Autotheory and Its Others

Deadline: Mar 15, 2023

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Autotheory, an emergent discourse with historic precedents, lacks a stable definition. Recently, Lauren Fournier defined the term as “a self-conscious way of engaging with theory—as a discourse, frame, or mode of thinking and practice—alongside lived experience and subjective embodiment . . .” (Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism). Yet there are as many approaches to autotheory as there are autotheorists. From a recognizable aesthetic in artistic practices to a more scholarly methodology, autotheory remains a shapeshifter.

Autotheory can be understood as a methodology rather than as a final result or a specific aesthetic. It is first and foremost an opportunity for a maker (i.e., a writer, a researcher, or an artist) to make sense of reality through a profound, embodied, and possibly speculative processing of theory and art in order to better open up past, present, and future worlds. An acknowledgement of those fields implies an acceptance of others, their realities, and their sense-making attempts. Thus, autotheory is not the act of pinning a loose reference to theory on one’s chest like an honorary medal. Instead, it needs the tangible, sizable presence of the other/s to confront, expand, and contextualize the auto-, and vice versa.

We can also approach autotheory as a scholarly genre itself, mixing one’s lived experience with a thoroughgoing engagement with and reflection on theory and art in all its iterations. Although autotheory is an example of what Michel Foucault called “technologies of the self”—a discursive practice, an exercise in shaping one’s life, and a form of pedagogy in the same way that Roland Barthes understood his lecture courses at the Collège de France as a form of paideia, “an introduction to living, a guide to life” (The Neutral)—it is best understood as a practice in which theory and art are not used as a reassuring mirror, a form of self-fashioning, but rather as a catalyst in a project of unlearning and undoing, of becoming other. Such a practice can be found not only in current manifestations of autotheory but also in its predecessors, i.e., in traditions such as romanticism, decadent aestheticism, existentialism, psychoanalysis, and surrealism: currents that tried to understand and galvanize everyday experiences by exploring other ways of doing, feeling, and thinking.

The preceding offers a framework for a multi-author collection tentatively entitled Autotheory and Its Others. Punctum Books has expressed early interest in the proposed collection. With editors working from both sides of the Atlantic—Eric Daffron and Becky McLaughlin from the U.S. and Maria Gil Ulldemolins and Kris Pint from Europe—this collection will serve as a testing ground for those definitions while providing space for work that expands and even challenges them. We invite practicing autotheorists to plot its different manifestations and roots. Different realities will require different encounters. What do the latter entail? Who is invited? How does the very defini-

tion of the self change depending on context? How does the understanding of the other/s change in different contexts? How do the less academic forms of knowledge, the more local, vernacular, and folkloric branches of culture, appear in autotheoretical practices? What can we learn from these engagements? We seek texts of all sorts—scholarly, creative, theoretical, and pedagogical—that pose and/or reflect on these questions in order to widen the understanding of not only what autotheory is but also what it can do. And, considering the rich legacy of autotheory's predecessors, biographical, historical, and critical studies of figures whose artistic, pedagogical, and theoretical practices might now be retroactively regarded as autotheory are also welcome.

Possible topics include but are not limited to the following:

Autotheory and its others:
----Autotheory in the classroom
----Autotheory and collaboration
----Autotheory and its predecessors
----Autotheory and the self as an/other
----Autotheory and self-experimentation/transformation

Autotheory and its discontents:
----Autotheory and confession
----Autotheory and alienation
----Autotheory and authenticity
----Autotheory and solipsism
----Autotheory and ego discourse

Autotheory and its genres and modes:
----Autotheory and life-writing
----Autotheory and autofiction
----Autotheory and the lyric essay
----Autotheory and performance
----Autotheory and visual art

Autotheory and its preoccupations:
----Autotheory and sexuality
----Autotheory and race
----Autotheory and trauma
----Autotheory and human rights
----Autotheory and climate crisis

Autotheory and its practitioners:
----Autotheory and Roland Barthes
----Autotheory and Hélène Cixous
----Autotheory and Michel Foucault
----Autotheory and Gloria Anzaldúa
----Autotheory and bell hooks

Please send proposals of 500 words and a brief CV to autotheoryothers@gmail.com with

“Autotheory” as the subject line.

Deadline for receipt of proposals is March 15, 2023.

Accepted papers will typically run between 6,000 and 8,000 words, but the editors will entertain somewhat shorter pieces on a case-by-case basis. We especially invite persons from underrepresented groups to contribute to this collection.

Reference:

CFP: Autotheory and Its Others. In: ArtHist.net, Jan 12, 2023 (accessed Nov 25, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/38297>.