

Semiotics – zelda: the twilight princess essay



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The Twilight Princess is the twelfth instalment in The Legend of Zelda Series. It is an adventure styled game with real-time battles, puzzle solving, and exploration. It tells a story right through the game including the final cut scene, which is hidden among the credits. Within this cut scene deep semiotic meanings are conveyed that reflect the whole game. Looking in depth we find the signifiers and their signified meanings within the cut scene that give meaning through a visual understanding.

The hidden cut scene is the final scene of the game therefore it has to show semiotics so that a message can be relayed to the player about what is going on within the text. Umberto Eco states " semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign" (Eco, 1967, p. 7). A sign " is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (Pierce, 1958, Vol. 2 Paragraph 228) therefore within this text there are numerous signs that join together to convey meanings about the game. This cut scene is based on the main three characters: Link, Minda and Zelda saying farewell to each other and you can tell this by the signs that are shown. These signs are the location, lighting and colours.

This scene begins with a downward tilt of Arbiter's Grounds, which in game is a prison that was built to hold the most merciless criminals while they await trial, execution, or exile. The appearance of Arbiter's Grounds is tall pillars and rounded walls seem to be a recreation of the Roman Colosseum. The Roman Colosseum is encoded with meaning due to the historic background of the building since it was constructed in 72-80 AD and since then it has been used for gladiatorial contest and re-enactment of famous events and battles for public entertainment. Due to background of the building a more

meaningful message is created behind why they used this building rather than a regular house. The audience can use this sign to determine that a boss fight or a big event is about to occur in the game. In this case the boss fight has just finished and it reflects the victory of what the player has done.

The use of lighting is important when interpreting the mood of a scene. Within this scene the orange lighting yet dark shadowing suggest that the time of day is dusk. In most cases "...the 'dusk' suggests nightfall..." (Besbes, 2007, p. 139) though this is more of a literal meaning since it is going to become night soon. Dusk can also be decoded as the "...journey is coming to a close..." (Besbes, 2007, p. 139) since the day is coming to an end so it can be determined that the adventure may also be over soon. Another game that used dusk to resemble the end of the game is Square Enix's Kingdom Hearts II (Hashimoto, S., & Kitase, Y., 2006) where they have the characters looking out over the ocean at the sun setting. If these final scenes were to be a sunset then the meaning would change to be that the adventure is about to begin or that a new day has begun so new things are to be done.

Colour is another example of a sign that adds semiotic meaning to this text since colours can "express coded information" (Faur, n. d). Colours are able to be easily identifiable and can "quickly inform us of about potential dangers" (Faur, n. d) depending on the meaning behind a specific colour.

Looking at Zelda the scene is very orange due to the setting sun but meaning behind orange within an eastern culture is happiness and spirituality whereas in a western culture it is to do with affordability or inexpensive items.

Colours within different cultures are symbolic to different things; therefore depending on the person playing they could get a different message. Though because the colour is expressed with the setting sun the meaning is linked with that allowing the player to recognise the day is over and everyone is glad that things have gone well. Looking at other colours in the scene such as the black twilight gate holds a different meaning than orange since it is a complete different colour. Black is commonly used to represent evil, death and unhappiness and within Zelda it shares similar ideas since it represents the twilight world, a shadow world. If this world were to be coloured with yellows and green people would not get the meaning that this area is evil but more of a friendly good area like Hyrule is.

The representation of good verses evil can be understood through the way colours and lighting is used within a text. Mentioned earlier with how Black can be used to identify that something is evil is the same concept as using another colour, most commonly white, to represent something good. When looking at the twilight world in Zelda it is hard to decipher whether it is good or evil since twilight when it comes to light and dark is somewhere in the middle of both. It is the crossing over of light turning to dark. Though since they use the commonly known colour of black it shows us a separation from the good world of Hyrule.

Midna and Zelda both speak of the ideas of good and evil through the synonyms of the words light and shadow. They define it as, " shadow and light are two sides of the same coin...One cannot exist without the other" (Miyamoto, S., 2006) since both sides are needed to keep balance. In other words if a text was created that lacked or had extensive amount of good or

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evil than the messages that could be portrayed is that there is an unbalance in power. During the Zelda game there had been an unbalance of power but within this scene because it is the end the balance is equal that is why there is peace shown through the orange colouring.

When looking at a cut scene we can see that there are signs such as the place, lighting and colours, that portray different meanings and when these signs are all brought together they portray a deeper understanding of what the overall meaning is. Within Zelda all of these signs lead up to understanding that this cut scene is the end and the feelings and emotions that are given are all because of the semiotic meanings that are portrayed visually.