

Metabolism - Statement

“There is nothing I cannot metabolise, no thing impervious to my alchemy.”

- Maggie Nelson¹

Often it's difficult to properly articulate what I mean. It makes more sense for me to describe or talk about something by referencing a feeling or emotion associated with the work I've had an interaction with. Physical responses and these senses of embodiment feel difficult to explain - a sentence, a string of words, can't properly trigger the 'oomph' that's felt.

Metabolism is an ongoing experimental art writing project taking the form of a website and is based upon the premise of autotheory, the voice, poetry and soundscape, through the practice of art writing itself.

The intention is to share and convey personal embodied sensations triggered by an artwork or exhibition through an abstract, vocal soundscape, capturing the point of interaction between the artwork and myself. I formulate a poem which is then reconfigured over and over again, sometimes repeated, sometimes distorted and then edited and reconstructed to create a work that ebbs and flows, forming a soundscape that brings my initial experience into the present. By listening to these recordings and through feeling the literal reverberations of sound, the listener engages with an alternative form of art writing, in which the work and the experience is felt and not read.

Queer theorists Annamarie Jagose and Lee Wallace describe autotheory as being "where the self ends and the other begins."² Its roots lie in feminist, queer and Black literature and history, as way to express experience as a way of understanding and to break colonial, white, 'masc' traditions in academia. For Metabolism, the autotheoretical is the vehicle of the expression of where the work and I collide. The soundscapes are the embodiment of my experience, taking the place of traditional, textual art writing to be interpreted uniquely by each listener through literal reverberation.

Philosopher, psychoanalyst and theorist Mladen Dolar states that the inherent desire of the voice is to physically say something,³ be that in the physical action of speech or through the meanings formed through combinations of words. Here, the voice, poetry and soundscape morph into one. They become abstracted, at times audible and at others a mess. The meaning of the soundscape becomes subjective despite being constructed from my own interactions and experiences with the artwork. It is the vehicle of reverberation, hoping to convey the embodiment of being present in the space I once stood, and the instant of collision between the work and myself.

The name 'Metabolism' is derived from Maggie Nelson's quote from her novel *The Argonauts*, a key piece of literature within autotheoretical discourse. While the idea of metabolisation and alchemy feels hierarchical in role of the writer, I believe it works both ways between writer and artwork. Through each encounter, the work digests us just as much as we digest the work, and in each instance the result, the physicality, the impact on the individual and the impact on the work, varies. The 'alchemy', in the case of Metabolism, is each person's lived experiences, the baggage we carry that impacts how we see and interpret the world around us, the autotheoretical. It breaks the implied hierarchy between writer/critic and artwork, between expert and novice, relying on personal, physical experience in order to understand.

¹ Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*, 1. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 2015), Page or Pages.

² Annamarie Jagose and Lee Wallace. "Dicktion: Autotheory in the Coupled Voice," *The Arizona Quarterly* 76, no. 1 (2020): 118, 10.1353/arq.2020.0004.

³ Mladen Dolar, "The Linguistics of the Voice," in *A Voice and Nothing More*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006).