

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
Student Assistant: Joanna Shen
Units: 4
Prerequisites: none
Office Hours: Thursday 1:30 to 3:30 pm. SCI 101B
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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 that will be completed over the course of the semester 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 open up to immersive media and the interactive involvement of the viewer/player into the projects. In this structure basic techniques of moving images, cinematography, directing, editing, and sound recording as well as design, spatial design, programming, and 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 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 sessions are 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 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 explore storytelling and your ability to translate ideas into images, sound and imaginary worlds. 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-based immersive experience: Explore the possibilities of 360 degree immersive moving images, the ability of the viewer/player to look in any direction and to visually - or physically - explore a space at will. For this project we will use a 360 degree camera and Unity 3D as a real-time play-back engine. You are encouraged to integrate the moving images into a larger, imaginary space. 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 the kinds of attractions offered to the viewer/player and what they communicate.

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. All readings will be provided in digital format.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

During our class meetings time will be allocated to provide basic introductions to all techniques and technologies used throughout the semester. Soft and hardware will be provided in SCA labs or through the SCA laptop requirement. Additional resources, such as cameras etc. are available on check-out basis through the SCA equipment centers. For certain equipment insurance fees will apply.

Grading Structure

CTIN 534 criteria for grading are as follows:

- Class participation: 5%
- In-class exercises: 15%
- Each of the four class projects: 20%

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Attendance

This course relies heavily on interaction between instructor and students and your participation constitutes a significant component of the learning process. Your attendance is fundamental to the structure of this course and the objectives and goals and is therefore mandatory. Students are allowed two absences before a reduction in grade. Each subsequent absence will result in one letter grade reduction. There is a maximum of four absences, any subsequent absences will result in a failing 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 presentations of the projects on the scheduled dates play the same role and are 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.

Course Outline:

1. Week

- Aug 27, 2019: Introduction
 - Overview over course structure
 - Discussion of different narrative structures
 - Set-up of lab and equipment access
- Aug 29, 2019: Lecture and discussion of concepts of visual storytelling and montage
 - Reading: Sergei Eisenstein: A Dialectic Approach to Film Form; in: Eisenstein, S., Film Form, 1977

2. Week

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- Sept 3, 2019: Camera 1: Introduction of camera operation and check out procedure
In-class Assignment: First camera experiments (fulfill shot list)
Take-home Assignment:(shoot short non-narrative sequence)
- Sept 5, 2019: Camera 2: Review of first experiments with the camera (camera 1 and non-narrative assignment)
Introduction of first project

3. Week

- Sept 10, 2019:Introduction to editing (Adobe Premiere)
- Sept 12, 2019:Guest lecture by John Rosenberg: Editing and the shaping of story

4. Week

- Sept 17, 2019:First project due
Screening and discussion of the first project (Group A)
- Sept 19, 2019:Screening and discussion of the first project (Group B)

5. Week

- Sept 24, 2019: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 26, 2019:Introduction to the creation of 360 degree film and its interactive playback
Brief intro to some concepts of Unity 3D

6. Week

- Oct 1, 2019: Exploring light and sound in Unity 3D
- Oct 3, 2019: Lighting exercise: Different moods and expressions (Sound stage)

7. Week

- Oct 8, 2019: Second project due
Screening and discussion of the second project (Group B)
- Oct 10, 2019: Screening and discussion of the second project (Group A)

8. Week

- Oct 15, 2019: 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
Introduction to the Unity 3D authoring environment, exploring point of view and character
- Oct 17, 2019: Fall Recess

9. Week

- Oct 22, 2019: Unity 3d Workshop: Group workshop for third project
- Oct 24, 2019: Unity 3d Workshop: Group workshop for third project

10. Week

- Oct 29, 2019: Third project due
Screening and discussion of third project (Group A)
- Oct 31, 2019: Screening and discussion of third project (Group B)

11. Week

- Nov 5, 2019: Lecture and discussion of recombinant and procedural experiences
Introduction of the fourth project
Reading: Umberto Eco, The Open Work; chapter 1
Introduction of fourth project
Take-home assignment: Conduct field research
- Nov 7, 2019: Report on field research
Lecture and discussion of visual design concepts, interface, and experience design

12. Week

- Nov 12, 2019: Project workshop and discussion in class
- Nov 14, 2019: Introduction to sound design (guest speaker Midge Costin)

13. Week

- Nov 19, 2019: Intermediate screening of fourth project (Group 1)
- Nov 20, 2019: Intermediate screening of fourth project (Group 2)

14. Week

- Nov 26, 2019: Introduction to non-traditional interfaces

Class evaluation

- Nov 28, 2019: Thanksgiving

15. Week

- Dec 3, 2019: Fourth project due
Screening and discussion of fourth project (Group A)
- Dec 5, 2019: Screening and discussion of fourth project (Group B)
Class round-up

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>

PLEASE NOTE:

FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX