ZMS Bw
Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und
Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr
Bundeswehr Centre of Military History
and Social Sciences

Leibniz ScienceCampus Regensburg
EUROPE AND AMERICA
IN THE MODERN WORLD
Transformations and Frictions
of Globality in Past and Present

Leibniz ScienceCampus Annual Conference 2024

in cooperation with

Working Group on Military Forces and Violence of the
Bundeswehr Centre for Military History and Social Sciences

Playing War

Simulations, Games, Exercises, and the Representations of Military Force and Violence

Date: November 27 - 29, 2024
Place: University of Regensburg, the Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS)
Deadline: 25 April 2024

"Is this a game, or is it real?"
David Lightman
War Games, USA, 1983 directed by Stuart Gillard, John Badham

Military organizations are unique in that their design, doctrine, training, and equipment are all based on an exception: warfighting. Especially in uncertain times, the military seeks to gain certainty of action through speculation. The military apparatus is constantly searching for ways to deal with unknowns and contingency. The largest NATO maneuvers since the end of the Cold War in response to Russia's war in Ukraine, wargaming from hybrid attacks to full-scale warfare scenarios, mock invasion of Taiwan conducted by the Chinese People's Liberation Army are just recent examples. In such contexts, the use of force and military violence must be imagined, represented, displayed, performed, - played. Using the concept of 'play' for this conference, we seek to decode how military force and violence functions within imaginatively created environments within the military and beyond.

Working towards decoding imagined military force and violence, we propose 'Playing War' as a key analytical lens for understanding how violence is represented, depicted, modeled, rendered, simulated, communicated, dialectically constructed and internalized. Military training exercises, digital battlefield simulations, wargames on paper, and table-top war games coincide with popular mediums of play, such as board games and video games. Historical reenactments of previous conflicts similarly recreate and reframe imagined and/or military violence of the past in the present and underline the complex temporalities of the military imaginary. In all these instances, the medium of play enables and entails the representation and performance of an imagined use of force.

Through ludic manifestations, play enables an otherwise absent enemy to be physically constructed and rendered 'real' in practical environments. For the military, simulations of the state's enemy reify and reproduce multiple forms of violence and communicate specific notions of order. Games, too, rely upon the practices of the military to engender entertaining commercial or educational products. This is especially true for reenactment, where all participants playfully reimagine, reinterpret, and perform all involved parties of past battles and conflicts. 'War' simulated in such environments is necessarily synthetic, as training, reenactment, and gaming cannot replicate the anticipated violence of war onto its players.

Elucidating 'Playing War' entails a broad portfolio of disciplinary approaches. We especially invite historians, sociologists, political scientists, cultural studies scholars, law scholars, and anthropologists to engage in interdisciplinary discussion. Contributions addressing all periods of history, as well as ongoing and future conflicts, are welcome. Multidisciplinary contributions are welcome. We expressly welcome contributions on dealing with all global regions, as well as research addressing the intersections of or within 'the West', Latin America, East and Southeast Europe and the broader post-Soviet space.

As primers, we pose the following questions:

1) (military) Operations: What understanding of warfighting etc. form play- and rulebooks? How does the state perform its "enemy"? What impact does playing war have on 'real' conflicts and operations?
2) Practice: How are war games played? What continuities and changes can be observed in the practices of playing war games? How do war games represent force and violence, and what practices of representation are evident in their portrayal?
3) Environment: Under what conditions is war played? What are the infrastructures? What could be said about the material culture of playing war?
4) Design: How are conflict, war, and combat modeled? What informs these processes? What about "playing peace"?
5) Knowledge: How and what kind of knowledge shapes play? How and what kind of games produce knowledge?
6) Technology: How does technology enable specific forms of wargaming? What is the significance of (perhaps future) military technology?

Authors are invited to submit abstracts of original papers until 25 April 2024. Submissions must not exceed 500 words. Please add name, affiliation, and a short (one page max.) CV to your proposal.

If you want to organize a panel (3 slots max. for a two-hour panel), extend your submission for each author under the mentioned conditions and a short idea of the Panel.

It will also be possible to organize an author meets critic event. State in your proposal a book, its relevance, and a possible commentator beside the book author.

A hybrid format of the conference is planned. We offer hotel accommodation for all conference contributors for up to three nights. Additionally, we can offer a contribution to cover travel costs to and from the conference.

Please send your submission to: info@europeamerica.de

The organizing team,

Juliane Tomann, Kerrin Langer, Jon-Wyatt Matlack, and Frank Reichherzer