

Juan Pablo García Sossa

More-than-Binary

Computing

Özgün Eylül İçsen: How would you start describing more-than-binary computing?

Juan Pablo García Sossa: Mid-brown skin, dark black hair – my eyes turn from brown-yellow to green-gray when the sunlight turns. I was born in Colombia. I grew up in Bogotá, and I've been between there and Berlin for the past ten years. This is from where I speak.

Since the conception of the idea of the globe, a one-world way of being has been positioned as our main cosmology. Cosmology can be understood as a set of principles or a framework that determines our understandings of the planet, our ways of being, and our ways of relating to each other. Consequently, our responses and response-abilities are conditioned by our cosmologies and frameworks too.

The dominant cosmology of globalism is deeply rooted in modern binary understandings of the planet with embedded hierarchies in them. Imaginary lines were drawn on planet Earth. Meridians and Parallels (Latitudes and Longitudes) were composed in a way to intersect each other, forming a grid, with the main intention to help humans understand and navigate the planet. This mesh of lines not only explored ways of understanding the planet but also of controlling and dominating it. This matrix of power we live in is deeply rooted in binary divisions such as Nature/Culture, Civilized/Savage, Human/Subhuman, The East/The West, and the so-called Global North/South. These binaries and dualities have embedded hierarchies in them that validate what is done at one side of the line and render invisible what is done at its counterpart. The computational thinking of solutionism and optimization has made us impose a homogenizing universal system into communities and environments for the sake of progress and civilization.

A pervasive idea revolves around our current digital technologies that they are all based on 1/0 binaries. More-than-binary computing is an envisioned concept that looks at how we could re-script the root code of what we think makes us human. More-than-binary computing acknowledges situated and relational knowledges. Possibly,

intelligences lie not only within subjects but rather in their relationships and inter-relations: in their in-betweenness. Here I'm interested in defying the modern binaries we live in the solutionism or computational thinking cycle we find ourselves in. Here I'm trying to go around or speak nearby what more-than-binary computing could be.

Özgün Eylül İşcen: I appreciate that you do that – speaking nearby. Indeed, the invitation to speak and think nearby, as proposed by Trinh T. Minh-ha, is something I pay attention to while engaging with media theory and art within this in-betweenness you are talking about.¹ Thus, it fits very well with the insurgent logic you are proposing with the term more-than-binary computing.

In this respect, I would like to ask where you situate “countering” in more-than-binary computing. How do you engage with it in your work dedicated to questioning coloniality in the fields of art and design as well as investing in alternative infrastructures and imaginaries of computation (e.g., algorithms as recipes)?

Here, I am also thinking of your very inspiring work in the case of Futura Trópica. By the way, this conversation made me realize how the project website is designed as a flow of images and texts in a circular movement rather than sharp edges and definitive titles – a design manifestation of speaking nearby. You are also part of the design team of Berlin's SAVVY Contemporary – The Laboratory of Form-Ideas. How do these projects speak to more-than-binary computing?

Juan Pablo García Sossa: I was trained as a designer and later on intersected new media art and research in my practice. For many years, wherever you studied design in the planet you would get told: good design is Swiss design and Swiss design is timeless. These statements often include the assumption that practices within the so-called Global North are considered design and elsewhere are crafts. The field of design has developed closely serving mass production, standardization, and universalism. Many of the principles embedded in design are taken as static systems. But there could be so much more.

More-than-binary computing emerges from several translation processes. Often there's a fascination with non-translatable or situated words that hint at nuances and contexts around them. In my opinion, there is an opportunity to reflect more on the relational aspects of elements and move beyond their isolated portrayal or projection that often reinforce individual and static views. That's why there is a strong interest in creolizing or hybridizing protocols, particularly in their logics, grammar, and syntax. This might be a way to re-wire the rootcode of what we think makes us human and alter our response-abilities. In these senses, we try to reflect on such translations putting in dialogue situated knowledges with emerging

technologies & infrastructures, craft elastic masala² (more-than-binary) protocols, and execute and embody them.

There could be a countering gesture or a refusal to binary thinking and models but in my opinion, it shouldn't be limited to this. As Argentinian thinker Walter D. Mignolo would say, we could move from resistance to re-existence.³ I think such a shift represents a much fertile ground that goes beyond the urge to flip the coin, but rather keeps it flipping – so there are no black/white polarities but rather ever-changing shades of gray (or all the colors in-between and around). I would possibly suggest exposing ourselves to thinking in an UnReCountering way. As a constant UnCountering and ReCountering approach.

Özgün Eylül İşcen: It is interesting that you bring this up because our use of the term “counter” hopes to embrace a similar openness. In the meantime, we are also curious about your historical, artistic, or theoretical references while navigating through multiple cultural and mediascapes from Bogotá to Berlin. You also invest in alternative socio-technical as much as geographical imaginaries in the above-listed projects that dissolve the hierarchies of high- and low-tech cultures or similar dichotomies. In this regard, we find your projects’ infrastructure- and community-making qualities fascinating. We would like to hear more about this from you.

Juan Pablo García Sossa: While growing up in a place like Colombia, you frequently get told you come from an “under-developed” or “third world” place. From very early in my life I was interested in exploring and understanding other forms of knowledges and technologies beyond an imposed idea of “development.” There is a strong urge of needing to catch up with the “developed world.” This often translates to copy-cattng whatever the so-called Global North does, without examining if such “solutions” make sense in our contexts. But it isn’t only Colombia that gets told this. When receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, Gabriel García-Márquez pronounced a discourse called *The Solitude of Latin America*: what he described was that we hadn’t found the means yet to render our lives believable. But one could say it isn’t only Latin America, it could easily be the Solitude of the African Continent or South Asia, Southeast Asia, or the Pacific. The Tropics are regions that have been historically exploited, undervalued, and (over-)exoticized. There is a need to redefine it in endotic ways so it isn’t only a matter of “being-seen” but rather “to-see-from.” I feel the Tropical Belt represents an opportunity to break the binary thinking we live in and shift to more-than-binary perma-computing. But these endotic redefinitions could come from other regions and climates too, such as the Mediterraneans or Altiplanos. It isn’t very often when tropicals have the chance to exchange laterally without a mediator from the North. With these netting projects, we try to braid a *Rede*

(Brazilian Portuguese word for hammock and network) for practitioners within the Tropical Belt to navigate together the complexities we face and nourish each other not only as allies but rather as *complicés*.

Özgün Eylül İşcen: Following up on that point, can you talk more about *Magical Hackerism or The Elasticity of Resilience* you curated at SAVVY Contemporary in 2022? How did it come into being as it embraced a multi-media and multi-site approach aligning well with your aspirations?

Juan Pablo García Sossa: Instead of asking what are the means to render our lives believable, *Magical Hackerism* embraced the question of what are the means to render a multiplicity of realities. This meant that in order to be able to generate truly diverse responses we needed to alter the frameworks that condition us and our imagination, namely the imposed homogenizing force of globalism. In this sense, this represented an opportunity to collectively navigate tech-dominating themes, yet re-framed and situated in other logics. With a strong desire to alter our conducts and the modus operandi of our bodies and organizations, we tried to expose ourselves to other logics and conditions looking for an embodiment of knowledges and situated practices. We never intended to tell what *Magical Hackerism* is but we wanted it to rather be something felt and perceived.

An example of this was that we wanted to move away from an import/export logic (the illusion of globalism and universalism that context doesn't matter and things work the same way no matter where they are). In this sense, we intended to situate works and projects in the context of Berlin, Brandenburg, and the space at SAVVY Contemporary. So, most of the works were re-composed and to some extent re-interpreted for such contexts. One could think of such a process as a relational translation (instead of a literal one) where we don't just bring the very same object or outcome from a different context but rather try to learn the logics behind a practice and try to apply it responding to the specificities of a place. It is like, in a recipe, exchanging bell peppers for the pointy ones, or instead of having croutons one could have fried cassava. Some works responded to underwater sounds and migratory birds in the region through the lens of a perception of time from Latin America or Mexico. In some other works, we intended to repurpose already-existing systems and conceive the possibility of works (worlds) within works (worlds). We hosted works at already-existing photo booths, sound systems, and LED banners that were otherwise disused or intended for something else.

Another aspect was that we didn't want to limit ourselves to only pairing the works in conversation but we wanted to establish relationships between practitioners whenever possible and have works so intimate and close to each other as if they were gossiping. Instead of

audiences only looking at things, we wanted pieces to be props for the performativity of the visitors. These included hammocks attached to each other and a gossip corner where visitors could recreate the fastest internet in the tropics: two *titas* gossiping.⁴

Including work and events with various kinds of media, aesthetics, and fidelity including workshops, an invocations program, and a virtual rave, *Magical Hackerism* was fortunately a stimulating excuse to stretch formats and containers of knowledge, so in a way also opening up the polyrhythmic energies of the multivalent in-betweenness trapped in binary thinking and computing.

Özgün Eylül İşcen: All that sounds fascinating! Finally, could you please suggest further examples of N-computing?

Juan Pablo García Sossa: FLOW (Free, Libre, Open, Wild) Computing; TropicalTurn-Computing; Tropikós Computing; Perma·computing; Creole Computing; Masala Computing...

Özgün Eylül İşcen: As it comes up multiple times, and we already have touched upon it with the contribution of Marloes de Valk and Ville-Matias Heikkilä to Counter-N,⁵ how do you approach perma·computing through the idea of more-than-binary computing?

Juan Pablo García Sossa: Our practice is deeply committed to pluriversing technologies towards a techno·diversity and more-than-binary perma·computing. Diversity isn't only a matter of inclusion or multicultural (or what is often called multi-kulti in the German context) quotas, it is rather an actual survival strategy. When we look at plantations and monoculture projects, we would notice that viruses spread easily because they don't need to decipher the DNA code of the other beings: it is the same. So, we used pesticides as solutions that resulted in being carcinogenic, as with chlordane in Martinique. This is not so different from digital monoculture where the homogenizing force of globalism promises to connect us through viral content. We are seeing the effects by now of solutionism and computational thinking. Meanwhile, in permaculture projects, viruses find it harder to spread between beings because they need to decipher the DNA code of each being. The diversity present in such LANscapes has nourished soil, making them more fertile. I believe we can break the melting pot of digital monoculture, while we connect with each other through our roots and differences. Ultimately this is a Creole Garden in the Caribbean or a *Chagra*⁶ in the Colombian Amazon: a multiplicity of worlds in relation and not necessarily a project of circularity that still reinforces the dominant system and cosmology we live in. This happens when we build *plantothèques* considering plants only by their use. This is permacultural but different to a Creole Garden or *Chagra* where beliefs, uses, and cosmos are embodied in each symbiotic being. Thus, practicing

perma·computing by composing generative protocols and developing pocket infrastructures might exercise or train us into more elastic and resilient grounds of techno diversity. I believe in a repositioning of a multiplicity of realities – a pluriverse: to be in a cosmos where many cosmoses fit, co-exist, and are inter·braided together.

1 Trinh T. Minh-ha, "'Speaking Nearby:' A Conversation with Trinh T. Minh-ha," *Visual Anthropology Review*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1992): 82–91.

2 Masala involves a combination or mixture of spices. There is no single way of doing masala but rather a million ways. Yet, we can still refer to it. Masala is a metaphor for generative relational and elastic protocols that can render and host the multiplicity of worlds.

3 Walter D. Mignolo, "Coloniality is far from over, and so must be decoloniality," *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context and Enquiry*, vol. 43 (2017): 38–45.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/692552>.

4 Here, *titas* refer to aunts as used in an informal (affectionate) way in the Philippines and in various regions in Latin America.

5 Please see: <https://edoc.hu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/18452/26287/counter-n2022-devalk-heikkilae.pdf>.

6 Chagra is defined "as a system of different indigenous (agro)forest(ry) processes that refer to a forest as an integrated system composed of ever-changing dynamics, including (agro)forest(ry)." Please see: Nidia Catherine González and Markus Kröger, "The potential of Amazon indigenous agroforestry practices and ontologies for rethinking global forest governance," *Forest Policy and Economics*, vol. 118 (2020): 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.forpol.2020.102257>.

Juan Pablo García Sossa's Bio:

Juan Pablo García Sossa / JPGS (*Bogotá, COL) is a Designer, Researcher, and Artist fascinated by the clash between emerging technologies and grass-root popular culture in the tropics. JPGS practice explores the development of cultures, visions, realities, and worlds through the remix and re-appropriation of technologies from a Tropikós perspective (Tropics as Region and Mindset). JPGS has been part of diverse research institutions and design studios and currently is a design research member at SAVVY Contemporary's Design Department in Berlin and Co-Director of Estación Terrena, a space for artistic research and pluriversing technologies in Bogotá. JPGS is a 2020 Fellow at EYEBEAM, a 2021 Web Fellow at Akademie Schloss Solitude, and a 2022 Prince Claus CAREC fellow. In 2021 JPGS initiated Futura Trópica Netroots – an InterTropical Net of Grass-Root Local Networks connecting communities and nets of support and affection within the Tropical Belt. It is meant for the lateral exchange of other forms of knowledges, nets, and technologies from a Tropikós perspective. In 2022 JPGS developed the curatorial research & netting project Magical Hackerism or The Elasticity of Resilience at SAVVY Contemporary Berlin.

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