

USC School for Cinematic Arts | Interactive Media Division

CTIN 534: Experiments in Interactivity

Time: Tuesday 2:00 pm to 4:50 pm
Thursday 2:00 pm to 4:50 pm
Location: SCI L114
Units: 4
Prerequisites: none

Professor: Andreas Kratky
Contact: akratky@cinema.usc.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 3 to 4 pm or by appointment
Office hour link: <https://usc.zoom.us/j/93263710235?pwd=STQ5YngzbW5FOGFNYmlnNnBGS2ZVZz09>

Student Assistant: Sammy Chuang
Contact: schuang8@usc.edu

Course Description

This course is an introduction to a basic set of skills enabling you to make 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. Narrative 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. This project is an individual project.

2. Spatial 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. This project is an individual project.

3. Combinatorial 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 class sessions 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 on the class google drive/Blackboard.

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. Throughout the class we will use several tools, such as editing software (e.g. Adobe Premiere or DaVinci Resolve), image editing software (e.g. Adobe Photoshop or Affinity Photo) and a game engine (e.g. Unity 3D). You will not be expected to be proficient in any of these tools, but it will be useful to have a certain familiarity with them. As part of the class we will offer introductions, tutorials and individual support to help you gain a level of proficiency that will allow you to creatively and conceptually engage with the class projects. The same goes for programming, you are not expected to be proficient in programming, and in Unity 3D many things can be done without programming - but it will prove extremely beneficial if you acquire a basic level of programming knowledge while you are in the program. We will not require the use of specific tools, if you prefer a different tool, you are welcome to use that, if it allows you to engage with the assignments in an appropriate way. Please communicate with the instructor if you have any questions about the technical requirements for your assignments.

Assignment Submission Policy

All written and digital assignments, including the documentation component of each of the class projects, should be submitted by email to akratky@cinema.usc.edu by the start of class on the day that they are due. All projects and in-class exercises should be uploaded to the class Google team drive and submitted by email to akratky@cinema.usc.edu. Projects to be screened in class must be on the team drive at the beginning of class, ready to be presented.

Grading Structure

CTIN 534 criteria for grading are as follows:

- Class participation: 5%
- In-class assignments: 20%
- Narrative Project (incl. critique): 25%
- Spatial Project (incl. critique): 25%
- Combinatorial Project (incl. critique): 25%

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

Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. (This includes possible online attendance.) 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 instructors. 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. You are expected to participate in every scheduled class session. This might be through in-person attendance, virtual attendance, or asynchronous viewing of class recordings and subsequent feedback/discussion. If you must miss a class, please be sure to get any notes and assignments from a classmate so you do not fall behind.

In case a situation requires students to attend class virtually in Zoom, please log in using your USC-enabled Zoom account for security purposes. It is also recommended that you keep your camera turned on so you can better interact with the class and participate in class activities.

If you feel that you are unable to participate in the ways listed above, please speak to your professor. Accommodations may be made for certain situations.

Unauthorized Social Media Use During Class

Non-class focused social media use, including text messaging, shopping, Internet messaging and email, is not permitted during class unless explicitly permitted by the instructors. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using non-class focused social media during 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 the graduate advisor for the division, who can either discuss the issue with you directly or point you toward other on- and off-campus resources for addressing your concern.

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 instructors 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.

Graduate Diversity Lab

As part of SCA's stated values and commitment to building more inclusive media industries, all incoming graduate students will attend five sessions in their first semester focused on building stronger, more welcoming and equitable media communities. Each student will select a date for a professional development training based in the principles of transformative justice, and then, four 90-minute seminars of their choice throughout the semester. Feel free to attend more than four sessions if they are of interest to you. Session topics and schedule will be available on the first week of classes. Attending these five sessions is part of CTIN 534 and will be factored into the course grade.

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; the instructor will outline with you 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 22, 2023: Introduction
 - Overview over course structure
 - Discussion of different narrative structures

Introduction of camera basics
Assignment: First camera experiments (fulfill shot list)

- Aug 24, 2023: Discussion of camera basics, considering traditional and computational photography
Workshop: Individual work and advisement on camera experiments assignment

2. Week

- Aug 29, 2023: Discussion of concepts of visual storytelling and montage
Review of shot list assignment
Assignment: Shoot short non-narrative sequence
Reading discussion: Sergei Eisenstein: A Dialectic Approach to Film Form; in: Eisenstein, S., Film Form, 1977
First class project assigned
- Aug 29, 2023: Introduction to editing (Adobe Premiere)
Workshop: Individual work and advisement on non-narrative assignment

3. Week

- Sept 5, 2023: Review and discussion of non-narrative assignment
Reading discussion: Scott McCloud: Understanding Comics, excerpt
Discussion of storyboarding and pre-visualization
Assignment: Class project 1 - Narrative project (due week 5)
- Sept 7, 2023: Workshop: Individual work and advisement on narrative assignment

4. Week

- Sept 12, 2023: Lighting exercise: Different moods and expressions, lighting for narrative
Reading discussion: John Alton: Painting with Light, chapter 2, Theory of lighting, chapter 3, Mystery Lighting.
- Sept 14, 2023: Discussion of virtual light and cameras in Unity 3D
Workshop: Translation of lighting experience from real lights to virtual lights

5. Week

- Sept 19, 2023: **First project due**
Screening and discussion of the first project (Group A)
- Sept 21, 2023: Screening and discussion of the first project (Group B)

6. Week

- Sept 26, 2023: Lecture and discussion of spatial and non-linear narrative structures.
Assignment: Class project 2 - Spatial narrative project (due week 9)
In-class assignment: Analytical field-trip
Reading discussion: Bachelard: Poetics of Space, excerpt;
Guy Debord: Theory of the Dérive
- Sept 28, 2023: Introduction to the Unity 3D authoring environment
Workshop: Individual work and advisement for field trip assignment

7. Week

- Oct 3, 2023: Review and discussion of field trip assignment.
- Oct 5, 2023: Unity 3D Intro (continued), exploring point of view and character
Workshop: Individual work and advisement for spatial project

8. Week

- Oct 10, 2023: Discussion of visual design concepts, interface, and experience design
- Oct 12, 2023: Fall recess

9. Week

- Oct 17, 2023: **Second project due**
Screening and discussion of the second project (Group B)
- Oct 19, 2023: Screening and discussion of the second project (Group A)

10. Week

- Oct 24, 2023: Discussion of combinatorial and procedural experiences
Reading discussion: Italo Calvino, Cybernetics and Ghosts; in: Calvino, I.,
The Uses of Literature, 1986
Assignment: 3. Class project - Recombinant narrative play project
(in conjunction with CTIN 541)
- Oct 26, 2023: Workshop: Group work and advisement for recombinant narrative project

11. Week

- Oct 31, 2023: Discussion of auditory perception and spatial sound
Reading: Murray Schafer, The Soundscape (excerpt)
In-class assignment: Sound story exercise
- Nov 2, 2023: Workshop: Individual/group work and advisement for final project

12. Week

- Nov 7, 2023: Introduction to sound design
Reading discussion: Walter Murch, Stretching the Sound to help the Mind
See, <http://www.filmsound.org/murch/stretching.htm>
- Nov 9, 2023: Review and discussion of Sound story assignment
Workshop: Individual/group work and advisement for final project

13. Week

- Nov 14, 2023: Intermediate screening and critique of final project
- Nov 16, 2023: Intermediate screening and critique of final project

14. Week

- Nov 21, 2023: Introduction to non-traditional interfaces

- Nov 23, 2023: Thanksgiving

15. Week

- Nov 28, 2023: **Third project due**
Screening and discussion and critique of third project (Part 1)
Class evaluation
- Nov 30, 2023: Screening and discussion and critique of third project (Part 2)

Final Exam

- Dec 7, 2023: **Final version of project and semester paper due (4 pm)**

ACADEMIC POLICIES

Land Acknowledgement Statement:

For those participating from the LA Basin, we acknowledge our presence on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Tongva and Chumash peoples.

Disability “Acknowledgement”

In the spirit of disability culture, please feel free to stim, stretch, knit, doodle, move around, change seats, do yoga or do what feels right to your bodymind.

SCA Diversity and Inclusion Statement:

Diversity and Inclusion are foundational to the SCA community. We are committed to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. The classroom should be a space for open discussion of ideas and self-expression; however, SCA will not tolerate verbal or written abuse, threats, harassment, intimidation or violence against person or property. If students are concerned about these matters in the classroom setting they are encouraged to contact their SCA Diversity and Inclusion Liaison, <http://cinema.usc.edu/about/diversity.cfm>; e-mail diversity@cinema.usc.edu. You can also report discrimination based on a protected class here <https://equity.usc.edu/harassment-or-discrimination/>

Course Content:

The required materials (readings, screenings, etc.) that are used in this course may, at times, depict or address potentially sensitive subject matter. Our discussions in class may also include these topics. The selection and presentation of these materials do not amount to an endorsement of the ideas expressed in them. If you have personal concerns about any of these materials, please discuss them with your professor so they may arrange appropriate alternatives if needed.

Disruptive Student Behavior:

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

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>.

Statement on Fair Use:

Fair use is a legal principle that defines certain limitations on the exclusive rights of copyright holders. Projects in this class are produced with fair use doctrines in mind using its four pillars: (1) the purpose and character of use, (2) the nature of the copyrighted work, (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole, and (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work. Generally speaking, this means you must only use as much of a copyrighted work as is necessary to make your point, and you must cite your sources accordingly.

Citation Guidelines:

We assert that work produced in our classes is covered under the Doctrine of Fair Use. In order to make this claim, however, all projects must include academically appropriate citations in the form of a References section, which covers all sources, in order to receive a passing grade. The References section is either included in the project itself or as a separate document, as appropriate. For citation purposes, we follow *Kairos Journal of Rhetoric, Technology and Pedagogy* style guide; Kairos uses [APA format](#), which is slightly modified and whose general guidelines and specific examples may be found here: <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/styleguide.html#apa>

Computer Code:

Computer code is often shared and reused. This is appropriate in a IMGD course unless otherwise directed by the assignment. If you do use code, you should attribute it. Please follow these protocols from MIT which call for placing a comment in one's code with a URL to the original source, a note if it was adapted, and the date of retrieval: <https://integrity.mit.edu/handbook/writing-code>

Research:

Need to do research but don't know where to start? Searching for a book, article, or data to support your argument? Not sure how to cite a source in your bibliography? Ask a librarian!

Research help is available:

- In person and by phone, chat and email at Ask a Librarian
- Through research guides and FAQs
- By contacting your subject librarian

USC Libraries: <https://libraries.usc.edu/>

COVID-19 Information for Students Coming to Campus

USC has COVID-19 and health protocols requirements for students who will be coming to campus. Please consult the [USC COVID-19 resource center website](#) for the latest COVID-19 testing and health protocol requirements. Requirements are continuously updated so please check frequently.

Students should also stay informed with the "We Are USC" portal:
<https://we-are.usc.edu/students/>

Students are also expected to follow the [University's Expectations on Student Behavior](#).

PLEASE NOTE:

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

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

Student Health Leave Coordinator – 213-740-0411 or uscsupport@usc.edu

<https://campussupport.usc.edu/students/health-and-wellness/health-leave-of-absence/>

Located in the USC Campus Support and Intervention office, the Health Leave Coordinator processes requests for health leaves of absence and advocates for students taking such leaves when needed.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

USC Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086 or eeotix@usc.edu

<https://eeotix.usc.edu/>

Find information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

<https://osas.usc.edu/>

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support & Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, *HSC:* (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, *HSC:* (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

ombuds.usc.edu

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.