**ASSIGNMENT:::** Orders for the Road

**WHAT:::** This semester has had a lot of anxiety and emotion compacted into just a few short months. The following are the orders for the road:

All our activities are linked to the idea of journeys. And I like to think that our brains have an information system giving us our orders for the road, and that here lie the mainsprings of our restlessness.

— Bruce Chatwin[1]

Not to find one’s way in a city may well be uninteresting and banal. It requires ignorance — nothing more. But to lose oneself in a city — as one loses oneself in a forest—that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest, like the startling call of a bittern in the distance.

— Walter Benjamin[2]

There may be days when you feel mired in nothingness. Every effort to work is a strain. Your mind has deserted you. Each attempt to bring forth an idea is an extraction by force. I have learned in these times that it is important to pause and be aimless. It is at these times that I walk.

Somewhere I read, “Where the feet walk centers poetry.” This is another way of saying that by placing the mind and body in movement it is possible to approach the heart of things from another direction. Walking helps to ignite the senses and to open self to external stimuli. To walk is to cultivate a wandering intelligence where we are placed in fresh relationship with the world and happenstance. When walking, thoughts are allowed to be free. We entrust ourselves to chance. Anywhere, anytime the unpredictable may appear. All we need to do is to stay open to it.

Wandering has often taken form as art. The 19th century flaneur’s purposeless idling and strolling about town allowed for spontaneous thinking. Henry David Thoreau walked without expectation believing a magnetism pulled him along to take the “right walk.” European Situationists ignited this spirit of discovery[3] to enact what they called the “dréive” (or “drift” from the Dadaist term “dérive”), as a critique of modern, consumer culture. Their practice was to float through the city, seeking out the unknown in situations; opening to whatever “ambiance” they came in contact with. In this way they exposed themselves to a whole spectrum of emotions encountered by chance in the unconscious zones of the city. Sailors “gunk hole.” They meander, following wind and weather, surrendering to a path that is not superimposed.

Walking also helps to generate a felt connection to internal, body intelligence.

Some of the greatest intellectual and artistic discoveries have been informed by walking. Beethoven used this technique to allow inspiration to come to the surface. He always walked with a notebook in which to work out the development of his themes.

**Project: The Walking Map**

Make walking part of your work. For a few solid hours every week permit yourself the freedom to be opened by the outside world. Begin by taking a walk around the block with a notebook or even a Global Positioning System locator. Wander the skyways downtown or up and down Eat Street. What do you encounter?

**Project: CREATE A REAL-TIME RECORDING OF WHAT YOU SEE AND HEAR**.

This is a form of automatic writing in real space. Commit to paper or video recorder the sounds, pedestrian comments, images, and sense impressions. Map these jottings or impressions. Trace the flow of the walk, recreating the journey within a spatial field. Vary the speed, cadence, scale, and volume of the words and images according to the experience of the walk. Remember: Experience within time and space is a matrix and not a linear sequence.

**Project: A Long-thought walk**

In “Drinking the Rain”, Alix Kate Shulman writes, “Think long thoughts, I read in a strange book with a fuchsia cover. The author is P.D. Ouspensky, a follower of Gurdjieff, both early-twentieth century Russian-born mystics. Each of our thoughts is too short. Until you have experience from your own observation of the difference between long and short thoughts, this idea will mean nothing.“[4]

Take an idea that is currently alive in your mind for a long-thought-walk. Use your mapping notebook or a stream of paper from an adding machine to track a thought for twenty minutes or so. When you arrive home again, transpose the rich intricate and interwoven aspects of this extended thought into a written passage.

**Technical:** Each of these projects will contribute to a website that you will create, using the p5js library. What the website looks like and what you create will depend largely on the artist, their circumstances, and your own personal preferences for media-type. Maybe this is just a video, hosted on a website. Maybe a set of photographs and texts that allow the viewer a peek into the world that is your mind.

Look for in-class demos as well as suggestions to be provided in class to give you further grounding for this assignment.

This project will be hosted on your Studio server, provided by MCAD. See the knowledgebase for more info.