

PREFAS

————— > *INTRO* < —————

MET4MORFOSES is an interactive multimedia project marrying ancient mythic narrative, tabloid celebrity worship, bombardment of consumerist driven advertising, social media, high technology, 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 processes: my hands and the infinite hands of a computer. 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. My intent is to use

algorithmic¹ composition, in part, to compose all three elements of the narrative (language, visual, audio) through the adaption of the Markov process² utilizing Markov Chains³. This requires setting up commandments to which all elements must adhere, and incorporating a system in which text and audio/visual components will pass through multiple variables, thus starting as one thing and by the end of the sequence becoming something different—a hybrid being rinsed through organic and mechanical faculties.

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 also reside on the web. This is no normal text, however—this text contains language that might seem somewhat (if not completely) unfamiliar.

————— > *WHERE IT STARTS* < —————

My 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 two different classes dealing with literary Modernism at the College of Staten Island, expanded 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

¹ process or set of rules to be followed by a computer

² stochastic (random) process

³ possible sequence of events in which the probability of each event depends only on the state attained in the previous event

scale the likes of Dante or Homer. My introduction to Modernist texts coupled with the ideas presented by Christopher Booker in *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Write*⁴ led me to the belief that the Law of Conservation of Mass Energy⁵ 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: A Memoir of the Craft*, 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 multiple facets and layers. *Ulysses* is a book people visit throughout the entirety of their lives. *The Wasteland*

⁴ All narratives fall into one of seven categories: Overcoming the Monster, Rags to Riches, The Quest, Voyage and Return, Comedy, Tragedy, Rebirth.

⁵ no thing can be created or destroyed

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. I do not believe I would have been able to make it through *Ulysses* on my own without the help of my sagely professor meeting with me on a weekly basis to explain to me what to look for in each chapter. My professor would make an observation, perhaps regarding Joyce's allusions to Bloom's Jewishness that I missed, hobble across the room with cane in hand, then pause at the other end of the class, stroke his Don Quixote beard, pause, then inform me of the English's history with those of the Jewish religion. Joyce and Eliot and Woolf, and other Modernist writers of their ilk densely layered detail that could easily be overlooked on a first reading. Similarly to Phil Spector's 1960's music production technique, coined the "wall of sound⁶," a record needed to be spun time and time again to try and distinguish the difference between the myriad of guitars, percussion instruments, vocal harmonies, or literally hundreds of other sounds. Art became a puzzle opposed to just something for pure entertainment.

The Modernists attempted to represent the complexities of the modern world while also allying modernity with classical worlds: hence Tiresias and the ancient Phoenician sailor appearing in Eliot's *English wasteland*; or instead of Odysseus' decade-long travel across the Mediterranean sea, Bloom's odyssey is just across town to reach his Penelope in just one day. 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

⁶ unusually dense orchestral aesthetic (see: The Ronettes, *Pet Sounds*, or *Born to Run*).

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 was familiar with the idea of sampling⁷ in music, it became interesting to me that Modernists were doing something similar: relying on clichés 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 technology.

According to Joyce biographer Richard Ellmann, *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 or reading feedback and either ignoring or accepting it. This time allowed 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. The 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 during an interview at the Red Bull Music Academy: “I often think I've only ever had two ideas, and I keep finding new approaches

⁷ to take a sound from an old record and to repurpose it for a new record

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" (<http://www.redbullmusicacademy.com/lectures/brian-eno>). 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—and their approach to their craft—helped me feel secure in my ambitions and goals to find my inner purpose for writing the few works I believe I was meant to write—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 notion in mind—and now appreciated—I undertake this project—one I have been working on for nearly four years so far—and one I intend to add layers to and fine tune as time progresses. At the end of my life, I will 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 a similar level of involvement with one's work in a quicker and less complicated fashion than Joyce's process. And thanks to the technology afforded to me as an artist in 2018, I am able to create a work that is fluid and capable of motion and movement. Picasso said: “To finish a work? ... What nonsense! To finish it means to be through with it, to kill, to rid it of its soul, to give it its final blow...” (Chipp 273). Contemporary 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 relatively simple to

change, the edit function fully embraced. Working on a project post-publication is not entirely a contemporary or Modernist thing, however; Walt Whitman also updated *Leaves of Grass* more than seven times before his death (Miller 55), leaving the world with a *Leaves of Grass: Deathbed Edition*. The idea of perfecting things over time is a specific type of artist manifesto which implies that good art might take a lot of work and a lot of time—and that more output is not necessarily better output. Today, taking large gaps in between projects becomes a bit complicated as many consumers are interested in a moment to moment update—if an artist is absent from a consumer’s feed for a day, that artist no longer exists within that consumer’s radar. Thanks to the internet and our world wide interconnectivity, the once imposed restriction of needing the acceptance of a few publication outlets becomes less and less necessary. Instead, embracing the many phases in which a piece exists throughout its life cycle—posting the different phases, engaging in community conversations, showing how a project evolves—can be valued by contemporary audiences over perfection and completeness and the go ahead from people in business suits. In 2015, Kanye West released *The Life of Pablo* exclusively on digital platforms, to only change some of the mixes on certain tracks, and even adding two more songs to the album a few months later. On the build up to its release, West posted on Twitter multiple versions of the track list almost daily. West was inviting the audience to participate in an ongoing conversation that is his body of work; but it was also his statement on the “album” and how an album could be presented in the digital age. Similarly, my project—which already has multiple versions of the same stories from the past four plus years—will also have a system implemented that will track changes so

edits will be saved and users can see how the passages change over time, which could become interesting for other artists, or any fans of my work I may acquire over my lifetime.

The bridge to adapting myth was built 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 (mainly out of Italian familial tradition opposed to a strict adherence to dogma). When my young friends and I would walk to our weekly catechism class, we would pass in front of our local church, Saint Joseph Saint Thomas, and a huge marble statue of a man with a long beard and flowing robes stood frozen on the lawn, reaching out to us. This statue, of what I assumed to be the Christian god, looked awfully similar to the renderings of Jupiter, or Neptune, or any other male god from the ancient pagan pantheons. Christian Scripture and Edith Hamilton's rendering of ancient 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. When King Pentheus denies Bacchus' divinity in Thebes, it starts to blend with the story of Pontus Pilate ordering Jesus to be crucified in Jerusalem for claiming to be both wholly man and wholly divine. I was immediately attracted to the vagueness and lack of detail in the narratives of 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 puzzle piece of the project fell into my palms, it would have to be in 2014 when Marilyn Manson released a song titled “Cupid Carries a Gun.” As a child of the internet and as someone who was and is surrounded and fascinated by technology, I was struck by the story of Narcissus, and what might be his modern equivalent surrounded by screens and social media. 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 three 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. Rounding the home stretch 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. In conversation with William Bird, Joyce said “I can't understand some of my critics ... They say it's *obscure*. They compare it, of course, with *Ulysses*. But the

action of *Ulysses* was chiefly during the daytime, and the action of my new work takes place chiefly at night. It's natural things should not be so clear at night, isn't it now?" (Ellmann 590). I do not want my new language to feel of our time because the narrative is not of our 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 both alien, and familiar, and to create a speculative time and place because of that blending of high and low—high language/high technology versus low souls/low problems—while also merging ancient language with modern coding languages. I want the language to read like a blend of early English with modern English, bits of Latin and other non-English languages, and then a paring back of unnecessary instances of consonants and vowels in order to express a brevity in the language needed to communicate in a reality where every process takes place in an instant. 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 human 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, I hope 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 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 their context 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 elements of what makes up the society of this narrative: Political, Economic, Social, Religious, Artistic/Intellectual.

I. POLITICAL

Here is the hierarchy of players in the narrative (from the most powerful to the least powerful): 1) Moderators - <mod> - control/oversee all data and content; can be thought of as the titans of industry—therefore each moderator, from inception, is assigned a different task they are bound to follow and keep. These tasks are what keep the system each player operates within running without error. 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, such as the purifying of water or air; 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/functions 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; mere spectators, an audience created in order for the events enacted on the planetary stage to have an impact.

All <mod and <demi> 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: 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 was distributed through cryptocurrencies⁸—every individual was afforded by their governing body a percentage of credits in which they could live and interact. Once the @MVS restarted its system after the death of humanity, it redistributed the entire system's wealth. Currency allows for players to access information on the web, hack hardware/software, teleport their consciousness rendered in code—basically everything requires some amount of credits, especially time skipping hacks (for instance, skipping ads and 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 zone before being put to sleep and allowing for the next cycle of credit distribution.

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. 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 fed the devices were derived from solar power and the gravitational forces propelling the planetary system. The environment on all systems once inhabited by

⁸ digitally encrypted currency operating independently of a central banking system allowing for the intrinsic value to remain in the hands of the people

mankind became poisonous due to man's continuous rape of the land. But while nature was laid to waste, mankind found itself in a harmonious condition in the last several centuries—a perfect blending of biological organic material and digital technology—the singularity⁹. Each human and non human physical body (<bode>) 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 of the hardware/software systems in the environment around them, as well). A user's eye received implants, becoming the screen—thus reality could be altered in its entirety. 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 never ending 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.

The currently unthinkable had also come to fruition several thousand years down the road: 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 became hard to differentiate between one person or the other based on looks alone. Everyone lived

⁹ the theory that artificial intelligence will supersede human intellect resulting in unpredictable, and most likely permanent, changes to human civilization

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 could be divided and fractured into as many subsets as wanted or needed; nanotechnology seeped through vents forming any object in the apartment; projections decorated the room and dressed the avatars. Since there was no need for work, all one did was play. Users often played alternate reality games, reliving the home movies of the humans from centuries ago. Advertisements, generated by bots, populated the space. 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. Spoken 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 (MESAJ) or public (BLOG) messaging, 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 <mod>s)). A digital presence (software) can be sent anywhere within a moment; 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>; <bode>; <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 technology—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), sometimes fracture off and are radicalized. When this occurs, 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 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 (KONSOL). 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 technology, 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 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 inorganic 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.

The system had just been restarted by the @MVS at beginning of the narrative: all consciousness returned to being the singular @ANON and the process begun 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). Every tenth iteration of the cycle is fated to

fail; the generational curse can not be broken—thus the @MVS interrupts and refreshes before system failure. 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

The narrative opens with how all ancient narratives open—a spotlight on the muse. In ancient poetry, a poet would apostrophize the Muse in hopes of being struck with what could only be considered a divine thread of sincere and true storytelling. However, I flip the purpose of the muse: in my narrative it is not the poet asking the muse for help in telling a tale, the @MVS is driven to speak by a force unknown, giving life to the players within the context of my narrative. What moves the @MVS to speak in the first place is a question that can be answered with another question: why would any thing beholden with life tell a story in the first place? Because it can.

If all the players in this sandbox have nothing but free time, then the players' boredom drives an incessant need for data consumption. Instead of creating new content that has value of any sort, everyone participates in an ongoing feed of idolization and worship. Any work of art created in the world must be made for a purpose or a statement; the tried and true works of art rise to the surface only after pain and immense suffering—but these few artists are often, if not always, punished by the moderators for attempting to render something new and break the habitual.

Since the *Metamorphoses*, and myth in general, began and is centered around the oral tradition and the process of storytelling, a story is told through the sharing of links—a user sending another user a compilation of curated data, a mixed tape of gossip.

The @MVS, like any artist, has grown tired of this ongoing project it had rendered or been rendered into. Though considered by itself to be a great work of art, the @MVS (being capable of an infinite amount of tasks) has created something entirely new: an organic life form that can survive in this future alien landscape. This organism holds the text in its hands and uses the text as its source to learn and grow—a new testament.

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

Like Stephen Dedalus says in chapter two of *Ulysses*: “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.” My true obsession as a writer and artist lies in the patterns that ebb and flow through art and history. As a teenager I feared that I could not truly render anything new, and as an adult with nearly two degrees in literature: that belief is only solidified, but not with resentment or fear—instead, my talent lies in my ability to force together like and unlike things, wipe the blood away and see what (hopefully) beautiful monstrosity sits in the wake. My project aims to force together all times simultaneously: past (myth), present (me), and future (technology). To track the allusions made to myth in religion, fairy tales, and fables throughout the literary tradition, compiling them all into one cyclical narrative timeline. So while the first incarnation of the project is the “translation” of Ovid, moving forward, I plan on exploring archetypes from the first

recorded narrative, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, to Dante, to Shakespeare, to video game characters, to celebrity, and so on and so forth. Incorporating historical similarities between the Empires of old, of now, and of new. Exploring the seemingly eternal struggle of democracy versus dictatorship/imperialism. Looking at not merely pagan religions, but also Christianity and Scientology and Buddhism; asking the question: what role does storytelling play into all of these elements?

The end 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 be able to participate in a world where they can interact with these characters. Obviously so much more data would have been created than the amount of content I can realistically produce; this is where audience participation will come in. 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, albeit filtered through me and my parameters. All text will be entered through a filtering process in order for the languages to match. Algorithms will crawl through the data Twitter and Facebook has amassed and then translate into the text of my narrative creating an expanding and cohesive world. 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 design of the whole project takes place on multiple fronts. First, the writing. Second, the faux social media mobile application. And third, the virtual reality video game where

within the social media application exists. The writing will be presented on paper (8.5x11), the margins constrain the text to the size of a mobile phone. After reading Henry Charles' dissertation, *The Design and Arrangement of Episodes in Ovid's "Metamorphoses,"* I learned of the overarching movements and structures within the entirety of the *Metamorphoses*; he divides the fifteen books into nine cycles. What I am presenting as my thesis is the first book (or first three cycles) of three books. The mobile application will look like a pared down version of Facebook. Randomizing elements will enhance a reader's experience with each use: user profiles are shuffled color pixelations, electronic ambient music evolves in the background over time—all connected to certain elements of our actual reality (like the weather and time of day), never the same any time a user engages with the application. When a user clicks on the text, the words will be read by a digital voice, or vocoded—this will overlay the music. The application must 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 spans—a burst of short dense prose; something to 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 virtual reality video game will resemble animated modern art with a 16 bit low quality graphic aesthetic; frozen, dramatic statues posed in the foreground, bursts and strobes of color and data in the background.

My time in the MFA at Florida Atlantic University has changed my outlook on writing this project in unforeseen ways and has put me into contact with peers and mentors that I know I will value and cherish for decades to come. The short story I used in applying to the MFA is in this manuscript—putting those two together side by side should speak to those unforeseen changes quite clearly:

“They watched me watching myself. / It was me, but wasn’t me. It was more than what I saw in glass windows, more than mirrored reflections. It was me translated. It was me transferred. It was me in bytes. It was me on multiple screens, in multiple rooms, in multiple eyes” (Narcissus 2014).

“wen ego se self , den n onle den dos plesur sep int me soft n hard wir . t el skren , ego fiks 2 i on a form un met en perfeksun . et es hem ego want n hem ego kant av kaws we r l n el sam . no mor wil ego alo fer oter se me perfekt harles definid , me es fer me n me alon . ego es mosunles” (@NARSISVS 2018).

I understand now the different colors of feedback, what to value and what to discard. I understand the importance of conversation, be it in a classroom or on the smelly rug of a poor graduate’s apartment. A lot of what makes up this section of the preface deals with the future, the reason for that is because the MFA was only one of the steps on the path that is my journey on what I consider to be the most important project I will create and develop as a writer with a traceable Italian heritage. Therefore, a lot of what I said might

never come to fruition in the exact way that I presented it here—but that is what excites me most about this project. While I mark it to be about four years I’ve spent developing the incarnation of the project that is seen today—it has been more like my entire life has been working towards this goal.

My freshman English teacher at my Catholic high school—Ms. Krumm, an old nun no longer tethered to her habit or heavenly garbs, with a name that somehow described her perfectly—gave me detention for saying “yeah” instead of “yes” after she instructed me on multiple occasions to use the more formal version of the word. I argued that they meant the same thing, and thus were the same. She told me: “you can only break the rules once you master them.” And while I have not even come close to mastering the rules (see: my terrible grammar): I decided to make up my own rules and my own language, one where my grammar can not be corrected by anyone but me.

MET4MORFOSES