Regenerative Play and the Experience of the Sublime in

The Legend of Zelda: Breath of the Wild



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Overview

- 1. Hypotheses
- 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.

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 α (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

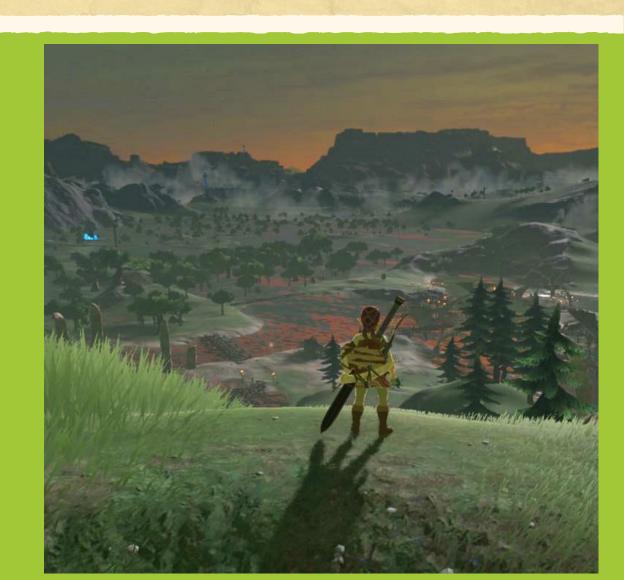
- Struggle for Utopia as the hero's
 ecological desire to restore balance in
 Hyrule: to appease the four elements
 disturbed by Ganon's pollution and have
 a restorative influence on the land's
 ecosystems.
- Regenerative experience:
 Serene moments of exploration and interaction juxtaposed to the thrill 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



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.

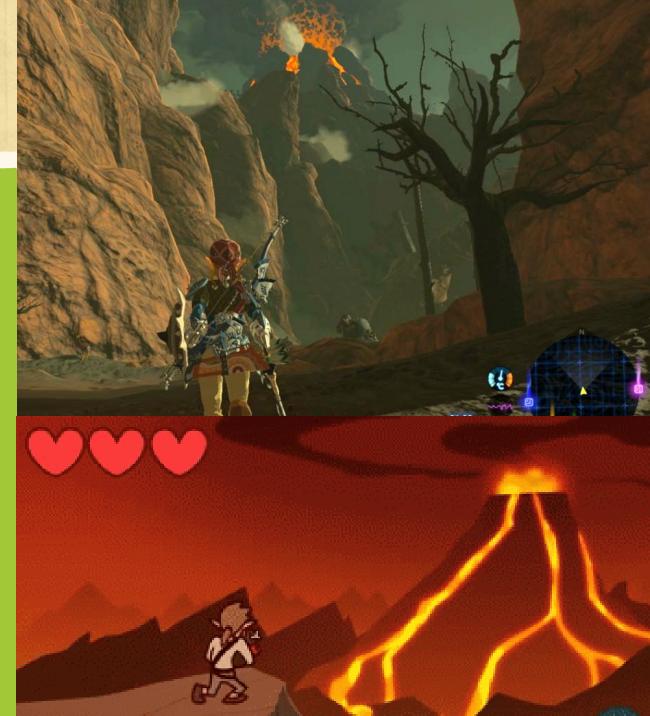
Death Mountain (Fire)

• 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)

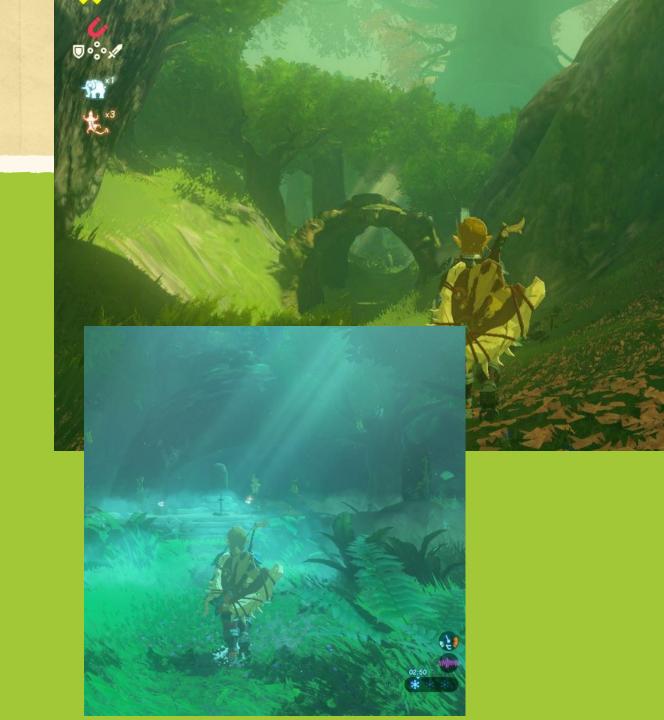
Emotions: Curiosity, fear of the Other.



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 openhearted (plot)

Emotions: curiosity, relaxation, distress, terror.

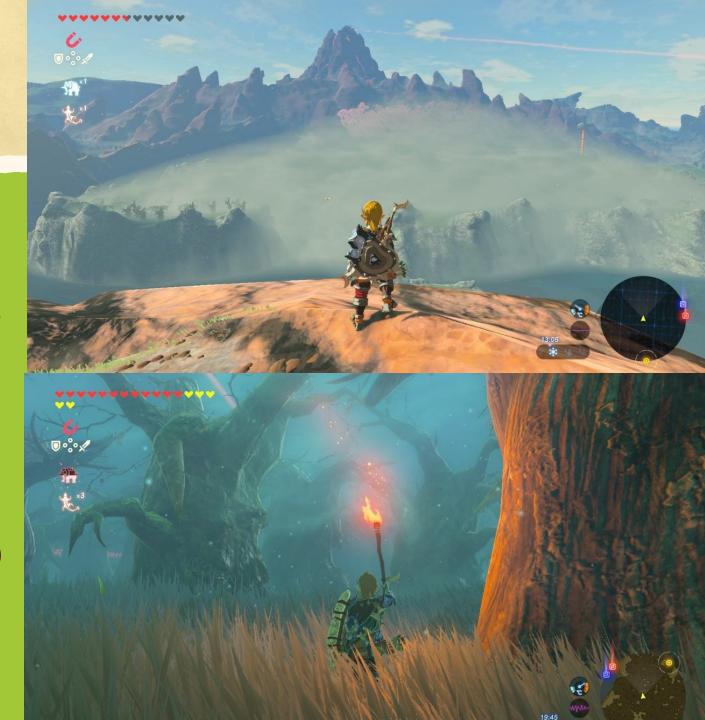


Korok Forest (Lost Woods)

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

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