



Private: About Der Spiegel Cover Story On Gaming

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Yesterday a huge german weekly publication *Der Spiegel* launched a cover story about video games. The headline is “spielen macht klug”, meaning playing makes you smart. The cover story attempts to legitimize games – to a readership that does not recognize games as culture, in a publication that does not recognize games as culture – by pointing to real life benefits in order to

appease the gate keepers of the establishment.

It's all so very wrong.

Respectable Culture

Let's get one thing absolutely clear here. The reasons to reject games as a valuable pieces of culture are arbitrary. It's a bunch of self-proclaimed arbiters of culture, who decided that games aren't art. It's a bunch opinion makers, who thought that they can capitalize on the public resentment against video games. And Der Spiegel is one of those entities as well.

Their section on culture covers everything ...except games. In this very issue, we have 17 pages of what Der Spiegel files under culture, including TV shows, TV movies, electronic gadgets, non-fiction books, theatrical movies, literature, collectible artifacts, fashion, pop music. Games are not a part of "culture" here.



Even online on www.spiegel.de we have the categories: TV, cinema, literature, bestsellers (yes, that 2 categories for books) and Kulturpiegel, which is kind of a misc section. In this misc section we have articles about: modern art, theatre, live music, food, direct to DVD films. No games.

Games can be found in the "Netzwelt" section online, which is a technology focussed section. ..not culture. Der Spiegel views and presents games as separate from "real" culture or respectable culture and this cover story does nothing to challenge that perception. On the contrary.

The Value Of Games The article looks for value in games outside of games culture. It's looking for health benefits and financial success. It's looking at games as a worthwhile specimen for academic studies or as a motivator for

other much more important endeavours. But it ignores the play value of games, the creativity of play and the intensity of experiencing stories interactively – therefore ignoring why most gamers play.

It is talking from the perspective of an establishment that fears and disrespects games culturally to a readership that fears and disrespect games culturally, trying to find something good about games to say without upsetting their fears and prejudices.

As if video games are like marihuana, the article discusses the benefits and perceived dangers of video games.

- Games pot is a huge business.

If done responsibly, games pot can be used without causing harm.

There are medical applications for games pot.

There are a lot of studies about the effects of games pot by people with actual phds and stuff.

Games pot can help against stress.

Games pot can help with learning.

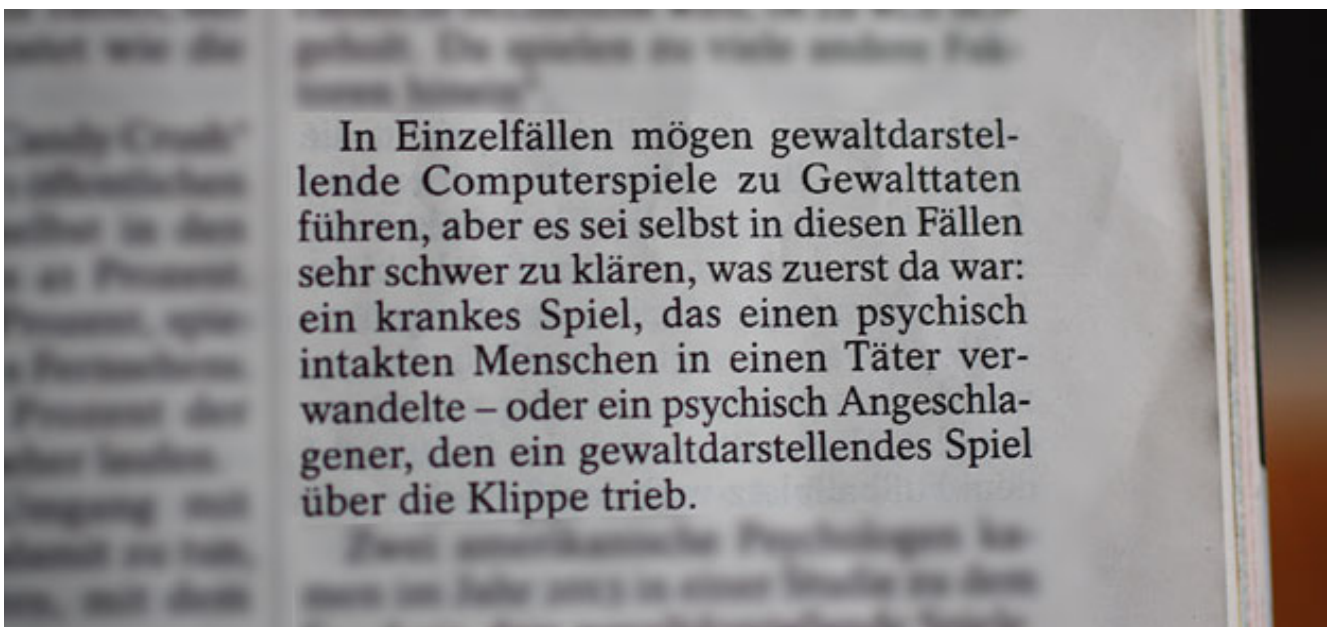
People use games pot to socialize.

Games pot can possibly maybe make people addicted.

In some instances games pot made people insane and then made them violent.

In some instances games pot made already insane people violent.

The last two sound too dumb to be true? Here:



Translation:

Video games depicting violence may lead to violent acts in some instances. But even in those cases it is hard to say, what came first: A sick game, driving a mentally healthy person to become a violent offender or was it a mentally damaged person, who was pushed over the edge by a violent video game.

Between quotes from people who studied the subject, all of them unequivocally saying that there is NO evidence to suggest that video games cause violence, the writers of the article just go there. They just outright say that games caused violent behavior and that there is only the question, if a player needs to already be “mentally damaged” or if the games make mentally healthy people crazy. And YES, they used the term “sick” to describe the kind of games accused here.

This is why Anita Sarkeesian is not Jack Thomson. People who appreciate the inherent value of games and who see the great potential of games can criticize games, so that the medium hopefully reaches its full potential. Der Spiegel apparently can't do that. Der Spiegel is like Jack Thompson, just more diplomatic.

The article also features a list of game genres with individual current game releases as references. The list is called “From killing to healing”, starting of with a modern military shooter and later diving into serious games. There shown is a game where you heal cancer, with the comment that playing this games has shown to increase real life healing of cancer as well. Healing as a game activity that causes healing to happen in real life on a list titled “Killing and healing”. Hmmm, I wonder what that implies.

Again: Der Spiegel is talking from the perspective of an establishment that fears and disrespects games culturally to a readership that fears and disrespect games culturally. It is showing games as a technology that can be used for good. Business men can make money, doctors can assist healing and academics can use games to teach stuff. But there is no inherent value to games, according to Der Spiegel. Gamers and game makers, who see inherent value in games get no support here. No, we still need to come up with a justification for why we would even dare to suggest that games are art, that it is a fulfilling experience to play and that it is a medium with great unique value.

Thanks to David Cage, Der Spiegel acknowledges that there are games which got the blessing of Hollywood and if you don't look to closely, they might even feel like watching a real movie. Yes, that is as good as it gets. Games are the not always laughable – only sometimes violent – bastard child of the movie industry. This is all the cultural recognition we get from Der Spiegel.



The cover story comes along with a controversial sounding title, as if it is set out to topple the social paradigms. While this effectively generated some buzz, the article in the end only serves to say “Games have their benefits, but it is still okay to be scared of them.”

The tagline of the article on the cover reads: “Why games are better than their reputation”. I tell you why. Because their reputation is fueled by fear and cynical opinion making and cultural elitism. It is fueled by the very self-righteous paranoid ignorance, which Der Spiegel displays and perpetuates with this article.

Piss off, Spiegel! Try again in 20 years, maybe you got it by then.

Resources:

I recommend this second opinion (in german) by Christian huberts: [\[link\]](#)

19 Comments



BoBo

02/06/2014 at 11:29 am

the article in Der Spiegel was bad, i had really search the fucking story in this fucking paper. really short without an explanation. written from a foreigner not from a gamer, go home Der Spiegel.

So niveaulos wie die Bild-Zeitung, hauptsache Kasse gemacht.



C-Port

01/27/2014 at 12:48 pm

At first I have to admit that I am not into gaming as much as many of you seem to be. But in my life, gaming has played a considerable role, as I am professionally familiar with the research with regard to games. As a former school teacher, I have also come to some effects gaming might have.

At first, I would like to know why you are after cultural appreciation in the first place. I do not think that for example hunters or people who are interested in fishing would demand cultural appreciation, at least not in the sense that they would say it would be appropriate that a newsmagazine would publish something about hunting or fishing in the culture section. In the same sense, historical enactors or role playing gamers do not demand cultural appreciation as well.

So why do you? Why are you after someone's appreciation here? If you like gaming so much, and if you think that gaming is a great thing to do, then just do it.

Well, you may still say that it's a matter of common sense, maybe a matter of cultural equality. If that were so, I would like to know how computer gaming deals with culture. So, how does gaming deal with life? Life in the greater sense, with all its problems, discussions and pressing matters? And, relating to the same issue, what kind of possibility does gaming give to people to deeply reflect upon that, to really think about life?

So, if you want to be appreciated as gamers, then I would like to know what the contribution of gaming to cultural, life and the questioning and thinking about life could be. Since that is what art seems to be about: To dedicate to produce something which makes people think; to support humanity for some sort of better cause. And equally important, to allow people to think, to give them the means to reflect upon what is presented to them.

What I see in the gaming field, is, as it appears to be, something different. During gaming, people turn into secluded individuals and become consumers. And even during multiplayer sessions, there is no indication of anyone looking for some kind of "deeper sense", for lack of a better term. And companies do not promote games as such – what is promoted is action, war and drama.

As a consequence, you may say that gaming is fun; but you can't expect everyone to agree upon that it would be on equal terms with art.

And in addition to that, where is the personality of a game? When taking a look at arts, we see the artist; when we read a novel, we know there is an author; when we listen to

music, we see there is band, a singer, a composer, whatever, at least a human being, and the same goes with movies, with actors, directors, and not only producers.

So what kind of personality does a computer game bring with it? Is it Sid Meier, is it Golan? Who do you think is giving a game some kind of personality, some kind of personal intention; a person's individual style, a color of thought which can be deduced from his or her own very personal commitment. So where are the Spielbergs, the Ringo Starrs and even the Ronaldos, if you want to include sports in this argument?

So, as a matter of consequence, I daresay computer games don't offer personalities – nor do they? And this is very much intertwined with my argument mentioned before, namely that computer games are essentially consumer products, like fishing equipment, hunting rifles or motor boats, but not art in the higher sense.

If you dispute my definition of “higher”, you need to be aware that there are indeed people who say that everything is culture, but not everything deserves our attention. There is still this “more”, which needs to be brought to the table here. Otherwise, you could as well argue that prostitution is an important culture worth being written about in newsmagazine. Since wouldn't anyone seriously dispute that millions of persons do go to prostitution each day?

Furthermore, I would like to mention something to the notion that evidence about negative effects of gaming is merely anecdotal. Well, you may disagree with my own anecdotal experience here, but I know what heavy gaming can lead to in school and private life. I have come across numerous cases during my job where gaming has led to some sort of, let's say alienation among students and patients; and often enough to heavy addiction.

You may still say this would be just only one opinion, and that it's – once again – only anecdotal. Well, to go as far as to say there wouldn't be any kind of hard evidence about negative consequences of gaming, however, is indeed not factual. Quite frankly, anything can have negative consequences, and some things do indeed have more negative consequences than one would suppose they might have on average. And that is what many studies claim.

I can't go into a great deal of details here. But I will just say that not anything can be seen with rosy glasses here. There is addiction, and there are mechanisms which lead to addiction, and they deliberately provided and offered by gaming companies on a daily basis. If you say that evidence is merely anecdotal then do not expect everyone to let this argument pass by, especially if someone has to deal with it each week at least once or twice.



**Juergen
Mayer**

01/28/2014 at 5:44 pm

The difference between gaming and other forms of leisure activities like sports centers around the fact that video games are also a form of human expression. They are usable by people as tools, much like stone is for a sculptor, to create something that lasts with their mind, which can even be considered to be their sole heritage to the world they were born and live in, i.e. a basic human right. Therefore people playing video games, i.e. “gamers”, are not only consuming them as products, but are also recipients of their content, i.e. the works created.

And by modifying or even only playing them, they get creators themselves (!). They create save games for example, or are manipulating their worlds because video games are also not only a set of rules but fiction.

Yet there are performative qualities in role-playing games like LARPs too, which could suggest to strengthen their given appreciation. As a historian I also have to say that (re)enacting events is also part of commemorative culture, a culture of remembrance.

And of great importance for this cause is again, that when people come together creating or playing video games, they usually do this as consenting individuals. Hunting or fishing on the other hand may generally be a violation of animal rights. While the whole notion of “addiction” is something coming very strongly from the product side of things, neglecting very large portions of video games, like their respective meanings or even ruling out different attempts regarding their possible interpretations. The “Catcher in the Rye” for example, has been often suggested being a source of inspiration for crimes, yet “inspiration” is not something usually associated when it comes to violent acts after playing video games.

The terms used by social sciences are much more focused on “correlation” to or even “causalisation” of events or unpleasant behaviour. While the criticized portions of “culture” or “art” as they are often used in Germany, are something that is very much excluding, elitist – not something coming from “ordinary” people but “Kulturschaffende” for example -, and therefore discriminating.

The problem centers around authoritarian concepts in which “art” has to be rooted in a positive “value”, “good” or “beautiful”.

The aforementioned concepts are politically especially problematic when it comes to the German cultural past. Yet “art”, especially much art of the later 20th century like the Wiener Aktionismus, is often something even not considering aesthetics but anti-aesthetics (!).



Ed Rivers

01/19/2014 at 8:45 pm

You can't remember games having a bad reputation?

Games used to be the scapegoat for making people lazy, aggressive, dumb or even killers.

Don't know if you ignored this in the past, Michael.

Now, games are praised and for me it just seems like the media is trying to reflect the overall meaning, that gaming is good. You know the story about Jeanne d'Arc and the Catholic Church? She's been crucified and later sainted. Double moral standards.



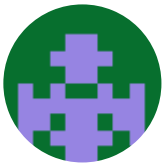
★ admin

01/19/2014 at 9:55 pm

Please read his comment carefully.

He said he can't remember TO AGREE that games have a bad rep, not that he can't remember games having a bad rep.

These are two completely different statements. Thanks.



arno kohl

01/16/2014 at 1:02 pm

I do agree with Fabian: your translation of "In Einzelfällen mögen gewaltdarstellende Computerspiele zu Gewalttaten führen" seems to be somewhat misleading. Seen in the larger context, from the first to the last sentence the Spiegel article is one single praise of computer games, or, to be more precise, of the benefits that playing has. From that flipping lady McGonegal to the cancer-healing effects of playing games (even I as a passionate gamer would not claiming something like that), from different academic studies to games as teaching tool in schools, the reader gets but one impression: it is without doubt highly beneficial to play computer games. That short passage on violence and computer games does not tell the reader, that violent games in general do lead automatically to violence in real life. It is, especially in a German magazine, an extremely moderate statement on a much claimed but never proofed causation of violence.

Yes, you are right that the Spiegel obviously does not see the cultural relevance of computer games, but, hey, as a German I am incredibly glad to have an influential magazine like that printing 8 pages of praise for computer games! What a difference to the usual games-are-dangerous-and-addicting nonsense stuff I am used to!



★ admin

01/16/2014 at 2:46 pm

I understand that there are different ways of reading the paragraphs on violence. I'm however concerned by how you judge the article in comparison to what usually goes in mainstream german press.

Did you really think we should be okay with this treatment here, because it could have been so much worse?



arno kohl

01/16/2014 at 4:41 pm

For the Spiegel like (too) many other German magazines and newspapers, game were (and probably are) bad / dangerous / addicitive and more the like. Seen in this context, this weeks' article seems like a turn of 180 deg. It takes games as something serious and not as something dangerous. And this could be a first step to a much more informed debate on games as part of culture, the fun factor of games and so on.

Look at the history of media: first a new medium is kind of a mysterium tremendum, something fearful and dangerous. It will be strongly criticized by the than mainstream media and culture critic experts often on the base of some kind of moral argument. But then, after some time (does mean: many years!) the opinions will shift not the least because a new generation of experts, now accustomed to the once new medium, appear. And even some more years later, the new medium becomes a more or less accepted part of culture, being kind of a mysterium fascinosum.

To mention but a few examples: after the invention of the printing press books became a dangerous tool of moral degression (e.g. the infamous German Leselust) but nowadays they are part of our higher culture. In Germany, movie theaters were seen as a blueprint for moral misbehavior (early 20th century), than came the comic books riddled with violence / sex / crime and thus seducing an unsuspecting youth (second half of the 20th century). An American psychologist of German origin even invented a new illness caused by the consumption of comic books: the linear dyslexia.

I remember one of my teachers warning me in the early 70s to never read a comic book because that would turn me into a dumb ass (my wording). Young as I was, I mistook that as a strong incentive to read as many comics as I could (sorry to my teacher). And then came that terrifying digital drug called "video game". Year after year so-called experts bombarded us with warnings because

of the addicting and hazardous nature of games. Sometimes it seemed that video games ranked just below the h-bomb with regard to the danger they posed to us.

If you see the Spiegel article in that context of media history, it could be a shift away from the *mysterium tremendum* to the *mysterium fascinosum*. Not perfect, but maybe a good starting point.

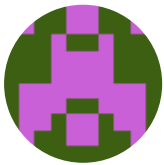


01/16/2014 at 12:31 pm

“Piss off, Spiegel! Try again in 20 years, maybe you got it by then.”

Piss off? Wow, actually destroyed the whole article. Very sad and acts totally childish.

Leo



★ admin

01/16/2014 at 2:43 pm

Yeah, sure. There are people, who think that actually expressing anger about something that angers you, kills the credibility of critical arguments. I however think, that this view is really silly.

If you decide to exclude opinions and arguments because the author is expressing his anger and/or not hitting a polite enough tone... ...that is your way of being ignorant. Have fun.



**Juergen
Mayer**

01/16/2014 at 5:04 pm

I consider the notion that talks about gaming shouldn't get passionate, but be “mature”, “sound”, “serious”, “reasonable” or “evolved” one of the greatest problems gaming is facing today. It's neglecting its heritage and preventing a future outside of cultural norms.

More than that, a lack of passion towards gaming is center and front of Der Spiegel. Therefore the last sentence even underlines the statement given very well.

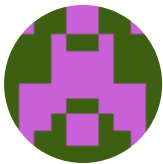
01/15/2014 at 8:48 am



**Fabian
Transchel**

Your translation in the section about violence from games is seriously flawed, I fear. The first sentence you translate as 'Video games depicting violence may lead to violent acts in some instances. ', while the (German) source says that 'In Einzelfällen [...]', which means 'individual cases' and is a much weaker suggestive figure than you try to make out of it.

Yes, the authors make the connection between games and violence, but the indeed *are* careful to say that there is only anecdotal evidence to back up the claim that they can lead to violent behaviour. Also, I don't see how they would engross this particular argumentation. On the contrary – in a critical article written with journalistic distance to the subject you *have* to bring up that matter simply because its so controversial to the target audience of the magazine.



★ admin

01/15/2014 at 10:29 am

Hey Fabian,...

I consider "some instances" and "individual cases" to be interchangeable, but it cool that my readers now have both translations available. Thanks.

There is no anecdotal evidence in the article. In fact there are mainly source who unequivocally say that there is no evidence for a connection of violent behavior and games. The authors still make a positive claim about the connection – without evidence – which is not saying that the issue is debatable or being skeptic about it. They are making a POSITIVE CLAIM without backup.

And considering how controversial the topic is to their target audience, why do they put fuel to the fire here? Why don't they do their job and just say, "nope, no evidence, but we'll keep looking" and leave it at that? Asserting that there is a connections is irresponsible, because it keeps an issue artificially alive and giving credit to an opinion, which is not based on evidence. This is not critical, it's biased.



**Fabian
Transchel**

01/15/2014 at 10:57 am

"The authors still make a positive claim about the connection"

Sorry, I don't see that from the part you quoted. With a bit more of context around that passage I *might* consider agreeing, but as such, I don't see where the authors are putting 'fuel to the fire'. As passionate gamers we first and

foremost have to understand that for other, less informed people it is *easy* to make such a connection, however in this instance the authors just repeat the notion that some people believe games can lead to violence, but they do not advocate given opinion: “But even in those cases it is hard to say, what came first.” Yes. It’s hard to say. And that’s a perfectly viable, objective statement about the issue given that most people in the world are not able to tell correlation and causation apart and neither are journalists some of them.



★ admin

01/15/2014 at 11:05 am

“With a bit more of context around that passage I *might* consider agreeing, ...”

...so you use your lack of context to correct me? How does that work. Shouldn’t your comment then say “I have to read the full story first and will get back to you.” ?

“But even in those cases...” is a positive claim, saying that cases exist.

If you can’t tell correlation and causation apart it is an obligation to default to correlation until a causation is evident.

Default to causation or still making positive claims about causation is irresponsible.



**Fabian
Transchel**

01/15/2014 at 11:29 am

“...so you use your lack of context to correct me? How does that work.”

You blacked out the rest of the text around that passage.

“But even in those cases...” is a positive claim, saying that cases exist.’

It is not. The whole sentence goes that ‘even in those cases [...] it is not clear what came first’. It clearly states that a *possible* connection is unknown, in the German original even more so: the connection is “schwer zu klären”. They don’t claim the connection, instead they even go as far as saying that one should be very careful to make it in the first place.



★ admin

01/15/2014 at 11:46 am

“*You* blacked out the rest of the text around that passage.”

Yes, I did. This article is commentary on a piece of publishing. If you did not read the piece of publishing, then you are not equipped to understand or judge my commentary. That’s just how it is.

“It is not. The whole sentence goes that ‘even in those cases [...] it is not clear what came first’. It clearly states that a *possible* connection is unknown, in the German original even more so: the connection is “schwer zu klären”. They don’t claim the connection, instead they even go as far as saying that one should be very careful to make it in the first place.”

You are massively misreading things. I will leave your reading here for my readers as a second – though strange – opinion. But I won’t comment further, because all I can do is repeat myself.



**Juergen
Mayer**

01/14/2014 at 7:13 pm

I really appreciate this very good analysis. Yet as a native German-speaking Austrian I have to admit that even design itself is commonly not regarded as art here. Yet alone television or other forms of entertainment.

Only film was some kind of appreciation given, and from this standpoint, every design is first and foremost “industrial”, not “artistic”. The only differentiator is “Kunsth Handwerk”, which means some sort of “craftsmanship”.

This dates back to the likes of Adorno, who only considered authentic pieces that cannot, or at least are not reproduced to be true “art”, i.e. “authentic”, but these extreme forms of discrimination are common ground within the German history of the mind. Others like Juergen Habermas do have very similar views which are quite the opposite of Raymond Williams, great democratic thinkers like Judith Butler and so on. Even people like Peter Sloterdijk are very strong on that. “Regeln für den Menschenpark”, first published in 1997, is perhaps the most fascist piece regarding these cultural views written after 1945, especially the “choice” between “book” or “stadium” mentioned in there.

For the matter of fact, such views are unproblematic here. They are just common sense.

Yet at least in late 2012, there was one article in Die Zeit which challenged that opinion to a degree not seen before in a widely publicized paper

<http://www.zeit.de/2012/50/Computerspiele-Medium-Zukunft>

The only problem is, that for the most part, Der Spiegel didn’t even try to present games as art, or even artistic. And the aforementioned ZEIT article didn’t even try to

present games as something else (!). While Der Spiegel was certainly more interested in games as some sort of therapy or leisure.



01/14/2014 at 6:04 pm

“Why games are better than their reputation” – sounds like classic priming. I can’t remember agreeing on games having a bad reputation.

Michael
Herzog
(@senorkaf
fee)

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