USC School for Cinematic Arts | Interactive Media and Games 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 a film with a spatial film: Explore the possibilities of panoramic 3D film embedded within an interactive environment that can be navigated by the viewer. Coming from the timebases narrative structure of film in the first project, the second class project explores film as a spatial construct. What happens when him is extended into space and becomes interactively navigable? What are the narrative implications of this transformation? In this project you will use camera generated footage within an interactive real-time environment created in Unity3D.

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.

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%

Assignment Submission Policy
All project assignments should be ready to the presented by the beginning of the class. Projects presented in the classroom should be uploaded to the instructor computer. Written assignments and documentation should be submitted by email to akratky@cinema.usc.edu or added to a shared google doc provided for this purpose.

Missing an Assignment Deadline, Incompletes
The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illness or a family emergency. Students must inform the instructors before the assignment due date and present verifiable evidence in order for a deadline extension to be granted. Students who wish to take incompletes must also present documentation of the problem to the instructor or student assistant before final grades are due. Incompletes are only available after the week-twelve withdrawal deadline.

For assignments turned in after the assignment deadline without prior permission from the instructor, a penalty will be imposed equal to 10% of the total available points for the assignment, for each day or part of a day that the assignment is late, up to a maximum of seven days.

Attendance Policy
Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving more than five minutes late to three classes, more than ten minutes late to a single class, or leaving early, will be marked as having an unexcused absence from class, unless prior permission has been obtained from the instructor. The following guidelines are from the Interactive Media Division & Games handbook regarding absences and grading and apply to all students.

Guidelines for absences affecting grading
Two unexcused absences: lowers grade ½ grade (for example, from A to A-)
Three unexcused absences: lowers grade one full grade
Four or more unexcused absences: request to withdraw from course (instructor's discretion)

Excused absences are:
Illness (with a doctor's verification)
Family or personal emergency (with verification)
Observance of religious holy day (with advance notice to instructor)

Unauthorized Social Media Use During Class
Social media use, including text messaging, Internet messaging and email, is not permitted in class unless explicitly permitted by the instructors. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using social media in class.

A Safer Space
In this class, we make a commitment to foster a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. This means that we will use preferred pronouns and respect self-identifications. While debate and discussion are welcome, please remain aware of the implications of your words and the images that you include in your work. If the instructor or another student points out that something you have said or shared with the group might be offensive, avoid being defensive; this is a valuable opportunity for us to grow and learn together.

Because this class involves presentation and discussion of creative projects that will contain a range of materials, some of which may present difficulties for others in the class, students and groups are encouraged to use content or trigger warnings as part of their presentation as appropriate.

If you have a concern about any aspect of the class, you are encouraged to speak with the instructor. If you feel uncomfortable speaking with the instructor, you are also welcome to speak with either the graduate advisor for the division, who can discuss the issue with you directly or point you toward other on- and off-campus resources for addressing your concern.

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.

Food and Drink Policy
Food and Drinks (other than water) are not permitted in any of the instructional spaces in the Cinematic Arts Complex.

Course Outline:

1. Week
   - Aug 21, 2018: Introduction
            Overview over course structure
            Discussion of different narrative structures
            Set-up of lab and equipment access

   - Aug 23, 2018: 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
   - Aug 28, 2018: 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

- Aug 30, 2018: Camera 2: Lecture and discussion of image aesthetics and shot composition.
  Review of non-narrative sequence (camera 2 assignment)
  Reading: Scott McCloud: Understanding Comics, Introduction; 1993

3. Week
- Sept 4, 2018: Introduction to editing (Adobe Premiere)

- Sept 6, 2018: Guest lecture by Norman Hollyn: Shaping Story

4. Week
- Sept 11, 2018: **First project due**
  Screening and discussion of the first project (Group A)

- Sept 13, 2018: Screening and discussion of the first project (Group B)

5. Week
- Sept 18, 2018: Lecture and discussion of spatial film and interactive narrative
  Structures. Introduction of second project
  Reading: Italo Calvino, Cybernetics and Ghosts; in: Calvino, I., The Uses of Literature, 1986

- Sept 20, 2018: Introduction to panoramic 3D film and its use in Unity3D

6. Week
- Sept 25, 2018: Lighting exercise: Different moods and expressions (Sound stage)
- Sept 27, 2018: Introduction to cinematography; guest lecture by Angelo Pacifici

7. Week
- Oct 2, 2018: **Second project due**
  Screening and discussion of the second project (Group A)

- Oct 4, 2018: Screening and discussion of the second project (Group B)

8. Week
- Oct 9, 2018: Lecture and discussion of concepts of interactivity, the relationship between author and viewer and storyboarding for interactivity
  Introduction of third project
  Reading: Henry Jenkins, Game Design as Narrative Architecture

- Oct 11, 2018: Unity 3d: Introduction to the Unity 3d authoring environment

9. Week

- Oct 16, 2018: Space Project Workshop: Group workshop for third project / Unity3D

- Oct 18, 2018: Space Project Workshop: Group workshop for third project / Unity3D

10. Week

- Oct 23, 2018: **Third project due**
  Screening and discussion of third project (Group A)

- Oct 25, 2018: Screening and discussion of third project (Group B)

11. Week

- Oct 30, 2018: Procedural landscapes and systems - field research assignment
  Reading: Field Research Reader

- Nov 1, 2018: Lecture and discussion of recombinant and procedural experiences
  Introduction of the fourth project
  Reading: Umberto Eco, The Open Work; chapter 1

  (Nov 5, CTIN 541: Paper prototyping)

12. Week

- Nov 6, 20187: Lecture and discussion of visual design concepts, interface, and
  experience design

- Nov 8, 2018: Introduction to sound design (speaker M. Costin), location: SCA B 128
  (Nov 12, CTIN 541: Paper playtest)

13. Week

- Nov 13, 2018: Intermediate screening of fourth project (Group 1)

- Nov 15, 2018: Intermediate screening of fourth project (Group 2)

  (Nov 19, CTIN 541: Digital Playtests)

14. Week

- Nov 20, 2018: Introduction to non-traditional interfaces
  Class evaluation

- Nov 22, 2018: Thanksgiving

15. Week

- Nov 27, 2018: **Fourth project due**
  Screening and discussion of fourth project (1st Group)

- Nov 29, 2018: Screening and discussion of fourth project (2nd Group)
  Class round-up

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Final Exam
- Dec 6, 2018: Final versions of projects and course post-mortems due.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:
Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/.   Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:
Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/

Sexual Assault Resource Center
For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: http://sarc.usc.edu/

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class.
https://equity.usc.edu/

Bias Assessment Response and Support
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/

The Office of Disability Services and Programs
Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations.
http://dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/

Diversity at USC
Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students.
https://diversity.usc.edu/

USC Emergency Information
Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, http://emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.
Provides overall safety to USC community. http://dps.usc.edu