



# SHADOWS: A VIDEO GAME CONCEPT AND GAME GUIDE FOR THERAPEUTIC USE

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## Personal Interest

I am an emerging adult who has grown up during a technological revolution. I identify as a "gamer" Video games have integrated themselves into my everyday life, and so my life journey can thus be tracked via the video games I have played. Over the years, platforming video games have developed my fine motor skills, an puzzle games have sharpened my thought processing. Strategy video games have improved my cognitive flexibility while adventure video games have inspired me creatively.

Each game I play has an overwhelmingly positive impact on my life as the challenges I face and the lessons I learn within the games highlight areas for personal growth in the real world. I am fascinated by gamings potential to be an engaging and immersive experiences that can facilitate personal growth. Though there is obvious evidence that games can be beneficial in a therapeutic setting, little to no games are being developed for this purpose. I believe that serious video games are an emerging field in therapy and I am therefore very passionate about filling this gap in the research with my applied project and future work as an art therapist.

Emerging adults today- millennials- are the first "born digital" generation to reach adulthood. I am interested in utilizing the familiar experience of gaming to facilitate deep reflection and personal growth in this generations narrative of selfhood.

## Background

### Emerging Adulthood

#### ○ In an Age of Uncertainty...

Social transformations of the twentieth century have fundamentally reconfigured dominant narrative of selfhood (Giddens, 1991)

Young people in their twenties and thirties now embrace a model of therapeutic selfhood: an inwardly self preoccupied with its own psychic development (Silva, 2012)

#### ○ Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development...

Intimacy vs Isolation: Learning to be open and share the self with others while maintaining a sense of self-identity plays a critical role in this stage.

### Decoding the Unconscious

#### ○ The Unconscious...

"To get a true sense of who we are, we must go to the unconscious and set up communication with it. Much of ourselves and many determinants of our character are contained in the unconscious" (Johnson, 1986)

#### ○ Myth...

Myths are original revelations of the preconscious psyche and involuntary statements about the unconscious psyche happenings (Jung, 1959)

The prime function of myth is to reveal the unconscious. The unconscious seeks to communicate its presence as clearly as possible. We simply do not understand its language (Segal, 1999)

#### ○ The Hero's Journey...

Mythological narratives frequently share a fundamental structure. Joseph Campbell (1949) called this structure the **monomyth**, or the hero's journey.

#### ○ Narrative Therapy...

Narratives enable us a symbolic space to contain and organize the endless challenges of our experience (Huss, 2015)

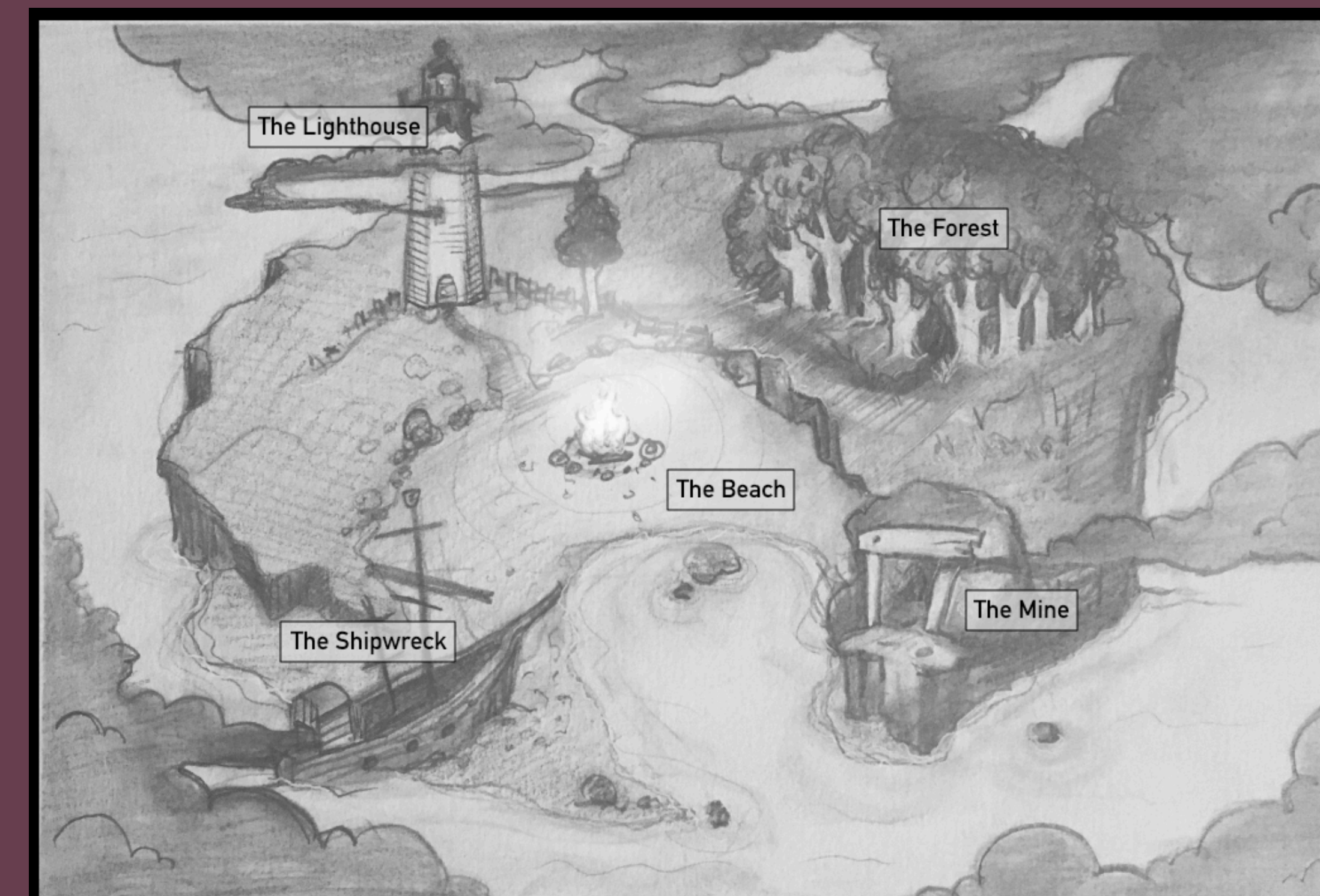
## Gaps

- Studies on the use of video games in therapy tend to focus on the the use of commercial games as a stress reducer, or as CBT interventions.
- Therapeutic video game literature tends to be homogenous towards children and adolescence.
- Few video games have been developed specifically for therapeutic use.
- Few mental health professionals have integrated gaming therapy into their current treatment plans.

## Project Description

*"Shadows" is an atmospheric 2D puzzle adventure game where a faceless hero strives to illuminate an ancient mirror to escape a mysterious island plagued by an infectious darkness that has consumed the faces and corrupted the souls of its unfortunate inhabitants.*

*You play as an adventurer who was thrown from your ship amidst a turbulent ocean storm. You awaken on a mysterious island and discover that you are not yourself. There is a darkness that has consumed your face, leaving you vulnerable to corruption. Armed with the subtle flame of a small lighter, you traverse the shadowy landscape in search of friends, foes, and clues. You are on a heroic quest to illuminate the secrets of the island, find your face, and escape the corrupting darkness...*



### What?

- The project contains concept work for the video game "Shadows", as well as a game guide for therapeutic use
- "Shadows" is a game concept designed to be used as a tool in narrative therapy based on the notion that a video game can act as a symbolic space for a client to explore life's problems and challenges
- "Shadows" is grounded in Jungian theory. The game takes the client on a heroic journey to overcome and integrate their painful shadow identities

### Who?

- "Shadows" is intended for emerging adults between the ages of 18-35 years
- "Shadows" addresses unhelpful behaviours that stem from a sense of isolation in the context of Erik Erikson's developmental theory

### Therapeutic Goals...

- Engage in a heroic and relatable narrative
- Make sense of developmental problems and struggles
- Facilitate an exploration of ones identity
- Engage with meaningful archetypal symbols
- Bring awareness to the unconscious shadow
- Humanize qualities of the self that may be perceived as negative

### Narrative Concepts...

The client engages in the activity of gaming to identify, then re-write their self-narrative through three phases:

- Deconstruction - identify and understand the problem
- Reconstruction - redefine the client's relationship with themselves, history or relationships
- Consolidation - consolidate the alternative self-narrative

### Video Game Mechanics...

- Reframes client as a hero
- A puzzle adventure genre valorizes creativity. Victory in this context is actualized through approaching problems from unique angles
- Encourages the client to inspect the world from different perspectives
- The isolated context of the game influences the player to seek intimacy
- The discovery of painful but relatable narratives of NPC's within the game simulates empathy.

## Reflections

As the gaming industry evolves, game designers and developers may begin to consider the needs of their users as they as they continue to develop new immersive experiences.

In the future I hope to secure funding and complete the games development. "Shadows" is a serious video game that is theoretically informed, engaging, and can be used in a wide variety of settings to provide reflection and insight into one's emotional or developmental challenges.

My intention is to create a gaming experience that is intentionally and inherently therapeutic. Though "Shadows" has been designed to be utilized as a therapeutic intervention within a treatment plan, ultimately I intend the game to be available to the public through online video game digital distribution centres.

If this project succeeds, this game concept is likely to be the first of many.

Through personal experience I am aware of gamings potential to facilitate personal growth and reflection in its players. I am eager to be part of a movement in which video games may be an accessible treatment to mental health issues.

## Whats Next?

### Future Work

- Secure funding for game development through investors, developers, or a crowd funding campaign
- Advocate for a dialogue within the mental health community and the gaming community that discusses, educates and normalizes the use of video games as therapy
- Develop educational training seminars for mental health professionals to facilitate confidence and competency in integrating video games into a treatment plan

### Future Research

- Establishing best practices and ethical protocols for rules of engagement with the game industry as partners
- Standardize therapeutic gaming terminology
- Standardize best practice methodologies and protocols

