Translatability, Translational Labor and Capitalist Subsumption: The Communicative Venues of Capitalism

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This essay advances a critique of current capitalism based on the operationalization of Gramsci's take on translation and translatability and Marx's notion of subsumption, and argues that translatability reveals subsumptive processes in communicative terms because it describes how the principle of exchange value productively interacts with language and signification, thus shedding light on how communication captures and is captured by contemporary capitalism. The significance of translational labor becomes especially manifest in the context the so-called gig economy, in which translational labor is needed to fill the gaps between the casualization and exploitation tendencies of the gig labor process and the powerful rhetoric of entrepreneurship and flexibility experienced by gig workers.

In this paper, my goal is to advance a critique of current capitalism based on the operationalization of Gramsci's take on translation and translatability (1975) and Marx's (1990) multilayered notion of subsumption. I will claim that we are all involved in (mostly unpaid) translational laboring, which mediates fundamental political economic contradictions and allows the monetization of information/communication-based practices, in other words expanding the realm of real subsumption of social life under capital.

Such labor (re-) produces a general condition of translatability, by which I refer to functional exchangeability between different meanings, actions and social spheres. I will claim that translatability reveals subsumptive processes in communicative terms because it describes how the principle of exchange value productively interacts with language and signification, thus shedding light on how communication captures and is captured by contemporary capitalism.

The significance of translational labor becomes especially manifest in the context the so-called gig economy. I will show how translational labor is needed to fill the gaps between the casualization and exploitation tendencies of the gig labor process and the powerful rhetoric of entrepreneurship and flexibility experienced by gig workers. Thus, ultimately translational labor contributes to an explanation of a fundamental hegemonic process: how the *necessity* of a particular economy can be bridged, ergo translated, to the perceived *freedom* of the particular subjectivities working for it.

Gramsci and the Expansive Approach to Translation

A growing number of Gramscian scholars have already applied the Gramscian notion of translation in order to reinforce the theoretical link between language and hegemony and to develop a Gramscian social historical hermeneutics (e.g. Boothman 2004; Carlucci, 2013; De Mauro, 2010 Helsloot, 1989; Ives, 2004). Building on and advancing such literature, I will employ translation and translatability as a way to explore a kind communication/information-inspired labor that is both fairly invisible and still systematically exploited by current capitalism in its gig configuration, thus becoming both an important outcome as well as an active agency of subsumption.

The Gramscian takes on translation and translatability expand from linguistic translation (Carlucci, 2013) to more broadly describe a fundamental homology between how we produce and circulate meanings and how we produce and circulate value and commodities (Rossi-Landi, 1968). Gramsci explains it in terms of reciprocal translations of different aspects of a given social formation:

> [Philosophy, politics, and economics] are the necessary constituent elements of the same conception of the world, there must necessarily be, in their theoretical principles, a convertibility from one to the others and a reciprocal translation into the specific language proper to each constituent element. Any one is implicit in the others, and the three together form a homogeneous circle (Gramsci, 1975, p.1109; Q11§65).

The concept of 'homogenous circle' mentioned above re-proposes and qualifies the well-known Marxist metaphor of base and superstructure: identifying reciprocal translation means identifying

the common lines of social determination that link different phenomena— such as linguistic and political economic ones—and therefore allow for their reciprocal translation (Boothman, 2004).

Capital, language and a given social order are considered by Gramsci tightly co-dependent. Not accidentally, the philosophical basis for translation/translatability must be found in his materialist approach to language, i.e. interpreting language within historic specific productive social relations as an articulating practice of making and sharing meanings. In fact, for Gramsci, language simultaneously implies "the creative spirit of the people in its diverse stages and degrees of development" (1994, p. 23) and "the question of collectively attaining a single cultural "climate" (1975, Q10§44), which is attained through articulating classes with divergent political economic and communicative interests into a hegemonic order.

Such coexistence in language of 'difference' and 'unity,' corresponds to Gramsci's distinction between an idiolectic way of speaking, i.e. a spontaneous "immanent grammar" (1975, p. 453), and a hegemonic linguistic mode enforced by social and cultural institutions and by individuals reciprocal monitoring themselves, i.e. "normative grammar" (1975, p. 454). In the same way, on the one hand, we create our own spontaneous translations, by coining metaphors and linking social elements or spheres creatively. On the other, we also translate in normative mode as the result of both structural forces such as the market, as well as of fairly conscious hegemonic projects, which are implemented through social and cultural institutions such as education, the family and the media.

Later on, when discussing the notion of hybrid translational subsumption, we will return to the coexistence of spontaneous and normative translational practices as a combination of reproductive and transformative tendencies of the gig economy. I will discuss how in order to make sense how gig workers, even when exploited and functionally working for capital, in their living, working and interacting with others, produce practical meanings that can often antagonize capital.

Conversely, the normative aspect of translatability mainly originates from the 'logistical' need to socially coordinate and cooperate, therefore to translate across practices, thus guarantying the circulation, appropriation and monetization of that linguistic/knowledge defined as *common* (Negri, 1989), i.e. resources continuously and spontaneously created by people such as languages, culture, traditions and knowledge in general. As we shall see, in the gig context, such spontaneous and publicly accessible creation of translational wealth is appropriated by gig companies, which are capable to capture and monetize it.

The condition of translatability does not depend on any metaphysical or genetic presupposition but rather on the historically based, intimate link of people's communicative practices to productive activities. As Boothman (2004) observes, two people can understand each other because their intelligibility depends on shared human activities, which derive from the fact that we belong to the same form of life, grouped together by a common material and existential struggle against scarcity to (re-) produce life.

In the next section, I will discuss how current capitalism enhances the parallel process of *socialization of information/communicative practices* and of *socialization of capitalist labor process and its subjectivities* via translational labor.

Translational Labor
As previously hinted, linguistic practices always operate as translational practices because our own 'spontaneous grammar' must be, to a relative and mutable degree, translatable to a shared basis, which is represented (but not limited to) by normative grammar. This constant semantic task of circulating meanings becomes vital for a mode of production such as capitalism. Hence, due to its highly developed division of labor—that fragments a common language into separated technical jargons — capitalism requires remarkable levels of social cooperation and coordination (Marx, 1990).

Thus, while capitalism has always been intimately linked to translations and a condition of translatability, I am here concentrating on a particular trend, namely the gig economy, that exemplifies rather well how those translational tasks could be considered as labor as well as their function of mediating economic internal tensions.

By gig economy I refer to a productive organization characterized by an increasing casualization of work, on-demand and free-lancing productive activities, often articulated by platforms and mobile connectivity (Srniceck, 2017). Gig economy reflects a broader shift in the 'spirit' of capitalism (Boltansky & Chiappello, 2007), which tries to defuse a fundamental internal tension between: progressive values such as subjective autonomy, creativity, informality, on the one hand; with an overt aggression against labor, constant control, and de-centralization of production, which is implemented by the incorporation of information communication technologies, on the other. Accordingly later on, I will show how translational labor instrumentally mediates the necessity of a gig labor process aiming at translatability/exchangeability of value and the perceived freedom of workers' exemplified by their subjective 'translational practices.'

As the Autonomist Marxist tradition understands it by the notion of post-Fordism (Dyer-Witheford, 1997), gig economy inherits a new kind of production logic that in many countries of the world started colonizing workers' life in integral ways since 1970s. It accomplished that by expanding the moment of production from the factory to the "social factory" (Tronti, 1966, p.3), by precarizing work, as well by cutting across spheres of social life previously outside the economic realm, such as the affective relations of family and friends, voluntary-humanitarian activities, private sphere and leisure time.

As a result, gig economy has been enhancing the instrumental significance of translatability to capitalism because colonizing new social spheres means essentially establishing—via the commodity and the value form and capitalist kind of social relations— principles of equivalences among previously diverse and even incompatible kind of meanings and practices. That is establishing a condition of reciprocal translations of practices, discourses and language-games previously disconnected and now mediated by capital.

As already observed, while the homology between meaning and value has possibly increased because of the cooperative and social powers of labor that have consistently characterized the capitalist mode of production (Marx, 1990), it becomes with the gig economy increasingly dependent on social knowledge, cooperation, and communicational skills (Read, 2003). In this scenario, wealth is no longer produced by bodies put to work in the closed spaces of the factory, rather by knowledge, communication, and social interactions (Virno, 2001), i.e. by translational practices and their translatable structures.

Furthermore, such knowledge/information/communication based economy establishes vicious cycles that increase the need of translatability. In fact, the context of knowledge-base commodities that are not depleted by consumption (e.g. you can deplete a candy but you cannot so easily do it with a mp3 song or a software) and due to the insinuation of capitalism in all social spheres, creates both a constant overproduction crisis of knowledge capital as well as its fragmentation in specialized languages created by a multiform consumer culture. In turn, both tendencies require translatability to constantly create links between diverse semiotic codes. From this point of view, the very flexibilization and hyper-connectivity of most gig works can be understood as a response to those needs.

In this sense, the economic integration of processes of digitization that took off since early 1970s provides a first striking example of how late capitalism benefits and attempts to increase translatability. In fact, creating digital versions of analog/physical objects such as documents or images allows the complete translatability of potentially all knowledge in bits and bytes, which makes creation, retrieving, and consumption of knowledge considerably more effective.

Not accidentally, digitization conceptually derives from the computational communication developed out of Shannon's information theory (1949), which aimed at a universal translatability of the world by abstracting information from a material and historical context and turning idiosyncratic meaning into consistently translatable information. Thus, when Shannon and Weaver claim that "The fundamental problem of communication is reproducing at one point either exactly or approximately a message selected at another point" (1949, p. 3), they ultimately refer to a translation process between information partitions as well as between the hardware and software components of computers. In fact, the translatability link between a computer hardware and software provides an evidence of the homological link between material/traditional and linguistic/translational kind of work (Rossi-Landi in Ponzio, 2008).

As we shall see with example of online app delivery workers, producing information for their companies, digitalization and information theory are key for the primordial valorization process behind language and knowledge, as they get valorized for instance by translating "knowledge into information, information into numbers, and numbers into value" (Pasqinelli, 2015, p.58).

Being a Translational Worker…?
When Marx describes capitalism as a mode of production characterized by "blindly operating averages between constant irregularities" (Marx, 1990 p. 196), refers to the consistent need of articulating and mediating conflicting aspects like different economic forms such as price and value and, more importantly, the different elements organized by the relations of production. In the case of the gig economy, this is exemplified by a labor process that implies over-exploitation

(Fuchs, 2010), precarity (Gill and Pratt, 2008), and workers who can also perceive realm of free choice of individuals acting as entrepreneurs (Salecl, 2010).

Translational workers are "social workers" in Negri's sense (1982, p. 209), i.e. they operate through social cooperation and with "the linguistic-relational abilities of humankind, in the complex of communicative and cognitive faculties"(Virno, 2004, p. 84). In other words, while we are social workers because we all produce, consume and accumulate this "collective linguistic wealth" (Rossi-Landi, 1968, p. 69), corporations take a much bigger share of it for free, as they are able to both capture and monetize such translational common. Furthermore, while homological to Gramsci's coexistence of immanent and normative grammar, some translations are idiolectic and some are more normative, especially when mediated by IC technology 'protological' codes (Galloway, 2004), capitalist-mediated translations tend to form a general condition of translatability.

While clearly most of us do not work as professional translators, as we work and socially interact, we produce the translatability condition needed for commodities and value to circulate. Following Fuchs' argument (2010) on internet users freely generating content, we enter class relations with capitalist in so far as we need to work thus keep translating and keep using commercial online platforms (e.g. Facebook, Whatsapp, Google) and connective technologies such as cell phones or emails. We also enter exploitative relations because we produce unpaid surplus translational value—such user generated content. So, even if we don't sell our translational labor, we create translational value produced by socially necessary translational labor time: i.e. the not-so- easily-pinpointable-but-still-existing translational time needed for a particular translation to implement: such as the Facebook environment establishing reciprocal translations via the meaningful practice of "likes' reciprocally translating clients and friends; or the neoliberal translation of philosophically based 'freedom' into a culture of consumer 'choice.'

Echoing the Gramscian distinction between spontaneous and normative grammar, translational work comprises both free and compelling aspects. In fact, like Terranova's free labour (2000), translational labor is voluntary and freely creative but is also compelling and often unavoidable because we need to be able to speak outside the idiomatic expression of our family or social regions, we need to write essays in relatively formal (ergo translatable) language when in schools or speaking to colleagues who do not perform or have been trained for the same tasks.

In order to understand the function and social necessity of translational work/labor, I put it into dialogue with other two important labor-related conceptualization of communication, i.e. Fuchs's communication symbolic value (2016), and Lazzarato (1997) and Negri (1989) immaterial labor. On the one hand, for Fuchs communication involves the task of transporting commodities' symbolic value, in other words, the use value promise and its annexed ideologies that motivate consumers to buy a given car or a given electronic gadget. So for instance, Fuchs (2016) claims that social media users "are transport workers who transport use-value promises (commodity ideologies) to potential consumers" (p. 30).

Incorporating the significance of translational value in Fuchs' transportation example, I argue that such transportation requires adequate venues/roads: a mediating signifying realm in which symbolic value can express itself via semiotic codes (language but not limited to it) and therefore

make explicit a relational phenomenology of equivalences, relationships, links, and compare/contrasts with other commodities use-value.

Thus, in my view, the transportation of symbolic value requires a pre-condition of translation as a kind of logistical task that creates semantic equivalences. Thus, still within the transportation metaphor, translational workers are the ones who build highways, bridges but also take care of road signals and gasoline stations… That is the production of communicational space in the same way as Lefebvre (1991) talks about 'abstract space' as a functional realm to capitalism: a generalized space of representation characterized by the "repression of quality over quantity" (1991, p. 353), a domain expressing "capitalist relations their logic" (1991, p. 53). In other words, without a semantic frame of references, the signs conveying Fuch's symbolic value would be meaningless and the encoding/decoding moment of mediation would hardly ever match (Hall, 1981).

Translational labor relates but also differs from immaterial labor as conceptualized by Lazzarato (1997) and Negri (1989). While both involve activities that are not normally recognized as traditionally value-productive, translational labor operates at a broader level compared to the immaterial one because while the latter refers to the 'informational-cognitive' tasks involved in the labor process and the production of cultural content of commodities, the former provides the conditions that allow the particular use value of cultural meanings to find equivalences, value to become abstracted into abstract values. So, while immaterial labor generates an image and a lifestyle to commodities (Read, 2003), people's translational labor makes sure that such immaterial halo is communicable across different social spheres, social practices and audiences.

Finally, according to Negri (1989), post-fordism creates a dynamic of social relation and subjectivities all centered around communication and information and their accumulation in terms of storage, processing, transmission, which is produced by immaterial labor. However, while Negri claims that communication capital constitutes a necessary component of the "bundle of goods and services that capital must deliver to workers in order to ensure its own continuing development" (in Dyer-Witheford, 1994, p. 95), I claim that such communication capital via translation also constitutes a necessary value that the socialized worker must deliver to socialized capital. Thus, making more explicit the productive and subsumptive power of communication.

Thus, to summarize, translational labor is essentially a circulatory and logistical activity, which can be considered productive in the expanded realm of the valorization process typical of post-Fordism and gig economy, and which is produced by socialized workers. In the final section of the paper, I will illustrate how, interacting with the Marxian notion of subsumption, my conceptualization can be used to de-construct and criticize gig work.

My Frantic Life…Translating "Gig"
In order to elucidate the explanatory value of the framework so far laid out, I draw on the New York Times' contributor Andy Newman and his recent article (2019) on his experience as food deliverer employed by online apps. While I will show how both those delivery companies and their workers use translational labor, I will also point to the fundamental class relation difference: platforms use such labor to extract value at the 'objective' level of labor process, workers mainly use it to fulfill their tasks as well as to rationalize their subjective condition. In

order to highlight that, I examine Newman's report through two main questions: 1) How does translational labor mediate the objective/subjective tension characterizing gig work; and 2) How does such mediation facilitate capitalist subsumption (i.e. further colonization of social life)?

Approaching my first question entails exploring a fundamentally Gramscian concern about hegemony building and how a coercive and exploitative economic organization such as gig economy can translate "a necessity recognized and proposed to themselves [the workers] as freedom, and not simply the result of coercion" (Gramsci, 1975, p. 178). Thus, linguistically but also semiotically, we must look for indicators of how a poorly paid, unstable and exploitative work can translate into perceive subjective opportunities.

Mobile digital technology, the great enhancer of the gig economy, plays a fundamental mediation role in this sense. Because of the poor wages of this kind of occupation, many riders work for multiple platform companies at the same time. While such structural necessity implies an aggravated casualization and intensification of work also translates into a context of personal and entrepreneurial choice. So, for instance riders like journalist Newman, working for both Ubereats and Postmates, often receives multiple orders from both companies and must assess and make a business bet whether he can fulfill all of them:

> I had to decide: Take on three orders at once and risk falling behind? Stick with Uber Eats, which was running a $10 bonus for doing six deliveries by 1:30, or try for a Postmates bonus?[…] Information was limited. The Uber Eats app doesn't tell you where the delivery is going until you pick it up" (2019).

Like in the romanticized rhetoric of venture capitalism, riders must make a bet, as they have limited information and even less time, and therefore must be ready like good entrepreneurs to quickly grasp the good opportunity and act fast on it. According to Newman, this requires "the cognitive reflexes of a day trader" (2019). Especially in a kind of job in which the boundaries between employment and self-employment are maliciously opaque, pressing the cell phone button "accept" orders means translating a compelling situation (i.e. being in need of working multiple jobs) into a partial fiction of self-employed discretional business.

In fact, each time the gig worker accepts an order, *de facto* enters exploitative class relations: surplus value is extracted by the delivery job but also by the translational job of providing for instance logistical data to companies about how effectively can workers cover urban ground and rely on cognitive promptness. Recalling van Doorn's research on platform capitalism, Newman comments:

> 'couriers' real value to app companies is not the delivery service rather the "data harvested like pollen as we make our rounds, data that will allow them to eventually replace us with machines" (2019).

Thus, returning to how information theory can be valorized (Pasquinelli, 2015), a fundamental way in which translational labor creates value is by translating analogical reality into digital data about speed, space, stopping lights, rush hours times of particular areas of the city.

At the same time, while the rate of exploitation of translational labor is extremely high because it goes almost completely unpaid, riders recognize the added flexibility and better pay (compared to working as a delivery guy for a restaurant) and tasting the thrill of delivery bet on multiple orders or earning a "Uber Eats Quest bonus" (Newman, 2019). Thus, this particular example of gig work also shows the fundamental translational task of easing and defusing the tension between the necessity and exploitation of a labor process and the gratification of a perceived choice, and a degree of agency. That is, in the end, a pivotal condition for a hegemonic regime funded on the combination of coercion + consent (Gramsci, 1975).

Translation as Subsumption
The same essential question of hegemony (re-)production and can be explored in even more nuanced ways by Marx's multilayered notion of subsumption, through which I will then approach my second question about capital reproduction. The reason to introduce subsumption at this point of the argument and analysis is to push further the study of the link between communicative practices and capitalism. In fact, while such a link has been consistently and brilliantly invoked by the critical literature of the last hundred years— from Voloshinov and Gramsci, through Rossi-Landi, Barthes, Williams, Debord, Baudrillard and Hall, up to more recently Marazzi, Fuchs and Aune— most frameworks linking words and value remain predominantly descriptive rather than analytical. Thus, my effort to establish homologies between *communication and translation, translation and labor*, and *translational labor and subsumption* provide explicit links and categories of analysis to understand current communicative capitalism.

Marx describe "subsumption," (1990, p.448) as the variable level of integration of a given labor process into capitalist process of valorization and, more broadly in the post-fordist and gig economy context (e.g. Negri, 1989), into the re-organization of social life as a whole.

Reflecting the abstraction power of capitalism, translational labor operates as subsumption by absorbing particular meanings/idiolects/practices into a universal standard, agglutinating them according to their function in the capitalist production process, thus creating a condition for their translatability operating as exchangeability. As Gunn eloquently puts it, the power of capitalism resides in "its capacity to reform pre-capitalist relations as its own mediations and thereby to translate them into modes of existence of itself" (Gunn, 1987, p.61).

Translational labor 'translates' into subsumption by creating bridges between otherwise relatively insulated language-games (Wittgenstein, 1953) that social specialization and division of labor almost naturally generate. Thus, circulating meanings across social space and social time and by connecting dominant communicative practices with residual (past) and emergent (future) ones. Trying to make sense of how both historically and logically capital carves its space into preexisting social contexts, Marx distinguishes four types of capitalist subsumption identified as 1) formal; 2) real; 3) hybrid; and 4) ideal (Murray, 2014). I will use such taxonomy to show how concretely translational labor operates in the gig economy realm.

Formal Translational Subsumption
If for Marx this type of subsumption takes place when a pre-existing productive activity is appropriated by capitalism, then formal translational subsumption means bridging a

communicative/cognitive practice to the scope of value form, commodity form and to/by capitalist labor process, commodifying it. In the case of emblematic gig economy workers employed by online app. delivery companies witnessed by New York Times reporter Newman, formal translational subsumption occurs first of all at the level of offsetting costs (from the company perspective), which implies commodifying the rider's body and his/her assets, such as the bike and cell phones. In other words, cognitive and physical skills implied by being able of using those tools are being appropriated by capital.

Moreover, formal translational subsumption takes place when appropriating workers communicational/relational skills at two levels: first, riders must translate the once needed interpersonal relations to manage orders across the company organization into a communication with a robot/app, which for instance means accepting orders via cell, being familiarized with the app and that translates into moving across the urban fabric. From this point of view, as Pasquinelli (2015) observes, connective technology-intensive gig economy relies on the translational labor that riders must mobilize at the machinic level, i.e. people-machine interface: "This map is always changing, always changing, always changing, it never stops changing", Newman reports (2019), which refers to the translational task of turning signs about represented space into urbanely concrete 'red zones' and 'hot spots' or the client's address.

Secondly, in the services sector like delivery, the sociability and communicability developed outside the job environment is employed for a salaried activity in order to create and sustain good clients and colleagues relationships, i.e. working at the level of affective relations (Cuninghame, 2010). This is how Newman puts it:

> It was nice not having an answer to a live person as I made my rounds. But taking orders from an all-seeing robot overlord could be eerie. "We've noticed you are heading in the wrong direction," read a message from Postmates one day as I detoured for an Uber Eats order (Newman, 2019).

Real Translational Subsumption
While formal translational subsumption introduces particular communication practices to wage labor relations, real translational subsumption implies a qualitative transformation of such communication in order to intensify and/or facilitate the labor process. For instance, in the gig economy kind of work, the reduction of face-to-face to the single relationship between the individual and the digital platform makes delivery bikers as emblematic of digital neo-Taylorism aimed at the automated management of work performance (Vecchi, 2017), therefore implying an important intensification of labor.

In addition, in the case of delivery workers, with a labor process controlled by algorithmic management of the app, with very limited info, riders strives to make rationale economic decisions: "All day long, while dodging taxi doors or battling buses for a sliver of asphalt, a delivery person thinks about time and money. How long will this order take? What will it pay?" (Newman, 2019).

Clearly, formal and real translational subsumption are often overlapping each other. In the case of gig-economy occupations this happens rather often as the very 'on-demand' and 'online'

nature of those jobs such as delivery services (Todoli-Signes, 2017) make them constantly colonizing more spheres and more of their workers' time. In this sense, the fluid terrain between formal and real translational subsumption constitutes one of the 'bloodiest' translational battle-ground between labor and capital in the current political economic context. That is because translational labor is needed to circulate and exchange information and value across different social spheres.

Illustrative of that is online delivery app Deliveroo's communication guideline for managers (Butler, 2017) that reveals the constant effort to translate employment subordination into a discourse of self-employment: "independent supplier" instead of "employee/worker/staff;" "onboarding" instead of "hiring;" "supplier agreement" instead of "employment contract;" "working *with* Deliveroo," instead of "working *for* Deliveroo; "riders choosing an area of work" instead of "assigning riders to a zone;" "Kit/equipment/branded clothing" instead of "uniform;" "logging in" instead of "starting a shift/starting a session/clocking in;" "fee per delivery" instead of "piece rate;" and finally "rider community" instead of "fleet."

Thus, the example above shows how such labor process capitalizes on re-signifying preexisting meanings of what it means to be free and flexible to describe an emergent form of work and its annexed exploitation dynamics. As a result, the meaning of freedom, similarly to Marx ironic remark about how capitalist exploitation requires the workers to be 'free' (1990), translates the meaning of freedom from a-capitalist to capitalist logic.

Hybrid Translational Subsumption
This kind describes how capitalism can take advantage of a particular social activity without necessarily controlling it, thus when no formal or real subsumption have been achieved. Accordingly, hybrid translational subsumption manifests the inherent dialectical agency and outcomes of translation. This is why if capitalist translation ideally aims at a creating pure abstract communicational space for value exchange purposes, it cannot avoid producing hybrid translational space in the process. As I discussed more in detail elsewhere (Briziarelli, 2018), this happens for instance with urban space and technology.

Thus, while the deployment of information/communication technology is mostly aimed at intensifying and increasing control of the typical post-fordist labor process (Moore, 2018), such control is never complete and the consistent connectivity modes (e.g. via mobiles, computers) combined with the implied necessity of constantly translating for communication from one device to another, produces hybridity and reversibility. In fact, delivery workers can exploit such sociality to re-translate flexibility and freedom to a politicized denunciation of unfair working conditions Thus, logistical and instrumental practice are translated into strategies of protest, as the wave of protests of the last three years in Europe so well displays. As I argued elsewhere (author, 2018), gig workers take advantage of such hybridity in order to re-appropriate the space of the city as a space for political mobilization and antagonize capitalism.

While the main narrative of paper predominantly conveys a logic of reproduction and capitalist colonization, it is important to notice how ultimately, hybrid subsumption reveals an inherent intractable productiveness of translational practices, which cannot produce new abstract logistical venues for meaning and value without activating potentially subversive and capital

antagonizing implications. Thus, translation, even in its purely subsumptive guise, cannot establish homologies and equivalence without irremediably violate them.

Ideal Translational Subsumption
Finally, *Ideal Translational Subsumption*, which describes an idealization process (Szakowski, 2016) taking place when capitalism becomes the dominant mode of production and functions as role model for other 'non colonized' social spheres. Accordingly, ideal translational subsumption displays how ideologically driven imagination shapes our not-directly commodified discursive practices, *as if* those practices were indeed subsumed. For instance, if the dominant labor relation inside capitalism is wage labor, then calling gig food delivery rider as 'self-employee' (Tassinari and Maccarone, 2017) reveals ideal subsumption of a relation not subsumed by wage labour but that operates 'as if it were' (Murrray, 2004).

As mentioned before, the translation behind "as if it were" is both objectively imposed as well as subjectively felt by the single rider, who monitors his/her own productivity (Formenti, 2012), becoming entrepreneurs of oneself (Brökling, 2016). Such subjective translation is at the basis for a gig economy hegemony building, because instead of relying on solely coercive and hetero-directed mechanisms (such as the app constantly geo-locating riders) gig workers experience self-direction, self-promotion of subjective resources and self-empowerment (Salecl, 2010). As a result, such tension is leading towards a model of subjectivity and society based on techniques of self-motivation, flexibility, and individual performance (Simone and Chicchi, 2017).

As a level of subsumption frequently operating at the level of ideology and practical consciousness, ideal translational subsumption mainly concerns the discourse-based processes of subjectivation because "capitalism 'must constitute itself subjectively.... develop the desires and habits necessary for it to perpetuate itself" (Read, 2003, p. 114). According to Rolnik (2011), in such environment subjects become managers of themselves and of all social relationships, extending to affective relations the logic of costs and benefits. Furthermore, those subjects partly internalize such flexibility as an apologetic ideology of self-enactment and individual choice. The result is a subjectivity that experiences the digital gig-economy by the ambiguity of exploitation and empowerment, along the realization/self-exploitation and pleasure–pain axis (Robbie, 2003).

   Illustrative of that is Newman's reporting comments of delivery colleague Bahadir Rozi when he says that: "The best thing about this job is freedom" (2019). Possibly, even more telling is the already mentioned push for a sense self entrepreneurship, here described:

> The apps roll out ever-changing and often confusing menus of bonuses and incentives borrowed from the video-game and slot-machine industries, engineered to convince riders that they may yet win as long as they keep playing. But with so many riders chasing the same prizes, they often fall short (2019).

This comment leads us back to the hegemonic question of translating necessity into freedom, which in this case operates at a practical ideological level. Ideal translational subsumption thus points to how highly creative communicative practices, such as speaking though metaphors and idiomatic expression, can link and therefore pave the way for the other forms of subsumption.

All in all, the established relationship between translational labor practices and the four types of subsumption here briefly reviewed in the context of gig work ultimately accounts for the multilevel ways in which communicating becomes a highly productive and reproductive both of subjective practices that shape our subjectivities as well as of functional homological structures. However, as hybrid subsumption reveals, the remarkable power of translational labor to socialize us to capitalism logics is still without guarantees.

Translation Without Guarantees
In this paper, I employ a Gramscian and Marxian based notion of translational labor to establish a series of fundamental correspondences between communication-signification and labor, the circulation of meaning and exchange value, and finally between translations and hegemony. From this point of view, the present translation perspective represents a thesis on the homology between linguistic mediation and social mediation, i.e. a language-inspired exploration of the dialectics of organized human interaction.

As a result, I described translational labor as a mostly unpaid/informal activity, which, in its function of circulating and exchanging meanings, appears to be a fundamental condition for both broad social interaction and cooperation as well as for the particular kind of productive activities necessitated by capitalism. Thus, not accidentally, translational activities concurrently contribute to produce the *public wealth* represented by the so called 'common' and 'general intellect', e.g. language, knowledge and culture, as well as the *privatized wealth* represented by capital or the management of a hegemonic regime.

While this paper mostly concentrated on its subsumptive function, translation is essentially open and intractable, as discussed in the portion dedicated to hybrid translational subsumption. In fact, its only inevitability is to turn into a terrain of political struggle and hegemonic negotiation. Exemplary of that is how the very notion of 'precarity' has been mobilized by gig workers, scholars and activists (Neilson and Rossiter, 2008) as a specular and counterpoising translation of neoliberal ideology of 'flexibility' and 'freedom.'

In this sense, the example of the online delivery workers, representative of the broader gig landscape, is particularly illustrative of the permanent need of translational labor to mediate all internal tensions implied by this economy: between the coercive and exploitative nature of the gig labor process and its subjective rationalization as an opportunity for flexible choice, venture capitalist agency and even freedom.

Moreover, in these information-communication technology intensive kind of gig jobs, translational activity constitutes a fundamental 'media technology.' This mediation links: the immanent grammar of each delivery worker and the normative grammar of the market and algorithmic management; and the language of a digital realm (such as the Google maps offered by the app) and the analogical language of an urban environment, with its ever changing landscape made of weather, streets and people.

Hence, both translation/translatability theory and its historic and capitalist-specific contextualization as subsumption activity in the gig economy, describe a broader messy

imperfect enterprise that while tends to establish semantic equivalences that favor capitalist abstraction and exchangeability, consistently creates novel meanings.

Thus, in my view, both my materialist and dialectical approach built on tensions provide an important entry point for the theorization of communication within the framework of an expansive, generalized and critical understanding of political economy (Baudrillard, 1981), which eloquently displays how "communication and its material means are intrinsic to all distinctively human forms of labour and social organization, thus constituting indispensable both of the productive forces and of the social relations of production" (Williams 2005, p.50).

At the same time, while echoing important theoretical debates about the relationship between language and hegemony, cognitive activities and labor and the materialist conception of ideology, the perspective here expound also contributes to an applied framework that can start opening many of the *black boxes* (Scholz, 2016) that surround the gig economy and platform capitalism.

The perspective conveyed by translational labor can indeed be applied to explain the preponderant concern of the current economy to 'enclose' the general intellect and communication commons (Vercellone, 2007) through the expansion and enforcement of intellectual property rights, to the rising of the knowledge and gig-economy workers class (Mosco and McKercher, 2007), and finally to the present general fetish around of words exchange. Especially, the context when such fetish is prompting a dangerous proto-fascist take on language and media as a whole—consisting of post-truths, fake-news and media spectacles (Giroux, 2019)—makes the intimate link of language and capital one of the first black boxes we must crack open.

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