

Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism

Immaterial Labour

A: al-‘amal al-lā-māddī. – E: immaterial labour. – F: travail immatériel. – R: nematerial’nyij trud. – S: trabajo inmaterial. – C: feiwuzhi de laodong 非物质的劳动

The expression ‘immaterial labour’ was coined by Henri **Storch** in the early nineteenth century, following Jean-Baptiste **Say** and the French ‘ideologues’. These economists were concerned with defusing Adam **Smith**’s notion that ‘the labour of some of the most respectable orders in the society is [...] unproductive of any value’ (1776, Bk.II, Ch.III, 265). **Marx**, who devotes much space to this debate about, and above all against, this thesis in *Theories of Surplus Value*, cites **Storch**’s discussion of ‘immaterial labour’, but does not however adopt the expression in his own vocabulary. **Marx**’s concern is ‘the relation between intellectual and material production’ on the basis of an analysis of ‘the specific form of material production’ and of the ‘organisation [*Gliederung*] of society’ deriving from that form (*MECW* 31, 182).

In the context of neoliberal discourse, especially about the ‘new economy’ and talk about the ‘dematerialisation of the economy’, the expression ‘immaterial labour’ has had a second life at the end of the twentieth century, this time with a broad influence, radiating even over the Left. Strictly speaking, it is a non-concept [*Unbegriff*], with at most a polemical function against sedimented notions of labour from the iron-and-coal age of industry or the Fordist formulation of the opposition between ‘mental’ and ‘manual’ labour. ‘Of course it is nonsense to speak of “immaterial labour”. Labour is always material’, says Antonio **Negri** (1996, 97).

Like other Italian ‘post-workerists’, **Negri** – who does not seem to be aware of the history of the concept and **Marx**’s rejection of it – never tires of using ‘immaterial labour’ as a collect-all concept for all post-Fordist labour and for the interpellation of a new revolutionary subject (i.e., the ‘mass intellectuals’ as successors to the Fordist ‘mass workers’). In this way, not only is the concept of labour expanded beyond the boundaries of formal social labour, but it is also stretched out to include all possible intellectual, communicative, and emotional aspects of activity or dimensions of production – from financial speculation to giving birth to children. The expression functions here not as an (epistemological or ontological) analytical concept, but as a myth in the Sorelian sense, aiming in a communist direction, as a political slogan that aims at a new proletarian identification of the multiply divided working people in ‘post-Fordism’, iridescently phrased in order to offer something to everyone.

From an epistemological viewpoint, ‘immaterial’ would only be the ‘interior’ of consciousness, and not even the expression thereof. Pure thought or imaginative activity could be considered ‘immaterial labour’. But that is not what is meant in ‘immaterial-labour’ discourse. Even if the discourse is this vulgar philosophy and even if its mobilisatory intention (‘Immaterial workers of the world, unite!’; **Immaterial Workers** 2000) is illusory, it draws a certain amount of evidence from the expansion of the computer as a ‘universal or, rather, a central tool through which all activities might pass’ (**Hardt and Negri** 2000, 292). It also draws upon the change in labour and the division of labour effected thereby, including gender-relations. For this reason, it is appropriate to call the use of ‘immaterial

labour' a dialectic of appearance – which is also more generally appropriate for the discourse of the “postindustrial” “dematerialisation” of money and possessions’, as it was called in a review of Rifkin (Deckstein 2000).

Because the post-workerist vocabulary is connected to Marx (even while ignoring his critique of Storch’s ‘immaterial-labour’ concept) and, because, while appealing to Marx in the name of ‘immaterial labour’, it declares at the same time the redundancy of his theory of value (Negri and Hardt 1994, 9ff), it is necessary to study Marx’s vocabulary, in which the expressions ‘material/immaterial’ have several meanings. In order to avoid equivocations and to clarify Marx’s seldomly-used expression ‘immaterial’, it is necessary to explicate the range in which he uses the term ‘material’ as complementary.

1. Marx does not indeed adopt the expression ‘immaterial labour’, but he does occasionally speak of ‘non-material production’ (e.g., *MECW* 34, 121–46); again almost verbatim in *Results of the Immediate Process of Production*, in *Capital*, Volume 1, 1047) in contrast to ‘immediately material production’ (*MECW* 4, 49) or simply ‘material production’ (*Grundrisse*, 81). He states, paraphrasing Say, that the ‘ideological etc. classes’ (*MECW* 31, 30) produce “‘immaterial’ commodities” (ibid.). It could seem that the talk of ‘the process of material production’ (*Capital*, Volume 1, 173) or of the ‘material mode of production’ would posit ‘immaterial’ as the complementary opposite in these cases.

1.1 Marx mostly follows everyday speech that uses ‘material’ in many ways, partly for ‘physical consistency [*stofflich*]’, ‘corporeal’, then again for ‘financial’, ‘economic’, ‘social’, or simply ‘real’. Thus, in the *German Ideology*, production is conceived as the ‘material’ ‘fundamental form of this activity, on which all other mental, political, religious etc. [activity] depends’ (*MECW* 5, 75–81). Regarding the wage-levels and living standards, Marx can say: ‘the material situation of the worker has improved, but at the cost of his social situation’ (*Wage Labour and Capital*, 98; trans. modified)

Marx writes retrospectively that, as editor of the *Rheinische Zeitung* in 1842/3, he ‘first experienced the embarrassment of having to speak of so-called material interests’ (*MECW* 29, 261; trans. modified). ‘Material’ means here: pertaining to property or income. For polite society, it was understood that the façade that behaviour is guided by ideas or is idealistic had to be kept up. One does not speak of money; one has it. The pseudonym for abstract wealth was borrowed from the old metaphysics, which firmly held ‘the opposition between the material and the immaterial to be insuperable’ (Hegel 1971a, 32) and which named the material as the complementary opposite of the ideal. One can observe in Marx what Brecht means when he says that the mode of speaking of the classical thinkers often resembles shields that are dented from their struggle with their opponents. This is why he puts ‘so-called’ before ‘material interests’. In interpreting Marx, one must always begin with the recognition that he uses the expression ‘material’ equivocally.

The epistemologically influenced vocabulary, on the other hand, can be observed where Marx polemicalises in the *Holy Family* against transforming ‘real, objective chains that exist outside of me into merely ideal, merely subjective chains existing merely in me – thereby transforming all external sensual struggles into pure intellectual struggles, and accordingly wanting ‘to abolish material estrangement [*Entfremdung*] by purely inward spiritual action’ (*MECW* 4, 82). In the ‘Postface’ to the second edition of *Capital*, Volume 1, he states: ‘With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought’ (*Capital*, 102). This is abbreviated because it leaps over the insight of the *Theses on Feuerbach* about the practical embeddedness of this transplanting and translation, effacing the difference from Feuerbach’s sensual realism, which above all favoured the corresponding misinterpretation in Soviet Marxism since Plekhanov.

1.2 With his talk of the ‘immaterial’ commodities of the ‘ideological etc. classes’, Marx critically connects to Adam Smith and

Henri **Storch**. For **Smith**, the issue is the value-theoretical status of services in the context of differentiating between productive and unproductive labour. Here, ‘not material’ clearly means that the product is not a graspable ‘thing’ in the everyday sense of the term. In *Capital*, Volume 1, **Marx** approaches the concept of the commodity in terms of its kind of being [*Seinsart*] in that he conceives it as ‘first of all, an external object, a thing’ (126). He does not subsume its property of satisfying human needs under any such ontological restriction. ‘The nature of these needs, whether they arise, for example, from the stomach or the imagination, makes no difference’ (ibid.). In a footnote, he lets Nicholas **Barbon** speak: ‘Desire [...] is the appetite of the mind’ (ibid.; **Barbon** 1696, 2). Furthermore, ‘how the thing [*Sache*] satisfies human need’ (ibid.; trans. modified) should play no role.

In explicating the differentiation between productive and unproductive labour adopted by **Smith**, **Marx** separates the concept of the productive from its relation to the ‘external thing [*Ding*]’ and connects it to the social relation in which a labour is performed. The concept thereby reveals its relativity or its particularity [*Standpunktbezogenheit*]. That which, from the standpoint of capital, is productive because it forms surplus-value is not necessarily so from the standpoint of the preservation of life, and vice-versa. In capitalism, therefore, he states emphatically, it is not good fortune, but rather, ‘a misfortune’ to be a productive worker’ (*Capital*, 644). Teachers and singers, according to his examples, perform productive labour when they teach or sing in a capital-relation. Nassau William **Senior**’s involuntarily comical sentence makes this explanation laughable: ‘According to **Smith**, the Hebrew lawgiver [i.e. Moses] was an unproductive worker’ (*Principes fondamentaux de l’econ. pol.*, Paris 1836, 198; cf. *MECW* 31, 184).

The concept of value, moreover, becomes ‘dematerialised [*entdinglicht*]’ in that the notion of value as a material [*dinglich*] attribute is comprehended as a displaced [*ver-rückte*] way of expressing a reified [*verdinglichtes*] social relation within the framework of

production based on private division of labour [*privat-arbeitsteiliger Produktion*]. When **Marx** characterises value as ‘something immaterial, something indifferent to its material [*stofflich*] consistency’ (*Grundrisse*, 309), he does so in his confrontation with Jean-Baptiste **Say** whose discussion uses the English terms ‘matter’ and ‘immaterial’. If ‘immaterial’ means here ‘indifferent to material consistency’, then the concepts ‘material consistency [*Stoff*]’ and ‘material [*stofflich*]’ – in **Aristotle**’s metaphysics, the complementarily subordinated counterpart of ‘form’ and ‘formal’ – have the advantage, in contrast to the concepts ‘matter [*Materie*]’ and ‘the material [*das Materielle*]’ in philosophical terminology, of not being appropriated by an epistemological framework. **Marx** reformulates the Aristotelian opposition of form vs. matter [*Stoff*] as that between social form-determination and physical-material [*physisch-stofflicher*] constitution. Relations of production, however, though they are ‘not-material [*nicht-stofflich*]’, (but rather, social) are in no way ‘immaterial’ in the philosophical sense. The ‘invisible threads’ that capital ‘pulls through’ the production-process are those of domination [*Herrschaft*]. But they are not as invisible in the factory – although, here too, they have, as **Brecht** put it, ‘slipped into functionality [*Dreigroschenprozess*]’ – as they are in the product in which ‘capital, as a relationship of form [*Formbeziehung*] seems to have disappeared’. Thus, that which is non-physical [*unstoffliches*] like this form-relationship can very well belong to the material in the philosophical sense. This is true too of physical relations [*Verhältnisse und Beziehungen*]: gravitation is neither physical [*stofflich*] nor visible, yet it is a fundamental condition of all that is physical [*Stofflichen*]. Moreover, there are visible energy-processes that are not physical [*stofflich*], but material [*materiell*]. Lacking a more developed conceptual apparatus, **Hegel** formulates the mode of being of light as ‘non-corporeal, indeed immaterial matter’ (*Enzyklopädie* II, *W* 9, 119), and he says of sound that ‘as immaterial, it escapes’ (291); of magnetism, however, he states that there is ‘nothing material that functions there, just pure immaterial form’ (205).

1.3 In his confrontation with **Smith's** value-theoretical ordering of the activities of the higher classes – which Marx categorised as the 'ideological orders [*ideologischen Stände*]' – **Marx** encounters **Storch**. In 1815, **Storch** used his concept of 'immaterial labour' or 'travail immatériel' (*Cours d'écon. pol. etc.*, 1823, III, 218), to which he attached the concept of the 'biens internes', or 'inner goods' (241; cf. *MECW* 31, 181), because he wanted, *contra Smith*, to recognise those élites engaged with such goods as 'productive'. **Storch's** concept of 'immaterial labour' follows the diction of Jean-Baptiste **Say's** *Traité d'économie politique* (1803) which re-baptises those activities that **Smith** classified unproductive as 'productifs des produits immatériels' (1817, I, 120) – that is, he displaced the negating prefix of 'un-productive' onto the material of the produced goods. Comte **Destutt de Tracy**, chief theorist of the ideologists, follows this in turn. He begins by declaring that all labour is productive, regardless of whether it produces material or immaterial goods; then he differentiates, again cutting across both kinds of labour, between rapidly consumed and long-lived goods: 'a discovery is of eternal use [...] but that of a ball, a concert, or a theatrical performance is quickly over and immediately disappears' (*Éléments d'idéologie*, 1826, III, 243f).

In the lectures on political economy that he held for Grand Duke Nicholas in 1815, and that **Say** published in Paris, **Henri Storch** baptises the labour that produces immaterial goods as 'immaterial labour' and ascribes to it the production of the 'biens internes ou les éléments de la civilisation' as the prerequisite for the production of national wealth (*Cours d'écon. pol. etc.*, III, 217). **Smith's** mistake, he argues, was 'not to have differentiated immaterial values and riches' (218). 'Therewith the matter is really closed', interjects **Marx** (*MECW* 31, 181; trans. modified). **Storch** was not even able 'to formulate the task, let alone solve it. [...] In order to recognise the relation between mental and material production, it is above all necessary to grasp the latter not as itself a universal category, but in its specific historical form'; otherwise it is

'impossible to grasp that which is specific about the mental production corresponding to it, and about the interaction between the two' (*MECW* 31, 181; trans. modified).

By 'immaterial labour' (for which **Marx** uses 'mental production'), **Storch** means 'all the professional activities of the ruling class that perform social functions as a business'. He was, however unable to understand the existence of these functions, and of the social orders that perform them, in relation to 'the specific historical organisation of the relations of production'; nor was he able to comprehend 'the ideological components of the ruling classes' of the 'free mental production of this given social formation' (*MECW* 31, 182f). **Marx** expressly agrees with **Storch's** reproach of **Smith's** critics for not having differentiated between 'valeurs immatérielles' and 'richesses', and **Marx** translates it into his own language: 'They insist that the production of intellectual products or the production of services is material production' (183). Otherwise, **Marx** judges **Storch** as not having gone beyond 'general superficial analogies and relationships between mental and material wealth'. **Marx** obviously considers **Storch's** category of 'immaterial labour' unusable. He continues to use the concept of 'intellectual' or 'mental' labour, which is concerned with mental production.

1.4 If one were to translate 'immaterial [*immateriell*]' as 'not-physical [*nicht-stofflich*]', then one could clarify what is problematic about the expression 'immaterial labour' through the nonsensical concept 'non-physical labour'. The notions spontaneously associated with the difference between 'mental' or 'intellectual' vs. 'corporeal' labour – a difference that the class-structure has turned into an opposition – can be observed in a comment by **Ludwig Feuerbach**: 'Hans Sachs was, indeed, a shoemaker as well as a poet. But the shoes were the work of his hands, whereas his poems were the work of his mind. As the effect is, so is the cause' (1986, 22). However, what **Marx** said in his well-known example of the master-builder is true too for the shoemaker, namely, that he put together the shoe 'in his head' and with the help of his

learnt qualifications before he crafted it in leather (*Capital*, Volume 1, 284). And vice versa, Hans Sachs wrote his pieces on paper, with his own hand, using pen and ink, as a practical performance in space and time. The difference is thus relative in terms of the physical side, and only the predominance, cemented by class-position, of the one or the other side raises it to an opposition.

The most general definition of labour that **Marx** gives is true for intellectual labour no less than for those named by the reified term ‘manual labourers’: ‘on the one hand all labour is an expenditure of human labour-power in the physiological sense’, and on the other hand, ‘in a particular form and with a definite aim’ (*Capital*, Volume 1, 137). By labour-power, **Marx** means ‘the aggregate [*Inbegriff*] of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind’ (270). What workers employ are their ‘natural forces which belongs to his own body, his arms, legs, head and hands’, and at the end of the process ‘a result emerges which had already being conceived by the worker at the beginning, hence already existed ideally’ (283–4). ‘Ideal’ means here: ‘in the imagination’, as ‘plan’. **Marx** emphasises that ‘a purposeful will that is expressed as attention’, becomes all the more important the less the worker ‘is attracted by the nature of the work and the way in which it has to be accomplished, and the less, therefore, he enjoys it as the free play of his own physical and mental powers’ (284; trans. modified).

Marx thus uses an integral concept of labour that encompasses the ‘corporeal’ and the ‘mental’ dimensions. In order to establish the connection among various kinds of labour – especially predominantly ‘mental’ and predominantly ‘corporeal’ – he coined the concept of the ‘total worker [*Gesamtarbeiter*]’ to account for the transformation of the product into one of a ‘combination of workers’, ‘each of whom stands at a different distance from the actual manipulation of the object of labour’ (643). This is the key to the analysis of all relations in which ‘the product ceases to be

the product of isolated direct labour, and the combination of social activity appears, rather, as the producer’ (*Grundrisse*, 709).

If one also considers that, in the wake of the neoliberal expansion of the world-market that was named ‘globalisation’ at the end of the twentieth century, the ‘unit of measure’ of value corresponding to the *marché universel* – as the world-market is called in the translation of *Capital* by **Roy** and **Marx** (*MEGA* II.7/483) – is ‘the average unit of general labour’ (584), then important conceptual approaches for further reflection under the conditions of transnational, high-tech capitalism emerge.

2. The ‘thoughtless enthusiasm’ that has been ignited by digitalisation as the ‘new technology of decorporealisation [*Entkörperlichung*]’ indicates that the ‘New Immaterials’ have the wherewithal to become the component capable of bearing the ‘affirmative culture’ of the twenty-first century (**List** 2001, 206). But even critical currents have been influenced by it. Already in the 1960s, Hans-Magnus **Enzensberger** opined that ‘immaterial exploitation’ of the subjects by the ‘consciousness industry’ had superseded the material exploitation of workers (cf. 1969, 7–17). A generation later, the Zapatista Subcommandante **Marcos** describes the new world-order that neoliberalism is striving for as ‘planetary, permanent, immediate, and immaterial’ (2000, 14) – but without any further analysis.

In the first speculative high phase of the ‘new economy’ at the turn of the twenty-first century, theories of the ‘immaterialisation [*Immaterialisierung*]’ or ‘dephysicalisation [*Entstofflichung*]’ of the economy were rampant. ‘Immaterial labour’ seemed to be ‘the new dominant in the chain of value-creation’ (**Möller** 2000, 215). ‘In this new world that trades in information and services, in consciousness and experiences [*Erlebenisse und Erfahrungen*], and in which the material yields to the immaterial and commercialised time becomes more important than the appropriation of space, the conventional conceptions of property relations and markets, that have been the determinants of life in the industrial age, are increasingly losing meaning’

(Rifkin 2000). The ‘new design-science’, explains one of the especially emphatic authors who wants to base his analysis on *Capital* – without noticing that he paraphrases the commodity-aesthetic’s most general mode of effectivity (cf. Haug 1980, 51f), – ‘must define its task as marketing before the product. Only then will it be mature enough for an economy that appears increasingly “soft” and immaterial’ (Bolz 1994, 74f). The crash of the new market and especially 11 September 2001 and the reaction of the USA, whose ‘world war against terror’ veils the war for the control of the oil-supplies (cf. Haug 2003, 199–276), have indeed muffled the affirmative discourse that ‘the material yields before the immaterial’ – though not the critical discourse of the post-workerists.

2.1 The Italian workerists, who in the last decade of the ‘golden years’ of Fordism agitated for a revolutionary politics to the left of the Italian Communist Party and unions among the ‘mass workers [Massenarbeitern]’ in northern Italian industries, lost their mass basis in the transition to automation (cf. Wright 2000). When, about ten years later, at the same time as the fall of the Berlin Wall, many Italian universities were occupied by students, former workerists identified in this movement the new subject of social change. This was the birth-hour of ‘post-workerism’. It declared that students are ‘immaterial workers’ and then expanded this concept to include ever more groups. Its representatives in Italy are therefore called ‘the immaterialists [immaterialisti]’.

Negri sees in the movements of university- and high-school students ‘the first expressions of the revolt of the “immaterial labour”’ (1996, 82). But this is overly inclusive, overlooking all differences and fissures: ‘to an ever-greater extent, labor in our societies is tending toward immaterial labor’ (Negri and Hardt 1994, 10). Here, all labour is without hesitation renamed as ‘immaterial labour’. But it is then even more narrowly defined: as ‘intellectual, affective-emotional and techno-scientific activity’ and, in science-fictional language, as ‘labor of the cyborg’ (ibid.). Finally: ‘The

increasingly complex networks of laboring cooperation, the integration of caring labor across the spectrum of production, and the computerisation of a wide range of laboring processes characterise the contemporary passage in the nature of labor’ (ibid.). With the technical professions resulting from the victory of the computer, commodity-aesthetic realisation-functions are thrown together – for Maurizio Lazzarato, ‘immaterial labour’ in its real sense is this ‘audio-visual production, advertisement, fashion, software-production, photography, cultural activities and so on’ (1993, 68; cf. Negri, Lazzarato, Virno 1998, 57). Furthermore, all activities that have to do with the production and handling of affects (Negri and Hardt, 2000, 293) are subsumed under ‘immaterial labour’. In the more narrow sense of ‘informationised [informatisierte]’ labour, everything that produces – in Say’s (unstated) concept – ‘immaterial goods’ (which the authors mistake for digitalised goods (306; for a critique thereof, Haug 2003, 97–115) qualifies as ‘immaterial labour’. Then again, they mean services of all kinds among which industrial labour is more or less thrown in: ‘The material labor of the production of durable goods mixes with and tend towards immaterial labor’ (Hardt and Negri 2000, 293).

In order to belong to the category of ‘immaterial labour’, according to the post-workerists, one must not be in a formal or informal labour-relation. They justify this abolition of boundaries with the Marxian category of the ‘general intellect’ from the *Grundrisse* (706). The theoreticians of the new economy consider the ‘scientific basing [Wissensbasiertheit]’ of production (which Marx diagnosed already at the threshold of the nineteenth century) as the specific characteristic of high-tech forces of production: fixed capital is no longer limited to its ‘material mode of existence’ in the form of machinery (*Capital*, Volume 1, 577) when ‘general social knowledge has become a *direct force of production*’ (*Grundrisse*, 706). Following the path of the ‘socialist’ entrepreneur Robert Owen, who in his *Essays on the Formation of*

the Human Character (1840, 31) reproaches his own kind for investing in machines while neglecting the ‘body and mind’ of people, **Marx** reflects that ‘from the standpoint of the direct production-process, the ‘full development of the individual’ can be seen as the ‘production of *fixed capital*’, ‘this *fixed capital* being man himself’, who becomes a new subject in whose head resides the accumulated knowledge of society’ (*Grundrisse*, 711–2). According to the sketch in the *Grundrisse*, capital ‘calls to life all powers of science and of nature, as of social combination and of social intercourse, in order to make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labour-time employed on it’ (706). From these anticipatory observations, which they hurriedly posit as a description of reality, the post-workerists derive the universal status of ‘immaterial labour’. Whatever developed social individuals do is, for them, always already ‘immaterial labour’. Thereby, moreover, the post-workerists can also define themselves as ‘workers like the others’ (**Negri** 1996, 104).

2.2 **Negri** justifies the concept of ‘immaterial labour’, whose theoretical senselessness he concedes, with the argument ‘that in the capitalist-dominated organisation of labour-processes, it is no longer a matter of labour on the basis of purely physical relations. Capitalist predominance is based on an autonomy of labour that is constituted outside of it’ (1996, 97). Here, he is thinking of ‘persons who work for television, in the operations of information processing, in advertisement, in fashion, i.e. in the clothing industry, etc.’ (ibid.). Under post-Fordist conditions, exploitation is ‘the exploitation of social cooperation. And affected thereby is the “intellectual proletariat” that needs this cooperation, and that makes it even possible’ (101). The thread of reality underlying these rewritings is the notion, developed by the automation-research of the 1970s, of the ‘chained emancipation’ of workers under the conditions of automation: their contradictory harnessing as ‘subaltern-autonomous’ subjects and the tearing down of the boundaries between labour and free time.

But post-workerist discourse arbitrarily helps itself to these findings and nourishes the illusion that they would apply to forms of labour that are still externally determined.

Finally, **Negri** contaminates his description of ‘immaterial labour’ with the ‘ghostly objectivity [*gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit*] of human labour-power without consideration of the (concretely useful) form of its expenditure’ that Marx presented while introducing the concept of ‘abstract labour’ in *Capital*, Volume 1 (150). He conjures up the ‘experience of a mobile, flexible, computerised, immaterialised and ghostly (spectral) labour’ that will be shared by all ‘*as clear as the sun*’, a ‘real illusion’ that no longer knows an outside nor space and time. ‘Only a radical “Unheimlich” remains in which we’re immersed’ (1999, 8f). **Marx**’s spectres are ‘no longer valid’ here; **Derrida** (cf. 1994) should concern himself rather with ‘the phenomenology of a new productive reality’ (9). Here, the concept of ‘immaterial labour’ slides over into that of abstract labour, and it is as though the mysticism of the world of capital had assimilated the discourse critical of it.

2.3 The talk of ‘immaterial labour’ is connected to the neo-liberal narrative of the miracle of a general ‘dematerialisation of the economy’ (for a critical perspective, cf. **Haug** 2003, 67–96). ‘The economy of physical production is dissolved by an immaterial economy of information, dominated by the fourth sector that, commensurate with the demands of production in the global cities, reorganises especially the finance and communication services for businesses’ (**Moulier Boutang** 1998, 13) Supposed characteristics are: 1. the sources of wealth are displaced onto conceptive activities; 2. value is added above all through transactions (communication, distribution); 3. no longer the ‘material’, but instead the ‘immaterial activities [*Aktiva*]’ are decisive: ‘knowledge, skills in dealing with information, culture’ (13f). This is often presented as though ‘the “becoming-immaterial” [*Immaterial-Werden*] of capital investment (artificial intelligence, information-technologies, education and information,

communication-procedures) were synonymous with the intellectualising of labour' (Vakaloulis 2001, 117).

3. The eclectic voluntarism of many post-workerist texts has been criticised in many ways. Frigga Haug has described their 'Lorianism' (Gramsci) that uses Marxian concepts 'like a wantonly thrown-together toy' as 'drug thinking [*Drogendenken*]' (204). Enzo Modugno who, like Negri, emerged from the workerists, replied to the thesis of the epochal dominance of 'immaterial labour' with the counter-thesis that the 'microelectric nemesis' is in the process of again taking away from the 'new labourers of total quality' (1996, 21) their intellectual competence that initially increased in the wake of computerisation (22): the 'general intellect' has become a machine, and intellectual labour has been subjected to a progressive 'mechanisation of the abstract intellect' (21) – 'the intellectual labourer has become an appendage of the great communication-machine' (24).

Stuart Hall initiates his critique by addressing the vulgar philosophical notion of immateriality: if the growing significance of language is understood by the post-workerists as the dominance of immateriality, he responds with a reference to the materiality of language: 'the word is today as "material" as the world. Through technology, design and styling, the "aesthetic" has already penetrated the world of modern production. Through marketing, layout and style, the "image" provides the mode of representation and fictional narrativisation of the body on which so much of modern consumption depends. Modern culture is relentlessly material in its practices and modes of production. And the material world of commodities and technologies is profoundly cultural' (1996, 232). In a wholly different sense, Hall himself speaks of 'immaterial labour' when he notes that everyone who 'is into cultural studies seriously as an intellectual practice, must feel, on their pulse, its ephemerality, its insubstantiality, how little it registers, how little we've been able to change anything or get anybody to do anything' (272). In this sense, one might

characterise the practice of the 'immaterialists', who have fashioned an essential element of their symbolic capital out of the talk of 'immaterial labour', as itself 'immaterial'. The 'intellectualisation' of growing segments of social labour that is driven forward by the development of the high-tech mode of production, as well as the breaks and lines of conflicts on this field, are more likely being covered up by the imposition of the decisionist category of 'immaterial labour' on them.

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Abstract labour, character-masks, class-society, collective worker, commodity-aesthetic, communication, division of labour, domination, empire, epistemology, *faux frais*, Fordism, form, gender-relations, general intellect, ghost, hacker, high-tech mode of production, idea, ideologue, immaterial, information, information-rent, information-society, information-worker, inner/outer, internet, labour in general, labour, needs, mass-intellectuality, mass-worker, matter, mental/corporeal labour, object, personification, post-Fordism, post-workerism, productive/unproductive labour, relations, self-valorisation, value-form visible/invisible, workerism.

abstrakte Arbeit, allgemeine Arbeit, Arbeit, Arbeitsteilung, Bedürfnisse, Charaktermaske, Erkenntnistheorie, faux frais, Fordismus, Form, Gegenstand, geistige/ körperliche Arbeit, general intellect, Gesamtarbeiter, Geschlechterverhältnisse, Gespenst, Hacker, Herrschaft, hochtechnologische Produktionsweise, Idee, Ideologe, immateriell, Imperium, Information, Informationsarbeiter, Informationsgesellschaft, Informationsrente, innen/außen, Internet, Klassengesellschaft, Kommunikation, Massenarbeiter, Massenintellektualität, Materie, Operaismus, Personifikation, Postfordismus, Postoperaismus, produktive/ unproduktive Arbeit, Selbstverwertung, sichtbar/ unsichtbar, Verhältnisse, Warenästhetik, Wertform.