

Analog Role-Playing Game Studies: A Brazilian Overview

Abstract: This paper aims to present an overview of analog role-playing games in Brazil. For this, it uses a mixed method that includes bibliographic research and document analysis in an autoethnographic perspective. The results from these different methodological approaches, which are evocative rather than exhaustive, are divided into two aspects: first, they present a brief history of both publications and the idiosyncrasies of the practice of larps and tabletop role-playing games in Brazil; second, they seek to synthesize the academic perspectives observed in the field of analog role-playing game studies, privileging the main disciplines of study, as well as themes, addressed by Brazilian research. Thus, this paper seeks to serve as a summary of the Brazilian framework, to facilitate future dialogues. In this sense, it is more of a signal for international dialogue than an exhaustive mapping of Brazilian intellectual production regarding studies of analog role-playing games.

This survey shows that several of the issues that permeate the Brazilian scene are common to other parts of the world and that, sometimes, because our intellectual production is available in Portuguese, we isolate ourselves from broader discussions. There are also problematic, endogenous patterns regarding the practice of analog role-playing games: there is a lack of documentation, which makes the sources for research scarce. Regarding the research itself, it is inferred that there is a lack of articulation among Brazilian researchers who, isolated, do not exchange knowledge among themselves.

Keywords: analog role-playing games, role-playing game studies, Brazil, scholarship, tabletop, larp

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study aims to provide an overview of analog role-playing games¹ in Brazil.² For the purposes of this paper, we understand analog RPGs as a macro-category that mainly encompasses TRPGs (tabletop role-playing games) and larps (live-action role-playing games), but which also evokes other forms that escape from our deeper knowledge, such as the CYOA (Choose Your Own Adventure). When placed in dialogue with game studies, analog RPGs receive a double exclusion.

First, game studies “is a new field of study focusing on games, particularly in their different digital forms” (Mäyrä 2008, 1). Therefore, the theoretical-methodological framework itself is sometimes inadequate, since, unlike the rigid programming that supports digital games, in analog games “each social situation is unique and gives way to different negotiations” (Fernández-Vara 2015, 26) so that the research of analog games is “closer to anthropological research” (Fernández-Vara 2015, 26).

In addition to being excluded because they are analog games, role-playing games are also excluded from game studies by the role-playing element. In the usual definitions of what would be a game used by the field, role-playing games fail to meet all the requirements to be considered a game. We highlight two examples, both from seminal works in the area. For Salen and Zimmerman (2012a, 95),

1 A previous version of this paper was submitted in Portuguese as a book chapter.

2 The international academic community chose to adopt the term analog as a differentiating feature in relation to digital games, which dominate academic production referred to as game studies (Torner, Trammell, and Waldron 2016). The adoption of the term “analog” here refers to this current, which we align ourselves with, which brings such problematization to the fore. At the same time, we consider it pertinent to problematize the need for adjectives for such games, since this practice contributes to the normalization of the digital game as a synonym for game.

“a game is a system in which players engage in an artificial conflict, defined by rules, that results in a quantifiable outcome.” From this definition, the authors point out that:

Role-playing games clearly embody every component of our definition of game, except one: a quantifiable outcome. As an RPG player, you move through game-stories, following the rules, overcoming obstacles, accomplishing tasks, and generally increasing the abilities of your character. What is usually lacking, however, is a single endpoint to the game. Role-playing games are structured like serial narratives that grow and evolve from session to session. Sometimes they end; sometimes they do not. Even if a character dies, a player can rejoin as a different character. In other words, there is no single goal toward which all players strive during a role-playing game. If a game does end, it does not do so quantifiably, with players winning or losing or receiving a score. (Salen and Zimmerman 2012a, 97)

Therefore, Salen and Zimmerman consider RPGs a *limit case* for the definition of games they propose. Juul, in turn, defines:

a game as a rule-based system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different outcomes are assigned different values, the player exerts effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels emotionally connected to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are negotiable. (2019, 45)

Thus, “pen and paper role-playing games are not classic games because, having a human game master, their rules are not fixed beyond discussion” (Juul 2019, 50). Thus, Juul considers RPGs as *borderline cases*. Interestingly, even among authors who exclude RPGs from their definitions, there is no consensus: for Salen and Zimmerman, the rules are there; as for Juul, there is a quantifiable result.

The issue is also presented in other terms. On the one hand, “analog games are designed to bring friends together around a table.”³ Encouraging interaction among players⁴ is critical to their design and should be the foremost concern in the minds of those who create board games, card games, and tabletop RPGs” (Breault 2020, 77). On the other hand, while in most games the narrative (when present) is at the service of gameplay, in RPGs these roles are reversed, since:

In these games, story takes top billing. Players are there to see how the story develops around them, to take their character from humble beginnings to great glory, to achieve some ultimate goal. In RPGs, gameplay serves as the vehicle that conveys the player character (and player) from plot point to plot point in an engaging story. The game-play still needs to satisfy the player’s need for action and excitement, but the allure of an RPG is more the story than the gameplay. (Breault 2020, 82)

In summary, analog RPGs are oriented both to the relationship between players and to the creation of narratives. In other words, they “are quite explicit story-creation systems, designed to facilitate the

³ It is noteworthy that “around a table” can be extended to interactions among players in other contexts, such as larps, in which the interaction among players takes place through their character’s embodiment.

⁴ Unlike Breault (2020, 77), who argues that “analog games were not made for solo players,” we understand their existence and pertinence – like solo RPGs. Even so, we assume that even these have a relational aspect, since the openness to negotiation of rules makes the intersubjective aspect overcome the objectivity found in digital games.

structured, collaborative authorship of narrative play” (Salen and Zimmerman 2012b, 126).

As a result of these idiosyncrasies, we highlight two international movements. The first is the reinvention of analog game studies (Torner, Trammell, and Waldron 2016), which rescued the tradition of studying analog games after the colonization of the concept *game* by digital games. The second is the defense of RPG studies as “a small but established and lively scholarly community with a diverse and growing body of organizations, conferences, journals, and monographs” (Deterding and Zagal 2018, 11). According to Deterding and Zagal:

RPGs sit at the intersection of four phenomena – roles, play, games, and media culture. . . They take a fundamental form of play – make-believe – and a fundamental aspect of social reality and identity – roles – and give them the structured form of a game. They arose from and sit at the heart of much of contemporary fandom, “geek,” and, increasingly, mainstream media culture. (2018, 2)

It is worth noting that the double adjective that differentiates the analog role-playing games studies (Schmit and Moro 2016) from game studies – with the addition of role-playing (Deterding and Zagal 2018) and analog (Torner, Trammell and Waldron 2016) – does not aim at a break in the dialogue between them. An example of this is the work of Janet Murray (2003), one of the cornerstones within game studies, which discusses larp at various times. Differentiation, on the contrary, only aims to highlight the specificities of such games, as well as any inadequacies and insufficiencies of the usual repertoire of game studies when placed in relation to analog RPGs studies.

This text seeks to dialogue with this context presented. Since no Brazilian author appears in the writing of the RPG studies cornerstone⁵ – although a book by Augusto Boal and an article by Carlos Klimick, Eliane Bettocchi, and Rian Rezende appear as cited references – the overview of RPGs in Brazil is not evidenced, being only mentioned passing through on two occasions: as one of the “many countries with strong local traditions of TRPGs” (White et al. 2018, 83); and “in Brazil, TRPGs became more popular than board games after *D&D* was published in 1993” (Healy 2015, as cited in Torner 2018, 196) – a statement open to challenge only in recent times, with the expansion of board game market (Sommadosi 2019; Battaglia 2020).

Thus, our proposal is to look at analog RPGs in Brazil in order to fill this gap. Our goal is by no means to exhaust the topic, so we opted for an evocative rather than an exhaustive approach: many phenomena will be left out, in order to merely summarize, in general terms, a perspective on RPG studies in Brazil. It is important to recognize in advance that our view is biased on our familiarity with these games being designers, researchers, players, and producers: in short, participants (Haggren, Larsson, Nordwall and Widing 2021) of both larps and tabletop RPGs. In this sense, we explicitly recognize that the role-playing games scene in Brazil is diverse. Our view is biased by our own repertoire, which in no way – despite the attempt to reach tabletop RPGs and larps (and their respective research) that are not of our daily life – minimally corresponds to the breadth of the Brazilian scene. Instead, our expectation is, by pointing out this specific bias, to provoke future reflections from researchers located in other paradigms.

To carry out this proposal, we chose to use bibliographic research (Stumpf 2010), i.e. consulting written sources on the subject, and document analysis (Moreira 2010), such as consulting pertinent

⁵ We consider it pertinent to highlight a parallel issue, which concerns the “easily accessible” expression, used by Deterding and Zagal (2018, 12) to designate part of their goals with the publication of the book. Given the exorbitant price of the book (about half the Brazilian monthly minimum wage), we stress the use of this adjective, especially in the context of a country that flirts with (re-)entering the hunger map.

magazines and audiovisual records. These materials are organized in an autoethnographic perspective, that is, “studies where the author provides insight into a culture they belong to” (MacCallum-Stewart and Trammell 2018, 368). The results of this process, presented in the present text, are divided into a brief history of the practice of tabletop and larp RPGs in Brazil, followed by an exploratory overview of the main researched themes about these same ludo-narrative phenomena.

2. (PART OF THE) HISTORY OF ANALOG RPGS IN BRAZIL

This topic is a tributary of previous research. Regarding TRPGs, our descriptions perform a mosaic of surveys carried out by other researchers (Miranda 2005; Serbena 2006; Schmit 2008; Vasques 2008; Oliveira 2012) – updating them for the last decade –such as the series of interviews conducted by Vasques.⁶ Regarding larps, we rely mainly on previously elaborated text (Falcão 2014). From these previous research sources, duly updated, we aim to put them in dialogue. The intention with this is to show, simultaneously, ruptures and continuities between tabletop RPGs and larps in Brazil.

As soon as they began to be released, most notably with *Dungeons & Dragons* in 1974, commercial TRPGs began to come to Brazil. According to Vasques (2008), before the 1990s, the dynamic consisted primarily of students, or their families, who traveled abroad and brought such materials with them. TRPGs were then disseminated through photocopies, which is why this first generation of gamers became largely known as the *xerox generation* (Benatti 1995). The practice of role-playing still lacked popularity, being limited mainly to university circles and elite colleges.

In the early 1990s, the first publications started to take place in the national territory (Schmit 2008; Vasques 2008; Chagas 2015a). The *Fighting Fantasy* (Aventuras Fantásticas) gamebooks and the *GURPS* TRPG basic set mark the beginning of the translations of foreign material, while the TRPGs *Tagmar* and *Desafio dos Bandeirantes* (Editora GSA) mark the first national productions. These first publications were followed by the translation of the *Dungeons & Dragons* black box (Editora Grow). The practice started to gain popularity, so that in 1993, the first Encontro Internacional de RPG took place (Benatti 1994a; Peixoto Filho and Albuquerque 2018), which at one point would become the second largest event of its kind in the world, after Gen Con in the U.S. (Serbena 2006).

In 1994, Brazil had both the translation of *Vampire: The Masquerade* (Vampiro: a Máscara) and the beginning of the publication of the magazine *Dragão Brasil* (initially *Dragon*, inspired by the homonymous magazine). Regarding the magazine, it is pertinent to state that it consolidates the subculture (Fine 1983) of TRPG players in Brazil, as it:

- 1) sets the standard for criticism of TRPGs,
- 2) announces releases,
- 3) establishes a lexicon, such as *RPGista* (Cassaro 1995) and *advogado de regras* (Cassaro 1996), respectively meaning role-player and the player’s attitude of invoking rules to favor his character,
- 4) orbits related interests, and
- 5) creates identifications between groups of readers and players.

In 1995, *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* was translated by Editora Abril (one of the major Brazilian publishers at the time). Devir consolidated its hegemony in the TRPG market since it had the most played RPGs in Brazil; *GURPS* and *Vampire* (in addition to later the rest of the White Wolf line), by the

⁶ The playlist for interviews conducted by Vasques about the History of RPG in Brazil are available at: <https://cutt.ly/5QLypmw>.

end of the decade, would also be responsible for the publication of *Dungeons & Dragons* (previously Editora Abril's right).

The heating up in the TRPGs market also motivated the publication of new national titles by Trama (*Dragão Brasil*'s publisher at the time), such as *Defensores de Tóquio*, *Arkanun*, and *Trevas*. However, it is important to emphasize that the TRPG ecosystem at the time was not a monopoly. On the contrary, the heated market favored new releases, and both Devir (through their *Encontros Internacionais*) and *Dragão Brasil* were celebrating new publications from other publishers. At that time, the translation of *Shadowrun* (Ediouro) and new national titles such as *Demos Corporation* (Venture), *Millenia* (GSA) and *Era do Caos* (Akritó), among others, flourished. The *Arkanun-Trevas* line would detach itself from Trama, emerging as a new publisher (Daemon).

The launch of *Vampire* also marks the arrival of larps in Brazil (Benatti 1994a; 1994b). In this *first wave* (Falcão, 2014), larp was understood merely as a way to play TRPG (Benatti 1994b), and it went through a boom in popularity. The larps of *Vampire's One World by Night* had a legion of supporters (Del Debbio 1996), with some encounters in the big capitals that comprised a few hundred players simultaneously. At the same time that *Vampire* larps spread across countless cities in Brazil (not only in large cities, but also in the countryside and even remote corners), larps of this or other themes proliferated in RPG conventions, either promoted through individual groups, or by groups that were consolidated from this practice, such as Confraria das Ideias and Megacorp (Falcão 2013). At the turn of the 2000s, the boffer larp, which has the Graal group (in partnership with Confraria das Ideias) as one of its pioneers in national territory (Saladino 2000; Graal 2014; Vasques and Godoy 2021), began to gain popularity a short time later, no longer brought by printed books physically distributed in the national territory, but by foreign videos and websites accessed over the internet.

Early in the 2000s, the Brazilian analog RPG went through a significant setback. Between 2001 and 2005, murders in Teresópolis, Ouro Preto, and Guarapari were sensationally (and erroneously) associated with the practice of RPGs (Vasques 2008, Fiori 2012) – a phenomenon of persecution known as moral panic, which had already occurred in relation to RPGs in the United States of the 1970s (Laycock 2015). In comparison with the moral panic in the U.S., it can be said that the allegations made by Brazilian moral entrepreneurs mixed the rhetoric of super-predators with anxiety about the existence of satanic cults, which indicates an importation of the allegations present in the context of the U.S. during the 1980s and 1990s (Laycock 2015). As immediate consequences, in addition to a suspicious perception of the practice by society, the establishment of the rating system in TRPG books (Ministério 2002), which was imposed after the repercussion of these cases, attributed to many of them the classification of 18 years (over the age of a significant portion of the public). Their sale was even prohibited in some cities such as Guarapari (2005), where the legislation is still in force.

Some publishers slowed down the pace of publications, although the moral panic associated with RPGs were not the only factor in the phenomenon. At least three other elements contributed to this. The first is the popularization of the internet, which allowed for easier access to foreign materials and original Brazilian productions, either through traditional trade or through piracy, which made *Dragão Brasil*, the only Brazilian magazine at the time to survive more than 4 editions, lose its strength and relevance. The second is the publication of the 3rd edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, which carried the OGL (Open Game License). The third factor, less directly associated with TRPGs, was the crisis in the printed distribution on the national territory – a market controlled almost exclusively by DINAP, a company linked to Editora Abril, which went bankrupt at that time (Vasques and Del Debbio 2017b). With the compatibility to the hegemonic *D&D* rules authorized, the publication of d20 material became a less commercially risky option. Within the scope of national TRPGs, the big star is *Tormenta* – commercially, the most successful Brazilian TRPG (Tancini 2018) – which was initially a scenario created in *Dragão Brasil* magazine to be played using other systems (*AD&D*, *GURPS* or *3D&T*), and

later migrating to another publisher (Jambô) and also being converted for d20.

Larp, in turn, entered the *second wave* (Falcão 2014), with the practice being recognized as a public cultural activity. In addition to inhabiting the private spaces of circles of friends, larps were now part of the cultural agenda of cities (whose most notorious example is the city of São Paulo), with some government funding for their production. The themes were diversified, distancing them from the predominance of fantasy seen in TRPGs. In this context, since 2007, Confraria das Ideias has become an NGO dedicated to using larp as a tool to develop critical thinking and promote social inclusion (Iuama and Miklos 2019a).

Influenced by the discussions of The Forge – recently documented by White (2020) – and responding to the market's saturation of d20 releases, space was opened for independent productions, which gained strength in the 2010s. A profusion of titles moved from the mainstream to the marginal production, such as *Mighty Blade* (Coisinha Verde), which circulated mainly through social media, in frank dialogue with those entitled *storytelling* games, such as *Violentina* (Secular Games), the first to be released through crowdfunding in Brazil (Jovem 2011), and *Pulse* (Encho Indie Studio).

Simultaneously, Brazilian larps entered their *third wave* (Falcão 2014), characterized by aesthetic and technical concerns, as well as an interest in the artistic exploration of language. The sibling groups Boi Voador (productive arm) and NpLarp (investigative arm) were the great catalysts for this movement, which moved Brazil beyond the U.S. sphere of influence towards the avant-garde discussion of larp (at the time, especially the Nordic production).

In the mid-2010s, TRPGs introduced new changes. On the one hand, new publishers willing to bring foreign material were starting to emerge. In this sense, the arrival of titles such as *Savage Worlds* (Retropunk), *Numenera* (New Order), *Mutant: Ano Zero* (Pensamento Coletivo) and *Fate* (Solar) was highlighted. At the same time, a new crop of national games began to present itself as commercially viable, having as some of its representatives *Old Dragon* (RedBox – today, Buró) – which although a retroclone of *D&D* and part of the OSR (Old School Renaissance) movement, has all its own technical and creative production carried out by Brazilians – and *Delóyal* (Lampião Game Studio). On the other hand, a movement similar – albeit in significantly smaller proportions – to the d20 fever of the previous decade began to take shape, with the profusion of several Powered by the Apocalypse (PbtA) – the TRPG design framework originated with *Apocalypse World* (published in Brazil by Secular Games) – releases. Finally, at the turn of the 2020s, a new editorial force enters the scene in the Brazilian market; coming from the board games market, Galápagos Jogos currently holds the publishing rights in Brazil for the 5th editions of both *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Vampire: The Masquerade* – historically, two of the most commercially successful TRPG franchises.

Brazilian larp, since the mid-2010s, has been experimenting with a format of diffusion that has been little explored until then (scripts, manuals) and has begun to experiment with alternative forms of circulation (periodical events, clubs, curatorships) (Prado 2014). At the same time, part of the production advocates for its own identity, as proposed in the “Jeitinho Brasileiro Manifesto” (Iuama, Prado and Falcão 2018).

However, it is important not to reduce the Brazilian history of analog RPGs to the history of publications. A factor that stands out when this type of mapping is carried out concerns the dynamics of distribution in Brazil. On the TRPGs side, there has always been a different marketing circuit from the traditional publishing market:

- in the first decades, the practice of photocopying;
- in the 1990s, the distribution of games on newsstands;
- in the 2000s, the availability of fan made material on publishers' websites, whose most

famous national example is Editora Daemon's netbooks;⁷ (Vasques and Del Debbio 2017a) and virtual piracy (Chagas, Rosa and Junges 2021);

- in the 2010s, both virtual piracy and crowdfunding.

On the larp side, adherence with cultural practice starts to guarantee funding by the cultural sector, so that the practice of larps in libraries, cultural calendar events, and institutions such as SESC⁸ becomes recurrent. Furthermore, the availability of one of the world's largest larp repositories,⁹ all free of charge, makes the practice exist outside the logic of commodification, since a significant part of Brazilian larps are free to play. Even when outside the more institutional spaces, larp moves from the logic under which TRPGs are practiced and starts to be organized also underground, in more or less temporary groupings, with the formation of more or less regular groups or longer lasting communities.¹⁰

In addition, the ecosystem of RPGs in Brazil involves a profusion of events. In addition to the aforementioned Encontro Internacional de RPG, events such as Lab Jogos, RPGCon, World RPG Fest, and Diversão Offline, as well as a profusion of regional events, demonstrate the diversity of the scene: while some focus on creating a space for games occur, others promote discussion about game design. Contests, like the *Faça Você Mesmo* (Chagas 2015b), also promote the dialogue, visibility, and incursion of game designers. In recent times, podcasts, such as *Botequim dos Jogos*, and Facebook groups, such as Larp Brasil and Indie RPG, configure an important aspect of the circulation of ideas.

An aggregating phenomenon that can also be observed regarding TRPGs is the wide dissemination of RPG streaming: sessions recorded and made available in an edited or full form on the internet, either in audio or video format, in some cases more spontaneous, in some others, somewhat staged. Following in the wake of international phenomena, some channels dedicated to this type of content ended up gathering many loyal followers and resulted in by-products – new lines of TRPGs or other types of publications – or are themselves by-products of successful franchises (such as TRPG *Tormenta* and the Jovem Nerd multimedia channel) or even both. One of the greatest examples of this statement is the channel¹¹ of the YouTuber Rafael Lange, better known by the pseudonym Cellbit, which has more than two million followers. In addition to the game session videos, a huge network of channels also plays a role in attracting new players, presenting news to existing players, and circulating ideas through the network. So far, nothing similar has been observed with larp.

Finally, we emphasize that the circulation of ideas between a scene is a central factor for this same scene to occur. In this sense, the emphasis on importance for practice would be more in these events and dialogues between participants than in the publications themselves – the movements of the latter being, to a large extent, a reflection of the movements of the former. However, following the trajectory of analog RPGs through publications configures a less arid methodological path, given that there is no consolidated tradition in Brazil in documentation, or even dissemination, of events. Many of the ideas that ferment in some of the events end up restricted to the people who participated in them.

7 Still available at <https://cutt.ly/qIYcH1f>.

8 Social Service of Commerce, a Brazilian institution dedicated to social welfare.

9 The Larp Brasil portal, available at: <https://cutt.ly/qQLG9vq>.

10 Examples of this statement are groups such as Saturnália (<https://cutt.ly/0OjvoPU>) and the application of larps during 2018's Brain Awareness Week (<https://cutt.ly/rOjvdrk>).

11 Available at: <https://cutt.ly/COjI7RQ>.

3. OUTLINE OF AN EXPLORATORY OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH INVOLVING RPGS IN BRAZIL

The first Brazilian research involving the subject dates back to the 1990s (Miranda 2005; Vasques 2008). However, the main criticism – with which we agree – to this pioneering research is the lack of familiarity that the researchers themselves sometimes had with RPGs, as pointed out by Vasques (2008). In some cases, in these early years, the individual who weaves the research does not understand the topic, which leads him to make mistakes, sometimes gross.

In the 1990s, one of the main characteristics of analog RPG studies in Brazil was established: research in the field of education. 92 results appear for the expression *role-playing game*¹² in exploratory research carried out on August 29, 2021, in the CAPES¹³ Theses & Dissertations Catalog. Of these, 36 are registered with Education or Teaching as an evaluation area. Furthermore, research appears in areas such as Chemistry, Physics, History, Geography, Biological Sciences, Mathematics and Letters – in short, each of the subjects that make up the Brazilian school curriculum. This means that, even when grounded in graduate programs in other areas, some of the research has the interface between RPGs and Education as a theme. Even in those evaluated in other areas, the obvious reference to the educational aspect of the research is recurrent, explained in titles that orbit a synthesized formula such as: The use of RPG as a tool/guide/methodology in the teaching of (discipline in question). Some examples of this statement can be seen in Coelho (2017), Silva et al. (2018), Machado et al. (2019), Lopes and Cunha (2020), and Carneiro (2021).

One thermometer of this profusion of educational research is that in 2002, in the city of São Paulo, the 1st Simpósio RPG & Educação was held, promoted by Ludus Culturalis in partnership with Editora Devir, the Terramédia store, APEOESP and SINPEEM.¹⁴ Subsequently, the transcription of the audio recordings of the events would be released in the form of event's proceedings (Zanini 2004), in order to document what happened. In the same year of publication of the proceedings also appears *SIMPLES – Initial System for Master Teachers Teaching through a Motivating Strategy* (Riyis 2004), a manual for the use of RPGs in the classroom. A possible justification for this proximity between Brazilian RPG studies and education is that “some old gamers here say that RPGs and education were related from the beginning in Brazil, because role-playing games were used by English professors in the mid-eighties” (Schmit, Martins, and Ferreira 2009, 78).

It should be stressed that there is fruitful research in other spheres beyond educational potentials and applications, such as: Anthropology (Fiori 2014), Communication (Iuama 2021), Design (Rezende, Araújo, and Portinari 2018), Performance Studies (Santos 2020), Philosophy (Bastos 2021), Psychology (Schmit 2017), Psychiatry (Von Sucro 2015), and Theater (Sarturi 2012). A total of 906 scholars are listed by *Plataforma Lattes*¹⁵ (research carried out on August 29, 2021) when searching for *role-playing games* as a theme. Adding the filter so that only doctors appear, there are still 389 scholars.¹⁶ From this

12 We understand that other research articles exist that are not indexed using this term. However, as throughout this text, the intention is not to exhaust the issue, but to adopt an evocative character.

13 Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel, a Brazilian government's institution that oversees graduate programs.

14 Both APEOESP and SINPEEM are teachers' unions.

15 A Brazilian standardized system of scholars' resumes and publications.

16 As a comparison criterion to providing orders of magnitude, we also carried out a search for *video games* as a

The first is the lack of dialogue and some kind of core identity between these researchers. Almost a thousand researchers (of these nearly four hundred doctors) could point to an ecosystem of construction and active exchange of knowledge, which is not the case. With a few exceptions, at most there is a room in a subdivision of a scientific event dedicated to RPG research. Most of the time, however, these researchers are solitary voices in the midst of events in their respective areas, with a lack of skilled dialogue for the subject.

The second, arising from the first, is the feeling of *(re)invention of the wheel*, present in the overwhelming majority of research on RPGs. In theses and dissertations, there is the presence of a chapter (re)presenting RPG, its history and origins, its arrival in Brazil, an (attempt at) definition, examples – in short, everything that is expected when there is novelty about a theme. If this is not a problem in a dissertation or a thesis (in fact, we consider it healthy), the situation is different in the production of scientific papers. These papers are usually delimited in terms of length, using part of this space to (re)explain the theme, as if (still) it was something exotic, alien to Brazilian scientific production, often undermining the very development of the argument pertaining to the paper. Some examples of this statement can be seen in the following papers, all of which have received requests for an explanation of what larp is in the peer review process: these explanations took up 2 of the 13 pages of the paper (Iuama and Miklos 2019a), 2 of the 8 pages of the paper (Iuama and Miklos 2019b), and 5 of the 15 pages of the paper (Miklos and Iuama 2020).

The third inference concerns the condition in which RPGs appear in research. In several (especially those willing to present an educational use), RPG is relegated and restricted to the condition of an object and not a theme, which sometimes makes the search for references from role-playing game studies to be perceived as secondary, or even unnecessary. We emphasize that this is not a problem in itself, but given that RPGs are (still) treated with an air of exoticism, confining them to the condition of an object can reinforce a supposed theoretical irrelevance on the theme, which is not the case.

Fourthly, in the overlap of the other three, it is clear that there is no competent literature review in a significant part of the research. It is possible to infer that this is due to the academic structure itself, in which supervisors invite the review of the theoretical-methodological contribution, and consider the description of the object (sometimes superficial) as satisfactory. But there is also a lack of identity for RPG researchers: it seems easier to imagine someone claiming to be a researcher in some other field, than an RPG researcher – and that, therefore, they should review the literature produced by these peers.

Finally, there is a lack of consensus. This statement is different from saying that there is dissent – something healthy and necessary for dialogues to broaden the field's reflections. To state that there is a lack of consensus is to point to the lack of common ground, the minimum space of familiarity between different positions, which would allow for dialogue. In this sense, part of the justification for this text is to point to such a situation, inviting dialogue in order to collectively seek our points of contact and identification.

We reinforce that this ghettoization of knowledge resulting from the lack of consensus operates in several spheres: not only do the areas of knowledge not dialogue with each other, but also within the same area there is often no attempt at convergence; different forms of roleplaying (such as TRPG and larp) are also often fenced; sometimes (despite being, for the most part, all players), RPG scholars and designers do not seek the interface between theory and practice.

It is worth remembering that there are attempts to solve this problem. The Facebook group Estudos sobre RPG is one of these, providing a fertile place for discussions and exchanges. *Mais*

theme, resulting in 1,865 researchers, 910 of which had PhDs. These numbers represent any researcher – Brazilian or foreigner producing from Brazil – who, at some point on their resume, mentioned the researched theme. Therefore, they do not serve as an absolute number, but rather as an indication of the volume of discussion on a given topic.

Dados, a scientific journal active for some years (and whose content, at the time of writing this text, is inaccessible on the networks), is another pertinent example: it presented a place where research on the subject could find interlocution, a posture similar to that adopted in recent years by *REVEL* (Journal of Ludic Studies), promoted by *REBEL* (Brazilian Network of Ludic Studies). We also cite the *RPG and Education Bibliography*,¹⁷ a blog post that seeks to act as an aggregator of research on the topic. However, with the number of researchers who feed their respective *Lattes*¹⁸ resumes with information about RPG, it seems pertinent that there is a more active and systematized effort on their part.

4. CONCLUSION

We reinforce our main point: we do not intend, with this research, to exhaust the topic. On the contrary: our objective is more in the sense of taking a step in the construction of a systematized panorama about the characteristics of analog RPG studies in Brazil. Thus, the search for patterns that make the disparate commune constituted the horizon of the process, and we understand that our own reach is limited (or even biased).

That said, we infer that the history of the practice of RPGs in Brazil is guided, as far as publications are concerned, by a logic of marginal distribution, schematized by the trajectory: *photocopies* > *newsstands* > *PDFs* > *crowdfunding*. This is not to say that the more traditional publishing market does not exist, but that the dissemination of RPGs to the point of constituting an ecosystem would possibly not exist without the help of such dynamics. The most obvious justification that arises due to such history is the economic imperative, since a country so marked by inequality(ies) and misery(ies), as in the case of Brazil, needs a different market dynamic from the traditional model: the book (often, with a colored core, the hardcover, the high-quality paper, and all the other components that make the cost less affordable) sold on the shelves. This audience certainly exists: otherwise, there would not be a group of publishers specialized in RPGs. But our argument is more towards the diffusion of the practice and, in this sense, we consider it reasonable to state that the history of RPGs in Brazil goes beyond the history of the publication of RPGs in Brazil. For this reason, a front that opens up for future investigations is the need for documentation about the practice – a problem that was present even in the search for sources for this research – since RPGs take place in games, and not in publications.

Regarding the academic aspect, there is a predominance of studies on educational aspects. But, contrary to what the volume of this production would lead us to believe, the result is, at times, insipid. The recurrence of works with similar proposals (under the aegis of the formula *the use of RPG as an educational tool in a given discipline*) indicates the lack of literature review and contact between peers, so that such works sometimes result in the reaching conclusions that other researchers have already reached and not presenting significant advances in knowledge. At the same time, this reflects a need to (re)present RPGs shrouded in an air of originality and exoticism – which is shown to be untrue, as 906 scholars announce role-playing games as a theme in their *Lattes* resumes. This number, close to a thousand, points out that the topic is no longer new to the Academy. Perhaps it still is exotic, but in this case also due to the lack of dialogue on the part of researchers themselves, who often need to discover for themselves a road that others may have already taken. In this sense, there is an urgent need for initiatives to bring together different perspectives, in order to bring individuals with common thematic interests into dialogue.

Regarding the dialogue with the international community, there is a unilaterality: whether in

17 Available in: <https://cutt.ly/CWfKc6X>.

18 The main instrument for mapping researchers in Brazil.

games or in theoretical production, we consume and absorb international production, but it is rare that a larp or TRPG, or a study on analog RPGs, is taken out of our territory. It should be noted here that this movement is not exclusive to RPGs, as it is very similar to what happens both with other cultural productions and with other academic productions.

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