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"It's [not just] in the game": the promotional context of video games

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Man's Best Enemy: The Role of Advertising During Atari's Launch in Brazil in 1983

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Abstract

In the early 80s Brazil a host of small companies, sheltered from prosecution by local laws, resorted to industrial piracy as they released clone after clone of Atari consoles and games. In this text the authors revisit that market's wild years and analyze the prize-winning advertising launch campaign of Atari 2600's officially licensed version in 1983. The main focus is a set of eight TV spots and four double-page printed advertisements published on magazines. The campaign helped establish a gaming culture centered on a message that everyone could join in and play, making the Atari a de facto standard in the country as children, adults and families adopted the platform.

Keywords: Atari; Brazil; Software piracy; Videogame advertising;.

Brazil, the largest country in South America, has had a history of protectionist policies regarding its technology markets. In the early 80s, small companies, sheltered from prosecution by local laws, resorted to outright industrial piracy, releasing clone after clone of Atari 2600¹ consoles and games. When an officially licensed version was launched in 1983, its advertising campaign had two goals. The first one was to present video games as family friendly entertainment and create the desire for a new technology among potential consumers, while positioning the original brand in a market that had become used to counterfeit copies and grey market imports for a few years already.

In this paper, we outline these wilderness years of the Brazilian market and analyze Atari's launch campaign's narrative choices through an observation of the role played by the advertising campaign not only in presenting a new product, but also in how it sought to make videogame culture mainstream in the South American country.

Our study will focus on a set of eight videos and four double-page printed advertisements for magazines. Our proposed methodology for image analysis is informed by Barthes (1990), Floch (1985, 1990) and Joly (2006), along with moving image analysis references by Aumont et al. (2002), Aumont and Marie (1993), Bazin (2009) and Jullier and Marie (2007).

Brazil in the 80s: recession, market reserve and peculiar dynamics

Brazil was governed by a military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985. Along with press censorship, political repression and human rights infringements, the economy of the country lived a brief period of prosperity in the 1970s dubbed by the press as the "Brazilian Miracle". Backed by strong funding from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with support from western countries like the United States, the measures helped boost the internal market, but by the early 80s the boom turned into bust, being 1983 the reference year for growing inflation and widespread recession.

¹ This paper will identify the classic Video Computer System as Atari 2600 since it was the model's name when sold in Brazil and because most part of the events discussed here took place after the console was renamed from Atari VCS to Atari 2600. In addition, it was the only version of the platform released in Brazil as the 5200 and 7800 were disregarded locally.

The videogames market in Brazil at that time was incipient. *TeleJogo*, a local clone of Pong, had been released by Philco Ford in 1977 and was still for sale. Odyssey, a local version of Magnavox Odyssey², was successfully introduced by Philips in May 1983 with carefully localized games, given local names and translated instruction manuals. According to a research conducted by the Brazilian electronics company Gradiente one year before Atari's official launch, quoted in Chiado (2011), an estimated 80.000 Atari 2600 consoles were being played in Brazil in 1982. Most of them were smuggled by tourists travelling abroad, professional travelers and flight crews or bought through grey market options, finding all ways possible to circumvent restrictions to the production of electronic goods by foreign companies:

There was a policy known as “Market Reserve”, from 1977, that turned to be a specific law in 1984 (Federal Law 7.232/84) that forbade any importation of computational equipment, as well any official presence for international companies, an effort to make Brazilian companies stronger and able to produce and develop these equipment inside domestic market. (CHIADO, 2011, p. 21)

According to this law, any official initiative should come from a Brazilian company linked to another one from the foreign market, but with industrial plants installed for local manufacturing and not just the packaging and re-selling of imported goods. As this law was applied to electronic devices, Brazilian companies jumped at the chance to register and create counterfeit copies of scarce, sought-after, foreign items. In October 1983, Minister Danilo Venturini, general officer of the National Security Council, said that “Government sees market reserve as a political tool, economy comes after” (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 1983, p.7), reaffirming the strategic value the military rulers saw in this measure.

These measures fostered a “legitimate” piracy industry and smuggling practices. Chiado (2011) recounts that in the early 80s small companies quickly discovered that videogames could be a profitable market. Engineers and enthusiasts started to import parts and cartridges as separate pieces to assemble consoles locally. In 1980, the company Canal 3 (Channel 3) began to sell its own version of the Atari 2600, even registering the brand for its own use nationwide. Two years later, before the launch of the official version of Atari, the company

agreed to stop producing its version of the console, but did continue to manufacture game cartridges. This was a smart move, because players demanded new titles and cartridges required very little investment on technical support. Canal 3 also started a chain of video game rental shops, making cartridges for its own stores and selling them elsewhere too.

There were three main clones of the Atari 2600 on the market before the official launch, along with the previous one made by Canal 3 that ceased its production after the deal with Gradiente/Polyvox. Sayfi Computadores (Sayfi Computers) had its line of Dactari Models, Dynacom presented Dynavision (who would later evolve to the Dynavision II, a Nintendo Entertainment System clone a few years later), and the VJ-9000, a model from Dismac, a well-known company that produced calculators and had a chain of stores all over the country (CHIADO, 2011, p. 54). The other two rivals were the Intellivision, licensed by Sharp, and the Odyssey, from Philips.

In an interview for Video News Magazine, Júlio Ivo Albertoni, one of the owners of Sayfi Computadores, said that “Our process is like the Japanese one: there's nothing original under the sun. If it worked for them, why not for us?” (DACTARI 2600-A, 1983). The Dactari line included Atari 2600 clones and even one known as 007, because it was manufactured in a briefcase as a portable version. In addition, it was launched with the name Apple Vision, even using the classic colored apple logo from Apple Computer².

Later, two other companies would release their products. The computer company Microdigital presented Onyx Jr, while branding some cartridges with “Microsoft” printed on the labels, and CCE released its first iteration of Supergame, recognized as a lower quality product with joysticks that would easily break.

For cartridge sales, there were a plethora of brands and formats. While Odyssey and Intellivision had their exclusive connectors, the variety of formats helped to spread the idea that “there are more games for Atari” among the players. The smaller companies resorted to

² There are no official registers about why or how Dactari changed the name of its product, but some collectors informally say that was a settlement between the American and Brazilian companies.

guerrilla-style advertising, hacking the code of the games' EPROMs³ and replacing any mention of designers or software companies with their own brand (Figure 1).

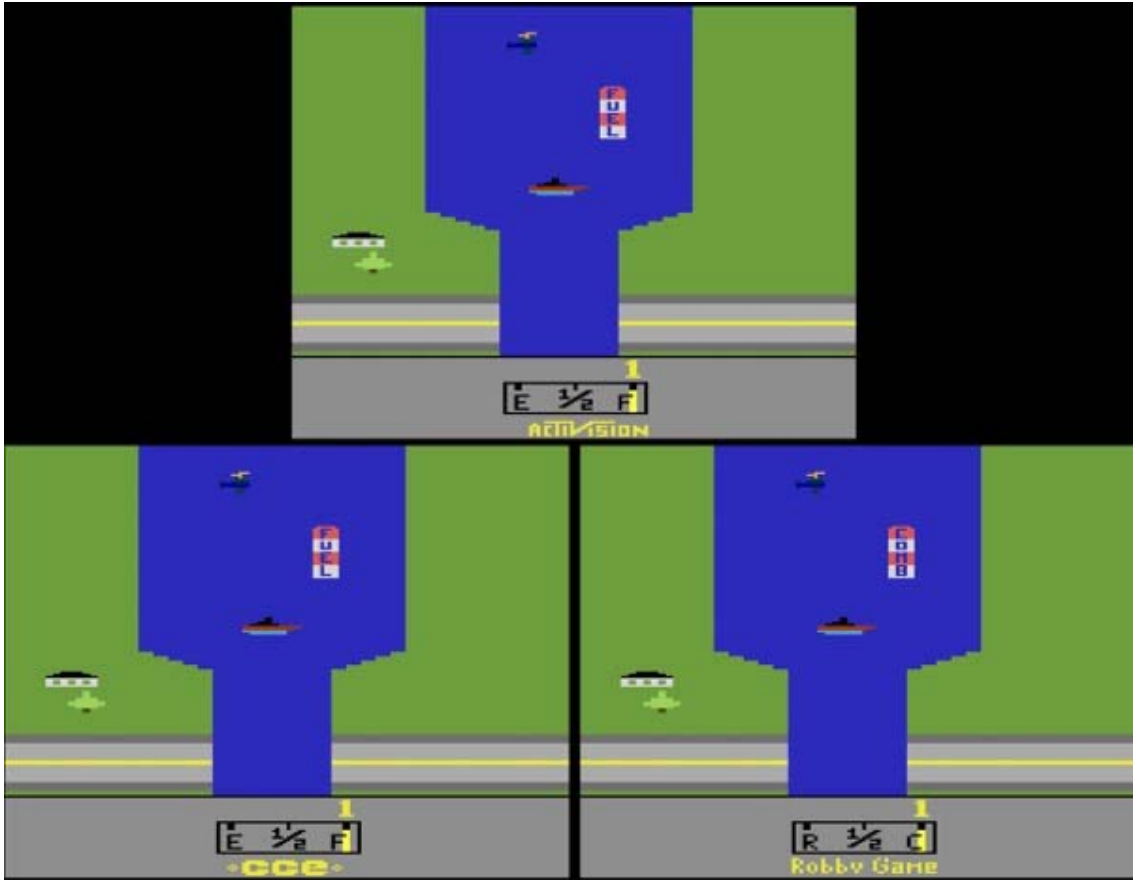


Figure 1: Arrangement of River Raid initial screens. The above is captured from the original, while the ones below were from Brazilian versions, CCE and Robby Game, yet another clone.

This led to a unique scenario for consumers, where original or counterfeit items did not make a difference for the buyers, who sought the cheapest items because they had learned that both of them would work with the consoles. Some titles were changed from brand to brand. *River Raid*, released by Activision in 1982, received names such as *Attack on the River* (Ataque no Rio, in Portuguese) and *Operation AM-X* (Operação AM-X, in Portuguese), the last one as a reference for the project of the Brazilian-Italian ground-attack aircraft produced in the same decade. It was up to the customer to negotiate the ambiguities in naming the games.

³ EPROM (Erasable Programmable Read-Only Memory) is a microchip that can store data when turned off, as the core unit of cartridges with games, but also became slang to mean gaming code extracted from a physical source and reprogrammed.

An inquiry made in October 2016 on Brazilian on-line auction websites returned 31 brands⁴, but there were more, some of them with details that make clear how Brazil had a dynamic and chaotic production cycle.



Figure 2: Image of Digivision cartridge with a Tie Fighter on its label
Source: Mercado Livre website (2016)

Some companies used a common label for their products, without images or quality illustrations like the ones from Atari/Polyvox. Digivision featured a Tie Fighter from the *Star Wars* movies on its label (Figure 2), Sayfi used the brand Apple Vision, and Tron had a different type of shell (Figure 3), none of them with the proper authorization to use names and images.

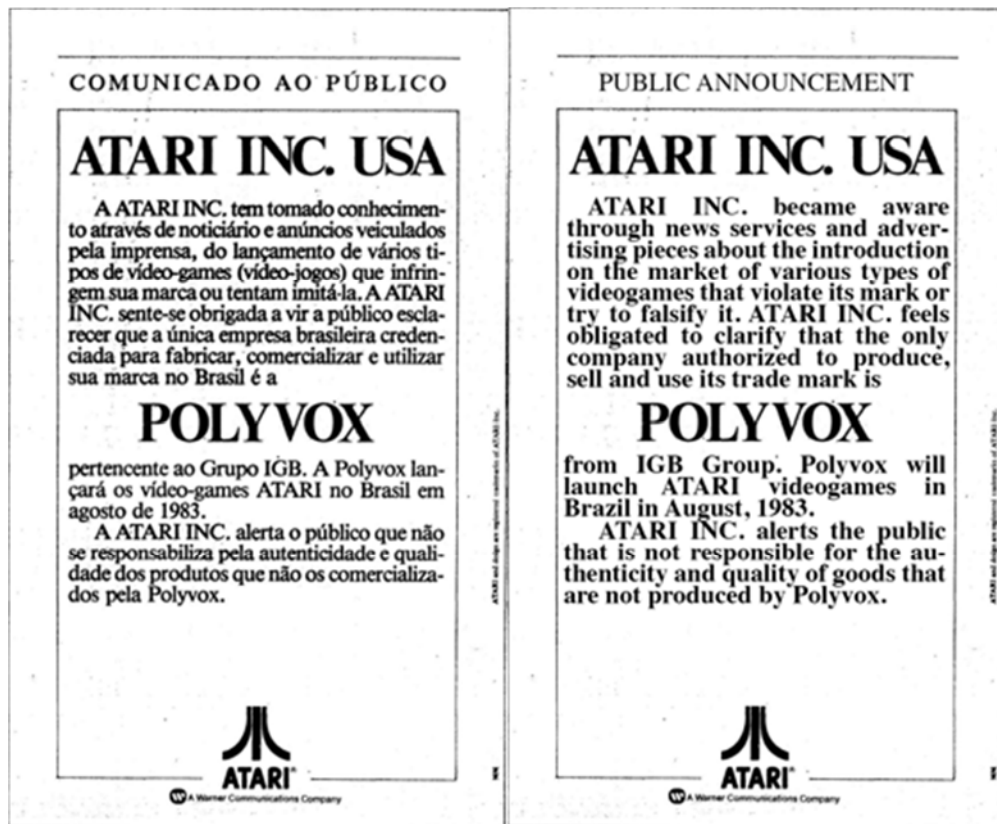


⁴ Some of the brands were Activision, Apple Vision, CCE, Dactar, Data Company, Digitel, Digivision, Dinamivision, Dismac, Dynacom, FGE, Fotomania, Galaxi, Genus, Imagic, JF, JVP, Onyx Jr (with some titles with Microsoft written on the label), Rentacom, Robby Game, Shock Vision, Softvision, Star Game, Supergame (not from CCE), Tecmagic, Tiger Vision, Top Game, Tron, VGS, Video Tiger, and Zirok.

Figure 3: Image of cartridge released by Tron
 Source: Mercado Livre website (2016)

In a market running rampant with such inventive modes of piracy, the official launch took some years of study, involving the local chapter of Warner (owner of Atari at the time) and Gradiente. The latter company was a prestigious electronics brand from Brazil, known for its TV sets and sound systems and, like other companies, was seeking to find new lucrative markets – and reasons to sell TVs in a market struggling with the effects of inflation and crisis. Under its label Polyvox, the company planned the release of a console with technical assistance, boxes and manuals in Portuguese, catalogs of future titles and countrywide distribution.

The first time the company addressed aspiring Brazilian players was through an announcement that there were clone systems in stores and only its machine was the certified original.



Figures 4 and 5: Original (left one) and translated version of Atari's public announcement
 Source: Estado de São Paulo newspaper (1983)

Figures 4 and 5 above are a composite made with the original piece printed in the Sunday edition of major newspapers in Brazil on April 17th 1983, and its facsimile with translated text (Atari, 1983, p. 6). It respects the typeface selection and layout, originally the size of ¼ of a page of a standard newspaper. This shows how Gradiente had to use the launching campaign not only to present the videogame as a new machine for future customers, but also as the sole official one. Used initially as a slogan, “Atari from Atari” was a motto repeated throughout the sales campaign.

Chiado (2011) states that 1983 is the year videogames in Brazil came of age, not only due to market expansion, but how the product found its space inside popular culture. During that year, some stories were published in newspapers from April to July pointing that Atari would be launched in August, with great expectations regarding prospective profits and sales (DO CARMO, 1983).

However, Gradiente had difficulties to import some electronic components to produce its Atari and had to delay the release of the console for the last quarter of the year. The console was finally released in October, taking advantage of two important dates to boost sales. The first one is October 12th, known locally as Children's Day and the day of Our Holy Lady of Aparecida, Catholic patroness of Brazil. This holiday is expected by kids and retailers alike, signaling which products and toys will be expected to be hot items on Christmas, the other important date.

As the licensed Atari was being produced, the clones flooded the market. Due to this, the company had to create an impact for its product or would lose more time, money and market share.

The “Best Enemy” television and print campaign: an analysis

In early October, a few months after the first officially published information regarding Atari's launch in Brazil, came the time to release the product and its launch campaign. The

pieces produced to advertise were unique among its peer companies manufacturing games in Brazil at the time because they were featured in print and television media; had a unified, original creative concept based around a narrative that positioned Atari as the “best enemy” (DPZ, 1983) and sought to overcome the niche market of enthusiasts to become a regular family entertainment option.

Created by Washington Olivetto and Gabriel Zellmeister from DPZ agency, then rising creative executives in the Brazilian advertising market, the commercials and print pieces placed the console as the living room's center of attention and desire, emphasizing how it challenged the players, finally showing that the players could win over the machine's dares. The adverts were reportedly approved by the former executive director of advertising for Atari International at the time, Richard D. Arroyo (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 1983, p. 9).

Other companies' advertising was simpler or not as wide-reaching in comparison. For example, the launch television ad for Odyssey, released by the electronics giant Philips in Brazil in May 1983, featured a futuristic presenter on a star field background showing the console's features without a developed narrative or a sequential attribute as the Atari campaign. Other smaller companies chose to remain in the less expensive print media, using space sci-fi, military or technology related themes on their ads, a common trope that Atari would also explore to greater profit.

Our analysis begins with the attempt to find primary sources to the print and television advertisements. This proved to be a challenging point, since most of the business players were gone or merged nearly three decades after the launch. IGB, the business group in control of the Gradiente and Polyvox brands, was close to bankruptcy in 2007 and has since tried to resurrect the brand after a series of setbacks, debts and mergers. DPZ, the advertising agency, has since been bought by the French group Publicis in 2011⁵ and reorganized itself. Its website has no mention of Atari and Polyvox, even in its “Classics” page. The closest source we could get was the YouTube channel maintained by the Brazilian retro gaming

⁵ PR Newswire (2011). "Publicis Groupe Acquires Brazilian Agency DPZ". News story. Available at: <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/publicis-groupe-acquires-brazilian-agency-dpz-125355058.html>. Retrieved on October 10, 2016.

enthusiast Garrett Chiado⁶, that posted the campaign's videos digitized from a VHS ad portfolio tape, which we took as source. The print ads were easier to find as the publishers remain active on the Brazilian market. Thus, we base our print ad sources on the on-line repositories of VEJA Magazine, Brazil's largest newsmagazine, and the Folha de São Paulo daily newspaper.

Our corpus consists of eight commercials and four double page color print ads. The commercials have been downloaded from YouTube for analysis in the highest quality available, standard definition (480p), with the help of the on-line tool Clip Converter⁷. In addition, visual summaries of the episodes were produced with the help of the Media Player Classic (Windows)⁸ that organized each episode in a grid of frozen frames at regular intervals and allowed the observation of key scenes with agility. The print ads were copied from the on-line repositories as image files in the highest available quality. All content received backup in a cloud service for consultation and the collaborative analysis of authors, also being used to store other references and the preliminary text drafts.

The campaign was released in October 1983, first on television and next on print during the following weeks. As pointed out before, the videos were presented to boost Children's Day sales, usually the biggest commercial event before Christmas in Brazil.

Our analysis methodology is informed by Aumont and Marie (1993) and Jullier and Marie (2007). Although these authors dedicated their texts mostly to film analysis, it became clear to the authors that the visual style used on the eight commercials was closer to a film's visual narrative than to television content or even to plain product advertising. The structure of a campaign implies more narrative redundancy throughout the pieces, a repetition intended to carry across the creative concept and its identity.

⁶Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/user/garrettimus/videos>. Retrieved on October 20,2016.

⁷ Clip Converter (2016). Online service. Available at: <http://www.clipconverter.cc/>. Retrieved on October 20,2016.

⁸ Media Player Classic (2011). Software. Available at: <http://sourceforge.net/projects/mpc-hc/>. Retrieved on October 24,2016.

The television launch campaign consisted of eight commercials. Four were teasers, the first one lasting 30 seconds and the other three 15 seconds each. The last four were complete ads, the first with 60 seconds and the remaining 30 seconds each. The commercials presented the characters, a white heterosexual couple and their boy and girl, the suggested place of consumption, the home's living room, and their relation of challenge posed by the “best enemy”, the videogame. The four teasers have only one shot each and no brand signature at the end, as described below.



Figure 6: A visual snapshot of the first teaser for the release of Atari in Brazil.

The first teaser (Figure 6) is 30s long and shows a wide shot of an average middle-class home at dusk. The lights are on; the car is in the garage. An ominous soundtrack, with wind sounds and off-screen dogs barking, is accompanied by a low-pitched narrator: “Within a few days this house will be invaded by ghosts. After that extraterrestrials will appear. The missiles, the androids.” The camera slowly approaches the house. Suddenly, the sky flashes in a supernatural purple thunder, reinforcing that something odd is about to come. Windblasts move the trees. “Will the family be able to defeat the enemy? Wait...”



Figure 7: A visual snapshot of the second teaser for the release of Atari in Brazil

The second teaser (Figure 7) is 15s long and shows a shot of an elementary school classroom. A world map and a skeleton are seen in the back. A boy is on the forefront with three other children writing on their desks as the camera slowly dollies in on the boy. The ambient sound of a school with children playing outside is overcome by an ominous soundtrack and the same narrator: “Within a few days this boy will go to war. He will face thousands of missiles, fighters, submarines. Can he beat the enemies? Wait...” As the camera approaches, the blue toned glow of a TV screen lights the boy’s face. The child looks puzzled at first, changing the expression to a “I can handle it” expression by the end of the ad.



Figure 8: A visual snapshot of the third teaser for the release of Atari in Brazil

The third teaser (Figure 8) is 15s long and shows a young adult man typing at an office desk. The office setting does not give specific clues about the subject's profession, but it has blueprint tubes on the background. As the camera approaches, an ominous soundtrack is accompanied by the narrator: "Within a few days this man will compete in a Formula 1 race. He will face a very dangerous track and corridors without love for life. Can he beat the enemies? Wait..." The man at first seems to be somewhat aware and unsafe with the camera moving in, but answers the question posed by the narrator with an expression of confidence.



Figure 9: A visual snapshot of the fourth teaser to the Atari's release in Brazil

The fourth teaser (Figure 9) is 15s long and shows a young adult woman making a meal in a kitchen. She has her back to the camera. Her clothes and hair recall stereotypical homemakers of 1950s advertising. The camera dollies in as she turns and tastes the sauce slowly, as the campaign's ominous soundtrack and narrator announce: "Within a few days this woman will start as a soccer player. Her debut will be against Pelé and other superstars. Will she be able to overcome the enemy? Wait..."

The woman at first is unaware of the camera. As it approaches, the blue glow of a TV screen illuminates her face, as she answers the question posed by the narrator with a wink of confidence.

A striking feature of Atari's teasers is the repeated indication that this will be an indoor experience. From the first one that shows the average house from the street at night to the last one that shows the house's kitchen, nothing relevant happens with the characters in an outdoor space. One can argue that this is related to a very specific feature from the product;

after all, this is not a portable gaming system, but rather a living room console connected to a television.

Nevertheless, we argue that the indoor representation also plays against a widely held notion of what Brazil's about. More often than not, its beaches, tropical forests and natural features represent the country both nationally and internationally in general. This means that the urbanized country is seldom seen as a defining feature of national identity. At the same time, the second half of the 20th century saw a growing exodus from rural areas to large metropolitan areas, a change in the demographics that proved to be irreversible so far. As mentioned earlier in the text, 1983 was also a year of widespread recession in Brazilian economy, meaning that household entertainment options could be seen as less expensive than going out, also being perceived as more insulated from street violence and crime.

There is also a more subtle narrative thread that runs throughout the teasers, especially in the last three teasers when the characters face the camera and have their faces bathed in the blue light from a close television screen. Instead of showing, as many other game advertisements have, the character being immersed in the virtual world, Atari's Brazilian writers chose not to show their actual interaction with the games but only their growing expectation. They are, after all, nameless, as the games hinted and so is the brand, suggesting that they are a shortcut for many possible consumers and products.

A recurring trope on the teasers is the presence of elements of the strange. This is first presented on the premiere teaser where an average house is surrounded by purple thunderous skies and is all but unaware of what is going around it. The text read by the narrator always reinforces the proximity of the enemy and the many challenges it will bring to the characters. The suggestion of the strange in the mundane life of the characters along with the ominous soundtrack and the deep-voiced narrator borrows from a repertoire of popular science fiction hits such as *E.T.* (Steven Spielberg, 1982), and specifically the television series *The Twilight Zone*⁹ (1959-64), although adapted to Brazilian audiences and advertising of the time.

⁹ The series, created by Rod Serling, had an anthology format with individual stories without a specific genre, but exploring themes of psychological horror, fantasy, science fiction, suspense, and psychological thriller often placing them within mundane urban spaces and closing the narratives with dark twists. It had two television remakes, a movie spin-off and other associated products throughout the decades.

For example, the second teaser about the boy that goes to war touched a delicate issue in Brazil at the time. The military government that ruled the country had a waning popularity and people called for presidential elections, so support toward military actions and drafting was seen as out of fashion. Since many games use military situations as themes and game mechanics, it was necessary to steer the perception towards fantasy as quickly as possible. Criticism towards this and violence in games was pondered as a public relations issue by the advertisers and manufacturers of Brazilian Atari consoles, as the report on a debate published on October 18th, 1983 suggests (FOLHA DE SÃO PAULO, 1983, p.7).

The teaser featuring the woman is particularly interesting in its context. Here we see advertising trying to update the profile of the female customer, even if building it in response to stereotypes. Instead of a passive position, an active one; instead of avoiding gaze, winking with confidence; instead of choosing a sport then accepted as normal, a suggestion of “playing soccer with the big boys” even when there were barely any female soccer teams in Brazil and a national team would only be assembled in 1988.

After the teasers introduced the main characters, who operate as avatars to the main consumer groups the campaign was targeting, as well as the “home” location as their place of play, the main commercials revealed the product and suggested ways to interact with it both socially and individually.

The first commercial in the series, shown on figure 10, has a duration of 60s, featuring 30 shots with an average shot length of two seconds. The narrative develops in two different threads that converge. The first is the street outside the house known from the first teaser for the campaign and the second is the view from inside the living room where the family is ecstatic playing videogames together.



Figure 10: A visual snapshot of the first commercial for the release of Atari in Brazil

It is night, flashing lights and muffled game sounds come from inside the house calling the attention of an old man and his dog that look intrigued. The first shots take their cue from the first teaser, where something odd is suggested as happening at an uneventful place. The narrator returns, explaining: “Tonight this house is being invaded by a terrible enemy. The Atari Video Game. The enemy came with ghosts, extraterrestrials, missiles, androids ...” The camera takes us inside the living room where the family is in front of the television playing with an Atari. The editing of the indoor scenes alternates between the game shots and the close-ups on the family members that cheer loudly as the narrator continues: “But the family challenged its intelligence and won. Atari Video Game - The enemy that everyone wants.” Outside, the lights and noises called the neighborhood's attention and the police is called as a huge crowd is drawn to the front lawn of the house, making the family's father go open the door and check what was wrong. A final shot shows the iconic game console once more and delivers the slogan:

The Atari from Atari

The second commercial, shown on figure 11, features the adult male shown on the second teaser playing alone, sitting on the living room floor very close to the TV. It is 30 seconds long and features 16 shots with an average of 1.9 seconds per shot.



Figure 11: A visual snapshot of the second commercial for the release of Atari in Brazil

As the camera hovers past the television and reveals the man, the narrator returns: “This man is competing in a Formula 1 race against a formidable enemy. The Atari Video Game. The track is very dangerous and the other racers do not have love for life.” The game is *Pole Position* and the shots alternate between details of the dexterity of the man manipulating the joystick, close-ups of his face and game shots. The narrator concludes: “But the man challenged its intelligence and won. Atari Video Game - The enemy that everyone wants. The Atari from Atari”. The man is seen victorious, as on a podium of a Formula One Grand Prix, spraying a champagne bottle, celebrating victory.

The third advert (figure 12) features the young boy, possibly the couple's son. It has 30 seconds and 17 shots averaging about 1.76 seconds each. The boy enters the frame by grabbing the joystick from the carpet as if it had been left behind by one of the adults earlier.



Figure 12: A visual snapshot of the third commercial for the release of Atari in Brazil

His movements have a defiant manner and the boy picks *Space Invaders* to play as the narrator returns: “This boy is at war against a formidable enemy. The Atari Video Game The enemy has fighter jets, missiles, submarines ...” Once more, the editing switches between shots of the boy’s hands, shots of the television screen with close-ups of the incoming alien attack waves and shots of the boy’s emotions, the exhilarating fun of playing the videogame. As he beats the stage and is awarded, the narrator concludes: “But the boy challenged its intelligence and won. Atari Video Game - The enemy that everyone wants. The Atari from Atari”

The fourth and last advert features the adult woman playing *Realsports Soccer*, a soccer game released in 1983. It is 30 seconds long and has 15 shots with the average shot length of two seconds each. It is shown on figure 13.



Figure 13: A visual snapshot of the fourth commercial for the release of Atari in Brazil

Once again the character is alone in the living room playing video games, emphasizing that games provide a sort of personal break from the household chores the same character was seen undertaking in the fourth teaser. The narrator returns: “This woman is playing soccer against a formidable enemy. The Atari Video Game. The enemy has Pelé and other superstars on its team.” The editing alternates shots of the woman’s hands, expressions and the game’s screen. As she scores a goal and celebrates, the narrator concludes: “But the woman challenged her intelligence and won. Atari Video Game - The enemy that everyone wants. The Atari from Atari.”

The four commercials from the launch campaign were highly praised and successful in driving sales of the console and its games (LEME, 1983). News reports from the following weeks towards Christmas write about over 80,000 units sold and low stocks kept in the stores, surpassing preliminary figures and giving competition a strong heads-up to join the market as soon as possible. When the first data about sales rose, Atari, Odyssey and Intellivision sold

180.000 consoles and 500.000 cartridges. Months later, in May 1984, another story indicated that Atari and its clones held 70% of market share.

The commercials in themselves feature a traditional shot blocking if you consider them as regular films. However, one particular style is evident in the construction of the visual narrative. In the first commercial, there is a different rhythm of cutting outdoor and indoor scenes. All the outdoor scenes are cut on a slower pace than the indoor ones, accelerating the cuts to entice viewers into understanding the sense of urgency and engagement that the action games featured demand. This structure of shot blocking is adapted in the following commercials focusing the editing on a 180-degree axis between close-ups of the player's face and the screen where the game is being played. This structure implies that gaming is first and foremost a personal activity with a communal experience coming second place.

Fears of isolation caused by video games and other technologies were understandably high at that moment, hence the choice to emphasize throughout the campaign that Atari was family entertainment, and even as it was anyone's "best enemy", it could be a foe also for loneliness, as a print ad affirms below in figure 14.

The featured games on the commercials are the arcade conversions of *Space Invaders*, *Pac-Man*, *Defender*, *Asteroids*, *Pole Position* and the non-arcade *Realsports Soccer*, all released by Polyvox. The choice of launch titles being coin-op conversions seems to make sense as an attempt in conquering mind share from games that were at least marginally known to the population or children. These are also games that feature easily identifiable images and situations instead of using other widely known games from the system, albeit more graphically abstract, such as *Missile Command* – the advertisers chose the games that would look good on a TV commercial break.

A closer reading of the texts spoken by the narrator suggests other games were considered to be in the commercials, but did not make it to the final cut. *Missile Command* is indirectly quoted in the text read by the narrator as he refers to "missiles" four times. *Combat* is alluded by its "fighter jets and submarines" quote on teaser 2. No game with "androids" is visually present in the eight videos from our corpus, but it is possible to infer that the mentions in

teaser 1 and in ad 1 are related to *Berzerk*, a huge hit for Atari's home console in 1982 as well as a conversion of an arcade game from 1980.

A curious theme that is present in the text read by the narrator is the appeal to the development of intelligence by the characters as they play. The family, the man, the woman and the boy become "more intelligent" because they have defeated the challenges posed by Atari. This strikes us as somewhat of a puzzling argument to sell a video game, since a game is a system closed within itself with its own rules and rewards. Of course, success in a game depends on a certain level of intelligence, but far more on hand-eye coordination than anything else. One can understand the appeal to intelligence as something used to justify the investment in the game system: it was not just a toy; it was something that your kids could learn from, nearly a personal computer. In the aforementioned debate, where questions about violence in video games were raised, the silver lining defended by manufacturers and advertisers was that computer science and its domestic spinoffs were a great tool to educate the young, thus a promise that shows up in the campaign.

The iconic shape of the Atari 2600 also plays an important part in the advert, operating as answer to the teaser and the signature shot at the end of the commercial. In spite of not revealing the packaging or the game cartridges in great detail, many shots emphasize the industrial design of the joysticks and the console itself. This is relevant as the software content was being openly pirated by various other companies, but the defining features of the physical console were harder to clone and had a higher profile for legal action.

The print ads were released on national high circulation magazines in late October 1983, following the first run of the television campaign. They expand the "best enemy" theme using the taglines: "The man's best enemy", featuring a teenager and his dog (fig.14); "The Brazilian family's #1 enemy" showing an advertising-standard heterosexual family with two children (fig.15); "Who has many friends needs this enemy" presenting a row of curious friends approaching the one that is playing (fig.16); and "The #1 enemy of loneliness" highlighting a boy completely absorbed in the gameplay (fig.17).



Figure 14: “Man's best enemy” print advertisement.
Source: Veja magazine, 26/10/1983, p. 12 and 13



Figure 15: “The Brazilian family’s #1 enemy” print advertisement.

Source: Veja magazine, 09/11/1983, p. 142 and 143

The printed ad layouts follow the same style and elements as the television commercials: they include a shot of a game being played, the Atari console is featured in detail, the characters created for the advertisement are seen playing or, at least, paying attention to the game and a general sense of wonderment and surprise is suggested. From the television commercials also comes an indoor ambience that defines the print layouts: there are no windows or outside view, only artificial light illuminates the rooms and an almost claustrophobic feeling could impose itself, if the characters had not been shown having fun.



Figure 16: “Who has many friends needs this enemy” print advertisement.
Source: Veja magazine, 30/11/1983, p. 24 and 25



Figure 17: “The enemy #1 of loneliness” print advertisement.

Source: Veja magazine, 14/12/1983, p. 154 and 155

Something that sets apart the print ads from the commercials is that the product’s Box is shown and some cartridges are also present. A chromatic difference is that all the ads have a red tint to their pages, a stark contrast from the bluish glow used in the television commercials. This choice makes some of the games’ colors stray far from the original ones, but makes for a better fit in the print media.

Closing comments: Atari’s lasting legacy in Brazil

Three decades later, Atari’s advertising campaign still enchants viewers. As analyzed, it not just sells a product, it offers a whole gaming culture and a message that it is easy for everyone to join in and play. The television ads were important in helping the audience understand the Atari brand value and experience suggested on the screen, and Gradiente’s huge network of distributors and certified sellers around the country was essential to ensure proper customer expectations. While other brands made products that were sold for years to

come, Polyvox became a *de facto* standard and set the pattern for a gaming culture, leaving Odyssey and Intellivision as niche products even with games tied to famous brands¹⁰.

Another important factor for Atari's victory was the huge variety of cartridges, even with the confusing titles and brands. Polemic creations such as *X-Men* or *Custer's Revenge* were received as jokes in the Brazilian market, while *Enduro*, *H.E.R.O.* and *River Raid* prevailed. By not killing cartridge bootleggers, Gradiente/Polyvox and Warner used the clones as tools to spread the platform, a move that time revealed as intelligent and that did not cost the life cycle of the product – it even extended it.

Looking back on the advertising campaign, it received a gold medal in the “Colunistas” awards, one of the most renowned prizes in Brazilian advertising. It was considered the “Prize of the Decade” best campaign in the toys, games and music instruments category, winning over 744 other pieces created from 1981 to 1990.

The prize is fair for a campaign that also defied the status quo of a country living the last days of a military dictatorship. Atari was placed as the citizen's best enemy and one that could be defeated, setting it apart from the economic crisis and politicians that were far from trustworthy. The counterculture element of the slogan was not emptied as it accompanied a product, but added a bit of political innuendo to the mainstream culture.

In addition, the pieces were elements of transgression. The video with the young woman playing soccer placed women as protagonists of a game that is traditionally masculine in Brazil. While worldwide fans know Pelé (a player also featured in his own game in 1980), the idea of a female professional player became mainstream in the mid-90s¹¹. In 2015, Electronic Arts released *Fifa 16* with the option to play with female athletes, using a composite shot of Alex Morgan, from the US Soccer team, and Leo Messi, from Barcelona,

¹⁰ Odyssey was released with localized titles and names in Portuguese. *K.C. Munchkin* was translated to Come-Come (Eat-Eat), the nickname *Pac-Man* received in Brazil. However, the main star of the console was Didi na Mina Encantada (Didi in the Enchanted Pit), a version of *Pick-Axe Pete* with the main character changed into Renato Aragão, Brazil's most famous comic actor.

¹¹ Even with the popularity of the soccer in Brazil, there is not a regular national female championship. Marta, five times chosen as FIFA World Player of the Year, plays in Sweden, not in her home country. Moreover, due to violence and other factors, the presence of girls and women rose in stadiums only near 2000, with increased security and tolerance for female presence.

as cover stars. While the modern game does not have the option to make a match with female and male athletes, the Brazilian video showed a girl defying stars and winning against them. Even if the ad created by DPZ did not shatter traditional chauvinistic tropes regarding soccer, it is possible to argue that it suggested an alternate gender balance regarding sports.

Differently from contemporary pieces by Sega and Sony, the campaign teased the audience without being vulgar. There was not one main character, but the whole family as main character, with each member with their own particularities, difficulties and one enemy in common that would be defeated with modern skills and fun. In 2006, Nintendo used pieces with a similar idea to promote the Wii, sometimes showing not the game screen, but emphasizing the expressions of various people having fun.

These ideas help us to sum up that products have a moment, an optimal slice of the *zeitgeist*, to prevail, and creative advertising helps to place them in the culture. Games were desired as novelty items, but also as something that could change the relation with communication and people around them. There is word of mouth, or the word of play in this case, but the advertising campaign marked Atari as a weapon of change in an age marked by the fear of mass destruction.

The way the slogan was placed, as a signature, illustrates how Atari was the center of this combination of fun and cultural change. Every emotion of the players could be the emotion of the viewer and was an element that built a narrative that only Atari could offer. If it was not by the official product, it was by its platform and not with Odyssey or the other ones.

In 1984, Atari finally reached mainstream status in Brazil as it was presented in the opening credits of "Transas & Caretas", a primetime *telenovela* aired by TV Globo, Brazil's largest TV network (MEMÓRIA GLOBO, 2010) in an early mix of advertising and entertainment (figure 18).

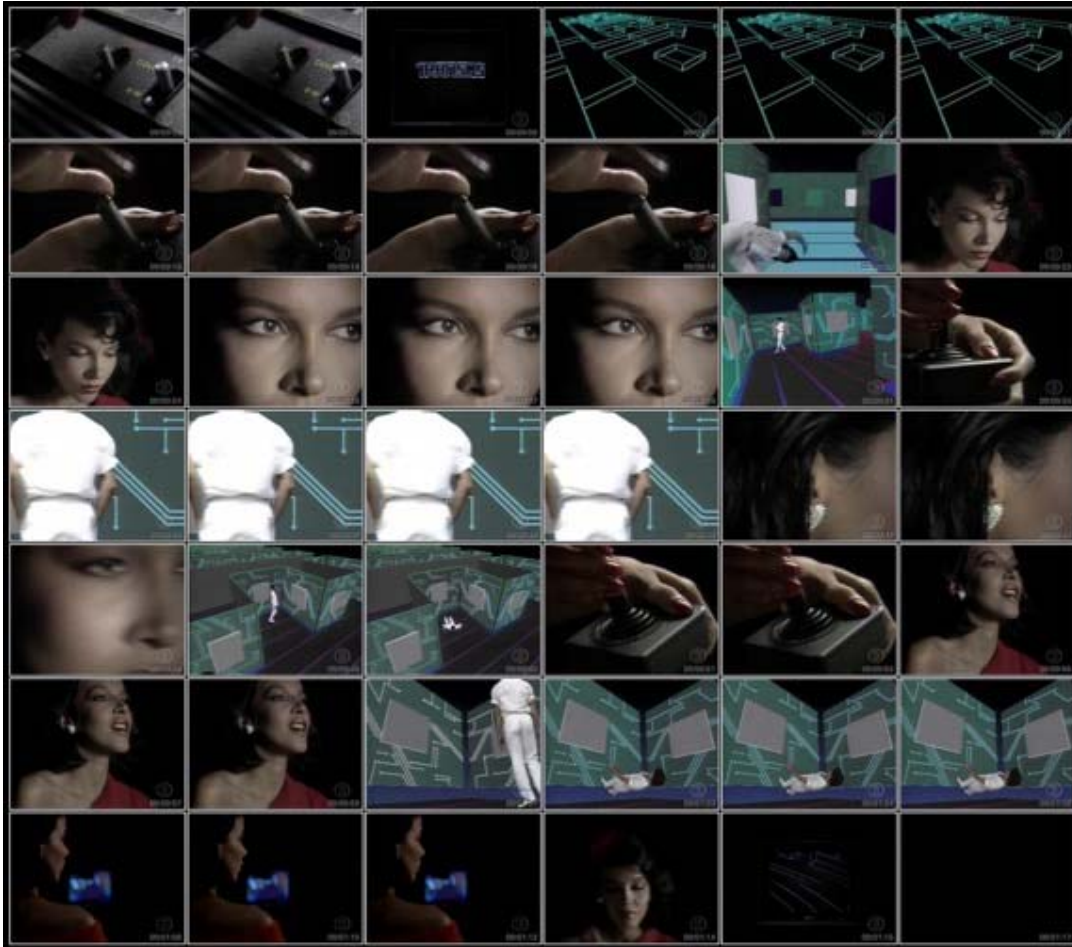


Figure 18: Visual snapshot of the opening titles to the telenovela "Transas e Caretas"
 Source: Memória Globo (2016)

An overview of the opening titles from the *telenovela*, shown in figure 18, highlight the presence of the videogame and other standard visual tropes regarding technology. The officially licensed Atari 2600 console, joystick and cartridge (customized with the show's name printed on it) are presented in the hands of the woman as the devices that command the on-screen action. Inside the simulated game, the walls resemble circuits, the topography is angular, the action takes place in a maze, the woman controls two white-clad male avatars and they display awkward, "robotic" movements. As a *telenovela* is often based on romantic plots, the representation of 1980s contemporary consumer technology is coupled with the oldest romantic trope of them all: a love triangle is suggested as the two avatars jump out of the screen, running towards the woman in the end of the sequence, reconciling convention and modernity.

Apart from other places, Atari's market lead started to end in Brazil only in 1988, when Gradiente released the Phantom System, a clone of the NES, followed by Dynacom and its Dynavision II (another clone of Nintendo's platform) and Sega's Master System by TecToy. The last models of Atari from Polyvox were sold until 1993, ten years after its release. TeleJogo was the first console released domestically, but Atari left its mark, and it is important to understand how videogames are a relevant part of contemporary culture and how advertising can reach audiences in electronic or digital contexts.

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