

Laputa Island – War Machine

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<http://www.floatermagazine.com/issue01/Laputa/>



Murray asserts that computers are “A new medium for storytelling.”¹

Eskelinen writes that “Luckily, outside theory, people are usually excellent at distinguishing between narrative situations and gaming situations: if I throw a ball at you, I don’t expect you to drop it and wait until it starts telling stories.”²

In literature and other non-interactive narrative media, as much as in interactive media like video games, all fictional worlds are incomplete: the world is partially described or illustrated and the rest is left to the reader’s/user’s imagination.

In Jonathan Swift’s renowned work *Gulliver’s Travels*, the reader encounters with the portrayal of numerous fictional places, one of them being Laputa, a flying island.³ The hero Lemuel Gulliver, after coming across a terrible accident, is floated in an uninhabited island. A few days later he witnesses a flying rock over his head. Gulliver reaches Laputa with the help of its inhabitants who are able to manoeuvre and fly the island due to magnetic levitation.

The author depicts Laputa as a ruined and tyrannic society. Laputa’s king controls the mainland within the region where the island can travel by threatening to crush rebel regions or throw rocks at them. This seems to be the first time aerial bombardment is conceived as a warfare method. Gulliver is impressed by the Laputans expertise in mathematics and music but finds their incapability to use their adequacies for practical ends unreasonable.

Due to the considerably appealing concept of a floating land and of the concept of the intellectuals as a transcendental culture, the fiction of Laputa, has become the inspiration for the production of several works in literature, filmography, and video game culture. In several video games we encounter the imagery of the floating land bombardising the ground and among them, some have incorporated a flying island called Laputa as an element of their fiction.

However, a fiction is not necessarily a narrative. Video games are generally fictions, but being interactive they make the implementation of a narrative problematic. This idea, lays on the essentially different mechanics a novel and a video game

are based on. Unlike traditional narrative media being representational, interactive media like video games are also based on another semiotical structure, *simulation*.

“Simulation is the act of modeling a system A by a less complex system B, which retains some of A’s original behavior.”⁴

The interactivity of the video game encourages the use of certain narrative tools while discouraging or disabling the author’s access to other options. In a video game the advance from one session to another is not required to be coherent, unlike the transitions within a novel or a film. Thus the narrator’s ability to manipulate the time line is restricted because of the increased subjectivity endured to the game player. Simulations share some common elements with narratives -character, settings, events-. However they are not just sequences of events, they also incorporate behavioral rules. Simulations are laboratories for experimentation where user action is not only allowed but also required.

In this interactive application, another representation of Laputa is attempted. This time under the scope of investigating the interlinked relations between narration and interactivity. The game player is able to manoeuvre the island and throw rocks on a hypothetical surface, margined by their browser’s window. As he interacts with the surface of the island’s digital representation, a text is evolving, apparted from randomly selected extracts from the novel. So the gameplay is the visualization of a structure that produces each time a new narration.

Notes

¹ Janet H. Murray, *Hamlet on the holodeck: the future of narrative in cyberspace* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 11

² Markku Eskelinen, “The gaming situation”, *Game studies 1:1* (2001), <http://www.gamestudies.org/0101/eskelinen/> (July 15, 2008)

³ *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726, amended 1735), officially *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, in Four Parts By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of several Ships*, is a novel by Jonathan Swift

⁴ Gonzalo Frasca, *Simulation versus Representation*, <http://www.ludology.org/articles/sim1/simulation101c.html> (July 15, 2008)

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