

ECONOMY

ABOUT THE READING ROOM

This Reading Room is intended as a theoretical and contextualising accompaniment to ECONOMY, providing an avenue for enquiries prompted by the exhibition to be furthered. It also exists as a standalone archive of texts surveying the means by which economy has been, and continues to be, engaged by art theory and practice in a historical context defined by the global domination of capital.

The task of curating a textual archive surveying the interrelationships is daunting at best and impossible at worst. The sheer quantity of literature devoted to economics in its own right is too vast to be adequately represented in this format. Likewise, where does one draw the line when selecting texts that deal specifically with the relationships between art and economy? The recent prominence of Marxist thought in art theory has brought economy to the fore, both in an explicit sense, and in more nuanced fashions. Any text discussing, for instance, art and its political agency will necessarily implicate economy in some form or other. Indeed, in the wake of recent debates regarding the economic circumstances of artistic production, it could be argued that any text discussing art will inevitably contain somewhere in it an implicit undertone of economic thought.

As such, some method must be employed in order to limit the field to a manageable quantity, without compromising the rigour of the debate this Reading Room is intended to precipitate. Texts have thus been included on the whole by virtue of the fact that they answer one or more of these three areas of enquiry.

- Firstly, texts which engage directly with the seven keywords which delineate the specific directions and focuses of the exhibition. The issues of crisis, enclosures, exodus, life, sex, spectres and work have been the subject of great swathes of writing, both discretely and in relation to art, and are accompanied by texts from the fields of art theory, economics, philosophy and sociology, amongst others. In each case, it has been my intention to provide a selection of the key texts on the subject as well as several which touch on the investigation of each through art. For instance, the question of 'sex' is accompanied by pivotal texts from the annals of feminism, queer theory and so on which focus directly on the economic implications and permutations of sex and gender, as well as art theoretical works which examine the practices of artists who likewise focus on such issues. It is important to note, however, that these keywords are neither exhaustive nor entirely independent of one another. Many texts cut across several of these categories, while some do not directly speak to any. The keywords should be treated merely as helpful signposts towards further investigation.
- Secondly, texts which speak more generally to the interrelationships of art and economy. During the late twentieth century, a period marked by the inexorable advance of consumerism, this field was predominated by discussions of the commodification of art, most notably by Fredric Jameson.

More recently attention has turned towards the labour and economy of the production of art itself (a tendency arguably prompted by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's influential 'The New Spirit of Capitalism'). These and other related dialogues represent perhaps the most explicit theoretical concatenations of art and economy, and a broad selection of texts on these subjects are to be found in the Reading Room.

- Thirdly, it would be remiss to neglect to include some of the cornerstones of economic theory. Regardless of their direct engagements with art (or rather the lack thereof) it is essential given the remit of this Reading Room to include the works by the likes of Marx, Smith, Ricardo, Keynes and even Friedman. Such texts have provided the backdrop for all further discussions of economy, artistic or otherwise, as well as of the current global economic situation. Of particular importance in the context of the contemporary Post-Fordist model of economic production is Marx's 'Fragment on Machines' from his 1858 text 'The Grundrisse'. His hypothesis that abstract knowledge would become the dominant domain of economic production seems remarkably prescient, and is especially pertinent to discussions of art and economy. Ideas presented by Marx in this passage have formed the backbone of many influential texts in the Autonomist tradition (represented in this Reading Room by Silvia Federici and Paolo Virno among others), particularly in the formations of the concepts of 'General Intellect' and 'Affective Labour'. These texts in turn have been subject to a heightened interest among artists and theorists from around 2000 onwards and as such are well represented in the Reading Room.

Also included in this Reading Room are entries for exhibitions, conferences, symposia, panels, sessions and so on which are complementary to discussions of art and economy. Much of the most interesting research to have been conducted on the subject has been disseminated in this fashion and as such should not be neglected on the grounds of an archaic privileging of the book form. Indeed, many of the texts included in this archive have been solely published online. Books, exhibitions, online articles, conferences etc. are here presented alike as equally worthwhile forms of theoretical distribution.

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