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Mouth Breather Broadcasting Systems

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MOUTH BREATHER BROADCASTING SYSTEMS

by

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The final copy of this dissertation has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

Wurst, Ryan Matthew (Ph.D., Intermedia Arts, Writing and Performance)
Mouth Breather Broadcasting Systems
Dissertation directed by Associate Professor Michael Theodore

Mouth Breather Broadcasting Systems (MBBS) is a work of practice based research and the writing in this document supports the creative project. MBBS is a series of three infinite television shows, which have been created as software.

Through the process of coding and animation, each show acts like a video game that plays itself. Utilizing common television narrative structures like, sitcoms, made-for-TV movies, and cop shows, the characters in each show improvise an endless number of scenarios. The primary tool used to create MBBS was the video game creation software Unity where custom artificial intelligence was created to give each character a personality and emotions.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Mouth Breather Broadcasting Systems (MBBS) began with a box of DVD's. In the fall of 2001, for my thirteenth birthday, I received the complete first season of The Simpsons. Before my family got a DVD player, which were still fairly expensive at the time, I was only able to watch the reruns on TV. Watching the show on television felt random and disjointed, and the episodes were repeated ad nauseam. The commercials interrupted the flow of the show, and I was forced to have conversations with my parents, many of which were related to chores and homework. Ultimately, it was this magical box of DVD's that allowed me to fully enter The Simpsons, and to binge watch my favorite show.

I watched those first episodes hundreds of times, while continuing to watch the more recent episodes on TV. I was immersed in the world of the Simpsons, and it was a home for me. Every part of my life was touched by The Simpsons. I would buy or ask for Simpson merchandise: underwear, action figures, an inflatable chair, posters, and even a Squishy (the Simpsons version of 7-Eleven's Slushee) machine. The impetus for the Mouth Breathers and MBBS is similar in that it stems from my desire to create and inhabit a dynamic world.

Typically a TV Guide acts as a schedule, but this MBBS Guide will introduce concepts and obsessions revolving around the TV shows on MBBS. My thought process is often scattered; this guide is a way for me to work through the thoughts

and ideas I had while making MBBS. This is by no means the finality of MBBS. It is simply the beginning. I hope you enjoy the show.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN OF THE MOUTH BREATHERS

The world of the Mouth Breathers is defined by my technological interests. I approach making pieces that explore what it might be like to fully inhabit a digital space. With their matte white, genderless bodies, I am able to project endless ideas onto the seventeen Mouth Breathers. Instead of using a blank canvas, I use blank digital bodies. I constantly strive to create open systems that allow for alteration, modularity, and development.

The Mouth Breathers were not my first created world. Rather, my first worlds were based in music. Starting around 2010, I made music in many different styles, such as ambient, noise, and chamber, and had just started experimenting with dance music. I struggled to find a single description for my differing styles of music. In dance music, I found many artists used pseudonyms to make alternative styles of music. By separating their musical output, these artists had no concern for a singular voice.

The first album that I made under a pseudonym was *DNA Hard Drive*, as pleasurlife. The album was complete in tone and style, and it also took less time to create. I never had an existential crisis voice while making the album. I never burdened myself with irrelevant questions, and only obeyed the rules of pleasurlife. With my new found artistic freedom, I continued to create pseudonyms: Yellow Hyper Balls (noise and grit), Bert Gan (ambient music), Soul Tangler (B-Movie

sampled dance music), and Pete Sheridan (algorithmic music). I no longer had to be myself. I could inhabit the world of my pseudonyms.

I took the creative structure of pseudonyms and applied it to my visual art practice as well. In 2013, I started making work that revolved around 3D animation and rendering. I was looking for ways to animate faster and found that I could utilize my Xbox Kinect as a motion capture device. I initially used it to animate boxes in the shape of a human. This felt trivial. I needed to create a structure similar to my musical pseudonyms. In the following weeks, I found a piece of software, MakeHuman, that could create 3D humans. I made 17 matte-white, stupid, digital humans that I called the Mouth Breathers.

CHAPTER III

PLAYGROUNDS FOR MOUTH BREATHING

The first artist I saw making artwork with video game engines was Ian Cheng. He creates simulations, or video games that play themselves. His work is centered around structures of the primitive human mind that he then codes as Artificial Intelligence (AI). Cheng describes his simulations like a zoo. The agents are allowed to play, like a lion with a ball, within a set of rules, like a cage. The zoo metaphor works well for Cheng's work, but I like to think of MBBS as a playground. A playground suggests various forms of activity to its visitors. Children are conditioned to see a slide and want to slide down it. I create similarly suggestive structures for the Mouth Breathers; I design their playground to resemble a TV show.

Typically, a TV show is a playground for many people. There are actors, directors, writers, grips, producers, show-runners, and many more who are involved in making a show. In making MBBS, I had to fill the role of each of these workers, and I needed to make them theoretically go on forever. Imagine a playground where monkey bars and slides are always generated, just before you reach the end. This is how I structure the three shows on MBBS, utilizing basic narrative arcs such as falling in love, hanging out, and murder, that the Mouth Breathers can swing, jump, and slide down. Each show has its own narrative playground based on three popular forms in TV.

Love at the Lake is a free, forbidden love playground. Alex and Chris have escaped their significant others for an endless weekend at their favorite lake in the mountains. This is the place where they let their love grow and where they wish they could be forever. They are in a love that can never be, for they must return to real life soon.

MBPD:SIU is a playground of criminality and the thin blue line that keeps society from deteriorating into chaos. A serial killer has struck again and it is up to Detective Alex and Chris to find the murderer before they find another body. Follow the two detectives as they search for clues, talk to witnesses, and hopefully bring this killer to justice.

Oh, Mouth Breathers! is jungle-gym of relationships. Alex is getting ready to host a party for his boss, Terri. Alex is running behind and has no time for his friends. Little to his surprise, his friends, Nat, Chris, Charli, Jerri, and Lou start to drop by. Comedy ensues as this unlikely group of friends annoy, antagonize, and ultimately love their friend Alex.

CHAPTER IV

PLAYGROUNDS FOR MOUTH BREATHING

MBBS is a study of filthy TV. It is a study of the kinds of TV that I love to watch, but rarely tell people about. *Love at the Lake* modeled on one of my guiltiest of pleasures, made for tv movie romance. In a typical made for TV movie the actors are competent, but rarely good. The stories are even worse. Think of all of the schlocky *Lifetime* movies where two people, usually opposites, find an unlikely love. I watch these shows in the same way that I slow down to see a car accident. It looks horrible, but I can't look away. *Love at the Lake* dives deep into the horrendously beautiful, romantic story that is impossible to bear, but you can't look away. I am searching through my loathing to find their love. I have constantly used love-hate relationship with various forms and styles of art as inspiration for my own work.

For most of my career as an artist, I have straddled two worlds, one being the academic world, and the other being the popular or "low-culture" world. The academic world is one of obscure, challenging thought, and often attracts a small, highly critical audience. I spent most of my early years as a composer trying to fit into an academic model of electronic music. Most academic electronic music is based in heavy research and bland sounds. I found myself unsatisfied with creating pieces that I would not listen to. My heroes then and still are minimalist composers, like Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and Pauline Oliveros. I found that they created music that was pleasurable to listen to and still intellectually challenging. This duality

allowed them to cross over into more popular forms of music as well. I wanted to be able to live in both worlds and make art that was critical, but that also interfaced with popular forms.

Once I embraced my dual existence, I started making works that directly sampled popular forms. The very first piece that I made was an ambient music generator, which only used samples from Kenny G, the wildly popular smooth-jazz saxophonist. I absolutely hate smooth-jazz, a bland and blatant commercialization of a progressive and thoughtful style of music. Through manipulating Kenny G's smooth tones, I found that I could still find aspects of the music that were interesting. This led me to the practice of trying to make music from styles and artists that I hated. My investigations into the art that I consider terrible is a philosophical starting place for much of my work. When something is filthy, like a sink full of dirty dishes, we usually clean it, but there is a small part of us that wants to see what can grow on our dishes. At least I do.

CHAPTER V

COP SHOW CLOUD WATCHING

If you go cloud watching, you are likely not interested in being entertained. Clouds are not the most engaging thing on earth. Cloud watching is for relaxation. It is an activity that allows your mind to wander, and maybe to find shapes in the clouds (“woolgathering”). It just happens that one cloud looks kind of like a dog, but the cloud is not a dog. We only see what is familiar to us. It is a great activity for friends. You can have discussions without worrying that you might be missing something. Clouds have no urgency. They will be there whether you are or not.

Almost everything that I just said about cloud watching could be said about cop shows. They are not usually the most entertaining thing on TV. Rarely are they so complicated that you have to pay close attention. You can talk to your friends without missing anything and no matter what, we can always depend on cop shows to be on TV. If you miss an episode, there is no need to worry. It will be on again soon. Like clouds, cop shows are ubiquitous. Dick Wolf, the creator of *Law and Order*, seems to have a new cop show every single year, or think of the various *CSI* shows with their locations ranging from Miami to Las Vegas. These shows follow a simple formula: 1. The crime is committed. 2. The police investigate the crime. 3. The suspect is taken to court. This simplicity of form allows passive viewing. We are able to relax with cop shows and clouds because they demand so little of us. Sometimes when we have had a long and

engaging day at work, we need something to let our brain decompress. We need something to half pay attention to, while we talk to our significant other. We need something comforting, that we know will always be there. We need cop shows, the clouds of TV.

CHAPTER VI

HOW I HATE YOUR MOTHER AND HER FRIENDS

The success of *Friends* and *How I Met Your Mother* does not come in their reinvention of the sitcom genre, or groundbreaking writing. Their success is in the construction of a system that prioritizes the hangout. When you think of either show, you most likely see all of the characters in one location, relaxing, drinking coffee and talking about their relationships. This is the hangout. Besides some special episodes that exist outside New York City, the architecture of these shows always lead to hangout moments. Events happen to the characters, marriages, deaths, long lost brothers, etcetera, but nothing can keep these characters from hanging out. Even realities outside the show cannot keep these characters apart. By the final two seasons of *Friends*, NBC paid each friend 1 million dollars per episode to keep hanging out, despite the cast's desires to pursue new outside projects. I hate these two shows.

My revulsion of the hangout is not the fault of these shows, but is in fact directly tied to my desire to hangout. I am almost disgusted with the fact that I have seen both of these shows in their entirety several times. I get sucked in because it is comfortable. I want friends that are so funny and witty all the time and to live a life where my only concern is my relationships. Instead, *HIMYM* and *Friends* push me to live a life watching others hangout. I invest my time in their relationships. My disgust comes from getting trapped in the loop, wanting to

hangout with real life friends, then hanging out with these fictional characters, then wanting to hangout with people, and so on.

These two shows and other hangout shows are almost always frustrating. Ross and Rachel are meant to be together, so we assume at some point they will be. We tune in from week to week hoping they will finally be together. But, this would possibly interrupt the hangout, which is the reason why people keep tuning in. This is almost the exact same narrative structure that keeps Ted and Robin from getting together until the final episode of *HIMYM*. The frustration loop that is built is an addictive one. It is a game that you can't beat.

Sitcoms like these would be truer to their nature if they never actually ended. I imagine that if *Friends* were still on and the characters never grew old, many people would continue to watch the show. There would be new cultural dynamics for the characters to engage in, but the crux of the show, the hangout, would persist. Imagine if we could drop in on our *Friends* hanging out at any moment. People would be tuned in constantly. People would choose hanging out with fictional friends rather than their real friends. *Oh, Mouth Breathers!* is my attempt to finally make an endless sitcom. Drop in and hang out for a while.

CHAPTER VII

SHITTY IMPROV IS STILL INTERESTING

Improvisors are some of the most optimistic performers because of their underlying belief in “yes and,” or accepting the situation they are in—the “yes”—then expanding upon it, the “and.” Every moment, no matter how terrible, can be useful if one accepts its reality and then adds to it. Great improvisers mask “yes and” because it looks and feels like a rehearsed play. On the other hand, shitty improvisors reveal the structure of improvisation because no one would ever produce such a terribly meandering play. I like to watch improvisers that reveal their tools and structures, which is only possible when improvisation turns to shit.

Much of Improv Theater is based in failure. Teachers of improv often use a phrase like, “take a leap.” You might not know exactly what you are doing, but take a leap off the cliff and maybe you will make it to the other side. You’ll probably fall to your death, but I’ll still want to watch. It is in this initial failure that the “yes and” becomes even more apparent. If a fellow improvisor goes off the established narrative, it is your job to support this person. “Yes and” creates a reality that is constantly in flux. It allows all who are involved, even the audience, to live in a reality that shifts, but like watching someone fall off a cliff, you can see every rock they will hit along the way.

I don’t think that many people get to experience shitty improvised theater. For the most part, people have seen improv from the best practitioners, be it *Whose*

Line Is It Anyway, *The Improvised Shakespeare Company*, late night talk shows, or even the cruise ship that has paid improvisors on board. The performers in these shows make improvisation look easy. A shitty improv show will most likely take place in a small theater in a strange building. The audience is often made up of the performer's friends. In a way, this strange system creates a joyful dynamic where every person, audience included, is supportive. When the improvisers are shitty, and they likely are, the audience claps and laughs as if they are good, hoping it will make the performers better. Often it doesn't, but at least it's revealing and optimistic.

All of the shows on *MBBS* are improvised. The Mouth Breathers follow code that is based on "yes and," and how improvisers know when it is their turn to accept and expand the story. Some of the improv you see the Mouth Breathers perform will be shitty. They are going to step on each other's lines, run into one another, and probably fall flat on their face. This is their first time improvising, so please be kind and show them your support.

CHAPTER VIII

CONTEXTUAL BRAIN FIGHT

Originally released in 2000, *The Sims* was a suburban life simulation, where players were able to build houses, go to work, make friends, and live out a banal fantasy of upper, middle-class life. In order for this game to be successful, it had to populate neighborhoods with Non-Player Characters, or NPC's, that could act human. In many video games NPC's are adversarial, or enemies put in place to make the game more difficult. *The Sims* needed to create NPC's for the players to play with, instead of against. The base AI system they used was called Utility AI or Needs Based AI. Every character in the game has a set of needs, which can be met by objects that are also in the game. Characters have a need to go to the bathroom and that need is met by the toilet. This structure is deepened simply by adding other needs for the characters, and it leads to a much more interesting and human-like NPC. You might think of this system as a kind of brain fight, only basing behavior on the needs of the individual, regardless of their context and social situations.

For the third iteration of the game, the developers wanted to expand the *Sims* world to include multiple neighborhoods and towns. This expansion made it much more difficult to simulate behaviors based on needs, since there were so many new social situations. Imagine an NPC stops by your *Sims*'s home and immediately starts cooking a meal. Unless you have invited a professional chef over, this

situation is very unlikely to happen. Richard Evans, who was the head of AI for the Sims 3, knew this, and implemented a set of contextual rules for the NPCs.

Depending on where the NPCs are, their house, the street, or someone else's home, they act differently. If one of their needs are not being met and cannot be met in their current context, then the NPC will leave. This contextual brain fight is the basis for how The Mouth Breathers make decisions in all three MBBS shows.

Taking from Evans and the Sims, I constructed narrative contexts for the Mouth Breathers. In *Love at the Lake*, the contexts include sun-bathing, swimming, hiking, and other activities two lovers might partake in on a lake vacation. In *MBPD:SIU* the contexts include interviewing witnesses, talking to lawyers, looking for clues, and other things typically done in a police serial drama. And in *Oh, Mouth Breathers!*, each character has individual contexts, like sitting on the couch, disturbing others in the scene, and many other aspects of friendship. It also contains a macro-context. Depending on which Mouth Breather is in the scene, the context will change. These narrative elements restrict the Mouth Breather's actions so they are contextually appropriate. At least, I hope the Mouth Breathers will act appropriately.

CHAPTER IX

A COMPUTER IN THE WRITERS' ROOM

Lawrence Myers's *Inside TV Writer's Room*, interviews various TV writers on what it's like to be in a TV writers room. Through his interviews with various writers, he outlines a psychological how-to guide to being a writer in the industry. Throughout all of the interviews in the book, the focus is squarely on the humanistic qualities of these writers and how they manifest in a writer's room. Much of the language focuses on words like feeling, creativity, collaboration, interaction, argument and many other human centered language concepts. Typically a writer's room is filled with human writers, so these kinds of discussions make sense. I did not have access to, nor the money to hire a room full of writers for MBBS. I needed to find a writing methodology that could generate the same, if not more, text than a room full of writers could. I turned to my computer to fill the role of the writer's room.

I am sure it will be said and continue to be said by people like Myers that nothing can ever replace a room full of creative writers. Hopefully putting Myers at ease, I am in no way interested in replacing writers. My goal is to devise a writing system that allows for a single person, like myself, to access virtual collaborators. This will allow a writer to see other perspectives, find creative solutions, and realize the power of collaboration without another human in the room. I want to create the Ableton Live of dramatic writing. In the not too distant past, if you wanted to

become a composer you had to learn a lot about music. Recording equipment and studio space were extremely expensive, and composers were forced to use the piano for feedback. Utilizing Ableton, composers are able to listen back to their composition while they are writing them, which in turn influences their compositional decisions. In Ableton, composers can experiment with new sounds and structures in real time. They are using the computer for instantaneous, dynamic collaboration. Unlike composers and producers, if dramatic writers have a project, like a TV show, that must be completed in a short amount of time, and they must work in a room full of collaborators. An Ableton for writers would allow anyone to start writing, regardless of their access to a writers room. MBBS is my first major attempt to theorize and make a human-computer collaborative writing system.

CHAPTER X

INFINITE STUPIDITY

Through making various works with the Mouth Breathers, I have come to find that much of my philosophy revolves around stupidity. The primacy of stupidity is largely based on Albert Camus's existential essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*. In the essay, Camus discusses our absurd existence as a contradiction between the search for meaning and the arbitrariness of existence. He then states that when we act upon the absurd, we act in defiance. While I agree with Camus about our meaningless existence, I do not think we act defiantly, but rather, stupidly. In the following pages I will outline Camus's argument that Sisyphus is absurdly free, but I will argue that every choice that we make after accepting a meaningless existence is inherently a stupid one. As we begin to layer stupid choices on each other, we then begin create systems, or games. It is in the creation and playing of games that we are able to achieve meaningful existence.

To understand Camus' argument that Sisyphus is an absurd hero, it is best to have a quick summary of the original myth, which goes something like this:

Sisyphus, the clever and prosperous ruler, angered Zeus and the gods by seducing his niece and also by killing visitors to his city. Zeus sent Thanatos, the god of death, to chain Sisyphus in the underworld for eternity. Sisyphus tricked Thanatos into chaining himself up, leaving the mortal world in chaos. Eventually, Aries, the god of war, released Thanatos, who was tasked to send Sisyphus to the

underworld. This time Sisyphus tricked Persephone, ruler of the underworld.

Sisyphus was eventually caught, and for his arrogance, punished. He was condemned to an eternity of rolling a heavy boulder up a hill, only to see it roll to the bottom at the end of every single day. (Gendler, 2018)

On the surface, Sisyphus's suffering in agony for eternity can be read as a warning against the hubris of man. But if we were to imagine Sisyphus' daily life after his punishment, it begins to resemble a modern working life. Think of a day when you see a single email in your inbox. You decide to get the task out of the way and respond. Right after you hit send, another email is delivered to your inbox, but this one is marked urgent. Fifteen minutes later, you are finally ready to get to work, but in comes another email, one in response to your previous email. This continues until it is five o'clock and you realize you've spent your entire day answering emails. Am I describing a Sisyphean hell or what often happens in a normal workday? What god did you deceive to deserve this punishment?

Similarly, Camus sees Sisyphus as an allegory for the modern man. In the essay, he spends very little time discussing the crimes of Sisyphus. For Camus, Sisyphus's punishment is an absurd existence. He is stuck in an infinite game where he is unable to utilize his intellect and craftiness to weasel his way out. No matter his methods or strategies, Sisyphus cannot avoid his boulder. It is only when he recognizes his meaningless existence, or the fundamental contradiction between the chaotic world and his existence, that he becomes aware of the absurd nature of being. Sisyphus is absurdly free. We often think of the absurd as a situation that

lacks logical sense, such as fishing with a sword. For Camus, the absurd lies at the center of humanity's existence. There is no meaning or logic that can explain why humans exist, and any attempt to find a universal reason for that existence will ultimately be made in vain. Before the boulder, Sisyphus lived in a state of anxiety. There was no way for him to unify his desires with the gods' wishes for him, and he was ultimately punished when he belittled the gods. As we imagine Sisyphus rolling the boulder up a hill, only to see it fall back down, we imagine a man in despair. He is longing for the meaning that has left his life and the cruelty of his punishment is in reducing his life to an infinite task.

For Sisyphus, there is no escaping the boulder, but human beings can opt out of existence through suicide or philosophical suicide. The primacy of suicide can be found in much of Camus's writing. In his book *The Stranger*, Meursault, the protagonist, has committed philosophical suicide. He is resigned to aimless life, as demonstrated by his indifference to his mother's death. In a moment of extreme despair, a traditionally rational thinker would conclude that life is not worth living. Since it is within our power to end our suffering through suicide, Camus wonders why we continue living. Once someone accepts cosmic emptiness, they are able to approach the world with all it has to offer. In other words, we are free in our emptiness to create individualized meaning. For Camus, this act is one of defiance, but I prefer to call this an act of stupidity. It is difficult to define stupidity. Sometimes we use the word in a sentence like, "I don't know, it's just stupid." A

stupid object is dubious or useless. My favorite example of a large group stupid things, is the SkyMall catalog. On flights growing up with my brother, we would do what we called a “SkyMall Race.” We would both go as fast as we could to find the most ridiculous item. The products for sale were remarkably stupid because of both their lack of sensible utility and their extreme price. My brother and I would wonder who had the money to buy a cereal dispenser, when a cereal box acts as a perfectly good dispensing system. Even my eight year old self understood that when a company sells an item, there has to be some demand for it. SkyMall was full of items answering questions that no one asked. All of the products seemed useless, nonsensical, and lacked intelligence. Ultimately, stupidity is defined by what it is not: smart.

An intelligent person is someone who can understand a system, like economics, and capitalize on that knowledge. Think of chess grandmaster Magnus Carlsen. I doubt that there are many people who would describe him as being stupid.[1] We consider him smart because he has mastered a complex system. He understands the game of chess on levels that only prolonged periods of practice can achieve. He exploits his comprehension to beat all those who play him. However, did Magnus make an intelligent choice in spending so much time playing chess, or was that initial impulse stupid? With the power of hindsight, Carlsen made a smart choice. At the time, his initial desire to pursue chess might not appear intelligent. Pursuing chess as a career will most likely lead to failure. Yet, Carlsen tried anyway. In a recent interview, the interviewer asks “Where does this unwavering

passion for chess come from?” Carlsen’s response is, “I have no idea.” (Wychowanok, 2017) Carlsen has no explanation for the defining activity of his life. He is intelligent enough to have pursued just about any vocation, yet one day he started playing chess and never stopped. If we were to ask Sisyphus a similar question about his passion for the boulder, I am sure his response would be “I have no idea.” He keeps pushing the boulder because that is what he does, which is similar to why Carlsen plays chess. The origin of these actions can only be seen as irrational or stupid.

Camus suggests that we act on our absurd freedom with defiance. But how is Carlsen being defiant if he has no idea why he continues? Defiance suggests that there is something to challenge, but Camus posits that there is nothing meaningful in existence. One cannot defy nothing. How would one triumph over an empty void? If there is nothing, then all actions must be illogical, useless, and ultimately stupid. But, if we are able to take these stupid actions and stack them on the useless actions of others, then we can achieve rules for our stupidity. In these stupid systems, we can play games.

At the very beginning of the essay, Camus follows this line of thinking, stating that all philosophical acts after contemplation of suicide are merely games. Pondering aesthetics, politics, and every other contemplation is a game. Similar to stupidity, we typically think of games as useless, but fun. Chess is a game that is largely pointless in the grand scheme of life, besides the few like Magnus Carlsen who are able to make it more than trivial. A game of chess is finite. There is a clear

winner and loser. But, the game can bring satisfaction to the winner and frustration to the loser. The loser might want to play again to pull themselves out of their frustration and the winner might want to go home while they still feel good. Managing one's emotions could be considered an "infinite" game. Most people strive for balance in their emotional well being, yet will never achieve perfection. It is always a work in progress. Every act is a stupid one, but we can achieve intelligence by mastering useless games. In this mastery, we can then create meaning.

Imagine Sisyphus playing games with his boulder. While rolling the boulder up the hill, he might contemplate every nook and cranny of the boulder and theorize the origin of the boulder. Naturally he would never find a true answer because that is beyond his grasp, but it would be an infinite game that he could play by himself, creating meaning beyond the boulder. He could create a game where he times how long it takes him to roll the boulder up the hill and then tries to beat his previous time. This could become his chess, satisfying to win and frustrating to lose. There is no inherent meaning in Sisyphus rolling his boulder, but every time he creates a game, infinite or finite, he becomes more intelligent about his world. Sisyphus, like us, acts stupidly, but through his games, he creates meaning.

I often like to imagine the Mouth Breathers as my Sisyphus. I am the god who has placed them in an infinite game that they play themselves. I launch the software and watch them roll the boulder up the hill. They are living out their purpose inside the computer. I am watching them and inviting others to watch them as well, but I can't help wanting them to break out of the computer. I

wonder if they are creating their own games? I hope they can find ways around their infinite monotony. Maybe they have found their own absurd freedom inside my computer. I can only hope that they are finding their existence satisfying. Maybe one day the Mouth Breathers will trick me the same way Sisyphus tricked Zeus. Until then, I will relegate them to our shared fate of stupidly pushing a boulder up a hill.

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