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The Miniature Giant: Reflections of Size within *Shadow of the Colossus* and *Angels Egg*

The concepts of the miniature and gigantic are ones that face opposition in both basic definition and function. In her book *On Longing*, author Susan Stewart reflects upon these two abstract ideas, echoing the sentiment of mutual exclusivity through how she portrays their use. The miniature in her writings is represented as being “contained” while the gigantic is a “container,” both of which relate specifically to the spatiality and temporality within each concept as well as how the gigantic and miniature are constructed (Stewart 71). However, when these ideas are applied to visual media forms such as video games or film, the mutual exclusivity between the two wavers. Modes of media that address scale on an explicit level such as Team Ico’s *Shadow of the Colossus* (2005) or implicitly, such as Mamoru Oshii’s *Angels Egg* (1985) obscure the miniature and the gigantic’s opposite status into a relationship of a singular function. While Susan Stewart portrays the miniature and gigantic as two mutually exclusive concepts, games like *Shadow of the Colossus* and films like *Angels Egg* provide a bridge between the two through their collective ability to engage the player/spectator with the diegetic landscapes/inhabitants in order to create meaning.

Susan Stewart’s book addresses and expounds upon these concepts in two separate chapters titled *The Miniature* and *The Gigantic*. With regards to the former chapter, Stewart writes about the miniature mainly through its size based description through a relationship to the world outside of it. A concept that she brings in with consideration to the miniature is that it does not exist within nature, but as a cultural product instead, one defined almost entirely by its ability to reference the physical world rather than exist within it (55). One particular case that she brings

up that relates to this is the existence of the child's toy and its express purpose. Stewart explains: "The toy is the physical embodiment of the fiction: it is a device for fantasy, a point of beginning for narrative. The toy opens an interior world, lending itself to fantasy and privacy in a way that the abstract space, the playground, of social play does not (56)." What she means by this is that the toy is not only an example of the miniature based on its size, but that it is also a key that opens up alternate worlds to those who activate it. In essence the miniature as an object allows for mimicry and fantasy, something that is contained by abstract space but can be prompted to reveal a world parallel to the one of the user, one that isn't "natural." The chapter following, about the gigantic however, constructs an opposing paradigm.

The Gigantic, deals primarily with nature in its physical form, and its relationship to scale. The most important mentioning of the gigantic within this chapter is on the mythical giant and its function. Stewart gives a brief overview on the perception of these creatures by saying that "typically, the giants are not the gods; they do not inhabit a transcendent space; they inhabit the earth, and it is their movement through the sensual world which gives shape and form to that world, if not meaning (73 – 74)." The difference here from the miniature is that in this context, the giant not only can exist within the (fictional) natural world, but it also happens to be a major contributor through its ability to provide meaning. This is in opposition to the miniature, which provides meaning to the world it creates rather than the world it inhabits. However, both concepts fall under the same category of providing meaning, the only difference being where this meaning has value. This is interesting when looking at the media representations of these concepts because the discrepancies in providing meaning are non-existent, as the world itself is constructed entirely on screen. This eliminates the dichotomy between something existing in the

natural world versus existing in a fantasy world, and providing the spectator/player with only the latter option, which can house both the miniature and gigantic.

These functions of the miniature and the gigantic are most apparent within the video game *Shadow of the Colossus*, and Sarah Cameron Loyd Grey's article *Dead Time: Aporias and Critical Gaming* sheds light upon this particular topic within the game. The main area of contention in this writing regards critical reflection on video games, but the section on *Shadow* bears importance to the similarity between the miniature and the gigantic through her explanation of the games ability to open up of a new "world" and give it meaning. The object of *Shadow of the Colossus* as a player is to seek out and destroy sixteen "colossi" in an attempt to resurrect a dead woman. There are no other enemies to be seen beyond these sixteen bosses, and the preceding journeys to find them are an uneventful cycle of horse rides through vacant nature. These horseback treks are untimed, and one could realistically explore the entire world without addressing the colossi at all. However, to complete the story the game requires the player to fight these figures in order, thus changing the presence of time from non-existent to abundantly present when the colossi are finally addressed. "When one finally finds a colossus to kill," Grey writes, "the temporal register of the game shifts dramatically. From vast and dead, time suddenly becomes shockingly full (Grey 236)." While this quote mostly relates to the structure of time within the game, its main argument is that the presence of the colossi allows for the player to both physically and metaphorically enter into a new space that isn't "vast and dead" like the area that they once inhabited. The purpose of opening a "fantasy world" through these gigantic figures is to give meaning to the world itself as without the company of the colossus the player remains in obfuscated vacancy. They are left in "a world that the player is barred from completely understanding" through the obscured language and absence of a divulged history,

therefore forcing the player to find their own meaning of this world, which is found through these battles (234).

The intriguing thing about *Shadow of the Colossus* in relation to Susan Stewart's argument is that the colossi can be read as synonymous to the natural giant (the gigantic) but also as the child's toy (the miniature). The gigantic is perhaps the most obvious similarity as the colossi, in comparison to the main protagonist, are massive in scale. Their size is emphasized in the gameplay as one fights a colossus by climbing its body until they reach a weak spot to stab. These colossi are located at various points within the massive and open over-world, but their domains are closed off and separated from this sweeping area. They are contained, unable to free themselves from these natural prisons. Many of these colossi must be approached by the player to start the battle, as they generally lay dormant without external provocation. Much like the mountains that one rides through, these dormant beasts exist within this natural world as pieces of the landscape through their confinement and stillness. They resemble a natural monolith more often than they resemble any type of predator when resting. Their aesthetics are varied, categorized mainly in type, size, and silhouette. However, all of them appear connected through the same natural color palate of earthy greens and browns, and homogenous glowing weak points on their bodies. Both of these aesthetic characteristics are emphasized during the battles. Stewart addresses the natural element of the colossus by stating that "their merger with the natural is thus further emphasized by their lack of individual dress and, consequently, individual identity (Stewart 74)." In essence, the existence of these colossi in nature is cause for their homogeneity in certain respects. Furthermore, the narrative explains that these sixteen colossi are all split parts of an amalgamated demon who gets summoned after their demise, which only adds to the uniformity of the colossi by explaining that these creatures are all different parts of the same

being, similar to how all of the colossi are different parts of the same landscape. Nevertheless, as mentioned before these colossi also function in a similar way to the miniature children's toy, mainly through how they are activated.

The similarities between that of the toy and the colossus within the game include their ability to "activate" the vacant world, and their shared duality of being either inanimate or animate depending on proximity. As explained before, the process of the boss fights within the game requires approaching the colossi, which triggers a cut scene showcasing the progression from natural inanimate monolith to a living giant. The toy, as Stewart explains it, follows a similar sequence:

The inanimate toy repeats the still life's theme of arrested life, the life of the tableau. But once the toy becomes animated, it initiates another world, the world of the daydream. The beginning of narrative time here is not an extension of the time of everyday life; it is the beginning of an entirely new temporal world, a fantasy world parallel to (and hence never intersecting) the world of everyday reality (57).

Stewart explains that the toy has two functions depending on whether or not it is being "played" with. When the toy is dormant it symbolizes the stillness of the perfect miniature world, one that is untouched by man and frozen within its own temporal space. But when it is activated through play by that of a child, it evokes reverie through the allowance to enter into a fantastic world, one that exists parallel to the world that they were in just moments before. The colossi, while dormant exist as an extension of these long untouched plains or ruins, in a state of tranquil slumber. But when attacked by the outside forces of the player "the temporal register of the game shifts dramatically" essentially opening up a world parallel to the one that they had been exploring thus far (Grey 236). Furthermore, the colossi are similar to that of a toy in that once activated, they do not stop their movement until they are killed, even if the player leaves the arena that these creatures are confined in. Their own movements are programmed to be

mechanical and repetitious. The colossi do not have the ability to learn and adapt to the attacks of the player, they simply attack repetitiously until death. This habitual response to activation is synonymous with that of a mechanical toy. Stewart writes that “the mechanical toy threatens an infinite pleasure; it does not tire or feel, it simply works or doesn’t work (Stewart 57).” This threat of infinite pleasure with the colossi ties in with the threat of narrative incompleteness in *Shadow*, as the colossi must be released from their repetitive tasks through death in order for the player to move forward in the narrative. The threat of the infinite, whether it be through infinite frozen time before activation, or infinite mechanical movement post activation is not only what forces the player to the inevitable end of the narrative, but through this gametic force towards completion, gives meaning to this narrative and therefore to the world itself. This gifting of meaning allows for the giant colossi to inhabit a miniature function while maintaining their gigantic stature. This connection of the miniature and gigantic through these natural landscape/inhabitants eschews Stewart’s initial idea of mutual exclusivity, however a big concept within her works regards the world itself. The use of a similar landscape/inhabitant crossover within the film *Angels Egg* provides a separate function for the miniature and gigantic in the same vein as *Shadow of the Colossus*’s titular monsters.

In many respects the 1985 film chronicling the journey of a little girl carrying a large egg and the man who follows her, shares similarities to *Shadow of the Colossus*. The plot is sparse, featuring only these two characters, and the aesthetics are dark and muted. In addition, there are even various types of colossi within the film, such as the forms of ghostly coelacanth-like fish, or the appearance of a floating monolith covered in thousands of goddess-like sculptures. However, the world that these creatures and characters inhabit is perhaps the most valuable in comparison, as it, much like *Shadow* is nearly devoid of life beyond the two main protagonists. “The realm is

uncanny; it is both eerily similar to our own and yet remains alien and alienating (Grey 234).”

Much in the same way as *Shadow*, this uncanniness has the ability to allow for the conjuring of new worlds similar to the function of the miniature, but it also can address the nature of the gigantic through its scale and vacancy.

The “empty” world of *Angels Egg* is one that the spectator has little to no understanding of during the duration of its narrative. There are locations that evoke similarity between the world of the spectator and the diegesis such as a city or an ocean, but these comparisons are stopped by an uncanniness due to the worlds represented temporal struggle. The city where the girl explores is the best example of this struggle in that it presents a dichotomy between serenity and chaos, both of which are dependent on the subjective status of time within the narrative. The film’s world is enveloped by darkness with the exception of a moment in the beginning showcasing the sun rising or setting. Time is only determined by the bells that ring out from a clock tower, and even then the audience is not given much meaning behind the melodious sounds beyond the girl running away after hearing them, potentially signifying danger. This presentation of time as an unimportant entity is reminiscent of *Shadow of the Colossus*’s own struggle of timing presented by Grey, in that it means nothing initially, but when prompted it becomes more apparent and valuable. In a similar way, this prompt is what allows for the world within the film to adopt characteristics from both the miniature as well as the gigantic.

Stewart addresses the representations of the two concepts by stating that the miniature is a “still and perfect universe” while the gigantic “represents the order and disorder of historical forces” (Stewart 86). The city follows this exact pattern depending on the narrative circumstances. When the film’s focus is entirely on the girl and her exploration, the city is still and devoid of life, all of what would be alive in later scenes is either not there or is frozen in

statuesque positions like the droves of fisherman who exist not as individual characters but rather as part of the cities architecture. This stillness is only furthered through a small moment that encapsulates the “perfect universe.” The scene details the girl looking up at a slightly opened window. The camera then cuts from her to the inside of the glass, returning this gaze while also showing unmoving materials like a hat and a water pitcher within the room. Both the image of the girl and the inside of this window are frozen in time within this moment. The framing of the window is similar to that of a prison, ensnaring the girl from leaving this windows gaze. This prison of time and space heavily resembles the miniature through its compositional perfection and stillness. However, the stillness of looking into the window is short lived through the passage of time, which brings in the “order and disorder” of the gigantic.

The scene that changes the city from the miniature into the gigantic contextually takes place after the main male protagonist is introduced. He follows the girl around the city, attempting to get close to her for an unknown reason. She eventually accepts his presence as they both stare through yet another window, another frozen display. However, this time is cut short by the re-animation of the groups of fisherman who the spectator saw earlier as statue like figures. Superficially, these groups of fishermen can be seen as gigantic in scale when compared to the two main characters on screen due to the quantity of fishermen. The gigantic can also be seen as the massive ghostly fish that they chase. But what they represent is far more important in explaining the paradigm presented earlier, especially with the latter part explaining the order and disorder of historical forces. These fisherman, while not “activated” are statuesque parts of the city, no different than the buildings that the characters walk through. They are order incarnate, just existing as frozen material to be viewed by passing spectators. But when they are prompted to chase the fish, they become disorderly, destroying the materials that they were once apart of

for some unknown gain. This dichotomy, according to the main girl, repeats itself every time the fishermen are prompted, though what has activated them is mysterious to the audience as the fish come out of nowhere. Regardless of the prompt, the function of these fishermen as a piece of the landscape is to display the gigantic as alongside the miniature of the city itself, showcasing that they can exist within the same plain of the landscape and that they can become each other, rather than being two separate concepts. This dual existence of the miniature and the gigantic within this diegetic world helps to slightly alleviate the uncanniness by providing diegetic historical context, whether it be through the cyclical nature of the fishermen or the items behind the window. This slight alleviation, in effect, allows for the engagement of the spectator with this parallel “new world,” and this engagement forces them to create alternate meanings behind it in reference to their own reality, which is the exact function of the miniature and the gigantic.

The the miniature and gigantic and what they represent through the works of Susan Stewart are read as two opposite ends of a spectrum of functionality. However, when one looks at media forms such as video games or cinema they are met with a more nebulous definition of the two, essentially combining both concepts so that their function is one and the same. With video games such as *Shadow of the Colossus* the colossi who are both simultaneously nature and inhabitant, expose the miniature and gigantic through threatening the player with the infinite and creating meaning from that threat. With films like *Angels Egg*, a similar simultaneous nature/inhabitant structure with the city and fishermen present the two size concepts as part of the same structure, crossing between the miniature and the gigantic at different intervals in order to extract meaning from the spectator, rather than existing as completely separate concepts. While Susan Stewart discusses the miniature and gigantic as two mutually exclusive concepts, games like *Shadow of the Colossus* and films like *Angels Egg* provide a bridge between the two

through their collective ability to engage the player/spectator with the diegetic landscapes/inhabitants in order to create meaning.

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