

BOC Publication No. 9

Issued July 1, 2011.

# BUREAU FOR OPEN CULTURE

[www.bureauforopenculture.org](http://www.bureauforopenculture.org)

## A MANUAL FOR THE IMMATERIAL WORKER

The Way We Work Now.

GENERAL SERVICE INSTRUCTIONS.

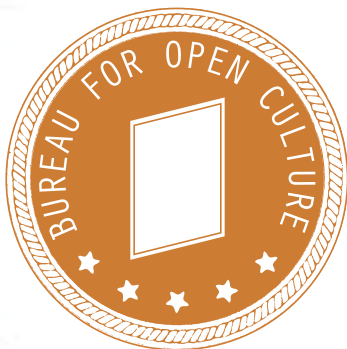
CONVERSION.

MAINTENANCE.

JULY, 2011.

PREPARED IN THE OFFICE OF BUREAU FOR OPEN CULTURE.

JAMES VOORHIES, Director.



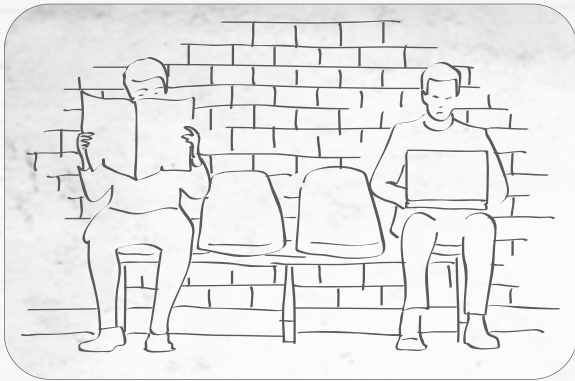
NATE PDAVICK, Designer.  
CASSANDRA TROYAN, Curatorial Assistant.

Bureau for Open Culture is a critical and research-based practice that takes the form of a contemporary arts institution to interrogate and re-imagine from within the way we engage with art.





structions they receive should inform them that part of their work is to create more work, create their work, even though there is already a surplus of labor itself. This is due to the fact that subjectivities are an infinitely reproducible form, which the construction of identity relies upon. We must reproduce what we think is so significantly and purely our own. We all want to believe that we are free from the products of capital. Yet the instability of the immaterial worker's presence, of their daily relation to time, makes the necessity for material things crucial to the ownership and control of the everyday.



something concrete but content that is consumed within the networked sphere that produces it.

Information technology and production of ideas then are part of a new Fordist production line, or what is called the post-Fordist model. The time clock does not stop for the post-Fordist assembly line worker. It goes on and on because unlike the wage laborer, who finishes work after eight hours, the post-Fordist worker has social time to add into their workday, to their workflow. The transformation from a Fordist to post-Fordist production model is when the symbolic value—design and aesthetics—of a good surpasses or equals its use value. We don't need a new car because the car we have no longer works. As Pascal Gielen tells us, we buy that new car because it is a symbol of how we want to be perceived, the style and identity we want to construct. In post-Fordism the workplace is no longer just the office or factory. It now includes personal life: dinner parties, opening receptions, weekend hikes, coffee breaks and after-hour drinks. It includes places like the airport and home. Because, of course, in this new factory society technology stays right there with the immaterial worker everywhere and every step of the way, as they move through space or remain on their couch. We are told this is the ultimate freedom, the freedom never to leave the comfort of one's own home to work. Yet the electronic sounds that indicate new email are constant and, thus, they require regular maintenance—even at home. Playing Whack-o-Mole with the email. A combination of the technology, the social and the physical collide into a totality that makes the life of the immaterial worker fully consumed by work. The baggage is light for this worker. They can work anywhere because their production line tools are the screen, the phone, the keyboard and of course the mind, don't forget the ideas. The work they do, however, is intangible and the production line continual, unchanging without any real evidence of the time that has ticked away from morning, afternoon, evening, to night and dawn again. All that is solid melts into air.



The general service instructions make clear that digital technologies have completely changed the relationship between intellectual work and work work. This is not to say digital technologies have replaced material labor. We know well that the world still makes things—we type, drive, eat, sleep and travel with those things—every day. But, digital technologies have allowed the content of making those things to become work; the idea ultimately produces the something we consume. Digital technologies are closely associated with communications and language. And, that is immaterial through and through, meaning content that does not manifest in

## CONVERSION

In the age of the immaterial worker, labor is fully the product of capital. At the onset of capital there existed the possibility of the industrial or the material worker to challenge capital's influence because work was strictly delineated by time, location and task. Class, or difference, was well defined by way of labor and capital, language. The subsumption of labor by capital is now complete. Labor is no longer associated with a "working class" or wage day, a time clock. Capital's grip is tighter than ever on everyone because it is now fused with the social. The deterritorialized character of the work site and the invasive role of the Internet for immaterial workers are factors that contribute to this rigid hold. Even the farmer no longer simply plows the fields and plants the seeds. Because the rural is in service to the city and by extension operating under the sway of capital, the original mode of agricultural production is not dissimilar to that of industrial manufacture. The farmer, long considered a manual worker *par excellence*, must have specialized knowledge of pesticides, weather forecasting technologies, hormone sciences, marketing, fertilizers and legal and government tax and subsidies. All are integral to the daily production of food. Indeed, farming obviously produces something useful—food. But the farmer has post-Fordist tendencies because the symbolic and marketing and design and communication and knowledge-producing associated with organic agriculture, for example, shows all the symptoms of a conversion from material to immaterial labor. Local farmers have a brand, they communicate with the public by email, websites and newsletters. Their CSA programs are orchestrated in a retail model with fruit and veggies and dairy arranged



WHF Over

Posted by Mighty Food Farm at 10:52 AM 0 comments

THURSDAY, JUNE 8, 2011

### Berries and A New Sink!

Many exciting things happened at the farm this Thursday!

1. We are picking berries like crazy and so are our CSA members. Not only are we harvesting many pints of berries per day to fill wholesale orders and to have them at the farmers' market, we have also opened the patch to members to come and pick berries in their share. So much fun in the strawberry patch. Look for our berries at Wild Cats Co-op in Williamstown, Ilseest Wright Co-op in Albany, at Moose Restaurant, and at The Walloonsac and Dorset Farmers' Market.



Loving the berries!

2. We got a new sink in the packing shed. This may not sound very exciting, but it totally is. Now we can have double the amount of produce chilling in cold water, which preserves its freshness. Ultimately, a wonderful thing for the farm and for our customers!



Our new sink!

3. We got rain! Our soil was looking dry and our plants were looking very thirsty. The downpour we had this afternoon gave the soil and our crops a much needed soak. We transplanted a lot of vegetables into the ground this week, so we are just so glad they finally got a drink! And it brought in some cooler and less humid air, which we appreciate immensely.

Posted by Mighty Food Farm at 8:52 PM 0 comments

FRIDAY, JUNE 9, 2011

### Harvest Season is Here

We are finally into full-swing of the harvest season. All of this gorgeous sunny weather means that our crops are doing well and we have a lot of food to offer both our CSA members and our customers. That makes us so happy.



Kelly and Ariel harvesting radishes.

On top of our normal harvest these days, we have also been requesting the strawberry patch, so busy picking the first-to-ripen berries. They have



gained from a bit with the cooler weather in the last couple of days, but they are definitely ripening and they are so tasty! But we know for sure that the crop will be prolific this year because the patch is just loaded with caribe berries and it is just a matter of time before they all ripen. (I wish there



in a seductive way for the consumer. It all appeals to the consumer who expects the experience as much as the product. One wants to see and pet the chickens and get to know the sources from where their fresh eggs and vegetables come. They want to see the strawberry patch growing on the side of the hill. The material or Fordist manufacturing system, not



just aligned with the industrial laborer, but also agricultural production, is learning the tricks of the trade for how to become a good immaterial industry. The product is a concrete something, of course, but the experience constructed through ideas and

content is part of the lifestyle associated with what is consumed today. The immaterial labor is beholden to this form of consumption.

Conversion is based on technology, communication and the social. Whereas the material worker exchanged its labor and time with capital, the immaterial worker is now perpetually fueling capital because their work is connected to the social, to lifestyle and experience. Lifestyle is a consumer product. There is a surplus labor because, as Marx predicted in *The Grundrisse*, labor appears no longer as labor itself but as the full development of activity and that activity is social. The conversion of material to immaterial labor helps to fulfill that development. The time clock is essential to the conversion. Whereas the time clock delineated the part of life where work and non-work were clear and thus labor and non-labor and what was in service to capital or not, the dissolution of the time clock or work day for the immaterial worker means that capital has converted all of life to labor.

# Thursdays

The New York Times



## Office Party? Let

By DAVID HOCHMAN

ON a rainy Tuesday last month, in an all-white office space in Brooklyn, a blogger known as "swissmiss" traded

For rising tech stars, sh



MICHAEL HAGLE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

## 's Tweet It

company called Fictive Kin joked about Russian spammers. A ZZ Top song was playing. The office puppy was napping. A clipboard was going around for lunch orders.

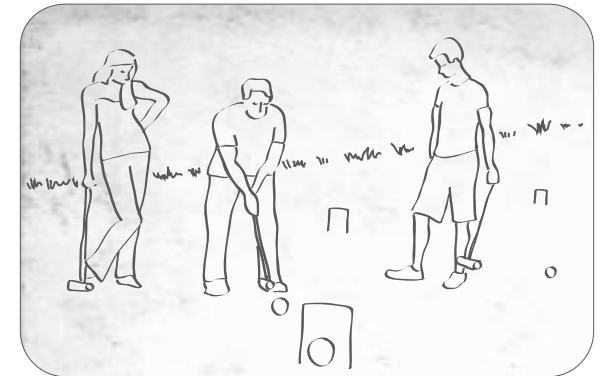
As a group, the writers, Web designers, illus-

**ON PARADE**  
Members of Studiomates, a co-working space in Brooklyn.

## MAINTENANCE

The immaterial worker is on the front lines of production, facing the public, and keeping everything flowing with ease. Maintenance is constant, so as to stop moving means one stops making, stops thinking, stops living, stops breathing. Sounds dramatic, but it's just the facts. Like Theodor Adorno told us would eventually happen, the masses have become an appendage of the machinery and the immaterial workers are inextricably tied to the culture they make, a culture that is in itself a commodity. The work becomes the labor of inventing and re-inventing labor and looming is the awareness of unrealized potential because the mind does not stop producing.

The immaterial worker is subordinate to a precarious existence. They acknowledge and acquiesce to the hustle—or work—they must perform in order to find time to work. The work they do is not always the work they do because they



are searching for some hidden strata of time, a layer of free moments that allow them to get to the point of their working existence. A regular maintenance of this condition requires the periodic replenishment or tapping into the writing, sculpting, designing and drawing, for example, that is at the core of their immaterial production pool. The precarity in this existence rests in the fact the immaterial laborer is required to use their content, their ideas, their education and their mobility for a wide array of other consumer points of contact with the public, from teaching higher education to corporate design to cultural production. Precarity, therefore, is the basis of the maintenance and the crisis is one of context. Our meanings and potential use values are structured by the perpetual





FORT

flux of context and that context shifts within the sway of capital and the consumption of subjectivities. Precarity they say is accompanied by freedom. But, is it really freedom? Immaterial workers have been tricked into believing that flexible work hours and mobility means time from the work site and the eight-hour workday. A freelance, immaterial worker has the chance to choose when and where they want to work. But, the maintenance of this life means they are always working to find work, worrying about finding work, producing content and ideas on spec, in hopes of one day placing those ideas, selling that content, fueling their freedom for the labor they do when not working. It's a tricky existence, this precarity, this immaterial laboring. This ossification of the subjectivity.

Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau remind us that the commodification of existence itself is by no means a new late-capitalist strategy. Since the onset of Fordism with the rise of consumer interests in the late 1960s, all inter- and intrapersonal relations are outcomes of market production valuation. Everything we do, everything we are is co-opted by the machine of cultural industry. Everything is a commodity, a fetish to be aggrandized by way of degrees of longing, as nothing is sacred or safe from the rapacious, late-capitalist consumer. And nothing says it better than the final scene of Jean-Luc Godard's 1967 film *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her*. There she is, the main character—housewife-cum-prostitute Juliette Janson. She lives in the Parisian suburbs. She's finished her day's work hustling the streets of central Paris to buy the very things and attain the very lifestyle that fashion magazines and television and radio say she should have. Our good immaterial worker Juliette has produced all day long nothing of material proof. She is a whore. But her existence, her body, her being, has labored. What it is that Juliette does each day is a mystery to her comatose husband Robert. As husband and wife ready for bed, reading and chatting about the day and what is in store for tomorrow, our awareness of Juliette's boredom reveals itself even more. We know she feels the grip and wants to resist the complacency of this precarious existence against a time clock that is not unlike that of the immaterial worker, a time clock guised as freedom that constantly grazes on the bios, human life. And so the immaterial worker is the whore of

the late-capitalist consumer world, always on call—available 24-hours a day. The close of the night for Juliette means just the beginning of tomorrow, another day of the same fucking thing. The tedium. The boredom. The lack of knowing what else to do besides work. Produce. It all makes maintenance for the immaterial worker a difficult thing to pursue.

**Robert:** Well, we got there.  
**Juliette Janson:** Where?  
**Robert:** Home.  
**Juliette Janson:** So what now?  
**Robert:** We go to bed. What's up with you?  
**Juliette Janson:** And then?  
**Robert:** We wake up.  
**Juliette Janson:** And then?  
**Robert:** Same again. We'll wake up. We'll eat.  
**Juliette Janson:** And then?  
**Robert:** I don't know. Die.  
**Juliette Janson:** And then?

I've changed,  
 yet I've remained the same.

MacBook Pro



---

ART **16**

ISTS &

ACTIV

ISTS

This pamphlet is the sixteenth of the Artists & Activists series, published by Printed Matter, Inc., New York City, 2011. Printed Matter's Artists & Activists series is made possible by generous funding from the Gesso Foundation.

Bureau for Open Culture, 2011

Copyright free: you are free to copy, distribute, display, and perform this work and to make derivative works.

ISBN 978-0-89439-058-6

[www.printedmatter.org](http://www.printedmatter.org)

Series design: Garrick Gott

---