Life Reiteration in "Life Is Strange" Video Game

Nenden Rikma Dewi S
Departemen Sastra Inggris
Universitas Komputer Indonesia
Bandung, Indonesia
nenden.rikma.dewi@email.unikom.ac.id

Abstract— **A story within a video game can be defined clearly yet the narrative is various based on the nodal situation and structures; thus this paper focuses on the representation of life reiteration in a videogame narrative. This research is significant to be executed since through its' players can learn that options are exist and able to alter facts. The paper then suggests that video games simulating reality can be used as a method to learn and comprehend probabilities and opportunities occurred in player's daily life. As a part of qualitative research, this paper applies a qualitative methodological approach in video games called as interface study to discuss the game interfaces which leads to another node. Life is strange itself is mentioned as an interactive drama game which allows players to experience stories. Those experiences are perceived as real-time reactions achieved through a character who is rekindling the relationship with her best friend. Through the research, this paper shows video games can be used as a method to help teenagers or young adults in learning life and its consequences.**

Keywords—**Choice, Interactivity, Narrative, Player's Experience, Real-time Reactions**

I. INTRODUCTION

This study entitled "Life Reiteration in Life is Strange Videogame" focuses on players' experiences in reality that affect their choice towards options given within the videogame story playing. This study investigates the player's tendency to reiterate his/her choice within the videogame's story playing. The reiteration itself displays repeating actions through choices based on a player's real-life experiences in order to adjust previous miscalculate actions which leads to undesirable results. In reality, a player unable to undo his/her actions thus, the only way to redeem the mistakes is through the atonement. The result, however, is unpredictable so that in reality players will always keep learning to amend his/her life.

A video game adapting this concept is "Life is Strange" developed by Dontnod Entertainment in 2015 and released as an episodic game by Square Enix. The first episode of the videogame is used in this study since it shows simple choice yet it leads to problematic situations as a player faces in reality. The videogame delivers its' story playing through Maxine Caulfield, or Max, as a senior photography student who's able to rewind time. She's also capable of having premonitions which leads her to take on responsibilities by preventing particular events to happen. As a result, she needs to comprehend that her interference in time and space causes other events.

As an interactive game, Life is Strange offers various options in which players will have different nodes or story. The players' choices are simultaneously built their

experience. Domsch [1] stated that there are two types of choices called the informed or conscious choice and the motivated choice which is also a conscious choice but it is not vice versa. In other words, the choices are made consciously based on personal experience. Related to that, experiences a person encounter as the character is fundamentally a reflection of our own expectations of security and ease of operation based on memories, and habituation [2]. Thus, it is essential to important to consider videogame and player's choices in it have closed relations with their experiences and interaction both inside the game and real life.

Concerning to the issue, there are some preliminary researches. First, Gonzalo Frasca [3] entitled "Simulation versus narrative: Introduction to ludology". He explored narrative within videogames and authorship concept in a simulation genre. Second, MAR Butt and Daniel Dunne [4] entitled "Rebel girls and consequence in Life is Strange and the Walking Dead" who discussed women's presence within videogames showing the spirit of women's revolution in sexism issue through sacrifices moments in Life is Strange and The Walking Dead season two. Third, L De Miranda [5] in "Life is Strange and "games are made": A philosophical interpretation of multiple-choice existential simulator with Copilot Sartre". She used Sartre's perspective in examining concepts of freedom, choice, autonomy and responsibility.

The preliminary researchers, however, do not discuss how interactive videogame is connected with the player's experiences that lead to "self-transcendence". Hence, this study proposes seeing videogame as a medium to help players understanding the causal effect of personal choices so that it can help him/her to overcome any casualty in reality. The issue is being observed by implementing Russon's concept of human experiences which he calls "self-transcending". The term is taken from the unification of Hegel and Merleau-Ponty's concept on forms of experience that is not only bodily but also beyond the nature of the body [2]. It means that the choices made by the players within the story playing are actually not only related to bodily experiences but also the value they have as an individual.

The issue within video games can be recognized through any discipline, yet it needs a particular tool and method to analyze the issue. There are several methodological kits in-game studies offered to be used as alternative approaches. This is necessary since Life is Strange is not only an episodic game with the non-unilinearity narrative but also a simulation game. Hence, this research is important to be executed in order to prove that players can have the opportunity in challenging different actions and result as a simulation of real life.

II.   METHODS

This study applies Consalvo and Dutton's interface study as a methodological kit in analyzing data. They mentioned that the interface study uses any on-screen provided information so that the players can have total control or manipulating elements of gameplay [6].

Furthermore, they also that simulation, world builders and real-time strategy games are usually designed with careful attention to the interface [6]. Thus, data are taken and collected taking screenshots during the play which shows issues related to options, choice and player's experience. The data themselves are based on a phenomenon that leads to player's choice within the node and prompts to another node as the result of a causal effect. Hence, technical steps in doing analysis containing research questions, exploratory questions and approaches are described as in Fig. 1 below.
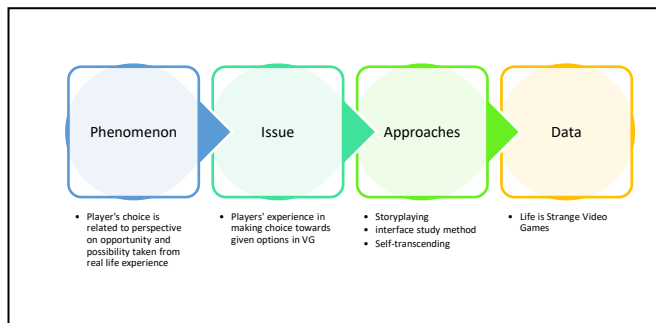

Fig. 1. Methodological steps

There are at least more than a dozen of pictures taken from Life is Strange's gameplay scenes related to the issue. However, this study only attaches six pictures and each picture is analyzed by conducting deep reading on the interface and human experiences, which lead players to make a choice.

Every item showed up on the interface is being discussed to gather and analyze information related to the gameplay scene.

III.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of this study, the interface on the screen can mentally influence players' choices and provoke to have reactions based on experiences or memories in real life. It can be seen through six data which exposed nodes of causal effect results. The first interface which needs attention from the player is a moment when Max recovers from her daydreaming during her class. The interface shows at least six items on her desk, yet the given options are only four. Each option leads to another node with a different narrative and needs different actions. The previous node which is assumed as daydreaming actually is Max's first premonition about a tornado storm heading to her town.

The player has control over Max's choice a moment after she observes her surroundings. During the observation, the player needs to identify certain items and situations. However, the gameplay itself gives a hint towards the player by giving vague buttons, as can be seen in Fig. 2.
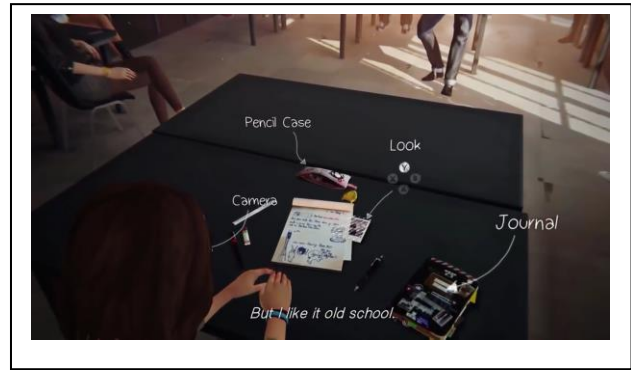

Fig. 2. Max's first options node

Options shown without vague buttons in this interface has the function to deliver comprehensive information about Max's life and interest. An old polaroid camera shows that Max is a photography student, her journal exposes Max's activities and personal information, and the writing utensils are just a mere additional item. Meanwhile, the buttons options exist beside her selfie portrait. The polaroid portrait is Max's assignment for her photography class. Max tends to avoid any interaction with her classmates and her polaroid camera has become her way to communicate.

The player with particular experiences tends to check all out the items before choosing the "look" text. It helps him/her to gather information and track possibilities that might happen after hitting the button. Meanwhile, other players have a tendency to focus on the mission and directly hit the button. A moment after, Max explains her situation in the form of a stream of consciousness.

During this node, the player has no control over the story since it delivers itself in a narrative like a movie or a video clip. There is a moment when Max realizes she has a rewinding time ability. She tries to use it as she accidentally dropped the camera, and it turned into pieces. The player is being taught how to make Max uses her ability as in Fig. 3.

Fig. 3. Max's first attempt of rewinding time

The interface shows a whorl with an instruction for the player to hold certain button on his/her joystick so that Max can rewinding the moment. Her ability enable her to repeat at least 10 seconds behind, which is the time before she dropped her camera.

The whorl, however, cannot be used casually since it only emerges every time Max needs to re-think or re-do her actions in particular event. When the whorl exist, Max can control the duration of the rewinding time, whether a second or the whole

ten second. It also re-emerges every time she is unable to complete the mission on the node.

Regarding this ability, a player may try several times until he/she meets the precise time or moment. This trial takes time yet not exactly alter the story within the node itself. The player with experience instinctively knows how he/she needs to hold the button in rewinding mode.

In the second try of using her ability, Max is led to take a rare blue butterfly flew inside the girl's restroom. It leads her to get inside the last toilet a moment before Nathan Prescot gets inside the restroom followed by Chloe. Nathan accidentally shot Chloe on her abs, and at the same time a whorl. The player spontaneously hit the button and the time is slowly repeatedly. Chloe is a bold girl who caught Nathan red-handed when he sold drugs to her schoolmates. Nathan is the son of the school owner and thinks that any of his action will not affect his future, or in the school. Chloe is pushing him and accidentally, he shot her.

Max saves her life by rewinding ten seconds before the shooting. She grabs a hammer behind her and knocks Nathan out. In order to take the hammer, the player needs to hold the joystick button until the whorl of time back in precise timing. Those players who can memorize and predict time duration tend to make the correct choice in rewinding the time.

This node, however, is the beginning of Max's interaction and reconnection with Chloe after they do not communicate for a while. Their friendship is restored and Max gets along very well with Chloe. She helps not only Chloe but also several kids at her school who get into trouble. However, Max just finds out that Chloe's stepfather often abuses her as well as put surveillance cameras inside her house. Chloe is a character shown as Max opposite since she has a tendency to get into trouble and dealing with it physically. Meanwhile, Max tends to use her feelings, so that the player is forced to use her sympathy and empathy in making choice as in Fig. 4.
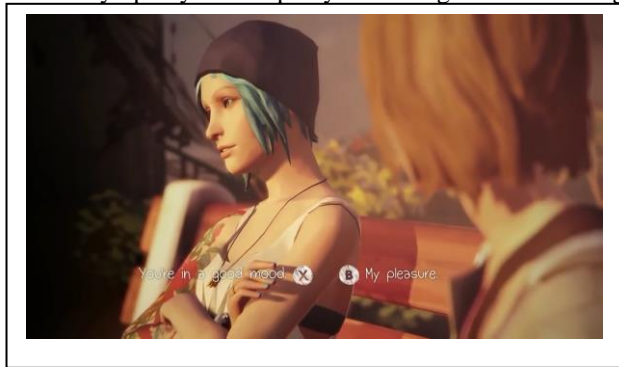

Fig. 4. Max and Chloe empathy-based interaction

Max finds Chloe in front of a lighthouse on the hill after they confronted Chloe's stepfather. Chloe greets Max sarcastically and the player is offered two options as Max's response to Chloe's statements. The options themselves appear in statements which later on will be used by Max. The options have two tones of the statement; first, it shows sarcasm, and second, shows empathy.

The player can choose one of the options based on his/her personal experience in real life or value, and/or just a spontaneous choice. If the player chooses sarcastic response over empathy, Chloe's response will not in a neutral state. This also consciously shows the player's mental state in facing similar moments in real-life interaction. So that, through this

node, he/she can correct the responses during off game communications.

In the middle of a conversation with Chloe, Max spaces out for a moment and she has a similar vision as she did in the class previously. The player is taken into a moment when Max mentally exists inside her own vision. At this state, a player may be shocked by the information that the tornado will happen within four days. Such an incident can raise the player's stress level so that he/she may prepare himself for any possibility happened in the next node. This however, also leads to player's reactions in dealing with particular issues and/or events that may happen in the future.

This node becomes an ending part of the first episode in Life is Strange. Chloe, who disbelief Max's vision, finally asks for Max to explain after they experience snow in the middle of summer weather. The episodes ended with all characters experience the snow as well. At this rate, the player disables to control or manipulate the story since he/she is only placed as a spectator. However, it affects the player's experience, mental judgment and values he/she holds. This condition can be assumed that the player has achieved the "self-transcending" which may help him/her in advance. Eventually, it also leads the player to continue the videogame and finishing the story play.

IV. CONCLUSION

"Self-transcending" and player experience develop at the same time through choices made towards given options. The player's response affects his/her abilities to recognize opportunities, probabilities and accepted response in real-life interactions. Life is Strange then can be used as a way to help anyone in overcoming various life situation which triggers stress level so that they will comprehend the causal effect of every action.

REFERENCES

[1] Domsch, Sebastian. *Storyplaying: Agency and narrative in video games*. Vol. 4. Walter de Gruyter, 2013.

[2] Russon, John. *Human experience: Philosophy, neurosis, and the elements of everyday life*. SUNY Press, 2010.

[3] Frasca, Gonzalo. "Simulation versus narrative: Introduction to ludology." *The video game theory reader*. Routledge, 2013. 243-258.

[4] Butt, Mahli-Ann Rakkomkaew, and Daniel Dunne. "Rebel Girls and Consequence in Life Is Strange and The Walking Dead." *Games and Culture* 14.4 (2019): 430-449.

[5] De Miranda, Luis. "Life Is Strange and "games are made": A Philosophical Interpretation of a Multiple-choice Existential Simulator with Copilot Sartre." *Games and Culture* 13.8 (2018): 825-842.

[6] Consalvo, Mia, and Nathan Dutton. "Game analysis: Developing a methodological toolkit for the qualitative study of games." *Game studies* 6.1 (2006): 1-17.

[7] https://store.steampowered.com/app/319630/

[8] https://lifeisstrange.square-enix-games.com/

[9] https://www.psychologytoday.com/intl/blog/the-human-experience/200812/the-human-experience

[10] https://www.humanexperiencecreations.com/