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# Master Dissertation

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## Annihilation by Alex Garland: Existential and Psychological Crisis

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## **Dedication**

To dear parents I dedicate this work of mine

Through times, of despair, fraught with dread, sorrow, and frustration

They patiently stood by

Strengthening in me hope and courage,

to scale mountains crafted with reams of ink and paper

Never could I return the favor,

no matter how hard I try

I shall be telling this with a sigh

And dedicate another line

For a friend of mine,

And a family that their love for me is Divine

## **Declaration**

I, undersigned, do hereby declare that this dissertation has been carried out by me as a partial fulfillment for the Master's degree in English literature and civilization under the guidance and supervision of Mr. Sedrati Yasser, Faculty of Letters and Languages, English Language and Literature Department, Mohamed Khider University of Biskra, Algeria.

I further declare that the interpretations put forth in this thesis are based on my own readings, understanding and examination of the original texts. The reported findings that I have made use of are duly acknowledged at the respective place. Also, I declare that this work is not published anywhere in any form.

**Debchi Amina**

**Date: 21/ 06/ 2022**

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the existential and psychological crisis of the characters in *Annihilation* via the scopes of existential philosophy, psychoanalysis, analytical psychology, and the notions of defensive mechanisms, namely intellectualization, denial, displacement, and projection. Simply stated, the theoretical foundation will be supported by the results of Sigmund Freud and Anna Freud in the field of psychoanalysis. Furthermore, a significant part of this work will be examined in accordance with Carl Jung's findings in Analytical Psychology. As a result, the current qualitative and analytical investigation will aim to provide explanations to the characters' existential and psychological crisis, and will directly relate them to their dependency on defensive mechanisms. Consequently, its objective is to analyze how the characters' external and internal struggles increased their reliance on these defensive mechanisms? Finally, our research indicates how all of these visible and hidden struggles interacted in conjunction with the psychological structure of defense mechanisms against their existential dilemmas, in order to discover the reciprocal relationship between the existential crisis they experienced and their psychological complexities in order to achieve the individuation they long fought for.

**Key terms:** Annihilation, defense mechanisms, denial intellectualization, displacement, existentialism, individuation, projection, psychoanalysis, struggle.

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# **General Introduction**

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In *Annihilation*, Garland opened for the audience a window of new, strange, and unexplainable feelings, he gave us the chance to face our human fragility, and awakened the darkest parts of our psyche, through an inner monologue of silence. Garland created a good story when he balanced the external aesthetics of a Sci-Fi movie with an internal feeling of an existential film. Granting the audience, a chance to explore bigger questions and to look for the unsaid in what has really been said, to acknowledge the real limits of the human mind, and what happens when we go beyond it.

Through the events of the movie, we somehow understand how Area X started, but we fail to comprehend why. Garland kept the Shimmer and everything inside of it beyond human understanding, without meaning, and with a tiny and frail concept of purpose. This contradicted the characters' desire of finding a clear meaning to their existence, as soon as they venture into the Shimmer, they lose every concept of purpose, and fail to understand everything they thought they knew about this universe; science, laws of physics, human existence. To them entering the Shimmer means becoming the Shimmer, for it was never properly theorized and the only constant within its borders is change, and the only dogma is oblivion.

Throughout the story, the characters start to face not only external life-threatening situations, but also psychological internal struggles. Each character in *Annihilation* loses somehow the control of her mind and allows her unconscious to take the lead. Therefore, in our study we will turn our focus to a completely different scope, and work towards achieving an objective investigation of the characters' internal and external struggle. In the present study, we will focus on the characters' conflicted psyche and its troubledness in dealing with their existential crisis. Therefore, to do a just interpretation of the inner psyche of the characters, we have chosen the



theories of psychoanalysis, along with analytical psychology. These theories are going to be best explained in our first chapter which forms the backbone of this dissertation.

Both psychoanalysis and existentialism are fascinating and vast fields that will provide excellent interpretations of the findings. Thus, Existentialism will be discussed as a philosophical movement in general, then in psychology in order to adequately understand the psychological complexities and existential crises encountered by the characters in *Annihilation*. We shall be able to trace back the main reasons for the characters' internal struggle and psychological difficulties in this manner.

Alex Garland's film *Annihilation* found a great interest among movies' lovers as well as from scholars, due to its important and new creative ideas. Many critics had approached this work from a cinematic critical view. However, a number of scholars also examined it from an academic view. Beau Deurwaarder in his paper, *Nothing Comes Back Annihilation as a Posthuman and Anthropocene Text*, treated the morphological themes of *Annihilation's* film. Beau Deurwaarder claimed that his paper will be about *Annihilation* as existential incentives to consider the position of the posthuman in the age of the Anthropocene. He explained his paper's aim as follows: "I will discuss Garland's rendering of *Annihilation* in conversation with the 2014 Jeff VanderMeer novel of the same name.... I will argue that both Garland and VanderMeer's version of *Annihilation* is read best as a cautionary tale that treats the threat of ecological collapse as an ethical and existential pasture to consider" (Deurwaarder 02)

Beau Deurwaarder worked his paper around the disparities of the original book of VanderMeer and the ambitious adaptation by Garland. He also recounted both versions interchangeably in order to serve and accentuate what is at stake in each text. By structuring his

response according to the three different movements of Garland's film. Thereby, the film is approached mainly from a philosophical point of view with no intervention of any psychological analysis. Whereas, in *Annihilation* film, Garland has shown a great emphasis on the psychological complexities of each character, shedding the light on self-destruction as the backbone theme of the whole film.

Approaching another scholar work done on this film by Hon-Lee Poon, titled as *Becoming-animal in Annihilation*. Hon-Lee Poon examined this work based on a scientific view through explaining the DNA changes occurring inside the shimmer which affected humans as well as all other creatures alive in our nature. He discussed the multiplicities of becoming-animal, which will not necessarily result in what we expect. At last, he concluded his work believing that *Annihilation* is an example of how films serve as an exploration of an ecological concept by embracing its science fiction genre to help us visualize the most abstract, unknown ideas. In addition to that, he stated that this film emphasized on the relationship between the human and the no-human, he also stated that the film unifies the ecological concept of 'becoming-' under the thematic umbrella of human's tendency to self-destruct, Showing off an admiration of the beauty and strangeness of our mother nature.

From this short review, we can see that this film is open to a great range of different and new ideas. It could be analyzed from multiple viewpoints and concepts. However, this masterpiece is lacking the psychological interpretation of its new concepts, themes, and ideas, and ever since its release in 2018, Alex Garland's film *Annihilation* had occupied a significant position in the Cosmic Horror works, beyond the monsters, violence, and danger, the horror in *Annihilation* is about the awareness of the limits of the human mind. The film often focuses on the characters facing things beyond their understanding, starting with the Shimmer, the fragmented rules of

physics and sciences, and the creatures inhabiting this strange area. In *Annihilation*, we are introduced to a creature that's constantly changing, we cannot define it. Thus, we are presented with an entity that we cannot understand or whose goals we cannot comprehend, even as it tries to look, act, or sound like the characters.

The characters' reaction after being faced with the incomprehensible leads them to look inwards, in an attempt of making sense of the complicated puzzle of emotions they are experiencing. The inability of the human mind to correlate its contents, and understand its deep unconscious parts is the most merciful thing in the world. The human mind was not meant to go that far or that deep, for it will only be brought upon itself madness and harm. Opening up such terrifying vistas of reality and of our frightful deep mind, will ultimately guide us towards the peaceful darkness of our existential dread, a rarely experienced feeling that is so difficult to explain, express, or verbalize, therefore it is even more difficult for others to understand.

The theoretical framework will be the work of Swiss Psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung; throughout the interpretation, a major part of our research will be examined via his work of Analytical Psychology, in order to better understand the characters' inner psyche. Nevertheless, along the way, essential contributions from American academician and philosopher Thomas Flynn and American philosopher Steven Crowell will be included to provide a thorough understanding of existentialism as a philosophy before delving into its contributions in psychology.

A significant portion of the first chapter will be dedicated to comprehending Freudian Psychoanalysis, with emphasis on the writings of Austrian neurologist Sigmund Schlomo Freud and his daughter Anna Freud. We will concentrate on defining defense mechanisms such as displacement, denial, projection, and intellectualization. Acknowledging these concepts can help

us comprehend the characters' coping mechanisms in an attempt to shield their fragile ego. Thus, the objective of this analysis is to discover and demonstrate how such coping modes had affected the psychological status of the characters, causing them a number of major obstacles that resulted in their psychological complexities, and precluded them from living a normal life outside the Shimmer, and from escaping it alive.

Consequently, in order to present a fair analysis of the characters' internal as well as external struggles, and to comprehend the reciprocal relationship between the psychological complexity and the characters' existential crisis in *Annihilation*, this research will be split into three chapters. The first chapter will lay the groundwork for the theoretical foundation and present notions that will assist to achieve the required comprehension of the characters' psyche. The chapter will be divided into five sections: the first will introduce the story's context and setting to provide a full understanding of the events, characters, shimmer, and psychological complexities encountered throughout the film; the second will narrow down the existentialism theory's essential notions to those we'll apply in our research; As a result, we move away from the broad domains of existentialism as a philosophy and psychoanalysis as a literary theory and toward its specific thoughts and concepts. The third portion, titled *Freudian Psychoanalysis of Defense Mechanisms*, is primarily an introduction to the idea in both literary and psychological contexts.

The following section of *Analytical Psychoanalysis* will explain Carl Jung's theory of the psyche, simply breaking it down into structures and providing a simpler explanation of each layer of the human mind. The last portion will synthesize the material gained in the preceding sections while emphasizing the film's fundamental topic of self-destruction. Furthermore, it exhibits further field research and case studies in order to get a definitive judgment on the defense mechanisms adopted to resist the psychological difficulties. Only once all of these theories and thoughts have

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been discussed, described, and applied to the characters' behavioral patterns and internal dynamics can a definitive conclusion be formed regarding their existential crisis and the profound impact of defensive mechanisms on their psyche.

**Chapter One:**  
**Theoretical Framework**



## **Introduction**

This research is structured by following the Existential Psychology approach and the Psychoanalysis approach. This study will be divided into three parts. The first part will be the backbone of our theoretical framework; investigating the inner conflicts and the psychological complexities leading to the existential crisis of the characters. The theoretical structure of any dissertation is vital to the success of the task. Therefore, our first chapter will explain, introduce, and cover the theory chosen for our analysis; Existential Psychology and Psychoanalysis.

To cover as much information as feasible in the allotted scope, the theoretical framework of this study will be divided into five sections. The story's context and setting would be covered in the first section. This section is required in order to form a full understanding of the events, characters, shimmer, and the psychological complexities encountered throughout the movie.

The second section, Existential philosophy and Psychological Complexities, narrows down the theory's essential notions to those we'll apply in our research. As a result, we shift from the broad domain of existentialism as a philosophy and Psychoanalysis as a literary theory to its specific notions and concepts, such as psychological complexities, the Existential Crisis, and the unconscious mind's defense mechanisms to fend it off. Some data from key case studies in psychotherapy will be used to demonstrate our explanations of such ideas.

The following section, entitled Freudian Psychoanalysis of Defense Mechanisms, is mostly an introductory section that includes a background of the theory in both literary and psychological contexts, as well as a simplified explanation and inventory of its primary elements. Given that no theory exists in isolation from its central characters, the opening section also includes an introduction of the thinkers from whom we will derive our research's parameters.



The fourth section of our study, entitled Analytical Psychoanalysis will conduct an explanation of Carl Jung theory of the psyche, it will simply break down his theory into structures and hold a simplified explanation of each layer of the human mind according to Jung's theory. We will definitely, include a small introduction of Jung's life, work, and journey in psychoanalysis to deepen our understanding of the theory.

The fifth and last section of this chapter is titled Defense Mechanisms. This last section brings together the information gathered in the previous sections and emphasizes the film's central theme of self-destruction. Furthermore, it demonstrates additional research and case studies in the field in order to form a final conclusion on the defense mechanisms used to combat psychological complexities, as well as how they eventually lead to psychopathology and self-destruction. As a result, by the end of this chapter, we'll be ready to start delving into the characters' existential crisis.

### **1.The Context and the Settings of the Story**

Since it was released in 2018, thenceforward Annihilation a science fiction horror film written and directed by Alex Garland had raised many debates and gave the permission for big ideas to float on the surface. Exploring how annihilation takes biological existential themes and turns them into narrative aspects to study how they are reflected in every facet of the story, from humans to the landscape to the creatures that inhabit the shimmer.

A group of female scientists are sent to explore an otherworldly border called the shimmer knowing that no person has ever survived from it. The film is a loose adaptation of the same titled book written by Jeff VanderMeer. The film is constructed on the source material of the novel by taking the core idea and crafting its own way of narrating the rest of the story. Garland takes the

same concept and environment of the novel, to make a film which brings us to think again that we as humans also came from nature and we will always belong to it.

The story goes around Lena, an U.S. Army veteran who now works as a biologist professor at Johns Hopkins University, she was agitated by the sudden appearance of her husband an Army soldier named Kane, inside the house after being missing for almost 12 months in a top-secret military mission. She decided to follow the steps of his mission when she discovered that he was sent into an environmental disaster area called the Shimmer. Which threatens to expand from its coastal swamp location to cities, states, and so on. Lena joined by the lead of the mission the psychologist, Dr. Ventress, a physicist, Josie, an anthropologist, Sheppard, and an ex-EMT Anya to seek a potential cure for her comatose husband.

Moreover, the five scientists volunteer for an ultimate aim which is to find answers to overcome an alien that threatens the future of humankind. The real story begins inside the shimmer where they enter a strange sort of energy causing unnatural mutations of the local flora and fauna. Once inside the shimmer, each character shows different hidden reasons of volunteering for this deadly mission. The psychologist shows her strong urge to reach the lighthouse not only to find answers but also because her biological clock is ticking as she was facing death after being diagnosed with terminal cancer. The anthropologist entered the shimmer to grieve her daughter's loss to cancer. The ex-EMT for fighting her alcoholic addiction, the physicist was inside the shimmer to feel the pain of death after committing suicide multiple times, and the biologist Lena to atone for her sins after cheating on her husband Kane. These are all defense mechanisms used unconsciously to show the repressed aims that manifest in the choices of the five scientists as a self-destruction tool to finally overcome their pain by ending their lives.

Annihilation is about different things perfectly woven together, the main concepts of the film are duplication, mutation, and self-destruction. These concepts can be viewed at a deeper level however, in Annihilation the design of the characters is used to express the theme of self-destruction through a suicidal mission. Therefore, this research, is centered around the idea of the reciprocal relationship between the psychological complexities; like self-destruction and the psychological existential crisis of each character, and how it was a direct consequence of their psychic disorder and their idea of self-destruction and death.

## **2.Existentialism in Philosophy and Psychological Complexities**

In order to do a just investigation in our study of Annihilation, we ought to have a deep and a clear understanding of existentialism in philosophy and psychology. Therefore, we will see a short cut and a brief definition of the philosophy. According to Thomas Flynn, an American academician and philosopher who claims that Existentialism is frequently connected with Left-Bank Parisian cafes and the 'family' of philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir who frequented them in the years following Paris' liberation at the end of WWII. Offbeat, avant-garde intellectuals, smoking cigarettes and listening to jazz, passionately debating the significance of their newfound political and creative freedoms immediately spring to mind. The atmosphere is one of excitement, innovation, agonized self-analysis, and – always – freedom. (Flynn 09)

In his book Existentialism a Very Short Introduction Flynn said that as a method of doing philosophy and addressing the issues that matter in people's lives, existentialism is at least as old as philosophy itself. It is as up-to-date as the human condition it investigates. He begins his first chapter with a discussion of philosophy, not as a doctrine or a system of belief, but as a way of living, to make sure that his argument is not missed. According to him Existentialism is a

philosophy regarding the concrete individual, as is widely known, a philosophy that has a longstanding tradition history with in the history of philosophy in the West, going all the way back to Socrates (469–399 bc). This is the practice of philosophy as ‘care of the self’ its emphasis is on the appropriate behavior instead of the abstracted collection of theoretical facts. Its glory and shame are embodied in this. He thinks that it is to existentialism's credit that it defends the fundamental value of what its main proponent, Jean-Paul Sartre, refers to as the "free organic individual," or the flesh-and-blood agent, in an age of mass communication and mass devastation. Thomas thinks that because of modern society's almost overwhelming urge toward conformity, what we'll refer to as "existential individuality" is a temporary success.

We are born biological beings, but we must accept responsibility for our acts in order to become existential persons. This is an example of how Nietzsche's admonition to 'become what you are' can be put into practice. In his point of view, many people never accept such responsibility, preferring instead to hide their existential individuality in the anonymity of the crowd. Throughout his following chapter, he follows what Kierkegaard refers to as "spheres" of existence or "stages on life's way" as an object lesson in becoming a person, and finishes with some thoughts about how Nietzsche would perceive this process of becoming an existential individual (Flynn -12).

Thomas stated that the existentialist adopts five basic themes, each in his or her own unique way. Rather than forming a precise definition of the term "existentialist," they show a family resemblance (a criss-crossing and overlapping of the themes).

Thomas had explained these themes briefly as follows; Existence precedes essence: is the first theme. What you are (your essence) is the result of your choices (your existence) rather than the reverse. Destiny isn't determined by one's essence. You are the person you create for yourself.

Time is of the essence: We are, at our core, time-bound creatures. Unlike measured, 'clock' time, lived time is qualitative: the meaning and significance of the 'not yet,' 'already,' and 'now' differ among themselves in meaning and value. Humanism: Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of the individual. Though not anti-science, it focuses on the human individuals search for identity and significance in the face of mass society's superficiality and conformism demands. Freedom/responsibility: Existentialism is an unrestricted philosophy. Its foundation is the ability to step back and reflect on our life. We are constantly "more" than ourselves in this sense. However, we are both free and responsible. Ethical considerations are paramount: Though each existentialist interprets the ethical in his or her own manner, as with 'freedom,' the underlying aim is to encourage us to question the authenticity of our personal lives and societies.

Diving deeper into existentialism takes us to another philosopher's perspective; Steven Crowell, an American philosopher who has taught at the department chair at Rice University, since 1983. Crowell graduated from Yale University with a Ph.D. in Philosophy in 1981. His research mostly focuses on twentieth-century European philosophy, such as phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics, and post-structuralism. In his book *The Cambridge Companion to Existentialism* he views existentialism as a philosophical phenomenon, that is frequently misunderstood, as a sort of radical subjectivism that rejects reason and debate and bears all the flaws of philosophical idealism but lacks conceptual clarity (Crowell 06-07). A group of distinguished commentators discuss the ideas of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Beauvoir throughout the volume of original essays in Crowell's book. The first to be devoted exclusively to existentialism in over forty years, and show how their focus on existence provides a compelling perspective on contemporary issues in moral psychology and

philosophy of mind, language, and history. However, in this study we shall focus on his last chapter, which holds the title of “Existential phenomenology, psychiatric illness and the death of possibilities”, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how existential phenomenologists' insights might aid our understanding of changes in the structure of experience that occur in psychiatric disease. The phrase "existential phenomenology" is used to describe a wide philosophical perspective shared by many philosophers. According to Crowell Existential phenomenology is more particular than "existentialism," because an existentialist can be a phenomenologist without being one. It is also more specific than "phenomenology" and is frequently compared with Edmund Husserl's "transcendental phenomenology.” However, it would be inaccurate to argue that only existential phenomenology, rather than transcendental phenomenology, contributes to this discussion. Husserl's later phenomenology has also influenced how mental disease is interpreted, and it is frequently invoked alongside basically comparable findings from Heidegger and others. Nevertheless, for present purposes, Crowell concentrates on "existential" thinkers such as Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and notably Sartre (Crowell 12-14).

Crowell also thinks that, Existential phenomenology and psychiatry have a long history of connection, and several existential philosophers maintained strong relationships with clinicians. Heidegger's fluctuating connection with psychiatrist and philosopher Karl Jaspers and his long-term acquaintance with psychiatrist Medard Boss were used to buttress his claim. Karl Jaspers, Kurt Schneider, Kurt Goldstein, Erwin Straus, Viktor von Weizsäcker, Viktor Frankl, Eugene Minkowski, Willy Mayer Gross, J. H. van den Berg, Rollo May, and Eugene Gendlin are just a few of the many others who have made significant contributions to the broad tradition of existential psychiatry and psychology. Several other existential psychologists and psychiatrists have also started practicing or inspiring forms of "existential psychotherapy," which aims to explicitly

integrate themes from existential philosophy into therapeutic practice, rather than just analyze psychiatric complaints in phenomenological terms and inform therapy in the process.

In this research, we will look at existentialism from a philosophical standpoint and then apply it psychotherapeutically on the characters in order to completely comprehend their psychological complexities, hence the reciprocal relationship between these complexities and their psychological existential crises.

### **3. Definition of Freudian Psychoanalysis**

As a matter of fact, the circle of Existential Psychotherapy is now recognized as one of the most comprehensive, all-encompassing schools of therapeutic psychology, which has slowly made its way into literary criticism, along with Psychoanalysis and Defense Mechanisms. Before delving into the depths of the unique theories that will form the backbone of our analysis, it's vital to note that the majority of the ideas, concepts, and principles used in the process were developed by Sigmund Schlomo Freud, an Austrian neurologist and the inventor of psychoanalysis, a clinical approach for diagnosing and treating diseases in the psyche through dialogue between a patient and a psychoanalyst. Sigmund Freud was, without a doubt, the most powerful intellectual legislator of his time. Psychoanalysis, which he developed, was at once a theory of the human psyche, a therapy for its problems, and a lens through which to analyze culture and society. Despite numerous criticisms, counter - arguments, and qualifications of Freud's work, his influence lasted long after his death and in domains far afield from psychology in the strict sense. The relationship between Freud's initial topographical separation of the mind into the unconscious, preconscious, and conscious and his subsequent structural categorization into id, ego, and superego was sought to be clarified in order to grasp the theoretical context of our research.

Sigmund Freud characterized the id as the infant's most primordial cravings for gratification, which were dominated by the need for pleasure through the release of tension and energy cathexis. The id is dominated by what Freud called the basic process immediately expressing somatically formed instincts, which is unfettered by the needs of expediency, indifferent to the demands of expediency, and unconstrained by the opposition of external reality. The infant learns to adjust to the demands of reality through the unavoidable sensation of frustration. The ego grows as a result of the secondary process, which follows what Freud called the reality principle, as opposed to the pursuit of pleasure that dominates the id (Freud 09-10). In order to avoid the anguish caused by unsatisfied needs, the necessity to defer pleasure in the service of self-preservation is gradually learned. To deal with such conflicts, the ego develops defense mechanisms, as defined by Sigmund Freud in his book *The Ego and the Id*. The most basic is repression, but Freud also proposed a slew of others, such as reaction formation, isolation, undoing, denial, displacement, and rationalization.

During the resolution of the Oedipus complex, the final component of Freud's trichotomy, the superego, emerges through the internalization of society's moral demands through identification with parental dictates. The superego derives some of its punishing power from borrowing some aggressive characteristics from the id, which are turned inward against the ego and cause guilt feelings. Following the psychoanalysis approach, we shall concentrate our research on Sigmund Freud's and Anna Freud's defense mechanisms (Freud 20).

Commencing with the works of Anna Freud and her book *The Ego and The Mechanisms of Defense*, the very first English edition of this book was released in 1937. Anna Freud, the daughter of Sigmund Freud, is not an ordinary psychotherapist. Her true contribution to psychoanalysis, however, was her clarification of defenses and the crucial extending of the practice



to children. The work of Anna Freud was particularly noteworthy because the majority of Freudian developmental theory was retrospective and inferential. This book discusses both of these sides of her career. The simplicity of the language and the immediate clinical content present a powerful picture of the genuine nature of defense mechanisms. Realizing that complex, nuanced descriptions of largely unconscious mental events can be conveyed without resorting to jargon in simple, everyday language is a relief. The content of the book is useful since it thoroughly explains the fundamental defense mechanisms and is well-illustrated with clinical cases, making it a great resource for understanding these unconscious processes that will be investigated in our study. As a result, the defense mechanisms in *Annihilation* are useful for understanding sophisticated attitudes and opinions that typically require significant modification. Therefore, understanding the protagonists and providing analytical techniques are made possible by perceiving violence, suicidal thoughts, addiction, and guilt as displacement, projection, denial, and intellectualization. In this book, Anna Freud describes the reaction-formation of those affected by such conflicts in a clear and elegant way, giving it new meaning.

In her book *The Ego and The Mechanisms of Defense*, Anna defined Psychoanalysis as follows: the name "psychoanalysis" should be reserved for new findings relating to the unconscious psychic life, i.e., the study of repressed instinctual impulses, feelings, and fantasies (Anna 03-04). Psychoanalysis was not appropriately concerned with difficulties such as children's or adults' adjustment to the outer world, or with conceptions of worth such as health and disease, virtue or vice. It should limit its inquiries to childhood fantasies carried over into adulthood, fictitious gratifications, and the punishments meted out in retribution. Such a description of psychoanalysis was not uncommon in analytic works, and it was possibly justified by current usage, which has always treated psychoanalysis and depth psychology as synonyms.

Furthermore, there was some reason for it in the past, because it could be stated that from the beginning of our science, its theory, based on actual evidence, was predominately a psychology of the unconscious or, as we might say today, of the id. When we apply the term to psychoanalytic therapy, however, it loses all credibility. The ego and its aberrations were always the focus of analysis as a therapeutic method: the research of the id and its style of action was always only a means to a goal. And the outcome was always the same: the abnormalities were corrected, and the ego was restored to its original state. The odium of analytic unorthodoxy no longer connected to the study of the ego when Freud's writings, beginning with *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921) and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), took a new course, and emphasis was clearly centered on the ego institutions. Since then, the term "depth psychology" has come to encompass a far broader range of psychoanalytic studies. We should presumably define the task of analysis as follows:

To acquire the fullest possible knowledge of all the three institutions of which we believe the psychic personality to be constituted and to learn what are their relations to one another and to the outside world. That is to say: in relation to the ego, to explore its contents, its boundaries, and its functions, and to trace the history of its dependence on the outside world, the id, and the superego; and, in relation to the id, to give an account of the instincts, i.e., of the id contents, and to follow them through the transformations which they undergo. (Anna 03)

#### **4. Analytical Psychology**

Carl Jung the father of modern psychology, and perhaps one of the greatest and most capable minds, the Swiss psychiatrist was one of the few genius minds, who attempted to explore

itself from the inside and demonstrate a full understanding of this kind of internal navigation system. He was born in 1875 in Kesswil, Switzerland, his father Paul Jung was relatively an impoverished rural. And his mother, Emilie Jung suffered from depression, and she always claimed that she can see spirits. Growing up Jung developed a very introverted personality, and he was an isolated child who spent most of his time alone projecting, dissociating, and analyzing the adults surrounding him. As a child he underperformed and disliked school. However, the older he got the more he focused on his education, Jung was interested in books, he read about philosophy, and religious texts. He pursued medicine at the University of Basel, he also worked at a psychiatric hospital, years later Jung become more successful and well-known in his domain, which gave him the chance to become acquainted with the extremely popular, ground-breaking, and controversial psychologist of the time, Sigmund Freud. Together they developed a strong friendship and professional association. However, they soon found themselves disagreeing over fundamental aspects of each other's theories, which led them to take different paths at the end. From around 1913 to 1918, Jung went through a psychological breakdown, but he spent most of his time writing about psychological experiments he conducted on himself, to explore the unconscious mind.

Jung has a primary objective which is understanding the nature of the psyche, and then develop theories and methods to help in the integration of all its components, in order to create a singular, unified state of wholeness. According to this, the psyche simply refers to the complete personality of the individual, a combination of the conscious and unconscious mind. His fundamental aim of life and psychological understanding was to become a maximized, authentic individual. He wrote: "...man's task, is to become conscious of the contents that press upward from the unconscious.... As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being." Jung believed that there is a constant interplay between the

conscious and the unconscious realms of our psyche. And that is what creates our complete personality. However, most of this exists in the unconscious realm under our awareness and control. Therefore, a great part of our real self is hidden in a realm that we do not actively understand or reach. Thus, the only way to become our real, authentic, and complete state of being, we ought to make that hidden part a conscious realm through tapping into it, and this is what Jung called individuation.

In his work *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology*, Jung gave a very interesting explanation of individuation process, to have a clear understanding of individuation we have to understand Jung's model of psyche; in which he divided into, consciousness, personal unconsciousness, and collective unconsciousness. According to him consciousness is the realm of personal awareness where one identifies explicitly and knowingly with themselves, at the core of the consciousness there lays the ego; which is according to Jung, is the responsible part of providing a sense of personal distinction, creating the story one tells themselves about themselves to maintain continuity in their identity. Expressing the ego in the conscious realm is called Persona, Jung says that the Persona is the outward efforts of appearance, which is actively displayed into the world by the individual. However, the Persona could often be disjointed from the individual's real self, because it displays the character that one thinks or wants to be, and that is according to what the ego believes is appropriate to the individual's society and role, but not to what the individual true self. The ego often filters different components of childhood and personal experience, into or away from the conscious mind, in order to get rid of, or maintain the proper appearances and self-esteem. The inappropriate actions, instincts, and appearances will be restricted and repressed deep down into the unconscious realm.

Moreover, Jung wanted to really go deep inside the human mind, and one of his most notably discovers as a psychologist is the new structure he gave of the unconscious mind. Jung divided the unconscious mind into two different structures; the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The first one is similar to the one explained by Freud; which we have explained before, the repressed part in the personal unconscious realm however, continue to interact back and forth with the consciousness. But the collective unconsciousness is so different and it goes deeper below the consciousness.

Jung explained that the collective unconsciousness hides universal elements which are inherited through the sum total of human history, in a way most similar to the biological evolution works. He wrote: “Man has developed a consciousness slowly and laboriously, in a process that took untold ages to reach the civilized state ... And this evolution is far from complete, for large areas of the human mind are still shrouded in darkness.” Which formed an unbroken psychological chain of imitations, going all the way back to the beginning of human history. To prove his theory Jung examined recurring similarities in the unconscious mind of a vast number of patients, and focused on his historical and mythological researches, to find similar motifs, symbols, and themes that appeared in his patients’ unconscious were also prevalent and consistent across art, myths, and literature of different cultures and at different times through time, despite the fact that these cultures often never encountered one another. These common motifs, symbols, and myths were a proof of the shared psychic structure of humanity; which he named Archetypes, the latter are the basis of the individual’s personality and psychic. In the bottom of the unconscious lays the repressed, denied, and unknown content, which the ego does not want to identify with, as the Shadow, Jung divided the shadow into the suppressed feminine qualities in a male ‘Anima’ and the suppressed masculine qualities in a female ‘Animus’. All of the structures explained previously

are what Jung called the psyche, they all work together in active circulation to ultimately form what lies at the center THE SELF; the combined, authentic totality of the conscious and the unconscious, the actual identity of the individual, what they really desire, like, and what they are really capable of.

Explained easily, individuation is getting the ego in a high degree of the persona as close to this as possible, and only then an individual could live an ultimately fulfilled life, and to Jung it is the task of the individual to determine and strive towards individuation. In *Annihilation* the characters took the path of self-realization, which required effort, radical self-acceptance, and radical self-honesty. Therefore, their journey into the Shimmer was a journey into the deep psyche. Each step they took inside the Shimmer, was like a small step down the stairwell into the unconscious. The deeper they moved the more they confronted these deeper, darker, alien elements of their real being hidden at the bottom of their psyche, working to integrate their Shadow; the core of their potential faults, misdeeds and wickedness. Using defense mechanisms such as, denial and repression as a way of rushing back up to the familiar consciousness. However, one's shadow does not disappear by looking away from it, and this is what will be interpreted in our third chapter of this research.

## **5. Defense Mechanisms**

Psychoanalysis is the foundation of this research; therefore, a thorough knowledge of the term was required for a more accurate interpretation. In addition, we must comprehend the characters' defense mechanisms, such like intellectualization, projection, denial, and displacement.

Each character in *Annihilation* was plagued with concerns and anxieties stemming from a multitude of external and internal sources. They were also resisted against by a range of

mechanisms, ranging from primitive needs for reassurance to complex obsessional defenses, with phobic avoidance being just one of several. We were confronted with a wide range of hazard emotions in *Annihilation*, ranging from archaic annihilation worries to separation dread and anxiety, death anxiety and guilt, and so on, from the primitive to the sophisticated. The characters react to them in a variety of ways, including inhibitions, passive compliance, active aggressivity, and phobic avoidance in a single instance. We can all agree that neither of these examples resembles a conventional phobia, but this leaves us with a lot of unanswered questions, the first of which is their link to a full-blown phobia. Is it correct to suggest that the characters symbolize steps toward phobic development, but that these steps are thwarted for some unexplained reason. Is it possible that there are some aspects of the psychic makeup that are required for phobic growth but are missing in these cases? Or is it far more common and natural for individuals to deal with their fears in other ways, with phobic and anxiety avoidance being the exception rather than the rule, rarely sought or achieved?

The creation of strong defenses is aided by anxiety induced by the strength of id impulses; fear of the superego, guilt, leads to drive modification and social adaptation. In other words, the same negative emotions that drive neurotic symptom creation are also understood to be necessary for proper character survival. It is not impossible, however, to draw a link between the problem of anxieties. The characters' response to their trauma is more akin to panic than any of the other infantile fears or anxieties. It's possible that the adoption of the most primitive of all defense mechanisms; intellectualization, projection, denial, and displacement, is due to the dreaded confrontation with panic itself. In this light, defense mechanisms could be viewed as the characters' alternative to traumatization.

In order to study the pathogenic component of the characters' means to transcend the existential dilemmas, we'll look into their past experiences while keeping an eye on a set of symbols and present indications that can explicate their inner psychological state. The fear and pathological anxiety induced and generated by trauma, whether on a conscious or unconscious level, is the most pressing of the latter disquietudes, as it has already been indicated, and the one that best suits the characters' data. As a result, this section will focus on the characters' reactions to trauma and some of their defense mechanisms, such as displacement, projection, denial, and intellectualization, which are prominent in their actions.

The term "displacement" refers to changing the impulse's goal. A violent inclination against one's father, for example, might be translated into a hostile attitude toward police officers or other authority officials. Actual aggression targets would be linked to the initial, restrained impulse target through meaningful linkages.

Moreover, projection is known to be a common term in both regular conversation and psychological thought. In its most basic form, it refers to recognizing one's own characteristics in others. A more thorough knowledge entails recognizing others as possessing characteristics that one incorrectly feels one lacks. Projection, as a wide kind of self-concept affect on person perception, is more of a cognitive bias than a protective mechanism. However, projection may be perceived as protective if noticing the frightening feature in others helps the individual avoid recognizing it in oneself or herself, and this is how Freud (e.g., 1915/1961a) thought about projection. As a result, there are several approaches to comprehending projection, which differ primarily in terms of how well the unwanted character or purpose is disowned as part of the self.



Denial, according to Freud, can range from a rare, nearly psychotic inability to recognize the physical truths of one's immediate environment to the more usual unwillingness to accept the consequences of an event. The line between denial and repression can be blurry at times, making it difficult to describe in a meaningful way (Cramer ). For the time being, consider denial to be the mere reluctance to confront certain realities. Denial may be a very beneficial defensive technique in the event that these truths are really unpleasant or threaten one's self-esteem.

According to Freud, intellectualization is a protective strategy that includes immersing oneself so totally in the logical component of a problem that the emotional aspect is completely ignored. People can emotionally separate themselves from anxiety-provoking stimuli by doing an intellectual examination of a traumatic incident. The person is consciously aware of the issue during intellectualization, but simply becomes "emotionally detached" (unconsciously keeping their feelings at bay). They do not live in denial, and they do not try to rationalize what has happened to them.

With that stated, we briefly discussed the characters' defense mechanisms in *Annihilation*; yet, we must also comprehend Lena's motives and experiences in order to fully understand her reaction as the story's protagonist. After discovering that her husband had gone on that mission as a result of her betrayal and adultery, Lena made up her mind to enter the shimmer out of guilt. To grasp this, we must first grasp the meaning of survival guilt, as described in *Anna Freud and the Holocaust: Mourning and guilt about surviving*. Examining the period of Anna Freud's life following the news of her relatives' deaths in Nazi detention camps during World War II. Consider the Holocaust involvement in her difficult mourning process to have a better understanding of this period. A succession of her nightmares are re-examined through the lens of survivor guilt and her father's difficult grieving during the Holocaust. Unconscious reproaches against her father are said

to have led to a connection with him, which included his 'choice' to abandon his sisters in Vienna. One of the challenging variables in the grief process is survivor guilt in respect to her aunts' killings (Hartman 11).

Sigmund Freud's self-analysis after his father's death is the first psychoanalytic statement of survivor guilt. In a letter to Fleiss from 1896, he referred to this concept as "self-reproach that appears regularly among the survivors" (quoted in Gay, 1988, p. 88). Survivor guilt, on the other hand, became a frequently used clinical concept by psychoanalysts and other mental health practitioners as a result of the study and treatment of Holocaust survivors. Niederland (1968, 1981) and Krystal (1968) contributed to a deeper understanding of the impact of severe trauma on people who lived through the camps' sufferings as well as those who escaped to better conditions. Niederland (1968) identified survivor guilt as one of a range of symptoms experienced by persons who have outlived someone important to them as a result of murder, suicide, war, genocide, natural disaster, or accident in which the survivor may have also died "One variable that might determine the intensity of the guilt in such situations is whether the avoidance of ill fortune is the result of an active decision made by the survivor or due to mere happenstance [Mark Moore, personal communication, 3 April 2008]" ( 278).

The relationship between survivor guilt and other forms of guilt brought on by pre-trauma internal and external conflict varies a lot depending on the person. Although Niederland (1981) enumerated a variety of characteristics of full-blown "victim syndrome," he summarized his perspective on survivor guilt as follows:

It is true that masochistic tendencies are operative in many of them [survivors] but, in the great majority, it is the survival itself that stands at the core

of the inner conflict. The holocaust survivor identifies himself with the beloved dead whom he believes he should join in death ... [T]he survival is unconsciously felt as a betrayal of the dead parents and siblings, and being alive constitutes an ongoing conflict as well as a constant source of guilt and anxiety...(123)

Choices, illusions of choice, and the appearance of choice all played a role in the experiences of Holocaust survivors. *Sophie's Choice*, a fictional description of life and death choices made all too frequently during the Holocaust, was written by William Styron in 1979. Many survivors' testimony includes times in which they were faced with a decision that involved decisions that afterwards became a cause of remorse. Many of these 'options' appear to be near-impossible possibilities, comparable to those confronted by the Freud family.

It is worth noting that the survivor guilt identified by Freud was interpreted by him as part of the guilt he felt about his father's youthful competitive sentiments. Surviving was one of the side effects of an unwitting victory over a rival. Survivor guilt is a part of oedipal guilt in this first understanding, not a conceptually different entity. The concept of survivor guilt has been separated from the context of the individual's childhood conflicts and complex relationships with the individuals who have died, as it has been described in the context of mass murders in the Holocaust or in instances of war, natural disasters, or fatal accidents. In the case of Anna Freud, her complicated family connections were closely linked to disputes sparked by the news of her aunts' murder in the concentration camps.

The intense remorse of Holocaust survivors has been described by Niederland (1961). Many of these survivors suffered from melancholy, anxiety, and psychosomatic problems as they battled to build new, often successful lives after the war. These symptoms, according to

Niederland, signified identifications with loved ones who had died, and were fueled by "survivor guilt," a "ever present feeling of guilt... for having survived the very calamity to which their loved ones succumbed" (p. 238). Niederland concluded that his patients' pathology was caused by their fate, not by their hidden hostile wishes toward their loved ones, but by the patients' unconscious perception that simply remaining alive was a betrayal of the dead. In this regard, Niederland downplayed the emphasis given by both Freud and Klein to inborn destructive drives in favor of an environmental interpretation based on affection for the item. When a person survives but their loved items do not, typical ambivalence about important possessions might lead to guilt. this kind of guilt is viewed as a fundamental human conflict.

Finally, one of the psychological complexities encountered by one of the characters, in this case Lena, is survival guilt. She unconsciously tried to intellectualize her sentiments, and instead of feeling and understanding them, she unconsciously adopted one of the defense mechanisms described above. This complex psychic problem of hers may have been the cause of her having an existential crisis, or it could have been the other way around, as we shall try to investigate in our research.

Other characters used intellectualization in various ways as well. Kane, Lena's husband, was afraid of facing the truth or confronting his feelings after learning of his wife's affair, so he utilized this defense mechanism and went on a suicidal mission into the unknown. This may have prevented him from experiencing grief and despair, but putting his life in jeopardy was the outcome of a variety of other psychological issues.

Other characters, such as Lena and Kane, adopted a variety of defense mechanisms and displayed a variety of psychological complexity along their path. In this research we shall

investigate the relationship between the characters' psychological complexities and their psychological existential crises in this research.

## **Conclusion**

In point of fact, chapter two focuses mostly on the principles discussed in the theoretical framework. As a result, it takes use of such mental data to interpret the characters' inner dynamics and get to the root of their concerns, anxieties, psychological complexities, and defensive mechanism.

As a result, the first chapter has been devoted to an introduction to the theory most suited for exploring the characters' existential dilemmas in a way that considers both their psychological issues and existential challenges. Therefore, the investigation of existential psychology and psychoanalysis as philosophical and psychological theories based on clinical principles is primarily based on the findings of Sigmund, and Anna Freud, who were fascinated by death as a primordial source of a variety of psychological disorder. And Carl Jung, who devoted most of his life to understanding the human psyche, the conscious and unconscious parts of the individual's mind.

Thereby, the following chapter will focus on the characters' unconscious use of intellectualization and other defensive mechanisms to avoid dealing with their psychological complexities and death anxiety.

## **Chapter Two:**

# **A Psychoanalysis of the Characters' Internal Struggle**

## **Introduction**

The second chapter of this research focuses on the inner complexities and struggles that produced and led to the characters' existential crisis in *Annihilation*, and will be the first analytical phase in our study of the characters' existential crisis in *Annihilation*. As a result, it carefully follows the paths of our theoretical framework in order to pinpoint the genuine origins of each psychological issue. Our goal is to not only study and depict the emergence of unconscious defensive mechanisms against psychological complexities and death dread, but also to explain their profound impact on the characters' personalities and how the psychological complexities lead to the existential crisis and vice versa.

The Psychological Complexities is the first section, and it sets the tone for the investigation by identifying the typical signals that reveal the characters' psyches which contain hidden psychological complexities and highlights the existential crisis, loss of meaning, and death anxiety. At this point, it is evident that the detection of all kinds of problems and psychological difficulties that have emerged from this coping strategies, such as intellectualization, projection, denial, and displacement, are at the forefront of our attention. The Existential Crisis will also be a part of our examination of the protagonists' existential crisis from the perspective of their own inner view. As a result, it focuses on the downfalls that result from relying on defense mechanisms to shield themselves from the fear of death, and which indulge the central characters in a sea of psychical trauma which affects their mental stability on the one hand, while also making them an easy feast for psychopathology on the other.

The following section, titled Defense Mechanisms, discusses the defense mechanism of intellectualization and denial. This section of the work deconstructs key patterns in the characters'

behaviors in order to highlight their reliance on two types of behaviors: conscious and unconscious behaviors. We will also look at the characters' exaggerated interest and distress in relation to the shimmer, which was the main source of all of the characters' triggered trauma.

### **1. Psychological Complexities**

The first chapter of our research, as well as the theoretical framework of our study, has given us insight into existential worries, specifically the death fear and the defense mechanisms adopted to avoid it. After becoming acquainted with these theories, our current goal is to delve into the characters behavioral patterns in *Annihilation* in order to demonstrate the impact of such conflicts and defense mechanisms on their actions and decisions. This section is devoted to the investigation of character relationships and their psychological mindset, as the title suggests. However, before beginning this process, it is necessary to clarify the symptoms and behaviors displayed by the characters, which show their existential crisis and loss of purpose in life, and to show that dealing with the fear of death is challenging in the first place.

Numerous theorists have sought to analyze the fear of death for centuries, but the fear of death is an important facet and an inevitable concern in all human beings' lives and existences. Melanie Klein is an Austrian-British author and psychoanalyst who is best recognized for her contributions to child analysis and the development of object relations theory. She believes that the fear of dying is the core of all anxiety: "I put forward the hypothesis that anxiety is aroused by the danger which threatens the organism from the death instinct; and I suggested that this is the primary cause of anxiety... anxiety has its origin in the fear of death" (ibid, p. 28).

Several authors suggest that death anxiety stems from a dread of one's own introverted destructive desires, a fear of ego-loss connected with intense sexual desire, and infantile anxieties



of physical immobility, the dark, or suffocation. The idea that death anxiety is a secondary manifestation, a derivation of other unconscious complexes, is shared by all of the interpretations so far. According to this perspective, the picture of death serves as an imagined "temporal inkblot," ready to symbolically symbolize any infantile concern that is projected upon it.

In *Annihilation*, such unconscious complexes are vividly visible in the characters' actions. Essentially every character in *Annihilation* has their own psychological complexities; Lena's psychological problems manifest themselves in her cheating and guilt feelings, Kane chose death over facing the bitter reality of his wife's affair, Sheppard in projecting her daughter's loss to cancer into a suicidal mission, Dr. Ventress in refusing to get her cancer treatment and trying to find a solution inside the shimmer, Josie in her suicidal attempts, and finally Anya who's addicted to alcohol as a way of avoiding her problems. Every character in *Annihilation* has their own psychological issues, which are considered as core unconscious complexes that led to secondary manifestations such as death anxiety and existential crisis.

Another indication of psychological complexities embraces a clearer reference of death anxiety and the existential crisis experienced by the characters. In a conversation between two characters "Lena" and "Sheppard" about their reasons of entering the Shimmer,

Sheppard said that: "Volunteering for this – it's not something you do if your life is in perfect harmony. We're all damaged goods here. Anya is a teetotal, therefore an addict. Josie wears long sleeves because she doesn't want you to see the pale scars on her forearms."

Lena asked: "She's tried to kill herself?"

Sheppard answered: "I think the opposite. Trying to feel alive."

Lena asked again: "What about Ventress?"

Sheppard: "No friends, no family, no partner, no children. No concession in her at all. It's like she's defined by what isn't there."

Lena: "She's alone."

Sheppard: "More than most. You can ask."

Lena: "You!"

Sheppard: "I also lost someone. But not a husband – a daughter. Leukaemia."

Lena: "... I'm sorry."

Sheppard: "Yes. In a way, it's two bereavements. There's my beautiful girl, and the person I once was." (Garland 71-72)

In fact, this dialogue provides two key elements about the characters' conflicted psychology. For starters, their problems are directly related to a lack of meaning in life. The latter appears to create a strong enough urge in their brain to overflow their unconscious mind, tricking their conscious awareness through the thought of 'extinction.' Our investigation of the characters in *Annihilation* returns to its initial track of existential crisis with the second detail. Because, despite their overwhelming fear of death and extinction, the first thing they did was embark on an uncertain mission from which no one has ever returned alive. In other words, instead of avoiding death and all its anxieties, they resolved to face it and find a meaning for their existence through

the shimmer. As a result, the shimmer portrays the figure of internal struggle in the protagonists' conflicted mind.

In few more lines, the Shimmer satisfied the essential themes of an existentialist individual by relying on the figure of an internal struggle. "The primary theme is that "Existence precedes essence: is the first theme. What you are (your essence) is the result of your choices (your existence) rather than the reverse. Destiny isn't determined by one's essence. You are the person you create for yourself." (Flynn 133). According to this, the characters made their own decision to enter the Shimmer; they did not simply exist; they chose to face death.

Another essential theme of what defines an existentialist is that "Time is of the essence: We are, at our core, time-bound creatures. Unlike measured, 'clock' time, lived time is qualitative: the meaning and significance of the 'not yet,' 'already,' and 'now' differ. among themselves in meaning and value." (Flynn 125). The protagonists in Annihilation struggled with the sense of time because they lost conscious awareness of time it as soon as they entered the Shimmer. Lena and Anya discussed their inability to define time in a conversation,

Anya: "You're finally awake."

Lena: "Sorry, you're going to have to give me a moment. I'm a little ... disoriented."

Sheppard: "Join the club."

Anya: "You don't remember setting up camp, right?"

Lena: "... I don't remember anything, after we reached the treeline."

Sheppard: "None of us do. But check your boots and pants. They'll be wet and covered in mud. And we've been doing an inventory of the food. From the depletion, we've been out here for at least forty-eight hours." (Garland 42)

Humanism: Existentialism is a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of the individual. Though not anti-science, it focuses on the human individual's search for identity and significance in the face of mass society's superficiality and conformism demands (Flynn 10). The various motivations for entering the Shimmer all center on one common theme: the individuals' frantic search for identity and meaning in life. Each character described her/his reasons for embarking on this hazardous quest in their own unique way; they all attempted to conceal their true motivations, but they all admit that they see themselves as damaged goods in the eyes of society.

It represents their unconscious mind's strategy for silencing the notion of death and a lack of meaning in life, resulting in a more or less trouble-free lifestyle. As a result, the Shimmer is utilized as a psychological stabilizer and a shield against the earliest psychological complexities. While the positive side of such a coping style is improved professional performance, the hidden and undesirable side of such an implement is a compromising limiting of the psyche's maturity. The characters accept a weaker place by placing the Shimmer on the pedestal of the internal struggle, which they gladly accept despite the resulting psychological hardship of degradation. For example, when they first stepped into the Shimmer, for instance, when they first entered the Shimmer, they lost all sense of time and awareness of events, and were confronted by weird and frightening monsters who might kill them in seconds. According to this assertion, the protagonists are aware of their inferiority along the lines that they, themselves, had set for their perilous mission,

yet it does not appear to disturb them. In sum, such treatment by the Shimmer takes on the hues of a reasonable price to pay for psychological equilibrium in their conflicted psyche.

The detrimental implications of relying on the Shimmer as a symbol of their internal struggle, on the other hand, go beyond psychological inferiority and establish the groundwork for far more serious consequences. The characters' dilemma is summed up in their declaration, "We're all damaged goods here," (Garland 71), which illustrates the unintentional behavioral pattern they had fallen into as a result of their trip into the Shimmer. In a nutshell, the characters' reliance on the Shimmer for psychological support in the face of existential issues, death anxiety, and lack of meaning in life has led to a type of regression over time, causing them to withdraw and retreat from life. Considering that the Shimmer is the source of their unconscious meaning, due to the psychological complexities and traumas they had experienced, the characters' psyches had begun to withdraw from their normal lives and social interactions, leading them to believe that they might find another meaningful life and answers inside the shimmer, since their lives outside it were already meaningless. That is why, when they couldn't detect the life they desired beyond the Shimmer, they preferred entering into an unknown mission and isolating themselves.

Furthermore, the protagonists in *Annihilation* have tied their entire existence to the Shimmer, not just their internal struggle. This may be seen in the dialogue between Dr. Ventress and Lena when she was trying to figure out why her spouse chose to go on this mission,

Lena: "Why did my husband volunteer for a suicide mission?"

Dr Ventress: "... Is that what you think we're doing? Committing suicide?"

Lena: "You must have profiled him. And assessed him. And he must have told you."

Dr Ventress: “So you’re asking me as a psychologist.”

Lena: “Yes.”

Dr Ventress: “Then, as a psychologist, I’d say you’re confusing suicide with self-destruction. Almost none of us commit suicide, and almost all of us self-destruct. Somehow, in some part of our lives. We drink, or smoke.

We destabilise the happy job – – or happy marriage. But these aren’t decisions. They’re impulses. And in fact, as a biologist, you may be better placed to explain them than me.”

Lena: “What do you mean?”

Dr Ventress: “Isn’t self-destruction coded into us? Programmed into each cell.”  
(Garland 87-88).

The unsettled state of the characters' mentality and the depth of their existential problem in relation to the Shimmer are reflected in the diction of this discussion. A suicidal expedition, they believe, is a better method of terminating their lives, at least for a good reason, because a life away from the Shimmer would not only be pointless, but also lead to their eventual 'end.'

Nothing is stated regarding the characters' future actions and approaches to life after their mission into the Shimmer in Annihilation. The circumstances become increasingly difficult, and the characters' internal struggle manifests itself in their actions as they turn on each other, and the fear of death reaches new heights with the death of one of their coworkers, Sheppard. In fact, the closer they got to death, the stronger the will to live became. This was the point at which their

belief system finally crumbled, leaving them disoriented and confused, unsure of what to do next or whether to follow their inner urges or their outside commitments. Such a conclusion supports our previous assertion that their psychological complexities are a psychical weapon more lethal than the dread caused by death itself.

## **2. Defense Mechanisms**

Following the analyzation of the characters' psyche in terms of internal struggle as a defense mechanism against death anxiety and psychological complexities, the goal of this section is to investigate the characters' use of displacement, intellectualization, denial, and projection, as coping modes for the same purpose. As a result, this section of the work will look into the coping modes that can be traced and found in the characters' behaviors, which are manifested through their strong interest in the Shimmer, whereas the latter could be seen in a number of worries that came to represent the more serious and oppressive fear of death.

### **2.1. Intellectualization**

When discussing the history of the theory of defenses, one popular point of reference is Freud's conceptualization of defenses in his 1926 text *Inhibitions, Symptoms, and Anxiety*. There, Freud discusses what is widely regarded as the classic defensive mechanism, which he claims occurs in steps. The id is first aroused to a prohibited sexual or aggressive desire. At an unconscious level, the ego predicts dangerous implications of that desire, such as lack of love, rejection, castration, or moral censure.

The prospect of danger causes what is known as signal anxiety, a slight hint of irritation that signals the ego to the impending threat. To alleviate the irritation, the ego tries to expel the

harmful impulse and its derivatives from consciousness. Freud referred to this as the ego's strategy of defense.

Even though Freud doesn't quite mention intellectualization as such and never coined the term, he did discuss the similar defense of affect isolation throughout examinations of obsessional disorders. When the obsessional is confronted with an unpleasant experience, Freud (1926) sustains that "The experience is not forgotten, but, instead, it is deprived of its affect, and its associative connections are suppressed or interrupted so that it remains as though isolated and is not reproduced in the ordinary processes of thought" (120). Freud associates such "isolation" with the typical phenomena of intense focus of thought, in which distractions are eliminated from concentration. According to Freud, an element of any obsessional symptom is an attempt of excluding unpleasant desires from full awareness by reducing their affective value.

However, according to his daughter; Anna Freud; (1936), intellectualization is a method in which an individual controls unconscious conflictive matters by transforming it into abstract ideas which are under conscious control. As seen by Anna Freud, intellectualization is a procedure in which the ego seeks to take control of instinct desires through reasoning. The ego "translates" intense desires into abstract conceptions to shield itself from overpowering urges (162). For example, an adolescent's interpersonal emotions may be intellectualized as philosophical ideals of friendship and devotion (162). One major distinction between intellectualization and regular thought is that intellectualization is an endeavor to conquer internal desires rather than solve external problems.

Individuals use their intellects in a number of defensive ways when they intellectualize. These people are escaping painful personal matters by retreating into a world of detached



abstraction. In modern literature, psychoanalytic writers use the concept of intellectualization in a variety of contexts, demonstrating that the concept has a variety of interpretations in the domain. Bulitt and Farber (2002), for instance, characterize intellectualization as a defense during which “individuals unconsciously avoid information by heightening intellectual processes” (41). They have used the case of a man whose girlfriend inquires whether he loves her. He responds by asking what love is and then citing the numerous dictionary different definitions. These writers make no mention of what information the individual is ignoring in their example. However, he is likely evading knowing if he loves his girlfriend or not, as well as the potential consequences of that information for their relationship.

What exactly do individuals whose defenses have been classified as intellectualization do? The obvious reply is broad: almost anything. Individuals' minds can be put to use in a variety of defensive techniques. The list is long: schizoid withdrawal, narcissistic idealization or devaluation, omnipotent control, undoing, masochistic self-punishment, identification with the aggressor. All of these defenses, among others, can be implemented through the use of the intellect.

We saw the usage of intellectualization as a protective strategy throughout our inquiry in *Annihilation*. The characters picked for the task all had distinct internal conflicts and psychological complexities, but none of them opted to confront her issues in the appropriate manner. The five scientists are extremely intelligent, but instead of dealing with their psychological issues, they embarked on a research mission into the unknown. For instance, the anthropologist “Sheppard”, the ex-EMT “Any”, and the biologist “Lena” decides to use their intelligence and intellect as a defense mechanism against their psychological complexity and existential crises. One who is distressed by her daughter's death, one of an addiction problem due to hard reality she faces as a soldier, and Lena to avoid the guilt feelings.

Another example can be found in the behavior by one of the characters in *Annihilation*, "Dr. Ventress," the psychologist and mission leader. She frequently had difficulties dealing with the other characters because she was the one leading the mission, but they seemed to overdramatize problems and respond to her with poor judgment. She struggled to cope with them, but she tried to correct them by reprimanding them and coaching them on the proper protocols that should be followed for the mission's success, but this approach did not provide the expected results. It was clear from the start that her attempt at remediation was fairly broad and defensive, and did not appear to be customized to the specifics of the circumstance. Dr. Ventress's intellectual understanding of procedures was used to respond defensively to interpersonal conflict, leading to the conclusion that intellectualization was the operative defense.

Josie, the physicist, sought refuge from an overpowering reality by immersing herself in fiction or the intellectual sphere. She dealt with possible interpersonal conflicts and anxiety by avoiding contact with the outside world and instead cultivating a vibrant internal life. Because of her distance from human relatedness, she was incorrectly thought to be cold and unemotional. However, she is internally struggling with moderating overpowering effect. Her inward emotional troubles, on the other hand, are frequently unnoticed to others due to her interpersonal detachment. Josie, like the other characters, had her own internal problems, and she utilized intellectualization as a defensive mechanism to escape the real world into the Shimmer, fantasizing about the new world buried within and searching for a meaningful end beyond. She eventually decided to become a part of that enigmatic universe by allowing it to reshape her into an unknown and beautiful creature.

## 2.2. Denial

Denial in Freudian terms encompasses anything from a rare, almost insane unwillingness to notice the actual truths of one's immediate surroundings to the more typical hesitation to accept the ramifications of some occurrence. The line separating denial and repression can be unclear at times, making it more difficult to describe in a meaningful way (Cramer, 1991). For the time being, we define denial to be the mere reluctance to accept certain realities. In the case of severely distressing information or possible self-esteem loss, denial can be a very effective protective technique. Denial may be viewed in a variety of ways. Broad meanings include a variety of different defenses. Perceptual defenses, building personal illusions, negation, reducing, maximizing, mockery, and reversal are all kinds of denial according to Cramer (1991). Researchers have offered little proof that individuals consistently fail to recognize the physical truth of true facts, even when confronted with tactile proof. (Of course, they are inclined to be wary of rumors or other reports that lack authenticity and attest to unpleasant happenings.) On the other side, there is enough evidence that individuals would refuse frightening implications and interpretations.

The most prevalent type of denial comprises dismissive reactions to failure or other negative input. When people are given negative feedback, they frequently reject the implications rather than adopting them into their ego. Making external attributions for failings, such as trying to point to bad luck or task complexity, is a popular and very well-known pattern of denying the implications of inability, because it asserts that the failure does not represent any incapability or other positive characteristics on the aspect of the self. That is an appealing technique of defense for persons who, in particular, seek to strengthen a shaky feeling of personal superiority.

However, in *Annihilation* we see a basic form of denial which starts with Lena denying the fact that her husband's absence for 12 months means that he has died. According to Janoff-Bulman (1992), denial may be extremely effective following trauma since it permits the interpretation process to progress in stages. There is frequently nothing a person can do after experiencing a major personal trauma, including an accident or victimization, and hence denial does not preclude adaptive reactions. Meanwhile, the work of coping with trauma entails reestablishing one's positive perceptions of oneself and the world. According to Janoff-Bulman, one should begin by denying the trauma in general, and then gradually remove the denial, allowing the individual to begin the job of reconstructing those positive concepts, rather of trying to discover some new interpretations all at once.

And this is exactly how Lena dealt with her trauma, she kept refusing to believe the loss of her husband Kane, she was waiting for him to come back and in a conversation between her and Daniel, she admitted that she still has hope to see him again;

Daniel: "Sarah and I have a few people coming over. A garden party, while the weather holds." Lena gives the neutral frown of someone prepping a polite excuse.

Lena: "You mean tomorrow?"

Daniel: "Yes"

Lena: "Actually, I do have something planned"

Daniel: "Are you sure? I think it'll be a lot of fun. We've asked Amir and Jenny, and.."

Lena (cuts in): "Thanks, Dan. I appreciate it. But I was going to paint our bedroom."

Lena corrects herself immediately. “The bedroom.”

Daniel looks at Lena.

Daniel: “It’s been a year, Lena. You’re allowed to come to a barbecue”

He reaches out, and catches Lena’s arm.

Lena: “It’s not a betrayal. Not an insult to his memory. I’m going to paint the bedroom” (Garland 12-13)

People tend to dismiss negative input concerning their health. They disregard numerous hazards and dangers and sometimes act as though they are invincible. They selectively forget stuff that is unpleasant or dangerous to their respect, or deny facts that could traumatize them. Some patterns have been associated to good self-esteem, adjustment, and contentment, which is consistent with the concept that denial may be an effective tactic; in Antihalation, denial allowed Lena to keep up, and the possibility of seeing her husband again protected her self-esteem from being devastated.

## **Conclusion**

To summarize, our second chapter is mostly based on the theoretical framework's assumptions. As a result, it employs such psychological data to grasp the characters' internal struggle and get to the core of their worries, anxieties, and defense mechanisms. As we have seen, the main goal has been to analyze the shortcomings of such a perspective to death and existential anxiety in order to highlight the consequences of depending on it.

The first section of the chapter and our examination of the internal struggle of the characters' existential crises are identified and detailed in the characters' behaviors as a result of their dependency on defense mechanisms. Hence, it emphasizes the negative effects of inactivity, detachment from life, psychological complications and intellectualization, on their minds. As we have seen, such struggles, in the long term, lead to a situation far more destructive than the direct exposure to the fear of death.

In light of this, the second and final section have been devoted to a detailed examination of the defense mechanisms employed in the characters' internal conflict, intellectualization and denial, this time as representations in the characters' own behavior rather than as theoretical notions. This stage has allowed us to understand much of what was previously mysterious. We were able to track down the characters' flaws and psychical complexities back to their origins, as well as investigate the role of defensive mechanisms in the formation of psychopathology through a collection of flaws that are somewhat visible in their actions, emotions, and choices.

As a conclusion, we finish the second chapter of our study with an interesting detail on how the characters failed in their goal of self - awareness due to their overdependence on defense mechanisms against psychological complexities and death anxiety. Finally, we should remember that “we have got into the habit of being alive” (Pratt 1920 244), so that we find it terrifying to eventually realize that we are doomed to die someday, which reinforces our argument against the use of any kind of such coping mechanisms in the presence of means for healthy existence and effective self - consciousness.

## **Chapter Three:**

# **The External Analysis of the Characters' Psychic**

## Introduction

We are all brought into this world without choice, to our parents, to our specific time, space, location, and to the special circumstances of our physique. When we open our eyes, we see a world moving around and onto us. We exist here, in the upcoming glimpses of our childhood, with no control over anything. We will soon outgrow infancy and enter our cognizant understanding of ourselves in the material universe surrounding us, and to restate the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, we will face the challenge of deciding what to do with what has been done to us, to decide what we think of almost everything and what it all means, as well as what we do with it. The famous statement from Sartre's lecture "Existentialism is a Humanism" highlights the main existential principle: "existence precedes essence." In this context, essence refers to the qualities of a thing that give it its function. For example, Sartre mentions how a paper knife is created with a certain purpose in mind before it is made. Only once it has been assigned a specific purpose and designed properly, it is constructed. With the exception of itself, its Essence precedes its existence. As rational human beings, we create almost everything out of Reason, even if the reason is to demonstrate that we can create things for no reason.

While the existential crisis covered in this study was largely created by the characters' inner struggle to reach a purpose or meaning for their existence after all the trauma and difficulties they went through, such concern had also been fostered and worsened by their expedition into the Shimmer. As a result, the third and final chapter concentrates on the external conditions and concerns that arose on their behaviors and actions as a result of their inner struggle, psychological complexities, and death anxiety.



The first section of the third chapter titled, External Defenses will discuss the characters' defense mechanisms for shielding their fragile egos. We will examine how they depend on those coping mechanisms to survive their inner and external struggle. The purpose of this part is to demonstrate how they displace, and project their internal struggle through their external aggressive and irrational behaviors.

The final section is titled Individuation, and its goal is to explore the reciprocal relationship between the psychological complexities and psychological existential crisis of the characters in Annihilation, which combines the characters' internal and external struggle to find a purpose or an explanation for their existence through their mission into the Shimmer, the theory used to interpret the film will be the one explained by Carl Jung in Analytical Psychology. As a matter of fact, the purpose of this section is to analyze the relationship between the shimmer and the characters' psyche and unconsciousness, and will also interpret the Shimmer as being the inner mind and shadow of the characters' psyche. In this chapter we will give a detailed interpretation of each character, and analyze their journey inside the shimmer based on their own feelings, thoughts, and views. We will track down their path of reaching the core of their real self, the path to individuation.

### **1.External Defenses**

Since this chapter concentrates on the external struggle and the connection between the latter and the characters' internal struggles, which were previously discussed in chapter two, External Defenses, is the title of the first section, which serves as the foundation for the analytical path. Surely, the title is merely a reflection of the content of this section of the research, which centers on the existential question of the purpose behind everything and its impact on the

psychological and existential well-being of the characters. To be more precise, the aim is to examine the eventual outcomes of the characters' behaviors in the center of an extremely alien space, and how such a context acted on and influenced their existential crises.

### **1.1.Displacement**

First of all, it is agreed that displacement comprises the construction of a new source of tension of an inferior level in order to replace the dread of dying. Thus, the unconscious mind uses a lower concern; which in *Annihilation* is the inferior problems and conflicts between the characters; as a source of distraction to keep the conscious mind from becoming aware of the death anxiety or the real psychological complexities, and the characters showed that through neglecting the real life-threatening situation they were prisoned in. However, a link always seems to be maintained between this lower concern and the individuals in order to form a strong connection between the two. And that connection could be seen through the characters' behaviors, when all they focused on was the small conflicts and different opinions they had.

Displacement is a defensive mechanism used by many other defenses and serves a distinct purpose from all other defenses. Displacement aims to create providing flexible solutions by locating issues in a new context. To have a clear understanding of the concept of displacement we can go through Freud's amazing understanding into his eighteen-month-old grandson's game. When his mother was not there, this child was known for playing with a wooden reel with a string attached to it. He'd throw the reel behind a curtain, declare, "It's gone," then recover it and declare, "Here." Freud deduced that the child's painful experience of Mother's departure was thus converted into an active mode. (Peter B 108)

We don't know if the boy was fully conscious of his mother's death while he was playing, but it's evident that he had influence over making a replacement item disappear or reappear. The displacement enabled him to experiment with emotional mastery, something he could not attain in his relationship with the principal object. Other protection methods, such as total suppression, denial of the incident, or projection, would not have provided the same chance to transcend the painful experience by exerting reparative powers to cure it.

Thus, whereas most defensive systems constrain drive derivatives, displacement relocates them to a location where ego command over them is possible. The first sign of displacement was shown by Kane, when he realized he had no control over his wife's affair, he chose to be a sergeant in an unknown mission where he could however, have some feelings of control over the situation. In order to avoid the traumatizing situation of confronting his wife. Another character which had a similar state is Dr. Ventress who was driven into the Shimmer by a terminal cancer diagnosis, and the responsibility for recruiting members for previous expedition teams, she felt that lack of control over her cancer and over the fact that she could not control saving the people she sent into the Shimmer for a long time, so she decided to go inside, thinking that she would gain more control over this mission as its leader. Displacement enabled her to gain a mastery over her emotions, something she could not attain in her relationship with the principal object. In this case also we are not sure if what Dr. Ventress was doing is out of her conscious awareness, but it's evident that she had influence over making the decision of dying. She knew perfectly that she'll end her life: "The Shimmer breaks people down until not one part remains. Not singular. Not alone." (Garland 56), yet she preferred to have control over death.

However, in *Annihilation*, we have seen the conception of displacement, specifically displacement of concern, which is only another form of the same defensive mechanism.

Furthermore, the way it displays itself is somewhat different and may thus be best characterized as when a person is involved in a dangerous accident that threatens his/her existence. The accident could, in fact, have triggered the person's death anxiety, which, as stated previously, was far more likely to adopt another pattern after being distorted by one or more coping mechanisms. As a result, it takes the shape of displacement, arousing a minor concern in the individual's mind in order to liberate him/her from a more oppressive anxiety. Immediately after the incident, the individual's conduct may change. Prior to the accident, the individual could go about his days talking with others and performing his regular activities normally, even enjoying his social interactions. Nevertheless, the individual may have severe anxiety about these social contacts or normal daily life duties immediately following the accident (Yalom 44).

Thus, we can see how the existential fear of death and the anxiety it causes has been displaced and turned into a less harmful concern, namely social self-consciousness. To counteract the concept of death that had been triggered in the individual's mind by the life-threatening accident, his defense mechanism had attempted to manufacture new anxiety to distract his conscious mind. As a result, the mind should avoid.

The death anxiety by repression and displacement. Based on this reasoning, we conclude that, while the immediate fear of death is displaced by a plethora of little concerns generated at an unconscious level, this course of action results in an infinite number of limits. This strategy had resulted in a set of physiological limits and, eventually, a detachment from everyday life.

The protagonists in *Annihilation* go through the same sequence of events, displacing their fear of death to an inferiority complex, which were visible in their attitude inside the Shimmer. This can also be tied to the concept of internal struggle, because after setting the Shimmer high above, it is equally relevant to their real life outside. As a result, the characters formed sentiments of

inferiority over time, making them self-conscious, timid, and anxious in their dealings with one another. This can be seen in their thoughts and behaviors during the mission.

Their fear of dying, combined with psychological complexities and internal struggle, had found a representation in displacement and a metamorphosis to a lack of self-esteem and aggression. The amount of regression and isolation from life generated by displacement as a defense mechanism led them to escape their real life in the first place, and after granting the Shimmer the same significance as that of the real world, they used displacement yet again, concentrating on the inferior issues between them while ignoring the actual life-threatening situation they were currently facing. As a result, a far worse and more dangerous situation was created than a direct death facing experience.

## **1.2. Projection**

The goal of this part is to analyze the characters' use of projection as a coping mode for the same reason after presenting our analysis of their psychology in terms of the use of displacement as a defensive mechanism against their existential concerns, psychological complexity, and death fear. As a result, this section of the study will look at the type of projection that may be discovered in the characters' behaviors.

Projection is manifested through the characters' external conflicts; as previously explained, the use of denial as a defense mechanism to protect the fragile ego, the unconscious mind works on projecting right after denying reality; as a result, The only way out for a denier is to project their own defects and misdeeds into others around them, in a way of protecting the conscious mind, Freud's exploration of numerous areas in clinical and practical psyche analysis relied heavily on projection as a conceptual tool. In truth, projection has been one of Freud's early conceptions, and

it maintained crucial to him for several years (1895). In a letter to Flies, he defined the term as a regular process that may be misused for the sake of defense. And it was a typical procedure connected to causal thinking: “Whenever an internal change occurs, we have the choice of assuming either an internal or an external cause. If something deters us from the internal derivation, we shall naturally seize upon the external one” (209).

In *Annihilation*, the characters' behaviors demonstrate projection in its most basic form; most of the characters recognized their own characteristics in others. After spending a long time inside the Shimmer, they lost track of time, and as a result of the life-threatening situations they encountered and the loss of conscious and rational thinking, the characters began to project their own bad desires onto others, resulting in a lack of trust and many conflicts through the story's events. They began to recognize others as having attributes that they wrongly believed they lacked.

However, projection appeared in its clearest forms through the behaviors of Anya, an addict who is denying her addiction and trying to protect her ego through projecting her internal thoughts and qualities in the other characters , first she ignored her own troubles, completely disregarding that she is an addict, and then she convinced herself that all the other characters are monsters, while she saw herself as the only one who knows the way, and the only one who would save the planet from annihilation. Anya's unconscious mind performed an excellent job of coping through denial and projection. Her unconscious refusal to see her true self and the world around her, on the other hand, becomes yet another dead end.

In *Annihilation*, though, projection may be regarded as protective since the character observing the frightening feature in others helps them from acknowledging it in themselves. Anya had a lack of self-trust due to her addiction problems, so she projected those sentiments onto Lena and the other characters. When she found out about Lena's relationship with Kane, she went insane and

tied up all of her friends in chairs in an attempt of gaining back the control over them and the situation, since she always had the lack of self-control due to her addiction issues.

Anya completely loses her mind and give up to her unconscious psyche, she tied up everyone, after finding a picture of Lena and Kane. In one of the scariest scenes in *Annihilation* Garland describes Anya's state as follows:

...Lena opening her eyes and seeing Anya Standing over her, holding her automatic rifle, watching Lena with her glassy stare. Everything about Anya now has the LSD off-rhythm of someone not sharing the same reality as those around them at that, Anya spins her rifle around, and smashes the stock down., knocking Lena out cold. Lena coming round groggy, nauseous, finding she is gagged, and sitting on a kitchen chair. Arms tied to the chair itself, behind her back blood running down her face from a cut inside her hairline. Josie and Dr Ventress are beside her, also on kitchen chairs, and similarly bound. Their backs are to the hallway. And Anya is in front of them standing facing away shoulders shaking. It takes Lena a moment to realize that Anya is crying. The strangeness of the moment extends, Lena pulls at her wrists exchanges a glance with Dr Ventress. Anya wipes her eyes, then turns faces Lena we can immediately see Anya is not at the edge of sanity, she's tipped past it she lifts a hand a silver chain is dangling from her fingers an open locket inside, the photo of Kane. Horror in Lena's eyes a sharp suck of air through her nose... (Garland 112-113)

As a result, the level of aggression and insanity induced by projection as a protective strategy is significantly bigger and more dangerous than a direct contact with death. In some cases, it may even cause overreactions of irrational behavior, such as the one presented by Anya, which

defines the amount of troubling tension caused by her defense system's unnecessary concerns in order to ignore external struggles and their detrimental influence on her actions and rationale thinking. Overall, this section demonstrates how projection was utilized by Anya as a defense mechanism against external struggles.

## **2. Individuation**

By understanding the features and strategies in which the characters' psyche makes use of displacement and projection as defense mechanisms against their psychological complexities, and the existential concerns, we have come to notice the broad concept behind the movie; how Garland mirrored the characters' process of reaching individuation in their mission, and how he represented the structures of the psyche; which were explained in the Analytical Psychology of Carl Jung; through the structure of the Shimmer. In this section, we will observe how the characters' psyche employed coping modes to keep their Self from reaching the darkest aspects of the unconscious mind, *The Shadow*. We shall be able to understand how these coping mechanisms resulted in a more perilous and riskier component than the existential crisis itself.

In order to give a just examination of how did Garland mirrored the process of individuation in the mission inside the shimmer, we need first to understand individuation through the ideas of Carl Jung. In his last book *Man and His Symbols*, Jung examined the individual's relationship to their own unconscious, emphasizing the importance of dreams in the life of the individual. In the first part of his book, Jung introduces the readers to several key ideas; symbols, dreams, and archetypes; which all arise from the unconscious. The language of the unconscious is symbols, and the means of communication are dreams. The interpretation of dreams drives the consciousness towards reviving the long-forgotten language of the instincts. It is through dreams that Jung was able to understand the real psyche of himself, and his patients. Therefore, in order



to reach individuation, and gain the full control of our self and existence, we must travel into the unconscious through our dreams. In *Annihilation* Garland created a strange and alien space which he called the Shimmer, so in reality the shimmer is just a dream for the characters. And only through this dream they will be able to reach individuation.

In one of his early works, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), Freud stated that dreams are: “the royal road to knowledge of activities of the unconscious mind.” In other words, dreams provide a method of interpreting and understanding waking experience. But what exactly is a dream in *Annihilation*? a meaningless whim of the unconscious mind? is it the moments when everything seems to be in blissful harmony? when the difficulties of regular life do not appear to exist? what happens when that dream is shown to be nothing more than a deception and an illusion of reality? what happens when the characters’ lives are suddenly twisted into chaos, when they are too puzzled to start realizing that they are on the verge of rock bottom, or when it has been too lifeless to have meant anything at all, when a meteor crashes down into their real life, into the lighthouse that stands at the center of their unconscious, which they had believed to brighten up a path into the unknown? and what happens when they are fully accountable for this destruction? carrying the weight of guilt, that will ever remind them of their misdeeds. Watching *Annihilation* raises so many questions, and forces the audience to look for the answers in what hasn't been spoken rather than what has been.( Freud 102)

Analytical psychology provides a mind-blowing reading of *Annihilation*, Garland symbolized the process of individuation in the quest towards the lighthouse, and everything inside the Shimmer was like a dream. All of the characters had internal struggles and psychological complexities, thus the only way to discover answers to their existential questions and silence the loud voices within their heads was to confront the darkest parts of their psyche "The Shadow." In

dreams, the Shadow archetype is frequently depicted by scary sights that may have a sinister attraction. Most individuals reject this aspect of their personality, but they also prefer to project it onto others, precisely what the characters in *Annihilation* did. Carl Jung wrote in his book *The Stages of Life*,

When we must deal with problems, we instinctively resist trying the way that leads through obscurity and darkness. We wish to hear only of unequivocal results, and completely forget that these results can only be brought about when we have ventured into and emerged again from the darkness. But to penetrate the darkness we must summon all the powers of enlightenment that consciousness can offer. (752).

Through this quotation, we can understand how the mission is a dream, the shimmer is the psyche, the lighthouse represents the collective unconsciousness, the Alien represents Lena's shadow, and the monsters represent the characters' anxieties and psychological complexities. Lena's last scene, accepting her shadow rather than fighting it, represents her success in achieving individuation, conquering all of her psychological complexities and existential concerns. Achieving 'The Self,' which according to Jung, is the core of the psyche and can be attained only when the unconscious and conscious are unified.

Understanding the Shadow concept is one of the most important things in our study, “Good does not become better by being exaggerated, but worse, and a small evil becomes a big one through being disregarded and repressed. The Shadow is very much a part of human nature, and it is only at night that no shadow exist.” Wrote Jung in his 1960 book *Psychology and Religion* (286). For an individual to be aware of their dark side, is what allows them to manage, control, and recognize it when it sneaks out of the deep parts of the unconsciousness, trying to reach the surface uninvited. It is well known that in order to solve a certain problem one must be aware of it.

Admitting that there is a sickness in the first place will be the first step towards healing. Self-acceptance and authenticity might seem obvious and simple to achieve, yet the actual act of working toward radical self-acceptance and individuation is definitely so far away from being simple, it is somehow impossible in the absolute sense. And in the above average sense, it is one of the greatest and hardest aims. For an individual, to accept their downfalls, weaknesses, evil, shame, unusual interests, to admit what they really see and fear, or hate in others, and be open about it in an honest and true way is one of the hardest goals.

In *Annihilation* this was the main case, the characters struggle to admit that they are not really who they think they are or want to be, that they are not as good as they wish to appear, and confront their mind, which has worked their entire lifetime to hide those repressed thoughts and facts, through the use of defense mechanisms. But their goal to admit so is what literally shakes the very core of their psyche, their existence, hence the core of all of their psychological complexities and internal struggles. However, to Jung this is the only way to achieve individuation, as we have already explained this term in our first chapter, reaching individuation is the only way to live a fulfilled and a complete life. His work is the map towards this life, only through his methods, theories, and insights, an individual can really achieve individuation, and move through this process, not only to gain access to fix their navigation system's faults, but access the full control, where they will be able to give the inputs of their destination and really achieve what they actually want to be and to do. And in *Annihilation* achieving the answer that will solve all of their psychological complexities, and put an end to their existential crisis, in his 1989 book *Memories, Dreams, reflections* Carl Jung wrote: "about dreams I have become convinced that at least part of our psychic existence is characterized by the relativity of space and time. This relativity seems to

increase, in proportion to the distance from consciousness, to an absolute condition of timelessness and spacelessness.” (305).

This realm within the Shimmer is the oddest, most mystifying spot one might encounter. Time, space, and matter blend as if in a dream. The order and structure of the outside world do not exist here. To suggest one could get lost in this location is an exaggeration, but it is where they all find themselves. A geomorphologist beyond with so much grief, a physicist without a purpose, an addict, a terminally ill woman, an adulterer, all in a condition of inner conflict, risking their lives to find solutions to problems that only individuals experiencing significant inner turbulence would find themselves caught up in despite their awareness of the dangerous end they will face: “There are two theories about what goes wrong inside the Shimmer. One, something in there kills them. Two, they go crazy and kill each other” (Garland 46)

Since the core of this bizarre universe is chaos, beauty is not the sole feature of its species. Delving deeply beneath the surface, the characters will encounter the hideous and dangerous side of the shimmer, as well as the monsters that will put the characters' instinctual survival talents to the test, when they least expect it. In Analytical Psychology, the typical dream in which the dreamer is pursued or hunted by an animal is frequently an expression of a repressed instinct that has been transferred from our consciousness into the deep unconscious self. That is striving to come back to life and be accepted into our lives. It is also recognized according to the same theory which was explained in our theoretical framework; that the more violent and dangerous the animal in our dream, the more unconscious the dreamer's innate essence is. In Annihilation the characters faced many dangerous and life-threatening monsters, the alligator with the teeth of a shark, and the bear who took away Sheppard, and Anya. Those monsters could be interpreted based on Jung's

theory as being the dark side of the deep unconscious part of the characters' psyche. The dark part that was repressed deep down, striving to reach the surface of their conscious mind.

However, during their journey through the Shimmer, the characters came across an abandoned military base, a familiar spot they assumed would provide them with some safety, but this heaven was hell for those who came before them. Finding that memory card just made this situation worse, as did watching the horrible end of those who came before them, and realizing that the demons they thought were only external in nature, dwelled abundantly within their own bodies, within their souls. The familiar base represents the familiar places in the characters' consciousness, which they seek refuge to. However, the psychological complexities they had, and their deep digging into the unconsciousness is a main stage in the process of individuation, which will prevent them from feeling safe, and keep them aware of the dark parts they need to encounter in order to reach the full control over their psyche.

Diving deeper into this mysterious world, the characters will eventually arrive at the lighthouse, where they will discover the meaning of everything. However, failing to achieve the light can lead them away from the ultimate meaning they long fought for, and take them instead towards a blind darkness, making them unconscious and vulnerable to any danger that may come their way. The characters fought demons and creatures created by the Shimmer, the bear that murdered Sheppard and used her last cries for mercy to scare and frighten the others. The characters' psyche will start to use the defense mechanisms to protect their ego, but using those defenses would only make them weaker against their psychological complexities.

Moreover, the next stage in the process of reaching individuation is acknowledging and admitting their internal struggles. The characters began to question if their own existence is the real danger, if they are the thing that is bent on self-destruction. Lena's conversation with Dr.

Ventress approved that they really started to see the danger in their core existence, and that destruction will emerge from within their cells and souls. accepting the fact that their inner self is the real danger which they often try to hide behind their external life which is only an outcome of who they really are. And denying that would mean disowning the existence of their inner self therefore their existence completely. Denial was one of the first used coping modes, Anya denied the facts she saw on that video. Her psyche developed reasonable explanations to protect her ego but in reality, the use of those defenses was the main reason of her end.

When an individual makes an attempt to see his shadow. He becomes aware of (and often ashamed of) those qualities and impulses he denies in himself but can plainly see in other people – such things as egotism, mental laziness, and sloppiness, unreal fantasies, schemes, and plots, carelessness and cowardness- in short, all the little sins about which he might previously have told himself: ‘that does not matter, nobody will notice it, and in any case other people do it too. (Marie Louise Von Franz, *Animus and Anima* 44)

For a denier the only way out is through the projection of their own flaws and sins into others around them. In *Annihilation*, Anya did a great job with the use of those two defense mechanisms, first she denied her own issues, refusing to admit that she is an addict, and then seeing all the other characters as monsters, and herself as the one who knows the way, who will save the world from annihilation. Her unconscious failure to see her real self and the reality around her, becomes nothing than another certain dead end. Which proves that the use of coping mechanisms is the real danger in the way towards individuation.

From a contrary perspective of Anya's, Josie have made peace with the fact that the more time she spends inside that strange world and the deeper she goes, the more it will change who she really is and how she really perceives her inner self. Her realization that the Shimmer's tumor is

not necessarily a result of external effects, but only an echo from her own inner world. Thus, the only way to save her own world from destruction is to save herself. However, she thought of why would she go through such struggles to salvage something that did not contain much value to begin with, at the end, life does what it wants, and so does the nature of the Shimmer. So, she sought no value in struggling against its will in the first place, decides to give up to her psychological complexities, and stop looking for answers to her existential concerns “Josie looks back at Lena. Through the green figures saying that Ventress wants to face it. You want to fight it. But I don’t think I want either of those things.” (Garland 124)

So, what is the right way of achieving individuation? Not through using the defense mechanisms, and certainly not by giving up. The only ones who will survive this strange world are the ones who really desire to return, and they will have the power to reemerge. Lena was the only one who had a strong reason to return, she promised Kane that she would find out what happened to him and that she would save him, as a way to atone for her sins: “I know what I have to do. I’m going to go in there. I’m going to find out what happened to you. And I’m going to make it better. She takes his hand Kane. I’m sorry.” (Garland 47-48). And so, one by one they perish, dissolve and disappear, until there is only Lena alone, seeking the company of her own thoughts. When all of her friends have succumbed to the darkness she stood there following once again an unknown path towards the lighthouse. Following death, but fighting to survive it, like the ever-continuing cycle of death and rebirth, the sign of the Ouroboros. In his book *Symbols of Transformation* Jung said: “Symbols are not allegories and not signs; they are images of contents which for the most part transcend consciousness (114). Carl Jung established Jungian analysis on the basis of symbol analysis. He wrote prolifically on the issue, emphasizing how the portrayal of symbols in dreams might help us grasp the unconscious mind's message. Garland also used symbols to convey the

hidden messages behind his movie. the symbol of a snake eating its own tail for the integration and assimilation of the opposite, of the shadow.

Lena discovered that the only path is to go through this extraterrestrial experience, something so massive and alien in nature that it must be something external to her, yet it feels weirdly familiar, like something profoundly internal, concealed under an ever-growing veil of delusion. Standing on its edges and watching it from afar may feel safe, and yet the only genuine solution will be found when she summons the bravery to enter. and so, she will. However, for her, the only way out of this mysterious puzzle, and to reach the meaning and purpose behind all of this strange event is to take the final step inside the lighthouse, the center and the core of everything. On her final step of the journey, Lena is already broken down, but as soon as she gets inside of it, she begins to slowly realizing that this is where the hardest challenge of the whole journey lays. Hidden in the darkness, deep down beneath any shining sparkle of light, it finally appears out of the darkness, a mandala shaped orb, an amazing wholeness but also a frightening alien creature, Lena runs away of fear, stumbles in shock. Finding a recording of her husband standing in the same space of confusion and strangeness, she tries to fight it, but it mirrors every single move she makes, she found only one way out, self-destruction which will end both her existence along with this alien's existence, knowing that this will eventually annihilate her permanently as well. the creature acts like her shadow, and even takes the shape of her face, so she realizes that if the Shimmer is her more than she is herself then she's just a lie and can exist no longer. This world was never an alien in nature, but a part of the characters' own repressed hidden self away in their unconsciousness, trying desperately to be acknowledged, to be part of their consciousness. Lena's realization leaves her one choice which is to look at herself directly in the



eye and accept her shadow as it is. Only then a final annihilation of that terror would be achieved. She faced the dark ground of herself and thereby has gained herself.

The final scene of returning to order is shown a reconciliation of two previously estranged souls, Lena and Kane, they both fought and faced their deepest inner darkness and reemerged as someone else, they become strangers, but closer than the strangers they were once before, embracing one another symbolizes a new first step to start anew carrying the Shimmer inside of them.

Annihilation, makes us ‘the audience’ realize who we truly are, and have thereby dissolved our pathologies, the journey toward the Shimmer is in reality a journey towards our inner mind, our personal unconscious, and collective unconscious. The deeper we go the darker it gets, but in the end facing our shadow will be the only way to gain our individuation, and the only way to overcome our inner conflicts and reach the state of inner peace we all seek to achieve.

## **Conclusion**

Whereas the second chapter of Annihilation dealt with the characters' internal struggles and psychological complexities, as well as their existential crises, the focus of the current section of the work will be on the characters' external struggles and their search to find a meaning in life. Our attention had been drawn to external defenses, individuation, and the uncovering of the relationship between the Shimmer and the characters' psyche.

The first part of this last chapter, dealt with external defenses, which had revealed how the psychological complexities of the characters manifested in their behaviors through the use of defensive mechanisms, such as displacement and projection. This highlighted the characters' desperate methods of overcoming their existential crises in particular. The characters' reliance on

defensive mechanisms prevented them from recognizing the true conflict and diverted them from the true path they should have taken. This causes them to lose sight of the true significance of things. and had empowered the previously internal fight, leaving them with two options: either delve deeper into the darkness, or give oneself over to be taken by the unknown.

The last section, individuation, is an analysis of the characters' psyche and how their journey into the darkest corners of the Shimmer is manifested in the search of their core actual self. In this section, we lay out all of the puzzle pieces and attempt to answer every question and illuminate every dark aspect of the characters' mind. We may ultimately understand Annihilation in the most appropriate manner after delving far into the unknown, confronting the long-concealed Shadow, and losing the core meaning of their life.

## **General Conclusion**

Several key results are to be reached at the end of the examination in relation to the existential crisis and the psychological complexities encountered by the characters, which prompted the unconscious mind to build defensive mechanisms in attempt to avoid and diminish the impact of the crisis. In all likelihood, the most evident, if not most substantial, assertion affirms that these psychological complexities are not to be overcome through denial, projection, displacing, or intellectualizing defense mechanisms, as these mechanisms adoption is nothing more than a shortcut towards mental disorders and self-destruction.

With no need for second thought, the defense mechanisms in general, and the ones outlined in this study, were capable of protecting the characters from the oppressive idea of death and existential concerns, such as loss of purpose, by displacing it into another concern; in their case the Shimmer; in order to keep the psyche from facing the fundamental and real struggles they were experiencing. At the same time, a series of side consequences from using these defensive mechanisms would eventually lead to the characters to having greater internal struggles that would manifest on their external actions, such as aggression, irrational thinking, isolation, and self-destructive behaviors.

This conclusion is the result of a detailed investigation performed on three separate layers. The earliest and most fundamental part was essentially theoretical, relying mostly on the findings of Sigmund Freud, Anna Freud, and Carl Jung. Hence, the first chapter helped lay the groundwork for acquainting with the theories in research topic, their broad principles, and their notions. The three primary ideas that have been outlined on light of the resemblance they exhibit to the internal and external struggle of the characters in *Annihilation* are psychological complexities, defensive mechanisms, and analytical psychology.

Furthermore, a significant portion of the theoretical chapter was devoted to comprehending the defense mechanisms primarily employed by the protagonists during, and even prior to, their mission. At the same time, the investigation of the consequences of depending on such defense mechanisms, and how they eventually lead to mental disorder, as well as conflicts between the characters and within their psyche.

Chapter two implements the collected theoretical data through examining the characters' behavioral traits, ideas, and desires in line with the themes of intellectualization and denial. Therefore, it emphasizes the characters' genuine motive for entering the Shimmer, the troubles they had prior to taking on this mission, as well as their real meaning as manifestations of the previously described defense mechanisms, existential concerns, and psychological complexities. Afterwards, the chapter's goal turns to investigating the troubles that could arise from the over dependence on each of the previously explained defensive mechanisms, and how they have harmed the psychological stability and life of the characters, causing them to first enter a strange and unknown deadly area, and then lose control over themselves, and act aggressively with each other.

The third and final chapter focuses on the connection between the characters' internal and external struggles, psychological complexities, and existential concerns, which ultimately led to their annihilation and worsened the instability in their psyche. In this chapter, we also looked into how they displaced and projected their true anxieties incorrectly. To do so, we had to conduct a thorough examination of the characters' psyches according to analytical psychology, and how they manifested their journey of individuation, into their mission inside the Shimmer, allowing their repressed, long hidden dark instincts to flow into the surface of the conscious mind, turning their world upside down.

The goal of the current study has been to investigate the characters' motivations and behavioral tendencies, through tracking their psychological complexities and inability to deal with existential concerns, and only after this, we have proven the evident coping mechanisms in their attitude, as well as their long-term adverse influence. Around the same time, we have underlined the importance of external struggles, which have both preserved and worsened their psychological state. Eventually, we draw the conclusion that opposes such use of the defense mechanisms. We also, demonstrate how the characters' psyches are similar to the Shimmer, and that the only way for them to find a purpose or achieve individuation is to venture into the darkest parts of the Shimmer, which in reality is the darkest parts in the characters' psyche.

The Shimmer is the alien, odd, and mysterious figure in Annihilation who represents the protagonists' inner psyche; the farther they go into the shimmer, the deeper they fall into their unconsciousness. This is significant for the protagonists' existential crises because their major motive for venturing into the Shimmer is to discover a purpose in life. However, the shimmer turned out to be the area where they would have to confront their worst selves in order to achieve individuation and regain control over themselves, as well as conquer their existential crises and psychological complexities.

While discussing the relationship between the defense mechanisms used to fend away existential concerns and psychological complexities. It is possible to provide a very humble subjective opinion, using such defense mechanisms had definitely protected the characters' psyches from the harsh and difficult reality they were experiencing for some time. Simultaneously, they have psychologically damaged and largely confined their psychical process of growth, isolated themselves from everything which caused them to escape their life, and severely limited them to a neutral style of living that led them eventually to venture into a dangerous world and risk

their lives. Most of the characters lost their souls in the search for a meaning to keep them alive, and gave up their lives in the process. therefore, following the defense mechanisms' illusions instead of searching for a way to solve the core issues, could be a direct way for someone to annihilate their existence. Lena managed to survive because she was able to dive deep into her darkest parts of the psyche, where she accepted her shadow instead of ignoring or fighting it. Thereby, she succeeded in her way to achieve individuation, overcome her psychological complexities as well as her existential crisis.

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## ملخص

يتناول هذا البحث الأزمة الوجودية والنفسية لشخصيات فيلم الابداء عبر نطاقات الفلسفة الوجودية ، والتحليل النفسي ، وعلم النفس التحليلي ، ومفاهيم الآليات الدفاعية ، وهي الفكر والإنكار الازاحة والإسقاط. في المقابل ، لا يركز تحليلنا للشخصيات على التصوير السينمائي للفيلم ، بل سنركز على سيكولوجية الشخصيات وتحليل النفس. ببساطة ، سيتم دعم الأساس النظري بنتائج سيغmond فرويد وأنا فرويد في مجال التحليل النفسي من أجل تتبع الصراعات النفسية للشخصيات من خلال تطبيق الآليات الدفاعية. علاوة على ذلك ، سيتم فحص جزء كبير من هذا العمل وفقاً لنتائج علم النفس التحليلي لكارل يونج ، في محاولة لتقييم صراعاتهم الداخلية والنفسية. وفقاً لذلك ، سيهدف البحث النوعي والتحليلي الحالي إلى تقديم تفسيرات للأزمة الوجودية والنفسية للشخصيات ، وربطها مباشرة باعتمادهم على الآليات الدفاعية. وبالتالي ، فإن هدفها هو تحليل كيف زادت الصراعات الخارجية والداخلية للشخصيات من اعتمادها على هذه الآليات الدفاعية؟ وكيف ان تعقيداتهم النفسية تتعارض مع حاجتهم لوجود هدف حقيقي؟ وكيف تمكن الشيمر من التحكم في وعيهم؟ أخيراً ، يشير بحثنا إلى كيفية تفاعل كل هذه النضالات المرئية والخفية جنباً إلى جنب مع البنية النفسية لآليات الدفاع ضد معضلاتهم الوجودية ، من أجل اكتشاف العلاقة المتبادلة بين الأزمة الوجودية التي عاشتها الشخصيات وتعقيداتهم النفسية لتحقيق التفرد الذي قاتلوا منذ فترة طويلة لأجل بلوغه.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الابداء ، الشواغل الوجودية ، آليات الدفاع ، علم النفس ، الإسقاط ، الزاحة ، الإنكار ، العلاج النفسي الوجودي، التفرد.