

**Graduate School
for East and Southeast
European Studies**



Leibniz ScienceCampus Regensburg

**EUROPE AND AMERICA
IN THE MODERN WORLD**

*From 'Early Access' and 'Open Worlds' to Game-Cons and Clans: The
Production of Spatiality and Community in Contemporary Gaming*

3rd Graduate Workshop of the Graduate School for East and Southeast European Studies at the University Regensburg in cooperation with the Leibniz ScienceCampus Europe and America in the Modern World

Regensburg, 14.09.2022 - 16.09.2022

Altes Finanzamt, Room 319 (3rd floor) Landshuter Straße 4, 493047 Regensburg

This Workshop will be held in accordance with the regulations of the University Regensburg, but the event is intended to take place in person, on site.

This Graduate Workshop seeks to investigate contemporary video games as an emergent space to be considered under the auspices of Area Studies, with special consideration given to practices, memory politics, and identity negotiation. By bringing together scholars and young professionals from a wide array of disciplines, we aim to advance the dialogue concerning methodological and conceptual approaches for video games in the humanities and social sciences.

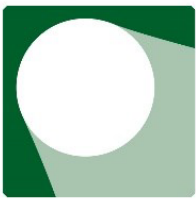
Cultural Historian Johan Huizinga postulates that play precedes culture, and that humans have not added an essential feature to the general idea of play (Homo Ludens). He stipulates that “in play there is something ‘at play’ which transcends the immediate needs of life”. Such interpretations on play presuppose a certain spontaneity and presume constraints on limited participation. Video games thoroughly complicate this view. They represent a fundamental departure, both in the manipulation of space and the magnified intensity of community built within and on the periphery of playerbases.

Occurring within their own artificial dimension, video games viewed from a spatial framework present perhaps a challenge to the transnational turn, as they allow for a fundamentally de-territorialized space for play, with participation excelling beyond the millions, thereby expanding the potential domain for Area Studies. In these de-territorialized spaces, players experience both unscripted interactions with other players, and engage with narratives from artificially constructed AI, or so-called non-playable characters (NPC's), which impact the player with a significantly different interaction than that with traditional media. Interactions occurring in turn in digital spaces are fully autonomous, both in their design and realization.

We understand history and its depiction as rendered tangible through interaction in video games. Similarly, we want to investigate how the interaction between players and games can be understood as a process of knowledge production. For example, analyzing the process of *how* a given reality is constructed within a game by tracing patterns of the depiction of history can reveal insights into exploring a new interdependence of the realities presented in games and those of the non-digital world.

Especially of interest is the process of community driven negotiation of producing ‘authenticity’ in an otherwise artificially constructed world. The point of view of play is similarly critical, as portrayals of individualism and collectivism can be challenged or reified based on the sort of gaze granted to a player. These aspect should especially be examined from a feminist perspective, as games and gaming communities are predominantly crafted by men, for men.

Overcoming stigmatizations, like gaming fostering violence or perceived social ineptitude of its practitioners, while also having a player-base that rapidly shifts in both age and gender, video games have become a vehicle of cultural communication both through the content they display and the means of consuming them. The challenges and privileges gaming has afforded through this process necessitate a critical perspective on the content of games and the communities that consume them.



Video games must also not be isolated from their concurrent platforms. The digital spaces of dialogue, display, and entertainment, such as *Twitch* for streaming, *Steam* for markets, and *Discord* for inter-gamer communication, create ripe opportunities for inter-platform cross-pollination in terms of the notions negotiated by players.

We posit the following questions:

- 1) How does the experience of gaming constitute new spaces and contest previous models of spatial conceptions? Both through the content of games and the opportunity to experience games as a collective? How can these be understood within the framework of Area Studies?
- 2) How is gender constructed and portrayed in video games, especially in terms of player perspective, romance, and market-driven realities? Where is the female gaze to be found, or, is the ubiquity of the male gaze reified again in these settings?
- 3) What knowledge production informs the construction of authenticity in gaming, and what potential implications are there to historical memory, the nation-state, and historicity?
- 4) What role do the various gaming-adjacent platforms play? What is the relationship between player and game developer, especially as it pertains to the audience interactions pre- and post-publication?

By discussing approaches to the outlined themes above we hope take a step towards sharpening the set of tools that researchers can use to deconstruct and critically investigate narratives, practices and perspectives that have created and continue to reinforce power structures and places of authority within the realm of gaming.

This graduate workshop endeavors to provide a forum for graduate students and early career researchers. We invite paper proposals of max. 300 words (title and abstract) to gsoses.conference@ur.de by May 31st, 2022. Please include a (max. 2 pages) CV in your application. Notifications of acceptance will be sent out no later than the end of the first week of June. Presentations at the workshop should not exceed 15 minutes and the working language will be English. Additionally, we ask that all accepted panelists submit their written papers (2000 words max.) a few weeks in advance, as they will be distributed among all participants beforehand.

We aim to publish the working contributions as essays on the blogjournal of Leibniz ScienceCampus "Frictions: Europe, America and Global Transformations" (<https://frictions.europeamerica.de/>). The *Essays* section publishes fully-referenced, peer-reviewed articles. A report of the workshop will be also published under the blogjournal's *Current Debates* section.

The organization bears the costs for hotel accommodation for panelists during their stay, on 14-16.09 (two nights). Moreover, the organization can accommodate up to €150 of travel expenses within Germany, €200 for EU countries, and €300 for non-EU countries. For any additional enquiries, please feel free to contact us at gsoses.conference@ur.de.

Your organizing team,

Denise Trzka, Cornelius Merz, and Jon Matlack