

Workshop

From Physical Kitsch to Digital Kitsch

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Video games such as *Katamari Damacy* (Namco, 2004), *Bishōjo Senshi Sailor Moon* (Angel, 1993) or – set within an East European context - *Krzyżacy* [*Knights of the Cross*] (*Free Mind*, 2002) or *Warsaw Rising* (*Pixelated Milk* 2019, *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*) have often relied on one-eyed storytelling, flat visuals and stereotypical character design.



Fig.1: Knights of the Cross 2002

Other games—such as *Bubsy 3D* (Bend Studio, 1996), many *Sonic* titles, as well as a wide range of casual and hypercasual games—have frequently been criticized for their

reliance on stock emotions, clichés, shallow affective engagement, or forms of bad taste.

While this does not represent the video game industry in its entirety, some argue that mass consumption, non-negotiable accessibility, and emotional persuasiveness are structural tendencies of the medium. An interesting question, then, is whether the framework of kitsch can be used to approach these aspects of video game creation. Much like garden gnomes, collectible figurines, or ubiquitous landmark souvenirs, can video games be understood as digital kitsch objects: plug-and-play artefacts created for mass appeal?

This workshop will critically investigate and rethink the concepts of kitsch under the conditions of the ludosphere. Starting from classical debates on the phenomenon of kitsch (Greenberg 1939; Broch 1955; Dorfles 1968; Kulka 1996; Mihailescu 1997) and moving toward more recent frames of kitsch in game studies, the workshop addresses the following questions:

- Is kitsch a relative phenomenon shaped by the growth of national or regional game development communities? (Majkowski, Kozyra, & Prokopek 2025)
- What role do players' cultural settings play when games are analysed in terms of their kitschiness?
- Do markers such as reproducibility (Benjamin 2008 [1936]: 236), "perverted style" (McBride 2005), or "trite sentimentalism" and "borrowed conventions" (Bogost 2011: 84) suffice to classify games as kitsch?
- Does realism or nostalgia reinforce or attenuate tendencies toward kitsch? (Fuchs 2019)
- What are political uses of game kitsch? (Roinioti 2023)
- Does kitsch age well? Can something once perceived as serious or refined later become kitsch—or vice versa?
- Can video games be understood as post-kitsch artefacts?

The workshop builds on a series of seminars held in 2024 and 2025, with participating students from Hungary, Austria, Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, China and Germany. During the seminar sessions, plastic Beethovens, miniature Greek Gods, and CePeLia, the infamous communist-era institution producing "folk art" circulated alongside theoretical propositions and conceptual building blocks. At the end of the workshop, participants will have developed a clearer understanding of kitsch in relation to digital games through both critical discussion and playful interaction.

Workshop flow:

Part A: Participants assume the role of both curator -placing their objects inside an un-exhibition- and visitor, circulating and writing down their thoughts on Post-It as part of the walk-along method (Kusenbach 2003).

Part B: In the second part, participants along with the organizers will analyze the findings from the walk-along method, initiating a discussion on kitsch and "kitschness" in games.

Important information:

Participants are

- a) requested to bring a kitsch reference from their own cultural background: a local video game (links, images, or videos), a related artefact, or a nostalgic object. Those who choose to present a digital kitsch object should also bring their laptop.
- b) invited to reflect on their object and think of a video game that aesthetically, visually or conceptually communicates with the object. A garden gnome might reference Plants VS Zombies Garden Warfare 2 etc.

Participants who are interested in joining us should send an email to: kitsch.games.ceegs@gmail.com until **30th September 2026**, mentioning their kitsch object of choice and why they want to participate.

Max.	Number	of	participants:	20
Duration	:	3		hours
Date:	20	November		2026
Ceegs 2026 Warsaw (https://ceegs.fsv.cuni.cz/ceegs-2026/)				



Fig. 2:

Objects from the students' collection (Zsuzsi Gyorki 2026)

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