

Metabolizer

Metabolizer* embodies the entanglement of exponential economic growth and exhaustion. It undermines hierarchies of qualitative and quantitative value. Dancing labour produces continuous co-transformation, both of data and dancing bodies. Metabolizer is a structure for relating.

Enter the pod - an authentic workspace - and begin dancing. The (anonymous) data from your dancing is fed into a database and then onto a dashboard display via closed loop. The dance is invisible, solo, but the data is visible, drawn from multiple bodies. Together, we will try to produce as much dance as possible, measured in minutes.

The KPI (“key performance indicator,” – or how you know you’re performing) is to grow the amount of dance-time by 3% each day until it reaches 12 hours. The KPI echoes the target annual growth rate for GDP, (“gross domestic product” – or the total monetary value of goods and services produced), which is often used as the key statistical mark for whether an economy is succeeding. GDP does not measure human or planetary health, or include the value of unpaid care work. The KPI also echoes the typical length of a working day for a sweatshop tailor or cobalt miner, whose cheap labour helps to fuel the growth economy. To create the possibility of producing 3% more dance every day, Metabolizer’s opening hours gradually lengthen over the course of the residency. The target of growing dance time by 3% each day is intentionally exhausting and impossible for one person to carry out; the absurdity of one person hitting 12 hours of continuous dancing recalls the impossibility of endless economic growth on a finite planet, which can be hard to feel at large scale but is immediately clear when condensed in time and into individual bodies.

The Metabolizer pod hides the form and quality of the dancing that spills out of multiple bodies, and makes the data the performer and virtuoso. This is an absurd literalization of what has been called the “tyranny of quantification” by environmental activist Chip Ward. The disappearance of the dance might be experienced by the dance producers as freeing - no need to be a “good” dancer, you can still contribute to growth - while also recalling value’s vampiric indifference to the what, who and how of production in service of ever-increasing profit and accumulation.

This systemic perspective is doubled with my human, artistic perspective

Metabolizer responds to my own transforming relationship with the value of my performing dancing body following 6 years of chronic, debilitating hip pain, coinciding with the shifting emotional and hormonal terrain of perimenopause. Over this time I watched my own movement become limited into smaller and smaller spaces, bordered by pain. I aimed to work around or ignore this process until that was no longer possible. In 2025, I underwent two major surgeries to replace both joints, with my dance practice largely replaced by repetitive rehab activities as I learned to do basic movements like walk and climb stairs again. In Metabolizer, I leave behind the practice and memory of my own virtuosity as a dancer and also grapple with my own continued desire for more...more visibility, more accomplishment, more recognition, asking “what happens when virtuosity is off the table?” I see this as an intimate, embodied act of post-growth economics, a way to take back time from the service of profit, with an alternative space which values dance and makes its own metrics.

Metabolizer values radical inclusion and distributed authorship

This is first and foremost expressed in its public-ness and free-ness: anyone can dance in the pod, and there is no financial barrier to any of the work. The pod radically includes all dances; one finger moving is a dance, a whole body moving is a dance. The resulting data is co-created by multiple bodies. These values are also expressed through the artist invitations in the Optimizer! evenings, which form a mini-series within Metabolizer, loosely inspired by the corporate practice of lunch and learns, but with an emphasis on dialogue and conviviality. Each invited artist brings work on a theme - mycelium networks, waste water, tracing through-lines of resources, and labour - which is in resonance with Metabolizer. Evenings include drinks, dialogue and dancing. Interweaving Metabolizer with others’ work is a practical move to share space and resources with other artists, to build artistic communities together in Plymouth. Optimizer! moves to explicitly acknowledge the co-authorship and networked enabling that is always part of making and performing whether or not it is formally recognized.

**Metabolizer refers to Marx’s concept of “metabolism” which describes how the action of labour co-transforms humans and more-than-human materials - and the rift caused by the accumulative process of capital. It can also refer to digestion and transformation into fuel for action, for example of food in the body, or injustice in the mind and heart.*