

Energy, Work, Labour

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Energy is defined in physics as the capacity to do work, and is in English a 16th Century word which my dictionary tells me is derived from the Greek 'energeia' (from 'en' 'in, within' + ergon 'work'). We might observe straight away that this is a notably labour-related definition. Our conceptions of energy are complex, with related yet distinct definitions spanning the arts and sciences. We might start our reflection upon energy by stating that classically, energy is conceived as a part of a matter/energy dualism, and in relation to a matter which energy in some sense vitalises.

There have been some interesting reflections upon how we think about matter in recent theory. However the same cannot be said about energy. This is especially curious given the ever increasing importance of energy-related environmental questions today, and given the fact that finding ways to conceive and quantify the flow of energy through ecosystems and environments was one of the key tasks that ecology (a term which has proliferated in recent architectural and cultural theory) set itself in the last century. In this paper I will present some reflections upon our conceptions of energy in thinking about the 'industries of architecture', especially in relation to labour and work, drawing in part upon some interesting letters between Marx and Engels on the matter of energy.

Biography:

Dr Jon Goodbun runs the Department of Ontological Theatre at the Royal College of Art. He also teaches at the University of Westminster and UCL Bartlett, and runs the research vehicle Rheomode ([www.rheomode.org.uk](http://www.rheomode.org.uk)). His PhD *Critical Urban Ecology: Towards and Architecture of the Extended Mind* was completed in 2011, and he was a leading member of the EU HERA funded Scarcity and Creativity in the Built Environment research project ([www.scibe.eu](http://www.scibe.eu)). He can be followed on twitter: @jongoodbun