

Self-Concept of NPC Characters in the Video Game “A Space for the Unbound” by Mojiken Studio [A Semiotic Analysis of Charles Sanders Pierce]

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Abstract. Modern literature has undergone significant transformations due to technological advancements and societal changes. Video games, as a form of new media, combine storytelling and interactive elements to create immersive experiences. This research examines how the concept of self is portrayed in the non-player characters (NPCs) of "A Space for the Unbound" using semiotic analysis based on Pierce's theory. The aim is to explore the fundamental elements of adventure video games in "A Space for the Unbound" and analyze the self-concept of NPCs using Carl Rogers' self-concept theory and Pierce's semiotics. This study emphasizes the potential of video games as a medium for literary and psychological exploration, contributing to the understanding of video games as complex, multi-dimensional literature. The qualitative study uses a descriptive-analytical approach, involving gameplay, observation, and documentation of interactions and narrative elements. Analysis is conducted using Theresa Dillon's basic game elements theory, Rogers' self-concept framework, and Pierce's semiotic model to interpret the game's visual and narrative signs. The game combines immersive storytelling with interactive gameplay, allowing players to explore deep emotional and psychological themes. NPCs are depicted with unique backgrounds and personalities. The "space dive" mechanic enables exploration of characters' inner thoughts and emotions, adding depth to the game experience. "A Space for the Unbound" demonstrates the potential of video games as a powerful medium for literary expression and psychological exploration. The study advances the field by applying semiotic and psychological theories to understand character development and narrative complexity in video games.

Keywords: Video Games, Semiotics, Self-Concept, Modern Literature, A Space for the Unbound

1 Introduction

Video games, as a of the new forms of literature, combine storytelling and interactive elements to create immersive experiences. “A Space for the Unbound” is a local video game with deep narrative elements. It is an indie game in the adventure and slice-of-life genres, combining elements of adventure and mystery set in 1990s Indonesia. The game's story focuses on the relationship between Atma and Raya face complex conflicts centered around "Man vs. Self," dealing with personal human issues such as depression,

anxiety, failure, guilt, questions about identity and life purpose. The game explores personal problems not only in the main characters but also in the side characters (NPCs). Based on the description above, the researcher aims to study the structure of ASFTU with Theresa Dillon's basic elements of adventure video games theory. Additionally, the researcher appreciates the narrative and storytelling presented in ASFTU by examining NPC characters through Carl Rogers' self-concept theory. Researcher also interested in analyzing the self-concept of characters using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics theory, which examines representamen, object, and interpretant.

2 Methods

This research is descriptive-analytic. It employs qualitative methods to interpret the game's content, using Theresa Dillon's basic game elements theory, Carl Rogers' self-concept theory, and Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics theory. The play-observe-note technique is used to understand the game's story deeply, involving repeated gameplay and detailed observation. The focus is on analyzing the self-concept of NPCs in ASFTU, using semiotics to interpret character dialogues, narrative quotes, and in-game objects. Unlike traditional narrative or psychological analyses, semiotics enables a deeper understanding of both narrative and visual elements, revealing the symbolic interplay between the player and the game.

3 Result and Discussion

3.1 Game Elements

This subsection explores the basic elements of the adventure game "A Space for the Unbound" using Theresa Dillon's framework, which includes game rules, game world, plot, theme, characters, objects/items, text, graphics and sound, animation, and user interface. In describing the **rules**, primary objective (goal) for the player in ASFTU is to solve the mysterious events unfolding around the main character, Atma. This goal drives the player to complete complex puzzles, thereby advancing the storyline and unlocking new areas and abilities. The game mechanics are crucial in setting limitations and possibilities for player actions. These mechanics allow the player to interact with objects, collect items, and utilize them to solve puzzles.

The game settings or **game world**, which in ASFTU is rich with cultural and supernatural elements. The world is divided into two main types: the real world, exemplified by locations such as Kota Loka (primary setting), and the supernatural realm, which players access through the "space dive" mechanic. The game's immersive world, steeped in cultural authenticity and laced with supernatural intrigue, provides a compelling backdrop for the character-driven narrative that unfolds across six distinct

characters in **plot**. The six primary chapters consist of; Prologue, Chapter 1: Raya, Chapter 2: Erik, Chapter 3: Lulu, Chapter 4: Marin, Chapter 5: Raya Fitri Nirmala. The game also features a secret ending, accessible only to players who have successfully completed all Atma and Raya's to-do list quest. ASFTU features a classic retro **theme** with a slice-of-life adventure genre, set in 1990s Indonesia with its distinctive pixel art style. The game narrative **theme** delves deeply into mental health problem, addressing issues like anxiety, depression, and trauma through its characters. The **characters** in ASFTU are well developed and contribute significantly to the narrative, with Playable Characters (PC) called Atma to the various Non-Playable Characters (NPC) such as; Raya, Nirmala, Erik, Lulu, Marin, etc. The interactions with these characters often reveal critical plot points and thematic elements of the game refers to dialogues object, or items. **Objects and items** in the game play a pivotal role in solving puzzles and progressing through the narratives. Items such as the "Magic Red Book" used for "space dive" and "Magic Wand" used for "rift dive" are crucial for unlocking new areas and understanding the characters' deeper layers.

To enhance the game's narrative depth, ASFTU heavily utilizes **text** within its dialogue boxes. These dialogue boxes will appear when the player presses the interaction button on NPCs or objects around game world. The game employs pixel art **graphics** with a retro aesthetic, which enhances the nostalgic feel of the game. The **sound** design, including chiptune music and retro sound effects similar to the music employed in classic video games like Mario Bros [1985], Space Invaders [1978], and other pixelated games. The **user interface (UI)** is designed to be simple and unobtrusive, allowing players to focus on the game without unnecessary distractions. The UI elements, such as item selection menus and dialogue choices, are intuitive and easy to navigate, ensuring a smooth gameplay experience.

3.2 Self-Concept of NPC Characters

The self-concept of NPC characters in A Space for the Unbound is analyzed using Carl Rogers' self-concept framework, which encompasses three key components: self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self. By applying Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory, each character's self-concept is deconstructed through the interpretation of signs (representamen) in the form of dialogue, narrative events, and symbolic in-game objects.

3.2.1 Raya Fitri Nirmala

Raya Fitri Nirmala's self-concept is constituted by a complex interplay between self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self. The **representamen** of her **self-image** is a girl who enjoys writing stories, possesses a high imagination, and tends to escape from harsh realities with the "Magic Red Book" as the **object**. The **interpretation** derived is that Raya Fitri Nirmala utilizes the "Magic Red Book" to express her imagination and anxieties. In terms of **self-esteem**, Raya Fitri Nirmala's **representamen** is akin to having

a superpower to control everything according to her desires within the dream world as **object**. The interpretation drawn from this is that Raya struggles with a fragile self-esteem, thus relying heavily on the power that transports her into her dream world. Raya's **ideal self** is **representamen** by accepting her past problems and continuing to strive to become a writer. This is signified by Raya's interactions with those around her and the piles of draft writings depicted in cut scenes as **objects**. The **interpretation** of the ideal self suggests that Raya has successfully overcome her past issues and continues to persevere towards her future as a writer. Based on this self-concept analysis description, even though Raya's self-image and self-esteem indicate a state of dejection, she has managed to create an ideal self that aligns with her self-image. This demonstrates a form of **congruence**.

3.2.2 Erik

Erik's **self-image representamen** is that of an attention-seeking and troublemaking child, particularly towards Raya, despite his secret affection for her. This is evidenced by his frequent disruptive behavior towards Raya, serving as the **object**. The **interpretation** drawn from this is that Erik constructs his self-image as a naughty and problematic child to gain attention from those around him. The significant problems Erik causes Raya lead to a blow to his **self-esteem**. Erik's self-esteem **representamen** is that of a true man seeking to apologize through actions. This is manifested by his act of giving Raya a Black Forest cake, serving as the **object**. The **interpretation** of Erik's self-esteem suggests that he, as a man, desires to acknowledge his mistakes by offering something rather than words. Erik's **ideal self** is **representamen** by his continued difficulty in expressing his feelings for Raya and apologizing to her. This is evident in the dialogue between Erik and Raya towards the end of the game, serving as the **object**. The interpretation of Erik's ideal self indicates that he remains firm in his stance as a man and finds it challenging to utter words of apology. Ultimately, Erik is unable to express his romantic feelings for Raya. Based on this description, Erik's inability to be honest and express his feelings suggests an underlying anxiety within him. This **incongruence** in his self-concept stems from his inability to reconcile his self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self.

3.2.3 Marin

Marin's **self-image representamen** is that of a caring and supportive friend to Raya. The **objects** of this representation are Marin's efforts to connect with, advise, and support Raya. The **interpretation** drawn from this is that Marin constructs her self-image as a loyal friend to Raya, despite her occasional hesitation to help Raya when ostracized by their peers. Marin's **self-esteem representamen** is driven by her desire to mend her friendship with Raya. The **objects** that signify this are Marin's attempts to gather information about Atma and her supportive advice to Raya. The **interpretation** of Marin's self-esteem suggests that she aspires to be a reliable friend who can assist Raya in overcoming her challenges. Marin's **ideal-self** aligns with her self-image **representamen**, both emphasizing the role of a dependable friend to Raya. The **objects**

that represent this are the dialogues between Marin and Raya where Marin expresses her willingness to help Raya publish her writings in the future. The **interpretation** of Marin's ideal self indicates that she strives to be a trustworthy confidante for Raya. Based on the aforementioned analysis, Marin's self-concept exhibits **congruence**, as her self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self are in harmony. This congruence contributes to her overall stability and positive self-perception

3.2.4 Lulu

Lulu's **self-image representamen** is that of an accomplished, assertive, and leadership-oriented girl who enjoys helping others. Lulu's role as a queen or judge in the game ASFTU serves as an **object** that reinforces this self-image. The **interpretation** drawn from this is that Lulu constructs her self-image as a prima donna, admired for her numerous strengths and dependability. Lulu's **self-esteem** takes a significant blow when her closest friends suddenly forget about her. The **representamen** of Lulu's self-esteem suggests that she feels undervalued and questions her significance to those around her. The **interpretation** indicates that Lulu's self-esteem is fragile and heavily reliant on external validation. If those around her no longer depend on her, she doubts her own worth and experiences anxiety. Lulu's **ideal-self representamen** aligns with her self-image, both emphasizing the qualities of kindness, inclusivity, and a willingness to help those close to her. The **object** is evident in Lulu's interactions with Raya. The **interpretation** gained that despite their strained relationship, Lulu actively seeks to connect with Raya and remains ready to offer assistance whenever needed. Based on the aforementioned analysis, Lulu's self-concept exhibits congruence, as her self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self are in harmony. This **congruence** contributes to her overall stability and positive self-perception.

4 Conclusion

The analysis revealed how each character's self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self are portrayed and interpreted within the game's narrative, using Carl Rogers' self-concept theory and Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics framework. Overall, the study illustrates how ASFTU effectively uses narrative and interactive elements to explore deep psychological and emotional themes. This research contributes to the understanding of video games as complex, multi-dimensional literature that can convey profound themes and character development. The application of semiotic and psychological theories in analyzing character development and narrative complexity in video games presents new avenues for future research in both game studies and literary analysis.

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