HOW TO NOT SUCK AT GAME DESIGN

GAME DESIGN, ART, RESOURCES, RESEARCH,
CRITICISM, TUTORIALS & STUFF BY ANJIN ANHUT.

DONATE

Pin it

This article is filed under *game criticism* and *game semiotics*.

Tweet Like 5 Share 4 0 Stu

If you liked the trailer and had strong connection to it, you probably shouldn't read on. Or maybe you should do it.

Don't know. My intensions are not to talk people out of what they enjoy. If you had a certain feeling after the trailer, you wanna conserve, leave now. Being contrarian is not a hobby of mine. I love games and I want to add to the discourse and available information to help games grow. That's why I teach classes in game design or write blog articles. But contributing to make games grow also means speaking up against the elements that in my opinion make games smaller than they actually need to be. Today I need to speak up against this:
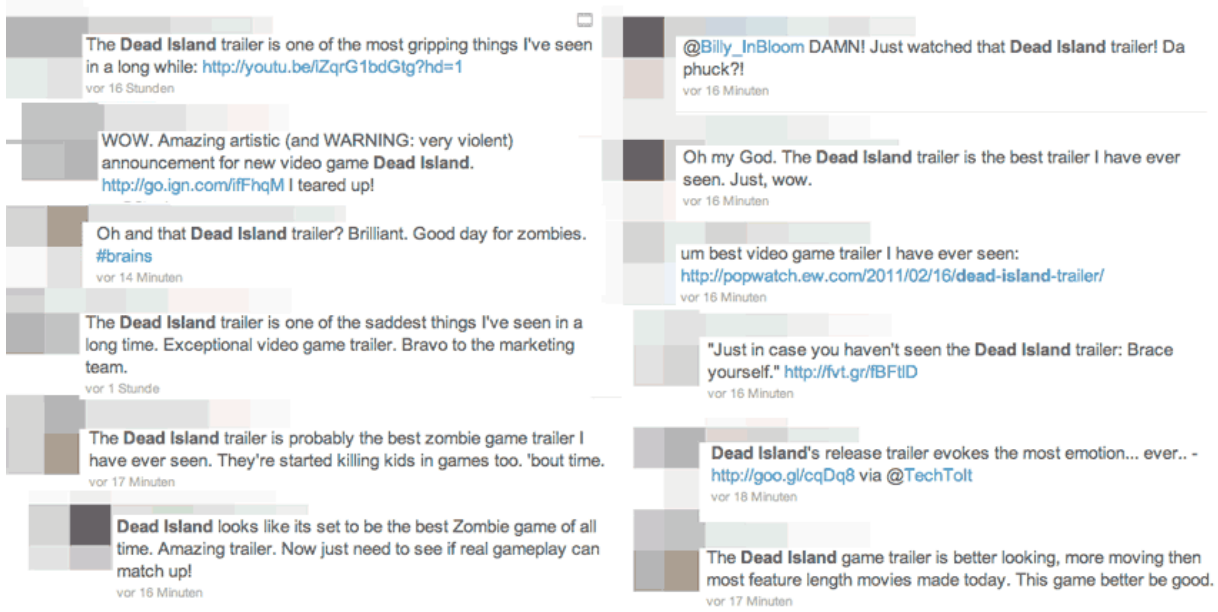
Is Dead Island what represents state of the art now? This goes allover twitter, facebook, commentary on video game sites and even among my friends. Are our collective expectations actually that low? No, that can not stand.

Admittedly the Dead Island trailer has a very impressive production value and maybe I try to get the piano score via iTunes. Cool tune. I like it. But what is it we actually get to see? In my opinion the Dead Island trailer is an offensively mainstream piece of narration, lacking of ideas, lacking of balls, using the cheapest and most transparent gimmicks, to get credits for something it simply isn't. Special. Nothing is special about this clip. On the contrary. I don't think we can let developers get praised for manipulative marketing and of the shelf content like that. We should demand higher standards. Way higher standards.

I KNOW IT IS CALLED ISLAND, BUT A BELLBOY, A BLONDE BIKINI CHICK AND A BALD FAT GUY? SERIOUSLY?

ARE THE CHINESE CHEF AND THE FRENCH MAID NEXT? DOES IT GET ANY MORE STEREOTYPICAL?

The clip is basically a recut of the opening sequence from 2004 Dawn Of The Dead. Daughter got bitten, father tries to save daughter and gets bitten himself for being a caring parent. But where Zack Snyder was able to create an atmosphere of intimacy and than ripping it apart with a sudden explosion of terror, Dead Island drowns in stereotypical characters and comical violence. What is hook for Deep Silver, is throwaway character exposition to be done with before the opening credits for Snyder.

HA, OF COURSE IT CAN.

WHY DID I EVEN ASK?

The video editing is another issue. The super sweet Gears Of War 3 "Ashes" trailers had a strong narrative and disturbing imagery to go along with the calm tone and sad music (Johnny Cash for the win) and the Halo 3 "Believe" trailer did so to, by showing us a battle scene frozen in time. Deep Silver's marketing department recognizes this trend and tries to follow that up with simple slow motion and time shuffling editing. But the editing serves no narrative point and feels like an afterthought to give the trailer an edge. As soon as you realize the starting sequence runs backwards, you are expecting the story to have a special beginning to be seen at the end of the clip. This gets spoiled by them suddenly cutting to the second timeline actually running forward. So the last possible tension and hope for a payoff comes from being curious of how the timelines connect in the middle. And then they do and there was nothing. No payoff, no climax, just pointless backward forward editing.
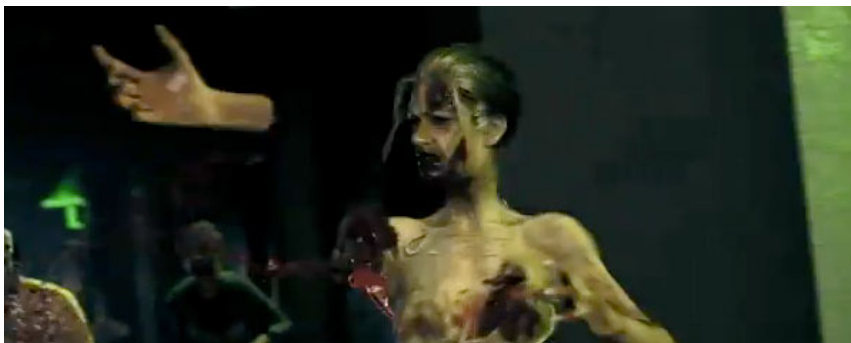
AN AXE IS NOT A KATANA.

SHE LOOKS CONFUSED ABOUT THE SHARPNESS OF THIS AXE.

NO WORRIES, BABY. I MADE THE SAME FACE, WHEN I SAW IT.

I know that zombies have mostly been reduced to cannon fodder in video games and that it is refreshing to see a video game acknowledging that there is a human connection here and that a zombie once was a human with family and all. But I refuse to hype this clip, just because I may have learned to not expect much more out of video games. This is pathetic. Dead Island tries to channel zombie film cliches, which are long outdated and even just in game terms trails behind many publications that actually tried to give us something fresh. Silent Hill, Resident evil, Dead Space, L4D, Dead Rising, even Stubbs the Zombie, all of those games were able to add something fresh to the mix. Dead Island actually goes one step back, plays it safe and tries to gimmick itself into our hearts. We as players, makers and zombie lovers should demand more and save our praises for developers who actually deliver.

8 THOUGHTS ON "DEAD ISLAND TRAILER – ALL GIMMICK , NO

BRRRRAAAAIIIINNNSSS."

Terrehbau5
on **October 20, 2012 at 11:24 pm** said:

I'm curious as to how beach goers and hotel staff at a beach resort on an island are stereotypical. Bell boys work in hotels, and there are blondes that wear bikinis on the beach, and there are overweight men that wear swim trunks. For a beach side hotel zombie outbreak, I don't know what you expect to be trying to attack these people. Zombified school teachers, coal miners, and Walmart staff?
Whether or not this ripped someone's heart out and threw it in a blender is just a matter of opinion, and that's completely subjective so it's different for everyone.
I'd just like to know how these are "stereotypical" characters.

And as for your point with the ax, you do realize this game is not at all supposed to reflect how things actually work. Depending on how sharp the ax was, and how good the guy was with it, it might have done that. Not so cleanly, but still.

Ur Bota
on **September 11, 2011 at 4:28 pm** said:

"People does not like what I like so therefor they must be wrong" Yay!

Kyle Blackston
on **June 16, 2011 at 5:25 pm** said:

I was one of those people that said, "This trailer is the most heart-wrenching zombie-game trailer I've ever seen." That said, I think the point of this trailer was to give some credit to the horrifying nature of zombie-games, even if it is still just another zombie game. I think that, after all of the other zombie games that have the gruff-and-tough Bill (L4D) or the rather humorous Frank West (Dead Rising), etc., etc., it's actually nice to see a zombie game that goes back to the roots of zombie movies and says, "This is horrifying." Yeah, it's unrealistic, and the zombie fight scene was pretty funny to watch (especially that girl's reaction to her arm getting cut off) but typical zombie games have left out the emotional aspect of what's happening.

While Silent Hill and Resident Evil (up until the fourth installment) are both rather horrific games, I've never really associated them with classical zombie films. Dead Rising was closer, but definitely humorous, and L4D came pretty close, but with the mass swarms of easily-disposed-of zombies, separated by big battles with super-zombies, even those didn't feel like I was playing through one of the older zombie movies. If this trailer hit anything, it's that appeal: they've mixed the new-age zombie genre of games and movies with what made the original Romero movies as good as they were. I haven't kept up on Dead Island as much as I'd like to, but if the game itself delivers any of this feeling whatsoever, then I think they will have filled a spot that's been lacking in zombie games for some time.

A friend of mine said, while watching it and laughing, "You just never go back for someone who's bitten. That's just stupid," and after realizing that the girl was their child, the emotional chord was struck. It's not a big, "I'm going to cry," moment, but it's a moment of realization that no zombie-game trailer (that I have seen) has ever even tried. I really do hope they keep that up in the actual game. Another Left 4 Dead is NOT what I want.

Anjin Anhut
on **February 26, 2011 at 8:21 pm** said:

@vyrulence

Thanks for your input here. But you are trying to counter arguments I'm actually not making here.

I rant about the disconnect I see between the personal feedback of viewers and the actual content and quality of the clip.
There is no failure in recognizing the trailers success, the animation company's intentions or the fact that the trailer's mainstream appeal helped make it fulfill it's purpose on my side. It is simply not subject of this rant and in no way important to discuss here.

And please don't try to lecture me on realism and game logic. Seeing the bikini zombie's hand getting cut off clean by the axe actually was very entertaining in a zombie action kind of way, as many other moments o f the trailer were also. But the strong emotional feedback, the claimed "tearing-up" to me has also a very strong disconnect to the entertaining and comical violence.

Realism or over the top display of violence do not in and out of itself are good or bad things. context is what makes this stuff fitting a scene or not. And the unrealistic cartoonish violence, though entertaining, does not fit the widely felt intimate and emotional impact of the trailer.

vyrulence
on **February 25, 2011 at 2:20 pm** said:

First: It's not that I have a strong connection or affinity for this trailer, I just liked it and it impressed me.

Well, you rant about how this trailer is "stereotypical", "unrealistic" and just not "deep" enough. Did you ever imagine that this is everything the animation company wanted to achieve? This trailer does not try to be deep or realistic: it wants to establish a certain emotional connection, and in this it certainly succeeds, as you've seen on the various blogs/magazines/social networks.

This trailer is *fully* aware of it's "mainstream" appeal, because that's what the mainstream actually associates with the zombie genre.

Okay, you don't like it, fine, we know that now. But this trailer left an big impact, so it has fulfilled it's purpose, no matter how bad *you* find it.

Sadly, you fail to understand this and focus on how bad and bland everything in this trailer is. You write how every other horror game adds something "fresh" to the genre, without ever seeing a single second of gameplay? You make assumptions based purely on trailer footage, something I would expect from the "mainstream", not a game enthusiast.

And then the totally blatant "the-axe-is-not-a-katana" 'critique': Come on, I could fire up just about *every* trailer ever made, and find something "unrealistic" in it. That's like saying "lol, in Gears of War you get shot and just when you are about to bleed to death, someone tags you and you're ready to rock again." This is called game logic, because total realism is just not *fun*.

Carl Jones
on **February 22, 2011 at 12:33 am** said:

At first I was one of the people gushing over this trailer but after doing a little research I found something interesting. The trailer isn't actually made by the developers but a Glasgow animation company called Axis Animation (http://www.axisanimation.com/) who do lots of CGI trailers for games companies and other stuff.

So for a start of course it would have no gameplay footage or anything to show about the game as it's purely a promotional piece. So it's really a project made by a design company for a client and they can stick this on their portfolio. The way in which they create the trailer is purely bells and whistles…still bloody good from a production perspective!

Ree
on **February 19, 2011 at 7:53 pm** said:

Good to see that I wasn't the only one that felt this way about this trailer. Although, I'm also quite fed up with Zombies at this point which may have contributed to my feelings towards this. They would have to come up with something quite unique for me to take another stab at a walking dead. I very much enjoy your blog here. So please keep it up :)

Pingback: Tweets that mention howtonotsuckatgamedesign -- Topsy.com