

Queer/Trans Game/Studies at a Crossroads: Reflections, Challenges, and Futures

Queer (Ruberg & Shaw 2017) and trans game studies (Ruberg 2022) have emerged as dynamic and growing fields of inquiry, investigating the increasing presence of queer and transgender identities in games (Shaw 2015, Ruberg & Shaw 2017, Thach 2020, Kosciesza 2023), queer and trans players (Whitehouse et al., 2023), queer independent designers (Ruberg 2019a, 2019b), but also the subversive potential of games as a medium (Ruberg & Shaw 2017, Ruberg 2019a, Chow 2023). Stemming from transgender studies, queer studies, and their overlap (Stryker & Whittle 2006, Stryker & Aizura 2013), these works have pointed out the need to diversify games and game studies, as well as to establish counter-hegemonic practices and angles (Hantsbarger et al. 2022). Prominent works in the field remain however limited, and mostly produced by Western European and North American scholars, underscoring the need for contributions from intersectional and marginalized voices.

This rise in the popularity of queer/trans game studies coincides with heightened political scrutiny of queer and trans lives (Butler 2024), underscoring the urgency of critically examining these intersections. Queer communities have become focal points in the public discourse, as several countries adopt hostile legislation and censorship targeting transgender identities, including closures and cuts in Queer and Gender Studies departments in Anglophone academia (Butler 2024). In times of unpredictability, with both dictatorships and democracies limiting freedom of speech and aiming for the silencing of queer lives, we must strive to preserve counter-hegemonic approaches across both the academic and the non-academic spheres.

This workshop seeks therefore to investigate the state of the art of queer/trans game studies, of queer and trans representations in and around games, and of the reception of queer and transgender studies in the field of game studies, highlighting their relevance and the potential tensions between such overlapping fields. It also proposes to explore how game studies scholarship situates itself within the current socio-political climate around transgender lives, and how it can comprise a safe space for promoting transgender and queer awareness.

The workshop proposes to investigate (but is not limited to) the following questions:

- What are the origins, trajectories, methods, and future directions of trans/queer games studies?
- What is the state of the art of transgender and queer representations in games, and can queer and trans communities benefit from more visibility in the medium?
- What limitations or gaps persist within queer/trans game studies and game representations?
- How are queer/trans game studies situated geographically, and what are the main communities in focus? How is it possible to incorporate intersectional perspectives?

- How can we move towards greater queer and trans acceptance in game studies conferences, departments, and broader academic contexts? Should academic practices align with transgender activism to promote awareness, safeguard rights, and foster a diverse environment? And if so, how?

This workshop aims to map the current landscape of queer and trans game studies, critically reflecting on their developments, and envisioning their potential to challenge, disrupt, and transform the relationship with game studies scholarship, bridging existing gaps and inviting research on underrepresented themes and from underrepresented subjectivities.

The workshop is also the first step toward a forthcoming CfP for an edited volume on queer/trans game studies with the journal GAME.

Submissions

The workshop invites contributions in various formats, including but not limited to academic presentations, debates, artworks, reflections, games, and gameplays. Authors are invited to submit a non-anonymized abstract of 300-500 words with a 150-word bio to robinlongobardizingarelli@gmail.com.

The initial deadline for submission is March 24th 2025. We start accepting from this date. Notification of acceptance for the first round of submissions is planned for March 31st 2025. This deadline ensures people can take advantage of the early bird registration if they are accepted for the workshop.

A second deadline is set for **April 24th, 2025**. Notification of acceptance for the second round is planned for May 5th, 2025.

Workshop Planning

Authors will receive 20 minutes for their presentations, followed by 10 minutes for questions, if they decide to follow the standard format - if not, a slot of 30 minutes will be allocated. The workshop will conclude with a collective 40-minute discussion and include two 10-minute breaks.

This structure allows a maximum of 10 participants in 6 hours. If more submissions are received, slot time can be reduced to 15 minutes for presentations and 5 minutes for questions. This allows a total of 14-15 participants. The expected number of participants is 6-15.

Criteria for selection

A selection will be made upon acceptance based on the following criteria:

- Relevance to the workshop theme: submissions should align with the themes of trans/queer games and game studies or queer/trans games, critically engaging with the fields' developments.
- Diversity of perspectives: we prioritize voices from marginalized backgrounds, particularly trans and queer scholars, creators, and activists, with special attention to submissions from underrepresented regions; but also early-career researchers, independent scholars, and game-makers who may not have institutional support or access to academic spaces.
- Balance in program structure: we aim to ensure a mix of academic and non-academic voices to balance the conceptual breadth, and to feature both traditional presentations and alternative formats (as self-reflections, creative works, and experimental formats).

The workshop is hybrid to encourage participation for low-income scholars and/or scholars who cannot travel to Malta.

Organizers

Robin Zingarelli (he/him) is a PhD student in Games Design at Brunel University London. His research focuses on transgender identities in video games. As an activist, he promotes trans acceptance and inclusive language practices in Italy. Robin has supported the organization of conferences such as (Inter)disciplinary Bodies (London, 2024), and he is currently Programme Chair for GamesLit 2025. He holds an MSC in Digital Games from the University of Malta.

Mark Maletka (he/him) (MPhil) is a PhD candidate at Tampere University, researching the relationship between video game mechanics and queer gender identities. As a trans scholar who moved to Finland after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine started, he has a variety of experiences in academia and advocates for broader representation and inclusion in and outside research. In 2024, he co-organised a workshop "Queer desires through games and playing" for the feminist and queer studies conference "Paluu juurille 2024" ("Return to the Roots 2024", Tampere).

Dr Merlyn Seller (she/her) is a Lecturer in Design and Screen Cultures at the University of Edinburgh. She holds a PhD from the University of East Anglia, focusing on transmedia works in interwar England. With a background in Art History and Visual Cultural Studies, she teaches game design and researches phenomenology in games, horror studies, post-digital aesthetics, and queer theory.

Our work lies at the intersection of transgender studies, queer studies, game studies, art and media representation. As transgender academics/early-career researchers, we bring together personal and scholarly experiences to shape the discussions and objectives of this workshop.

References

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