Butler et al., 2024, p. 5). As one cleaner put it, "I cannot go to the shops, for example, or do anything. Because I need to be on call. But I don't get paid for that time, you know? (Butler et al., 2024, p. 5)

Unpaid waiting for work and paid work leads to working days where workers sacrifice many hours of their day for work. In other words, in order to make up for the unpaid waiting, workers need to work long hours for a day to be worth it in monetary terms. This kind of work scheduling undermines the creation and maintaining of social life outside of work hours (Butler et al., 2024, p. 5).

In examining remote gig work, there exist the same conditions surrounding pay and unpaid labour. Unpaid labour here is understood as client communication, purchasing platform currency (used for bidding), work intensification and extension, searching and applying for work, extra tasks, reputation building and free working samples (Pulignano et al., 2022, p. 6). For these workers, it is critical that a good performance score is maintained in order to continuously attract work from potential clients (Pulignano et al., 2022, p. 6). This leads to instances in which workers undervalue their own labour in bidding, and do more work than requested by the client:

Clients are like: 'Oh, but this was also a part of the project, and this, and that. So at the end you keep doing things for free or you reduce your rates just for the sake of getting good reviews. (Pulignano et al., 2022, p. 7)

It seems then that unpaid labour for locally-based gig workers and remote gig workers is an essential part of gig work (Pulignano et al., 2022, p. 1). A large chunk of the working day is unpaid, and this extends the working day itself because the received payments are already unsustainable for living.

Low pay and unpaid labour sustain a working environment in which full-time gig workers must endure precarious conditions such as long working hours, extra labour, reputation building, and more, in order to make a sustainable living. In other words, in order to maintain a living, workers need to work longer, more intensively, and undervalue their own work. These precarious working conditions make workers more dependent on the platform in the long term in order to sustain themselves.

### **Access to work as gig companies' most important leverage**

For some workers, platforms are among the only options available for work. This is especially true for migrants who take on gig work due to its low requirements, flexible working hours, rapid recruitment and promises of income (Newlands, 2024, p. 1263). It has been found that majority of gig workers in various nations are migrant workers (International Labour Organisation, 2021; Lata et al., 2023, p. 2). Gemma Newlands conducted an interview study with 37 Foodora workers in Sweden and Norway, most of whom were migrants (Newlands, 2024, p. 1270). These workers reported remaining in gig work far longer than first expected (Newlands, 2024, p. 1274), and struggling with feelings of being stuck (Newlands, 2024, p. 1273). Newlands argues that this is due to a lack of work alternatives, discrimination, and an unstable economic climate. It also seems that gig work has low occupational prestige in the eyes of other employers because of the emphasis on physical capacity and workers' own use of equipment (Newlands, 2024, p. 1274).

Another study investigated the value of gig work experience for potential employers by sending 9,987 applications to employers (Adermon & Hensvik, 2022, p. 8). Researchers compared the callback rate of applications emphasising gig work experience, traditional work experience with similar work tasks as the gig work applications, and unemployment, while also comparing applicants with Swedish-sounding names and Arabic-sounding names (Adermon & Hensvik, 2022, p. 1). They found that gig work experience was slightly more valuable than unemployment in callback rates from employers. However, gig work experience was far less valuable than standard work employment even if the work tasks itself were similar (Adermon & Hensvik, 2022, p. 2). When comparing Arabic names with Swedish ones, no previous experience increased callback rate. When examining the impact of Arabic names, researchers found that gig work and traditional experience did not increase the callback rate compared to unemployment (Adermon & Hensvik, 2022, p. 8). The researchers conclude that this might be due to employer bias towards ethnic minorities.

It seems then that there are reasons to believe that the gig economy becomes an important labour market entry point for migrants, due to the low requirements and rapid recruitment, but it carries the risk of creating migrant worker dependence on platforms for access to work. This is due to gig work's weak employability transfer to traditional employment, which we saw is due to a discriminatory labour market, low occupational prestige, and lack of work alternatives.

In this way, there are external structural factors making gig workers dependent on platforms, and there are factors internal to the gig economy itself that, at the very least, implicitly incentivise dependence on platforms. Structural and external factors include those previously mentioned, such as a discriminatory labour market, gig work's low occupational prestige, and lack of job alternatives. Internal factors are those traits of gig work, such as its low pay and unpaid labour, which we saw create unpredictable scheduling and encourage workers to work extra, overcompensate, work faster, undervalue their own work, etc. It is worth noting that dependence is not necessary, there are many gig workers who utilise gig work as a side income and never fully depend on it. But there seem to be conditions that may create dependence on gig work. The point here has also been to show the reader that a higher dependence on gig work corresponds to less autonomy and flexibility for workers. If there are no other means of making a living and gig work is easily accessible, as it usually is, then, despite gig work's low and unpredictable pay, there is a trade-off between flexibility/autonomy and dependence. Gig workers may never be fully autonomous and flexible with their work due to the nature of algorithmic management that controls certain parts of the working process, but further worker dependence on the platform, for access to work, undermines autonomy and flexibility.

Furthermore, Lukes pointed out that there is the possibility of the exercise of power being the result of unintended consequences by institutions, organisations, and even persons. The above-mentioned structural factors ought to be viewed as an unintended exercise of power that constrains the choices of workers through creating and maintaining dependence on platforms. The vast unpaid labour is the result of companies having workers use their own means to work, i.e., computers, cars, mobile phones and the associated maintenance and repair of the equipment. In this way, gig companies outsource the risk to individual workers (Hägg et al., 2025, p. 10). For workers, this becomes an investment into working. This implies the existence of exit costs making it harder to exit for workers. Low pay is usually connected to the oversupply of labour in gig work, due to the fact that gig companies have minimal

labour costs and can thus afford to create a large pool of labour power. These aspects of gig work combined with external structural factors such as the lack of alternative work, a potential discriminatory labour market, and the low occupational value of gig work conditions a certain type of dependence that constrains workers from doing anything else, or at the very least makes workers stay far longer than originally envisioned. Seen from this light, internal and external structural factors surrounding gig work constrain worker choices by tying them to the platform for critical access to work. The third dimension of power involves the capacity to shape the wills and wants of subjects. This is precisely what these structural factors unintentionally do. They align workers need for income with the company's supply of work, either because workers have no other choice or exiting becomes associated with exit costs. This effectively conditions dependence.

Lastly, this is yet another example of a relationship of dominium as power over labour. It is visible in how structural factors condition dependence on the platform. It seems unlikely that this is a conscious exercise of power. I interpret this as a power that arises from the internal and external conditions of gig work. Even if it is not conscious, it is a structural exercise of power over labour, with the consequence of making labour accept and comply with the order of things that serve the interests of the respective gig company.

### **Predation: value appropriation in gig work**

Like Durand describes predation in contemporary times, it is an allocation mechanism by appropriation (Durand, 2024, p. 186). In other digital economic sectors, Durand identifies contemporary predation through four mechanisms of rent. The commonality is that the appropriator is disconnected from the actual process of production of which value is appropriated from. In other words, producers like manufacturers and internet users produce value which is appropriated by digital companies. In this section, I will briefly explore the commonalities between Durand's line of thinking and how value is appropriated from gig workers.

Value appropriation happens in two ways. The first way is rather straightforward. Workers, as we saw in previous sections, need access to work, which is a primary resource of gig companies. In order to access work, workers agree to produce services on conditions arranged and set by gig companies. One of these conditions is the appropriation of the value created and produced by the worker. This appropriation happens at the end of the labour process. Researchers say that workers are typically paid on a piece rate basis (Dubal, 2020, p. 2;

Howson et al., 2022, p. 640). This is because gig workers receive payments from clients for each service that they produce, of which the company takes a percentage (Berg et al., 2018, p. 14; Özlük, 2023, p. 687). In some parts of remote gig work, workers even pay for in-platform currencies in order to bid for work. So, workers are allowed access to work through the platform in exchange for a monetary rent appropriated by the company. The idea of piece rates and wages, as the worker being paid for each produced good (Marx, 2018, p. 482), holds true for the relation between the client and the worker. But it does not hold true between gig companies and workers. Here, the company merely extracts a share of the produced value. Some researchers have called this a form of rent (Howson et al., 2022, p. 634; Özlük, 2023, p. 691). This happens in accordance with companies' not being involved in the process of production with own capital (Vallas & Schor, 2020, p. 282).

The second way of appropriating value conducted by gig companies is through the monetisation of data, similar to Durand's exposition of how data is transformed into value. Researchers from Amsterdam argue in 2020 that captured data, while sometimes being monetised to third parties, also has a long-term value that is potential and hard to predict. I have briefly mentioned in previous sections how data is used to refine and improve the capabilities of algorithmic management. Here, the researchers mean that data is transformed into value because it improves the algorithmic capabilities in appropriating more monetary rent. Improved algorithmic capabilities also has the potential to attract more capital from investors (Van Doorn & Badger, 2020, pp. 1480–1481). This is an early study and there seem to be a general scarcity on this topic. Some new research seems to support the researchers' conclusions.

For a time, gig companies have been found to be unprofitable, being mainly dependent on investment capital. For example, Uber has, since its inception, continuously seen heavy economic losses throughout the years. In 2023, Uber managed to turn losses into a surge of profitability. This was managed due to their launch of the dynamic price setting – an adjustment of how the algorithm calculated and determined price (Sherman, 2025).

Researchers from Oxford University found that, after Uber introduced dynamic pricing, Uber's median take rate, i.e., the share of value taken from drivers, increased from 25% to 29%. On some trips, the share may be as much as over 50% (Binns et al., 2025, p. 8). The dynamic price setting works by increasing the share taken from drivers based on available data on clients and drivers. This allows it to identify drivers inclined to work for less, or clients tending to pay more. The algorithm then matches drivers and clients in order to

maximise value capture. Thus, Uber managed to transform data into value by enhancing the algorithmic capabilities and increasing profits, all while not changing the production. Simply put, they found a way to increase their share taken in value production due to their informational monopoly.

We see then that gig workers are individual producers of services that could perform the same services outside the platform. The importance of working for platforms is that platforms maintain a pool of clients. So, gig workers are allowed access to work in exchange for a share of the value produced. The fact that gig workers are single producers of a service is significant because it implicitly reveals that gig companies are not producers of a service. They are also disconnected from production by not investing capital or owning capital goods used in production. They are disconnected from the actual production of services, and extract portions of the value produced by gig workers. This happens either through monetarily appropriating a share of the produced value, or it happens by transforming captured data into value through third parties, attracting investor capital, or by enhancing the algorithm's capabilities in appropriating value. These are rental mechanisms because they appropriate value from producers. This is the predation of gig work.

### **Summary of relations of dominium and predation in gig work**

There exists a highly dynamic power relationship in gig work between workers' need for autonomy and companies' need for control and compliance. This is exemplified by how strongly companies control the agenda in terms of service documents and enforce it through algorithmic management, and how workers employ different methods to evade these regulations. On a general basis, gig workers have decision-making power over equipment, time off and scheduling, vacations, workplace, but they lack decision-making power over pricing of services, either due to algorithmic price setting or competitive bidding between workers.

The individual producers who are gig workers are restricted from deciding on price because this is where companies extract value. Wood identifies control as operating at the end of the labour process through the system of rating and reviewing (Wood et al., 2019, p. 64). I reframe this by arguing that control operates most visibly at the end of the labour process, in part due to the rating and ranking systems, but also because this is where part of workers' earnings is appropriated by the company. Continuous attempts at securing worker compliance during the work process are made to secure current and future value appropriation. There, we

also see control attempting to operate during the labour process by limiting information to workers. Information that could be potentially relevant and useful, especially to workers’ decision-making power. Information is a key resource of companies in their compliance management.

Algorithmic management, disciplinary measures and tight control of work regulations are the most visible forms of power used by the companies. The structural internal and external factors are invisible and unintended uses of power by companies.

It certainly seems that companies’ ownership and control over platforms enable a large capacity of power over labour. Companies’ tight regulation of work in the terms of service documents is inherent to the fact that companies own and control the platform. This arrangement entitles companies to use various powerful measures to control and secure worker compliance. Because there is no in-platform avenue for workers to appeal, contest, or negotiate, they resort to alternative means of regaining agency outside the platform. In this sense, companies exercise power over labour because they exercise power over the platform, which works to facilitate and ensure a predatory value appropriation.

**Feudal resemblance in the organisation of gig work**

In arguing that the digital economy is techno-feudalistic, Durand utilises a table that compares different modes of production to later make clear how the digital economical system shares traits with feudalism. Here I do the same with gig work in order to make clear its similarities to feudal traits identified by Durand.

To remind the reader, there are five terms to keep in mind. These include the means of production, the means needed to produce; labour which reflects the workers’ freedom status; the work process, meaning how the work is organised; surplus value, which entails how value is extracted; and productivity, a term that signifies how the organisation of work and the use of surplus value affect production efficiency.

	<b>Feudalism</b>	<b>Capitalism</b>	<b>Gig work</b>
<b>Means of production</b>	Land owned by lords, instruments by dependents	Monopolised by capitalists	Platforms owned by gig companies, instruments by gig workers

<b>Labour</b>	Unfree	Free	Contractually free, tendency for dependence
<b>Work process</b>	Independent, individual	Subordinate, cooperative	Independent, individual
<b>Surplus extraction</b>	Separate from production	Takes place in production	Separate from production
<b>Productivity</b>	Weak	Dynamic	N/A

*Table adapted from Durand, How Silicon Valley Unleashed Techno-feudalism, page 170*

In my adaptation of Durand’s table, I inserted qualities of gig work that have been explored in the previous sections. First off, the externalised labour costs result in gig workers utilising their own equipment for production. This is interesting because it indicates that products usually associated as consumer goods are turned into means of production. This is while the platform, of which workers access work through, is owned by gig companies. An underlying dynamic here is that gig workers invest into their own equipment, which could be argued that it binds them closer to platforms because leaving would be associated with high exit costs in the form of lost income and potentially wasted investments.

Second, labour is contractually free insofar as they consent to platform regulations, but not as equals, due to the fact that workers have minuscule bargaining power in negotiating what conditions will regulate work. The gig companies wholly decide on work regulations through their terms of service. Workers either consent to platform conditions or find work elsewhere. Further, as I have argued, there are certain structural factors to gig work that condition gig workers to stay far longer than expected. So, there is a tendency for dependence on platforms’ supply of work.

Third, the work process is independent and individual. Due to owning their own equipment, workers have a greater autonomy in structuring their working days and time. However, this depends on how far the algorithmic management attempts to secure worker compliance during the work process. What is certain, however, is that workers do not have to work. They manage their own time, working days, vacations, workload, and some work decisions related to work allocation and tasks. What algorithmic management does is attempt to constrain worker choices under the working process in order to raise the likelihood of worker

compliance in working faster and more efficiently, which is primarily done through rating and ranking systems.

Fourth, surplus extraction in gig work takes the shape of predatory value appropriation, whereby companies are detached from the process of production and make workers pay a fee for access to work. In a book published in March by American professor Jodi Dean titled *Capital's Grave*, Dean uses Uber as an example of new relations similar to feudalism. She argues that gig companies do not buy labour like traditional employers in capitalism do. Clients buy labour through the platform, workers individually and independently perform the whole process of labour, and the platform takes a share of the value produced through a fee (Dean, 2025, p. 42). Researchers Öborn, MacKenzie, Örnebring, and Van Couvering found that workers would circumvent algorithmic allocation of work by visiting platform personnel in order to facilitate the sale of their labour power. They defined this as opportunistic agency (Öborn et al., 2023, pp. 1–2). The personnel would then manually assign workers to clients looking for labour. This clearly shows that it is not the companies that employ workers, but clients. What companies do is maintain and control a pool of labour and a pool of clients, restricting worker access to clients (and thus work) by having them consent to the fee.

Lastly, concerning productivity, this is a quality not explored in previous sections. It would be beyond the scope of this thesis and too close to the field of economics. However, I offer some speculative words on the matter. First, algorithmic management tries to make work more efficient and faster. Second, productivity could be argued to be more efficient because individual work tasks are delegated to a large supply of workers. Third, it could be argued that productivity is wasted because of the large amount of idle time workers spend waiting for work. Fourth, gig companies do not reinvest in the means of production for increased productivity. Instead, they invest in making algorithms more efficient in managing workers. Considering these points, it seems productivity has a doubleness to it, similar to the point on labour's freedom being both constrained and autonomous. The topic of productivity requires further investigation, and future research could explore it in greater depth.

Gig work shares commonalities with feudalism, with the exception of labour. Labour is contractually free, similar to other forms of labour in capitalism. A difference is that gig workers are individual and independent value producers, what we understood as predation. In fact, companies like Uber develop algorithmic software to enable greater value appropriation without fundamentally changing the production process itself. If the Uber case were to be generalisable, which it most likely is, then we have an entire industry where gig companies do

not reinvest into the production of value, rather only in the increase of appropriation of value. The reason gig companies do this is because they face no labour costs, which has a twofold effect. This leads to mass recruitment of workers to increase the labour supply, and thus they are able to blame low pay on supply, while the calculation of pay is unknown to workers. It is also beneficial for gig companies to maintain an expanding labour pool, because it means they have a territorial advantage in local or digital markets. What is significant about this is that it enables them to appropriate more value without added costs. In traditional capitalist employment arrangements, employing someone adds labour costs and increases enabling more sales. In the gig economy, expanding the labour pool does not increase productivity in the individual process of production. But it does mean an expansion of the total amounts of service productions, which enables a total increase in value appropriations by gig companies.

The quality of labour being contractually free is the quality of gig work that is most similar to capitalism. But it is not completely similar. Marx understands that workers under capitalism are free in a double sense – free from owning and from being bound to the means of production (Marx, 2018, p. 629). Like workers in a capitalist mode of production, gig workers are not bound to the means of production, but they do own their own means of production, like the serfs did. Some gig workers may be structurally disposed to becoming dependent on gig companies for access to work. Workers are single producers and could produce these services without the platform, but it is highly unlikely that workers would face no difficulties in finding clients, especially considering how gig companies maintain pools of clients. This is the meaning given to the idea of worker dependence on platforms. True, workers could find work elsewhere, switch gig companies, or produce the same services by themselves, but there are structural constraints for full-time gig workers that we found in the dominium analysis. These structural constraints are far from being complete in creating and maintaining dependence, but they are partially effective. This is why I argue that labour is contractually free with a tendency for dependence.

From this perspective, gig work is analytically similar to feudalism in many aspects, more so than capitalism. Because gig work emerged out of capitalism, it will not be fully similar to feudalism. It partially shares the status of contractual labour freedom with capitalism. But the rest of the qualities in the mode of production resemble feudalism. This raises the possibility that gig work is techno-feudalistic, and more so that gig work ought to be considered as analytically distinct from capitalism.

## Discussion

In this part, I assess the results of the analysis and frame it into the broader discussion on gig work. In so doing, I argue why gig work differs from traditional capitalism and present my theoretical contributions. At the end I offer insights into the limitations of my results, analysis and argument.

### Connecting the findings with previous literature

As mentioned in the literature review section, Srnicek posits that the digital economy is due to manufacturing sector's decline. Here, gig work is positioned as a continuation of capitalism's drive for growth and profitability by leveraging the usefulness of data. This is intuitive, especially considering how data can continuously make algorithmic management more efficient. However, I agree more with Törnberg's notion that platform capitalism is a continuation of capitalist trends that simultaneously conditions a discontinuity with capitalism. This is exemplified by the analytical findings of this thesis. We saw how gig work shares some continuity with capitalism in the way that workers still retain a degree of freedom. At the same time, other results show that the organisation of gig work is more analytically similar to feudalism in its relations of power, mechanism of value extraction, and qualitative structure as a mode of production. However, I have not empirically observed gig work. I have conceptually reframed research on gig work to make the theoretical contribution to the debate that gig work can be viewed as analytically analogous to feudalism. This implies the possibility that gig work is techno-feudal. In doing this, I am simultaneously implying and arguing that there is a need for rethinking how we view gig work.

Furthermore, Durand does not closely examine gig work. He offers a limited discussion on gig work because his analyses are more concerned with the macroeconomic trends of contemporary society. Here, I have expanded the use of his conceptual tools in order to enable a closer examination of a limited subject area, in this thesis, gig work. This is another theoretical contribution of mine to the sociological research community.

Lastly, Varoufakis favoured viewing gig workers as cloud proles, arguing that they are paid piece rates under precarious conditions. Varoufakis, citing Marx, means that this amounts to the most appropriate form of wage reductions for the capitalist mode of production. Dubal, Alkhatib, Bernstein, Levi and Woodcock made similar cases. I diverge here. The presented primary research and my theoretical reframing clearly shows that this is not the case in gig work. First, gig companies do not employ gig workers in the sense that they purchase their

labour-power. This is the same case made by Jodi Dean. They merely control and maintain a supply of labour. Clients purchase labour-power. Second, this implies the predatory aspect of gig work in the way that gig companies appropriate a share of the value produced by workers, not during the labour process (like in capitalist work arrangements), but at the end. Further, this highlights why it may seem that gig work is a continuation of early industrial piecework. But it also shows that this is not the case because the social relations surrounding gig work are essentially different from piecework.

## **Limitations**

The thesis could have been strengthened by labour process theory to investigate and examine more closely the aspects of predation in gig work. I have given a simple presentation of predation in the section results and analysis in order to support my larger claim of techno-feudalism. It could be of great interest to the field of economics and labour economics to investigate how value is created, appropriated, and how this sets it apart from traditional employment arrangements.

I have found broad general traits in gig work, which limit precise or divergent understandings of gig work. For instance, some content creators own and control companies with smaller production teams of editors and recorders, implying that the work process is cooperative. This and other kinds of gig workers were excluded from the research process.

I have broadly examined research on full-time gig workers with some exceptions. Part-time gig workers likely experience gig work differently than full-time workers. They are also the majority of gig workers. My argument for the tendency for dependence on platforms is contingent on full-time gig workers.

The techno-feudal hypothesis is a multi-disciplinary hypothesis, ranging from sociology, economics to political economy. I may only cover the sociological perspective of techno-feudalism, meaning that there is potential for more research in other disciplines on how gig work could be understood as techno-feudal. One example in this thesis is the absence of a productivity analysis. This would cross into another scientific discipline. However, it could be further researched.

## **Conclusions: the techno-feudal framing of gig work**

The aim of this thesis was to explore how gig work is analytically analogous to feudalism using the framework of techno-feudalism. This is in background to gig work literature usually positioning gig work as platform capitalist work. I operationalised three research questions from Durand's framework and operationalised the concept of dominium with Lukes' three-dimensional view of power. Then I explored these questions by thematically analysing research on gig work. In this section, I present the conclusions on the topic by clearly answering my research questions, and I also remind the reader about the limitations of this thesis. In the end, I propose suggestions for future research.

### **How may research on power dynamics in gig work be explored and thus reworked as a relation of dominium?**

As previously mentioned, dominium was defined as "power over men and land". I have adapted the terminology by replacing "land" with "platform" and "men" with "labour". In addition, to get a broader and deeper understanding of the power relations at hand, I utilised Lukes' three-dimensional view of power. In this way, I divided the domain of research into three analytical themes: power over labour through decision making, power over platforms through setting the agenda, and hidden power over labour and platforms.

I found that gig companies exercise decision-making power over labour through the use of automated algorithmic management. It is a dynamic power relation where gig companies attempt to constrain worker choices during the labour process by withholding key information about work (to prevent strategic declining), and the use of a rating and ranking system that aims to secure worker compliance. Workers have decision-making power over working hours, vacations, time off, etc. The power relation during the labour process could be described as gig companies exercising power with the intent to constrain worker choices, while workers enjoy limited power over deciding on the structure of work. In some cases, workers circumvent and resist the gig companies' power over the labour process.

Further, gig companies exercise a near complete domination of the agenda. I found that workers have little to no possibilities in contesting the terms of service documents outlining the conditions of work.

Lastly, I uncovered structural conditions that motivate workers to comply with generally unfavourable working conditions. I consider this as a form of hidden power because of its

external factors, such as the discriminatory labour market, low occupational value, and lack of work alternatives, and internal factors such as gig work's low pay, unpaid labour, and companies' control over access to work, conditions worker dependence on platforms. This tendency for worker dependence is mostly relevant for workers who work full-time. Part-time gig workers never fully find themselves in a dependent relation to platforms.

### **How may research on value extraction in gig work be explored as predation, i.e. an appropriative allocation mechanism?**

Predation, defined as an allocation mechanism by appropriation, was found to exist within the research literature as a relation in the value extraction in gig work. These were twofold. The first entails gig companies' control over pay, where workers fully produce a service, and a fee is extracted based on a percentage. Second, data of workers is monetised by either selling to third parties or by transforming its usefulness into value. The latter happens by using data to develop the algorithmic management software that enables more efficient value extraction of labour, as we saw with Uber's development of the dynamic pricing model. In some cases, the dynamic pricing model allowed Uber to extract value as much as over 50%. The predatory aspect here is the fact that gig companies are detached from the process of production and instead position themselves as extractors of shares of the value creation.

### **How could general conditions of gig work, as presented in primary research findings, be further explored as qualitatively similar to feudalism using the concept of mode of production?**

I used an adapted table from Durand that presents the conceptual scheme of mode of production. Together with the collection of primary research findings, I explored how conditions of gig work could be illustrated with mode of production. The presented qualities highlighted how the organisation of gig work is qualitatively more similar to feudalism than the capitalist mode of production. The most important limitation here is the fact that I am limited to primary research findings, and my own theoretical reframing of these findings.

### **Suggestions for future research**

The absence of a systematic literature method, a focus on general traits in some parts of gig work, a chief focus on qualitative research, and the risk of decontextualising research limits the generalisability of my thesis and limits its full potential in achieving its stated aim.

Despite these limitations, the thesis presents a strong case to the research community to reconsider gig work as analogous to feudalism. Therefore, future researchers have a multitude

of options to consider. First and foremost, there is a need for extending the reframing of gig work into the empirical world, i.e. conducting confirmatory research on results and ideas generated here. Second, concepts like dominium and predation could be extended to other types of gig workers. For instance, how do we view the power relations for content creators who own and control their own companies? What are the relational dynamics between the content creator, their employee and the platform company? Third, there is a need for a closer inspection of the value creation and extraction in gig work, especially the role of data. Fourth, there is the possibility to examine the relationship between workers, gig companies and clients. How does the client fit into the framework of techno-feudalism or, alternatively, the concept of serfdom? Additionally, researchers could focus on and make clear if gig workers are double exploited by clients and gig companies. Are gig workers simultaneously subject to a capitalist and a feudal value appropriation during work? If gig work is to be seriously understood as a form of work that is analogous to feudal work relations, more empirical research is needed.

## List of references

- Adermon, A., & Hensvik, L. (2022). Gig-jobs: Stepping stones or dead ends? *Labour Economics*, 76, 102171. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.labeco.2022.102171>
- Alexander, W. (n.d.). Will Neoliberal Capitalism Survive the Coronavirus Crash or Is This the Beginning of Techno-Feudalism? *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, 86, 406–431.
- Alkhatib, A., Bernstein, M. S., & Levi, M. (2017). Examining Crowd Work and Gig Work Through The Historical Lens of Piecework. *Proceedings of the 2017 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 4599–4616. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3025453.3025974>
- Anwar, M. A., & Graham, M. (2020). Hidden transcripts of the gig economy: Labour agency and the new art of resistance among African gig workers. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 52(7), 1269–1291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X19894584>
- Berg, J., Furrer, M., Harmon, E., Rani, U., & Silberman, M. S. (2018). *Digital labour platforms and the future of work: Towards decent work in the online world* [Report]. International Labour Organization. <https://apo.org.au/node/244461>
- Binns, R., Stein, J., Datta, S., Van Kleek, M., & Shadbolt, N. (2025). Not Even Nice Work If You Can Get It; A Longitudinal Study of Uber’s Algorithmic Pay and Pricing. *Proceedings of the 2025 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency*, 1484–1497. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3715275.3732099>
- Blumer, H. (1954). What is Wrong with Social Theory? *American Sociological Review*, 19(1), 3. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2088165>
- Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. (2025). *Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2024*.

- Braganza, A., Chen, W., Canhoto, A., & Sap, S. (2022). Gigification, job engagement and satisfaction: The moderating role of AI enabled system automation in operations management. *Production Planning & Control*, 33(16), 1534–1547.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09537287.2021.1882692>
- Brignardello-Petersen, R., Santesso, N., & Guyatt, G. H. (2025). Systematic reviews of the literature: An introduction to current methods. *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 194(2), 536–542. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwae232>
- Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (Fifth edition). Oxford University Press.
- Butler, O., Zampoukos, K., & Mitchell, D. (2024). Antinomies of the gig economy: The annihilation of space by time or the annihilation of time by space? *Population, Space and Place*, 30(8), e2815. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2815>
- Ciotti, F., Hornuf, L., & Stenzhorn, E. (2025). Lock-In Effects in Online Labor Markets. *Journal of Economics & Management Strategy*, 34(3), 615–631.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jems.12612>
- Crocetti, E. (2016). Systematic Reviews With Meta-Analysis: Why, When, and How? *Emerging Adulthood*, 4(1), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696815617076>
- Cropanzano, R., Keplinger, K., Lambert, B. K., Caza, B., & Ashford, S. J. (2023). The organizational psychology of gig work: An integrative conceptual review. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 108(3), 492–519. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0001029>
- Dean, J. (2025). *Capital's grave: Neofeudalism and the new class struggle*. Verso.
- Drahos, P. (1995). Information feudalism in the information society. *The Information Society*, 11(3), 209–222. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.1995.9960193>
- Dubal, V. (2020). The Time Politics of Home-Based Digital Piecework. *Center for Ethics Journal: Perspectives on Ethics, Symposium Issue, 2020*, 50–67.

- Duggan, J., Carbery, R., McDonnell, A., & Sherman, U. (2023). Algorithmic HRM control in the gig economy: The app-worker perspective. *Human Resource Management, 62*(6), 883–899. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.22168>
- Durand, C. (2024). *How Silicon Valley unleashed techno-feudalism: The making of the digital economy*. Verso.
- Eurostat. (2024). *Employment statistics—Digital platform workers*.
- Ferry, W. H. (1962). Forms of Irresponsibility. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 343*(1), 65–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000271626234300109>
- Flemming, K., & Noyes, J. (2021). Qualitative Evidence Synthesis: Where Are We at? *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 20*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406921993276>
- Gilbert, J. (2024). Techno-feudalism or platform capitalism? Conceptualising the digital society. *European Journal of Social Theory, 27*(4), 561–578. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310241276474>
- Gilje, N. (1995). *Samhällsvetenskapernas förutsättningar* (2. uppl). Daidalos.
- Grimshaw, M. (2017). Digital society and capitalism. *Palgrave Communications, 3*(1), 28. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-017-0020-5>
- Guerreau, A. (1997). *Le concept de féodalisme: Genèse, évolution et signification actuelle*. HAL archives.
- Hägg, G., Kurczewska, A., & Poček, J. (2025). A context in mutation: How the gig economy is changing the rules of the game for entrepreneurship? *Review of Managerial Science, 1*–21. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11846-025-00859-0>
- Heinrich, M. (2012). *An introduction to the three volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*. Monthly Review Press.

- Herr, B. (2021). Delivering Food on Bikes. In J. Woodcock & P. V. More (Eds), *Augmented Exploitation: Artificial Intelligence, Automation and Work* (pp. 41–49). Pluto Press.
- Hobsbawm, E. J. E. (1969). A Case of Neo-Feudalism: La Convención, Peru. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 1(1), 31–50. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022216X00000043>
- Howson, K., Ferrari, F., Ustek-Spilda, F., Salem, N., Johnston, H., Katta, S., Heeks, R., & Graham, M. (2022). Driving the digital value network: Economic geographies of global platform capitalism. *Global Networks*, 22(4), 631–648. <https://doi.org/10.1111/glob.12358>
- Hughes, K., & Tarrant, A. (2020). The Ethics of Qualitative Secondary Analysis. In K. Hughes & A. Tarrant, *Qualitative Secondary Analysis* (pp. 37–58). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526482877.n3>
- Ilsøe, A., & Söderqvist, C. F. (2023). Will there be a Nordic model in the platform economy? Evasive and integrative platform strategies in Denmark and Sweden. *Regulation & Governance*, 17(3), 608–626. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12465>
- International Labour Organisation. (2021). *World Employment and Social Outlook 2021: The Role of Digital Labour Platforms in Transforming the World of Work*. International Labour Organisation (ILO).
- Kaine, S., & Josserand, E. (2019). The organisation and experience of work in the gig economy. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 61(4), 479–501. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022185619865480>
- Kalleberg, A. L. (2018). JOB INSECURITY AND WELL-BEING IN RICH DEMOCRACIES. *The Economic and Social Review*, 49(3), 241–258.
- Landow, G. P. (1992). *Hypertext: The convergence of contemporary critical theory and technology*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

- Lata, L. N., Burdon, J., & Reddel, T. (2023). New tech, old exploitation: Gig economy, algorithmic control and migrant labour. *Sociology Compass*, 17(1), e13028.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.13028>
- LeCompte, M. D., & Goetz, J. P. (1982). Problems of Reliability and Validity in Ethnographic Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 52(1), 31–60.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543052001031>
- Lukes, S. (with British Sociological Association). (2005). *Power: A radical view* (2nd ed). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Marx, K. (2018). *Kapitalet: Kritik av den politiska ekonomin. Första boken: Kapitalets produktionsprocess* (Sjunde upplagan). Arkiv förlag.
- McKenzie, M. D. J. (2024). Precarious Participants, Online Labour Platforms and the Academic Mode of Production: Examining Gigified Research Participation. *Critical Sociology*, 50(2), 241–254. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205231180384>
- McKinsey Global Institute. (2016). *Independent work: Choice, necessity, and the gig economy*.
- Möhlmann, M., & Zalmanson, L. (2017). *Hands on the Wheel: Navigating Algorithmic Management and Uber Drivers' Autonomy*. International Conference on Interaction Sciences. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Hands-on-the-Wheel%3A-Navigating-Algorithmic-and-Uber-M%C3%B6hlmann-Zalmanson/70aa7c8eaacf7bf802ec211123281364cbaf528d>
- Montgomery, T., & Baglioni, S. (2021). Defining the gig economy: Platform capitalism and the reinvention of precarious work. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 41(9/10), 1012–1025. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-08-2020-0400>

- Myhill, K., Richards, James, & Sang, K. (2021). Job quality, fair work and gig work: The lived experience of gig workers. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 32(19), 4110–4135. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2020.1867612>
- Newlands, G. (2024). ‘This isn’t forever for me’: Perceived employability and migrant gig work in Norway and Sweden. *Environment and Planning A*, 56(4), 1262–1279. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X221083021>
- Öborn, D. R., MacKenzie, R., Örnebring, H., & Van Couvering, E. (2023). Bypassing the Limitations of Algorithmic Management via Out-of-App Activities and the Emergence of Opportunistic Agency in the Swedish Gig economy. *New Technology, Work and Employment*, n/a(n/a). <https://doi.org/10.1111/ntwe.12323>
- Oxford English Dictionary. (2023). Prole, n. In *Oxford English Dictionary* (3rd edn). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/2009649889>
- Özlük, D. (2023). Next Stage of Global Capitalism: Digital Platforms and Rentier Capitalism. *Ekonomi Politika ve Finans Arastirmalari Dergisi*, 8(4), 681–695. <https://doi.org/10.30784/epfad.1350739>
- Palm, J. (2019). [Review of *Arbetsvillkor och arbetsförhållanden inom gigekonomin*, by G. Aronsson].
- Perrig, L. (2021). Manufacturing Consent in the Gig Economy. In P. V. Moore & J. Woodcock (Eds), *Augmented Exploitation: Artificial Intelligence, Automation and Work* (pp. 75–86). Pluto Press.
- Pesole, A., Urzi Brancati, C., Fernandez Macias, E., Biagi, F., & Gonzalez Vasquez, I. (2018). *Platform Workers in Europe*.
- Pitt, J. (2020). The BigTech-Academia-Parliamentary Complex and Techno-Feudalism [Editorial]. *IEEE Technology and Society Magazine*, 39(3), 5–8. IEEE Technology and Society Magazine. <https://doi.org/10.1109/MTS.2020.3012257>

- Poell, T., Nieborg, D., & Van Dijck, J. (2019). Platformisation. *Internet Policy Review*, 8(4).  
<https://doi.org/10.14763/2019.4.1425>
- Pulignano, V., Piasna, A., Domecka, M., Muszyński, K., & Vermeerbergen, L. (2022). Does it pay to work? Unpaid labour in the platform economy. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.  
<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4013358>
- Ravenelle, A. J. (2019). “We’re not uber:” control, autonomy, and entrepreneurship in the gig economy. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 34(4), 269–285.  
<https://doi.org/10.1108/JMP-06-2018-0256>
- Schwandt, T. (2007). Double Hermeneutic. In *The SAGE Dictionary of Qualitative Inquiry*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/97814129862681.n90>
- Selberg, N. (2023). Autonomous regulation of work in the gig economy: The first collective bargaining agreement for riders in Sweden. *European Labour Law Journal*, 14(4), 609–627. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20319525231178980>
- Sherman, L. (2025, June 23). *How Uber Became A Cash-Generating Machine*. Medium.  
<https://len-sherman.medium.com/how-uber-became-a-cash-generating-machine-ef78e7a97230>
- Srnicek, N. (2017). *Platform capitalism*. Polity.
- Stanford, J. (2017). The resurgence of gig work: Historical and theoretical perspectives. *The Economic and Labour Relations Review*, 28(3), 382–401.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1035304617724303>
- Stebbins, R. (2001). *Exploratory Research in the Social Sciences*. SAGE Publications, Inc.  
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984249>
- Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8(1).  
<https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45>

- Tonsor, S. J. (1979). Feudalism, Revolution and Neo-feudalism: *A Review Article*. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 21(1), 131–138.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500012706>
- Törnberg, P. (2023). How platforms govern: Social regulation in digital capitalism. *Big Data & Society*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20539517231153808>
- Vahabi, M. (2015). *The Political Economy of Predation: Manhunting and the Economics of Escape* (1st edn). Cambridge University Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316460139>
- Vallas, S., & Schor, J. B. (2020). What Do Platforms Do? Understanding the Gig Economy. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 46(1), 273–294. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-121919-054857>
- Van Doorn, N., & Badger, A. (2020). Platform Capitalism’s Hidden Abode: Producing Data Assets in the Gig Economy. *Antipode*, 52(5), 1475–1495.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12641>
- Varoufakis, Y. (2024). *Technofeudalism: What killed capitalism*. Vintage.
- Wallerstein, I. M. (2003). *Historical capitalism with capitalist civilization* (11. impr). Verso.
- Wark, M. (2009). *A Hacker Manifesto*. Harvard University Press.
- Wark, M. (2021). *Capital Is Dead: Is This Something Worse?* Verso Books.
- Watson, G. P., Kistler, L. D., Graham, B. A., & Sinclair, R. R. (2021). Looking at the Gig Picture: Defining Gig Work and Explaining Profile Differences in Gig Workers’ Job Demands and Resources. *Group & Organization Management*, 46(2), 327–361.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1059601121996548>
- Weidenstedt, L., Geissinger, A., Leick, B., & Nazeer, N. (2024). Betwixt and between: Triple liminality and liminal agency in the Swedish gig economy. *Environment and Planning A*, 56(4), 1280–1297. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308518X231172984>

- Wood, A. J., Graham, M., Lehdonvirta, V., & Hjorth, I. (2019). Good Gig, Bad Gig: Autonomy and Algorithmic Control in the Global Gig Economy. *Work, Employment & Society*, 33(1), 56–75.
- Woodcock, J. (2020). The Algorithmic Panopticon at Deliveroo: Measurement, precarity, and the illusion of control. *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organizations*, 20(3), 67–95.
- Wu, D., & Huang, J. L. (2024). Gig work and gig workers: An integrative review and agenda for future research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 45(2), 183–208.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2775>
- Yardley, L. (2000). Dilemmas in qualitative health research. *Psychology & Health*, 15(2), 215–228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440008400302>
- Zuboff, S. (2020). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power* (First trade paperback edition). PublicAffairs.

## Appendix I

### Appendix I: Analytical and descriptive themes

Below is a non-exhaustive list of references used in the results and analysis section. The first table (A1) is provided to present the initial themes and descriptive themes. The next table (A2) will illustrate the refined analytical categorisation of descriptive themes.

Themes	Descriptive	Quote
Algorithmic management	Racist reproduction	Cleaners say that algorithmic management reproduce racism
Algorithmic management	Autonomy	Deactivation because of not accepting work or bad reviews hinders/impedes autonomy/control over work
Algorithmic management	Control/power	Refernce Rosenblat & Stark (2016) who show how effective algorithmic management is in structuring labour force behaviour through soft control.
Algorithmic management	Definition, characteristic	Algorithmic management is defined as “oversight, governance and control practices conducted by software algorithms over many remote workers”. It is characterised by continuously tracking and evaluating worker performance and automatic implementation of decisions.
Algorithmic management	Definition, function, information asymmetry	Algorithmic management arise from the need to govern and enforce their policies. Authors argue that algo management constitute a different managerial logic. It tracks and evaluates behaviour, performance, and automatically implements decisions. All this with lack of transparency on how the system works.[46] High information asymmetry decrease drivers’ sense of control.
Algorithmic management	Disciplinary methods	“Whenever you punish people [...] that’s being treated as an employee” Jose, 60.[65]
Algorithmic management	Internal workings	Algorithms internal workings are seldom disclosed due to competition.
Algorithmic management	Management methods	Three management devices crucial in platform management:
Algorithmic management	Non-compliance	Workers utilise methods of opportunistic agency to circumvent algo management. Non-compliance for competitive advantage in selling own labour power.
Algorithmic management	Purpose, function	Purpose of tech is to coordinate high number of workers, while limiting their discretion in fulfilling work tasks.
Algorithmic management	Resistance	Workers do different methods of resistance such as collectively ignoring Uberpool, or cancelling requests, switching apps, and gaming the system etc.
Platform control	Labour regulation	Platforms construct contract around self-employment in order to avoid labour regulations.
Platform control	Lack of control	Lack of control is a source of stress

Platform control	Power, value appropriation	Platforms are permissive potentates. Permissive because they delegate control, and potantates because they rule. Platforms exercise power over economic transactions by delegating control among participants. They play the tertius gardens (simmel). Govern the service triangle between employers, workers and customers. Control is distributed, but power is centralised. Value creation through effectivising a labour process by removing the middle manager. Feature two is transformation of employment relationship into open relationship. Feature three is disciplining/control measures are limited, easily evaded.
Platform control	Strategies of control	Clients try to recruit gig workers on the side, but platforms have strategies to prevent that.
Platform control	Terms of service	Terms of service are non-negotiable, if worker disagrees with it, then the only option is to leave.
Platform control	Value appropriation	The payment system is complex, uber takes 25% cut.
Platform control	value capture	Monetizing user data does not seem to be a core part of the business model of these four platforms (yepstr, gigstr, taskrunner, instajobs)
Working conditions	Access to work	For migrants, gig work has become a labour market entry point because of low requirements, flexible working hours, rapid recruitment and promises of income.
Working conditions	Access to work, unpaid time	Workers must be continuously on standby in order to gain work.
Working conditions	Autonomy	Uber drivers exercise autonomy over 1. Work hours, vacations, time off, working areas, own cars and other equipment
Working conditions	Collective agreement	Authors describe how the collective agreement is still beneficial to the gig platform
Working conditions	Dependence	Workers remain in gig-work far longer than expected. Frustration with lack of alternatives, discrimination, unstable economic climate = long term
Working conditions	Income volatility + Autonomy	Income volatility is higher among taxi/couriers than compared to hospitality workers. "Primary gig workers" most dissatisfied with income insecurity. Also, hidden work costs such as licensing, maintenance and insurance that worker is responsible for. Some view absence of contractual obligation and rights as worth it for the relative freedom they enjoy.
Working conditions	Lack of feedback, access to work	Some find it better to use apps for work rather than arbetsförmedlingen. Find lack of feedback an issue.
Working conditions	Pay	Reference Berg (2016) study of 1510 AMT workers and crowdflower. Low pay is a result of a high ratio of unpaid work and availability of work.

Working conditions	Pay	Reference D’cruz and Noronha (2016) on Upwork labour, find that a lot of unpaid work in order to get paid work. Its competitive, and workers can see eachother’s bids.
Working conditions	Promises	Gig companies promise flexibility, freedom and the possibility to be one’s own boss.
Working conditions	Tools	Weak employability transfer. Investments into own equipment. Mechanistic labour process emphasises physical capacity and economic investment in equipment.
Working conditions	Categorisation	Distinction between remote gig workers and local gig workers.
	Composition	2.2. Describes 10 categories of workers on platforms: data collection, categorisation, content access, verification/validation, content moderation, market research/reviews, machine learning, transcription, content creation/editing.
Working Conditions	Scheduling	Unpredictable scheduling make social life difficult to maintain, applies to fulltime gig workers

*Table A1: Shows the initial coding from the early reading process.*

<b>Analytical themes</b>	<b>Descriptive themes</b>
Power over labour through decision making	Definition, function, internal workings, management methods, power relations, autonomy, disciplinary methods, non-compliance/resistance
Power over platform through setting the agenda	Lack of feedback, terms of service
Hidden power over labour through the creation of dependence	Dependence, pay, access to work, scheduling,
Predation	Value extraction, value capture, value creation

*Table A2 shows the final refined analytical themes with respective descriptive themes.*

## Appendix II

Durand presents four rental mechanisms that digital companies engage in which appropriate value from other producers, without being a part of the process of production itself.

First, dynamic innovation rent functions by utilising data from users in order to continuously refine and improve algorithms that form the basis for targeted advertising, personalised services and other predictive services. Digital companies make other manufacturing firms produce according to their intellectual property. The data stemming from the later personal use of these products is extracted by the digital companies, and in some cases shared with the suppliers for improvement reasons. Other digital companies, such as Amazon, control digital platforms where suppliers sell their own goods on. Data here is extracted by Amazon, and only relevant data is shared with the supplier. So, there is a centralisation of data where digital companies accumulate large amounts of data and share with suppliers only what is relevant to their business practices (Durand, 2024, p. 139).

The second form of rent is rent from intellectual property. There are companies that specialise in buying rights to intellectual property, or patents, that are known as patent trolls. The ownership of intellectual property enables these companies to charge users of their intellectual property. In this way, simply owning intellectual property impedes innovation and investment opportunities by becoming an additional fee for other companies wishing to use these patents (Durand, 2024, pp. 132–133).

Third, rent from natural monopolies arise as digital companies outsource the manufacturing of their products to manufacturers. Manufacturers become specialised in producing according to the digital company's intellectual property, but the effect is also that manufacturers become dependent on the digital company. This allows for the digital company to control the entire chain of production, from the design to retail. Essentially, the manufacturers become responsible for the production and its associated costs, but the largest share of the value of the final product goes to the digital company. For example, Apple outsource manufacturing of their products to other companies. So, they own all relevant intellectual properties and other immaterial assets (patents, design, brand, digital systems, etc.) and control the coordination between different actors in the chain of production. This conditions manufacturer dependence on Apple. Manufacturers need Apple for access to its intellectual property and consumer markets. The rent, for Apple, arises from the fact that Apple does not engage in the labour necessary to produce the goods, yet they appropriate major parts of the value from each step

of the chain of production. In other words, the source of the rent comes from Apple's ownership of high-value intellectual property and immaterial assets (Durand, 2024, pp. 134–135).

The last form of rent identified by Durand are differential rents from intangible assets. Intangible assets is another word for immaterial products or means of production which typically include software, databases, trademarks (Durand, 2024, p. 4), computer codes, designs and procedures (Durand, 2024, p. 127). Intangible assets may be reproduced at very small costs, compared to tangible assets which has larger costs associated with their reproduction. Thus, the production of respective assets results in different yields. As total production of a product containing intangible and tangible assets increases, the average costs of intangibles decrease rapidly while total cost for tangible assets increase rapidly. This dynamic shows that the digital companies, who control the chain of production, deals with small costs for the reproduction of intangible assets, while the manufacturers for the digital companies pay a larger cost to produce tangible assets. Subsequently, the digital companies receive a disproportionate share of profits from the process of production (Durand, 2024, pp. 136–137). This is the source of the differential rents from intangible assets.

This is how Durand ascribes the digital economy the concept of predation. Many traditional capitalist companies and other users of IT services become dependent on digital companies' infrastructure. Additionally, the underlying argument and what Durand means by rent is that these four rental mechanisms show that digital companies are increasingly disconnected from the process of production and instead relying on other producers to produce while taking a share of the value (Durand, 2024, pp. 174–175).