

**CTAN - 592 MASTER CLASS - 2 Units**  
**Visual Directing**

**Semester:** Spring 2024

**Course Type:** Lecture

**Location:** SCB205

**Day and Time:** Friday, 1 to 3:50 p.m.

**Instructor:** Peter Chung

**Office Hours:** Individual consultations for one hour before and after each Friday session, by appointment only.

chungpet@usc.edu

**Teaching Assistant:** Aloha Lee - haekyung@usc.edu

**Course Description**

This is an advanced, assignment-based course for students wishing to gain a theoretical foundation for visual storytelling and to develop practical skills needed to pursue a career in writing, designing and directing narrative films.

Students will be required to create work at a professional level and to push themselves to the edge of their abilities.

Traditional education is founded on a dependence on the written word as the primary language of ideas. Yet human events and stories exist first and foremost as experience, not as lines of text. Film is an experiential medium. Filmmaking is the organization of images in sequence to create meaning. At a time when films have become the predominant storytelling medium, there is a need for young filmmakers to understand how visual language can convey complex ideas with efficiency, universality and emotional impact. This course will explain visual language principles and how they apply to narrative filmmaking.

In animation production, drawing is the main method used by the artist to convey concepts, characters, locations and story points in visual terms. Students will learn to maximize the power of their drawing by aiming to prompt the viewer's emotions and thoughts. Basic drawing skills are required. For students working in live action or CG, live photography or computer graphics will be permitted.

Drawing instruction will take up a minor portion of the time spent in class. The emphasis will be on how images can convey complex ideas through the use of context, viewer psychology, and precise formal control. Drawing proficiency will be assessed as it applies to storyboards, layout, character, environment and prop design. Composition and perspective will be covered, but this is not a course in painting or illustration technique.

## **Learning Objectives**

Training and grading will be based on results, not process. Students will be required to participate in group discussion to develop critical and rhetorical skills as are needed in the professional arena.

- To understand theories and methods of animated filmmaking — including their origins through study of art and film history.
- To apply objective standards of analysis and criticism by which to communicate and collaborate with others.
- To practice drawing skills as needed for professional layout, concept design and storyboarding work.
- To improve creativity through exercises that require original thinking.
- To become fluent in visual storytelling as an alternative to traditional text-based narrative methods.
- To use visual cues to convey characters' thoughts and feelings in ways more powerful than through narration and dialogue.

All assignments will be free of text, dialogue and narration. In the same way that photographers and painters must first master B&W before color, filmmakers need to learn to convey ideas through images and movement without benefit of words.

## **Course Assignments**

Drawing assignments may be done on paper, or digitally. All artwork will need to be scanned and saved as digital files. Shading and tonal gradations may be added in photoshop layers, allowing for adjustments in contrast and opacity.

For non-drawing students, photography of live models, miniatures, or CG will be permitted.

Weekly assignments need to be delivered as jpg or QT files and posted on the class Google drive by the start of each session. In the case of storyboarded projects, deliver each panel as a separate file as they will be viewed as a slideshow and must be editable.

We will view and critique each student's project in group discussions. Clips from films will be shown as working examples of the principles discussed.

## **Grading Criteria**

Performance will be evaluated based on commitment to improve, classroom participation, and evidence of understanding through completed assignments. All projects may be resubmitted with revisions if they fail the initial critique. Innovation and original thinking is encouraged.

Participation and Attendance 10%

Weekly assignments 60%

Final assignment 30%

## **Class 1 - 2024 Jan. 12**

### **Introduction to Visual Narrative**

Instructor introduction, course overview, and open discussion of students' interests. Art's purpose is to provide the viewer with an experience that conveys meaning. How are meanings detected and communicated through the senses?

Comparative discussion of narrative media: literature, theater, music, painting and film. Film vs. Literature. Actions vs. words. Why visual narrative can be a more powerful conduit of empathy than writing. Defining "text", "context" and "subtext" as they apply to narrative film.

Final project will be explained to allow students time to develop their desired story or subject.

**Assignment 1: Spatial Continuity. Draw two views of a character in an interior space from two opposing camera angles at the same moment in time.**

**OR**

**Spatial Context. Draw a scene that conveys one meaning in a cropped format, and reveals a greater or opposing meaning when viewed in its entirety. E.g.: One scene, cropped two ways. View A makes you laugh; View B makes you sad.**

## **Class 2 - 2024 Jan. 19**

### **Modes of Representation**

Historical and theoretical foundations. The evolution of modes of representation (primitive, classical, modern, post modern) will be defined as the changing relationship between form and content. Cultural differences between Western and Eastern artistic traditions and their resulting works will be examined. Classicism = Classical animation = The Illusion of Life. Non-Western animation arises from a tradition of non-classical representation and is better viewed in terms of modernism.

**Assignment 2: Form in Motion. Draw a layout with multiple levels and camera movement that results, in its final frame, an unexpected revelation.**

## **Class 3 - 2024 Jan. 26**

### **Film Form**

Pure form as a carrier of thematic and narrative content. Using the camera as an instrument, not a recording device. Composition, orchestration, rhythm. Visual music. Audience psychology and leading viewer expectation.

**Assignment 3: Transition. Produce a fluid transition point between two opposing or unrelated views with a movement that ties them together.**

## **Class 4 - 2024 Feb. 2**

### **Visual Exposition**

Strategies for engaging the viewer and arousing curiosity. Aftermath as visual exposition. Absence of event as a strategy. Exploiting ambiguity to hook the viewer. Ambiguity of meaning is desirable. Ambiguity of story is not. The importance of technical virtuosity.

**Assignment 4: Aftermath. A static scene depicting signs of a past momentous event. Include details that hook a viewer's desire to know what happened. E.g.: a crime scene; a disaster area; a post-celebration site.**

**Class 5 - 2024 Feb. 9**

**Hand-drawn 2D animation production for television.**

One full 22- minute episode of Aeon Flux will be screened and discussed in class. Preproduction materials including script, character model sheets, background and prop design sheets and storyboards will be presented and explained. Special attention will be given to the use of on-screen geography, and architecture on film. Discuss effective scene planning, layout, choreography, blocking and camera. Translating words on the page to images on the screen. Discovering subtext and exploiting dramatic potential. Also, strategies for ensuring that the initial creative concept and personal vision survive a lengthy production phase.

**Assignment 5: Specific Space. Design a space that poses a physical challenge: E.g.: a death trap; a passage with a blind spot; a guarded doorway. It should contain details for an imagined solution.**

**Class 6 - 2024 Feb. 16**

**Previsualization and Storyboard**

In animation, storyboarding equals directing. Storyboarding tricks of the trade. Types of transitions and how to use them. Juxtaposition; non-linear cutting; oblique camera movement. Examples of types of storyboards will be examined and compared.

**Assignment 6: Specific Time. Depict an action in a series of six or more frames that a character must complete within a specified time. (E.g.: Collapsing structure; avoiding detection; being observed. No ticking bombs.)**

**Class 7 - 2024 Feb. 23**

**Guest lecture**

Class begins with critique of weekly projects for one hour. For the following two hours, a prominent professional director or designer will share insights and lessons from working in the current animation industry. Guest to be determined pending availability.

**Assignment 7: Temporal Context. The “loaded” image: impart an unexpected emotion, meaning or train of thought to an innocuous image by a preceding sequence of shots.**

**Class 8 - 2024 Mar. 1**

**Drama and Subtext**

All scenes contain subtext, whether by intention or not. Exposition vs. drama. Change and choice. Shaping the scene. Blocking dialogue. The invisible director.

**Assignment 8: Dramatic Subtext. Depict a character making a choice either driven by a visible motive or one that sparks curiosity in the viewer.**

### **Class 9 - 2024 Mar. 8**

#### **CG animated feature production**

In-class viewing of Firebreather. Script and preproduction materials will be presented to explain the production process of a full CG feature film. Considerations for designing for feature length animation. Scenes from the script will be used to illustrate the translation of page to screen. Scenes will be looked at in varying stages of production: storyboard; pre-visualization; layout; animation; texturing; lighting; vfx; compositing. The challenges of directing long-form.

**Assignment 9: Moral subtext. Depict a scene that elicits a moral reaction, an urge to intervene or to participate. E.g.: negligence, injustice, deception-- or conversely, diligence, altruism or honesty.**

### **2024 Mar. 15 - Spring Break - No Class**

### **Class 10 - 2024 Mar. 22**

#### **Making it Personal.**

If the goal of creating visual media is to communicate, then what is worth communicating? How to translate the personal to the public. In-class discussion of personal epiphanies and how to mine them. Applying personal observation to creative practice. Finding your directorial voice.

**Assignment 10: Draw an image that represents your own aesthetic bliss. An event or place that makes the viewer wish to enter or take part.**

### **Class 11 - 2024 Mar. 29**

#### **Progress Review.**

Students will display a portfolio of their collected weekly assignments. Past projects will be revised as needed to reflect the student's understanding of the concepts covered in the course thus far.

### **Class 12 - 2024 Apr. 5**

#### **Final Project: Animatic Production**

Production of a one to three minute animatic (storyboard only - no animation) for a short film or sequence that makes use of the principles covered during the course. The animatic may use sound and music, but no dialogue, narration, or onscreen text. The piece will be a self-contained story or a single continuous sequence from a proposed longer story. It must tell a story or part of a story. No montages, trailers or music videos. Characters may be reused from the students' other work outside the class, but the story or sequence must be original and exclusive to this assignment. A one page sheet describing the piece's basic concept must accompany the finished animatic.

Students should come to class with ideas for their animatics and be ready to talk about them. The class may contribute suggestions in a live brain storming session.

### **Class 13 - 2024 Apr. 12**

#### **Work on final project.**

Work in progress will be discussed and critiqued in class. The instructor will provide

individual reviews and advice as requested.

### **Class 14 - 2024 Apr. 19**

#### **Work on final project.**

Work in progress will be discussed and critiqued in class. The instructor will provide individual reviews and advice as requested.

### **Class 15 - 2024 Apr. 26**

#### **Final assignment due.**

Final projects will be discussed and critiqued in class. The instructor will provide individual reviews and advice as requested.

## **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” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](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, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](https://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### **Support Systems:**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*

[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](https://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 – 213-821-4710*

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

<https://policy.usc.edu/student-health-leave-absence/>

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

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://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](https://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)

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

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298*

[equity.usc.edu](https://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](https://titleix.usc.edu)

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 or (213) 821-8298*

[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](https://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 Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776*

[dsp.usc.edu](https://dsp.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](https://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](https://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](https://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](https://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](https://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

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

[ombuds.usc.edu](https://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.

PLEASE NOTE:

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