

Public Secrets Research Report

200 Word Summary

Public Secrets is a book/website with substantial research potential that exposes and challenges a public secret. A public secret is a secret that the public willingly turns a blind eye to because we know that the reality of the secret is harsh and unpleasant and it is much easier to pretend it does not exist or that it does not concern us than to learn about it and speak against it. The secret exposed in this artifact is that of the prison/justice system, specifically the women's prisons of the United States. The methods utilized to convey the message of the injustice in our system are significantly interwoven and provide a unique opportunity for interaction between the site and the user. This artifact has a graphic approach that is important to the field in which it should be studied; graphics as a rhetorical device that are tied intricately with the other components, such as audio and full text descriptions. Though there are other works similar to *Public Secrets*, most others provide information about past events whose story we have no hope of ever transforming. With *Public Secrets*, the opportunity to study a unique approach to conveying information as well as informing the public about a current injustice makes this artifact worth spending as much time researching it as the time spent developing the concept, content, and design.

Objective Description

The website/book known as *Public Secrets* is authored by Sharon Daniel and Erik Loyer and is an exposé of the true nature of women's prisons and the "justice" system that convicts alleged criminals and houses them. It is a moving (literally) work of art that uses a combination of quotations from inmates and authors and rhetorical graphics. The main pages present general

topics that juxtapose prison life and normal life, such as "Bare-Life" and "Human-Life." These pages have one constant and stationary tagline that explains the subject's relationship to prison life, like "Bare-life is preserved as an expression of sovereign power." The rest of the page fills up with alternating quotes, which you can click on and view the source, the entire transcript so you can view the quote in-context, listen to the audio, and see more about the source. On the home page, you can view dozens of topics, such as the prison-industrial complex, alternatives (to putting criminals behind bars), and inside violence; these topics open the door to many sources that discuss the topic and how it is connected to other authors or topics, which then opens up a new page with more sources, authors, and topics. The blocks of information provide a fragmented view that invites readers who are curious about that particular snippet of information to explore it further while simultaneously keeping those that aren't interested from being discouraged by large blocks of information. The audio provides a striking encounter with the source unlike one you could experience with a textual book. In short, this artifact allows for an interactive experience with actual quotes from inmates and scholars that informs the public on the secrets of prisons and the justice system.

Sketch of Research Context

Public Secrets should be evaluated and researched within a specific field that takes into account its interactive features, audio component, rhetorical graphics, and serious content. Every aspect of this website/book is essential and should be regarded as unique when compared to similar works that are lacking one or more of these components; for example, Chris Ware's *Building Stories* is extremely different simply because it does not incorporate audio. Each of the aspects should also be viewed as linked to each other, as the serious content is only strengthened with the audio, and the graphics work smoothly as an interface for the interactive features.

Technical Analysis

This work is not compatible with others, as it seems almost unchangeable because you must download the data almost as you would with a PDF. It's unique in that it does not simply link you to an endless number of web pages that require the user to load more data each time. Instead, all of the data is loaded from the start and no additional downloading is required. This seems to be the best approach with a book this large because the constant need to wait to load each new set of content would discourage users from continuing in their searches and cut their experiences short. This could be considered one of the methods utilized in the creation of the book to ensure that the users are able to engage with the work as much as possible with little to no hindrances. It also could create an issue with those who don't have great signal to download all of that data at once; contrarily, if one does not have good signal, constantly loading a web page each time would still not be a good option either.

As was stated in the objective description, much of the layout is rhetorical and user-friendly. The graphics are rhetorical because it maintains the systematic dull colors associated with prisons, which are black, white, and grey, and the quotes, text, and menus are presented in blocks that represent the prison format and the inmates. The blocks pushed together, specifically in the presentation of the topics, resemble the prison cells and the blocks floating past each other resemble the inmates because they related to each other but also carrying their own story.

One clear approach by this author was to create an appealing, though sinister, layout so that users can engage with the information they are actually interested in. He accomplishes this by always keeping the initial content short but also by making the content fleeting; the blocks quickly float away or disappear if you don't click on them fast enough. This method requires the reader's

attention and for them to instinctively click on what they attracts them rather than browsing through an unmoving list of topics and clicking on what they believe should attract them.

Evaluation of Research Opportunities

This book is significant in the field of research that studies the effectiveness of user-friendly interfaces and interactive modes of learning. Both the artistic intent and the serious content work together to make this piece a meaningful artifact whose significance lies in its ability to impact readers. Several other similar resources are based on historically significant periods of time, in which it is more informational than thought-provoking. This model shows us that we can inform the public on an important injustice that is current and that can be acted upon should readers be so inclined. The artifact also makes a strong argument in favor of creating interactive sites that include many interconnected components, such as the audio and the graphics. The solid bond between these components allows for a more solid source, and contributes to its value in terms of research opportunities.

Resources for Further Study

Interactive Exhibits at the Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust

<http://www.lamoth.org/visitor-information/guide-to-the-museum/interactive-technology-and-the/>

Voyage into the Unknown

http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/coover_voyage_into_the_unknown.html

Pieces of Herself

http://collection.eliterature.org/2/works/davis_pieces_of_herself.html

Vectors Journal

<http://www.vectorsjournal.org/issues/index.php?issue=7>