

Interactive Cinema

USC School of Cinematic Arts, CTIN 501

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Course Description

Interactive cinema is the idea of a hybrid form of cinematic and interactive media that – rather than polarizing the two domains – integrates their best parts. Both media forms have their origin in technological and creative innovation. Each one of them went through experimental phases until the dominant forms of production and distribution were established: The Hollywood movie industry became the defining standard of commercial success in the domain of cinema and it was the video game industry that became the dominant model of interactive entertainment. Both domains have developed into massive cultural and economic forces that coexist side by side, sharing more and more of their stories and characters.

From the experimental phase of interactive media on the idea of interactive cinema remains in the discussion and is sometimes seen as the “mythical promise” of the ultimate creative form and sometimes as the failed experiment that tries to bring two elements together that do not fit.

This class analyzes the ideas and practices behind interactive cinema and situates them in the field between cinema and interactive media. Through case-studies of the works of several artists who crossed the border between cinema and interactive media like Chris Marker, Peter Greenaway, Michael Snow, Zoe Beloff, and others the course develops an understanding and innovative approach to interactive cinema.

In a class project students will conduct their own experiments and formulate one experimental work in the field of interactive cinema. The class project will be conducted in groups over the course of the semester. One intermediate presentation and one final presentation will give occasion for discussion, criticism, and refinement. Before the project proposals are presented each student will give a short in-class presentation of his own research on a particular topic of interactive cinema.

Course objectives

- Understand the differences and commonalities of cinema and interactive media.
- Develop a deep understanding of the fundamental structures of the two domains.
- Investigate the aesthetic and creative potential of cinema and interactivity.
- Develop and sharpen your ability to formulate your ideas and communicate them effectively with expressive means of interactive cinema.
- Experiment with different approaches to cinema and interactivity

Meeting Information:

Lecture: 3 hours

Units: 2

Location: RZC 201

Pre-requisites: N/A

Evaluation of student performance:

Participation	10
Class Exercises	20
Presentation	20
Project	50
Total:	100

Course content (summarized by class meeting)

Week 1: Course Introduction

Overview over course structure and class projects
Discussion of similarities and differences of cinema and interactive media
Screening and discussion of examples both domains

Week 2: Form and Phenomenon of Cinema

Lecture on the characteristics of film and narrative
Screening and discussion of relevant examples
Reading: David Bordwell / Kristin Thomson: *The Concept of Form in Film*, in Bordwell / Thomson: *Film Art*, 1990 (online)

Week 3: Form and Phenomenon of Interactive Media

Lecture on the characteristics of interactive media
Screening and discussion of relevant examples of interactive cinema
Reading: Gonzalo Frasca: *Simulation versus Narrative*, in Wolf / Perron: *The Video Game Theory Reader*, 2003 (online)

Week 4: Open Work – Open Forms

Lecture on open works and alternative narrative forms
Reading: Umberto Eco: *The Poetics of the Open Work*, in Eco: *The Open Work*, 1989 (online)
Assignment due: Presentation of individual research on the concept of the open work

Week 5: Construction of Meaning: Combination

Lecture on montage, editing, and the creation of meaning through combination
Screening and discussion of relevant examples
Due: Presentation and discussion of project concepts
Reading: Sergei Eisenstein: *A Dialectic Approach to Film Form*, in Leyda (ed.): *Film Form*, 1977 (online)

Week 6: Construction of Meaning: Recombination

Lecture on combinatorial forms and database narrative
Screening and discussion of relevant examples from the domains of cinema and interactive media
Reading: Lev Manovich: *Database as a Symbolic Form*, in Manovich: *The Language of New Media*, 2001 (online)

Week 7: Deconstruction of Meaning: Counter Narrative and Counter Film

Lecture on deconstructive approaches to film and narrative
Screening and discussion of relevant examples from the domains of cinema and interactive media
Reading: Italo Calvino: *Cybernetics and Ghosts*, in Calvino: *The Uses of Literature*, 1986 (online)

Week 8: Deconstruction of Meaning: Counter Gaming and Hacking

Lecture on counter strategies in interactive media
Screening and discussion of relevant examples from the domains of cinema and interactive media
Reading: Peter Wollen: *Godard and Counter Cinema: Vent d'Est*, in Wollen: *Readings and Writings*, 1982 (online)

Week 9: Intermediate Screening

Due: Intermediate presentation of the class projects

Week 10: Crossover – Database: Peter Greenaway's Tulse Luper Suitcases

Lecture on the art of exhaustion
Screening and discussion of works of Peter Greenaway: *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* (interactive), *The Stairs* (installation), and excerpts from *The Moab Story* (film)
Reading: Benjamin Noys: *Tulse Luper Database: Peter Greenaway, the New Media Object and the Art of Exhaustion*, in *Image and Narrative*, 2005 (online)

Week 11: Crossover – Memory: Chris Marker

Lecture on aspects of memory and memory distortion
Screening and discussion of works of Chris Marker: *Sans Soleil* (film), *Immunity* (interactive)
Reading: Catherine Lupton: *Memories of the Future*, in Lupton: *Chris Marker*, 2004 (online)

Week 12: Crossover – Alternated Perception: Michael Snow

Lecture on reality, virtuality, and the reality referent
Screening and discussion of works of Michael Snow: *Wavelength* (film), *Digital Snow* (interactive)
Reading: Roland Barthes: *Camera Lucida*, No. 34 to 37, in Barthes: *Camera Lucida*, 1981 (online)

Week 13: Crossover – Psychoanalysis: Zoe Beloff

Lecture on psychoanalysis, spatial representation and forgetting
Screening and discussion of works of Zoe Beloff: *Charming Augustine* (film), *Here Where Where There There Where* (interactive), *The Somnambulists* (installation)
Reading: Normal Klein: *Histories of Forgetting*, in Klein: *The History of Forgetting*, 1997 (online)

Week 14: Crossover – Exploration

Lecture on aspects of identity, representation, and avatars
Screening and discussion of the work complex of Tomb Raider: *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (film), *Tomb Raider – Legend* (interactive), *Tomb Raider Mod* (interactive)
Reading: Bob Rehak: *Playing at Being*, in Wolf / Perron: *The Video Game Theory Reader*, 2003 (online)

Week 15: Final Screening

Due: Final presentation of the class projects
Class round-up and evaluation

Missing an Exam, Incompletes:

The grading of this course is based mainly on the projects that are completed and presented throughout the course of the class (see the grading section of this syllabus). There are no particular mid-term or final exams but the presentation of the projects on the scheduled dates plays the same role and is mandatory. The only acceptable excuses for missing a presentation or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illnesses or a family emergency. Students must inform the professor before the project presentation and present verifiable evidence in order for a make-up to be scheduled. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor before final grades are due.

Mid-term Conferences

These conferences allow you to get a sense of your overall progress, areas for improvement and an estimated grade at mid-point in the semester. If you are in danger of failing, you will be alerted in writing and in a conference; we will outline together what steps must be taken in order for you to pass. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of USC's add/drop and withdrawal deadlines.

Note for students with disabilities:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to us as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, and is open 8:30am-5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

Academic Integrity:

The School of Cinema-Television expects the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical performance from USC students. It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on exams, submitting a paper to more than one instructor, or submitting a paper authored by anyone other than yourself. Violations of this policy will result in a failing grade and be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. If you have any doubts or questions about these policies, consult "SCAMPUS" and/or confer with the instructor.