SOCIOMATERIAL CONDITIONS, INTERNATIONALISED PRECARITY, AND LOCALISED MEMORIES OF PLAY: INTERROGATING INNOVATION AND AFFECTIVE ECONOMIES THROUGH *STREET FIGHTER DE RODOVIÁRIA*

CONDIÇÕES SOCIOMATERIAIS, PRECARIEDADE INTERNACIONALIZADA E MEMÓRIAS SITUADAS DE JOGAR: QUESTIONANDO INOVAÇÃO E ECONOMIA AFETIVA ATRAVÉS DE *STREET FIGHTER DE RODOVIÁRIA*

Bruno de Paula
Doutor em Cultura, Comunicação e Mídias pela University College London (Londres/Reino Unido).
Professor na University College London (Londres/Reino Unido).
E-mail: bruno.depaula@ucl.ac.uk

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ABSTRACT

As deeply affective objects, the history of games is often intertwined with the life histories of players. Yet, in the popular imaginary, we often face the rhetoric that places games primarily as a key sector within creative industries, often flattening localised experiences of players in favour of universalising views towards gaming. To address tensions between global and local, and between broader sociomaterial conditions and localised affective memories, I propose, based on previous scholarship on public heritage and individualised and collective memories, an approach to balance these macro and micro aspects that shape our engagement with videogames. Relying on a particular historical case, 'Street Fighter de Rodoviária', the popular name attributed to 'Street Fighter II: Rainbow Edition' in 1990s Brazil, I combine the broader conditions that configured the production and distribution of the Street Fighter II franchise until different (official and illicit) versions reached the hinterlands of São Paulo state, where I grew up, in the 1990s, combining these conditions with my memories of play. As (unofficial) part of a worldwide successful franchise, 'Street Fighter de Rodoviária' allows us to examine the broader conditions for official game development, the tensions between official distribution, piracy, discourses around innovation and creativity, and how such elements shape, but do not determine, the affective memories produced in the personal, localised encounters with cultural products. These processes highlight how games are a significant part of the affective economy, and provide a more nuanced and less homogenising way of examining gaming as a global cultural practice.

Keywords: Street Fighter II. Piracy. Transnational Networks. Memory. Innovation.

RESUMO

Como objetos profundamente afetivos, a história dos jogos é, em muitos casos, entremeada com as histórias de vida de jogadores. No entanto, no imaginário popular, comumente vemos o uso de uma retórica que posiciona os jogos primordialmente como um setor crucial para as indústrias criativas, muitas vezes favorecendo visões universalistas sobre o jogar em detrimento de experiências situadas. Para lidar com essas tensões entre global e local, entre condições sociomateriais mais amplas e memórias afetivas situadas, nesse trabalho, baseado na literatura sobre memórias individuais, coletivas, e patrimônio público, proponho um modelo para examinar concomitantemente macro e micro aspectos que moldam nosso engajamento com videogames. Através de um caso histórico, 'Street Fighter de Rodoviária', nome popular para 'Street Fighter II: Rainbow Edition' no Brasil, examino as condições que configuraram a produção e distribuição da franquia Street Fighter II até que diferentes versões (oficiais e ilícitas) chegassem ao interior de São Paulo, onde cresci, nos anos 90, combinando essas condições às minhas memórias de jogo. Como parte (não-oficial) de um sucesso global, 'Street Fighter de Rodoviária' permite reflexões acerca das condições para desenvolvimento e distribuição de jogos à época, tensões entre legalidade e pirataria, discursos sobre inovação e criatividade e como diferentes elementos ajudam a moldar, mas não definem, as memórias afetivas produzidas em diferentes encontros com produtos culturais. Essa análise permite elaborar como jogos são parte importante da economia afetiva, assim como favorece uma visão mais ampla e menos homogênea de como o jogar é uma prática cultural global.

Palavras-chave: Street Fighter II. Pirataria. Redes Transnacionais. Memória. Inovação.

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1 INTRODUCTION – VIDEOGAMES BEYOND AN UNIVERSALIST VIEW

Videogames are, undeniably, an important part of contemporary popular culture (Muriel; Crawford, 2018). This position is often justified by certain rhetorical elements, such as the number of active players worldwide, or the amount of money moved by the videogame industry (Yodovich et al., 2025). While the economic argument is often employed to justify games' relevance in contemporaneity, for example, in the way videogames are often singled out as a pivotal sector for the rise and maturing of creative industries as economic pillars for developed and developing contemporary societies (Cunningham; Swift, 2019; Flew, 2019; Keogh, 2023; Keogh; Hardwick, 2024), this argumentative path can lead towards the obfuscation that videogames cultural relevance is also well-rooted in the affective relationships we establish while engaging with games (Anable, 2018). These affective relationships between players and games can be found, for example, in research that examine the links between videogames, nostalgia and memory (Lima; Varga, 2023; Makai, 2018; Navarro-Remesal, 2017), including research that specifically focus on the economic/market aspects related to this topic (Fleury, 2025). Therefore, from the beginning of the production chain to final users' fruition, videogames exemplify what Lehmann, Roth and Schankweiler (2019, p. 143) define as one of the strands of affective economy, one 'concerned with the role that emotions and affects play in contemporary neoliberal forms of working and living'.

Understanding videogames as part of affective economy is important since, besides the relevant discussions on the operationalisation of passion as part of the professional identity of gamesworkers (Chia, 2019; Keogh, 2023; Ruffino; Woodcock, 2021), it evidences how, in contemporary cultures, videogames operate at different scales. In other words, engaging with and understanding a videogame can be contingent both on *macro* elements, such as the sociomaterial[1] conditions that shape how games are made and circulate around the world, how they are encountered by different users, and *micro* elements, such as the personal connections and affective elements that call our attention to a particular artefact. This might sound like an obvious reflection, but it is not always evident in the public discourses about gaming.

My argument, therefore, is that an analysis that considers these different scales in which games operate culturally can foster more nuanced and complete reflections about the cultural impact of our object of study. To make evident this potential, in this paper I focus on the specific localised history

[1] Here, I employ the term sociomaterial in the same way as the tradition of critical theory (e.g. Ferguson, 2018), acknowledging how such conditions are contingent both on social and material elements, and how these two categories are mutable and influence each other (Dale, 2005).

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of the game series *Street Fighter II,* with special attention to a particular game, namely *Street Fighter II: Rainbow Edition* (Leone, 2023), a bootleg version of *Street Fighter II:Champion Edition* made in Taiwan, that in Brazil received different popular names such as *Street Fighter de Rodoviária* (Moreira, 2014). In this paper, I intertwine both macro (e.g., broader socioeconomic context for game production and circulation, including piracy, and the global networks that allowed these games, made in East Asia, to reach the hinterlands of São Paulo state, Brazil) and micro (e.g., affective aspects related to my own encounters with *Street Fighter II,* including *Street Fighter de Rodoviária)* elements related to the history of *Street Fighter II,* foregrounding the relationships between sociomaterial conditions for media production and circulation, creative industries, innovation, affective economies and memories.

My work, therefore, is aligned to the growing scholarship, from the Global South and beyond (Apperley, 2010; Ferreira, 2020; Macedo; Kurtz, 2021; Messias; Amaral; Oliveira, 2019; Penix-Tadsen, 2024; Perani; Swalwell, 2022; Pérez-Latorre; Navarro-Remesal, 2022; Rizvi; Mukherjee, 2023; Schleiner, 2020; Silva, 2025; Švelch, 2021; Swalwell, 2021a; Wong, 2024), that focuses on the relationships between sociomaterial conditions, locality and videogames. These studies challenge the simplistic narratives often found in the field of history of games. According to Nicoll (2019), these simplistic narratives tend to treat this history as a single thread of linear progress, led by mainstream actors based in central spaces such as Japan or the USA. Such view ends up reifying a traditional trope that sees innovation flows as unidirectional, stemming from central spaces in the Global North towards the Global South[2] (Gómez-Cruz et al., 2023) while ignoring Global South-specific ways of knowing or innovating (Cruz, 2021).

Often confined to the (problematic[3]) label of "local Game Studies", in challenging these simplistic narratives, this growing scholarship aims at resignifying peripheric spaces, not just as "lesser" counterparts to mainstream spaces, but as places where innovation and knowledges[4] are produced (Nicoll, 2019; Penix-Tadsen, 2024), not just in local isolation, or necessarily in association with central spaces. In that sense, this growing scholarship offers alternative epistemic models beyond those centred in mainstream

[2] Acknowledging here that the Global South, as a term, encompasses many different "Souths", but is still as an important concept to highlight the common conditions found in particular parts of the world (Pereira da Silva, 2024). Rizvi and Mukherjee (2023), for example, discuss that "flattening" of Southern experiences specifically in relation to videogames.

[3] Problematic because this label is often used to confine research that looks at non-mainstream spaces from an angle that foregrounds the relevance of locality. In that sense, it creates a false dichotomy between a "local/regional" version of games versus a hypothetical "global/universal" approach to videogames, when all approaches to games have a particular locality/standpoint. A similar argument, in the context of intersectional game research and the "siloing" of such work, is put forward by Ganzon (2022).

[4] Knowledges, in the plural, is used here following the decolonial idea that there are multiple systems of knowledge.

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spaces (see, for example, Banfi, 2024)[5] which, by omitting their locality and specificity, end up being presented as universalist models. Such universalism can "flatten" and/or erase different forms of game production and player experiences across the world (Pepe, 2025).

Through this paper, therefore, I contribute to the development of more specific and less universalist models for comprehending videogames as a truly global phenomenon, placed between transnational connections and local specificities (Swalwell, 2021b). A question remains, though: what exactly led me to choose *Street Fighter de Rodoviária* as my object of study?

Street Fighter de Rodoviária, even if not canonical, is part of the lineage of *Street Fighter II*, itself a set of games/franchise that was a worldwide success (Lemon; Rietveld, 2020; Skolnik; Conway, 2019). However, what I argue here is that, as an artefact, *Street Fighter de Rodoviária* lends itself for raising questions pertaining to (illicit) development, creativity, piracy and innovation stemming from a non-central space, and how this history is often intertwined with "official" development. More importantly, looking at this particular phenomenon from a localised perspective allows us to add nuance to this "worldwide success" narrative, recruiting both macro elements, such as the transnational flows of videogames from East Asia to the Southern Cone via Paraguay (Pinheiro-Machado, 2009), and micro elements, such as affective connections with particular artefacts from particular subjective positions. In the next section, therefore, I focus on the methods adopted in this study, and then moving onto the analysis.

2 MACRO AND MICRO: METHODS TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING VIDEOGAMES THROUGH AFFECTIVE ECONOMY

Reflecting on such a complex network of relationships that go from the broader sociomaterial conditions that allow the production and, later, distribution of a particular game to the affective relationships that emerge from playing and/or discussing a game is by no means an easy task. To examine this phenomenon, I recruit the work carried out by Fioravanti and Moncusí-Ferré (2023) in the context of public memory scholarship, specifically in relation to how memory and heritage are shaped in particular places. Like with lived spaces, the history of games is often intertwined with the life histories of users (Makai, 2018), and heavily contingent on sociomaterial conditions (Dale, 2005).

[5] While the work cited here is indeed a relevant proposal to organise a discussion around the history of games, the issue, in my view, is in how this kind of work end up often backgrounding its locality and specificity (i.e., the USA). Banfi foregrounds its inspiration in US-based History of TV, for example, but does not acknowledge that his model for History of Games is highly US-centric and, therefore, might have limited value elsewhere. For example, the "crash" of the Atari that is an organising principle in Banfi coincides with a period of high productivity in other places such as the UK (Gazzard, 2016) or Spain (Fernandez-Vara, 2022).

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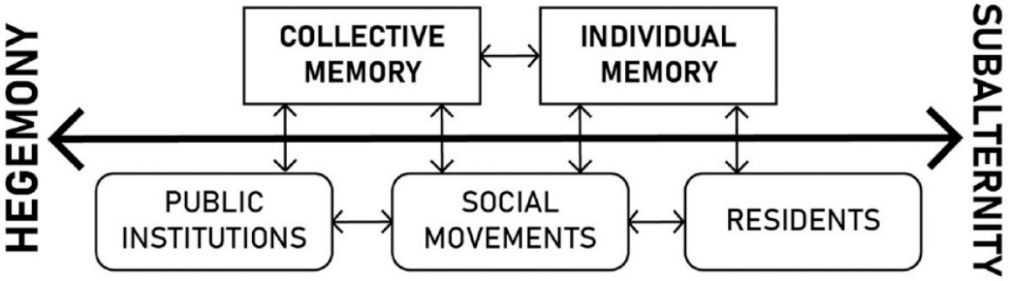
In order to acknowledge these entanglements between space, sociomaterial aspects and memories, Fioravanti and Moncusí-Ferré (2023) argue that memories are produced and reified by different actors (e.g., public institutions, organised groups, and individuals), and the ways such memories are produced and discussed can be seen as distributed as across an axis that goes from hegemonic (i.e., closer to 'official' discourses from public institutions) to subaltern (i.e., closer to the individualised discourses of dwellers, in the context of their theory, or, in this context, of players/users). Such dynamics might give rise to collective and individual memories, which are sometimes entangled and can mutually influence each other, with collective memories closer to hegemonic elements, and individualised to subaltern ones, as summarised in the following diagram (Fioravanti; Moncusí-Ferré, 2023):

Figure 1 – Model for understanding situated cultural memory



Source: Fioravanti; Moncusí-Ferré (2023)

In this paper, I adapt Fioravanti and Moncusí-Ferré's model to look specifically at how macro (e.g., sociomaterial conditions for production and circulation of media products) and micro (e.g., affects and individual memories) elements interact, giving a greater insight into the nuances of how media artefacts can be understood through the lenses of affective economies. The goal here is, following other in the field (Ahmed, 2004; Fontefrancesco, 2023; Lehmann; Roth; Schankweiler, 2019), to map out how affects are mobilised and mediated by media artefacts in a social context. Lehman, Roth and Schankweiler (2019, p. 148), for example, remind us how the affective intensities in discrete encounters between media artefacts and beholder open up specific spaces of experiences that are historically and culturally situated, and in these encounters, 'generic form[s] […] shape (but does not fix) the translation of affective intensities into subjective feelings'.

In order to exemplify those processes at a micro-scale, I employ here a small reflexive exercise, inspired by Mitgustch's method of playography (2013), recalling my individual memories and affects in relation to my early encounters with *Street Fighter II* (and *Street Fighter de Rodoviária*) in 1990s Brazil. This becomes, then, an *auto*playography, adopting the reflexive stance found in autoethnographies (Adams; Ellis; Jones, 2017; Webber; Wilde, 2025), focusing simultaneously on text and (broader social) context.

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Using my own experiences, I argue, is important not because they can necessarily provide generalisable insights into the ways videogames are/were consumed in a particular place (Global South/Latin America/Brazil/São Paulo state) and time (1990s), but precisely because they exemplify the links between encounters with media, individual memories, and affects.

These individualised memories, however, are only part of the whole phenomenon: as argued by Lehmann and colleagues (2019), (affective) media encounters are always historically and culturally situated. In other words, the contexts which create the conditions for the media encounters we live through cannot be ignored, since they not only set the contingent elements for such encounters, but they also help shape the ways in which affects circulate, helping us understand affective processes as two-way – affecting and being affected by media encounters – as well as how such affects move from individual to public/collective sphere. In order to examine the context, I rely on archival material – e.g., interviews conceded to other authors – as well as research that covers the historical context of the socioeconomic aspects related to the transnational networks of goods pertaining to *Street Fighter II* (and, more broadly, videogames) in 1990s South America.

My object of study here is the *Street Fighter II* set of games, including unofficial and official versions. While *Street Fighter II* was a worldwide success (Lemon; Rietveld, 2020; Leone, 2023), a situated view on the dynamics across different actors in the production, distribution and consumption dimensions can unveil specific elements which might be specifically localised, challenging, therefore, a supposed universality in global successes.

In the following sections of this paper, therefore, I apply this model, relying on macro and micro elements towards a more nuanced and less universalist view of gaming as a global cultural form. I begin this process by offering a brief overview of *Street Fighter II*, to then present a brief overview of the state of (official and unofficial) videogame circulation in Brazil at the time, contextualising the scenario in which my own encounters with *Street Fighter II* happened, and then bringing my own experiences to the foreground. I then move onto the different versions existing at the time, how they were received and ended up prompting an official response by Capcom, in a movement that complicates the simplistic narratives about unidirectional innovation flows (Gómez-Cruz et al., 2023).

3 CONTEXTUALISING STREET FIGHTER II

It would not be an exaggeration to claim that there are, in the history of videogames, few games as influential as *Street Fighter II*. With the first version, *The World Warrior*, released in 1991 (Leone, 2023),

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it is often recognised as a seminal text in one-on-one fighting games[6] as a genre (Surman, 2007). This position as, arguably, the 'first modern fighting game' (Poole, 2000, apud Surman, 2007, p. 209) is often associated with *Street Fighter II* due to its gameplay innovations, namely, the well-balanced use of different regular attacks, blocks, special moves, and the (involuntary) introduction of 'combos[7]' (Surman, 2007), which would become a staple feature in fighting games.

The number of playable characters, initially 8 in *The World Warrior* (De Oliveira Matumoto, 2022), with distinctive assets (e.g., scenarios, sound design), fighting styles, special moves, and endings, while most games still relied on simple asset swap to increase the number of playable characters (Lemon; Rietveld, 2020) created new gameplay dynamics for the genre. For example, the player-vs-player experience became well integrated with the player-vs-machine experience. A player-vs-machine battle could be interrupted at any time by a second human player pressing start (and, if in an arcade, inserting a token), and the winner could continue playing against the machine afterwards (Lemon; Rietveld, 2020).

Such features (the balance in gameplay, the striking audiovisual forms of each character, and the favouring of the versus gameplay experiences rather than the co-op ones found in other common arcade games at the time) paved the way for *Street Fighter II* to become a global success while also playing a role in shaping the competitive gaming landscape (Leone, 2023; Skolnik; Conway, 2019), a role that it still occupies in the present.

This success emboldened Capcom to continue developing the game, releasing other versions that introduced other features, such as the ability to choose the 4 bosses and of mirrored fights (two players with the same character) in *Champion Edition*, for example. A summary of the different official versions of *Street Fighter II* for arcade can be found in Table 1 below.

[6] Surman (2007) classifies *Street Fighter II* as a 'beat-em-up'., I argue, based on my Brazilian gaming tradition, that there is a difference between one-on-one fighting games, such as *Street Fighter II* or *Mortal Kombat*, and what popularly is known as '(side-scrolling) beat-em-up', games in which the player(s) fight a myriad of enemies traversing different levels, such as *Streets of Rage* or *Final Fight* (Cook, 2023). This is another example on how the history of games is always contextual.

[7] In his interviews with Capcom developers, Leone (2023) details how combos were a side-effect of different timings between reading controller inputs and animations, which made possible "linking" different attacks. Shinichi Ueyama (lead developer for *Street Fighter II*), claims 'it was a mistake. […] But it was interesting, so we left it in.' (Leone, 2023, p. 60–61)

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Table 1 – Official versions of Street Fighter II produced by Capcom

Release Date (Arcade)	Title	Main Changes vs Previous Version
March 1991	Street Fighter II: World Warrior	Base version
March 1992	Street Fighter II: Champion Edition	Addition of the 4 bosses as playable characters. Mirrored fights. Rebalancing of characters strength/speed.
December 1992	Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting	Increased play speed. Rebalancing of characters strength/speed.
September 1993	Super Street Fighter II	Addition of 4 new fighters. Rebalancing of characters strength/speed New graphic pack and audio assets. New scoring system (e.g., tracking combos). Play speed returned to SFII: CE
February 1994	Super Street Fighter II Turbo	Play speed increased to match SFII: HF. Rebalancing of characters strength/speed.

Source: Leone (2023)

Even if we can praise all these design traits, a question remains: how popular was it?

Street Fighter II arcade machines were so popular that it is often credited as a game that gave the arcade/coin-op business model a respite in the early 1990s, when the trend was indicating a move towards home consoles (Lemon; Rietveld, 2020; Skolnik; Conway, 2019). Different actors involved in the operation diverge in the amount of arcade sales for *Street Fighter II*, ranging from 20,000 to 25,000 (Leone, 2023, p. 77), to 50,000 to 55,000 (Leone, 2023, p. 115), impressive numbers for arcade cabinets.

Its success was not only limited to arcades, and its portings to different consoles were also significant: for example, Nintendo and Capcom close ties made *Street Fighter II* firstly an exclusive game for the Super Nintendo[8] for a period of time, becoming a pivotal factor in the dissemination of the Super Nintendo in the US market and helping Nintendo to get a grip in the console wars in North America (Leone, 2023, p. 157). Combined, the portings of *Street Fighter II* and *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting* sold 10.4 million copies (Leone, 2023, p. 168).

Jeff Walker, vice-president of sales and marketing for Capcom USA during the early 1990s, claims that 'the Street Fighter II series [made] more than a billion dollars across different parts of the industry' (Leone, 2023, p. 79). While it is clear that *Street Fighter II* had a significant economic impact for Capcom, its cultural impact cannot be ignored. James Chen (Leone, 2023, p. 13) summarises *Street Fighter II*'s cultural impact by claiming that:

[8] There was a six-month interval between the Super Nintendo and the Mega Drive ports.

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> Here's the thing that people today might not understand: *Street Fighter II* wasn't just a popular videogame. It was a cultural phenomenon unlike anything we'd seen like *Pac Man*. While games like *Super Mario Bros* and *The Legend of Zelda* had a massive fanbase, they were still considered children's properties. Videogames still had the stigma of being a waste of time. Adults did not take videogames seriously. But *Street Fighter II* appealed to everyone. And because of its wide appeal, you could find it everywhere: liquor stores, gas stations, pizza joints, VHS rental stores, bowling alleys, etc.

Now, while all this information stands and is relevant to contextualise *Street Fighter II*'s importance, an attentive reader might have noticed that, to some extent, all elements to describe *Street Fighter II*'s worldwide impact are aligned to the same kinds of historiography I criticised in the earlier sections. It focuses on worldwide official numbers, and broader ideas around gaming without taking into consideration specific contexts. This becomes clear in the quote above by Chen who, to exemplify the ubiquity of the game, lists a series of places; all of them (e.g., liquor stores, pizza joints, bowling alleys), however, are typically US-bound, remarking the place where Chen (at the time, living in California) is speaking from.

While official numbers are important to demonstrate the relevance of *Street Fighter II*, they only show a part of the full picture. *Street Fighter II* was not exempt from piracy. In his interview to Leone (2023, p. 122), Ian Rose, part of Capcom USA General Council, claims that 'the rumours were [...] that at a given time at the height of popularity of the coin-op game, it might have been something like a ten-to-one ratio, counterfeit to real, or maybe higher'. Part of this was caused by the game's success and the following demand: Brian Duke, Capcom USA Western regional sales manager, claims that he 'remember[s] having orders every month of a thousand standing orders [on the West Coast] and [they] would only get in 1,200 for the entire US at a time' (Leone, 2023, p. 77), giving a sense of the gap between supply and demand in a pivotal context such as the USA. The question that follows then, is, if demand was unmatched in a mainstream space, what was the scenario in other places? In the next section, then, I turn my attention to 1990s Brazil, focusing on the game distribution scenario at the time to later move onto my own encounters with *Street Fighter II.*

4 PLAYING IN 1990S BRAZIL: PIRACY AND TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS

Putting it simply, the history of games in Brazil is a history intertwinned with *jeitinhos* and *gambiarras* (Ferreira, 2020; Tietzmann; Pase; Piovesan, 2023), making do with the specific sociomaterial and regulatory conditions in the country. In the 1990s, the Brazilian games market was still dealing with the aftermath of decades of the market reserve, a particularly protectionist policy set by the military

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government to foster the local computing industry. The *Política Nacional de Informática*[9] (National Policy of Informatics) directly affected videogame production and circulation (Ferreira, 2020, 2025; Tietzmann; Pase; Piovesan, 2023). Cloning, the practice of reverse-engineering and locally-producing versions of international platforms such as the Atari 2600 or the NES, locally known as "Nintendinho" (Penix-Tadsen, 2024), was a common practice in Brazil since the 1970s until a few years after the fall of the market reserve, in the early 1990s (Ferreira, 2020; Tietzmann; Pase; Piovesan, 2023). This is by no means an exclusivity of Brazilian history – after all, national market reserve policies and cloning also happened concomitantly in other places, such as South Korea (Jo, 2020; Nicoll, 2019), Taiwan (Larson, 2022), or Argentina (Penix-Tadsen, 2024) – but to contextualise the Brazilian situation in early 1990s.

As detailed by Tietzmann, Pase and Piovesan (2023), the market reserve policy in Brazil had a direct impact for videogame players in that, since the 1970s, it generated a parallel (grey) market fuelled by smuggled imports, practices of so-called industrial piracy (Tietzmann; Pase; Piovesan, 2023) or, more directly, bootlegging (Larson, 2022). In terms of industrial piracy, a more resilient practice was the local copying and reprogramming of games for the local market, often including (illegal) alterations such as rebranding (Ferreira, 2020; Penix-Tadsen, 2024) or, in some cases, even localising certain parts of the game, especially during the Atari era (Tietzmann; Pase; Piovesan, 2023)[10]. As the time progressed, with the official arrival of international companies in early 1990s – e.g., SEGA, in partnership with TecToy, and Nintendo via Playtronic/Gradiente (Amaro; Freitas, 2025) – and the increase in complexity for informally copying and reprogramming cartridges from the later eras (8 and 16-bit[11]), the local informal markets shifted their sourcing operations to the Brazil/Paraguay borders at Foz do Iguaçu/Ciudad del Este (Tietzmann; Pase; Piovesan, 2023). Such shift can be explained through a confluence of factors, from the boom in (bootleg) game production in Taiwan (Larson, 2022) to the the complex transnational political-economic relationships that made Ciudad del Este a crossroads for the informal economy in the Southern Cone (Pinheiro-Machado, 2009).

[9] While beyond the scope of this paper, Marques (2015) offer a deep overview of this moment and of the successes and failures of the policy in relation to computing – not videogames – rejecting simplistic claims that it was inherently bad for local industries.

[10] The informal localisation and adaptation/mediation to local audiences via piracy is a long-lasting phenomenon, still identified by Anne-Marie Schleiner (2020) in her research about gaming in Latin America and South East Asia in 2000s-2010s, or in the never-ending modding of football games in Brazil (Messias; Amaral; Oliveira, 2019).

[11] While local counterfeit reprogramming of games diminished extensively, there was a noticeable official local production in 1990s Brazil. The partnership between SEGA and Tectoy, for example, yielded both hardware and games made in Brazil, including some exclusive games using local characters (Amaro; Freitas, 2025; Ferreira, 2025), as well as portings, such as a *Street Fighter II* version to the Master System.

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Larson (2022) claims that the strong economic development experienced by Taiwan during the 1960s-1980s was a significant factor in shaping Taiwanese electronics industries, including here personal computing and gaming. As in other parts of the world, Taiwan saw a local industry based on replicating arcade cabinets and cloning platforms and games flourish during that time. This expansion would set the base for a network of informal (and later, formal) production, which would continue even after the adoption of the international IP laws in 1990s (Larson, 2022).

The boom in Taiwanese electronic industries also coincides with a localised phenomenon in the Southern Cone, the rise of the "sacoleiros", who supported popular markets in medium or large cities in Brazil. This process is connected to the long-lasting diplomatic relationship between Paraguay and Taiwan (Pinheiro-Machado, 2009). Historically, Paraguay was one of the few countries in the world to maintain diplomatic relationships with Taiwan, leading to economic advantages to the South American country: Pinheiro-Machado (2009, p. 226 - free translation) describes how, during the aformentioned economic boom, many Taiwanese citizens relocated to Paraguay, specifically to Ciudad del Este, and, making use of their personal connections, established direct importing routes between Taiwan and Paraguay, being '(alongside Syrian-Palestinian migrants) [...] responsible for the constitution of one of the world's biggest fake and trinket-based commercial centres' [12]. These commercial centres, grounded on unregulated (informal) economic practices, allowed extremely low prices to be practiced in the commercialisation of Taiwanese – and, since the mid-1990s, also (mainland) Chinese – products, such as electronic goods, toys, clothing and, of course, counterfeit products (Pinheiro-Machado, 2009). Such low prices ended up attracting a mix between tourists and professional "sacoleiros", who, travelling from Brazil and Argentina, would buy products in bulk to later resell in popular and informal markets in their own cities (Pinheiro-Machado, 2009).

In the 1990s, this Paraguayan route was key for the maintenance of the already established informal gaming markets in Brazil, facilitating the circulation of both counterfeit and official games (i.e., cartridges), home consoles, and arcade cabinets. This route, therefore, would be key for the development of the gaming culture in Brazil, creating an audience that, even if reluctant in spending significant money to access the latest gaming technologies (Tietzmann; Pase; Piovesan, 2023), would be significantly game literate, used to the different languages and tropes related to videogames (Ferreira, 2020, 2025).

[12] Original quote: 'responsável, (ao lado dos imigrantes sírio-palestinos) pela formação de um dos maiores centros comerciais do mundo no ramo de bugigangas e falsificações'. Later, the starting point of these routes shifted to mainland China, particularly the region of Guangdong.

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Considering the specific focus of this paper, *Street Fighter II*, and that Capcom only started to officially distribute this in Brazil in 1993, with *Super Street Fighter II* arcades ("Foi assim que a Capcom chegou no Brasil", 2025), it is not ludicrous to claim that the Paraguayan route was pivotal in the dissemination of *Street Fighter II* in Brazil.

After revisiting the broader scenario – or, in the framework adopted here, the macro elements that constitute this phenomenon – in the following section I turn my attention to my own encounters with *Street Fighter II* as a young kid in the hinterlands of São Paulo.

5 HERE COMES A NEW CHALLENGER: A *MOLEQUE* ENCOUNTERS STREET FIGHTER II

My first encounter with *Street Fighter II* happened in 1993, when I was 6, during Christmas eve. My older cousins – 15 and 9 years older than me, living a few blocks from my house in the hinterlands of São Paulo state – got a new console, a Super Nintendo[13], and rented for the Christmas break *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting*. While this Christmas gift had significant ripple effects for the rest of my life[14], it also provided my first chance to engage with something like *Street Fighter II.* I remember arriving at the living room to find my cousins tandem playing (Consalvo et al., 2018) with their neighbour, struggling against Balrog[15], the Spanish ninja and the second of four bosses in the game. A flamenco-like soundtrack is booming under my cousins' discussion on how to best Balrog. My younger cousin, playing as Ken, gets ready, as I notice how the music, colours and actions were much more lively and sharper than the games that I was used to in my *Phantom System*, one of the many "nintendinhos" available in Brazil at the time (Penix-Tadsen, 2024). The battle goes on, and Balrog uses his special move climbing the cage, then flying and piledriving Ken, for another victory. While my younger cousin cuss and pass the controller around –

[13] With the help of an uncle who had just returned from… Paraguay.

[14] Before the Super Nintendo, they had a Mega Drive, which I ended up "inheriting". An interesting anecdotal data point regarding the game distribution in Brazil at the time is that even though the Mega Drive had local distribution through Tectoy, the console I 'inherited' from my cousins was Japanese (or a copy based on the Japanese) version, with "16-bit" written in a large golden font, and its iconic blue reset button, different from the version commercialised by Tectoy in Brazil, which followed the standards from other markets (e.g., white reset button).

[15] The naming pattern of certain *Street Fighter II* bosses varies according to the version: for example, the Spanish ninja mentioned here is named Balrog in Japan, and Vega in the USA. Both nomenclatures coexisted in Brazil, depending on the origin of the version you could get your hands on. Leone (2023) provides a good overview of the reasons for these changes – namely, seeing naming a troubled boxer as M. Bison when Mike Tyson was the world heavyweight champion as pontentially problematic for the US market. Here, I adopt the Japanese naming, since that was what the game I played on that day.

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and my aunt, from a different room, warns that she might turn the videogame off if this happens again – I notice I am completely hooked.

After a few plays by the older family members, they lose a bit of interest, and I get the chance to try it. Of course, my Ryu is no match to the CPU-controlled E. Honda that I fight – I am still adjusting to holding this different, grey controller with shoulder buttons – but I am in awe with this game. On top of the smooth animations, the colours and sounds, the sense of accomplishment when a blow hits your opponent, another key detail makes me enjoy this game even further: every fighter is from a particular place in the world and, even if this often resorts to stereotypes and problematic representations, like the Brazilian monster in Blanka (Arrivabene; Cordeiro; Perassi, 2019; De Oliveira Matumoto, 2022), for a child completely in love with maps and flags, that was another point of consonance.

While discussing this first encounter with *Street Fighter II* might sound self-indulgent, I argue, following other researchers (Lima; Varga, 2023; Makai, 2018), that revisiting these affective memories are crucial for understanding why videogames are the global phenomenon that they are. In several cases, it is the affective memories, the ones we build in the interplay between text (the game) and context (where, in which circumstances, and with whom) that are key to produce the bonds we have with videogames as cultural objects (Anable, 2018; Makai, 2018). These bonds, however, are not just dependent on first encounters, but on being cultivated through time, and in the following years – renting a copy for my Mega Drive, in visits to friend's houses, or places with arcades – *Street Fighter II* became a staple in my gaming repertoire. The joy of playing *Street Fighter II*, like identified in much of the literature (Skolnik; Conway, 2019; Surman, 2007), was on the combination between this competitive camaraderie with friends, on the attempt to master fighting styles, on the small pride that followed when learning a new special move, or turning around a very difficult battle and, why not, in seeing yourself, even if just a little bit, represented in that yellow-green monster on the banks of the Amazon river: when most Brazilian representation in international games focused on sports (i.e., footballers or F1 racers), there was Blanka (Arrivabene; Cordeiro; Perassi, 2019).

In that, I would argue that, besides the joys of mastery, *Street Fighter II* hit so many notes for me because it is a great example of how a cultural product situates itself in the affective economy, in that it positioned itself in the vast network of meanings and affects recruited through cultural products and personal experiences, recruiting and reshaping them through aesthetic experiences (Lehmann; Roth; Schankweiler, 2019). In my particular case – as a young Brazilian interested in videogames, martial art films, geography and, *at the time*, proud by seeing national symbols being hoisted after sports-related successes – the 'affective intensities [after encountering Street Fighter II] open up a specific space of experience that is historically and culturally situated, [with] a generic form [playing the game]

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shap[ing] (but not fixing) the translation of affective intensities into subjective feeelings' (Lehmann; Roth; Schankweiler, 2019, p. 148). This is why, up to now, even if knowing all the issues with stereotyping and hyper-sexualisation (Arrivabene; Cordeiro; Perassi, 2019), for example, *Street Fighter* still holds a grip over me.

Between that first encounter and finally getting for my birthday a few years later a (counterfeit) copy of *Super Street Fighter II* and a 6-button controller for the Mega Drive, my time with *Street Fighter II* in arcades was pivotal in shaping this devotion. The small *padaria*[16] close to my home had a very particular version, as quick as the *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting* that my friends with Super Nintendos could rent and play, but with added features, such as multiple (fire) hadoukens, teleports, and the ability to change fighter mid-battle. More than skill, it felt that several times that the fun was in how strange the battle would unfold, and how ludicrous the performance would be. While this version, which would be locally known as *Street Fighter de Rodoviária* (Moreira, 2014), was by no means my favourite version – I still preferred the strategically controlled battles found in other places – it had its time and place, especially when playing in group.

What was not known, at the time, was that this particular version was a bootleg, unofficial, and that while we experienced it as yet another version of *Street Fighter II* (maybe a glitchy one), it had a particular history. In the following section, then, I turn my attention to *Street Fighter de Rodoviária*, to reflect again on worldwide chains of production and distribution and creative economies.

6 THE RAINBOW ENDS IN TAIWAN: STREET FIGHTER, PIRACY AND INNOVATION

The version I had played multiple times in my local *padaria* is popularly known worldwide as the *Rainbow Edition*, due to its different logo (with the title in the colours of the rainbow). *Rainbow Edition* was one of the many counterfeit arcade modifications of *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* produced in Taiwan during the early 1990s. *Rainbow Edition* was part of a thriving market not only due to *Street Fighter II*'s popularity, but also because, as detailed earlier, Capcom was struggling to meet the worldwide demand (Leone, 2023) and the economic boom in Taiwan that led to a flourishing local electronics industry (Larson,

[16] A *padaria*, in a literal translation, is a bakery. However, while baked goods such as breads and cakes are indeed the main product sold at padarias, in Brazil – or, at least, in São Paulo – it is common for padarias to be a cross between a bakery, a café, a "day" restaurant selling hot meals, a small convenience store and, in some cases, a "day" bar, selling alcohol. The fact that a *padaria* in the hinterlands of São Paulo state had a SFII arcade can be treated as an indicative of SFII's global reach, corroborating a locally-situated version of what Chen (Leone, 2023) argued based in an US-based context.

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2022). An important point to consider in this latter aspect is that, even if the local production practices were based in counterfeit or illegal products, there was a substantial level of know-how involved in the establishment of those practices, as Schleiner (2020) reminds us when discussing piracy in the Global South[17]. This know-how was summarised by Ian Rose, general counsel member from Capcom USA who, in his interview with Leone (2023, p. 120) recognised the technical challenges involved: 'these were people who were coming up with pirated versions of the game on a piece of hardware – [...] a printed circuit board that had to be in some ways designed from scratch'.

These counterfeit practices were not only limited to copying *Street Fighter II*, but more than often included modifying to the original game. These mods, hardcoded into the motherboards, were either directly produced in brand-new circuit boards or, sometimes, sold separately as "upgrade kits" to be added to existing boards (official or not), which would modify certain game parameters. At a commercial level, these were also interfering with Capcom's business, as detailed by James Goddard, from Capcom USA: '[The issue was] the fallout with the operators [...] They were buying these $200, or whatever they were, Taiwanese aftermarket ROM upgrades, and the amount of chaos that was causing just took a while to really sink in.' (Leone, 2023, p. 133).

Besides the commercial advantages – since the pirated versions were indeed cheaper than the official ones – there was the novelty factor in terms of gameplay. As detailed above, when discussing the version I played in my local *padaria*, Street *Fighter II: Rainbow Edition* added a number of features to *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition,* including the ability to change fighters mid-battle, and the easiness – or randomness – of special moves. These features, for Capcom workers, made *Street Fighter II: Rainbow Edition* to be seen as a "broken" game (i.e., a game of luck, rather than one of skill). Nevertheless, another element was a key factor for differentiating both games: the speed. The same James Goddard, after being requested a report on *Rainbow Edition*, reflects

> 'I had just spent the last four to six hours playing Rainbow Edition at 25 percent speed increase, so Champ Edition felt like shit. It was so slow. [...] The real threat [for Capcom] of Rainbow Edition is not all the fireballs in the air and the craziness. The threat is the speed is addicting, and it changes everything.' (Leone, 2023, p. 134–135).

The realisation that the (increased) speed was providing a different kind of experience – one that was proving more popular than the "original" one – led Capcom to redesign their development plans and comission the production of a new version, *Street Fighter II: Hyper Fighting*, focusing specifically on

[17] Even if Schleiner was focusing on a different place (South-East Asia) and time (2010s).

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increasing the movement speed (Leone, 2023). An important aspect to be remarked here is that, while this would later prove a correct commercial decision, with *Hyper Fighting* being, according to Capcom Japan producer Noritaka Funamizu 'very successful in suppressing or reducing the impact of the pirated version' (Leone, 2023, p. 148), there was an internal resistance from game designers in "speeding up" *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* to create this new version. Capcom translator Tom Shiraiwa argues that 'the team [in Japan] never believed making it twice as fast would make for reasonable gameplay. [...] But actually trying [the pirated] versions told them it could be fun.' (Leone, 2023, p. 141).

What this microstory on *Street Fighter II* franchise development highlights to us is, even if there was a clear asymmetry in power in relation to Taiwanese bootleggers and Capcom – and that, in the end, Capcom ended up benefitting most from the whole process – the relationship between official and unofficial versions makes clear how creativity and innovation are not an exclusivity of mainstream spaces. It is difficult to speculate the space that *Street Fighter II* – and, why not, the *Street Fighter* franchise as a whole – would stand in relation to the history of games without the learning processes that Capcom underwent with the Taiwanese counterfeit games and *Hyper Fighting*, but such example makes clear how the actions from unknown actors in a particular (illegal) context can generate ripple effects both at macro (e.g., in terms of global, commercial development) and micro (e.g., in terms of localised, personalised histories of play).

In this analysis, it is clear how the (initially precarious) sociomaterial conditions in Taiwan generated a particularly creative and knowledgeable workforce that was capable of innovating – even if illegally. This aspect is important to challenge more standardised narratives on creative industries, indicating how different ways of thinking can indeed lead towards innovations, as discussed by Messias and Mussa (2020) in their use of *gambiarras* as an epistemic approach to innovation. Another relevant non-Western approach to creativity to read *Rainbow Edition* would be the Chinese Shanzhai culture, often seen by the West as mere copying, when it is in fact a combination between copying and localising, often *enhancing* the original product (Austin; Sloan, 2022). In this sense, it becomes clear how peripheric contexts can have specificities and similarities (Pereira da Silva, 2024), and how often innovative approaches stemming from these spaces are ignored since they are not aligned to Global North epistemic models (Cruz, 2021).

7 FINAL THOUGHTS

While videogames are indeed a global cultural phenomenon, its global nature should not be seen as an excuse to focus solely on particular spaces or actors as universal keys to understand this phenomenon. Videogames are global because, besides their economic relevance, being, therefore, a pivotal sector

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in the so-called creative industries, they are a clear example of how cultural products take part in the affective economy, recruiting our attention and at the same time, affecting and being affected by different imaginaries in relation to the different cultural landscapes we take part in. It is in the dynamics between these different cultural landscapes, between individualised and collective experiences, between hyper-localised and interconnected conditions, that these affective elements that make games so popular worldwide operate.

In this paper, relying on previous work in Game Studies and in different fields, I propose a specific model to examine the interplay between the different aspects, that operate at different scales, that shape our affective experiences with videogames. Our relationship with videogames is shaped both by macro elements, such as the sociomaterial and political conditions in which videogames are produced and distributed, and micro elements, such as our own encounters and experiences with these cultural artefacts, including how, in which spaces and with whom we play. I employed *Street Fighter II* – and, more specifically, *Street Fighter II: Rainbow Edition*, or *Street Fighter de Rodoviária* – as a case to exemplify such approach, addressing the broader global context in which a – unarguably, very successful – game was produced and distributed around the world, but also how it has been appropriated by unoffical actors and, in more specific aspects, how existing sociomaterial conditions helped to shape the ways in which affective encounters with that particular set of games happened.

Street Fighter de Rodoviária becomes an important case because, besides helping to shed light on these broader sociomaterial conditions, it also complicates easy narratives about creative industries, innovation, and affective economies. The counterfeit versions of *Street Fighter II* were a direct outcome of existing expertise in the Taiwanese workforce that produced unofficial modified *Street Fighter II* motherboards and, while for some time these had a negative impact in Capcom's economic results, these counterfeit versions were pivotal in influencing Capcom's future developments in the series. More importantly, though, they only influenced Capcom because these counterfeit versions were a key element in shaping the affective memories of *Street Fighter II*, further disseminating and prolonging its life as a game in different places around the world, in the peripheries (Moreira, 2014) and in central spaces (Leone, 2023). Understanding these processes is important to shed light on how innovation and economic development are not only originated in mainstream spaces, or through initiatives sanctioned by hegemonic models.

The history of videogames is indeed a global history, but global, as argued by Pepe (2025), does not mean universal. The fact that *Street Fighter II* arcades could be found at gas stations and liquor stores

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(Leone, 2023), or *padarias* and *botecos*[18], and that *Rainbow Edition* in Brazil was associated with a mundane and democratic space such as the *rodoviária* (bus station), indicates how, with its own local specificities, *Street Fighter II* might have indeed been globally ubiquitous at its time. What we have in this scenario is a set of different interconnected histories, and in examining the interplay between global infrastructures, sociomaterial conditions for game production and circulation and apparently innocuous memories of play, more of those interconnections across different histories and contexts can be established, leading towards a more nuanced understanding towards games as a global phenomenon.

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[18] Vernacular name for popular (as in "not-posh") bars in Brazil.

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