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**Analytical Psychology, Therapy, and Catharsis in Video
Games: Persona 3 and its Application of Jungian
Principles**

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Analytical Psychology, Therapy, and Catharsis in Video Games: Persona 3 and its Application of Jungian Principles

INTRODUCTION

Video games have become one of the most ubiquitous and culturally relevant forms of media in an exceptionally short time span. In my own experience playing video games as a child in the 1990's and as teenager during the 2000's, I witnessed firsthand how the relatively simple games from my childhood gave way to a plethora of games that offered increasingly immersive narratives. However, the reason many games were simpler in the past was not due to the various developers' lack of trying. As can be expected, artists have attempted to convey intricate and satisfying stories with compelling emotional cores since video games were first invented. Oftentimes what held many creators back, though, were the limitations imposed by the hardware they worked with. Being limited to no voiced dialogue, compressed music files, and confined spaces in which gameplay could take place were common and expected constraints that developers had to work with. Around the year 2000, though, new game systems such as the PlayStation 2 provided noticeably increased memory and processing power compared to the previous generation of consoles. This drastic change in technology allowed developers to attempt to create ever more ambitious projects, yet the new metaphorical leg room that developers had access to still had severe limitations, from a modern standpoint. This meant that game creators had to be cunning in their use of the space they now had, and they did this by employing techniques that were quite similar to the ones often used in independent filmmaking. Tight camerawork could hide unrendered textures, high-quality models could be swapped in specifically for cutscenes, and other tricks of the trade were honed to help convey the story and gameplay to their fullest potential. One interesting aspect related to this heightened graphical fidelity was that video games could more accurately render physical spaces without the need to resort to symbolic shorthand. Characters could now convincingly inhabit these spaces, and it also became more common to hear dialogue voiced by actors rather than simply read text on the screen. More, higher quality music could also be added than ever before to accompany and guide the player's emotions during the narrative scenes and gameplay. In essence, while creators had endeavored to tell stories through the medium of video games since the medium was born, developers in the early 2000's could now strive for a level of immersion that fundamentally changed the way these stories could be told.

It was in this experimental context that *Persona 3* (Atlus, 2006) was conceived of, developed, and released. This video game was of considerable help in shaping my growing awareness of the world as a teenager, and many aspects of its core tenets and philosophy have guided me to this day. Thus, as living proof of the therapeutic potential that *Persona 3* has specifically, and that video games have as a whole, the aim of this thesis is to analyze the psychoanalytical and Jungian aspects that were deliberately woven into the making of *Persona 3*. Attention will, in particular, be given to the way that Jung's theories on psychology, philosophy, and religion have been disseminated throughout and give value to the work, and how these theories complement and spur on an eventual player's own journey of self-discovery and individuation. My analysis will be conducted with a particular eye towards Jungian analytical psychology, as myriad aspects of Jung's theories directly informed and shaped key elements of both the explicit and implicit themes present within *Persona 3*. Furthermore, this analysis will provide insight into how videogames such as *Persona 3* can be utilized as a valid psychotherapeutic support, particularly regarding adolescent players. Once the salient pieces of Jung's work have been explained and the therapeutic uses of video games have been explored, I shall then dedicate the third and final chapter to illustrate how *Persona 3*, as a work of art, deftly intertwines these various elements into a cohesive whole.

CHAPTER 1. CARL JUNG AND ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY

1.1 The Foundation of Analytical Psychology

Carl Gustav Jung is one of the 20th century's most influential and well-known psychologists, of whom a nigh limitless number of books, papers, and essays have been written, and who himself wrote a staggering array of literature that provides for much of the epistemological basis of modern psychology. Therefore, any introduction that can be given to him and to his work will inevitably find itself lacking in one respect or another. It is my consideration that one key incident of his professional life should be examined, so that the focus may then be shifted onto the aspects of his theories that are more relevant to this paper. The event in question is the reason behind Jung's disagreements with, and subsequent departure from, Sigmund Freud and his psychoanalytical theories.

Jung's many professional achievements include his collaboration with Freud, the self-styled father of psychoanalysis, in their exploration of the newfound field of psychology. Jung's professional relationship with Freud lasted approximately from 1906 until 1912, during which time they had become close friends. They respected each other's ideas regarding the nature of the subconscious and nurtured healthy debates on the matter. Yet it was not meant to last, as the two came to several irreconcilable disagreements. Jung's break with Freud was largely due to the concepts that Jung illustrated in his book *The Psychology of the Unconscious*, which he published in 1912. Within this treatise, Jung emphasized the role of what he called the collective unconscious, claiming that it was more important than Freud's concept of sexual libido. Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, which will be illustrated later in further detail, posits the idea that inherited and innate archetypal concepts and patterns of thought are the driving force behind humanity's intellect. While Jung understood that coming to terms with one's own sexuality was an important aspect of an individual's personal growth, he did not agree with Freud who insisted that only libidinal forces were to be considered responsible for the major impetus behind an individual's personality. This divergence of opinion proved untenable for Freud, who endeavored to ban Jung from the Vienna psychoanalytic circle. Jung did not lose heart, though, and further developed his theories into what is now the foundational knowledge of analytical psychology. Even though Jung's main academic efforts were dedicated to the field of psychology, his books and essays ran the gamut from anthropology, to philosophy, to religious studies and more. The sheer density of Jung's interconnected theories, alongside their numerosity, makes it difficult to summarize his work without omitting the relevant details that emerge from his work as a whole. While the entirety of his body of work has become the basis for most any modern foray into the human mind, for the purposes of this paper I shall maintain focus on three of his principal theories: The Process of Individuation, the Collective Unconscious, and Archetypes. It bears repeating that these three aspects of Jung's theories are different parts of a vaster, more holistic theory. Therefore, they share the same conceptual framework between them and are interdependent on one another. None of the more intricate aspects from one of these theories would function separately from the mechanisms described by the others. Yet, for clarity's sake, I shall examine each theory separately on its own merits in turn. Regarding the theory of archetypes, specifically, I shall also explain how this topic has become inseparably intertwined with the iconography of Tarot cards and provide the historic motivations behind this seemingly occult association. Before I get ahead of myself, however, I shall attempt to summarize and explain the key concepts of analytical psychology. These

foundational theories will be indispensable towards our understanding of all subsequent theories.

Jung's view of the psyche was rooted in the idea that an individual's mind was a trustworthy source of information. This did not mean that every thought that occurred within an individual's mind was objectively true, nor that one could solely rely on humoring the instincts that arose from their inner world to live a more fulfilling life. Rather, Jung thought that the mind was constantly attempting to communicate its inner, subjective truth to the individual through whatever means it had at its disposal. Jung thus believed that an individual's natural impulses were trustworthy, as he observed that an individual's mind would look after itself and, with time, be capable of self-correction. An individual, therefore, could achieve and maintain wholeness of their psyche by heeding the signals of the unconscious mind and aligning their conscious mind with these otherwise hidden, personal urges. It is important to note that Jung's definition of the unconscious mind included everything that was not presently available to the lucid, rational mind, such as unresolved emotions and complexes, forgotten memories, and even known information that was not actively being recalled; Jung noted that all these aspects of an individual's mind resided within the unconscious. He also recognized that the unconscious was a constant presence that primarily existed to help the individual succeed against the struggles of daily life, and that it acted both in directly obvious and indirectly subtle ways. According to Jung's theories, overtly negative mental symptoms such as aggression, paranoia, and depression were signals from the unconscious mind indicating that the individual was not living their life in accordance with their own natural proclivities and needs. To achieve psychic wholeness, one could then discover where the imbalances in one's psyche lay by listening to and acting upon the signs given by these "negative" aspects present within an individual's personality. Accepting and heeding one's own antagonistic qualities, therefore, is a necessary and crucial step before an individual could commence their process of individuation, which will be examined in-depth shortly.

The goal of this analytical process is the creation of a versatile and flexible persona. A persona is a social mask that serves to make an impression upon others as well as shelter and protect an individual's true self. The persona concept is, unsurprisingly, the keystone to the *Persona* series of videogames which will be discussed in depth in chapter three. In any case, Jung theorized that having a persona is essential to being able to interact with others in society, since he believed it was impossible to interact with others without any form of mediation between an individual's inner world and the outer world. Personas are not a singularly positive force,

however, as individuals risk identifying themselves too deeply with their persona. This would cause an individual to become little more than a conformist that cannot distinguish between their deeper self and the societal role they perceive themselves to have. Yet, the absence of a persona is also a sign of mental disturbance, since that situation would represent an individual who remains blind to the workings of the outer world and who is unable to meaningfully interact with the people around them. So, the objective of the process of individuation is to allow an individual to reach the cathartic moment in which their persona disintegrates. The disintegration of a persona is but the loss of a semblance which hides a deeper truth. Following successful individuation, a new and more viable persona will be restored. Individuation is thus a cyclical process that continuously provides the individual with a stronger persona, one that does not hinder nor obfuscate their true self. Ideally, one's persona should be a reflection of both their inner sensibility and their outer sense of self. Jung later elaborated upon this concept of a persona that functions as a guide or a sort of inner conscience. The persona would be depicted as an individual's idealized representation of their personality on a holistic level. An individual's true self, therefore, represented the individual's archetype that they identified with. Effectively, Jung theorized that an individual with an appropriate persona would be capable of drawing upon their reason and their intuition in equal measure to grant them awareness of the means through which they might simultaneously manage the outer world while satisfying their inner impulses. An individual that achieves this dynamic and syncretic view of their inner and outer worlds can then reach catharsis, where the conscious and unconscious mind reciprocally flow into and inform one another. All these foundational theories and aspects are represented within *Persona 3* in one form or another. For now, though, let's further examine the process of individuation.

1.2 The Process of Individuation

Jung observed that there was a continuous exchange of information between the conscious and the unconscious parts of our minds. However, he also noticed that most people did not have the adequate mental frameworks and systems of awareness to help themselves regulate and direct this exchange towards their own benefit. The process of individuation, put simply, is the way through which a person can help themselves achieve a state of balance between their conscious and their unconscious and cultivate a strong, flexible persona. Jung proposed that psychological growth occurs when elements of the unconscious mind are integrated into an individual's ego

and are thus made conscious. Individuation involves recognizing and embracing unconscious aspects of the self, including undesirable traits and archetypal influences. This process leads to greater self-awareness, inner balance, and psychological wholeness. The exact specifics of how to go about the process of individuation differ greatly from person to person, since each person's ego, their lived experiences, their complexes, and their relationship with society and its archetypes cannot be reduced to a scientific formula. Rather, an individual's own therapeutic path is often revealed via indirect means and by interacting with, experiencing, and comparing the lives of others with our own. This process starts from an individual's innermost core and, over time and through interiorization, integration, and healing, one's awareness of the structure of their own mind will gradually extend outwards.

A good starting point for one's process of individuation is to analyze the relationship they have with their ego, since the ego is specifically and wholly ascribed to the personal unconscious. According to Jung, our perceived sense of self is the sum of our conscious and unconscious mental faculties. Since we exist in an unconscious state before we develop conscience the self, therefore, exists before the ego. This means that the ego is an extension of the self, and yet the ego is also an element that is separate and distinct from the self. The ego is better known as the part of our psyche which is commonly referred to as our conscious mind. It is through our ego that we rationally experience and organize our daily lives. The ego is therefore easily mistaken for the self, since it is the part of our psyche that is known and readily available to us. By contrast, the totality of the self is fundamentally unknowable since it includes our unconscious mind which, by definition, is that part of our psyche of which we are not and cannot become fully aware of. Jung argued that the reason the ego is often mistaken for the self is because of our internal biases; since we all must experience our lives through our ego, which is akin to a window that our conscious mind uses to interface with the external world, we have a natural bias to give excessive value to our conscious mind. When this occurs, an individual may end up believing that their ego is the key to their true self. However important our ego may appear to be, though, it remains an expression of an individual's much vaster unconscious.

For an individual's ego to become aligned with their unconscious self and allow for a more direct expression of their true self, the ego must undergo cyclical patterns of reflection, action, and analysis that oftentimes brings about mental distress. This is because the ego is usually unwilling, and other times unable, to come to terms with and integrate aspects of the unconscious. This is often due to an instinctual rejection of what one unconsciously feels and thinks for a variety of reasons, for instance, whether we want to perceive ourselves differently

than how we truly feel, whether we believe society will not accept us, or whether we are unwittingly striving to identify ourselves with an unconscious archetype. In these cases, the persona, which is a projection of the ego, may not properly disintegrate or may disintegrate and be negatively restored, which is when an individual reverts to old habits and acts as if they are who they used to be at another moment in their life. One way or another, however, for the benefit of an individual's personal growth it is important to first become aware of the complexes that stem from their unconscious mind, so that they can then process and reintegrate them into their conscious life. Individuation is a transformative process through which an individual's ego is put under scrutiny, tested, and challenged. When carried out properly, this transformation leads to the ego's acquisition of awareness regarding both the individual's personal unconscious and the broader collective unconscious, which allows for the creation of a more resilient and ductile persona. It is important to emphasize how the process of individuation is not a singular path that leads to enlightenment, but rather a continuous cyclical dialogue that is established between our ego and our unconscious. An individual who is diligently maintaining their mental health, according to Jung, is one who dedicates time, energy, and commitment to channeling their inner self into their daily reality.

One of the key transitional phases in a young person's life is the emergence and definition of their ego. The ego is an essential component of a healthy psyche, and it is especially important for an individual's ego to develop properly during one's formative years. This is because the ego is the part of our psyche that functions both as a window through which we perceive the world, as well as a mirror that allows the individual to perceive themselves. The ego determines and is determined by who we perceive ourselves to be, which in kind determines how we relate with the external world around us. It grants us the ability to self-reflect and claim an identity. There can be no personal choices without the ego separating and defining the individual from their subconscious, nor any reflection upon how the individual can define themselves as distinct from the other. An important marker of the healthy development of the egos of children and adolescents is when they become able to define themselves as separate from their environment, then separate from their peers, and then again separate from their parents. The development of a healthy ego thus allows individuals to reassure themselves that their choices distance themselves from people, places, and concepts which they do not like, while drawing themselves closer to those that they do like. This process is commonly known as the process of self-discovery and, ironically, it could much more aptly be named the process of ego-discovery. As with any developmental process, there are risks associated with an ego's growing pains. For

instance, an overdeveloped ego can lead to drastic, dangerous, or unhealthy decisions being taken to conform with certain social groups, or to avoid others. Alternatively, an overdeveloped ego may also cause an individual to overestimate their own importance in the eyes of others, what is more commonly known as having a big head. An underdeveloped ego, on the other hand, can lead to difficulties in engaging in social interactions, emotional suggestibility, and apathy. These mental distortions resulting from overdeveloped and underdeveloped egos are quite commonly found in adolescents. While it is possible to overcome these distortions without conscious effort on one's part simply by experiencing the rigors of growing up, care must be taken so that one does not carry these ego-related issues far into adulthood.

The process of individuation can only commence in earnest once an individual's ego has reached a certain degree of maturity. This often occurs during early adulthood when people usually reach a level of physical and mental maturity coupled with the societal freedom to determine their own role amongst others. The integrative aspects of individuation require that one's ego be capable of acknowledging one's own existence as a single element within a greater whole. The nature of this greater whole depends largely on how the individual perceives society and their place within it. The commonality lies in a feeling of belonging and co-authorship with one's peers. Often this feeling will begin with one's family or core group of friends, then extend outwards until, ideally, one can find kinship with the outer world as a whole. In time, awareness of the self-imposed barriers that one erects will reveal a more holistic sense of self. If the process of individuation proceeds smoothly, one's ego can then integrate elements of the individual's unconscious into their daily lived experience. Jung considered the entire process of individuation as the process of self-realization, in its literal meaning of bringing the self into reality. Without individuation, an individual's ego will become subservient to the unchallenged complexes they harbor within their unconscious. The discovery and integration of personal and collective meaning helps individuals understand what they are striving for on a personal and a communal level. Through individuation, one can discover and identify what the value of an individual means in relation to their own true self. Individuation is therefore not a state of being that can be permanently achieved. Rather, it is an ongoing dialectical and heuristic process between the conscious and the unconscious. These two areas of an individual's psyche mix with and repel one another in equal measure. Only through repeated processes of individuation can an individual reach states that, at least momentarily, will allow them to feel that their process of individuation has reached its conclusion. This interplay between dualities is another key

element of Jung's work. The synthesis of opposites such as consciousness and the unconscious, soma and psyche, and life and death are crucial to successful psychological analysis.

The therapeutic praxis of psychological analysis can be seen as therapist assisting a patient through their own process of individuation. The process of individuation may be nurtured and expedited through mutual investment in the social relationship between the therapist and the patient. The social aspect of psychological analysis has the potential to lead to self-actualization that may otherwise not occur individually. Psychological analysis is thus necessarily relational and cannot be conducted without an analytical link between the therapist and the patient. In other words, the therapist must also undergo their own process of individuation as they lead the patient through theirs. The idea that an individual may achieve lasting individuation without putting in the effort to maintain one's mental state is untenable. Only through a collaborative effort can both participants, the guide and the guided, hope to find their own truth. In summary, the core goal of the process of individuation is for the ego to gain the ability to manifest a persona that mediates between the true self and the outer world. By channeling the power of the ego, and not relinquishing ourselves to it, one's inner self may be consciously expressed and realized.

1.3 The Collective Unconscious

The best introduction to the concept of the collective unconscious comes from Jung himself in his essay *The Significance of Constitution and Heredity in Psychology*, where he states that

[...] the essential thing, psychologically, is that in dreams, fantasies, and other exceptional states of mind the most far-fetched mythological motifs and symbols can appear autochthonously at any time, often, apparently, as the result of particular influences, traditions, and excitations working on the individual, but more often without any sign of them. These 'primordial images' or 'archetypes', as I have called them, belong to the basic stock of the unconscious psyche and cannot be explained as personal acquisitions. Together they make up that psychic stratum which has been called the collective unconscious.¹

At first glance, Jung's concept of the collective unconscious may appear to be drawn from the realm of spirituality or mysticism rather than psychology. The theory of the collective unconscious has certainly been used to justify all manner of subsequent theories, from the more empirically sound to the downright magical, and has undoubtedly been the source of much

¹ Jung Carl Gustav, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Bollingen Series XX, 1921

confusion over the years. The basic theory of the collective unconscious stems from the idea that social archetypes and idealized drives are instinctually present within humanity, similarly to how physical instincts are present within all animals. Humans are social animals, therefore there are basic thought structures which are common throughout all of humanity. This collective unconscious is distinct from an individual's personal subconscious, which is the mental structure that contains an individual's complexes and repressed thoughts, and from which an individual's ego arises. The collective unconscious, Jung claims, is the wellspring of archetypes that are interconnected between all people. Everyone encounters and forms relationships with the archetypes connected to the sun, water, plants, animals, and various societal roles, for instance. Because of our shared heritage, therefore, Jung posited that the human mind had a shared mental framework that would then react similarly when brought into contact with similar experiences.

Writer and professor Joseph Campbell was quite familiar with Jung and his body of work. In fact, Campbell partially credits Jung's theories in the formation of his own theory of the Hero's Journey, which he described in his seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell formed his theory of the hero's journey through his studies in comparative mythology, and it is there that he developed his narrative theory in relation to the concept of the monomyth. The much-debated theory of the monomyth claims that stories across all cultures follow specific archetypal patterns that are linked to our shared perceptions as human beings. This idea clearly relates to Jung's quite similar idea of the collective unconscious from which, ostensibly, all inspiration arises.

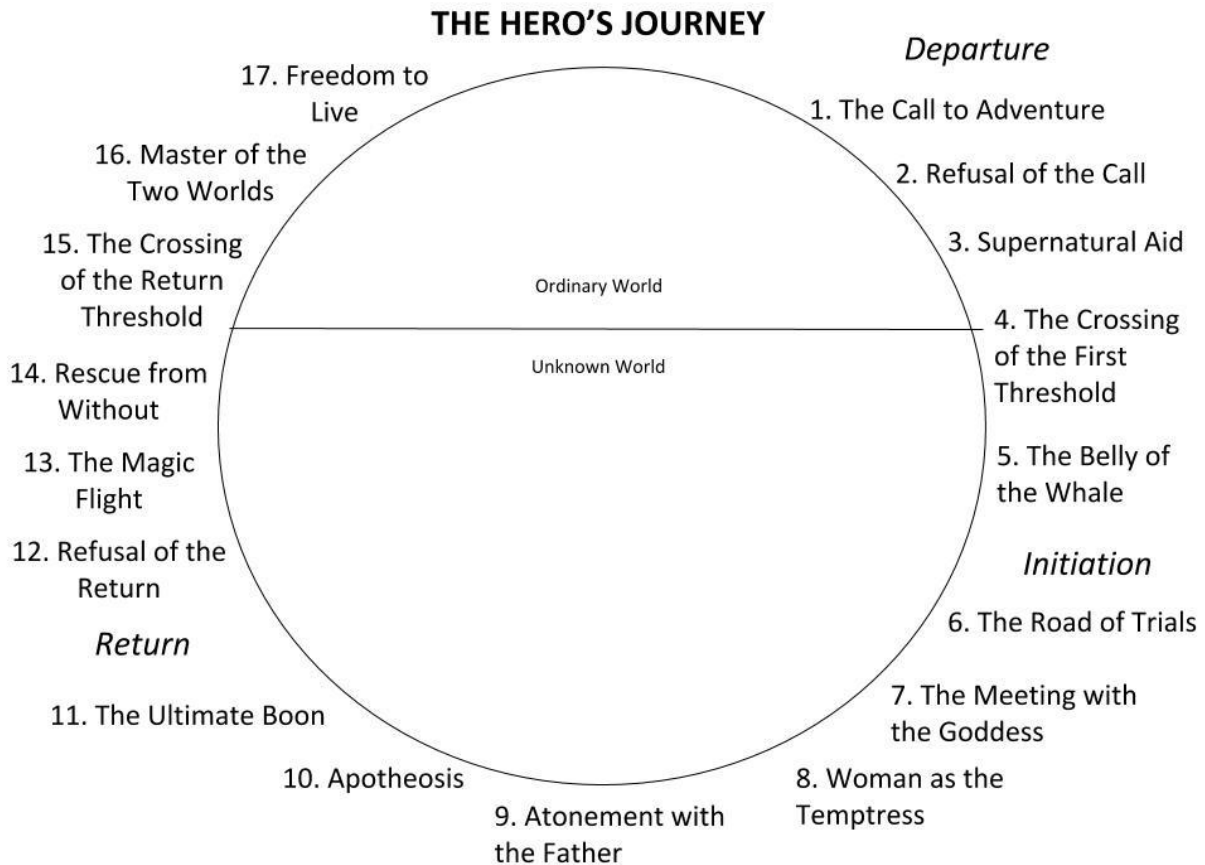


Figure 1 Representation of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey

Before analyzing the hero's journey further, it's important to clarify that Campbell claimed that his theory was descriptive and not prescriptive. Therefore, not every story must necessarily represent every stage of the journey to the same degree, if at all, but rather that all stories, when condensed to their bare components, have the potential to share these commonalities. It is also important to note that Campbell had his own flaws, the most apparent of which was an underlying misogyny that colored his work. There are two specific references to women and one to men in The Meeting with the Goddess, Woman as the Temptress, and Atonement with the Father that could all just as well be represented by men, women, or by neutral entities or forces. Furthermore, Campbell claimed that the hero's journey was conceived with an archetypal male hero in mind since, according to him, women fulfilled other archetypal roles. Fortunately, his beliefs have proven to be untrue, and protagonists from all walks of life may find themselves resonating with steps upon their own hero's journey. What is particularly interesting to note for the purposes of this paper is how Campbell's hero's journey can be interpreted both as the description of what heroes undergo in the context of their various stories, as well as the potential stages of an individual's process of individuation. Let's compare how

Campbell's journey maps itself onto the typical steps taken during someone's journey of individuation.

The journey begins within the Ordinary World, otherwise known as normality or the conscious mind. This is where people live their daily lives and follow their routines until they get interrupted by The Call to Adventure, or in the case of individuation, by signals from their unconscious mind. Refusal of the Call may occur if they feel obliged to remain where they are, or if their fear of the unknown wins out, but both adventure and the unconscious don't relent easily. Supernatural Aid represents a mentor or a force beyond the ordinary world that wants to help them, such as a wizard, a therapist, or similar entities. With their help, one can hope to survive The Crossing of the First Threshold which leads to the Unknown World, also known as the unconscious, and begin to face whatever may lie on the other side. However, they may soon find themselves within The Belly of the Whale where there is no turning back to the safety of the world they left behind. The hero, or the patient, makes a commitment here to fully engage with the journey ahead of them. These first five steps are placed in the Departure macro-area, which indicates that the cycle is just beginning and that the steps taken are perceived as moving away from the ordinary world and towards the unknown. Once the threshold of the unconscious has been crossed there will be a Road of Trials that will provide obstacles and challenges to the individual traveling upon it. These represent the complexes that the individual has formed with their personal and collective archetypes, and the steps they must take to form a positive relationship with them. The Meeting with the Goddess, as previously mentioned, does not necessarily mean the discovery of a female force. Rather, it denotes when the hero encounters a force of love or goodness that our individual must find a way to connect with. Similarly, Woman as the Temptress does not indicate the stereotypical idea of an evil seductress, but rather an antagonistic force that causes the hero to doubt the progress they've made upon their journey and that potentially causes the individual to stray from their path. Atonement with the Father, again, does not necessarily describe a father figure. Rather, it is the step during which the individual realizes that their mentor figure is flawed, even though they may still need to rely on this fallen mentor for assistance. Apotheosis describes when the individual reaches a higher and more comprehensive form of awareness and understanding. Thanks to this step, the hero now has the tools at their disposal to face the most difficult stage of their journey. If the hero then proves themselves able to overcome their struggle, then they will achieve The Ultimate Boon. They have acquired what they were looking for, or they will have completed the task they had set out to do. These following six steps are situated within the Initiation macro-area. This phase

takes place wholly within the unknown world and represents the various challenges that the protagonist must confront before they can become privy to vital, heretofore hidden information and. Initiation is also when the protagonist hones their skills and visibly improves the most, since it is the most tumultuous of the phases. The final six steps in the Hero's Journey are often glossed over in mass media narratives, even though they are perhaps the most vital steps in the process of individuation. If the knowledge, abilities, and overall improvements that were gained during the journey cannot be brought back and integrated into the ordinary world, then they might as well have never been achieved in the first place. The Refusal of the Return may occur because the hero has grown accustomed to their new, magical world. However, with their newfound awareness, they know that they cannot rest upon their laurels and must embark on the last leg of their journey. The hero feels longing for their community, and The Magic Flight may occur if they need supernatural assistance to escape the unknown world. Rescue From Without describes how the individual, having been physically or mentally weakened by their journey, might have to rely on someone from the ordinary world to retrieve them and pull them back into the ordinary world. At last, there is The Crossing of the Return Threshold where the individual leaves the unknown world behind. Now they must find a way to keep their boon and integrate it with the old world. As Master of the Two Worlds the hero balances and bridges the apparent separation between the two worlds, often in a spiritual sense. They are proof of the gap between how they began and how they have returned. Finally, they have achieved the Freedom to Live and are released from the fear of death. They can now live without being afraid of or beholden to their past or their future and simply exist in the moment. This new stage of life is seen as a rebirth, since some or all the hero's thoughts, behaviors, and connections have transformed over the course of the journey into new ones that have taken their place. These final six steps are placed in the Return macro-area. The Return is, tritely, when the hero returns, but it is also the stage that helps us comprehend how no amount of struggles, conquests, and epiphanies can make any lasting change if they are not returned to and integrated back into the conscious mind.

The steps represented within the hero's journey exist within the collective unconscious. The process of individuation is, thus, how the individual encounters, challenges, and integrates these collective images during their personal journey. In fact, Jung considered the process of individuation to be a process of distinguishing oneself from the collective subconscious by encountering and resolving one's complexes with different archetypal characters and iconography. Psychotherapy based on analytical psychology seeks to analyze the relationship

between a person's individual consciousness and the deeper common structures which underlie them. Personal experiences can both activate archetypes in the mind as well as give them meaning and substance on an individual level. These preexisting archetypes may also exert influence over human experience and memory without conscious effort from the individual; this can cause mental distortions of various sizes and imports, and which may become apparent only through therapy, indirectly, or in retrospect. Understanding the power that the collective unconscious and the archetypes within it potentially hold over people, therefore, is a vital aid during one's own process of individuation. An individual cannot determine the value of their own relations with their inner world or with external reality if they are not able to confidently manage their relations with the archetypes that are subconsciously made manifest therein. In other words, the entirety of an individual's prejudices, biases, and preconceptions inevitably impact the way that an individual relates to their own lived experiences, and it is not at all likely that an individual will be capable of analyzing and realigning their behavior to better express their inner feelings if they cannot find a way to positively interface with the reality they live in.

1.4 Archetypes and Tarot Cards

Archetypes are the functional units of the collective unconscious. They are the irreducible mental concepts that all of humanity shares with one another. Specifically, Jung claimed that archetypes are universal concepts defined as an “introspectively recognizable form of *a priori* psychic orderedness” in his *Synchronicity* essay. These figures include concepts which Jung believed to be transversal to human social life, such as the Mother, the Child, Love, Water, the Trickster, and so on. Jung believed that the essence of these archetypes' thought structures was physiologically innate to human minds and that these concepts were shared amongst all humankind, even though the way in which these archetypes are expressed occurs dynamically based on the specific individual's personality, socialization, and physical environment. To wit, archetypes are patterns of thought and behavior that cause individuals to unconsciously strive for their actualization. Shadow archetypes, conversely, are those archetypes that individuals unconsciously repress and avoid in their daily life, such as Death, Abandonment, and Fear. Therefore, one of the crucial steps that occurs during the process of individuation is that the individual must become aware of the relationship they have with both their personal and collective archetypes. The individual can then come to terms with their own complexes by actualizing their archetypes, that is, mentally working through them and bringing them to their

conclusion. This process follows a specular therapeutic path where further awareness of an individual's relationship with their archetypes, which are the functional units of the collective subconscious, allows for the individual to become more aware of their own complexes, which are the functional units of the personal unconscious. Causal links are then formed on both the macro and the micro level which form a virtuous circle of awareness and healing. Once an individual's complexes are successfully analyzed, understood, accepted, and reintegrated back into the wholeness of one's psyche this way, that individual's ego can then project a more viable persona that, in turn, will be able to function as a more faithful intermediary between their true self and the outer world.

So, how do all these psychological theories relate to Tarot cards? Where did the mystical obsession for a deck of playing cards come from? And how can Tarot cards actually be used as a beneficial tool in one's own process of individuation? A summary of the history of Tarot cards will answer all these questions. While much historical misinformation persists on the subject of Tarot cards, records indicate that the initial decks of cards that gave rise to modern Tarot originated in Bologna around the middle of the 15th century². It bears repeating that these cards were used exclusively to play various card games, and that they did not differ greatly in use from modern French playing cards. The main game that was played with the Tarot deck was aptly called "Tarocchi", which means Tarot in Italian. This game was a trick-taking game that featured the inclusion of a variable number of trump cards. These cards, which produced different in-game effects, were drawn from the folk imagination of the time: street merchants, chariots, popes, death, and the moon, to name a few. Yet these cards held no special occult or psychological significance. The very idea that mystical cards could exist that could be used to foretell one's future was not widespread in the way that we are accustomed to today.

Antoine Court de Gébelin was the 18th century creator of the modern, occult associations that Tarot is now best known for. He was a French Protestant pastor, a Freemason, and is now also considered to be the grandfather of much of Western occultism. His main interests included hermeneutics, symbolism, and linguistics, although he did not have a formal education in any of these subjects. One of the main theories he promulgated was one of his own making called Unified Cultural Theory. According to this theory, in the distant past there existed a universal language and culture that all contemporary languages and cultures can be traced back to. While certain elements of his theory would partly be proven true in later linguistic theories, such as

² Decker Ronald, Depaulis Thierry, Dummet Michael, *A Wicked Pack of Cards: The Origins of the Occult Tarot*, London, Duckworth, 1996, p. 28

with the recreation of the Proto Indo-European family of languages, the broad generalizations and sweeping simplifications that Court de Gébelin often utilized, along with his lack of any historical evidence, ultimately led to the dismissal of his Unified Cultural Theory.

Among another of his greatest achievements was the publication of an essay in parts called *The Primeval World (Le monde primitif)*. In a specific part of his long and rambling essay he claimed that the Tarot deck of cards was no ordinary plaything. Rather, he believed to have stumbled upon an encoded, esoteric compendium within which ancient Egyptian wisemen had decided to hide their most secret knowledge. Court de Gébelin's claims appear outlandish, especially considering that they were made before Jean-François Champollion's groundbreaking work in deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphs. Armed with nothing but his intuition and a dose of apophenia, Court de Gébelin went on to claim that these special cards were subsequently smuggled out of Egypt to be given to the popes of Rome for safekeeping. Later, he claimed that Tarot cards would end up in the hands of the popes of Avignon. This circuitous and baseless history was Gébelin's way of explaining how and why the Tarot deck made its way from Egypt to France and beyond.

To further complicate matters, Court de Gébelin was in contact with the Comte de Mellet who added his own ideas to Gébelin's already convoluted theories. Namely, de Mellet claimed that the Tarot deck's newly standardized 22 trump cards held a mystical connection to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. As if that wasn't enough, he also claimed that the Romani people, who were often mistakenly believed to be ethnically Egyptian, were also keepers of the sacred secrets supposedly represented within the images of the Tarot deck. Shortly after the publication of these new, ill-conceived "revelations", yet another important figure added his own contributions to the already muddled waters. This was a man who wrote under and became famous with the pseudonym Etteilla, whose real name was Jean-Baptiste Alliette. Etteilla claimed that the Tarot deck's purpose was explicitly divinatory in nature; he created his own version of the Tarot deck which, he purported, allowed him to commune with otherworldly forces. He also was the first to make the distinction between the Major arcana and the Minor arcana, that is to say, between the named face cards and the numeral suit cards. His conviction in divinatory Tarot cards, alongside other likeminded people in the late 18th century, created the basis for future occultists to latch on to.

It wasn't until the 19th century that Éliphas Lévi truly cemented the relationship between Tarot cards and the occult by expounding on the patchwork theories and harebrained connections

espoused by his predecessors. He invented a convoluted backstory that removed the Egyptian connotations from Tarot cards. He also declared both firmly and erroneously that Tarot cards were a product of Kabbalistic philosophy. Lévi, as well as many other occultists after him, would continue to compound upon and exaggerate the role that Tarot cards supposedly held as a spiritual and magical tool.

One crucial aspect of this mystical meandering, however, would allow Tarot cards to one day be utilized as a legitimate psychological device; the notion that the Tarot's Major arcana, in ascending order, represented the stages of a person's spiritual growth from throughout their life. This idea sowed the seeds of what would later become known as the Heroes' Journey, which was analyzed in the last chapter. The first card in the Tarot deck, which starts at number zero, is The Fool, who is our protagonist that blithely wanders onward. The figures that proceed after the Fool represent people and situations within the ordinary world until The Lovers, which represents a choice between two paths. The first group of seven cards represents the journey's Departure. Using the power of The Chariot, the protagonist descends into the unknown world. Here they encounter a series of allegorical figures and situations until they inevitably meet with Death. This Death isn't the end, though, since it represents change. This second group of seven cards quite aptly represents the journey's Initiation. After the protagonist has transformed and has met with Temperance, which represents the mixture and balance of opposites, they encounter a few more obstacles while they make their way back to the ordinary world past The Star, The Moon, and The Sun. When the protagonist surpasses Judgement and grasps meaning, they will have completed their return to the ordinary world and be represented by The World. This third and final group of 8 cards represents the Return. While we can safely ignore the vastly trumped-up mystical origins behind a deck of Tarot cards, it is nonetheless handy to have such an appropriate chart that can represent the various archetypes one may find during their process of individuation. By examining the archetypes represented within this deck, an individual can question their own personal relationship they have with these thought patterns in a more tactile and recombinant way. A tarot deck can, therefore, become a type of psychological shorthand that can be used to help an individual connect thoughts and feelings that would otherwise go unheeded. This type of self-reflection has immediate psychological benefits which, it must be emphasized, do not have anything to do with Tarot's mythologized connection to supposed arcane powers. If anything, the success of Tarot cards as a tool in analytical psychology demonstrates that iconographic representations can condition and influence our thoughts and reiterates the care that should be put into deciding what types of

imagery people should be routinely subjected to. As Sallie Nichols, one of Jung's students, said in her book *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey*: "A journey through the Tarot cards is primarily a journey into our own depths".³ She studied under Jung during his professorship in Zurich and developed a fascination with archetypal imagery that both of them shared. While her book on the subject could certainly be considered a personal take on the subject matter, it is nevertheless an excellent example of an idea that prevailed amongst many Jungian scholars; that the archetypal imagery present within a deck of Tarot cards is an excellent wellspring of inspiration during the process of individuation, especially when seen through the lens of the heroes' journey. By reflecting upon the subjective meaning that each card may hold, an individual can better understand one's own relationship with their subconscious complexes and be better equipped at resolving them.

³ Nichols Sallie, *Jung and Tarot: An Archetypal Journey*, York Beach, RedWheel/Weiser, 1980

CHAPTER 2. THE VALIDITY OF ANALYTICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND PLAY IN THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS

2.1 *Psychology with the Psyche: The Merits of Analytical Psychology*

Since its inception, the prevailing opinions regarding Jung's theories of analytical psychology have been divisive, at best. Many authoritative sources have classified Jung's theories as belonging firmly to the fields of pseudoscience and mysticism for a number of reasons, such as a lack of empirical and scientific data to support his claims, or because of his sometimes-rambling forays into the nature of religion or the unconscious. Despite this prejudice against Jung and his admittedly intuitive based research methods, the tenets of analytical psychology have still guided the foundation of many of the branches of modern behavioral psychology and have continued to shape their development. Much of this ambiguity regarding the validity of Jung as a scientist and as a psychologist has to do with how the developing field of psychology itself was perceived in his time. In the late 19th century, experimental psychology was designated as a natural science, and therefore as a science that could break down the workings of natural phenomena to irreducible parts that follow objective rules. It was postulated that the mind, being simply another part of human anatomy, could eventually be understood in its entirety. It is certainly true that subsequent advancements in the study of neurology and biochemistry have allowed researchers to better grasp the relationship that the human brain has with the rest of the body. However, even with a much better understanding of the brain's inner workings, there are still many aspects of the emergent mind that present too complex of a challenge to explain deterministically. For example, let's posit the hypothetical scenario in which two individuals were to possess the exact same set of neurons; from the moment that their minds began to experience the world as two separate and distinct entities, their lived, inner worlds would begin to diverge and would never become functionally equivalent again.

The psyche cannot be reduced to a set of data points and can only be holistically represented by a living, active reality. It follows that if the metrics of the natural sciences are applied to the mind, then that would entail treating an interconnected whole as if it were simply a collection of isolated phenomena. According to Raya Jones, "it would mean overriding descriptions of the subjectively lived experience in favor of the hypothetico-deductive method".⁴ Scientific studies

⁴ Jones Raya A., "Jung's 'Psychology with the Psyche' and the Behavioral Sciences", *Behavioral sciences (Basel, Switzerland)*, Vol. 3, July 2013

are, of course, the backbone of psychology and behavioral sciences. However, the fact remains that the human psyche is more than the sum of its parts and cannot be quantified. It is no wonder Jung's studies, that so often brought him face to face with this liminal and spiritual space, have had difficulty being integrated into the scientific system that cannot abide ambiguity.

The non-testability and fundamentally subjective nature of Jung's body of work has limited the amount of technical research that it can be applied to. However, the clinical and therapeutic results of applying analytical psychology in practical settings with real patients have proven effective. Christian Roesler, in his article *Evidence for the Effectiveness of Jungian Psychotherapy: A Review of Empirical Studies*, collated and analyzed several studies dedicated to investigating the effects of Jungian psychotherapy. The overall results were noteworthy, showing marked improvement in reducing the severity of patients' symptoms, a reduction in interpersonal problems, and general improvements in conducting everyday life. The effects of this form of therapy were also proven to be stable for a period of up to six years. These results were mostly seen once the therapy sessions had concluded their course, which is consistent with the theories that analytical psychology has espoused. It is not necessarily the result of the individual steps in the process of individuation that have improved patients' mental health and helped them achieve mental well-being, but rather it is the journey they have undertaken and the individuation they have achieved that allows them to enact lasting change.

Research has thus shown that there are empirical benefits to analytical psychology. Not only can it change and scale down symptoms, but it also can transform the structure of an individual's personality and allow them to better adapt to the various challenges, contexts, and relationships in life. This is all consistent with what has been previously explained regarding the relationship between the ego, the persona, and the self. There is, nevertheless, a portion of the population to which Jungian analytical psychology was not proven to have brought any benefits. Roesler specifies that "...in all studies 10%–20% of patients did not profit from Jungian therapy".⁵ However, he also adds that "this is a common finding also in other studies investigating other schools of psychotherapy", indicating that the failings of analytical psychology are not indicative of systemic problems, but rather confirming that it meets the generally accepted metrics that other forms of psychotherapy are judged by.

⁵ Roesler Christian, "Evidence for the Effectiveness of Jungian Psychotherapy: A Review of Empirical Studies", *Behavioral sciences (Basel, Switzerland)*, Vol. 3, October 2013

Jung found himself in the unenviable position of attempting to describe and codify the psyche, which by its very nature cannot be exhaustively described nor explained. Consider, then, how the basis of analytical psychology is the relationship between the therapist and the patient, along with all the idiosyncrasies and specific elements that any interpersonal relationship will have, and matters become even more complicated. If we add the ever nebulous and ephemeral influence of personal and collective archetypes to the mix, which manifest accordingly with both the individual's lived experiences as well as their cultural background, the hope of ever coming to a scientific consensus as we know it all but vanishes. However, Jung insisted upon his inductive research into the psyche because he could not ignore the mounting evidence that he was on to something. Just because the human mind could not be expressed as a purely rational function did not mean that he could ignore his findings. Jung understood the paradoxical nature of psychology which was, essentially, the mind's attempts at understanding the mind. Since we cannot rid ourselves of our own subjectivity, why should the nature of the mind be any less subjective? Analytical psychology, thus, is necessarily a personal process of self-reflection. According to Jones, "Jung implicitly positions its practitioner—not as someone who detachedly studies something called a psyche—but as someone trained to apply his or her own psyche as a tool towards trying to fathom how human beings attune themselves to own (sic) existence"⁶. The fact remains that analytical psychology functions as well as many other therapeutic frameworks. Regardless of whether Jung's theories have purely scientific validity or not, it is undeniable that something about the process of individuation often triggers drastic, positive change in people's mindsets. Until the day comes that new research can prove exactly why the mind works the way it does, perhaps we can learn to apply the adage "don't look a gift horse in the mouth".

2.2 *Idealization, Flow States, and Realization*

Engaging with play is one of the best ways to learn and interiorize new ideas. Individuals often feel that they have mastered a subject when they feel comfortable enough to engage in a state of play with its contents without feeling threatened by them. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, in his seminal work *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety*, describes the various ways that the mental state of an individual can align itself with a range of different conditions when engaging in various types of activities. This variation hinges on where the individual's personal skill level in a given

⁶ Jones R. A., op.cit.

activity can be placed relative to the perceived difficulty of said activity. By comparing the individual's skill level, or their degree of ability in accomplishing a certain task, with the task's difficulty, or challenge level, we can ascertain what the individual's emotional state will likely be when they engage with the task at hand. There are eight emotional states that may appear when carrying out an activity. These emotional states can be charted out on a graph that demonstrates whether they are the result of a high or low level of relative challenge within the activity, which is met with a high or low level of individual ability. This graph also demonstrates that these eight emotional states are all, in reality, combinations of two foundational emotional states which share traits with neighboring major emotions. This helps us understand how these emotions may come to be. It is also important to note that while Csikszentmihalyi's theory of emotional states being tied to the Challenge/Ability axis is especially relevant when considering states of play, it is also a theory that is pertinent to most every task-based activity imaginable.

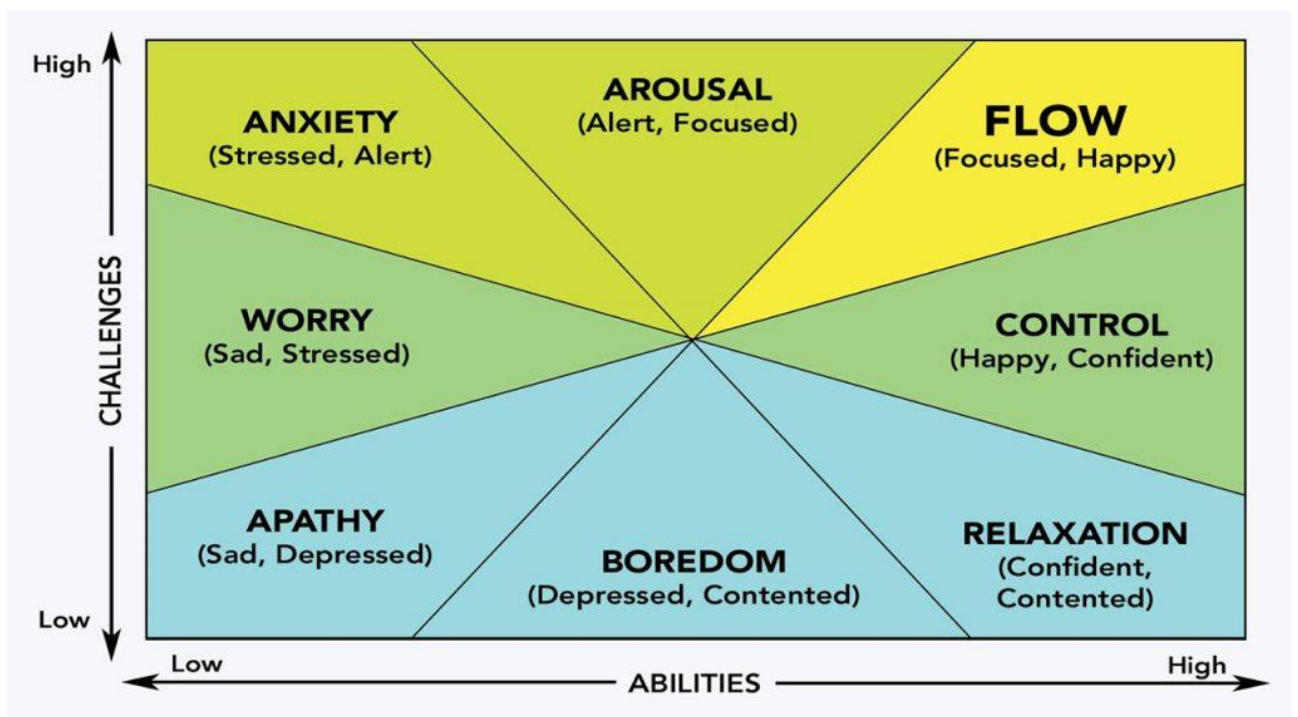


Figure 2 Csikszentmihalyi's model of emotional states

Out of the eight potential combinations of emotional states that might arise when an individual attempts to complete a task, the ideal condition that allows for the most productivity and the best state of psychological well-being is the flow state. This state occurs when an individual is focused on the task at hand while also being happy and willing to engage with it. Furthermore, the flow state requires that a high skill level be combined with an equally high challenge level,

creating a delicate balance where neither the challenge nor the individual's ability exceed one another by a significant amount. In essence, the flow state can be most easily achieved by an individual who knows what needs to be accomplished and who also has the functional capacity to be able to complete the task at hand, and who all the while is being met with an appropriately increasing series of stimulating challenges. This works because the individual is able to identify the ideal experience they desire to have while accomplishing their task, and is then able to strive to realize their ideal experience. This creates a positive feedback loop where the individual's ideal experience and their realization of it are spurred on by the task's innate features. The individual's focused and happy states, which combine into the flow state, will then often culminate in the successful completion of the task at hand. The beneficial effects of the flow state are also noticeable when dealing with longer or more intricate tasks, since the individual will be able to make measurable and satisfying progress towards their goal with seemingly little effort. The tendency for people experiencing the flow state to feel completely absorbed and engaged in their chosen activity is noteworthy. As Sebastian Ruiz says, entering the flow state when playing a game makes us ponder, "Where does your soul go?".⁷

There are seven other states on the chart, and while they are not as ideal as the flow state, most of them have their own benefits and drawbacks. The apathy state, however, is almost entirely negative. Apathy is formed from sadness and depression, and it is the polar opposite of the flow state. It is the result of low personal ability encountering low challenge. This low energy state can result in the rejection of the individual to even participate in the activity at all. Apathy can also create a positive feedback loop where the individual doesn't feel able to engage with the task nor has the drive to do so, and therefore they will never interact at all. If they did engage with the task, then their ability in said task would gradually increase. This would then shift their emotional state first into boredom, and then into relaxation, which would be an improvement considering that both states are preferable to apathy. Alternatively, apathy could also be shaken off if the challenge increases. Even though worry and anxiety are still not ideal emotions, they are still preferable to apathy because they at least provide for the possibility that the individual will be spurred into action that will, hopefully, allow their personal ability to increase in turn. Essentially, the more an individual engages with whatever activity they find in front of them, the better their emotional state will be regardless of the challenge level.

⁷ Ruiz Sebastian, "Happy 2026! Are video games art now?", 27/01/2026, URL <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dws8qjI9jag> (consulted on 27/01/2026)

Individuals approach unfamiliar ideas, emotions, and sensations with greater ease when they are presented as elements within a state of play. In most cases, engaging playfully with new elements within a game space will lessen the emotional stakes associated with those elements, especially the fear of failure. Individuals often find it stressful and demanding when they must assimilate new information, even more so when there are consequences on the line. It is possible to impart new information in a more harmonious way by creating welcoming environments within game spaces where players can discover aspects of the game at their own pace, and where failure can become an educational or even fun experience in its own right. Failure and its consequences are conducive to great learning opportunities when presented in the right way. It is important to allow the possibility of failure when designing experiences. The potential of failing at a task can act as both an incentive to excel at said task, and it may serve as a liminal space where the player can learn from their mistakes. Players are more willing to accept otherwise annoying or unsavory elements within an experience, such as unsatisfying gameplay mechanics, unengaging narrative beats, and so on, so long as the experience the player derives from playing the game allows them to holistically enter a flow state. In this regard, the game space is more than the sum of its parts. The repetitive nature of play, where layers of rules are alternatively enforced, suppressed, or synthesized, naturally reinforces the explicit and implicit elements that constitute the game on both a conscious and subconscious level. The agentic nature of engaging with the constraints of a game causes the player to immerse themselves, to at least a certain degree, in the aspects that the game requires from the player. The repeated rehearsal of semantically playful elements within a safe space is the component that allows players to become more confident in their technical abilities when interfacing with the game. This repetition also allows space for players to reinforce their ability of abstraction, which in turn permits players to consciously and unconsciously mediate between mental frameworks.

2.3 Video Game Therapy's Tailored Approach

Video Game Therapy, or VGT, is a term coined by Francesco Bocci in 2019 to describe a therapeutic method he developed that utilizes video games as a tool to assist with psychotherapy. VGT follows the tenets of Adlerian therapy with the goal of bolstering and strengthening emotional regulation. An additional benefit is the possibility for personal growth to occur through the application of VGT amongst a wide variety of age groups and social contexts. In *Putting the Gaming Experience at the Center of the Therapy—The Video Game*

Therapy® Approach, Marcello Sarini writes that VGT’s “...core assumption is that playing video games could facilitate patients in reaching conditions where traditional methodologies and therapeutic approaches could work best.”⁸ In essence, patients can more easily open themselves up to the beneficial effects of therapy through the directly immersive experience that video games provide. The aforementioned article proceeds to claim that VGT has brought positive results in many areas, including in “Promoting awareness of one’s role or identity at a given moment in life, thanks to the correlation between the real-life lifestyle of the game and the protagonist’s avatar or a character in the virtual story”.⁹ VGT is thus a form of therapy that can help people by allowing them to increase their awareness, specifically by letting patients feel immersed in gameplay experiences and act vicariously through the lens of the game’s avatar.

A question regarding VGT arose regarding how to decide which video games could best benefit patients during therapy. Needless to say, this is due to the dizzying variety of video games that exist. Video games differ not only in terms of content and presentation, but also in terms of core gameplay loops which can drastically alter perceived and lived experiences. Two video games that feature similar semantic areas can give entirely different impressions depending on how the games effectively play out. Take, for example, *Final Fantasy* (Square, 1987) and *Stranger of Paradise: Final Fantasy Origin* (Team Ninja, 2022); while the latter utilizes narrative, thematic, and visual elements from the former and, in a certain sense, may be considered to be a graphically updated remake of *Final Fantasy*, the gameplay found within *Stranger of Paradise* is completely different from the original, thus leading to a completely different experience. *Final Fantasy* is a strategic, turn-based roleplaying game, while *Stranger of Paradise* is a real-time character action game. While they both loosely feature the same simplistic story, the lived experience of playing one over the other differs greatly. VGT answers the question of how to find the right video game for the right person by administering the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, or MBTI, to patients undergoing the VGT process. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is a widely known and utilized instrument which was created by Katherine Cook Briggs and her daughter Isabel Briggs Myers. It consists of a test intended to measure an individual’s personality, preferences, and tendencies while assessing where that individual may be placed according to four sets of dichotomous scales: Extraversion vs. Introversion; Sensing vs. Intuition; Thinking vs. Feeling; Judging vs. Perceiving. The inspiration for this specific test

⁸ Bocci Francesco, Ferrari Ambra, Sarini Marcello, “Putting the Gaming Experience at the Center of the Therapy—The Video Game Therapy® Approach” *Healthcare* 1767, November 2023

⁹ Bocci F., Ferrari A., Sarini M., op.cit. Ibidem

came from the study of Jung's book "*Psychological Types*", in which Jung wrote about his observations regarding how people's minds adhere to preset typologies. In this book, Jung proposes that there are two perceiving, or non-rational functions (sensation and intuition), which alongside two judging, or rational functions (thinking and feeling) constitute an individual's consciousness. Additionally, Jung believed that an individual's level of extraversion or introversion modified the result. It is plain to see how Myers-Briggs simply utilized the core aspects from Jung's essay and added the Judging vs. Perceiving macro area to even out the assessment grid. Therefore, although VGT mostly adheres to Adlerian principles, Jungian principles aid the process through their inculcation within the MBTI.

VGT was specifically developed with the tenets of Adlerian therapy in mind, which is a therapeutic process that is comprised of four stages: The first stage is *engagement*, where a relationship of trust is established between the therapist and the patient. The second stage is *assessment*, where the patient is invited to speak about their life, including their personal history, their hobbies, and their lifestyle patterns. The third stage is *insight*, where the therapist helps the patient to discover new perspectives related to their current situation. The final stage is *reorientation*, where "the therapist helps the patient engage in satisfying and practical actions that reinforce or facilitate the individuation of new insights"¹⁰. During VGT, the first stage of engagement remains largely unaltered. The same is true for the second stage of assessment, albeit with one key difference; the patient takes the MBTI during this stage to help the therapist determine which video games would be most appropriate for the patient's needs. The MBTI results accompanied with the patient's personal recounting of their life history provides an excellent diagnostic basis from which to start from. VGT begins to differentiate itself from traditional Adlerian therapy during stage three, insight. This stage would normally be conducted conversationally if orthodox Adlerian therapy methods were employed, yet VGT takes a different approach. During the insight stage, the patient undergoes "complete immersion into a compelling video game story and gameplay"¹¹ with the support and supervision of their therapist. This allows the patient to safely explore all manners of emotions, both positive and negative, from a safe space that encourages emotional recognition and containment. The various benefits that patients may experience from this modified insight phase include an increased awareness of their feelings, the desensitization to negative stimuli, and the possibility to enter into a Flow state with its accompanying emotional catharsis. The wellspring of insights that are

¹⁰ Bocci F., Ferrari A., Sarini M., op.cit

¹¹ Bocci F., Ferrari A., Sarini M., op.cit

generated during this stage are mainly the fruit of the patient interacting with the semi-real spaces, which are those spaces that elicit real emotions while remaining blatantly artificial. The therapist can then help guide the patient towards a better understanding of themselves. However, the true realizations are those that arise independently within the patient when they experience, interact with, and overcome moments of emotional friction within the game space.

The final stage of Adlerian therapy, reorientation, occurs mostly the same within VGT as it does in traditional therapy. This stage is reached when the patient is ready for change. The therapist's role is to guide the patient in reflecting upon and enacting satisfying and practical actions that can be maintained outside of the therapeutic context. Effectively, the therapist's role is to assist the patient in reinforcing and facilitating the insights gleaned during the previous insight phase. Patients are encouraged to reflect upon their subjective experiences from the gaming session, such as the different ways in which they engaged with or temporarily adopted different identities or traits of the characters they played as or interacted with. Real transformation of the patient's outlook on life may occur this way, especially considering the patient's time spent confronting, managing, and integrating new perspectives and narratives into their own. Ideally, the reorientation stage allows patients to be better equipped to apply newfound techniques in real-world situations which may present similar skills and emotional states as those met within the game space.

Ultimately, VGT facilitates the therapist and the patient in discovering and exploring parts of the patient's psyche that the patient may not have been aware of, or that the patient could not properly access. Being able to live through a variety of experiences in a safe environment that, nonetheless, can challenge the patient, provoke emotional responses, and simply allow them to have fun is an excellent way to bolster traditional therapy techniques. The continual shifts from states of flow, into catharsis, and then introspection, are parallels to the cyclical nature found during the process of individuation. The repetitive nature of video games and their gameplay loops can thus be utilized as a virtue, as it allows the patient to continually reexamine themselves and their relationship with the content present within the game at hand.

CHAPTER 3. PERSONA 3: A GAME ABOUT DEATH, GRIEF, AND REBIRTH

3.1 Persona 3's Development History and Philosophical Background

Now that the previous chapters' notions regarding analytical psychology and psychotherapy have been explained, it is time to begin an analysis of *Persona 3* in earnest. I shall begin with the history of how *Persona 3* came to be developed, which includes the history of the game series it spun off from. In the following section I shall summarize the game's plot and narratively relevant elements. Then, I shall go into depth about why *Persona 3*, specifically, reflects the tenets of Jungian analytical psychology, and why it is an excellent example of a video game that could and should be used as a therapeutic aid. So, first and foremost, *Persona 3* may be justifiably mistaken as the third entry in the *Persona* series due to its title. It is, however, the fourth main and numbered installment in the *Persona* series. The *Persona* series is also not an independent game series, but rather a wildly successful spinoff of the Shin Megami Tensei (SMT) JRPG series which began with *Digital Devil Story: Megami Tensei* (Atlus, 1987), published by Atlus. The mainline SMT games feature core gameplay and narrative elements that carry over into the *Persona* series such as turn-based combat mechanics featuring systems based around exploiting elemental affinities and weaknesses, as well as an emphasis on dungeon crawling to obtain experience points and level up characters, and central narratives that deal with the incursion of supernatural entities often drawn from Gnostic mythology into mundane reality.

Revelations: Persona (Atlus, 1996), also known as *Persona 1*, distinguished itself from the mainline SMT games by virtue of its narrative style and tone. Instead of dealing with a religiously ordained apocalypse and the eternal struggle between order and chaos like SMT, *Persona 1* featured a slightly more grounded story that drew inspiration from the magical realism genre and the works of David Lynch. The game features a group of Japanese high school students that find themselves embroiled in increasingly bizarre psychic and supernatural events. The plot takes a drastic turn when it is revealed that the town everyone lives in is an idealized world drawn from the psyche of a single girl, whose mind has shattered into separate and distinct personalities. Even though the core gameplay loop is limited to dungeon crawling, narrative exposition, and some light map traversal and resource management mechanics, the story's psychological framework is steeped in distinctly Jungian elements. These go beyond the eponymous personas that the protagonists use to defend themselves, which are represented here

as tangible psychic manifestations of the characters' souls. The game features themes of finding oneself and explores the nature of the ideal and the archetype, and even boasts characters that exist as shadow impressions of their original selves. There is also a narrative mechanic where the game tracks whether the choices the player makes represent their ideal self or not, providing an evolution of the main character's persona as a reward. *Persona 1* even features Jung's own real world "spirit guide" Philemon, whom Jung wrote about in his personal journals which have now been posthumously released as the Red Book and Black Book collections. Jung saw Philemon as his archetypal "wise old man" with whom he could confide, and the developers of *Persona* thought it fit to render Philemon into a character central to the game's plot. Philemon, within the diegesis, represents the supernatural force that grants the main characters the ability to manifest their personas in order to defend themselves against a variety of supernatural threats.

The critical and commercial success of *Persona 1* led to the development of a sequel which was, itself, divided into two parts: *Persona 2: Innocent Sin* (Atlus, 1999), and *Persona 2: Eternal Punishment* (Atlus, 2000). These titles' gameplay mechanics and narrative themes were quite similar to those found in *Persona 1*, where a disparate group composed mostly of high school students were forced to confront the threat of reality altering rumors. The protagonists find themselves plunged into a twisted world where people's subjective words and beliefs actively shape reality, which ultimately leads to a fragmenting of anything resembling a shared, objective truth. Here, the core narrative focus is on how friendship and social bonds are essential to maintain sanity in the face of a shifting, ambiguous outer world. *Persona 2: Innocent Sin* and *Persona 2: Eternal Punishment*, while technically being two different games, are actually a duology. The first is incomplete without the second, and vice versa. It is unknown to me whether the decision to develop and release *Persona 2* as two separate video games was primarily for stylistic, financial, or practical reasons, but for all intents and purposes the two parts should be examined as halves of a single whole. In any case, *Persona 2* was a modest success for Atlus, and it was crucial in laying the groundwork for future titles.

Persona 3 was first released in Japan in 2006, yet there have been many different special editions, remakes, and adaptations, some of which have altered the narrative in interesting and unexpected ways. *Persona 3 FES* (Atlus, 2007), for instance, is an extended edition of the original game which features several gameplay fixes and plenty additional content. Its defining feature is a new, playable epilogue to the main story called The Answer. This epilogue will be analyzed in more detail in the following section alongside *Persona 3*'s story. Next, *Persona 3*

Portable (Atlus, 2009) was an edition made for the PlayStation Portable that added several features yet was forced to sacrifice others to get the game to function on the hardware. It was graphically inferior to the original PlayStation 2 title and the main character's movement was limited to a series of menus except while in dungeons, but this version boasted the ability to form Social Links, which will also be explained later, with all party members instead of only select few. Most notably, however, this edition includes the addition of an entirely optional second story mode that features a female protagonist instead of the previously exclusively male protagonist. The female protagonist's story also incorporated several graphical, stylistic, and musical variations, alongside the ability to become romantically intimate with the previously unapproachable male companions. This version, however, did not include The Answer epilogue that was introduced in FES. The most recent remake of *Persona 3* is *Persona 3 Reload* (Atlus, 2024), which is a ground-up remake of *Persona 3 FES*. This latest version features a new English voice cast, improved graphical fidelity, altered gameplay elements, and the addition of many extra story scenes which allow for the main characters to have more salient narrative moments. However, since this edition of the game was modelled after *Persona 3 FES*, it does not feature *Persona 3 Portable*'s improved Social Links nor the option to play as a female protagonist.

For clarity's sake, the specific version that will be taken into consideration during the upcoming analytical chapters of this thesis is *Persona 3 Reload*. This decision is due to its status as the version of *Persona 3* with the most complete set of features and additional story elements. Unfortunately, there is no "definitive version" of *Persona 3* since every version of the game from the original up to the most recent remake lacks some form of content when compared to the other versions. It is important to note, however, that the validity of the connections to Jungian analytical psychology and philosophy, as well as the potential uses of the game in therapeutic settings, are present and accounted for in every version of *Persona 3* released thus far. While there is some debate about which edition of the game is subjectively the best, the differences in story, pacing, and gameplay mechanics between the editions of the game are minor enough that they do not fundamentally alter the core experience.

Persona 3 is a departure in many ways from the previous *Persona* titles. It was the first *Persona* game to be developed for the PlayStation 2, which allowed for much greater processing power and graphical fidelity than the previous titles which were developed for the original PlayStation. *Persona 3* also benefitted from greater funding from Atlus, which was also thanks to a newly dedicated fanbase, allowing the developers to branch out and experiment with the core

gameplay and narrative. As a matter of fact, under Katsura Hashino's direction *Persona 3*'s core gameplay loop underwent significant alterations. In its final form, *Persona 3*'s gameplay became strikingly different from the previous *Persona* titles, and the series' core narrative and psycho-philosophical tenets were expanded upon. Hashino added a key gameplay aspect to *Persona 3* that would become a distinctive fixture of all following *Persona* titles, namely, the Social Link system. The innovation of this system lies in its relative simplicity, wherein gameplay elements were borrowed from the dating simulator and visual novel genres. Thanks to this new system, players became able and encouraged to create and foster relationships with a variety of specific NPCs throughout the game. These interactions allowed players to level up their relationship with these specific NPCs over the course of ten main encounters, as the player now had the opportunity to choose who they wanted to talk to and deepen their relationship with over the course of the game. Furthermore, each NPC that could be interacted with via the Social Link system was also represented by an appropriate Tarot card meant to communicate the symbolic nature and mood of the relationship. The ingeniousness of this system lies not only in it breathing life into the game's world, but also in how these Social Links feed back into the main combat gameplay loop. Combat is centered around the main character's ability to wield multiple personas which all have different abilities and statistics, and that can be leveled up and fused together to create new personas. As players deepened their relationships with NPCs that represented specific Tarot cards, the personas they could create that were represented by the same Tarot card would also be strengthened. Therefore, strengthening social bonds in the ordinary world also strengthened the associated personas, and having those associated personas in your roster also gave bonuses when engaging in their associated Social Links. This double connection between the combat and the narrative proved to be the defining element that set *Persona 3* apart from its predecessors. Further additional features that were absent from previous titles include a day and night cycle, an in-game calendar which tracked players' progress over the course of a fictional school year, and full 3-D movement within the game space, among other things. Thanks to these additions the story could now take place and develop over a defined span of in-game time, thus simulating the protagonist's daily life and struggles over the course of a year. This way, *Persona 3*'s story could unfold much more organically than its predecessors' stories, since both *Persona 1* and the *Persona 2* duology were set in a timeless space where the story only progressed alongside the completion of combat and exploration. *Persona 3*'s pacing could thus alternate between the main character's daily life attending school in a fictional Japanese city, and dungeon crawling in a supernatural tower full of monsters. These new timekeeping and relationship building aspects bolstered and complemented the

already tried and true dungeon crawling routine present in the previous titles, thus creating a wholly unique gameplay experience that allowed the player to feel more immersed within the narrative. *Persona 3*'s protagonist thus takes on the role of a cipher, that is a blank or semi-defined character that is meant to act as a stand-in for the player within the game space. While the previous games' protagonists were also ciphers, to an extent, the lack of meaningful daily activities to participate in and the lack of the Social Link system did not allow these protagonists to fully act out the player's desires. *Persona 3*'s design philosophy was fundamentally different in this regard, since the story structure could only work if the players were able to immerse themselves within the game world through the protagonist's eyes.

3.2 A Summary of *Persona 3*'s Plot



Figure 3 *Persona 3 Reload* (Atlus, 2024)

Persona 3's story begins on the sixth of April 2009, in a fictionalized version of Japanese city reminiscent of Tokyo. It starts with the player naming the main character, whom I will refer to as the MC for convenience. Even though the extended media based upon *Persona 3*, such as animated films, manga, and so on, have defaulted to giving the MC a definite name, Makoto Yuki, the original *Persona 3* video game gives no suggestion as to how to name the MC. Naming the MC yourself is one of the first steps towards having the player identify with him throughout the story, especially if the player decides to name the MC after themselves.

The MC is a 16-year-old orphaned boy who has just arrived at Tatsumi Port Island to attend Gekkoukan High School. This is the same island where his parents were supposedly killed in a car crash 10 years prior. Other details about the MC's life are left purposely vague. Late at night, as the MC makes his way to the dormitory where he will spend the next school year, the world goes eerily silent. A green pallor engulfs his surroundings, blood pools over the streets and buildings, and everyone except for the MC has been replaced by tall black coffins. This is the MC's first exposure to the Dark Hour, a secret hour that occurs every night when the clock strikes midnight. Unaffected by the strangeness of the Dark Hour, the MC makes his way to his dormitory. There, he encounters a mysterious boy who calls himself Pharos that asks him to sign a contract, stating that the MC will take full responsibility for his actions.

A few days pass as the MC eases his way into life at his new school and gradually makes some new friends. On the night of the full moon, however, trouble appears in the shape of a giant, shadowy creature that attacks the dormitory. The MC becomes trapped on the rooftop along with one of his classmates who also lives in the dormitory, by the name of Yukari Takeba. She attempts to fend off the creature with a strange pistol but is knocked over. The MC picks the pistol up off the ground and is instinctually drawn to put it to his own head. He pulls the trigger, which blasts a psychic manifestation of his mind out of his head, his persona. This persona takes the form of Orpheus, from Greek Mythology. However, something goes wrong as Orpheus is torn to pieces from the inside and Thanatos emerges. Thanatos destroys the creature that was threatening the dormitory, only to vanish, returning Orpheus to its place. The MC then falls unconscious after awakening to his Persona. His mind is transported to an enormous elevator where two bizarre characters, named Igor and Elizabeth, observe him. Igor explains that this place is the Velvet Room, a place between dream and reality, where the MC will be able to return to throughout the following year to help him in his quest. The MC has the power of the Wild Card, meaning that unlike normal people who can only potentially manifest a single persona, he can hold multiple personas at once, as well as fuse them together to discover new and more powerful aspects of his mind. Igor also encourages the MC to form Social Links, strong bonds with people, which will in turn strengthen the personas he will create.

The MC wakes up to find that he has been in hospital for several days. After he recovers, he is approached by Mitsuru Kirijo, a fellow student, and Shuji Ikutsuki, the chief director of his high school, who request that he join a special group called SEES (Special Extracurricular Execution Squad) that is dedicated to protecting the city from Shadows. They explain that every night, Gekkoukan High School transforms into an immense tower called Tartarus where shadows

congregate, and that every full moon a greater shadow emerges to attack the city. What's more, people begin to succumb to a supernatural form of depression called Apathy Syndrome in the weeks preceding each full moon. Ikutsuki states that those suffering from Apathy Syndrome began to recover after the greater shadow that attacked the dormitory was destroyed by the MC. He believes that by destroying the remaining eleven of these shadows they will be able to end the appearance of the Dark Hour and prevent more people from succumbing to the shadows. Their only method to defeat shadows is by using their personas, which are summoned by using gun-shaped items called Evokers. Evokers are not really guns, but by shooting themselves in the head their psyche's defense mechanism is sparked which manifests an individual's persona. This only works for those who have the potential, and it is unclear how that occurs. The MC agrees to become part of SEES and starts living a double life. During the day he attends school, meets friends, and participates in numerous after-school activities. At night he climbs the seemingly infinite floors of Tartarus wiping out shadows, and during nights when the moon is full, he helps plan and execute special missions to destroy the greater shadows that roam the city. Before nights of the full moon the MC sees Pharos, the mysterious boy, appear in his room during the Dark Hour. Pharos always engages in cryptic but friendly conversation before vanishing.

The weeks pass, full moon shadows are defeated, and the MC's team now includes Yukari Takeba, Mitsuru Kirijo, Junpei Iori, Akihiko Sanada, and Fuuka Yamagishi, who all attend the same school. At one point, Mitsuru reveals that her grandfather was the head of the Kirijo Group, a research team that studied and experimented upon shadows. However, the experiments resulted in a terrible explosion that released these twelve larger shadows, each one associated with one of the major arcana from the Tarot deck. The Kirijo Group was thus also responsible for the creation of Tartarus and the Dark Hour. More time passes, and more persona-users join the team: Ken Amada, an orphaned fifth-grader whose mother died two years ago; Koromaru, an albino Shiba dog whose previous owner died; Shinjiro Aragaki, Akihiko's foster brother who had previously quit working with SEES due to a mysterious incident, and was reticently convinced to return; and Aigis, an android created by the Kirijo Group as an anti-shadow weapon.

During SEES's full moon operations they encounter two hostile people named Takaya and Jin. They call themselves Strega, and state that their intention is to bring about the Fall, a prophesized day when the world will succumb to Apathy Syndrome and die. They are also persona-users, although their personas were made manifest artificially through experiments that

the Kirijo Group tried to cover up. They can summon their personas without using Evokers, although they also must use toxic persona suppressant drugs to prevent their personas from becoming shadows and killing them. Over the summer Junpei meets an intriguing girl his age named Chidori. She finds him annoying, and Junpei obliviously reveals that he's a member of SEES in an attempt to impress her. Chidori is really the third member of Strega, and during the next full moon at the end of summer she kidnaps Junpei. The MC and SEES manage to destroy the greater shadow and recover Junpei, as well as capture Chidori who was confined to a hospital room. Junpei visits her frequently, and they start to like each other more.

On the fourth of October, SEES defeat the shadow that appeared during the full moon without assistance from Ken and Shinjiro. The two meet, instead, in a back alley where, two years earlier, Shinjiro had accidentally killed Ken's mother during a similar operation after losing control of his persona. Ken wants vengeance but doesn't know if he has the will to kill Shinjiro. The two are interrupted by Takaya, who mentions that Shinjiro's use of persona suppressors will kill him before long anyway. Takaya then shoots Shinjiro to incapacitate him, then threatens to shoot Ken if they don't reveal the other members of SEES. Shinjiro jumps in front of Ken as Takaya fires, taking a fatal bullet for Ken. Shinjiro's death causes great grief and shock throughout SEES's members, especially for Akihiko and Ken. The group bonds over their loss.

In November, Pharos appears in the MC's room before the full moon as usual, saying that this will be the last time the two will see each other like this. The following night, SEES drive off Takaya and Jin as they try to sabotage their operations, and then SEES succeed in destroying the final full moon shadow. The group is dismayed the following night, however, when the Dark Hour appears as usual. Shuji Ikutsuki betrays everyone by reprogramming Aigis to subdue them. Mitsuru's father is killed, and everyone else is hung up on crosses as a sacrifice. Ikutsuki reveals that the destruction of the greater shadows freed the essence of a being called Nyx, who will bring about the death of the world. The Kirijo Group's original experiments on shadows were done with the intent of summoning Nyx. Now, Ikutsuki intends to help bring about the Fall. He orders Aigis to execute her teammates. Even though she is an android, the friendships she has cultivated and the experiences she has been exposed to have made her more human. This allows her to disobey this command, and she frees SEES instead. Ikutsuki then falls to his death.

Shaken and without a long-term goal, the group struggles to put their lives back together. A new transfer student named Ryoji Mochizuki is added to the MC's class. Though Aigis is wary of

him, he charmingly makes friends with the MC and the rest of SEES. At the end of November Takaya and Jin break Chidori out of the hospital she was confined in. They claim that Chidori has lost sight of their goal of bringing about the Fall. They are confronted by SEES, a fight ensues, and Takaya fatally shoots Junpei. Chidori, however, has a change of heart and channels all her power to heal Junpei. He survives, but she enters a deathlike coma. Her fate is decided by the player: if the MC talks to Junpei further on, inciting him to bring her flowers to her while she's in hospital, she will pull through. If the player does not do this, Chidori will pass away.

At the beginning of December, Ryoji and Aigis fight on the Moonlight Bridge. Ryoji wins and heavily damages Aigis, revealing that he isn't human. Rather, he was born from the unification of the twelve shadows and is the harbinger of Nyx. Ten years ago, Aigis defeated him on the same bridge, yet she could not destroy him. His essence was then thrust upon the closest living being, the MC, who as a child was nearby after his parents had died during the clash. Ryoji thus existed as an aspect of death within the MC and reveals that he was Pharos. He is sorrowful, however, and he wishes that the Fall did not have to happen. He claims that there is no way to stop Nyx from coming, though he tells SEES that he will appear before them on December 31st where they will have the chance to kill him. This will not stop the Fall, yet it will erase all memories associated with the Dark Hour, allowing SEES to live peacefully until they die. If Ryoji is not killed, they will live in anguish knowing that their deaths cannot be averted.

After a month of deliberation, Ryoji appears as promised on December 31st. The members of SEES, except Aigis, have decided that they want to let Ryoji live, meaning that they will keep their memories and try to fight Nyx. Ryoji reminds them that this is a futile gesture, but everyone would rather live their lives fully until the end rather than be effectively euthanized. Ryoji and the MC go to his dorm room in private. There, Ryoji pleads one last time with the MC, asking to be killed to avoid further suffering. The player has two options here: if the player kills Ryoji, everyone loses their memories of the last year. The calendar skips forward to the beginning of March where everyone has been living normal school life. A series of events unfold without the player's input as the school's end of year ceremony occurs. Later that evening it is implied that everyone dies, without any awareness of it happening. If Ryoji is spared, however, he tells the MC that he will appear at Tartarus' summit on January 31st to herald Nyx, and the game continues into January.

Aigis reveals that she wanted to kill Ryoji because she couldn't bear the thought of seeing the MC suffer. However, she realizes that she was wrong and wants to make the most out of the

time they still have together. Takaya and Jin, meanwhile, create a cult centered around the Fall. This new religion preaches to the vulnerable that Nyx's arrival will be salvation. Throughout January the cult's influence can be seen all over town in the form of pamphlets strewn about, graffiti on the walls, and litter and trash everywhere. People suffering from Apathy Syndrome listlessly crowd the streets as their numbers rise and there are too many to take care of. On the 31st of January SEES make it to the top of Tartarus to face Nyx, defeating Takaya and Jin along the way. They encounter Ryoji at the summit, who is now in his true form as the avatar of Nyx. This is the game's final boss, and an appropriately long and difficult fight ensues. Even though they defeat the avatar of Nyx in combat, it is a futile gesture as nothing can truly stop him. He calls to the moon, which splits open and rushes towards the Earth, while ordinary people are pulled into the Dark Hour and are physically transformed into shadows. The MC visits the Velvet Room within his mind, where the eternally ascending elevator reaches its stop. Igor bestows the power of The World to the MC as the ultimate boon for his efforts, and the MC uses it to travel into the heart of Nyx. There, the MC calls upon the power of his Social Links to sustain him as he uses his own life force to create a seal that will lock Nyx away.

The MC returns to his companions as Tartarus and the Dark Hour vanish. Afterwards, they lose the memories of the past year that were linked to the Dark Hour. Time passes until March 4th, the penultimate day of the school year. The player has one last day as the MC to interact with the game and is encouraged to experience the epilogues to the Social Links that they managed to bring to maximum level. The atmosphere is peaceful and full of reminiscence as the player visits the various places around the city for the last time. People the player interacts with comment on the MC's appearance, noting that he is pale and lethargic. On the next day, the graduation ceremony on the 5th of March, the members of SEES slowly start regaining their memories. Meanwhile Aigis, who had always retained her memories since she is an android, meets with the MC and leads him to the school's rooftop. There, the MC lies upon Aigis' lap as she talks about the emotional journey she has had and how she has found what it means to truly live. Aigis reassures the MC, who is calm and serene, that she will never leave his side and will protect him always. The player's last choice is between closing the MC's eyes or abiding in silence. A blue butterfly representing Philemon flutters away. Everyone else rushes to the rooftop with their memories newly restored. They are ecstatic that they have saved the day and are still alive, yet they arrive just as the MC drifts to sleep and then passes away. The credits roll.

This is the end of *Persona 3*. An epilogue chapter, called *The Answer* in *Persona 3 FES* and *Episode: Aigis* in *Persona 3 Reload*, delves into the grief that everyone dealt with in the aftermath of the MC's death. It is not strictly necessary to experience *Episode: Aigis* in order to reach closure regarding *Persona 3*'s story, although the epilogue does further characterize how the main cast reacted to the events they experienced. The gameplay lacks the dating sim and Social Link elements and focuses entirely on the dungeon crawling. Here, Aigis takes on the protagonist's mantle alongside the power of the wild card after the dorm and its residents become stuck in a time loop on the 31st of March. A mysterious black android named Metis appears claiming to be Aigis' sister. Then, a gigantic hole forms in the ground leading to what Metis calls the Abyss of Time. She claims that Aigis and her friends will be free to go after reaching the end of a series of challenges. Tensions flare between Aigis, Metis, and the rest of SEES, since everyone feels trapped and unable to progress with their lives. The Abyss of Time also shows visions of traumatic moments from their past.

After many efforts the team finds pieces of a key which, when combined, will allow them to unlock the dormitory's front door and return to their normal lives. However, Metis reveals that the key could also be used to return to the past, specifically the night before their battle with Nyx. The group is torn about whether they should attempt to alter time and save the MC, or whether they should honor his sacrifice and move on. A sequence occurs where the members of SEES fight one another, and Aigis and Metis must fight three boss fights against their friends. Once Aigis prevails and obtains the unified key it is revealed that only she can use it. Everyone's grief and anger is talked through, and the group unites stronger than before. They discover a secret door which leads will lead them through the depths of time to Erebus, the incarnation of mankind's death wish and their darkest impulses. It is also revealed that Nyx, as the incarnation of death, is a neutral entity and that it was Erebus's keening that called Nyx to the world. The MC's sacrifice allowed him to become part of a great seal that blocks Erebus from reaching Nyx. However, this seal's power cannot withstand Erebus on its own. SEES decide to help the MC in whatever way they can and decide to fight Erebus. Once they emerge victorious, Metis tells Aigis that she was a part of her psyche, a manifestation that emerged when Aigis lost her will to despair and wished to return to being a mere machine. After accepting Metis back into her soul, Aigis feels the exhaustion that she had been blocking out until then. Her cybernetic components burn out, yet she continues living on regardless since she has truly become a living being. With a newfound appreciation for one another and bright hopes for the future, the former members of SEES unlock the door to their dormitory and step back into their daily lives.

3.3 *Personas, Archetypes, and Allegory*

The most obvious elements of Jungian analytical psychology that are present within every title in the *Persona* series are the eponymous personas. In traditional analytical psychology, an individual's persona is the social mask through which one's ego mediates between their inner self and external reality. In the *Persona* series, however, personas are physically externalized manifestations of the characters' psyches which are primarily used to confront enemies that represent a variety of shadow archetypes. Throughout the series, the precise methods that the characters use to manifest their personas vary according to the specific overarching themes within the games. In the same vein, the main character's personas and the personas of their allies and enemies are drawn from archetypal and mythologic foundations upon which specific narrative themes are built. *Persona 3* draws narrative inspiration from Greek Chthonic cults, specifically the Orphic, Gnostic, and Hermetic cults. These were all philosophical and religious movements that encouraged a reevaluation of one's apparent reality in the search for deeper, fundamental truths. This inspiration is readily apparent in the main character's initial persona, Orpheus, who according to legend descended into the underworld to rescue his muse Eurydice. Upon losing her right as they had nearly returned to the surface, Orpheus went mad and was then torn apart by those who were driven insane by his terrifying music. The broad strokes of this journey are represented in *Persona 3*, where the main character climbs to the top of Tartarus and confronts death, then returns to the world of the living only to die in earnest.

The idea of having to cyclically break down one's psyche and allow one's old self to die in order to be born anew is a recurring motif of Jung's work that is represented in many ways throughout the game. Players are encouraged to lead the main character to the Velvet Room, a liminal space of introspection, to fuse personas together to create newer, more powerful ones. Older personas thus metaphorically die while passing on abilities to new personas. The main character can create and wield over one hundred personas over the course of the game, allowing players to experiment with many different playstyles. However, the main character does not automatically obtain a transformed version of his original persona, Orpheus, through progress in the main story as his allies do. His ultimate persona is optional and requires a high character level (91 to be precise) and the fusion of Orpheus and Thanatos. The high character level and specific persona requirements are meant to demonstrate that players have satisfactorily engaged with the game from both a narrative and gameplay perspective, and they are thus awarded with the main character's ultimate persona, Messiah. The archetypal concept of a savior is common to mythologies all around the world, and a common feature of these messianic figures is that

their destinies cannot be fulfilled until they die and are reborn. This transformative aspect is also relevant regarding one's personal journey of self-reflection, in that one can save themselves only once they have relinquished the parts of themselves that were holding them back. In Orpheus' myth he traveled through the underworld, seen here as a metaphor for the unconscious, and he managed to return to the world of the living. However, he lost Eurydice along the way because of his doubts, and she was the sole reason he embarked on his journey in the first place. He later died as a result of the torment he caused with his unbearable music. Orpheus, in this sense, is a failed savior who was undone by his own self-doubt. The archetypal messianic figure also travels through the underworld, yet they gain priceless knowledge and awareness there. Even if the fate of the messiah remains the same as that of all mortals, and they must eventually die upon their return to the ordinary world, they would only do so after having saved others. The parallel thus drawn between Orpheus and Messiah is the same as that drawn between the Fool and the World when one utilizes the Tarot deck as the blueprint of the hero's journey. The former is an empty potentiality that could accomplish anything, but without awareness of their actions, while the other is the totality that encompasses all potential and that is fully aware of the meaning behind their actions and their repercussions. The Fool and the World represent the same journey with and without awareness and represent a life lived with or without meaning. In terms of the hero's journey they are both located within the ordinary world, yet one has just begun their cycle and the other has already completed their cycle.

All *Persona* titles share certain narrative themes such as the nature of individuality, the power of perception, and the importance of the social bonds we forge with others. If there is one major narrative and thematic element that connects all *Persona* titles, though, it is the necessity of rejecting an imposed, artificial reality in favor of the spontaneous, true reality that springs from our inner self. Dire consequences await the protagonists of the various *Persona* titles should they choose not to embrace their own inner selves. To varying degrees, every mainline *Persona* title thus far has included the option for players to change the story's outcome through pivotal gameplay decisions. Many of these decisions boil down to specific scenes where certain dialogue choices will either lead to a prescribed "bad" ending where the main character reneges their destiny, or even works against the narrative, or to the "true" ending that gives full closure to the story and characters. In *Persona 3*'s case, the bad ending will occur if players accept Ryoji's offer and kill him on December 31st. Thematically, this represents the main character deciding to turn away from death and go back to being the Fool he was at the beginning of the story, blissfully unaware of anything until his unavoidable end. This echoes Orpheus' myth;

there, Orpheus was undone by his doubt, and here the main character might also be undone by his doubts. Players are repeatedly told that it is impossible to defeat Nyx, and if they accept that version of reality and doubt that they can prevail, they may also lead the main character to metaphorically return from the underworld empty-handed and spread more misery, like Orpheus. Only by accepting the apparent certainty of dying for a seemingly impossible cause can players lead the main character to the true ending, where he incarnates the messianic archetype and saves everyone at the cost of his own life. As confirmation of this interpretation, there are only three Social Links that progress automatically alongside the main story: The Fool levels up as the members of SEES get to know each other and defeat greater shadows together; Death levels up when Pharos visits and converses with the main character; and Judgement levels up as SEES trek through the uppermost floors of Tartarus on their way to the summit where they will face Nyx.

An in-depth analysis should also be given to the personas manifested by the other members of SEES and Strega. Carefully designed parallels are drawn between each character, their mythological persona, and their associated Tarot card. Below, I shall summarize each character's main traits, their story arc, and the mythological significance of their persona. All these elements are points of contact meant to spur reflection and facilitate players in understanding the character's process of individuation.

Junpei Iori is carefree and self-aggrandizing, and he starts with the persona Hermes. He is the only member of SEES to start with a persona representing a major god, which demonstrates how he earnestly perceives himself as a hero. His associated Tarot card is the Magician due to his mix of inexperience and genuine potential. After having established a relationship with Chidori and experiencing her (apparent) death, he comes to grips with the weight of the responsibility that has been thrust upon him. He cannot simply play the lone hero, but he must become someone that others can rely on in times of need. His persona transforms into Trismegistus, which mythologically is used as an epithet for Hermes in his aspect as the founder of alchemy. This indicates that Junpei's heroic nature has remained unchanged, though he is now privy to the deeper truth of the world.

Yukari Takeba is driven and slightly ornery due to her complicated relationship with her mother and her deceased father. Her father was a researcher with the Kirijo Group and was killed when their laboratory exploded. She starts with the persona Io, a priestess of Zeus who finds herself bound against her will, indicating how she feels the need to carry on someone else's legacy.

Her associated Tarot card is the Lovers, superficially because of her caring nature, and more deeply due to how she feels torn between wanting to live a normal life and wanting to fight with SEES. After learning the truth about her father, that he willingly gave his life to sabotage the Kirijo Group's evil experiments, Yukari's feelings of abandonment towards him vanish. She understands that his sacrifice was for the greater good, and her resolve to see his mission to its conclusion and bring an end to the Dark Hour is strengthened. Her persona transforms into Isis, indicating that she is no longer bound by her father's choices.

Akihiko Sanada is stern, competitive, and focuses solely on his training to complete his mission. He was one of SEES' initial members alongside Mitsuru and Shinjiro, with whom he had a brotherly relationship. He starts with the persona Polydeuces, an immortal prodigy known for his physical prowess and his equally skilled, but mortal, twin brother Castor. His associated Tarot card is the Emperor (the Star in *Persona 3 Portable*), due to his stoic and strong bearing and his desire for victory above all else. After Shinjiro's death, he realizes that he cannot only focus on the mission in front of him and that he needs to be a guiding figure for those around him, who can also offer guidance in return. His persona transforms into Caesar, indicating that his quest to better himself is no longer personal, but a shared goal among all his friends.

Shinjiro Aragaki is aloof and cynical. He left SEES and dropped out of school after he accidentally killed Ken's mother during a shadow-hunting operation. His only persona is Castor, the mortal twin brother of Polydeuces, indicating his closeness to Akihiko and foreshadowing his death. His associated Tarot card is the Hierophant (the Moon in *Persona 3 Portable*), which shows his spiritual power as opposed to Akihiko's temporal power, as well as his reserved and mysterious nature. His persona never had a chance to transform as he sacrificed himself to save Ken from Takaya. If he had survived, though, his ordeal and change in attitude would certainly have been the catalyst for the transformation of his persona as well.

Mitsuru Kirijo is haughty, shrewd, and comes from a rich and influential family. She was SEES' first member at the behest of her father, who was trying to eliminate the Dark Hour to atone for the sins of his own father. She starts with the persona Penthesilea, a mythological Amazonian queen who joined the Trojan war as penance. Her associated Tarot card is the Empress, indicating her regal bearing and exacting measures while also showing her kinship with Akihiko. She becomes the leader of the Kirijo Group after her father is killed by Shuji Ikutsuki. She shoulders the burden of managing her organization and goes from being a glorified child-soldier to the leading font of resources and information crucial to eliminating the Dark Hour.

Her persona transforms into Artemisia, an ancient queen who carried out her husband's legacy and who was known for her battle tactics. This indicates how she is no longer fighting someone else's battle, and how she has the wits and resolve to see her mission through to the end.

Fuuka Yamagishi is kind, soft-spoken, and naïve. She joins SEES after being the victim of bullying which leads to her getting trapped inside Tartarus by accident. She starts with the persona Lucia, a Christian martyr who is the patron of sight, which aptly represents her persona's unique non-combat role as a navigator. Her associated Tarot card is the High Priestess, which shows her thoughtful and introspective nature. After Shinjiro's death, which Fuuka blamed herself for since she didn't keep a close enough eye on everyone, Fuuka finds that her ex-bully turned friend will transfer to a different school. After a heartfelt talk, Fuuka realizes that distance cannot break the bonds of true friendship. Her persona transforms into Juno, indicating that her clairvoyance will no longer be used passively, but rather that she will actively watch over her friends and protect them during their missions.

Ken Amada is precocious and remorseful. He primarily joins SEES not to help with the group's overall goal, but as means to exact vengeance against the man who killed his mother, Shinjiro. He starts with the persona Nemesis, indicating his urge to get back at those who have wronged him. His associated Tarot card is Justice, indicating how he believes he is doing the right thing and how he genuinely cares about people's plights. After Shinjiro sacrificed himself to protect him from Takaya, Ken sees that he had lost sight of what was truly important. To honor Shinjiro's memory, Ken decides to dedicate his life to eliminating the Dark Hour, the existence of which cost his mother her life in the first place. His persona transforms into Kala-Nemi, a Vedic figure linked to dusk and destiny, indicating that Ken sees the tragic destiny that befell him as something that was necessary to allow him to avenge the fallen.

Koromaru is loyal, protective, and it's also worth noting that he is a dog. He joins SEES after being found wounded by shadows during the Dark Hour. His previous owner was a priest who tended the local shrine who had died of old age, and Koromaru remained faithful to his memory and protected the location from wandering shadows. His only persona is Cerberus, and it is implied that this is already his transformed persona. His associated Tarot card is Strength, which both plays up the card's usual imagery of a woman taming a beast and indicates how Koromaru is exceptionally faithful and dependable. Even though he is exceptionally intelligent for dog standards, Koromaru is still a rather simple creature. He doesn't contribute much to the overall

storyline, but his presence serves as an example of the steadfast temperament that comes from having made peace with the death of a loved one.

Aigis starts out emotionless, detached, and robotic, and slowly becomes more sensitive and caring as time goes on. She is an anti-shadow weapon, an android made using a fusion of technology and supernatural components that allow her to summon a persona. The fact that she has a personality at all was considered a side-effect of her original design, since a persona cannot exist without a conscience to reside within and is required to combat shadows. She starts with the persona Palladion, a term which refers both to statues of Athena and the protection they were said to provide. Her associated Tarot cards are the Chariot, for her persona, Aeon for her Social Link, and then the Fool in Episode: Aigis. Aeon is a special card that doesn't exist in the traditional Tarot deck. It is meant to signify the step between Judgement and the World, the liminal space at the end of the hero's journey. Aigis' association with the Chariot arcana indicates her drive to complete her mission, though it also indicates that she is a machine following someone else's commands, while the Aeon arcana proves the depths she has gone to on her journey for personhood and meaning in life. The Fool becomes hers when she loses her way and becomes the secondary protagonist during the epilogue chapter. After Aigis rebels against Shuji Ikutsuki's programming and frees her friends, rather than killing them, she realizes how much she values her own emotions and sense of self. She goes from perceiving herself as being primarily a weapon, to primarily a person with wants, needs, and friends. She also comes to love the main character in her own way and wants to protect him from the cruelties of the world. Her persona transforms into Athena, indicating how she is no longer a facsimile of a person, but a genuine individual as real as anyone else.

Now, let's briefly examine the personas belonging to Strega. Takaya's persona, Hypnos (meaning Sleep) is mythologically a child of Nyx, indicating his desire for all mankind to drift into the eternal slumber of death. He believes that the world is beyond salvation and that this end would be preferable over continuing with the drudgery of existence. Jin's persona, Moros (meaning Doom) is also mythologically a child of Nyx, indicating his calculating and exacting nature. He wants to aid Takaya in bringing doom to everyone, as he has concluded that the world and its inhabitants deserve nothing more. Chidori's persona, Medea, is different from the others. Mythologically speaking, she is a tragic figure who becomes disillusioned with life, though she also falls in love with the hero Jason of the Argonauts and subsequently defies her father's wishes so that she can elope with him. Chidori's story follows this plotline as she falls

in love with Junpei, SEES' self-styled hero, and ultimately defies Strega's efforts to bring about the Fall. She also has potent healing powers which reference Medea's selfsame abilities.

With that, I have examined every character's persona and character arc. It is self-evident how everyone's struggle in coming to terms with death and grief is a central narrative theme. Every companion's own process of individuation provides relatable themes and moments that players can identify with, and their shared journey provides examples of how the bonds of friendship and community can help people weather tragedy much better than how they could on their own.

3.4 An Analysis of Persona 3's Key Elements

The main character is a mostly silent protagonist since he's a cipher meant to embody the player. The fact that he rarely ever speaks without the player's input helps players unconsciously identify with him. This is also thanks to the Kuleshov effect, wherein a person's blank face will be interpreted differently according to whatever it is juxtaposed with. It may often occur that players interpret the main character as content, shocked, sad, or afraid, all while his face remains unchanged. Most every conversation within the game's various Social Links will feature a moment where players can choose a dialogue option for the main character to say. Picking the option that's contextually appropriate for whoever the main character is talking to will reward players with some extra progress towards the next rank in the Social Link. These dialogue options also inform players about the main character's core personality traits, such as they are, and help players see what might be going through the main character's mind. Characters in the game rarely ever comment on the protagonist's taciturn tendencies, since most everyone includes him as if he were participating normally in conversation. This allows players to experience most conversations as an observer, while still being able to give incisive comments when needed.

The Social Links that players are encouraged to participate in with secondary characters are examples of relationships that could potentially occur within the real world. The people that players can interact with do not have world-ending stakes in their lives, yet they nonetheless come face to face with loss in a variety of mundane and relatable ways. Each Social Link with a certain character unfolds over the course of a series of ten conversations that tell a side story, and in each one the main character talks to and becomes closer with someone who is undergoing their own process of individuation. Their stories, from a gameplay perspective, only progress when players decide to interact with them, although certain characters may only be available to

be spoken to when school is in session or on specific days of the week. Players thus find themselves in the position where they can become the main driving force behind the positive changes in these NPCs' lives. There are two interesting psychological effects embedded within this system that can help players who struggle with interacting with others. The first benefit is that players can experience a variety of developing friendships in a safe environment. Here, they don't need to provide consistency, saying the right thing will help but is not imperative, and players know that the relationship can only improve. While this is not realistic, being able to experience and practice what it's like to get to know people who are different from you can provide great psychological benefits, especially to the extremely shy and introverted. The second benefit is that, from a certain point of view, players act as therapist stand-ins for the various NPCs they can have Social Links with. It is satisfying to feel that another person has found the strength to overcome the obstacles in their life thanks to your presence and input. The game provides opportunities for players to feel like they are both the therapist and the patient. If players are struggling with similar issues in their own lives, they might then be able to ask, "What advice should I give myself?", which can be a powerful tool on the journey to autonomy.

The only real barrier to leveling up and completing all the Social Links in the game is a pervasive, but subtle one: the passage of time. Unless a player is following a walkthrough and doing exactly as it says, it is highly unlikely that they will be able to maximize their levels in all the Social Links during a single playthrough. This may seem like a design flaw from the point of view of someone who is only attempting to maximize their gameplay efficiency. However, this deliberate choice helps reinforce the perception that time is really passing and that it must be spent wisely. Players just starting the game will likely feel that they have all the time in the world to experience all the activities and Social Links on offer. But as time creeps on by, players will start to notice that they won't be able to finish everyone's stories. They will then be forced to prioritize the Social Links with characters they have grown to like, and they will probably finish the game with many stories that did not receive a proper ending. This subtle hand that pushes players ever forward serves, yet again, to help players identify with the main character. When the story gets serious, Strega's presence becomes pervasive, and characters must come to terms with how they want to live out their dwindling number of days, players also must decide who they want to get to know before it's too late. These half-finished stories that players often leave behind spur on their desire to continue existing in the game world, which mirrors the same desire likely felt by the main character. This system underscores the

game's themes better than if the game allowed players to easily finish all the Social Links and leave no stone unturned by its conclusion.

Persona 3's narrative themes deal heavily with the concepts of death, grieving, and rebirth. While the game does have moments of levity, camaraderie, and mirth, this strong emotional throughline characterizes many of the game's narrative choices. *Persona 3*'s main plot weaves the main character and his allies' stories of grief into a cohesive whole. Shinjiro's death greatly affects SEES diegetically, and this tragedy also affects players non-diegetically through the loss of a playable character that had unique equipment, skills, and activities to engage in. Even players who might not have cared for Shinjiro as a character are made, in their own way, to reckon with his death through the preclusion of gameplay elements that were previously available. This event also serves to raise the stakes because once a single character has died, players have no way of telling if it will happen again. For instance, when Junpei gets kidnapped by Chidori, or when Aigis becomes inoperable after facing Ryoji, players may come to genuinely worry about their safety because they have already witnessed the death of a companion. Through the main character's role as a cipher, players vicariously experience these events and the characters' reactions to them, which in turn will ideally create emotional connections between players and the characters. Keep in mind that, while players are strongly encouraged to participate in Social Links, they remain an optional gameplay element that could be completely ignored, even if doing so would constitute a severe gameplay handicap. This is why it is so important that the main story's progress includes scenes that showcase the primary characters' key trials and epiphanies, rather than allow those storylines to become optional and missable. Basically, the main story provides the essential experience, and the Social Links complete it with optional content that reinforces the core narrative.

The Social Links which are available with Yukari, Fuuka, Mitsuru, and Aigis, deepen and strengthen our understanding of these characters. However, the purpose of these Social Links is not to show us their greatest epiphanies during their processes of individuation, but rather to add the option of heteronormative romantic or platonic relationships with these characters. While their personal stories are intriguing and the option of having the main character fall in love with them may be enticing to some, the completion of the stories presented within their Social Links is not required for these characters to become fully individuated within the narrative. This is explicitly demonstrated by the fact that each one of these character's personas evolves into an improved version that better reflects their true selves without requiring that the player complete their Social Link.

Let's compare how the Social Links with the main cast work in *Persona 3* with how they work in both *Persona 4* (Atlus, 2008) and *Persona 5* (Atlus, 2016). Both sequels feature Social Links with all the main party members which, when compared to *Persona 3* that only features Social Links with half the cast, seems like a major improvement. They also have key story moments dedicated to introducing each character into the story, usually in the role of someone that awakens to their latent persona power. However, as with any Social Link, relationship progress with these characters will proceed only at the player's discretion. Therefore, if players aren't interested in progressing specific Social Links with their allies, or if players simply end up not having enough in-game time to finish all their desired Social Links, it is entirely possible to reach the end of the game without seeing certain party members' whole story arcs. This also means that some companions may not complete their full process of individuation and will remain with their initial, unevolved persona even during the main story's climax and epilogue. This departure in gameplay and narrative from *Persona 3* has valid reasons to exist and serves different purposes. Firstly, by choosing to have characters gradually join the party over time, entire segments of the game can be dedicated to participating in the mental struggles of the new allies before they are recruited. This then allows for a new character's initial persona to be seen as an achievement in and of itself within the narrative. Completing a character's Social Link, therefore, effectively rewards players through gameplay with that character's evolved persona. This functions both on a gameplay level, where it is a reward for the time and effort put into advancing the Social Link, as well as on a narrative level, where it is an epiphany of self-acceptance that the character achieves after having spent quality time with the main character. Furthermore, on a purely functional level, it is narratively satisfying to have the game's potential Social Links include most of the party members. The Social Link progress – dungeon crawling progress axis can also be further strengthened by spending more in-game time with party members rather than other characters that exist outside the core group. However, while these design choices arguably improved the overall gameplay experience of *Persona 4* and *Persona 5*, they would not have fit into *Persona 3*'s design philosophy. A key aspect of *Persona 3*'s thematic identity is how people deal with the inevitable losses in their lives. By uniting a group of characters who are all already persona-users, including those who join further on, the thematic focus in *Persona 3* is shifted away from how these characters began their journey and towards how they will end it. *Persona 4* and *Persona 5* feature an expanding group of friends that players get to know from the beginning of their process of individuation, though it's up to the player to help them achieve their deeper individuation through their Social Links. *Persona 3*, on the other hand, features disparate people who are roped together in service of a common

cause. Players aren't necessarily privy to how they started their journey, but they will certainly experience their deeper individuation through the main story. Since there are no variables concerning when, or if, characters will complete their character arcs, it also means that the game's developers were able to express deeper relationships between the characters while taking their character arcs into consideration. It's worth mentioning that one of *Persona 3 Portable*'s additions was playable Social Links with all companions that complemented their growth in the main story. I believe that this is the best way to have an intriguing, well-defined story that weaves the characters together while also allowing for more personal additional content. It is unfortunate that these improvements were not carried over to *Persona 3 Reload*.

Persona 3's representation of Tartarus differs from the version found in Greek mythology for several reasons. For one, it only manifests during the Dark Hour, the supernatural hidden hour which appears at midnight between the death of one day and the birth of the next. Secondly, it physically manifests as an impossibly tall tower of amalgamated buildings that spring from the protagonist's high school. Once the Dark Hour ends, Tartarus vanishes and the school returns to normal, leaving no trace of its existence. There are relatively few actions that are technically required for the game's story to progress. One of these actions is that players must face the greater shadows that appear during the full moon and defeat them. The other, which is required for the true ending, is that players must climb all the floors of Tartarus and reach its peak where the climactic final battle against Nyx's avatar takes place.

It is no coincidence that the protagonist's high school and Tartarus coexist in the same location. A core duality and juxtaposition is maintained between the players' actions that may be taken during the day, and the actions that may be taken during the night (though some options remain available be it day or night). During the day, these actions almost always include attending lessons followed by the player's choice between a myriad of potential activities and Social Links. During the night, the player will routinely find themselves advised to venture into Tartarus where the strength of one's social links will determine the strength of the personas they can utilize in battle. The enemies faced inside Tartarus are almost exclusively shadows that are meant to represent hostile, unassimilated fragments of the collective unconscious. By prevailing against these shadows, the main character will become stronger by leveling up, which will unlock the ability to fuse ever more powerful personas. Afterwards, the variety of personas acquired within Tartarus will help the player progress their daytime Social Links more efficiently. The twin facets and mechanics of this single location, which functions both as the main character's school and as the game's primary battleground, feed into one another in a

process that mirrors the steps taken during an individual's process of individuation. In both a metaphorical and literal sense, the essence of what is experienced throughout the main character's school life in the ordinary world becomes the fuel that allows him to face and assimilate what he encounters in the unknown world of the unconscious. By further strengthening his mind, in turn, the main character can more effectively interact with people and open himself up to them. Each expedition into Tartarus becomes a miniature hero's journey, and these moments also shape the hero's journey witnessed on a macro-level.

The various titles in the *Persona* series provide differing contexts to the means through which a character may acquire the ability to summon their persona, as well as a variety of explanations for mankind's continued struggles against shadows and their ilk. One theme that is common to all narratives within the *Persona* series is that persona users must have strong wills and undergo some special trauma in order to manifest their persona. Not everyone can withstand the psychological strain required to wield a persona, and the unprepared who encounter shadows will often be subsumed by them. In *Persona 3*, specifically, personas can be manifested by special individuals who have had strong emotional experiences dealing with tragedy, loss, and death. This ever-present theme of death is also represented quite dramatically via the method used to summon personas, that is, using gun-shaped tools known as an Evokers. The Evoker is held against one's own head, and the trigger is pulled. This mimicked suicide leaves the persona user physically unharmed, while stimulating a psychological trauma response which causes one's persona to manifest due to the psychic distress. The developers' decision to require such a symbolically charged method to summon one's persona is a constant reinforcement of the prevailing theme of death. Moreover, it metaphorically evokes the concept of ego death. This is a crucial aspect of the process of individuation wherein an individual's old ego, and thus the persona projected by it, must be allowed to die so that a new ego and persona that are more in tune with the self may take their place. According to Leary, Metzner, and Alpert it is:

[...] one of the oldest and most universal practices for the initiate to go through the experience of death before he can be spiritually reborn. Symbolically he must die to his past, and to his old ego, before he can take his place in the new spiritual life into which he has been initiated.¹²

The constant diegetic repetition of how necessary it is to die to be reborn primes the player for the main character's ultimate death and sacrifice from the very beginning. Throughout the main story and Social Links players gain a better awareness of death in its many forms. This readies

¹² Alpert Richard, Leary Timothy, Metzner Ralph, *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, New York, Kensington, 2022

the player for the tragedy to come and, most importantly, it causes the player's and the main character's determination to save everyone, no matter the cost, to become synchronized. At the end of the story the main character realizes that victory can only be achieved through their sacrifice. The main character gives their life to save their loved ones, coinciding here with the ultimate ego death and a total identification with the collective self which Jung considered to reside within the collective unconscious. This dissolution of the psyche into the collective unconscious represents the ultimate shift away from individuality and towards communality, which is archetypally consistent with the parallel between the emptiness of the Fool and the completeness of the World. This narrative element's effectiveness, however, depends on the degree to which players have identified themselves with the main character throughout their time playing as him. As Riccardo Fassone mentions regarding closure in video games, it is a "clinch", which he describes as "a consonant effect between the present state of the narrated events and the expectations the reader has built up to that point".¹³ Effectively, the game encourages players to live vicariously through the main character and experience his process of individuation in an attempt to spark the player's own processes of individuation. Over the years, when confronted with *Persona 3*'s bittersweet ending, players have often come to accept and cherish the tragic beauty of the main character's sacrifice. This is an intriguing consideration, since many other unrelated video games that culminate in the main character's sacrifice are often criticized for their decision to include this element. It is certainly a risky maneuver to not only take agency away from players and prescribe an arguably extreme narrative outcome, but also to do so while killing the character that players have likely come to identify with. To my knowledge, there is no other game like *Persona 3* that encourages players to identify with their main character to the same extent that also ends with such an earned and emotionally satisfying sacrifice and conclusion.

¹³ Riccardo Fassone, *Every Game is an Island: Endings and Extremities in Video Games*, Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 35-47

CONCLUSION

Persona 3 is ultimately about the acceptance and reintegration of one of humanity's greatest collective shadow archetypes, death. Every character provides their own perspective on this eternal struggle; from the smaller tragedies represented within the Social Links (such as the ending of careers, relationships, and ideals) to the greater and more impactful tragedies experienced during the game's main story (such as the death of loved ones, the loss of meaning in life, and having to reckon with one's own mortality). The game offers players the opportunity to guide the main character as he lives his life, and the game also encourages players to create friendships and perceive all the beauty and hardships the main character experiences as if they were their own. As players become immersed in the story and the main character's life, they also become more willing to allow the story to guide them in return. In different moments and with varying intensity, *Persona 3* asks players to take on the role of a therapist and help the various characters they meet face their fears and become better versions of themselves. This is a two-way process, since in analytical psychology the therapist can only assist their patient if they both depart on their journey of individuation together. The brilliance of this is evident in how *Persona 3*, through its gameplay, narrative, and emergent qualities, discreetly takes on the role of the therapist and assists players in their own process of individuation. The main character and the player embark upon this journey together and, by the end, the player will realize just how much they have grown alongside him. This is what I personally experienced back as a teenager when I first played *Persona 3*, and this is also what I experienced just this year when I completed *Persona 3 Reload*. With all the evidence I have gathered, I believe that *Persona 3* was purposely designed with this intent in mind, and I am certain that many others have been helped and will yet be helped by playing this game. My life would have been greatly impoverished had *Persona 3* not helped me realize the value and strength of reaching out to others. Loss is an inevitable and brutal part of living, yet we mustn't need to face it alone. While *Persona 3* is not a substitute for therapy and real social bonds, it is an experience that has the potential to greatly help those in need. The arcana is the means by which all is revealed, memento mori.

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