

Thursday, July 11

Keynote lecture at 18:00

Christopher A. Paul (Seattle): The Stakes of Optimization: Why What's Best for the Individual Breaks Games (and Society)

Optimization shifts play, making it more instrumental and risking a tragedy of the commons, where actions that are good for individual players jeopardize the overall state of the game and the community of players. As players theorycraft to develop a meta, or most effective tactic available, they structure and limit play, seeking out a best option and casting other choices to the side. Optimization limits games and causes disharmony amongst the player base. In worst case scenarios players can build the perception that a game is solved, leading them to turn away from the game and seek out other options. Looking at games from *Overwatch* to *Marvel: Snap* and *World of Warcraft* to professional sports, this talk makes the case that what is best for individual players often isn't best for the game then reaches beyond games to argue that games can teach us about the broader implication and political impacts of optimization run amok throughout society.

Christopher A. Paul is professor of Communication and Media at Seattle University. His research focuses on applying the tools of rhetoric to aspects of digital media, most frequently video games. He has published four books: *Free-to-Play: Mobile Video Games, Bias, and Norms* (MIT Press, 2020), *Real Games: What's Legitimate and What's Not in Contemporary Video Games* (with Mia Consalvo, MIT Press, 2019), *The Toxic Meritocracy of Video Games: Why Gaming Culture Is the Worst* (University of Minnesota Press, 2018), and *Wordplay and the Discourse of Video Games: Analyzing Words, Design, and Play* (Routledge, 2012). His latest monograph is the forthcoming *Optimizing Play: Why Theorycrafting Breaks Games and How to Fix It* (MIT Press, 2024).

The keynote is followed by a reception.

The conference is free and open to the public. All are welcome!

Conference organizers:
The American Studies team at TU Dortmund

<https://islk.kuwi.tu-dortmund.de/ptf4/>

Contact: sascha.poehlmann@tu-dortmund.de

Conference venue:
Internationales Begegnungszentrum (IBZ)
Emil-Figge-Straße 59, 44227 Dortmund

Playing the Field IV

Video Games and Politics



Conference program

TU Dortmund University / July 11-13, 2024

Friday, July 12

- 9:00 Marko Jevtic (Konstanz): Between Interactivity and Activism: Identity Tourism and the ‘Playful Translations’ of (Radical) Resistance
- 9:30 Stefan Schubert (Leipzig): “Another White Asshole Deciding What I Get To Do”: Narrative Instability, Black Female Agency, and the White Male Writerly Self in *Alan Wake 2*
- 10:00 Steffen Wöll (Leipzig): Race and the Politics of Survival in the Chthulucene: The Case of *Dark Corners of the Earth*

coffee break

- 11:00 Kübra Aksay (Freiburg): (Outer) Space for Politics: Diplomacy, Authority, and Colonialism in Space Exploration Games
- 11:30 Eren Ileri (Vienna): Working for the Factory: Planetary Colonization and the Imagination of Outer Space in Construction and Management Simulation Games
- 12:00 Nicole A. Schneider (Munich): Of Lines and other Things: Video Games and the Politics of (Infra)Structures

lunch break

- 14:00 Sarah E. Beyvers (Passau): Playing against the Grain: The Politics of Critical, Transgressive and Queer Play
- 14:30 Jaya Bauer (Duisburg-Essen): Woke Games: Exploring Approaches to Queer Visibility in Video Games and their Application in ELT
- 15:00 Tom Dirkschnieder (Tübingen): Walking Through Backlash: Resisting Heteronormativity in Fullbright’s *Gone Home*

coffee break

- 16:00 Cornelius Beckers (Freiburg): Playing through the Ages of Empire: Politics of Imperial Temporality in Strategy Games
- 16:30 Andrei Nae & Alessandra Ciufu (Bucharest): Colonial Diversity in *Uncharted. The Lost Legacy*

games & pizza at IBZ

Saturday, July 13

- 9:00 Elliot Niblock (U of Virginia/Dortmund): The Janus Face of Video Games: Immersion—For Better-and-Worse—in the Culture Industry’s Products, Considering *Horizon Zero Dawn*
- 9:30 David J. Cross (Stuttgart): The Politics of the Post-Apocalypse and Kinship in Hideo Kojima’s *Death Stranding*
- 10:00 Max Andreas Oehmichen (Leipzig) ‘Cyberpunk is dead’ – Performative Agency in the Post-Political Dystopia of *Cyberpunk 2077*

coffee break

- 11:00 Rüdiger Brandis & Alexander Boccia (Göttingen / Achtung Autobahn Studio): The Lack of Democratic Systems in MMORPG Guild Structures
- 11:30 Lisa Westermayer & Luisa H. Rieger (Dortmund): Authenticity in *Assassin’s Creed: Odyssey*: A Sociolinguistic Evaluation
- 12:00 Angelina Skuratova (Paderborn): Faithful Infidelity: Innovative Game Adaptation Strategies in HBO’s *The Last of Us* (2023)

lunch break

- 14:00 Naghmeh Esmaeilpour (Berlin): Gameture: The Storyworld of Interactions between Iran and the US
- 14:30 Diogo Oliveira (Porto): Pikachu, the Lightning American: How Nintendo America Changed the Way the West Played *Pokémon*
- 15:00 Rebecca Käpernick (Oldenburg): Mothers, Clones and Brain Children: The Maternal as Political Force in Guerilla Games’ *Horizon* Series

coffee break

- 16:00 Nataliya Gorbina (Konstanz): Play-to-Die(t): The Anti-Speciesist ‘Other’ in Video Games
- 16:30 Lars Lindemann (Kiel): “Ecofascism” or “Fully Automated Luxury Communism”? Political Visions of Life after Climate Catastrophe in *Frostpunk*