

Critical Media Studies

Edited by Janet Wasko and Eileen R. Meehan

Gaming Globally: Production, Play, and Place

Edited by Nina B. Huntemann and Ben Aslinger

Gaming Globally

Production, Play, and Place

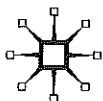
Edited by

Nina B. Huntemann and Ben Aslinger

palgrave
macmillan

8

UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE LIBRARY



GAMING GLOBALLY

Copyright © Nina B. Huntemann and Ben Aslinger, 2013.

All rights reserved.

First published in 2013 by

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN®

in the United States—a division of St. Martin's Press LLC,
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

Where this book is distributed in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world,
this is by Palgrave Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited,
registered in England, company number 785998, of Houndmills,
Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS.

Palgrave Macmillan is the global academic imprint of the above companies
and has companies and representatives throughout the world.

Palgrave® and Macmillan® are registered trademarks in the United States,
the United Kingdom, Europe and other countries.

ISBN: 978-1-137-00632-5

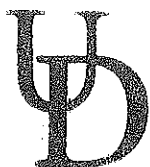
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available from the
Library of Congress.

A catalogue record of the book is available from the British Library.

Design by Newgen Imaging Systems (P) Ltd., Chennai, India.

First edition: January 2013

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



GV

1469

.3

G428

2013

Contents

<i>List of Figures and Tables</i>	vii
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	ix

Introduction	1
<i>Ben Aslinger and Nina B. Huntemann</i>	

Part I Macro

1 Who Plays, Who Pays? Mapping Video Game Production and Consumption Globally	19
<i>Randy Nichols</i>	
2 Women in Video Games: The Case of Hardware Production and Promotion	41
<i>Nina B. Huntemann</i>	
3 Redefining the Console for the Global, Networked Era	59
<i>Ben Aslinger</i>	
Snapshot 1: Brazil: Tomorrow's Market	75
<i>James Portnow, Arthur Protasio, and Kate Donaldson</i>	
Snapshot 2: Video Game Development in Argentina	79
<i>Agustín Pérez Fernández</i>	

Part II Play Practices

Snapshot 3: Crafting a Path into Gaming Culture	85
<i>Sean C. Duncan</i>	
4 Heterogeneity in Game Histories	91
<i>Philip Tan and Konstantin Mitgutsch</i>	
5 Playing at Being Social: A Cross-Generational Case Study of Social Gaming in Shanghai, China	101
<i>Larissa Hjorth and Michael Arnold</i>	

75-81

SNAPSHOT I

Brazil: Tomorrow's Market

James Portnow, Arthur Protasio, and Kate Donaldson

Despite having a population of over 190 million people and the largest economy in Latin America, Brazil's cultural imprint seems to be limited to soccer and supermodels. In many areas, Brazil is evolving financially and socially, but the gaming industry still lacks the maturity and development of other major countries like the United States and Japan. There are approximately 35 million active players in the Brazilian gaming community (Takahashi 2011), and as this number continues to grow, developers must cultivate a broader and more sophisticated presence both locally and in international markets.

Brazil has been producing games since the 1980s. Historically, most games have been independent productions, the most notable example being TILT Online's 1983 release, *Amazon*. Titles such as *Planeta em Noite Animal* (ATR Multimídia 1996) and *Show do Milhão* (SBT Multimídia 2000) represent an enduring trend of games based on board games or national TV shows. The *Deer Hunter* series (developed by Southlogic Studios and published by Atari) and the popular title *Outlive* (developed by Continuum Entertainment and published by Take Two Interactive) each attracted sufficient interest from other countries to merit distribution by international publishers, but their success was not great enough to transcend the underdeveloped Brazilian gaming ecosystem and produce significant national revenue. More recent projects with higher production values, like the sci-fi Massively Multiplayer Online (MMO) game *Taikodom* (Hoplon Infotainment 2008) and Donsoft Entertainment's 2009 historical action-adventure game *Capoeira Legends: Path to Freedom*,

have received a little of the international spotlight, but even this level of recognition is the exception rather than the rule.

Most games that are developed and distributed in Brazil are designed for mobile or web-based platforms rather than traditional consoles. The easiest way for aspiring designers and programmers to establish themselves in the industry has typically been through the development of video games designed to promote brands or products, known as *advergaming*. Globally, Brazil maintains a positive image and a strong reputation, and this attracts high-profile publicity agencies and well-recognized brand names looking to incorporate games into their advertisement strategies, which is how many local game studios receive funding. Similarly, some magazines looking to modernize have begun reaching out to developers with the intention of creating *newsgames*, which utilize web-based games to enhance specific articles or stories.

The free-to-play model is also well received in Brazil, as indicated by the strong presence of game localization companies that bring Korean MMOs to the country. The viability of nontraditional business models is further illustrated by the large, growing population of social, mobile, and MMO gamers within the country. In fact, Brazil is the leading Western country when it comes to widespread acceptance of new game platforms and innovative business models (Takahashi 2011).

But part of this is based in necessity: there are several significant obstacles that impede the accessibility of Brazilian games to the Brazilian people. The Brazilian Ministry of Justice is required by law to assign a nationally recognized content rating to all retail games before they can be sold. The Brazilian Apple App Store lacks a category for games altogether; a casualty of this process. Developers, therefore, cannot call their games "games" if they wish to release them at the App Store. Instead, they are forced to choose between categorizing them as applications in the existing "entertainment" subcategory, or not making their games available for purchase at digital stores Brazilians can access. Consumers who wish to have access to unrestricted content are left with the workaround of registering their accounts in other countries, which may have its own technical and legal challenges.

Additionally piracy in Brazil, particularly when it comes to console games, is a direct consequence of the factors that stand in between the consumer and the content. Excessive taxation, poor distribution, licensing issues, and the reluctance of companies to "officially" establish themselves on the market can easily contribute to the frustration of customers (Karaganis 2011). All of these issues raise the relative price of games in the country: titles that cost around US\$50 in the United States can be sold for US\$110–US\$150 in Brazil. However, this appears to be changing.

Microsoft and Sony have both launched their respective networks (LIVE and PSN) in the country, and while the prices and selection of content is not yet at par with their American counterparts, it is an important step in the right direction. Microsoft recently began manufacturing Xbox consoles domestically, providing a significant price reduction for the console, accessories such as the Kinect, and several games (Azevedo 2011).

The general outlook for the game trade in Brazil is positive, but all progress requires a period of adjustment and adaptation, so growth in the industry will not be instantaneous. The strong presence of independent mobile developers in the country reveals that the market is open for different types of games, and it indicates a focus on smaller and simpler games that can evolve gradually.

And while a few studios are starting to show breakout successes, like *Ant Smasher* by Best Cool Fun Games and Aquiris's *Unity 3.0 Bootcamp Demo* that's spun up into a major online first-person shooter, the big question that remains for Brazil is how to grow the internal market. Because of taxation, problems with distribution, and years of piracy, the local player base is just not amenable to the tradition box product model. Until a developer can find a model to really monetize the avid gaming community in Brazil, Brazil will remain solely an outsource house for the rest of the world—though each passing year shows a growth in revenue from the internal market through free-to-play, ad based, and other nontraditional methods of sale.

It's going to be a wild few years, but now is the time to be betting on Brazil. A little publishing money spent there now could ensure that major Western publishers are the publishing entities for all of Latin America for the foreseeable future. This market is simply too big and too rapidly developing to dismiss.

References

- Azevedo, Theo. 2011. "Microsoft Oficializa Produção do Xbox 360 no Brasil; Consol Chega em 5 de Outubro por R\$ 800." *Jogos UOL*, September 27. Accessed December 15, 2011. <http://jogos.uol.com.br/ultimas-noticias/2011/09/27/microsoft-oficializa-fabricacao-do-xbox-360-no-brasil.htm>.
- Karaganis, Joe. 2011. *Media Piracy in Emerging Economies*. New York: Social Science Research Council. Accessed December 15, 2011. <http://piracy.ssrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/MPEE-PDF-1.0.4.pdf>.
- Takahashi, Dean. 2011. "Emerging Markets Will Spend Billions on Games This Year." *Venture Beat*, September 13. Accessed December 15, 2011. <http://venturebeat.com/2011/09/13/gamers-will-spend-billions-this-year-in-emerging-game-markets>.

SNAPSHOT 2

Video Game Development in Argentina



Agustín Pérez Fernández

Latin America is big. From Mexico to Argentina, it is formed by several countries with very different cultures, dialects and governments, and social differences within regions can be vast. It is a developing region, which means that many people still do not have access to essential things like water or food, and education is inconsistent. The percentage of people that have access to a computer with Internet is very low; and fewer still have access to a game console. Old game consoles like the Sega Master or Genesis systems, or the Nintendo Entertainment System were still very popular only a few years ago, so much so that some Brazilian companies were still making games for those consoles. Piracy is also very high in the region because it is difficult to find original games at an accessible price.

I am part of an independent game development community in Argentina. You can find me online as "Tembac." This community is very young. The Videogames Association of Argentina (ADVA) was founded in 2001, in the midst of an economic crisis. Before then, game development in the region was scarce. In the 1980s, an arcade game based on a popular card game of the region, *El Truco* was produced. This game was developed by a group of aficionados with knowledge of the gambling industry.

In the nineties, more development groups formed; we were far from being an industry, but the pioneer spirit was present. In 1995, *Dark Rage*,

a game that was very advanced for the region, was released. It was a great 2D side-scroller shooter and the best example for many would-be designers in Argentina that game development was possible. That same year an Argentinean company called Conde Entertainment Software developed another important game in Argentine video game history, *Regnum*. *Regnum* was a real-time strategy game that enjoyed enough success that a sequel was developed and published in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay; more than 10,000 copies sold. A few years later in 2000 Sabarasa Entertainment developed another real-time strategy game called *Malvinas 2032*, inspired by the 1983 war between Argentina and the United Kingdom over control of the Falkland islands.

In 2001, Argentina was suffering an economic crisis that turned out to be an important opportunity for existing game development companies. The devaluation of the peso and the high rate of unemployment brought outsourcing opportunities to the region, and resulted in new business opportunities for software developers. ADVA was part of this growth, attracting several investment opportunities and planting the seed for several new companies. Companies founded decades earlier were able to grow: Sabarasa Entertainment opened offices in Argentina and Mexico. They developed games for Nintendo Wii Ware, Game Boy Advance, DS, and the Sony PSP. Some of the developers of *Regnum* founded NGD Studios. They created a successful Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing game called *Regnum Online* that is very popular in the region and in Germany. Recently, they released *Bunch of Brothers* a cooperative shooter available on the PC distribution network, Steam.

Games developed in the region are not usually marketed to the Latin American consumer. That tendency started to change recently in part due to the expansion of social networking. *Mundo Gaturro*, a game marketed toward young children and based on an Argentinean comic character, is hugely successful. It was developed by QB9, a company focused on casual gaming and advergames.

Several industry events are held to bring the developer community together. In Argentina, we have EVA, the Videogames Exposition of Argentina. In Brazil, the Brazil Game Show is becoming the biggest game festival in Latin America. High-profile contests held annually encourage young developers to create games, develop a professional portfolio, and start companies. One example is Code AR (Code Argentina) challenges, during which a new theme is proposed every 3 months, and developers create games for that theme in one month. Several interesting games have come from Code AR and new talent has been discovered, such as Alejandro Iglesias (aka, "Tyranus"). Iglesias made an original Flash game about the life of a little bird called *Pajarito's Life*. An Argentinean

company Killabunnies, formed in 2009, made a popular Code AR game about the classic French children's tale, *The Little Prince*.

The expansion of the industry also encouraged several creative developers interested in making more expressive, art games. One of those Developers is Daniel Benmergui from Buenos Aires. He made two very successful Flash games *I Wish I Were the Moon* and *Today I Die*, which were nominated for the Independent Game Festival awards in 2010.

In 2007, in nearby Uruguay, the government initiated a program to increase digital literacy and distribute inexpensive laptops to young children who otherwise did not have access to technology. This initiative was later imitated in Argentina. As part of the same government digital literacy plan, Daniel Benmergui and indie game designer Fernando Ramallo, begun teaching children basic game development. These efforts to build a sustainable game development industry in Argentina continue. Today, an estimated 65 companies are dedicated to game development, employing over 3,000 people (Byrnes 2011). According to ADVA, the video game industry in Argentina generates US\$55 million a year and shows no signs of slowing down.

Reference

- Byrnes, Brian. 2011. "Argentina's Video Gamers Take on World." *CNN Tech*, November 15. Accessed November 24, 2011. http://articles.cnn.com/2011-11-15/tech/tech_argentina-video-games_1_video-game-buenos-aires-industry.