Francesco Levato | poet@francescolevato.com | @_levato

Critical Statement for *Semi-peripheral (3D)* videogame

Semi-peripheral (3D) is a critical-creative videogame concerned with issues of bordering. It is an expansion of my hybrid text, *Semi-peripheral: Spaces of Deviation, Abjection, Madness* that utilizes a videogame development platform to immerse users in a three-dimensional exploration of the text. The hybrid text itself is a mash-up of critical theory, poetry, and science that examines the works of H.P. Lovecraft as an (other)world-system, through the theoretical frames of world-systems analysis, heterotopic spaces, and abjection. The videogame extends that work into a virtual space that symbolizes a Wallersteinian semi-periphery, and also serves as overlapping heterotopias of deviation and crisis, where incongruous objects are juxtaposed and in tension with both the desire and threat of penetrating borders. Originally conceived as an interactive game-based art installation, the videogame was informed by the work of installation artist Christoph Büchel. Büchel's installations span multiple rooms and floors, and contain thousands of objects whose symbolic juxtapositions are left to be discovered by attendees as they work their way through the installation's sprawl. For *Semi-peripheral (3D),* I adopted an observational mode of user engagement similar to Büchel's. Users navigate its three-dimensional world from a first-person perspective where they can construct their own narrative by engaging with the various assemblages of symbolic objects and also with the actual texts, which are scattered throughout the environment and which, when picked up, trigger an audio recording of that text. As a crisis heterotopia the main level of the game serves to contain the user, offering glimpses of two other world systems (the *Core*, developed capitalist economies represented by a cityscape, and the *Periphery*, developing economies represented as a border town). As a semi-peripheral world system, the main level also contains objects from both the *Core* and the *Periphery*. These objects are manipulable in three-dimensional space, and in a future version will serve as keys to accessing and exploring the other world systems. In addition, as *Core* economies tend to exploit and seek to control both the *Periphery* and the *Semi-periphery*, a series of panoptic constructs are in place that keep the player under surveillance, while denying the player the ability to see those keeping surveillance: in the *Core* room, gun turrets follow the player's movements; and in the sentinel room, attempting to access the "core" door will activate the sentinel, who will then also track the player.

Author's note on the text, *Semi-peripheral: Spaces of Deviation, Abjection, Madness*

The hybrid text is a move towards blending my creative and critical writing in a more seamless whole; creating resonances between different texts, paratexts, practices and entities, while simultaneously attending to creative, critical, and materialist concerns.

The poems are based on chance operations (a variation/combination of Bernstein's Acrostic Chance method and John Cage's Mesostics) that use (other)world texts (fictional books located in Lovecraft's mythological system) as a seed text, and a series of source texts including the *Collected Works of H. P. Lovecraft*, and a combination of obscure books referenced in Lovecraft's stories. Language from the source texts is collected via procedure, then reworked to shape the final poems.

The prose sections blend critical theory with quotations from Lovecraft's short story, *The Call of Cthulhu.*

Navigation/Interaction

To navigate the world, use either the Up/Down/Left/Right arrows or the W/S/A/D keys (which correspond to Up/Down/Left/Right) to move in those directions. Use the mouse to look in any direction. To pick up objects and to read the texts, click the mouse button on any of them; a second mouse click will drop the object. Objects can also be rotated and thrown. Active objects will change the crosshairs to white when they are rolled over (to indicate that they can be manipulated). There is also a flashlight to illuminate objects and areas. Key commands are detailed below:

Movement (to move forward, back, side to side):
- W (or arrow up)
- A (or arrow left)
- S (or arrow down)
- D (or arrow right)
- SPACE (to jump)
- Use the mouse to look up, down, left, right

Interaction:
Certain objects can be picked up, moved, and reassembled. Objects that can be manipulated will change the crosshairs to white when they are rolled over.

- Flashlight: press the "f" key to toggle flashlight on/off.
- Mouse click to pick up an object or read a text (text audio will automatically play).
- Another mouse click to drop the object.
- Throw: once an object is picked up press the left "option" key to throw it.
- Freeze: objects react to the environment so if you hit them against something while carrying them they may start rotating. To freeze them in place press the left "command" key, then you need to click on them with the mouse to grab them again.
- Rotate: once an object is picked up you can rotate it by holding the "r" key while moving your mouse.