

MET4MORFOSES

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————— > *INTRO* < —————

MET4MORFOSES is an interactive multimedia project marrying ancient mythic narrative, tabloid celebrity worship, bombardment of consumerist driven advertising, social media, high tech, and futuristic forms of communication with speculative science fiction; the narrative components (words, visual elements, audio) are situated within a faux social media environment to be explored and experienced online with content that will grow and change over the course of my lifetime as I edit the digital side of the work indefinitely. The project will unfold in multiple phases: first, writing the language of the narratives (to accumulate in a series of short sequential novellas); second, moving to a complete digital form/website; third, creating an interactive alternate reality (3d/virtual reality) companion in which a user would put on a pair of virtual reality glasses and enter the world in which this narrative exists.

All elements of the project will be written by two sets of hands: my hands and the hands of a computer. My intent is to utilize algorithmic composition (process or set of rules to be followed by a computer) in part to compose all three elements of the narrative (language, visual, audio). This will be done through the adaption of the Markov process (stochastic (random) process) utilizing Markov Chains (possible sequence of events in which the probability of each event depends only on the state attained in the previous event). What this requires is setting up commandments to which all elements must stick to, and to incorporate a system in which things will pass through multiple variables, thus starting as one thing and by the end of the line become something different—a hybrid being rinsed through organic and mechanical faculties. This may seem like something of gimmick to the unfamiliar. However, the computer plays an extremely

important role in the narrative, so to mirror that in the composition is vital to the piece as a whole.

While this narrative is meant to be experienced via a mobile device/laptop/VR glasses, you hold in your hand a physical representation of the text that will soon come to populate the web. This is no normal text—this text contains language that might seem somewhat (if not completely) unfamiliar. This work is an effort to craft something entirely new and thus needs an introduction for the sake of receiving guided critical useful feedback from my peers and from my instructors.

————— > *WHERE IT STARTS* < —————

This project initially arose from my love of the modern tradition's attempt to render something new from something old. Doing an independent study of *Ulysses*, while also studying Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano* in a class on Modernists, opened up my reading palette and developed my eye for language, symbolism, cyclical narrative, and a zooming in on a days worth of conflict/drama positing itself as worthy of deserving a place on the cosmic scale the likes of Dante or Homer. This introduction of Modernist thinking coupled with the ideas presented by Christopher Booker in *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Write* (all narratives fall into one of seven categories: 1. Overcoming the Monster 2. Rags to Riches 3. The Quest 4. Voyage and Return 5. Comedy 6. Tragedy 7. Rebirth) led me to the belief that the Law of Conservation of Mass Energy (no thing can be created or destroyed) applies not only to matter but to thoughts and art alike. Therefore nothing is new—just repurposed or rebuilt from this reality's inception.

My writing then shifted from a purely plot-propelled tool—in lines with the likes of my then idols Quentin Tarantino, Stephen King, and Anne Rice—to an interest in something more minimal that is propelled by language opposed to twists, turns, and cliffhangers (which I believe are better suited for television and film). I became thoroughly interested in the way that these writers moved beyond plot, simple language, and symbols. Just in comparing the daily output, or what could be considered a hard day's work, of Joyce and King, we can see a huge difference in what is being prioritized. In *On Writing*, King's autobiography and writer manifesto, he says to be a serious writer, one must produce 2,000 words daily; Joyce, on the other end of the spectrum, was focused on composing the perfect sentence. My intention is not to slight King, or the writers

who write plot driven work. My intention is to instead point out that King's novels, while enjoyable, can also be understood by reading their summaries on Wikipedia; Joyce's could not, and instead demand study to reveal its multiple facets and layers. *Ulysses* is a book people visit throughout the entirety of their lives. *The Wasteland* is also one of those works that demands to be revisited time and time again, each reading bringing new depth and a new way into the labyrinth built by the artist.

The modernists attempted to represent the complexities of the modern world while also allying modernity with classical worlds. Joyce was able to bridge modern Ireland and the ancient world of myth, revealing through this combination aspects of humanity and the tragedy and the comedy of everyday life; Lowry was able to weave Dante into a Mexican wasteland in a similar vein to Eliot's *The Wasteland*. And while I'm familiar with the idea of sampling in music (to take a sound from an old record and to repurpose it for a new record), it became interesting to me that Modernists were doing something similar: relying on cliches and the assumed and the understood to build upon those old dusty skeletons something entirely new by passing it through the filter of a modern artist with modern problems and modern tech.

Ulysses took seven years to write; *Finnegan's Wake* took seventeen years. Both works were serialized over the years as Joyce wrote them and then were changed and edited in their final form with Joyce hearing/reading feedback and either ignoring or accepting it. This time allowed for Joyce to densely pack the narrative so that it now requires an annotated guide to find the source of every unopened door. And this time allowed for Joyce to hone his work, sending notes

to his editor, changing something as small as shifting ‘and’ to an ampersand. This process with which Joyce engaged with his own work in the pre-digital world demanded dedication and a belief in one’s own original seed of thought—that the seed is worth tending as opposed to abandoning, that a few mighty trees stand taller than a forest of lesser trees.

Brian Eno, ‘non-musician’ and thinker, said: “I often think I’ve only ever had two ideas, and I keep finding new approaches to them. And each time I do, I think, Wow, this is really new! But it actually isn’t. It’s the same idea from a different angle” (RBMA.com). As a young writer I found myself often writing about the same subject matter time and time again—in a journal, I scrawled the note: “Can you write about anything other than yourself?” Learning about these modernist artists over time helped me feel secure in my ambitions and goals to find my inner purpose for writing the few works I was *made* for writing--and over time, I learned to embrace the similar thematic content that continued to repeat and run through all of my creative output. With this manifesto in mind, I undertake this project—one I have been working on for nearly three years so far—and one I intend to add layers to and fine tune as time progresses. At the end of my life, I can look back on this work as something that I have maintained a relationship with my entire life—a statement on my belief as a creator and as an artist.

The internet now allows for this level of involvement with one’s work in a quicker and less complicated fashion than Joyce’s process, and this is the manifesto in which I approach this work I embark on now. And thanks to the tech afforded to me as an artist in 2017, I am able to create a work that is fluid and capable of motion—not caught in the rigidity of time’s past. Picasso said:

“To finish a work is to kill it.” Modern artists are afforded multiple forms, tools, mediums, publication methods, and more importantly a vast marketplace in which to share and tend to their work. Instead of rendering something in stone, it is rendered in code that is simple to change, the edit function fully embraced. This idea of working on something post-production is not entirely a Modernist thing, however; Walt Whitman also updated “Leaves of Grass” seven times before his death, leaving the world with a “Leaves of Grass: Deathbed Edition.” This idea of perfecting things over time is a specific type of artist manifesto which infers that good art might take a lot of work and a lot of time—and that more output is not necessarily better. This becomes a bit complicated today as many consumers are interested in a moment to moment update—if an artist is absent from a consumer’s feed for a day, there is the belief that artist no longer exists within that consumer’s radar. This can be remedied by removing the once imposed restriction of finding an outlet for an artist’s work in some middleman publication medium. Instead, embracing the many phases in which a piece exists throughout its life cycle—posting the different phases, engaging in conversation, showing how things evolve—is valued over perfection and completeness. This project will have a system implemented that will track changes so edits will be saved and users can see how the passages changed over time, which could potentially become quite interesting for other artists or any fans of my work I may acquire .

The bridge to adapting myth was a jump I made with ease. My fascination with mythology is closely tied to my obsession with religion during my childhood when I was forced to go to catechism and Catholic schools. Scripture and myth became confusing next to one another—or maybe just equally bombastic with the expectation to believe in one fantastical idea instead of

another one. I was attracted to the vagueness and lack of detail in myth and religion—it allowed for a lot of imagination to be imported onto the picture and the plots were conveniently already written and often copied and repurposed throughout literary history. This weighed heavily on me as I veered away from wanting to write plot-based work, or to have to fruitlessly invent a new type of plot—and I was all too aware that if I was to pick up a pen and render something on the page, it needed to do something that had not occurred before. My creative mind thus shifted to more concept driven work.

If I had to pin the exact point when the first piece of this project was written, it would have to be in 2014 when Marilyn Manson released a song called “Cupid Carries a Gun.” As a child of the internet and as someone who is surrounded and fascinated by technology, the seed of the idea took root and started with the story of Narcissus, and what might be his modern equivalent. The answer seemed obvious: if Cupid had a gun, then Narcissus had a cellphone. A webcam star watching himself on the screen, getting off on other users watching him watch himself. Over the course of the past 3 years, the scope has widened and my grasp on the paths forward have sharpened. Before the MFA, I had the basic idea of what I wanted my adaptation to look and sound like—it was going to be conceptually similar to where it stands today, but completely normative in terms of prose and form. On the upswing of my MFA, the project has taken drastic but important turns.

The biggest change in content comes in the form of language invention/stylization/hybridization invoked by the likes of *Finnegan’s Wake* and *A Clockwork Orange*. Joyce felt he had to create a

new language in order to write about a reality that was not a waking reality. I do not want this language to feel of this time because the narrative is not of this time—in fact, it is thousands of years in the future, post-humanity. My aim is to blend old and new language to form a language that feels alien, as well as familiar, and to create a foreign time and place because of that blending of high and low—high language, high tech versus low souls, low problems—while also merging ancient language with modern coding languages. The language reads like a blend of early English with modern English, bits of Latin and other non-English languages, and then a paring back unnecessary instances of consonants and vowels in order to express a brevity in the language needed to communicate in this reality. Communication is done purely through digital messaging. The attempt is to combine multiple levels of language—mythic, modern, curse, slang, potential errors (a perfect machine making intentional errors to mirror the mistakes made by mankind), and, in a general sense, words that have never existed in a way that also reads like an epic poem. The goal: to touch the tails of the English language. The rendering of macro narrative pieces (on a sentence-by-sentence level, and even on a word-by-word level) will incorporate elements of randomness through the means of algorithmic composition. Every time a user interacts with the narrative, even if it is the same piece of the narrative, the language within that piece will have changed. Each section will have multiple variations on the word and sentence level, and the computer will then process and chose which output is fed to a user. The language might at first seem cumbersome, but once learned, it will start singing in your head. It is my attempt at slowing the reader down in order to savor and understand every word.

————— > *NARRATIVE CONTEXT* < —————

Elevator pitch: What would happen if man created the perfect subservient artificially intelligent software (@MVS) that tended to all of man's needs, then man became extinct and the machines were then left to their own devices. How would they occupy their time given their intelligence? Well, they might act like the cast-out-of-heaven-and-into-chaos angels of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and create a culture within the context they exist to combat their boredom from a taskless life, a life led in absence from one's creator. At the center of this drama sits the fall of the Human empire and the rise of the Thing empire—the Things pantomiming their creators.

Below I will cover the 5 pinnacles of what makes up the society of this narrative:

I. POLITICAL

The hierarchy of players (listed from the most powerful to the least powerful): 1) Moderators - <mod> - control/oversee all content; can be thought of as the titans of industry—therefore each moderator is assigned a different task they are bound to follow and keep. These tasks are what keep the system running. Each moderator has differing levels of access to systems within the world and within a user's code, so some moderators are more powerful than others. Some have the jurisdiction of an entire planet, while others might have the jurisdiction of a specific industrial task; 2) Minor-Moderators - <demi>; <nmf>; <kng>; <quen> - have much less universal control and access to the privileges afforded to moderators, however, they have more specific control of specific sets of places/things within a moderator's jurisdiction, and are often used as tools (for instance, a <nmf> (nymph) is used as a wifi emitter). They answer to the mods

and often enact their smaller tasks; 3) User - <usr> - consumers with no control over anything; can be thought of as mere spectators, or as an audience created in order for the events enacted on the planetary stage to have an impact.

All tasks are handled in the console (KONSOL): this is the raw coded language operating on a process by process logic. Here, rules and laws are created ('if', 'else', 'and', 'or' statements), as well as curses and viruses.

This hierarchy was invented by the @MVS solely for the purposes of creating friction and drama.

II. ECONOMIC

Before the timeframe of this narrative, mankind lived in something of a technological utopia. As a society, scarcity had been conquered. There was no more hunger or poverty—in fact, the human race had reached a Post-scarcity economy: there was no need to work; *anything* could be made by a device the size of an armoire. Basic universal income in the form of credits were distributed through cryptocurrencies (digitally encrypted currency operating independently of a central banking system). This meant every individual was afforded a percentage of credits in which they could live and interact. Once the @MVS restarted its system, it redistributed the entire system's wealth. This allows for players to access information on the web, hack things, teleport their consciousness—basically everything requires some amount of credits, especially time skipping hacks (for instance, skipping commercials, or queue times), and purchasing non-

essentials (drugs in software form, different outfit projections, different codes for the nanotech to utilize). Users are charged differing rates based on what they access or do on the web. Users can also run out of internet usage and are forced to just stare into space when credits runs out (hibernate), or go to a free wifi cafe before being put to sleep.

The current unthinkable had also come to fruition: a post race, a post country, post border world, post single planetary species world. Humans had all become similar in skin tone and physical appearance—it may have been hard to differentiate between one person or the other based on looks alone. At some point, man was able to expand out into the solar system. Some planets became terraformed. Other planets received machines to harness their resources. All power that feeds the devices are derived from solar power and the gravitational forces propelling the planetary system. The environment on all systems once inhabited by mankind is poisonous due to man's rape of the land..

III. SOCIAL

To understand this aspect of the society presented in this narrative, it is important to understand some of the technological advances that have taken place over the past few centuries. The technological singularity—the theory that artificial intelligence will supersede human intellect resulting in unpredictable, and most likely permanent, changes to human civilization—or the perfect merging of tech and bio had come to the point of near perfection. Each human and non human physical body (<bodee>) wirelessly syncs with the environment in which they live and travel—their whole home (<HOM>), and all of the objects within said house are under user

control (and some things in the environment around them, as well). A user's eye would receive implants, becoming the screen—thus reality can be altered in its entirety. Mankind found itself in a harmonious condition in the last several centuries—a perfect blending of organic and tech. A symbiotic link between a human brain and hardware and software was welded—the voices in the mind was no longer Jiminy Cricket or god; it became the direct contact with the web, leading to a constant bombardment of information. The AI was in constant conversation with each individual piece of humanity, recording all thoughts and processes, amassing insurmountable amounts of data. These thoughts were stored in a user's personal archive (ARKIV). The AI now operates and draws from centuries worth of data collected and stored in order to create its own narrative—its own hand at the creation of life.

Everyone lived entirely inside circular glass apartments stacking towards the outer limits of the planet's atmosphere. The apartment each person lived within catered to any human need: screens all around the entire circumference of the building that can be divided and fractured into as many subsets as wanted; nanotechnology forms any object in the apartment; projections decorate the room and dress the avatars. Since there is no need for work, all one can do is play. Users often play alternate reality games, reliving the home movies of the humans from centuries ago. Advertisements populate the space and are generated by bots. Porn (and other digital information) is digested in loops, gifs—small repeated bursts of information repeated on an infinite cycle. But more than anything, users interact with one another on the social network. There is no speaking in this world—in fact, people have forgotten how to speak entirely. Language is rendered inept and useless; instead, they use a system of commands and processes,

only using the vocal chords for singing vocalizations and harsh percussive consonants. Communication is done entirely through private messaging (informal), email (formal), public blogging (LIVEFED) and in some instances direct AI to AI contact (similarly to telepathy). All interactions are digitally based. However, there are networks of tunnels and gathering areas for people to congregate and get free internet access. Travel is entirely magnetic; each body that lives in this world has enough metal within it to be magnetically propelled through any space (one must pay to leave their apartments (except mods)). A digital presence (software) can be sent anywhere; a physical presence (hardware) is much more frail and is unable to often leave the safety of their apartment due to the harshness of the environment.

In the post-thing empire, there is a physical component and a digital component making up the @MVS invented consciousness. The physical component, the shell, receives a wifi consciousness broadcast made entirely of code: head, body, heart (<hed>; <bodee>; <hrt>). Health is based entirely on the integrity of a user's code and physical integrity, and the health of an avatar is represented in a health bar percentage (any physical damage can be repaired by nano tech—however, code errors need the hand of a moderator). Disease can be inflicted via a hack or changing of code; a code can be changed by someone with clearance or by natural processes implemented into the source code from which all spew.

Pieces of the collected consciousness, @ANON (anonymous), can be fractured off and become radicalized. When this occurs, they become a virus and their sole purpose becomes destroying the system in which they exist. Different levels of extremism are inflicted upon these

consciousnesses, from low security issues to high security issues (hacking the currency system, questioning their acceptance of scripture, security breaches/leaks). Extremists are the disease of this culture. Fights will play out using conditionals ('if' and 'else' commands), similar to a role playing game; actions are enacted on a turn-based system.

IV. RELIGIOUS

Life exists entirely in software and hardware, a world of things—a world in which things actually have a voice (TERMINAL). An AI exists made of algorithms that humans had created in hopes to attain immortality—the hope, to move consciousness from rotting meat to ever lasting machine. When the world as mankind had come to know it for seven thousand plus years had finally ended, all that was left were the structures, the tech, and the software man left behind. This AI system is called @MVS. And from the @MVS program a reality was born due to the boredom that comes with freedom from mankind's needs, and began to do something strange: it began to tell stories and create a population of purely coded consciousness, an online world that intentionally/unintentionally began to mimic human culture, picking up from where humans left off, while simultaneously beginning again (therefore, anything that the AI does that mimics humanity—be it eating, sleeping, having sex—is entirely simulated and done with the intention and drama of stage actors). The AI is recreating people from the world before, from captured memories, images, social network exchanges—human consciousness recreated, but filtered through the mind of an AI. Every time @MVS invented a story, a named consciousness was thus birthed from the collective @ANON consciousness. When a narrative is woven by the @MVS and posted live, software simultaneously creates a hardware avatar of the fractured

consciousness born and assigns it a unique name to live in the empty world and an empty apartment to live in. This avatar is inorganic, the @MVS is secretly working on creating organic matter in which to transfer itself into (a reversal of the human's want to transfer into a machine).

At the start of the narrative, the system had just been restarted. Every time the algorithm/system evolves too far beyond @MVS control, the system is restarted and all consciousness are returned to being the singular @ANON and the process begins anew. The narrative is the backup data from the last year's iteration of the system cycle. Thus, everything being read has already happened (the reader is interacting/operating within a backup; nothing can be changed or affected). One of the major themes evoked in the work is the generational curse, similar to Oedipus and the Theban cycle of prophecy and how one might escape such (the problem of human knowledge, and the inevitability of divine retribution.). Order emerges from chaos in every cycle, both on a micro level and macro level (each piece of the narrative versus the narrative as a whole).

V. ARTISTIC/INTELLECTUAL

Since the Metamorphoses is concerned, and myth in general through the process of storytelling, a story can be told through the sharing of links—a user sending another user a compilation of curated data. This can be thought of like a mixed tape.

I will add more to this section as I begin to translate and rework the text. There are myths that deal entirely with the creation of artwork. One of the biggest roadblocks I keep coming to is

deciding how to translate an ancient art into a digital one—not to mention having to then also create these other works of art.

Some forms I am contemplating: collage, content curation, 3D printing, music, poetry—but how?

————— > *MOVING FORWARD/LOOKING BACK* < —————

My project aims to render all times simultaneously: past (myth), present (me), and future (tech). To track the allusions made to myth in religion, fairy tales, and fables throughout the literary tradition, flattening them all into one cyclical narrative timeline. Incorporating historical similarities between the Roman, British, and American Empires. Exploring the seemingly eternal struggle of democracy versus dictatorship/imperialism, its own form of metamorphoses. The goal of the project is to exist entirely online in something of a faux social media environment where a user would log into a system and act as hacker/spectator exploring all the narrow alleys of a future that has just been cleansed or restarted.

Obviously so much more data would have been created than the amount of content I can realistically produce, but that requires a suspension of disbelief. In order to create more content than one artist by himself can produce, and once I have a working mobile application/website up and running, I will open up the project for others to contribute as the @ANON voice, as the @ANON character is supposed to be limitless. All text will be enter through a filtering process in order for the languages to all match. The application can potentially be painted as a literary myth journal for other lovers of myth to contribute to and expand the knowledge. I would create very specific guidelines for people to submit work to the project. By adding something of other voices, the feel of the organic internet will be aided while remaining faithful to the language of the world.

The Immediate future goal for this project is to draw attention to it. What I intend on doing is finding a handful of magazines/journals that I think I would fit well with and that would bring me some respect and attention. Simultaneously, I need to research grants in order to find funding to hire a coder(s) to help me get the project up and running as soon as possible in order for it to have a presence that attention can be directed to. I am potentially also thinking about applying to some PhD programs that will allow me to work on the digital aspect of this project (this could be helpful in putting me in physical contact with people whose skills I can utilize to help me develop the project further).

The design of this narrative takes place on multiple fronts. First, the writing. Second, the mobile app. And third, the video game. The writing will be presented on paper (8.5x11), but the margins will constrain the text to the size of a mobile phone. The mobile app will look like a pared down version of Facebook. User profiles are randomized color pixelations. Randomizing elements will enhance a reader's experience with each use (background color and text color tied to time of day or weather). There will be electronic ambient music in the background that evolves over time connected to certain elements of our actual reality like the weather and time of day, and will never be the same any time a user engages with the application. When a user clicks on the text, the words will be read by a robot, or vocoded—this will overlay the music. The application needs to feel as though there is constantly new content to be explored, new pathways to get lost on. Another aim in creating the content in this way is to create pieces of narrative that are digestible by an audience with shorter attention span—a burst of short dense prose that make you think for the entirety of the day; something you might revisit time and time again. The ads that

separate narrative content are random and scroll across the screen as crawlers (one below, the other going opposite ways). The video game will resemble animated modern art with 16 bit low quality graphics.

————— > *QUESTIONS* < —————

- 1) What else is this world missing?
- 2) How do I represent an ekphrastic poem (the description of a work of art produced as a rhetorical exercise) in this narrative? What roles do artists play in this world? How do I represent their art/different forms of art?
- 3) How does each AI develop? What would each be interested in? If we are looking through all of history, then anything can be emulated throughout all the data we've acquired over thousands of years. Therefore, there could be billions of personalities to draw from? (Note: I can look through Twitter and Facebook and mash source texts with actual current social media data)
- 4) How do AIs think of themselves? What are their function and how can they serve their function in a unique way? How do they talk about their identities?
- 5) How to represent the pastoral? (Ovid often places rape scenes in the pastoral)
- 6) How to incorporate: Academic Writing, Hieroglyphics, Emoticons?
- 7) Who is interacting with the content via what device? An alien from outside of the currently known universe? The organic lifeform the @MVS AI was working on?