



Exploring the Human Psyche in Neon Genesis Evangelion: A Psychological Analysis of Trauma, Identity, and Existentialism

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Abstract

Neon Genesis Evangelion (NGE), created by Hideaki Anno, transcends its mecha genre origins to delve into profound psychological themes such as trauma, identity, existential dread, and human connection. This paper examines the series through multiple lenses, including Freudian psychoanalysis, Jungian psychology, attachment theory, existential philosophy, and theories of self-actualization. By analyzing characters like Shinji Ikari, Asuka Langley Soryu, Rei Ayanami, and Gendo Ikari, this study explores how their behaviors and struggles reflect universal human experiences with trauma, defense mechanisms, and the search for meaning. Additionally, the paper interprets the philosophical and psychological implications of the Human Instrumentality Project, connecting it to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, and postmodernist thought. Through direct quotes from the anime and scholarly sources, this paper contributes to the discourse on trauma, identity, and human connection in contemporary media.

Keywords: Neon Genesis Evangelion, psychological trauma, Freudian psychoanalysis, Jungian archetypes, existential psychology, Human Instrumentality Project

1. Introduction

Neon Genesis Evangelion (1995–1996) is widely regarded as one of the most psychologically complex and philosophically rich anime series ever created. While ostensibly a mecha anime, its true depth lies in its exploration of existential and psychological themes. Set in a post-apocalyptic world where humanity battles mysterious beings known as Angels, the series transcends its genre trappings to explore profound questions about identity, trauma, and the human condition. Through its deeply flawed and introspective characters, NGE delves into the psychological repercussions of abandonment, the struggle for self-worth, and the existential dread of isolation.

This paper seeks to analyze Neon Genesis Evangelion through a psychological lens, drawing on established theories such as Freudian psychoanalysis, Jungian archetypes, and existential psychology. By examining the series' characters, symbolism, and narrative, this study aims to uncover how NGE reflects universal psychological struggles and offers insights into the human psyche. Through direct quotes and thematic analysis, this paper argues that NGE serves as a powerful exploration of trauma, identity, and the search for meaning, making it a valuable text for psychological inquiry.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Psychological Theories Relevant to NGE

- **Freudian Psychoanalysis:** Freud's concepts of repression, the Oedipus complex, and defense mechanisms provide a framework for understanding the characters' internal conflicts (Freud, 1923). For example, Shinji Ikari's avoidant behavior and fear of rejection can be analyzed through Freud's structural model of the psyche—ego, superego, and id.
- **Attachment Theory:** Bowlby's attachment theory highlights the impact of early relational experiences on emotional development (Bowlby, 1969). Shinji's insecure attachment style, stemming from his abandonment by his father, underscores his struggles with intimacy and self-worth.

- **Jungian Psychology:** Jung's archetypes, including the Shadow, Anima/Animus, and the Collective Unconscious, illuminate the symbolic dimensions of NGE (Jung, 1968). The Evangelion units themselves can be seen as manifestations of the pilots' repressed emotions and unresolved traumas.
- **Existential Psychology:** Theorists like Viktor Frankl (Man's Search for Meaning) and Jean-Paul Sartre (Being and Nothingness) explore themes of existential dread, loneliness, and the search for meaning (Frankl, 1946; Sartre, 1943). These frameworks are particularly relevant to Shinji's existential crisis and the broader implications of the Human Instrumentality Project.
- **Self-Actualization and Psychosocial Development:** Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Erikson's stages of psychosocial development provide a lens for interpreting the tension between individuality and collective existence in the Human Instrumentality Project (Maslow, 1943; Erikson, 1968).

2.2 Prior Research on NGE

Previous studies have explored NGE's psychological and philosophical dimensions, but few have integrated direct character quotes and applied multiple psychological frameworks simultaneously (e.g., Brock, 2001; Cavallaro, 2009; Herman, 1992). This paper builds on existing research by offering a comprehensive, theory-based analysis that synthesizes insights from Freudian psychoanalysis, Jungian psychology, existential philosophy, and modern trauma studies.

3. Character and Thematic Analysis

3.1 Shinji Ikari

Shinji Ikari is a deeply introspective and emotionally fragile character who struggles with feelings of inadequacy, fear, and self-doubt. Thrust into the role of an Evangelion pilot against his will, he grapples with existential questions about his purpose and identity while navigating complex relationships with those around him, including his distant father, Gendo Ikari. Throughout the series, Shinji's internal battles—marked by moments of both cowardice and courage—highlight his difficulty in reconciling his desire for connection with his fear of rejection and pain.

3.1.1 Existentialism & Self-Deception

Quote:

"I mustn't run away, I mustn't run away, I mustn't run away..."

Psychological Framework:

- Existentialism** (Sartre, Camus):
 Shinji's mantra encapsulates his internal struggle to confront fear and responsibility—a hallmark of existential thought. He grapples with the absurdity of his situation: being thrust into piloting Eva against his will while yearning for meaning in a chaotic world. His repetition reflects an attempt to overcome cowardice through self-affirmation but also reveals deep insecurity about his ability to face challenges (Sartre, 1956; Camus, 1942).
- Self-Deception** (Sartre):
 Shinji's repetitive affirmations reveal "bad faith," where he deceives himself to avoid confronting harsh truths. By telling himself not to run away, he masks his inability to take decisive action, highlighting the tension between freedom and determinism (Sartre, 1956).

Content/Thematic

Analysis:

Shinji embodies the paradox of free will within oppressive systems. While he has agency over whether or not to pilot Eva, societal pressures and familial expectations constrain him. His declaration—"I mustn't run away"—is both a cry for autonomy and an admission of helplessness, underscoring how external forces shape individual choices (Anno, 1995).

Shinji exhibits symptoms of trauma and PTSD, stemming from his abandonment by his father and the immense pressure of piloting the Evangelion. His repeated refrain, "I mustn't run away" (Anno, 1995), reflects his avoidant behavior and fear of rejection (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

3.1.2 Hedgehog's Dilemma & Interpersonal Relationships

Quote:

"The hedgehog's dilemma, the closer we become the more deeply we hurt."

Philosophical Framework:

- **Hedgehog's Dilemma (Arthur Schopenhauer):**

This metaphor explains human relationships—people desire intimacy yet fear emotional pain. Shinji's withdrawal stems from vulnerability; he avoids connection because it risks rejection and hurt (Schopenhauer, 1851).

Content/Thematic Analysis:

Misato recognizes this tension in Shinji's reluctance to connect, understanding it as a defense mechanism against deeper relational wounds. Shinji's interactions with others highlight his ambivalence:

- With Misato, he seeks maternal warmth but resents her intrusive presence.
 - With Rei, he feels curiosity but struggles to bridge their emotional distance.
 - With Asuka, his feelings oscillate between admiration and resentment due to her volatile personality.
- This dynamic underscores the universal challenge of balancing intimacy and independence—a central theme in Shinji's development (Anno, 1995).

3.1.3 Identity Crisis & Alienation

Quote:

"I had nothing before I started piloting the Eva.

"By piloting the Eva, I can be me."

"They'll praise me if I pilot the Eva."

Psychological Framework:

- **Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory:**

Shinji experiences an identity crisis typical of adolescence. He questions his role as an Eva pilot, his worth as a person, and his ability to connect with others (Erikson, 1968).

- **Alienation (Marxist Perspective):**

Shinji feels estranged from himself, others, and society. His existence as a tool for NERV parallels Marxist concepts of alienated labor, where individuals lose autonomy over their lives (Marx, 1844).

Content/Thematic Analysis: Shinji's sense of alienation is exacerbated by:

- His strained relationship with Gendo, who treats him as expendable.
- His inability to form meaningful bonds with peers like Rei and Asuka.
- The dehumanizing demands placed upon him by NERV.

These factors contribute to his profound existential despair, making his eventual affirmation of life all the more significant (Anno, 1995).

3.1.4 Cognitive Distortions, Self-Hatred & Internalized Anger

Quote:

"I'm a coward. I'm cowardly, sneaky, and weak."

"I hate myself!"

"Everyone hates me. Every person in existence must hate me."

Psychological Framework:

- **Self-Loathing:**

Shinji's self-loathing stems from perceived inadequacy and abandonment by parental figures (especially Gendo). This unresolved trauma manifests as chronic low self-esteem (Beck, 1979).

- **Internalized**

Anger:

Unlike Asuka, who projects her anger outward, Shinji turns it inward, blaming himself for failures beyond his control (Freud, 1917).

Content/Thematic**Analysis:**

Aaron Beck's cognitive-behavioral model identifies distorted thinking patterns such as overgeneralization and catastrophizing. Shinji's belief that everyone hates him exemplifies these distortions, reinforcing his low self-esteem and perpetuating cycles of depression. His internalized hatred mirrors Albert Ellis's concept of irrational beliefs, wherein rigid demands ("I must be loved") lead to emotional distress when unmet (Beck, 1976; Ellis, 1962).

Rei's observation—"That's just what you imagine"—challenges Shinji's distorted perceptions, encouraging him to question the validity of his thoughts. This aligns with CBT techniques aimed at restructuring negative cognitions. Shinji's self-hatred reflects broader themes of guilt and shame. His belief that he doesn't deserve love or happiness creates barriers to personal growth. However, his gradual realization that "My life is worth living here!" marks a pivotal moment of self-acceptance, echoing humanistic psychology's emphasis on unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1961).

3.1.5 Desire for Connection & Intimacy**Quote:**

"[Hallucinating] Do you want to become one with me? To be of one mind and body?"

Philosophical Framework:

- **Human Connection (Buber's I-Thou Relationship):**

Shinji yearns for authentic connections but fears rejection. His hallucinations symbolize his subconscious longing for unity and acceptance (Buber, 1923).

- **Attachment Theory (Bowlby):**

Shinji's attachment style is insecure-avoidant, shaped by neglectful parenting. He craves closeness but sabotages relationships to protect himself from potential pain (Bowlby, 1969).

Content/Thematic**Analysis:**

Shinji's dreamlike visions highlight his isolation and unmet emotional needs. His interactions with Kaworu represent a rare instance of genuine connection, challenging his belief that he is unworthy of love. Kaworu's declaration—"I'm saying I love you"—validates Shinji's humanity and catalyzes his journey toward self-worth (Anno, 1995).

3.1.6 Freedom Through Death vs. Life Affirmation**Quote:**

"My life is worth living here!"

Philosophical Framework:

- **Freedom Through Death (Heidegger, Sartre):**

Kaworu's assertion that "Death may be the only absolute freedom" resonates with existentialist views of mortality as liberation. However, Shinji rejects this nihilistic perspective, choosing instead to affirm life despite its suffering (Heidegger, 1927; Sartre, 1943).

- **Life Affirmation (Nietzsche's Will to Power):**

By declaring his intrinsic value, Shinji embraces Nietzschean ideals of creating meaning amidst chaos (Nietzsche, 1883).

Content/Thematic**Analysis:**

Shinji's transformation culminates in his recognition of life's inherent worth. Despite enduring immense pain, he chooses to continue existing, asserting his individuality and rejecting external definitions of success or failure. This act of defiance underscores the series' exploration of resilience and existential fulfillment (Anno, 1995).

3.2 Asuka Langley Soryu**3.2.1 Self-Hatred & Narcissistic Injury****Quote:**

"I hate myself... Why do I have to do this? Why me?"

Psychological Framework:

- Narcissistic Injury (Kohut):**
 Asuka's self-loathing stems from deep-seated feelings of inadequacy and abandonment, rooted in her unresolved trauma with her mother, Kyoko Zeppelin Soryu. Her outward aggression masks an inner fragility, where she equates failure with worthlessness. This is compounded by her inability to reconcile with her mother's mental illness and eventual suicide, which left her emotionally orphaned.
- Internalized Anger (Freudian Defense Mechanisms):**
 Asuka projects her anger outward—blaming others for her pain—but ultimately reveals that her deepest hatred is directed inward. This reflects a lack of self-compassion and an over-reliance on external validation to maintain her fragile sense of self-worth.

Content/Thematic**Analysis:**

Asuka's character embodies the tension between pride and vulnerability. Her relentless drive to excel as an Eva pilot is both a coping mechanism and a manifestation of her fear of abandonment. The pressure to perform exacerbates her narcissistic injury, leading to cycles of self-sabotage and despair. Her outburst in underscores her internal conflict: *"I hate my dad, I hate my mom! But mostly, most of all, I hate myself!"*

3.2.2 Attachment Theory & Abandonment Anxiety

Quote:

"Please look at me, I'm begging you, mama! Just don't stop being my mother!"

Psychological Framework:

- **Attachment Theory (Bowlby):**

Asuka's plea to her mother reveals her profound fear of abandonment and need for validation. Her early childhood trauma—witnessing her mother's descent into madness and eventual death—left her with an insecure attachment style. She craves attention and approval but struggles to trust or form meaningful connections due to her fear of rejection.

- **Abandonment Anxiety:**

Her volatile personality and desperate need for control stem from her inability to process her mother's neglect and subsequent loss. This anxiety manifests in her interactions with others, particularly Shinji, whom she alternately mocks and envies for his perceived passivity.

Content/Thematic Analysis:

Asuka's relationship with her mother serves as a microcosm of her broader struggles with intimacy and identity. Her repeated cries of *"Mama!"* during her mental breakdown highlight her unresolved grief and longing for maternal love. This emotional void drives much of her behavior throughout the series, including her competitive rivalry with Shinji and Rei, whom she perceives as threats to her tenuous sense of superiority.

3.2.3 Existential Crisis & Self-Actualization

Quote:

"Why do I have to do this? Why me?"

Philosophical Framework:

- Existentialism (Sartre, Camus):**

Asuka grapples with existential questions about her purpose and identity. Unlike Shinji, who retreats into passivity, Asuka adopts a defiant stance against meaninglessness, channeling her pain into ambition. However, her reliance on external achievements to define herself ultimately proves unsustainable.

- Self-Actualization (Maslow):**

Asuka's journey reflects the pitfalls of pursuing self-actualization without addressing underlying psychological wounds. Her fixation on proving her worth through piloting Eva leaves her ill-equipped to handle failure, which she interprets as a negation of her entire being.

Content/Thematic Analysis: Asuka's existential crisis reaches its peak during her confrontation with the Angel Arael. Stripped of her defenses, she is forced to confront the emptiness beneath her bravado. Her screams of *"Help me!"* and *"I'm not a doll!"* reveal her desperation to assert her individuality and autonomy. Yet, her inability to accept help or vulnerability perpetuates her suffering, illustrating the destructive potential of unchecked pride.

3.2.4 Alienation & Dehumanization**Quote:**

"I won't rely on anyone!"

Philosophical Framework:

- Alienation (Marxist Perspective):**

Asuka's refusal to depend on others mirrors humanity's alienation under oppressive systems. Like Shinji and Rei, she is dehumanized by NERV's utilitarian approach, reduced to a tool for survival rather than a person with intrinsic value.

- **Dehumanization**

(Bauman):

Her insistence on independence—"I can live by myself!"—is paradoxically a symptom of her dehumanization. By rejecting connection, she denies herself the very relationships that could provide solace and meaning.

Content/Thematic**Analysis:**

Asuka's alienation is exacerbated by her role as the Second Child. Her identity becomes synonymous with her performance as an Eva pilot, leaving little room for personal growth or fulfillment outside of combat. This dehumanization is poignantly illustrated in her hallucination of merging with Unit-02, symbolizing her complete subsumption by the machine. Her resistance to dependency reflects not strength, but fear—a fear of being vulnerable and truly seen.

3.2.5 Identity & Autonomy**Quote:**

"I am Asuka! Asuka Langley Soryu! Charmed, huh?"

Psychological Framework:

- **Identity** **Formation** **(Erikson):**

Asuka's repeated assertion of her name and title reflects her struggle to establish a coherent sense of self. Her brash confidence masks an underlying insecurity about her identity, which she anchors in her achievements as a pilot.

- **Autonomy** **vs. Shame** **(Erikson):**

Her fierce independence is a double-edged sword: while it shields her from vulnerability, it also isolates her from potential sources of support. Her inability to balance autonomy with interdependence contributes to her eventual collapse.

Content/Thematic**Analysis:**

Asuka's identity is deeply tied to her role as the "best" Eva pilot. When this identity is challenged—whether by

Shinji's unexpected successes or her own failures—she experiences a crisis of self. Her fragmented monologues in *Don't Be*. ([1.22])—"I'm Asuka! Look at me, dammit, look at me!"—highlight her frantic attempt to reclaim agency in a world that seems intent on erasing her.

3.2.6 Freedom Through Death & Existential Philosophy

Quote:

"Die with me!"

Philosophical Framework:

- Freedom Through Death (Heidegger, Sartre):**

Asuka's willingness to embrace death alongside her mother echoes existential themes of liberation through mortality. For Asuka, death represents escape from the unbearable weight of existence—a release from the pain of living without true connection or purpose.

- Existential Philosophy:**

Her plea to die with her mother reflects a desire to transcend her isolation, even if it means ceasing to exist. This contrasts sharply with Kaworu's acceptance of death as a liberating act; for Asuka, death is less about freedom and more about reunion—a return to the only source of unconditional love she ever knew.

Content/Thematic

Analysis:

Asuka's fixation on death underscores the futility of her attempts to find meaning in a hostile world. Her repeated cries of *"Die with me!"* and *"No, I'm not Mama's doll!"* encapsulate her internal struggle: torn between yearning for connection and resisting subjugation. Ultimately, her inability to reconcile these opposing forces leads to her psychological unraveling.

3.3 Rei Ayanami

3.3.1 Existential Emptiness & Identity

Quote:

"I have nothing else."

Psychological Framework:

- Existential Void (Sartre):**
 Rei's statement underscores her profound existential emptiness. Her identity is entirely tethered to her role as the pilot of Evangelion Unit-00, leaving her devoid of personal aspirations or connections. This reflects a lack of agency and self-determination, as she exists primarily to fulfill NERV's objectives rather than pursue her own desires.
- Identity Fragmentation (Jungian Archetypes):**
 Rei embodies the archetype of the "empty vessel," symbolizing humanity's potential for creation and destruction. However, this also renders her incomplete—a fragmented being whose sense of self is contingent upon external validation, particularly from Gendo Ikari.

Content/Thematic

Analysis:

Rei's declaration, *"I have nothing else,"* encapsulates her existential plight. She lacks personal relationships, hobbies, or ambitions beyond piloting Eva. This absence of individuality highlights themes of dehumanization within NERV's system, where pilots are treated as tools rather than people. Her emotional detachment mirrors her artificial origins, raising questions about what it means to be human when one's existence is defined solely by function.

3.3.2 Alienation & Isolation

Quote:

"Loneliness? I don't understand... You don't want to be by yourself, correct?"

Philosophical Framework:

- Alienation** (Marxist Perspective):

Rei's isolation stems not only from her interpersonal struggles but also from her structural position within NERV. Like Shinji and Asuka, she is alienated from her labor (piloting Eva), her product (the outcome of battles), and her fellow humans.

- Isolation vs. Connection** (Heidegger):

Her interaction with Armisael reveals her limited understanding of emotions like loneliness. While others yearn for connection, Rei's detachment makes her incapable of fully grasping such feelings. This duality—her simultaneous longing for belonging and inability to engage emotionally—underscores her tragic existence.

Content/Thematic**Analysis:**

Rei's curiosity about loneliness reflects her yearning for connection, even if she cannot articulate it. Her artificial nature isolates her from humanity, yet moments of vulnerability suggest an underlying desire to transcend her programmed purpose. This tension between detachment and yearning forms the crux of Rei's character arc, illustrating how her alienation shapes her interactions with others.

3.3.3 Autonomy & Individuality**Quote:**

"No. I am me. Not you."

Philosophical Framework:

- Autonomy** (Kantian Ethics):

Rei's assertion of her individuality against Armisael's attempts to merge with her represents a pivotal moment of autonomy. Despite her artificial origins, she resists assimilation, affirming her right to exist as a distinct entity.

- **Selfhood**

(Existentialism):

By declaring "*I am me*," Rei challenges the notion that her identity is merely a construct of NERV or her creators. This act of defiance aligns with existentialist ideals of self-definition, emphasizing her capacity for free will despite her predetermined role.

Content/Thematic**Analysis:**

Rei's resistance to Armisael symbolizes the human drive for autonomy, even in the face of overwhelming forces. Her declaration marks a turning point where she begins to assert her individuality, moving beyond her utilitarian function. This moment underscores her evolution from a passive instrument to an active participant in shaping her destiny.

3.3.4 Bonding & Dependency**Quote:**

"Because I'm bonded to it."

Psychological Framework:

- **Attachment**

Theory

(Bowlby):

Rei's bond with Eva Unit-00 parallels attachment behaviors observed in humans. Her connection to the machine serves as a substitute for genuine human relationships, providing a semblance of purpose and belonging.

- **Dependency**

(Freudian

Psychoanalysis):

Her reliance on Eva reflects unresolved dependency issues, rooted in her ambiguous relationship with Gendo Ikari. By identifying with her role as a pilot, Rei avoids confronting her deeper insecurities and fears of abandonment.

Content/Thematic**Analysis:**

Rei's bond with Eva underscores her complex relationship with authority figures, particularly Gendo. While her

loyalty to him provides structure and meaning, it also perpetuates her dehumanization. Her willingness to sacrifice herself for the mission reflects both her devotion and her inability to envision life beyond her prescribed role.

3.3.5 Emotional Detachment & Vulnerability

Quote:

"Why are you crying? I'm very sorry I don't know what I should do or feel at a time like this."

Psychological Framework:

- Alexithymia (Emotional Processing Disorder):**
 Rei exhibits traits of alexithymia, characterized by difficulty identifying and expressing emotions. Her confusion when confronted with Shinji's tears highlights her emotional immaturity and lack of social cues.
- Vulnerability (Humanistic Psychology):**
 Despite her stoicism, Rei demonstrates moments of vulnerability, particularly when interacting with Shinji. These instances reveal her latent humanity, suggesting that beneath her detached exterior lies a fragile, evolving psyche.

Content/Thematic

Analysis:

Rei's awkward response to Shinji's distress underscores her struggle to navigate interpersonal dynamics. Her apology—"I don't know what I should do or feel"—reveals her discomfort with emotional intimacy. Yet, these moments of vulnerability hint at her potential for growth, as she gradually learns to recognize and reciprocate human emotions.

3.3.6 Artificiality & Humanity

Quote:

"Made from the red soil are humans. Made by Man and Woman are humans."

Philosophical Framework:

- **Artificiality** vs. **Authenticity** (**Baudrillard**):

Rei's musings on creation blur the line between artificial constructs and authentic beings. Her existence as a clone challenges traditional notions of humanity, prompting reflection on what constitutes personhood.

- **Human Nature** (**Aristotelian Teleology**):

Rei's journey explores whether her purpose is predetermined by her creators or if she can forge her own path. Her gradual assertion of autonomy suggests that true humanity lies in the ability to choose one's fate, regardless of origin.

Content/Thematic

Analysis:

Rei's poetic monologue delves into existential questions about creation and identity. Her contemplation of humanity's origins mirrors her own search for meaning, highlighting the tension between her artificial design and emergent humanity. This duality positions her as a philosophical cipher, embodying the series' central inquiry into the essence of being.

3.4 The Human Instrumentality Project

The Human Instrumentality Project (HIP) represents humanity's attempt to transcend individual suffering by merging all consciousness into a single, unified entity. This concept resonates deeply with both Western psychological theories and Eastern philosophical frameworks, offering a multifaceted exploration of identity, unity, and the human condition.

Western Psychological Perspectives

From a Western perspective, Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Erikson's stages of psychosocial development highlight the tension between self-actualization and the dissolution of identity (Maslow, 1943; Erikson, 1968). Self-actualization, as the pinnacle of human growth, emphasizes the fulfillment of one's unique potential. However, the HIP negates individuality entirely, creating a paradoxical conflict between personal growth and collective unity. While Maslow's framework posits that self-actualization is achieved through the realization of one's distinct capabilities, the HIP seeks to dissolve these distinctions, rendering self-actualization impossible. Similarly,

Erikson's theory underscores the importance of identity formation and the balance between autonomy and connection; the HIP disrupts this balance by dissolving personal identity in favor of collective existence.

Eastern Philosophical Interpretations

From an Eastern perspective, the HIP can be interpreted through the lens of Advaita Vedanta, a non-dualistic school of Hindu philosophy that explores the relationship between Atman (the individual self) and Brahman (the universal consciousness). In Advaita Vedanta, the ultimate goal is the realization that Atman and Brahman are one—an understanding that transcends the illusion of separateness (Maya). The HIP mirrors this pursuit of oneness by dissolving the boundaries between individuals, effectively erasing the ego and merging all souls into a singular, undifferentiated state. However, unlike the spiritual liberation (Moksha) envisioned in Advaita Vedanta, the HIP imposes this unity forcibly, stripping away individual agency and free will.

Jungian Analysis: The Collective Unconscious

Jung's concept of the collective unconscious further enriches this interpretation. The collective unconscious represents a shared reservoir of archetypes and primal experiences common to all humanity. By merging all consciousness, the HIP seeks to actualize this collective unconscious on a literal level, eliminating the barriers (AT Fields) that separate individuals. While Jung viewed the integration of the personal unconscious with the collective unconscious as a path to individuation—a process of becoming whole—the HIP bypasses this journey entirely, imposing unity without the transformative struggle. This forced merger raises profound questions about the value of individuality and the role of suffering in personal growth.

Shinji's Rejection of Instrumentality

Shinji's ultimate rejection of Instrumentality in *The End of Evangelion* aligns not only with Camus' concept of the "absurd hero" but also with the existential choice to embrace individuality despite its inherent pain. Camus argues that true meaning arises from confronting the absurdity of existence and finding purpose in the struggle itself (Camus, 1942). Similarly, Shinji's decision to reject the HIP reflects his acceptance of the human condition,

including its suffering, loneliness, and imperfections. This choice underscores the importance of preserving individual identity, even in the face of overwhelming despair.

Moreover, Shinji's rejection can be seen as a rejection of the illusion of ultimate unity. While the HIP promises liberation from suffering through dissolution, it ultimately denies the richness of human experience—the joy of connection, the pain of loss, and the complexity of relationships. In this sense, the HIP serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of seeking transcendence at the cost of individuality. It suggests that true fulfillment lies not in escaping the self but in embracing the challenges and contradictions of human existence.

Narrative and Philosophical Implications

The HIP's failure to provide a meaningful solution to human suffering highlights the series' central thesis: that suffering is an intrinsic part of the human experience. By rejecting the HIP, Shinji affirms the value of individuality and the importance of navigating life's complexities. This conclusion resonates with existentialist philosophy, which emphasizes the significance of personal freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning in an indifferent universe (Sartre, 1943).

4. Symbolism and Psychological Interpretation

4.1 AT Fields: Symbolizing Barriers to Human Connection

The Absolute Terror Field (AT Field) is one of the most iconic concepts in *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. It serves as both a literal defense mechanism against external threats and a metaphorical representation of psychological barriers that individuals erect to protect themselves from vulnerability. These fields symbolize the tension between self-preservation and the desire for connection, reflecting universal human struggles with intimacy and emotional exposure.

- **Psychological Interpretation: Defense Mechanisms and Emotional Vulnerability**

- **Freudian Psychoanalysis:** Freud’s concept of repression and defense mechanisms provides a useful lens for understanding AT Fields. These fields represent the unconscious mind’s efforts to shield the individual from emotional pain or trauma. For example:
 - **Shinji Ikari:** Shinji’s reluctance to form close relationships can be seen as an extension of his AT Field—a psychological barrier that prevents him from opening up to others. His repeated refrain, “I mustn’t run away,” reflects his internal struggle between seeking connection and retreating into isolation (Anno, 1995).
 - **Asuka Langley Soryu:** Asuka uses her AT Field as a metaphorical shield, projecting confidence and aggression to mask her deep-seated insecurities and fear of abandonment (Anno, 1995).
- **Attachment Theory:** Bowlby’s attachment theory further illuminates the role of AT Fields in human relationships. Characters like Shinji and Asuka, who experienced early relational trauma (abandonment by parents), develop insecure attachment styles characterized by mistrust and emotional withdrawal. Their AT Fields represent the psychological distance they maintain to avoid being hurt again (Bowlby, 1969).
- **Existential Psychology:** From an existential perspective, AT Fields reflect humanity’s inherent fear of intimacy and vulnerability. Arthur Schopenhauer’s “hedgehog’s dilemma” is directly referenced in the series, illustrating the paradoxical nature of human connection: people crave closeness but fear the pain it may bring. The AT Field embodies this tension, serving as both a protective barrier and a source of isolation (Schopenhauer, 1851).

- **Narrative Significance**

- In the series, breaking through an Angel’s AT Field is often depicted as a pivotal moment in battle, symbolizing the overcoming of psychological defenses. However, the characters’ inability to fully lower their own AT Fields highlights the difficulty of achieving genuine human connection. This

theme culminates in the Human Instrumentality Project, which seeks to dissolve all AT Fields and merge humanity into a collective consciousness—an attempt to eliminate barriers to connection at the cost of individuality.

4.2 Evangelion Units: Manifestations of Repressed Emotions and Trauma

The biomechanical Evangelion units are not merely machines; they are deeply intertwined with the pilots' psyches, representing repressed emotions, unresolved traumas, and unmet needs for parental validation. These units serve as physical manifestations of the pilots' inner struggles, blurring the line between the conscious and unconscious mind.

- **Freudian Interpretation: The Unconscious Mind and Repressed Desires**

- **Repression and the Id:** According to Freud, the unconscious mind houses repressed desires, fears, and instincts that shape behavior. The Evangelions can be interpreted as physical manifestations of the pilots' unconscious minds:
 - **Shinji's Eva Unit-01:** Linked to his mother, Yui Ikari, whose soul resides within the unit, Unit-01 underscores Shinji's unresolved feelings of loss and longing for maternal love. His struggles to control the Eva mirror his internal conflict between his conscious self (ego) and repressed desires (id) (Freud, 1915).
 - **Asuka's Eva Unit-02:** Reflects her need for validation and recognition. Her aggressive piloting style and reliance on brute force symbolize her attempts to compensate for her fragile self-esteem and maternal neglect (Anno, 1995).
- **Oedipus Complex:** Freud's Oedipus complex offers additional insight into the relationship between the pilots and their Evas. The Evas' maternal origins evoke themes of dependency and unresolved familial tensions. For instance, Shinji's interactions with Unit-01 highlight his ambivalent feelings toward his father and his yearning for maternal approval (Freud, 1923).

- **Jungian Archetypes: The Shadow and the Collective Unconscious**

- **The Shadow:** Jung's concept of the Shadow—the darker, repressed aspects of the psyche—is embodied by the Evangelions. Each unit represents the pilot's inner turmoil and hidden fears:
 - **Rei Ayanami's Eva Unit-00:** Embodies her existential dread and lack of identity. Its cold, mechanical appearance mirrors Rei's detachment and her struggle to assert her humanity (Jung, 1969).
 - **Asuka's Eva Unit-02:** Reflects her fiery personality and suppressed vulnerabilities. Its vibrant red color contrasts with her outward bravado, hinting at the emotional turmoil beneath the surface (Anno, 1995).
- **The Collective Unconscious:** The Evangelions also tap into Jung's idea of the Collective Unconscious, representing shared human fears and desires. Their monstrous forms evoke primal anxieties about power, control, and destruction, resonating with universal archetypes such as the Hero and the Monster (Jung, 1969).
- **Object Relations Theory: Maternal Influence and Identity Formation**
 - Melanie Klein's object relations theory emphasizes the role of early relationships in shaping identity. The Evangelions' connection to the pilots' mothers underscores the series' exploration of maternal influence:
 - **Shinji's Eva Unit-01:** Contains fragments of his mother's soul, symbolizing his unresolved grief and longing for maternal validation.
 - **Asuka's Eva Unit-02:** Is derived from her deceased mother, reflecting her unresolved anger and resentment over maternal neglect.
 - **Rei's Eva Unit-00:** Blurs the line between creator and creation, highlighting her existential crisis as a clone of Yui Ikari (Klein, 1946).
- **Biomechanical Nature: Conscious vs. Unconscious**

- The hybrid biomechanical design of the Evangelions underscores the interplay between the conscious and unconscious mind. While the pilots exert conscious control over their Evas, the units often act autonomously, driven by the pilots' repressed emotions and instincts. This duality reflects Freud's structural model of the psyche, where the ego struggles to mediate between the demands of the id and superego (Freud, 1923).

4.3 Crosses and Religious Imagery: Themes of Suffering, Redemption, and Humanity's Relationship with the Divine

Religious symbolism permeates *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, with crosses and Christian/Kabbalistic imagery playing a central role in the narrative. These symbols reflect themes of suffering, redemption, and humanity's search for meaning.

- **Suffering and Redemption**

- **Christian Symbolism:** The frequent use of cross-shaped explosions during battles evokes Christ's crucifixion, symbolizing sacrifice and suffering. The Evangelions themselves bear resemblance to crucified figures, emphasizing the burden placed on the pilots to save humanity. This imagery aligns with Viktor Frankl's existential philosophy, which posits that suffering can lead to personal growth and the discovery of meaning (Frankl, 1946).
- **Shinji's Journey:** Shinji's repeated sacrifices and emotional struggles parallel Christ's suffering, suggesting that redemption comes through embracing pain rather than avoiding it (Anno, 1995).
- **Kabbalistic Themes:** The Tree of Life and other Kabbalistic motifs underscore humanity's quest for spiritual enlightenment. The Human Instrumentality Project, which seeks to merge all human consciousness, can be interpreted as an attempt to transcend material existence and achieve divine unity. However, the series ultimately rejects this solution, arguing that true meaning arises from individual suffering and connection (Jonas, 1958).

- **Humanity's Relationship with the Divine**

- **Gnostic Philosophy:** Gnosticism's emphasis on the duality of spirit and matter resonates with the series' exploration of the human condition. The Angels, representing spiritual entities, oppose the material world inhabited by humans. This conflict mirrors the Gnostic belief in the alienation of the soul from the divine.
- **Gendo Ikari's Ambition:** Gendo's pursuit of the Human Instrumentality Project reflects a Gnostic desire to transcend earthly limitations and achieve spiritual perfection. However, the series critiques this ambition, suggesting that humanity's flaws and imperfections are integral to its essence (Jonas, 1958).

- **Ambiguity of Faith**

- The series' use of religious imagery is deliberately ambiguous, inviting viewers to question the role of faith and divinity in a chaotic universe. The Spear of Longinus, for example, serves as both a weapon of destruction and a tool of salvation, embodying the dual nature of faith itself.

- **Narrative and Visual Impact**

- The recurring visual motif of crosses reinforces the series' themes of suffering and redemption. Whether through the cruciform silhouettes of the Evangelions or the cross-shaped scars left by defeated Angels, these images serve as constant reminders of humanity's struggle for meaning in a seemingly indifferent world.

5. Conclusion: This analysis demonstrates how *Neon Genesis Evangelion* serves as a mirror to contemporary struggles with trauma, identity, and existentialism. By applying psychological theories, we gain insight into the characters' behaviors and the series' broader philosophical implications. The integration of Freudian psychoanalysis, Jungian archetypes, and existential philosophy reveals the universality of NGE's themes, making it a timeless work of art that resonates deeply with audiences across cultures and generations.

Neon Genesis Evangelion offers a nuanced commentary on the human condition, blending psychological theory, existential philosophy, and religious symbolism. Its characters' struggles with trauma, identity, and the search for

meaning reflect universal human experiences, making NGE a valuable text for psychological inquiry. Future research could explore other psychological frameworks, such as cognitive-behavioral theory, to further analyze the series and its relevance to ongoing discussions about mental health and existential well-being.

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