Towards a Southern Epistemology in Game Studies: Gaming Practices, Ideological Struggle, and Common Sense in Latin America

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

To analyze how video game culture is shaped and engages with questions of power, Shaw (2010) advocates for the theoretical foundation of cultural studies. This tradition, with its extensive critical examination of cultural products and practices and their connection to the social and political order, has provided critical approaches within Game Studies a key framework for examining how video games, players, and gaming practices participate in strategies of domination and resistance, ideological conflicts, and processes of identification and subjectification. This work adopts Shaw's premise as a central point of departure and expands it through an epistemology situated in the Global South.

Drawing from foundational Latin American cultural studies theorists such as Paulo Freire (2015 [1968]), Jesús Martín-Barbero (2010 [1987]; 2002; 2004), Néstor García Canclini (2000 [1990]) and Beatriz Sarlo (2019 [1994]; 1997), this research proposes an analytical framework that updates their concepts and links them to Game Studies. This framework aims to understand gaming practices within ideological struggles and the construction of common sense. Martín-Barbero's work (2010) is particularly significant, as it shifts the focus on power from media as ideological apparatuses to processes of consumption and everyday appropriation. Here, subjects, mediated by Latin American popular culture, actively reinterpret and resignify cultural products.

The need for such an approach is grounded, as Penix-Tadsen (2019; 2016) points out, in the historical, geopolitical, and sociocultural trajectories of Latin America and the Global South, which differ significantly from those of the Global North, traditionally positioned as the productive and theoretical center. This asymmetry has led to a tendency to rely on external references to explain ourselves, which often obscures the particularities and complexities of our own realities. From a Latin American decolonial perspective, authors like Aníbal Quijano (1992) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009) critique this epistemic dependence in knowledge production and advocate for the development of Southern epistemologies that recognize peripheral specificities and provide more appropriate explanations for these realities. In this sense, this work underscores the importance of developing an epistemology rooted

in the Global South to analyze video game consumption practices through its own theoretical and cultural frameworks.

Central to this argument is the recognition of cultural hybridity and Latin American late modernity as historical processes that articulate local temporalities, imaginaries, and symbols with global technologies and narratives through everyday cultural consumption practices. In the case of video games, this means that products designed for Global North markets do not produce straightforward processes of cultural alienation; rather, they trigger creative uses and appropriations that resignify their discourses.

From this perspective, this research also aligns with Regional Game Studies, a subfield that aims to decentralize Game Studies by integrating theoretical and empirical contributions from non-hegemonic contexts (Liboriussen and Martin 2016; Švelch 2018). Incorporating a Southern epistemology not only provides a more nuanced understanding of gaming practices in Latin America but also challenges dominant theoretical frameworks in Game Studies. This contributes to a process of knowledge decolonization while broadening the field's scope of debate.

This theoretical approach is enriched by ethnographic research conducted within gaming communities in Chile, which serves as an illustration of the proposed epistemology. Within these communities, players actively negotiate global discourses by incorporating elements of their historical memory and local traditions. These practices demonstrate that video games are not neutral; rather, they participate in ideological battles and become spaces for cultural resistance and creativity. As such, cultural hybridity in video games reflects the tensions and contradictions of Latin American modernity while highlighting the capacity of popular cultures to reconfigure common sense.

In conclusion, this work proposes a critical epistemology rooted in the Global South and grounded in Latin American cultural studies for analyzing gaming practices and their ideological implications. By placing everyday mediations and appropriations at the center of the analysis, it reaffirms the contributions of theorists such as Jesús Martín-Barbero to the field of Game Studies. This approach opens pathways to diversify theoretical references and advance a deeper understanding of the cultural and political complexities of video games in non-hegemonic contexts.

Keywords

Cultural studies, Latin America, gaming practices, southern epistemology, ideological struggle, common sense.

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