

The RPG Self: Bleed, Constellation, and Consent

Abstract: This article is a philosophical exploration of the intersection between the deep narratives of tabletop RPGs and the notions of bleed and consent. This synoptic view integrates the theories of Carl Jung into a broader theory of self that expects the conscious meta-cognition of patterns within RPG play. It revisits bleed as a bi-directional process, its types, and properties (Beltrán 2012, Kemper 2017, Hugaas 2019, Hugaas 2024). Then, the article explores and extends the Jungian approach to RPGs (Bowman 2012, 2017, Beltrán 2012, 2013, Diakolambrianou & Bowman 2023), broadening the theoretical framework of bleed studies and consent-based gaming. The advantage of Jung's theory lies in its aptitude to combine inner psychic manifestations with symbols, images, and feelings (Stevens 2002). The archetypes, the universal figures of supra-personal character that organize feeling-toned complexes, are key concepts (Stein 1998). Wrought in our dreams and mythology (Jung 2014), they set up the playground for our symbol-forming capacities (Stevens 2002).

The article proposes two new concepts to study individuation, archetypal engagement, and bleed in RPGs: constellation and the RPG Self. Finally, it discusses insights for studying bleed in Game Directors and, employing ideas from archetypal psychology (Adams 2002, Hillman 2004, Paris 2008), it explores future perspectives on devising safe strategies for consent-based gaming via the conscious recognition of archetypal images and mythic narratives born within the RPG Self.

Keywords: depth psychology, role-playing games, identity, archetypes, individuation, constellations, consent

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1. INTRODUCTION

Game worlds in role-playing games (RPGs) possess deepness, i.e., they result from a collaborative creation process beyond the single participant (Wolfendale & Franklin 2012). The story shapes and unfolds unexpectedly, gaining an organic, autonomous, and symbolic character (Bastarrachea Magnani 2020, 2023). RPGs are more than make-believe fiction, triggering authentic emotional responses to events and things happening in the magic circle and producing a unique aesthetic experience (Ehrett & Worth 2012).

We find *bleed* among the consequences of RPGs, a phenomenon corresponding to those moments experienced by participants, where content, either emotional, procedural or cognitive, flows between persons and characters and viceversa (Bowman 2013, 2015; Hugaas 2019). Although difficult to define (Montolla 2010), bleed is recognized by the thinning of the distinction between the different figures in which an RPG participant unfolds (Waskul 2002, Waskul & Lust 2004). Because it is spontaneous and unconscious, there are many open questions about its relationship to consciousness, either to exploit it for the RPG experience (Montolla 2010, Montolla, et al. 2015, Kemper 2020) or to alleviate its adverse effects (Fine 1983, Harder 2018).

Unconscious processes such bleed introduce a challenge for consent in gaming, i.e., the collective agreement of what is safe and what is not when playing (Reynolds & Germain 2019), as the rich unfolding of the participants implies a multilayer array of consequences in either the fictional, imaginary, and everyday worlds. Because one aims to create safe gaming environments to immerse oneself in (JARPS Editors 2020), a better understanding of those layers and how content flows through them seems timely.

Here, I revisit bleed as a bi-directional process, its types, and properties (Beltrán 2012, Kemper 2017, Hugaas 2019, Hugaas 2024). Then, I explore and extend the Jungian approach to RPGs (Bowman 2012, 2017, Beltrán 2012, 2013, Diakolambrianou & Bowman 2023), broadening the theoretical framework of bleed studies and consent-based gaming. The advantage of Jung's theory lies in its aptitude to combine inner psychic manifestations with symbols, images, and feelings (Stevens 2002). Here, the archetypes, the universal figures of supra-personal character that organize feeling-toned complexes are key concepts (Stein 1998). Wrought in our dreams and mythology (Jung 2014), they set up the playground for our symbol-forming capacities (Stevens 2002).

I propose two new concepts to study individuation, archetypal engagement, and bleed in RPGs: *constellation* and the *RPG Self*. Jung's constellation is the process by which archetypes manifest structurally and concretely in the psyche, thus forming the Self and identity (Jung 1981). It implies a simultaneous activation of specific archetype mixes, leading to a cluster of self-referenced complexes and spontaneous clusters of images (fantasies and dreams) (von Heydwofff 2000). The RPG Self is an extended description of the Jungian Self constituted of three parts: the collective unconscious that makes archetypal engagement possible; the personal Self, which supports the everyday personality; and an interpersonal Self that feeds from the content of all the participants of an RPG session.

The deepness in RPG's game worlds would result from the interconnected evocation of archetype clusters; characters are understood as co-constellations, i.e., symbolical personifications alive, meaningful, and affectively charged; and bleed as a natural process coming from the context-based flow of meaning that results from interacting constellations. Finally, I discuss some insights for studying bleed in Game Directors and, employing ideas from archetypal psychology (Adams 2002, Hillman 2004, Paris 2008), I explore future perspectives on devising safe strategies for consent-based gaming via the conscious recognition of archetypal images and mythic narratives born within the RPG Self.

Role-playing games (RPGs) constitute a co-created, improvised, and spontaneous shared reality simultaneously enacted and experienced (Bowman 2012). A central distinctive trait is their *deepness*, i.e., the collaborative process creating them goes beyond the single participants taking part in the activity (Wolfendale & Franklin 2012). The story shapes itself and unfolds unexpectedly, gaining an organic, autonomous, and symbolic character (Bastarrachea-Magnani, 2020). Therefore, RPGs become more than just make-believe fiction (Ehrett & Worth 2012), producing a unique aesthetic experience, and triggering authentic emotional responses to events and things happening within and beyond the magic circle, i.e., the barrier between the game and everyday worlds (Huizinga 1949, Salen and Zimmerman 2003). Among the consequences of RPG's deepness, we find bleed phenomena (Boos 2007), i.e., those moments experienced by participants, where "their real life feelings, thoughts, and physical states spill over into their characters and viceversa" (Bowman 2015). Even for psychology, the concept has been challenging to define (Montolla 2010). Still, it is recognized by the thinning of the distinction between the different figures in which a person is divided inside and outside the RPG's magic circle. Because bleed is a spontaneous and unconscious phenomenon, many open questions exist about its relationship to consciousness.

Bleed phenomena represent a challenge for consent in gaming, i.e., the collective and sustained agreement between game participants about what is safe and what is not when playing (Reynolds & Germain 2019), which also makes explicit the limits on what can or cannot happen in the narrative, including character development and interpersonal dynamics (Zambrano 2019, Gage 2023, Writing Games 2024). Consent has become a central issue in gaming because one aims to create safe environments in which to immerse oneself (JARPS Editors 2020). However, it is difficult to define and set up, as often it is reduced to a static verbal yes/no contract that is insufficient as "a "simple "yes" consent can be given out of fear, out of exhaustion, or because one feels that it is what they are "supposed" to do" (Voseen 2018, 217) or considered self-evident instead of assuming it is an evolving process (Voseen 2018). Instead, consent in gaming is characterized by the function it serves, keeping the voluntary, enjoyable, and safe character of playing. A key feature of playing games is their deliberate and free character (Huizinga 1949, Caillois 2001). It could include activities requiring compromise, including learning rules, research, and preparation, but all of them serve to shape the freedom of play. Accordingly, playing becomes an intimate space where, if the boundaries are unclear, it may render us vulnerable. For E. Voseen, a signature of consent breaking is the bursting of the magic circle, "The bursting of the magic circle is the moment which makes game play worthless to the player. That moment is based entirely on a player's own perception of the shared magic circle" (Voseen 2018, 210). There are explicit harmful practices that break it, like breaches of a prearranged social contract, harassment, offensive attitudes and stereotypes, discrimination, or handling recklessly psychologically damaging topics, but others might be subtle. Several mechanisms for consent in RPGs have been proposed, depending on whether one deals with anticipated or spontaneous situations during play or desires anonymity. Preparation tools include the so-called session zero (Wallis 2020), which helps to set up the information and tone of the game or campaign, and checklists (consent forms) that help to negotiate topics that should be avoided or screened. Others are employed based on open communication that allows players to indicate freely and safely their boundaries, triggers, and expectations, such as pausing mechanisms, script changes, consent cards (such as the X card), and safe words (Stavropoulos 2013, Big Bad Con 2016). A better understanding of how content flows between layers of complex games such as RPGs where the magic circle is semipermeable (Bastarrachea-Magnani 2023), and gaming spans beyond the single game session is required.

My research on bleed is motivated by my personal experience as a Game Director participating in long-term tabletop campaigns. To produce a rich game world with diverse nuances for players to explore, I enact a plethora of non-player characters and other personifications. The intense and continuous character of my performance produced bleed in me. Also, I noticed bleed from the players and that their problems—which I was not wholly aware of—permeated the story and their character's development. However, at that moment, I didn't possess the conceptual resources to acknowledge these phenomena or manage them. It was years later, when debriefing those campaigns, that I made it intelligible and recognized the potential negative impact in my life that, as Game Director, I could have produced inadvertently. These experiences convinced me that setting up the magic circle as a mere social contract is not enough to guarantee consent: more things are at play, primarily

unconscious. RPG deepness begs for a reformulation of what we understand as playing together. RPGs allow us not only to question and reinvent social structures but also to experiment with our identities (Huugas 2022) and transform us on a deep level, but this process occurs collectively. Hence, “we must accept that eventually, players will bring challenging content from their imagination into the design and play of games” (Bowmann 2022, 10). Precisely, bleed entails a spillover of content between players mediated by the game world and their characters. This content may destabilize us, given the vulnerable state we have when shifting identities in play (Diakolambrianou & Bowman, 2023), via the enactment of personal fantasies and repressed content (Beltran 2013, Brown & Morrow 2015, Bowman 2017b, 2022) or unacknowledged bleed (Bowmann 2013, 2022).

In this contribution, I address these issues by extending the current Jungian approach to RPGs from a philosophical perspective, employing the concept of *archetypal constellation* to the emergence of characters and proposing the new concept of the *RPG Self*. The spontaneous and unconscious character of bleed suggests that a Jungian framework might help unveil the relevant mechanisms behind it. The deep psychology of Carl Gustav Jung is familiar to RPG studies. Mainly, it has been employed before to propose a basic framework to study immersion (Bowmann 2012), active imagination (Bowman 2017a), archetypal engagement, and ego bleed in larp (Beltrán 2012) to explore psychological repression in subcultures (Beltran 2013), and the engagement of repressed materials via shadow work (Beltran 2013; Bowman 2022, Diakolambrianou & Bowman 2023). The advantage of Jung’s theory lies in combining inner psychic manifestations with symbols, images, and feelings (Stevens 2002). Furthermore, his concept of the collective unconscious opens up connections to metaphysics, religion, and spirituality via symbolic channels. I propose four objectives: 1) to make further progress in Jungian approaches to RPGs by positing the notion of *constellation* as key to understanding the onset and enactment of archetypal images, character emergence in RPGs, and bleed 2) to develop the notion of an *RPG-Self* that combines a *transpersonal* and an *interpersonal* Selves and helps to account for non-explicit avenues for consent. 3) to push forward the idea that consent in RPGs should consider the *collective ownership* of characters. 4) to set up elements that help to expand the current framework of bleed theory to include the Game Director dimension.

2. THE CONCEPT OF BLEED

Although bleed is connected to strong or significant situations experienced by the player, it is suggested it might always occur as part of the identity transformation within the gaming experience (Hugaas 2024, Diakolambrianou & Bowman 2023). In the first instance, it is recognized by the thinning of the distinction between persona and character, so the person’s subjectivity becomes influenced by the character and vice versa (Montola 2010). As a process, bleed possesses both direction and pathways through which it manifests. First, it is a bi-directional process. This means the experience flow between characters and persona can go both ways (Bowman 2015, Bowman & Lieberoth 2018). *Bleed-in* is the term used to denote when states in the persona affect the character. Instead, *bleed-out* indicates that states triggered by the occurrences of the fictitious (fantastic) world happening to the character are migrating to the persona. Second, bleed occurs in different ways, depending on the experience that is being transferred. These pathways are often deployed superimposed. However, three major types have been recognized, thus defining types of bleed. Hugaas (2019) has proposed they are *emotional*, *procedural*, and *memetic*. Emotional bleed consists of spilling emotional experiences (Waern 2010); procedural bleed corresponds to the transference of physical states, from weariness to gestures; and memetic bleed entails the flow of cultural units and knowledge, including the aptitude for learning. Proponents have also suggested more specific channels, such as transferring personality features or ego bleed (Beltrán 2012), emancipatory bleed (Kemper 2017), and design bleed (Toft & Harrer 2020). Moreover, a framework in which the pathways are distinguished between basic and high-level bleed components but integrated into one, *identity bleed*, has been recently put forward (Hugaas 2024). Ego bleed is significant here, as it would be “a process by which fragments of personality are passed both ways between players and their characters with both immediate and long-term outcomes” (Beltran 2012, 95). In other words, ego bleed aims to describe the effect of mythic archetypal engagement on personality and the mid- and long-term effects of bleed (Beltran 2012).

Furthermore, bleed has two central features I would like to draw attention to: it is primarily spontaneous and unconscious (Bowman 2015). Generally speaking, bleed is a problem of the unconscious, thus, in part, uncontrollable. For some, it can be a powerful experience. “Whether or not participants intend to play for bleed, the impact of bleed experiences can become intense for some individuals” (Bowman 2015). When we say it is spontaneous, it not only means that it depends on the subject and game situation but also that its intensity is variable up to the point that it could be recognizable even with similar conditions. It does not happen only when one shifts in or out of character; it may happen anytime during a session. Moreover, it is unclear why it could occur more frequently in some individuals while others never experience it (Hugaas 2019). Some processes have

been explored that could lead to strong bleed out (Leonard & Thurman 2018) and it has been proposed there is a bleed perception threshold that depends on the pathway and subject (Hugaas 2024).

Hence, the role of consciousness in bleed is still under debate. On the one hand, becoming aware of bleed could reduce or dissolve the effect (Hugaas 2019). On the other, it is clear that a degree of conscious control plays an essential role in managing it either by shielding us from unwelcome effects or by inducing and intensifying it. Consciousness is anyways significant when facing bleed consequences, which can be considered negative or positive depending on the situation. Adverse effects may include the generation of perturbation of the persona's personalities and their relationships in the everyday world (Beltrán 2013), from feelings of exclusion and antagonisms between players in everyday life to extreme situations such as *overinvolvement* (Fine 1983) or *limerence* (Harder 2018). Here, several techniques are intended to manage bleed, including in-game signaling, de-roleing, or debriefing (Bowman 2015). Instead, the positive effects of bleed-in are related to engineering effects in-game space to increase, for example, immersion and the RPG experience itself (Nilsen 2012). Such is the case of *steering* (Montola 2010, Montola, et al. 2015) and *wyrding* the self (Kemper 2020). Positive effects related to bleed-out are associated with fostering learning. Regarding the conscious driving of bleed, there is a connection to the *alibi*, i.e., the set of elements that allows players to accept the situations inside the game space happening to their characters without compromising their personas and the accountability of their actions (Montola & Holopainen 2012, Bowman 2015, Deterding 2017). The alibi might be considered a defense mechanism (Bowman & Hugaas 2021) triggered in response to the liminal game space. Then, "the stronger the alibi, the weaker the bleed" (Bowman 2015), given that it might interfere with key processes for individuation (Bowmann 2022). But if controllable, it can be viewed "as a way to loosen the rigidity of an individual's need for self-continuity, or as a way to lower their identity defense" (Hugaas 2024, 6), opening avenues for identity transformation (Bowman 2022). The matter is an open issue since alibis seem to be distributed over the conscious and the unconscious. Thus, studying how the Self configures in response to an RPG session is relevant.

3. JUNGIAN ARCHETYPES AND THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

The advantage of Jung's theoretical approach lies in its ability to combine inner psychic manifestations with symbols, images, and feelings (Stevens 2002). Notably, the collective unconscious is a paradigm of a self-sustained, objective, deep inner (non-external) space that contains all repressed, forgotten, and primordial contents (Jung 2014a). Next, I will sketch the central aspects of Jung's theory of the psyche to set up the framework of what I call the transpersonal Self in RPGs. In particular, the focus will be on archetypes and constellations.

Jung's program attempts to describe the psyche and its dynamics. The Jungian M. Stein claims, "I think of it as a three-dimensional map that shows the levels of the psyche as well as the dynamic interrelations among them" (1998, 8). His theory is affect-based, as feelings are the centers for organizing psychic components (Kalsched 1996). "The essential basis of our personality is affectivity. Thought and action are, as it were, only symptoms of affectivity" (Jung 1982, CW 3 78, 57). What we call the Self is not identical to the Ego or persona. The Self is a tapestry of all the different features of subjectivity, both the conscious and unconscious (what we and others see, and we don't, respectively). Instead, the Ego is only the front—or most external part—of the Self and its locus. It is an actualization of the Self and, thus, that part of our personality at the center of the consciousness (Stevens 2022). The unconscious is where all the repressed and forgotten contents gather (Jung 2014a). It can be divided into two layers, the personal and the transpersonal, and integrated into three parts: the ego and the personal unconscious (together constituting the personal Self), and the collective unconscious accounting for the transpersonal Self (Beltran 2012).

The personal unconscious contains psychic contents that disappeared from the immediate consciousness because they were either forgotten or repressed (Jung 2014a). It includes a set of personality patterns that depend on each individual acquisition, named feeling-toned complexes (Jung 2014a). Complexes are autonomous groups of representations or emotional images that serve as "the basic building blocks of the personal psyche" (Beltran 2013, 97). They are affects that bring out a "tone" organizing sensations, ideas, memories, concepts, etc., and are thought of as a psychic analog to molecules (Jung 1982). Strong experiences are accompanied by strong affects and complexes allow them to cluster around. However, a personality's concrete history requires that the Self transverses to a more primordial and transcendental level (Stevens 2002). There, complexes group together around universal figures of supra-personal character that lie more profoundly in the unconscious (Beltran 2013). The collective unconscious is the deepest stratum containing those primordial structures that serve as conditions of possibility for the human experience as such, thus being transcendently shared by subjects. It does not come from personal experience, but it is innate, and "identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in everyone of us" (Jung 2014a, CW 9 3, 4). In this sense, it is

shared among humans, being “an impersonal psyche common to all men, even though it expresses itself through a personal consciousness. When anyone breathes, his breathing is not a phenomenon to be interpreted personally” (Jung 2014b, CW 9 314, 186).

The contents encoded in the collective unconscious are called archetypes. They are “more or less invariant universal fantasies and patterns of behavior” (Stein 1998) and present themselves without mediation, for example, in our dreams and fantasies or wrought in mythology (Jung, 2014a), setting up the playground for our symbol-forming capacities (Stevens 2002). One would say that the complexes are the matter of psychic contents, as a personal shell, while the archetypes are their form, as a transpersonal core (Kalsched 1996). Archetypes are archaic (originary) and possess a psychoid (quasi-psychic) character, i.e., not representable (Jung 2010). Rather than being ideas, we can think of them as universal instinctive patterns that organize the unconscious psychic process in the personal Self (Jung 2010). Hence, archetypes-as-such are not empirical by themselves but only, in a sense, the deposits of all our ancestral (and future) human experiences. They work as *a priori* categories of the psyche, much in the Kantian sense (Kant 1999, Bishop 1996). As conditions of possibility for human life, archetypes reach “not only upwards to the spiritual heights of religion, art, and metaphysics but also down into the dark realms of organic and inorganic matter” (Stevens 2002, 34). As a result, archetypes are not universal images (representations) but universal propensities to have specific experiences and create certain images (Papadopoulos 2006; McGrath 2012). “We must, however, constantly bear in mind that what we mean by “archetype” is in itself irrepresentable, but has effects which make visualizations of it possible, namely, the archetypal images and ideas” (Jung 1975c, CW 8 417, 278). Therefore, despite them going beyond historicity, we are used to representing them via stereotypical (archetypical) images, such as the Trickster, the Great Mother, the Shadow, etc. (Rensma 2009).

However, one should not forget that unlike Kantian *a priori* representations devoid of sensuous content (Jung 1963), archetypes are not mere formal figures but “a living, empirical entity, charged not only with meaningfulness but also with feeling” and “a piece of life, a living system of reactions and aptitudes” (Stevens 2002, 44). “To the extent that the archetypes intervene in the shaping of conscious content by regulating, modifying, and motivating them, they act like instincts” (Jung 1975d, CW 8 404, 266). They have the task of crystallizing experiences in terms of complexes, furnishing the imprint of subsequent experiences (Samuels 1986), and providing meaningful representations for our psychic dynamics with which we can interact. To achieve this end, Jung regarded them as bipolar structures. “One pole of the archetype represents instinct and related affects rooted in the body; the other pole is represented by a form-giving spiritual component made up of images produced by the mind. The psyche exists between these two opposites and represents a “third” factor combining instinct/affect and spirit into unconscious fantasies that create meaning” (Kalsched 1996, 92). The archetype allows the inner and outer world, allowing for context-based responses, so “the image represents the meaning of the instinct” (Jung 1975d, CW 8 398, 262). The closest metaphysical objects are probably F. W. J. Schelling’s primordial thoughts (*Urgedaken*), universal figures that, in the form of the gods of mythology, take root in art and poetry, forcing themselves into existence and developing by the rules of fantasy within the German philosopher’s psycho-ontological interpretation of mythology (Schelling 1999, McGrath 2012). Finally, they can also be considered biological entities subject to natural selection and, thus, evolution (Stevens 2002). In a way, we inherited them so they could be traced back to primordial times in an evolutionary sense. Still, there are no vestiges but biological necessities, and current avenues investigate their psychobiological origin (Vedor 2023), either in the brain architecture (Major 2021) or in the genetic background (Major 2021) as biological programs.

4. TRANSPERSONAL, INTRAPERSONAL, AND RPG SELVES

Personal experience translates to the activation and development of archetypal potential dormant in the deep layers of personality. Individuation is the process of integrating the Self as an Ego (Stevens 2002). It is a natural activity where the Self conforms as an individual by making all the Selves into a whole personality that recognizes itself as such (Bowman 2012, Beltrán 2012). The Ego is not fixed, but it is created every time new experiences arise to be integrated. Consequently, we always have the potential for personal growth and change. During individuation, people empirically engage with archetypes, then “The Ego experiences itself as an individual in this moment -separate, somehow, from the archetypal entities with whom it has interacted, and yet altered through the experience of interaction itself. Jung dubs this process individuation, the sudden awareness of the Ego, as distinct from the archetypes” (Bowman 2012). In this way, we would say that our psyche’s personal history is not merely determined causally but emerges from both historical events occurring to us and the collective history of the whole species, encoded in the archetypes (Stevens 2002). I will call the archetypal level, where the Self gets in touch with its supra-personal dimension, the transpersonal Self. Hence, the engagement with the archetypes is the point of contact between the personal and transpersonal Selves.

Let's go back to RPGs. When one considers the interplay of the individuation process and how RPGs participate in forming the Self, noteworthy imagination plays a central role. Imagination is a productive faculty that entails synthetic power, so it can combine different contents, even contradictory ones, and integrate them into new ones. For Jung, active imagination and free association are means of individuation (Beltran 2012). Active imagination creates a free space for the ego to relax, allowing the unconscious to participate in the integration process (Beltran 2013). Bowman adds, "Active imagination involves the relaxation or temporary suspension of the primary ego in order to delve into deeper levels of consciousness." (Bowman 2012). At those moments, the growth potential is unleashed. This is particularly important for Jung's psychotherapy, as the Ego could be nurtured by symbols extracted and arising from the collective unconscious that, being impossible to get sick, could heal and restore the psyche (Stevens 2002, 39). Active imagination is also connected to immersion (Bowman 2012). As W. Beltran explains, "the archetypes embedded in one's own personal psychic landscape make them useful for unpacking the ongoing process of interaction between players and their characters." (2012, 91). Evidently, RPGs offer a playground to intensify the unconscious processes relevant to the imagination. So, it seems bleed is deeply intertwined with these capacities. However, to account for the deepness of RPGs and the interactive and collaborative narrative insufflating life to them, we need to go beyond the transpersonal Self, i.e., to create a new category. The reason is that the imagination participating in RPGs is not merely individual but collective, shared.

A central question to this work is: where do RPG characters come from? A short answer would be that they are partly conscious, partly unconscious, a mosaic of elements of the Self, gathered by the imagination. Nevertheless, the phenomenon is more complex once we consider the RPG's deepness. Even though personas could initially drive their characters during character creation, they live in a co-created world. Once characters develop, they become simultaneously fed from the collective experiences of all the people involved in the game, either Game Directors or players. They do not come just from the action of a single participant but from a mutual ground. In other words, RPGs occur in the shared imaginary world where the story unfolds. Thus, to set up a framework for bleed and consent in RPGs, we must make a second distinction between players and their Self when interacting with the co-created narrative that composes RPGs. One of the challenges in RPGs is that meaning emerges outside of a traditional derivative conceptual way from premises to conclusions. Instead, their deepness results from a rhizomatic unfolding that gets across complex levels of the personal Self, intersubjectivity, and the world itself (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). I will call the Ego that emerges and is integrated within the co-created space as the interpersonal Self.

How is this interpersonal Self composed? To separate the different figures in which a persona interacts with the world built in RPG, as Egos, I employ D. Waskul's formalism (2002, Waskul and Lust 2004). The RPG participant is divided into three figures (Selves) acting in different worlds: the person playing, the player, and the character. The person is the figure that inhabits everyday life, or that belongs to the real world. The player is the figure the Self takes when participating in the ludic activity. It belongs to the imaginary world, the space resulting from the co-created interactive narrative. Lastly, the character is the figure that lives by the fictional or fantastic world, i.e., the scenario that follows its own rules and possesses its internal coherence, natural or supernatural. The person is the anchor in the ordinary world, while the player enters the magical circle of the RPG session (gaming world). From there, the character explores, develops, and thrives within the fantastic world. Nevertheless, the separation is never completed: "Role-playing games obligate participants to occupy a liminal role located in the boundaries of persona, player, and person" (Waskul & Lust 2004). There is a continuous overlap of the three worlds and their figures. One piece of evidence for this is the existence and necessity of meta-game. A clear separation is not as strict as R. Caillois would demand of every game (Caillois 2001), and the magic circle seems semi-permeable (Salen & Zimmerman 2003; Bastarrachea-Magnani 2023). Summarizing it, the created world in RPGs lives in three different "logical spaces": the ordinary, everyday world; the imaginary, transient, or liminal world; and the fantastic, supernatural, extraordinary world, where the dominant figure is the persona, the player and the character, respectively. Notice that neither the character nor the player comes from a single Self (persona) but emerges within the interpersonal Self from a shared (overlapped) individuation process considering all the Selves (participants) taking a role in the RPG. Here, we observe that bleed becomes not a singularity but part of the individuation process of figures as a result of shifting between Egos in the interpersonal Self.

Likewise, the way these figures traverse these worlds is not unique. Jonaya Kemper's proposal to apply Simon Brind's ideas to larp seems relevant here (Brind 2017). Kemper distinguishes between the plot, the story, and the narrative. The plot would be the plan or script in the mind of players and Game Directors (GD); the story is how the events unfold for the figures in the actual play; the narrative is how the events are put together once the game session has occurred (Kemper 2020). In other words, they constitute three temporal moments linking

the real, imaginary, and fantastic worlds concerning the actual play, i.e., before, during, and after. The Self is integrated and re-integrated during game sessions due to the interaction with the other Selves and their own figures (other participants of the RPG, the GDs, or even the fictive blocks present in the game session). Thus, the interpersonal Self emerges from the propagation of the personal Self back and forth between the Ego and the character as an emergent phenomenon resulting from the Selves in action. The three different worlds (Waskul's) and three different accounts (Kemper's) set up a complementary framework to investigate the distance between the player, persona, and character (Diakolambrianou & Bowman 2023). I believe these dynamics play a key role in bleed phenomena and must be considered when addressing consent, e.g., regarding Shadow work. Bowman points out that "players and facilitators can shape their preparation before games, the play experience itself, and post-game processing with the intention of working with the personal and/or collective Shadow" (2022, 8). Consent-based play requires considering those moments beyond the single game session.

Once we have established the different figures composing the interpersonal Self, we define the RPG Self as the Ego that emerges in the transient domain shaped by the confluence between the transpersonal and the interpersonal Selves. It feeds on the psychic content of the persona playing and their engagement with the collective unconscious, as well as from all the figures participating in the interpersonal Self. Here, M. Buber's idea of the I-Thou (2018) comes in handy in the sense that the existence of the interhuman existence realm, such as the RPG Self, rises only in endeavors when one relates the otherness with our whole being (Gordon 2002). To explain the emergence of characters in the RPG Self, I will discuss the concept of constellation next.

5. ARCHETYPE CONSTELLATION

Constellation is a concept that Jung mentions continuously in his works but rarely defines. In short, it denotes the activation (Jung 1976) or actualization of the archetypes (Papadopoulos 2006). It constitutes the "symbolic law" dictating their dynamics before manifesting at the level of the personal consciousness, i.e., as a patterns of behavior (complexes). Constellation would then be the (symbolic) process by which archetypes can manifest structurally but concretely in the psyche (Jung 1982), thus forming the Self. The word is formed by the Latin root *Stella* (star), the prefix *con-* which means coming together, and the suffix *-ation*, which points to an action, process, or state. In other words, it means the process of joining/joined stars. Here, of course, the stars play the symbolic role of being the archetypes, a wink to stargazing and astrology applied to the inner self.

In his 1905 text, *The Psychological Diagnosis of Evidence*, where Jung studied word associations, he explained that "(...) the complex has the effect that the subject does not react by arbitrary random connections of words but derives most of his reactions from the complex. The influence of the complex on thinking and behaviour is called a constellation. The reactions of our subject are thus constellated by a complex" (Jung 1981a, CW 2 733, 321). Also, in *A Review of the Complex Theory*, the Swiss psychologist details that

This term simply expresses the fact that the outward situation releases a psychic process in which certain contents gather together and prepare for action. When we say that a person is "constellated," we mean that he has taken up a position from which he can be expected to react in a quite definite way. But the constellation is an automatic process that happens involuntarily and which no one can stop of his own accord. The constellated contents are definite complexes possessing their own specific energy." (Jung 1975a, CW 8 198, 132)

Constellation could be conscious (active), half-conscious, or unconscious; however, for associations, it is primarily a non-conscious process (Jung 1981b). One should notice that, as a process, the concept has two meanings in Jungian terms (von Heydewolff 2000). The first one is the triggering of a complex by external causes, which manifests in the thinking and acting as a disturbed state of consciousness influenced by the archetypes behind those complexes (Jung 1981a, 1975a). Here, I am focused on the second one, i.e., the process with which the archetypes are clustered unconsciously and spontaneously in the form of images (fantasies and dreams). Constellation allows one to become conscious of something really new or keep aware of unsolvable conflicts (von Heydewolff 2000).

The central feature of a constellation is it comprises a simultaneous activation of a specific mix of archetypes leading to a set of complexes. In other words, archetypes are neither activated alone nor actualized as a whole, so they cluster to manifest as living possibilities in thought and action, "mostly, archetypes affect individuals and groups not in isolation but in clusters/networks/constellations" (Papadopoulos 2006, 32). Otherwise, the psyche will be overloaded. According to Stevens (2002), Jung:

...came to the conclusion that elements capable of constellating an archetype activated not just the corresponding portions of the archetype but the total archetypal system. The system, once activated, then seeks encounter with associated elements other than those which brought about the original activation. This hypothesis is entirely in line with Jung's overall concept of a Self which seeks its own completion in the individuation process. (Stevens 2002, 143)

The field concept from quantum physics would be analogous to a constellation, as contents in the collective unconscious appear ordered, just as particles arrange in the presence of a magnetic, electric, or any field and are dressed by them; hence, what "makes sense" for the conscious mind is in harmony with the preconscious constellation (von Franz 1964).

As the bring birth of archetypal images, constellation is a specific way in which we refer to the individuation process: archetypes aggregate when actualized, as no single group is a priori predominant. Hence, a constellation entails two parts: first, the clustering of the archetypes, and next, the cluster of the empirical, personal manifestation, or the complexes. Jung explains, "In my studies of the phenomena of association I have shown that there are certain constellations of psychic elements grouped round feeling-toned contents, which I have called "complexes." (Jung 1975b, CW 8 18, 25). So, constellations, as clusters of archetypes, are definite and help to actualize complexes, creating a complex-constellation duplex. "Yet human beings differ immensely in the strength of their emotions. In accordance with the intensity of their emotions people's thinking and behaviour are constellated by their complexes, and so are their associations" (Jung 1981a, CW 2 737, 322). There are as many constellations as contexts we face. "The grip that the archetypal constellation would have on an individual creates a new context, a shift, a new unique pattern that shapes and, indeed, patterns one's understanding of one-self, one's relationships with others, and one's very sense of identity" (Papadopoulos 2006, 37). A constellation works as a based affective network of archetypal meaning. In this sense, I would call archetypes pleiotropic, i.e., they participate in more than one effect.

I consider the constellation concept richer for the description of RPGs than that of individuation alone because the first refers directly to a simultaneous instantiation of several archetypes, creating a self-reference mental space that, even though it does not have an extension, as in the traditional physical space, allows for the positioning of the archetypes concerning each other by limiting themselves, through their mutual constellation (Stevens 2002).

6. CONSTELLATION ENGAGEMENT

A major thesis in RPG studies is that the rise of larp, TTRPGs, and almost all forms of RPGs in general, is a result of a postmodern need for myth, ritual, and archetypal engagement in Western society, getting a closer involvement with the archetypes. (Beltran 2012). Indeed, one challenge for RPG Studies is understanding these processes and their consequences (Bowman 2012). I propose a symbolic approach is adequate to discern the archetypal dimension in RPGs (Bastarrachea-Magnani 2023). Symbols are representations capable of embodying inexhaustible content (the signified) and transferring vitality via each embodiment (the signifiers). The psychoid character of archetypes is manifested via the two possible exegeses of the symbol, rituals, and myths. "Archetypes are models that appear repeatedly in mythological figures and images across cultures and throughout the human experience" (Beltran 2012, 90). As symbolic devices, RPGs are ritual and mythic phenomena (dramatic liminal action and everlasting narratives) (Bastarrachea-Magnani 2023) that operate through symbolic experiences. The central thesis of archetype engagement in RPGs is that "Enacting characters supersedes the limits of player's everyday roles so that they may engage more directly with the archetypes by relaxing their own egos" (Beltrán 2012, 91). As I propose below, this effect is possible thanks to the symbolic amplification in the RPG Self via constellated experiences.

As mentioned, the constellation process creates a self-referenced psychic space that does not require an a priori hierarchy, neither rational nor affective. The complex-constellation duplex gives birth to an image as an embodiment of an activated group of archetypes linked together and capable of attaining the symbolic level, thus becoming profoundly meaningful to us. Complexes become images of a symbolic, personified affect, i.e., they have a universal tendency "to image themselves in dreams and other fantasy material as animate beings (persons) in dynamic interaction with the ego. The psyche's natural symbol-forming function (if adequately constellated by "good enough" parental care automatically personifies affects in the form of recognizable images" (Kalsched 1996, 90). This personification is context-based, as the actualization of archetypes is a complex and rich phenomenon in which the combination salience of cultural, historical elements, and personal situations contribute to the onset of the final constellation for that situation (Stevens 2002). In other words, archetype en-

gagement leads to constellation engagement, and the individuation process gives place to creating constellations of meaning, where all images created, characters, and objects in a cosmos (ordered world) possess coexistent (simultaneous) meaningful relations.

This idea of a constellated cosmos of meaningful, personified images can be enriched by considering archetypal psychology (Hillman 1970), an evolution of Jung's theory, developed by later Jungians such as J. Hillman, G. Paris, and M. V. Adams, where the study of psychic experiences and their processes shifts from the archetypes to their phenomenal manifestations, precisely, the imaginal landscape and culture, including fantasy, symbolic images and the narratives triggered by them (Hillman 2004, Paris 2008). This is a departure from the Kantian character of archetypes (Hillman 2004, Bishop 1996), defining them not as underlying structures but as symbolic constructs (Adams 2004). Images become central to constructing reality, knowledge, and the psyche, turning into an irreducible datum for archetypal psychology. In agreement with the notion of constellation I am proposing, all images can become archetypal, i.e., they can gain both "intentional force (Jung's "instinct") and the mythical field of personifications (Hillman's "Gods")" (Hillman 2004, 25), ascending to the symbolic domain (Hillman 1978), where they turn tautegoric (Bastarrachea-Magnani 2023). Adams (2004) goes further to propose a fantasy principle, where fantasy is no longer associated with an unsatisfied life, something that must be cured or corrected to conform to an externally defined reality (Freud) but is seen as a wish fulfillment, a vital principle, natural to everyone, including happy persons. This approach aims to increase the consciousness about fantasies and images in interpreting our experiences, as they don't require translation as mere interpretations but an effort to make conscious of what they mean in themselves (Adams 2004). "The function of reality is adaptation; the function of irreality is liberation from that very adaptation" (Adams 2004, 7).

While my approach is not detached from the Kantian perspective of Jung's archetypes, I consider an important contribution of archetypal psychology that images reaching an archetypal level become personified features symbolically alive (Adams 2004). Whether we talk about the clustering of archetypes (Jung's analytic psychology) or at the level of the meaningful networks of images (archetypal psychology), what matters is the impact of constellations over our lives while we play an RPG. I think of RPG characters as constellations capable of an "affective presence" (Armstrong 1971) shared at the table. Jung says an image "is a speaking figure at all, then say what you have to say to that figure and listen to what he or she has to say" (1973, 460). As archetypal images, they are alive, i.e., they become "animated like an animal (...) and like a person whom one loves, fears, delights in, is inhibited by, and so forth" (Hillman 2004, 25).

We see how the idea of the RPG Self helps conceptualize why RPGs are excellent territories for fostering archetypal (constellation) engagement. Within the RPG Self, we can play with a larger and richer space of affect-based personifications (Ego-figures). During the RPG session, our Self expands beyond the collective unconscious via the transpersonal Self, which then flows through the interpersonal space (person-player-character) toward the same collective unconscious, but now based on the Self of the other persons playing. The experience is thus intensified (amplified) via the interplay between the personal and the collective unconscious and through the interaction with the interpersonal Self and "other transpersonal Selves." Figures and characters are Egos emerging in the magic circle of RPG present themselves constellated and can be seen as personified, enriched complexes in the RPG Self. In this framework, Game Worlds result from the interconnected evocation of archetype clusters, a set of constellated character personalities of both the players and Game Directors. In summary, characters are co-constellations that may emerge as symbolic images full of the life-enhancing power from the archetypes. I conjecture their constellated character grants them persistence in their psyche even beyond the game session.

Here, RPGs' ritual features are central because they offer a liminal space where we engage with non-typical roles (Beltran, 2012). It is the liminal space that makes it possible to create alibis and feel safe enough to relax, expand the self, and engage with constellations. Bowman elaborates on this idea: "Because of the protective frame of the magic circle, the temporary loss of identity and assumption of a new role is understood and accepted. Therefore, even within liminal experiences, the participants feel a sense of safety when altering their identity and performing unusual acts" (2012, 52). Moreover, Beltrán claims that "Larp gives players access to roles they would not have the ability to occupy in everyday life, thus stimulating the development of their own internal archetypes. Instead of remaining defined and fenced in by a narrow identity, the psyche has a chance to examine experiences in other climes of mental and emotional space, allowing for an opportunity for expansion of the self" (2012, 91). In this relaxed state, the interaction between clusters of constellated, self-referenced archetypes appears as shared characters and situations fostering an inter-individuation, explaining the organic character of the RPG narrative and its deepness. Here, Stevens' claim is appropriate: "Without some acknowledgment of the devil within us, individuation cannot proceed: coming to terms with one's own evil is the first and indispensable stage in conscious realization of the Self." (2022, 277).

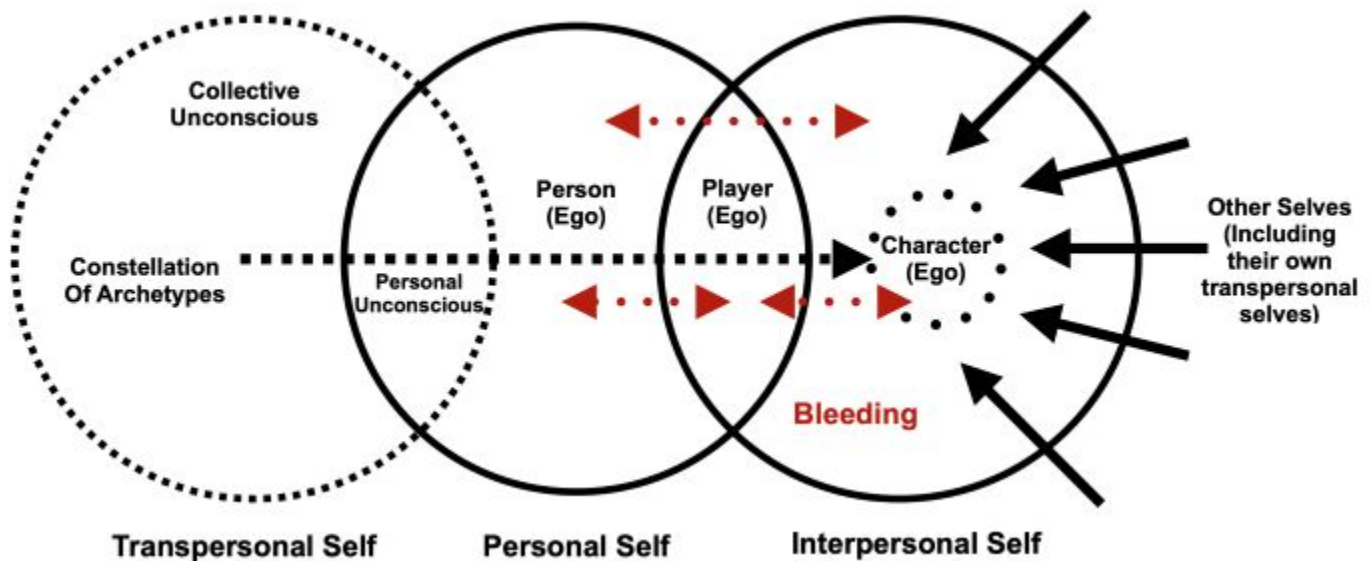


Figure 1: Author's diagram of bleed and different selves

Now, we can understand bleed within the constellation context. Ego bleed, as the thinning of the person-character frontier, can be explained as a requirement of the agile management between the Egos (constellations) in the RPG Self that players exhibit (Leonard & Thurman 2018), from person to player, person to character, character to player, etc. In general, bleed would occur because, once the constellations enter into play, the transitional process between those figures in the interpersonal Self is potentiated through archetypal engagement. There is no isolated figure; all of them are subsumed within a constellated network of feeling and meaning that pours into us and the others. How bleed and its threshold manifest depends on the constellation. In the figure below, a pictorial schema summarizes the proposal of the parts of the RPG Self, the constellation, and the bleed process.

7. MYTHIC NARRATIVES AND CONSENT

Given that mythic narratives are a by-product of the constellation and the testimony we interact with, it is important to consider them in a constellation-based framework for consent in RPGs. Mythology is one piece of evidence that prompted Jung to propose the idea of universal structures within the psyche (Stevens 2002). Personal experience becomes transpersonal thanks to a self-amplification process of the complex via a mythology that spiritualizes and aggrandizes their personifications (Kalsched 1996, 89). Mythic stories become the narrative link between existence and meaning and the link itself, helping to actualize our potentiality. In *The Structure of the Psyche*, Jung sets up the connection between constellation and mythology by asserting that,

The whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious. We can see this most clearly if we look at the heavenly constellations, whose originally chaotic forms were organized through the projection of images. This explains the influence of the stars as asserted by astrologers. These influences are nothing but unconscious, introspective perceptions of the activity of the collective unconscious. Just as the constellations were projected into the heavens, similar figures were projected into legends and fairytales or upon historical persons. We can therefore study the collective unconscious in two ways, either in mythology or in the analysis of the individual. (1975c, CW 8 325, 205)

As the German philosopher Schelling pointed out, we do not make myths, but they make us: "Since mythology is nothing other than the archetypal world itself and the initial universal intuition of the universe" (Schelling 1989, 52). Whether we create myths or not, "our engagement with them is meaningful and important" (Beltran 2012). Myths are necessary as a source of legitimacy and vitality of life and reason. Getting in touch with myths allows us to draw vitality from the archetypal source. As Stevens points out, "they awaken in us a sense of participation in the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* which pervades the relationship between the cosmos and the Self" (2002, 41). Ultimately, every story we tell is infused with emotions and interpretations, and our identity is created from the mythic complicatio of old and new stories (Paris 2008).

The mythic character of RPGs offers novel opportunities for easing the incorporation of constellations into everyday life. Precisely, when RPG characters and adventures reach a mythic level, this is reflected in their imprint on our memories as a testimony to a numinous, powerful experience (Stevens, 2002). The archetypal, dormant potential flourishes and allows the re-creation of our Egos by integrating mythical gaming experiences. The constellation organically forms a personified affective “other,” which is not a mere reflection of the personal Ego but nourished from all the complexity of Selves in play, allowing us to gain contrast and transform ourselves. Thought as symbolic devices, RPGs transform us both consciously and unconsciously; their ritual features provide permanence to their mythical ones and the later meaning to the first. Hence, they grant us ways to modify, expand, and enrich our inner and outer Selves. “The symbols linked with each stage are constellated by the rituals culturally ordained as appropriate to that stage, and through the medium of a rite of passage provide a safe and reliable means for further development” (Stevens 2002, 196). Precisely, one function of rituals and myths is to alleviate the weight of rapid events in our lives that produce significant change and are common between people sharing a spatio-temporal, historical, and cultural framework. Hugaas points out that “the simulated events to which we subject ourselves will most likely be substantially more dramatic than any we will ever experience in our modern lives” (2019). The freedom in RPGs offers archetypes the chance to be consciously represented in personal mythical images or tropes, including legends, heroes, gods, and characters, without depleting their manifestation, as they are symbolic and thus alive, persistent, and reliable.

Because the affect-based power of mythic narratives emerging in RPGs is spontaneous, it should be considered for consent-based gaming. According to G. Paris (2008), identity transformation via individuation has two avenues: reinterpreting the mythic narrative in which an experience is ciphered but keeping the same archetype behind it or changing the archetypes and creating a new myth. Paris explains, “Freedom begins with how one interprets that situation, creates a version of the story, and angles the plot with a certain archetypal inflection” (2008, 2). As a means of fictionalization, RPGs grant us a playground to change the scripts of our everyday lives, hence, the archetypes and myths driving us. This includes unearthing hidden and destructive mythic narratives (Paris 2008), performing Shadow work (Beltrán 2013), but also, the converse: that a powerful mythic narrative infused with our spontaneous bleed and that of the other participants creates a robust constellated network of meaning that leads to harmful effects.

Archetypal psychology hints at a cue to deal with this: conscious gaming. As we have seen, this theory “invites us to pay attention to the distance or the proximity between the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves as well as the stories others relate about us or to us” (Paris 2008, 6). Thus, for practicing consent in RPGs, the three epistemological tenants of archetypal psychology, when considered as an imaginology, are helpful (Adams 2004). Explication (making the image’s essence explicit), amplification (contrasting and comparing the image with cultural sources), and active imagination taken as “a deliberate induction of fantasy by the patient (...)” that “(...) entails both observation of the images and participation with them” (Adams 2004, 15). Jung explains “You must step into the fantasy yourself and compel the figures to give you an answer. Only in this way is the unconscious integrated with consciousness by means of a dialectical procedure, a dialogue between yourself and the unconscious figures. Whatever happens in the fantasy must happen to you” (1973, 561). Acknowledging that RPGs are interactive playgrounds for active imagination and that we can exercise a dialogue with the co-constellations (shared personifications) opens up a pathway toward safe play. Also, here, it is relevant to notice that Jung’s approach has been criticized because, in the search for the transcendental of the collective unconscious, he more or less overlooked the fact there is psychic energy inspired by cultural, historical, and geographical strains (Brewster 2017). Hence, I recognize the emphasis of archetypal psychology on the context-based constellation of the archetypes or “objective level,” i.e., that the personification of affects is not only self-referenced in the inner world as constellations but must be referenced to objects in the external reality (Adams 2004). In Modern societies, racial and gender identities are charged with social trauma. For example, regarding the archetypal nature of African American culture, F. Brewster notices that “Understanding that racism as a possible archetypal energy is always present in the therapy room is a helpful beginning. This establishes a degree of honesty upon which trust can be built” (2017, 10). This is particularly important for consent at the table, as this kind of energy varies depending on the society. For example, the tension between Prehispanic and Hispanic heritage in Post-colonial Mexico has always been in play, impregnating all the figures in the RPG sessions in the games I have participated in, either as a player or Game Director.

8. SOME INSIGHTS ON THE GAME DIRECTOR’S BLEED

I would also draw attention to the role of Game Directors in this context. According to Zagal and Deterding: “One special player – called the referee, game master, judge, dungeon master, or something similar – is the arbi-

ter and manager of the game. The referee enforces the rules of the game, and enacts the fictional world by telling the players what their characters perceive and what the non-player characters (NPCs) do" (2018, 27). May it be a referee, an arbiter, an authority, a holder of the ruling, a procedural guide, a storyteller, a demiurge, or just another player, the Game Director faces the tasks of planning, improvising, and keeping the fun and the coherence of the narrative. This is very challenging because GDs face the "implicit promise of TRPGs that a player can at least try to do anything" (White et al. 2022, 46). The GD features are tied to their interactions with the players. For example, White et al. characterize the figure in terms of two polarities (2022). First, the monologic versus dialogic, where the GDs regard players as a more passive or active audience, respectively; second, the adversary versus non-adversary, where the GMs are responsible for posing challenges to the players (thus, a figure of a planner) against that of one who is there to entertain the players, proper of recent times (White et al. 2022). In any case, the figure of the GD has not been as thoroughly investigated as the players (Torner 2008). Understanding the psychic and symbolic processes of Game Directing is central, not only because "being a Dungeon Master presents itself as a rather challenging interactional practice requiring no small degree of group communication skill and leadership ability" (White et al. 2022, 47) but also due to the common thought that a human GD has an advantage over other media thanks to "their capacity to read the emotions and desires of their fellow players and adapt to them," despite "they are also often limited by their previous preparation for a session and their capacity to convincingly improvise new material" (Jara & Torner 2018, 276).

This sets up a phenomenological difference that must be considered when discussing bleed for GDs for which no study has been done to date, as well as its implications for consent. While RPG players tend to stay in a single character, GDs shift between several personalities (such as Non-Player Characters or NPCs, landscapes, and other strange personalities). They tend to overlap those figures to build and sustain the imaginary and fictitious worlds where the players and characters unfold and, more significantly, where the Egos relax. They lead the becoming of the plot into a story. Moreover, while NPCs can be mere narrative resources, they can develop well-defined personalities and emotional charges after repeated interaction with player characters (and other NPCs). These personalities could go back and forth between sessions for months or even years. It seems GDs somehow learn empirically how to control bleed-in and bleed-out and polish this ability with practice. In any case, GDs should have a mechanism of bleed management and steering for themselves. Otherwise, it would be impossible to handle multiple characters simultaneously. So, while bleed might be more or less intense in players, in GDs, bleed management is necessary and would become more natural to them with practice.

Here, constellation and the RPG Self concepts help develop an initial framework for studying GD bleed. I propose that GDs exploit constellations to draw specific figures and worlds and save mental and emotional resources. Once an archetype cluster is evoked, all the personalities the GDs handle can be interconnected a posteriori, i.e., during and after sessions. The constellation of meaning supporting the fantasy world directed by the GD eases the psychic effort to maintain it. Constellation is particularly relevant for GD bleed because it comprises a self-limited process not immediately overflowed by external triggers and allows for the simultaneous manifestation of figures and, most importantly, sub-personalities. However, at this stage, an empirical study becomes necessary. We would need to determine quantitatively (statistically) what kind of bleed happens the most in GDs (either emotional, procedural, memetic, etc.), how these features change between larp and TTRPG or other forms of RPG, what are the short and long-term effects that GDs recognize, and how they steer it.

9. CAVEATS AND CONCLUSIONS: CONSENT FOR AN RPG SELF

The proposed framework allows the translation of the deepness of RPGs in terms of the autonomy each constellation gains. When a constellation comes to life, personified, it demands an interaction as an organic entity. Infused from the vital content of the archetypes is an emergent phenomenon expressed symbolically, i.e., in ritual and mythical spaces. The network of meaning sustaining itself via the participation of the interpersonal Selves (each persona, player, and character) is reflected in the story's symbolic character. Then, once the game session is finished, all the aspects are redistributed and separated, returning to the transformed, personal Self.

Where do characters go once the game session ends, though? As mentioned before, unlike other games, there is a sort of character permanence, i.e., part of the interpersonal Self remains somehow open. Otherwise, one would be prevented from recovering or recreating the "same" Player Character (PC) or Non-Player Character (NPC). What is true is that the borders of the RPG Self are not fixed, not at the level of the inner, transpersonal, or the outer, interpersonal worlds. Hence, bleed seems not a matter of solely the interplay of persona and character but an intensification of an intersubjective (constellated) process resulting from all the participants of the table or scenario feeding characters. Namely, insofar as bleed is subjectively acknowledged, it is also a collective phenomenon nourished by the spillover of all the participants and figures in the gameplay. Bleed-in and bleed-out

would then be ciphered in the spontaneous integration and disintegration of constellations, and the degree of control, such as steering, might be related to how conscious we can be about the specific constellations in play.

My aim is to draw attention to the development of a consent-based way of playing RPGs that takes into account that characters, as co-constellations, do not wholly belong to a single person or player but evolve thanks to the input of all the figures participating in the RPG Self, so there is a shared responsibility of them. It is not my character but our characters. Consent is not only about communicating discomfort during play but also developing safety tools to deal with the persisting vulnerability resulting from the intense exchange of personal and transpersonal content, as in bleed phenomena in the liminal space and beyond it, in the mythic domain extending and binding game sessions among each other. Personified complexes could disturb the Ego as they gain autonomy, which becomes problematic if the Ego is individuated in a shared open space. Of course, not all game sessions are so intense to grant this autonomy. Still, it will depend on the subjective psychic gauge of each participant, their historical and geographical context, and the resources that shape the narrative and gameplay (props, miniatures, maps, etc.). Nevertheless, we should remember that “To the psyche, a negative meaning is apparently preferable to no meaning at all; a negative fantasy better than no fantasy whatsoever” (Kalsched 1996, 95). From the Jungian standpoint, a Self can become a survival Self, i.e., an archaic self-defense and self-splitting “form taken by the Self when its otherwise individuating energies have been diverted to an earlier development task, i.e., assuring the individual’s survival” (Kalsched 1996, 97). In the face of a threat, the archetype splits its duality, offering a dislocated fantasy to represent the ordeal, and this image can gain control over our lives.

Thus, first we need to calibrate mechanics to assess the affect tolerance of players before, in between, and during game sessions. This is no simple task, considering one cannot identify the breaching of consent by simply looking at the bursting of the magic circle anymore. Unlike video games with “unlimited” storage for characters, personified complexes brought from session to session may produce weariness to players and Game Directors alike. Second, we need to develop awareness, i.e., practicing a conscious play that trains fantasy to identify the constellations in play, their amplification, and the network of meaning that has developed and remains after the game session. Consent-based playing should consider not only for healthy playing but also for its potential to enhance our capacity for fantasy and transformation. “When functioning healthy, the polarities inherent within the archetype are mediated by the symbolic process which enriches and energizes a flexible ego” (Kalsched 1996, 92). Hence, developing techniques that balance mental and emotional energies and infuse the Egos without overwhelming them may help to improve character enactment so “they can be used intentionally as a vehicle to develop more authentic, empowered, individuated, balanced, and integrated self-concepts in daily life.” (Bowman 2022, 3). Critical consent-based gaming can help to pair bleed phenomena and self-reflection, as well as uncover and potentiate new configurations of the Selves. (Diakolambrianou & Bowman 2023). In the end, players and GDs who lead the ordeal should be careful that characters might spontaneously become transformation images (Adams 2004), inadvertently transforming us and others at the table. Consent entails an active engagement with the safety of our peers. In this sense, RPGs require image work (Hillman, 2004), as it will poetically integrate characters and their symbolic appreciation with the cultural background and its cultural, historical, and geographical affective energies in our everyday lives. Additionally, actively engaging with image work could lead to novel avenues of role-play that exploit conscious constellations.

At this stage, the framework sets up more questions than it answers. For example, how much introjection could play a role in constellating specific archetypal clusters in RPGs? What is the distance between the player, persona, and character that stimulates or reduces bleed? Beltran claims, “When a participant chronically plays over a long period, a certain level of ego bleed from the character to the player is inevitable; those traits that the player continually enacts as their character will eventually integrate at least partially into the player’s understanding of self” (Beltrán 2012, 95). Is this process identical to that of players and GDs alike? How many NPCs can a GD run, and how is the number related to bleed? What are the distinctive traits of bleed-in and bleed-out for GDs? How is the bleed process connected to worldbuilding? Finally, is there any insight into how identity is built and evolves from studying when Game Directors are partitioned into multiple characters and bleed into them? Here, I restrict myself to bringing attention to the nuances of constellated playing and the rich scenario of the RPG Self to investigate personality shifts and identity transformation when we play RPGs, paving the way for further investigations, as well as to recall that “Developing fantasy means perfecting our humanity” (Jung 1977, 40).

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