

this is that if they claimed outright there was such a connection, we'd all laugh our heads off!

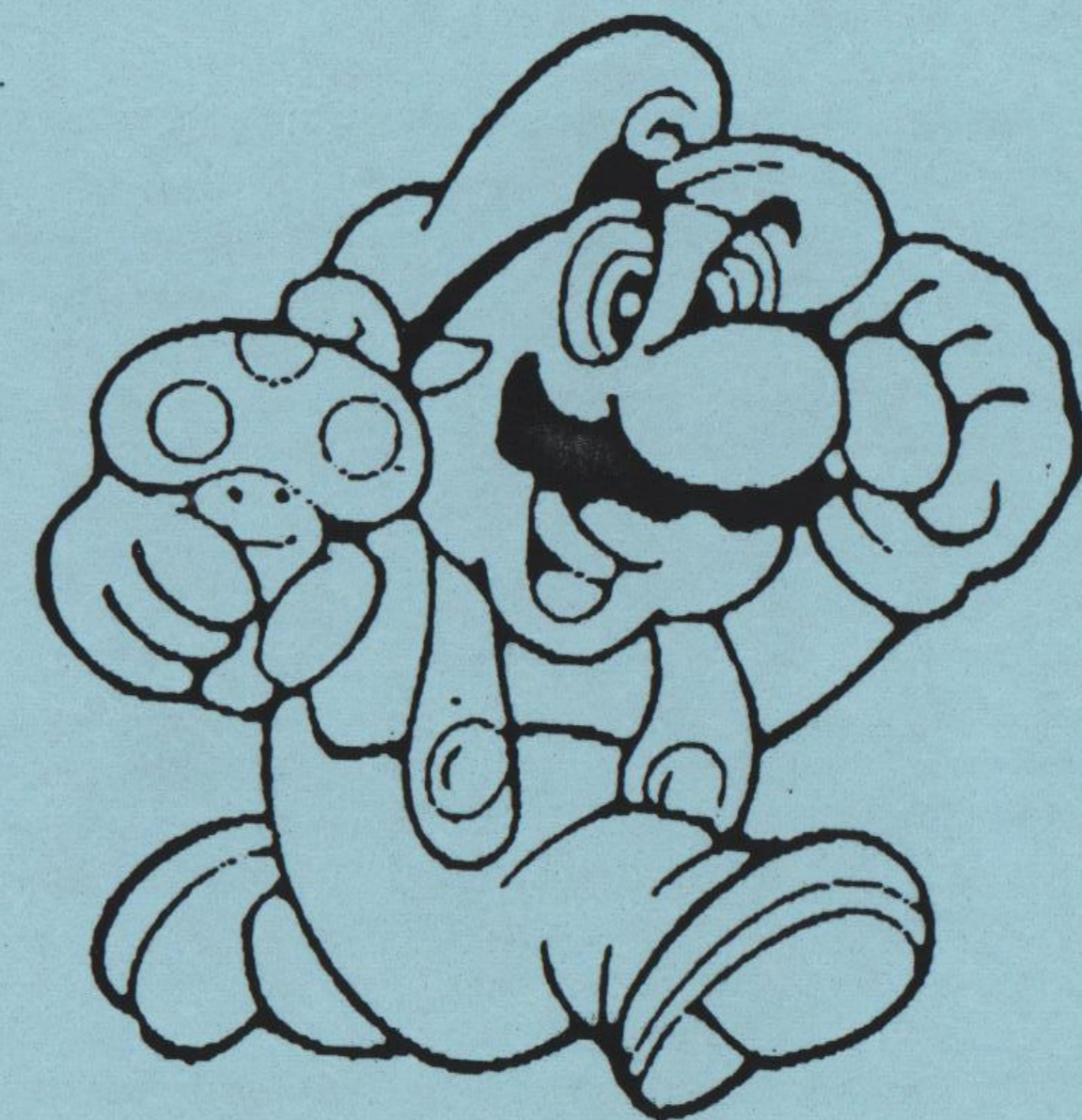
Some concerned journalists have voiced their worries about the violence of many of the games. The number of people playing these vicious fantasy games must be huge. But if it is a journalist's job to highlight potential social problems, it is the state's job to deal with them. It is interesting to see that whereas ninjutsu is now illegal in the UK, there is no problem in selling games in which you can fantasise this violent martial art. Sega even give their ninja game "Shinobi" away free with some of their mega drive consoles. That this is all permitted shows that the state can accept violent fantasies and even any actual violence that springs from them. But on the other hand it will not allow people to train in weapons so that they become competent in using them (as in ninjutsu). This is because the police can cope OK with a small increase in the quantity of violence but could so easily be in hot water if the violence they are up against becomes more expert. How easily could the pigs defeat a riotous mob of real life "street ninjas"?

Earlier I talked about the isolation while actually playing the games. That isn't the whole story. The culture associated with the toys (eg feeling part of the in crowd, the specialist mags, etc) give an illusion of being in some kind of community. And in addition to this illusion a sense of community comes with the swapping and sharing of games cartridges amongst friends. But these feelings of being a part of something are ironic. The whole nature of the phenomenon; the isolation and passivity, the sexism and consumerism, the exclusion of people without the cash to buy the machines; all this works together to prevent the creation of a real community where people relate to each other as equals in a deep and non alienated way.

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MEGA SALES DRIVE



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Computer games made by Sega and Nintendo were the biggest selling toys last xmas. These games are now so pervasive that Nintendo's character "Mario" can advertise pizza on British TV, is better known amongst American kids than Mickey Mouse or George Bush and is soon to be the subject of a film starring Danny De Vito. What the fuck is happening?!

One of the causes of the games' success is just that old favourite; fashion. The continuous hyping of the toy along with people's desperate attempts to try and feel "part of something", together cause a snowball effect with (for a limited period only) ever more people buying. Obviously in a situation like this the market soon becomes saturated. The media which previously hyped a particular product now tells us it is old hat or second rate and we must go out and buy the latest hyped product. Manufacturers plan ahead for this sort of trick e.g. when Sega replaced their Master System with the newer Mega Drive the games for the new system could not be played on the old. New systems will continue to be introduced every couple of years. This encourages you to fork out for a new console or expensive converter every few years, and so keep profits rolling in. It is a straight forward con.

Fashion is a dead weight on our backs. Many people don't have the money to keep up with it even if they want to, and so feel excluded. Others feel they have to buy so as not to be the odd one out, even if they can't really afford it. Everyone who buys the hyped product is disappointed to find that the product isn't the life fulfilling prize they at least half thought it might be. Fashion and hype sometimes have strange results. For example, they have made the Nintendo Game Boy the most popular console on the market. This is a prime case of "emperor's new clothes syndrome", in which people believe what everyone else believes rather than what their own eyes tell them. What I mean by this is that the Game Boy is obvious crud, with a crappy little monochrome screen. If an arcade game had graphics this bad nowadays, no one would play it!! Having said this though, all the consoles are pretty poor in one way or another. For instance Sega's Game Gear uses up so much power that the batteries can run out before it is possible to win some of the games! Another drawback with the hardware is that all the consoles use either cartridges or CDs rather than magnetic discs, which means that the games can't be copied. But there are problems more fundamental than this. The consoles are obviously much less versatile than a real computer. These can be used not just for permitted purposes, such as gaming, but also for such things as hacking where users can sabotage company records or even delete their own phone bill. Even with a machine like the

Nintendo E.S. which can be used over the phone, the way the machine is designed makes it impossible to do anything illegal with it; it just is not versatile enough. You can't use the console for hacking, instead you can be given the choice to trade shares using it; in other words play games with people's lives.

The games themselves are in any case pretty dodgy. Despite the superficial complexity of some of them, all the games on all the systems give only a very limited scope for improvisation. When you play the games you are following a set of procedures set down previously by some middle class computer programmer working for one or other multi-national. In this sense the consoles are a vehicle for the colonisation of large numbers of minds by a (relatively speaking) tiny group of professionals. And the ideas they are actually putting across are pretty scummy too. For instance an American study found that out of the 36 top-selling non-sport Nintendo games, 13 had as a theme the murder or abduction of women. Other games are based on the exploits of murderous gangs such as the Nicaraguan contras and the US SEALS (commandos), both of which are involved in random terrorism and the torture and murder of rebels.

But even where the games aren't based on some form of atrocity there is still the vampiric effect of the games. Even if you haven't done it yourself, everyone knows someone who has spent some stupidly long session playing console games. This is such an amazing waste of time (one of the only worthwhile things that most of us own); usually spent alone and in a trance like state. I know people who have played a particular game hours on end and then not been able to recall the colours of the character they've been staring at the whole time. These games capture both kids and adults and bind them to the screen. People who might find just sitting staring at TV too boring can now sit and stare at a screen and press buttons too! This is the worst aspect of these machines: that they are a more efficient and effective way of turning potentially active and rebellious people into hyper-passive, alienated half-zombies, at least temporarily.

The Game Boy TV advert helps create an image of activity beyond the tiny movements of the thumb needed to operate the toy. Giving the console the name "Game Boy" makes it clear they are talking about sex (baby). And in case that wasn't obvious enough, the advert shows a brief shot of a woman who has been rolling around in the hay with her Game Boy. Another shot shows several Game Boys shoved into a woman's bikini bottom. These pathetic attempts to link electronic toys with sexual activity make it obvious that adolescents (rather than younger kids only) are a main target of the campaign. It's worthwhile noting that the link between sex and the consoles is implied, almost subliminally, rather than stated openly. The reason for