CHAPTER NINE

Re-Reading Local Spaces: City as Text™ Goes Virtual

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INTRODUCTION

City as Text™ (CAT) has been an integral part of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC) since 1976. From the signature experiential learning event at the NCHC annual conference to honors semesters and winterims for students, CAT pedagogy engages participants in a deep understanding of place through strategies of mapping, observing, listening, and reflecting (Machonis 2008). The topic of multiple NCHC monographs—*Shatter the Glassy Stare* (2008), *Place as Text* (2010), *Writing on Your Feet* (2014), and *Place, Self, Community* (2021)—City as Text has also been the focus of dozens of NCHC faculty institutes. Aimed at helping faculty learn how to incorporate CAT into a wide range of academic endeavors, including student orientations, service learning projects, study abroad curricula, and assignments in course syllabi, City as Text faculty institutes are site-specific. From Detroit and Barcelona, to Yellowstone and Death Valley, locations for CAT faculty institutes are carefully scouted and planned to promote participants' connection with the cities, towns, and landscapes they explore. Participants are invited to engage deeply in the places where CAT faculty institutes are held: they walk the streets or trails, ride public transit, talk with locals, and, sometimes, get happily lost or venture off the beaten path, all with the goal of moving beyond the position of visitor or tourist toward understanding what makes a place—city, national park, small town, or rural community—work.[1]

When COVID-19 struck in spring 2020, two City as Text faculty institutes were set to launch—one in Charleston, South Carolina, the other in Portland, Maine. Such annual professional development offerings have been a mainstay of NCHC and a hallmark of the Place as Text Committee, which plans CAT programming each year. In lieu of these in-person experiences, members of the Place as Text Committee decided to offer the first virtual CAT faculty institute. *Reading the Local in the New Now: An NCHC City-as-Text™ Virtual Faculty Institute* launched via Zoom in July 2020 and occurred over three days. The facilitators and participants alike were new to many of the technologies and much of the work that would shape the pandemic academic year of 2020–2021. In true City as Text fashion, however, facilitators rallied to reimagine the central principles of CAT in a virtual space during a pandemic that limited participants' ability to move about freely or

engage with others in places they would explore. The 2020 inaugural CAT faculty institute was so successful that a second one—*Re-Reading Local Spaces*—was approved by the NCHC Board and ran in June 2021.

This chapter provides honors program faculty and directors with detailed strategies for running a CAT experience in a hybrid or virtual format. It documents specific ways the traditional CAT institute principles were adapted to a virtual space, including changes made to the institute format, destinations, collaborations, and assignments. A new emphasis on multimedia platforms, central to the virtual institute, are discussed. Finally, a summary of what the facilitators learned in the process of shifting a fundamentally in-person experience to online is shared.

ADAPTING CITY AS TEXT PRINCIPLES TO THE VIRTUAL SPACE

A typical in-person City as Text faculty institute runs for four days when located at a site within the U.S.; institutes that are completed internationally tend to last about six or seven days total. Participants arrive at the location where the workshop will be held by a specified day and time, engage in CAT assignments, and are introduced to key principles used to design CAT experiences. These include principles around institute format, destinations, collaborative work, assignments, and strategies. Each of these areas needed to be reimagined in the virtual City as Text institute. Some principles were easily shifted to the online space while others translated less smoothly. New elements, such as the integration of multimedia technologies, were added to the virtual institutes, which led facilitators to discover new avenues for innovation that were less apparent at previous in-person CAT faculty institutes.

In-Person CAT Institute Format: City as Text faculty institutes are professional development opportunities for honors faculty that, with variation and flexibility in place for institutes based on location, follow a predictable format. Day one opens with a welcome, after which participants are sent out to complete a Walkabout assignment. They return at a specified time and debrief as a group. An Initial Impressions writing assignment is due that evening to capture day one of the institute. On day two, participants meet in the morning for an overview of the

day and are then sent out on a longer exploration to a new area, perhaps one that takes significant time to reach. Participants return for an afternoon seminar that gives them the opportunity to dig deeper into their experience of the spaces they explored, to hear from groups that went to other destinations, and to begin to integrate some of the readings shared prior to the start of the institute. An Observation Essay is the assigned homework for day two. Day three is typically an all-day exploration of a third new destination. Depending on the location of the institute, this may involve groups traveling further afield to explore a new and contrasting location. At the Albuquerque Institute on day three, for instance, half the group traveled to Santa Fe by train while the other half drove to Acoma Pueblo by van. A Turning Point essay is the final written work due that night. Day four is devoted to sharing key moments from the Turning Point essays and workshopping ways participants can bring City as Text pedagogy back to their home campus.

Virtual CAT Institute Format: The Virtual CAT institute format follows the fundamental structure of in-person CAT institutes with some adjustments made to accommodate the fact that participants may be in different time zones, at home where there are distractions, and reluctant to be online for multiple hours. For example, virtual CAT institutes are shorter—those launched during the pandemic were only three days in length—and the amount of group time each day is limited to approximately three hours to counter the fatigue many experience from sitting for too long in front of a computer screen.

On day one, the whole group meets on Zoom for a welcome, just as they would at the start of an in-person institute. Also similar to in-person institutes, participants are sent out for their Walkabout directly after the welcome concludes. Unlike in-person institutes, however, during which participants explore areas identified by the facilitators, virtual CAT institute participants leave the opening group meeting and head out to complete the Walkabout in an area of their choosing. Some may decide to do their Walkabout on their own campus; others choose a park or parcel of public land nearby; some opt to walkabout in a neighboring town while others stay closer to home and investigate their neighborhood. While reorienting this assignment

for a variety of unknown locations, the facilitators were concerned that some participants living in rural areas may be too far from a town to return within the time limit; a separate set of instructions for "rural walkabouts" was included in the assignments to offer an alternative for these participants. Like an in-person institute, virtual institute participants return as a group to debrief. While the lack of common ground—both literal and figurative—makes the group debriefs more challenging in a virtual institute, the multimedia assignments, discussed later in the essay, bridge this gap.

Given the shortened daily meeting time of the virtual institute, day two asks participants to complete their exploration before the group gathers mid-day. This adjustment is a significant departure from the process followed on day two of in-person institutes in that the exploration is done prior to any group meeting, and each participant explores a destination of their choosing rather than being assigned one by the facilitators. As on day one, the virtual institute's reliance on each participant selecting a destination and then exploring it on their own means that the afternoon whole group debrief needs to help participants share their individual experience while also seeking commonalities. Day two of the virtual CAT institute also previews the Turning Point essay, which is the culminating assignment of all CAT work and is due on day three. While an in-person institute will include a second exploration—usually taking the full day to complete—virtual institutes require participants to complete only one Exploration. An optional second exploration is provided and asks participants upon reflection to intentionally use a different lens. Finally, day three of the virtual institute aligns closely with day four of the in-person institute: a discussion of the Turning Point assignment followed by a workshop of participants' ideas that can be brought back to their home campuses. The primary difference lies in the length of the workshop: in-person faculty institutes spend a full day in the workshop while virtual institutes spend between two and three hours. A day-by-day comparison of a sample in-person and virtual CAT highlights key differences in workshop format:

Day	Sample In-Person CAT Institute	Sample Virtual CAT Institute
Day 1	2:00 PM (in hotel meeting room or other group space) Opening & City/Place as Text Experience: orientation, introductions, & Walkabout overview 2:00–5:00 PM Small group Walkabout 5:00 PM Welcome reception **Assignment** due Day 2 at 9:00 AM – Initial Impressions writing assignment	12:00–2:00 PM CDT (on Zoom) Opening & City/Place as Text Experience: orientation, introductions, & initial Walkabout overview 12:30–2:00 PM Individual Walkabout 2:00–3:00 PM (on Zoom) Discussion – Small group debrief of Walkabout [See instructions below] **Assignment** – Initial Impressions multimedia assignment Looking Ahead – Overview of "Local Exploration" City/Place as Text experience to be completed anytime before 1:00 PM CDT on Day 2
Day 2	9:00 AM – Whole group meeting to debrief Walkabout; review of the day's Exploration assignments 10:00 AM–3:00 PM Depart in assigned groups for destinations 3:00–4:00 PM Whole group discussion of the day's explorations and outings **Assignment** due Day 3 at 8:00 AM – Observation Essay	On your own anytime before 12:00 PM CDT City/Place as Text Experience: complete "Local Exploration" assignment 12:00–2:45 PM (on Zoom) Discussion – Small group sharing of "Local Exploration" experience and group exercise share out – "Local Exploration" assignment 2:45–3:00 PM (on Zoom) Looking Ahead – Overview "Turning Point" and preview Day 3 workshop City/Place as Text Experience – Optional local Exploration
Day 3	9:00 AM Small group departures for all-day excursions to neighborhoods	On your own anytime before 12:00 PM CDT Complete "Turning Point" assignment [See assignment description below]

		12:00–12:45 PM (on Zoom) Share Out "Turning Point" assignment 12:45–2:15 PM (on Zoom) Workshop & Consultation – workshop a City/Place as Text Experience for the next academic year 2:15–3:00 PM (on Zoom) Debrief & Closing 3:00–3:30 PM (on Zoom) Optional Q&A and/or social time
Day 4	10:00 AM–4:30 PM Workshop 6:00 PM Group Dinner	Not applicable

In-Person CAT Destinations: In a traditional, in-person CAT faculty institute, destinations play a critical role in the design and implementation of participants' experience. In advance of the institute opening, facilitators carefully scout destinations to which they will send participants. In addition, regardless of the institute location, facilitators intentionally select destinations that contrast. For instance, in the *Las Vegas/Death Valley Institute*, the Strip was selected as one destination while the Downtown section of the city was selected as another. These contrasting parts of the city—the newest and the oldest—provided participants with different experiences that helped create a complex map of the site. Similarly, the city of Las Vegas was deliberately paired with Death Valley National Park, making the contrasting sites a vehicle for conversations around similarities and differences between built and natural environments.

Other strategies used in designing CAT destinations include sending small groups of participants to different places. By sending groups to different locations, participants can learn from each other, be inspired to examine an aspect of the location they had not noticed during their own exploration, and begin to build a mental map of the entire area regardless of whether they are able to explore every part of

the city or place. For example, the Boston faculty institute focused on city squares and coastal ports. For one Exploration, participants were sent to different coastal towns available by train from the city of Boston. Each group was only able to explore one or two towns along the train route; however, during the whole group debrief, during which each team shared its observations, a broader overview of the area's coastal cities was garnered through the collective lens.

Traveling to destinations on foot or by public transportation when possible is a final principle of CAT destinations. While not possible in national parks, rural areas, and cities with limited public transportation, these preferred forms of travel keep participants that much closer to the spaces being explored. Walking by storefronts and residences provides an opportunity for closer observation and engagement not just with places but with the people who live, work, and play there. Riding the local bus or train offers a unique insight into who uses public transportation and for what purposes. As with all CAT experiences, the closer participants can be to local experience, the deeper the observations and reflections that unfold.

Virtual CAT Destinations: In contrast to an in-person CAT faculty institute, for which destinations are carefully scouted and chosen in advance of the institute opening, including, often, the documentation of bus and other travel routes, virtual CAT institutes leave the selection of destinations in the hands of the participants. For planning purposes, the participants were informed that they should think ahead about possible places to explore during the institute but were given no other information or instructions until the opening meeting when the Walkabout assignment was shared. This strategy allowed the essential CAT faculty institute format to remain in place—a quick opening followed by the Walkabout. Rather than being sent out to preassigned destinations, however, participants arrived at the welcome with a destination already selected, which they went out on their own to explore. During the pandemic, because of health and safety protocols that limited participants' movement, the initial walkabout was sometimes completed in participants' backyards, neighborhood streets and parks, and even a home office. Since participants joined from their homes across the country—in all kinds of urban, suburban and rural settings—a new

alternative Rural Assignment was included in each of the explorations as a possible destination.

The CAT principle of exploring contrasting sites could also be adhered to in the virtual institute even though destinations were selected by participants rather than by facilitators. At the end of the first day of the virtual institute, in a preview of day two, facilitators asked participants to think about a new site to explore before the whole group meeting on day two. Participants were encouraged to select a site that significantly contrasted to the Walkabout destination they completed on day one, such as a different street in their town, a rural or urban setting, or a downtown area in the next town over. This second exploration during the pandemic was done in the same yard, street, or even room as the initial Walkabout, thus making the element of a contrasting site less dramatic and more nuanced, the emphasis changed to using a different lens or sense, such as observing what the space sounds like.

Finally, during a virtual CAT Faculty Institute, the emphasis on traveling by foot or public transportation becomes a strong suggestion rather than a requirement. While facilitators carefully plan destinations and gather bus and train routes to support these explorations in person, the diverse locations of virtual institute participants makes this process impossible to require. Nonetheless, facilitators encouraged participants to walk or take public transportation when possible, thereby adhering to the spirit of the original CAT principle as much as they were able.

In-Person CAT Collaborations: During an in-person City as Text faculty institute, participants collaborate throughout the explorations. From the initial Walkabout assignment to longer explorations, participants are organized into small teams of 2-4 people. These teams are planned in advance by the facilitators to ensure that participants from the same institution are not in the same group, that participants in each group are from different academic disciplines, and that small groups are reorganized a few times throughout the institute. This intentional arrangement of small groups brings different perspectives to explorations, thereby deepening observation and understanding of the area explored.

Another key element of collaboration during a CAT faculty institute is to invite (even require) participants to talk with people they encounter during their explorations. This scenario may mean

asking the local coffee shop server if she is from the area or talking to others while waiting for the bus. Keeping groups small is directly related to the charge of talking with people during explorations: large groups move less seamlessly through spaces and can be intimidating to individuals with whom they might want to interact.

Two other key elements of CAT that involve collaborating with others include the initial avoidance of bringing in experts/expertise and having ample opportunities to engage in formal and informal conversations during which participants debrief their experiences. Rather than bringing in experts on the history or current status of the city or national park at the start of an institute, CAT invites participants first to create, and even co-create, their understanding of the place, which largely happens through private reflection and public discussion. Therefore, readings assigned in advance of an institute are deliberately general, providing a broad overview of the place, perhaps generating questions, without claiming to be an authority on the subject.

Other material cultural products may also be introduced to participants along with readings. (For example, participants in the New Orleans Master Class were given a Spotify playlist of music they could listen to in advance of the meeting.) When experts are consulted, they are brought in at the end of the institute as an additional lens rather than as an authority. Finally, since experts are generally avoided, it is important that CAT faculty institute participants are given multiple opportunities, both formal and informal, to share their perceptions and experiences from each assigned exploration with other participants and facilitators as they digest and synthesize what they are observing. This exchange can happen in scheduled daily seminars as well as in conversations over meals and in shared spaces at the institute hotel or another location.

Virtual CAT Collaborations: Unlike an in-person City as Text Faculty Institute, in which collaborating with other participants plays a key role throughout, a virtual institute has limitations around the form and frequency with which participants interact. The primary difference lies in the use of small groups of participants who are carefully organized, and reorganized, daily to explore assigned destinations. By definition, virtual CAT participants cannot meet in the hotel lobby and head out the door together to explore a neighborhood, cultural

institution, or street. While more than one participant from a single college or university may attend a virtual institute, even partnering those individuals does not align with the CAT strategy of working in interdisciplinary, discrete groups. Instead, explorations are done by the participant on their own or, possibly, with a local colleague. Where CAT-based group work can be mirrored is in the virtual small group discussions built into each day's debrief. Here, facilitators can intentionally create small groups of participants who are from different disciplines and institutions to share their experiences. As discussed in the outcomes section of this essay, when the shared work of developing a multimedia presentation invites these small groups to identify patterns and themes in their diverse experience, the CAT element of small group work is most effective in the virtual space.

Other CAT elements of collaborating—including talking to people, the avoidance of experts, and designing opportunities for formal and informal conversations—are easier to replicate virtually. The Walkabout and Exploration assignments ask participants to talk to people during their outings—asking questions, even directions, in order to deepen the connection to place through engaging with others. Readings assigned in advance of a virtual CAT institute will necessarily be general, as the diverse locations from which participants join the institute make it impossible to home in on site-specific material. As a result, the reliance on experts is less likely, although participants should be reminded, especially as they explore spaces familiar to them, to engage with a beginner's mind that allows them to see even their own backyard through a new lens. Finally, virtual CAT institutes lend themselves to formal and informal opportunities for discussion. The use of virtual meeting tools like Zoom create space for whole group and small group discussions through the use of breakout rooms. Shared documents can create an archive of notes from discussions, and links can make group multimedia projects available for view by all members of the Institute.

In-Person CAT Assignments: There is a three-assignment sequence in CAT faculty institutes: 1) The Walkabout and Initial Impressions Writing Assignment; 2) The Exploration and Observation Essay Assignment; and 3) The Extended Exploration and Turning Point Essay Assignment (Quay). Assignments are written in advance by facilitators to add site-specific details and prompts. Prompts are typically

inspired by the institute theme. For instance, assignments in the *Preservation, Progress, and Politics in Charleston, South Carolina* institute might encourage participants to pay attention to tensions around the history (preservation) and future (progress) of the city.

The Walkabout is completed on day one of the institute and is a relatively short exploration, completed in small groups, of an area close to the place where the institute welcome is held. Participants receive a written Walkabout assignment with general prompts that invite them to use their senses, to see places with a beginner's mind, and to talk to people. The Walkabout is relatively quick—an hour or two—followed by a whole group debrief. The Initial Impressions Assignment is a written reflection completed that afternoon or evening in which participants capture and record their preliminary thoughts on the space they explored that day.

The Exploration is the focus of day two of an in-person institute, which begins after a whole group meeting in the morning from which small teams depart to new destinations. Just as with the Walkabout assignment, participants are given a written copy of the Exploration assignment that includes site-specific details and questions. In addition, the Exploration assignment provides participants with definitions of the guiding City as Text™ Strategies of Mapping, Observing, Listening, Reflecting. A whole group debrief is held late in the day, after the Exploration assignment has been completed. Participants are then given the Observation Essay Assignment to write that evening. The Observation Essay is also a written reflection that asks participants to home in on a specific aspect of their Exploration. At the end of day two, new teams are assigned and the written assignment for day three, the Extended Exploration, is given out, which includes instructions for writing the culminating Turning Point Essay. On day three of an in-person CAT institute, small teams spend most if not all of the day on their Extended Exploration, usually heading to destinations further afield. The Turning Point Essay is due the morning of day four, which begins with a discussion of the Turning Point reflections followed by a daylong workshop of participants' ideas for bringing CAT to their home campus.

Virtual CAT Assignments: Both the assignments that send participants out to specific sites (the Walkabout and Exploration)

as well as the written reflections on those experiences (Initial Impressions, Observation, and Turning Point Essays) had to be reimagined for the virtual institutes. Given the shortened length of the virtual institute, only the Walkabout and Exploration Assignments were required, although an optional exploration aligned with the Extended Exploration was offered for those who wanted to complete an additional exploration on their own. In addition, participants would not necessarily be traveling to a new location and discovering it in small peer groups. Rather, many participants would be bound to their homes, neighborhoods, towns, or campuses, reading these familiar places alone, or perhaps with family members or a colleague in tow. As a result, the assignments had to be written to accommodate the lack of control facilitators had over where participants were located and what types of places they were able to explore. For example, CAT institutes are often held in accessible, walkable areas, often urban environments. One adjustment that was made to the Walkabout and Exploration assignments was to include prompts for those living in rural areas. The Alternative Rural Walkabout was designed as follows:

> If you live in a rural area, you could drive to a nearby town, park, or trailhead and follow the directions of the walkabout outlined above. If you would prefer to explore your rural home or property, imagine yourself as a stranger and note your initial impressions. Describe the layout, buildings, landscape, landscaping, animal enclosures, gardens, the entrance to the property, nearby traffic. What sounds do you hear? Do you hear people speaking? If so, are you close enough to eavesdrop? If you stand at the head of the driveway and observe the surrounding area, what do you notice and does anyone, in fact, notice you?

Another change in assignments lay in a shift of the theme of the prompts. In-person institute assignments include prompts connected to the location. For instance, the *Detroit Renaissance: Challenges and Choices* institute prompts linked to the theme of that city's historical difficulties and attempts to overcome them. Virtual institutes lack a common place around which to build a theme, thus making the prompts more general. At the same time, the virtual institute assignment prompts were connected to the historical moment of the

pandemic, which impacted all participants regardless of location. As a result, the virtual institute themes—*Reading the Local in the New Now* and *Re-Reading Local Spaces*—shaped the prompts used in the assignments. For example, the Exploration Assignment asked participants to either revisit the same space as the first day or venture out into a new area—potentially one where they might send students. Wherever participants went they were asked to keep in mind that there have likely been changes over time, some rather recent. Participants who were familiar with an area they explored were asked to think about the changes it has undergone during the pandemic:

> What is made visible now that may not have been seen this time last year? How does social distancing (or lack thereof) change the observations, interactions, and assumptions you have of who this space is for (or not for)? What 'services' do you see offered in this space? As you explore, be aware of the institute theme (the "new now") as it will be part of our upcoming debriefs.

A final and perhaps most significant change made to the assignments during the virtual institutes was to expand the form of reflection beyond the traditional written essay. Given the virtual space the participants met together in, the shortened time frame of the institutes, and the need to share reflections and observations virtually, participants were asked to move beyond the written and explore various technologies to document and reflect on their experiences. An additional incentive for emphasizing technologies in the initial June 2020 CAT institute was that faculty around the world were facing a steep learning curve around using technology to deliver instruction in their courses during the pandemic. The institute seemed like an appropriate place to support faculty development not only around CAT but around technology tools that could be effectively used for student reflection. By testing multiple media forms themselves during the institute, faculty would be better prepared to curate technologies when teaching their students during the pandemic and beyond. For each exploration—the Walkabout and Exploration—participants were encouraged to capture their experience using audio, video, still photos, or other media forms. These were then used in the Initial Impressions, Observation, and Turning Point "essays," which took many different

forms from PowerPoint to fully developed short videos that included voiceover, text, and images.

The Observation Essay was the reflection altered most significantly in the virtual format. Rather than a written reflection on a specific element of the Exploration Assignment, participants gathered on Zoom, were put into small breakout groups, and asked to share observations from their unique Explorations and then create a multimedia mashup that captured patterns and themes of the group. The goal of the assignment was threefold: to provide a way for participants to debrief about their Explorations while on Zoom, to try new collaborative technologies, and to encourage reflection through the group's identification of themes and patterns that were then represented visually, to their own group and to the whole group as well. Examples of the multimedia adaptations of the traditionally written reflections are described below:

Assignment	Multimedia Adaptation
Initial Impressions Essay	Please keep in mind that your first multimedia assignment is due tomorrow afternoon. This should be a compendium of your impressions, questions, and thoughts from today's walkabout recorded on a technology platform. We encourage you to use this Institute as an opportunity to experiment with new technology you might use on your campus. The Institute is a supportive place to leave your comfort zones and explore! Feel free to reference the City as Text™ Strategies. + Multimedia document, in particular the multimedia sections, as you complete this assignment.
Observation Essay	As we discuss our explorations, take note of themes and patterns that emerge. You will be given an hour to each share your Explorations and your takeaways from the new location you visited today, then create a "mashup" of everyone's experiences. This mashup may be a Google Slides or Jamboard, a PowerPoint, Prezi, or Padlet, a Wakelet, or other internet application of your choosing. You are encouraged to experiment and have fun while combining your Explorations themes. You will report back to the group and share this multimedia mashup with the whole group.

Turning Point Essay	As you reflect on your Turning Point, you may also consider in what way has technology helped and/or hindered you in your exploration of the local? Participants have discussed using the following digital tools so far in the institute: Adobe Rush, Adobe Spark, Audacity, Canva, Google Jamboard, Google Site, Google Maps, IPad Paper app, Mentimeter, Miro, Padlet, Perfect Video, Sifter, Storymaps, and Wakelet.

In-Person CAT Strategies: City as Text is based on specific strategies for engaging with places: Mapping, Observing, Listening, and Reflecting (Machonis). CAT asks students and faculty to attend to (i.e., see, hear, smell, taste, and touch) the world around them as they begin to understand that all aspects of perception involve interpretation. Both perception and interpretation are necessary for any attempt at analysis and are prerequisites for understanding. While the four CAT strategies are not introduced to institute participants until day two, when participants complete their Exploration Assignment, they are key to the exploration process.

Moreover, the Observation Writing Assignment asks participants to specifically consider these strategies as they reflect in writing on their experiences during the day's exploration. The following definitions are given to in-person CAT faculty institute participants as part of their Exploration assignment:

City as Text™ Strategies: Mapping, Observing, Listening, Reflecting	
(1)	**Mapping:** You will want to be able to construct, during and after your explorations, the primary kinds of buildings, points of interest, centers of activity, and transportation routes (by foot, vehicle, or other means). You will want to look for patterns of housing, traffic flow, and social activity that may not be apparent on any traditional map. Where do people go, how do they get there, and what do they do when they get there?
(2)	**Observing:** You will want to look carefully for the unexpected as well as the expected, for the familiar as well as the new. You will want to notice details of architecture, landscaping, social gathering, clothing, possessions, decoration, signage, and advertising.
(3)	**Listening:** You will want to talk to as many people as you can and to find out from them what matters to them in their daily lives, what they need, what they

	enjoy, what bothers them, and what they appreciate. Strike up conversations everywhere you go. Ask about such matters as how expensive it is to live there (dropping by a real estate agency could be enlightening), where to find a cheap meal (or a good one or an expensive one), what the local politics are (try to find a local newspaper), and what the history of the place is, what the population is like (age, race, class, profession), what people do to have a good time. In other words, imagine that you are moving to that location and try to find out everything you would need to learn to flourish there.
(4)	**Reflecting:** Throughout your explorations, keep in mind that the people you meet, the buildings in which they live and work, the forms of their recreation, their modes of transportation—everything that they are and do—are important components of the environment. They are part of an ecological niche. You want to discover their particular roles in this ecology: how they use it, contribute to it, damage or improve it, and change it. You want to discover not only how but why they do what they do. Do not settle for easy answers. Do not assume you know the answers without doing serious research. Like all good researchers, make sure you are conscious of your own biases and that you investigate them as thoroughly as you investigate the culture you are studying.

Adapted from: Peter Machonis, editor. *Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education.*

Virtual CAT Strategies: During the virtual institute, before beginning the assignments, participants were given instructions on the strategies CAT emphasizes: mapping, observing, listening, and reflecting. In addition, participants were asked from the beginning how they could employ technology for multimedia documentation and presentation of their explorations. In other words, they were asked to capture their mapping, observing, listening, and reflecting in digital forms. Participants were also encouraged to contribute their own list of tools, to experiment with a new tool, and to take the opportunity the institute provided to find a tool that works best for them, their students, and their campus. For participants, this meant placing themselves in the role of students who are acquiring observational skills not just through the four CAT strategies but through the use of technologies as well. Suggestions for using multimedia tools were outlined next to the appropriate CAT strategy to support participants in this process.

Another shift made in the CAT strategies during the virtual institutes was in the incorporation of "Rural Considerations" for each strategy. As mentioned earlier, because participants zoomed in from diverse locations that could not be predicted, the Rural Alternative

Assignment was created to help participants living outside of cities or even small towns to engage with the Walkabout and Exploration Assignments. In reviewing the CAT strategies, we saw that mapping in farmland would look slightly different from mapping in a more built environment. The original CAT strategies, newly added rural considerations, and multimedia technologies prompts are listed below:

	City as Text™ Strategy	Rural Considerations	Multimedia Technologies
(1)	**Mapping:** You will want to be able to construct, during and after your explorations, the primary kinds of buildings, points of interest, centers of activity, and transportation routes (by foot, vehicle, or other means). You will want to look for patterns of housing, traffic flow, and social activity that may not be apparent on any traditional map. Where do people go, how do they get there, and what do they do when they get there?	**Rural Mapping Considerations:** How does the landscape impact the way the property is laid out/constructed? What is the flow of the property like—i.e., how does the property suggest use and movement? What is the tempo (fast or slow) of the property? What about the property suggests tempo?	**Apply mapping technology:** There are plenty of kinds of mapping software that you can use with your phone. Students could also work on one shared map using a Google map or Story Maps.
(2)	**Observing:** You will want to look carefully for the unexpected as well as the expected, for the familiar as well as the new. You will want to notice details of architecture, landscaping, social gathering, clothing, possessions, decoration, signage, and advertising.	**Rural Observing Considerations:** As you walk, single out something you want to think more about. What about your property have you not considered? Examine that in detail. If there are people present on the property, observe how their actions are impacted by these elements of flow and tempo? How do they interact with the property? If there are	**Apply technology to document:** Take photos. Perhaps create a collaborative space online where students can share observations—maybe that's as easy as a hashtag on a preferred social media platform, or maybe it's creating a shared space for students to return to throughout the semester on a site

		animals present on the property, observe how their actions are impacted by these elements of flow and tempo. How do they interact with the property?	such as Padlet. You can also continue using mapping technology or another technology that you have chosen to explore
(3)	**Listening:** You will want to talk to as many people as you can and to find out from them what matters to them in their daily lives, what they need, what they enjoy, what bothers them, and what they appreciate. Strike up conversations everywhere you go. Ask about such matters as how expensive it is to live there (dropping by a real estate agency could be enlightening), where to find a cheap meal (or a good one or an expensive one), what the local politics are (try to find a local newspaper), and what the history of the place is, what the population is like (age, race, class, profession), what people do to have a good time. In other words, imagine that you are moving to that location and try to find out everything you would need to learn to flourish there.	**Rural Listening Considerations:** Listen to the landscape mindfully using all of your senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, movement, and muscle memory. Are there visual observations you haven't already considered? Perhaps find a place to sit quietly and close your eyes as you attend to each of these senses individually. What do you hear (animals, leaves rustling, mosquitos, traffic, machinery, voices, etc.)? Describe the quality of the sound. What do you smell (manure, exhaust, rain, berries, grass, etc.)? Go for a walk. What do you taste (fruit or vegetables growing, a scent so strong you can taste it, etc.)? Touch something and describe that sensation. Consider how the landscape directs your movement. Do you move differently in certain areas of the landscape than in others? When does muscle memory take over (scooping feed, weeding a garden, avoiding an obstacle, etc.)?	**Apply technology to document:** Take videos of sounds and conversations with strangers. Conduct brief interviews with your phone. But don't forget to eavesdrop! You can also continue using mapping technology or another technology that you have chosen to explore. You can combine videos and images into a single video quickly with Adobe Premiere Rush (desktop and phone apps available for free) or the movie program on your personal computer.

(4)	**Reflecting:** Throughout your explorations, keep in mind that the people you meet, the buildings in which they live and work, the forms of their recreation, their modes of transportation—everything that they are and do—are important components of the environment. They are part of an ecological niche. You want to discover their particular roles in this ecology: how they use it, contribute to it, damage or improve it, and change it. You want to discover not only how but why they do what they do. Do not settle for easy answers. Do not assume you know the answers without doing serious research. Like all good researchers, make sure you are conscious of your own biases and that you investigate them as thoroughly as you investigate the culture you are studying.	**Rural Reflecting Considerations:** Think about how you feel trying to view your home/property through the eyes of a stranger. From your observations, imagine what conclusions that stranger might make about the people who live on the property. How do you feel about those possible conclusions? Did you learn something about your home/property that surprised you? How might you interact differently with your property after completing this exploration exercise? Like all good researchers, make sure that you are conscious of your own biases, the lenses through which you are seeing and judging, and that you investigate them as thoroughly as you investigate the culture you are studying.	**Apply technology:** Turn a reflection into a visual or aural story by adding your collected documents to your writing with an Adobe Spark webpage.

Adapted from: Peter Machonis, editor. *Shatter the Glassy Stare: Implementing Experiential Learning in Higher Education.*

LEARNING FROM VIRTUAL CITY AS TEXT FACULTY INSTITUTES

Other Textualities: Historically, CAT reflections—the Initial Impressions, Observation, and Turning Point essays—have been completed in the form of a written essay. With the integration of multimedia technologies as an additional strategy used during the virtual institutes, this traditional reflective form was expanded and served as a reminder that a text is by no means a written document only. Rather, a text can be anything that is communicable, traceable from thought to experience to outcome. The basic premise of CAT is to

explore and come to an understanding that locations can be "read" as text. This reading enables participants to do more than just textualize a specific site. Instead, through the explorations and reflections, the site becomes a network of readable loci that sets the participants on a path toward a new understanding. Given the theme and the virtual nature of the institute, it seemed appropriate to take on the task—as facilitators and participants—of deconstructing traditional notions of text.

Why multimedia? How is multimedia different from a traditional reflective written essay? Perhaps the answer resides in the concept of textuality itself. To read a place is to interpret that place. If participants and facilitators alike were truly experiencing a "new now," and horizons were limited to the local, as they were because of the pandemic, then it made sense to approach traditional reflective practices from different perspectives. Hence, a need to rethink the reflective practices that would enable us to truly see the local anew. Therefore, the textual fabric would have to take on a different shape.

The decision to add multimedia technology for the daily assignments opened up new avenues of creativity. While the goal was not to replace or try to replicate the written essay with a purely visual form, what unfolded was a deepening understanding of what it means to be reflective using technologies that combine writing, images, video, and audio. Through the use of multimedia, participants were asked to infiltrate the presence of reflection as a means to not only understand their experiences of the institute, but to carry those experiences to new places of understanding. The fact that much of the technology was new to everyone created a sense of collaboration and cooperation to complete the work. Many participants enjoyed the challenge of trying out platforms they might introduce to students. Some discovered media platforms that lent themselves to CAT assignments, mapping, or collaborative working better than others. The CAT strategy of Mapping became especially visible in the reflective assignments because participants used all sorts of multimedia tools to create their own maps of areas they explored.

Like writing, multimedia is a re-presentation (the hyphen is important here) of thought and experience, but one that is multidimensional. Multimedia incorporates sounds and sights, along with silence, in ways that writing simply is unable to convey. Still, to be clear: the multimedia assignments are in no way intended to replace

writing as a means to represent the reflective process. Instead, these assignments are intended to enhance and offer up a different kind of critical and creative thinking to the reflective process and encourage us to reconceptualize the familiar or the ordinary as it is lived under extraordinary circumstances.

Access: Unlike in-person CAT faculty institutes that involve traveling, sometimes great distances, to the city or location where the institute will be held, the distance to travel in order to participate in the CAT virtual institutes shrank to the literal steps participants had to take to turn on a home computer and join a Zoom call. When the first virtual institute was being envisioned, we were concerned about who would enroll and how this approach would affect attendance. The virtual institute enrollments averaged 27 participants, making them among the largest CAT faculty institutes to date. Participants attended from all over the United States. With the institute occurring over Zoom, a number of concerns that typically keep people from attending the in-person institutes were eliminated. No travel expenses (airfare, meals, lodging) dramatically reduced the cost of attending. Participants did not have to leave their homes, families, and other responsibilities. The overhead of running the institute was near zero, which also kept the tuition reasonable, a critical factor during the pandemic when many honors programs had limited or no travel budgets. The virtual format eliminated that issue. Because some honors programs, even in the best of times, have limited resources, the low cost of the virtual institute may very well make CAT institutes accessible to a broader range of honors faculty, directors, and staff.

Considerations: Not surprisingly, the virtual institute encountered some challenges that need addressing in future planning. The engagement with technology did not always go smoothly or lend itself readily to a new understanding of place and text. Some participants felt frustrated by the use of new technology tools; other technology could bridge some gaps but may create other issues. Full participation required a reliable internet connection. Internet connections occasionally dropped during a meeting, and missing part of the discussion could prove frustrating as well as limiting. Relying on the help of others to dial back into the conversation was common.

While the virtual environment addressed some concerns about accessibility, it raised others. Physical limitations were lessened but more attention needed to be paid to such issues as closed-captioning of the presentations and discussions. In addition, the virtual environment might be more democratic in terms of opening opportunities for attending, but many found themselves distracted and pulled in multiple directions. By not leaving the everyday environment of work and home, quite a few attendees were pulled into meetings or had to juggle other assignments because they were at home. This situation challenged CAT's goal of engaging actively.

The virtual institute added new multimedia and technical platforms to bridge the gap of being alone during the Walkabout and Local Exploration and offered new tools to map observations and make connections. The application of new technologies created opportunities and challenges. Physical accessibility and the economic constraints of travel were replaced by access to free technologies, which after an initial free trial, had hefty price tags and sometimes required a credit card to sign-up. Internet bandwidth, along with the level of comfort different participants had learning new platforms without adequate technical training, also led to some unforeseen challenges. Moving forward with institutes that incorporate a virtual component or that are completely virtual will require additional conversation about how to strengthen these areas.

CONCLUSION

Although the pandemic forced people to physically distance, technology brought many of us back together. The two virtual NCHC City as Text faculty institutes reimagined a time-tested pedagogy in a flexible, hybrid, and distanced space. Participants developed their understanding of CAT strategies—Mapping, Observing, Listening, and Reflecting—while they designed ways to make CAT work regardless of context or setting. Traditional CAT institute principles were adapted to a virtual space, including changes to the institute format, destinations, collaborations, and assignments. In many instances, these foundational principles were transferrable to the virtual experience; in some cases, however, these principles had to be adapted. A new emphasis on multimedia platforms was central to the virtual institutes. Not

only did technology help uphold key principles of CAT pedagogy in innovative ways, they also provided participants with interdisciplinary experiences that documented their learning. Practically, groups had to decide how to synthesize their experiences, what technologies would be used, and how best to present their individual inquiries as a group. Such engagement provided participants with ideas for how to integrate technology into the CAT assignments they design for their own students. Despite the necessary adjustments of eliminating formatting and timing from the in-person institutes, the virtual institute delivered the key principles of City as Text pedagogy, making the pandemic pivot a space not just for exploration of local spaces but for innovation in a longstanding practice of honors programs.

ENDNOTES

[1]It is worth noting, as Bernice Braid does in her Introduction to *Place, Self, Community* (2021), that the term "City as Text™" has a history that incorporates the broadest definition of "city" to include a variety of places and spaces:

> Over four decades ago, City-as-Text morphed into City as Text™, which was trademarked in the 1980s to indicate that its origin was in the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), which should be acknowledged in publications. Students nicknamed courses and conference sessions CAT, an acronym still in use. When sites broadened beyond urban areas to include rural areas, villages, parks, forests, and jungles, the umbrella term shifted to Place as Text, which is now the official name of the NCHC committee working on the project. (x)

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