Visual Narrative and Marathon Training

The [Corona Papers](https://benrhodes477.wordpress.com/) Post #3. To view associated images and metadata, click [here](https://www.flickr.com/photos/190032975@N06/albums/72157716195961466).

*Introduction:*For this continuation of the Corona Papers, I compare three tools to test their suitability in creating a visual narrative: [StoryMap](https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymapjs/cd5330bf34ccc772495aab9389907dd4/afternoon-jog/index.html), [GeoJSON](https://benrhodes2843.github.io/geojson_demo/), and [paper and pencil](https://www.flickr.com/photos/190032975@N06/50483863167/in/dateposted-public/). I structured my engagement with the tools around a jog I took in my neighborhood. I took my phone with me with the intent of finding five interesting things to document during the course of the run, then using the collected data and jog route to employ the digital and analog tools. Throughout the course of the run, I took five photographs of various objects and kept track of my route through Lincoln. When the run was finished I turned to the tools to represent my run. I found StoryMap somewhat limited in visual narrative telling, and GeoJSON more suited to the task. But perhaps most enjoyable was the visual representation I created by hand with paper and pencil.

StoryMap was certainly the simpler digital interface—I uploaded photos and made up descriptions, then it did the work for me—and created what I viewed to be a more visually arresting final product. But that StoryMap only connected points using straight lines was frustrating: it emphasized the individual stops more than the journey as a whole (not to mention shortchanging my hard work by a few miles). This was in opposition to GeoJSON, where I enjoyed the ability to draw lines of any kind between points, collecting them into a narrative. It seemed that StoryMap suffered in that regard by simply having a series of points on a map connected by uninspiring (and misleading) straight lines.

However, in terms of what Graham describes as the “authority of visualization,” StoryMap has *authority* over the viewing experience: viewers must traverse my map essentially *in the order that StoryMap presents it*. There is a clear this-then-that mechanism. My GeoJSON map is more viewer-friendly in terms of exploration, as the viewer can examine parts of the map in any order, but this possibly disrupts the visual narrative—is it truly a narrative without a singular order? Regardless, I would still argue that GeoJSON is the better narrative-creating software, with more freedom for the creator to tell a story. I also wasn’t put off by the requisite coding of GeoJSON and GitHub; with little coding experience, I found the coding interfaces less challenging than expected (thanks mostly to Ms. Dussault’s clear instructions, but also due to the site design).

Both digital tools were intriguing, but they also contained constricting written and unwritten rules. So looking at a blank sheet of paper, and realizing I didn’t have to conform to notions of graphical representation as the digital tools conceived them, was exciting. I drew a graph showing what I was actually thinking and feeling during the jog: it compares, over the timeframe of my run, my “Energy Level” and “Desire to Find Something Else to Photograph (and thus end the run).” Initially, I found several things to photograph and was still feeling fresh, but then as I became more weary I couldn’t seem to find anything to photograph. Thus my desire to find a fifth object to document grew rapidly. This graph realizes Hegel and Seer’s “storytelling potential of data visualization” because it, like my GeoJSON map, shows a continuous narrative, not just a set of discrete points.

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