DIGITAL PLATFORM DELIVERY GUYS: EXTENDED PRODUCTION POINT IN THE CITY

Iván Ojeda Pereira, *University of Chile*
Fernando Campos-Medina, *University of Chile*

ABSTRACT

This visual essay uses accompaniment methodology to address the urban experience of a digital platform delivery guy in Valdivia, in the south of Chile. Through images, we question the notion of "place of production", which is fundamental for Labor Process Theory (LPT) studies. In this sense, this perspective has identified the place of production as a physical, unitary, and stable space for both traditional industries and services economies. Our urban journey, accompanying a digital platform delivery guy, observes the place of production as the attempt to suppress the physical space between the customer and the desired product, which can only be done by activating a vast urban experience by those who transport the products.

KEYWORDS

Platform work, Urban sociology, Global south, Labor process theory, COVID -19

BIO
Iván Ojeda Pereira
Coordinator and Researcher of the Territorial Sociology Laboratory. Degree in Sociology from the University of Chile. He is currently a student of the Master in Political Science at the University of Chile as a fellow of the Center for the Study of Conflict and Social Cohesion (COES). He has a Diploma in Territorial Planning and Citizen Participation; and a Diploma in Public Management.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5146-0002
Researchgate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ivan-Ojeda-Pereira?ev=hdr_xprf
ivan.ojeda@ug.uchile.cl

Fernando Campos-Medina
Director of the Territorial Sociology Laboratory and Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Universidad de Chile. He is a sociologist from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile; Master in Housing and Urban Planning, Polytechnic University of Catalonia; Ph.D (Dr.) in Sociology, mention in Environmental Sociology and Human Geography, Friedrich Schiller University of Jena. Ph.D. (Dr.) in Urban Planning with mention in Urban Sociology, Bauhuas-University Weimar.
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7772-3544
Researchgate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Fernando-Campos-5
fernandocampos@uchile.cl

GEOLOCATION INFORMATION

The photographs were taken in the city of Valdivia in the south of Chile.

Presentation

The Labor Process Theory (LPT) has been developed in the Anglo-Saxon world and currently does not have a finished approach in Latin America. Ratto y Castillo (2018) published a document where they systematized the LPT key proposals and discussions, allowing to open the discussion to Spanish-speaking groups. The text argues that the importance of the PTA lies in its reflections on workplaces, labor regimes, control mechanisms, and resistance practices developed in the capitalist model. In this sense, the LPT would reclaim, analytically, the place that work has in society. Unlike dominant perspectives in Marxism, the LPT highlights the problem of subjectivities considering that "it places the dominance of the conflict and hegemony between capital and labor in the concrete point of the social relations of production" (Ratto and Castillo 2018: 6).

According to Professor Thompson (Castillo, 2020), the object of the LPT's research has been the work regime, also understood as a business model. This object of study materialized during the 1990s in studies about Call Center and -at that time- new forms of control, for example, emotional management. Nevertheless, Thompson mentions that these objects no longer seem central, and he is encouraged to mention that the challenges that LPT is facing go hand in hand with the technological transformations that have taken place in the labor market (Boreham et al. 2008). Recent experiences have suggested the rise of new working modalities, one of the most important being the work organized and developed through digital platforms (Castillo 2020).

Alessandro Gandini (2018), from an LPT approach, has focused on relieving and describing the distinctive features of a digital platform. For this purpose, he analyzes the notions of *i) point of production, ii) emotional work, and iii) control on digital platforms.*[1]. Thus, this essay focuses on the point of production, which refers to the specific place or space where the employment relationship is developed. In this way, space/place becomes a central element for the relationship between capital and work to exist.

Without prejudice to the significant contribution made by Gandini (2018), this photographic essay proposes a re-reading of the concept of *production point* from a territorial perspective based on the theory of action (Werlen 2021)[2]. From this perspective, the notion of space and territory as a reservoir of social reality is surpassed, and the emphasis is placed on actions that daily build territoriality because it cannot be ignored that despite the virtuality of digital application (henceforth, app), workers perform their work in specific physical spaces that are interwoven through their mobility, occupation, and interpretation. In this sense, it is essential to pay attention to the physical space because through the actions of different actors, the territory becomes active in the reproduction of structures, the construction of subjectivities, and the ways in which control is practiced.

It is clear that digital platform workers and those who perform deliveries are no longer in the classical industrial factory with sheds, machinery, and smoke, but does it mean that there is no production point?

In this photo-essay, we hold that the production points of this type of workers are macro-urban areas, and that this situation forces us to think of the *point of production* from an extended territoriality and not only from a delimited and reduced space. That said, it opens up a more complex line for the LPT because when the point of production referred to an industry, workers tended to stay in a small city area. However, when considering the point of production of delivery workers of digital platforms from a territoriality extended to the urban macro zones, we can venture that these workers deploy mobility strategies to carry out their functions.

A delivery guy shifts between different worlds and urban experiences, to diminish physically and temporarily the distance between the customer and the product that he wishes to obtain at the door of his house, at a party, or in another defined place. Therefore, in a contracted and extended space that is experienced and suppressed by different social actors, there are new points of capitalist production in the economy of gigas.

It is sometimes argued that people in the city tend to have mobility strategies related to their narrow social worlds and work obligations. In its classical sense, functions generate specific urban circuits. However, in the case of platform deliveries, this takes place in an alternate way, distancing itself from the classic mobility modes. A delivery guy develops extensive urban mobility by interconnecting places

---

[1] That the author understands as part of a new economy called "gig economy".
[2] Regarding the territoriality of capitalist production in Chile, Domingo Pérez (2019) develops the relationship in a more complex and extended way, focusing on the mining and large-scale grocery store sector.

that were traditionally disconnected. Nonetheless, this mobility is not random -here we find a greater complexity of the argument and a relationship with the LPT-, but it is determined by an *algorithmic management of urban mobility* of the app in which he works. For example, in Valdivia, in Chile, a worker connects downtown, and the app sends him to the city's main shopping center. From there, he must transit to deliver the order to the area where the hospital is located. Immediately, he is sent to a popular sector in search of fast food that must be delivered in one of the most affluent sectors of the city. The totality of this route, that is, the origins-destinations and the routes that he takes, are directed by the delivery app that indicates where to move through links with other navigation apps.

When we elaborate the idea of a production point through a link with human geography, new lines of deliberation and research are opened up, especially when we glimpse the fuzzy spaces for this new urban actor: the digital platform delivery guy. An actor who has appeared in our daily lives and transforms the dynamics and rhythms of traffic, urban mobility, and experiences the city from a double perspective. On the one hand, as its point of production, and on the other, as the space where it dwells like any other person.

The photographic series that can be observed in the following visual essay is the result of a typical day of work of a delivery guy (Ojeda, 2020) of the "Pedidos Ya" app in the city of Valdivia, in southern Chile, whom I have accompanied on his motorcycle, carrying his backpack, and photographed with a mobile device. Although this makes the photography to have a lower quality, it allowed me, as researcher, not to have marked a disruptive presence for the everyday life of those involved. The photographs are intended to reveal the point of production, workers, app, and city relationship in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, opening a new confluence space for LPT and human geography.

References

BOREHAM, Paul – PARKER, Rachel – THOMPSON, Paul - HALL, Richard
2007   *New technology @ work.* England: Routledge.

CASTILLO, Alejandro
2020   Trayectoria y desafíos de la Teoría de Procesos de Trabajo. Entrevista con Paul Thompson. *Trabajo y sociedad,* 35: 281-296.

GANDINI, Alessandro
2018   Labour Process Theory and the Gig Economy. *Human Relations,* 72: 1039-1056.
        doi.org/10.1177/0018726718790002

OJEDA, Iván
2020   Repartidores de Plataformas digitales y dinamicidad de la ciudad en covid-19: ¿precarización laboral o funcionalidad urbana? *PLANEO*, 44. doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.11281.66407/1

PÉREZ, Domingo
2019   *Territorio laboral capitalista. Despliegue de poder sindical en minería y supermercados.* Santiago: RIL.

RATTO, Nicolas – CASTILLO, Alejandro
2018   *Teorías del proceso de trabajo. Una revisión de su desarrollo y de las nociones de control y Resistencia.* Santiago: Fondecyt Nº1150860 y CIPTRA.

WERLEN, Benno
2021   *La Construcción de las Realidades Geográficas. Una geografía de la acción.* Santiago: Editorial Universitaria.

IMAGE 1: Outside the Regional Hospital of Valdivia, Chile.
The delivery guy delivers the order to two nurses in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic.

IMAGE 2: Journey through the streets of Valdivia, Chile.
In our way to get the following order, moving from a public services area to a popular residential sector through the app's algorithmic mobility.

IMAGE 3: Fast food restaurant in Valdivia, Chile.
The delivery guy gets the order at a fast-food restaurant located in a popular residential neighbourhood. The app sends a message to maintain social distance due to COVID-19 pandemic.
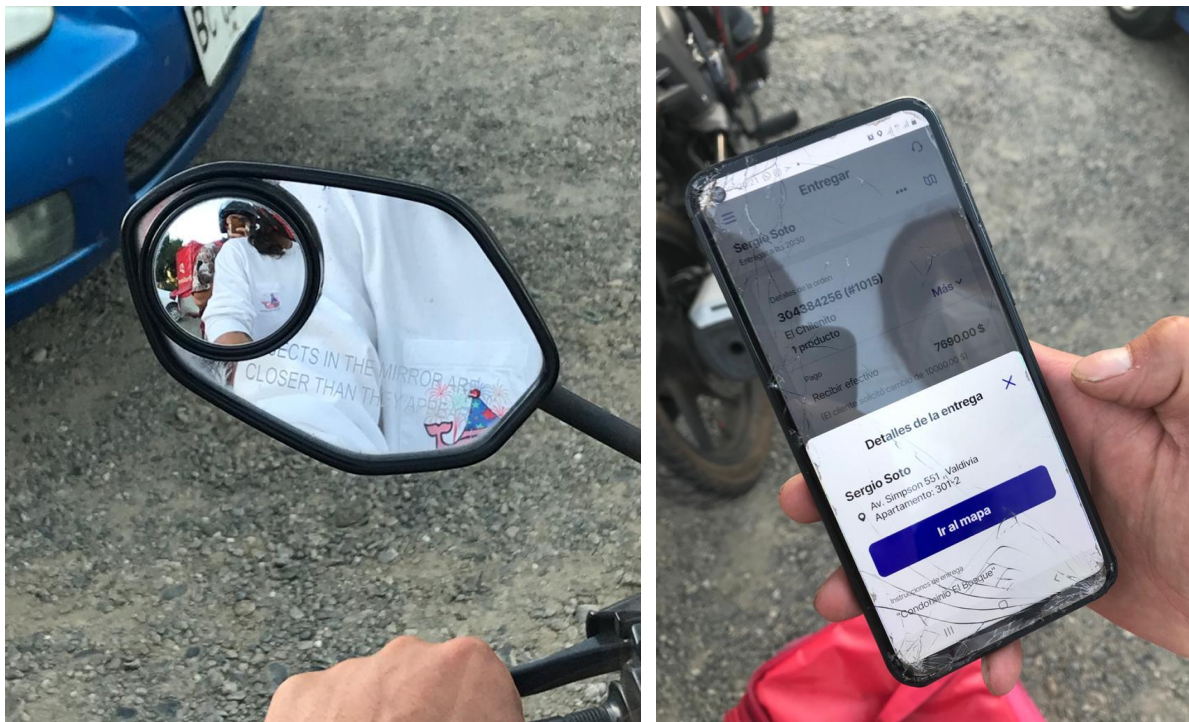
IMAGE 4: On our way to the address in Valdivia, Chile.
Description: The app sends the delivery guy to another location in town, "El Bosque Sur", characterized for its high socioeconomic level.

IMAGE 5, 6: "El Bosque Sur" area in Valdivia, Chile.
Description: The delivery guy must enter alone to deliver the order at the "El Bosque Sur" private condo.
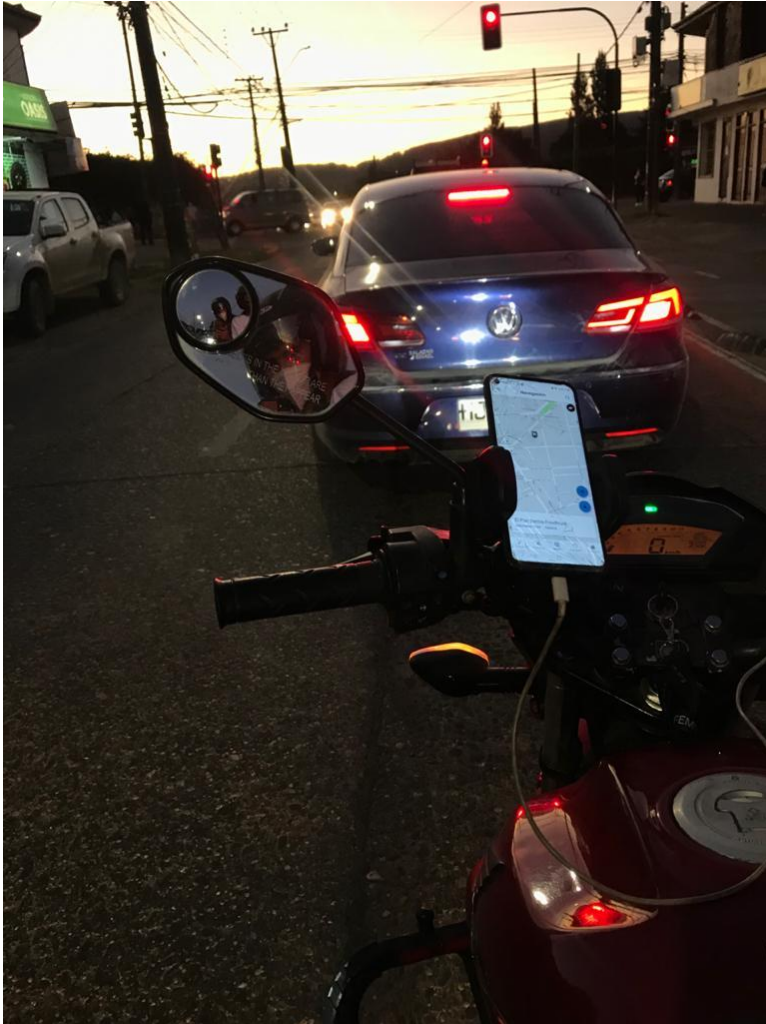
IMAGE 7: Journey through the streets of Valdivia, Chile.
On our way to get the order at the next store, moving from a high socioeconomic residential area to the "Barrios Bajos" sector of popular and university life, guided by the app.

IMAGE 8: Journey through the streets of Valdivia, Chile.
On our way to get the order at the next store, moving from a high socioeconomic residential area to the "Barrios Bajos" sector of popular and university life, guided by the app.

IMAGE 9: Valdivia, Chile.
End of the journey. We end up with a silhouette that is more and more recurrent, an actor that produces value and is exploited at a point of production as widespread as the city itself; at the same time, he inhabits there like any other person.