USC School for Cinematic Arts | Interactive Media Division

CTIN 534: Experiments in Interactivity

Time: Lecture: Tuesday 2:00 pm to 4:50 pm
                   Workshop: Thursday 10:00 am to 12:50 pm
Location: SCI L114
Professor: Andreas Kratky
Units: 4
Prerequisites: none
Office Hours: Thursday 1:30 to 3:30 pm. SCI 201Q
Contact: akratky@cinema.usc.edu

Course Description

This course is an introduction to a basic set of skills enabling you to formulate compelling work in the field of interactive media. The aim of the course is to convey the necessary technical skills in close combination with the ability to express your ideas with images and sound. Both aspects are inseparable since it is impossible to create an expression without the technical means but at the same time it is impossible to determine the "right" application of techniques without a clear idea of what needs to be communicated. The class will deliver lectures discussing the conceptual and aesthetic structures of film and interactive media, hands-on lab exercises introducing the fundamentals of the technical skills that will be applied to the class projects, and extensive presentation and critique sessions. Each of the four projects will be presented in class with discussion and feedback from the class members, faculty, and occasional guests.

Beginning with an introduction to linear storytelling and film production we will gradually open up to non-linearity and an increasing interactive involvement of the viewer into the projects. In this structure basic techniques of video production, cinematography, working with actors and directing, video editing, sound recording and design, spatial design, programming, and some aspects of interface design will be covered. These techniques will be applied in the four class projects, each of which explores a different approach to storytelling and interactivity. The first three projects are individual projects, conceived as a succession where one project builds on the previous ones. The critique received in the presentations should inform always the next project. The last project is a group project that will be developed over a larger timeframe with an intermediate presentation and feedback during the work process.

The class projects are mainly evaluated in respect to their experimental engagement rather than in respect to their technical perfection. All the work shown in the presentations is work-in-progress and is not expected to be perfect. The aim is to train an "analytical eye", the ability to analyze your work in respect to its artistic potential and its success in communicating your ideas. The class intends to be a platform for creative discourse and the critique part of the presentations is essential to the learning experience. The goal of the course is not to teach recipes of how to do things, but to bring forward an understanding of the aesthetic fundamentals and encourage the experiment as the most important creative resource for the creation of compelling and effective work.

The work in CTIN 534 is done in a group where everybody helps everybody with feedback and skills. Collaboration and exchange at every stage of the projects are highly encouraged.

Course objectives

- Investigate the aesthetic potential of images, sound, and interactivity.
- Develop and sharpen your ability to formulate your ideas and communicate them effectively with visual media
- Experiment with different approaches to narrative and interactivity
- Formulate constructive criticism and use the feedback you receive from others to analyze and sharpen your work
- Understand the relationship between form and content
- Understand the relationship between storytelling and interactivity
- Develop fundamental skills in the areas of technical knowledge taught in the course

Course projects

1. Project:
Realize a short linear film: This project will be a first exercise to apply what has been learned about camera handling, cinematography and editing. For this project you will have to conceive a simple story that develops over the course of a linear film. The "mental interaction" of the viewer is a point of particular interest in this project, engaging the viewer and playing with his expectations.

2. Project:
Realize of a film with a non-linear structure: Explore the possibilities of multiple interwoven story-threads and a flexible temporal structure that can be navigated by the viewer. For this project you should use the footage produced for the first project, possibly extended with some new footage, and edit it in a way that experiments with aspects of non-linearity. A point of particular interest in this project is the question of the relationship between the different storylines and how they form an experience as a whole. Consider different kinds of choice and how the choice is offered and communicated to the viewer.

3. Project:
Realize an experience with a navigable spatial structure: Create a geographic space that the viewer can explore by navigating in different directions. The path that the viewer takes in this space should be a comprehensive narrative experience. The main question addressed in this project is the collaboration of the author with the viewer: How to create a meaningful and legible experience while at the same time letting the viewer decide by himself in which direction to proceed and where to look.

4. Project:
Realize an interactive experience with a recombinant structure: Build the experience out of elements that can be read and re-interpreted in different ways depending on the navigation of the viewer. In order to communicate the choices and consequences of the navigational decisions to the viewer you should design a custom-made user interface that becomes an integral part of the experience. This project is a group project.

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2/6

Readings

Several lectures have reading assignments. The readings are required in preparation of the class meeting they are listed for.

Grading Structure

CTIN 534 criteria for grading are as follows:
* Class participation: 5%
* In-class exercises: 15%
* Each of the four class projects: 20%

Two missed classes without excuse as well as three times being late for class without excuse will reduce the grade.

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. Incompletes may only be given after the twelfth week of classes. 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.

Academic Integrity

The School of Cinematic Arts 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 Professor or Department Chair. The Student Conduct Code can be found in Section 11.00. Recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS.gov

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 that the letter is delivered to the Professor 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.

Course Outline:

1. Week
- Aug 25, 2015: Introduction
  Overview over course structure
  Discussion of different narrative structures
  Set-up of lab and equipment access

- Aug 27, 2015: Lecture and discussion of concepts of visual storytelling and montage
  Camera introduction
  Reading: Sergei Eisenstein: A Dialectic Approach to Film Form; in:
  Eisenstein, S., Film Form, 1977

2. Week
- Sept 1, 2015: Camera 1: Introduction of camera operation and check out procedure
  In-class Assignment: First camera experiments (fulfill shot list)
  Review of first experiments with the camera (camera 1 assignment)
  Assignment: Camera 2 (shoot short non-narrative sequence)
  Introduction of first project

- Sept 3, 2015: Camera 2: Lecture and discussion of image aesthetics and shot composition.
  Review of non-narrative sequence (camera 2 assignment)

3. Week
- Sept 8, 2015: Introduction to editing (Adobe Premiere)

- Sept 10, 2015: Guest lecture by Norman Hollyn: Shaping Story

4. Week
- Sept 15, 2015: **First project due**
  Screening and discussion of the first project (Group A)

- Sept 17, 2015: Screening and discussion of the first project (Group B)

5. Week
- Sept 22, 2015: Lecture and discussion of non-linear narrative and variable narrative Structures. Introduction of second project
  Reading: Italo Calvino, Cybernetics and Ghosts; in: Calvino, I., The Uses of Literature, 1986

- Sept 24, 2015: Introduction to the programming of simple interactive structures in html 5

6. Week
- Sept 29, 2015: Lighting exercise: Different moods and expressions (Sound stage)
- Oct 1, 2015: Introduction to cinematography; guest lecture by Angelo Pacifici

7. Week
- Oct 6, 2015: **Second project due**
  Screening and discussion of the second project (Group A)

- Oct 8, 2015: Screening and discussion of the second project (Group B)

8. Week
- Oct 13, 2015: Lecture and discussion of concepts of interactivity, the relationship between author and viewer and storyboarding for interactivity
  Introduction of third project
  Reading: Espen Arseth, Allegories of Space; in Cybertext Yearbook 2000

- Oct 15, 2015: Unity 3d 1: Introduction to the Unity 3d authoring environment

9. Week
- Oct 20, 2015: Unity 3d 2: Continuation of intro to Unity 3d authoring environment

- Oct 22, 2015: Unity 3d 3: Continuation of intro to Unity 3d authoring environment

10. Week
- Oct 27, 2015: **Third project due**
  Screening and discussion of third project (Group A)

- Oct 29, 2015: Screening and discussion of third project (Group B)

11. Week
- Nov 3, 2015: Lecture and discussion of recombinant and procedural experiences
  Introduction of the fourth project
  Reading: Umberto Eco, The Open Work; chapter 1

- Nov 5, 2015: Lecture and discussion of visual design concepts, interface, and experience design

12. Week
- Nov 10, 2015: Introduction to sound recording and location sound

- Nov 12, 2015: Introduction to sound design

13. Week
- Nov 17, 2015: Intermediate screening of fourth project (Group A)

- Nov 19, 2015: Intermediate screening of fourth project (Group B)

14. Week
- Nov 24, 2015: Introduction to non-traditional interfaces
  Class evaluation

- Nov 26, 2015: Thanksgiving

15. Week
- Dec 1, 2015: **Fourth project due**
  Screening and discussion of fourth project (Group A)

- Dec 3, 2015: Screening and discussion of fourth project (Group B)
  Class round-up

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6/6