For this Tuesday (2 September 2014), you read George Perec’s *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*. For our next meeting, you will conduct a similar experiment here in Bloomington. These are due Thursday, 4 September 2014, at the beginning of class.

**Basic Task**
You should spend *at least* one hour observing the social and technological world around you from a single, fixed location. Your observations should take the form of English-language sentences, but we are happy to read other note-taking methods. Note the start and end time.

You should not interact with the world. This means (among other things) that you should not send e-mail, take phone calls, or chat with friends. You are welcome to *observe* the e-mails and phone calls you receive, but should yourself withdraw from the world.

You can “set up” the observation however you like. Sit somewhere that you expect to see *some* human activity; if you are near a window, observe both inside and outside. Recall Perec’s attention to the *infranormal*: not the big things, but the many little ones.

**Observation vs. Interpretation**
You are to *observe* as much as possible, not to interpret. Observations include both human and animal behavior, as well as that of objects at any level of technological sophistication.

The primary form of interpretation you will (likely) find yourself doing is attributing states of mind and beliefs to the people you see (what we called in Lecture Two “mindreading”).

An example from Tuesday’s discussion was the difference between noting that a police officer “reveals his weapon” and noting that a police officer “reveals his weapon to scare the protestors”. Taking another step back, you might write that “the officer’s weapon becomes visible.”

Perec attempts, as much as possible, to go backwards from interpretation to observation. What this means for us is simple: when you notice that you’re interpreting, stop.

“Pure observation” may be impossible, but by becoming aware of when you are undertaking a particular interpretative task, and seeing what happens when you stop, you will further develop your abilities. You are welcome to follow Perec in noting these moments during your task.

**Ethics**
You should both respect and think through the responses people might have to your observations. Your ethical duties towards others *always* trump your scientific activities.

In general, activity conducted in public has little to no “expectation of privacy”—it is legal to photograph, record and document. Within private spaces (such as a café) you have few rights, and conduct your activities only with the (implicit or explicit) permission of the owner.

These purely legal tests ignore crucial ethical aspects of our public lives. Stationing yourself near a bathroom or a hospital entrance, for example, or at a public playground, may cause discomfort and raise legitimate concerns. Part of this assignment is to become aware of these concerns as explicit or implicit rules of conduct that our society settles on. Even if you think a concern is foolish, you have (in this assignment) a duty to respect it.