

EAAS Digital Studies Network

2nd Online Open Forum

Digitality and Power in American Studies

December 19, 2025



Organization:

EAAS DIGITAL STUDIES NETWORK

Coordinated by:

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Event registration form:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSebWENBK1N6TZURuq0rOgPKEc9pskJE9RkojF3UrPe50LTMxA/viewform?usp=preview>

EAAS Digital Studies Network Description:

The EAAS Digital Studies Network plays a pivotal role in nurturing a dynamic community of scholars, researchers, and postgraduate students in Europe. It serves as a platform for fostering effective communication and collaboration among individuals who share a profound interest in topics such as digital literary forms, evolving landscape of digitality, the realm of popular culture, innovative experimentation with print and digital writing, dynamic typographic practices, the burgeoning field of locative media, and narrative design.

The network emphasizes the significance of digital humanities within the broader context of American Studies, acknowledging its transformative potential and the valuable insights it offers into the interplay between technology, culture, and society. As an integral part of its mission, the initiative actively seeks to establish and strengthen connections with European institutions, organizations, and specialized postgraduate programs dedicated to exploring and advancing knowledge in these domains. By encouraging dialogue, sharing resources, and supporting joint initiatives, the EAAS Digital Studies Network aims to foster an innovative research environment that advances digital scholarship within American Studies and beyond.

OPEN FORUM PROGRAM
(via ZOOM)

6:00pm-6:05pm CET
WELCOME ADDRESS

Stefan Brandt
Frank Mehring
Tatiani Rapatzikou

6:05pm-6:35pm CET
SESSION ONE

Chair and Moderation: Irakli Tskhvediani (Akaki Tsereteli University, Kutaisi)

Alexandra Glavanakova (Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'), "The Power of Digital Reading"

In an effort to address the dogmatic binary opposition between analog and digital reading, this presentation explores the transformative impact of digital technologies on reading practices and experiences. It examines how digital reading reshapes not only access to texts, their production and dissemination, but specifically reader engagement, and interpretive possibilities across diverse platforms. Drawing on recent research in digital humanities, the talk highlights the transformations of literary reading in networked environments. It addresses challenges and opportunities posed for education by focusing specifically on digital social reading (DSR). The goal is to invite reflection on how digital reading empowers readers to interact dynamically with text, while it also redefines traditional notions of authorship and readership.

Bio sketch:

Alexandra K. Glavanakova, PhD, is associate professor in American Literature and Culture at the Department of English and American Studies at St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, Bulgaria. Her teaching, academic research and publications focus on the culture and literature of the U.S.A.; transcultural studies and identity; the major cultural shifts in literacy, education, and literary studies under the impact of digital technology. She is the author of two monographs: *Posthuman Transformations: Bodies and Texts in Cyberspace* (2014) and *Transcultural Imaginings. Translating the Other, Translating the Self in Narratives about Migration and Terrorism* (2016); the editor et al. of *New Paradigms in English Studies. Language, Linguistics, Literature and Culture in Higher Education* (2017) and *Swiftian Inspirations: The Legacy of Jonathan Swift from the Enlightenment to the Age of Post-Truth* (2020). She has been involved in several projects and publications on reading literature in the digital age (Reading Practices in Bulgaria, 2018-2024; a Fulbright grant at UCSB, 2022) and is currently writing a monograph on modes of literary reading in the post-print era.

6:35pm-6:45pm CET
SHORT BREAK

6:45pm-7:15pm CET
SESSION TWO

Chair and Moderation: Gaetano Di Tommaso (Roosevelt Institute for American Studies, Middelburg)

Thomas van Gaalen (Radboud University), “Corpus Analysis from Below? Charting Solidarity Discourse in the Interwar Caribbean”

In the early 1900s, leftist discourse on solidarity spread rapidly through the Caribbean region, coinciding with a surge in anticolonial movements, labor unions and socialist organizations. In recent years, historians have noted that solidarity discourse often had a practical and strategic function to on-the-ground movements: by invoking solidarities rooted in categories of labor, race or nationality, local movements could make “gains,” to speak with Charlotte Alston, and lay claim on political backing and material support to challenge social elites. Digital corpus analysis methods prove helpful in rendering visible the diverse, ever-shifting uses and conceptions of solidarity within Caribbean radical discourse. Nevertheless, without embedding transnationally circulating solidarity discourse in the particular local, on-the-ground conditions in which solidarity discourse acquired its meaning and strategic significance—“gains”—to many people, movements and collectives, digital corpus analyses of solidarity discourse risk neglecting the popular social base on which the interwar spread of solidarity discourse was predicated. This presentation uses the case of interwar solidarity discourse in the Caribbean to ask: how and to what extent could we practice digital corpus analyses, which generally represent a birds’ eye view on historical discourse, *from below*? Building on the field of history from below—an area of social history that centers how the experiences, activities and perspectives of non-elite people shaped history—I propose and critically discuss three potential ways to practice digital corpus analyses without omitting influence and perspectives from below. Doing so, the presentation invites reflections on the power researchers (inadvertently) impose via their digital methods, and provides starting points for countering the top-down biases present in some methods of corpus analysis.

Bio sketch:

Thomas van Gaalen is a PhD candidate at Radboud University. His work revolves around (global) labor history, social movements, and intersections of capitalism and empire. His PhD project studies how practices of solidarity provided an on-the-ground response to the economic transformations that marked the Americas of the early twentieth century. Taking three particular collective labor actions on the Caribbean island of Curaçao as its core focus, the project integrates archival and digital methods to shed light on the ways in which people negotiated and contested the expansion of early twentieth-century global capitalism ‘from below.’ Thomas also works as a freelance illustrator, and is the artistic director of political magazine *Jacobin Nederland*.

7:15pm-7:25pm CET
SHORT BREAK

7:25pm-7:55pm CET
SESSION THREE

Chair and Moderation: tba

Paschalia Mitskidou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki), “Virtual Reality as a Transformative (?) Medium/Technology: Issues of Power and Control”

The latest wave of Virtual Reality's (VR) development since its reemergence in the 2010s has been accompanied by tension between those that maintain skeptical attitudes and the enthusiasts, who often embrace uncritically the novelty of the technology, promoting a narrative about its transformative potential for revolutionizing society and even indulging in visions of replacing the physical realm with some sort of virtual utopia. These competing tendencies indicate that VR imaginaries are structured both around cultural anxieties and technological fantasies. The discussion will focus on the overinflated expectations about VR as a medium/technology that project a distorted view of its current state and its possible future trajectory. As VR technologies proliferate in present-day digital culture, apart from the opportunities they open up, they also pose risks regarding the power relations and implied politics underpinning these systems, as well as the control exercised by the key VR operators within a late-capitalist framework. In this context, concerns about the commodification of immersive experiences and VR products, data privacy and user surveillance are foregrounded; these issues will be framed by an exploration of the problematic discourse around the inevitability of technological progress, and VR's mass adoption in particular, mainly circulated among the tech and media industries. Such forward-looking, deterministic visions of collective prosperity and technological advances for the benefit of the public tend to obscure the exploitation of social disparities and underlying power asymmetries, in the interest of legitimizing economic pursuits tied to specific technological paths.

Bio-sketch:

Paschalia Mitskidou is a PhD candidate in the Department of American Literature and Culture, School of English, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH), Greece. She holds an MA in Creative Writing (University of Western Macedonia) and a BA in History (Ionian University). Her PhD research project concentrates on Virtual Reality in contemporary American culture and the representation of the historical past through Virtual Reality narrative practices. She has presented her research in various national and international conferences, and workshops. She is a member of the Hellenic Association for American Studies (HELAAS) and the Multimodal Research and Reading Group of the School of English, AUTH. Her research interests include contemporary American fiction and digital culture, interactive digital narratives, and virtuality in the context of new media technologies. She is a freelance writer and editor, and a private tutor of Greek as a foreign language.

7:55pm-8:00pm CET
FINAL REMARKS