

Regenerative Play and the Experience of the Sublime in

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild



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Overview

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2. Heroes, Night-time Dreams, and the Playful Experience of the Sublime
3. Affect Theory and Regenerative Play as a Form of Cultural Ecology
4. Game Analysis
(Goron, Zora, Rito, Gerudo, Korok)

1) Hypotheses

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.

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

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).



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

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)



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

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*.



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

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

Example from *BotW*: The Lynel



"[T]he sense of jeopardy and self-preservation manifest in gooseflesh and twitching flight muscles—at which point those physical excitations can become felt as an emotion, such as fear" (Stanley 2017: 99).

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

Cultural Ecology: Influencing Discourse

“[E]cological force within the larger system of culture and cultural discourse” (Zapf 2016a: 140).

“[B]reaks up ossified forms of language, communication, and ideology, symbolically empowers the marginalized and reconnects what is culturally separated” (Zapf 2016a: 147).

➤ *Aesthically complexe media influence the discourse positively and elicit long-term change in society.*

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

The Role of the Recipient

- *"What is especially important is the emphasis on the active, participatory role of the recipient in the creative processes of art [in the sense of ergodic and imaginative activity in games], which are [...] necessary for the continued evolution and self-renewal of human civilization" (Zapf 2016b: 20–21).*

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, earth and wind (*system*).
- Help through hot 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.



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) (*system*).

Emotions: confusion, terror, panic, anger.



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

Games

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MASS EFFECT: ANDROMEDA. Bioware/Electronic Arts, PS4, 2016.

NO MAN'S SKY. Hello Games/Sony Interactive Entertainment, PS4, 2016-2018.

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REMEMBER ME. Dontnod/Capcom, PC, 2013.

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