



# ser.en.dip.ity

## REVOLUTION: PHILADELPHIA 2005

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*This is documentation of a student project presented at the 2005 AIGA: Revolution conference. If you should find yourself using any or all of this material, I would be very interested in hearing about the results and or manifestations. Please email me at [slowe@utk.edu](mailto:slowe@utk.edu).*

As designers we are all aware of the happy accident -- that moment of discovery that propels a project farther than you ever could have in your conscious mind. There is a lot said about serendipity in the visualization stage, but it can be overlooked as a sense of discovery in other routine or seemingly mundane everyday acts. For this student project, I wanted to place a strong emphasis on serendipity as integral to concept development. This project began as a weeklong exercise in a graduate class and has since developed into a project in our undergraduate information design course.

From the project brief ...



## OBJECTIVES

**ser-en-dip-i-ty**

1. The faculty of making fortunate discoveries by accident.
2. The fact or occurrence of such discoveries.
3. An instance of making such a discovery.

**Word History:** We are indebted to the English author Horace Walpole for the word serendipity, which he coined in one of the 3,000 or more letters on which his literary reputation primarily rests. In a letter of January 28, 1754, Walpole says that “this discovery, indeed, is almost of that kind which I call Serendipity, a very expressive word.” Walpole formed the word on an old name for Sri Lanka, Serendip. He explained that this name was part of the title of “a silly fairy tale, called The Three Princes of Serendip: as their highnesses traveled, they were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things which they were not in quest of....”

GOOD FORTUNE, ADVANTAGE, BIG BREAK, BLESSING, FLUKE, FORTUNATENESS, GODSEND, GOOD LUCK, HEALTH, KARMA, KISMET, LADY LUCK, LUCKINESS, LUCKY BREAK, MAZEL TOV, OCCASION, OPPORTUNITY, PROSPERITY, SMILE, SNOWBALL CHANCE, STROKE, SUCCESS, TRIUMPH, VICTORY, WINDFALL, BREAK, BREAKS, CERTAINTY, CIRCUMSTANCE, CONCLUSION, CONDITION, CONSTELLATION, DIVINE DECREE, FUTURE, HAPPENSTANCE, HEREAFTER, HOROSCOPE, INEVITABILITY, INTENT, INTENTION, KARMA, KISMET, LOT, LUCK, MOIRA, OBJECTIVE, ORDINANCE, PREDESTINATION, PREDETERMINATION, PROSPECT, WEIRD

As design students you are becoming familiar with a process that suits your particular way of working. You are aware of what is comfortable for you, what works, what will allow you that break into solving the given design problem. While this safe way of thinking often can provide comfort, which is good because we all need to remain sane, it can also lead to prescribed ways of thinking that may begin to reduce your body of work to a formula.

This project begins with you performing the research stage prior to knowing the outcome. You don't know the audience. You don't know the final context. You don't even know if it will be a design project in the end. What you do know is that it is probably flying in the face of everything you know as a designer. What you also need to understand is that you should run with it.



## PRODUCTION

**START HERE (BRING A BACKPACK).**

Each of you has been given a floor map of the library with a call number in the upper left corner. Start there. Go to that number, look up and down the row of that number, select a book that strikes you as interesting. Wander along the aisles throughout the entire floor. As you are wandering, select a minimum of 8 more books that strike you as interesting. Write down all of the connections that fire off in your brain as you wander.

**SIT AND REFLECT.**

Once you have gathered all of your books and before you leave, sit down and document the process that you went through in selecting those particular books. Take your shorthand list of connections and write a more complete narrative. You are a visual person, illustrate with words and/or images. Begin to flip through the books and engage with them, what do you find? What excites you? Where does your mind begin to go? Be as descriptive as possible.



## CALENDAR

Bring books + your written text(s) to class on Tuesday and we will talk about where to go from here. You should be prepared to hand in a copy of your written narrative.



Students come to the next class with their books and each takes a turn reading their narratives aloud. Some students embrace the idea of wandering while others are uncomfortable and have to develop a system or a "reason" for doing what they are doing.

Their approaches to this exercise range from methodical (turn down every 3rd aisle and grab the 18th book on the right), to thematic, to emotional (which books relate to my childhood) , to physical (get on the ground, do a "headspin" and which ever way I land I'm going in that direction), to visual (grab books which look to be the "runt" on a particular shelf).

Many have never even thought about reflecting on why something may speak to them the way it does. The writing component of this exercise is integral to their understanding of how they undertook their library wandering. Making the connections and analyzing their library experience allows them a platform from which to depart as they begin the design phase of the project.

They are then given the assignment ...

 OBJECTIVES

Now that you have completed your tour through the library, you are going to take that experience and map it out so that others can follow your journey.

*What is a map?\**

*Maps inhabit the realm of fact, although not exclusively. They are figurative representations of dimensions, attributes and relations of things in the physical or logical world, reproduced as a scale smaller than life-size.*

*What can be mapped?*

*Anything can be mapped, and most things are: places, businesses, galaxies, histories, bodies, philosophies, devices and databases. The subject matter of a map is measured, named and ordered (captured!) by the mapmaker who, armed with carefully verified data and a language of pictorial description, puts everything in its proper place with its proper name as he or she sees it.*

*Why make maps?*

*Maps give their makers the power to define the territory in their terms and write a singular vision onto the landscape.*

You encounter maps on a regular basis to help orient yourself within a certain body of information. In this mapping project, the information to be presented will be your journey through the library. It is not just marking the exact points you visited, but the order in which they were visited and the information you received at each point. How can you convey to someone what you encountered at what point? How can this map then communicate beyond your travel from point A to point B? Think about the perspective from which you view the information, both editorially and visually. What connections can you use to make this map a more cohesive whole when you are dealing with such disparate subject matter. Be careful of cliches. If you find yourself stuck there, how can you distill that idea down to another iteration? You may use the library floorplan as a reference point or accompanying visual ONLY, it is not to be the main navigational device in your piece. The form is up to you, although the concept should justify the form and the final size is up to you. If you find yourself struggling with the form, default to a poster. Work within your strengths here. Just know that you have options should you need them.

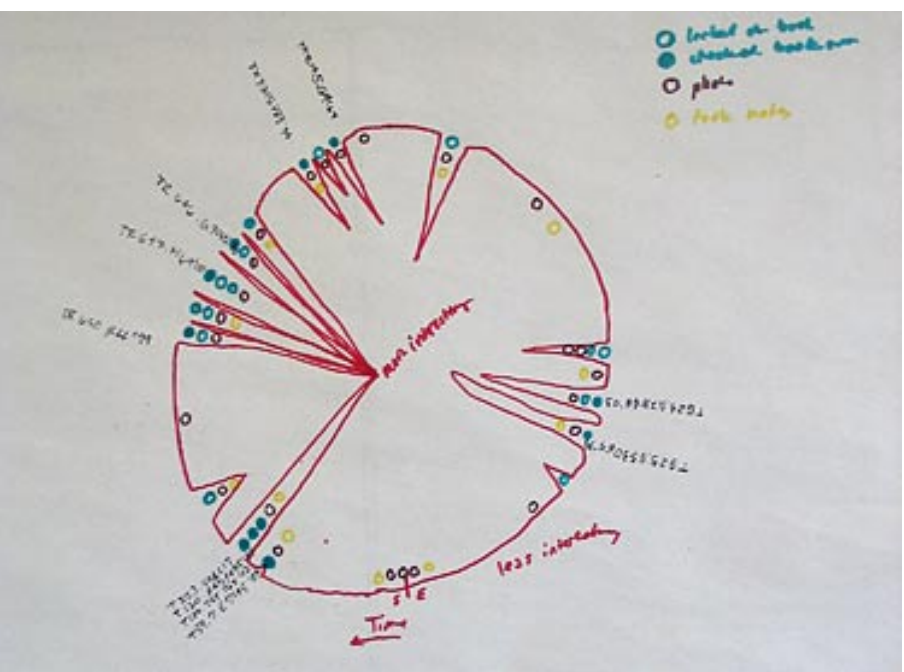
 REQUIREMENTS

- > call number of book
- > book title
- > your name, title of your journey, text to provide context for map (someone should be able to look at this understand what the journey was all about)
- > additional information, at least 3-5 levels, (TBD by you)
- > key (if needed)

 CALENDAR

- 02.15** :: library content due // project assigned // in-class exercise
- 02.17** :: first round sketches due including form ideas
- 02.22** :: bring in 3 different map examples
- 02.24** :: (off-site)
- 03.01** :: round 1 comps // class discussion
- 03.03** :: individual meetings round 2 comps // in-class workday
- 03.08** :: round 3 comps // in-class workday
- 03.10** :: no class -- use time appropriately!
- 03.15** :: maps due

\* text taken from *Mapping: An Illustrated Guide to Mapping Navigational Systems*



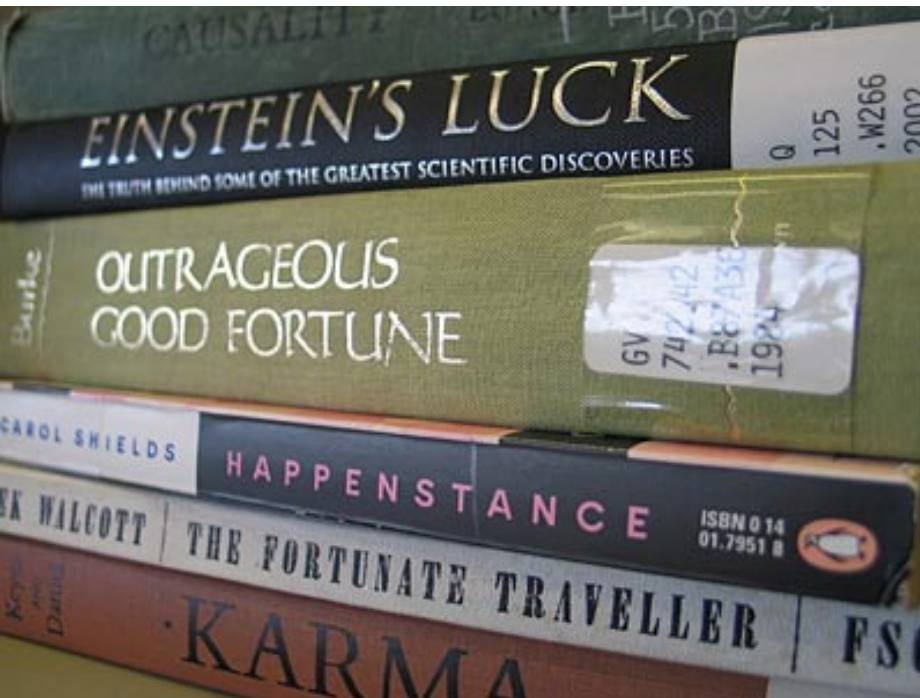
The end product of this library exercise is a translation of this adventure into a map. In the graduate exercise, it was easier for the students to explore alternative ways of thinking about a map. However, in the undergraduate class I developed an in-class assignment to get them past the “literal” mapping of the space.

To do this, they engaged in several in-class drawing exercises\* in which they mapped the space spontaneously. After the first one in which they were to map the experience with their eyes closed, they stood back and looked, noticing that several of these maps looked the same. We discussed why they all approached their lines rectilinearly and how the gut instinct is to map it based on physical space.

Moving on to draw it based on a particular emotion or sensory reaction revealed more interesting interpretations of the experience. For example this one above illustrates the degree of interest in the book. The center of the circle represents most interesting, therefore the deeper the pie wedge, the more interesting the student found the book. With this in-class component they were able to move past the “physical” outline of the building and understand that mapping this experience was not limited to the physicality of the experience – that there were several levels from which they could approach this project. This exercise in combination with their narrative provided them with resources to draw from when developing the concept for their final map.

\* In-class drawing exercise:

Each student was asked to bring in several media of their choice to work with and a pad of newsprint. Each selects some wall space in the room and tacks up several sheets of newsprint. Students were first asked to map it blindly by closing their eyes and mapping it in one continuous line. Once done, and with their eyes open, they mapped up to 4 additional layers of information on the drawing. These layers were anything else encountered during their experience. Finally, they were asked to put a key in the lower corner indicating the meaning of the additional marks. This was repeated for several rounds which included mapping it from below, as a cross-section, as words, as only circles/gradients of emotions, and 3-dimensional.



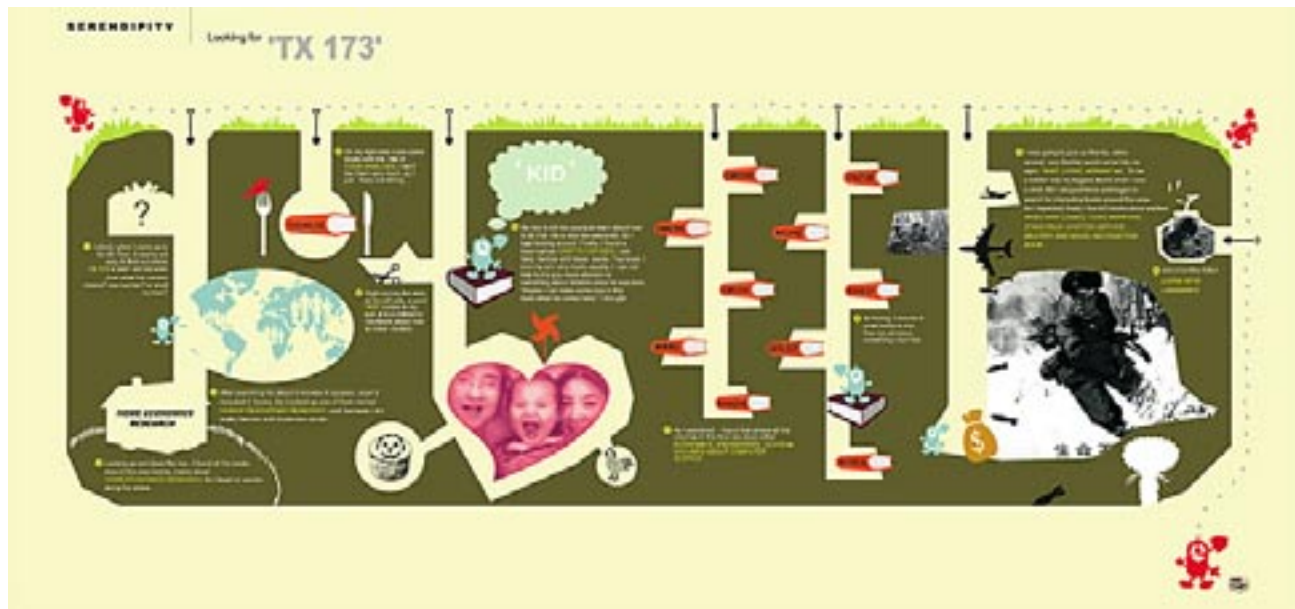
The final map had to clearly communicate but also should express the experience the student had in this adventure. Each student chose the perspective from which they wanted to approach the mapping of their experience.

A big difference in this project from others I have assigned is that the students are not provided the outcome from the beginning. While knowing the outcome is most akin to a design problem in a client-based setting, it is not always the most beneficial to students; particularly students who have either not fully developed or realized a process in which to approach their work. These tend to be the ones who are not as willing to explore or “play” in their design process, ones who may jump to a conclusion rather than explore the problem.

My overall goal with this project (aside from instilling in them my love of wandering through the library) was to try and get students to better understand the benefit of serendipity. Many have found books that have lead to other ideas or even discovered areas of the library they did not know existed (gulp!). This project has helped to illustrate that the concept for a given design problem can be inspired by being open to what you may find, even in the most seemingly mundane everyday activities.

Resources :: *(again, please feel free to send me any others you would add to this list)*

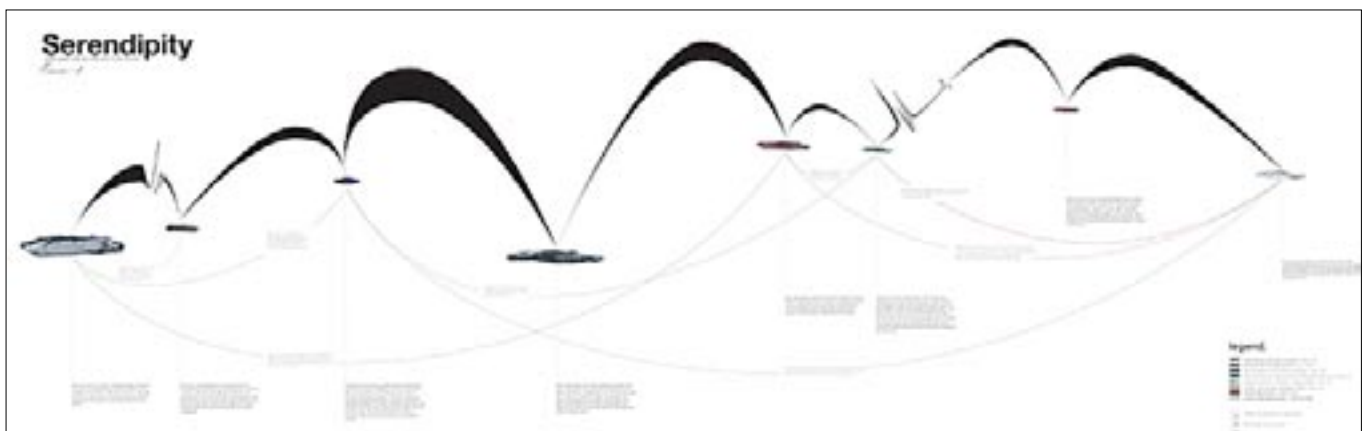
- Mapping: An Illustrated Guide to Graphic Navigational Systems (ISBN 2880467071)
- You Are Here (ISBN 1568984308)
- Tufte books
- Understanding USA - <http://www.understandingusa.com/>
- An Atlas of Cybersppace - <http://www.cybergeography.org/atlas/atlas.html>



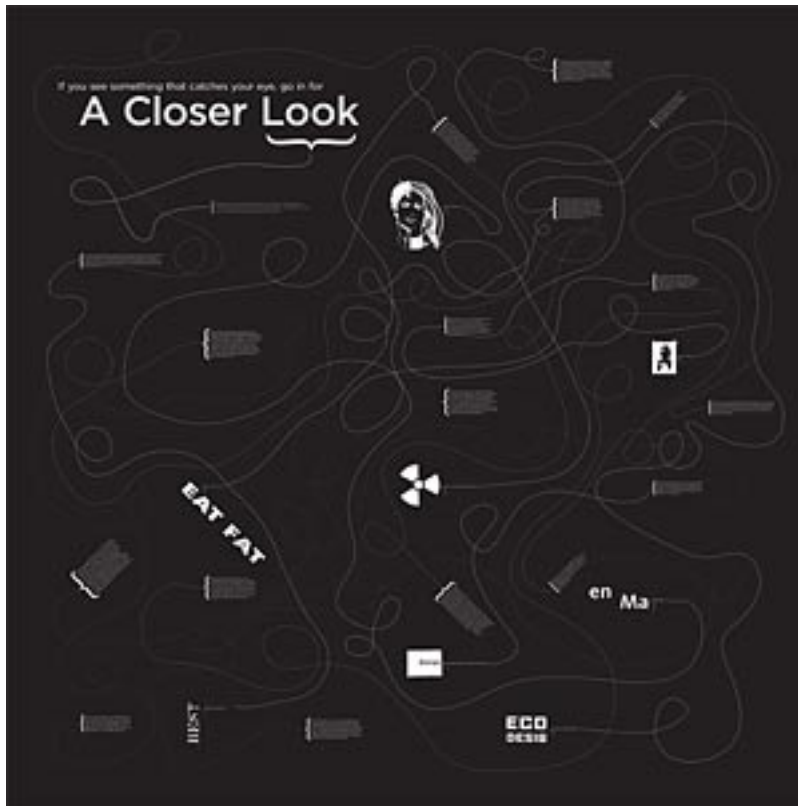
Lin Li



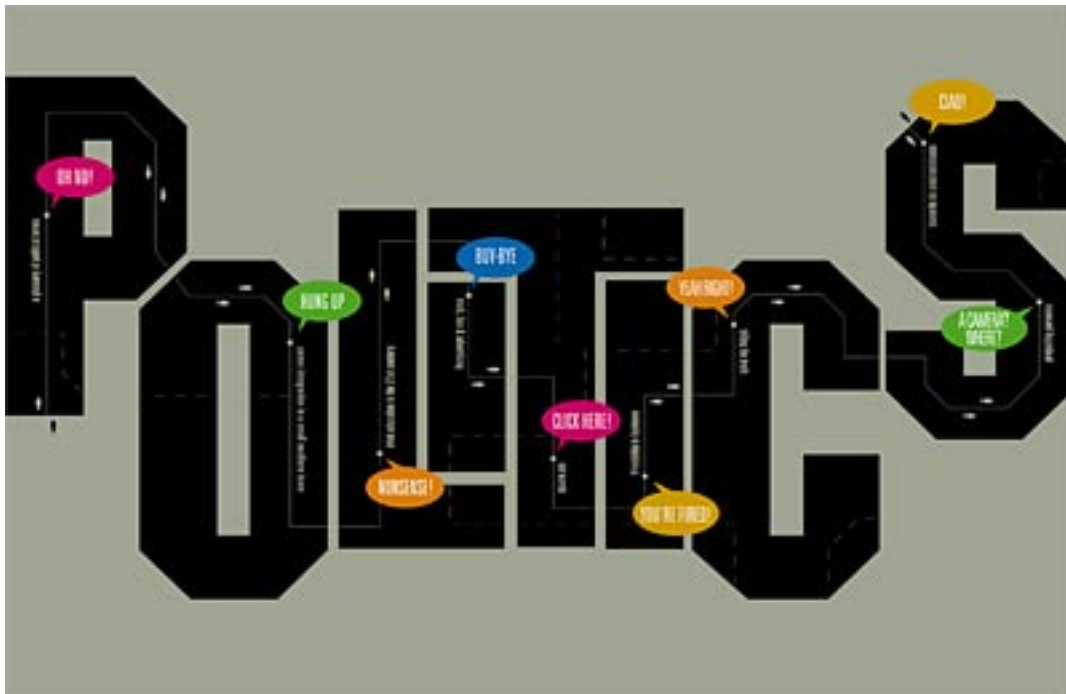
Jeremy Longmire



Jeff Romaniuk



David Jewell



Bob Newman