

# Bernd Herzogenrath & Lasse-Marc Riek ~ @ovid's Metamorphoses

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@ovid's *Metamorphoses* is an expansive, multi-media project, including 7 CDs, 2 data DVDs and a 200-page book packed with art and text. An astonishing 133 international artists participated in the project and produced 152 works of film, sound, text, drawings, photos and paintings, compiled while playing 19 games of exquisite corpse.

How in the world did Frankfurt professor **Bernd Herzogenrath**, in association with **Lasse-Marc Riek** of Gruenrekorder have the time to organize such a project? The easy answer, referenced in the title, is COVID. We all had a lot of time on our hands over the course of those lethargic years, but few of us put it to such good use. While not quite as long as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the release references the narrative poem, itself a collection of myths, and suggests a new narrative network, a burst of creative strength in a time of societal stagnation.

Here's another way to regard the release: *a generous serving of everything we like*.

Readers of this site will recognize a multitude of names, while the sheer wealth of music, art and text guarantees nearly a full day of enjoyment and intellectual pursuit. The reader/listener not only receives the art, but seeks to understand how each piece relates to each other, as well as the whole: a metaphor for the social condition.

Every project has a ground zero, in this case a "number 0" from **Maja S K Ratkje**, to whose tail the next artist will connect. The electro-acoustic piece is dense, flecked with protuberances, agitated and occasionally howling, an emotional reflection of the first COVID spring. **Bergsonist** picks up the thread with percussion, and the game is on. A two-minute piece is followed by a thirty-three minute piece, mirroring pandemic time distortion. A period of turbulence leads to sudden silence at 8:34; one cannot help but associate this moment with the personal moment in which we realized that everything was shutting down. From this silence grows a wisp of activity that never returns to prior levels. We're not surprised that **Francisco López** was out making field recordings during

this time: a boon for those seeking long-muffled sounds. The sound artist decorates these recordings with a different level of intentional distortion. Lasse-Marc Riek provides a reminder that during the pandemic, many people believed birds were louder than usual, when the opposite was true; they were singing softer, given the lack of sonic competition.

On CD2, some artists get to play exquisite corpse twice, extending work that extends their own. Narration begins as **David Vélez** muses on time, memory, reality and dreams. A meta narrative, this piece comments on the *@ovid's Metamorphoses* mailing process, as well as the recording. A church bell and clock share a five-second piece. CD3 begins with the words, "I'm almost human, but not quite human," a symbol of disorientation.

**Halla Steinunn Stefánsdóttir's** piece sounds like a performance on an empty stage in a shuttered concert hall, a cry to an impassive universe. **Lee "Scratch" Perry** makes an appearance, a reminder of those we have lost. The proximity of Perry to **Richard Reed Parry**, followed by a collaboration, is a clever pairing of homonyms and sonic kin.

"Obsolete Capitalism" is a manifesto for societal change, proposing a world in which capitalist values are reversed.



CD4 is a spooky disc, starting with a rainy, spectral piece from **Thelmo Cristovam**. The ghosts are restless, demanding answers; none are given. The liquid theme continues in **Angélica Castelló's** piece, plus distant conversation, and is extended by **João Castro Pinto**, who reduces the volume while increasing the mystery. **Lucretia Dalt** sings without words; **Marc Richter (Black to Comm)** drenches drones in downpours. The full set

offers radio transmissions, abraded communications, forest screeches, turntable scratches, vinyl crackle and vocal abrasion. Even as a single disc, this chronicle of alienation stands on its own.

Drips and birds connect **Janko Hanushevsky**'s CD5 opener to other discs and games.

During the pandemic, international artists were experiencing similar things, responding in unique yet related ways. Again, conversation seeps into a composition, followed by a monologue by the ocean. The waves crash against the shore and retreat again, pulling pebbles in their wake. Accustomed to loss, the listener hears the first beep of **Constantin Gröhn**, piece as a heart monitor, only to be relieved when tentative electronic melodies develop. The early parts of CD6 contain some of the set's most overtly melodic pieces, projecting a form of emergence. In **Achim Zepezauer**'s piece the waves return along with thunder, organ, snores, a rooster and church bells, solidifying the association.

The final disc showcases moments of narrative lucidity: "So I told the man to grant me the wish: to see everything in a golden light, to make everything illuminous, to always make me see the beauty in everything." **James Yorkston**'s piece is calm, accompanied by animal snorts, a bucolic escape. "Before the gift, all I did was work," he admits. "I was so stressed out." **Jonas Noack** continues with a gently strummed ode. But then **Rehab Hazgui** crashes the previous pieces together like a child with metal cars, producing a sense of unease. For some, the pandemic is ending; for others, the ending remains a phantasm. The disc vacillates between quietude and distortion, comfort and unease, often – as in **Simon Whetham**'s piece – within tracks. The scars of the scourge remain.

But wait, there's more! There are also dozens of videos to enjoy, many which pair the artists on the CDs with new partners. Fair warning: do not adjust your speakers, as **Bill Morrison** begins with a silent film, 18 short segments of black and white clips featuring everything from factory weavers to scroll rollers to radio operators to jellyfish; viewers may choose their own soundtracks, or wait for Ratkje's music to be added in Version Two. Throughout the set, films are presented silently before being paired with individual or multiple scorers.

The most engaging works on the first disc include **Hedvika Hlavackova**'s work with Jacob Cooper, a series of provocative split-screen efforts that operates as a lyric video and is later remixed into another video, and **Kaveh Navabadian and Ashley Jane Richards**' stunningly shot surrealistic depiction of a single woman's lonely pandemic day, ending in a silent scream. On the second DVD, **Karel Doing** flashes rapid juxtapositions of words and images: *montrous, sacred, alien*. **Vincent Moon**'s gorgeous horse study is available in three versions: one with natural recordings, one with James Yorkston's music and a third with Jonas Noack (from CD7), all farmlike and fitting.

The book provides even more context. Packed with images, including still shots from the videos and a wealth of additional art, the book also includes liner notes for the music and insight into the ingredients that Herzogenrath calls "positive antibodies," so that art could attempt to become a "healing force." The game of exquisite corpse becomes a vessel of

transformation: handwriting to visual art to sound to remix to story. The original message may be distorted or enhanced, but the transformation itself is positive. While the virus is transmitted by infection, so is inspiration, as every artist “infects” the next in a series of chains.

While reading about the process, the entire project comes together visually and intellectually, the web of Ariadne (referenced by more than one author) revealed. Many artists reference politics, emphasizing the dangers of “modern individualism” versus an awareness of our “collective global life.” A cartoonist turns Hercules gentle, while an essayist highlights the health benefits of trees. The transcript of George Floyd’s murder is followed by Walt Whitman poem. The Perry & Perry section lists things that should be “obsolete:” fascism, racism, sexism. Throughout the set, artists engage directly with society, proposing better paths.

By extension, this review is also a remix, an extension of the exquisite corpse game. The reader of the review is next in the chain, forming an impression of an impression. Can art truly serve as an antibody, overwhelming the infections of fear, of violence, of oppression? While immersed in this project, we believe in its collective power. **(Richard Allen)**



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/EwZ6fiA2zrw>

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