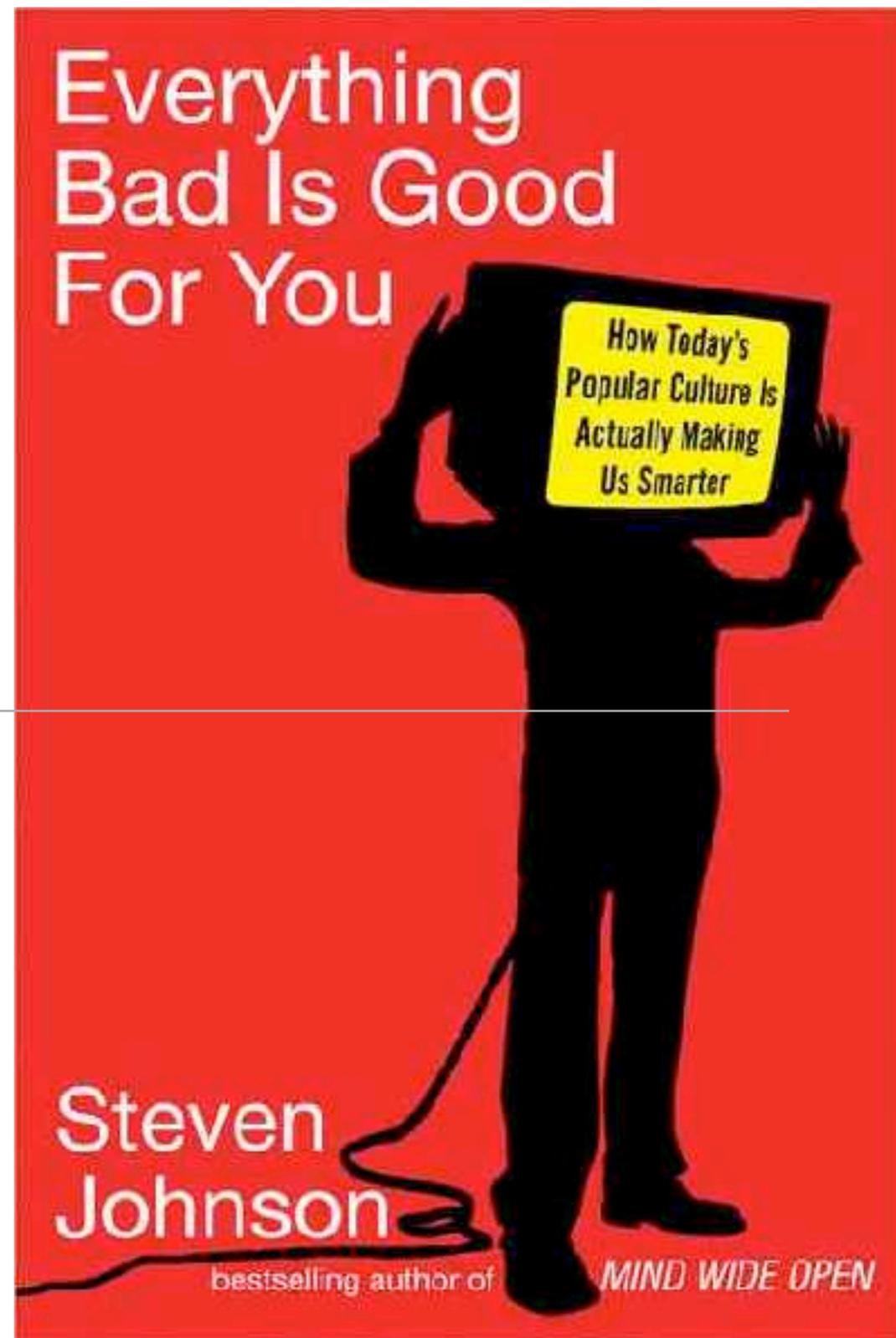


# Everything Bad is Good for You

## Steven Johnson

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Fachbereich 12



## Text Stats

These statistics are computed from the text of this book. ([learn more](#))

### Readability ([learn more](#))

### Compared with books in [All Categories](#)

Fog Index:	16.1	78% are easier		22% are harder
Flesch Index:	43.0	61% are easier		39% are harder
Flesch-Kincaid Index:	13.6	82% are easier		18% are harder

### Complexity ([learn more](#))

Complex Words:	15%	52% have fewer		48% have more
Syllables per Word:	1.6	54% have fewer		46% have more
Words per Sentence:	25.4	90% have fewer		10% have more

### Number of

Characters:	280,825	38% have fewer		62% have more
Words:	46,320	38% have fewer		62% have more
Sentences:	1,821	29% have fewer		71% have more

### Fun stats

Words per Dollar:	2,843
Words per Ounce:	3,488

## Text Stats

These statistics are computed from the text of this book. ([learn more](#))

### Readability ([learn more](#))

Compared with books in [Nonfiction > Social Sciences > Media Studies](#)

Fog Index:	16.1	33% are easier		67% are harder
Flesch Index:	43.0	17% are easier		83% are harder
Flesch-Kincaid Index:	13.6	41% are easier		59% are harder

### Complexity ([learn more](#))

Complex Words:	15%	10% have fewer		90% have more
Syllables per Word:	1.6	12% have fewer		88% have more
Words per Sentence:	25.4	70% have fewer		30% have more

### Number of

Characters:	280,825	10% have fewer		90% have more
Words:	46,320	11% have fewer		89% have more
Sentences:	1,821	10% have fewer		90% have more

### Fun stats

Words per Dollar:	2,843
Words per Ounce:	3,488

*Scientist A:* Has he asked for anything special?

*Scientist B:* Yes, why, for breakfast... he requested something called „wheat germ, organic honey, and tiger's milk.“

*Scientist A:* Oh, yes. Those were the charmed substances that some years ago were felt to contain life-preserving properties.

*Scientist B:* You mean there was no deep fat? No steak or cream pies or ... hot fudge?

*Scientist A:* Those were thought to be unhealthy...

–from Woody Allen's *Sleeper*

# Dumbing down by popular media?

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- „an increasingly infantilized society?“ (George Will)
- „Wir amüsieren uns zu Tode“ (Neil Postman)
- Beispiele
  - Daily Soaps
  - Reality Shows
  - Talkshows am Mittag
  - TV-Shopping

# Johnson: Positive brainwashing

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- the popular media steadily, but almost imperceptibly, making our minds sharper, as we soak in entertainment usually dismissed as so much lowbrow fluff
- Sleeper curve
- a feeling that the popular culture isn't locked in a spiral dive of deteriorating standards.
- The sky is not falling. In many ways, the weather has never been better, It just takes a new kind of barometer to tell the difference.

# Chapter 1: The Sleeper Curve

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- Baseball Simulation Game & Advanced Dungeon & Dragons
- „I was some kind of statistical prodigy, building simulated worlds out of legal pads and probability charts.“
- Today: part of everyday entertainment on TV and PC screens
- „culture is getting more intellectually demaning, not less“
- „story of trends, not absolutes. I do not believe that most of today’s pop culture is made up of masterpieces that will someday be taught alongside Joyce and Chaucer in college survey courses. The [stuff we will look at] are not, for the most part, Great Works of Art. But they are more complex and nuanced than the shows and games that preceded them.

# If Books were new and Games were old

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- If Books were new:
  - understimulates the senses
  - only a small portion of the brain is devoted to processing text
  - tragically isolating
  - what to do with dyslexia?
  - they follow a fixed linear path
  - passivity - follow the plot instead of learning to lead

# Benefits of reading

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- complexity of argument and storytelling
- stretching the imagination
- shared experience (e.g. Harry Potter)
- rewards of reading
  - information conveyed by the book
  - mental work you have to do to process and store that information

# Why do people like to play

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- if it is often frustrating or tedious?
- there is delayed gratification?
- you often need to consult „walk throughs“
- according to Johnson
  - neurophysiological processes
  - seeking / see the next thing
  - flow

But isn't this the equivalent of crack-cocaine?

# Building a mental muscle...

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- Johnson de-emphasizes the content of video games or TV
- John Dewey (Experience and Education)
  - Collateral learning in the way of formation of attitudes, of likes and dislikes, may be often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what count in the future“
- Games forces You to make decisions.
- probe, hypothesize, reprobe, rethink

# The changing complexity of TV series

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- Starsky & Hutch vs. Hill Street Blues
- 2 threads vs. 9 threads
- NYPD Blue, ER, The West Wing, Alisa, The Sopranos, Lost, Desperate Housewives
- Simpson halloween 1995 episode: 15 movie references
- Seinfeld 1997: The Betrayal - reverse chronological order
- Memento

# Reality TV

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- Low Autism Quotient (AQ) entertainment
- What will they do?
- What do they think?
- Group psychology experiments
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# Mediendemokratie

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- Neil Postman 1985
  - people are excluded from high political offices if they are
    - fat
    - bald
    - not significantly enhanced by the cosmetician's art
    - cosmetics has replaced ideology
- Johnson: but people may have chosen over Nixon because of Emotional cues

# More proof of complexity

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- Dallas vs. 24: a social network view
  - 12 persons vs. 26 persons
  - 17 connections vs. 44 connections

# Internet: hypertext and blogging

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- Google: second nature
- Search and collect and compare
- Blogs - multi-threaded discussions by the millions

# Film

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- Star Wars: 9 persons
- Lord of the Rings: 21 persons
- Finding Nemo vs. Bambi
- Films to disorient You:
  - Being John Malkovich, Memento, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Run Lola Run, Twelve Monkeys, Magnolia, Big Fish, The Matrix
- But: you need time, 90 Minutes is not enough! LOTR 12 hours!

# Flynn Effect

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- 46 years
- 13.8 IQ points + for USA
- 3 points per decade worldwide
- Netherlands: 1972 - 1982 by 8 points - accelerating!
- Carmi Schooler: reflection of environmental complexity

# The future

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- The end of the **Least Objectionable Programming**
- entertainment and learning at the **outer edges of competence**
- **not too easy, not too hard**
- **flow**
- **Most repeatable programming**

# The loss

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- a post-modernistic view
- loss of coherence
- the Age of Reason get's evaporated by non-linear text?
- Or is it just a new step into non-linear thinking?

Sleeper Curve