Preview: English/Film Studies 394: Theories of Mass Culture – Game and Story
Stuart Moulthrop – Spring 2021 – Online

DRAFT SYLLABUS AVAILABLE AT:
www.smoulthrop.com/teaching/ENGL_394_SP21/draft_syllabus.pdf

This will be an asynchronous, online class focusing on the intersection of procedural play and narrative. It is based around Twine, a free and easy-to-learn platform for making interactive texts, which most Twine makers understand as games. In its first decade, Twine has become a major tool for experimental and independent developers. Many important indie games have been made with Twine, including Zoe Quinn's *Depression Quest* (the game at ground zero of GamerGate), Porpentine's *With Those We Love Alive*, Anna Anthropy's *Queers in Love at the End of the World*, Ztul's *The Uncle Who Works for Nintendo*, and a host of others on sites like itch.io. The famous "Bandersnatch" episode of *Black Mirror* started from a treatment built in Twine, suggesting a connection to screenwriting and media production, for those who are interested.

The syllabus will alternate between making and reflecting. In *making* weeks you'll work through one or more practical exercises, learning how to do increasingly ambitious things with Twine. In *reflecting* weeks you'll read articles, view videos and play games, exploring possibilities for interactive storytelling. There are three projects, with an assignment-free week set aside for each. Options for the projects will include making an original story/ game or writing an essay. It is hoped/assumed that everyone will take the game-making option at least once.

The class will be conducted online without scheduled meetings. At the beginning of each project work week the instructor will give a live demonstration of relevant Twine techniques, recorded for later reference. There will also be weekly online hours for technical help. Online resources for Twine learning are excellent.

Anticipated questions:

Does this class have any face-to-face meetings? No. It's online and asynchronous. The only scheduled events will be the optional demonstration before each project is due.

Isn't it hard to learn coding online? Maybe and maybe not, but Twine doesn't require a lot of coding.

Should I have a personal computer for this class? Yes, but it can be very modest. Twine uses the same basic technologies as the web. It runs on all major operating systems.

Do I need to be a writer? You're already a writer. You're welcome to work in any genre, style, or medium.

Do I need to be a gamer? If you say so. All you really need is some curiosity about multi-path, procedural writing.

Is there a syllabus? A draft syllabus will be ready around mid-November.

How do I find out more? Contact Stuart Moulthrop, moulthro@uwm.edu.