

BLOOD SUGAR

Summary

Blood sugar is a collaborative piece by author Sharon Daniel and designer Erik Loyer that consists of interviews with twenty drug addicts. The goal of the project is to give voices to the individuals who society has deemed as undeserving of care or attention. *Blood Sugar* argues for an unorthodox solution to society's war on drugs, tolerance instead of abstinence. Daniel and Loyer combine critical theory with subjective experience and moving text with corresponding audial recordings to achieve that goal. This redesigned documentary breaks many boundaries, within the project itself, socially, and academically. By presenting critical information in an unconventional way, viewers are forced to not only reevaluate their beliefs and prejudices against stigmatized individuals but also their relationships with how to read text. Internally, the viewer is invited to be the needle that penetrates the body and into the core of each addict. The design asks the viewer to interact with and journey through the unique experience of each drug addict as vulnerable as the addict who is sharing his or her past. These individuals are much more than just a disenfranchised group of people and deserve to be treated with respect and compassion.

Description

Blood Sugar is a voice chronicle of interviews held in an HIV prevention and needle exchange program with individuals who were current or recovering drug addicts. Needle and syringe programs are "aimed at reducing the risk of HIV transmission by providing injection drug users with sterile needles and syringes" (Zandonella). After *Blood Sugar* is launched from its introductory page, the project begins with the appearance of twenty distinct voice graphs that are parallel to each other (fig 1). When the mouse is hovered over any of the voice graphs, the name of the individual who was interviewed materializes above the voice graph. There is no specific order to these interviews since the individual who begins speaking changes each time the project is launched. Once an individual's voice graph is chosen, he or she begins to tell the story of his or her journey with addiction while the screen zooms in on only that specific voice graph. A few key phrases, quoted statements and unquoted questions, surface and continue to revolve around the voice graph as the audio recording plays (fig 2). Quoted phrases are linked with specific parts of an interview while unquoted questions are the larger concepts that the author explains in more detail. If quoted statements are chosen, then the audio will immediately change to the part of the interview beginning with that specific quote. If the unquoted questions are chosen, then a text box with an in-depth explanation given by the author will appear (fig 3). All of the larger concepts and big picture questions the author presents are connected to each other in the bottom left hand corner of that text box. Then, going further, after either a quoted statement or question is chosen, the screen zooms in on an image of a cell with more quoted statements and themes floating around it (fig 4). The quoted statements, again, lead to specific parts of an individual's interview. The single word themes reveal the names of other individuals who have stories with similar themes in them (fig 5). After clicking on the cell, the final magnification

appears as a nucleus of the cell. The nucleus is constantly moving while quotes from the interview and single word themes float around it (fig 6).

Along with this layered design, there are other options on how to customize an experience. A viewer can read the transcript while listening to the audio or read the transcript without audio or listen to the audio without reading the transcript. With connected white lines, a “history” option shows the viewer a map of which interviews he or she has already chosen and how far he or she has gotten through it. The “index” option lists the topics, or the single word themes, the big picture questions that the author explains with in-depth text boxes, the transcripts of all of the interviews, and outlines the author’s critical argument and theory on how to treat society’s war on drugs.

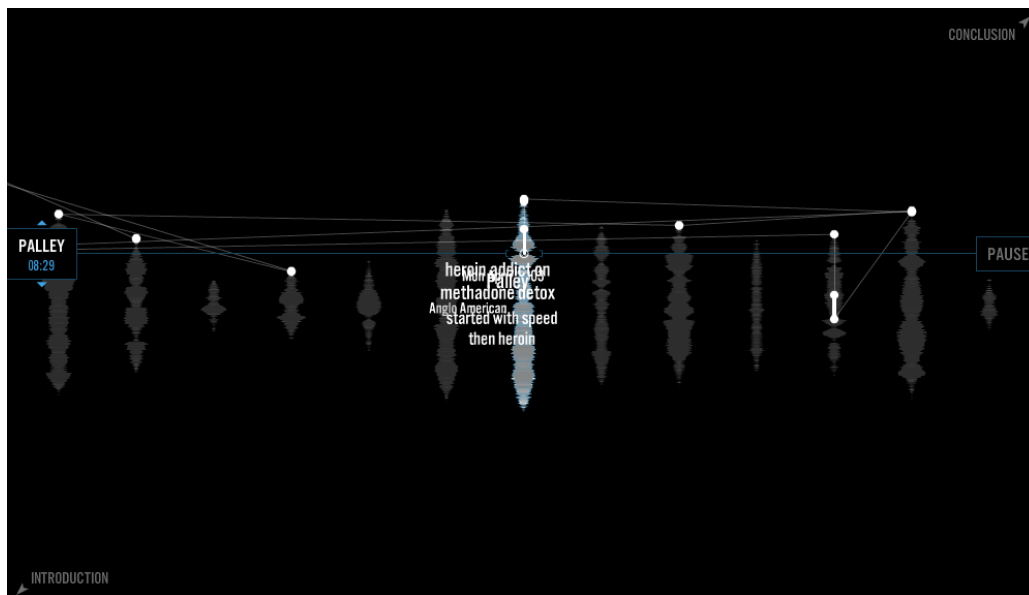


Figure 1: Voice graphs

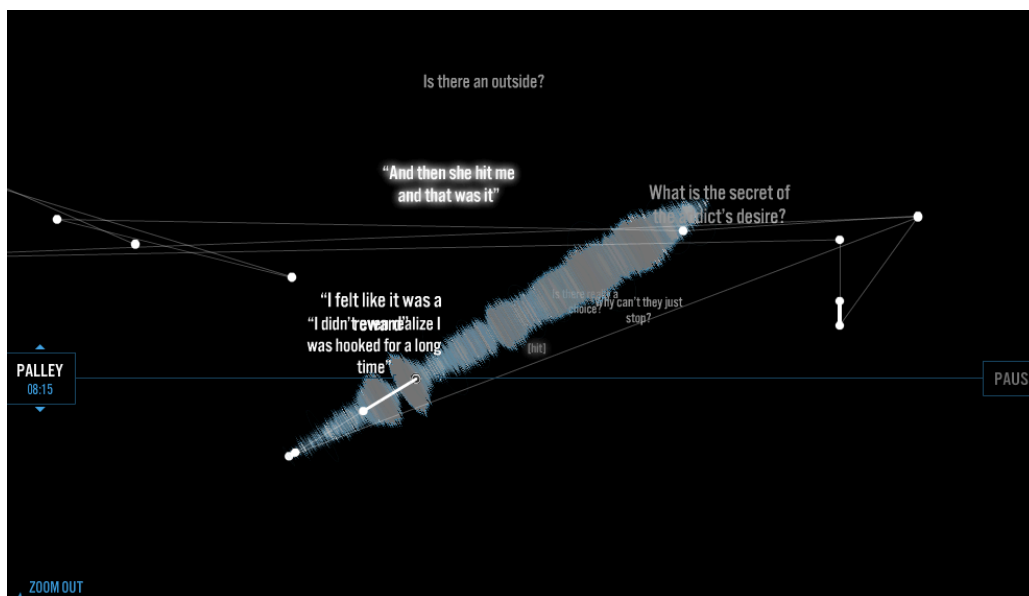


Figure 2: Individual voice graph

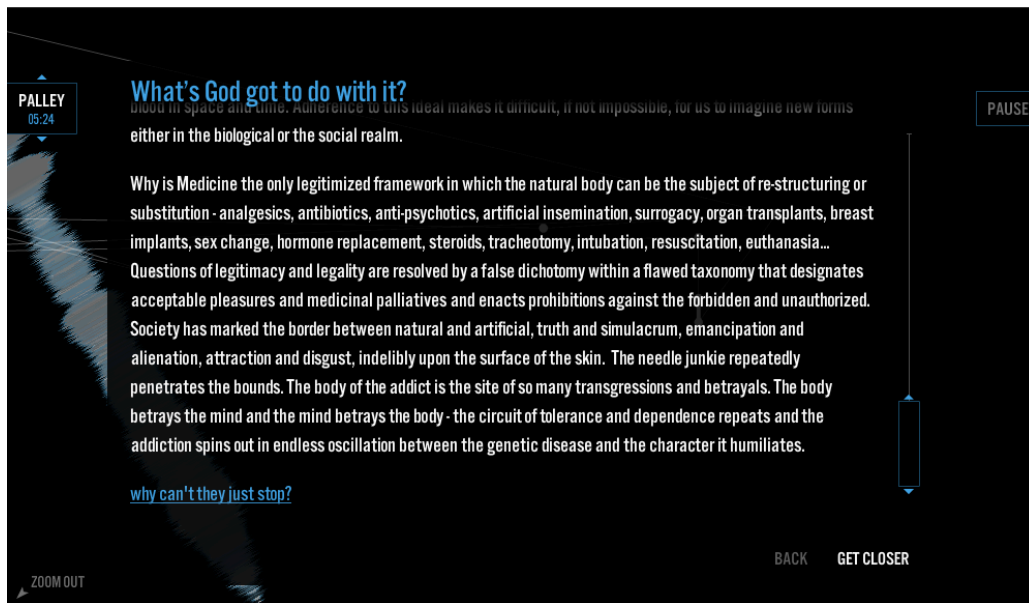


Figure 3: Author's explanation of a question

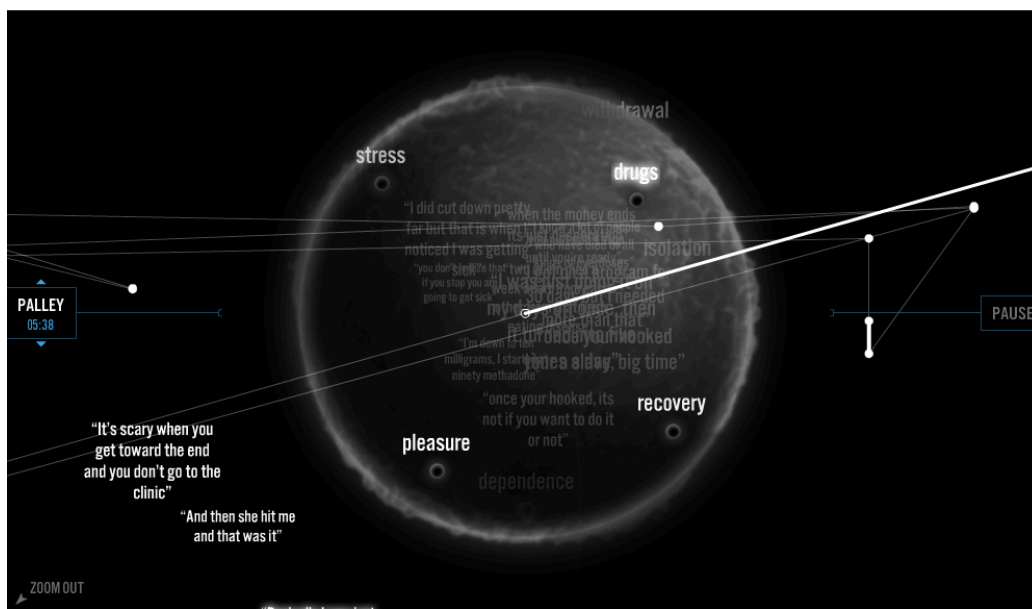


Figure 4: Cell

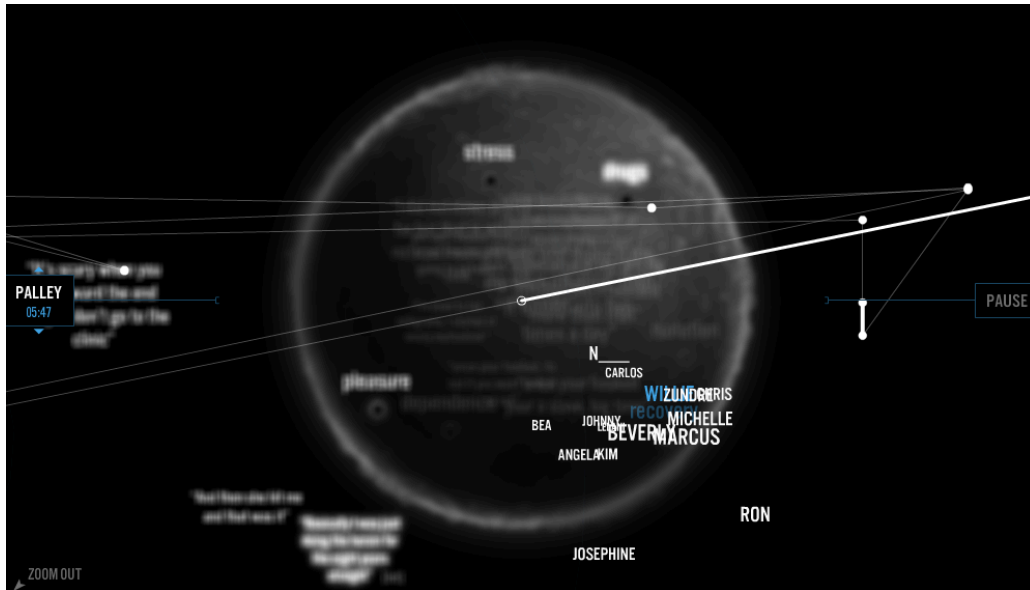


Figure 5: Cell with the word “recovery” highlighted

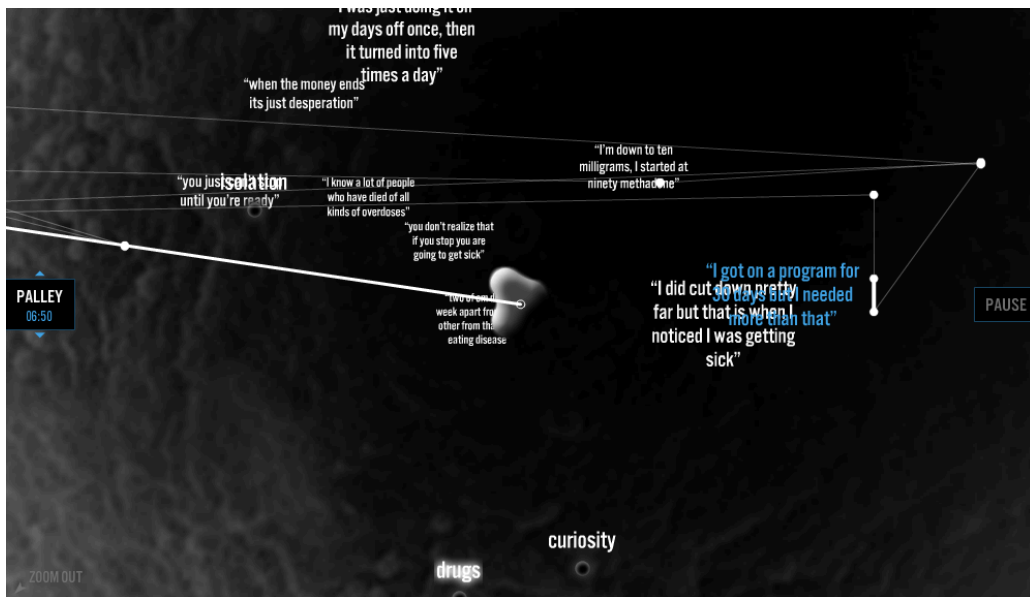


Figure 6: Nucleus

Research Context

A project of experimental publishing, *Blood Sugar* is a collaborative and interactive multimedia documentary that combines visual and audial spaces with subjective and evidence-based critique. Experimental publishing constructs a new collaborative framework for collecting, assembling, and circulating scholarly content while applying a system that stimulates the sharing of resources and information. The project itself becomes a narrative construct since it is interactive and no one person will have the same experience while interacting with it. With so

many aspects moving and operating at the same time, this documentary also becomes a whole apparatus with many functioning parts. There is a shift away from a single focal point to multiple surfaces that constantly disperse attention and shatter preconceived beliefs of how to interpret information. Reading is no longer linear since the screen displaces the familiarly fixed parallel lines of text to unfamiliar moving key phrases. From the author's perspective, there is a move from the objective to the subjective experience. This highlights the notion that interpretive thought cannot be removed from the body of either the reader or the author.

Technical Analysis

Reconstructing the components of a documentary, this project is no longer an unresponsive, one-sided relationship between viewer and film. *Blood Sugar* is a living creature with cells and nuclei, urging for interaction. All of the elements, from voice graphs to words, are constantly moving, disappearing and reappearing, on the screen. These unfixed words challenge the viewer's understanding of how to read and interpret text. This project cannot be read left to right and up and down, the conventional understanding of how to read. The viewer must connect with and give full attention to the words as they move. Just as the design asks the viewer to reevaluate his or her beliefs with how to read text, the critical argument asks the viewer to reevaluate his or her understanding of addicts as well.

Each voice graph symbolizes the body of the individual who was interviewed. As with humans, although these twenty voice graphs are similar in color and general form, they are all distinct from one another. The voice graphs stress the individuality of each person. Every addict has led a different life and should not be stereotyped into a disenfranchised group. The many layers of magnification symbolize human skin and are designed so the viewer becomes the needle that pierces the addict and sees into his or her core. This design highlights the addict's vulnerability and the power of the reader as the penetrating needle. By portraying these addicts as so honest and raw, *Blood Sugar* restores a sense of humanity within these demonized and stigmatized individuals. This project breaks through the social prejudices against addicts by giving them voices so they cannot be treated as less than human any longer. The magnification of design and voices of these individuals demonstrate that non-addicts are just as human as addicts, down to the biological make up.

By incorporating her personal experience with addiction in her family with her neuroscience research, the author crosses "over from objective to the subjective, from expertise or authority to unauthorized alien... 'the anecdotal' where theorizing and storytelling [are] together" (Daniel). Daniel's authorial voice breaks down the familiar objective barrier between the viewer and critical theory by inviting the viewer to experience these addicted individuals through a subjective, empathetic lens, as she does. To solve this war on drugs society must realize that it cannot treat addicts with solutions that only make sense to sober, un-addicted people. Complete abstinence may make sense to those whose brains have not become wired to crave a drug but not to those who have had that neurological change. With interactive text, Daniel argues that tolerance, by accepting that drug use will persist and keeping those who inject drugs away from sharing needles that could potentially spread diseases, would be more effective than the current attempts at abstinence.

Evaluation of Opportunities

Blood Sugar engages the viewer in a way that the standard documentary cannot because it requires intensive interaction and attention for any possible understanding. It furthers the potential of experimental publishing by portraying this genre as capable of harnessing enough interest to make a social impact. It represents socially stigmatized individuals as themselves, human and vulnerable, with raw content about the adversity they have experienced in their lifetimes. Casting away preconceived notions of authorial authority, this project reveals that critical theory from an anecdotal perspective of an author can be just as valid and profound as critical theory from an entirely objective author. *Blood Sugar* also creates the potential for other authors and designers to work together collaboratively to develop a creation that is not only socially and scholarly impactful, but artfully inspiring and affecting as well.

Resources for Further Study

Daniels, Sharon, and Loyer, Erik. "Blood Sugar." *Blood Sugar*. Vectors Journal, 2010. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <<http://vectorsjournal.org/issues/6/bloodsugar/>>.

Daniels, Sharon, and Loyer, Erik. "Public Secrets." *Public Secrets*. Vectors Journal, 2008. Web 17 Mar. 2015. <<http://vectors.usc.edu/issues/4/publicsecrets/>>.

Zandonella, Catherine. "Injection of Hope." *The Publication on AIDS Vaccine Research*. IAVI Report, 2006. Web. 16 Mar. 2015. <[http://www.iavireport.org/Back-Issues/Pages/IAVI-Report-10\(4\)-InjectionofHope.aspx](http://www.iavireport.org/Back-Issues/Pages/IAVI-Report-10(4)-InjectionofHope.aspx)>.