Regenerative Play and the Experience of the Sublime in

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild

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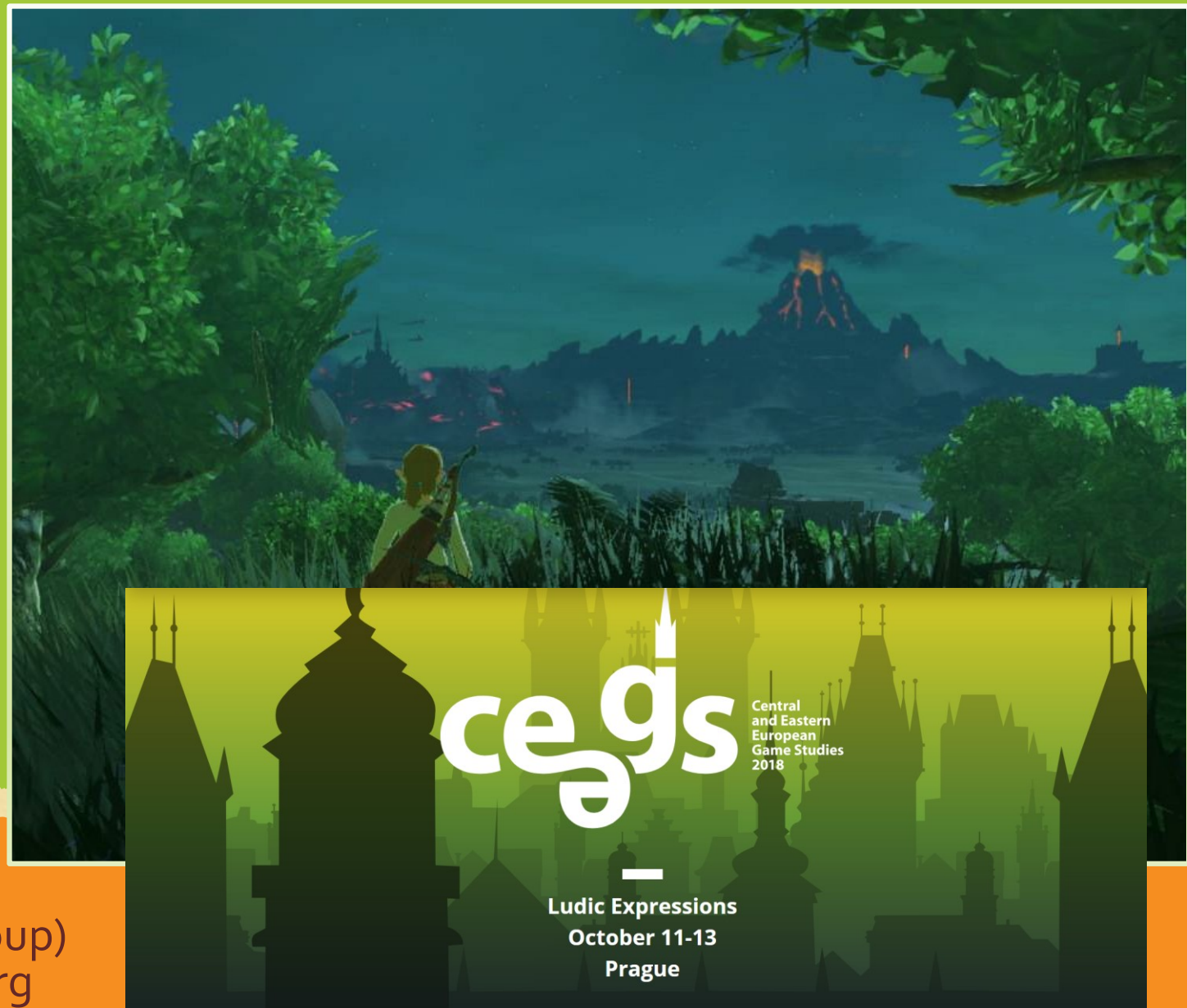Ludic Expressions
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Introduction

When Link and the player enter Hyrule, they encounter a majestic place and natural world. Lush grasslands and towering mountains create an environment for animals to thrive and offer the player a *wilderness* to explore and interact with. Vibrant colours and a myriad of natural sounds and noises are here merged with the vastness of the gamespace and remind one of an expressionist painting come to life in the gameworld. It is this ergodic and imaginative openness of open world games which fuels players' creative faculties and their desire for exploration, to seek out possibilities the tranquil scenery offers.

Overview

1. Hypotheses

2. Heroes, Nighttime-Dreams, and the Playful Experience of the Sublime

3. Affect Theory and Regenerative Play

4. Game Analysis
   (Goron, Zora, Rito, Gerudo, Korok)

Regenerative Play

- As an **affective** and **aesthetic experience** that has players ponder the gameworld occurrences in context to their empirical surroundings.

- In **ecogames** it resensitises them to the natural world and helps them gain a different perspective on ecosystems, potential pollutions, and natural-cultural relations.

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild

- A **regenerative experience** in many ways that shows an **inherent utopian impulse**:

  i.e. environmental experience, relations with humans and nonhuman, playing with the elements, vegan run (Westerlaken, 2017), ecological journey of the hero to restore natural-cultural balance, etc.

1) Hypotheses

Regenerative Play as the Affective and Aesthetic Experience of the Sublime

▪ The **implied player** of *Breath of the Wild* outlines contrary **affects** in players, depending on the region of the gameworld (Goron, Zora, Rito, Gerudo, Korok)—the interpretation of which results in different **emotions** in players.

▪ These include, for example: *curiosity* and *fear*, *excitement* and *distress*, *startle* and *anger*, *pleasure* and *terror*.

▪ The players' affective responses then culminate in the ***tumultuous emotion of astonishment* as the aesthetic experience of the *sublime***, which triggers imaginings in players and reflections about life, nature, and culture.

The Journey of the Hero Towards an Ecological Sustainable Utopia

▪ It is the task of the hero "to retreat from the world of secondary effects to those **causal zones of the psyche** where the difficulties really reside, and there to clarify the difficulties, eradicate them in his own case" (Campbell, 2008: 12).

▪ Sigmund Freud's **Oedipus Complex**: the son's desire to struggle for maternal security and the "intrusion" of the "the unfortunate father" (4), an "enemy" (4).

Utopian Impulse in (Eco)fiction

- Personal dreams, as "(*disguised*) *fulfilment[s] of a (suppressed, repressed) wish*" (Freud 1997: 68), can assume a universalised form.

- Two types of wish-fulfilment: purely personal or **individual 'egoistic' type**, [the artist's or a character's] and a **disguised version** which has somehow been universalized and made interesting, indeed often gripping and insistent, for other people" (Jameson,2005: 46).

- *Principle of Hope* (Bloch, 1986)

Utopian Impulse in (Eco)fiction manifests in the Hero's Journey

▪ Struggle for Utopia as the **hero's ecological desire to restore balance in Hyrule**: to appease the four elements disturbed by **Ganon's pollution** and have a restorative influence on the land's ecosystems.

▪ **Regenerative experience:**
Serene moments of exploration and interaction juxtaposed to the *thrill of adventure* and *danger*.

Regenerative Play as the Experience of the Sublime

- When the affect of **terror** and the **fear of death** results in **delight** and, finally, **astonishment** (Burke, 2017: 35-27).

"Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the **ideas of pain and danger**, that is to say, whatever is in any sort of terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a **source of the sublime**; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling" (22).

3) **Affect Theory** and Regenerative Play as a Form of Cultural Ecology

The Principles of Psychology by William James

- Inversion of usual perspective: Affect as reason for emotion

- **Triade:**

1. Stimulating Event

2. Bodily reactions (affect)

3. Interpretation of reactions (emotion)

Adaptation to Videogames

1. **Stimulating event** in the gameworld as **outlined by the implied player**.

2. Response of **empirical player's body** (affect).

3. **Interpretation** of bodily reactions by players (emotion)

=> aesthetic response /regenerative

The Gameworld as (Miniature) Garden

- **Miyamoto's** famous (and probably mistranslated) description of ZELDA as "a **miniature garden** that you can put into a drawer and revisit anytime you like" (Paumgarten 2010).

- *A garden's internal behaviors, and how we understand those rules, help us to wrap our heads and hands around the garden. The intricate spaces and living systems of a garden surprise, delight, and invite participation. Gardens, like games, are compact, self-sustained worlds we can immerse ourselves in [...]. Gardens are a way to think about the aesthetic, cognitive, and representational aspects of game space.* (Gingold 2003: 7)

- Gardens are **man-made, recreational spaces** that are made to be looked at as much as traversed (Mehta and Tada 2008: 11) and reconfigure nature for a human perspective. As man-made places, there´s an intended affect.

4) **Game Analysis:** The Implied Player

1. **Sensorial Perspective:** audio-visual, haptic perception.

2. **World Perspective:** setting and design of the gameworld (labyrinthine structures) and its characters.

3. **Plot perspective:** plot developments outlined according to Campbell's monomyth structure: the hero's ecological journey, cultures and races.

4. **System perspective:** processes and player actions outlined by the game's rule system: ludic interactions with the world and enemies, playing with the elements.

Death Mountain (Fire)

- **Impressive aspect of the mountain**, seen from afar and from different points of view (*sensorial*).

Emotions: curiosity, respect.

- Entrapment: Linear, dangerous path towards the mountaintop (*world*).

- Haste: limited time due to heat exposure and elixir/food time limit (*system*).

- Threat through enemies and elements: fire and earth (*system*).

- Help through hot wind and water: geyser and hot springs (*system*).

Emotions: fear, haste, relief.

Death Mountain (Fire)

- **Culture:** tribal industrial culture, social hierarchies,

  friendly and helpful race that live in extreme conditions.

Emotions: respect, admiration (for values), affection (friendship).

=> Incentive to help them (*plot*).

Zora's Domain (Water)

- Torrential rain and darkness aggravate perception (*sensorial*).

Emotions: curiosity, mystery, terror.

- Linear path filled with enemies alongside a river to the hidden Domain of the Zora (*world*).

- impossibility of climbing and therefore reduction of former possibilities (*system*).

- Racism of the Zora due to Link's and Zelda's failure to defeat Ganon during the calamity (*plot*)

=> incentive to help: redemption (*plot*)
Emotions: anger, distress, remorse.

Rito Village (Wind)

- Tranquil, wide open wilderness without enemies (*sensorial*).

- Wide landscapes juxtaposed to towering mountains and deep chasms (*world*).

Emotions: relaxation, respect.

- Proud nature-culture and traders.

- Treat Link well and ask for help (*plot*)

- Playful exploration of the glider ability and the element of wind (*system*)

Emotions: admiration, thrill, challenge.

Gerudo Desert (Earth)

- Impressiveness of the desert, open space (*sensorial*).

- Open world, sandstorm mazes with few oases (*world*).

Emotions: haste, distress.

- Hostile temperatures (hot/cold) (*system*).

- Sheika Slate malfunctions *(system).*

- Unknown position and behaviour of enemies, e.g. Moldugas (*system*).

Emotions: excitement, distress, confusion, terror.

Gerudo Desert (Earth)

- **Culture**: Conservative, matriarchial society of warriors (orientalisation) (*plot*)

- Proud and violent race with strong hierarchies (almost) without men (*plot*)

Emotions: Curiosity, fear of the Other.

Korok Forest
(Ecological Heart of Hyrule)

- **A place of wisdom and power**, (Deku Tree and Master Sword), untouched by the outer Hyrule. Grants Link help and the power to restore balance (*plot*).

- Juxtaposition of **light and dark places:** lush, alive, and of utmost beauty, but also dark, dying regions (*sensorial*)

- Korok nature-culture: warm and open-hearted (plot)

Emotions: curiosity, relaxation, distress, terror.

The Forest as a (Zen) Garden

- The forest space evokes imaginings of **the most spiritual aspects of gardens,** and particularly Zen gardens.

- These require a certain degree of **asymmetry**, **tension**, and **depth**, where the landscapist hides its hand and their work looks natural, as if the garden "grew by itself" (Habib et al. 2013: 16). There is a sense of lawlessness in this forest that coincides with a **calm harmony**.

Korok Forest (Lost Woods)

A place of **mystery, trial, reflection and terror.**

- **Maze-like structures and blinding mist** aggravated Link's pathfinding (*world*).

- Confusing sounds and noises (*world*).

- Trial and error (*system*).

- Desire to attain the means to defeat Ganon and find treasure (Master Sword) (*plot*).

Emotions: confusion, terror, panic, frustration, longing.

Conclusion

Experience of the sublime results out of players emotional disarray and the **astonishment** created by the experience of and interaction with **objects of terror**.

These include:

- the vastness, confusion, and ungraspable appeal of the **gameworld**.

- Dark **creatures**, their screams and threating appeal.

- The obliqueness of the **game system** which evokes in the player the necessity for trial and experimentation.

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