

Intertextuality in the Video Game Persona 5

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Université de Liège

Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres

Département Langues, Linguistique, Littérature et Traduction

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Co-Promoteur : Björn-Olav Dozo

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INTRODUCTION

I have always been a fan of video games since I first held a controller in my hands. As I was playing, I discovered that video games had a wonderful effect on me: they could pacify me and drag me into their universe. Nevertheless, I had to mature before realising that video games had more than a ludic aspect. In video games could tell stories from a totally different point of view than cinema and books. It is first and foremost the capacity to interact with the story that appealed to me.

While playing more and more games, I could see that some video games were in fact, to some extent, an adaptation or an interpretation of a pre-existing story, an already existing text. Throughout my academic formation, I had the opportunity to discover literary tools and theories that proved the connections between texts: that is intertextuality. As intertextuality describes the relation between texts in an infinite set of discourse, I asked myself if these theories could apply to video games, or if there was another theory that has been conceptualized in order to discuss this phenomenon in video games. This postulate eventually led me to write this dissertation as my final academic piece of work.

After further investigation, it became clear that intertextuality was also used to describe this phenomenon in contemporary research on video games. To that extent, I wanted to analyse a video game that, in my opinion, presents tremendous intertextual connexions.

That game is called *Persona 5*, which was released in Japan in 2016 and the year after in Europe. Developed by Atlus studio, this game reinterprets the “gentleman-thief” myth as well as the picaresque tales in order to create a whole universe based on masquerade, deception, as well as making social commentary of a contemporary Japan that is deaf to the increasing youth issues.

The objective in this paper would be to analyse the types of intertextual relationships in *Persona 5* by basing myself on books and texts that the game draws inspiration from. Therefore, this dissertation will be divided into four chapters to follow this main goal.

The first chapter will be about discussing the difficulty for video games to insert themselves in the scientific study. This will allow me to discuss how games were colonized by the literary field before arguing that a compromise between video games and literature is still a possible option when it comes to studying video games. After discussing the relevance of intertextuality in the case study, I will explain how it defined the many types of relations between texts and explain what they consist of. To close that theoretical frame, I will

highlight how intertextuality is also applied in media scholarship and allows a process called the cultural-transduction* process to be carried out.

The second chapter will be a brief summary of the plot of *Persona 5* in order to highlight the points I will analyse in the third chapter.

The third chapter will deal with the analysis of the intertextual relationships present in *Persona 5* so as to discuss how the developers drew inspiration from a pre-existing text, i.e. which intertextual device was deployed. In addition to that, I will also discuss the relevance of intertextuality as a means for video games to comment on both social expectations and society itself.

Finally, in the last chapter, I will explain through what kind of intertextual relationship the process of cultural-transduction is carried out and explain how the game become thus a palatable product for every type of audience.

I would also like to utter why I decided to underline some words within this paper. In my opinion, the main reason is that it seems easier for the reader to follow the analysis by keeping track of the technical words linked to intertextuality and Jung's theories. Moreover, the words with an asterisk will be further defined and explained in the glossary.

CHAPTER I
THEORETICAL FRAME

1 ARE VIDEO GAMES “MODERNIZED” VERSIONS OF PREVIOUS TEXTS?

1.1 VIDEO GAMES AND RESEARCH, A LONG AND DIFFICULT BATTLE FOR A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

Until the 1980s, video games were long considered as a mere pastime, offering the user of the game the opportunity to have fun and escape their daily routine.

Though they increased in numbers and genres due to their commercial success, they still struggled for acceptance as a scientific object worthy of investigation. According to James Newman, quoted in Ian Bogost’s *Persuasive games: the expressive power of video games*, they were even perceived as a “child’s medium denigrated as trivial [...] and demanding no investigation.” He also claimed that they were seen as a form of “low art [that carries] none of the weight, gravitas or credibility of more traditional media” (Bogost 2007: 1-2).

For these reasons, researchers were forced to instrumentalize their work in order to legitimate their study and valorise the status of videogames: video Games could be used for purposes other than “ludic”, such as education, sociology, history, etc. The instrumentalization of research would demonstrate the beneficial aspects of video Games as well as change the public’s representation of the medium. However, in spite of these efforts to improve the status of video Games as a worthy object of study, video games were until the 1980s falsely accused of making teenagers violent, lazy and disconnected from reality. Mistrust and even fear of video games spread globally and led groups of people such as “Familles De France” to beware of video games, by linking them to all sorts of addictions:¹ drugs, tobacco, including addiction to video games themselves. In some cases, these warnings turned into genuine crusades against video games, and eventually led to censorship such as in the European version of *Silent Hills*² and others.

1 « MISSION D'INFORMATION SUR LES TOXICOMANIES, RAPPORT D'INFORMATION sur les toxicomanies, p. 151 » [archive], sur le site de l'Assemblée nationale, 30 juin 2011

² <https://www.jeuxvideo.com/dossiers/00016426/les-jeux-les-plus-polemiques-de-l-histoire-les-victimes-de-familles-de-france-018.htm>

As of the 1990s, rather than focusing on the sole beneficial aspects of video games, scholars, predominantly from the field of literary studies, tried to approach the medium as an object worthy of scientific research. For that purpose, a group of scholars, later labelled as “narratologists” used narration as a way to analyse videogames and link them to higher forms of art such as literature and cinema. However, Markku Eskelinen claimed in *The Gaming Situation*: “when [...] computer games are studied and theorized, they are almost without exception colonized from the fields of literary, theater, drama and film studies [and end up] as interactive narratives, procedural stories or remediated cinema.”³

What Eskelinen tried to explain is that, to some extent, videogames are studied with tools, theories and techniques that come from other fields of study and are then applied to the medium, thus denying the specificities of the medium itself.

Because of this denial, other scholars called “ludologists” in the wake of the 2000s published texts criticising the overvaluation of narration and eventually led to a fierce conflict between the two groups, even though both belonged to the realm of games studies, i.e. works dedicated to video games as a cultural object.

In reaction to these debates and the overvaluation of narration, critic Mathieu Triclot, in his *Philosophie des jeux video*, underlined and emphasized the importance of the player and his action in the studies of videogames. In his opinion, studying the form (genres such as adventure and role-play, game mechanics, graphics) and content (narration, characters, etc.) of a game is not enough. It is essential to take into account the player’s experience. This new approach gave birth to the play studies.⁴

The idea of the above is not to trace the history of videogames studies nor is it to decide which of these different approaches was best suited for a study of videogames as a cultural object. What I wanted to put forward is that, even though videogames have inherent specificities that cannot be defined or studied through the traditional tools, the obvious parallelism with other forms of arts (literature, cinema) may be one of the factors that led scholars to use these approaches.

³ Eskelinen, Markku. “The Gaming Situation” in *Games studies*, Vol. I n°1, 2001. URL : <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen/>.

⁴ Décrire ce qui se passe sur l’écran, sans jouer, objectiver le système des règles, sans jouer, cela ne suffit jamais à caractériser l’expérience du jeu. C’est que celle-ci n’est pas déposée une fois pour toutes dans l’objet, la machine, le discours à l’écran, le récit, le système des règles ou le gameplay, mais produite par le joueur à l’aide du jeu. » Triclot, Matthieu : *Philosophie des Jeux Vidéos*. Paris, Editions La Découverte, 2011, p.19

No matter which one of these approaches is more reliable and adequate than the other, their very existence hints that videogames have become a worthy subject of study and no longer have to struggle for acceptance. Video games are now considered as persuasive narratives that can simulate real-world events to demonstrate how they: “[can] make claims about how real-world processes do, could, or should work [and make claims] that speak past or against the fixed worldviews of institution like governments or corporations” (Bogost 2007: 57).

Though video games studies are now structured and developed, I would still argue that a compromise between video games and literary fields is still a possible option for analysing video games.

1.2 COULD OTHER TOOLS ORIGINALLY FROM THE LITERARY FIELD BE USED TO ANALYSE VIDEO GAMES?

The need for an appropriate approach to video games, as mentioned above, led researchers to test the theoretical tools available at the time. Using those of literature could be a legitimate start since literature had been the first medium by which men could tell all sorts of stories (fictional or real), express thoughts, organize arguments pros and cons, share epiphanies and other experiences, describe a scenery, educate and amuse the reader, give the reader food for thought, etc.

We could, for example, use theoretical tools from the literary field and apply them to painting. We could, for instance, relate Giuseppe Arcimboldo's painting *The Fire* to the grotesque literary and the concept of defamiliarization elaborated by Wolfgang Kayser: at first sight, the painting is that of a man's head and torso in profile. However, if we take a closer look, we discover that the painting is in fact an intricate arrangement of objects somehow related to the element of fire (his hair suggests a campfire, his ears old fashioned lighters, his throat a candle and his torso firearms):



(Figure 1: Giuseppe Arcimboldo's *The Fire*)

Wolfgang's theory of the grotesque has it that: by presenting us with an image that seems both familiar and yet alienated to us, we are confronted with a connexion between the fantastic and the real world that breaks with our standards. The elements of which the head and torso are made are familiar enough. What surprises us is that they can be arranged in such a way as to create a man's portrait. This leads us to take a step back and reflect upon the message Arcimboldo wants to convey. In my opinion, the elements above the necklace hint at the positive aspects of fire (the campfire suggests both heat – warmth and brotherhood, the candle may suggest enlightenment, intelligence and a guide in the world's darkness [background of the painting]), while the elements under the necklace suggest the destructive force of fire, the necklace working as a border between good and evil, life and death, the two faces of the same coin.

Could the same be done with video games? Could literary theories be used to analyse video games? Could some video games be a rewriting of pre-existing texts? In my humble opinion, the answer is yes and that is what I propose to demonstrate in this work.

To provide a striking example of games that used texts written centuries ago, we could mention the game *Dante's Inferno*. Developed by Visceral Games, this beat'em all⁵ tells the story of Dante, a crusader who lost his faith in God after witnessing the atrocities of war and the inconsistencies of Christianity. After being stabbed in the back while protecting a fortress, he is confronted with Death, which he eventually defeats, and returns to the realm of the living. After coming home, he discovers that Beatrice, his beloved, is dead. She had gambled her soul with the Devil whether or not Dante would stay faithful to her while on his crusade. She had eventually lost and gets dragged into hell under the helpless gaze of Dante. Determined to atone for his sins and save Beatrice, Dante decides to plunge into hell. Needing guidance through these lands unknown to mortals, he is accompanied by Virgil, who acts as a guide and provides him with essential information regarding the circles of hell, their inhabitants and their never-ending punishment.

We have only touched the tip of the iceberg and yet we can clearly see the many similitudes between the poems of the famous Dante Alighieri and the game developed by Visceral Games. In Dante Alighieri's *Cantos*, the hero (Dante himself) descends into hell to find his Beatrice and is also guided by Virgil.

⁵ A Beat'em all* is a type of action game where the player character must fight a large numbers of enemies in combat, with or without weapons.

Could the developers' deliberate choice to use elements from previous texts and transpose them to video games originate in the theories of literature in the second degree, and more precisely in the theories of intertextuality? This idea of rewriting texts by transposing them into video games will be central in this work, given that the latter proposes to analyse one particular video game, some of its intertextual references and practices, and explain in how far they contribute to a satire of the Japanese contemporary society and youth.

Indeed, employing intertextual references as well as drawing one's inspiration from previously written texts in order to create their own universe allows video games to meet a twofold objective: on the one hand, it allows to introduce readers/users/players to texts they may never have heard of and on the other hand, it gives video games a cultural impact, giving them more weight, and destroying the label of video games as being a mere pastime targeting specific audiences. Like Enrique Uribe-Jongbloed et al. point out; we should focus on video games as cultural objects since "[they] have quickly become the 'new' media of interest in terms of their economic worth and impact upon users/players"⁶ (Uribe-Jongbloed et al. 2016: 143).

It is exactly with that point of view in mind that the last opus of the *Shin Megami Tensei* sub-franchise called *Persona 5* was launched in 2011 (*Shin Megami Tensei* is the main license of Atlus studios: they then proceeded to create a subfranchise, where they kept the main elements of *Shin Megami Tensei* franchise and called it *Persona*). The subfranchise was a great success in Japan after the release of *Persona 3*. As the urge to make a bigger commercial success and attract more people to play these kinds of games in Europe increased, the developers decided to create a game with a mix of elements of our contemporary society (2010) and its faults, and worldwide culture. While preserving the features of the previous games (i.e. a division into two gameplays: on the one hand a social life simulator and on the other hand, a "traditional" Japanese Role Play Game* [from now on JRPG]). The last episode of the franchise had sold 3,000,000 million copies worldwide by 2019, making this episode the franchise's best-seller.

⁶ Uribe-Jongbloed, Enrique, et al. "Cultural Transduction and intertextuality in Video Games: an analysis of three international case studies" in *Contemporary research on intertextuality in video game*. Hershey PA : Information Science Reference, 2016. URL: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305790248>

1.3 INTERTEXTUALITY AS GUIDE

It has now become undeniable that video games have achieved the status of cultural medium worthy of study and research. They have won their own place in contemporary culture and research on and around them keeps growing and structuring itself. Even though video games have their own codes and mechanics, the quantity of intertextual references in some of them demonstrates their potential to appropriate themes and subjects from various origins and cultures. The idea is to get interested in something that already existed somewhere else as well as to fill a cultural function by their very presence on today's market.

In that perspective, *Persona 5* is a Japanese Role Play Game whose story, characters and multiple intertextual references testify to the developers' inspiration and their wish to modernize already existing texts or stories. Its inherent intertextuality and transtextual practice deserve to be discussed, given that it allows demonstrating that we can still analyse video games with theoretical tools originating from the literary field, without denying the specificities of video games. Moreover, my intention is to show and explain "what the purpose" of making references to a vast set of discourse or rewriting other texts is.⁷ This work will therefore analyse intertextuality and "transtextual practices"⁸ in the video game *Persona 5*, show the source of inspiration of the developers and explain the underlying motivation to use this intertextuality.

⁷ Does the game uses the tropes and thematics of the picaresque novel to make a satire of our contemporary society for example.

⁸ Based on Genette's terminology and Camarero's extension of the concept.

2 INTERTEXTUALITY

2.1 DEFINITION OF THE CONCEPT AND CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

Before getting into the problematic of this work, I would like to make a summary of the state of intertextuality, its definitions and its current use. In the *Dictionnaire du Littéraire*, Jean-François Chassay tells us that intertextuality is,

“*stricto sensu*, “le processus constant et peut-être infini de transfert de matériaux textuels à l’intérieur de l’ensemble des discours. Dans cette perspective, tout texte peut se lire comme étant à la jonction d’autres énoncés, dans des liens que la lecture et l’analyse peuvent construire et déconstruire à l’envi. Au sens plus usuel, ‘l’intertextualité’ désigne les cas manifestes de liaisons avec d’autres” (Chassay 2001 : 422)⁹.

The term “intertextuality” was first coined by Julia Kristeva in the 1960s as a translation for the Bakhtinian notion of “dialogism”. She defined the concept by saying that the literary word was not a fixed point, but a dialogue between multiple writings, of the writer, the addressee and the cultural context. As a result of this, critics must analyse the mechanism of a text by deconstructing the discursive heterogeneity that forms the text. To her, no text is individually authored: texts are infinitely “permeated by a social ensemble which is itself a textual ensemble” (Ott and Walter 2000: 432). The principle of intertextuality was also extended by the works of Roland Barthes, who in *Le plaisir du texte*, claimed that intertextuality should become a tool for poetic analysis, which would articulate the type of relations that would be inserted in different texts.

In the 1980s, the term was redefined by many critics from many fields (media scholars, literary critics, etc.), such as Michael Riffaterre and Antoine Compagnon. The former considered that a literary text would “be characterized by a communicational functioning, based not on the reference but on the intertext” (Riffaterre: 1979), while the latter “transformed the process of citation he studied as a model for literary writing” (Compagnon: 1979). However, the term was also redefined for a different use by Gerard Genette, who

⁹ “*Stricto sensu*, the process of infinite transfer of textual materials inside a set of discourse. In that perspective, all texts can be read at the junction of other enunciates thanks to the links the reading and analysis construct and deconstruct at free will. In its everyday use, intertextuality refers to manifests links between texts. (Chassay 2001: 422)

argued that intertextuality was not only a process of infinite transfers from one text to another, but also a type of relation within texts.

Effectively, in his *Palimpsests*, Genette defines intertextuality as one of the five categories of transtextual relationship: “I define it, no doubt in a more restrictive sense, as a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another” (Genette 1997: 1-2). From this perspective, Genette illustrates that the most obvious cases of intertextuality would be those of plagiarism and allusion. With this definition, the concept of intertextuality does not serve the purpose of defining a literary text, but rather illustrates a precise relationship where a text can be identified in another. This reductive (as Genette calls it) “extension” of the concept of intertextuality was also revisited in the 1980s by sociocritics. In that regard, Marc Angenot explained that “[an] intertextual approach may result in the disruption of the fence of the canonical literary production in order to record it in a large network of modes and discursive status, the social discourse.”¹⁰ This very definition of intertextuality differs in the sense that it questions the position of literature in the symbolic activity: intertextuality is perceived as a “dynamic” (for lack of a better word) process, or descriptor that is not specific to the fields of literature only. This quotation also argues that intertextuality can be applied to other fields, such as in media scholarship.

Indeed, according to Brian Ott and Cameron Walter in *Intertextuality: Interpretative Practice and Textual Strategy*: “media critics observed that films, television shows [and video games] had increasingly begun quoting and referencing other popular cultural art[e]facts. [To that extent, media critics did not coin a term for this phenomenon, they decided to adopt the term intertextuality]” (Ott and Walter 2000: 429). Even though the term came from the literary field, media scholars used it to describe two opposite tendencies and phenomena operated in media texts. As Ott and Walter put it, “the first tendency consists in considering intertextuality as a description for the interpretative practice unconsciously exercised by audiences living in a postmodern landscape, [whereas the second tendency regards intertextuality as a] textual strategy incorporated by media producers that invites audience to make specific associations between texts” (Ott and Walter 2000: 430). In this context, I will briefly explain the properties of the two tendencies of intertextuality in contemporary media scholarship and demonstrate that both tendencies are derived from distinctive “views” of what

¹⁰ Angenot, Marc. “« L’intertextualité » : enquête sur l’émergence et la diffusion d’un champ notionnel” in *Revue des sciences humaines*, n° 189, 1983, pp. 121-135.

intertextuality is about. Moreover, I will try to show why the second approach is best suited for a study of the game *Persona 5*, though we will still analyse the game through the lens of interpretative practice in order to highlight a process in contemporary media scholarship.

2.2 INTERTEXTUALITY IN MEDIA SCHOLARSHIP

2.2.1 *Intertextuality as interpretative practice*

The first tendency, the unconscious interpretative practice on the part of the reader/user/audience (I chose to include reader and user on purpose) is described as how audience/user/reader use their knowledge of cultural codes learned from other texts to create meaning. This tendency has been heavily influenced by Barthes because this critic, in describing intertextuality, placed emphasis on the audience/reader/user in the creative process of texts: it is the audience that writes texts and not the author (Ott and Walter 2000: 431). The existence of a text lies in its infinite expansion of readings, where each reader brings new texts to bear upon their readings of that text. Each reading is a rewriting of the previously read text, since every reader possesses their own textual/cultural knowledge. Even though most scholars agree with employing intertextuality to describe “the way audience reads media texts within a larger web of media culture, [some nevertheless restrict intertextual reading to a few ‘primary texts’ that are ‘explicitly linked’ (genre, character, or content) and to other texts that refer ‘explicitly’ or ‘directly’ to the primary texts (secondary texts such as texts produced by the viewers themselves in the form of letters to the press for example)]”¹¹ (Ott and Walter 2000: 432). This restriction of intertextuality results in two major issues.

The first one is that if we follow that direction, we have to limit our analysis of media texts to explicitly linked texts, thus obscuring the subconscious textual linkage the audience make while reading a text or playing a game. Given that audience/reader/player always reads/writes all texts intertextuality as Barthes and Kristeva said, we cannot only rely on this idea of limited set of discourse.

¹¹ According to Ott and Walter, television critic John Fiske made a restrictive approach of intertextuality.

The second issue with this restriction is that, to quote Ott and Walter: “[we could] conflat[e] the concept of intertextuality as interpretative practice with the notion of intertextuality as a textual strategy” (Ott and Walter 2000: 433).¹² Critics such as Fiske made the confusion when he analysed Madonna’s music video in his *Understanding Popular Culture* (1989). To him, intertextuality is unique to some texts, given the fact that some texts make explicit references and intentional allusions to specific other texts. This postulate is erroneous for the fact that making intentional and explicit references refers to deploying intertextuality as a stylistic device: it is something that authors do and not something the audience/reader/player does.

Because of these conflations and misunderstandings, intertextuality as interpretative practice seems not only to divide critics, but also appears to be an unsettling basis for an analysis of the game *Persona 5*. To that extent, we should discuss the second conception of intertextuality in contemporary media scholarship and demonstrate why this conception is better suited for an analysis of the game, even though analysing the game through the interpretative practice will remain relevant in this piece of work.

¹² Ott and Walter illustrated this argument by quoting and analysing Fiske’s reading of Madonna’s music video *Material Girl*

2.2.2 Intertextuality as textual strategy

The second tendency is more aligned with the works of Genette, where intertextuality is perceived as a stylistic process or device that includes particular references as part of the text. If I did not elaborate too much on Genette in the previous section, it is because it will be more detailed in the next paragraphs.

As previously said, the other tendency of intertextuality finds its “roots” in Genette’s *Palimpsest* (authors such as Bakhtin and Umberto Eco used terms as “double-voiced words”, the “already said” and “the montage”, but none used the term intertextuality to describe this relation where texts incorporate others). In this work, he tried to define the different types of transtextual relations in literature as well as to examine the manifold textual relations such as parodies, pastiches, allusions, etc. To him, intertextuality defines: “A relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: [i.e.] the actual presence of text in another texts.” (Genette 1997: 1-2) To that extent, a text has to make references to other texts by means of implicit or explicit forms. In the case of explicit forms of copresence, we can find citations/quotations (hence, the use of quotation marks) and the references. References provide ways to reach the original text without reproducing it; our task is to insert the content of the reference into the text. As an example, if Ryuji, the first teammate of the protagonist in *Persona 5* dodges an enemy attack, he will say: “Can’t touch this” and shout “Hammer time” during his counterattack, a reference to M.C hammer’s song is made, but we have to insert it in order to make the reference coherent and “real”.

In the case of implicit forms of copresence, we could find plagiarism and allusions. Allusions are vague when dealing with the relation with other texts. The problem with allusion is that “it refers to an enunciate whose full intelligibility assumes the perception of a relationship between this [said] statement and the other [text]... it is a sort of citation but it is neither literal nor explicit” (Uribe-Jongbloed et al. 2016: 147).

Nevertheless, these relations of copresence, whether they are explicit or implicit, are not the only type of intertextual relationship text creators have to choose from. Indeed. Camarero, in his *Intertextualidad: redes de textos y literaturas transversales en dinámica intercultural* (2008), decided to “draw on Genette” in order to elaborate a typology of the different intertextual choices of authors. With copresence being the first type of relationship, just like Genette mentioned in his *Palimpsest*, Camarero decided to include another type of

relationship, which he labelled derivation: the imitation of the style of a usually canonical text. With that being said, we should also point out that this relationship is also divided into two subcategories. The first subcategory developed by Camarero is that of transformation, in the sense of parody: the author/creator uses recognizable elements of a classical text that are subverted by ridicule. The other subcategory was labelled imitation (pastiche) and consists of imitating the stylistic elements of a given author in the production of a completely different text.

Even though Camarero decided to include transformation and imitation as types of intertextual relationship, we should keep in mind that these effects were originally designated by Genette as the types of transformation a hypertext may go through. As Genette points out, “a hypertext is any text derived from a previous text either through [simple or direct transformation (which I will simply call transformation) or indirect transformation (which I will label imitation)]” (Genette 1997: 5). The fact that Camarero took elements from the changes a hypertext may go through and decided to “apply” them as an intertextual choice the author makes, matches Genette’s perspective of transtextuality: the five types of transtextual practices described in his book should not be considered as impenetrable and separate categories without reciprocity only. All transtextual relationships are intertwined and should not be treated in their exclusivity.

2.2.3 Three intertextual devices applied in media texts

Though Camarero extended the concept and strategies deployed in intertextuality by using Genette’s definitions, we should bear in mind that they mainly apply to literature, and we should not make the mistake of only using tools and theories from the literary fields, given that it would deny the specificities of video games. We have to include Ott and Walter’s analysis of the major three intertextual devices applied in media texts.

The first device is called “parodic allusion” and consists in the use of elements of renowned texts, putting emphasis on humour in order to “[...] amuse through juxtaposition – a goal that is enhanced by the reader’s recognition of the parodic gesture [without offering any commentary on the original text]” (Ott and Walter 2000: 436). To Uribe-Jongbloed et

al.¹³, this device could be associated with Camarero's model, more specifically to allusions because "they apply to textual connections that are not clearly marked, but that imply a reference or homage" (Uribe-Jongbloed et al. 2016: 147-148).

The second device mentioned by Ott and Walter is called "creative appropriation" or "inclusion". To them, this device: "involves the incorporation of a part of the original text with its stylistic conditions, modifying some aspects through either visual or audio editing." (Uribe-Jongbloed et al. 2016: 148). To that extent, even though this device risks to be considered as a form of plagiarism given that the developer is deliberately using material from another text, it nevertheless remains an interesting strategy to refer to other set of texts or to invite the audience into re-reading something.

The last device identified is called "self-reflexive reference", and refers to: "references that overcome the barrier of the text, by appealing to or evidencing the text itself [...] through description of the conditions of the work as part of the narrative strategy or by bringing to the text information that relates to [the producer's role] in the creation of the product" (Uribe-Jongbloed et al. 2016: 148). In other words, the video game is deliberately making comments on the conception of the video game itself, or the ideas brought by the developers of the game and consider it as a necessity for the game's narrative.

2.2.4 A sum up of the research on intertextuality "itself"

What follows is a brief summary of what intertextuality is about and mentions the cleaving positions it creates when scholars try to agree on its accession.

Intertextuality is a literary term and tool that originally designates the presence of a text within an infinite web of discourse by means of copresence or derivation. With the years and the emergence of new media, more and new definitions and positions appeared.

In contemporary media scholarship, the term intertextuality refers to two distinctive practices: intertextuality can be an interpretative practice where readers/users use their knowledge of cultural codes learned from other texts to create meaning. It can also refer to the

¹³ Uribe-Jongbloed, Enrique, et al. "Cultural Transduction and intertextuality in Video Games: an analysis of three international case studies" in *Contemporary research on intertextuality in video game*. Hershey PA: Information Science Reference, 2016. URL: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305790248>

textual strategies deployed by content producers in order to incorporate a previously written text into their creations.

Since intertextuality as interpretative practice can lead to conflation with the process analysed, I have decided that intertextuality as textual strategy is best suited for the study of *Persona 5*.

If we follow the textual strategies, we can incorporate a text into another by means of copresence or derivation in case we focus on the literary tradition only. Should we decide to enlarge our theoretical frame by adding the definitions provided by contemporary research, we then would be able to incorporate a text into another by means of parodic allusion, creative appropriation and self-reflexive reference. Even though this tendency of intertextuality seems more legitimate and less confusing for an analysis than intertextuality as interpretative practice, we should not limit our study to the intertextual strategies deployed by the creators in *Persona 5* nor deny the important aspect of the interpretative dimension.

Indeed, this dimension of interpretative practice highlights the importance of the audience that consumes the product (the video game in this case): if the product fails to match the ideological and the cultural codes of the audience, the product becomes irrelevant and misses its target(s) and, eventually, become an economic flop. To be successful and economically profitable, video games must imperatively meet the cultural codes of their target audience by deploying the appropriate interconnections of texts.

In order to match the ideological practice to the cultural background of the target audience, it is essential to introduce the concept of cultural-transduction put forward by Jongbloed et al. in 2014. This is the subject of the next section, in which it will be defined and examined to determine in how far it can be implemented in a study of intertextuality in *Persona 5*.

2.3 CULTURAL-TRANSDUCTION: INTERTEXTUALITY AS A KEY MECHANISM

According to Jongbloed et al., cultural-transduction refers to “the process through which a given text goes when being altered to suit a different cultural or national market from the one where it was originally conceived (Uribe-Jongbloed et al. 2016: 161).”

It is exactly the concept of cultural-transduction that the developers of *Persona 5* used to make their product palatable to an international (mainly Western), non-Japanese audience. We should note, however, and will briefly analyse it in the Chapter IV, that the mechanism of cultural-transduction works both ways. *Persona 5* takes its audience into a clearly and explicitly Japanese setting, as if the developers wanted to give us a tour of today’s Japan, to introduce us to its cultural, social and even geographical background. Interestingly, the names of Tokyo’s streets and Underground stations are similar to their real counterparts¹⁴, the way the villains are punished (public apology) is typically Japanese, just like the seemingly omnipotent/ “mandarin-like” status of the teacher/master. The students wear a uniform that shows not only the school they are from, but also their social status inside the Japanese school system.

The need for cultural-transduction can be explained by the unprecedented success of video games as a global medium and the enormous investments required in order to create such products, investments that can be amortised only if the product is exported and sold world-wide.

Between 2002 and 2008, sales of video games have increased an outstanding 60% growth partly due to the emergence of a well-off middle class in developing countries such as China and a growing infatuation for video games world-wide. This relentless growth has generated two distinctive pressures onto video game developers all over the world.

The first pressure exercised onto video game creators is external: the creators “have to generate products that can be easily consumed in the growing market, sometimes including localization processes aimed at making a product understandable within specific markets to ensure that cultural barriers are overcome (Consalvo 2006: 120)”. Because video games are sold worldwide, video game creators may need to incorporate elements in order to please a specific type of audience (the target audience) or to close the gap created by the cultural

¹⁴ *Persona 5* is based on Tokyo’s typography and real cities.

distance via specific processes; such as the “[exerting a] wide range of activities designed to adapt products to the perceived differences between local markets” (Carlson & Corliss 2011: 65).

The other pressure exercised on video games is internal and consists in the need for video games to: “develop from local successful media products and cultural capital to ensure internal consumption, or to draw from seemingly universal tropes or successful transnational products, to insert themselves within larger global markets” (Yoon & Cheon: 2013). This internal pressure implies that video games insert themselves in a vast web of global markets and integrate, to make sure they are successful, elements such as characters, events, folklore, settings or hints that are (trans)nationally/ locally recognised.

Needless to say, these pressures applied on video game producers invite us to think that they have to deploy intertextual devices in order to meet the target audience’s ideological codes and allow their games to insert themselves into a larger web of markets; allowing thus the cultural-transduction process defined in Christophe Duret’s collective.

Because they wanted to draw attention on the process through which the transduction is carried out¹⁵, they demonstrated that intertextuality played a major role in the insertion of video games into cultural markets by closing the gap of cultural distance, so that the target audience can feel a connection to the product “and therefore be more inclined to consume it.” If video game producers create a product that is impossible to understand because of the elements that compose it, i.e. if the video game producers do not deploy the appropriate intertextual strategies and devices, it may turn the audience and/or the market away from the product. This impossibility to understand a cultural media product because of the elements that are integral to it, as Uribe-Jongbloed et al. point out, has been labelled by Rohn as “cultural lacunae”¹⁶, which was divided into three separate categories that, on further inspection and extension, go hand in hand with intertextuality.

¹⁵the “Process” was one of the four aspects discussed when they analysed the interplay in the design and distribution of a product

¹⁶She defines Lacunae as: “gaps or mismatches between the cultural baggage of the media producers, which influences the topics and the style of the content, and the cultural baggage of the audiences, which influences the kind of media content they select, how they understand it and to what extent they enjoy it.” (p. 633)

This first category is called “content lacuna” and refers to the impossibility for an audience to come to terms with the elements present in the product [because the audience is repelled by the product for various reasons or because they cannot make any connexion whatsoever between the product and themselves.]” If we go back to intertextuality as an interpretative practice exercised by the audience, the audience create meaning to the game or the text by mobilizing their ideological codes and their cultural knowledge in order to make connections with their own set of discourse. According to Jongbloed et al, content lacuna could be associated with intertextuality, where it is perceived as a barrier that could potentially prevent audience from “com[ing] to terms with the product” (Rohn: 2011). This idea of intertextuality as interpretative practice could be applied to a study of *Persona 5*, though the methodology applied to it could be a risk given its complexity.

The second category that was conceptualized by Rohn is the “capital lacuna” and refers to the fact that: “despite acknowledging the content [of the product], the cultural elements [embedded in it complicate or prevent the audience from making the connections” (Rohn: 2011).” This demonstrates the complex process of making the appropriate reference in order to access the content of the product as well as referring to the notion of intertextuality as textual strategy, where deploying the appropriate intertextual device allows the audience to gain that said access.

The last category introduced by Rohn is the “production lacuna” and, to put it simply, refers to: “the enjoyment in terms of style of the culturally foreign product and its possible reception” (Rohn: 2011) This definition may lead us to think that production lacuna imperatively deals with one of the two options mentioned, once again according to Jongbloed et al.

After taking a closer look at these definitions, we can clearly see the relationship they have with intertextuality as interpretative practice and more importantly as textual strategy. Its use might be one of the most consequential roles played in their development and their (cultural and commercial) success. “Since intertextual demands may increase or diminish the pleasure an end user experiences with a text, [...] the lack of recognition of parodic allusions, inclusions and self-reflexivity, may turn people away from the product, due to cultural lacunae” (Jongbloed et al. 2016: 148). If we had to extend the concept to a study of *Persona 5*, we could definitely claim that the developers were aware of the differences between the cultural markets and the consequent pressures exercised on their video games. They

consequently incorporated elements from pre-existing tropes that were (trans)nationally/ locally known in order to meet the audience cultural codes as well as to insert the product itself within larger markets via specific devices and mechanisms, such as intertextuality, that go hand in hand with other processes, such as cultural-transduction.

2.4 TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEMATIC

As discussed above, we have seen that games struggled for acceptance and that related research used to be colonized by other fields to justify the study. Nevertheless, this is not the case anymore and video games are now accepted as scientific objects with inherent characteristics that cannot be dismissed. As for intertextuality, even though the accession of the term is relatively cleaving, most of the time it refers to a practice authors/developers use and consists in inserting particular references to other sets of discourse in a text/game.

In addition to that, it also consists in tackling the intertextual choices (a relation of copresence or derivation) authors/developers make when elaborating their text/game. By taking all these elements into account, the aim of this work will be manifold: an intertextual approach of the video game *Persona 5* will require an analysis of different types of intertextual references, whether implicit or explicit, and try to show how including these references in the video game allows the latter to create its own universe. Moreover, it also requires analysing what type of transformation the video game creates compared to the original texts and discuss what this transformation implies. It also requires discussing the purpose of making these intertextual references and transtextual practices as a means to comment on contemporary society and its flaws. Finally, this analysis will demonstrate how the game successfully allows itself to operate the cultural-transduction process thanks to intertextuality.

Given the tremendous intertextuality present in *Persona 5*, a thorough analysis of this practice would be too much of a task. I have, therefore, decided to limit myself to a certain set of texts in this work. To that purpose, I will put some emphasis on the intertextual practices and relations with Dante's *Divina Commedia*, the picaresque tradition, based on one of the main books of this tendency: the anonymous *La Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes*, Jung's conception of the persona and the tricksters and, last but not least, the figure of Arsène Lupin.

As a final word of caution before getting into the problematic and the analysis, we should bear in mind that this piece of work dealing with *Persona 5* is not the first of its own, though it centres on its intertextuality. Other studies have dealt with this game, but treating rather different subjects, such as Melissa Jane Lewis's *Beneath the Mask: Schoolgirls, identity, and Procedural Revolution in Persona 5*, where she argued that we could read the game by combining textual analysis with more contemporary approaches (such as Bogost's

concept of procedural rhetoric) and demonstrate what arguments it makes about Japanese society, how it does so and evaluate if it should be considered as a subversive game. We could also mention David da Silva's thesis centered on the analysis on the characters of *Persona 5*, where he claimed that each character alongside their Personas, because of their derivation from an external source (i.e. because they were created by different authors) could be analysed to show the extent of how "Intersemiotic Translation factored into their creation and thus demonstrate both the potential of Intersemiotic Translation and its applicability to videogames narrative." This piece of work will become relevant in our study of intertextuality in *Persona 5*, thanks to the thorough analysis da Silva provides on Carl Jung's theories on the concept of persona and the shadows, which are two of the elements that we will discuss in this work.

CHAPTER II

BRIEF SUMMARY AND COMMENTARY OF THE FIRST “HEIST” IN *PERSONA 5*

1 PERSONA 5: SUMMARY OF THE PICARESQUE GENTLEMAN-THIEF THROUGH HELL

1.1 PRELUDE

Before getting into the analysis of intertextuality in the game, I think that making a summary of the plot would help those unfamiliar with the game. As said before, this game is filled with obvious intertextual references, ranging from Dante's *Divina Commedia* (focusing more on the purgatory) to the picaresque tradition, which are made clear as the story unfolds. Even though this plot summary will be quite long, we should bear in mind that the in-game time cutscenes and dialogues solely centered on the main plot last for at least 40 hours (43 hours and 26 minutes), thus summarizing this game cannot be done in just a few pages. Moreover, I will avoid trivial details that are part of the plot, such as the beach episode and the school trip. This concise summary will be available in the annexe section of this piece of work, given that it is not the main focus of this work.

This section will therefore be divided into three sub-sections as follows: the first one consists in a tremendously reduced summary of the game as a means to isolate the key elements I will analyse in this work: I will thus focus on the first heist that occurs in the video game and highlight the points I will analyse. The second one will consist in a brief commentary on those key elements highlighted throughout the summary and the last will be a discussion on their relevance for a study on the intertextuality present and deployed in *Persona 5*.

1.2 A FALL INTO DISGRACE: THE BEGINNING OF JOKER'S JOURNEY

As we start a new game, the game invites us to sign a contract in order to partake in this game: we agree that this story is a pure work of fiction and similarities between characters or events to persons living or dead in our world are purely coincidental. We will incarnate a trickster, someone opposing fate and desire change. After a short cutscene introducing the atmosphere of the game, the story begins *in medias res*: we are drawn into a cell to be interrogated by the prosecutor Sae Nijima for the recent events that occurred in Tokyo. What follows is the unfolding of the events told in a series of flashback.

To cut a long story short, *Persona 5* tells the story of a silent youngster who will be called “Joker” for plot reasons. The story begins with Joker trying to protect a random woman from a drunk who is verbally and sexually harassing her. In the process, Joker hits the drunk, and gets falsely accused of aggravated assault. He is sentenced to year probation and expelled from his school. If he gets into trouble during his probation year, he will be sent to a juvenile center. Even though he got expelled from his school, a family relative called “Sojiro Sakura” agrees to look after him during that time and make sure he will attend Shujin Academy in Tokyo (the only school that accepted Joker because of his criminal charges). Joker is therefore sent to Tokyo to attend Shujin and will have to “stay on the line” during this year-long probation.

During his first night at Sojiro's place (a coffee shop/ restaurant called Leblanc) Joker is drawn into a peculiar place called the Velvet Room*, a place that looks exactly like a prison. There, he is welcomed by two jail keepers and an enigmatic man called “Igor”, who tells him that: “[he must be rehabilitated in order to avoid the incoming ruin.]” After that night, on his way to his first schoolday on probation, he discovers that a strange app called the “Metaverse Navigator*” has been downloaded onto his phone. At first, Joker decides to delete the app he had never downloaded himself before. During his first day at school, he is told how to avoid getting into trouble if he wants to avoid the juvenile center.

The next day, however, Joker notices that the strange app is still on his phone and that deleting it is useless. He then goes to school and meets Ryuji Sakamoto, his first schoolmate and soon-to-be partner in crime. He is a former athlete who got suspended because of Suguru Kamoshida, his abusive Physical Education teacher. Before entering the school, both Joker and Ryuji are dragged into a parallel universe (the Metaverse*) without their

knowledge. The entire place is distorted and looks like a Castle, even though it is located where the school is. Both proceed to investigate the place and discover that it is in fact their school in a parallel universe.

During their investigation, both are captured and thrown into a cell in order to be tortured by Kamoshida, the ruler of the Castle. Joker, cornered by the situation, frees himself from his chains and unlocks his potential: he has the ability to summon a side personality; a Persona called Arsène¹⁷ who will help him battle in the Metaverse. After unleashing his power, the two prisoners escape the cells and make their way to the exit. On their way out, they meet one of the most important character of the game: an anthropomorphised cat called Morgana¹⁸ that knows everything about the Metaverse and its implication (even though he¹⁹ has no clue where this knowledge comes from: he just knows how everything works and will act as a guiding figure throughout the game) when they get to the entrance door, they are welcomed by Kamoshida's shadow, who then proceeds to abuse Ryuji and explains why he expelled him from his athlete track group for no reason. Angered by his actions, he awakens his Persona and helps the group flee from the castle.

After the first three protagonists escape Kamoshida's castle, Morgana starts to explain what the Metaverse is and what one can find there. Moreover, he mentions that some people create a Palace when the distortion (corruption or negative thoughts) in their heart is too overwhelming. To bring justice, they have to infiltrate the Palaces and discover the treasure that lies within.

After fleeing from Kamoshida's Castle of Lust, the three protagonists decide to take actions: given that the teacher is wreaking havoc in the school while remaining untouched, they will try to steal the treasure in his Palace in order to make him confess all the sexual abuses and physical violence he caused his students. To that purpose, they must infiltrate the Palace once more to discover where the treasure is planted and try to steal it. However, once inside, they find that another student has been dragged against her will in the Metaverse: Ann Takamaki, another soon-to-be partner in crime and protagonist. After awaking her Persona and keen to make the teacher pay for his part in a friend's suicide attempt, Ann joins the team (now a team of four with Joker, Ryuji, Ann and Morgana) in an attempt to fire the teacher at

¹⁷ The in-game description of the Persona fits the character of Arsène Lupin. He is described as: "A being based off the main character of Maurice Leblanc's novels, Arsène Lupin. He appears everywhere and is a master of disguise. He is known to help law-abiding citizens." – *Persona 5*, Background description of Arsène.

¹⁸ This being also possess a Persona called Zorro, the fictional character created in 1919 by Johnston McCulley

¹⁹ Though he is a cat, Morgana has a strong sense of masculinity and hates to be referred to an animal.

first, then to make him confess his crimes. Nevertheless, Kamoshida grows more and more suspicious of the students' actions to fire him (even though he is unconscious that he has a Palace and that the thieves are inside after school) and thus tries to expel the students from Shujin Academy during the school assembly.

Before the due date, they have to steal the Palace's treasure to end the distortion in the teacher's heart and, to quote one of the game's Leitmotiv, 'Change his heart'. To that end, they need to do it stealthily, for if the shadows in the Palace recognized the true identity of the students, the unconscious would remember them and they would be then recognized in the real world. Even though the cognitive existences* do not affect their real counterparts, we have to bear in mind that Palaces* and Mementos* are shaped by the unconscious, so they have to avoid identity exposure during their infiltration. Given all these parameters, they will establish hideouts, code names (this is the reason why the main protagonist is almost always called Joker) and form a vigilante brigade called "The Phantom thieves" whose goal is to change the heart of corrupt adults and reform society.

During the final phase of their infiltration, they meet Kamoshida's shadow, who has been waiting for them all this time with his treasure, a crown, a symbol indicating that he is the king of the castle. After defeating Kamoshida's shadow, in an impetus of atonement, the shadow asks the Phantom thieves to seal his fate. They decide to make him apologize publicly during the school assembly, which he does. During the assembly, he says that he is "reborn" and openly confesses his crimes, claiming that he is willing to take the full responsibility while begging for the cops to come and arrest him. Over the next days, his confession is broadcasted across Japan (thanks to social media at first), leaving him nothing but shame.

With all of that done, the treasure in the real world was not a crown, but the Olympic medal Kamoshida won during the Olympics. The Phantom Thieves decide to sell it to stage a buffet and relax a bit, but their fate would be sealed this very same day. During the party, they discuss how cool it is to be a member of the Phantom Thieves, but they wonder if it is worth continuing. When they leave, they bump into the man who falsely accused Joker, as if destiny had put him on their way. The man does not recognize Joker and leaves, but Joker explains to the others what really happened at the very beginning. In disgust of this corruption, they decide that they will reform society by stealing people's heart. For that, they need to get more attention from the media and have to find an appropriate target and steal his heart. During the

day, they will be “common students”, but during the night, they will go into the Metaverse and achieve their true goal. Their great story had just begun the day Kamoshida was defeated.

1.3 SHORT CLOSING OF THE SUMMARY PRECEDING THE COMMENTARY: THE SEVEN PALACES

As a short conclusion to the summary, I would like to draw attention to the key parts I wanted to isolate in order to get into the analysis of intertextuality in *Persona 5*. Given the “durée de vie” of the video game, some elements are more legitimate for an analysis of intertextuality than others, even though they remain as relevant. To take a short example, I summarized the first part of the game, the first Palace and its infiltration and deliberately decided to close this section in order to avoid redundancy; discussing the whole unfolding of the plot would only result in the analysis being too repetitive, though the settings and the heroes “motivations” differ from an event to the other.

To demonstrate my idea, I will expose the schematic trajectory the heroes follow throughout the entirety of *Persona 5*. Throughout the game, the protagonists will follow the same *modus operandi* and will have to infiltrate the palaces of the “corrupt adults”²⁰ threatening their group or society and change their heart by stealing their treasure. As they unveil the atrocities/ the despicable behaviours of the people they try to change while exploring the Palace, they almost always meet a new soon-to-be member of the Phantom thieves: a youngster victim of a form of abuse or psychological trauma caused by “corrupt adults” who eventually awakens his Persona during the infiltration of the Palace (with the sole exception of the last two Palaces). Once their exploration/ infiltration is over (meaning that the Phantom Thieves find the treasure room), they secure an escape route and send a “calling card” where they threaten to expose the sins of the person causing havoc and steal his treasure. Unaware of this treasure, the Palace’s host will materialize the treasure (before the calling card is sent, the treasure only looks like a white ball of unconscious ideas). After entering the Palace a final time for the theft, they always have a showdown with the host’s shadow and ultimately defeat him. They must not kill him for two reasons: it would either ruin their reputation or kill the host (which would only create havoc and social anxiety, as anyone can become a target of the Phantom Thief as well as the setup of a serious investigation.) Once the shadow is defeated, it confesses to the team the reasons behind their corruptions and actions and let them take their treasure. After the theft, the host makes public apologies or turn himself in because of his change of heart.

²⁰ These were lines pronounced by Ruyji while discussing with the Thieves.

With that being said, we can see a clear pattern when we focus on the plot only: The Phantom Thieves are threatened by a group of people/ a major figure that could put the Thieves in trouble, they then get as much information as they can on their target, they infiltrate the palace where a new member joins the Thieves and awakens a Persona based on a fictional/folkloric character. Once the escape route is secured, they follow a specific method of sending a calling card before the final infiltration, the showdown with the shadow's host and the uncovering of the truth, by means of a public apology. The major difference with each infiltration and each individual they deal with, other than plot-related elements, is the Deadly Sin they incarnate and the allegorical interpretation that could be done. Though the Palaces will be analysed in the next chapter, I wanted to draw attention on their existence in this section, given that we have discussed the existence of an “alternate reality” and the Castle of Lust.

The developers deliberately decided to make The Phantom Thieves infiltrate various Palaces named after the Seven Deadly Sins as a mean to invite players to analyse the tacit messages conveyed through the Palaces, named The Castle of Lust, The Museum of Vanity, The Bank of Gluttony, the Pyramid of Wrath, The Casino of Jealousy (Envy), The Cruiser of Pride and last but not the least, the Prison of Sloth.

1.4 INTERTEXTUAL REFERENCES AND RELATIONSHIPS; COMMENTS PRECEDING THE ANALYSIS

As said in the short conclusion of the last section, even though the summary of the game has been tremendously reduced, we could still highlight the many intertextual references *Persona 5* unfolds throughout the entirety of the plot. Though the elements analysed do not represent an exhaustive analysis of intertextuality present in the game, they nevertheless represent the most obvious cases of intertextual references and practises. The analysis will therefore be divided into two chapters: the first one will consist in an analysis of the intertextual practices by means of copresence and derivation in *Persona 5* and discuss their relevance in the conception of the game's original universe. The second part, a sub-chapter, will deal with the importance of intertextuality in the cultural-transduction process.

Moreover, this work will focus on the tropes that have been raised through the summary.

The first intertextual connexion that should be analysed is the Christian iconography and the representation of the Seven Deadly Sins in *Persona 5*.

The second trope that will be analysed is the Jungian tradition that seems to form the basis of the *Persona* franchise, and more specifically *Persona 5*.

The third element I will analyse is the realm of Maurice LeBlanc's fictional character, Arsène Lupin; putting emphasis on his myth and his representation in *Persona 5*.

The fourth will be a brief comment on the intertextual connexion the members of the Phantom Thieves exhibit in the first analytical part, and highlight their relevance in the cultural-transduction process.

The last element I want to draw attention to is the trope of the picaresque. As said in the previous section, the plot unfolds the misadventures of an "anti-hero" whose purpose is to reform society with the help of his partners-in-crime, The Phantom Thieves. All the main characters share the same condition and are seen as belonging to the same "group of people": picaresque dissidents whose social ascension is made impossible due to social pressures.

CHAPTER III

FORMS OF INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIP: ANALYSIS OF “COPRESENCE” AND “DERIVATION”

1 THE SEVEN PALACES AND THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS: A REFERENCE TO CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY AND LA DIVINA COMMEDIA

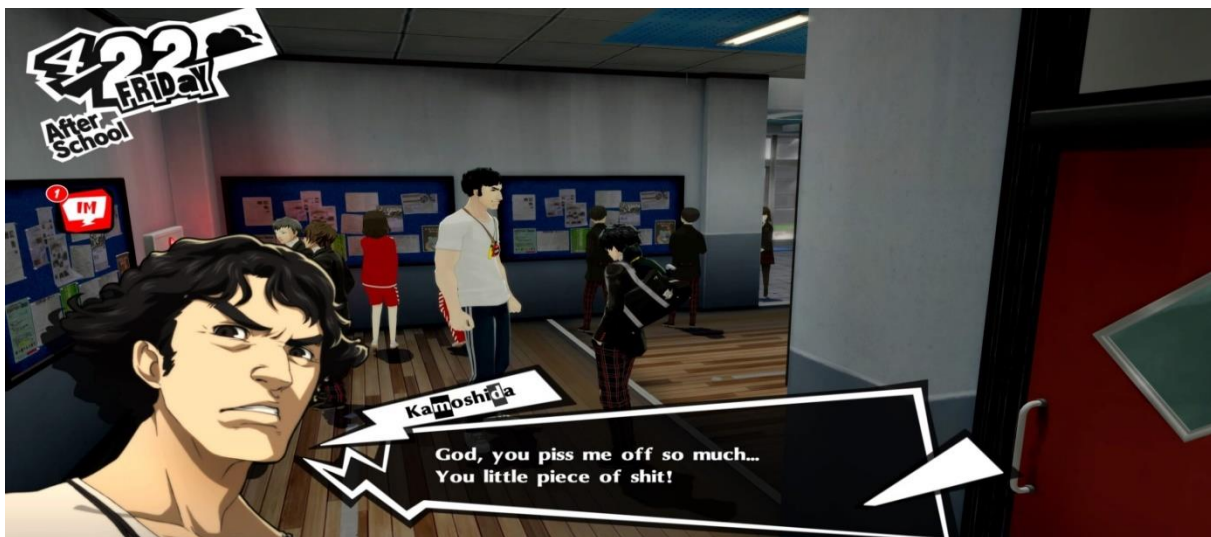
I would like to draw attention to the Metaverse and explain how it functions and what it actually is before starting the analysis of the Palace and their intertextual references. To put it simply, the Metaverse is a parallel universe where some actions can be taken without incidence on the ‘actual/real’ world. It is also more importantly the universe that is shaped and formed from the collective unconscious: some places look like their real counterpart, but most of them are personalized spaces cognitively overlaid into areas in real-life Tokyo. Most people need a “Metaverse Navigator” (the app the protagonists have on their smartphone) in order to get into this universe, and must preferably be able to wield a Persona to avoid life-threatening situations. In addition to that, the Metaverse is shaped in two distinctive forms, “Palaces” or “Mementos”.

The “Mementos” are the distortions created by the collective unconscious and their negative corrupt thoughts and emotions. These emotions hidden deep within their heart create a gigantic Palace shaped as a twisted version of the subway in Tokyo, where the trains are connected to an infinite web of tracks and where people look like shadows wearing masks. Because most people do not have their emotions too twisted, most people’s Palaces take the shape of a single location that represents the collective; and the subway is perfect to fill in that role. In literature, subways, omnibuses and public transport are the best metaphors to represent the entirety of society, where microcosms are formed thanks to the disparate social classes one can find there.²¹ Mementos are divided in eight layers (nine in the Royal edition of the game, which will not be covered in this work) and the last layer is supposed to hide the Holy Grail, humanity’s wish and treasure.

The “Palaces” are isolated domains from the Metaverse separated from the Mementos. They are the “physical” and “geographical” (given that it is a location) manifestations of strong negative or corrupt thoughts one person can have. If their emotions overwhelm them, a

²¹ « Je Cherche une personnification de la société, je la trouve entière, vraie et juste, avec ses anachronismes, ses non-sens, son crétinisme, sa sottise et son amour-propre, dans l’omnibus. [...] Tout le monde passe par l’omnibus ; faire l’histoire de l’omnibus, c’est faire l’histoire de la société » Edouard GOURDON. *Physiologie de l’omnibus*, 1841.

personal distortion would be created in the Metaverse and will be inhabited by their shadow selves without their knowledge. The stronger their negative emotions, the stronger the shadow will be in the Palace. Moreover, not only is there a shadow version of the host's self in the Palace, there are also cognitive existences projected by the host's interpretation of a real person or idea that appear in the palace. These existences can either be passive or be a threat to intruders. We could illustrate this idea with the first villain of the game (Kamoshida), who sees all his male students as toys he can physically and verbally abuse for his amusement and all his female students as submissive sexual slaves who are totally devoted to him and finally, he strongly believes that the school is his castle and that represents the fact that nobody can lay a finger on him; he is safe from any form of threat:



(Figure 1: Kamoshida verbally insulting Joker for being in the same hallway)



(Figure 2: Kamoshida's shadow explaining to Joker how he sees the school and their students)

Now that we understand what the Metaverse is made of, it would seem easier to analyse the trope of “The Seven Deadly Sins” in Christian iconography and western literature. As we progress in the story of *Persona 5*, The Phantom Thieves have to infiltrate Palaces which are named after one of the seven deadly sins, starting with the Castle of Lust and finishing with the Prison of Sloth. Even though their depiction in *Persona 5* differs from the “conventional” representation in Christian tradition, they nevertheless share common features and their depictions share a common objective: to teach us about the vices of our world and warn us against a life driven by such excesses.

Historically speaking, the concept of “The Seven Deadly sins” can be traced to the works of Evagrius Ponticus,²² Christian monk and ascetic of the fourth century and one of his pupils, John Cassian. Originally, Evagrius decided to list eight evil thought Sins that existed in Greek mythology (by means of translation and commentary), ranging from gluttony to boasting and pride. As they were translated into the Latin of Western Christianity thanks to Cassian’s *The Institutes*, they successfully were implemented into the Western Christian spiritual and religious tradition before being revised by Pope Gregory I in AD 590 and eventually gaining the status of the Sins we know today, i.e. Gluttony, Lust (fornication), Greed (Avarice), Sloth (Acedia), Envy, Wrath and Pride.

In the Christian vision of “how to be a good Christian”, none can live a life led by such excess in order to look upon the face of God, and those who decided to do otherwise (i.e. live a sinful life) must face the consequences with never-ending punishment. Given that the punishments inflicted to sinners in the Christian traditions are sometimes “debatable” for their links between the Deadly Sin and the actual punishment (for example: the lustful are covered in fire and brimstone and the envious are placed in freezing waters), emphasizing on Dante’s *Divina Commedia* and more precisely his *Purgatorio* would be preferable for the analysis of how the developers intertextually integrated tropes and themes of the seven deadly sins as well as the analysis of the similarities and dissimilarities of the Seven Deadly Sins the videogame *Persona 5* presents.

As indicated in the theoretical frame section, a text (or a video game) can present forms of intertextual relationships by means of implicit or explicit forms of copresence: the presence of a text in another text. If we follow Camarero’s definition, *Persona 5* manifests a form of

²² Evagrius (2006). *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* translated by Robert E. Sinkewicz. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press

explicit copresence by means of references: “[the developer] deliberately makes references to [other sets of texts] without reproducing the original texts. They rather provide a way to reach it and leave the reader to insert the content of the reference into the text.” As we progress in the story of *Persona 5*, The Phantom Thieves come face to face with villains whose lives were led by their excessive behaviours and their immoralities as defined by Dante Alighieri in his *Purgatorio*. The major differences with Dante’s demonstration of the Seven Deadly Sins are that the villains driven by their excess are not punished with never-ending suffering; they are rather forced to make public apologies by denouncing their evil deeds and turn themselves in. The people condemned with the never-ending pain are in fact the cognitive projections in the Palaces, whose existence only relies on how the sinner perceives the outside world. Moreover, *Persona 5* deals with a sin that is considered as part of another one and that Dante did not cover in his second part of the *Divina Commedia*, the Sin of Vanity. Last but not least, their depiction in *Persona 5* sometimes differs from Dante’s definition of the concept, as the developer wanted to tackle the Sins in relation with contemporary issues.

The first Sin treated by Dante and *Persona 5* is the Sin of Lust, in particular people characterized by an intense sexual desire/drive but moreover a disordered love for individuals whose eternal punishment is to walk within flames to purge their lustful thoughts. In *Persona 5*, Lust is embodied by Suguru Kamoshida, as he leisurely molests his students and harasses them at free will. In addition to that, his Palace reflects his belief that he is the king of the school (depicted in the Metaverse as a castle) and is filled with references to his sexual desires and fantasies, as the interior is decorated with paintings and books of himself and with pillars of stripped female students.

The second sin treated in *Persona 5* is the one not covered by Dante and is the Sin of Vanity. Historically, Vanity has been considered as one of the manifestations of Pride, the father of all Sins and was considered as a form of self-idolatry and boasting. This definition suits appropriately Madarame’s lifestyle, given that he never hesitated to steal his students’ work and put his name on it. Moreover, his Palace turns his dilapidated shack into a golden museum, where the counterfeit paintings and the images of his suffering pupils are exposed as real works of art.

In *Persona 5*, we are also confronted with the Sin of Gluttony as third Sin, but in a sense that differs from Dante’s depiction and definition of the Sin. Dante defined the Sin as an overconsumption of anything to the point of waste, generally with food, drinks and bodily

pleasure. As for their punishment, the gluttonous are condemned to be starved in the presence of trees whose fruits will remain out of reach for eternity. In comparison with that, the depiction of Gluttony in *Persona 5* is embodied by the third villain, Junya Kaneshiro, and has nothing to do with the overconsumption of food. The villain is already wealthy beyond reason but still “demands” (blackmails) more money for the sake of pressuring people for his amusement and getting richer of course. Money is what attracts this character and bases his lifestyle: his Palace takes the form of a floating bank that endlessly sucks the money from the inhabitants (seen as living ATMs because of Kaneshiro’s worldview) until their death. Given that there is a clear emphasis on the extortion of money rather than food, we could say that the depiction of Gluttony in *Persona 5* acts as a critique of contemporary issues, such as the extortion of money and the overvaluation of wealth. In other words, the “contemporary” Sin of Gluttony represented in the game is a way for the developers to “includ[e] a kind of commentary on the values of contemporary society and trea[t] that as essential to the game’s story and theme”²³

As for the Sin of Wrath, it has been defined as uncontrollable feelings of rage and hatred that could lead to harmful or self-destructive behaviours. For their punishments, the damned must walk through lands filled with blinding smoke, symbolizing the blinding effects of wrath. This vision is entirely shared with the fourth Palace that is infiltrated in *Persona 5*, the Pyramid of Wrath. Futaba Sakura, after being misled on her mother’s death (declared in a faked note as a suicide caused by maternal psychoses) becomes a shut-in and rarely gets out of her room. She has a self-destructive behaviour and cannot interact with people because of her blinding rage and that would have never changed if Joker and The Phantom Thieves had never stolen her heart. In addition to that, we could mention the Sphinx that guards the treasure, embodying the revengeful side of Wrath, as she holds Futaba responsible for her death and blames her throughout the battle.

Moving on to the Sin of Greed (or Avarice), Dante defined it as being an excessive concern for earthly goods, material or abstract (in that case, property or ambition and power). People whose life is led by greed are punished by being forced to lay face-down on the ground and recite psalms. In the canto XIX, Dante speaks with Pope Adrian V, repenting for his desire for prestige and power. Similarly in *Persona 5*, Okumura is seen in his flying saucer, formed by his twisted desires for economic and political success, despite the hurt he

²³ Extract from an interview with the developer

inflicts on his employees (seen as disposable units) and his daughter Haru with her arranged marriage.

Envy (or jealousy, as Sae's Palace is called The Casino of Jealousy) refers to "looks with grudging hatred upon other man's gift and good fortune, taking every opportunity to run them down or deprive them for their happiness."²⁴ As for their punishment, the envious have their eyes sewn shut with iron wire as a means to "block the looks filled with hatred". This definition of the Sin is quite representative of how Sae Nijima's Palace functions, as all games are rigged in favour of the house. As The Phantom Thieves manage to progress in her Palace, she gets frustrated and starts to give them more tasks before allowing them to come in the manager's room.

Considered as the most serious of the Seven Deadly Sins, Pride is defined as corrupt selfishness, i.e. putting one's desires before the welfare of others. Punished for their over-selfishness, they are condemned with their head being bent down by the weight of the stones put on their neck. This Sin is incarnated by Masayoshi Shido, the candidate running for the election, whose Palace is depicted as a huge and luxurious cruiser, where only his allies (servants) can stay along; the others have no right to stay by his side and must disappear.

The last Sin, but not the least, is the Sin of Sloth, and *Persona 5* used a different side of the concept. Dante normally describes Sloth as the failure to love God with all one's heart, all one's mind and all one's soul. As a punishment for that failure to love God, the Slothful are now full of energy and run at full speed around the terrace. In *Persona 5*, the depiction of Sloth is made throughout the entirety of the last arc, The Prison of Sloth (The Prison of Acedia), and refers to its ancient definition as being the sin of Acedia, where one neglects to take care of anything, not having a single care. This definition of the concept could then be linked to apathetic behaviours, originally caused by a state of depression that caused a spiritual detachment from our world. In the Prison of Acedia, we meet the shadows of every human being and of the antagonists willing to submit their will to the Holy Grail, as if they surrendered their free will and their emotions to a higher entity. In addition to that, The Prison of Regression is the deepest part of humanity's Palace, reflecting a deeply rooted issue in Japanese society.

²⁴ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Purgatory*, notes on Canto XIII.

The fact that the developers used this definition of the Sin of Sloth is far from being accidental: as with the Sin of Gluttony, they wanted to draw attention to the social pressures one could go through living in Japan while putting emphasis on Japanese youth. To quote Allan S. Miller and Satoshi Kanazawa: “Japan has a high degree of social order, and ‘the great majority of citizens obey laws and conform to social norms’” (Miller and Kanazawa 2000: 3). The fact that Japan is ‘constructed’ (for lack of a better word) by means of social norms forces other to conform in order to avoid being treated as deviant. People who decide to do otherwise stain society because of their remoteness social norms, essential in the Japanese societal and work culture. Moreover, there is an emphasis on socialisation, as Hechter²⁵ claims that the social order of a society can be attributed to conformity and solidarity on the group. The people who are oblivious to the needs of others and act selfishly are then considered as outcasts of society, “unable to read the atmosphere” (Lewis 2020: 17).²⁶ This culture of casting out those who do not conform to society led to societal/youth issues, such as the appearance of shut-ins (*hikikomori** in Japanese): people who withdraw from society as they lack social interactions and lack of finding a “place to belong”, as said Tomita Fujiya in his *Hikikomori kara no tabidachi*.

To cut a long story short, *Persona 5* tackled societal themes in a contemporary Japan by means of intertextuality: by referencing Christian iconography and Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, the developers endeavoured to deal with a “dysfunctional” system where people are forced to cope with societal pressures as they need to find a place to belong. Those who cannot do that or live in a selfish lifestyle will be considered as outcasts of society, which could ultimately lead to psychological traumas and have harsh consequences. By depicting the Seven Deadly Sins, they also warn people that living a life subjugated to one’s vice could ultimately lead to one’s downfall.

²⁵ Mentionned in the article of Miller and Kanazawa.

²⁶ In her thesis, she also mentions an implication of a collective unconscious: “where what is morally right should be obvious to all members of the group.” (Lewis 2020: 17)

2 CARL JUNG: THE INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HIS THEORIES, THE TITLE OF THE GAME AND THE SUMMONS²⁷.

We have discussed so far the existence of the Palaces, Personas, shadows and the Metaverse, but all these original settings offered by the game raise a question: could these concepts be derived from an idea explained or theorized in another text? In other words, could these concepts be intertextual references to some other texts? I would argue that yes and intend to demonstrate in how far the developers of *Persona 5* have incorporated these concepts in their video game. An analysis of the type of intertextual relationship is therefore required as much as an explanation of how it is illustrated in the game.

In addition, we will have to discuss the fact that employing these tropes allowed the developers to comment, just like in the Palaces, on both society and video games.

The very title of *Persona 5* hints that this word could represent much more than the summons present in the game. After some investigation, the title clearly appears to refer to the Jungian conception of the persona. This concept is entirely relevant in this case study, for various reasons: the first is that we can trace which text *Persona 5* refers to and discuss in how far the game incorporates the text in its universe by means of intertextual relationship. We will then be able to discuss to which purpose intertextuality allows the game to comment on contemporary youth in Japan, and to emphasize the role played by individuals in society.

Carl Gustav Jung devoted a part of his life to analyse human psychology and in his *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, he defined the concept of persona as: “the mask worn by an actor to signify his rôle²⁸” (Jung 1928: 164). This means that the persona is in fact the mask an individual wears in a given context and situation in order to appropriately interact with his environment. Though the term persona refers to the mask worn by an individual in a specific context, we have to bear in mind that the persona does not represent the true self of the said character. If we had to paraphrase Jung, the mask is a compromise between the individual and society: “as to the kind of semblance to adopt, what a man should ‘appear to be’. He takes a name, a title, represents an office and belongs to this or that” (Jung 1928: 165). This highlights that personas are neither false identities; neither does it imply that the individual

²⁷ In their adventures, the Phantom Thieves can invoke summons to help them battle in the Metaverse. These summons are called Personas.

²⁸ The word is written that way in the essay.

pretends to be someone else. The personas promote specific behaviours depending on the situation. In other words, personas are adaptive mechanisms humans develop so that they can interact with their environment.

In addition to the concept of persona, Jung conceptualized the shadow, another important aspect depicted in *Persona 5*. In *L'Âme et la vie*, the shadow is defined as

“quelque chose d'inférieur, de primitif, d'inadapté et de malencontreux, mais non d'absolument mauvais. [...] Elle est 'les gens', auxquels on prête la bêtise, la cruauté, la couardise qu'il serait tragique de se reconnaître. Elle est tout ce qui déclenche la jalousie, le dégoût, la tendresse” (G. Humbert: 1992).

The underlying message is that shadows are troublesome projections from the individual that prevent the latter to behave appropriately. Nevertheless, though it is described as a psychological flaw, people can become aware of their shadows through a phase of introspection. The confrontation of individuals with their shadow most of the time triggers a phase of rejection that can lead to negative consequences, ranging from jealousy to self-loathing “[if] the confrontation fails” (Jung 1951: 8-10) .

Last but not least, Jung put forward the notion of archetypes, among which he identified the archetype of the trickster.

In order to conceptualise the archetypes, Jung defined the Collective unconscious as: “a common library of symbols available to each individual that has been involved in society” (Jung 1969: 10-15). These symbols are described as: “pre-existent forms, the archetypes” (Jung 1969: 43). To Jung, archetypes are defined as: “universal images that have existed since the remotest times” (Jung 1969: 5) and can manifest themselves in the shape of events or of a figure or character close to a stereotype. The trickster archetype, has also been described as

“[manifesting a strong tendency to sly jokes and malicious pranks], his dual nature [...] and his approximation to the figure of a saviour. [...] In picaresque tales, in carnivals and revels, in magic rites of healing, in man's religious fears and exaltations, this phantom of the trickster haunts the mythology of all ages, sometimes in quite unmistakable form, sometimes in strangely modulated guise” (Jung 1969: 255-260).

As of now, we can paraphrase and say that the trickster is a rogue-like figure that deceives people via sly pranks. His adversity towards the social order causes him to influence

society, reform it, and be either considered as a “saviour” or a “villain”, since their omnipotence and ubiquity “haunts the mythology of all ages”.

Not only were these Jungian tropes and definitions integrated in the video game *Persona 5*, they were also adapted to fit the universe of the game in order to make them accessible to the fans. We should note, however, that *Persona 5* intertextually refers to the Jungian theories of personas, tricksters and shadows by using various intertextual devices; references and parodic allusion.

2.1 INTERTEXTUAL RELATION WITH JUNG: REFERENCES

2.1.1 *Personas (concept)*

As we have discussed for the Palaces, an intertextual relation by means of reference implies that “the text has to deliberately make references to [other set of texts] without [actually] reproducing it. These references rather provide a way to reach the other set of texts and leave the reader [(the player in this case)] to insert the content of the reference into the text” (Uribe Jongbloed et al. 2016: 147). To that purpose, the developers of *Persona 5*, since the franchise derived from the *Shin Megami Tensei* saga, ceaselessly deployed the Jungian tropes to tackle major societal issues in Japan by means of references. They incorporated into their universe the persona by means of references because they wanted both to draw attention to the issues raised by leading a life dictated by amoral behaviours and to discuss the social pressures on Japanese youth for whom any step away from the norm results in marginalization.

To make my point, I need to discuss how *Persona 5* incorporates the persona trope in its universe. As we have said, Jung described the persona as being a mask that people wear in a specific context, notably regarding human interactions. In this video game, Personas are summons that reflect their “master’s” identity. After being put in a stressful situation, the individual can develop a desire to rebel against one specific figure of authority as well as a desire to use their newly acquired power to protect other victims from some other corrupt adults. Every time a member of The Phantom Thieves becomes aware of the predicament he allows himself to be put into (for example, when Ryuji failed to rebel against Kamoshida’s corporal punishments or against his exclusion from the track and field team), a voice asks if he/she is prepared to go along with the wrongs he is suffering or if he is willing to rebel and change the tides of events. If the individual accepts the voice’s offer, a mask will subsequently appear on their face. The contract is signed by the Persona reciting the lines, before adding comments that individualize each pact: “I am thou, thou art I...” (*Persona 5*: 2016)

Once the Persona has recited the lines, the individual has to rip off the mask and gains the full access to their new powers. These new powers do not come easily and the decision of “standing their ground” and of refusing to be pushed around anymore appears to be a very painful process.



(Figure 3: Ryuji, Joker's associate, ready to remove the mask off his face.)



(Figure 4: Ryuji in pain after ripping his mask off.)

As we can see on the two figures (figure 3 and figure 4), the act of ripping off the mask is a real challenge. Better said, a painful introspective battle to attain a state of authenticity²⁹, as the mask he was wearing actually: “concealed [his] true nature” (Jung 1992: 192) and

²⁹ According to Lewis, we need to link this authenticity state to Sartre's concept, where “hiding one's true nature equates to living in bad faith” (Lewis 2020: 48)

allows him to get rid of the deeply rooted shame he had been made to suffer as a result of Kamoshida's despicable physical and psychological abuse.

By ripping off their respective masks, the Phantom Thieves show their resolution to rip off the label society had stuck on them and their readiness to rebel against a questionable establishment based on social norms (Miller and Kanazawa 2000: 3) they have made up their minds to overthrow once and for all.

Social norms and social expectations are two factors that Japanese youth feel they have to comply with and force them to: “adjust to each other, and [improve] the fit between what one is doing and what one is expected [to do]” (Markus and Kitayama 2003: 10). They create a painful ambivalence between who the Japanese youth appear to be and who they really are, between a *tatemae* (an outside face in Japanese, used to interact with other individuals) and a *honne* (a private face, more in keeping with their true selves).

By incorporating the Jungian concept of the persona, the developers tacitly discussed the omnipresent pressure exercised on the youth in Japan, pressures that force them to cope with societal structures that label and marginalize them should they dare not to fit into them. This referencing to Jung's theories goes hand in hand with the intertextual reference made to the Christian iconography, where those who live in a “dysfunctional” system not only have trouble finding a place to belong, but also difficulties to express their genuine personality.

2.1.2 Tricksters

As for the tricksters, the archetype is materialized through Joker. As it has been raised in the summary, *Persona 5* invited us to “partake in the game” in order to reform society. To achieve that goal, we incarnate a trickster, a figure willing to oppose fate and desire change. According to Jung, the tricksters are rogue-like figures that play malicious tricks in order to fool people and pursue their goals (Jung 1969: 255-265).

To change society in *Persona 5*, the Phantom Thieves have to venture through Palaces in order to trigger a change of heart in the villain who wreaks havoc in their surroundings, i.e. who socially interacts in a despicable manner. This out of the ordinary method reminds us of what kind of insidious tricks the archetype described by Jung could eventually resort to.

2.2 INTERTEXTUAL RELATION WITH JUNG: PARODIC ALLUSION.

The other intertextual relationship that should be discussed is that of the shadows described by Jung. We could also demonstrate how far *Persona 5* modulates the trope, in a comical though satirical manner, to warn people living a life led by their amoral behaviour. The relationship could have been the same as in the previous section, i.e. reference, but I think that this strategy plants an issue.

As discussed in the theoretical frame, developers can deploy intertextual strategies in video games. One of the examples provided was called parodic allusion and was defined as: “the use of elements [from] renowned texts, putting emphasis on humour in order to [...] amuse through juxtaposition – a goal that is enhanced by the reader’s recognition of the parodic gesture.” (Ott and Walter 2000: 436). As we see, there is an emphasis on the parodic gesture, the amusing strategy that mainly focuses on humour while using the elements of Jung’s discourse. Because of how the shadows are depicted in *Persona 5*, reference does not work because this strategy lacks the humoristic dimension. Analysing the shadows under the lens of parodic allusion, therefore, fits the analysis much better.

If we follow Jung’s definition of the shadows, we see that they are conceptualized as troublesome projections of primitive emotions and thoughts that eventually prevent individuals from behaving appropriately (Jung 1951: 8-10).

In the video game, the shadows are depicted as allegorical embodiments of evil deeds committed by the villains. The Palace in which the host’s shadow resides reflects what he thinks of his environment (the locations and the cognitive existences represented in the Palaces are shaped by the host’s interpretation of reality) and the shadow itself represents how the host sees himself. As we progress in the Palaces, we encounter the antagonists’ shadows and we see that all of them are portrayed according to their host’s interpretation of their surroundings. For example, in the first Palace called the Castle of Lust, the first antagonist, who sees himself as the king of the Castle of Lust (in fact Shujin Academy) and is portrayed as a half-dressed king relentlessly trying to seduce women and constantly belittling men. This very satirical depiction that focuses exclusively on Kamoshida’s physical and moral flaws emphasises that the first antagonist has failed to confront their shadows and has eventually let his vices dictate his behaviour, thus his life.

The fact that the antagonists' shadows are depicted in a grotesque and defamiliarized way, suggests that the developers deployed parodic allusion as an intertextual relationship to Jung's definition of the shadows. The developers felt compelled to link their product with psychological theories in order to discuss the ubiquitous pressure of social interaction and which behaviour to adopt when one interacts with society in a specific context. When individuals fail to confront deeply-rooted feelings of frustration, jealousy and envy, their moral conduct is inevitably influenced. As their lives are influenced by their failure, their behaviour consequently fails to match the said: "fit between what one is doing and what one is expected to do" (Markus and Kitayama 2003: 10).

2.3 INTERTEXTUAL RELATION WITH JUNG: A SUMMING UP

As soon as the developers decided to move away from the *Shin Megami Tensei* franchise to the saga of the *Personas*, they increasingly incorporated psychological theories and themes into their universe in order to tacitly discuss the inherent pressure exercised on individuals (especially Japanese teenagers) when interacting in society. Ranging from Sartre's concept of Authenticity to Jung's theories of masks and shadows, they highlighted the issues raised by Japan's group-oriented social norms which marginalize the individuals who do not abide by them.

For that reason, they intertextually referred to Jung's theories by means of references for the trickster archetype and the persona and by means of parodic allusions for the shadows.

The persona concept allowed them to criticise the above mentioned social pressures on Japanese youth and to emphasise their difficulties to reconcile the need to be part of a group-oriented society and their legitimate craving to express their individual identity.

With the trickster archetype, they draw our attention to how hard it is to change Japanese society. This goal can only be achieved by resorting to insidious strategies.

When using parodic allusion, they planned to highlight the evil that hides in every one of us, that is the shadow. This idea is to warn against a life led by amoral behaviours and the negative consequences of one's inability to cope with one's own flaws, as it is the case with all the villains of *Persona 5*.

3 JOKER AND ARSÈNE; BETWEEN THE ALLUSION TO ARSÈNE LUPIN AND THE IMITATION OF HIS LEGACY

Now that we have described and explained Jung's theories of the persona and the mask, we can go deeper into our analysis and discuss the next intertextual reference made in *Persona 5*. As I said in the previous chapter, the main characters awaken a Persona after being confronted with a stressful situation or angered by any of the characters embodying authority. A strong desire of justice relentlessly grows inside of them, making them wish to use their new powers first to protect those who have been disgraced and abused, later to rebel against the established order. Once Joker is jailed in Kamoshida's Castle of Lust, he feels powerless to save Ryuji. The subsequent false charges of aggravated assault against him and the attempted execution of Ryuji trigger his anger. At this moment, a voice taunts him and says:

"What's the matter? Are you simply going to watch? [...] Was your previous decision a mistake then? Vow to me. [...] Call upon my name, and release thy rage! [...] I am the pillager of twilight - 'Arsène'! I am the rebel's soul that resides within you."

(*Persona 5*: 2016)

In the painful process during which Joker rips the phantasmal mask off his face, flames surround him and his Persona appears dressed up as a dandy from the late 1900s/ early 2000s symbolizing Joker's insatiable thirst for justice. We recognize what we later will identify as a defamiliarized version of Arsène Lupin:



(Figure 5: **Arsène** sealing a contract with Joker to lend him his powers.)

To me, this is an obvious intertextual relationship with the “gentleman-thief”, fictional character created by Maurice LeBlanc.

Throughout the plot of *Persona 5*, we will discover many intertextual references to the character of Arsène Lupin and his myth. The physical appearance, the psychological traits and the *modus operandi* of The Phantom Thieves, everything is there to create intertextual connections with Arsène Lupin.

It is essential to point out both the similarities and the differences between Joker, his Persona (called **Arsène** from now onwards) and Arsène Lupin himself because they allow us to analyse the intertextual connection between the three figures and thus the intertextual connection between *Persona 5* and Arsène Lupin’s myth.

After comparing the three characters and their depictions, we will discuss what kind of intertextual relationship is made (or what kind of intertextual device is used) and demonstrate how far this intertextual relationship allows *Persona 5* to create its own universe. In the next chapter, we plan to show how far incorporating the tropes of a (trans)nationally/ locally recognised character make *Persona 5*’s representation and myth of Arsène Lupin palatable for an international audience.

3.1 THE MYTH OF ARSÈNE LUPIN, A HIGHLIGHT.

3.1.1 *Arsène Lupin*

Before getting any deeper into the similarities and differences between the characters, it is important to contextualise the history for Arsène Lupin.

Set in the late 1900s – early 2000s, his universe revolves around a bourgeoisie at the dawn of a new era. Progress is everywhere: starting with a revolution in transportation, as the automobiles gradually replace horse-drawn carriages. Society becomes increasingly mediated and opens to consumerism (Bussi 2007: 5).

Famous for being the master of disguise and his debonair style, the legacy of Arsène Lupin starts in a story called “The Arrest of Arsène Lupin”, published in the magazine *Je Sais Tout* in 1905. Ironically, his legacy starts with his arrest at the end of the plot: five thousand kilometres from the French coasts, Bernard d’Andrézy³⁰, the passengers and the crew of the boat receive a phone call claiming that the infamous Arsène Lupin is on board and is hiding under the name of “R.”. Despite elaborating a plan that consisted in fooling every passenger into believing that a passenger named Rozaine was the culprit, he is eventually arrested by inspector Ganimard after the ship has docked:

“- Arsène Lupin, n’est-ce pas? Je me mis à rire. – Non, Bernard d’Andrézy, tout simplement. – Bernard d’Andrézy est mort il y a trois ans en Macédoine. [...] Encore un truc de vous, une fausse piste sur laquelle vous les avez lancés, là-bas ! Ah ! Vous êtes d’une jolie force, mon gaillard. Mais cette fois, la chance a tourné. Voyons, Lupin, montre toi beau joueur.” (LeBlanc 1905: 21)³¹

Though the plot of this story ironically ends with his arrest, this very story sets the premises of Lupin’s subsequent myth as it already shows his abilities to trick people and nevertheless eventually rally them to his cause.

³⁰ This is the pseudonym used by Arsène Lupin in his first venture and refers to his mother’s name: Henriette d’Andrézy. In this chapter we get to know more on the Arsène’s background (LeBlanc, *La Comtesse de Cagliostro*, chapitre VI p. 110)

³¹ “- Arsène Lupin, is it not?” I laughed, and replied: “- No, simply Bernard d’Andrézy.” “- Bernard d’Andrézy died in Macedonia three years ago. [...] Another of your tricks; a false scent that deceived them at Havre. You play a good game, my boy, but this time luck is against you.”

This first appearance of Arsène Lupin did not however grant LeBlanc immediate literary success. According to François Forestier, Pierre Lafitte asked LeBlanc to write *The Arrest of Arsène Lupin* for his magazine, but it was the theater play written in collaboration with Francis de Croisset and played in 1908 that started Lupin's international fame. Between 1909 and 1910, there were more: "than fifty performances of the American adaptation on Broadway" (Renouard 2016: 85).

In terms of physical appearance, Arsène Lupin is often depicted as a charming man with a monocle, a black cape and a black top-hat, personifying the "France de la Belle époque". Lupin's extravagant dandyism reflected LeBlanc's anarchist tendencies, and: "the dress-code [the anarchists'] feeling of superiority over the rest of society" (Derouard et al. 2004).

Regarding the character's psychology, there is an oscillation between two distinctive major traits; an everlasting ambivalence between the man of the people and the aspiring aristocrat. This duality can be explained by his family background: though his mother was born an aristocrat, Lupin's father, Theophraste Lupin, was a commoner. Marked by profound moral values, Arsène Lupin differs from the classical thief figure. His victims are as often as not, "white-collar" criminals, people who became illegally rich and nevertheless show off their wealth by exhibiting luxurious jewellery. Though he is and remains a criminal and the police is constantly after him, the choice of his victims earned him the sympathy of the honest people³².

3.1.2 Joker

Joker is the protagonist of *Persona 5* who lives a double life. He is a traditional Japanese student who attends his daily classes and lives a normal life in a contemporary Tokyo setting. When false charges pressed against him forced him to leave his hometown to live with a relative in the attic called "Café Leblanc", he decides to infiltrate Palaces and reform society. The young student becomes Joker and later the leader of the Phantom Thieves, the vigilante group who tries to change the world by stealing the heart of corrupt adults.

³² Such is the case in the story called *Herlock Sholmès arrive trop tard*. In that chapter, Nelly, who Arsène Lupin initially met on his first adventure, becomes his accomplice. (*Herlock Sholmès arrive trop tard*, 1907: 239)

His personality is left to the players' discretion: we can decide how to respond in specific situations (interactive cutscenes and secondary quests are examples), what activities to do after school and who to interact with.

Aesthetically speaking, Joker is depicted as a masked criminal wearing a black shirt, a black tailcoat and red gloves to match his attire. In his thesis, Da Silva analysed the symbolism of Joker's outfit and according to him: "[Joker wears red because it is a symbol for passion, representing his determination to see his goals come to fruition. Comically enough, his red gloves harken to the expression 'to be caught red-handed' as the plot of the game begins with Joker's arrest]" (Da Silva 2018: 30-34).

3.1.3 *Arsène*

Arsène is Joker's Persona and the first summon available at the beginning of the game. This persona reflects Joker's burning passion and true self, the one that seeks justice. Physically, **Arsène** is depicted as a demon dressed as a dandy from the early 2000s. He is dressed in red and has dark wings, which, according to the game's character designer, represents the idea that as a group: "thie[ves are] free from moral obligations, [can] do whatever [they] like and [can] go where common people usually [cannot]" (Da Silva 2018: 34).

3.1.4 *How far Joker, Arsène and Arsène Lupin are similar?*

The depictions of Joker and **Arsène** are clearly indicating that *Persona 5* makes explicit references to the famous fictional character created by Maurice Leblanc. Joker and **Arsène** share many common psychological features such as a self-made sense of justice where the villains must be punished without violence together with a sheer determination to achieve their goal. Their unmistakable charisma draws people's sympathy towards them, which will prove helpful at some point in the game. For example, while the Phantom Thieves are planning their first heist, they manage, through their charisma, to convince an arms dealer, Munehisa Iwai, to provide them with the weaponry they need.

The description of their physical verisimilitudes allows us to decide which intertextual device links *Persona 5* with on the one hand, the figure of Arsène Lupin, and on the other hand, his myth.

Therefore, our analysis of the intertextual relationship will be divided into two sections

When it comes to analysing which intertextual device links *Persona 5* with the figure of Arsène Lupin, it is obvious that intertextuality is achieved by means of allusions, an implicit form of Copresence.

When it comes to analysing which intertextual device links *Persona 5* with the myth of Arsène Lupin, I find that intertextuality is achieved rather by means of Imitation, i.e. is one possible form of Derivation

3.2 INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIP BY MEANS OF COPRESENCE: (PARODIC)-ALLUSIONS TO ARSÈNE LUPIN

According to Camarero, allusions are more vague than references and citations and are lost on an uneducated player/reader. They only leave hints to identify the initial text.

Despite the esoteric aspect of allusions, it is this device which the developers of *Persona 5* have chosen to, in my opinion; achieve intertextuality when it comes to the figures of **Arsène** and Joker.

The first allusion I would like to comment upon is the physical representation of the three characters (Joker **Arsène** and Arsène Lupin). Comically enough, the three characters share the same kind of outfit revealing their ideological and moral values. With their extravagant dandyism, the three characters allegorically incarnate the anarchists of the early 20th century who wanted to overthrow what they considered to be a corrupt regime and reform society.

As an alternative to Arsène Lupin's monocle, Joker wears a white mask that covers his eyes. His hair hides most of his forehead, evoking Arsène Lupin's black top hat. Joker's tailcoat hints at Lupin's black cape. As to **Arsène**, his red outfit is synonymous of: "danger and crime" (Da Silva 2018: 34), and refers to the dangerous situations Lupin's puts himself into, whereas **Arsène**'s black wings are a clear allusion to Arsène Lupin's cape.

Joker shares more than physical similarities with Arsène Lupin. His state of mind also bears unmistakable similarities with that of Arsène Lupin.

Joker and Arsène Lupin are basically non-violent characters (Maugarlonne 2001: 91). For Arsène Lupin, this draws the sympathy of his contemporaries. For Joker, his insistence of non-violent actions wins him over the trust of some of the people he meets during his journey, some of whom will even eventually join The Phantom Thieves.

Joker and the Phantom Thieves are out to expose the villains' they are confronted with whereas Arsène Lupin robs people he believes are corrupt and "white-collar" criminals. Both want, to some extent, to reform society, or at least, purge it from its villains.

Both are ambivalent characters. Before he becomes Joker, the protagonist is an ordinary Japanese student whose chivalry lands into trouble (he got falsely accused of aggravated

assault, forced to move to another town, etc.) until he becomes Joker and the leader of The Phantom Thieves. Arsène Lupin is also an ambivalent character: the way he is dressed suggests that he is a member of the aristocracy (or at least of the upper-bourgeoisie) but his actions and his claims hint that he is some kind of anarchist, anxious to expose and punish by robbing the members of a corrupt establishment.

So far, we have seen that Joker and **Arsène** intertextually refer to Arsène Lupin with their physical depiction and pointed out that the three characters share psychological traits. Moreover, they also share moral values that guide them throughout their journey and pave the way their life will take. Still using allusions to refer to Arsène Lupin's figure, the developers of *Persona 5* incorporated the latter's psychology and morals in order to create the main protagonist and the Persona **Arsène** as well as use them to develop their own story and their evolution.

The last allusion to Arsène Lupin that I would like to highlight is the *modus operandi* that both Arsène Lupin and Joker share. As I have mentioned, Lupin loves making a challenge of his burglaries, and thus would not hesitate to pull tricks such as giving his enemies some advance warning that he is going to rob them. If we go back to the first story Lupin appeared in, the crew receive a phone call claiming that Arsène Lupin was on board. As suspicion grows towards another presumed suspect (Rozaine), he manages to steal some diamonds, pearls and necklaces that were hidden in the ship, though he tricked every single passenger of the boat (LeBlanc 1905: 11).

The same applies to Joker and the Phantom Thieves, as their plan consists in "hiding in plain sight". As they infiltrate their enemies' Palace without raising suspicion, find the treasure, and prepare an escape route, they finalize their mission by sending a calling card to the said enemy (the Physical Education teacher for example) in order to materialize the treasure inside the palace and steal it. This calling card takes various forms: a private letter, a public tract or even a video that is broadcasted across the whole country (such is the case with their antepenultimate villain, the candidate for the elections). The calling card consists in explicitly accusing the villain whose heart must change of the wrong deeds he has committed as well as saying that "the Phantom Thieves will steal their treasure." The major inconvenience with this method is that it will raise the palace's level of alert to the maximum. Because of that, they have to avoid any form of contact with the shadows that patrol in the palace to keep the treasure safe, and bet on their discretion to accomplish their goal.

Needless to dwell any further on Joker's and Lupin's operating procedures. We can, once again, definitely highlight a clear parallelism between the characters. The way the Phantom Thieves operate always complicates but never jeopardises the achievement of their goals. If an educated player infiltrates Kamoshida's palace and sees the calling card the villain receives, he will definitely make the link between Arsène Lupin's traditional method of warning his victims and The Phantom Thieves' process of "calling cards". In others words, the educated player can make the links between the two texts thanks to the similarities conveyed by the many allusions, i.e. implicit intertextual relationship.

To sum up this section, it is thanks to the many allusions to Arsène Lupin that the developers have managed to integrate the character of Arsène Lupin through both the figure of Joker and **Arsène** into their game *Persona 5*.

Inserting the tropes of the gentleman-thief also has allowed the developers to meet a twofold "objective". They were able to create a universe, characters and plot elements that are entirely original while mobilizing pre-existing tropes in their creation; demonstrating that: "[the defining traits of a pre-existing character or literary figure would inspire authors and developers to integrate them in their own creations]" (Da Silva 2018: 32). Though these allusions might (or might not) be clear to everybody, an educated player will definitely perceive the often esoterically conceived similarities, whether they are physical or not, between Arsène Lupin, Joker and **Arsène**.

3.3 INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIP BY MEANS OF DERIVATION: IMITATION OF ARSÈNE LUPIN

In the previous section, we dealt with the implicit relations of copresence, more precisely allusions to the figure of Arsène Lupin that we identified in *Persona 5*.

We can now move on to focus on derivation, which is present in *Persona 5*.

As defined earlier in this work, derivation refers to the “[transformation] or imitation of the style of a usually canonical text” (Camarero 2008: 33).

In the study of the myth of Arsène Lupin, I have not been able to identify any kind of transformation. I will therefore concentrate on the imitation aspects of derivation.

If we follow Camarero’s definition of imitation as: “the use of [...] stylistic elements of a given author [...] in the production of a completely different text” (Camarero 2008: 34-35), I would argue that the developers of *Persona 5* achieved intertextuality by means of imitation. In other words, the developers imitated LeBlanc’s canonical style of Arsène Lupin to construct plot elements of *Persona 5*. This is particularly obvious if we read *L’Arrestation d’Arsène Lupin* and *L’Evasion d’Arsène Lupin*.

If I insist on LeBlanc’s literary canon, it is because the myth of Arsène Lupin has created such an infatuation since it became a Broadway hit that a whole field of studies became and still is dedicated to Lupin’s adventures to such an extent that the neologism lupinology was coined to define these studies. The object of lupinology is in part to trace the gentleman-thief’s biography through the different stories in which Arsène Lupin is the main character and bring forward the many inadequacies in LeBlanc’s literary work.

As mentioned before, Arsène Lupin’s legacy begins in *The Arrest of Arsène Lupin* where he fools the passengers of the boat before getting eventually arrested. Ironically (or not!), Joker’s journey begins in the exact same way: after an introduction *in medias res*, Joker is arrested before getting interrogated by prosecutor Sae Nijima. During this interrogation, he will try to persuade the prosecutor of his innocence and indicate her that all of the events that occurred in Tokyo are part of a scheme. As the story progresses, he eventually convinces her of his innocence and befriends her. This will allow him to escape the same way Arsène Lupin’s escape in the next story.

At one moment, in *L'Evasion d'Arsène Lupin*, Arsène Lupin hires a man called “Baudru Desiree” for the simple reason that they share physical similarities. When Lupin gets arrested and sent to prison, he goes on a diet to make his resemblance to Desiree as complete as possible. This enables him to fool the vigils and escape prison while Desiree remains in jail and is eventually tried instead of Arsène Lupin.³³

This very scenario has been re-exploited by the developers of *Persona 5* and adapted to the plot of the video game. As Joker tells prosecutor Sae Nijima about the events that led to his arrest, she begins to realise he may be innocent of the crimes he is accused of. Eventually, he asks her to trust him and let him as he asks her to show a former/temporary member of the Phantom Thieves a trapped mobile phone. This former member proves to be no one else than Goro Akechi, the traitor set a trap on Joker during the penultimate infiltration (in the Casino of Jealousy, Sae’s Palace) and the illegitimate son of Masayoshi Shido (the main villain). After offering Joker to the police on a silver plate, Goro Akechi is hired by his father to kill Joker. As Sae Nijima leaves the interrogation room, she encounters Goro Akechi, who is suspiciously heading in the direction she came from. As she fears the worst for Joker, she decides to trust Joker and shows the phone to Goro, who does not suspect what would happen next. As Goro enters the room and taunts Joker for losing the game, he takes his gun out, pulls the trigger and leaves the room, with a strange yet familiar feeling.

What happened is that Joker used the Metaverse and a decoy that had been set up in advance to lure Goro into killing a fake cognition of Joker. In other words, Joker never died in the interrogation room, Akechi killed a decoy that allowed Joker to escape and hide during the end of the investigation and the unfolding of Masayoshi’s endeavours to overthrow the government and become Prime Minister.

Concretely, *Persona 5* imitates the story of Arsène Lupin to create its own universe. By means of derivation, the developers imitated the literary canon and subverted it with contemporary elements in order to on the one hand fuel the plot of their game to make it original and on the other hand to make the story and myth of Arsène Lupin accessible to a vast audience that might never have heard of him before.

³³ LeBlanc, Maurice. *L'évasion D'Arsène Lupin* (p.69-76)

3.4 INTERTEXTUAL RELATIONSHIP TO ARSÈNE LUPIN: CONCLUSION OF THE STRATEGIES DEPLOYED

This section has examined the different types of intertextual relationships *Persona 5* presented through the figure of Joker and **Arsène**. Though their characterization and depiction refers to allusions, the way they recreate the adventures of Arsène Lupin in a contemporary and defamiliarized method highlights the deployment of imitation.

These methods also suggest that the developers were aware of the cultural ideologies of their target audience and thus tried to make their product palatable to the said audience by deploying intertextual devices referring to a figure that is locally or transnationally known, i.e. allowing the cultural-transduction process to operate, which we will further examine in the next chapter.

4 THE PHANTOM THIEVES: THE CULTURAL INFLUENCES OF FOREIGN FOLKLORE.

Though we have discussed the importance of Arsène Lupin's intertextual relationship in *Persona 5*'s leitmotiv, there is another aspect that should be discussed. In my opinion, the Personas that most of the Phantom Thieves exhibit, are not only reflections of themselves: they are also characters that are drawn, just like Arsène Lupin, from foreign folklore.

Because the comparison between the members of the Phantom Thieves and their respective Personas has already been exhaustively developed in another work, my purpose here is twofold. I intend to demonstrate in this section in how far most of The Phantom Thieves' Personas are intertextually connected to an entire set of discourse that is mainly non-Japanese. In addition, I also plan to put forward in the next chapter how the fact of mobilizing these tropes while incorporating others that refer to Japanese culture, allows the cultural-transduction process to operate.

To make my first point, I will briefly mention the Personas' names that are drawn from Japanese-foreign folklore, link it to the original/ literary character, and show which intertextual device is deployed.

The first member that joins the Phantom Thieves is Ryuji Sakamoto, who eventually awakens his Persona **Captain Kidd** in Kamoshida's Palace. His Persona is based on the figure of Captain Kidd, a notorious Scottish pirate who sailed and roamed across the Atlantic in the 17th century.

The second member, Morgana, already has a Persona when he meets Joker in the Metaverse. His Persona is called **Zorro** and is a clear allusion to Johnston McCulley's fictional character set in the Spanish California for the first time in *The Curse of Capistrano* 1919, Zorro. Dressed as a masked and caped character fighting with a rapier, the Persona embodies the trope of Zorro starting from his outfit to the famous "Z" trademark he carves on the body of his adversaries once they are defeated, as a means to mock them.

The third character, Ann Takamaki, awakens her Persona, **Carmen** in the castle of Lust after rejecting Kamoshida's sexual advances and calling him names. Not so surprisingly, **Carmen** draws inspiration from *Carmen* the gipsy in Prosper Merimee's eponymous novel and further popularized in Georges Bizet's opera.

The fourth character that gets involved with the Phantom Thieves is the only one whose Persona originates from local Japanese culture. As he confronts Madarame in his Palace, Yusuke Kitagawa awakens his persona, **Goemon**. His persona is based on the real figure of Goemon Ishikawa, a Japanese outlaw that lived under Toyotomi's shogunate and whose story tale was embellished by popular Japanese fiction (he was known to steal from the rich and give to the poor for example).

The fifth character, Makoto Nijima, awakens her Persona during Kaneshiro's "heist". Her Persona **Johanna** is, in fact, an esoteric allusion to a supposedly historical figure, Pope Joan. Though this figure is supposed to have lived in the 9th century in England, no proof can testify of the veracity of her existence.

The sixth character, Futaba Sakura, awakens her Persona during the infiltration of her own Palace, **The Necronomicon**. This Persona takes the shape of a flying saucer, but we should highlight that the Necronomicon is in fact an allusion to H.P. Lovecraft's magical grimoire supposed to offer descriptions of Lovecraftian mythological creatures as well as incantations to summon the Old Gods (Lovecraft: 1924).

Haru Okumura, who is coincidentally the seventh individual that joins the Phantom Thieves, awakens her Persona during the "heist" on her father. As she rips off her mask, a creature dressed like a "lady" from "The Second Empire" appears, claiming to be **Milady**. As European, we recognise Milady, Richelieu's venomous female spy from Alexander Dumas' *The Three Musketeers*.

We also have to mention Goro's Akechi's Persona. He is one of the villains who plotted against the Phantom Thieves. After blackmailing the Phantom Thieves into infiltrating a Palace (Sae's Palace) one last time, he sells his teammates and eventually tries to assassinate Joker after his interrogation by prosecutor Sae. As he had helped the Phantom Thieves before his betrayal, he showed that he had already awakened a Persona, **Robin Hood**, which refers to the English prince of thieves who "robbed the rich to give to the poor."

With the concept theorized in our theoretical frame, we could suggest that the developers were aware of the vast set of discourse available and decided to incorporate them into their universe, by means of implicit intertextual relationship, i.e. allusions, such as it was the case with Arsène Lupin. By referring to the non-Japanese folklore and incorporating it in *Persona 5*, the developers connected their universe to an infinite set of discourse as well as

they created their own universe. This incorporation of major non-Japanese tropes is essential to carry out the cultural-transduction process, which we will be demonstrated in the next subchapter.

5 A REFERENCE TO THE PICARESQUE TRADITION

The last intertextual relationship that we could examine is the trope of the picaresque novel and the figure of the pizaro. Indeed, an explicit reference to this genre is made by Igor when he tells Joker that he is a “hero figure” from this genre. As Joker is drawn into the Velvet Room, Igor describes the bonds Joker recently created throughout the game:

“The bonds that you have reeled in are quite intriguing... In other words, they all have been unfairly labelled by society and are standing up against such fates. [...] Have you noticed? They seem to have influenced you. *chuckle* These picaresque dissidents of society... Deepen your bonds with them.” (*Persona 5*: 2016)

Traditionally, the picaresque novella is classified as a “sous-genre” that puts emphasis on the story of an antihero, usually coming from the lower classes of society. As a result, these characters have to face all the adversities in their endeavours to rise up in society and get rid of their status of underdogs. In addition to that, they are constantly up against pitfalls and unfortunate events; events for which they are not responsible but which constantly disrupt their lives.

The genre was first introduced by the anonymously written *La Vida de Lazarillo de Tórmes*, even though it is the second part that gave fame to the picaresque.

To make a long story short, *La Vida de Lazarillo de Tórmes* relates the fictional life of a Spanish young boy called Lázaro. As his family lives in poverty and cannot afford to feed everyone, he leaves the family domain to try to live a better life (as well as to have a full stomach). Throughout his journey, he will serve different “masters” or “guides” who all make his life worse and worse instead of better. As Lázaro depends on his guides for shelter and food, he is subject to any form of abuse from them, which is highlighted with his first guide, a blind beggar who physically punishes Lázaro. Moreover, as Lázaro tries to survive with different guides, he can see the many hypocritical faces of the people he shares his life with. Because of the behaviour of some of his guides, Lázaro has to resort to malicious tricks in order to fulfil his desire, have a full stomach; hunger is an omnipresent theme, a leitmotiv associated with Lázaro being a poor underdog. To illustrate Lázaro’s slyness, he tricks his second guide and steals the key from his second guide in order to open a lock that hides food.

As hunger was gnawing at his stomach, he did not hesitate to hide the key in his mouth in order to not be caught red-handed and be punished more severely than he has previously been.

As Lazarillo wanders from guide to guide, he eventually climbs some steps in the social ladder. However, misfortune never stops and his life remains very much what is used to be, no matter what he does.³⁴ Though he is aware of the situation, he seems not to mind given that he finally has food on his plate and goes on with his life.

Needless to say, this story puts forward the fact that picaros lead a life ruled, almost determined, by their social origins and surroundings. They, therefore, have to rely on hypocritical figures that publicly show their good face while hiding a dark side they only express in private. No matter how hard the picaros may try to change their social status; misfortune is always lurking around the corner. Destiny seems to have condemned them to a life of physical misery and unhappiness.

At first glance, the tropes and characteristics of the picaresque novella and the figure of the picaro correspond to a large extent to the Phantom Thieves' journey and characters. After further analysis, I would argue that it is definitely the case and that the developers of *Persona 5* intended to create a video game whose universe suggests picaresque settings, both in the plot itself and the characters. With such a claim, we can identify the intertextual relationship made with the picaresque tradition and the figure of the picaro.

If we had to decode which intertextual device was deployed, I would argue that there is a direct reference to the genre originating from Spain. Igor, the master of the Velvet Room tells Joker that he is a hero from a picaresque tale and that the bonds he created with his teammates are based on the same premises: every single individual of the Phantom Thieves is a picaro; an outcast of society whose social ascension is made impossible because of the status they are labelled with. In addition to that, all of them have been subjected to a form of abuse from a higher authority figure.

According to Camarero, references: "provide ways to reach the original text without actually reproducing it; our task is to insert the content of the reference into the text." Such a claim applies to *Persona 5* when Igor describes Joker's relationships with his gang of vigilantes and points out to the picaresque tradition.

³⁴ His wife has an affair with the pastor.

These premises seem to form the basis of the Phantom Thieves' association. So does the progression of the plot. However, we need to elaborate to what extent *Persona 5* takes some of the tropes of the picaresque tradition and figure of the pizaro and applies them in the video game. Moreover, we could highlight why connecting their game to the picaresque tradition allowed the developers to comment both on social pressures and society itself.

In his *Curriculum Vitae del Pizaro*, Jesús Cañedo categorised important traits, settings and events that characterise the picaresque tradition as well as the figure of the pizaro. Coincidentally, seven of them apply to *Persona 5*.

The first concept is called *la casualidad* (fate, coincidence) and designates what occurs to a pizaro without him being responsible for the events; it can be associated with the concept of fate and misfortune (Cañedo 1966: 1-3). As the pizaros journey through life, a series of unfortunate events will occur and put them in delicate situations. Both the Phantom Thieves and Lázaro are subjected to events upon which they have no grasp. Lázaro constantly navigates between different guides only to find himself worse off and more miserable than before. Similarly, The Phantom Thieves are always subjected to a new form of threat that prevents them from carrying out their plans to reform society. For example, as soon as they have changed Kamoshida's heart, The Phantom Thieves get themselves involved into a wider scheme that is in fact a gamble between two entities: the demiurge (representing Sins and humans' darkest side) and the master of the Velvet Room (representing mankind's faith). The gamble involved Joker being the loser or the winner in an attempt to reject the social order and reform society, which ultimately happens thanks to the Phantom Thieves' efforts. As we see, the concept of fate definitely applies to *Persona 5*

The second concept deals with the *ingenio* (ingenuity, the inventiveness) and refers to the pizaros' craftiness, their effects and their results (Cañedo 1966: 1-3). As Lázaro navigates between his guides, he ceaselessly resorts to cunning methods to either get food or money (to get food.) The same applies in *Persona 5*, though the reasons they deploy insidious stratagems are far from being the same. Lázaro needs to be cunning in order to be able to fill his stomach and stay alive whereas the Phantom Thieves elaborate plans to infiltrate Palaces and change the hearts of corrupt villains.

The third concept is related to the pizaro's *malos tratos* (mistreatment). Cañedo designates this mistreatment as the pains, both physical and psychological, inflicted by others on the pizaro, whether they consist in corporal punishment, harsh and belittling words,

despicable deeds, or humiliating treatments (Cañedo 1966: 1-3). Throughout the plot of *La Vida de Lazarillo de Tórmes*, Lázaro is a victim to various forms of abuse: he is physically and verbally punished by his first two masters because he failed to bring money to the former and tried to steal food from the latter. This key parameter (for lack of a better word) of the picaresque trope is a feature shared by all the members of the Phantom Thieves.

Each member of the Phantom Thieves has suffered some form of abuse from a figure who had a higher degree of authority (student vs. teacher, slave vs. master, daughter vs. father, etc.) Joker himself has been falsely charged with aggravated assault for protecting a woman from sexual abuse. Ryuji has been physically and psychologically abused by Kamoshida, just like Ann got sexually harassed by their Physical Education teacher. Yusuke has developed a Stockholm syndrome after living with Madarame, who had let his mother die before adopting and eventually abusing him. Makoto suffers from the loss of her father and from the huge social expectations her sister (Prosecutor Sae) imposes on her. Futaba has been made unfairly guilty of her mother's death because she got falsely accused after Shido's agents read her a forged suicide letter in which her mother implied that her daughter was responsible for her psychoses and subsequent death. Last but not the least; Haru is forced to accept her arranged marriage to someone she does not love in order to preserve her father's wealth. The sole character that does not experience any form of abuse is Morgana. He is a particular character and as such, will not be discussed.

The fourth concept deals with *mejoría*, (improvement) designating the picaro's state of mind and the constant changes he goes through during his/her adventures (Cañedo 1966: 1-3). Every time Lázaro falls from one precarious and disagreeable situation to another, he is eventually rewarded (by being given food for example), and feels momentarily better, less desperate.

Similarly, The Phantom Thieves are deeply of the harmful consequences should their attempt at stealing the treasure (exposing the villains). Kamoshida might expel the students, Madarame might press charges against them and their very lives might be jeopardized by Kaneshiro's blackmail. After they have reached their goals, however, and have succeeded in purging society of its corrupt and envious, wrathful, greedy, gluttonous, prideful, lust-driven, slothful villains, they stage some kind of celebration party in order to stress out before their next heist.

The fifth concept deals with the picaro's *obediencia* (obedience) and refers to the necessary submission of the picaro to their guides' directions. Just like the villains in *Persona 5*, incarnate an obvious and uncompromising form of authority, the picaro is totally dependent on has no other choice than to comply with the authority of his guides (Cañedo 1966: 1-3) if he wants to avoid punishment and ensure his own survival.

Similarly, before becoming members of The Phantom Thieves, Ryuji, Ann, etc. are naturally submitted to their masters and thoroughly dependent on them to survive.

The sixth concept, the *satisfactoria* (satisfactory), refers to the favourable opportunities in which the characters momentarily experience (Cañedo 1966: 1-3). Because Lázaro experiences *mejorías* (improvements) in his life throughout his journey, he finds himself in favourable situations and enjoys the "pleasurable excitement" of a newly acquired, though momentary satisfaction. In *Persona 5*, as the characters awaken their Personas, they feel that their problems can be solved, that their lives will be dramatically improved. Their consequently acquired new powers will in addition help them protect those that might be wronged by the corrupt villains in the future.

The seventh and last concept is the picaro's *voluntad* (free will, wishes) the decisions deliberately made and later acted upon by the picaro (Cañedo 1966: 1-3). In spite of the possibly harmful consequences, the picaro nevertheless makes the decision to oppose his guide and trick him in order to reach his goal

Similarly, The Phantom Thieves' decision to break their restraints and get free from their shackles, is not riskless, and might jeopardize an already ominous predicament.

As we see, *Persona 5* borrows freely from the picaresque tradition. Indeed, the characteristics of the picaresque antihero apply to the lives and to the characters of the game. The developers of *Persona 5* have to some extent reinterpreted the myth of the picaresque tradition, in which the adventures of a marginal individual towards whom our sympathy is drawn (the picaro) manages to convince the reader that the society in which he lives needs reforming. Similarly, the Phantom Thieves

The wrongs suffered by the Phantom Thieves draws the readers/players' sympathy and justifies their endeavours to expose the villains and reform a society that tolerates their very existence.

We could illustrate that idea if we compared a passage of *la Vida de Lazarillo de Tórmes* and *Persona 5*. Lázaro's third guide exemplifies the hypocrisy of the society in which they live. Though he is dressed as a man of a higher status, we soon realize, with Lázaro, that the hidalgo lives in the same precarious situation as himself. Dressing about above his status is the only way he found to avoid some form of marginalization

In *Persona 5*, the villains who seem to behave appropriately in public are in fact abusive and corrupt individuals that hide their true faces. The members of the Phantom Thieves are considered by the media and police as criminals, and thus marginalized. However, because they can infiltrate Palaces through the Metaverse, they are able to see the allegorical representation of what the villains truly are, as the villains' Palaces and shadows reflect their interpretation of reality.

To summarize, *Persona 5* incorporates the trope of the picaresque novella by means of reference to first draw the attention of the player to the "sous-genre". After introducing the idea of the picaresque, the player is invited to play the game as if it was a retelling of a picaresque tale, where the emphasis lies on the unfair labels society puts on marginal people, once again as a means to criticise society in general and Japanese society in particular as well as to justify its need to reform it.

CHAPTER IV

THE FUNCTIONAL CAPACITY OF
INTERTEXTUALITY: BRIEF ARGUMENT

1 INTERTEXTUALITY: THE CULTURAL-TRANSDUCTION PROCESS

This chapter will not be as detailed as the previous ones, and should rather have been a section. My purpose here is not to study the intertextual devices deployed and demonstrate how far the game modulates the tropes. The aim of this section is rather to discuss how deploying intertextual devices allowed the developers of *Persona 5* to meet their audiences' expectations, ideologies and cultural background as well as closing the cultural gap while preserving Japanese settings.

As discussed in the theoretical frame, intertextuality can represent a whole spectrum of definitions and strategies. It can either refer to the interpretative practice an audience exercises by mobilising their cultural background, or a textual strategy deployed by authors or developers in order to incorporate a whole set of discourse into their texts/games. We have discussed in the previous chapter that the developers have achieved different types of intertextual relationships by means of copresence and derivation in order to do two things. The first was to decode the type of strategy that was deployed, analyse the text or discourse that was used as material and determine how far the text modified it to comment on the Japanese youth issues and culture.

The second was to draw the attention to one last aspect of intertextuality, which has also been raised many times throughout this work, i.e. the cultural-transduction process; process carried out by the different types of intertextuality (such as allusions, references, etc.) present in *Persona 5*.

So far, we have seen that the developers mainly used tropes from foreign, non-Japanese discourse and incorporated them into *Persona 5*. Some of the tropes we have highlighted were dealing with the myth of Arsène Lupin and the respective Personas the Phantom Thieves exhibit. As we demonstrated that most of them were intertextually connected (by means of allusion for example) to literary and historical figures, we mentioned their potential to contribute to the cultural-transduction process.

As discussed above, the definition of cultural-transduction entails a process through which a text is modified in order to comply with a cultural market that differs from the original market (Uribe-Jongbloed et al. 2016: 161). This process allows connections with other texts (or discourse) and prevents the public from being repelled by the product, because: “they [cannot make any connexion whatsoever with any other discourse]” (Rohn: 2011).

By incorporating the tropes of various cultures that are intertextually connected to the universe of the game, the developers showed that they were aware of the cultural disparity on the global market and thus had to deploy stratagems to prevent any form of “content lacunae”; the impossibility to come to terms with a product for the above mentioned reason. If players pay attention to the hints the developers integrated, they see that some elements of the game match their own cultural background, and therefore enjoy the game as well as the intertextual pleasure derived from it. According to Sanders, quoted in Uribe-Jongbloed et al., the intertextual pleasure can be defined as: “the [...] pleasurable aspects of reading into [discourse] in their intertextual and allusive relationship with other texts, tracing and activating the networks of association” (Sanders 2006: 7).

This suggests, if we had to refer to our theoretical frame, that the developers were aware of the interpretative dimension of intertextuality, and thus had to deploy the appropriate intertextual stratagems. Katsura Hashino, one of the developers of *Persona 5*, confirmed this idea in one of his interviews by saying that the developing team: “could feel what the fans were expecting from [them], and believing in what [they] could achieve, [they] really didn’t want to let them down. [They] wanted to lay out the content that the fans were expecting.”³⁵

As the members of the Phantom Thieves awaken their Persona (or summon them), we see that the Personas all share a common feature: they are rogue-like figure originating from disparate backgrounds. Their origin ranges from American literature, with H.P. Lovecraft’s cursed book (the *Necronomicon*) to the French myth of Arsène Lupin. However, one of the members of the Phantom Thieves, Yusuke Kitagawa, exhibits a Persona, which is the only Japanese one.

³⁵ The extract is Lewis’ translation of an interview with Katsura Hashino and 4Gamer.

The aim of the cultural-transduction process the developers had to carry out is to mark their product with the appropriate elements so that it becomes palatable to all markets. However, the idea of preserving an element that refers to Japanese tradition only plants an argument. Though *Persona 5* needs to adapt to its target audience, it does not mean that the game has to be “de-Japonised”.³⁶

As far as all the Phantom Thieves’ Personas are intertextually connected to a non-Japanese figure by means of allusions, Yusuke’s Persona, **Goemon** is based on a traditional, romanticised rogue that lived in the 16th century Japan. In addition to that, most of the settings of *Persona 5* are based on Tokyo’s genuine typography:



(Figure 6: *Persona 5*’s Yongenjaya Station compared to Tokyo’s Sangenjaya Station³⁷.)

My point here is that even though the tropes of the Personas (the summons) analysed in the previous chapters allude to characters that are not Japanese-based, we can still clearly see that the developers of *Persona 5* wanted to keep their game a Japanese tale. In other words, as we can identify the non-Japanese tropes that have been deployed in order to export their game into larger foreign markets, the setting is definitely Japanese. The ubiquity of Japanese elements shows the developers insistence to show that cultural-transduction works both ways: the product has to be palatable to a large audience and thus requires the appropriate intertextual connections, but the many typically Japanese details do take the players on a tour of a defamiliarized Tokyo and on a survey of important aspects of Japanese culture.

³⁶ Purge the Japanese product of its Japanese settings for example.

³⁷ Retrieved from google.

The developers, then, showed that they were well aware of the capital lacuna and thus thought of all the devices that should be deployed in order to make their product an exquisite masterpiece that could be inserted in the market as well as make intertextual connexions to a set of discourse that is close to every individual, allowing the audience to make connections between the product, themselves, and a set of discourse.

CONCLUSION

As a European white-male, my cultural background does not allow me to have an exhaustive and unbiased grasp of what a Japanese video game actually is. Given the cultural differences, I have felt compelled to try to highlight only some specific traits of a Japanese video game under the lens of scientific and literary theories and contemporary research.

At first, video games were instrumentalized, by which I mean that video games were studied for their potentially beneficial aspects only (for example: their beneficial aspects in psychology, sports, arithmetic, etc.).

Later, they were studied to the point of colonisation, namely under the lens of exclusively literary theories, which led to fierce debates between narratologists and ludologists.

Video games have now become worthy objects of scientific research, thanks to the many elements that compose them. Considered as pastimes, persuasive narratives and cultural artefacts, research on and around them never stops, neologisms appear and theories are developed.

Ironically, these theories could at some point originate from another field, as in the case for intertextuality. As intertextuality proved to be a literary tool, a textual strategy and an interpretative practice, this work endeavoured to demonstrate what kind of intertextual devices were deployed in *Persona 5* and to show in how far the developers transformed the original text (or discourse) to create the game's universe, comment on society, and allow the cultural-transduction process to operate. Thanks to the definitions provided, we have examined in this case study that *Persona 5* was connected to an almost infinite set of discourse and analysed a few, among which some leitmotifs and satires were tacitly conveyed.

By making references to Christian iconography as the first intertextual connection analysed, we have highlighted how *Persona 5* incorporated the tropes through the Palaces as a means to warn people living a life ruled by inappropriate behaviour. In addition to that, the developers also commented on a society built on social norms and social expectations and eventually ostracized those who did not find their place in it.

This idea of place to belong was also an idea we examined through the allusions to Jung's theories and concepts of mask, psychology and social interactions. With the allusion to the persona, we showed that the developers wanted to discuss the difficulty of having to cope

with social expectations and norms while retaining the possibility to express one's intimate self.

As the Thieves decide to reject the corrupt establishment that ostracises those who do not conform and make up their minds to rebel against the corrupt adults, they rip off their masks, and eventually awaken their Personas. In addition to Jung's theories of masks, we have also drawn the attention to how the game alluded to the concept of shadows by depicting defamiliarized and grotesque projections of embodied vices. These depictions served the purpose to highlight those who failed to confront their deepest fears, their deepest selves and thus led a life ruled by their amoral behaviour.

After introducing the Jungian theories, we analysed the allusions to Arsène Lupin, whose figure is reinterpreted through Joker's and **Arsène's** physical appearance, psychological traits and *modus operandi*. Recreating the trope of Arsène Lupin allowed the developers to modernise the myth of the "gentleman-thief". In addition to that, the developers of *Persona 5*, by means of imitation, inserted the first stories of Arsène Lupin in the plot of the game in order to create its own universe, demonstrating their creative appropriation and their capacity to develop the game and adapt it to pre-existing tropes.

Arsène was not the only Persona who was intertextually connected to another set of discourse; all the Personas were connected to historical or literary figures, though their characterization was not the point I wanted to make. I wanted to draw the attention to the fact that they were intertextually connected to a mainly non-Japanese based background by means of allusion to highlight the cultural-transduction process that was carried out through them.

Before demonstrating the functional capacity of intertextuality, I emphasised that the narrative of *Persona 5* was also influenced by the picaresque tradition and the figure of the picaro. To that purpose, we analysed how the game made a direct reference to the genre by referring Joker's associate (and himself) as "heroes" from this literary genre, i.e. "picaresque dissidents". As we discussed how similar to the picaro Joker and his associates were, we have shown that how referring to the picaresque tradition was both a means to recreate and modernize the trope of the picaresque tale and to comment on society, as the picaro is able to see (and sometimes expose) the hypocrisy of people that normally behave in public and act like monsters in private.

In the final chapter of this work, I tried to demonstrate that, by alluding to disparate discourse, the developers wanted to make sure that their audiences would definitely be able to make a connection between the product and their own cultural codes and ideologies, allowing the cultural-transduction process to be carried out. This process allowed the developers to insert the game into a larger discourse. By making their games accessible to the cultural codes and ideologies of its potential buyers, the developers ensured the game's global attraction and eventual success.

With this work, I hope to have demonstrated that it was indeed possible to make a compromise between literature and video games, by studying some of the elements in *Persona 5*. I also hope to have provided examples of the different forms of intertextual relationships present in the video game *Persona 5* and to have drawn the attention of those who might wish to go deeper into the study of intertextuality in video games in general.

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APPENDIX I: GLOSSARY AND KEY DEFINITIONS

- **Beat'em all:** A Beat'em all is a type of action game where the player character must fight a large numbers of enemies in combat, with or without weapons.
- **Cognitive projection/existence:** existences projected by the host's interpretation of a real person or idea that appear in the palace. These existences can either be passive or be a threat to intruders.
- **JRPG:** a Japanese Role-Play Game
- **Mementos:** distortions created by the collective unconscious and their negative corrupt thoughts and emotions. These emotions hidden deep within their heart create a gigantic Palace shaped as a twisted version of the subway in Tokyo, where the trains are connected to an infinite web of tracks and where people look like shadows wearing masks
- **Palaces:** are isolated domains from the Metaverse and separated from the Mementos. They are the "physical" and "geographical" (given that it is a location) manifestations of strong negative or corrupt thoughts one person can have.
- **Persona (Summon):** Personas are entities that are the manifestation of one's true "personality". To awaken these entities, one must be dealing with frustration or a feeling of being taken advantage of. Once the user decides to rebel, the shadow will form a contract with the host and create a mask that has to be ripped off as a signature. Once the contract is sealed, the user can summon the Persona in the Metaverse at freewill.
- **The Metaverse Navigator:** An app that allows Persona wielders to enter the Metaverse
- **The Metaverse:** the Metaverse is a parallel universe where some actions can be taken without incidence on the 'actual/real' world. It is also more importantly the universe that is shaped and formed from the collective unconscious: some places look like their real counterpart, but most of them are personalized spaces cognitively overlaid into areas in real-life Tokyo.
- **The Velvet Room:** A peculiar room where the Protagonist is often dragged to discuss with Igor about the events that will soon unfold. It takes the shape of a cell.
- **Hikikomori (shut-in):** people who withdraw from society because they cannot socially interact and find a place to belong.
- **Cultural-transduction:** The processes through which a given text goes when being altered to suit a different cultural or national market from the one where it was originally conceived.
- **Procedural rhetoric:** the way video games create meaning by simulating real-world events or processes (such as consumerism).

- **Persona**: a Jungian concept that describes the mask people wear depending on specific contexts of interactions.
- **Shadows**: a Jungian concept that describes the negative and troublesome projections all individuals have inside.
- **The collective unconscious**: a Jungian concept that describes the common library of symbols that is available to all individuals once they interact with society.

APPENDIX II: SUMMARY OF THE PLOT OF **PERSONA 5**

1. The castle of lust falls

This section consists in a summary of *Persona 5*, for those who need to be guided. This summary will start after the Phantom Thieves have fled Kamoshida's Palace for the first time.

After fleeing from Kamoshida's Palace, the three protagonists decide to take actions: given that the teacher is wreaking havoc in the school while remaining untouched, they will try to steal the treasure in his palace in order to make him confess all the sexual abuses and physical violence he caused his students. For that purpose, they must infiltrate the Palace once more to discover where the treasure is planted and try to steal it. However, once inside, they find that another student has been dragged against her will in the Metaverse: Ann Takamaki, another soon-to-be partner in crime and protagonist. After awaking her Persona and keen to make the teacher pay for his part in a friend's suicide attempt, Ann joins the team (now a team of four with Joker, Ryuji, Ann and Morgana) in an attempt to fire the teacher at first, then to make him confess his crimes. Nevertheless, Kamoshida grows more and more suspicious of the students' actions to fire him (even though he is unconscious that he has a Palace and that they are infiltrating it after school) and thus tries to expel the students from Shujin Academy during the school assembly.

Before the due date, they have to steal the Palace's treasure to end the distortion in the teacher's heart and, to quote one of the game's Leitmotifs, 'Change his heart'. To that end, they need to do it stealthily, for if the shadows in the Palace recognized the true identity of the students, the unconscious would remember them and they would be then recognized in the real world: even though the cognitive existences do not affect their real counterparts, we have to bear in mind that Palaces and Mementos are shaped by the unconscious, so that have to avoid identity exposure during their infiltration. For that purpose, they will establish hideouts, code names (this is the reason why the main protagonist is almost always called Joker) and form a vigilante brigade called "The Phantom thieves" whose goal is to change the heart of corrupt adults and reform society.

Now that the Phantom thieves are set up, they launch a final infiltration into Kamoshida's Palace, whose shadow is waiting for them with his treasure, a crown. The shadow then morphs into his true demonic form: his twisted emotions overwhelm the shadow that becomes a gigantic demon called Asmodeus, which embodies the sin of Lust.



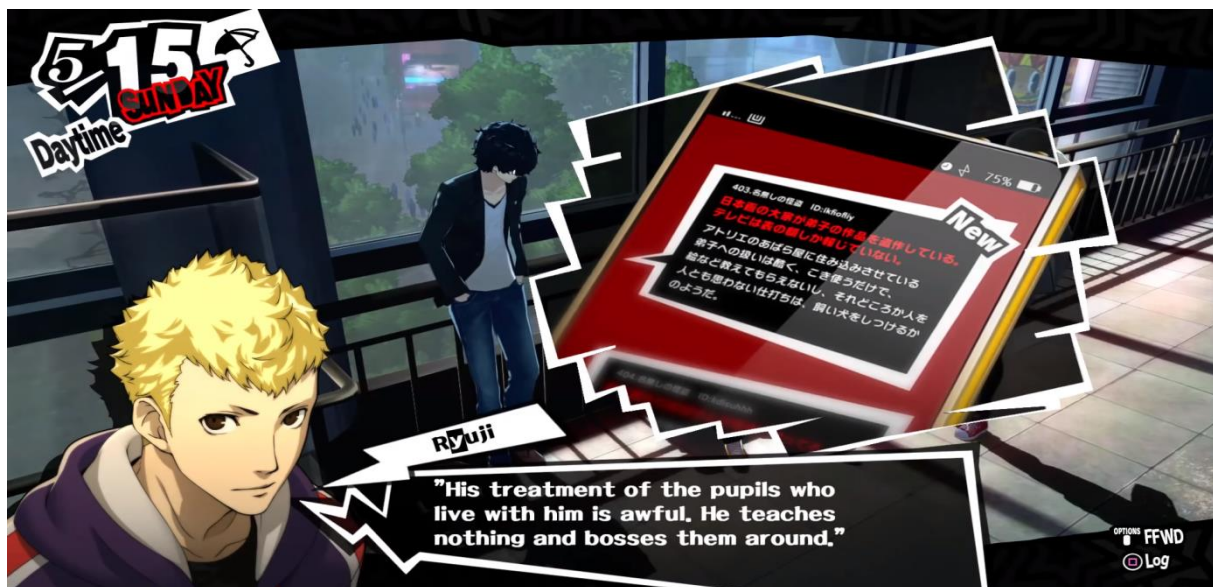
(Figure 8: The embodiment of Lust, Asmodeus)

After defeating the demon, Kamoshida's shadow, in an impetus of atonement, asks the Phantom thieves to seal his fate. They decide to make him apologize publicly during the school assembly, which he does. During the assembly, he says that he is reborn and openly confesses his crimes, claiming that he is willing to take the full responsibility while begging for the cops to come and arrest him. Over the next days, his confession is broadcast across Japan (thanks to social media at first), leaving him with nothing but shame.

With all of that done, the treasure in the real world was not a crown, but the Olympic medal Kamoshida won during the Olympics. The Phantom Thieves decide to sell it to stage a buffet and relax a bit, but their fate would be sealed this very same day. During the party, they discuss how cool it is to be a member of the Phantom Thieves, but they wonder if it is worth continuing. When they leave, they bump into the man who falsely accused Joker, as if destiny had put him on their way. The man does not recognize Joker and leaves, but Joker explains to the others what really happened at the very beginning. Gutted by this corruption, they decide that they will reform society by stealing people's hearts. For that, they need to get more attention from the media and have to find an appropriate target and steal their heart. During the day, they will be "common students", but during the night, they will go into the Metaverse and achieve their true goal. Their great story had just begun the day Kamoshida was defeated.

2. The Museum of Vanity closes

After the events of the first part, Joker goes back to Leblanc café to get some rest before his next move. During his sleep, he is once again dragged into the Velvet Room, where Igor congratulates him for defeating the ruler of Lust. With that achievement, Joker is ready for his next big shot and is granted new powers from Igor, eager to look forward to Joker's rehabilitation. The next day, Joker and his partners discuss who their next target will be and come across a post on social media where a pupil used to be abused by his art teacher and famous artist called Ichiryusai Madarame. Curious about this, The Phantom Thieves start investigating and eventually meet Madarame's last student and foster son, Yusuke Kitagawa (another soon-to-be partner). They discuss Yusuke's project and are invited to an exhibition of Madarame's art gallery before parting. After the exhibition, another strange message that criticises Madarame as being a man that plagiarizes his students and treats them inhumanely is posted on social media:



(Figure 9: Ryuji reading out loud the post about Madarame's attitude)

One thing is sure for the Phantom Thieves, Madarame will be their next target in order to cause a huge scandal. Nevertheless, they need to be sure that these statements are true before taking actions. They decide to interview a former student that ultimately approves what is said about Madarame while highlighting the fact that he is a destructive man that comprises his students' art career.

During a meeting in their hideout, they notice that Madarame indeed has a palace: the shack he provides to his students in the real world is transformed into a golden museum,

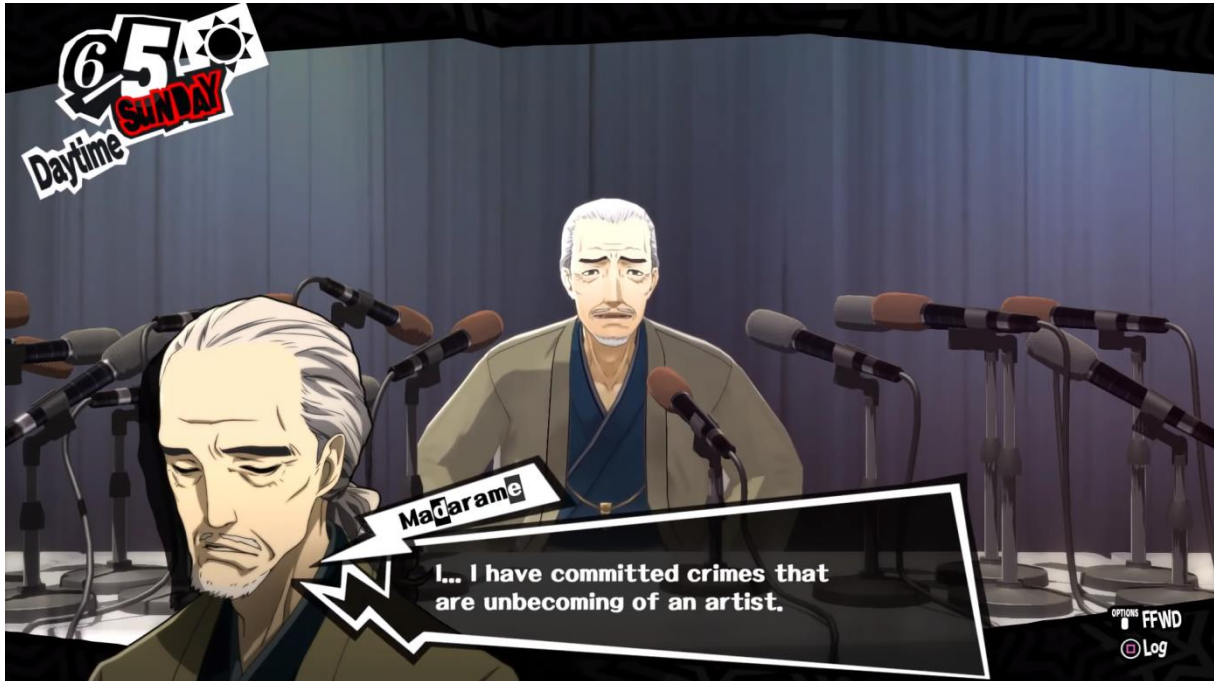
where every single piece of art that exposed to a huge crowd. Needless to say, his art is in fact stolen property from his students. He sells their work using his own name to make profits, which explains why some portraits in the Palace are portraits of the students he scammed over the years. After witnessing the Palaces' vices, the Phantom Thieves decide that they need to have a talk with Yusuke about Madarame's actions and behaviour, in vain. He tries to defend his tutor and find excuses for his crimes because of the Stockholm syndrome inflicted on him: when Yusuke's mother died, Madarame looked after the young boy until now, even though he treated him as if he was nothing but a dog. During this encounter, they discover that Madarame stole a painting that had been lost for decades and has been painted by Yusuke's mother. Caught red-handed by Madarame, they are threatened to be charged with trespassing his property, so that flee into his Palace with Yusuke, who is finally forced to admit his masters' actions with all the evidence provided by the palace. He witnesses the never-ending nightmare his former colleagues endure and hears his mentor's shadow openly confess his crimes. With all this evidence, Yusuke decides to make his mentor pay, awakens his Persona and ultimately joins the Phantom Thieves for good.

After securing the infiltration and escape route, the Phantom Thieves send their calling card to Madarame, whose treasure has to be stolen before the end of the exhibition. If they steal his treasure before that date, they will not be charged with trespassing and Madarame will make a public apology. Once the treasure materializes, they follow the same *modus operandi* and go to the treasure room, where Madarame's shadow is waiting for them and ready to reap them "for the sake of his future" as he claims. Like the first antagonist of the game, he morphs into his true form, a monstrous painting called Azazel, the fallen angel who was stained in vanity.

After his defeat, he apologizes for his deeds, but tries to justify himself by claiming that: "No one cares for true art... All they want are easily recognizable brands...! I'm a victim in this too! [...] Art revolves around money [...]" (*Persona 5*: 2016).

The Phantom Thieves, falling on deaf ears, tell him that he will have to publicly denounce himself. Relieved, he still asks them "what [will you do] about the man with the black mask". Unaware of who it is, they decide to deal with this later, as the Palace starts to disappear because of its ruler's defeat.

At the due date, Madaramé kept his promise and made a public apology by confessing all the mistreatment he inflicted on his students, his responsibility for the death of Yusuke's mother and the fact that he stole his pupils' paintings during the past years:



(Figure 10: Madaramé making a public apology after having his change of heart)

With this confession, The Phantom Thieves gained a new member, Yusuke, and notoriety; however, they cannot slack have and must be ready for their next target, which definitely has to be a “bigger fish”. In addition, they will have to proceed with extreme caution, since Madaramé claimed that an unknown person has access to the Metaverse and causes trouble.

3. The Bank of Gluttony goes bankrupt

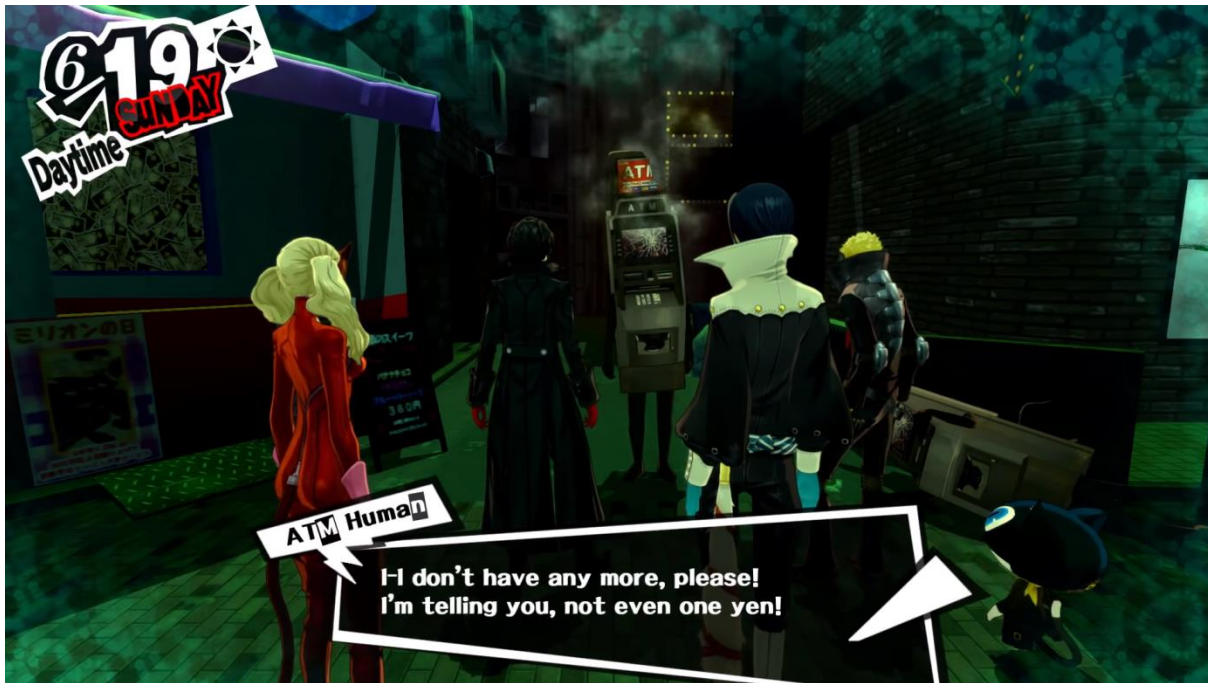
After the events of Madarame's change of heart, an investigation of the Phantom Thieves' actions and motives is launched. Sae Nijima, the Public Prosecutor, increasingly grows suspicious and thus tries to understand how they proceed, what their motives are and solve the mystery around the mysterious mental shutdowns some people have suffered from, thought to be linked to the Phantom Thieves' actions.

Nevertheless, our protagonists, in their relentless pursuit of social reform, prey on their next target. During their next meeting at the hideout, they are caught red-handed by Makoto Nijima, the student council president of Shujin academy. Scared to have their identities exposed, they act as if they were common citizens, but to no avail. Makoto directly tells them that she wants someone to have his/her heart changed. The group accepts to listen to the council president who wants to change the heart of a mafia boss. She thinks that this person has too much influence in Shibuya and in the school, given that this man does not mind blackmailing students and extorting money from them. Lacking Intel on their target, they decide to investigate in their school and see the influence of the mafia has in their school. With the many testimonies their colleagues provide, they are sure that the Mafioso is worth having his heart changed, but it is impossible to get his name given his elusiveness. Their investigation leads them in the suburbs of the town and in different bars. Luckily for Joker, he comes across a secondary character that is very familiar with Tokyo's gossips. After a few drinks, she unfolds the name of a man who controls Shibuya's nightlife, a Mafioso called Junya Kaneshiro.

With this information, the Phantom Thieves are now investigating a man who is hard to identify, even for the police. In an attempt to have a meeting with this Mafioso, Makoto is subdued by a henchman to a private party. In an attempt to save her, the Thieves follow her and are led to Kaneshiro's hideout. Feeling threatened by the students, he decides to blackmail them by taking a picture of them inside his party, where drugs, alcohol and a lot of money are exposed. If they do not bring him 3,000,000 Yens by the end of the next three weeks, he would leak the photos to Shujin academy, causing a lot of trouble for Joker and his schoolmates

With this deadline being a huge weight on the students, they decide to start the infiltration the very same day in order to have his heart changed as soon as possible. However, Kaneshiro's Palace is impossible to reach, given that it is a floating bank, UFO

extorting money from every single being in Shibuya. Before entering the Palace, the team talks with the Palace inhabitants, who all apologise for not being able to repay their debts to the Mafioso:



(Figure 11: Shibuya's citizens in Kaneshiro's Palace, seen as living ATMs that owe him money)

To get inside the Palace, they will need the help of Makoto, who is unconsciously considered as a customer of the bank since she has to repay Kaneshiro. As they progress through the Palace thanks to Makoto's help, they discover that repaying their debt will not settle the deal with Kaneshiro, who was already planning to make them pay tremendous amounts of interests. In an access of rage, Makoto awakens her Persona and joins (like the other protagonists) the Phantom Thieves to make Kaneshiro atone for his sins.

As they progressed through the palace, they are eventually led to a safe room where they find a huge platinum safe that is supposed to keep the treasure. Once in the real world, they send the calling card all over Shibuya to materialize the treasure in his palace. Once they get back inside to steal it, they found themselves face to face with Kaneshiro's shadow, morphing into a pathetic fly that hides into a robotic piggybank that battles them to their doom. Nevertheless, the Phantom Thieves succeed in defeating Kaneshiro; he confesses that his behaviour has been caused by society, where poor and weak people cannot lead a happy and wealthy life. Moreover, he reveals that a third party member is able to manipulate the Metaverse for his own profit and might be responsible for the mental shutdown some people

have suffered from. With his treasure being stolen by the Phantom Thieves, his change of heart causes him to call Makoto to tell her that he dropped the debt and ultimately turned himself in to the police.

Needless to say, this episode is a new victory for The Phantom Thieves, but this arrest only draws more attention to the group. This attention leads a group of people to blackmail the team and force them to steal a specific person's heart: as soon as they had finished changing Kaneshiro's heart, Medjed, a terrorist organisation, threatened to reveal The Phantom Thieves' identity:

To the Phantom Thieves causing uproar in Japan: Do not speak of your false justice. We do not need the spread of such falsehood. We are the true executors of justice. However, we are magnanimous. We will give you an opportunity to repent your ways. If you agree to a change of heart, we will accept you as our own. If you reject our offer, the hammer of justice will find you. We are Medjed. We are unseen. We will eliminate evil.³⁸ (*Persona 5*: 2016)

³⁸ The way the statement is made clearly indicates a reference to the hacker group called "Anonymous", where they punctuate their apparitions with a "We are anonymous, we are legion. We do not forgive. We do not forget. Expect us."

4. The Pyramid of Wrath collapses

With the weird threat The Phantom Thieves have received, they decide to investigate the issue with the terrorist organisation called Medjed and avoid having their identity exposed to the public. In order to avoid that, they have to change someone's heart to be recognized by Medjed. Right after receiving the threats, the Phantom Troupe is contacted by "Alibaba" who tells them who their next target will be: a young girl called Futaba Sakura. To The Thieves' surprise, they realize that she is in fact Sojiro's adoptive daughter. Given that they have to infiltrate her Palace, they need to get more information about Futaba to get the keywords necessary to enter, but her antisocial personality prevents them from getting into the house and have a conversation with Futaba. To get more Intel from her, they decide to question her on how living in her house is like, to which she replies that it is very painful: it is like being dead inside and being unable to get out of here. She is going to die there, in her tomb.

With these confessions, The Phantom Thieves decide to input the keywords in their application and discover that a destination has marked. Before entering the Metaverse, they check on Futaba and ask her if she will keep her promise to not leak their identities and help them shut Medjed down, which she accepts.

Once inside the Metaverse, they find themselves in a desert with their real clothes on: they are not seen as a threat at the beginning, given that Futaba asked them to change her heart. Futaba's palace is the only palace that is not created by corrupt emotions: it was rather created by the grief she has towards her mother's death and her sense of guilt of being responsible for that. As the shadow leaves to the treasure room, The Phantom Thieves' clothes change into their infiltration clothes and so they start exploring the pyramid of Wrath, Futaba's Palace. As they progress through the palace, they slowly realize that Futaba is in no way responsible for her mother's death and that it all was staged from the beginning. Her mother made some research on cognitive and supernatural phenomena and eventually discovered things that revolved around the Metaverse. Considered as a threat, someone caused a mental shutdown that made her throw herself in traffic. To make the murder suspicion disappear, a fake suicide note accusing her daughter circulated and ended up ruining Futaba's mental health.



(Figure 12: Futaba's shadow explaining to the Thieves how guilty she feels for her mother's death)

Determined to change her heart and make her guilt disappear, they redouble their efforts to get inside the treasure room and send their calling card to finish their business here. Instead of sending a semi-public calling card, they decide to send her a private card to avoid definitely ruining her mental health that is already in a really bad shape. Once this is done, they immediately infiltrate the palace one last time and go to the treasure room, which happens to be on top of the Pyramid. Strangely, Futaba's shadow is waiting for them, but opposes no threat to the protagonists. Nevertheless, they hear a strange noise and see a huge sphinx land on top of the Pyramid and call Futaba a "disgraceful girl". To everyone's surprise, the treasure keeper is in fact a cognitive apparition of Futaba's mother, represented as a monster that embodies Futaba's loneliness and feeling of guilt, since she was made to believe that she used to be an obstacle to her mother's career.

While the Phantom Thieves' struggle against the Sphinx, Futaba discovers that the Metaverse navigator got installed on her phone and decides to check it out. She eventually is drawn into her own Palace, where the others are fighting. Forced to face her fears and her shadows, she starts to recall how nice her mother used to be and that her death was so unnatural she could not be responsible for it. As she realizes she has been lied to and deluded herself, she awakens her persona and helps the others defeat the Sphinx.

After their victory, Futaba's mother's true self appears one last time to reassure Futaba and tell her that she should never ever believe that she never loved her from the bottom of her heart:



(Figure 13: Futaba accepting her mother's death)

Once back in the real world, Futaba is stricken by a huge fatigue, given all the events that took place inside her mind and her palace. Nevertheless, she decides to join the Phantom Thieves as their navigator and their hacker, keeps her promise and prevents Medjed from leaking The Phantom Thieves' identities by hacking the system. She then tells the Joker that she is Medjed, but that the message they received did not come from her. With that in mind, our protagonists feel that something is wrong and that they will have to be more and more careful if they do not want to get caught.

5. The Spaceship of Greed Destroyed

After the events of Medjed, the team decide to take a break and see who their next target will be. In the Phantom Aficionado Website (The Phantom Thieves fan-made website), loads of requests concerning a character called Kunizaku Okumura, the CEO of Okumura foods who has doubtful business practices: his overseas competitors withdrew slowly as the mental shutdown incidents spread, making him one of the top leaders in the food industry. At first, The Phantom Thieves are quite indecisive on whether or not they should change his heart. As the days go by, one of the protagonists, Morgana, feels that he is slowly becoming useless in the team and throws a tantrum before leaving the group for some time.

The Thieves become more and more worried about Morgana, and eventually listen to the news to discover that somebody is vandalizing Okumura's headquarters, even though there is no trace of trespassing or breaking in. Positive that these are the actions of Morgana, they decide to give a try at Okumura's Palace and see if it is worth having his heart changed. As soon as they enter the Palace, they meet Morgana and a new character called Haru, the last official member of the Phantom Thieves. She decides to help Morgana because she knows that her father causes a lot of trouble to his employees as well as to her. Indeed, his Palace has the form of a Spaceship, indicating his desires for success to the point of complete refusal to admitting the pain he inflicts on his family with his overly ambitious actions to run for presidency. Moreover, the cognitive projections of his workers are that of robots that devote themselves to Okumura until they are broken down, symbolizing that the latter views his workers as dispensable labour. Moreover, once these robots are broken down, their parts serve the sole purpose of fuelling the ship, indicating that they can serve as sacrifice and be used to the bone.

With these confessions, the Phantom Thieves think that Okumura's heart is definitely worth changing, but it is not the only reason why they want to change it. On top of all the mistreatment he imposed on his daughter, he is even willing to doom her life by forcing her to marry a wealthy man she does not love a marriage that will help her father achieve his goal.



(Figure 14: Okumura telling her daughter to not throw a tantrum at his wish for an arranged marriage)

As all these elements become crystal clear, The Phantom Thieves decide that they cannot let go a man so heartless and ultimately decide to infiltrate the palace and steal the treasure as soon as possible to avoid the arranged marriage. After listening to her father's words, Haru awakens her Persona³⁹ as well and decides to stand against her father once and for all. The party progress through the Spaceship and discover more and more tormented visions of how the CEO sees the outside world.

After a long infiltration, they discover the treasure room and decide to send the calling card, but they do this in a sly manner: Haru will be the one giving the calling card to her father, claiming that someone left it in their mailbox. After reading the card, the CEO grows worried and his treasure finally materializes in the Metaverse. The Thieves then decide to proceed to the final infiltration, but are met by Okumura's shadow and his army of workers. As the shadow is defeated, the group decide to interrogate the CEO and try to discover who is responsible for the mental shutdown some people are experiencing. He plainly tells them that he had a contract and had to fill some requests to eliminate people in the real world, thus confirming the presence of a mysterious criminal in people's Palaces.

³⁹ Her persona is called Milady de Winter (or simply Milady) and is a fictional character in the novel *The Three Musketeers* by Alexandre Dumas. With that being said, we can now see that all the main protagonists have a Persona, given that they have a clear grip on their desires.

While the palace crumbles to the ground, the Thieves decide to leave the Palace and wait for his public apologies in order to discover who is responsible for the shutdown. However and against all odds, Okumura has a mental shutdown during his public apology. He literally dies on screen and the Phantom Thieves are now held responsible for that, given the fact they changed his heart:



(Figure 15: Okumura dying from a mental shutdown on stage while make public apologies)

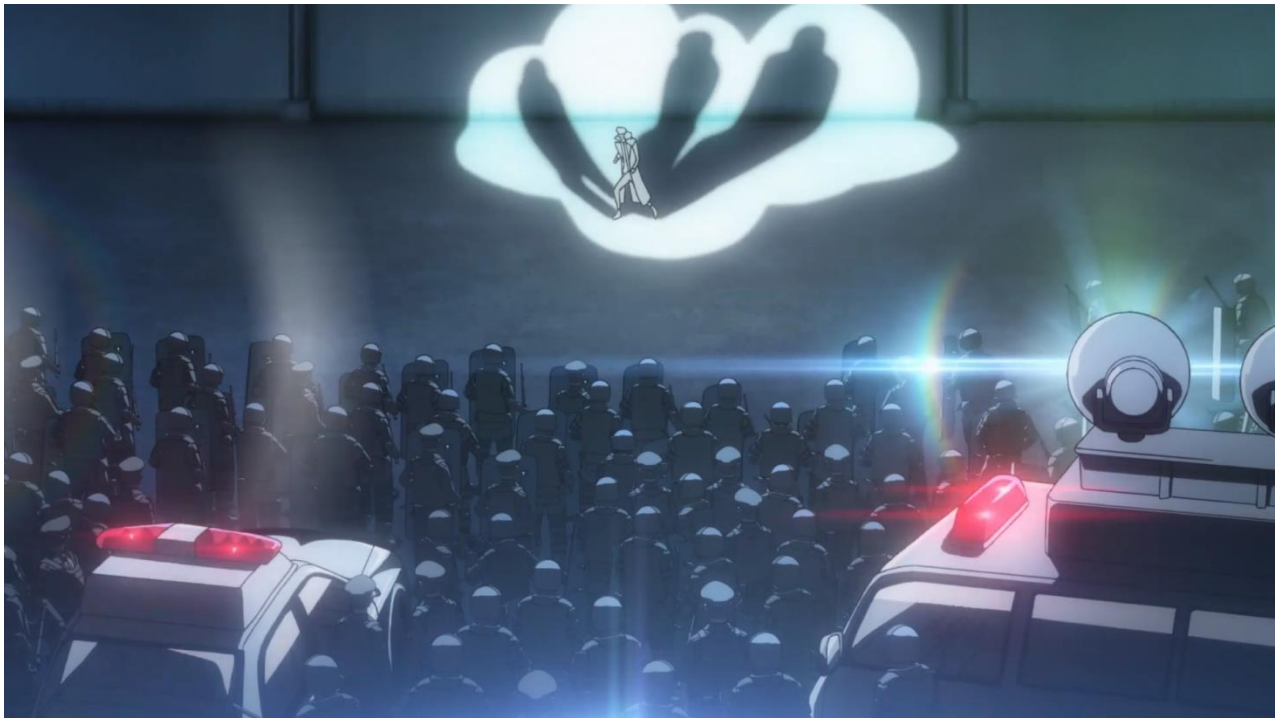
Puzzled by these events, The Phantom Thieves' reputation drops as they are now considered as criminals. Certain that these events were not caused by The Phantom Thieves, they decide to keep a low profile and try to understand what is the conspiracy that lurks around the corner since Madarame's Palace.

6. The Casino of Jealousy (envy) shutdown

With Okumura's death, The Phantom Thieves ratings are as low as ever; they do not know what to do next given that they are now considered as real criminals. Moreover, the investigation launched prior to these events is slowly getting to them, where they hear on TV that they are sure that these actions were perpetuated by students from Shujin Academy. With the investigation being now centred in Shujin to see who the students responsible for the mental shutdown are, they decide to stop being Phantom Thieves as long as the police meddle in their school. Nevertheless, a major character (that has not been treated until now) called Goro Akechi, a well-behaved and charismatic high school detective, tells them that he knows who they really are, showing them a picture of their escape from Okumura's Palace. They then decide to make a deal: Goro Akechi will help them seize the treasure of their next target and help them catch the real culprit, while helping them clear their name. In exchange, he will destroy the photo evidence. Nevertheless, this is not the only term of the contract: The Phantom Thieves must disband forever after their final heist. With their agreeing, Akechi explains to them that their next target will be Sae Nijima, the Public Prosecutor. Because of the loss of her father and her rage towards a rigged judiciary system, a distortion was created in her heart and ultimately created a Palace, a golden casino where every single game is rigged in favour of the house, demonstrating Sae's wish to rig every case in her favour.

As they progress in the Palace, Sae uses every method possible to slow them, such as forcing them to play rigged games to earn coins and unlock the VIP access and lounges. Even with her best efforts, The Thieves nevertheless gain access to these rooms and locate the treasure in the Manager's room. With this information, The Thieves decide to have Makoto deliver the calling card to her sister to materialize her treasure and make their final heist as a group of vigilante. Once again, with the treasure materialized, they make their way in the manager's room, where Sae's shadow prepared everything for their battle.

After turning into the leviathan, she is somehow defeated thanks to everybody's help, but something is not right. The palace does not crumble and they can hear a voice call (thanks to Futaba's hacking) of the Police saying that they are "ready to come inside and arrest the Thieves". To everybody's surprise, someone sold the information of their infiltration and also has the access to the Metaverse. In desperation, Joker tells his crewmates to flee as soon as possible while looking for another way out. Thanks to his help, all of his crewmates have escaped into the real world, but Joker was somehow captured by the police in Sae's Palace.



(Figure 16: Joker being cornered and eventually captured by the police outside Sae' Palace)

With Joker being arrested, the Thieves are worried about what would happen next, given that he is going to be interrogated. Joker wakes up in the room where the game initially started (the game starting with flashbacks of The Thieves' deeds), with Sae interrogating Joker on his motives. As he told the full story with no strings attached, Sae starts to believe in him and asks how she can help. Joker tells her that The Thieves got betrayed by one of their members, but they knew it all along: they set up a trap where Joker would indeed be arrested, but this was only to catch the culprit red-handed. As Sae leaves the room, Joker asks her to show his phone to the person that would eventually come next inside this room. She agrees and wishes him the best of luck.

As she makes her exit, she encounters Akechi, heading to Joker's room. Suspicious that he is going to harm Joker, she shows him Joker's phone and triggers a distortion in the interrogation room. Joker escapes and leaves a copy of him, which all can observe while the true traitor explains his motives. After he entered the room, Akechi shoots Joker's copy dead and reveals himself as being the traitor.



(Figure 17: Joker, still alive after fleeing into the Metaverse and simulating his death)

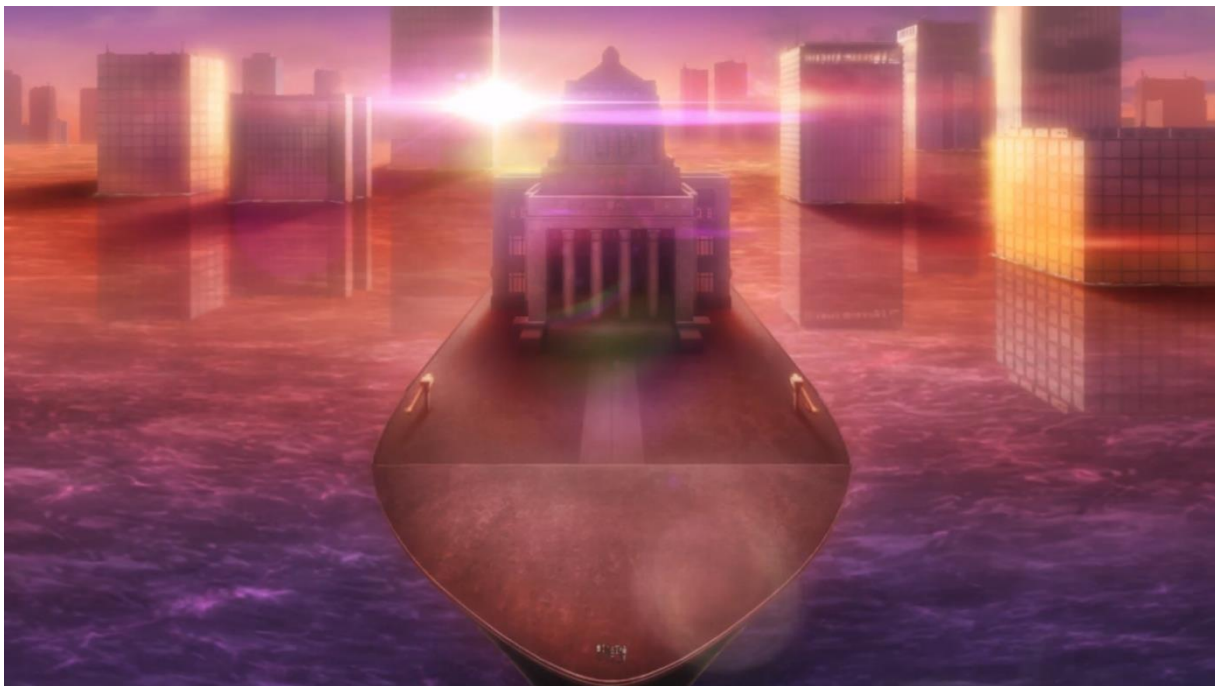
With Joker still alive, the Phantom Thieves decide to gather in their hideout and discuss the situation: they have been betrayed by Goro Akechi and everybody believes that The Phantom Thieves' leader is dead (Only the vigilante group knows that he is alive). To that extent, they know that a conspiracy used the Phantom Thieves for their own interest and used them as an excuse to cause the mental shutdowns in the whole country. What is sure is that The Thieves are not disbanded and will do all they can to get the truth and discover who was behind these malevolent schemes.

7. The Cruiser of Pride sinks

Alongside The Phantom Thieves' last heist, a politician called Masayoshi Shido is slowly gaining fame thanks to his speech. His eloquence allows him to treat subjects that currently pose problem to him, such as the actual government's policy, justice, and so on, and ultimately inspire the mass. As our heroes continue their journey, Masayoshi sparkles debates on Japan's financial and diplomatic weaknesses, which would be resolved if he were to be on the prime minister's seat. With him gaining popularity and the Phantom Thieves' leader thought to be dead, the group decide to investigate on his real motivation, suspicious that he is the mastermind behind all the events that happened over the last years.

As Shido starts a real campaign in Yongen-Jaya (a location based on Sengen-Jaya, in Tokyo), the group tries to pinpoint if he has a palace and how it should look like in order to enter the keywords in the Metaverse Navigator. After recollecting various encounters with him, they decide to try keywords evoking ships, and finally get inside Shido's Palace only to discover that it is shaped as a huge and luxurious cruiser that sails across a sunken Tokyo.

As Pride being his sins, the cruiser is filled with propaganda posters, political speeches repeated ad infinitum and a rigged legislative chamber where the voting always go the Masayoshi Shido.



(Figure 18: Shido's Palace sailing across a sunken Tokyo)

Once they enter the cruiser and start discussing with the cognitive projections there, they realise that Shido was behind every single evil deed: he is the one responsible for the people's mental shutdown, he is the one that executed Futaba's mother because she was meddling in his business, and ultimately, he is the one that falsely accused Joker of aggravated assault in the beginning of the game. He even forced his illegitimate son, Goro Akechi, to comply without saying a word if he wanted to be accepted. Akechi, wishing to be accepted by his father (Shido molested a prostitute who eventually gave birth to Akechi before committing suicide), went into the Metaverse to kill the person's shadow and cause the mental shutdown. Given these circumstances, the Phantom Thieves decide to do everything in their power to sink the ship and make Shido pay for his deeds.

Given the power Shido has obtained throughout, it will be almost impossible to locate the treasure room. To that extent, they will need introduction letters given by the VIP members of the ship, the ones close to Shido: People that have a lot of political power and did not hesitate to cause havoc to gain power. As they gather the letters and discover that many people were involved in Shido's scheme, they decide to make the best calling card they ever made after discovering the treasure in the legislator's chamber: They will broadcast the calling card in the form of a huge video that will be aired in the entire country, where the Phantom Thieves denounce Masayoshi Shido, what he has done over the last years, and reveal the Phantom Thieves leader has never committed suicide and is ready to get his revenge.



(Figure 19: Shido being denounced as the mastermind behind the conspiracy in Japan)

After these leaks, Shido gets really irritated and materialises his treasure. Ready to settle things once and for all, the Phantom Thieves launch their final assault on the Shido's Palace, only to be stopped by Shido's shadow, the exact replica of Shido but dressed as a knight in shining armour. As the Thieves are ready for their "final" battle, they attack him as they can, only to see him transform into an enhanced version of himself, a demon called Samael. Even though he looked as if he was at the peak of power, the Thieves manage to defeat him and force him to make the greatest apology ever made in public. He will have to list all his sins and clear The Phantom Thieves' name, proving once and for all that they were innocent and just wanted to reform society for the better.

The day of the elections, Shido has his change of heart and confesses to his crimes, leading to his arrest and the end of the Phantom Thieves' investigation. Moreover, thanks to Shido's arrest, the ratings on The Phantom Thieves website exploded to a peak of popularity that has never been obtained before (93% of favourable ratings). Nevertheless, The Thieves notice a shift in people's way of thinking, as they become more and more passive and apathetic in the real world. In Joker's opinion, something is wrong, but he has no clue that all that has happened until now was part of a scheme way larger than he could have imagined.

8. *The Prison of Sloth (prison of acedia): the true trickster and ending*

As people are being more and more passive and apathetic, Joker is sucked into the Velvet Room one final time, only to have Igor tell him concerning things about Men's world:

“The distortion of man's world is endlessly deep... Fixing it may now be impossible even with the appearance of a Trickster... The time of ruin is nigh...” (*Persona 5*: 2016)

Disturbed with these words, Joker demands a meeting at Leblanc café, the last Phantom Thieves hideout. Together, they decide to go into the depths of Mementos in order to discover what lies in the deepest part of Humanity's palace, and steal their treasure to reform the whole Japanese society. Given the fact that Mementos are Humanity's palace, they may understand what causes their apathy deep down. As the Thieves go deep down Mementos, they arrive in a strange place called the Prison of Regression, or the Prison of Sloth, where every single human's shadow is held in cages by their own free will (including the person who had their heart stolen, such as Kamoshida, Madarame, and Shido.) Bothered by this discovery, they go even deeper and find themselves face to face with a Grail, The Holy Grail to be more precise. The Holy Grail is humanity's treasure and is supposed to grant wishes, but it is nothing more than a deity that wishes to control everybody. The Phantom Thieves then engage their penultimate fight against the Holy Grail, only to lose to its divine powers.



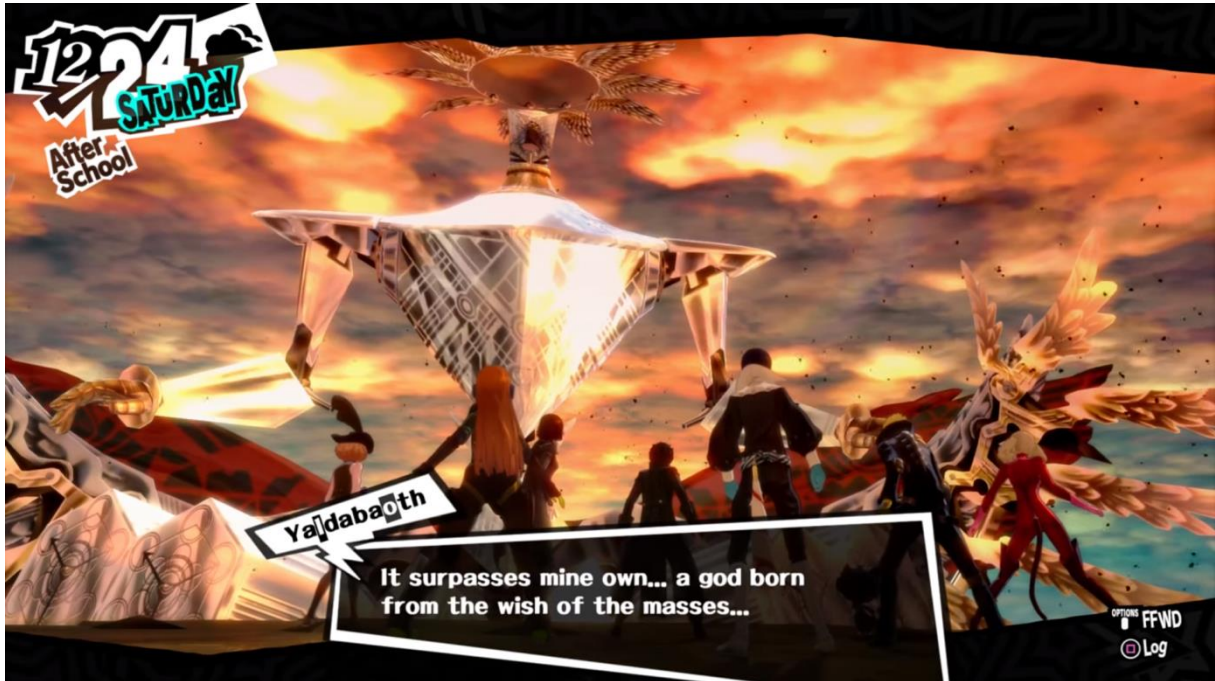
(Figure 20: The Phantom Thieves defeated by the Holy Grail, fuelled by humanity's wish to be tamed)

Defeated by the Holy Grail, The Thieves have no choice but to surrender and submit to the Holy Grail, who then proceeds to merge the Metaverse with reality (in other words, there is a kind of metalepsy that is operated, merging the two realms into a chaotic one, where shadows wander in the real world, wreak havoc, and where the Phantom Thieves never existed).

Transported one last time in the Velvet Room, Igor orders Joker's execution for his inability to reform society. Against all odds, Igor's servants rebel and fuse together into the true guardian of the Velvet Room, Lavenza. She saves Joker and tells him that the man in front of him is just a usurper and not her real master (the real Igor). As the enigmatic usurper declares being the embodiment of the Holy Grail, he decides to tell Joker what his plan was all along: Before everything even started, he and Igor made a bet to see who between Akechi's desire to destroy and recreate the world and Joker's will to reform society and stand against ruin would be the strongest. Feeling hopeless in humanity, the Holy Grail never intended to undo the ruin and eventually imprisoned Igor: The Holy Grail is sure that humanity is a hopeless cause and does not deserve to live in freedom for their ignorance (for example, an unconditional support for Shido to rule over Japan even if they knew how evil a person he was), which is the opposite belief the real Igor has, having high hopes for humanity.

As The Holy Grail escapes, Lavenza tells Joker to go and check on his crewmates that are held captive in the Velvet Room and lost faith in rebelling to the Holy Grail. After persuading his friends, they leave the Velvet Room only to discover what their world has become, a mix of the real Tokyo and nightmarish scenery called the Qliphoth World. Ready to end things once and for all, they engage in their last battle with The Holy Grail, which eventually transforms into its true form, the Demiurge called Yaldabaoth, God of Control. As they fight the Demiurge, Yaldabaoth unleashes the power of the deadly sins as a proof of man's self-destructive nature, while expressing his view on why humanity is how it is. As The Phantom Thieves slowly lose faith in winning their final battle, the aficionado website creator intervenes and demands to the people to send their energy to The Phantom Thieves. As people are slowly regaining faith in them and wish to be freed from Yaldabaoth Control, Joker awakens his true Persona, the fallen angel of Chaos, Satanael.

As Joker prepares his final attack, Satanael charges his gun with the Sinful Shell, a bullet harnessing the seven deadly sins that were condemned by Yaldabaoth. Having his head pierced by the fatal bullet, Yaldabaoth finally realises that Igor was right and that humanity is not made of fools that should be tamed.



(Figure 21: Yaldabaoth recognising Humanity's strength)

As the Demiurge vanishes into oblivion, the world and Mementos are slowly getting separated, leaving only the real life Tokyo in the picture. Celebrating their victory, the Phantom Thieves see one of their friends, Morgana, disappear slowly. Before disappearing, we are told that Morgana was in fact one of Igor's (the real one) creations that would help and guide Joker in this journey through hell. Even though Morgana disappeared, he reappears before the end of the game in the form of a regular cat, eager to say goodbye to Joker given that his yearlong probation ended.

As Joker says goodbye to his teammates, given that he has to go back to his city, they all kidnap him for one last voyage together before driving him home, where the story finally ends.

APPENDIX III: LIST OF FIGURE:

Figure 1: Giuseppe Arcimboldo's *The Fire*.

Figure 2: Kamoshida verbally insulting Joker for being in the same hallway.

Figure 3: Kamoshida's shadow explaining to Joker how he sees the school and their students.

Figure 4: Ryuji, Joker's associate, ready to remove the mask off his face.

Figure 5: Ryuji in pain after removing his mask.

Figure 6: Arsène sealing a contract with Joker to lend him his powers.

Figure 7: *Persona 5*'s Yongenjaya Station compared to Tokyo's Sangenjaya Station

Figure 8: The embodiment of Lust, Asmodeus.

Figure 9: Ryuji reading out loud the post about Madarame's attitude.

Figure 10: Madarame making a public apology after having his change of heart.

Figure 11: Shibuya's citizens in Kaneshiro's Palace, seen as living ATMs that owe him money.

Figure 12: Futaba's shadow explaining to the Thieves how guilty she feels for her mother's death.

Figure 13: Futaba accepting her mother's death.

Figure 14: Okumura telling her daughter to not throw a tantrum at his wish for an arranged marriage.

Figure 15: Okumura dying from a mental shutdown on stage while make public apologies.

Figure 16: Joker being cornered and eventually captured by the police outside Sae' Palace.

Figure 17: Joker, still alive after fleeing into the Metaverse and simulating his death.

Figure 18: Shido's Palace sailing across a sunken Tokyo.

Figure 19: Shido being denounced as the mastermind behind the conspiracy in Japan.

Figure 20: The Phantom Thieves defeated by the Holy Grail, fuelled by humanity's wish to be tamed.

Figure 21: Yaldabaoth recognising Humanity's strength.