Hope McCaffrey September 24, 2020

Dev Report #4

Downtown Lincoln [Evanston] in the Coronavirus Age (Field) [500 words]

(describe what you see and engage in critical response to it; a critique)

Begin with brief introductory section that summarizes key points.

Engage previous critical readings…

(Does prior experience now shape what you observe and how you document it? *Yes, because I know that mixed-mediums make for interactive and engaging digital displays of information and critique.*)

You might also consider some of the deeper material configurations that shape what you saw on campus versus what you see in the city….

Analyzing downtown Evanston’s Coronavirus landscape with a focus on sensory experience offers a chance for critical engagement with the city’s pandemic policies. This piece examines downtown Evanston through a sensory lens while invoking theories of enriched interpretive experiences to translate the observations to a digital platform. Knowing that these reflections will become part of a documentary digital project, I pushed myself to observe beyond just optics: what did it feel like? In short, this reflection aims to create an immersive and interpretive archive of Evanston in a pandemic.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Before my foray into downtown Evanston, I tried to 1) determine which “phase” of re-opening the city was in, and 2) what that meant practically. But, I had difficulty locating this information. After trolling the City of Evanston website and the State of Illinois’ Coronavirus Response site, I ended up Googling “what phase is Illinois in?” Phase 4, it turns out. But this highlights an interesting point. I gleaned more data about how I was supposed to behave publicly, when masks were required, and what was open, by walking around downtown Evanston than I did from browsing the websites responsible for providing this “critical” information. Northwestern’s deviant digital humanities project[[2]](#footnote-2) proves more efficacious in communicating information and enforcing rules than did all of Evanston’s “Coronavirus” subpages (including useless pages titled “Evanstrong” and “ReCOVER Evanston”). So what is Phase 4? Revitalization. Gatherings of 50 or fewer allowed, bars, restaurants, and retail open with safety measures and capacity guidance.[[3]](#footnote-3) Meanwhile, nationally, coronavirus deaths creep toward quarter of a million.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In my car at 2 pm on Tuesday I waited, sweating, for my phone to download Evanston’s Parking App. Despite a global pandemic, economic devastation, and more empty parking spots than cars surrounding my little Subaru, I still needed to pay to park in downtown Evanston. $2 an hour. I didn’t want to press the buttons on the machine. But I had opera playing in the car, so it wasn’t all bad.

Downtown Evanston was quiet. Not eerily quiet, but that lull usually found early in the morning. Quiet enough that cicadas could be heard over cars, muffled conversations behind masks, the gentle wind, and an occasional stereo system bumping past. [Insert recording?]

Small stores were having big sales. 50%-off sales. Their goods lined the sidewalk, forcing you to inadvertently shop as you walked down the street. But a lot of businesses wouldn’t take cash, and all required a facemask to enter. I stopped by one of my go-to coffee shops. It was my first time there since leaving Evanston nearly seven months ago. Entering, I was struck by memories of sitting in the then-crowded space with my friends. You had to watch your elbows lest you bump your neighbor; that’s how packed it was. But on this Tuesday, the room seemed much bigger and was certainly emptier. I felt equal parts nostalgic and fearful, watching fifteen customers drinking and chatting at tables inside with no masks.

What was I not greeted by? The smell of fresh coffee. Because all I could smell was my own breath trapped inside my three-layer Mom-made cat mask. Even though I wear mine as if my life and others’ depend on it, not everyone does. Especially not outside. In fact, most people outside were not wearing masks, even when sitting and chatting in the fenced-in area outside the coffee shop. Nearly thirty maskless people sat close to one another in the coffee shop’s designated pen. I wonder what they smell.

[579 words]

**UNEDITED:**

Downtown Evanston’s Coronavirus landscape, with a focus on sensory experience, offers a chance for critical engagement with the city’s policies regarding the health and safety of the Evanston community. This piece limns downtown Evanston through the lens of physically experiencing it while invoking theories of enriched interpretive experiences as the observations are translated and maintained in a digital platform. In short, this reflection aims to create an immersive and interpretive archive of Evanston in a pandemic.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Before I forayed into downtown Evanston, I tried to find out first, which “phase” of opening the city and state were in, and second, what that meant practically (who had to wear masks, where, what was open?). But, unlike Northwestern, which inundates its community with updates and plans, it was difficult to locate this information. After trolling the City of Evanston website as well as the State of Illinois Coronavirus Response site, I ended up having to just Google, “what phase is Illinois in?” Phase 4, it turns out. But this brings up an interesting point. I gleaned more information about how I was supposed to behave publicly, what was open, who was required to wear masks, and the impacts of this devastating virus by walking around downtown Evanston for an hour than I did browsing the websites which are supposed to provide such “critical” information. Northwestern’s deviant digital humanities project[[6]](#footnote-6) proves more efficacious in communicating information and enforcing rules than do all the tabs on Evanston’s “Coronavirus” webpage (including useless pages titled “Evanstrong” and “ReCOVER Evanston”).

What is Phase 4? Revilazation. Gatherings of 50 or fewer allowed, schools open, all employees return to work (with IDPH approved safety measures), bars, restaurants, and retail open with safety and capacity guidance.[[7]](#footnote-7) Nationally, Coronavirus deaths creep toward a quarter of a million.[[8]](#footnote-8)

It’s a Tuesday, around two pm, and I sat inside my car sweating as I waited for my phone to download Evanston’s Parking App. Despite the global pandemic, economic devastation, and more empty parking spots than cars surrounding my little Subaru, you still need to pay to park in downtown Evanston. $2 an hour. I didn’t want to press the buttons on the “Pay to Park” machine, so. It was getting really warm in my car and I began to sweat as I toggled through accepting the privacy terms and conditions and using the same 4-digit pin as I everything else that requires a 4-digit pin. But I had opera playing in the car, so it wasn’t all bad.

Downtown Evanston was quiet. Not eerily quiet, but that lull quiet you’d usually find early in the morning. Quiet enough that cicadas could be heard over cars driving by, muffled conversations behind masks, a gentle wind, and the occasional stereo system bumping past. [Insert recording?]

Small stores are having big sales. 50%-off sales. Their goods line the sidewalk, forcing you to inadvertently shop as you walk down the street. But a lot of businesses won’t take cash, and all require a facemask to enter. I stop by one of my go-to coffee shops. It’s my first time here since I left Evanston nearly seven months ago. Entering, I am struck my memories of sitting in the then-crowded space with my friends. There we sat, across from each other, mask-less, discussing seminars and assignments. We had to watch our elbows lest we bumped our neighbor; that’s how crowded it was. But now the room seems much bigger and it is certainly emptier. I feel equal parts nostalgic and fearful, as about fifteen customer sit drinking and chatting at tables inside with no masks.

What am I not greeted by? The smell of fresh coffee. Because all I can smell is my own breath trapped inside my three-layer Mom-made cat mask. Even though I wear mine as if my life and others’ depend on it, not everyone does. Especially not outside. In fact, most people are not wearing masks outside, whether they are exercising, strolling, or just sitting and chatting with friends, which many are in the fenced-in area outside the coffee shop. Nearly thirty maskless people sit close to one another in the coffee shop’s designated pen going about their business. I wonder what they smell.

1. Stan Ruecker and Jennifer Roberts-Smith, “Experience Design for the Humanities: Activating Multiple Interpretations,” *Making Things and Drawing Boundaries*

   <https://dhdebates.gc.cuny.edu/read/0bf2487d-ccb2-4388-bffd-275ee90a3c65/section/fc008ab5-502a-4073-8624-fb24ba243dbc#ch31> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Hope McCaffrey, “A Deviant Digital Project,” <https://hmccaffrey477.wordpress.com/a-deviant-digital-project/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. State of Illinois Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response, <https://coronavirus.illinois.gov/s/restore-illinois-phase-4> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “US coronavirus cases and state maps,” *Washington Post*, accessed September 24, 2020: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/national/coronavirus-us-cases-deaths/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Stan Ruecker and Jennifer Roberts-Smith, “Experience Design for the Humanities: Activating Multiple Interpretations,” *Making Things and Drawing Boundaries*

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6. See Hope McCaffrey, “A Deviant Digital Project,” <https://hmccaffrey477.wordpress.com/a-deviant-digital-project/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. State of Illinois Coronavirus (COVID-19) Response, <https://coronavirus.illinois.gov/s/restore-illinois-phase-4> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. “US coronavirus cases and state maps,” *Washington Post*, accessed September 24, 2020: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/national/coronavirus-us-cases-deaths/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)