

## CTIN 499: Database Cinema

**Professor:** Andreas Kratky

**Units:** 2

**Prerequisites:** none

**Office Hours:** Wednesday 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.

### Course Description

The goal of the course is to provide the students with a 'vocabulary' of conceptual and artistic means to create computer based interactive works.

The students will be lead to practical experiments with this 'vocabulary' and the development of their own personal artistic approaches to 'database cinema' will be encouraged.

During the course an interactive database project will be developed. Each student contributes an individual module that will be integrated into an overarching framework together with the material from other students of the class.

At the end of the course the completed project will serve both the function of a sketchbook of different ideas containing a rich pool of approaches and second the function of a 'show-piece' featuring the individual students contribution to it. Through the work on the group project the students will develop skills in the conceptual and visual design as well as the prototyping of artistic database applications.

### Course objectives

This course will explore the impact of digital media and databases on our perception and creation of narrative and meaning. The database as the most common way to structure information in digital media paired with interactive techniques provides fertile grounds for the artistic experiment to create associative multilayered narrative threads. In the recent years several projects have made use of these technologies and extended the ways we think about narrative and conceive art works. The attempt to engage the viewer into an active exchange and the drive towards open and associative structures has roots in many fields of cultural production which are developed to a new stage with interactive media.

Through the analysis of different approaches in the fields of media art, film, literature, music and popular culture as well as archiving and electronic data retrieval, and through their own experimental exercises the students will gain an overview and understanding of fundamental principles of database narrative.

### Grading Structure

499 criteria for grading are as follows:

- Class Participation: 10%
- Blogging: 10%
- In Class Exercises: 30%
- Module projects: 30%
- Final Project: 20%

**Missing an Exam, Incompletes:** Both the mid-term and final exam in this seminar are projects rather than written exams. However, USC standards still hold: The only acceptable excuses for missing an exam or taking an incomplete in the course are personal illnesses or a family emergency. Students must inform the professor before the exam 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.

**Academic Integrity:**

The School of Cinema-Television 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.

**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.

**Seminar Content:**

1. Week: Introduction (26 Aug 05)

- Overview over course structure
- Lecture: Different concepts of database narrative and the relationship to narrative in cinema
- Presentation/Discussion: Relevant examples
- Reading: Nyce, J. M./Kahn, P.: From Memex to Hypertext: Part 1, Chapter 5: As We May Think

2. Week: History of Database (2 Sept 05)

- Lecture:
  - The birth of the database from the file cabinet
  - Archives and databases
  - The role of computing in data management and association
- Presentation/Discussion: Relevant examples
- Class project: Briefing of students regarding their individual contributions
- Assignment: Look for databases and try to recognize the patterns in examples that we encounter in every day life. Find one example particularly enriching or revealing (because of its artistic contents or its associative quality etc.) that you would like to present.
- Reading: Eco, U.; The Open Work; Chapter 1: Poetic of the Open Work

### 3. Week: Open Narrative Works (9 Sept 05)

- Lecture:
  - Linear and non-linear, interactive and non-interactive structures of narrative
  - Associative thinking and remembering
  - Concept of the open artwork
- Presentation/Discussion: Relevant examples
- Assignment-Presentation and discussion of last weeks assignment
- Assignment for class project: Gathering of material according to brief (a hand-out with details will be given out)
- Reading: Barthes, R.; Camera Lucida; part 2; chapters 34 to 37

### 4. Week: Creating Data (16 Sept 05)

- Lecture:
  - What are data? The translation of the world into data.
  - How can data be organized and accessed in a database?
  - What is between the frames? Questions of transcoding, resolution and interpolation
- Presentation/Discussion: Relevant examples
- Class project: First presentation and discussion of the students materials for their project contributions
- Reading: Kinder, M.; Hot spots, avatars, and narrative fields forever—Bunuel's legacy for new digital media and interactive database narrative - films of Luis Bunuel - Critical Essay, Film Quarterly, Summer 2002

### 5. Week: In the Labyrinth of Database Narratives (23 Sept 05)

- Presentation with guest speaker Marsha Kinder  
(Reading: Kinder, M.; Hot spots, avatars, and narrative fields forever - Bunuel's legacy for new digital media and interactive database narrative - films of Luis Bunuel - Critical Essay, Film Quarterly Summer 2002)
- Presentation/Discussion: Relevant examples
- Reading: Eisenstein, S., Film Form; Chapter: A Dialectic Approach to Film Form

### 6. Week: Ways of Combining the Data (30 Sept 05)

- Lecture:
  - Collage and montage principles in film, graphic novel and photography
  - The Aesthetics of Collage
  - Design principles for the combination of multimedia content (images, typefaces etc.)
- Presentation/Discussion: Relevant examples
- Class project: Exercise on the interrelationship between images and text in combination with material gathered by the students

### 7. Week: Control vs. Randomness (7 Oct 05)

- Lecture:
  - The role of the viewer in interactive applications
  - Aleatoric structures as a source of surprise and inspiration
- Presentation/Discussion: Relevant examples
- Class project:
  - Exercise on the presentation of multiple parallel layers of the students material
  - Discussion and specification of the general framework for the group project
- Reading: Manovich, L.; Language of New Media; Chapter 5: The Database

8. Week: Ways of Navigation (14 Oct 05)

- Lecture:
  - Different approaches to navigate interactive experiences
  - Analysis of patterns like linear, hierarchical and rhizomatic structures and their narrative potentials
- Presentation/Discussion: Relevant examples
- Class project: Presentation of script and material for students individual modules and their relationship to the general framework
- Reading: Klein, N. M.; History of Forgetting, Introduction

9 Week: The Space in between: Narrative strategies for databases (21 Oct 05)

- Presentation with guest speaker Norman Klein
- Presentation/Discussion: Relevant examples

10. Week: Database Design: The Database and it's Interface (28 Oct 05)

- Lecture:
  - Introduction into database design and metadata
  - different ways to retrieve and use data from databases ranging from archives, collections to narrative networks
  - Analysis of different interface models
- Class project:
  - Presentation of outline and sketches for the general framework

11. Week: Building Database Applications (4 Nov 05)

- Lecture:
  - Introduction into the technical implementation of interactive database applications
  - Discussion of different deployment possibilities such as the DVD publication, the internet and spatial installations
  - Different interface strategies that are custom tailored to the respective deployment
- Class project: Presentation and discussion of beta versions of the individual modules

12. Week: Technical Aspects (11 Nov 05)

- Lecture:
  - How to combine a multiplicity of different media into one framework
  - File formats of media files
  - Performance issues
- Class project: Final presentation and delivery of individual modules

13. Week: Integrating the Individual Parts into One Structure (18 Nov 05)

- Class project:
  - Integration of all individual modules into the general framework
  - Usability Tests, assessment of the interplay of the modules and fine tuning

14. Week: Thanksgiving (25 Nov 05)

No class session

15. Week: Presentation (2 Dec 05)

- Class project: Final presentation