

performing tasks they
secretly believe do not
really need to be
performed

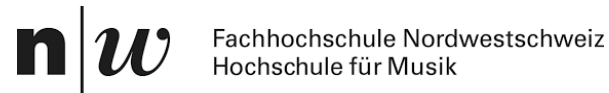
/ James Saunders

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performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed requires the players to undertake a series of simple, repetitive activities that are in themselves relatively pointless. They are simultaneously given additional instructions which affect the way they carry out the tasks, accompanied by music from YouTube playlists matching the search terms 'concentration music', 'work focus music' and 'relaxation music'. This constitutes the work of the piece; the players operate within a network of arbitrary rules and constraints, trying—or not—to complete the tasks as best they can. There is no explicitly stated aim or goal for them to achieve, and the piece explores how following instructions can be an end in itself. Any sense of purpose emerges from their choices and the way they respond to the tasks, and in the way these actions are viewed. The title comes from David Graeber's book *Bullshit Jobs* (2018). It is well worth reading.

at least 15 players with cardboard boxes and audio playback

duration: 24'



SETUP

Mark a large area on the floor of the performance area using tape or any other appropriate method that does not create a barrier or a trip hazard. The area can be of any shape: regular, such as a rectangle or circle, or irregular to fit the space. It should be large enough to accommodate all the performers and objects at the same time if needed, or larger.

Near to the marked performance area, create a storage area for the instruction cards, materials, and boxes used in the piece. This could be a table, for example. The storage area should not be directly next to the marked performance area so that there is a distinct space between them.

Mark a waiting area for the players when they are not actively involved in carrying out any actions. This should be near to the storage area.

Set up audio playback for the instruction track so that it can be heard by the players and audience.

Collect a range of cardboard boxes as outlined below, ensuring there are at least as many as there are players in the piece, or ideally more. Players should be encouraged to bring some of their own boxes to create a diverse collection. Place the instruction cards, materials, and boxes in the storage area so that they are accessible to the players.

MATERIALS

Stereo PA with audio playback source.

A large selection of cardboard boxes in different sizes, sourced in part by the players. Boxes can be of any type, either open (with one open side) or closed. Examples might include house moving boxes, matchboxes, home delivery boxes, furniture boxes, supermarket packing boxes, food boxes (clean), shoe boxes, banana boxes etc.

The boxes will be marked and potentially destroyed during the performance, so only use boxes which are disposable. Please recycle all boxes locally after use.

A box of pencils (approximately enough for one for each player)
Some pairs of scissors
A few rolls of packaging tape and sticky tape

PERFORMANCE INSTRUCTIONS

During the performance you will repeatedly enter the marked performance area, complete a task and potentially follow audio instructions, and then leave. This sequence may be completed as many times as required. When you are not doing this, wait in the waiting area.

The piece begins by starting the audio instruction track, and ends when the track finishes.

When the piece ends, all players immediately cease their current action.
They should then leave the marked area and congregate in the waiting area.

During the piece, the following actions are possible:

1. PLACE BOX, INSTRUCTION CARD AND MATERIALS

- Take a box from the storage area.
- Take an instruction card from the storage area and any required materials (e.g. pencil, scissors, tape)
- Enter the marked performance area.
- Place the box with its instruction card and materials somewhere in the marked performance area.
- Leave the marked performance area and return to the waiting area.

2. REMOVE BOX, INSTRUCTION CARD AND MATERIALS

- Enter the marked performance area.
- Remove a box (together with its instruction card and any materials) which has previously been placed in the marked performance area and is not currently being used
- Leave the marked performance area.
- Return the box, instruction card and materials to the storage area and return to the waiting area.

3. MOVE BOX, INSTRUCTION CARD AND MATERIALS

- Enter the marked performance area.
- Move a box (together with its instruction card and any materials) which has previously been placed in the marked performance area to a new location within the marked performance area.
- Leave the marked performance area and return to the waiting area.

4. COMPLETE TASK

- Enter the marked performance area.
- Go to a box in the marked performance area and follow the instructions on the card.
- When the action is complete, gather the box, instruction card, and materials and leave the marked performance area.
- Return everything to the storage area and return to the waiting area.

5. FOLLOW AUDIO INSTRUCTIONS

- While completing the tasks, audio instructions will be given which affect the way tasks are carried out.
- These instructions must be followed by all players currently in the marked performance area
- Players entering the marked performance area after an instruction has been given may follow the instructions, or not.

If in doubt, do the best you can.

Audio recordings used in the backing track were sourced from YouTube channels after searching on 'concentration music', 'work focus music' and 'relaxation music'. The following sources were used: [Quiet Quest](#), [SensualMusic4You](#), [GreenRed Productions](#), [Yellow Brick Cinema](#) and [Chill Music Lab](#).