Anna Oechslen

Global Platform Work

Negotiating Relations in a Translocal Assemblage

Arbeit und Alltag

campus

Global Platform Work

Work and Everyday Life

Ethnographic Studies on Work Cultures

Series of the Commission "Working Cultures" in the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Empirische Kulturwissenschaft (German Society for European Ethnology and Folklore)

Edited by Irene Götz, Gertraud Koch, Klaus Schönberger and Manfred Seifert

Volume 25

Anna Oechslen works as a research associate at the Leibniz Institute for Spatial Social Research in Erkner. She holds a PhD in cultural anthropology from the University of Hamburg.

Anna Oechslen

Global Platform Work

Negotiating Relations in a Translocal Assemblage

Campus Verlag
Frankfurt/New York

This book has been published open-access with financial support from the open access publication fund of the Leibniz Association and the Leibniz Institute for Research on Society and Space.

Revised version of the dissertation "Global Platform Work. Negotiating Relations in a Translocal Assemblage", submitted at the University of Hamburg in 2022.

The work, including all its parts, is subject to copyright protection. The text of this publication is published under the "Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International" (CC BY 4.0) licence.
The full licence text can be found at:
https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.en



Any use that exceeds the scope of the CC BY 4.0 licence is not permitted without the publisher's consent.
The images and other third-party material contained in this work are also subject to the aforementioned Creative Commons licence, unless otherwise stated under references / illustration index. Insofar as the material in question is not subject to the aforementioned Creative Commons licence and the usage in question is not permitted under statutory provisions, the consent of the respective rightsholder must be obtained.

ISBN 978-3-593-51807-7 Print
ISBN 978-3-593-45567-9 E-Book (PDF)
DOI 10.12907/978-3-593-45567-9

Copyright © 2023 Campus Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt/Main
Cover design: Campus Verlag GmbH, Frankfurt/Main
Typesetting: le-tex xerif Typesetting-Font: Alegreya
Printing office and bookbinder: Beltz Grafische Betriebe GmbH, Bad Langensalza
Beltz Grafische Betriebe is a certified carbon-neutral business (ID 15985–2104-1001).
Printed in Germany

www.campus.de
www.press.uchicago.edu

Contents

1. Introduction 7
   - 1.1 Background and context 8
   - 1.2 Research problem 11
   - 1.3 Research questions 14
   - 1.4 Conceptual framework: Assembling volatile connections 16
   - 1.5 Methodology 17
   - 1.6 Argument and structure of the dissertation 18

2. Literature Review: Lines of Transformation in the Gig Economy ... 21
   - 2.1 Overview: Dimensions of platform work 22
   - 2.2 Online platforms and the transformation of work 24
   - 2.3 Gaps and blind spots in the literature on platform work 37

3. Conceptual Framework: Work as Practices of Assembling 41
   - 3.1 De-centring economic productivity: Work beyond paid employment 41
   - 3.2 Platform-mediated work from a global assemblage perspective 51
   - 3.3 Working definition of practices of assembling 56

4. Research Approach and Methodological Perspectives 59
   - 4.1 Co-construction of research, researcher, and field 59
   - 4.2 The lens of digital ethnography 61
   - 4.3 Research process 62
   - 4.4 Concluding reflections on methodology 77

5. Negotiating Value 81
5.1 What is the value of a logo? Negotiating fair rates 83
5.2 Investing in subjective value: Trade-offs and long shots 89
5.3 Process matters: Being valued as a creative professional 98
5.4 Synthesis: Heterarchical negotiations of value in platform work 101
6. Managing Emotions 105
6.1 Between thrill and frustration: Managing one's own emotions . 106
6.2 Emotional relations 112
6.3 "Finding you a designer you'll love": How platforms mediate emotions 123
6.4 Synthesis: Limited knowledge and volatile trust 128
7. Aligning Relations 133
7.1 Assembling the life-work continuum 134
7.2 Everyday practices of aligning relations in platform work 145
7.3 Synthesis: Ambiguous alignment 157
8. Synthesis: Negotiating Relations – Assembling Global Platform Work 163
8.1 Summary of findings and answers to research questions 163
8.2 Practices of assembling 168
8.3 Work in a volatile, complex, and opaque environment 180
9. Conclusion 183
9.1 Main contributions 184
9.2 Significance and implications 187
9.3 Limitations and directions for further research 189
List of Figures 191
Works Cited 193
Acknowledgements 203

1. Introduction

This study seeks to explore and theorise remote gig workers' everyday work practices of making and sustaining global connections mediated by online platforms. By shedding light on an aspect of work that is usually unpaid and often overlooked, the insights generated from this study are anticipated to contribute to debates about how work can be organised, managed, and allocated more fairly. Moreover, with the notion of 'practices of assembling', concepts of work are extended to better reflect everyday experiences of work in the gig economy. The study focuses on everyday practices by freelance designers based in India, who connect to overseas clients via online platforms. With online observations, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and digital photo diaries, I compiled key elements of a global assemblage of platform work and related them to each other.

This chapter begins with a short vignette of how Ankit,[1] one of the research participants of the study, organises his everyday work. This is followed by an outline of transformations in the world of work brought about by the growing influence of online platforms, and prevalent academic perspectives on platform work. Building on this, I present the conceptual framework, the purpose of the study, and the research questions guiding analysis. Subsequently, the research design and methodology are outlined. The chapter concludes with an outline of how the thesis is structured.

1 All research participants' names have been pseudonymised to ensure the protection of their personal data.

1.1 Background and context

Ankit usually starts his workday in the early afternoon, Indian Standard Time. Most of his clients are based in the US or Europe, so it is still night or early morning for them when he sits down at his desk. He lives in Pune, a university town in India, not very far from Mumbai but not exactly in the centre of the creative industries, either. At the time of our interview in March 2020, he works as a freelance graphic designer, combining local jobs, which he gets mainly through recommendations, with remote gigs mediated by the online freelance platform 99designs.

On 99designs, he regularly participates in design contests like this one:[2] Manuela Altenhagen, a coach for personal development based in Germany, wants a new logo for her business, which should include her name and her slogan, "personal coach with heart". On the website, she provides a brief description of her business in German and English, using keywords like inner satisfaction, recognising one's strengths, and achieving harmony. Moreover, she has selected colours for designers to choose from and located the design she is envisioning with sliders along the lines of several pre-set categories, between classic and modern, grown-up and youthful, feminine and masculine, playful and sophisticated, economic and luxurious, geometric and organic, and between abstract and specific. In addition, she has attached a pdf document with exemplary designs that transport her ideas, including the font she likes, and specified that the logo should contain a heart to reflect her slogan.

What is more, Ankit can see what files he is supposed to deliver if he wins the contest and how much the winner will be paid: 190 US dollars, in this case, for a bronze contest. If Ankit decides to participate, he creates a logo to match Manuela's brief and hopes to hit the nerve of what she was looking for. With the information he gets from a contest brief, he often finds it challenging to grasp a client's vision – quite often, he finds that the information only equips him for "making a design based on an educated guess of what they would like" (Interview with Ankit, 01–03-20). If Ankit manages to win the contest, he will hand over the design that he has created in the file formats that were specified in the brief and sign the rights to the design over to Manuela Altenhagen. Afterwards, she will have five days to review his design

2 This fictional contest brief is based on an aggregation of different contest briefs; names and details have been altered to ensure anonymity.

and request minor changes until the payment is released to Ankit. If someone else's design is chosen, Ankit will not earn any money for the design that he has created.

Ankit originally studied animation, but he found that the Indian animation scene did not offer him many job opportunities. As an alternative source of income, he transitioned to graphic design, starting with small jobs for friends. Quite early on, he started using online platforms to get design jobs, attracted by ads he saw online and recommendations from friends. When he started venturing into platform work, he tried out different platforms, struggling to win any competitions at first as a young and rather inexperienced designer. By taking part in different contests, he gradually found out how to create designs that appeal to clients, and he took breaks in between to study design principles in depth via online courses and lectures that he found on YouTube. Now, he predominantly uses 99designs and he has advanced to the level of a platinum designer there. Like all designers who register on the platform, he had to verify his identity first by uploading his ID and started as an entry-level designer. This means that he could only participate in a limited number of contests in the beginning, and only bronze briefs like Manuela's were open to him. After around a month, he contacted the 99designs team to ask for his designs to be reviewed and proceeded to the next level after this. Over the course of a year, he made his way up to the highest level, platinum designer, which allows him to participate in all briefs from bronze to platinum. While bronze briefs start at roughly 200 US dollars, he can get up to 1400 US dollars for winning a platinum contest. The design levels are not necessarily a measure of the complexity of a task but rather reflect the stratification of designers: if a client submits a platinum-level brief, 99designs promises them submissions from their best designers.

Having access to all levels of design briefs means that Ankit can earn much more money on 99designs, of course, but it also makes his work there more complex. When he chooses which one of the many contests to participate in, he weighs the risks and rewards associated with each design level: if he chooses a lower-paying brief, his chances of winning are quite good, but he also will not be paid very much for his design. If he chooses a platinum brief, by contrast, he can earn a lot of money, but competition is fierce and his risk of losing and thus having worked in vain is high. To mitigate this risk and to make the decision on a brief a bit less complex, he has created a structure for himself where he switches between levels of briefs daily: he looks only at silver briefs on Monday, at gold briefs on Tuesday, and at platinum

briefs on Wednesday, for example. This way, he spreads the risk and reduces the complexity of briefs on offer to some extent. He worries that if he did not do this, he may spend the whole day getting lost in different opportunities, never getting to the point of deciding which brief to apply for: "because, see, there are like a thousand briefs on 99designs and it's really hard to go through all of them, obviously, because there are a thousand briefs and, me personally, just my personality, I'm quite indecisive" (Interview with Ankit, 01–03-20). Once he has chosen what briefs he wants to work on during the day, he tries to finish them as efficiently as possible – as he puts it: "online, I have to dish out designs pretty fast, and I cannot spend a lot of time designing online, because, as I said, it can get rejected instantly, so, I have to just give them the gist of the design" (Interview with Ankit, 01–03-20). This phase of creating designs for design contests varies – sometimes, he gets stuck on a brief for the entire day, other times, he completes two or three in an afternoon if he does not have any local jobs to complete. Afterwards, he usually goes out to meet friends for a couple of hours and often fits in another shift after midnight until about 3 or 4 am to interact with clients who are online or to incorporate feedback that he got in the meantime.

Just like his remote clients, I have never met Ankit in person. I found his account through the "Indian designers" subgroup of the 99designs designers' forum. Later, I found out that he is mainly active there to catch the 99designs team's attention, hoping to be featured on their website and thus to increase his chances to be approached by prospective clients to work together without going through a design contest first. We talked on Skype in early March 2020, about two weeks before face-to-face interviews became a thing of the past for the remainder of my thesis due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, the medium of communication was more a matter of convenience, to bridge the roughly 850 kilometres between Bengaluru, where I was based during my field stay, and Pune, where he lives and works. As an active user of the online platform 99designs, Ankit is one of millions of workers in the rapidly growing global gig economy.

Online platforms have come to mediate a wide range of different jobs, from location-based services, such as driving a taxi or delivering meals, to web-based services, including graphic design or translation but also medical consultations, for example (cf. ILO, 2021, p. 43). As the vignette above illustrates, continuously forming new work connections, navigating these multiple connections, and interacting with the mechanisms of the online platform, takes a lot of work. Gig workers who connect to clients remotely

through online platforms spend a lot of time and effort organising their work and preparing the ground for gigs – according to an ILO report, "[f]or every hour of paid tasks, workers spend about 23 minutes on freelance platforms and 20 minutes on microtask platforms doing unpaid work" (ILO, 2021, p. 166), such as searching for work, setting up and curating one's profile. Although they make up such a substantial portion of workers' time, these practices are usually unpaid and not counted within the category of work. In this thesis, I will focus primarily on practices of making and sustaining connections in an uncertain environment. I will draw on prevalent research perspectives on platform work to outline how the growing influence of online platforms on the organisation, allocation, and management of work is transforming the world of work.

1.2 Research problem

First, the gig economy organises work as loose and short-term relations, thus making workers' everyday practices very volatile. Most gig platforms have a drastic oversupply of workers: out of the 42781 freelancers registered on 99designs in September 2020, for example, only 37 percent had completed at least one project, and only 10 percent had completed more than ten. On Guru, another online web-based freelance platform, only 0.5 percent of over a million registered workers had earned more than one US dollar (ILO, 2021, p. 50). In the academic literature on the gig economy, the lack of stability and the shift of risk to workers is frequently associated with increasing precarity (cf. e.g. Kalleberg & Vallas, 2018; Sutherland et al., 2020; Wood & Lehdonvirta, 2021b).

Second, online platforms manage and mediate work processes. Technological processes are closely intertwined with economic interests here: the affordances and constraints, that is, the range of possible uses, that online platforms provide are based on their respective business models (van Dijck et al., 2018). In the literature on platform work, authors have come to different conclusions about the degree to which online platforms can control workers – while some define gig work by the absence of an employer (Friedman, 2014), others find that online platforms play an important role in structuring work processes with technological features (e.g. Aneesh, 2009) or rule sets (e.g. Jarrahi et al., 2020).

Third, work relations are spatially reconfigured by the rise of platform work, prompting Graham and Anwar (2019) to proclaim the emergence of a "planetary labour market" enabled by digital technologies. Unlike the classic business process outsourcing (BPO) industry, online platforms outsource jobs and services without a mediating formal organisation (Graham, Hjorth, & Lehdonvirta, 2017, p. 137), and work is spread globally in more dispersed ways. However, work relations in the remote gig economy are still predominantly formed between clients from high-income countries and workers from low-income countries (ILO, 2021, p. 53), and workers' location affects what they earn for a gig on average (Beerepoot & Lambregts, 2015), as well as whether clients will trust them with tasks that require special skills (Gerber & Krzywdzinski, 2019, p. 37). That is, not only technology affects the spatial reconfiguration of work through online platforms, but also various social, cultural, and economic factors. For workers, the planetary labour market also increases complexity and competition, as they sort through an almost unsurmountable number of briefs, hoping to be selected from a global crowd of workers. While the academic literature has made important contributions to understanding global platform work, it also misses some perspectives, which I will outline below.

First, while the literature on work experiences in the gig economy is growing, there is still a stronger focus on work regimes than on everyday practices and workers' perceptions. Against this backdrop, Gandini (2019) proposes "not to overstate the relevance of employment regimes [and instead] to expand our interest to these workers' experiences" (Gandini, 2019, p. 1052). What is more, online platforms as novel actors in work constellations call for a framework that leaves space for how different actors' roles are negotiated. Categorising work in a dichotomy between flexibility and stability misses important nuances of workers' practices and experiences (cf. Ivancheva & Keating, 2020). As Wittel (2004) argues, especially political economy approaches to digital labour reduce labour to an abstract category, neglecting subjective experiences and workers' agency (p. 17).

Second, existing approaches to platform work often neglect the heterogeneity and ambiguity of platform workers' experiences. When platform work is studied, especially in terms of its precarity, authors usually – implicitly or explicitly – take a Fordist model of standard employment, that is, full-time permanent employment (cf. ILO, 2016, p. 11), as a point of reference. Within this framework, the loose connections of gig work are classified as a departure from stable employment. However, this perspective neglects that

standard employment relationships have historically and geographically been an exception rather than the norm (Neilson & Rossiter, 2008). Considering the global spread of work connections through platform work, it is important to depart from perspectives that only reflect the experiences of a small proportion of those who perform platform work. While a framework of exploitation by platform capitalism provides important insights into working conditions, it often leaves little space for the heterogeneity and ambiguity of workers' experiences, as well as their agency. Thus, categorising work in a dichotomy between flexibility and stability misses important nuances of workers' practices and experiences (cf. Ivancheva & Keating, 2020).

Third, a narrow view of work is often applied when studying platform work, focusing on activities that are considered directly economically productive. Connecting this point to the one made above, the unpaid work that is necessary to enable the standard employment relationship is often overlooked. Discourses on de-limitation of work (Gerber & Krzywdzinski, 2019; Gregg, 2011) or subjectification (Huber, 2013; Krohn, 2013), too, suppose a pre-existing clear distinction between work and non-work that is only recently eroding. As a result, practices beyond paid employment are often neglected within these perspectives. This includes care work, for example, but also the unpaid work done by platform workers, which I have described above. To grasp the scope of unpaid work done by gig workers to navigate the uncertain work environment of the platform, concepts of work that extend beyond the job descriptions on the platform are necessary. Moreover, across different perspectives, workers' integration in interdependent relationships is regularly overlooked (Ivancheva & Keating, 2020, p. 274).

As I have outlined above, online platforms contribute to a transformation of how work is organised, managed, and allocated. This development is reflected in a transformation of work practices: as actors in a work environment that is characterised by loose and short-term work connections, online platforms steering work processes, and an unevenly global labour market, remote freelancers perform a great deal of unpaid work to prepare the ground for paid gigs. While the literature on working conditions in the gig economy is growing, little is known yet about the everyday work practices of navigating this uncertain work environment. The emergence of these work practices, moreover, poses the question of how work can be conceptualised in a way that reflects the ambiguities and the heterogeneity of gig workers'

experiences, and that accounts for the multiple dimensions of work beyond paid labour.

1.3 Research questions

To address the research problem outlined above, this study seeks to explore and theorise remote gig workers' everyday work practices as making and sustaining global connections mediated by online platforms. By approaching work from a relational angle, I aim to centre practices and experiences, transcend categories of paid or unpaid work, and foreground the interdependence of actors. The study focuses on the elements of remote platform work that are directly connected to managing the uncertain work environment, largely leaving further aspects of work in the gig economy aside. It can thus not provide a full picture of work but aims to contribute one element to a spectrum of work practices.

The research questions guiding this study start from the assumption that while online platforms provide the technological infrastructure to make global connections, it takes work to put these connections into practice and to stay connected over time. How gig workers relate to other human and nonhuman actors is influenced by technology, but also by explicit and implicit rules of conduct, by power asymmetries, and by their implication in interdependent relationships beyond platform work. Accordingly, throughout the analysis chapters, I will explore the work of making and sustaining connections. Reflecting the notion of a "life-work continuum" (Ivancheva & Keating, 2020), both relationships with clients and with platforms as nonhuman actors, and relationships beyond the realm of platform work are included in this exploration. Approaching this combination of elements from the perspective of everyday work practices, the overarching question of the study is:

How can platform work be conceptualised through the lens of making and sustaining connections?

The exploration of gig workers' practices of making and sustaining connections is embedded in the three critical lines of transformation that I have outlined above: the volatility of the gig economy, the management of work

processes by online platforms, and the global reach of work connections. The research questions reflect these aspects:

How do gig workers navigate the volatility of work relations?

This question is directed at the freelancers' everyday work practices. It guides the exploration of how freelancers organise their work, as well as the strategies they develop to deal with the uncertainty of their work environment. Do they try to introduce stability, or do they embrace the flexibility of their work? How do they try to stand out to prospective clients, and what resources do they mobilise to be successful? This set of sub-questions addresses the heterogeneous experiences of platform work.

How do online platforms mediate work practices?

This question connects freelancers' work practices to their interaction with the online platforms that they use. It directs the exploration of platform work at how workers relate to the technological infrastructure of online platforms, as well as how they negotiate the rules set up by them. Through this guiding question, I aim to incorporate the ambiguities of worker agency and platform control into the analysis.

How do remote freelancers align global work relations with local, situated practices?

This final sub-question points to practices of relating to clients from different cultural and geographical backgrounds. I aim to explore the friction between the global form of platform work and situated work practices by asking how workers anticipate cultural stereotypes in the way they present themselves, as well as how they work on aligning different scales.

The three themes reflected in the research questions are interrelated and jointly contribute to the exploration of making and sustaining connections in remote gig work.

1.4 Conceptual framework: Assembling volatile connections

Taking the premise that work is a socially constructed category as a starting point, the conceptual background of this study is based on research approaches that critically examine and expand what counts as work, going beyond paid labour or occupation. As Star and Strauss (1999) argue, work as a category is not self-evident, but depends on how a situation is defined – and who has the power to define it. First, from an STS perspective, this includes invisible background work associated with technology (Star & Strauss, 1999; Vertesi, 2014). Second, I connect my research to feminist perspectives on work. Feminist scholars have sought to shed light on unpaid work, frequently performed by women, such as care work, by framing reproductive labour as work in its own right (cf. Mackenzie & Rose, 1983). Moreover, work has been expanded to an emotional (Hochschild, [1983] 2012) and affective (Hardt, 1999) domain. Third, taking it one step further from adding new aspects to a nevertheless relatively stable category of work, more recent perspectives propose to fundamentally rethink work and the productive domain to account for the embeddedness of economic actors in interdependent relationships (cf. Ivancheva & Keating, 2020).

In addition, I use the term "global assemblage" (Ong & Collier, 2005) as a sensitising concept to construct the field of research. The ontology of assemblage reflects the tension between the technological promise of a global labour market and the actual situated work practices and lived experiences of graphic designers using gig work platforms in India. The practices that constitute the field of platform work are constantly in flux and both the elements and how they relate to each other keep changing. As the phenomenon I study is highly dynamic, it cannot be grasped by ideas of a static and bounded field. I use the term volatility here to reflect how loose the connections that gig workers make are: volatility implies that there is no stable structure as an endpoint for gig workers. Instead, they continuously work on making and sustaining connections, thus contributing to the assemblage of platform work.

While the feminist perspectives outlined above provide the foundation for a broad understanding of work, including both paid and unpaid practices, and acknowledging their interdependence, the assemblage perspective provides a framework to grasp the work of making and sustaining connections. As Li (2007) argues, "[a]ssemblage flags agency, the hard work required to draw heterogeneous elements together, forge connections between

them and sustain these connections in the face of tension" (p. 264). Connecting the deconstruction of the category of work with the assemblage concept, I tentatively frame work as the continuous effort of making and sustaining connections. This perspective also informs the research design of this study. Rather than building up a coherent image of work from constitutive elements, I feather out different practices and relate them to each other, focusing on the building process instead of its result.

1.5 Methodology

To address the research questions posed above, I have chosen a "non-digital-centric approach to the digital" (Pink et al., 2016, p. 7), that is, I have studied digital media through the everyday practices of their use (cf. also Hine, 2015, pp. 28–29). I have focused my research on the experiences of graphic designers in India: by choosing a creative type of work that requires specialised skills, I anticipated a higher level of personal interaction and a stronger need to stand out as the best one for a job than for more routine tasks. India as a geographical frame was chosen as one of the countries with the largest populations of freelancers on online platforms (ILO, 2021, p. 53). I switched between sampling, collecting, and analysing material in an iterative process, using coding techniques based on Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2003).

At the beginning of the research process, I generated an overview of different online platforms from the literature and through online research. From the large field of different online platforms, I selected four for a closer investigation through theoretical sampling: 99designs, Upwork, Talenthouse, and Fiverr. I conducted online walkthroughs of these platforms to establish their "environment of expected use" (Light et al., 2017), and observed debates in the online forums that are part of the platforms (cf. Hine, 2015, pp. 157–180). Based on this exploration of the platform-mediated work environment, I conducted semi-structured interviews with creative professionals during a field stay in Bengaluru in February and March 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic brought about travel and contact restrictions shortly after my field stay had started, the research design had to be adjusted: instead of shadowing remote freelancers at their places of work, I conducted follow-up interviews after a first round of selective and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2003) to report back and to refine my hypotheses. To fill in the gaps in my material, I created photo prompts and short questionnaires,

based on which research participants documented and reflected on their everyday work practices for seven days.

1.6 Argument and structure of the dissertation

The rationale of this study emanates from the need for an understanding of work that reflects the ambiguities and heterogeneity of gig workers' experiences, and that accounts for the multiple dimensions of work beyond paid employment. It starts from the observation that online platforms are transforming the world of work, leading to a complex, volatile, and dynamic work environment. Remote gig work is characterized by loose and short-term work connections on a global scale, and platforms have emerged as novel actors in work constellations. Navigating this work environment brings about work practices that current concepts of work cannot fully grasp. Using standard employment relationships as a reference and neglecting workers' integration in interdependent relationships, they capture only a part of the activities of platform work, while others remain not only unpaid but also unnoticed. By applying a global assemblage perspective to platform work, the focus of this thesis is directed at workers' everyday practices of making and sustaining connections, which I refer to as practices of assembling in this study. This focus on relational practices allows for an exploration beyond a dichotomy between flexibility and stability, incorporating affective relationships within and beyond platform work, as well as multiple spatial scales.

Throughout the study, different dimensions of practices of assembling are explored and related to each other, including affective dimensions, negotiations over value, and relationships beyond platform work. From this kaleidoscope of practices, I distil four characteristic features of practices of assembling: guessing and anticipating, adapting to constant change, producing relatable selves, and creating temporary alignment. These features reflect how freelancers interact with the platform-mediated work environment by continuously negotiating uncertain relations. From this vantage point, I compare my findings about work in an assemblage to existing accounts of work, focusing on flexibility and precarity, worker agency, and the subjectification of workers.

The results of this study are significant on several levels: First, by amplifying stories of everyday work experiences in the gig economy, unpaid and

largely invisible aspects of gig work are elucidated. Shedding light on mostly invisible and unpaid aspects of work can contribute to the articulation of demands for fair working conditions. Second, the lens of global assemblages provides a perspective on work beyond dichotomies between flexibility and stability, or work and non-work. This allows for a more nuanced classification of what platform work entails. Understanding the everyday negotiations of gig workers' lives may "begin a longer conversation about the better workplaces we might imagine for the future" (Gregg, 2011, p. 18). This is relevant for various actors: gig workers, workers' initiatives and unions, platform operators, as well as policymakers seeking to adjust regulatory frameworks to changing work environments. Third, this study seeks to contribute to academic debates on the transformation of work in digitally mediated environments from a feminist perspective, expanding the notion of work to incorporate relationships and their various dimensions. The insights generated on practices of assembling can inform perspectives on work beyond remote platform work by providing a relational framework.

The study is organised as follows: In Chapter 2, I present a focused review of the literature on working conditions in the gig economy. I provide an overview of the research on platform work and outline the literature along three lines of transformation: volatile work connections in the gig economy, platforms as novel actors in work constellations, and spatial figurations of platform work. Based on this, I further elaborate on the gaps in the literature. In Chapter 3, I lay out the conceptual framework of this study. First, I outline research perspectives that have aimed to expand and deconstruct the category of work by foregrounding a variety of practices beyond economic productivity. Second, I elucidate the assemblage perspective that I use to construct the field. Building on these two elements, I develop a tentative understanding of work as practices of assembling. In Chapter 4, I present my methodology and reflect on the research process. I locate my study within a methodology of digital ethnography and outline the tools from Grounded Theory that I have used. Moreover, I describe how I iteratively gathered and analysed material through online analysis, interviews, and digital photo diaries. Finally, I reflect on instances of friction in the research process and ethical implications.

Subsequently, I present my findings, organised along three sets of practices. In Chapter 5, I explore how platform workers continuously negotiate the value of their work, how the value of their work is entangled with their value as workers, and how the process of negotiation is framed and struc-