Double Consciousness of Virtual Realm and Real World in Porter Robinson and Madeon's Shelter

Alvina Salshabilla Linjani Putri[1], Dzil Fikris Shamad[2]
Rommel Utungga Pasopati[3]
[123]Universitas Dr. Soetomo, Surabaya, Indonesia
Email: [1]salshabillaalvina@gmail.com, [2]fikriselxenver@gmail.com,
[3]rommel@unitomo.ac.id

Abstract

This article examines the portrayal of virtual existence in Porter Robinson and Madeon's short film Shelter. This paper is focusing on the character Rin and her life within a virtual dimension while her physical body remains in outer space as unbeknownst to her. Drawing upon W. E. B. Du Bois' theory of double consciousness, the analysis explores Rin's dual identity and the interplay between her virtual and physical realities. Through qualitative method and explorative approach, this writing investigates the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in shaping Rin's virtual environment and influencing her perceptions of reality regarding her journey within the framework of double consciousness of digital and real realms. In the conclusion, this article gives insights into the complexities of identity, agency, and the human experience in virtual realms especially in the short film of Shelter.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence; Double Consciousness; Shelter.

A. Introduction

A collaborative undertaking that manifests in the form of a music video, specifically styled as a short animated film, which bears the title Shelter, has been greatly crafted by the renowned electronic music artists Porter Robinson and Madeon (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). In partnership with the esteemed animation studios A-1 Pictures and Crunchyroll, they produce such a remarkable fusion of their artistic talents. This visually and audibly captivating video was made publicly accessible on the popular online platform YouTube on the date of October 18, 2016, and has gained impressive viewership over 66 million views. Indeed, it is illustrating its widespread appeal and resonance with audiences globally (Robinson & Madeon, 2016).

The synergistic collaboration embodied in Shelter emerges as a direct consequence of the visionary aspirations of its creators. It is also aiming to produce a piece of art that

not only intricately intertwines robust electronic music elements, but also comprehends a profoundly emotionally resonant narrative that engages viewers on multiple levels (Pasopati et al., 2024; Robinson & Madeon, 2016; Wijaya et al., 2023). This particular song indicates a complex variants of emotions, including nostalgia, loss, and hope. All of them are quite woven into an evocative story that embarks on a journey. It is then centered on the profound quest for personal identity and self-discovery of the characters involved.

The story of Shelter is about a father who creates technology to ensure his child lives in a virtual world after the apocalypse. The video showcases the technology that allows the child to recall past memories by pressing a button on a tablet (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). Moreover, the child's original body is located outside in space, connected to an infusion, while her life is in the virtual world created by their father. She remains doubted whether what she thinks in mind is her own body. The doubt is indeed part of her main

question to her own self as she could never ignore her own consciousness. In addition, she also feels such uncertainty regarding the authenticity of her mental perceptions in relation to her physical bodily statements (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). This uncertainty constitutes a fundamental inquiry that she poses to herself, as she is unable to disregard the essence of her own perception to her own world.

In this article, understanding from W. E. B. du Bois' theory of Double Consciousness is emphasized for the analysis. Double consciousness refers to the concept of having two distinct and often conflicting identities or realities. In the context of the Virtual Realm and Real World, double consciousness can manifest in various ways. For example, individuals may have a virtual identity that is separate from their real-world identity, leading to a sense of double consciousness (Du Bois, 2006; Robinson & Madeon, 2016; Wijaya et al., 2023). This separation can lead to a sense of identity fragmentation, where individuals struggle to reconcile their

virtual and real identities. Additionally, the Virtual Realm can be seen as a separate reality from the Real World, leading to a sense of double consciousness where individuals navigate between these two realities. This can result in social isolation, blurred boundaries, and new forms of interaction and communication.

B. Research Method

By using qualitative method, certain concepts and written data are analyzed to answer the question in this paper. Written through description, online and offline scripts are used to explain correlations between Porter Robinson and Madeon in the work of *Shelter* and idea of Du Bois' Double Consciousness alongside with literary concepts and cultural studies ideas. Online and offline scripts are derived from books and journals to understand shown matters. The data analysis includes attaining sources, reading and watching sources carefully, comparing with other issues, quoting into paper, and writing down in references lists. The research

data comes from both Porter Robinson and Madeon music video and concepts as well as contexts of Du Bois' Double Consciousness. Each of them is read then broken down into its every particular element. The ideas in the story accentuate questionable matters to be answered as involved in double consciousness. The premises and logics used in double consciousness's ideas are also drawn to underline matter of being suitable to values of human beings. Here, Porter Robinson and Madeon music video *Shelter* is the object while Du Bois' Double Consciousness is a tool to analyze. More elaborations related to expanding analysis are also provided in addition furthermore.

C. Results and Discussion
The Realities inside *Shelter*

The animation of *Shelter* is actually quite simple. It revolves around a condition between a father and his child (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). However, it is not simple as it is. The animation shows such different consciousness intermediated by technological advancement. The

memories are kept in technology supported by Artificial Intelligence (AI) that enables them to be recalled whenever needed. The data below accentuates the details of the story of the animation;

Picture 1
Unread yet Abandoned Messages

The aforementioned scene elucidates the quantity of unread messages attributed to the principal character. It is disclosed that these messages remain unread for a duration of 2,539 days, which corresponds to a period of seven years in the past. This indicates that the principal character has neglected her messages for a span of seven years (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). The absence of a single message further suggests that the interpersonal relationship has also been forsaken. It is subsequently revealed that while the present reality has dissipated, the recollections of memories always endure.

Picture 2
Drawings Become Reality

The scene above indicates a time when main character tries to draw something in her tablet and it becomes a real condition (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). The main character uses the image feature and then becomes reality as she wishes. There is also a swing that is not drawn by the main character, then the main character approaches the swing and holds it but suddenly she is dragged in her old memory. It is shown that the tablet consists of her previous memories. By accessing the imageries in the tablet, she goes deep diving into her lost pieces of memories.

Picture 3
Gradation from Real to Virtual World

The screenshot above points out a gradation between real and virtual world. It is indeed triggered by imageries of the tablet. All of a sudden, there was a sketch in her tablet, and it turned out that was her village from her past memories (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). Then, she walked to her home in her lost memories. She is slowly getting involved into the imageries. She believes that she is familiar with that world. It is because of the past memories being included in the gradation of the world. The scene also gives meaning to how memories keep its traces intact though different consciousness is intact.

Picture 4
The Main Character and Her Previous Memories

The scene indicates how she is shocked because of she can see her old memories with a man. It is her childhood memories being played before her. At first, she did not recognize if that man is her father (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). When she is aware that it was her father, her memories goes on into her father doing a research. It is interesting how recalling memories are poured into an animation. This is the underling points of AI of the animation and inside the content of the motion picture itself.

Picture 5
The Main Character's Father is a Scientist

The narrative illustrates that the protagonist's progenitor was an esteemed scientist. He possesses the awareness that the termination of the world is imminent. Consequently, he is devising a construct for his offspring upon receiving the information regarding the impending apocalypse (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). He engineered an aircraft for his daughter to preserve her existence amidst the threat of mortality. By employing scientific principles, he formulated an aircraft that possesses a linkage to virtual reality. The simulated environment will safeguard her recollections in order to maintain

her connection with him, albeit it exists solely within the realm of virtual memories. That is the best he can do for her.

Picture 6
The Father Sends His Daughter to Outside the Galaxy

The narrative illustrates that the father dispatches his daughter beyond the confines of the galaxy to preserve her from impending mortality. He also provides her with several dolls to serve as companions in the alternate realm. She appears to be in a state of anesthesia, which accounts for her presentation as if she were in slumber (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). Although he exhibits signs of sorrow, it is imperative for him to ensure his daughter's safety. He is unable to accompany her due to the necessity for an individual to operate the machinery and its artificial intelligence. Consequently, he places his daughter's well-being as a priority, permitting her to proceed while he remains behind.

Picture 7
The Bitter Reality from a Father to His Daughter

The scene is a flashback of memories. It is done when the daughter knows the messages sent by her father before. The daughter is sitting in empty room reading the messages from her father sent from seven years ago. She cannot hold her tears as this shelter is built by her father in order to save her (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). It is also a sign of the father's sacrifice to his daughter. This scene is also how AI plays a medium to bridge two kinds of consciousness related to real world and virtual one.

Picture 8
Reality of the Daughter's Body

The depicted scene illustrates that the female subject is, in fact, existing within a virtual construct of

memories orchestrated by her progenitor. It is revealed that for the preceding seven years, she has been residing in a digitally fabricated environment devised by her father. Her corporeal form is situated within a solitary spacecraft, entrapped in a coma state, interconnected by an array of cables that tether her to her virtual consciousness (Robinson & Madeon, 2016). She is not engaging in authentic consciousness; rather, she is sustained by a multitude of mechanical devices designed to preserve her memories. She is unaware that she inhabits an alternative consciousness.

Double Consciousness and Its Prolonging Senses

The idea of double consciousness is coined by W. E. B. Du Bois to show how Afro-American must live within the domination of White people and their own culture (Du Bois, 2006; Meer, 2019; Pittman, 2023). The concept then is used widely to underline any kind of twoness of identities being involved. It is also to show various internal and external conflicts experienced by individuals who navigate multiple identities. The signs of double consciousness are also similar to such existential crisis since it gives meanings to differences of dual identities being embraced (Esubalew, 2020; Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015; West, 2021). People will always feel doubted whether to prioritize one identity without leaving the balance between multiple ones.

Du Bois defines the concept of double of consciousness as being forced to view oneself not only through one's own lenses but also through the prejudiced lenses thus resulting in a conflicting and fragmented identity (Du Bois, 2006; Meer, 2019; Pittman, 2023). There are several indicators related to double consciousness and its widened concepts of differences. The first one is internal conflict. It happens when individuals experience a struggle between their self-perception and how they are perceived by the dominant culture. This often leads to feelings of inadequacy or alienation as they try to reconcile their identity with societal expectations. The idea is that they think this identity is true but it is not what the society requires

(Esubalew, 2020; Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015; West, 2021). Someone must always choose one from another. That sense is done not because people do not have freedom, but it is actually such consequence of having that freedom.

The second aspect pertains to the cognizance of stereotypes: There exists an amplified awareness of societal stereotypes and biases, which can significantly influence mental well-being and self-perception (Du Bois, 2006; Meer, 2019; Pittman, 2023). Individuals may experience an intrinsic pressure to either align with or resist these stereotypes in their conduct and self-representation. This stereotype can be more broadly characterized as a designation attributed to specific identities. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that identities are intricately connected to the cultural context within which the framework of values remains intact. Additionally, this phenomenon manifests in consciousness, wherein the awareness of being part of a collective is perpetually juxtaposed with the sentiment of being unique, exceptional, and even distinct

(Esubalew, 2020; Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015; Marstaller, 2020).

The third aspect pertains to cultural duality. Individuals frequently maneuver between their cultural identity and the predominant culture, resulting in a bifurcated existence in which they may conceal certain elements of their identity to mitigate the risk of discrimination. This duality can engender tension and a pervasive sense of "twoness" within their lived experiences (Esubalew, 2020; Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015; West, 2021). The emergence of this duality typically occurs when the comfort of one's identity is called into question. It is also manifested when an unusual stimulus evokes past recollections. In the context of technology, this phenomenon is experienced when individuals exhibit attachment to it yet struggle to differentiate between the authentic and the virtual realms.

The fourth aspect concerns social relationships. The intricate dynamics of interpersonal relationships, especially with individuals from disparate racial backgrounds, may illustrate the complexities inherent in double

consciousness. Individuals may experience pressure to modify their behavior or identity during mixed interactions, thereby influencing their sense of belonging and authenticity (Ciriza & Marrin, 2024; Ikhsan et al., 2024; Verdickt, 2023). It is a fundamental truth that no individual can exist in isolation. While people may reside alone, they invariably retain a sense of memories shaped by their interactions with others. This underscores the significance of identities, which are critical in elucidating the meanings intertwined with the profound psychological and social ramifications of double consciousness.

Double Consciousness in *Shelter*

Shelter transcends mere animation, serving as an intricate representation of double consciousness. This concept is intricately tied to the duality of identities that the daughter perceives concerning her father. Unbeknownst to her, her corporeal form lies in a state of coma while she inhabits the realm of her own recollections (Ciriza & Marrin, 2024; Robinson & Madeon, 2016; Verdickt, 2023). She

perpetually contemplates the possibility of receiving further communications from her father. Nonetheless, such messages will remain unattainable, as her father has already passed away. It is she who resides within the apparatus constructed by her father.

The phenomenon of the daughter's dual consciousness emerges when she becomes acutely aware of her father's absence and her reliance on the apparatus for sustenance. She perceives her existence as a manifestation of her authentic identity. However, the underlying truth contradicts this perception. Her lived experience is fundamentally constructed upon the recollections influenced by the presence of her father and her prior existence (Marstaller, 2020; Robinson & Madeon, 2016; Verdickt, 2023). She continues to operate under the assumption that she is progressing through life, yet she is, in reality, ensnared in the cyclical recollections of both her and her father's experiences. She grapples with the dichotomy of her memories; finding solace within the nostalgia while

simultaneously confronting the harsh realities imposed by the machine.

In accordance with the aforementioned four indicators, the subsequent analysis of Shelter is delineated as follows. First, the internal conflict arises when the main character grapples with a dichotomy between her recollections of the past and the fabricated reality orchestrated by her father (Johnson, 2020; Kourkoulis, 2021; Robinson & Madeon, 2016). Her endeavor to ascertain her authentic identity amid a contrasting reality can be characterized as a manifestation of internal conflict. As evidenced in the duration of the animation, she endeavors to comprehend her reality and its intricate relationship with her father. She persistently interrogates the existence of her father, which accentuates her identity as a child yearning for parental connection (Johnson, 2020; Kourkoulis, 2021; Robinson & Madeon, 2016).

Second, the comprehension of stereotypes is fundamentally linked to the process of self-awareness. This connection is not explicitly illustrated in the aforementioned animation.

Concurrently, it is evident that the daughter's cognition is persistently inquiring about the potential return of her father (Du Bois, 2006; Meer, 2019; Robinson & Madeon, 2016). She harbors a significant apprehension regarding the possibility of losing her paternal figure. This fear may stem from the perception that her father constitutes her entire existence. Her dependency on him is profound. Although the narrative does not overtly depict racial stereotypes, the recognition of disparate realities can be construed as a manifestation of stereotype awareness and its implications for self-perception (Du Bois, 2006; Meer, 2019; Robinson & Madeon, 2016). The dichotomy between the father's tangible reality and the daughter's virtual existence, as mediated by artificial intelligence in this animation, serves as a clear representation of their respective identities.

Third, the phenomenon of cultural duality is exemplified in the manner in which the daughter inhabits a dichotomy between the tangible realm and the digital sphere. This dual existence is illustrated by

her physical presence within the spacecraft juxtaposed with her cognitive engagement in virtual reality (Johnson, 2020; Kourkoulis, 2021; Robinson & Madeon, 2016). The experience of oscillating between these two realms may be likened to the complexities of maneuvering through various cultural identities. This condition is conceptualized as a form of double consciousness. She remains oblivious to the sacrifices made by her father; however, his subsequent communications serve to enlighten her perspective (Hamdani et al., 2023; Mulrow & Grubert, 2021; Robinson & Madeon, 2016). She gradually realizes that she is experiencing temporality rather than the precise nature of reality.

Fourth, the examination of social relationships is illustrated through the proximity between the father and his daughter. The primary protagonist's connection with her father's memory remains preserved within this animation. Her emotional navigation while perusing correspondence from her father subsequently elucidates the intricate dynamics inherent in their

relationship (Boxill, 2023; Mulrow & Grubert, 2021; Robinson & Madeon, 2016). The discord between her virtual persona and the tangible nature of her relationship with her father exemplifies the ramifications of double consciousness within her social interactions. In this context, artificial intelligence functions as a mediating force in the dynamics between a father and his daughter.

D. Conclusion

Shelter represents a form of animation wherein the dynamics of the relationship between a daughter and her father are facilitated by artificial intelligence. The narrative is imbued with a profound sense of double consciousness, as the daughter remains oblivious to the reality that her existence is sustained by a machine. She harbors the belief that her father is still alive, eagerly anticipating his communications. Subsequently, she discovers the sacrificial nature of her father's actions, revealing that he has forfeited his life for her benefit. This realization engenders an additional layer of consciousness, as she

comprehends that she is, in fact, residing in outer space, awaiting not anything external, but rather her own attainment of genuine consciousness. The animation conveys a convenient theme, portraying artificial intelligence as a conduit bridging the tangible presence of a father and the digital realm inhabited by the daughter.

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