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HW0209 Academic Communication in the Arts, Design and Media Studies

Assignment title: *Assignment 1: Review*

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Tutorial group number: *ADM1*

Tutorial day/time: *Tuesday, 10.30am - 12.30am*

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Persona 5: A Japanese game curated by Western influences

Lau Meichi Aster

Heavily based on Jungian psychology, *Persona 5* is a Japanese game riddled with a fair amount of Japan-exclusive issues and symbolism but curated by western influences. Bleak Japanese social issues and human experience such as suicide and rape are tackled with the stereotypical Western fist-first approach – the introduction of superheroes, vigilantes and superpowers.



Fig. 1: *Persona 5*, Atlus's 20th Anniversary Edition, 2017¹

Players find themselves using their power to reduce an immoral villain to a snivelling, remorseful figure. The story plays out like a superhero comic with a clear villain and objective. For the Japanese who are used to a culture where troubling others would be considered deviant², fighting is never a solution to any issue. For others, the deep-rooted issues of Japan become accessible through the familiar Western storytelling approach. The game's duality between the stifled state and criminal personality becomes what makes gameplay mysterious and absolutely thrilling. Aware of this, the game continually questions what makes our main characters so different from the criminals they target.

¹ Julian Benson, 'Persona 5 is Getting a Tonne of DLC, Release Dates and Pricing Revealed', *Kotaku*, Published on March 22, 2017, <http://www.kotaku.co.uk/2017/03/22/persona-5-is-getting-a-tonne-of-dlc-release-dates-and-pricing-revealed>.

² Boyne, Samuel, "Meiwaku and Gaijin: Politeness and Group-Mentality in Japan," *Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs*, Published on March 17, 2017, <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/posts/meiwaku-and-gaijin-politeness-and-group-mentality-in-japan>.

Game graphics and design are also heavily influenced, taking risqué Japanese media topics such as sex and violence and filtering it through the child-friendly Western comic lens. The sleek and playful look is highly praised on many popular game review sites, such as by GameSpot (2017)³ and IGN (2017)⁴, and lends itself as one of the biggest draws of the game.



Fig. 2: *The Art of Persona 5*, 2017⁵

The importance of upkeeping a social image in Japan⁶ is also tied in with Jungian psychology. A mask, representing a social label, can be ripped from a character's face to release a physical manifestation of a character's repressed self. The concept of human nature's duality links closely to what Carl Jung's *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*: "Every good quality has its bad side, and nothing that is good can come into the world without directly producing a corresponding evil."⁷

However, there are aspects lost during the localization process, such as the meaning behind the design of Kamoshida – a lecherous gym teacher who turns into a grotesque monster reigning from a toilet bowl. The meat toilet, represented by the toilet bowl, is a derogatory Japanese term that suggests the villain's perception of women as nothing more than a sexual outlet.

³ Lucy James, "Persona 5 Review: Style and Substance," *GameSpot*, Published on March 29, 2017, <https://www.gamespot.com/reviews/persona-5-review/1900-6416640/>.

⁴ Andrew Goldfarb, "Persona 5 Review," *IGN*, Published on March 29, 2017, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2017/03/29/persona-5-review>.

⁵ Atlus, Shigenori Soejima, *The Art Of Persona 5* (California: Prima Games, 2017), pg. 18.

⁶Tuukka Toivonen, Yuki Imoto "Transcending labels and panics: the logic of Japanese youth problems," *Contemporary Japan* (2016): pg. 61, accessed February 26, 2018, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1515/cj-2013-0004?src=recsys>.

⁷ Carl Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (London: Trubner and Co, 1933), pg. 199.



Fig. 3: In-game screenshot of Kamoshida⁸

Colloquial Japanese symbolism is rarely brought up during a critique of *Persona 5* – a failure in the English localization of the game which creates a rift in gameplay experience.⁹

That said, *Persona 5* has done incredibly on an international standard and certainly deserves its recent ‘Best Roleplaying Game’ at *The Game Awards 2017*¹⁰. If you are looking for a standard Japanese role-playing game, *Persona 5* sneaks into your heart through nurturing friendships with a lovable team of colourful misfits.

Only after taking you on a psychedelic Japanese culture and Jungian psychology crash course, of course.

(Word Count: 590)

⁸ Ryan Gilliam, ‘Persona 5 guide: Kamoshida Castle Palace walkthrough’, Polygon, Published on May 23, 2017, <https://www.polygon.com/persona-5-guide-walkthrough/2017/4/4/15177508/kamoshida-castle-palace>.

⁹ Molly Lee, “Persona 5 deserved better: a translator’s take on a subpar script,” *Polygon*, Published on April 20, 2017, <https://www.polygon.com/2017/4/20/15356026/persona-5-translation-localization>.

¹⁰ “The Game Awards - Full Show with Death Stranding, Zelda and More,” YouTube video, 3:19.15, posted by “thegameawards,” December 7, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bs5Ml7_2wT0.

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