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## Proposing guiding principles for a decolonial production of diverse video games

JULIA STATERI

Pontifícia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (PUC/SP) – São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.  
E-mail: [julia@oficialudica.com.br](mailto:julia@oficialudica.com.br)  
ORCID: 0000-0001-8818-5158

JADERSON SOUZA

Universidade de São Paulo (USP) – São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.  
E-mail: [jaderson.souza@gmail.com](mailto:jaderson.souza@gmail.com)  
ORCID: 0000-0001-9461-2996

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## Abstract

In order to propose guiding principles for the production of decolonial diverse video games, this article presents a quick look at the Brazilian independent developments' scenario, reflecting critically on the respective posture that differs from the paradigms imposed by the mass industry. Starting from the theoretical foundation based on critical authors of the field of video games, as well as from the decolonial thought, a descriptive and methodological analysis of projects that can be characterized in the proposed definition of diverse video games was made so that, finally, one could propose the referred guiding principles.

### Keywords

Video games; Diversity; Decoloniality; Oppression; Authorship.

## Introduction

In this article, we intend to discuss experiences of elaborations that propose to be decolonial to identify and compare local actions that guide the creation of several video games, showing their similarities and particularities to those who may be interested in applying these guidelines in new contexts. However, we understand it may be impossible to develop a video game completely detached from these implications that exist in the colonial influence on processes of elaboration, reception, and consumption, which range from the training of developers, selection of work tools and distribution platforms. We also understand that the role of video game producers – be they developers, artists or people from other specialties – bears the weight of the subjection of what is usually called success and which we will briefly cover in this introduction.

What, then, would this idealized success be, almost always distant from most developers – as we will see later –, who organize themselves independently?

Generally speaking, we can observe several pop culture media vehicles that judge the success of a video game based on the number of copies sold (or, more specifically, nowadays, the number of downloads); for the lifetime of the brand the product builds (becoming a franchise, for example); by the revenue the developer company or the publisher obtained launching the title, after a certain period of time; other indicators almost always related to the potential of the capital that can be generated.

In fact, such data serve the purpose of establishing a balance regarding the financial sustainability of certain titles, as well as the possibility of launching products and derivatives, with good reception by the buying public. The problem starts to present itself when only the referred data are taken into account to determine what should or should not be produced without considering the context of the production of a video game and who produces it. In addition, it becomes extremely problematic when educational institutions responsible for training new developers, mediators, and facilitators of access to tools and creative knowledge within and outside the academic environment, replicate this superficial part of the industry as a decisive and determining factor of projects that would be worth being made available to the public.

Independent video games usually start from places of creation that the market would call niches (Anderson, 2006). These works are created – as we will see in more detail below – by authors who are outside the industrial production circuit. Although these authors may be concerned about the financial sustainability of their products and their professional activity, their creative decisions are not usually guided by the demands found in the mass market. On the contrary, due to their social markers, many of them become authors motivated by the difficulty of finding products that meet their expectations and respect their subjectivity as players.

Such issues relevant to the understanding of the massification of a cultural product, or even of politically engaged production, are not recent and may receive an interesting contribution in the works of Benjamin (2012), such as the Brazilian edition of *Magia e técnica, arte e política: ensaios sobre literatura e história da cultura* [Magic and technique, art and politics: essays on literature and history of culture] and, above all, *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction* (idem, 1955).

While Benjamin investigates the artist's creative freedom, as a counterpoint to the social pressure to place art at the service of a specific cause – which can also happen in the creation of narratives originating from social minorities, which is the scope of this article –, he also understands that social relations are based on production and consumption relations. Works produced in line with the spirit of an era or the predominant power in a society would therefore be considered reactionary, insofar as works that question the structure and current power relations would, in turn, be considered revolutionary.

For Benjamin, the way to shape a new form of production would be through collaboration in the composition of a work, literary or not, and by sharing the author's role with those who consume

a work – what we see happening today, with the emergence of facilitated creation tools that allow the person who plays to enter the field of creation. When mentioning the reproducibility of photography, printed literature, as well as the formation of massive consumption, Benjamin observes the change in the relationship between producers and consumers, something that we can also observe – transposing to the theme of this work – in the case of video games.

The fact that video games are potential tools to deal with social issues – even in an attempt to raise awareness of different and distant realities from the person who plays – is nothing new. In 2001, the designer Gonzalo Frasca presented his dissertation talking about the use of video games as a means to address the oppressions experienced by the so-called social minorities. *Videogames of the Oppressed: Videogames as means for critical thinking and debate* was presented to the Georgia Institute of Technology and later remodeled in a dialogue with Mizuko Ito and Eric Zimmerman, being published as a book chapter named *Videogames of the Oppressed: Critical Thinking, Education, Tolerance, and Other Trivial Issues* in the book *First Person: New Media as Story Performance, and Game*, edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (2004). In the chapter, Frasca (2004) proposes a methodology for a game design that he calls non-Aristotelian, in a critique of games that seek narrative-poetic references that would compromise the necessary distance to build the critical reflection intended during the act of playing a video game with social themes related to possible oppressions. For the author, a more interesting alternative would be the use of simulation – for example, modifications made to the game *The Sims* (whose first edition was released in 2000) –, while the narrative would deal with what has already happened and remained in the past, exhausting the creative and critical possibilities that can be offered to the person who plays.

The references sought by Frasca (*ibidem*) start by applying the theory of the Brazilian playwright Augusto Boal, creator of the *Teatro do Oprimido* [Theater of the Oppressed] (1975) – influenced by the *Pedagogia do Oprimido* [Pedagogy of the Oppressed] by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1997) and by the theatrical *praxis* of the German Bertold Brecht –, which consists in the reappropriation of the means for theatrical production by the very people who suffer some kind of oppression. The *Teatro do Oprimido* includes other principles, such as the breaking of the fourth wall – which is the term designated for the so-called invisible wall that separates the actors from the public – and the understanding of production as part of an even greater articulation in the generation of social transformations, unable to bring about significant changes by itself. Transposing the proposal to video games, the idea would be to deal with the fourth wall that separates the person who plays from the game, which is responsible for engaging with the narrative. By breaking this fourth wall in the context of the game and with the disruption that would generate a distance between the player and the simulated action, it would be possible to access oppressive situations for later critical reflection. Instead of offering an immersive or even cathartic experience, a distance would be elaborated so that the development of the simulation could be put into perspective, analyzed under a critical look, and, finally, debated – for example, in an application of the proposal in an educational environment.

The method described by Frasca and discussed in that chapter by Zimmerman and Ito (2004) emerges in a wake-up call made by the latter, when questioning the delimitation, until that moment, between those who produce video games and those who consume them primarily due to an economic factor. Fifteen years ago, when people called for the democratization of video game production, one of the biggest barriers encountered by aspiring game designers and developers was the difficulty of accessing creation tools. Currently, with the increase in the availability of cheap (or even free) and facilitated development tools, we see the emergence of titles that serve social markers that are outside the mass audience targeted by the large industry in the examples of works by independent developers, such as Victor Hugo Da Pieve – founder of Male Doll, a studio that produces narrative games for the LGBTQIA+ public using the engine called *RPG Maker* (s.d.) –, or even like Raquel Motta, Marcos Silva and José Wilson – from the Sue The Real studio, focused on the creation of video games that propagate Afrodiasporic

narratives.

Before proceeding with practical expressions of observable decolonial practices in a comparative analysis, let's see how the independent production of video games works in the Brazilian scenario.

## Independent production and diverse video game

With the popularization of software for development and publishing platforms, the production of video games independently became more accessible in technical aspects.

Although it is argued, as in Juul (2019), that independent video game development is not so new – the author mentions the example of the revolution of home computers in the 80s and the way in which developers started creating original games, distributing them through floppy disks –, it is in the field of the so-called indie games (Diver, 2016) that we can see experimentations and blends between genres, breaks, and remodeling of patterns present in major franchises. Where financial support is commonly lacking, creativity is not limited by choices based on what would make the final product easier to sell.

On the one hand, the growth and diffusion of digital games comes from technological development, while its construction process takes place through game *engines*<sup>1</sup> that allow the construction and combination of all the parts that make up the system, such as graphics, physics, animations, sounds, and programming codes.

As for the increase of access, we can observe that, in terms of licensing, tools considered state-of-the-art, such as the *Unreal Engine* (s.d.), now have free versions. Regarding the learning curve, tools such as *Unity* (s.d.) emerge, allowing the construction of prototypes and complete games with a friendly interface and the installation of plugins – small encapsulated subprograms – that contribute to greater autonomy in the productions performed by non-programmers. Other tools that draw a lot of attention in terms of technical ease are the *makers*, systems designed to build specific video game genres – such as *RPG Maker* (s.d.) and *Visual Novel Maker* (s.d.) – in a very practical, inviting, and non-excluding way.

Accompanying these updates in development tools, digital distribution platforms emerge and spread production. The content becomes the focus of the cultural product, while its distribution takes place primarily through the internet. Platforms such as *PlayStation Store* (Sony, s.d.), *Xbox Live* (Microsoft, s.d.), and *eShop* (Nintendo, s.d.) opt for exclusive or selective distribution of products (Kotler & Keller, 2013), companies that have greater control over the processes of publication. However, channels such as *Steam* (s.d.), *Green Man Gaming* (s.d.), and mainly *itch.io* (s.d.) present interfaces and bureaucracy quite reduced for the publication of digital games.

In this scenario, the independent production of video games begins to be promoted. Tools that used to cost thousands of dollars can be downloaded for free. With the rise of video platforms, a huge variety of tutorials becomes available. In principle, there would be no need for projects to submit to the scrutiny of publishers, companies that work in publishing on specific platforms and that, with their knowledge of the market, manage to position production in order to maximize sales. In short, more people could create and make their video games available.

Even so, the independent creation movement, based on the presupposed opposition to the structure of mainstream creation – Juul (2019), in turn, would say that these video games were not created as an alternative to the mainstream, but they would define what would come to be mainstream –, starts to be absorbed by the mass industry. Independent titles considered successful go through the same process of appropriation by large companies. Part of the independent movement ends up taking the traditional path of the big entertainment industry.

However, there are elements that manage to run through these paths. Works performed by small

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<sup>1</sup> In the field of game development, engine refers to specific software for video game programming.

groups, small cultural producers, or just one person whose creations represent the cultural diversity only accessible through minority groups – scenarios in which oppressed groups seek to express aspects of their culture, promoting it for a public that might never have another opportunity to know it.

Is this the process by which people outside the production structure come to see themselves as authors within the concept we call authorship?

In Benjamin (2012), Juul (2019), Murray (2003) and others, we can find relationships between the concepts of authenticity and authorship. However, the term authorship has been frequently associated with the scope of narrative creation, which makes us look specifically in this section for an adequate definition of the role of the so-called video games of the oppressed as tools for sharing stories experienced or witnessed by people from different social markers, which is the main focus of this work.

Luz Aurora Pimentel (2016) talks about the idea that authorial narratives bring the situation in which the subject who mediates and the perspective that is narrated coincide. We are interested in this definition because, in this context, the narrator's point of view, their position, and worldview gain voice and become clear through the narrative that is told.

However, it is important to pay attention to the differentiation between the narrator and the author: while the narrator of the story can be the subject of the enunciation, this does not necessarily mean that the story told will be that of the author *themselves*. An autobiographical narrative will always be authorial, but an authorial narrative does not always need to be autobiographical. For Pimentel (ibidem), the character can be seen as a reflector of the reality that is represented in the work by the author.

Thus, we can think that authorship could be presented as a synonym for empowerment, given that, since 2006, theories have been formulated in that regard. This is the case of the text by the specialist professor in Victorian literature, George Landow, who, since the 1980s, has been dedicated to the exploration of the concept of hypertext, especially by his book *Hypertext 3.0* (2006), which would raise a question similar to the one we pose here: can hypertext empower somebody?

The interesting thing about turning to a text published fifteen years ago is that we realize that, even today, we ask very similar questions regarding video games as tools of empowerment. Putting this past in perspective is important for us to understand what has changed due to technology and identify social problems that took over a decade and a few chips to be solved.

We risk saying that both Landow (ibidem) and Aarseth – cited by Landow as a critic of his work with hypertext – are accurate in raising the Foucaultian idea that authorship would depend more on the social category than on the technology itself. This is because, whether in the case of hypertext, the internet, or video games, providing access and ease of use of creation and development tools is a priority, which precedes the authorial experience that Landow considers democratizing. In the aforementioned publication, which presented the debate between Frasca, Zimmerman and Ito (2004), the latter leaves a wake-up call that was related precisely to the need to popularize access to the tools for the development of video games that we now call independent. We saw that, currently, the scenario already presents many options for this call to be finally answered.

Following this flow, we see the emergence of video games as cultural products coming from authors belonging to the most diverse social markers. Because there is a need for a more complete definition, the term that the research uses for these works, whose development is carried out with the purpose of cultural expression, claiming the place of speech (Ribeiro, 2017) and resistance to oppression (Freire, 1997), from this moment on, it's *diverse video game*.

## Examples of diverse video games and decolonial practices in Brazil

In order to demonstrate what we mean by a diverse video game and to bring this discussion to Brazil – given our intention to describe our own practices and ways of working, structurally and culturally

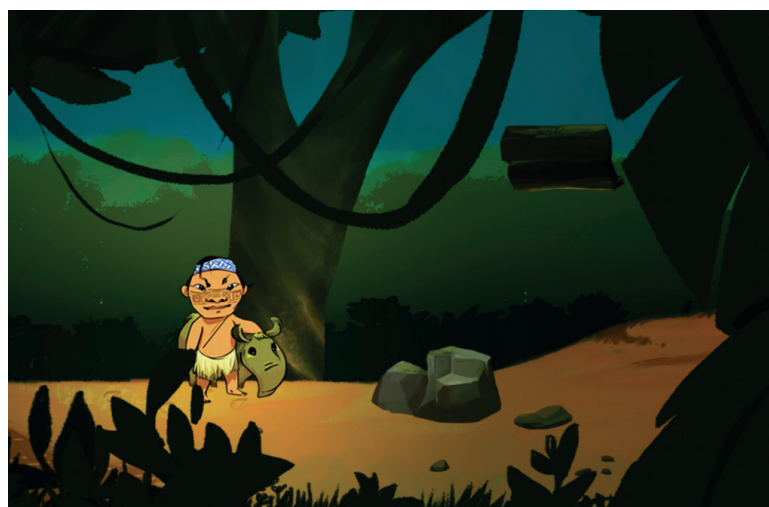


–, we have separated some examples that we know both by following the development process (albeit in the form of documentary files and openly published declarations) and by the enjoyment as players.

Throughout this work, we establish our theoretical bases mainly in *Epistemologias do Sul* [*Epistemologies of the South*], organized by Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Maria Paula Meneses (2010), according to the understanding of coloniality as seen in the text by Anibal Quijano (Idem) and other authors of the compendium, from which we take the definition of decolonial. In the definition adopted by Restrepo and Rojas (2010), under the influence of the thought of Walter Mignolo (author of *The dark side of western modernity: global futures, decolonial options*) in his work *Coloniality of power and decolonial thinking* (2007), we searched for the concept to discuss the manifestations that exist in the national territory. A decolonial option can be considered as one that aims to project a future that allows the confluence of multiple political projects that present themselves critically to Eurocentrism. To this end, projects must come from indigenous nations, Afro-descendant populations, mestizos, from South America, or from Latinos present in the United States. In addition to a diversity centered on monotypic Eurocentric thinking, the decolonial option refers to a response to the wounds imposed by the experiences of oppression lived by these populations in situations of marginalization, injustice, inferiority, abuse, and, ultimately, death.

As the first example, we describe for the decolonial production of a diverse video game, the work *Huni Kuin* (2017) presents the myths of the homonymous indigenous people by mixing a platform genre mechanic with the delivery of narrative excerpts (Screenshot 1). The project was conceived by Guilherme Meneses, an anthropologist with a Ph.D. in the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology at the Department of Anthropology at the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences, University of São Paulo - USP, in partnership with Isaka Huni Kuin, leader of the São Joaquim village/Centro de Memórias [Memory Center] and also one of the coordinators of *Ponto de Cultura* [Point of Culture]. The work – which had the participation of technical experts, researchers, and the community – brings at its core the presentation of some Huni Kuin myths in the form of a video game. Although we can find other Brazilian video games addressing the themes of indigenous mythology and culture, *Huni Kuin* stands out as a project that approaches the community to, alongside it, portray the view of indigenous people on their own reality. Instead of finding, under an external gaze, rich material to be explored in the video game media, the production process opens up to embrace the community it deals with, bringing it inside, in an effort that could be considered decolonial.

Screenshot 1 – Huni Kuin



Source: Huni Kuin (2017)

Another project we bring to illustrate what we call diverse video games is *Florescer* [Bloom] (Screenshot 2). Developed as a final paper for the Digital Games Course at Anhembi Morumbi University, *Florescer* (Pugcorn, 2019) tells the story of Bia, a transgender girl whose speech place is questioned in the simplest actions of her daily life, such as, for example, going to school. The title was developed in partnership with the *Centro de Acolhida Especial para Mulheres Transexuais Casa Florescer* [Casa Florescer – Special Welcoming Center for Transsexual Women], located in downtown São Paulo. The partnership had the participation of people welcomed by the house through reports, which help forming the narrative of the diverse video game. Although it only partially counted on the participation of women from *Casa Florescer*, it is a movement worth taking a closer look, as it started with the interest of students in a course that trains professionals to be absorbed by the industry. The attempt to approach communities is not something commonly found in the digital games industry, for the reasons mentioned above, such as, for example, the determining factor of mass production releases being focused on sales volume. Thus, focusing on the development of products, which are often detached from the process, the oral knowledge brought by such communities in this context of production is not valued either. In this aspect, *Florescer* shows a different trend towards a more welcoming look, both from students who graduate from universities and from communities that come to understand the potential of digital games in their sociological dimension (Botelho, 2001).

Screenshot 2 – Florescer

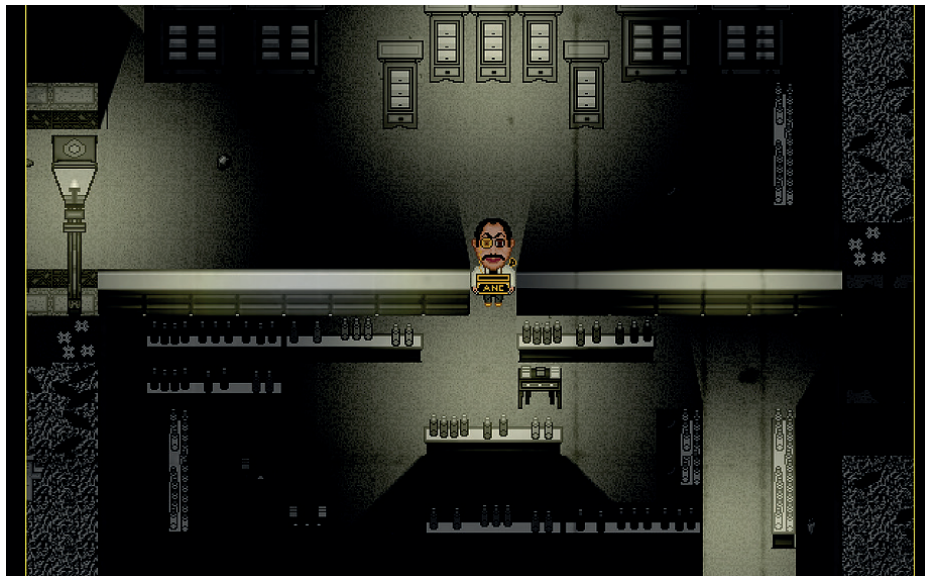


Source: Pugcorn (2018)

Present in the market, with a critical productive logic, the title *A Nova Califórnia* [New California] (2017), was developed in parallel with the socio-educational mediation work of the *NGO Jogos pela Educação* [Games for Education] and, later, through *Game e Arte* [Game and Art], carried out by Jaderson Souza and Tainá Felix, from 2013 to 2017. It is an adaptation of the homonymous short story from Brazilian literature by Lima Barreto (s.d.), written in 1910 and originally published in 1915. Lima Barreto was one of the first black writers, grandson of enslaved people and son of free parents (Oliveira, 2017), and who approached racism from his own experience. Over a hundred years after the publication of the original text, two black authors, Jaderson and Tainá, try to rescue and dialogue with the timeless work of this important Brazilian writer. From a development process based on research and technical construction, *A Nova Califórnia* (Screenshot 3) is considered a cultural work with a sociological dimension (Botelho, 2001). In other words, its idealization starts with the manifest intention of building certain meanings and reaching the public. It is not about replacing the original short story with the game, but about exploring the potential of video games in terms of their nature as an aesthetic experience.



Screenshot 3 – A Nova Califórnia



Source: Game e Arte (2021)

Performed at the Institute of Arts and Design of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, the *Cores Vivas* [Vivid Colors] (s.d.) project is a pioneer in research in Afro-centered video game design, which makes it an excellent example of sharing practices for the creation of diverse decolonial video games, albeit derivatives. Coordinated by researcher Eliane Bettocchi, the program is currently developing mods for Minecraft (2011), including textures based on Yoruba Mythology. In addition to textures, the group is currently working on the digital construction of *Quilombo dos Palmares*. It is a work built through academic research. Investigating African and Afrodiasporic references, the construction of digital textures reveals the systematic absence of Afro-centered content, in contrast to the vast content found in Minecraft communities.

Still, in the field of sharing practices, coordinated by *Mãe Beth de Oxum* [Mother Beth of Oxum], the platform *Contos de Ifá* [Tales of Ifá] (s.d.) brings several games scripted from Afro-Brazilian mythology. *Mãe Beth* develops video games in her *terreiro* [Umbanda yard], which is also the *Centro Cultural Coco de Umbigada* [Coco de Umbigada Cultural Center] (s.d.), a certified Culture Point in Olinda, Pernambuco. Strengthening traditions of African origin, the cultural center develops its activities through music and free technologies. Their video games are produced in partnership with people in the community. In citizenship innovation laboratories, activities related to black identity are promoted, strengthening the episteme, fighting racism and religious intolerance. The fundamental participation of *terreiro* references, as consultants, allows the expression of orality in the digital medium as preserved in African matrix houses.

It is worth noting that there are several titles and actions that we could mention as examples of various video games and efforts to decolonial practices in the field, produced by fellow Brazilian developers, of equal importance to those presented. We have selected for mention in this article those with which we are most familiar so that we can reflect on the proposed concept.

## Analyzing the Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics of diverse video games

The MDA framework, a methodology that analyzes the relationship between Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics existing in games, is born from the experience of designers – Robin Hunicke,

Marc LeBlanc, and Robert Zubek – who worked independently in the production of video games. The presentation of this methodology to the academic community took place through an article entitled *MDA: A Formal Approach to Game Design and Game Research* (2004), in order to formally describe the practice developed by the authors during game design and tuning workshops that took place in several editions of the Game Developers Conference (GDC) in San Jose, between 2001 and 2004. Taking into account the authors' repertoire, mainly for their practical experience in the process of developing independent games and later sharing practices with the community, we found sufficient adherence to use this work in the analysis of previously selected titles.

In order to present a formal approach to understanding games, the authors explain that the MDA framework tries to cover the gap that would exist between game design and development processes. The methodology would bring together criticism and technical research into games, with the intention of strengthening iterative development and research processes (Hunicke et al., 2004).

In the article, the authors explain that all that they call game artifacts, digital or not, are created based on some design methodology, which would serve to guide the process and ensure the quality of the work. In the case of independent development of diverse video games, we notice that methodological formalization sometimes appears more or less formal. In the case of the *Contos de Ifá* platform, for example, the concern with the presentation of not one methodology, but methodologies (plural), is clear, as stated on the *contosdeifa.com* website (s.d.): "Methodologies for creating games with students and teachers from public schools and cultural projects." In the development of the *Huni Kuin* video game, the Shared Production of Knowledge method was applied, which is quite present in indigenous communities and academically recorded through productions such as those of the researcher Sergio Bairon.

Bairon (s.d.) was responsible for the research Shared Production of Knowledge: Community and University, funded by FAPESP in 2021, which resulted in a graduate seminar and participation in activities developed by Cedipp (Center of Digital Communication and Shared Research) of the ECA-USP. Alongside Magna Vicini, the researcher also published, in the journal *Iluminuras* (2019), the article *Experiência estética, produção partilhada do conhecimento e pós-humanismo: a arte mural em terra Kaingang* [Aesthetic experience, shared production of knowledge and post-humanism: mural art on Kaingang land], among other productions that register the aforementioned method.

Regarding the video game development process, we can see interdisciplinarity as a characteristic capable of uniting people – professionals or not – with particular skills, striving to deliver a product that should provide an integrated experience. This convergence of efforts towards a common result is named by the authors as systematic coherence (Hunicke et al., 2021).

The gaming experience is a form of video game consumption that can occur in different ways: over an extended period, in an intermittent way or even non-linear. As it also involves diverse, artificial, and human intelligences, the consumption of video games can provide the emergence of unexpected – dynamic – behaviors. The MDA framework tries to formalize the design process designed for production aimed at this type of consumption by analyzing three components: rules, system, and fun, related to their counterparts, respectively Mechanics, Dynamics and Aesthetics.

To keep it short, we can say that, in the context of the MDA framework, Mechanics describes the components that structure the game (whether it is a video game or not). This would refer, then, to the basis of rules or the programming of the software that understands the game that will be put into action when executed.

Dynamics, in turn, refers to the functioning of Mechanics in real-time. When the video game software is executed or the game of a board game is started, for example, people who play the game start to have decision-making power, exercising actions in the context created. Such player actions and game system reactions are part of the composition of a Dynamic.

Finally, Aesthetics corresponds to the evocation of an emotional response in the person who plays

and the sensation of the game experience when in contact with the system. It refers directly to the factors that make a game fun.

The analysis of these components can occur in two ways, through the application of the MDA framework: on the one hand, there is the designer's perspective that will outline the mechanics that should provide a basis for the emergence of the desired dynamic behavior, resulting in an aesthetic experience; on the other hand, there is the person who plays, immersing in the game experience for its entertainment factor, interacting in the game environment based on an observable dynamic that will only be possible thanks to the behavior of the operational structure presented by the mechanics.

Now let's see how we can understand these components in the titles referred to in this work as examples of diverse games.

## Mechanics

In this article, we talk about practices, appropriating tools, and sharing the ways found by independent video game developers to turn their ideas into products that can be experienced. For this reason, it is reasonable that our perspective of analysis is that of the person performing the design. We think about the structure and focus on the process because, usually, this holds greater importance and meaning than the final result.

Taking the *Huni Kuin* video game as an example, we have a development guided by the Shared Knowledge Production method. Although the indigenous people belonging to the 32 villages close to the Jordão River have not directly operated the video game development tools or acted directly programming its code, it was based on the mediation of researcher Guilherme Meneses that their knowledge could be structured in a way that provides an aesthetic gaming experience.

The other games mentioned follow the same idea, focusing on the process – comparable to the artisan – of elaboration, sharing, and critical discussion among those involved. When not performed directly by the authors, they bring, in their production, the mediation of their knowledge in the proposition of functioning structures that would make up the possible experience, rather than the desired aesthetic experience.

## Dynamics

Still following the focus given to the elaboration process in the analysis of Mechanics, the various video games mentioned work directly with the emergence of discussions catalyzed by the experience of playing. Thus, Dynamics could be seen in two perspectives: one of which comprises the involvement of people who will not necessarily directly integrate the production process, even during the development stage; and the other through which the product is finished and starts to serve as the starting point for dynamics that escape the playing experience, such as discussion circles and critical workshops.

As expected, *Huni Kuin* encompasses both sections of Dynamics, as in addition to involving non-developer participants in mediated experimentation processes during iterative elaborations, the product of this elaboration is later used to enrich critical discussions in game events and community spaces.

Likewise, *Florescer* is a product that does not resolve itself, because its objective is not simply to provide a product for enjoyment. During its development, the project proved to be an important critical formative exercise for the students responsible for its creation, as well as an agent for valuing the people contemplated by the Casa Florescer entity. Although the action's product is a video game that can be enjoyed, dealing with a theme openly engaged with the issues of the LGBTQIA+ community, it is almost impossible for its play to pass innocuously to the emergence of reflections linked to the cause.

With a production process centered on the duo of developers Jaderson Souza and Taina Félix,

although *A Nova Califórnia* was not built through a planned action work with the community, it is a video game presented in cultural spaces dedicated to welcoming children and young people from outskirts of São Paulo, stimulating conversations that strengthen a black identity of game creators.

The *Cores Vivas* and *Contos de Ifá* projects elaborate on this strengthening insofar as they fight against prejudice with actions inside and outside the academic environment.

## Aesthetics

Why and how are diverse video games fun? The enchantment of the aesthetic experience found in the act of playing the titles selected in this work is more in accordance with recognition than with distancing from oneself, usually provided by the fantasy present in commercial titles. Whether bringing narratives closer to the reality of those who play, as in *Florescer*, or transposing a literary fiction about human greed, as in *A Nova Califórnia*, engagement in playing occurs through the recognition of something of oneself present in these (such as in others) independent games.

The quality of graphics, sound, gameplay, and replayability, the duration of the video game as a whole thing are all subject to the limitations of the resources used by the developers. That's why it is important to consider the engines or makers with which they were able to work, the narratives they were able to articulate, the time they had to learn to do by doing between the intervals of mandatory studies, work, sometimes family care and support.

Commercially, the aesthetic appeal of a Minecraft modification to recreate the Quilombo dos Palmares, as occurs in the work conducted by professor Eliane Bettocchi with *Cores Vivas*, could be considered something empty. However, for the community that produces and consumes such an experience, it is irreplaceable. The same can be said for the *Contos de Ifá* platform, led by Mãe Beth de Oxum, given that, at the time of this article's submission, none of the titles produced by the industry that the authors are aware of originated from black developers, in the terreiro's culture, with the concern of dealing with themes relevant to religions of African origins in a respectful and non-exploratory manner.

For the reasons described, more than sticking to issues of the structural composition of video games themselves, such as the constitution of their scoring systems, movement, determinations to win or lose, we turn our analysis to the importance of the aesthetic objective that involves all titles described here: taking people from minority groups out of invisibility, recognizing them as players and encouraging them to appropriate production tools that give them voice and authorship.

## Properties of diverse video games for a decolonial practice

Under the perspective of theories of memory, presented by Assman (2016), the digital game is placed as a plastic mass, always reformulated from different perspectives of the present. Thus, in the era of digital media, the examples mentioned above seek to reframe the cultural memory. The game *Huni Kuin* is used to teach, in the villages, the myths of the ancestry of the people. *Florescer* reached spaces that, initially, the group of developers would not have expected. *A Nova Califórnia*, which had its initial publication on *Steam* at the end of 2017, was downloaded by people in more than seventy countries. In addition to the digital publication, the work circulates thanks to the experiences mediated by its developers, in which the public has the opportunity to play, discuss and reframe it in the context of the communities where they live. *Cores Vivas* and *Contos de Ifá* allow the confrontation of the black epistemicide<sup>2</sup>, both in the instance of the representation of images and in the protagonism of black people in video game development. In an attempt to get out of the hegemonic thought, such proposals present

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<sup>2</sup> The term "epistemicide" was created by the Portuguese sociologist and specialist in the epistemologies of the Global South, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and serves to designate the process of erasing sociocultural contributions that are not consistent with the standard established by the Global North.



an emancipatory way out. Given the difficulties of the environment, both projects intend to make diversity guidelines visible, claiming, as in the words of Djamila Ribeiro (2017, p. 43) about the condition of black people, “the right to one’s own life.”

Photography 1 – Huni Kuin registration image



Source: Huni Kuin (2017)

When proposed by groups of discriminated minorities, whose agendas come from concerns regarding their own social markers, such projects enhance communication from the place of speech (ibidem). When we understand the importance of the proposition of these groups, the characterization of the game as a space for the production of knowledge becomes evident, allowing diverse minority populations to access and see themselves recognized in the digital environment. From the perspective of the ‘place of speech’ concept, it is a matter of existence. There is no single face representing the processes of domination. According to Santos (2017), there are multiple historical agents of oppression, some of which have been neglected by modern critical theory. Not only neglected by ignorance, but also by the very maintenance mechanisms that keep black bodies and other minority groups away from spaces, such as the video game production.

Even though, at first, the democratization of publishing engines and platforms has brought new possibilities to the universe of various video games, it does not necessarily mean that there was a democratization of knowledge production in the digital medium, opening to progressive ideas. On the contrary, according to Appadurai (2009), the world has generated forms of extreme violence, ethnic cleansing, and means of coercion of bodies. In this way, there is a confirmation of social anesthesia, processes of domination and erasure in favor of capital. This can even happen in design processes which, in an attempt to ensure accessibility for all – as proposed by the principles of Universal Design (s.d.), originally proposed by Ronald Mace –, end up, inadvertently, erasing cultural particularities, replacing them often by references from the global north.

In addition to systematic processes of erasure, cultural production from discriminated minorities faces the pressure of capitalism. Upon becoming a successful video game, marketing eventually identifies such movements as a trend (Kotler & Keller, 2013), leaning towards assimilating initiatives in favor of capital. In this situation, agendas in the public domain become private, serving corporate profit and

incorporating actions that do not always actually involve the community. It is about identity politics, a concept idealized by the far-right movement, which links actions related to the identity of discriminated minorities to the claim of more space in the market (Haider & Liberato, 2019). In order to think about the decolonial practice in diverse video games, we consider it essential to conduct a journey through the epistemologies of the global south. Although it is currently impossible not to coexist with the current capitalist paradigm, it is an attempt, within the present scenario, to build small utopias (Santos, 2017) that mainly aim for better conditions of participation of discriminated minorities in the universe of video games. In an attempt to create small cracks in this paradigm, the need for a real commitment to breaking through oppressive logics is understood (Davis, 2016).

In short, we could present the following as properties of different video games, implying a decolonial construction logic:

Table 1 – Properties of diverse video games for a decolonial practice

Properties	Explanation	Actors
Authorship	Seeing oneself as an author, sharing one's worldview within the respective place of speech, breaks up the mass industry paradigm that the stories of oppressed minorities do not matter unless told for exploitation by an outside agent.	Frasca (2001), Pimentel (2016), Ribeiro (2017).
Democratization of Tools	More than the increase of free and easy-to-use tools for creating video games, it is necessary to provide a gateway to those who are not familiar with the development process.	Ito, Zimmerman and Frasca (2004), Landow (2006).
Global South Epistemologies	To look at the reality of the global south, questioning the formative and productive processes that take place under the influence of both the global north and Eurocentrism.	Mignolo (2007), Restrepo and Rojas (2010), Santos (2017).
Broader Minority Empowerment Projects	Thinking about the decolonial practice in diverse video games as part of a broader political project, which depends on articulations between institutions, society, and public authorities to generate effective changes.	Boal (1975), Freire (1997), Landow (2006).

Source: Elaborated by the authors

## Thinking about the principles of a possible decolonial methodology for the production of diverse video games

In order to identify aspects in common and dialogue with the idea of a decolonial practice particular to diverse video games, we present a comparative table with some of the organizational aspects observed in the aforementioned works.

We do not want to ignore the entire referential coming from colonialist origins, as there is no



way to escape the fact that we are the result of colonization. However, we claim that, by recognizing that we are products of a violent conditioning process, we organize ourselves to better understand our functioning, looking more affectionately at our particular actions, which are different from the Eurocentric standards, but not incorrect. It is with this perspective that we believe it is possible to start defining a practice that can be organized and shared in the future as an accessible, democratic methodology and the result of a critical process of decolonization in video game production.

Table 2 – Comparative table of decolonial practices in video games

Project	Who was the protagonist of the action?	Used accessible tools in order to democratize their use?	Is it related to epistemologies of the South?	Is it part of a larger project to strengthen minorities?
Huni Kuin	The Huni Kuin community, mediated by the researcher Guilherme Meneses, using the shared production method with 32 villages in Brazil, close to the River Jordão.	The development using the Unity free version engine had programmers taking care of the technical part, while the community was dedicated to transmitting the contents that would be worked on.	Yes, because it resumes important stories to the Huni Kuin people.	Yes, because the final product presents itself as a catalyst for discussions in different events, both in the field of games and in community spaces.
Florescer	Trans women welcomed by the entity together with undergraduate students in Digital Games.	The programming in Unity was left to the students' discretion, while the women from the Florescer Welcoming Center collaborated with testimonies.	Yes, because it records reports of people who suffer systemic oppression solely because of their social markers.	Yes, because the product does not resolve itself. In addition to being a critical training exercise, the project was part of an action aligned with an entity.
A Nova Califórnia	(blind evaluation) and Tainá Felix, self-identified black cultural developers, and producers.	Yes, the tool used was RPG Maker which, although it fits as a proprietary engine, is a gateway to new developers for being intuitive.	Yes, the adaptation of the homonymous tale by Lima Barreto is made by people who are self-identified as black people.	Yes, because the video game is used in projects with communities, especially on the outskirts of São Paulo, with support from community spaces and/or accompanied by creation workshops.

Cores Vivas	The project is an initiative of Eliane Bettocchi, a researcher self-identified as a black woman, and participant in a terreiro community.	It works with the texturing of avatars for Minecraft – a video game that is already part of the participants’ repertoire – and the construction of Quilombo dos Palmares through game modifications.	Yes, as it tries to transpose Afrodiasporic themes to the video game environment.	Yes, as it is part of an academic research project that forms a bridge to critical discussion with the contemplated community. Producing the modifications is just part of the whole process.
Contos de Ifá	The initiative is conducted by Mãe Beth de Oxum, lalorixá, self-identified as a black person, responsible for the Ponto de Cultura Coco de Umbigada.	The development of video games is done in HTML5, and the methodologies for building are shared with students and teachers from public schools and cultural spaces in Olinda/PE.	Yes, because it directs the efforts to create educational games that value stories from African origins.	Yes. It is in line with the radio programs of the terreiro communities in Brazil, and with the political commitment to fight prejudice, racism, and intolerance to religions of African origins.

Source: Elaborated by the authors

Based on the properties previously highlighted and on the presentation of this comparative table, we bring a greater detail that allows us to observe the projects in depth, with the objective of formulating some interesting principles for the identification of decolonial aspects for the creation of diverse video games. We can start with the impossibility of dissociating the construction of the work from its developer. While epistemicide acts directly on the existence of bodies, it is of fundamental importance that the protagonism of the initiative rests with the communities. Although it is understood that the mediation process can be a shortcut for the production of titles with diverse themes, this resource should not be used as the only existing alternative for creation. The content of the works reveals guidelines related to the collectivity and must, therefore, allow the people represented to access it, but also modify it and participate in its creation right from the beginning. It is important that bodies excluded from mass industry can take advantage of such protagonism.

The contextualization of the project and understanding of the community in which the creative process is born are important aspects that are referenced in the ideals expressed by the authors mentioned above: it is seen in Freire, Boal, Santos, Davis, Frasca, and many others. Highlighting the production from its place of origin, searching for a universalized and innocuous method of development is, as we have seen, quite problematic, as this practice incurs in the erasure of points outside the curve, of the culture of diversity and, as seen in the reflection on the paradigm that is established under the idea of success, almost always implies the repetition of methods and patterns of creation that emerged in the global north.

Despite that, on the scale of production observed in the projects mentioned, the creation processes have taken place in a similar way to the artisanal (Sennett, 2009). The production pace sets

itself apart from the one of the industry, following the flow of the process as the most important part of the creative experience, as if each step of the journey (and those that accompany it) were more important than the final goal to be reached. In this method of production, the works reveal the imminent dialogue with the communities. In different ways, each group tries to include and communicate with the external development environment, demonstrating that the agendas presented are in the public domain.

In the case of video game development, knowledge construction processes lead to technical productions. *Huni Kuin* and *Florescer* use the *Unity* engine. *Contos de Ifá* is developed in HTML5. *Cores Vivas* makes modifications to the *Minecraft* game, while *A Nova Califórnia* works with the *RPG Maker* software. Developed by specialized professionals, sometimes involving partner communities, the domain of technical procedures proves to be important in claiming the prominence of productions. Lélia Gonzalez (1984) points out that social privilege is associated with epistemic privilege. In this way, the questioning about the valid, exclusive and dominant knowledge production model – in this case, the white and Eurocentric model – involves the appropriation of tools that allow more people to tell their own stories.

The comparative framework brings out a common point – more or less formalized – among all the projects: the development of research related to production processes. In the article, which presents three perspectives on the processes of creation in the media, Lúcia Leão and Cecília Salles (2011) point to the adoption of a critical and reflective behavior that leads to practical experiments and conceptual inquiries. In this way, the artist-researcher is not only performing tasks but also questioning them. The approach that encompasses the creation and research processes requires a transdisciplinary attitude. While engaged in the production of narratives dealing with concerns related to their own conditions of existence, the discriminated minorities that play a leading role in the construction of digital games linked to research make discoveries through their own processes. At this point, what is instigated is not the work itself, but the construction processes.

Finally, synthesizing principles we consider fundamental in the decolonial production of several video games, we would have:

1. The creation of a diverse video game must be performed by oppressed populations;
2. Allies can be part of the mediation and facilitation process, but authorship must be centered on oppressed populations;
3. The choice of work tools should privilege ease of access and viability of use by oppressed populations;
4. The focus of the action must be on the process and not on the final result, given that the availability of diverse video games escapes the logic of market competition;
5. The action must be part of a broad policy to strengthen oppressed populations, in a joint effort between researchers, producers, and the community.i

## Final remarks and future developments

Aware of the complexity of the scope for creating a decolonial methodology for the production of diverse video games, in this article we discussed aspects that we consider essential to paving this path, presenting it to those interested in taking it.

In a very brief way, we brought some of the actions conducted by groups that lead the development of video games which, based on the presented premises, we consider to be decolonial.

We limited ourselves to the national scope of this brief study, understanding that a more comprehensive survey and in-depth monitoring of such processes can culminate in the identification of more aspects that can be considered decolonial and interesting for the development of what we are calling here as diverse video games.

Such detail in the analysis of decolonial practices may also be accompanied by a more specific approach to each of the agendas. When we saw the need to go deeper into themes, under penalty of falling into generalizations or the unrestrained use of the term diversity, we understood how important a study focused on themes such as gender, race, class, etc. is, both in community action and in bibliographic research.

For a possible continuity of research in the scope of video game creation processes and consolidation of a de facto methodology, it is possible to observe, in the condition of artist-researcher, a potential catalyst in the processes of formation of their creators' own identities. In this process, the study of thematic guidelines such as gender, race, class, etc. – which is aligned with the technical development of independent video games and also decolonial narratives –, would benefit from the formation of a conscience that could influence the transformation of oneself. As highlighted by Leão and Salles (2011), thinking requires an attitude that does not separate theory and praxis, with multiplicity as a vector in the knowledge construction process.

Aligning the process of formal study in video games with the usual path taken by these groups, one of the intentions with the research of decolonial practices in video games is the return to the community. The strengthening of discriminated minorities in the recognition of their authorship potential and in the access to resources for the construction of video games aimed at the production of culture in a sociological dimension is a means of expression and sharing experiences that are very important in contemporary society.

The challenges are multiple. If, on the one hand, there is a need to question the very position of the university, whose traditional method insists on excluding aesthetic experience and oral knowledge from academic knowledge, on the other hand, confronting the mass cultural industry requires the construction of decolonial methods that pursue the invention of small utopias (Santos, 2017), accompanied by the confrontation of epistemicide and necropolitics, claiming the possibility of existing.

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**Julia Stateri** has a Ph.D. in Visual Arts (UNICAMP). In this article, she contributed to the conception of the research design; development of theoretical discussion; interpretation of data; support in proofreading and writing the manuscript.



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**Jaderson Souza** is a Ph.D. candidate in Humanities, Rights and Other Legitimacies at Diversitas – FFLCH – USP. In this article, he contributed to the conception of the research design; development of theoretical discussion; interpretation of data; support in proofreading and writing the manuscript.