Downtown Wander-Around

The Corona Papers Post #4. To view associated images and metadata, click [here](https://www.flickr.com/photos/190032975@N06/albums/72157716433958951). To view associated visual narratives, click [here](https://benrhodes477.github.io/geojson_demo/) for GeoJSON and here for paper and pencil.

*Introduction:*For the next component of the Corona Papers project, I spent an hour wandering downtown Lincoln to observe the coronavirus response. I found a common thread expressed in countless different ways, and how those relate to one another and our course concepts is intriguing. Though having prior knowledge of the next stages in the project affected my observations, I felt that knowing where my data collection was leading was beneficial.

Strolling through the bustle of a warm fall afternoon, what I found in downtown Lincoln was an enormous litany of signs. Handwritten, typed, taped to windows, doors, poles, streetlights, professional, homemade, government-created, privately created, business-created, of every size, shape, color, and font imaginable—all professing one message: *hope*. “How we missed you.” “Welcome back.” “We’re glad you’re here.” “All are welcome—mask required.” “We’re open.” “Limited dining seating available again.” “Support your community—wear a mask, shop local.” These signs revealed that, one, Sayers’ ideas regarding minimalism are relevant because the signs are simplistic, succinct, and highly accessible to any would-be maker; and two, Lincolnites are viewing the pandemic as something to overcome together rather than a challenge to face alone.

I assumed the piecemeal nature of downtown Lincoln’s coronavirus response would mean patterns would be more difficult to find than while documenting the campus response. However, finding similarities between business’ responses was simple because each appears to be on the same fundamental page. Furthermore, the differences stemmed from individualized creativity rather than a disparate *message*, and seeing the unique ways in which different stores expressed the same ideas was exciting. My favorite example of this was Jimmy Johns’ sign— “Six feet? That’s like nine sandwiches.” Thinking of downtown Lincoln’s coronavirus response as an experience, the design of that experience engages with many key elements of Ruecker and Roberts-Smith’s essay on the audience-maker continuum because all the sign-makers created signs *to deliberately force the audience to react in some way*, be it wearing a mask or making me smile thinking about nine end-to-end sandwiches.

Though I tried to avoid it, I subconsciously observed things as more than a passive recorder. I observed in a way that guided toward *documentation*—and how I would reflect on it for this course. But I didn’t feel creatively stifled, because having guiding principles in mind made my observations more coherent, preventing me from cataloging extraneous details that would never make a final DH publication. At the same time, working toward a goal means that I probably (unwittingly) missed things irrelevant to the publication but interesting nonetheless. So having previous knowledge of the end result was beneficial for this class, but regarding awareness of the state of downtown Lincoln, I likely suffered in my detail capture. Ultimately, however, finding a common message of hope, unity, and progress was heartening regardless of how I came to observe it.

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