From Traditional to Digital: Understanding Remediation of the Postcard through the Case of PostSecret.com

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Dedication

For Willow, Kooper, Justice, and Lillynn, who make the world brighter.

Abstract

PostSecret has been credited with blurring the lines between private and public information and traditional media formats and digital media formats. In 2004, what began as one man's art project became a worldwide phenomenon that has continued past the publishing of this dissertation, a lifetime in online lifespans.

This dissertation examines a rhetoric of remediation, the dynamics and rhetorical aims of ethos, habitus, and materiality that construct, support, and complicate a traditional to digital remediation of postcards that furthers our understanding of what it means to meet audience expectations and needs in multiple spaces.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Postcard to PostSecret

"The best thing for you would be to write at least weekly, if only a post-card, and say just how things are going." William James. (1900)

In November 2004, the impact of the postcard was about to change. In a medium that had, for a century, been regarded as a means to connect with others over long distances as well as a means for promoting business ventures, the private was suddenly becoming public in a display that connected the image and text on postcards in a new way.

This dissertation is a rhetorical analysis of how a multimodal approach containing both alphabetic and graphical communication is used in one online anonymous community: PostSecret. PostSecret.com is online curated display of postcards that have been sent in by users to the site's owner, Frank Warren. Warren posts approximately twenty new postcards, each anonymous with a secret, on Sunday. As a rhetorician, the intersection between alphabetic and graphical communication on a traditional medium, which is then remediated to a digital setting, is a compelling area of study. I chose PostSecret.com precisely because it presented this nexus succinctly and completely. This concept of remediation, as developed by Bolter and Grusin[1], is the basis for the theoretical interpretations

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[1] This theoretical foundation will be explored fully in Chapter 2.

in this study which is a distinct instance in which remediation is occurring across two visual mediums (postcards and the Internet), between two composers (the original composer and Frank Warren, the site curator) and to multiple audiences (Frank Warren, PostSecret readers, and specific recipients of the messages). In addition, there were other factors that influenced my decision to research PostSecret.

One secret, written about the collapse of the Twin Towers, Figure 1, has long
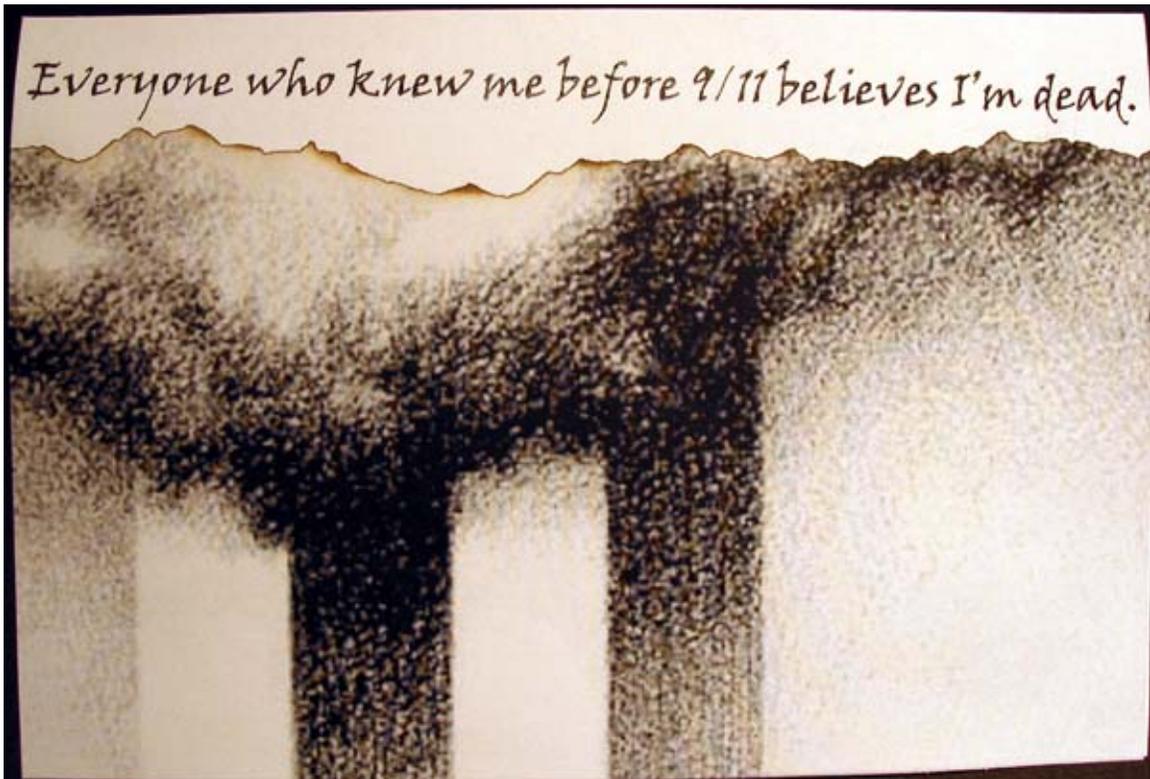
Figure 1: Anonymous. tower2_1.jpeg

remained with me and influenced how I looked at early secrets posted on the site. The connections between travel, home, and postcards, as well as the

concept of habitus, make the sharing of private information in public venues all

the more intriguing. Most importantly, the rhetorical concepts of ethos and

identity were engaging because the concept of anonymity is promoted on the site

and belies the non-private connections to the composers of the postcards.

Finally, my research interests during my Master's thesis focused on the absence

of connection between the image and text in online environments -- and this has

always been a foundational point for my interest in studying alphabetic and

graphic intersections.

Like all case studies, this one starts with a story. The following is the case

narrative of PostSecret.

Background

In 2004, Frank Warren, a Maryland artist, developed a project that would change

the way postcards were viewed and used. On the PostSecret Community

website, Frank Warren (n.d.), in his backstory to his PostSecret project, writes

> In December 2003, I took my first trip to Paris, France. That night checked into a hotel in the Latin Quarter. While I slept I had an extraordinary dream that would change my life and eventually lead me to the PostSecret project.
>
> My first day in Paris I had purchased three Antoine de Saint-Expery's "Little Prince" postcards from a small shop near my hotel. When I got to my hotel room and prepared for bed I placed the cards in the nightstand drawer and went to sleep. During the night, I had a lucid dream in which I was aware that I was in my own dream. I found myself in my hotel room. In my dream I opened my nightstand drawer and examined the three "Little Prince" postcards.
>
> Each one had been altered with messages written on their backs. The first message read, "unrecognized evidence, from forgotten journeys,

unknowingly rediscovered," the second message was about a "reluctant oracle" postcard art project and the last message I could not understand at the time.

When I awoke, I removed the actual postcards from the drawer and tried to recreate them so they would appear like the ones I had seen during my dream. What I did not know was that those three remade Little Prince postcards would be the first work of a trilogy of postcards that would consume my life and set me on an unimaginable journey.

Warren goes on to discuss a 2004 project he claims he was engaged in called the "reluctant oracle" in which he left cryptic anonymous messages in the forms of postcards inside corked bottles around the Washington, D.C. area. He writes that the final reluctant oracle message included "You will find your answers in the secrets of strangers" (Warren). He then writes that the next weekend, PostSecret began.

SHARE A SECRET?

You are invited to anonymously contribute a secret to a group art project. Your secret can be a regret, fear, betrayal, desire, confession or childhood humiliation. Reveal *anything* - as long as it is true and you have never shared it with anyone before.

Steps:
Take a postcard, or two.
Tell your secret anonymously.
Stamp and mail the postcard.

Tips:
Be brief – the fewer words used the better.
Be legible – use big, clear and bold lettering.
Be creative – let the postcard be your canvas.

SEE A SECRET.
www.postsecret.com

place postage here

PostSecret
13345 Copper Ridge Rd
Germantown, Maryland
20874

Figure 2: Warren, F. pc4.jpeg

Warren has said that in November 2004 his final "reluctant oracle" postcard,

Figure 2, was the first PostSecret postcard. 3,000 identical postcards were

handed out "at subway stations, ...left in art galleries, … and slipped...between

the pages of library books" in various public spaces inviting others to participate

in this new art project. On the postcard, the recipient is told that the project is

dependent on the participants' anonymity and secrets that are revealed on the

postcards. The only restrictions are that the secret has to be true and that it has

never been shared with anyone else.

On May 31, 2005, PostSecret received the first of many international mentions in

mainstream media. In an article in the *New York Times*, written by Sarah Boxer,

PostSecret is associated with the rising number of online confessional sites, but

is then placed in a different category. Boxer asks why PostSecret is able to

continue to post "engaging, original, and well told" secrets each week, and

responds by saying that "the Web site gives people simple instructions" in

reference to the original postcard shown above.

In July 2005, the MTV website wrote about the connection between PostSecret

and the American rock band The All-American Rejects. The video director,

Marcos Siega, Googled "secrets" when looking for inspiration for the 2005 music

video release of "Dirty Little Secret." "The clip features performance footage of

the Rejects interspersed with images of people holding up postcards with

messages" (Harris, 2005)[2].

In December 2005 the first of five (at this writing) PostSecret books was published. The hardback book, *PostSecret: Extraordinary Confessions from Ordinary Lives,* was wrapped in a cover that resembled brown postal wrapping paper with the PostSecret address written on the cover (alongside a $.37 stamp, the postal stamp [from Olympia, Washington], and the postal barcode adorning the bottom of the cover). Aside from the foreword, the introductions, and a final sentence at the end of the book, 278 pages are dedicated to larger-than-life postcards sent in by recipients of the original postcards and by those who found out about the project in other ways.

On February 26, 2006, PostSecret received its own Wikipedia page, which was, in essence, a placeholder. The original text, submitted by user Cruffenach, read:

> That is the introduction to the rapidly growing venture that, after its inception on January 1, 2005, has collected and displayed upwards of 500 original pieces of art from people across the United States and some parts of the world (international readers have also been known to send in postcards). The idea of the project is simple: completely anonymous people decorate a postcard and portray a secret that they have never before revealed. There is no restriction on what the content of the secret must be, only that it must be completely truthful and must never have been spoken before. Entries range from admissions of sexual misconduct and criminal activity to confessions of secret desires, embarassing habits, and hopes and dreams.
>
> The site, which started as an experimental Blogspot and is updated every Sunday with 10-15 new pieces, has a relatively constant style, giving all 'artists' that participate some guidelines on how their secrets should be represented. The only instructions given are as follows:

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[2] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gPDcwjJ8pLg for video.

You are invited to anonymously contribute your secrets to PostSecret. Each secret can be a regret, hope, funny experience, unseen kindness, fantasy, belief, fear, betrayal, erotic desire, feeling, confession, or childhood humiliation. Reveal anything - as long as it is true and you have never shared it with anyone before.

Create your own 4-by-6-inch postcards out of any mailable material. But please only put one secret on a card. If you want to share two or more secrets, use multiple postcards. (Please do not email your secret.)
Please put your complete secret and image on one side of the postcard.
Tips:
- Be brief - the fewer words used the better.
- Be legible– - use big, clear and bold lettering.
- Be creative - let the postcard be your canvas."

Recently the project has gotten some national news being featured weekly in Washington DC's The City Paper as well as more recently in the All-American Rejects video Dirty Little Secrets. Artwork from the site was blown up to poster size and used as the backroun for the shoot.

As postcards began filtering in, Warren started posting them online using the Blogger (Blogspot) site as his host at http://PostSecret.com. He made the postcards available and viewable to all, but he did not allow comments. Warren writes that "the postcards are inspirational to those who read them, have healing powers for those who write them, give hope to people who identify with a stranger's secret, and create an anonymous community of acceptance" (Warren, PostSecret, 2007). From June 24 to July 3, 2007, comments were opened to the public. Warren quickly disabled comments on July 3rd when many of the posters began berating an anonymous participant for a secret. Today, viewers write in to the PostSecret site, and Warren and his team of interns determines what responses will be posted next to the postcard.

Warren has commented publicly that a typical week will bring in over 10,000 postcards to his home address (the address he used for the project). He has photographed people standing outside his mailbox taking pictures as well as given credit to the various postal carriers who have brought him mail over the years.

The PostSecret website of today is much more than the simple website it was in 2004. It has grown into a portal for multimodal presentations that extend beyond the limits of virtual space into real-time presentations, art exhibits, and discussions. While the website is the center of the PostSecret universe, it is not the only means of saturation of the media.

PostSecret Expansion

Today's PostSecret website is not only the single splash page where 20 postcards are posted each Sunday. It is also a gateway to the PostSecret community which is monitored by interns whom Warren employs to curate, moderate, and communicate with the PostSecret community. The community is also a forum that allows the audience to participate in discussions, assist with translations, and debate authenticity of postcards away from the postcards themselves. The website has also become a space used to sell the five books based on PostSecret, to post the multiple professional videos developed for PostSecret, and to post Warren's appearances around the world.

Since 2009, Warren has been using Twitter to post links to the postcards themselves. This quickly evolved into people sharing secrets, albeit it not anonymously, on Twitter, and to Warren posting comments about the postcards through his Tweets. Warren has also used Twitter to promote his involvement in the 1-800-suicide organization, as well as using it to talk about politics, sports, and other personal topics that are important to him.

When the PostSecret team began using Facebook, it was to post a special Saturday Secrets posting that consisted of two postcards that would not be included in the regular Sunday's postcards, and that were only posted for those who used Facebook. Today's PostSecret Facebook is a mix of comments about the postcards, political links, promotions of PostSecret paraphernalia, and promotions for other artists.

PostSecret has used YouTube to promote the PostSecret books since the publication of the fourth book in the series. The first videos were much less polished than later videos in which people started telling secrets on the videos. Voices and faces are often put together with the secrets, limiting the amount of anonymity the participant can actually have.

Figure 3: Warren, F. Facebook Fan Page. A post from PostSecret on Facebook announcing the end of the PostSecret iOS app.

The PostSecret iOS (Apple device) app met with some controversy. The app itself required that a user define his or her location at least to the level of the state, if not the city or space the user is in. This is allowed for a more social aspect to secret sharing. The secrets in this case were not limited to postcards, but are regulated to postcard shapes – in that they were formed on an app with specifications for the size and shape of the visual presentation as well as where the words go, what type of font is used, and how long the secret could be. However, in late 2011, the app was removed from the iTunes app store because of issues with flaming, trolling, and questions of safety for participants (Figure 3).

A Year in the Life of PostSecret

While the entire history of PostSecret thus far is an interesting study, the year I focused on was of particular importance. The year in study, from February 2007 to February 2008, is midway through the current history of PostSecret. At this point in its history, PostSecret is no longer a new phenomenon, but it has not reached a saturation in which postcard composers become copycats nor when

10

they try to "one-up" one another. Two books have been published with secrets, but it's before PostSecret has expanded into other online media venues, making it the perfect year to investigate. Further reasons and details for the year I've studied are shared in my methods chapter. In this chapter, I will build a detailed chronology and description of that year.

January 2007

PostSecret 2007 began with a big event. On January 8th, Warren appeared on the American Broadcasting Company's (ABC) morning news program, *Good Morning America* (GMA) to promote *The Secret Lives of Men and Women*, the third book compiled by Warren from PostSecret submissions. On the 9th, *The Secret Lives of Men and Women: A PostSecret Book* was published. In the introduction, Warren (2007) writes that the secrets are mailed in because "there is no social cost for exposing a guarded secret to millions" (1). He goes on to say that "men have secrets but women keep the best secrets" (1). These comments are indicative of the ethos of the postcard composers and that the postcards have gender assigned to the composers which affect the ways the postcards are read. This book shows the complexity of distinguishing the gender of the anonymous composers while the "compiler," Warren, clearly establishes the categorization by gender amongst the postcards. Later this month, January 20th, a PostSecret International Exhibition was held in Winnipeg. During these events, Warren typically opens with a presentation, then invites audience members to participate by either telling their secrets to the rest of the audience (and thereby

voiding the anonymity he requested in his initial call for secrets) or sharing how

secrets have affected them. There are no online publicly-available secrets from

this month.

February 2007
Northeastern University hosts a PostSecret event on February 4th. On February

18th, the site has five separate posts (which is not a common occurrence on this

website). The first is an announcement that *My Secret: A PostSecret Book* was

available for the first time outside of the United States. The second is an

announcement of upcoming events. The third is a post of three images of

postcards from the first page of the new (third) book, *The Secret Lives of Men*

and Women: A PostSecret Book. A quote, without attribution (2007),

accompanied the images: "Every single person has at least one secret that would

break your heart. If we could just remember this, I think there would be a lot more

compassion and tolerance in the world" (2007). The fourth post is to become a

rallying cry for Hopeline.com, an organization Warren works with and which he

supports through PostSecret. This post is an advertisement for Hopeline followed

by an email that includs a photo of a young woman. In this email, Casie, the

young woman, writes that she had a very positive encounter with Hopeline and

that they had saved her life. Her image was subsequently included on many

Hopeline advertisements on PostSecret. The fifth post, the February 17th

postcards, are the first archived PostSecret postcards, since the beginning of

PostSecret in 2004, available through Google Reader RSS feeds, and are the

beginning of the dataset used in this dissertation. On February 22nd, The Ohio State University hosts a students-only PostSecret event. February 24th includes two separate posts on the site. The first post is an advertisement to buy the three PostSecret books on Amazon. The second post is the weekly secrets. However, archives of these postcards are not available. The images have been removed, but the placeholders remain, with no explanations for the removal. On February 26th, the University of Maryland, College Park hosts a PostSecret event with an American Sign Language interpreter present. Finally, on February 27th, Virginia Tech hosts a PostSecret event that was open to the public.

March 2007
On March 3rd, the link to the GMA episode is posted, as was a link to buy *The Secret Lives of Men and Women* on Amazon. Also on that day, the weekly secrets are posted. However, as on February 24th, these archives are not available and contain only the placeholders for the original published postcards. On March 22, Warren records an interview with Doug Fabrizio (2007) at KUER at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Utah. During this interview, Warren discusses the types of postcards he receives and what he believes they tells us about the composers and their connection to the audiences that view them.

May 2007
On May 13th, Mother's Day themed cards are posted, and these, like other thematic PostSecret postcards before, are reminiscent of holiday cards, but also portray the lack of connection to mothers, the loss of one's mother, and the

disappointment in one's mother.

Summer 2007

The summer of 2007 brought about great change and tumult in the PostSecret

environment. It began with a large PostSecret event in Toronto on June 2nd. On

June 17th, the Father's Day theme was posted. The posted Father's Day

postcards are often accusatory and negative. Later that day, Warren (2007)

posts an interview he did with Orato[3]. Summing up his experience with

PostSecret to that point, he comments

> I don't think PostSecret is a reflection of a highly dysfunctional society, quite
> the opposite. We keep secrets for a reason. But I think the feelings,
> thoughts, beliefs and fears we hold in private are often the exact same thing
> that unite us with others. They're sometimes the most humanistic part of us
> (Orato).

What he doesn't address in this comment is the effect of making those secrets

public and what that may do to the composer and the reason for keeping a secret

or interactions with others is affected by sharing the secret in a public venue.

Later in the month, on June 24th, Amazon opens up pre-orders for Warren's

fourth book based on PostSecret: *A Lifetime of Secrets*. This is the first of the

PostSecret books to not distinguish between curation and writing. This book is

not labeled as "compiled by," but, instead, simply has Warren's name as the

author. In the introduction to this book, Warren (2007) writes that he "selected

postcards that show how secrets can reveal a momentary impulse or haunt us for

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[3] The Orato interview is dated June 20, 2007, but it was posted early on the PostSecret website.

decades and arranged them by age to follow the common journey we all take

through childhood, adolescence, adulthood, maturity," defining the anonymous

postcards according to his own assessment (*A Lifetime of Secrets,* 1). Warren's

interpretation not only affects how he views the postcards, but then goes on to

affect how audiences view them, because of the ways he curates, how he

organizes, and how he presents the postcards.

Also on June 24th, the comments section of the site, which is built using Blogger,

a blogging software, is opened to the public. On the site, Warren (2007) writes

> As an experiement, I recently enabled all visitors' comments to appear on
> the Blog. Some people liked the ability to post their feelings immediately,
> others though something was lost. I understand both views but will be
> disabling unmediated comments based on the opinion of the community.

The comments had been disabled as of July 3rd, but Warren (2007) states that

"Posting my comments here is another break with tradition. I rarely share my own

thoughts on the PostSecret Blog because I believe what's most important are the

anonymous voices speaking through these mailed works of art." In a continuation

of that post, a reader comments that no new secrets had been posted on

Sunday, July 1, 2007. The reader asks if PostSecret is over. Warren (2007)

comments that

> "It's not the beginning of the end of PostSecret. But maybe it is the end of
> the beginning." He continues, "Experimentation, participation and
> collaboration have allowed PostSecret to grow-up without selling-out [sic].
> … you can expect to see our collection of soulful secrets, and the
> transformative stories behind them, shared in new and different ways"
> (PostSecret, July 8, 2007).

Here Warren alludes to the upcoming uses of social media, community events, and other mediums to promote PostSecret in different ways. One of the first of those is a mailing list that was developed on July 28th. The mailing list was established to keep the PostSecret subscribers up-to-date on details and news of PostSecret events, books, videos, and social media interactions. The next change to PostSecret is the first PostSecret YouTube video release, *New PostSecret Mini-Movie* on August 2, 2007 (Warren, *PostSecret Mini-Movie*, 2007). This video is 4:54 minutes long. The first image shown is the Twin Towers postcard from earlier in this chapter (Figure 1). The music used in this video becomes the consistent bond between all PostSecret videos. In this video, Warren discusses PostSecret. As of December 2012, this video has been viewed nearly 2 million times. On August 12, there is another break in the posting on the website. Instead, Warren posts the embedded PostSecret video and writes "Working on the PostSecret Video has been a labor of love. I hope you find the secrets as meaningful and moving as I do" (PostSecret, August 12, 2007).

September 2007
Throughout the remainder of August, postcards are posted regularly with a mention of upcoming September events at Florida State University (September 14th), Ramapo College (September 28th), and Christopher Newport University (September 29th). While the first two are open to the public, the latter is for students only. On September 2nd, postcards are posted (although archives only show placeholders, black boxes with no other information, no postcards -- as is

the case with September 8th). A post about International Exhibits for the current schedule of the traveling PostSecret Exhibition (2007-- 2009) is also posted. On Saturday, September 8, 2007, Saturday Secrets are introduced on the website without any fanfare. There is no discussion, only the archived placeholders for the postcards.

On Sunday, September 16, 2007, the traditional PostSecret blog is gone and replaced by a spam blog. Subsequently, Blogger locked the site so no new spam could be posted. But this also locked Warren out of the site. Warren broadcast on social media, most notably *Facebook* and *Twitter*, to ask others to help him solve the problem. He asks followers to write to Blogger requesting that the site be unlocked. By 12:19pm the site is back up and postcards are posted (with placeholders in the archives). In addition, a post about Student Newspaper Interviews is posted. Warren writes about being interviewed for *Good Morning America* and *NPR* and being on the cover of *USA Today*. But, he writes, his "favorite interviews have always been with university reporters" (Warren, PostSecret, 2007). He goes on to write about the new book being published and who to contact should a college newspaper reporter want to interview him about it.

Throughout the rest of September the postcards are posted regularly, again with only placeholders in the archives. On September 27th, a post, "New Book

Countdown," is posted to talk about the release of the newest book, *A Lifetime of Secrets*. In this post, Warren says that the book "is composed of never-before-seen secrets from people as young as eight and as old as eighty" (Warren, PostSecret, 2007). He goes on to say that if composers have mailed in secrets but have never seen them on the website, they may be in the book. The post also contains links to buying the PostSecret books on *Amazon* and *Barnes&Noble*, as well as tour dates listed on *Facebook* and *MySpace*.

October 2007
On October 7th, two posts are posted to the PostSecret website. The first contains a new video, *PostSecret: A Lifetime of Secrets*, that shows an older couple entering a bookstore and reading the new book (Warren, *PostSecret: A LIfetime of Secrets*, 2007). It goes on to show people writing and leaving secrets in books while others find and read them, descending in age to a younger writer. This post also contains the secrets, in placeholder form in the archives, for the week. At the end of the post is another embedded video, the original posted in August. The second post is a discussion of the end of the HopeLine Tour, which is also called the PostSecret/FOUND charity tour within the post, and of a PostSecret gathering in which a room of more than 500 people were "laughing and sighing and together -- it felt in a way like a big family, there was no holding back, no pretending to be someone you're not" (Warren, PostSecret, 2007).

On October 8th, *A Lifetime of Secrets* is released. On PostSecret.com, Warren

writes, "Hundreds of never-before-seen secrets arranged in loose chronological order reveal the fascinating ways our secrets change over the course of our lives and the surprising ways they remain exactly the same" (Warren, PostSecret, 2007). Later that week, on the 14th, secrets are posted (in the archives they are placeholders). This week is slightly different, however, in that at the end of the normal secrets, one postcard is posted that was "Found between the pages of a *A Lifetime of Secrets* [Vienna, VA.]) [sic]," and a link to Amazon is posted so followers could "See six more secrets from the new book" (PostSecret, October 14, 2007). Two new PostSecret sites are opened during October 2007: the PostSecret Community (http://www.PostSecretcommunity.com/), in which the history of PostSecret, contact information, events, and a community forum are housed, and a French version of PostSecret, PostSecretFrance (http://PostSecretfrance.blogspot.com/) with French language postcards.

November 2007
The November 4th and 11th secrets are posted as usual (and, again, only placeholders in the archives). However, on November 18th, a post titled *Wednesday Secrets* is put up. PostSecret had been a part of a charity event in which $13,150 was raised for the Kristin Brooks Hope Center, and this post shares information about the event with the readers, as well as an email address to contact the director of the Hopeline. In addition, the post says that week's postcards will be posted on Wednesday. On November 20th, postcards are posted (as placeholders in the archives). On November 24th, the first PostSecret

International exhibit, a traveling exhibition, opens in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada at the Winnipeg Art Gallery. The exhibition, running from November 24, 2007 to February 3, 2008, is the first stop on a "three-year international traveling museum exhibition" (Warren, PostSecret International Art Exhibit, 2007).

December 2007
December 2nd and December 9th postcards are posted as usual (again, placeholders in archives). On the 9th, a special post is made to encourage readers to buy PostSecret books for the holidays, using the *Amazon* link on the site so PostSecret could earn 10% of the sales back. December 16th is a typical post day, except that in this case one postcard is left in the feed while the others have placeholders. This postcard, k.jpg (Figure 59), drawn on vellum, is posted backwards. Also on this day, an auction is held for the PostSecret billboard used in the All-American Rejects music video to benefit the Kristin Brooks Hope Center, and a link to a *Today Show* segment on PostSecret is posted (the link is no longer active). On December 23rd, postcards are again posted (archival placeholders), with a note from Reese Butler, the founder of the Kristin Brooks Hope Center, in which the PostSecret audience is thanked for $150,000 in donations from the charity tour and book sales during 2007. The final posts for December 2007 include the actual postcards and a final link to the new PostSecret community that states "This link is unstable Sundays and Mondays due to high traffic" (Warren, PostSecret, 2007).

January 2008

The postcards from January 6th, 12th, 19th, and 26th are available through archival retrieval as of April 30, 2011. At the end of the January 12th posting, Warren posts that the International Exhibit will be leaving Winnipeg on February 10th, and that a documentary will be filmed there on January 17th. He states that he will be in Winnipeg during the filming to present on PostSecret. On January 20th, a review of the Winnipeg show is posted on the site. On January 26th, an announcement for a student-only PostSecret presentation at Northeastern University is posted at the end of the secrets. In the seventh annual Weblog Awards, the PostSecret website receives Weblog of the Year for 2007.

February 2008

The February 2nd, 10th, and 17th postcards are available through archival retrieval as of April 30, 2011. The postings are all typical of PostSecret posts except that there is an identical email posted at the end of the secrets on both the 10th and the 17th from a young woman self-identified as the "Blind Girl" who shares her story about what happened to her after attending a PostSecret event at her college. Below the email on the 17th, PostSecret Events, The Ohio State University (February 22), University of Maryland, College Park (February 26), and Virginia Tech (February 27) are announced. Finishing this year in the study, a German version of PostSecret is started as PostSecret auf Deutsch (http://PostSecretdeutsch.blogspot.com/) in February 2008.

Research Questions

With a basic understanding of how the PostSecret enterprise works, I will now

explore the research questions posed within this dissertation, and why this area of research is important not only to the study of digital and visual rhetorics, but also to the field of rhetorical studies overall.

This dissertation is a case study of PostSecret, taking an inductive approach and relying on rhetorical analysis as the primary method. In reviewing and subsequently analyzing the data I gathered from PostSecret, some questions interested me:

1. How do alphabetic and graphic elements, viewed separately and in combination, demonstrate the rhetorical significance of the PostSecret postcards?

2. Identity and ethos: How are identity and ethos constructed through the postcards?

3. Anonymity: How does anonymity affect ethos and identity?

4. Space and Place: Why is online posting significant in PostSecret?

    a. How do composers connect with ideas of space and place?

5. Audience: Why does audience matter?

6. Materiality: How is materiality affected by the remediation of the postcards?

As general questions, they helped me focus on the research and how it would be approached. I will further address my research questions in Chapter Three. In

light of the above questions, brief definitions are below to shed some light on how

I approached the concepts within this dissertation. The concepts, which guide my

analysis, and which will be discussed further in Chapter Two, relate to the

aforementioned questions by establishing the key rhetorical concepts within the

questions. While remediation is the overarching concept that drives this research,

the points of analysis, ethos, habitus, and materiality, help define the key issues

in the questions above.

Definitions

Remediation

The basis of this entire research project is the idea of remediation. Bolter and

Grusin (2000) argue that remediation is demonstrated when "[o]ur culture wants

both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: ideally, it wants to

erase its media in the very act of multiplying them" (5). In this situation, the

erasure of a traditional media, the postcard, is mediated into the amplification

and multiplication by the digitizing of postcard artifacts. Bolter and Grusin go on

to explain this by stating that "[o]lder electronic and print media are seeking to

reaffirm their status within our culture as digital media challenge that status. Both

new and old media are invoking the twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy

in their efforts to remake themselves and each other" (p. 5). The immediacy of

the postcards belies the time and space of postal service delivery, making each

postcard visible immediately, for a very short period (one week, in this case), to a

very large audience. Aside from the archives, which are accessed only through

Google Reader, the postcards have a very limited viewable viewing period.

Ethos

It is important to understand the historical research of the development of ethos,

which necessitates a study of the classical rhetorical traditions, including the

Aristotelian tradition of ethos. As Aristotle (2007) established his proofs of good

speeches, he contended that ethos was a way "to make the speaker worthy of

credence; for we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly"

(1.2.4). However, it is also important to note that the Platonic view of ethos was

inclusive of different characteristics than Aristotle's. Baumlin (1994) writes, "ethos

describes the inner harmony among language, character, and truth -- in Platonic

fashion, ethos defines the space where language and truth meet or are made

incarnate within the individual" (xiii). Baumlin also contends that "It suffices, then,

for a speaker 'to make us think him credible'" (xv). It is within these contexts of

credibility and individual projection that I will focus my research on investigating

anonymous identity in conjunction with ethos.

Habitus

The concept that everyday activities and experiences define the social groupings

we are engaged in informs this section of the research. Pierre Bourdieu (1980)

defines habitus as systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured

structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles

which generate and organize practices and representations that can be

objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming

at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain

them (53).

By looking at how public memory-making and societal norms define conditions,

the objectivity of the artifacts becomes essential. Developing this concept in an

online multimodal environment helps situate it in a more contemporary rhetorical

space.

Materiality

Defining a digital artifact as material is often baffling and confusing. However,

understanding how an artifact becomes tangible to an audience is a concept

digital researchers have long worked to develop. In this case, there are two

levels of materiality. The rhetorical materiality is based on what Blair and Michel

(2008) define as "(1) the material conditions, contexts, and other discourses that

articulate with a given rhetorical artifact, and (2) the materiality of the rhetorical

artifact itself" (140). The digital materiality is founded on what Hayles (2012)

describes as "when attention fuses with physicality to identify and isolate some

particular attribute (or attributes) of interest" (91) and in the juxtaposition between

what Kirschenbaum (2012) calls forensic materiality and formal materiality.

Forensic materiality is the physical space in which information is placed on

hardware, while formal materiality is a focus on the manipulation of symbols[4].

Understanding the processes behind digitization of artifacts and how those

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[4] Kirschenbaum uses a digital photograph to explain formal materiality as a file containing not only the image that is seen, but metadata embedded in the artifact as well as other layers of information that are created in the digitization process.

create rhetorical statements is at the heart of this discussion.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have provided the development of PostSecret not only as a cultural phenomenon, but also as an online enterprise. Both are based on the cultural significance of the postcard: its connection to sender and receiver, its ephemeral qualities, and its connection to place and space. This discussion provides a strong foundation for research in this area.

In Chapter Two, I explore the literature that informs this study. Beginning with a history of the postcard, I will discuss the various issues of defining a new communication medium in the nineteenth century. Next, defining Aristotle's treatise on ethos and arguments surrounding his concepts in more depth, I then focus on issues of identity and anonymity. All of these topics will be discussed in general, but will then focus in relation to Internet Studies specifically, adding to the discussion of why it is important to understand that the terms may be applicable or defined differently in a virtual space. Additionally, I explore current literature on visual rhetoric, habitus, and materiality and their connections with digital literacy and research.

Chapter Two: Rhetorical Theory in a Remediation Framework

In this chapter, I provide a background on traditional postcards to establish a framework from which the postcard is viewed as a communication medium, then transition into a discussion of the literature associated with this dissertation, including remediation, ethos, habitus, and materiality.

Why postcards matter

In 2005, I joined an online website, Postcrossing, in which members sent one another postcards from around the world (Magalhães, 2005). Members did not know one another except to have an address and preferences for types of postcards they'd like to receive. Each week, I'd get a postcard from places around the world like Finland, Russia, China, Bali, and Brazil. In each of those postcards, I took delight in the truncated communication that told me a little bit about the person who sent it: where s/he was from, what interested that person about the postcard, the small message that person sent (typically a tidbit about their home), and the diverse stamps chosen to accompany the postcards. In turn, I sent postcards around the world, sharing a bit of my home with the receivers. It was at once strangely intimate and yet random and anonymous. I would never get a postcard from the same person twice, nor would I even know the person's last name (and sometimes not even the first name). I would not know if what was shared was truthful or not, but a connection between images and words on those small pieces of correspondence became touchstones to a much wider world, and

to the people who sent them.

History of postcards

How did those postcards that I received through the Postcrossing website come
to have such a cultural significance not only for me, but for others around the
world? How does one small medium of correspondence become a cultural
artifact that transcends international boundaries?

The rise of the postcard is a complicated topic. On one hand, a leading authority
in postcard history, Staff (1966), claims that it was a solution to a financial issue
within the postal service. He claims that the first postcards were developed to
combat the increasing prices of postal rates, and not as touchstones to people,
places, and times as they are now. Predecessors of the postcard, pictorial
envelopes and headed writing paper, led the way for the modern postcard and
instigated the need for regulated postal charges because of the shift in
dimensions of the mailings. However, Brown Nicholson (1994), a well-regarded
author and lecturer on paper ephemera and postcards in particular, writes that
postcards developed from souvenirs that "were produced in 2½ by 4 inch carte
de visite size, then cabinet size and stereoscope sets" (1). She goes on to claim
that there "were illustrated letter sheets, valentines, and New Years [sic] and
Christmas greeting cards used during the 1840s and 1850s" mailed that "led to
the development of the picture postcard" (1). Since both histories were occurring
simultaneously, it may have been the confluence of each historical perspective

28

creating what we now know as the postcard. Understanding how the postcard came into circulation is as complicated as understanding why it came about.

Staff (1966) continues his argument for the financial beginnings of the postcard by stating that in the 1850s and 1860s, sovereign governments around the world were discussing the development of a standard international rate for postage. In 1865, Dr. Heinrich von Stephan, a German post office official, was attending the Austro-German Postal Conference, where he recommended an "open post-sheet (*offenes Postblatt*), which was the most suitable name to describe a postcard" (44)[5]. In this recommendation, he discussed the history of the letter's forms, from wax tablets to scrolls to thin sheets of iron. He also informed the conference that the letter's form was not based solely upon the fads of the time, but that they were often more influenced by "business necessities as well as by the means of conveyance adopted" (Staff, 44). Von Stephan addressed the need for brevity in certain types of correspondence and how a smaller format would be better suited to this type of need, but that it would also benefit the postal services in being able to sell them without needing to give them too much space in the shop. He suggested that the *offenes Postblatt* "have the dimensions of ordinary envelopes of the larger size, and consist of stiff paper" and that on "the face of the card there might appear at the top the name of the district and perhaps a small device (the arms of the country, etc.)," leaving space on the left for an impressed

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[5] Staff is cited as the expert of postcard history in most academic publications (most notably in the research-based collection "*Postcards: ephemeral histories of modernity*," edited by David Prochaska and Jordana Mendelson) (2010). Rarely are any other postcard historians cited.

postage stamp (Staff, p. 44-45). Conference attendees were intrigued by the idea of an *offenes Postblatt*, but ultimately the original idea failed as a national movement in the German states because of the wide range of governments and official standards within each state.

However, on January 26, 1869, an Austrian professor of economics, Emanuel Herrmann, "wrote an article in the *Neue Freie Presse* proposing the use of postcards" to discuss the problems with the current system and the economic inconsistencies it provided. He noticed that letters "with ordinary contents such as dispatch notices, receipts, accounts, orders, short commercial announcements" and other such notices "amounted to roughly one-third of the total bulk of mail" (Staff, p. 83). He concluded that a smaller format, about the size of an envelope, with a writing space for twenty or fewer words, would "save millions of Gulden (monetary value) on postage and letter-writing materials, and [that] the Post Office would benefit by the increase in mail" (Staff, p. 83). The Austrian government agreed with Herrmann, and by September of that year, the official post office regulation was being enforced. Following this adoption, other European states began to adopt similar regulations. However, in the United Kingdom, debates about the postcard focused on concepts of privacy and cost. In 1871, Canada became the first country of the Crown to adopt postcards. The United States began issuing postcards in 1873 to a great response: more than 60 million postcards were sent within the first six months of availability (Staff, p. 49).

However, Brown Nicholson (1994) argues that during this time period the postcard was being developed in the United States by John P. Charlton of Philadelphia, who "obtained a copyright on a private postal card in 1861" (1). When Charlton was not able to sell his postal cards on the grand scale he had imagined, he "sold his copyright to H.L. Lipman of Philadelphia, who produced and sold the *Lipman's Postal Card*" (1). The *Lipman's Postal Card,* Figure 4,"was a non-pictorial message card with a stamp box and address line on one side and a blank message space on the other" (1). Brown Nicholson continues by stating that these cards, which were used mostly for advertising, were in circulation until 1873, when the United States government issued the government postal card. At this point, Brown Nicholson's historical account mirrors Staff's in regards to the Austrian and German connections early in the postcard history.

Figure 4: Petrulis (2007). Lipman's Postal Card.

Picture postcards did not become widely used in the United States until after the

"World Columbian Exposition of 1893, when, for the first time, coloured view

cards of the Exhibition, handsomely printed, were placed on sale" (Staff, p. 62).

But to say that postcards were a success worldwide is an understatement. In

1898, picture postcards were issued sans imprinted postage and became even

more popular. "From 1898 to 1918 a phenomenon called the *Golden Age of*

Postcards emerged. Both adults and children were obsessed with buying,

sending, and collecting postcards" (Brown Nicholson, p. 3). Postcard collecting

clubs were formed and members met to share, trade, and discuss postcards.

Despite this popularity, post offices were still trying to decide how to control the

ways that postcards were made, sent, and received.

Regulating the Postcard
Many countries regulated postcards by the types of print that could be sent out

on the postcard itself. Some countries, like Britain, specified that the postcards

had to be written, addressed, stamped, and used in only certain situations, most

often that of business or official correspondence. If a postcard were sent abroad,

the postcard would be marked as "Not Transmissible to Places Abroad" and sent

back to the sender (Staff, p. 49). Brown Nicholson (1994) states that it wasn't

until 1875, under the first International Postal Treaty, that postal cards could be

sent internationally (p. 2). In the United States, postcards could be sent abroad,

but required more postage to do so until 1898 when the United States Congress "provided privately published postcards the same standards and rates as government postals" as long as they "were inscribed *Private Mailing Card-- Authorized by the Act of Congress, May 19, 1898*" and retained the same standards as those of government-issued cards (Brown Nicholson, p. 2-3). Brown Nicholson writes that this designation was eventually withdrawn and private postcards had to have "Post Card" on them to differentiate them from the government "Postal Card." "A large quantity of government postal cards with black and white drawings distributed as advertising cards," were "printed by American firms who later were to become the pioneers of the picture postcard industry" (Monahan, 1981, p. 10-11). This ushered in a boom for postcards in the United States that continued through the first few decades of the 20th century.

The visual appeal of the postcards is also an area of debate. "While the purchaser of these cards printed and even illustrated the messages, they were not commercially produced picture postcards," writes Brown Nicholson (1994) in regards to government postal cards of the 1870s (p. 11). However, in the early adopting states of Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, postcards were on sale "with small views of resorts and interesting places printed on them; frequently a hotel or restaurant would be depicted" (Staff, 1966, p. 49). These images were most often done in monotones and limited to the edges or tops of the postcards.

In the 1870s, pictorial postcards were developed for military troops, especially in areas where the Franco-Prussian troops were assigned. In France, Leon Besnardeau "designed, printed, and sold cards having a patriotic motif to the soldiers and sailors encamped at Conlie" (Staff, p. 49). The Prussian soldiers stationed in France swapped pictorial postcards depicting ribald humor.

Postcards went through dramatic changes in the nineteenth century, transitioning from strictly text-driven documents to those that had monotone images, to duotones, to those that had lithographed, fully colored images, though this practice was limited to countries with more postal freedom than the United States or the United Kingdom, where the post office "prevented the issue of privately printed picture postcards" (Staff, p. 56). In European countries that allowed more elaborate and colorful postcard production, the words "Gruss Aus" ("Greetings From") began to appear with the name of the resort, town, or business, allowing enough room for the sender to include a small personal message. "By 1895, the "Gruss Aus" cards of German manufacture, appropriately inscribed for use in many countries, were becoming increasingly popular, and by the end of the century, they were on sale almost all over the world" (Staff, p. 57). Once these multi-colored greetings became available universally, they quickly caught on and became souvenir pieces from travels as well as correspondence to family and friends back home.

The colorful images on the front side of the postcards were only part of the

postcard though. From 1902 to1907, the postcard went through dramatic

changes on the rear side of the postcard in England, France, Germany, and the

United States. The postcard then became divided, allowing "one half for the

message, the other for the address" (Brown Nicholson, p. 3). Prior to this

division, messages were on the back while the address was on the front.

Size restrictions
While size restriction of postcards varied, and still varies greatly, through the

world, each country designated a specific size for its postcard. In the United

States, the postcard was originally defined as "five and one-eighth inches in

length and three inches in width; and is made of good stiff paper, water marked

with the initials U.S.P.O.D. in monogram" (Staff, p. 86). The original markings on

the US postcards were also very specific, containing an imprint of the Statue of

Liberty, a border scroll, and a stamp. Today's postcard restrictions are not as

restrictive, but are specific: the postcard must be rectangular, at least three and

one-half inches in height and five inches in width and 0.007 inch thick; the

postcard cannot exceed four and one-half inches in height and six inches in width

with a maximum thickness of 0.016 inch (USPS). The United States Postal

Service informs senders than any piece of mail outside of these dimensions

would be considered a letter and charged letter prices and sent through standard

mail instead of first class. However, current regulations do not restrict the use of

images or words on either side of the postcard as earlier regulations did.

This history is not only important in understanding how postcards became

culturally significant worldwide (and definitely in the Western Hemisphere), but

also why the shape, size, and design of the postcards signifies meaning and

public knowledge to an audience. Burdick (1956) writes "The criterion is not that

a card has been, or could be, sent through the mail but that the card was made

with the intention that it could be used by itself as a mailed message or souvenir"

(p.10). Indeed, the postcard has come to symbolize more than the sum of its

parts. "Like the touch of a friendly hand in greeting, postcards with their simple

messages fluttered through the private mailboxes to cement many an

understanding between strangers, which were to ripen into friendships to last a

lifetime" (Monahan, 1981, p. 10). Postcards, as cultural artifacts, have become

the foundation of understanding and universal communication that crosses many

different types of boundaries.

Remediation
The very act of remediation takes a familiar medium and changes it in ways that

creates not only something new, but something visceral and connected to how

we understand the world while also stretching that knowledge and understanding

in different ways. While I gave a general overview of Bolter's and Grusin's

definition of remediation in the introduction, I'm going to go into more depth here.

Remediation is more than the simple act of using one medium as a foundation for

conversion into another medium. "The digital medium wants to erase itself, so that the viewer stands in the same relationship to the content as she would if she were confronting the original medium" (Bolter & Grusin, 2000, p. 45). Remediation requires understandings of place, space, audience, and the mediums themselves. It requires the composer to understand the historicity of the artifacts used in remediation. Where do they come from? How can they extend that cultural knowledge into a new medium? What parts or wholes can be used to extend and re-make public and/or cultural memories?

> Digital visual media can best be understood through the ways in which they honor, rival, and revise linear-perspective painting, photography, film, television, and print. No medium today, and certainly no single media event, seems to do its cultural work in isolation from other media, any more than it works in isolation from other social and economic forces (p. 15).

In order to understand the impact of a remediated artifact, it is also important to understand its significance in relation to earlier media and its connections to memory-making. New media emerges "from within cultural contexts, and they refashion other media, which are embedded in the same or similar contexts" (p. 19). This makes remediation perfect for rhetorical study -- understanding how the context shapes, develops, and extends the connections an audience makes when "reading" a remediated artifact.

Indeed, remediation has been applied to discourse analysis research as well as rhetorical studies in the past. As Prior and Hengst (2010) write, "Remediation points to ways that activity is (re)emediated -- not mediated anew in each act --

through taking up the materials at hand, putting them to present use, and thereby

producing altered conditions for future action" (p.1). In their discussion, the

practice and act of remediating is just as important as the artifact that is

remediated. They write that "semiotic remediation as practice then is

fundamental to understanding the work of culture as well as communication; it

calls on us to attend to the diverse ways that semiotic performances and re-

represented and reused across modes, media, and chains of activity" (p. 2). They

extend this discussion to include the elements of semiotics, pointedly specifying

multimodal elements: "...language and signs need to be understood as concrete,

historical, situated, and social phenomena..." (p. 2). In the case of PostSecret,

this is especially important in understanding the rhetorical aspects of the

postcard artifacts because of the way the postcards in PostSecret are created

and displayed. In using a traditional medium, the paper postcard – itself a

historical, situated, and social artifact, and remediating it, to make it a digital

artifact, PostSecret establishes a firm use of language and signs to reach

audiences on various historical, situated, and social levels.

The remediation of an artifact is similar to the copying and copying of earlier

mediums. It is this connection that firmly places remediation within the contexts

of rhetorical studies.

> The logic of remediation...is similar to Derrida's (1981) account of mimesis,
> where mimesis is defined not ontologically or objectively in terms of the
> resemblance of a representation to its object but rather intersubjectively in
> terms of the reproduction of the feeling of imitation or resemblance in the

perceiving subject (Bolter & Grusin, p. 53)[6].

The concept of copying and mimesis is most important as I begin my analysis of graphical materials that also involve alphabetic connections. Using traditional forms of communication, remediating them, and presenting them anew, but with connections to their former selves, complicates and expands on this definition of mimesis. The postcards are no longer copies or simple reproductions of their former selves, but have become something wholly new. As Bolter and Grusin explain, it is the logic of remediation that is similar to mimesis, but the act of remediation makes an artifact become something more than a mere copy.

Remediation and the Visual

As online interactions and the tools used to facilitate those interactions grew, so did the integration of visual communications. While at first it was limited to static images, moving images (typically animated GIFs) quickly became popular, followed by short video clips, longer movie length video, and animated GIFs again (although modern animated GIFs are more sophisticated than those of the 1990s). The introduction of visual theories focused not only on the image itself, but on the entire composition as a content-driven artifact, on the multimodality of the artifact. Eventually, visual artifacts became one of the most used tools to construct an online identity. As Dickinson and Maugh (2004) write, "visual rhetoric can be particularly useful as individuals seek to create coherent and comfortable identities" (p. 262). In the 2009 Iranian revolution, protests followed

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[6] It is important to note Derrida's nod to the postcard in which is not necessarily about postcards, but about writing, connecting, and psychoanalysis (Derrida, 1987).

the elections in Iran. To show support, connection with, or a means to hear from the revolutionaries themselves, the color of green was integrated into social media. This was most prominent on Twitter, where the revolution was called the Twitter Revolution because of its saturation with connections to the Iranian revolutionaries. On Twitter, those in support of the revolution transformed their icons to have green overlays or green ribbons. In many cases, this became a rallying cry, a connection to ideas of democracy and public discourse and constructed an *ethos*.

Images can convey both *ethos* and identity if the purpose is to construct an identity through which presence and a character, or ethos, displayed. The key figure in all of this is arrangement: "By the very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to the audience, their importance and pertinency to the discussion are implied. Indeed, such a choice endows these elements with a presence" (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969, p. 116). Although this idea was not addressed to visual artifacts in particular, the principles hold. One can construct an argument based on the arrangement of the image. As Finnegan (2004) writes, "Reproduction acknowledges that images are hybrid entities, that we do not encounter them in isolation, and that their arrangement (at least in the spaces of print culture) is always the result of particular editorial choices and framing of ideas" (p. 200). This is true online, as well. The placement of an image is inherent to the argument being made. The framing, choice of colors,

integration into a text, and adherence to a style are indicators of the message of the composer. Therefore, juxtaposed, embedded, and secreted within the visual artifacts, identity is constructed in a way that requires analysis of the elements separately and as a single artifact.

Remediation, as rhetorical theory, has the potential to bind the context of the artifact to the audience's perception. This, in a nutshell, is how this dissertation aims to evaluate PostSecret through rhetorical analysis of the postcards. The rhetorical constructs that support the connections of remediation to rhetorical theory, as dynamics of remediation, a rhetoric of remediation, if you will, are the foundations of the analysis in this dissertation. This rhetoric of remediation incorporates, in this particular research project, concepts of ethos, habitus, and materiality, which serve as the dynamics of remediation. These three concepts support, develop, and even complicate the idea of remediation while marking its importance in digital studies.

Ethos

On ethos and identity

In the modern technological (computers, mobile devices, the Internet) age, the word *ethos* is often used in technology-related writings, podcasts, videos, and other mediums to refer to corporate identity, environment, and interactivity. For instance, the IBM *ethos* is often a reference to white shirts, business-oriented structures, and rule-oriented, while the Google *ethos* refers to transparency,

campuses, and idea-oriented. These do not, as Aristotle (2007) defined it, refer

to the character of the company nor its employees. He wrote that "[There is

persuasion] through character whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as

to make the speaker worthy of credence" (1.2.4). He goes on to explain that any

persuasion that is conducted on behalf of the speaker should be what is heard at

that moment, rather than any historical notion one has about that speaker. In

today's culture, however, there is often a strong connection between what is

perceived about that person or corporation (identity) and what that person or

corporation does (character). It would seem as if Aristotle's original treatise on

ethos has been revisited to construct a more holistic approach to the person or

corporate entity[7].

In order to explore the connections between concepts of *ethos* and the modern

communications, it's important to first establish the connections between *ethos*

and identity and how those can be perceived in classical and modern terms, as

well as in anonymous and visual environments. Next, the concepts of identity and

ethos will be examined in the PostSecret dataset to establish the importance of

understanding these rhetorical concepts in a multimodal environment. And finally,

I will establish how this analysis impacts today's rhetorical studies.

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[7] It is important to note here that Kennedy, who is often referenced as the foremost translator for Aristotle's On Rhetoric, complicates this debate with a shift of how ethos is defined between his first and second translated editions of On Rhetoric. The idea of ethos, as projected character and credibility of the composer or the authentic character of the composer and whether ethos reflects the identity of the composer is further complicated in digital environments where composers have multiple and/or anonymous profiles within one site.

Contextualizing the concepts of *ethos* and identity in digital settings requires

understanding how *ethos* and identity worth together and separately as concepts

and constructs. Alcorn (1994) writes "Classical considerations of *ethos* frequently

link three separate ideas closely together: the development of self, the

development of *ethos*, and the development of ethical habits." (p. 4). He implies

that there has long been a connection between *ethos* and identity, and that these

connections will carry us forward in future *ethos* research. In fact, he goes on to

state that "There is no inner entity, the self, that chooses its character" and that

"Different social situations trigger different self-structures," an issue that is

important in understanding how *ethos* works in the various modern

communication structures (p. 5). *Ethos* and identity, according to Alcorn, are

inextricably linked.

Swearingen (1994), in the same collection, argues differently. She writes that

while "[w]e look at questions of identity, voice, self, and authenticity as intrinsic to

ethos," "Classical thinkers ... did not" (p. 115). She goes on to explain that

"[t]hough classical thinkers did not develop conceptions of empowering

individuals or the self through rhetoric, their conceptualizations of the powers of

rhetorical imitation and of the power of voice resemble modern understandings of

self and voice in their emphasis on *ethos* as a surface, as an assumed, apparent,

or pretended character, as a mask" (p. 119). Is it possible, then, that the idea of

43

identity was a foreign one that had not been considered at that point because focus was on outwardly emphases on how the self was interpreted by others? It would seem that Swearingen is advocating this line of thinking, that imitation and amplification were more conducive in understanding the self in terms of rhetoric, whereas philosophy focused on the internalization of the self (for example, the soul).

If the classical sense of *ethos* is only based on the external elements of the self, which it is not clear that it does, given the controversy surrounding the concept of ethos, where, then, does the internal self emerge in the literature? Anderson (2007) argues that questions of *ethos* and identity were classically connected with the understanding of reality. He writes "character's *independence* from reality in its ability to persuade seems exactly what the concept of ethos was intended to highlight in the first place" (p. 96) (author's emphasis), and that "identity or self-understanding a rhetor portrays evokes much more powerful expectations about realness and authenticity than the character or agential nature a rhetor may depict" (p. 96). In this way, *ethos* and identity are always connected, but because cultural understandings of "realness" shifts, they are also at odds with one another. Kress (2010) agrees with this, especially in modern-day culture. He writes that "identity is now constructed through the exercise of choice in consumption in the market" and argues that consumption is not only the purchasing of goods, but the choices made in what to read, watch, engage in,

communicate with, or ignore (p. 184). But Kress also believes that "identity is embodied and becomes more than a merely mental phenomenon, an 'attitude', maybe, that I display or perform" (p. 77). In defining identity in this way, Kress makes the point that *ethos* is really a part of identity, that it only constructs a part of what identity is. What makes the tenuous hold between *ethos* and identity transparent, integral, and intentional in the modern technological age?

In PostSecret, because the postcards are created by composers who mail the postcards to a central address, which are then posted online by a curator, the authenticity and connections we have to the composers are wholly defined by one single postcard artifact. In order to connect with, understand, and respond to the compositions, it's important to understand the ethos and identities of the composers and how they've constructed these appeals within a single composition.

Audience

In any rhetorical analysis, audience plays an important role in how a composition is studied and interpreted. Indeed, for those of us in this field, "audience is obvious, crucial, and yet remarkably elusive" (Park, 1982, p. 247). This idea is complicated further when the rhetorical analysis is of a remediated form that was, at one time, a one-to-one or one-to-few correspondence and has become a one-to-infinity correspondence. Because of this, understanding audience analysis is imperative. As Leach (2000) writes "[t]he specialized language, the conventions

of citation, the structure of text with ordered sections, and the relationship between diagrams and text, all select a certain audience of readers, as well as position them in certain ways" (p. 212). She stresses that while audience analysis began with understanding oral performances, "texts and mass mediated forms of communication … do not exist in the same relationship to an immediate and identifiable audience" (p. 212). In a remediated environment, and one that focuses on the graphical interpretation as much, if not more, than the alphabetic, audience analysis becomes complex and imperative. "Someone composing a text that has visual materiality has to pick and choose among available strategies to build a text that attracts a desired audience, is understandable to that audience, and moves it toward the ends desired by the composer" (Wysocki, 2004, p.126). It becomes important to understand the context in which audience is approached and the types of appeals used to connect with that audience when researching the postcards of PostSecret. While audience is not addressed as a specific analytic approach in this dissertation, the appeal of the postcard artifacts to audience is addressed throughout each of the analysis chapters. In order to understand the various rhetorical dynamics at play here, it is important to also understand how the postcards appeal to audience.

Anonymity
Online communications, especially in the early days, meant dealing with others who were literally invisible. The only foundation to base information on was how a person wrote and how that person was perceived by others within the

community, which is, in essence, the very basis of ethos. Much of the time

anonymity was the norm, with screen names other than a person's given name,

being taken on, either to explore a new identity, to provide privacy, or to be able

to say things that wouldn't be said if others knew who you were. The concept of

anonymity has long been regarded as an important contributing factor in literacy

studies generally, and in digital literacy specifically (Turkle, 1995; Gurak, 1997,

2001). As Gurak (1997) writes "[w]ithin these new online communities, the

rhetorical features of delivery and *ethos* are still critical, but in slightly altered

ways" (p. 6). In her study, Gurak focuses on the issues of *ethos* as it evolves in

early online communications, and how *ethos* developed in online settings. One of

the interesting outcomes is that she determined that "group *ethos* appealed to

others of similar persuasion and made it easy to spread the word to others with

similar beliefs" (p. 13). The evolution, then, of *ethos* is that one didn't actually

have to hear, see, or be near the speaker in order to feel the effects of the

communication, but be in approximation to a mode of communication that could

move the character of the information along or to be in approximation to a group

member who was promoting that *ethos*. Gurak makes the contention that while

"character and credibility of the speaker are often considered the most important

features in rhetoric," people in her study forwarded information "because

something about the letter resonated with them" (pp. 84-85). In fact, the author of

the letter was not known to many of the people who received it, but it seemed

important enough to pass along, bypassing any personal *ethos* at all, but instead

constructing a group *ethos*. In what better way could anonymity be preserved than to stand with others as a group, to establish an identity as a group protesting or advocating for a certain way of thinking, being, or acting? This has even been seen recently in online communities with protests against corporations like Amazon.com, Facebook, and international protests against nation-states like Iran, Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya.

Anonymity within online communities is not simply restricted to text, however. In online space, the development of the image and its embedded text constructs a significant piece of character. "The dialectic of word and image seems to be a constant in the fabric of signs that a culture weaves around itself" (Mitchell, 1986, p. 43). Take, for instance, the Iran Revolution, often also called the Twitter Revolution. During that time, anyone who supported the revolutionaries were apt to put images of the Iranian flag into their profiles or, preferably, overlay the green from the Iranian flag onto their own profile images. This green was used to associate all supporters as one large group instead of individuals fighting against a regime. It is, therefore, important to understand how the connection between the image, text, and anonymous identity connect with one another to construct *ethos*. In no other place is this as important as online communities where the very essence of their existence is dependent upon this understanding.

In PostSecret, one of the essential attributes of the postcards is that they are

anonymous. While there are some indicators that could signify a specific composer (images, handwriting, postmarks, etc.), overall anonymity is the one consistent attribute of the postcards. Throughout this dissertation, anonymity is not usually addressed specifically, but is always an undercurrent within the analysis.

Ethos and Identity in Postcards
Postcards have long been a symbol of ethos and identity, both for individuals, nations, and for the business world. "The typical postcard, with its aspirations to the beautiful, sublime, and heroic, usually delivers a heavy dose of nostalgia, sentimentality, and kitsch" (Prochaska & Mendelson, 2010, p. xvii). It is this foundation in nostalgia and sentimentality that firmly connects the postcard to both *ethos* and identity.

As in the Iranian Twitter example, postcards have often been, and to some degree still are, connected to nationality, national identity, civic duty, or political statements. For instance, during the 1800s, postcards were used by the British to promote imperialism of the British Empire. "Within a short period after their introduction in 1870, these cards, themselves products of many of the same processes that aided the spread of empire, became popular commodities that were exchanged, collected and sold by a public eager for both cheap, industrial commodities and imperial images" (Patterson, 143). Not only was it an artifact used by governments to exert ideals to nations, but it was used as a way to

define segments of society. In 1907, James Douglas, a London journalist, wrote about the place of the postcard in the modern household. "The Postcard has always been a feminine vice. Men do not write Postcards to each other. When a woman has time to waste, she writes a letter; when she has no time to waste, she writes a Postcard" (as cited in Frank, 1966, p. 81). Postcards have been used in the suffragette movements[8] of both North America and Europe, in war propaganda, and in depicting non-dominant cultures (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Palczewski, C. H. I want to speak for myself at the polls.jpg (circa 1914-1915).

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[8] Catherine H. Palczewski's collection of suffragette postcards is often cited in this group (Palczewski).

Habitus

Habitus is a complex term that defines how we react, respond, engage, and interact with cultural artifacts and their environments. The impetus of habitus is a visceral response to a stimulus that engages our cultural awareness, a subconscious knowledge of practices within the various cultural environments we find ourselves in. Pierre Bourdieu (1980) explains habitus as that which is "constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions" (p. 52). However, in fitting with the idea of remediation, it is David Morgan's (1999) explanation that is more fitting: "habitus is both the collection of schemes informing practice and the generative source of new or modified practices (p. 7). He goes on to say that "[t]he habitus, we may say, contributes fundamentally to the construction of the world that one takes for granted because it provides the range of conscious and unconscious codes, protocols, principles, and presuppositions that are enacted in the world's characteristic practices" (p. 7). As in the discussion of remediation, this shows how one's use of culturally significant artifacts that have a firm place in public memory can construct ways of "reading" those artifacts. By understanding the very nature of the culture the artifacts are shared in, in this case the Internet, one can presuppose how an audience will respond, interact, and engage with the artifact. In fact, Morgan writes, "habitus is useful for understanding the dynamics of the social construction of reality" (p. 8).

Understanding the ways habitus is developed within a curated body of work helps an audience establish a means of connection to that work. Bourdieu claims

51

that the very act of creating habitus presupposes an uncharacteristic connections to the culture in which it is linked to. It is not possible, says Bourdieu, to create connections that don't fit because they are automatically thrown out according to cultural norms. In remediating an artifact, this is automatically true. While an artifact may make its audience uncomfortable, it is the very connection to the audience's culture that does so. Instead, what habitus does is create a new, remediated, public memory. "The habitus, a product of history, produces individual and collective practices -- more history -- in accordance with the schemes generated by history" (p. 54). Habitus, thus, connects the past with the present and the future by generating new schemes in ways that only that practice can. In the case of PostSecret, the remediation of the postcards is not only a connection with the entire history of postcards, a culturally significant association, but with each secret that is revealed within the postcards. The connection to the future, the audience response is just as important.

> Because the habitus is an infinite capacity for generating products -- thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions -- whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its productions, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning" (p. 55).

This connection, the back and forth between the past, present, and future, are the remediations of habitus. "Practice, like dialogic approaches to discourse in general, then needs a theory of connection that accounts for the re-..." (as in re-use, re-play, re-present), that "must emerge from some mix of indexical, iconic, and/or tropic mappings between events or between entities" (Prior and Hengst,

52

2010, p. 11). Remediation, as Prior and Hengst argue (specifically semiotic remediation in their argument), is the theory of connection. The overlapping of habitus and remediation are, thusly, perfect companions in establishing a foundation for understanding PostSecret, which will be seen in more depth in Chapter Five.

Materiality

Remediation is, at its core, a discovery of materiality and how it affects both the composer and audience. When the primary media is re-mediated, it is changed, converted, incorporated, and assimilated while retaining some semblance of its original form[9]. The connection between materiality and remediation is more than a surface level connection, however. As defined in the introduction, materiality is, in this case, an exploration of two specific areas: the postcards themselves, and the system upon which the postcards have been established, including naming conventions, archives, and the infrastructure of the site.

In keeping with Blair's and Michel's definitions of materiality[10], the PostSecret postcards and the conditions in which they are displayed are firmly embedded in materiality. Not only do the definitions apply to the postcards themselves, but they (specifically definition 1) are applicable to the mechanics of materiality that will be pursued further below.

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[9] The changes can be extreme, as in remixes in videos, or simple as in the postcards from PostSecret.
[10] Reiterated from the introduction: "(1) the material conditions, contexts, and other discourses that articulate with a given rhetorical artifact, and (2) the materiality of the rhetorical artifact itself" (2008, p. 140).

There is much scholarship on the materiality of technology, the connection of technology to the composer, and the materiality of artifact creation. The majority of this scholarship is firmly based within science and technology studies (STS). There is less scholarship on the materiality of the systems in which digital artifacts are housed or the materiality of those artifacts themselves.

Within rhetorical studies, Faigley (1999) writes an excellent history of materiality as it pertains to literacy and visual design, and, specifically, web design. He reconciles issues of transparent text -- those that are not alphabetic, but that still are objects of literacy -- with the idea that "literacy has always been a material, multimedia construct" (p. 175). He continues with a discussion of how the Internet is inherently material because of the connection to the machines we turn on, the ways we connect to the Internet (she writes of modems, but today we have wireless -- which seems less material in many ways because we do not hear or see it other than a blinking light on a machine several feet or rooms away from where we work -- if we see it at all), and the need for RAM to access websites.

Haas (1996) writes on the connections between composers and writing technologies -- computers, in this case -- and how those affect the ways composers think, write, revise, and connect. This study is important in the initial

54

phases of postcard composition. How does the original composer connect to the postcard? Is the act of using a pen, pencil, crayon, or other hand-held device different from creating online? Haas writes that in her research, "the three-dimensional world of pen-and-paper writing supported more interactions between writer and text" (p. 132). This affects the ways an audience reads a postcard from PostSecret because there is an original author who had a connection and interaction with the original text but that the remediated form of the text, the digital postcard, is not an act of composition but an act of re-sharing that amplifies the original composer's statement.

In "A theory of digital objects," digital objects are defined as differing from physical objects according to specific criterion: 1) digital objects are editable; 2) digital objects are interactive; 3) digital objects are open and malleable; 4) digital objects are distributed (Kallinikos, Aaltonen, & Marton, 2010). The act of remediating a physical object to a digital object negotiates the terms established in this article. Kallinikos, et. al., contend that in order to be editable, "digital objects are pliable and always possible...to act upon and modify continuously and systematically" (2010). They also argue that "digital objects are interactive in the sense of offering alternative pathways along which human agents can activate functions embedded in the object or explore the arrangements of information items underlying it and the services it mediates" (2010). Their definition of open argues that it is "possible to access and to modify by means of

other digital objects," such as Photoshop, Audacity or other digital tools used for digital manipulations. Finally, their claim for distribution is that the objects are "seldom contained within a single source or institution" and that the connections between the objects and place are as tenuous as the links that connect them.

In the same edition of First Monday, Leonardi claims that using the term "material" to define digital artifacts often refers to "some property of the technology...that provides users with the capability to perform some action" (2010). He argues that "the traditional view of materiality as "matter" is not appropriate, nor does it convey the importance" of the role of the artifact (in his case, he's discussing software).

Finally, Kirschenbaum's argument for two types of materiality, formal and forensic, has been the most prominent connection to materiality in recent years, especially for digital artifacts[11]. This argument makes a strong impact on the ideas of the systems used to create, define, and contain digital artifacts. The focus is on how a digital artifact is constructed (through bits of information coalesced into a larger whole), but eschews the tangibility of a digital artifact that is wholly digital (rather than the systems used to contain the artifacts).

Remediation, in terms of materiality, forces us to think about how a tangible item,

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[11] To reiterate, Kirschenbaum defines forensic materiality is the physical space in which information is placed on hardware, while formal materiality is a focus on the manipulation of symbols.

such as a postcard, which has tactile meaning for us, translates into a digital

object that can no longer be read through non-digital senses (touch, smell, etc.).

PostSecret in Research

When I first began this research in late 2008, very little research had been done

on PostSecret. By the time this dissertation was written in 2013, however, much

research had been written on PostSecret in various disciplines in the format of

seminar papers and graduate research. In relation to the research being done in

this dissertation, there are several other studies that approach different elements

researched in this study, but none that offer the breadth of study as this research

does, nor are there any within the rhetorical studies discipline.

In researching topics similar to habitus, Motter, in discussing art and education,

writes, "Through public online interpretations [of the PostSecret postcards] and

dialogue, individuals may teach others and sway their beliefs" (2011, p. 44). In

the area of materiality, Poletti, from the biographical perspective, writes, "In their

materiality—the recurring presence of handwriting, collage, objects and

photographs—the postcards constitute their authenticity as individual life

narratives by presenting physical traces of their authors" (2011, p. 30). Her

argument about materiality focuses on how materiality signifies the difficulty of

the postcards being created by Warren, and their inherent intimacy and

connection to the original composer.

Genre

I would be remiss if I did not explore some areas of genre, although this is not my main focus for this specific piece of writing. This study would, at first glance, fallen within several distinct areas of genre studies: digital genres, postcards, and confessional genres. However, as Berkenkotter (2012) writes that "[g]enres stabilize situations and social groups by...adapting flexibly to different communicative needs" (p. 42). The study of postcards and their remediation is less about stabilization of a situation or social group, and more about the ways the postcards, through remediation, appeal to broad audiences. However, in the future, this may be an interesting areas to research as the confessional genre has changed because of the Internet and its influences on cultural needs.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

Since I am interested in PostSecret, and most specifically, in the postcards of

PostSecret, and because this is a study based on bound set of dates and

artifacts, the most suitable research method is a case study, using content and

rhetorical analysis as the method of analysis. Therefore this is a case study of

the rhetoric of remediation based on postcards posted in a public online

environment. In order to do conduct this type of study, I've had to define what this

study is and why it may matter in the area of rhetorical, composition, and

technical communication studies. In order to get to that point, I am guided by the

following question, which is then supported by three follow-up questions:

1. How do alphabetic and graphic elements, viewed separately and in

   combination, demonstrate the rhetorical significance of the PostSecret

   postcards?

   a. Identity and ethos: How are identity and ethos constructed through

      the postcards?

   b. Space and Place: Why is online posting significant in PostSecret?

      How do composers connect with ideas of space and place?

   c. Materiality: How is materiality affected by the remediation of the

      postcards?

In asking the first question, I set the foundation on which this study will be based,

and how the rest of the questions will be informed.

Case Studies

Case studies are a natural fit within the field of rhetorical studies, and have been

used often to study the rhetorics of specific phenomenon. For example, Gurak's

1999 research that utilized a case study to discuss the online protests over Lotus

Marketplace and Clipper Chip. A case study is a methodological approach to

data that is bounded (typically by time or an event), and is usually used in

qualitative research. In this section, I will discuss the case study as a

methodology and the advantages and disadvantages of using a case study.

What is a case study?

The most salient definition of case study comes from Lapan and Armfield (2009):

"Case study is a form of research that endeavors to produce rich descriptions

about singular contemporary events or topics (not historical ones), such as the

thorough study of a recent teachers' strike or a close examination of a new hiring

policy at an insurance company" (p. 166). A great current event example of a

case study is the news medias' use of Twitter in the Boston Marathon bombings,

which is bound by a distinct set of circumstances, namely the bombing itself and

the use of Twitter to do on-the-spot reporting. Case study is the methodology

encompassing the various ways the data collected from that event will be

collected, analyzed, and reported. In order to focus on the details of what case

study research consists of, three authors on case study research will consulted:

Gerring (2007), Stake (1995), and Yin (2003). Other authors will add depth to the

research of the three main authors.

Gerring (2007) says that case study research is a "definitional morass" and that it could mean one of eight things (he lists these ideas) according to noted studies in the field (p. 17). Gerring approaches the definitions from a decidedly social science perspective, focusing first on issues of N=1 research design. However, once he settles into a definition, he commits to the idea that "a case may be created out of any phenomenon so long as it has identifiable boundaries and comprises the primary object of an inference" (p. 19). This is useful in understanding the case of PostSecret because of the definite boundaries that have been established (a year of postcards, from a specific site: PostSecret.com). While Robert Stake (1995) also looks at case study from a social science perspective, education, he approaches it in a different way. Stake focuses on *how* to conduct a case study, outlining the different ways a researcher can conduct the research, analyze the data, and present the data of a case study. Stake is much more interested in an interpretivist (or, we could even say humanistic) approach to research than in the positivist approach. This approach is much more closely aligned with how rhetorical studies are typically conducted than that of an N=1 research study. Stake contends that an intrinsic case study is one in which the researcher needs "to learn about that particular case" (p. 3). When one has a specific interest, it is an intrinsic case. Yin (2003) gives the researcher specific questions to determine if the bounded study is a case study. From the beginning, Yin writes that "case studies are the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator

has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary

phenomenon within some real-life context" (p. 1). Yin differentiates the case

study from histories by explaining that within the case study, "relevant behaviors

cannot be manipulated" (p. 7). This is especially important given that the data

collected for this research is archival and could be used as a history-based

research project in different circumstances.

Advantages & Disadvantages of Case Study Research

Yin explains the obstacles of case study research by stating that "the case study

has long been (and continues to be) stereotyped as a weak sibling among social

science methods" and that "investigators who do case studies are regarded as

having downgraded their academic disciplines" (p. xiii). What, then, could drive a

researcher to engage in such a methodology of research? It is, as we will see,

fraught with disadvantages. However, the advantages to using case studies are

very useful to technical communicators generally, and to digital literacy and

remediation researchers specifically.

Advantages

In case study research, one of the most significant advantages to a technical

communications researcher is that the data that the researcher analyzes is

unchanged from its original form. It is not manipulated or adjusted to fit a specific

need. In fact, most studies are "planned in advance so that the data is collected

systematically and in a form that enables others to examine it later" (MacNealy,

1999, p. 198). This is important because it recognizes that the data may have

additional uses, but also recognizes that an interpretivist view of the data informs

the analysis of that data. MacNealy also writes that in a case study, "more than

one method of data collection is used" (p. 198). This concept will be especially

important later in this paper when we look at a specific case.

An important advantage of case study research is that it "allows investigators to

retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (Yin, p. 2).

This approach to case study research is often called a "naturalistic inquiry, where

the case researcher makes every attempt to leave the program undisturbed

during observation" (Lapan, p. 166). Stake and Trumbull (1982) extend this to

contend that "the naturalistic researcher observes and records what readers are

not placed to observe for themselves, but who, when reading the descriptive

account, can experience vicariously the various perplexities" of that case (p. 3).

Thus, it allows those who would not necessarily analyze their role in an event or

bounded case, to do so in ways that can be beneficial to them. Both MacNealy

and Yin contend that this is an important advantage, even beyond the above

claims, because of the details embedded in case study research. As MacNealy

argues, these details can "lead to a better understanding of an event or situation"

that could not be "otherwise collected" (p. 199). Gerring agrees when he writes

that "in-depth knowledge of an individual example is more helpful than fleeting

knowledge about a larger number of examples" and continues by stating that "we

gain better understanding of the whole by focusing on a key part" (p. 1). This is

very important to the technical communicator who may be doing research on a specific workplace event, classroom situation, or software launch. If they can provide data back to a company, school, or end-user base, the results could be significant enough to effect change or improvement.

Disadvantages

As Yin explained, the case study is not the most well regarded research methodology. Some, like MacNealy claim that this is because "case study methodology is misunderstood" and is, therefore, "susceptible to poor research design or misapplication of the term 'case study'" (p. 199). MacNealy goes on to suggest that results are not generalizable, that case studies are "regarded as non-scientific," and are "sometimes expensive to conduct" (p. 199). Gerring, who examines the case study against the backdrop of other methodologies (specifically those conducted in more quantitative research in social sciences), declares that the difficulties of case studies (he lists nine separate issues of case studies, ranging from "inadequate specification of a causal model" to "faulty data") "may be understood as the by-product of causal variables that offer limited variation through time, cases that are extremely heterogeneous, and 'treatments' that are correlated with many possible confounders" (p. 4). This perspective seems to squeeze this type of methodology into a position it was not meant to hold.

Why Case Study?

For PostSecret, the case study approach was a natural one. I was choosing to

study one full year of data from the RSS feed of PostSecret. That data would be collected in a systematic way that preserved the holistic perspectives of the data as well as presenting it in a uniform manner. The data was bounded by space (online and archival) and time (one year), which made this research particularly attuned to case-based research.

Why Rhetorical Analysis?

Within the framework of case study or case-based research, it is necessary to choose an analytical tool with which to analyze the data. In this case, several different analytical approaches could have been incorporated into the research, including discourse analysis, textual analysis, and social theory that would have been appropriate to my field of study and to the data set itself. However, given my need to assess not only the alphabetic and graphical information as well as their multimodal components, the reach and breadth of rhetorical analysis was more appropriate. Not only has rhetorical analysis been used in the analysis of many types of alphabetic and graphical artifacts, but it has been used in digital content research extensively (Gurak, 1999, 2001; Logie, 2006; Hocks, 2003).

Data Collection

As seen in Chapters 1 and 2, the history of the postcard is long and complicated, and while the history of PostSecret is not as long, it is situated in a multimodal environment that is also a deep reservoir of information. Postcards have been researched on many levels, including analysis of the images used, situations postcards are used in, and as a historical perspective on world events, to name a

few. In order to analyze the postcards of PostSecret, the processes I used to

collect the postcards are: 1) defining a set time span for study; 2) using archives

to collect postcards; 3) analysis of the postcards; 4) extensive backup systems.

Time Span

Because PostSecret has now been posted for seven years, with at least twenty

postcards a week being posted, I had to limit the amount of data that would be

analyzed. This was further constricted by the availability of the artifacts in online

spaces. Early on, I had determined that three months of postcards would be

sufficient to do an analysis of the site. However, the more work I did in data

collection, the more I realized that I would have to expand that time in order to

get enough data. At that point, I had to look into the archives of PostSecret.

Archives

While the PostSecret site claims to have been online since January 2004, no

publicly available records indicate that postcards were posted until February of

2005. According to the Internet Archive (http://www.archive.org/), there are

records for PostSecret.com available from February 3, 2005. However, when

trying to reach those records, I was taken to a 404 page. According to the

Internet Archive, viewable data was not available until 2010.

Finding that the Internet Archives would not be able to assist me in finding the

earliest available postcards, I turned to Google Reader RSS archives. In doing

so, I was able to find archives of the postcards from February 18, 2007 to the

present. This is unique in RSS reader archives in that Google Reader is, at this time, the only system that allows the retrieval of archived data for years at a time. In order to preserve the data as it was presented, I created screenshots of each date that was posted for all retrieved pages, using a dating naming convention to delineate them from one another (for example: screenshot2-17-07.jpg).

Within these records, there are dates missing and artifacts removed from the records (which seem to parallel the topics and release of PostSecret books). In order to facilitate a study with enough data, I had to expand my initial date limits to a full year's worth of postcards, beginning that collection with February 18, 2007 and ending on February 17, 2008. While I could have chosen later dates that were easier to access and copy, it seems that once this type of site becomes popular, it loses its authenticity. There can be copy-catting interactions to see who gets published first. Indeed, the posts on PostSecret have become more salacious and, at times, disturbing than they were in the earlier days. Understanding this, I chose to study the earliest data available from the site, hoping to retain some of the original intent of the site within the data.

Analysis
Because this is a study based in an inductive analysis process (Eisenhardt, 1998), I analyzed the postcards in three stages in order to make a complete analysis of the postcards from an interpretive perspective.

Stage One

Initial analysis of postcards was based on a rhetorical reading of the postcards. This stage determined how best to approach the postcards: as elemental (alphabetic and graphical separately) or as content (the multimodal composition as one unit). It also indicated the need for understanding the curation of the postcards: did the date it was posted matter to this study? This stage also indicates the appeals made by the composers of the postcards.

During this stage, I began my analysis in digital format, using a filing system to create themes that arose from my readings of the postcards. However, this approach was problematic in that it quickly became impossible to see the postcards in large quantities at any given time to understand how they worked as a group or as singular artifacts within one thematic setting. In order to "read" them better, I had them printed in full color. Printing not only provided the opportunity to write notes on the pages the postcards were printed on and to develop the themes as more holistic constructs of the whole, but allowed me to understand the different ways that remediated artifacts may need to be studied. What I hadn't realized is that this act changed the entire way I interacted with the postcards and how I viewed them. They became more tangible and tactile. While the printing was only a flat representation of the postcards (and, thusly, only one side of the postcards), they became something more than a digital artifact. They became more material.

Stage Two

The secondary analysis of postcards based on the first allowed for some overlap, misreading, and more finely tuned reading of the postcards. In this stage, I assessed the themes that rose out of the data, based on the content, in order to explain the rhetorical reading of the postcards. This stage will included coding the data: suggested what the postcards construed; raised the issues of anonymity and fair use.

At this point, I went back through the printed postcards, assessing whether they really fit the themes I had assumed they did on the first reading. Some postcards changed. Others were assigned multiple thematic designations. During this stage, I also began to question how the postcards were curated and what that conveyed to the audience. How did the curator's decisions develop the reading of the postcards as a whole during each weeks' postings? How did it develop the way the audience reacted to the postcards, to the site, and to one another? Why is this important in a rhetorical analysis? Each question led to more analysis in order to develop a connection with each postcard and with the entire collection. This stage also brought up issues of anonymity, how it was developed and maintained, as well as naming conventions of the postcards and how that could be used to develop rhetorical dynamics.

Finally, during this stage I had, as I had done on other occasions, visited the PostSecret community, which is separate from the PostSecret postcard website.

During this review, I found that the owner of the site had posted a copyright

notice that had not been there prior to this visit. This new posting created some

concern on my part because it restricts use of the postcards for any use. In order

to assess my ability to continue with my research, I contacted a copyright

librarian at the University of Minnesota. I was told that my work fell within fair use

as it pertained to the PostSecret site.

Stage Three
The final stage of analysis included fine analysis of the rhetorical appeals of the

postcards to understand the elements used, and to assess what has been

communicated through the postcards (beyond the obvious secret itself). This

stage included a continuation of coding, defining the key components of this

case, and organizing the data into a visual display of the final analysis.

The rhetorical analysis was based on previous research in alphabetic, graphical,

and multimodal analysis (Gurak, 1999; David and Richards, 2008; Murray, 2009;

Kress, 2010). In order to understand how my research should proceed within the

field of rhetorical studies and technical communication, I needed to understand

how others, in my field and those my field used as foundational materials,

analyzed alphabetic, graphical, and multimodal artifacts. This understanding

helped me assess the most logical procedure of analysis of the postcards. In

doing so, I was able to understand the benefits of separating the alphabetic and

graphical information as well as analyzing a multimodal artifact. Because the

postcards were multimodal, it seemed as if this would be the correct way to review them. However, as the analysis continued, the postcards became not the sum of their parts, but their parts became the most important pieces of the puzzle. For example, when a postcard had alphabetic communication that was at odds with the graphical communication, how did this add to the conversation and the rhetorical analysis? Why would it be important and how could it help us, as a field, understand how others represent themselves in online environments? These questions spoke to the area of digital literacy as well as a humanistic approach to the information.

Understanding the requirements of the postcard analysis also informed the way the analysis of remediated forms took shape. Analyzing a remediated artifact requires understanding copyright issues (the postcards, the artists, the composers, the curator, the site owner, the server owner, etc.). The connection to these issues led me to research the different ways copyright and fair use are invoked within internet studies, including the definitions used by the Association of Internet Researchers, US copyright laws, IRB definitions, and university conventions. Copyright and fair use questions naturally led to questions about attribution. Who would be attributed in each postcard, especially since the postcards are anonymous? To understand this better, I consulted with other scholars who had done similar work with anonymous contributors, including those doing research in online sites like Wikipedia. Questions of authenticity and

attribution also require maintenance of data integrity, to retain the dates artifacts are posted online as well as the naming conventions used to define them for the site's curator.

Data Storage

The most efficient method of collecting the data was to save each postcard to a hard drive. In order to understand the flow of information, each postcard was saved into a folder along with the rest of that week's postcards, marking each folder as one week's worth of postcards. Archiving was done in this way with all postcards from the twelve weeks available during that year. This archival resulted in 253 individual postcards to analyze. In addition, the screenshots of each weeks' postings were included with that week's postcards in order to see the context in which each postcard was found. The postcards were saved under their original filenames, without any changes or adjustments in order to maintain the integrity for understanding the material forms of the data.

The collection has also been backed up to two external password-protected cloud sites (Dropbox and Google Drive), as well as two other external hard drives that are stored outside of the original space of the computer.

Private versus Public Controversies

Throughout my graduate career, I've been interested in the online participants who make their private lives public. In my Master's degree program, I researched how women developed their online identities by posting very private experiences

to connect them with their targeted audiences (sometimes with less than savory results) and included memoir analysis in my studies. So when I came to my doctoral research, I was not unfamiliar with the ethical and emotional concerns that this type of research can be fraught with. In fact, in my previous research, I may have even been more protective of those I studied than I was in this case. Perhaps that was because I knew who they were (their offline names and identities) in my thesis research and because my dissertation research was based on anonymous contributors.

What this type of approach influences a researcher to consider is whether or not digital artifacts can be used simply because they've been posted in public places online. The contributors may not have considered that their posted artifacts would become the subject of research or critical analysis. Indeed, it is likely that they did not. This lack of consent requires me to be more conscientious of the approach I take to their postings, especially given the intimate associations that could cause ramifications for the original composers. In understanding this need, I went through several processes of determining whether I needed to request permissions from the site's owner (Frank Warren) or from each of the composers (which would be nearly impossible given that they were anonymous and from 5-6 years ago -- which is a lifetime in online communication). What made this process a more straight-forward progression was the document produced for the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) by Charles Ess (2002). Within this

document, "Ethical decision-making and Internet research," each step of my research was covered, including the issues of case study, audience, and artifacts. One section was specific to the very concept of protection that I've stressed here: "the greater the vulnerability of the author / subject - the greater the obligation of the researcher to protect the author / subject" (p. 5). In this case, the composers are all anonymous from the very moment the postcards are sent through the mail -- without any ways to connect them to their composition. In addition, the postcards are associated by their site-assigned file names, without any connection to a composer. The only ways that these compositions could be associated with others is by the inclusion of personal images, names, etc. within the composition. However, very few of the postcards have anything like this included.

Chapter Summary

The complexity that Internet researchers face as they access, assess, and analyze online data is tremendous. Understanding how the data fits within the current realm of rhetorical studies and where it may fit in interdisciplinary studies (such as Internet studies) is important for accessibility. However, the methodologies and methods used in constructing reliable research remain the same. By understanding these methods, the foundations stabilize the research and help focus it in productive ways that will, hopefully, add to the communal knowledge of a disciplinary field, even one as diverse as rhetorical studies.

Now that I've described my research approach and detailed my data collection and analysis, I will begin to describe the data, how it fits within specific rhetorical dynamics, and how the postcards become connected to audience.

Chapter Four: Ethos

As seen in Chapter Two, ethos has long been a topic discussed in online communities but has rarely been reviewed as a part of a multimodal composition. In spaces in which how we portray ourselves is based on what we show of ourselves, *ethos* becomes the fundamental appeal to establish effective digital communications. While some of what we know about *ethos* is similar in digital environments, these spaces, and the ways users interact within them, also tell us about the ongoing ways character and credibility are developed differently in multimodal environments. The direct connection between the composer and message become imperative -- the message is often the composer in the audience's mind. When that composer is anonymous, the connections between character and credibility are complicated when the message is not clear or when it seems at odds with other messages the composer may be delivering. When the message is restricted to a singular post, making a cohesive and direct communication and focusing on ethos and message is not only imperative, but is the only way a message won't be misconstrued and is the only way the audience can connect with the composer. Therefore, composing a strong multimodal artifact, using both alphabetic and graphical texts to convey messages, becomes important to build *ethos* and deliver strong messages.

In keeping with the overarching theory of remediation, this chapter shows how traditional concepts of ethos within a traditional medium are constructed within a

mutlimodal anonymous environment. Because of the postcard's immediacy and multimodal impact, it comes as no surprise that the postcard can be used to develop a concept of ethos in the digital age. In this chapter, examples of the digitized postcards from PostSecret.com will be examined to show the various ways in which ethos is displayed: health, identity, sexuality, appearance, and race. These postcards were selected based on how well they exemplified the category they were in, and how well they fit within the context of other postcard examples. As noted in chapter three, coding of the postcards took place in several steps to ensure that the categories that arose through inductive reasoning were true to the postcards themselves. However, one area that is nearly impossible to ascertain is who the intended audience is for each of the postcards. Anyone who conducts research in *ethos* understands that this is one of the main foci of that research because a message will change depending on the intended audience. In this case, I do make some comments about audience, how audience connects with composer through ethos performance, and how the audience could be more than what I, or any other researcher, may see on review of the data. Because so much of what is displayed in public digital settings has this issue, it is important to note how dynamic the idea of audience can be, depending on when and how it is viewed within the digital environment. For instance, the view I had of the postcards, through RSS feed archives, was different than that of the original audience who either saw the postcards on the PostSecret site or in RSS feeds. How we construct our readings of the postcards

77

then becomes the way we assess and connect with them.

Out of the total 251 postcards that were retrieved from the PostSecret.com archives, 111 were coded as demonstrating, primarily, characteristics related to the concept of ethos.

Table 1: Ethos in PostSecret

Topic within Ethos	Number of Postcards in Classification
Identity	35
Health[12]	30
Mental Health	23
Physical Health	7
Sexuality	22
Appearance	18
Race	6

In PostSecret

In light of the constructs of ethos in chapter two and the discussion above on how ethos fits within digital settings, I now turn to the case study of PostSecret.com, which, when I first began considering it as a research subject, became a portal into the very notions of how ethos is established and functions in online environments. Presented in visual formats were the very ideas that developed the composers' sense of self, of connection, and of definition to one's self,

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[12] Health is divided into two sections: Mental Health and Physical Health.

others, and society.

One of the most important issues that has arisen from the first stage of analysis is that on the surface the postcards appear initially to have a pathos-based appeal as the primary appeal. This approach became very apparent as I began showing the images at a multimodality workshop during the summer of 2011[13]. Some of the participants showed clear emotional response to the postcards. All of these participants were in the field of rhetorical studies and told me that the immediate appeal was pathos. Then they began to wonder why their initial responses were based on pathos and not other Aristotelian appeals. Our discussion of the postcards quickly moved from the initial emotional response to what evokes that kind of response and why it may be more important to understand who is created the postcards. Who are the composers, what are they trying to tell us, and why do we care? Understanding the deeper connections that can be made with the postcards instigated research into the area of ethos and established the basis for understanding how ethos is constructed in the postcards.

Identity
As discussed in Chapter Two, the connections between ethos and identity are strong, but not always agreed upon. In this chapter, I've made identity a sub-category of ethos because the representations of identity speak to the ethos of

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[13] Rhetoric Society of America, Multimodality Workshop, 2011.

the composers for this case, which I think is important to understand -- ethos and

identity can be interchangeable, but they aren't always. While identity, and,

thusly, ethos, could be considered as a part of every postcard within all 240 of

the data set, there are some instances in which identity is clearly a main

component of the composition and must, then, be assessed on its own. In this

section, I have created three sub-categories within Identity in which the postcards

seemed to fall throughout the coding process. The sub-categories are 1) Self-

Representation: how the composer sees him/herself; 2) Interpersonal: how the

composer uses relationships to define his/her self; 3) Topical: how the composer

identifies according to a topic. The postcards I show here are indicative of those

sub-categories and helps to show the various ways composers establish their

sense of identity, which then creates an ethos-based appeal – an appeal based

on the character of the person behind the postcards.

Self-Representation

This first sample of postcards was chosen because of the theme, illegal acts, and

how this theme is portrayed on the postcards. The theme alone introduces an

ethos of the composers, but by looking in more detail, it demonstrates an identity

that the composers have established for themselves through the postcards. Each

is engaged in an illegal act, which necessitates the viewing of the postcards from

a specific space. We know that these composers have stolen merchandise,

keepsakes, or money. Beyond that, there is a clear message that indicates that

none of the three is remorseful of his/her act. Therefore, as we look at each of

80

the three postcards, we view it with a critical eye focused on the basis of this

ethos. This is where identity really comes into play. Given how ethos is

established through character and credibility and how a sense of self is

conveyed, identity becomes a specific point of interest. In this theme, in

particular, ethos and identity are nearly interchangeable.

Each postcard is seemingly very different, but the composer of the postcard

made a conscious choice about the image and the way that image was shared,

as well as the language that is used to reveal the secret. It is the composition and

the inclusion of the language that helps construct the composer's identity.
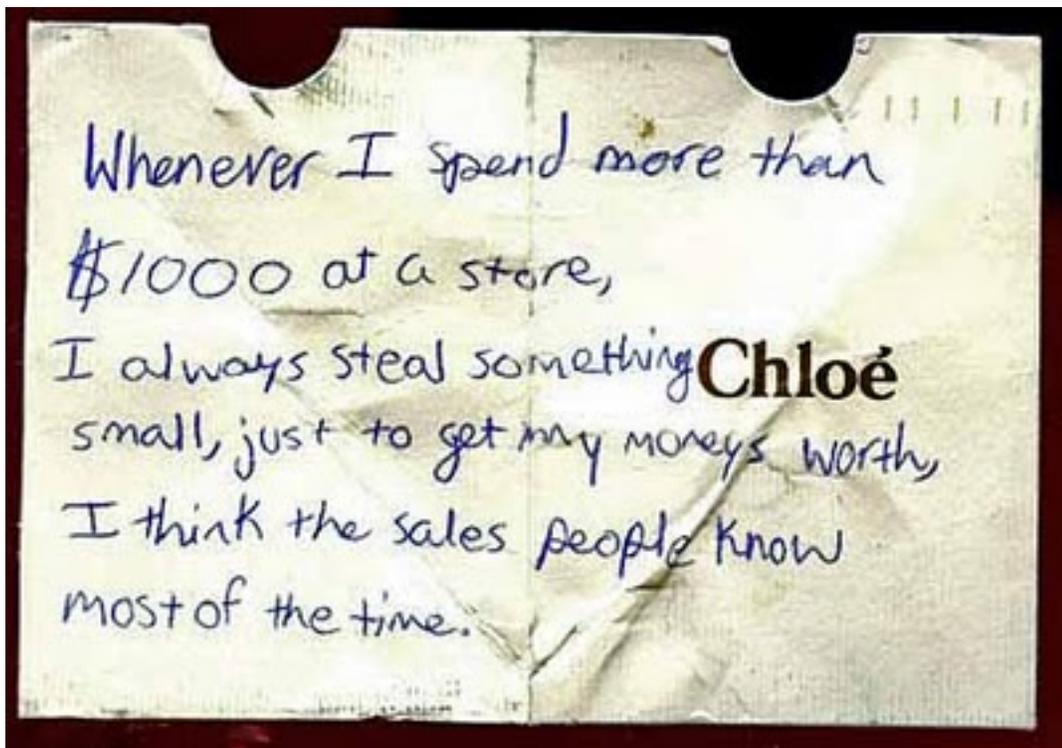
Figure 6: Anonymous. chloe.jpeg

In Figure 6, the postcard is sans image, except for the word *Chloé* stamped on it. This stamp is indicative of the high-end women's accessories line sold in up-scale stores. The card itself has the markings of the postal service (top right) and also has marks of wear on it. The secret is handwritten in ink, surrounding the Chloé stamp, without writing over it; in fact, it looks as if the composer made the effort to write "something" smaller at the end in order to avoid writing over the stamp. This composer has told us that s/he is able to afford buying more expensive items frequently, and that when doing so, steals other items from the store. But the composer also tells us that s/he is frugal, and wants to make sure that what is being bought is worth the price being paid, and that the store employees are aware of what is being done.
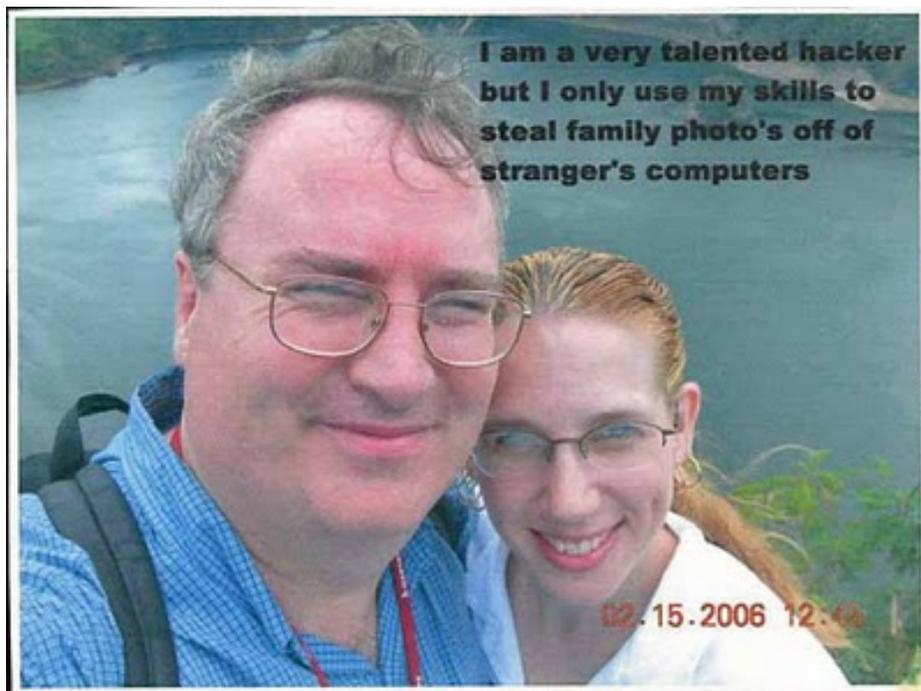
Figure 7: Anonymous. 12.15.jpeg

In Figure 7, we have a different type of theft: hacking. As a pathos-based appeal, this would seem to be a very sad commentary on the composer's life: that a connection to family is made through the viewing of other people's lives. But through the lens of ethos and identity analysis, the composer may be telling us even more about who s/he is and why this is done. In this case, the composer typed the message, and made the choice to place the message above the image, but to the right of that image. The image, a photograph, of a couple is a happy one, in that the people are smiling. The message that accompanies it seems to indicate that the composer chooses these messages specifically because of their connection to people, or, more specifically, families, albeit strangers' families. What we know of the composer is that s/he is considered a talented hacker, but that the only hacking done is to obtain images of strangers' families. This approach to the hacking would indicate that the composer views this use of the images as a more benign type of act, rather than one in which very secure systems are infiltrated.

In Figure 8, we see a complex pattern of posting the text with the image. The message has been typed on external paper and taped, in chunks, to the image. The message surrounds the central theme of the image on two sides, while the other two sides of the central theme are controlled by the end of the image on the top and a structure on the right. This composition carefully juxtaposes the theme

of the image within boundaries, either set within the image or by the text. There is structure and control to this image that is only slightly apparent in the two aforementioned images.
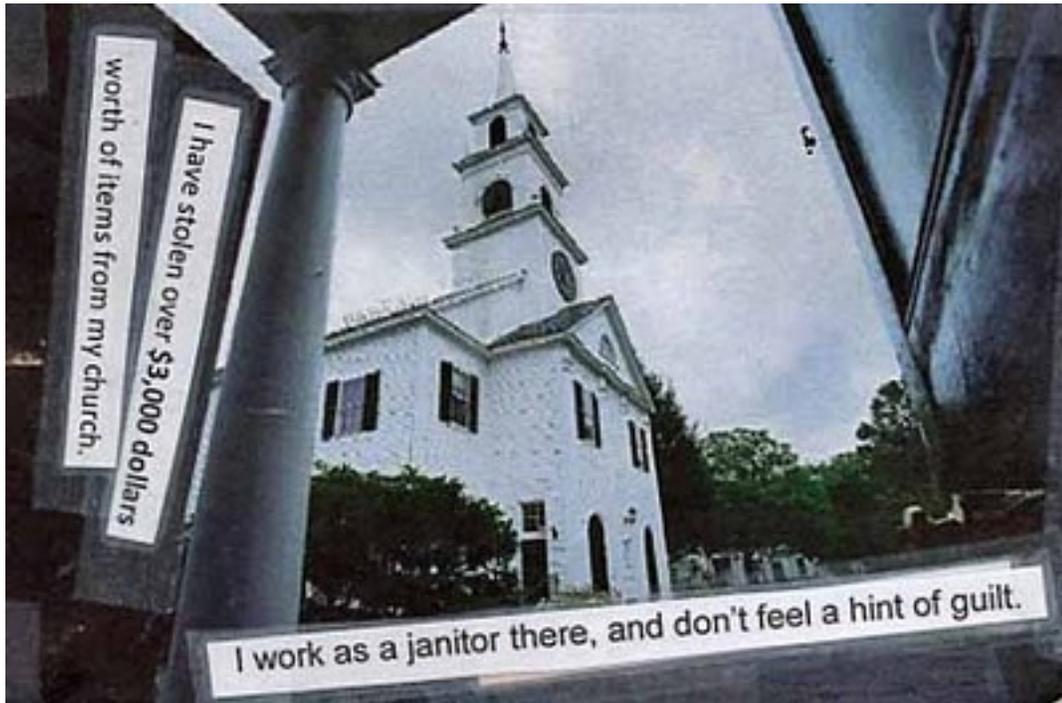
Figure 8: Anonymous. hint.jpeg

The text of this image indicates that the composer is a janitor in a church. It also indicates that the composer does not feel guilt in stealing from her/his employer. The image itself, with the church surrounded by text and other structures, but tilted in a way to make the church dominant, would indicate that this is a strong figure in the composer's life. It is also important to note that the church itself is located on the left side of the image, creating more open space (before the structural boundary) to the right of the church, indicating some movement or openness to the right. The open space is also where the part of the message

about guilt is located, indicating that this is an open area of the composer's feelings. Knowing that this composer is a janitor, usually a lower economic paying position, and that the church is a large part of this person's life, indicates that despite the wording, the composer may be dealing with that guilt in a subconscious way.

What is most interesting about these three postcards and their theme of stealing is that these cross socio-economic boundaries, implying that there can be levels of guilt at any of the three, and that there is some connection with where and how the theft occurs. The sharing of secrets that could have legal ramifications is also a strong indicator of a lack of social cues and the research literature that has attested to the lack of connection to communication in online spaces, where composers are often willing to say something online that they wouldn't in person (Hiltz & Turoff, 1993). These are strong connections to *who* the composers are and how they self-identify within their communities. With this ethos-identity interplay, there is the ethos as projected, and there is the actual identity of the composer.

Interpersonal

Often the ways we construct identity are not restricted to how we show ourselves through our actions or discussions of those actions, but in how we see ourselves in the eyes of others, our connections with others, and our interactions with others. In many ways this is a very clear way of establishing ethos because it

establishes our character and credibility with a specific audience, especially in

offline interactions; but in these postcards in online spaces with a widely diverse

and dispersed audience, it only establishes how identity is developed according

to how the composer sees him/herself interacting with others -- not a true

example of what is happening to the composer. In this, it is a declaration of

identity, a way of performing identity, that goes to defining ethos based on what

the composer states rather than what the composer does or acts in relation to

others. Many of postcards dealt with themes of family, not only because of the

Mother's and Father's day cards, but with being a parent, a child, a spouse, or

being connected to others in some intimate way. These connections to others

help the composer establish an identity based on who the composer is to others,

rather than how he/she sees him/herself.

Figure 9: Anonymous. disowned.jpeg

In Figure 9, the composition is more reminiscent of a photograph than a postcard

and is, in fact, a more common design choice in the PostSecret postcards than traditional postcards (which will be reviewed in the next chapter). It is more personal than the typical postcard. The composition is situated around the image of the child, but much of the bedding is also visible. The entire composition focuses on the right side of the image rather than the left or a more centered composition. The writing is handwritten, smaller at the top, where the image is darker, and larger at the bottom, where the image is lighter and seems more urgent. The color of ink used is very close to the color of the baby's hair -- connecting the alphabetic information to the graphical information in a formal way. As for identity, the composer is self-identifying as a granddaughter, daughter, and mother, without specifying her gender. She is also identifying as someone who has dysfunction within familial ties. This postcard is much more pathos driven than our previous examples and exemplifies the pattern in relationship postcards within PostSecret -- they are much more emotional than others, situating them within more confessional genres and connecting them to memoir compositions. However, when analyzing the postcard beyond the initial appeal, the ways the composer develops identity are much more telling and complex.

While the previous postcard was more intimate and personal, Figure 10 creates an intimate space by focusing on the creative expression of the composer. It appears to be hand-drawn with a piece of paper adhered to the main document

to add focus and space for the alphabetic composition. In addition, this postcard

uses two types of alphabetic script: the first is handwritten print in capitalized

letters using blue ink; the second is handwritten script in black ink. The latter is a

full sentence, but is structured so the focus is on "children" rather than any other

part of the image because of it's placement. The image on the postcard itself is

whimsical, hand-drawn line art butterflies in various colors (blue, purple, yellow,

orange) with smudged borders. The implications of the hand-drawn art and

writing are a creation of an intimate space that develops a connection between

the composer and her secret. The composer, a mother, is connecting to her

children from afar, through a beautiful representation of what she wishes could

have been
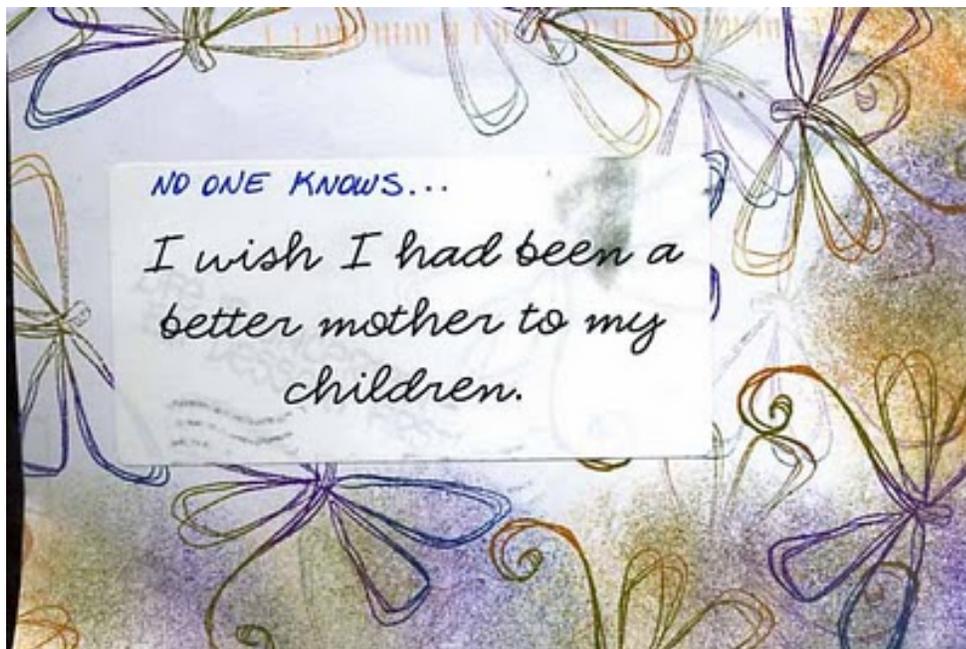
Figure 10: Anonymous. better.jpeg

Not all postcards dealing with interpersonal identity are as visually intimate as the

two previous examples. In Figure 11, the composer has eschewed any graphical

information and focused on the alphabetic information. In doing so, the composer

has constructed a very specific identity of time and space. Each statement in this

composition situates the composer in a certain demographic: age, marital status,

and veteran. In addition, the composer constructs a view of life that is regretful

and unrequited. That the composition is created in alphabetic text only, the focus

is on the words and their meanings, rather than conflated with images. The

composer also adds emphasis by using bold lettering on the conversational piece

of the composition, thereby focusing the audience's' attention in that space.

I graduated from High School in 1967. So did the girl I love, she never knew. Now, 2 marriages, 1 war, and 40 years later, I can honestly say:

"There has not been a day in the last 40 years, that I have not thought of her with love and regret."
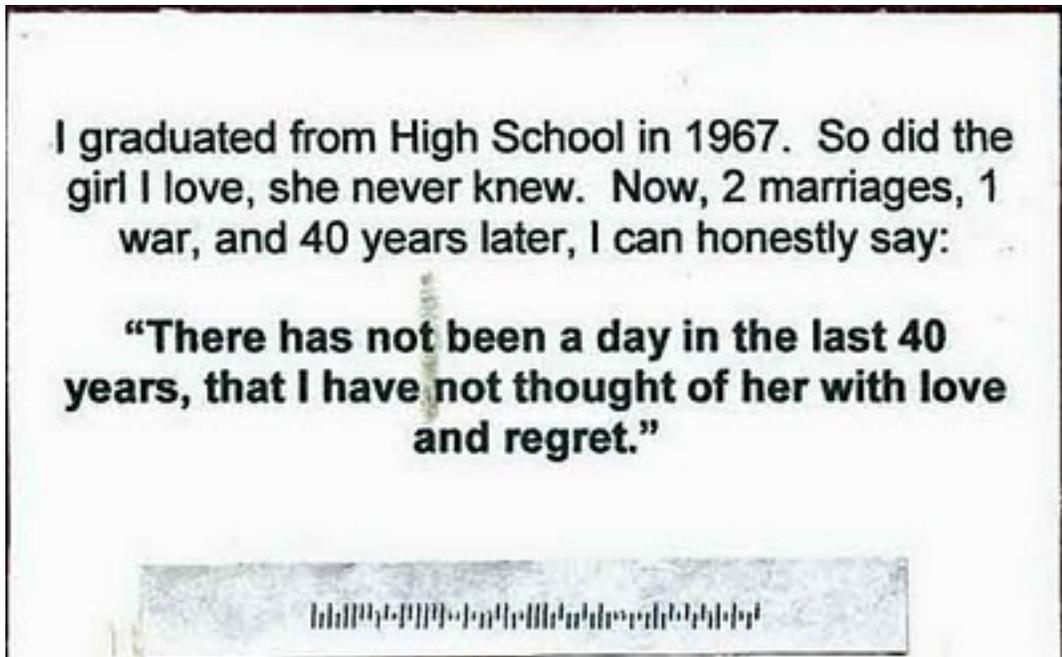
Figure 11: Anonymous. 1967.jpeg

These postcards show how important relationships are to conveying some

elements of identity, and, at the same time, project a particular ethos, a sense of

character and credibility. This type of identity focuses the audience on whys and

89

hows of ethos: why is the composer creating this type of postcard and secret;

how does audience find a composer reliable in light of his/her connections to

others? These questions, within the framework of this research can only be

speculated upon, but they pose some of the reasons audiences may be attracted

to the postcards.

Topical

While intimate relationships are important in self-identification, and are the

majority of the postcards in the identity data set, the ways that composers

connect with their topic is also an important signifier of identity. The connections

that the composers have with others functions as an indicator of how they see

themselves and/or others around them. However, in this set, we see how

composers see themselves in relation to a specific topic and/or a connection to

an idea.
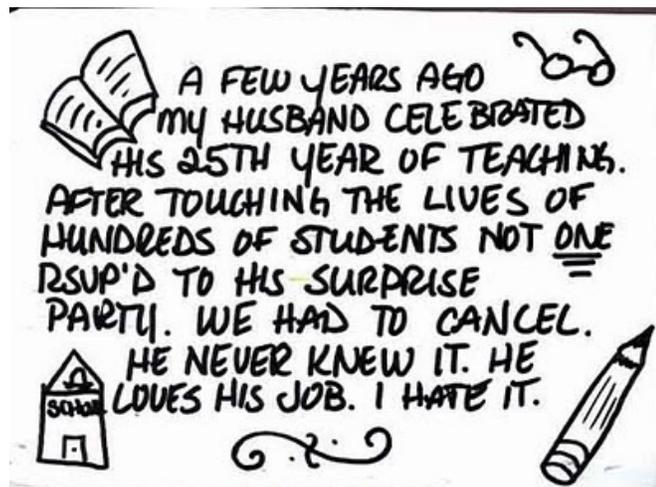
Figure 12: Anonymous. teacher1.jpeg

In Figure 12, the composer is the spouse of a teacher. The composer's

90

connection to the topic is not the relationship to the spouse nor the students of

the spouse, but the relationship to the career the spouse has chosen. The hand

drawn alphabetic and graphical communication indicates a level of intimacy and

connection with the topic. (Anonymous, teacher1.jpeg, 2008)The images are

indicative of teaching, connecting them with the occupation of the spouse, but

are more reminiscent of positive aspects of the career, not negative aspects. The

scrollwork at the bottom of the message is complex in that it has multiple parts

rather than a simple scroll, but, again, is more of a positive statement than a

negative statement. While the composer's words say that the spouse's

occupation is hated, the images are welcoming, inclusive, and communally

shared images of what school is about. There seems to be a connection

between the idea of being a teacher, but not with the concept of hating that

occupation, thereby nullifying the final statement within the composition, which

seems to be the actual topic of the postcard.

This example, Figure 13, of a page from a book, shows that the connection

between the material artifact the composer writes upon is just as important as the

connection made with the object of this composition. While the focus of the

grammatical sentence is on drinking beer, modified by the who and what, the

intent seems to be that the composer found the book to be a special connection

with the professor. There is no indication of what this connection is, albeit friendly

given that a social connection is implied, nor why this connection was made,

other than the book was meaningful in some way. In this example, the composer

has self-identified as someone who wants to connect to someone else that made

a contribution to the composer's life in some way (the book). As with Figure 12,

the message in Figure 13 is confusing because there are many implications that

can be made, but that are not explicitly described. That a page from the book, a

non-traditional postcard, was used, indicates a connection to both the artifact

itself, but the textual structure indicates a connection to the giver of the book. In

addition, the alphabetic information is complex: the handwritten text is

superimposed over the printed information of the book, making a positioning of

connection with the book rather than the person.
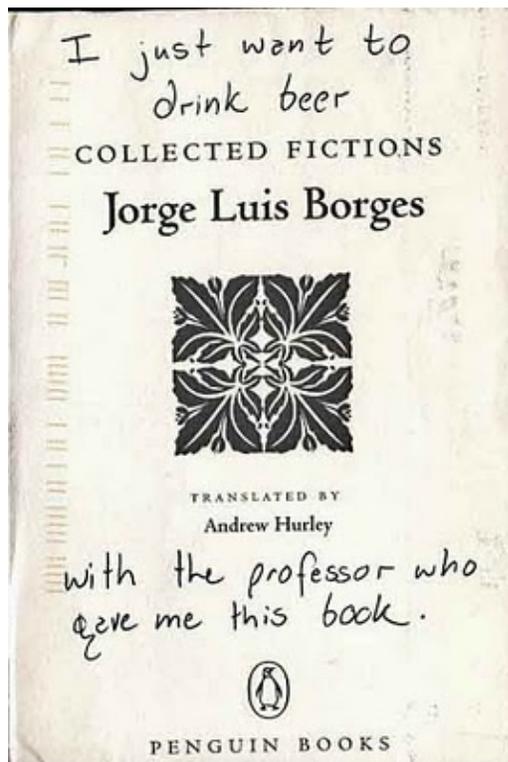
Figure 13: Anonymous. penguin.jpeg

The final example of topical is another postcard that is connected to education,

but in a more direct manner for the composer. In Figure 14, the composer

identifies as a student and employee, but wishes to identify as a mother. The use

of a baby shower announcement as a postcard places the emphasis on the baby,

while the text places emphasis on motherhood and connections with others. In

addition, the structure of an announcement defines how a space will be used: all

text will be inserted to the right of the pre-designed information. This limits the

space the composer could use, but also created an artifact that would be seen

through a very specific lens.
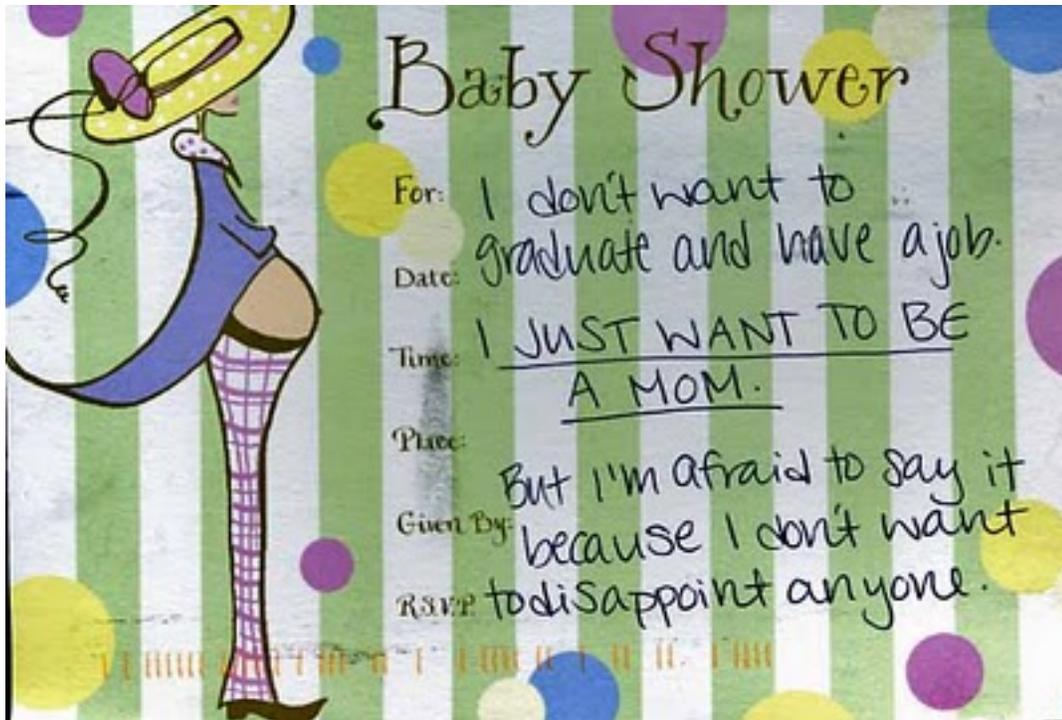
Figure 14: Anonymous. disappoint.jpeg

The style of the announcement also defines the message to a certain degree.

The image of the pregnant woman creates an image of who the composer may

be (and this is highly stylized, so it may not be what the composer imagined at all). The vertical lines on the announcement naturally draw the eyes along those lines, but the differently colored circles disrupt the ways information is read. That the "I just want to be a mom" is in capital letters and underlined indicates that this is the most important part of the message. However, the final statement indicates that even though the baby announcement and the emphatic alphabetic statement are important, the real emphasis is in what the composer can't do. This, again, leads to a bit of dissonance between the graphical information and the alphabetic message.

Concepts of identity, though pervasive throughout all areas of this research, are not the only emphasis within the postcards. The topic of health, whether mental or physical, is, by far, the most pervasive within this section. However, many of these could also be classified as identity, but for the sake of categorization, I made them their own category because they were such a large section. From there, other concepts and themes arose (as we will see further in this chapter).

Health

The concepts of health directly affect the ways ethos is constructed in creating a foundation for how the artifacts are viewed. In online environments, the issue of mental health often plays a part in how composers are considered, reacted to, and interacted with, while physical health typically affects how the composer portrays him/herself, how the composer associates the physical with identity, and

how it impacts what is posted.

Mental Health

Although few, if any, of the composers used the term "mental health" to indicated their topic, many of the postcards are situated around mental health themes of depression, phobias, and suicide. Some are humorous, while others are more serious and deal with serious issues of mental health. The more serious postcards are more prevalent. It may be that constructing one's ethos around mental health necessitates the need for seriousness, or it may indicated the need to explain the composer. The majority of these postcards are self-directed rather than a need to connect with others to explain the concept. However, when another person is a part of the composition, it is usually in a very specific and directed way.
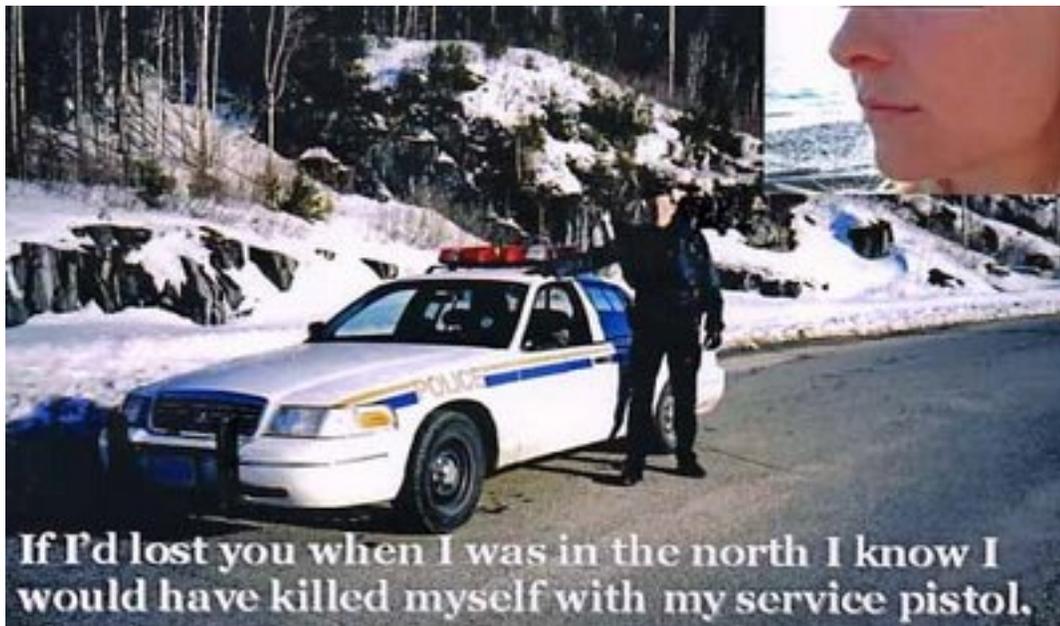
Figure 15: Anonymous. service.jpeg

In Figure 15, not only is a person indicated within the alphabetic information, but the bottom half of a woman's face is imposed over the image in the upper right hand corner of the postcard, as if watching over the main subject of the postcard, the officer and police car. While the theme of this postcard is suicide, it is also about dependence on another person -- and that person's likeness is directly connected and overseeing all aspects of the composition. That the woman's face is looking back over the composition (rather than looking forward from the left), and is situated in the upper corner, indicates that this holds a strong implications in the overall message. This postcard has a lot of information to build ethos: the occupation of the composer -- both in alphabetic and graphical language, the background of snow juxtaposed with the "north" text, and the "you" with the image of the woman's face. Each element constructs a level of ethos that indicates that this person has made careful decisions about the composition of this postcard.

This level of composition is common among the postcards related to mental health, as if the message that is delivered must be constructed in a certain way to avoid ambiguity.
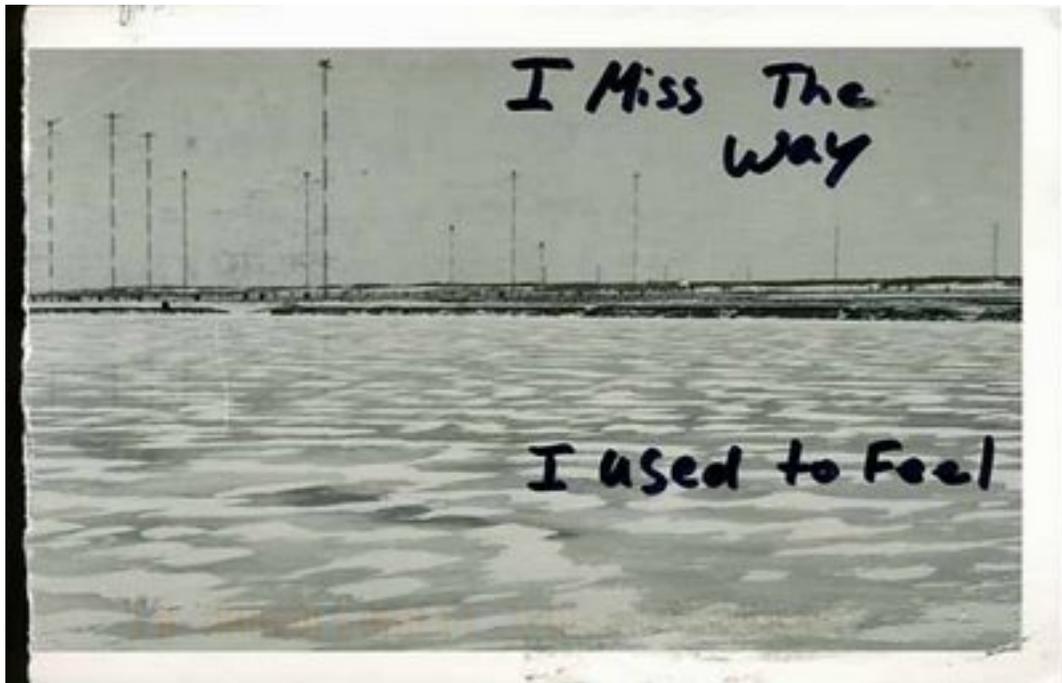
Figure 16: Anonymous. teenager2.jpeg

While not all of the postcards go to this level of complicated composition, some rely on their simplicity to construct a similar ethos. Figure 16 uses simplicity to construct the same level of sophisticated communication. This image, which appears to be an older photograph (the borders and the left margin that is indicative of film compositions point in this direction), is a black and white composition of non-descript elements. It appears to be water, but could be sand, with some sorts of structures in the background. It creates a very plain, yet nuanced, composition. The alphabetic message is written in a way to capitalize on the simplicity of the background. The "I Miss" are written slightly to the right of center, but apart from the next section of the sentence. "The Way" is written vertically and separate from all other parts of the postcard, as an emphasis to the

composer's need to focus. However, the last part of the sentence, "I used to feel"

is in the bottom half of the composition, in the area that is either water or sand,

where there is more of a projection of calm or peace, as if this was a past

connection that no longer corresponds to what the composer feels now.

However, given that the entire composition is done in black and white, this is also

a dichotomy of sorts. It creates a positioning of then and now, here and there,

that the composer capitalizes on. The complexity of a composition and the

concept accompanying that composition may be in what is not explicit.

i tell a made-up story of a tragic childhood event to explain my phobia

so I don't have to admit I have an extreme and irrational fear of ▓

for no reason at all.
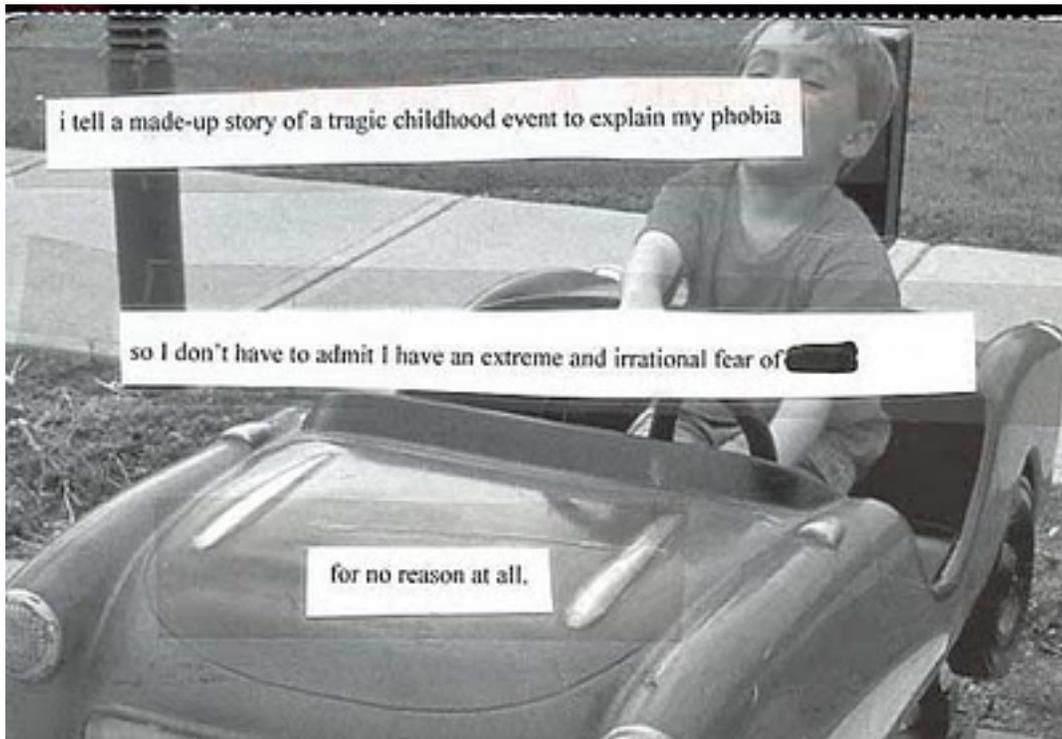
Figure 17: Anonymous. phobia.jpeg

In Figure 17, the composer has connected two seemingly disparate concepts: the

phobia and the child driving a play car on a playground. The composer has

created a space in which to explore the phobia, while crossing out the actual phobia. Is it cars? Children? Boys? Girls? Playgrounds? The word is short, as indicated by the marking out, but without the actual postcard, it's nearly impossible to deduce what it is. However, the message is complex because of what is missing and how that information is there, but it isn't. In addition, this again appears to be a black and white photograph, although because of the rough top edge, it could be a tear-out from some other publication. The black and white extracts some of the power of the image and focuses the audience on the alphabetic message. This message is typed on separate paper and affixed, seemingly by tape, to the composition. It begins at the left margin, but moves inward with each line, with the final line, which seems to be the impetus of the message, to be nearly centered. The language is somewhat hyperbolic "made-up, tragic, extreme, irrational," but adds to the power of the message. While this composition is not as simple as the previous, nor as complex as the one prior to that, it's power is in how the language is constructed to almost negate the image -- without actually doing so. This is important because the image may give a hint to what the phobia is, but it's impossible to tell without further information, thus keeping the confession a secret.

Physical Health

When dealing with physical health, nearly all of the postcards have some body parts or human connection in them. The first postcard in this section, Figure 18, could be included in mental health or identity, but the image focuses on the

99

physicality of the message.
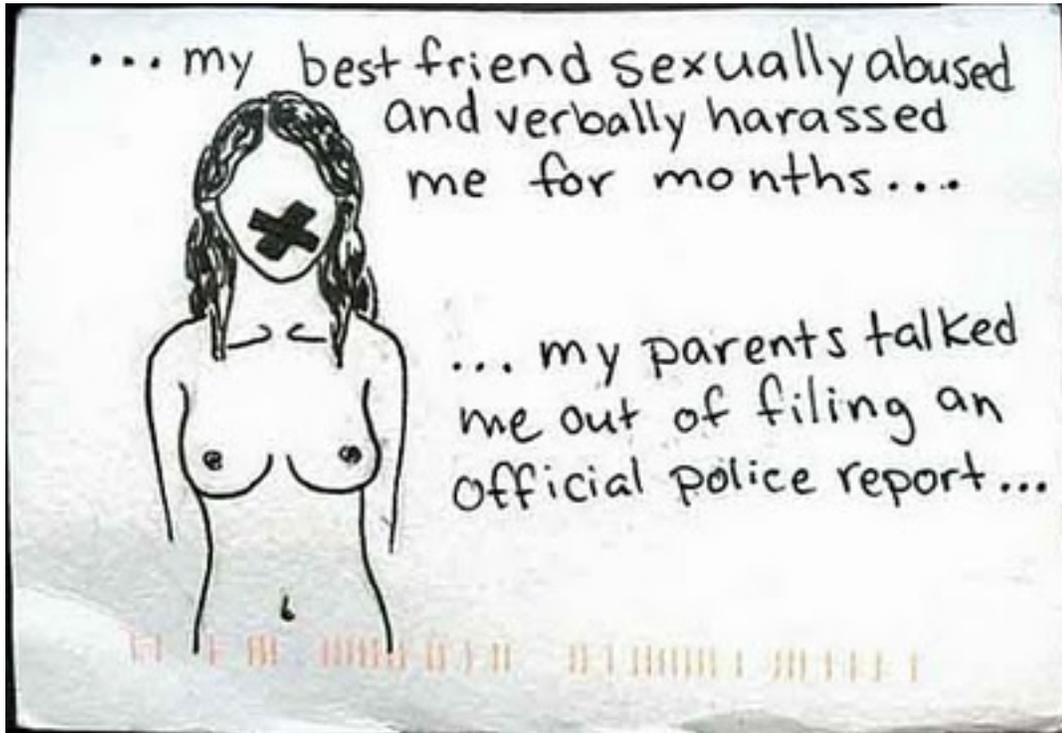
Figure 18: Anonymous. blind.jpeg

This postcard, hand drawn and written, reads from left to right in the typical

Western form. Much like a formal text, the image is indented with the text

wrapped around it. Because of the ellipses at the beginnings and endings of

each section of the alphabetic text, it leaves the option that there is an ongoing

conversation, that much of what being said is left out of what is actually written.

The top section of the alphabetic text is written fairly horizontally, while the

bottom is angled up slightly within each line. The image is the head and torso of

a woman, sans hands, eyes, nose, and mouth. The mouth is covered with a

black X, which is reminiscent of protesters who cover their mouths with tape to

indicate a silencing. Why this may be important is that the emphasis is placed on

the mouth. However, a part of the postcards that I haven't discussed yet, the

filename (which will be discussed extensively in the materiality chapter), is

focused on eyesight. That the curator of the site chose to name this image

"blind.jpeg" indicates that it was viewed differently by that person than, perhaps,

by someone who has seen the X used in silencing dialogues previously. The

focus of the graphical text on the physical speaks to the abuse and silencing in

the alphabetic text. A simple line art composition creates a strong message in

this postcard.

Physical health is also the focus of how composers see their connection to

activities. Figure 19 is fairly straightforward and places the emphasis on the

running, rather than the stroke because of the connection with the graphical text

(although, again, the curator chose the stroke over running).
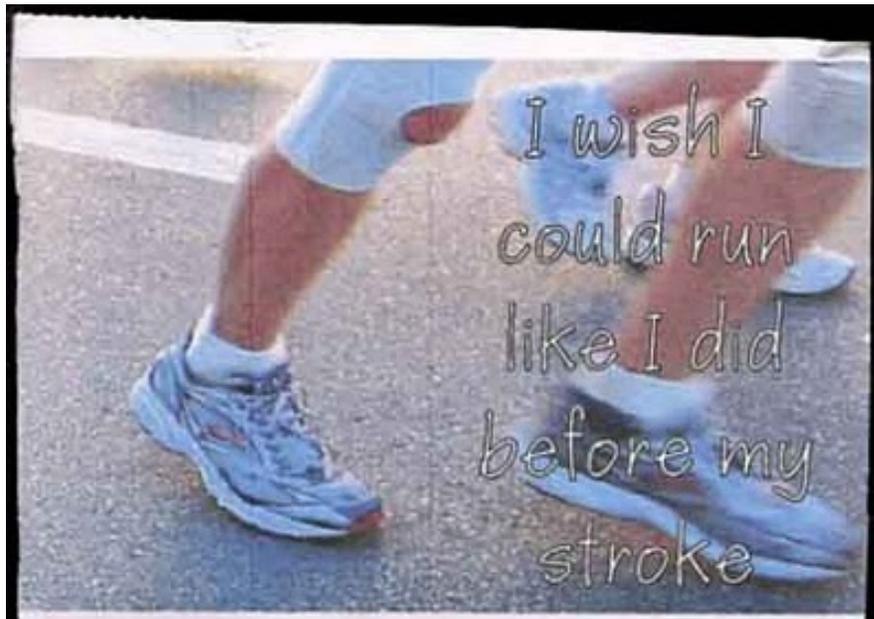
Figure 19: Anonymous. stroke.jpeg

That the image is clearly a runner, connecting with the "I wish I could run...," puts

the emphasis on the running. The second half of the statement is a cause, rather

than the actual focus of the composition. However, the alphabetic text is written

in silver (similar to gel pens) and nearly fits the color of the asphalt that the

graphical text incorporates. This connection, between all parts of the

composition, with a forward motion, indicates that running is still occurring, if not

at previous levels. Again, this composition is placed on a photograph rather than

a traditional postcard. The emphasis on the physical, with a clear indication to

health, makes this confessional more akin to goal setting than secretive

explorations.
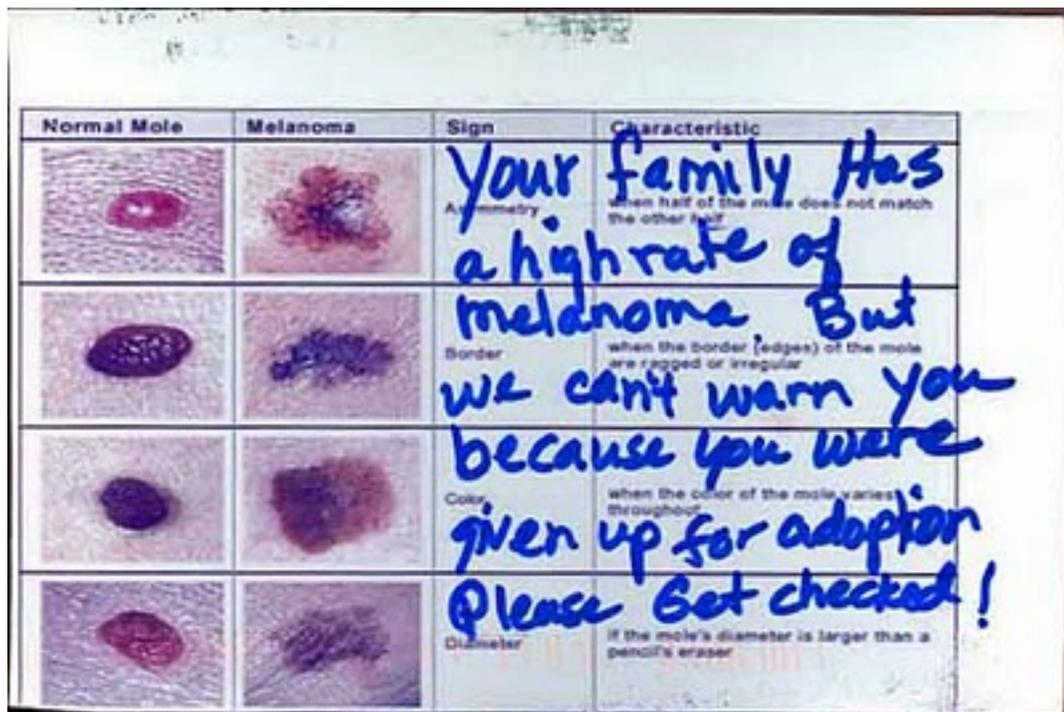
Figure 20: Anonymous. melanoma.jpeg

The final postcard in this section, Figure 20, is not about the composer's health,

but the health of another. In this case, the graphical information is an informational guide to how to recognize different types of skin cancer. The alphabetic text is a plea for an adopted person to get checked for melanoma because of a family history of the disease. Again, a non-traditional postcard, but in this case, the connection between the graphical text and the alphabetic text is direct. While the graphical information is formal, the alphabetic message is not. The message is written in blue ink that seems to avoid writing over the formal information, as if to allow for the reading of that information after reading the composer's writing. In fact, the handwritten text conforms to the white space on the graphical display. The way the postcard is composed speaks to the ethos of the composer to give as much formal and non-formal information as possible without actually speaking directly to the intended audience.

While the physical health postcards focused on the physicality of the human body, postcards that deal with sexuality often avoid dealing with the human body as a whole and focus only on specific body parts.

Sexuality

The most interesting reading of the postcards in this section is that most of them are handmade and developed specifically to connect the graphical interface with the alphabetic message. In doing so, the composition is not only multimodal, but a fully whole composition. This is certainly clear in Figure 21. This postcard, a rectangular shape with tissue paper covering a photograph, tied with a ribbon,

and torn open to show the message, constructs a very deliberate message. That the postcard is covered in white with a white ribbon, corresponds with a Western connection of white to virginity.

Figure 21: Anonymous. 35.jpeg

This is a secret that needs to be uncovered, opened up, like a package. What can be seen of the photograph are hands that form a V over the pelvic region, with an opened piece of clothing surrounding the body. The piece of the

composition that is torn open is deliberate as well. It is only torn over the

alphabetic message, which is imposed over the pelvis of the person in the

photograph, creating a more secretive message. This connection to the

alphabetic message is ambiguous. Is this an image of the mother or of the

composer or neither? While this image does have a portion of a body exposed, it

is not the focus, but a fully integrated part of the whole composition. Without each

of its parts, this composition would not have the same impact. But the

sophisticated way this postcard is composed creates a story that remains to be

uncovered.

The first postcard focused very narrowly on the human body, with only a glimpse

of a body, but Figure 22 uses the human body to shape the composition. While

this composition could be included in the section about appearance or identity, in

how the composer sees the couple, the alphabetic and graphical texts work in

conjunction to create a story about sexuality and how the composer views its

place within the relationship. The outline of a female form, from the back, creates

a border for the alphabetic text, constraining the information in both shape and

size. A non-traditional postcard, this is line art with hand-written alphabetic text.

The alphabetic text has been written over several times -- indicated by the

multiple lines within the text itself. However, even so, some of the text is darker

than other parts of the text. The word "more" has been underlined to indicate

emphasis, while the word "small" is diminutive compared to the rest of the words

to indicate emphasis. In this case, the author has created ethos by establishing that there is 1) connections between arousal and porn; 2) connections between body image and porn; 3) disconnection between how the composer and his/her spouse views porn and its resulting impact. Written succinctly, the overall composition focuses on body image and how the composer has connected with concepts that are in popular media's portrayal on porn's impacts and how those impacts affect gender and sexuality in different ways.
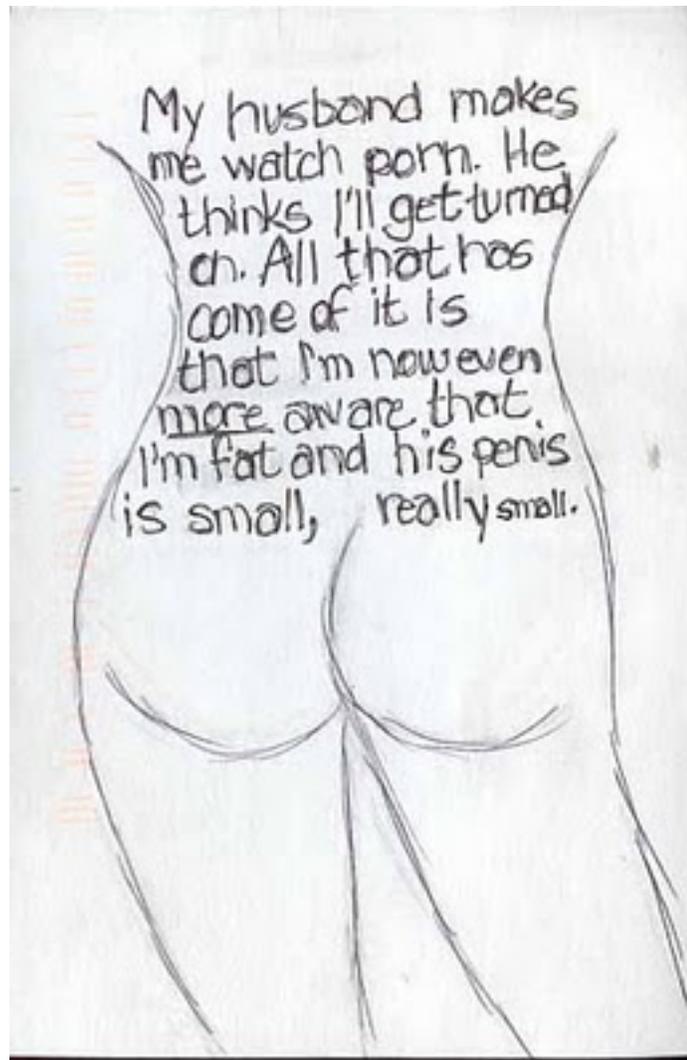
Figure 22: Anonymous. reallysmall.jpeg

The final postcard in this section, Figure 23, does not use the human body as a focus but, instead, incorporates different elements to create a message. This composition looks as if it could be a traditional postcard, perhaps one created for a business or organization (although with an extensive image search, I couldn't find any others that looked like this, although some were similar). The postcard, a horizontal rainbow, is the background for the actual message. While it unifies the different alphabetic texts, it does not add to the overall composition otherwise.

Figure 23: Anonymous. rainbow.jpeg

The alphabetic texts are created using three different types of design. The first is a hand-written, specific, personal message. The second, which is crossed out, could either be a part of this postcard (the blue outline matches the blue of the rainbow) or could be an affixed image. The third is typed, using all capital letters,

creating emphasis on a white background and affixed to the composition. The

first and third pieces of alphabetic text are connected in that they complete a

sentence, but are otherwise separate in their styles and implications.

Health and sexualty focused on different types of body parts and how those

affected health and sexualty. However, issues of appearance also use specific

body images to construct secrets about how one's self-image may impact how

they project ethos.

Appearance

While this section could easily go under identity, there are so many postcards

that are specific to appearance that it seems imperative to understanding the

ethos of the composers. Most of the postcards in this section focus on physical

attributes and how that affects their connections with others.

Figure 24: Anonymous. curly.jpeg

Figure 24, while simple, is only one of several that discusses hair and how that affects the composer. In fact, most of the appearance postcards focus on a societal connection to what beauty may be and how that is constructed. This postcard places this argument in the most simplistic terms.   The composition, a simple photograph of a woman with very curly hair and a text box, shows the focus of curly hair. While the woman is disembodied[14] the connection between the alphabetic and graphic texts is not ambiguous. The emphasis on the word "curly," with it's vertical angle and darkened color, is juxtaposed most closely to the part of the graphical text that has the curliest hair. The rest of the text, hand-written and fairly horizontal, is written in all capital letters and specific to a single message. This composition is well composed to make a direct statement.

While there are several postcards that concentrate on appearance, they are typically about the same theme: constructs of beauty within a specific societal setting. It is important to note that all of these postcards are written in English and have images and text that indicate they are Western constructs.

Like appearance, race is a smaller subset but one that became apparent because of its focus on a specific theme. The postcards in this section are multiracial, with very little overlap of one race over another.

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[14] This is true of most of the data set. Women are often shown disembodied while men are shown as whole people.

Race

This subset, while small, is significant in that it creates ideas of ethos based on a very specific set of criterion. The images in this theme are all very specific in their use of color, images, and connections to racial stereotypes. In Figure 25, a graphic text of a white, blond woman surrounded by darker, more unclear (gender, race, and nationality are unspecific), bodies is the foundation for the alphabetic text that is written in several text boxes situated around the centerpiece of the graphical text.

Figure 25: Anonymous. racism.jpeg

The alphabetic message is in a serif font that is bold. Each word has its own text box that is then affixed to the image. The connection between the alphabetic and

graphic texts are opposed. The alphabetic makes a statement of racism and exclusion, while the graphic makes a statement of inclusion. However, the graphical text also shows a hierarchy in which the woman is placed above the other bodies, with her hair spread out over them. The light is focused on the woman, making this statement more complex. It is unclear what the original image was used for or how it was constructed. It is clear, however, that while the texts have some kind of connection, it may not be the connection the composer considered.

Chapter Summary

Ethos is a complex term that incorporates many ways of seeing and connecting with texts, whether they are alphabetic or graphic. In this chapter, I explored how ethos is developed, constructed, and presented in various ways. I also showed the complex relationship between ethos and identity and how it is often difficult to segregate them. What is interesting about how ethos is developed is that the alphabetic and graphical texts don't always collude with one another to create a cohesive message. When alphabetic and graphic texts are presented as a whole unit, the postcard artifact becomes more powerful, leaving less room for ambiguity. In "reading" the postcards, ethos, and the themes therein, percolated from the connections the composers made to their subjects, topics, and compositions, making the study of the postcards necessarily multimodal in focus. Further questions arose from this analysis, however. What is the role of composer and audience and how does that work in a dynamic, yet ephemeral,

environment? How does a composer compose for a widespread audience in a specific space, yet still retain the message? How do we determine character and creditability of anonymous composers when we only have one artifact to base our determination upon? environments. The remediation of the postcards eliminates some of these concerns. Even if the composer was creating for a specific audience, once the postcard is remediated, it has a different audience that is more widespread and diverse. If the composer was thinking of a worldwide audience, it would be impossible to reach every audience member in the same way, so some generalities would need to be incorporated – without cultural significance.

In the next chapter, I move from the sense of ethos and composer, audience, and medium to ways that social construct, cultural signifiers, and place and space are understood within a foundation of *habitus*. As a step away from the composer focuses on the communication of the postcards, habitus is a natural state to progress from *ethos*.

Chapter Five: Habitus

As seen in Chapter Two, habitus is a complex term that has been used to describe those connections that we use to find mutual understanding in commonplace artifacts. In digital environments, these kinds of connections become essential in helping us communicate with others who may not have the same cultural artifacts in their repertoire. So how can an introduction of a cultural scheme, protocol, or dynamic instigate understanding? These PostSecret postcard artifacts have long been used in traditional media across cultures to signify specific idea; for instance, since their creation, postcards have been used to define a connection to place – as in the vacation postcards. The postcard, as cultural artifact, is synonymous as a brief communication device to promote a connection to place. This connection is used in advertising, movies, and other media to create an identity of the sender/receiver. Because these messages and understandings embedded within the idea of the postcard, they are connected to identity, and, thusly, ethos. Habitus is an important explanatory concept in this case because it builds on the analysis and ideas articulated in the previous chapter. The analysis of the composers' appeal of ethos and the conveyance of identity leaves out the larger cultural and contextual issues. Remediating consistent cultural icons means that a larger audience becomes accustomed to the artifacts, creating that visceral response to the information the artifact may carry. So even if someone is from a country in which postcards are used exclusively for business communication, they would understand that a postcard

also symbolizes interpersonal communication in specific contexts. PostSecret

has created, in some ways, a repository of postcard artifacts that encourage,

improve, and saturate digital settings with cultural significance that then become

habitus to an audience.

Remediation of a traditional artifact is, in and of itself, habitus. It is taking an

artifact, one that is well known, and creating a digital, remediated form of that

artifact that then carries with it the traditional connections to a culture as well as

the new, digital implications of that artifact. In this chapter, I explore how this is

done through the postcards of PostSecret. By assessing the different categories

of postcards that emerged from inductive analysis, we can see how the

traditional format of the postcard has influenced the cultural connection, as well

as how the remediation of these postcards has developed its own cultural

significance. When analyzing the postcards for themes related to the topic of

habitus, I found three categories: cultural, space, and cultural, with several sub-

categories. These categories unfolded through the multi-step process explained

in Chapter Three. While many of the postcards in this section could also be

indicative of ethos, in Chapter Four, or materiality, in Chapter Six, they really

show connections to things, places, spaces, ways of being, interacting, and

conveying information. Because it would be impossible to insert all 77 of the

postcards, the postcards shown in this chapter are representative of the whole

data set of the postcards coded as habitus. They were chosen as the best

representatives of the concepts that emerged from the analysis of this set. In addition, they were chosen as those that exemplified how habitus was understood and manifested by this researcher. As with any interpretive analysis, this analysis could shift depending on the researcher's perspective. Interpretive analysis is most relevant in this chapter given the shifting understanding of cultural norms, connections, and presuppositions.

Out of the total 251 postcards that were retrieved from the PostSecret.com archives, 77 were coded as demonstrating, primarily, characteristics related to the concept of habitus.

Table 2: Habitus in PostSecret

Topic within Habitus	Number of Postcards in Classification
Cultural	19
Postal	12
Communal Knowledge	7
Space	23
Wish You Were Here	11
Ephemeral	12
Place	35
Specific	12
General	23

In PostSecret

In light of the constructs of habitus in Chapter Two and the discussion above on how habitus functions within digital settings, I now turn to the case study of PostSecret.com, which, when I first began considering it as a research subject, seemed to be an archive of pathos and ethos appeals, rather than anything else. In fact, when discussing this with a colleague, I lamented on the worry that the postcards would not present much for an in depth study, let alone a dissertation. However, once I began to explore them as presented in the RSS archive feeds, themes other than pathos and ethos, as mentioned in Chapter Four, began to emerge and stuck with me so that when I did the actual coding, these themes presented much more clearly. The visual format of digital artifacts plays to the strengths of understanding habitus; indeed, what is more tangible, in digital form, than a graphical reproduction of an idea, concept, and connection to a culture's very essence?

Once I was able to see past the overwhelming examples of pathos and ethos, I began to wonder about postcards as cultural artifacts and how they have played an important role in all Western cultures since the 1800s, and nearly all of the world since then. Postcards have been a touchstone to who we are, how we've viewed the world, and how those views have shifted during the nearly two centuries of the postcard's place within society. During the aforementioned

summer 2011 multimodality workshop[15], I wondered how I could put the inherent

connection to place, which is presented in traditional postcards, when the digital

postcards are rarely connected to place, but have connection to space (virtual),

into my dissertation. A workshop colleague[16] recommended that I look into the

concept of habitus. She said she thought it was a perfect fit for the work I was

doing. In researching habitus, the several ideas began to emerge. What is that

connection to culture that the postcards exemplify? How do traditional postcards

feed into the very notions that PostSecret is perpetuating in using postcards as

their designated artifacts? What does remediation do to the message? What is

so important about postcards that we still view them as important to connecting

with others? These questions establish the basis for how habitus is developed

and disseminated in the postcards.

Cultural

While all of the sections of this chapter could be considered cultural artifacts, the

postcards in this section are specific indications of culture and how the world is

viewed from the composer's perspective. While cultural implications are always a

part of what habitus is[17], it's important to note those artifacts which do so

explicitly, and to explain from the beginning what is meant by a cultural artifact. In

this section, I have created two sub-sections: 1) Postal: postcards that show

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[15] Rhetoric Society of America, Multimodality Workshop, 2011.

[16] Martha Cheng, Associate Professor of Rhetoric at Rollins College.

[17] To reiterate, "The habitus, we may say, contributes fundamentally to the construction of the world that one takes for granted because it provides the range of conscious and unconscious codes, protocols, principles, and presuppositions that are enacted in the world's characteristic practices" (Morgan, 1999).

specific codes, stamps, or other indications of connections to postal services; 2)

Communal Knowledge: postcards, like the aforementioned wedding ring, to show

a connection to ideas that may influence the reading of the postcards. This

section is first in the analysis to set up a foundation for which all others will follow.

These are more specific to cultural artifacts than those in Space and Place, and

suggest how I am looking at habitus more clearly.

Postal

Postal codes, in one form or another, are used around the world. These codes

indicate a site of origin for a piece of mail, but also include other localized

information, especially in the case of stamps. Stamps may indicate a national

hero, a nationally recognized important date, or other cultural signifiers. In this

section, I examine three postcards that use different types of postal information

to create concepts of habitus.
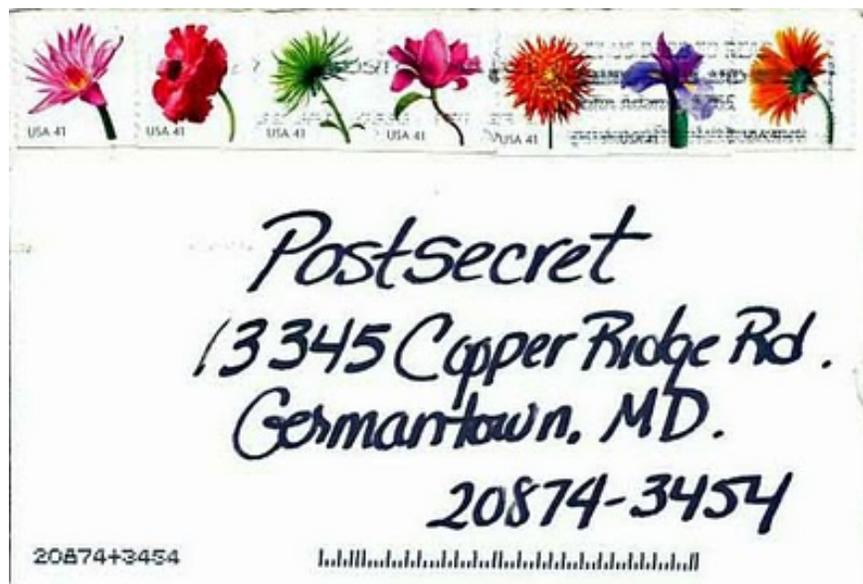
Figure 26: Anonymous. flowers.jpeg

118

In this first postcard, Figure 26, posted as a part of the regular 20 postcards that week, it is not a postcard of a secret. Instead, it seems to be the front of an envelope. The postcard is addressed to PostSecret using handwritten script in a large, black, thick ink. The most significant part of this postcard is the stamps. The composer of this postcard affixed seven United States 41 cent flower stamps, each one a different flower, to the composition. These stamps, while probably overkill in the amount that was required to send the composition, create a stunning graphical display. The flowers alternate between those that have a spiky appearance to those that have softer petals, which creates a pleasing pattern. In addition to the colorful stamps, the United States Postal Service (USPS) has stamped the composition with the zip code of the recipient, PostSecret, in the 5+4 zip code format, in addition to a bar code that is typical of correspondence sent through USPS. While the traditional round stamp that indicates the city of origin along with the date is not readable (it seems to have been smudged), it is on the top of the card. This card is fairly typical of the postcards originating in the United States and posting within the United States, albeit with more postal stamps than most contain. It has to be argued, though, that the composer designed this composition intentionally. It is too symmetrical and deliberate to not be intentional.

The second postcard in this section, Figure 27, is from a location outside of the United States. While the file name of the postcard (din okologiske frisor, der

119

taenker pa bade miljo og sundhed.jpeg) seems to be in Danish, the phone

number on the bottom of the card is a French phone number. The round postal

stamp isn't quite clear enough to indicate where, exactly, it came from. However,

it is clear that it came from outside of the United States because of a few specific

indicators. The first is the stamp. It is a blue stamp with a face on it (seems to be

male), and a denomination of 8.7. The stamp is slightly ripped outside of the

typical tear marks where stamps are removed from one another.
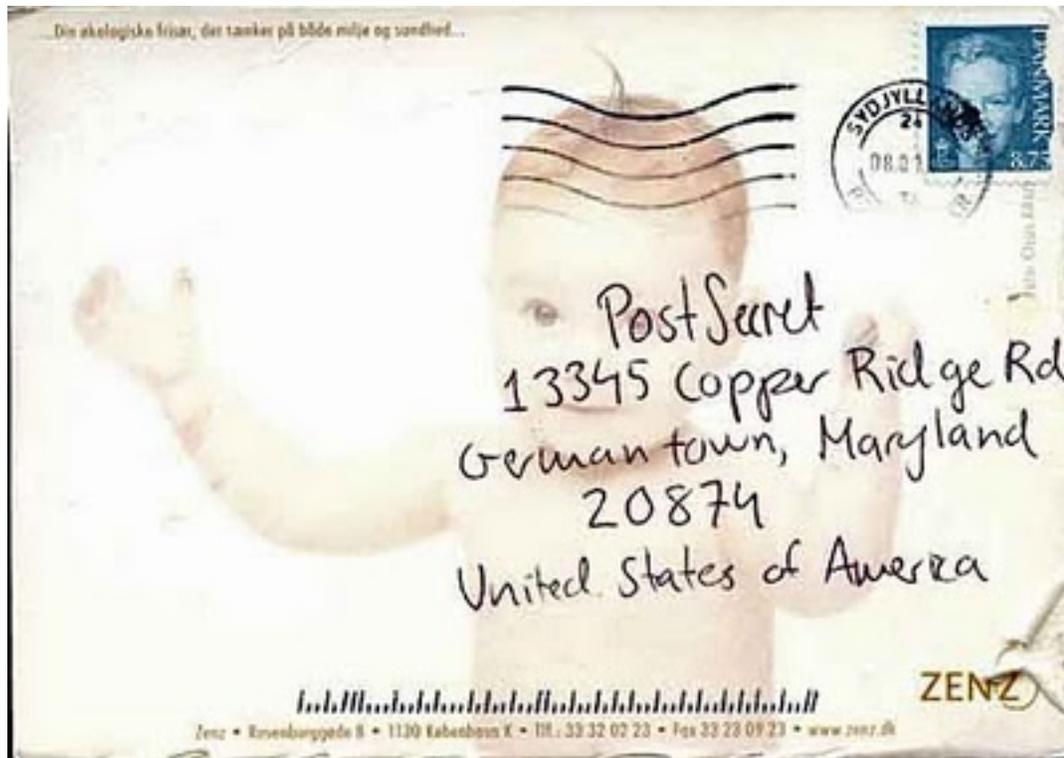
Figure 27: Anonymous. din okologiske frisor, der taenker pa bade milljo og sundhed.jpeg

The second indicator is the round postal stamp that indicates it's from a place

beginning with SVDJVLL. Finally, as is typical with non-American

correspondence, the country of the recipient is written on the postcard. The

opaque image of a caucasian baby, created in light sepia tones, is one that is

recognizable as an image that evokes an emotional response. This postcard is

most interesting because of the universal symbols of postal service imprinting as

well as the image of the baby. All of these contribute to cultural understandings.
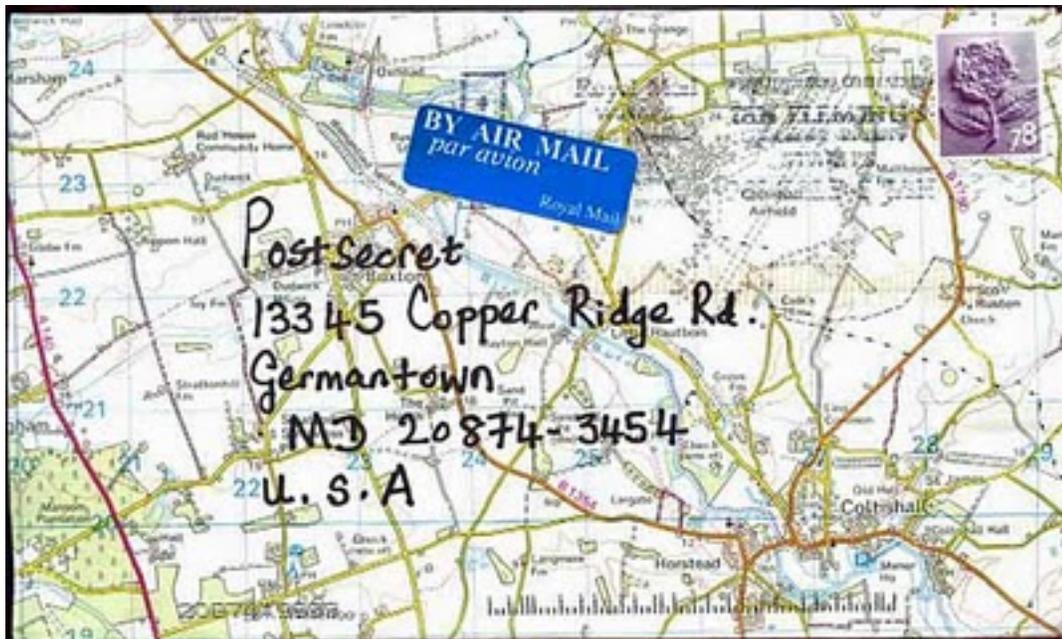
Figure 28: Anonymous. Buxton.jpeg

The final postcard, Figure 28, in this section doesn't seem to be a postcard

either. It is, instead, a map of the English county of Norfolk, as indicated by the

city of Coltishall in the lower right corner. Instead of a round postal impression,

this postcard has information about Ian Fleming, who had United Kingdom (UK)

Royal Mail postal stamps named after him in January of 2008. Much of this is

smudged, but the words "Ian Fleming" are quite clear. The stamp itself is of what

seems to be a raised tulip, or a similar flower, in a purple tone. This postcard,

unlike the previous two, also has a typical Air Mail sticker that is often put on

overseas mail originating in the UK[18]. This postcard, like the previous two, has

the postal bar code at the bottom and, like the Danish/French postcard, has USA

in the addressee location, indicating foreign (outside of the US) origins.

The postcards in this section exemplify how, in Western countries, the similarities

between the ways mail is processed, presented, and shipped throughout the

world. The postal imprints, while all slightly different, are located in similar

sections of the artifacts, contain similar information, and provide insight into

where the correspondence originated. In addition, the imprints speak to the

international consistency in mail processes. What's impressive about that is that

very few regulations transcend national borders, but in this case, as insignificant

as it may seem, there is a consistency across borders that creates a stable

understanding of these protocols. In addition, that these symbols have been

remediated and posted as parts of the curated whole of PostSecret indicate the

importance of the connections between the traditional postcards and the digitized

postcards. These postcards have been touched, handled, and carried long

distances to make their way into a space that is not bound by time and space --

but the connection between space and time and traditional restrictions of time

and space are clear. Digitally remediated forms often retain strong connections to

their prior forms. Within the PostSecret project, and especially with postcards

similar to the samples shown in this section, there seems to be an emphasis on

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[18] This is my experience from having lived in the UK and mailed correspondence home during my duration there.

connecting the traditional and digital forms; the postmarks and other postal

symbols are the most direct way to show that connection as well as how diverse

the reach of PostSecret is. As we will see in the next section, symbols extend

beyond those of postal codes and symbols.

Communal Knowledge

In this section, we return to more representative examples of PostSecret

postcards, with both alphabetic secrets and graphic texts created to impart a

message. Communal knowledge implies that the audience understands the

implications made in the messages, whether it is in the alphabetic or graphic

texts. This requirement makes an implicit understanding that what is presented is

communal knowledge and that the audience will accept the message based on

that understanding.
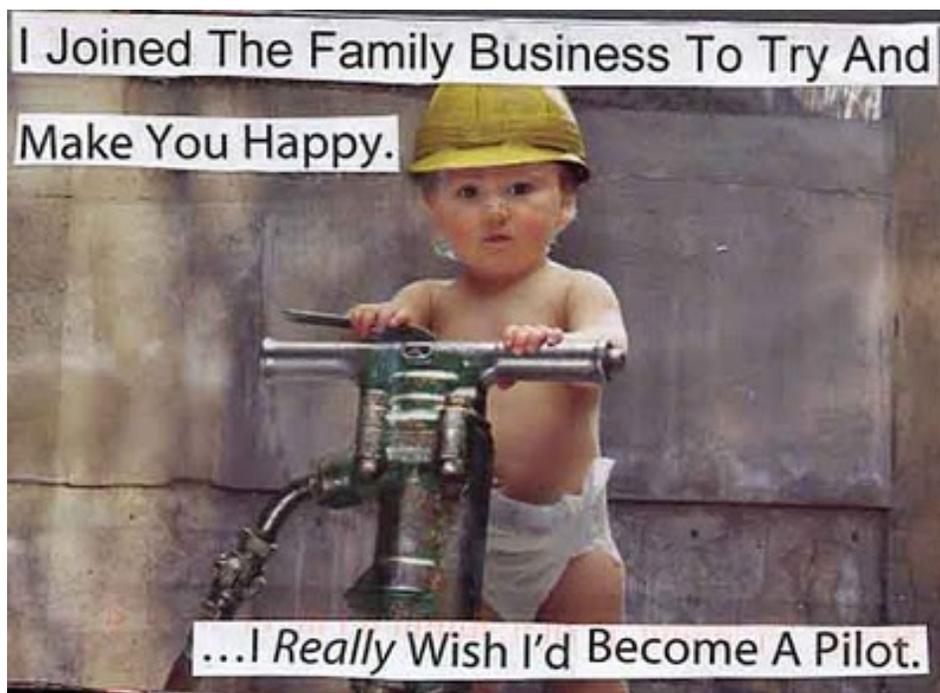
Figure 29: Anonymous. pilot.jpeg

Figure 29 is composed of a simple alphabetic text that has been typed on plain white paper and affixed to an graphic text of a child in a diaper wearing a hardhat working with what appears to be a hydraulic drill. The alphabetic text is divided into three parts with one sentence, in two parts, at the top of the postcard. The third section is preceded by an ellipses and a full sentence indicating there is some thought, idea, or pause (as is common in online communications) between the previous sentence and the final sentence. This postcard requires some understanding of a connection between the alphabetic and graphic texts. While both texts could stand on their own as statements, together they create a more holistic view of the message. The alphabetic text speaks of "the family business." The implication, the child working with a hydraulic drill, is the family business, is clear if the audience understands how a child may be induced into participating in a family's business from a very young age, that the connection between the child and the work s/he is doing is the family business, and that the symbols of construction work, the hardhat and hydraulic drill, imply the word the composer speaks of. This postcard, more than than the others in this section, requires a communal knowledge of what constitutes work, family business, and familial pressures to participate in a family business.

The second postcard in this section, Figure 30, may be more universal among those who equate flowers with romance and intimate relationships. In this postcard, the entire postcard is a graphic text of a rose in the foreground and

tiger lily in the background with vignetting around the flowers, creating dark

borders. The alphabetic text is written in different colors (green, pink -- which

matches the flowers, and blue) and typefaces (both serif and sans serif) placing

emphasis with color and style on different words. The message in this postcard is

simplistic in that the connection between the alphabetic and graphic texts is

explicit, including not only the word "flowers" but the connection between color.

However, the implicit message is the connection between the word "waste" and

what the flowers imply, which, in this case, seems to be the demise of an intimate

relationship. The understanding that flowers are given as an act of love, or as a

connection with someone to symbolize love is imperative in understanding this

postcard.
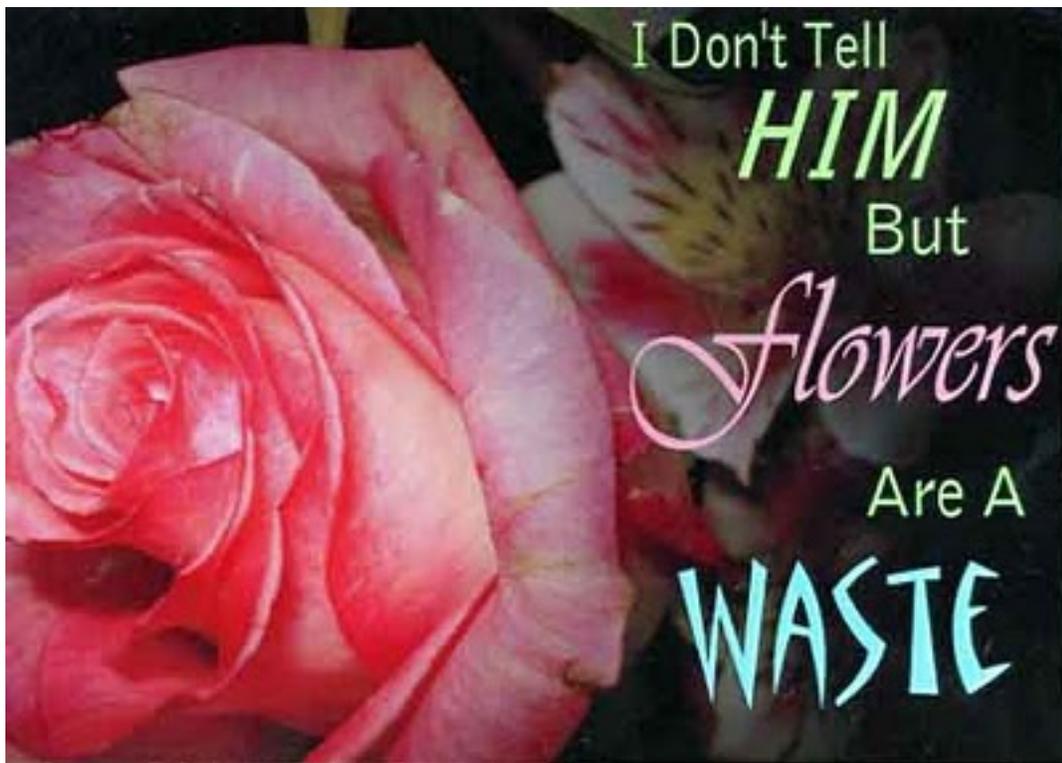
Figure 30: Anonymous. waste.jpeg

The final postcard in this section, Figure 31, is probably the most direct of the

communal knowledge postcards and is, most likely, the most universal of these

postcards. This postcard is composed of individual alphabetic texts printed on

paper that is affixed to the graphic text of a skull with what seem to be women

from the turn of the 20th century (maybe earlier) interlayered within and around

the skull. The alphabetic text is positioned in horizontal lines that become more

non-linear as the sentence extends, placing emphasis on the specific words of

"faked" and "death." The serif font is more indicative of a typewriter (much more

like Courier) than of more modern typefaces. The image is created in shades of

blue with a retro look that is similar to cyanotypes in photography. The graphic

text, especially the skull overlaying the images of the women, is clearly indicative

of death. This universal symbol of death would speak to most, if not all,

audiences as clearly as any international symbol. The alphabetic text reinforces

the message, indicating the message is about death. This postcard speaks to

communal knowledge in a way that the previous two allude to. It is as specific to

the message as any of these postcards can get, being explicit in all ways. While

the previous two require some level of localized communal knowledge at the

least, the symbolism in this final postcard speaks to all audiences -- whether that

audience reads English or not, they would understand this postcard is about

death in some way.
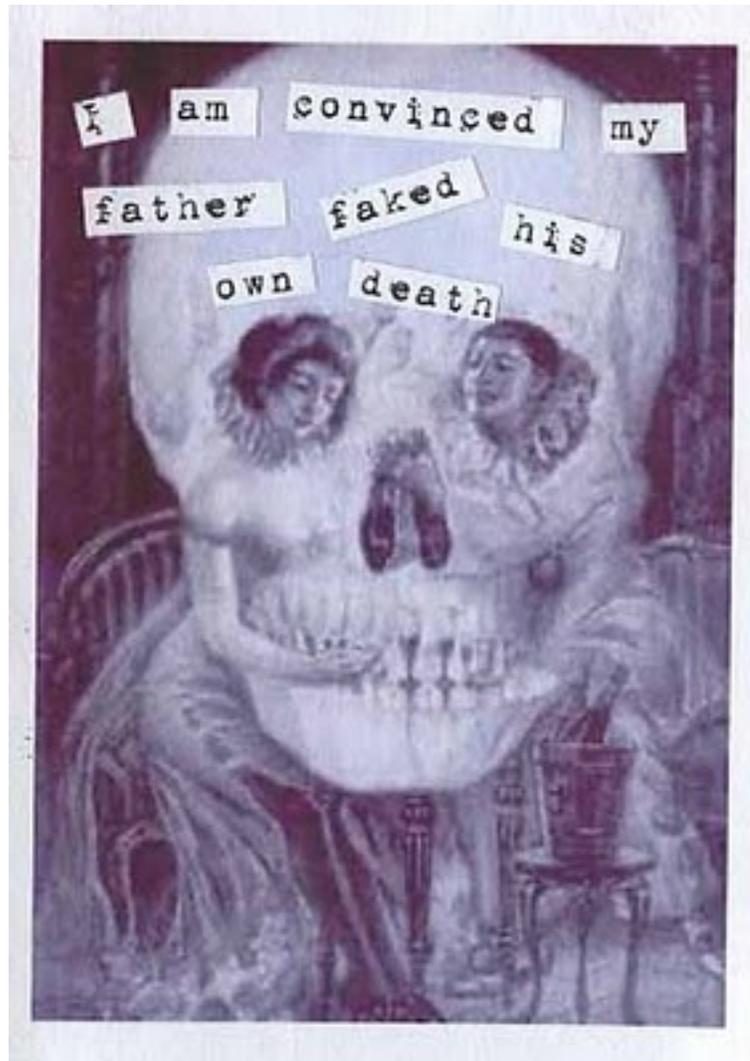
Figure 31: Anonymous. skull.jpeg

Communal protocols of information can often confuse or connect audiences. If

that audience is not a part of the community that recognizes the information, that

audience may not understand the full message. The graphic text of a flower may

seem like a gesture of goodwill or an indication of a bountiful garden, but when

placed with alphabetic text that works in conjunction with that graphic text, an

audience who understands communal norms will associate the image with what

the composer intended. Were these postcards sent as traditional postcards to a single audience, the implications would, undoubtedly, be clear. However, when this traditional medium is posted in a digital form to an international audience, the messages can become garbled because of a lack of communal knowledge.

Cultural artifacts are the basis of the definition of habitus. Incorporating cultural signifiers into a text ensures that a specific audience, whether that is a localized or international audience, will understand the message as long as the artifact is specific to that audience. In the Postal postcards, the international use of postal service imprints ensures that an international audience of postal service employees and any who are interested in those symbols, will understand what is being said in the postcard. In the Communal Knowledge postcards, we can see that specific knowledge may be required in order to understand what is being said in specific messages. In the following sections, the connections shift from cultural artifacts to ideas that are either implicit or explicit to denote space.

Space
The very notion of space is somewhat intangible. What one person considers "here" will inevitably be different from what the next person defines as "here." In order to understand what space means in terms of habitus and how that relates to what the postcards are communicating, I have divided Space into two sections: 1) Wish you were here: postcards that, while not always traditional "wish you were here" postcards, express the notion; 2) Ephemeral: postcards

128

that imply that "here" is specific to the composer, but that may appeal to the audience on a similar level. In this section, habitus is explored by what connects the composer to the audience -- the textual protocols that make connections and how that is constructed.

Wish You Were Here
In this section, I examine three samples from the Habitus data set that are indicative of the idea of traditional postcards that carried the "Wish You Were Here" statement, which is the most traditional theme of postcards and which illustrates the connection of the postcard to physical space. This connection complicates remediation from the traditional to digital especially when the postcards are viewed in an anonymous digital setting. In this case, I use the phrase to configure a space in which the composer expresses a desire to have someone near, but not necessarily the audience the postcard is directed to. This set includes two postcards that were posted on Father's Day in 2007, connecting the composers to their father's not only in an abstract way, but in a way that those who celebrate Father's Day in June (typically those in the United States) would understand and connect with. The third was posted to PostSecret.com on the Sunday prior to Valentine's Day in 2008, establishing habitus with the audience through the the use of that date. Whether this was intentional on the curator's behalf or not is unclear, but the reinforcement of common protocols includes the audience as players in the understanding of the artifacts.

COURSE	TEACHER	CY1	CY2	CY3	EXM	SEM	CY4	CY5	CY6	EXM	SEM
SPANISH 7A	MOHR H	90	90								
RS 301 1											
MATH 7 H/P/AP	BISHOP K	93	78								
RS 716 3											
ART 7/8	CULLEN R	93	89								
RS 313 10											
ADVISORY 4 PER	HARDIN S	100	97								
RS 704 13											
ENGLISH 7H/P/AP	HARDIN S	88	84								
RS 714 6											
LIFE SCI7H/P/AP	PHILLIPS R	91	90								
RS 722 4											
READING 7H/P/AP	CARTER A	93	76								
RS 712 6											
TEXAS HISTORY 7	BISHOP D	96	92								
RS 723 4											
GIRL ATH 7	SALAZAR, IMEL	100	93								
RS 206 4											

Handwritten text on image: My parents were divorced when I was 3. My Dad remarried and had 2 more kids. **He died in Iraq** a month ago. I didn't know he cared so much about me until I got some of his belongings. He saved ALL **MY** report cards.

Figure 32: Anonymous. reportcards.jpeg

This first postcard, Figure 32, is indicative of the connection to a different person than the audience in an abstract way. The postcard is created from a report card without any other graphic texts. This report card connects the audience to the alphabetic text the composer creates. The alphabetic text, written in pink ink, tells a narrative about the composer's father who died in Iraq, a statement that has been inked over several times to create a bold statement. The narrative also contains a phrase "the report cards" that has been changed, with black ink, to "MY report cards" to indicate a connection to the composer. From a surface reading, this postcard may not appear to say "I wish you were here" to an audience. However, the connection between the graphic text and the alphabetic text imply that the composer wishes a connection with his/her father, who is no

130

longer available and is, in effect, saying "Wish you were here."
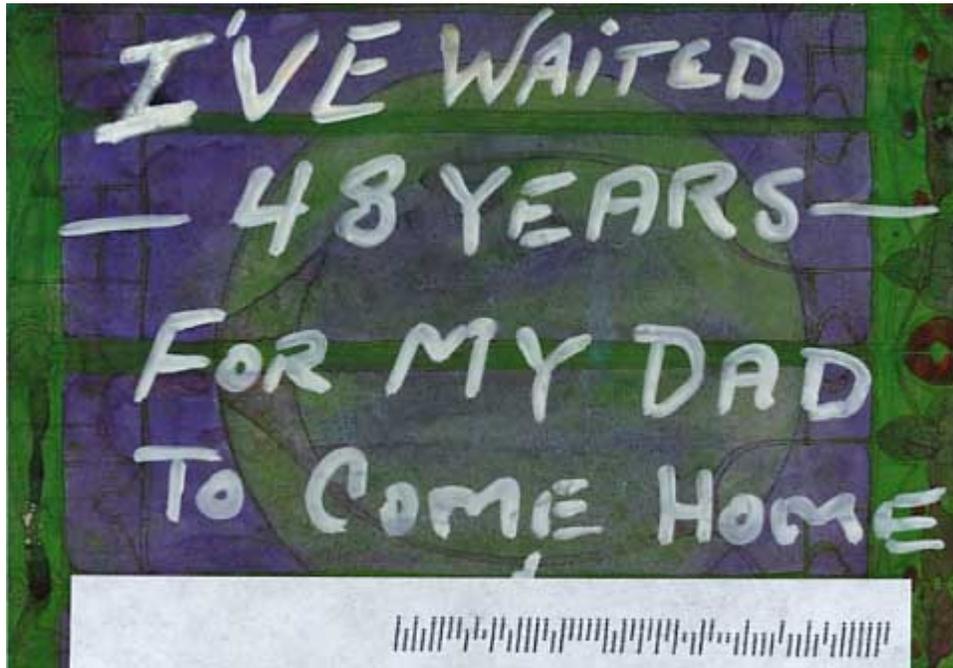
Figure 33: Anonymous. [48].jpeg

The second postcard in this set, Figure 33, is similar to the first in its sentiment, although not in its direct appeal to wishing someone was there. This postcard is hand drawn with complex designs in greens and purples with black lines and some red circular shapes set as the graphic text. The graphic text is quite abstract. The alphabetic text is handwritten in white ink in all capital letters. One section is set apart in how it is written, using em dash: -- 48 YEARS --. This postcards, again while not saying "Wish you were here," is more direct than the previous postcard to imply this sentiment. The word "waited" implies that the composer desires his/her father to be "here," which, in this case, is signified by "home." There is a longing in this simple message that is indicative of a "Wish

you were here" communication.
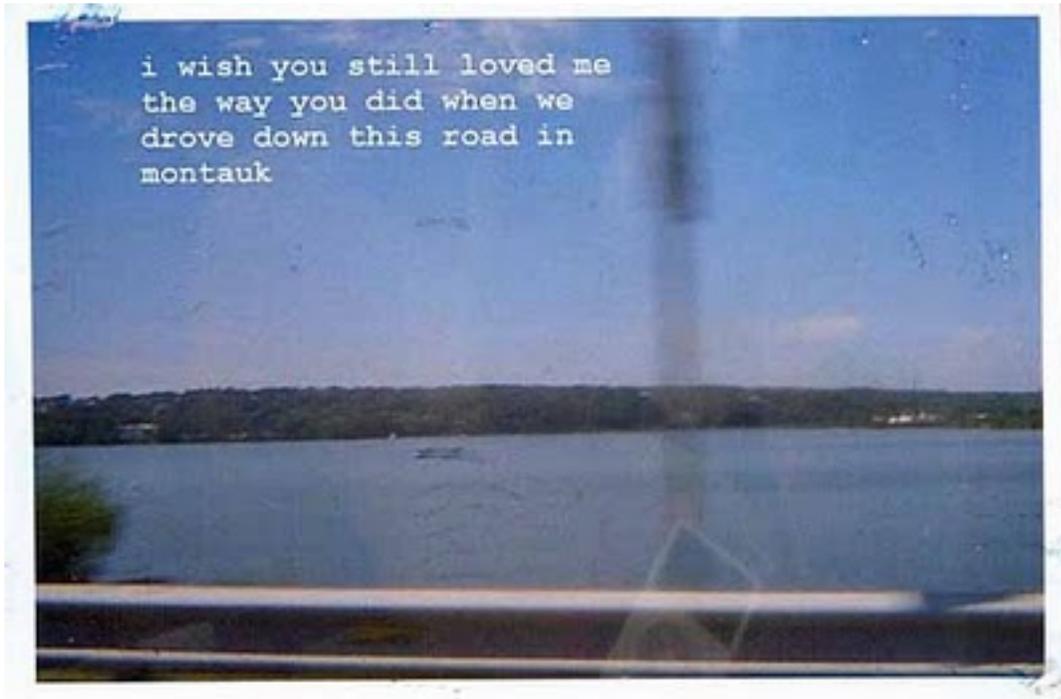
Figure 34: Anonymous. trip2.jpeg

The final postcard from this section, Figure 34, is, again, very simple in its

presentation. The graphic text on this postcard is a view of water and land that

appears to be viewed from a moving vehicle (as evidenced by the vegetation in

the lower left that is slightly blurry). It is taken through a window, as evidenced

by the reflection of an iPod in the lower right center of the image. The alphabetic

text is typed in all lowercase letters in a white serif typeface. While a place is

indicated, Montauk, the space that is implied in this postcard is one of longing for

a person who is no longer there. The "Wish you were here" is more explicit on

this postcard than the two previous in that the composer expresses specific

wishes for his/her specific audience (which may or may not be the same

132

audience that viewed it on PostSecret.com).

One of the issues that seemed most poignant to me as I analyzed this section of

the data set is that traditional postcards with the "Wish you were here" statement

are often not about wishing the recipient was in that place with the writer, but that

there is a space in which the recipient occupies that needs to be filled. This made

me consider the hundreds of postcards I've sent to family and friends when I've

traveled. They were never actually about the place I visited, but about missing

the person I was writing to and wishing I could share an adventure or space with

that person, even for that short moment that it takes to read a postcard. When

traditional postcards are remediated, the "Wish you were here" statement

becomes more complex because the audience reading it defines what is "here."

Even in the case of the third postcard in which a section of roadway near

Montauk is specified, the here is relative. As an audience member, I thought

about my drives to Montauk and which part of the road might make me think this

way or connect with the composer in a certain way (even though I'm certainly not

the specific audience the author had in mind). "Wish you were here" is relative --

to a person, a place, a space in time. This may tell us, in some ways, that we

always connect back to the physical world, even when artifacts are created

virtually.

Ephemeral
It is that relativity that makes this next set of postcards important. In this set,

133

space may be defined by a smell, an online space, or proximity to something, all of which are at once tangible and intangible, but always fleeting, in the same way postcards, whether traditional or digital, are ephemeral. Nothing in this section is meant to last long, but the connections to who we are and how we connect are important. Habitus is also ephemeral in that the connection between what the composer is describing and how an audience may interpret and/or associate it with its own life may be tangible or intangible, but is always short-lived.
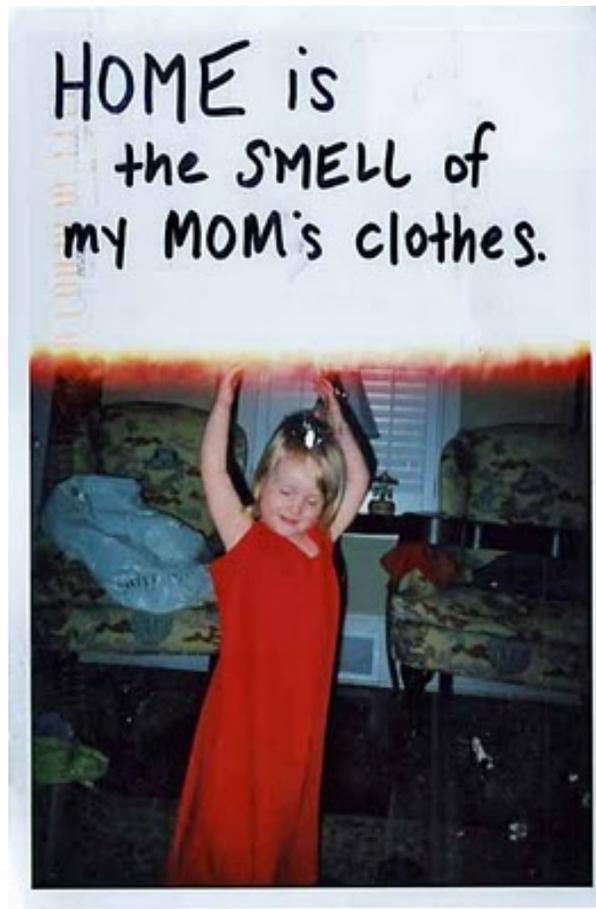
Figure 35: Anonymous. home.jpeg

This first postcard, Figure 35, jumped out at me because of my visceral response

to it. I immediately smelled the laundry detergent my mom used to use when I was a kid and I associated that with a feeling of comfort and connection to home, quite in the same way the composer does here. The postcard is composed of both alphabetic and graphic texts. The top third of the composition is white space with an alphabetic text written in black ink. Placing the words in uppercase letters places emphasis on the words: HOME, SMELL, MOM's. The lower two-thirds of the postcard consist of a graphic text that is an image of a young child dressed in what seems to be an adult's dress in a home setting (living room chairs, blinds on windows, blankets, etc.). The child has her/his arms stretched up with eyes closed. The child is smiling. The space in this postcard is clearly "home," but because the composer comprised the message to include the sense of smell, the idea of "home" becomes more ephemeral and audience specific. How "home" is interpreted becomes much more personal and specific to an audience that may read this, as it did for me. It becomes an incredibly personal experience upon reading of this postcard.

The second postcard, Figure 36, is a meta-connection between traditional postcards and the remediation of those postcards as well as a meta-connection between family offline and online and the writing we do in online spaces. The postcard consists of both alphabetic and graphic texts. The alphabetic text is typed on a piece of white paper that is affixed to the graphic text. The image of the graphic text is a classical image of two women in draped clothing, one with

135

the bodice of her gown off-shoulder. The eye of of this subject has been replaced

with a larger blue eye that is outlined by red, which appears to be a photograph

of a human eye. The connection between the alphabetic and graphic texts are

cultural examples of habitus, but they are also ephemeral examples of habitus.

The ephemeral habitus is one of spying/lurking in online spaces. It is that

connection between the composer and audience that states that this activity that

many online, and, indeed, everyone at that time on PostSecret (since comments

weren't allowed when this postcard was posted), plays a spy/lurker role in online

environments. Not only is the spying/lurking ephemeral, but blogs, themselves,

are ephemeral, as are postcards -- both digital and traditional. Everything about

this postcard becomes meta of itself, perpetuating the ephemeral consistency of

the postcard.
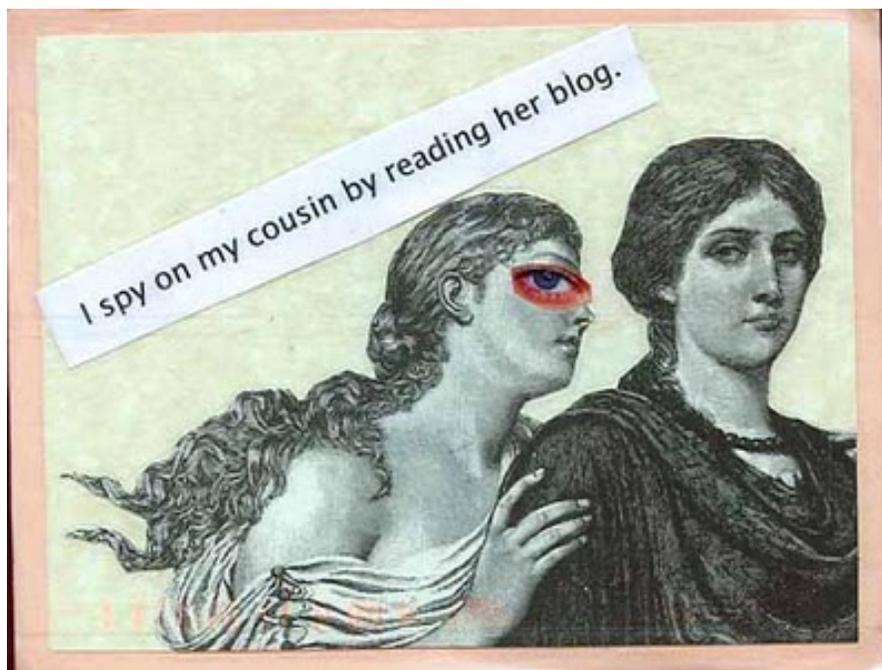
Figure 36: Anonymous. blog.jpeg

The final postcard in this set, Figure 37, has its ephemeral qualities set in the use of the word "around" and what that means, not only to the composer, but to the audience as well. The postcard is designed with a graphic text of a photograph of a smiling elderly woman behind a young girl, holding her cheeks up in a smile, with each of their eyes blacked out with a strong black line. The location seems to be an institutional room (a school, church, etc.) where uniforms are stored on a moving rack. The alphabetic text consists of handwritten text in both thin black ink and thicker blue ink. The blue ink is used for emphasis. In terms of space, the composer indicates that the proximity to others, specifically his/her family. While this may put a distance between the composer and audience, the use of the word "around" indicates an inclusion. There is vicinity, a designated space that the composer has implicated as being a difficult space.

Figure 37: Anonymous. smiling.jpeg

Space is a complex concept to define. Whether it is in trying to understand it as a connection between a place and the people who have frequented that place, between the idea and reality of a connection, or in the loosely defined "spaces" of online environments, space becomes as ephemeral as the ways in which we can define, label and try to connect with it. In this section, I've shown how different ways of thinking about space create habitus, connecting the composer with audience, whether the postcard is written to a specific audience or not. I've discussed how the idea of space shifts depending on the composer's creation or on the way the audience perceives the message. The interlacing of space and habitus is a way of connecting that transcends a physical artifacts, but includes ideas of connection -- much like the remediation of the postcards.

138

Place

Place is a concept that is vastly more tangible than space. In most cases, there is

a connection to the place, something that ties the idea to the physical site. In the

postcards in this section, it's no different. The postcards point to places, whether

by name, imagery, or description, to define the topical place. Because of this, a

connection between habitus and place is also more tangible. Given that many

places have common meaning within the very naming of the place gives a place

habitus. In this section, place is defined by two sub-categories: 1) Specific:

places are named specifically; 2) General: places are alluded to and/or shown

without naming them. The remediation of these postcards places even more

emphasis on the knowing of places, and of shared experiences in the knowing of

places. Whereas a traditional postcard may imply a connection with a place

(whether the postcard is from that place or not, have postal imprints from a place,

or some other connection), remediated postcards make a place instantly

accessible to a wider audience who may never have had a connection to the

place at all except through the postcard. Given that some of these postcards in

this sample are not traditional postcards, the connections to place become more

tangible because of the material connections to the ideas of the postcards

(materiality of the postcards will be explored further in chapter six).

Specific Places

In order to understand how habitus is connected to place, the clearest connection

is to show a direct, specific example of place. In this set, each of the postcards

has a very specific setting, which is often made explicitly clear through the

graphic text, but sometimes through the alphabetic text as well.
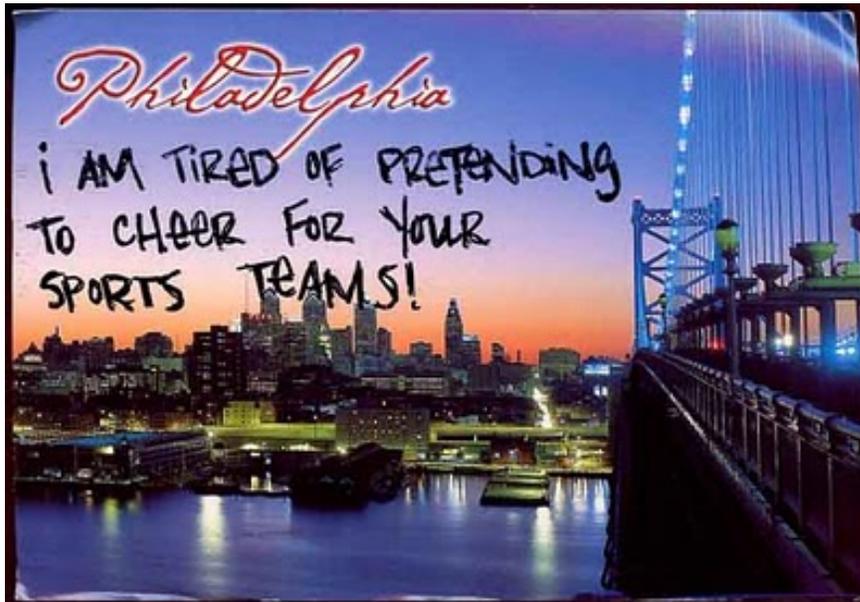
Figure 38: Anonymous. eagles.jpeg

The first postcard in this set, Figure 38, is as specific as the postcards can be. A

traditional postcard from the city of Philadelphia, this postcard shows the skyline

of Philadelphia with the word "Philadelphia" as a part of the printed postcard. In

fact, the connection to the city and its alphabetic message seems so ingrained in

the way an audience might view it, the filename for this postcard is eagles.jpeg[19].

The alphabetic text is written in black ink that has been traced over several times.

The implied connection between the alphabetic text and the graphic text is that

the composer has had to cheer for Philadelphia teams and would rather not. In

addition, the communal connection to the message is embedded in the view of

Philadelphia. The view of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, as taken from Camden,

New Jersey, is a sight millions of people see daily on commutes as well as the

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[19] Although were I to create a filename for it based on a sports team, I would have chosen the Phillies over the Eagles.

millions who have passed through the area from New Jersey to Pennsylvania (or vice versa)[20]. It has become an iconic view of the city, connecting the idea of the city with the city itself.

The second postcard in this set, Figure 39, is indicative of iconic connections between place and habitus for several reasons. The postcard, a receipt from Tiffany & Co. in New York City, is composed of the whole receipt, including the sales representative's name, the merchandise purchased, and the total of the receipt ($18,748.88)[21]. The alphabetic message is written in a simple blue ink reminiscent of a ball point pen -- which almost seems out of place on a Tiffany receipt, as if two worlds are colliding. Not only is the receipt from Tiffany & Co., but that it is the Tiffany's located in New York City is important. This is a store that has been featured in many popular media productions, including both print and video advertisements, movies, and television shows.

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[20] I drove on this very bridge in June 2012 and saw this view myself.
[21] The naming of this postcard by the curator seems to be associated to the total price. I can think of no other reason for the name "tiffanyfuck.jpeg."

141
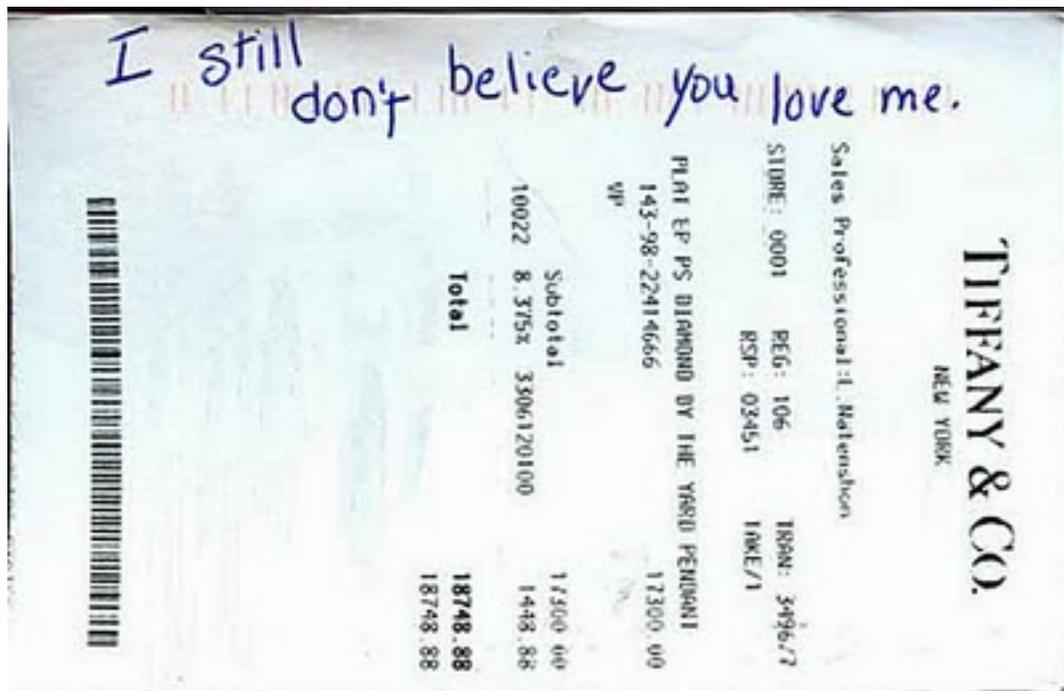
Figure 39: Anonymous. tiffanyfuck.jpeg

The connection between the place and the symbolism of the place would not be lost on most audiences, but especially those in Western cultures. The connection between affluence and Tiffany's is ingrained in popular media and, thusly, within the communal consciousness. That the total price is included increases that understanding. Like the image of Philadelphia, the image of Tiffany's is one that millions of people know: the storefront with small windows that showcase special jewelry. This is also a place in which even the boxes that the jewelry is sold in are iconic. The branding of Tiffany & Co. has become a part of popular memory.
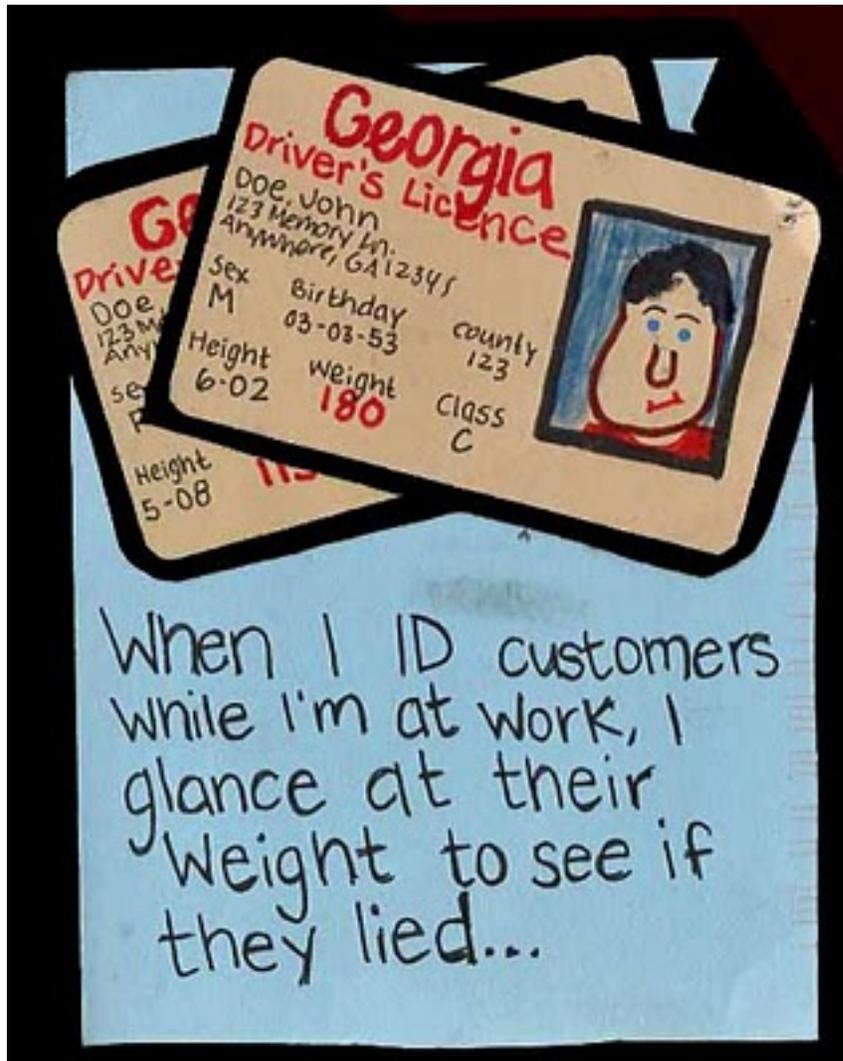
Figure 40: Anonymous. georgia3.jpeg

The final postcard in this set, Figure 40, is slightly different than the previous two.

This postcard is a complete composition designed by the composer from the

alphabetic to the graphic texts. Each element is designed to construct the

message in a certain way. The postcard comprised of a drawing of two Georgia

driver's licenses and alphabetic text written in print using thin black ink. While this

postcard does not evoke communal memory or connection in the same way as

the two previous postcards, it has the connection to the state's name that can produce visceral response in an audience. For instance, my first thought when seeing this, especially because Georgia is prominent in red ink, was of Georgia peaches. My association with Georgia is the media reproductions of peaches since I haven't been to Georgia since I was a very young girl. This composition leaves the connection of place to a more abstract way of thinking about the place, other than as a state in the United States (rather than the nation-state in Eastern Europe). The abstract connections means that while Georgia may have iconic placeholders in communal memory-making, in this postcard they become secondary to the message. The place is important enough for the composer to include it, but not important enough for it to change the way the message is read -- whereas in the previous two postcards, the implications of the connections to place could very well change how the messages were read.

When a specific place is named, it is common to place an idea, a memory, an image with that place. In doing so, however, the audience automatically adds additional information to the message that may not have been intended by the original composer. The additional information may completely change the way the message is read and, therefore, become an entirely different composition within the audience's framework of viewing the artifact. But when a specific place is not named, the way the audience views it can be shaped in different ways. It may signify that despite digital remediation, certain features about postcards and

about human communication remain stable.

General Places

In this set, the sample postcards speak to the generality of place. The places in these postcards could be anywhere similar: a ski lift, a Middle Eastern city, a psychiatric hospital. The exact locations are not important in these examples, but the ideas behind them are. The ways we understand place becomes more important here than it is in the Specific set because of the ways we can generalize about place rather than have a specific idea of the place with all of our preconceived ideas about that place included in our reading of the message.
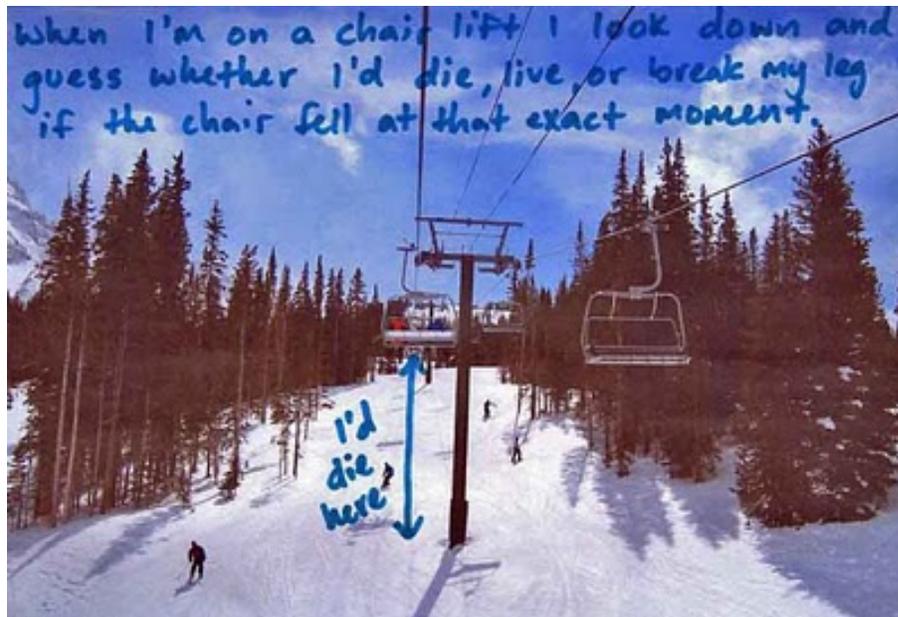
Figure 41: Anonymous. live.jpeg

The first postcard, Figure 41, exemplifies the idea of a general place creating a location but not a designation. This postcard is composed of both alphabetic and graphic texts. The graphic message is a photograph of a ski lift in a nondescript location with what appear to be lodgepole pines (indicating the mountainous

western United States). The alphabetic text is handwritten in blue ink that is similar to a fine gel pen or felt tip. The alphabetic text is divided into two parts: the first is the main message; the second is a line graph indicating how the main message would affect the composer. Understanding ski lifts, the trajectory of a ski lift, and the dynamics in which the chairs lift from the ground would be the areas in which some prior knowledge could assist the audience in understanding this message, but it's not completely necessary because of how the composer created the postcard. However, understanding the mechanics of a ski lift does add to the impact of the message and a comprehension of how the composer could come to the conclusion in the message. What's important in this example is that it's not about a specific place like Vail or Aspen, but about the ski lift, the connection between the composer and the ski lift, and the ideas that the composer has when riding the ski lift.

The second postcard in this set, Figure 42, could be identified by the spires in the city[22], but this would not be common knowledge among most Western readers of PostSecret.com. The implications, however, are what are most important in this postcard. The postcard is comprised of a photograph of a the spires of buildings of a non-specific (to this postcard) city and an alphabetic text that is typed in a white serif typeface which is divided into two sections. The top section is located in the sky of the graphic text, which seems to connect with the idea of clouds in

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[22] I did an image search with the postcard in Google Image Search and found this to be the Mosque-Madrassa of Sultan Hassan in Cairo, Egypt.

the sky and a connection with the main message, which is the bottom section of

the alphabetic text. This text is in a larger case of the same font and overlays a

building, making it emphasized to a greater degree than the smaller font above.

The place of this postcard is not as important as the idea of the place. It implies

that the composer is going to the Middle East because s/he was told to go by

his/her God. Instead of being truthful about the reason, the composer uses

culture as an excuse. As habitus, this could not be more important.

I told everyone that I was going for the culture

because they'd think I was stupid

if they knew that I'm really only going   because

I believe God told me to
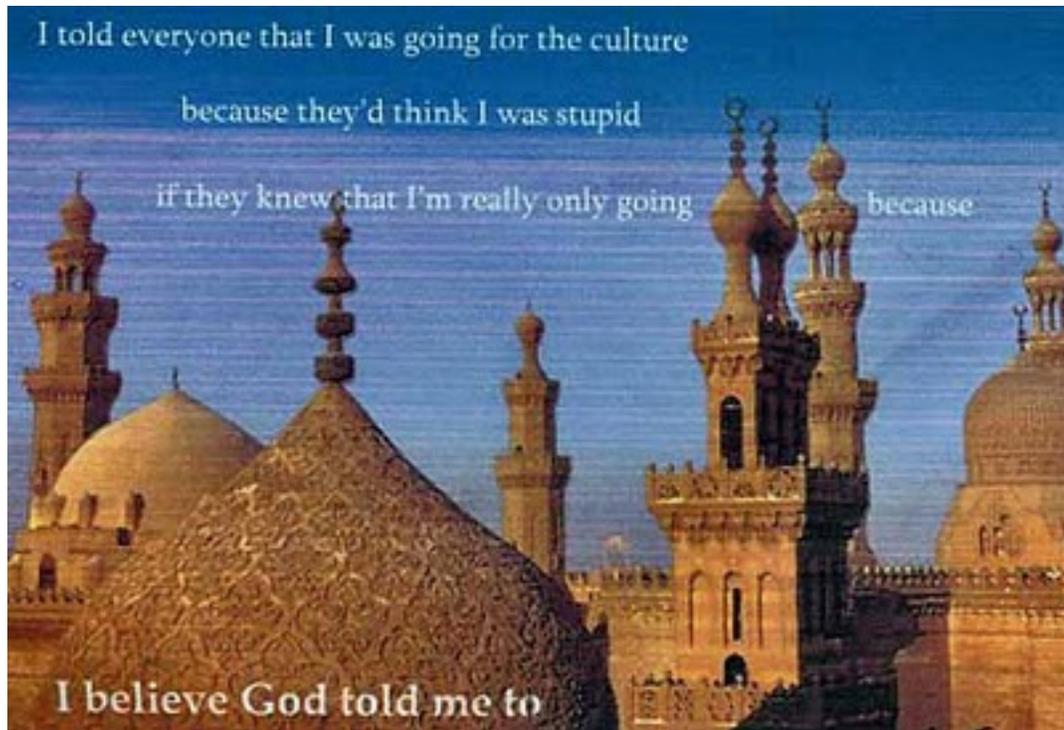
Figure 42: Anonymous. East.jpeg

The connection between the cultural iconography of Middle Eastern spires to

religion and culture have international implications that will be read differently

depending on where the audience is located, how they read the connections, and

what their connection to the concepts are. In this case, audience perception is

more akin to the specific place than to the previous general place postcard.

However, given that the Middle East, as a geographic location holds iconic

imagery for people around the world, it would be nearly impossible to have any

image of places within the Middle East that didn't have preconceived

connections.
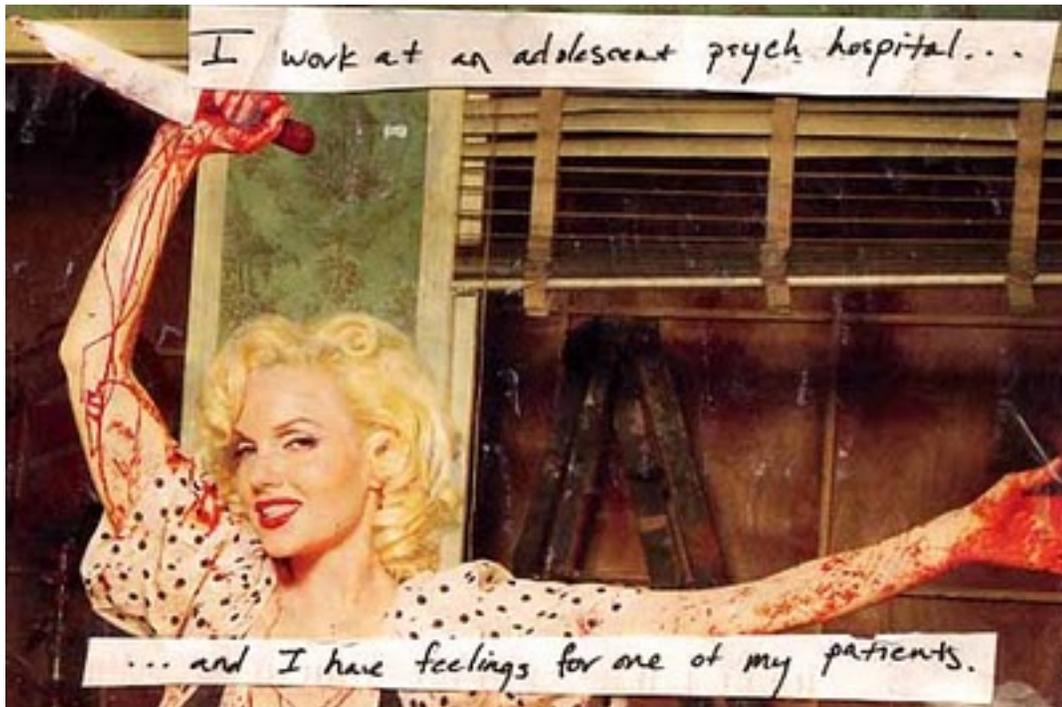
Figure 43: Anonymous. psych2.jpeg

The final postcard of this subsection and of the chapter, Figure 43, is probably

the most disturbing because of the composition choices the composer made. The

composition consists of an graphic text of Marilyn Monroe, an iconic figure,

covered in blood and holding a knife in her hand while smiling and two sections

of alphabetic text written in cursive handwriting in black ink on a white

background tinted with red smudges affixed to the top and bottom, respectively,

of the postcard. The place of the graphic text is not immediately apparent. It is

the alphabetic text that gives the graphic text context. The implication is that this

scene is in an adolescent psychiatric hospital. That the specificity of the hospital

is not named is not important. The implication is that a taboo is being committed -

- that an employee at the hospital has an emotional attachment to a patient in the

hospital. The taboo is implied by the place, the occupation of the composer, the

blood and knife in the graphic text, and the status of the adolescent as a patient.

In this case, understanding the connection between Marilyn Monroe and mental

health, the portrayals of mental health facilities in popular media, as well as

portrayals of unconventional attachments within popular media will enhance the

reading of this postcard. Habitus, in this postcard, will increase the discomfort

that an audience will have with the postcard, which may be the ultimate objective

of the composer.

As seen in the General subsection of Place, the specific location in question is

not necessary to construct habitus. In fact, the association one makes with non-

specific locations may be greater, but may also require a greater knowledge

outside of the place in order to have a more in depth understanding of the

postcard.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have examined habitus and its relationship to remediation in

regards to different types of postcards. The shift from traditional to digital

mediums has changed the way the postcards in this chapter are viewed because they require some level of cultural understanding, connection to composition elements, or understandings of extraneous elements that may be alluded to within the postcards but that are not explicitly portrayed. Were these postcards sent as traditional postcards, the composer would most likely construct a composition that the audience, a single person in a one-to-one traditional postcard correspondence, would understand. But because these postcards are composed for an infinite audience, my analysis suggests that the composers have made certain assumptions on how the postcards will be viewed and what those responses will entail.

In the next chapter, I move beyond the ideas of ethos and habitus to look more closely at the postcards themselves rather than their connections between the composers and audience. In chapter six, the filenames, the construction, and connections to public memory are explored through the lens of materiality.

Chapter Six: Materiality

As seen in Chapter Two, materiality is a term that has been used in various ways to describe different ways of "being" when it comes to computer-related artifacts. Typically, those who work in computer sciences look to computer hardware as the material items of their research. This line of research and understanding of materiality is, of course, important. The hardware we use shapes the ways we communicate, how we design, and how we extend ourselves in digital settings. However, this type of inquiry negates materiality if the artifact isn't physically tangible. Rhetorical research, however, considers both the hardware materiality (the conditions and contexts of the artifacts) and the materiality of the artifact. This approach is important in analyzing digital artifacts, and especially remediated artifacts, because there is a connection between the artifact and the audience and how the audience will perceive that connection.

Remediation necessitates a call to understanding materiality, especially in the case of PostSecret.com, because of the very tangible materiality of the postcards when they are created up to the point they are digitized. The traditional format of a regulation postcard consists of ephemeral, paper materials. Many of the postcards from PostSecret.com are made of similar materials, with few others constructed out of alternative materials. Because an audience will typically understand how a postcard, or paper looks, feels, and functions, the connections between habitus and materiality are important. The cultural connections to

151

postcards, in understanding the materiality of traditional postcards, functions as a

type of public memory in understanding the materiality of the digital postcards. As

I show in this chapter, the postcards extend that materiality into the digital space.

The postcards shown in this chapter are representative of the whole data set of

the postcards coded as materiality. They were chosen as the best

representatives of the concepts that emerged from the analysis of this set.

Out of the total 251 postcards that were retrieved from the PostSecret.com

archives, 63 were coded as demonstrating, primarily, characteristics related to

the concept of materiality.

Table 3: Materiality in PostSecret

Topic within Materiality	Number of Postcards in Classification
Material Conditions	14
Filenames	14
Site Design	N/A
Public Memory	49
Layering	26
Drawn	15
Multimodal	8

In PostSecret

In light of the constructs of materiality in Chapter Two and the discussion above

on how materiality fits within digital settings, I now turn to the case study of PostSecret.com. While digital analysis had functioned well enough to help me determine the themes for Chapters Four and Five, the final analysis chapter eluded me. I could not see more information with the data in the flattened perspective shown on a computer screen. The postcards didn't seem "real" enough for me to grasp what they were trying to tell me -- and I could feel that there was something more to them than what I was seeing. In order to understand what that something was, I went to Kinko's to print, in full color, the entire set of postcards, each postcard on it's own page[23]. As soon as I opened the box the printed postcards had been placed in, I could see what that final analysis was supposed to be. My response was immediate and visceral. It was as if I could feel the postcards as the full-bodied original postcards they were because they were clearer, normal sized, and reminiscent of my connection to traditional postcards. The physical format of the postcards embodied the material form of postcards. It wasn't until later, when I was doing the formal analysis of the copies of the postcards that the sub-categories emerged, and only then as I spread the postcards out to look at them did I see other themes emerging within materiality. Because the postcards are a curated collection in which the curator receives the physical postcards, digitizes them, and posts them online, the physicality, at least in part, is important in the choosing of the postcards. Because of the ways the postcards are physical, my questions became not only

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[23] I don't necessarily recommend this to future researchers, especially graduate students. 251 pages of full color printing is very expensive, cumbersome, and overwhelming at times. But it helped me determine what I needed to see in this set.

about the ways the postcards were displayed, but also how the connections to wider audiences became important and what made them so.

Material Conditions

The material conditions in which the postcards are found is as important as the postcards themselves. By material conditions, in this case, I mean the filenames attached to the postcards as well as how the postcards are displayed on the screen. As far as the hardware for the postcard support, they are built on the Google Blogger system, which is a blogging website that allows for different types of posting, typically chronological, integrated RSS feeds (which is how I conducted my research), and is powered by Google in one of their server warehouses. In this case, the actual servers are not as important as the ways the postcards are displayed. For this section of the chapter, the filenames are analyzed as well as two perspectives of the PostSecret.com website -- both from a site perspective and from the RSS feed perspective in which I obtained the postcards. In order to obtain the filenames, from the RSS feed archives I saved the files (postcards) exactly as they had been loaded, with the filename intact. I saved them in each week's grouping so they would retain their continuity with a particular theme the curator may have intended.

Filenames

As I have assessed in earlier chapters, some of the filenames of the postcards do not seem consistent with the postcards themselves. The naming conventions are often obscure and confusing and, when doing rhetorical work, can have the

ability to shape the ways a researcher (who is probably one of the few people who would ever look at the filenames since they aren't visible on the site) sees the data. In most online environments, curators take care to use naming conventions that will assist them in finding the information later and will help them in organization offline. It seems, in this case, however, that filenames are arbitrary and not consistent whatsoever. In this section, I will show two sets of postcards: 1) Consistent: filenames which seem to fit the postcards and, 2) Inconsistent: filenames that seem to be at odds with the postcards. As I reviewed the postcards for this section, I realized that all 251 of the postcards would fit in one of these two categories, but for brevity, I condensed it to the most typical samples. It is important here to note that all of the filenames are .jpeg, rather than the typical .jpg, which is consistent in how older Windows machines saved JPEG files. The ways that files are named in online environments is what is called formal materiality: systems used to create, define, and contain digital artifacts (Kirschenbaum, 2012).

Consistent

The first postcard in this section, Figure 44, is a simple postcard that is layered paper that doesn't look to be the size of a regulation postcard. The background is green with graphing paper affixed to it. The alphabetic text is handwritten on the graph paper with black ink that looks as if it has been retraced a few times. The message is a second person statement made to a specific audience, rather than the whole of the PostSecret.com audience. Rather than being a secret, it is a

155

command. The filename for this particular postcard is "stop.jpeg."
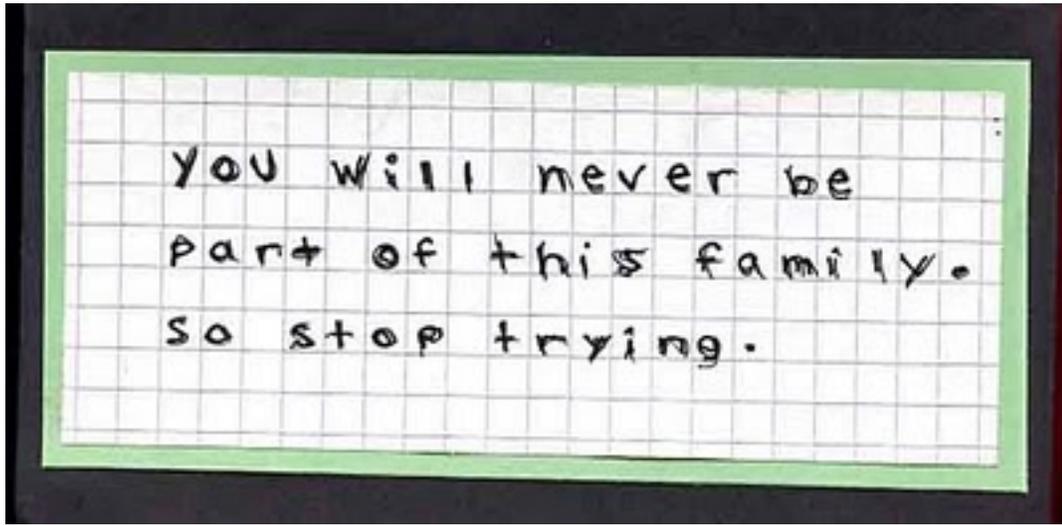
Figure 44: Anonymous. stop.jpeg

In this example, the filename was taken from the alphabetic text on the postcard. This is fairly consistent with the majority of postcards in the entire data set. It is, however, interesting to contemplate why one word is chosen over the others. In this case, a word from the middle of the text was extracted to become the filename. In addition, it is the one command verb in the composition, making it a more interesting word to choose.

In this second example, Figure 45, the postcard is similar in size to a regulation postcard. The postcard seems to be plain paper that has been colored blue along the edges, leaving the center of the postcard plain for the alphabetic text, which is handwritten in both blue, for the salutation, and purple for the message. The message, written as a letter, is also an accusation rather than a secret --

although it is more of a comment to someone, a specific audience, that may be difficult to say in person. This postcard, like the previous one, pulls a specific word from the postcard. In this case, the word is a negative word from the middle of the text, using the filename of "scam.jpeg." The question that arises from this postcard is why other words, that would also associate well with this postcard, weren't chosen. For instance, "honest" would give this postcard a different appeal than "scam" does.
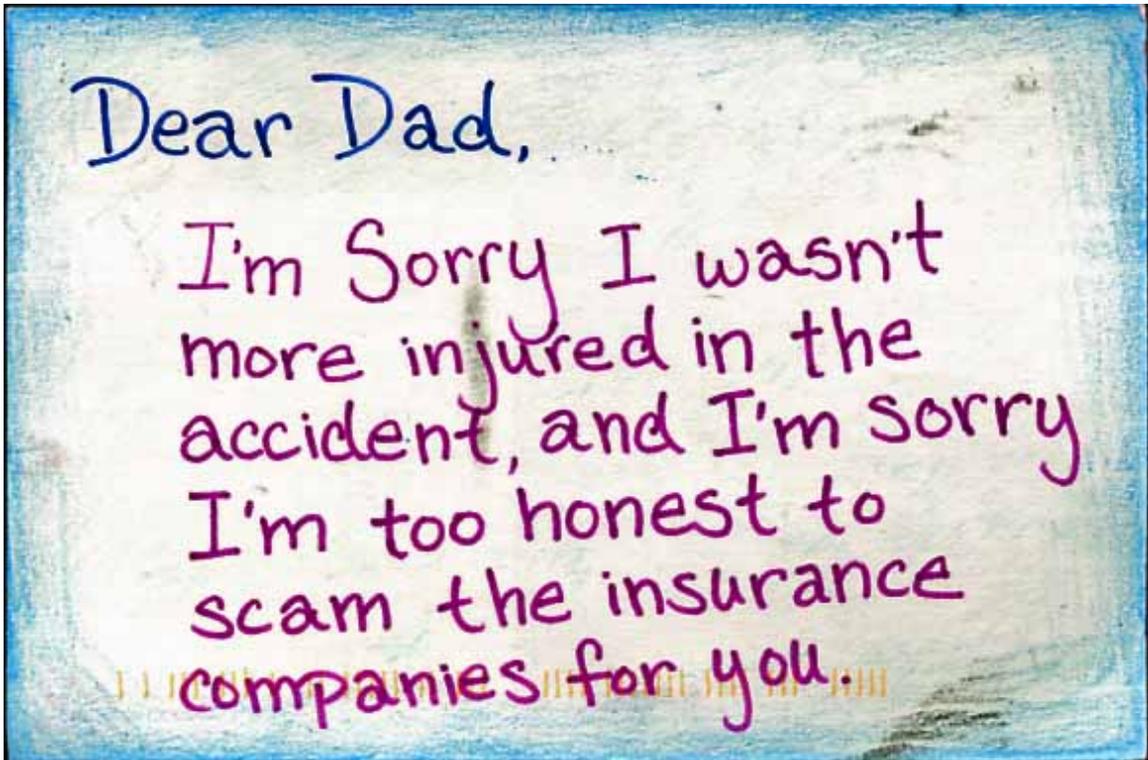

Figure 45: Anonymous. scam.jpeg

The final postcard, Figure 46, could be a regulation postcard. The postcard has a white background with a graphic text. The graphic text is both a word, "thanks," and what seems to be confetti in the colors of the word sprinkled around the

postcard. The alphabetic text is handwritten with a thick felt-tip type black ink.

This example, like the previous two, is a message written to a specific audience

rather than to the entire PostSecret.com audience.
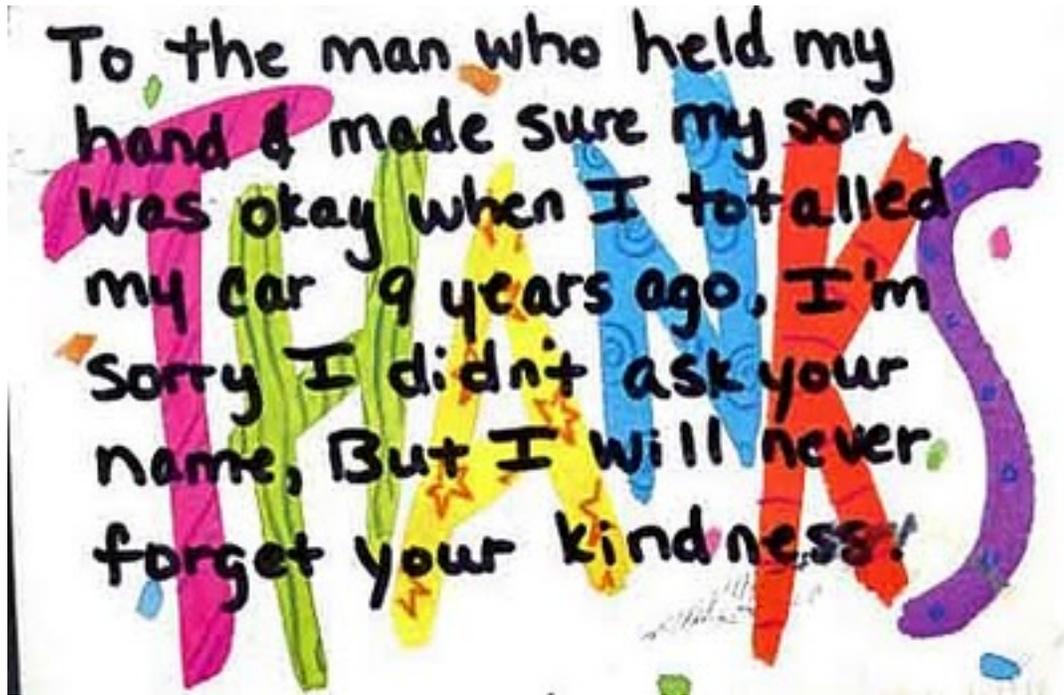
Figure 46: Anonymous. thanks.jpeg

It is, again, not necessarily a secret, but perhaps a regret in not doing something

when the time was right to do so. The filename in this example is taken from the

graphic text, rather than the message, "thanks.jpeg, which is more consistent

with the general naming conventions, but different in that it is not pulling from

what the composer wrote, but from the graphic instead.

Inconsistent
The naming conventions in this set are interesting. They do not follow the

conventions defined above, but, instead, make a comment about the postcard

itself.
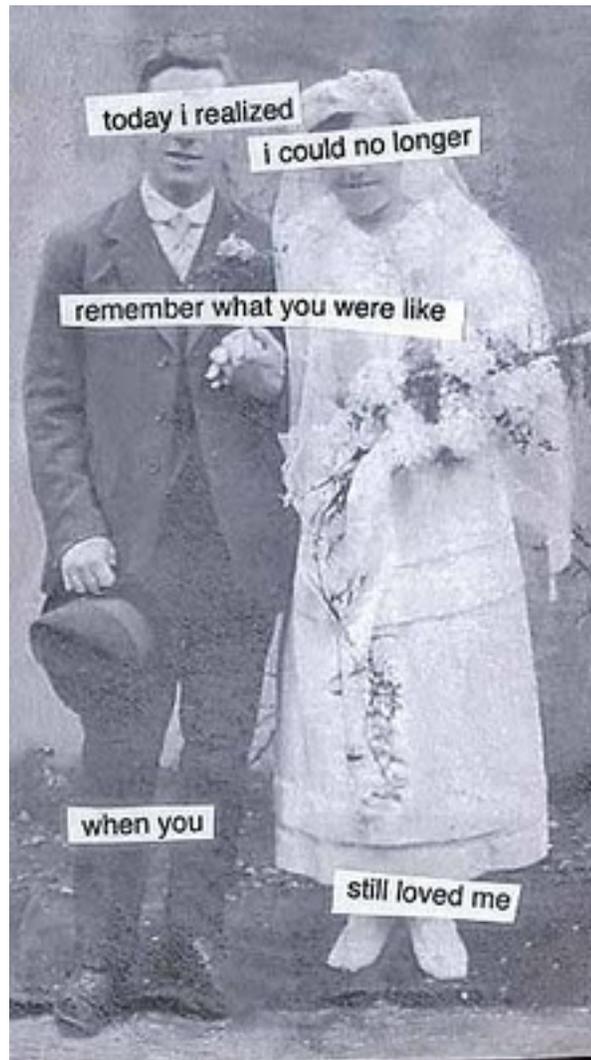
Figure 47: Anonymous. levatation.jpeg

The first postcard's filename, Figure 47, is humorous in its intent, but the

postcard itself is not humorous. The postcard composed of an older photograph

with what seems to be a turn-of-the-20th-century wedding couple. The alphabetic

text is divided into several pieces of white paper with typed sans serif words

affixed in different areas of the postcard. The message, again, is one written to a

159

specific person rather than the whole of the PostSecret.com audience. The

filename for this postcard is a comment on what the curator saw in the graphic

text: levatation.jpeg [sic]. Like many older photographs in which people were put

on different levels of risers to create consistent height, the effect is one of

levitation. However, in this postcard, the naming convention detracts from the

composer's message and focuses on one attribute of the graphic text. This

necessitates the query on why naming conventions are important and how they

contribute to a data set rather than detracting from it.
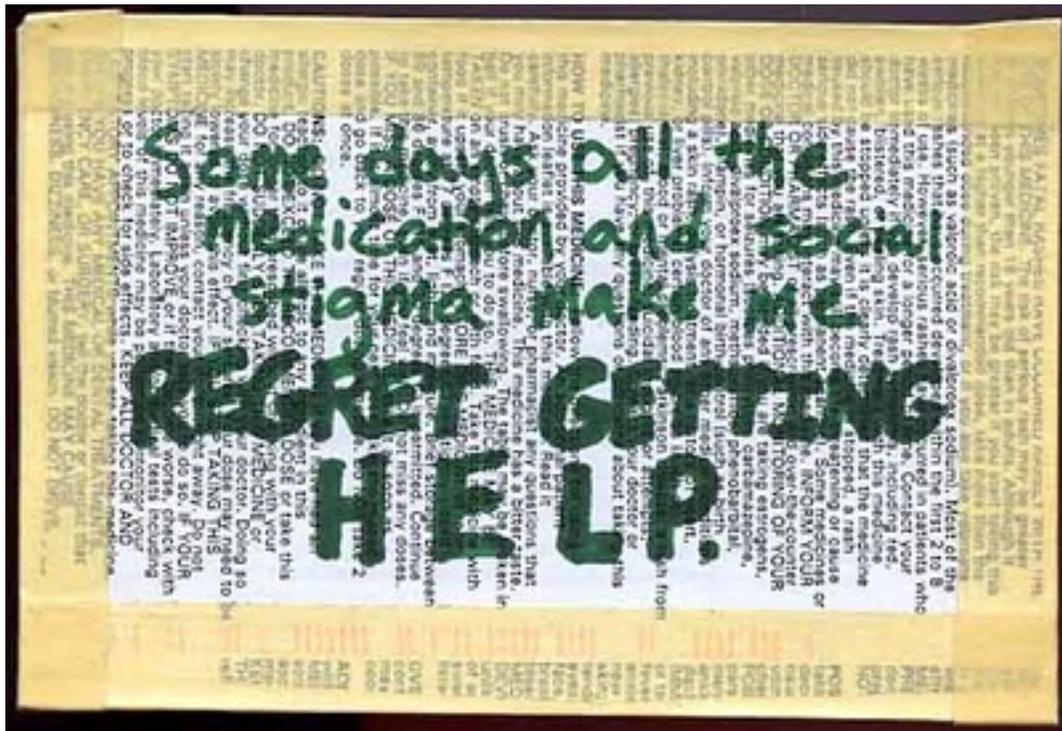

Figure 48: Anonymous. nothingpretty.jpeg

The second example, Figure 48, is one that could fit into the Public Memory

section of this chapter as well. The postcard is composed of what looks like the

inserts that come with medications, surrounded by masking tape. The insert is

written over with alphabetic text in green felt tip that is smaller and thinner on the

top, getting larger and thicker toward the bottom of the message to create

emphasis. The message, which is, in this postcard, a statement regarding the

composer's lament on receiving help, is a serious confession. The filename,

"nothingpretty.jpeg", is confusing. It doesn't seem to fit this postcard at all, and

detracts from how a reviewer may view it. It's hard to know if this is a statement

regarding the message itself or is commentary from the curator on how the

message makes him/her feel. But because it doesn't extract information from the

postcard, nor does it reflect the theme of the postcard, it defies a consistent

naming convention.
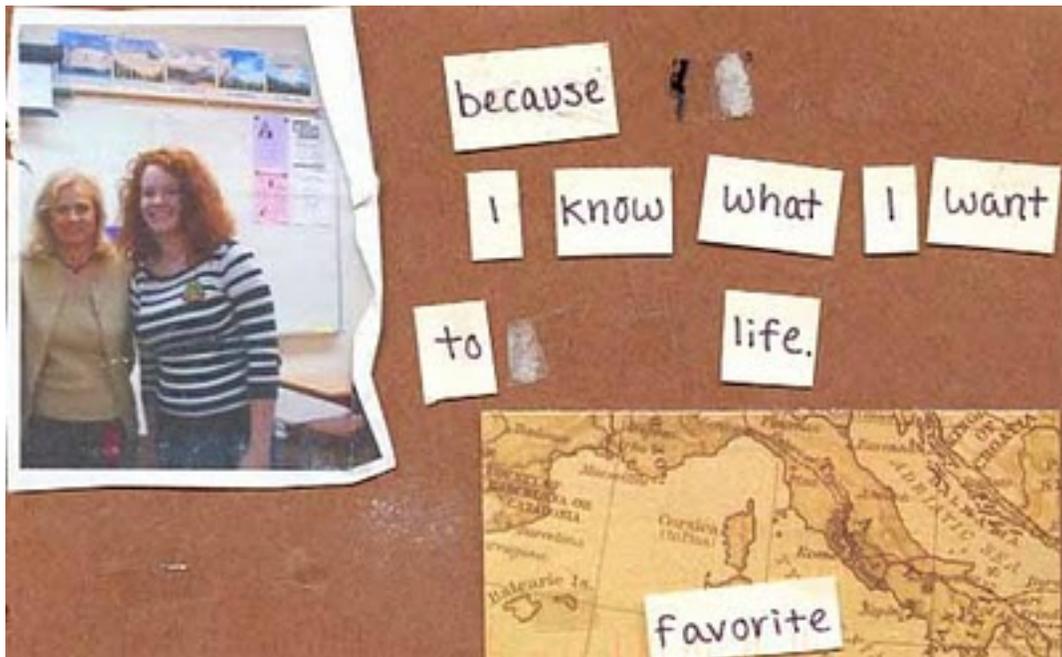
Figure 49: Anonymous. teacher2.jpeg

The final postcard in this section, Figure 49, is a collage that seems to have

either lost some of the affixed information, or the information was intentionally

removed. The postcard is composed of a brown background with several elements affixed. In the upper left corner is a graphic text of two women standing in front of what appears to be a whiteboard. The upper right contains several single alphabetic texts written on white paper that is affixed in different intervals. The bottom left looks like something was attached, but that is no longer there. The bottom right is a map of Italy with one alphabetic text attached over Cyprus. In this case, the filename, "teacher2.jpeg[24]," is probably a safe assumption, given the whiteboard, but it is still an assumption. If naming conventions had held as they did in the previous section, it would have been more appropriate to use one of the words from the alphabetic text, such as "want" or "favorite" rather than base the name on conjecture and to have more than one file with the name of "teacher."

As seen throughout this section on filenames, there is some consistency throughout the site. However, when those conventions are disregarded, it shifts the rhetorical statement of the postcard from the original composer to the curator who is making a statement above and beyond the curation. This act is one that only occurs when an artifact is remediated from a traditional format into a digital format because it necessitates the handing off of the artifact from the original composer to the curator, who then makes value judgments of the artifacts to place them according to the curator's scheme. This form of materiality is founded in how systems define the artifacts and how the systems in which they are placed

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[24] "teacher1.jpeg" is also in this set, which is not always the case, and is featured in Chapter Four.

– the hardware/naming – constitutes a formal materiality.

Site Design

The scheme the curator chooses is important in how the postcards are "read" and what the rhetorical appeals of those postcards would be in the original groupings, rather than as individual artifacts. In this section, the focus is on how the postcards are displayed on PostSecret.com. As a part of the material conditions in which the rhetorical artifacts are housed, the different ways of reading PostSecret will be explored and analyzed.

PostSecret.com site

The PostSecret.com site has changed little in the ensuing years since my research data was posted. The style of the site is an adapted blog site that contains a single post, rather than a chronological posts throughout the life of the blog.
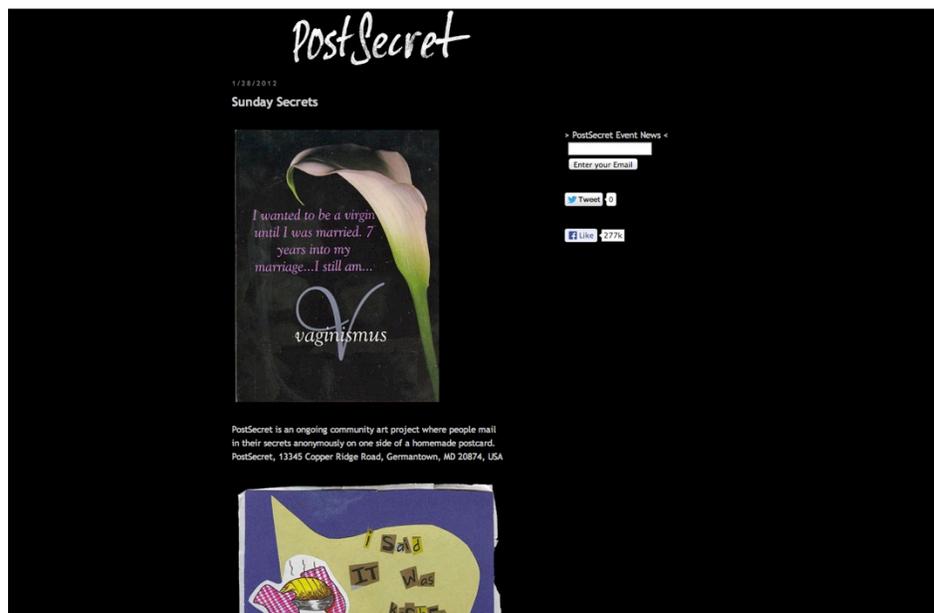
Figure 50: Screenshot of PostSecret.com

As you can see in Figure 50 from January 28, 2012[25], the site contains a smaller

header with the site's name, followed by blogging convention dates and titles of

posts (in this case, that date and the consistent "Sunday Secrets"). Postcards are

posted in a linear fashion with some commentary about the site below the first

postcard (this is consistent with every week's posting). There is a text box on the

right to sign up for the PostSecret newsletter with a Twitter Tweet button followed

by a Facebook Like button.
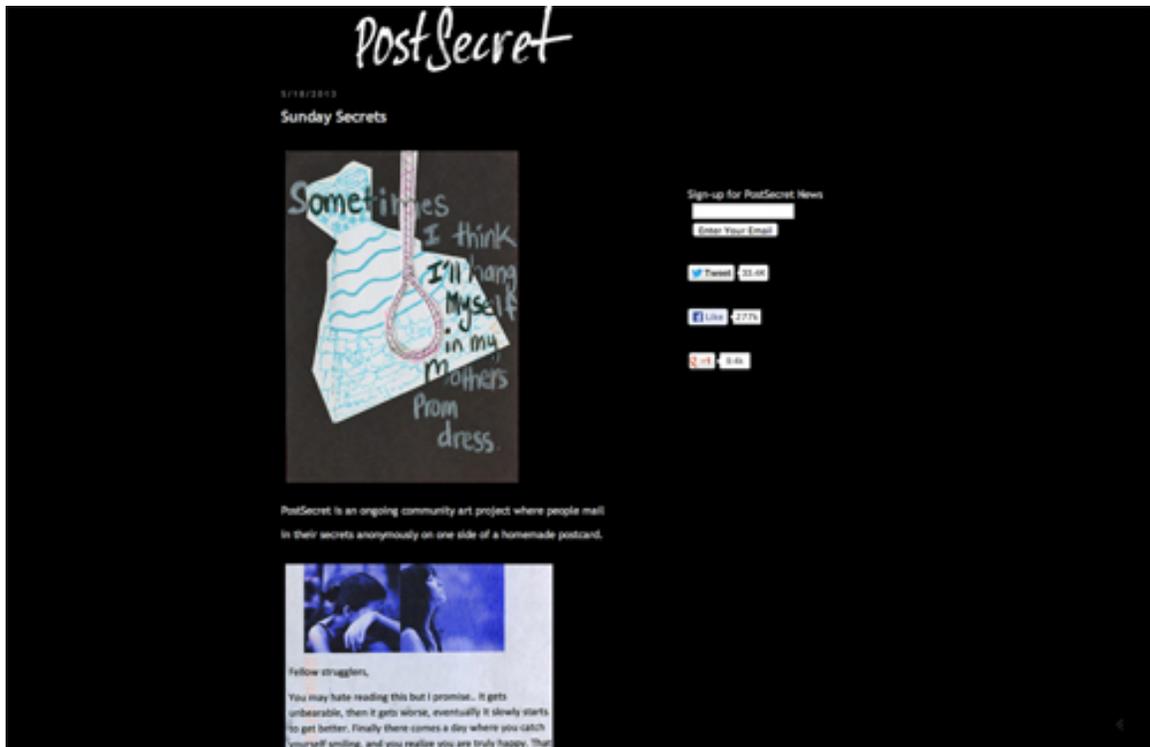
Figure 51: Screenshot of PostSecret.com

This site is so consistent that even more than a year later, on May 19, 2013

(Figure 51), the only element that has changed, aside from the postcards

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[25] I was not able to take screenshots from the time of the data since the curator deletes all of that
information within one week of posting.

themselves, is that an additional button has been added for Google+. What should be noted is that commenting is not allowed, which is also a blogging standard, and there is no commentary about the postcards. They stand on their own, in conjunction with one another.

The site has a look consistent with many sites from the early years of blogging[26] in that it has a two-column style with one large column and a sparsely constructed right column all in one color, black. Black was a common background color early on because it seemed to create a more consistent background for images that brought out the colors of the images. Today's designs typically avoid all black backgrounds, especially with white fonts, to ensure that audiences with sight disabilities can view the sites well.

Because the site is designed in this very linear fashion, it encourages the audience to read the postcards in the order in which the curator posted them. While audiences could skip around, scrolling through the page (it is typically a very long scroll, another attribute that has been changed in modern site design), it is often easier to go in order since the audience has to pass each of the postcards in scrolling anyway.

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[26] There is a long history of blog design, but this is a very early look at what blogs looked like. Today's blogs are very dynamic and have coding (responsive design) that allows them to be seen fully on various devices like laptops, tablets, and smartphones better than older blogs could be seen.

RSS Archives

The Google Reader archives is one of the only pre-designed ways that archival

information is able to be retrieved from older RSS feeds. That Google is closing

Reader down in June of 2013 will create a hardship for digital researchers who

rely on the tool for archival research. Google Reader allows a researcher to scan

back, over the years, to pull data as it was posted during the time of the feed. In

this case, I rolled my feeds back to the earliest dates available in Google Reader.

For this section, I have pulled screenshots taken of the earliest date, 2-18-07

(Figure 52), and the last date of my data set, 2-17-08 (Figure 53), to show how

the information is displayed in the RSS feed, as opposed to the site.

Figure 52: Screenshot of Google Reader RSS feed for PostSecret 2-18-07

The feed is very similar to the site -- and is something a site's owner has the ability to control (how much of a post is viewable, whether to show images or not, how many posts to show at once in a feed, etc.). Since this was taken in the PostSecret feed, there is no need to have the site's title on each post. The title of the post, Sunday Secrets, is located at the top of the post in a blue type, while the date is in grey to the right of the post title. The same information available on the website, included the text written under the first postcard, is also available in the feed. The feed for the last set of postcards is exactly the same as the first feed. The ways the information was posted was not changed at the site level (and, of course, there is consistency in the ways Google presents it because these were all retrieved on the same day (April 30, 2011).

Figure 53: Screenshot of Google Reader RSS feed for PostSecret 2-17-08

What is different between the actual site and the RSS feeds are significant, even

if small in number. When viewing through the feed, the audience does not see

the PostSecret header which is, for all intents, the branding of the site. In

addition, the feed does not reproduce a site's colors, but, instead, posts

everything on a white background (and this is true whether the site has any other

color). The ability to sign up for the newsletter, which was not available at that

time, is also not shown, nor are any of the social media sites[27]. The implication

with the feed is that the information within the page is of utmost importance -- not

the superfluous design choices or website/blog additives[28]. It is important to note,

however, that when reading through Google Reader, all sites look exactly the

same. The name of the post is in blue at the top, the date is to the right in gray.

The post content is below in whatever fashion the site's curator has chosen to

display it in. So were I to compare PostSecret with another postcard site, the only

differences would be in how the content was displayed according to the site's

protocols, not Google Reader's.

Public Memory
In this section, habitus plays a part in how materiality functions. Because I printed

the postcards out, the ways in which they were created became more apparent.

The details of the postcards became more apparent. Where tape was used to

affix an element could be seen. Where damage was done in transit was much

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[27] During the dates of my data, Twitter was very young, Facebook did not have the saturation it does today, and Google+ wasn't even a sparkle in the eye of Sergei Brin.
[28] It could be argued, and has, that the design influences how a site is read and removing design choices influences audiences in different ways.

more apparent. What embeds habitus in the concept of materiality in this section

is the understanding of how certain things feel when we touch them, an

understanding of the everyday artifacts that we see, feel, touch, and smell. We

know that paper will have a smooth feel, unless crinkled, and then it will have a

rise in it or creases that must be flattened. It is this type of communal knowledge

in a sense, the sense of touch, which influences this section of the chapter. As I

will show, it is the very material aspects of the postcards that make them more

accessible and attractive to an audience because they appeal to more than the

sense of sight. The act of remediation makes this type of materiality possible by

extending the material tactility into the digital. It is precisely because of the

digitization and the sharpening of the materiality in the postcards that the digital

artifact "does not exist independently of its physical media (Heath, 2011). The

artifacts in this section are the best examples in the data set of how the sense of

touch can be evoked by a digital artifact.

Layering
In this set, the artifacts all have some level of layering, either by creating

collages, affixing other elements over one another, or combining elements in

some ways as to compose an effect of layering. In Figure 54, the composer

created a postcard from a piece of lined paper, a square pink sticky-backed

paper (with handwritten alphabetic text, a plain piece of white paper (with

alphabetic text), and a darker element, maybe a photograph, used as a border.

What makes this postcard unique and remarkable, however, is that there are

creases in the paper. It is apparent that the paper went through some process

that pushed the paper in on itself. But the creases are so apparent that they have

changed the shape of the paper, put creases through words, and have become a

part of the composition. As I looked at the printed copy of this postcard, I wanted

to smooth out the creases, to make the paper more smooth. It was as if I could

feel the creases even though I couldn't.
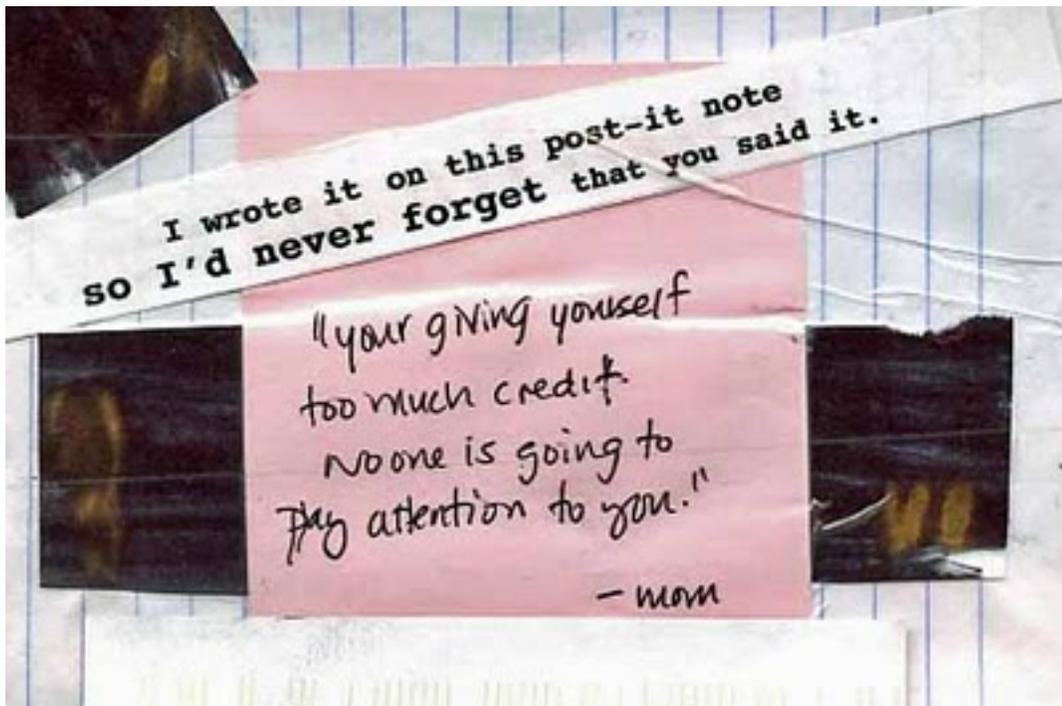
Figure 54: Anonymous. mom.jpeg

The second postcard in this set, Figure 55, is one that will be recognizable to

older audiences and to those who are interested in retro photography[29]. This

postcard is composed of a Polaroid picture taped to a piece of white paper. The

Polaroid, a blurry image of a smile, is placed to the left of handwritten alphabetic

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[29] There is certainly a large Polaroid resurgence with the Impossible Project.

text, which is on the paper. The alphabetic text is written in a thick black ink and extends parallel to the length of the Polaroid. While this postcard is less layered than the previous postcard, it is similarly material for several reasons: 1) Polaroids have a distinct feel and smell: they are thicker than normal paper, have some give in them, and smell like the chemical processes that make them (even years after they've been created; 2) there is transparent adhesive tape affixing the Polaroid to the paper on the top and bottom of the postcard: this type of tape has its own specific feel, usually smooth; 3) the paper itself is distinctive because of its uneven edges. This postcard, while digital, is a sensory item appealing to touch, sight, and smell.
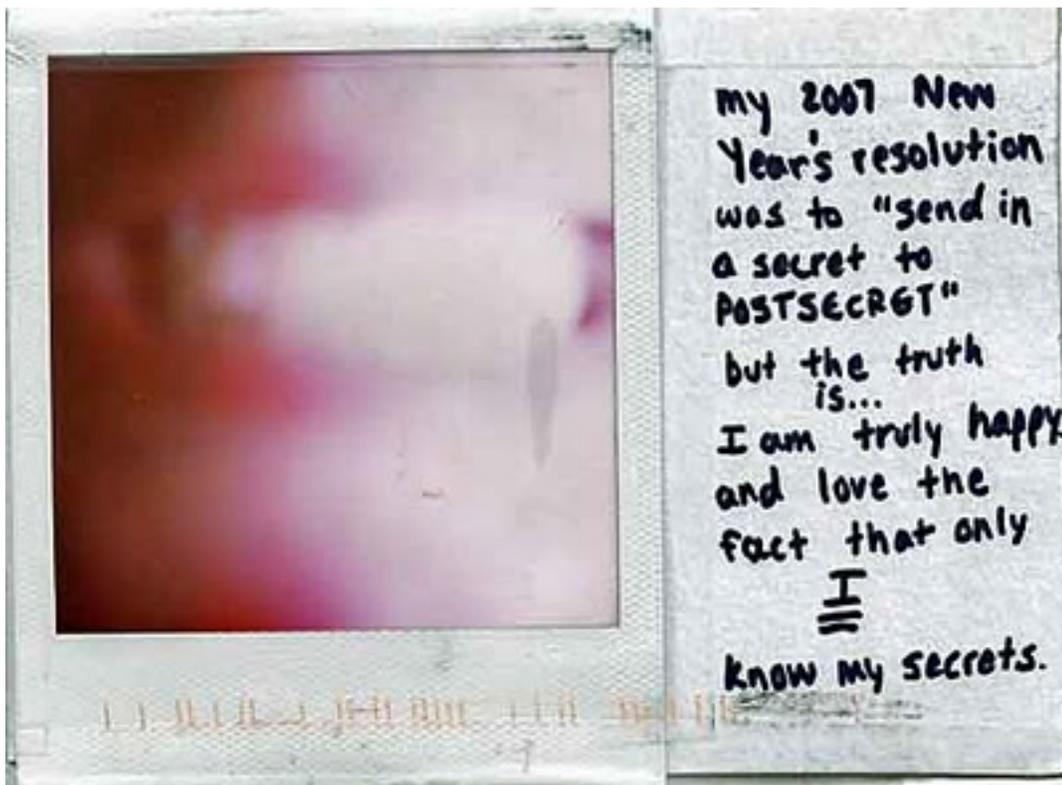
Figure 55: Anonymous. smile.jpeg

The final postcard in this section, Figure 56, is one that requires the audience to

understand how certain textures feel and what their properties are when layered.

This postcard is composed of white paper with a photograph on top of the paper.

Figure 56: Anonymous. iwashappyonce.jpeg

Masking tape overlays the photograph, allowing a very opaque view of the

photograph below. Alphabetic text is written on the masking tape at the bottom of

the postcard. The alphabetic text is very light, as if it may have been written with

an ink pen that was losing its ink. In addition the masking tape is overlapped,

creating lines over the photograph that cannot be seen through. At the bottom of

the postcard, the card has been damaged the tape has been pushed up, creating

172

creases and bumps in the postcard. This postcard creates an unmistakable connection to the roughness of masking tape, how that feels when it's layered (much thicker), and the smell of masking tape. In addition, the "bubble" of masking tape at the bottom of the postcard has its own connection to the touch sense and how that manifests.

Layering is, with its roots in the physical world, a clear connection to materiality and how we connect with artifacts that contain layering. When the elements that are used are those found in nearly every household, at least in the United States, there is an understanding of the physical properties of that artifact, that they have distinctive and shared properties. When we look at artifacts that are made in different ways, they affect different senses.

Drawn

Whether we doodle, color, or create masterpieces, drawing is a part of life from very young ages. We associate drawing with a connection to ideas like family, homes, hearts, and more. Drawing is as essential to how humans communicate as alphabetic text. In this section, I look at three images that increase in sophistication of the skill required to create them. The degree of sophistication creates a level of materiality – the more basic, the more comfortable audiences are with understanding how they are created. As the postcard's level of sophistication increases, it becomes more difficult to connect with the materiality of the postcard.
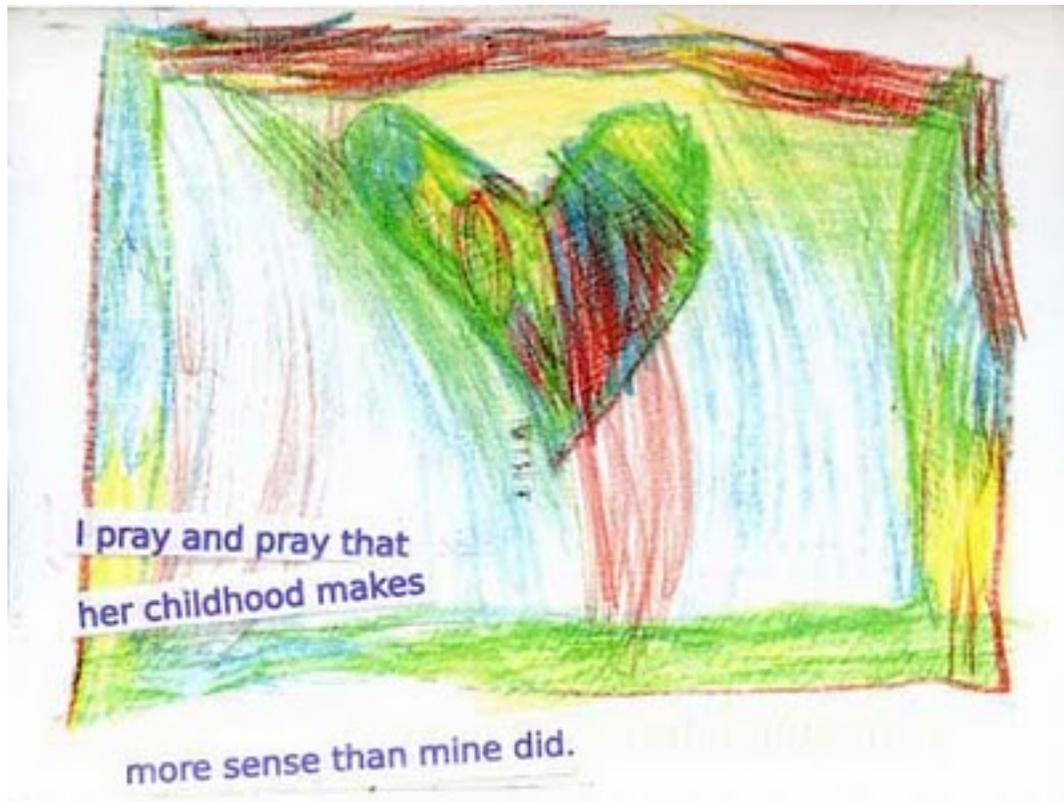
Figure 57: Anonymous. pray1.jpeg

In Figure 57, we see a very simple hand drawn image. The postcard is a single

piece of white paper with a multi-colored thick-bordered box drawn on it. In the

upper center of the box is a hand drawn heart that is outlined in green and filled

in with multiple colors. On the bottom left of the postcard are three lines of

alphabetic text that have been typed in a purple sans serif type on three separate

pieces of paper that are affixed to the postcard. The image of the heart, one

children learn to make at a very young age, seems to be directed toward the

"her" (the child) of the alphabetic text. We can't know if this was drawn by the

child or by the composer, but its connection to childhood is clear. In addition, that

this is the type of image that many people have drawn as children, the

connection to materiality becomes more apparent. This is an image we can imagine picking up our crayons or colored pencils to create for a Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, or Father's Day card. This might even be something created in school for our parents. The visceral connection between drawing and the audience is the materiality of this piece.

When you told me to wash the blood out of the sheets I wasn't sure it was rape.

Whatever it was, it didn't wash out.
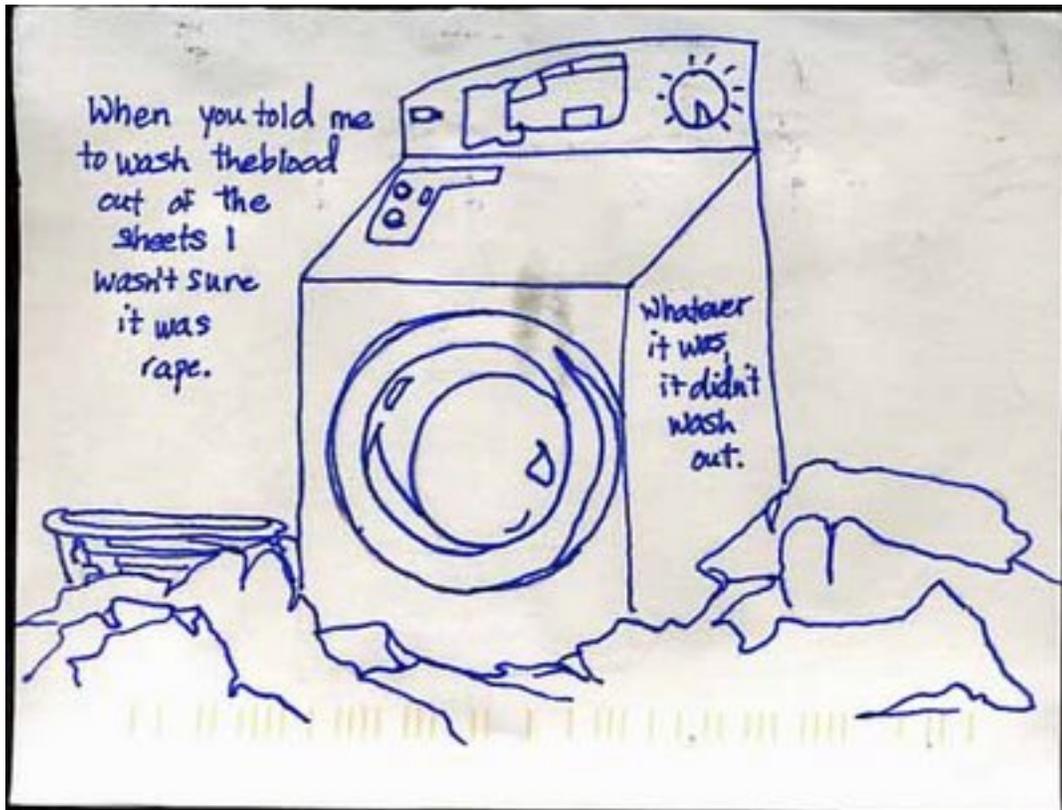
Figure 58: Anonymous. washer.jpeg

The second postcard, Figure 58, is a more complex drawing, but draws on the same visceral connection as the previous postcard. The postcard is composed of a line drawing of a washing machine surrounded by a laundry basket and what appears to be piles of clothing. The alphabetic text is written in the same ink used for the drawing and is placed in the white space to the upper left of the washing

machine and within the right side of the washing machine (rather than the white

space to the right, which connects what is written to the machine itself). This

postcard is written to a specific person, not the PostSecret.com audience as a

whole, but its appeal will be universal because of how the message is presented.

Not only will many people connect with the concept of removing stains in laundry

(there are entire advertisement campaigns centered around this concept), but

many will appreciate the difficulty of drawing perspective in block-like drawings

(something taught in art classes in grade schools -- where these classes are still

available) and the complexity of drawing in a way to make a common object clear

to the audience. Because this is drawn in ink (and what appears to be exactly the

same ink in the roller ball pen I am using right now), the simplicity of the drawing

and our connections with drawing connect us in material ways to the postcard.
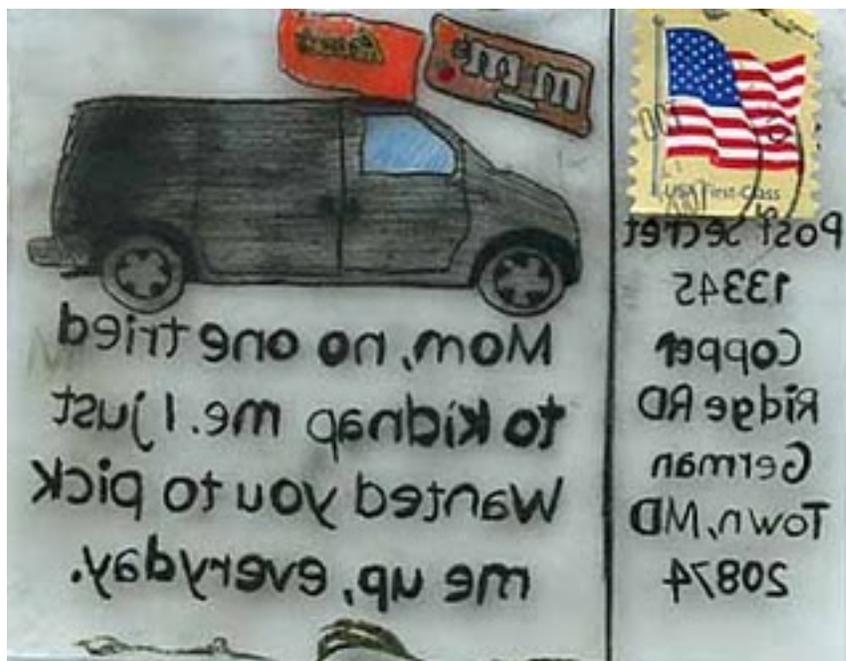
Figure 59: Anonymous. k.jpeg

176

Figure 59 is much more complex because of how it is drawn and displayed. The postcard is composed on what appears to be vellum[30]. The postcard has been posted backwards, and since vellum is opaque, it can be read through the paper. The composition has created a postcard-like style, using one side for the message and the other for the address of the recipient. The drawing is of a black van with candy wrappers drawn above the van. The alphabetic text is handwritten in a black ink below the graphic text. While this may appear to be less material than the previous two examples, the hand drawn graphics connect it to the others. In addition, the use of vellum makes this a very material artifact. Vellum is difficult to write on (it smudges easily) and it has a specific material composition. When older, vellum cracks. It can be quite brittle. It is also typically thin and tears easily. The surface of vellum can be very smooth or slightly rough in texture. Audience members who have worked with or around vellum would recognize and respond to these properties.

While materiality is more difficult to show in hand drawn images than in layered images, it is still an important part of understanding our connections to the postcards in their remediated forms. This way of understanding them as if we were the composers, or understanding how the composers create them, speaks to the enduring physicality of them as they are remediated. It allows an audience to connect on a deeper level than as if it were a flat digital artifact.

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[30] This paper is akin to the types of paper used in modern scrapbooking that is typically called vellum.

Multimodal

While all of the postcards on PostSecret can be considered multimodal (they
incorporate multiple modes of composition: alphabetic, graphic, and more), the
examples in this section take multimodal further. The composers of these
postcards use everyday items to construct the postcards to create a material
effect for the audience.

Figure 60: Anonymous. ok.jpeg

In Figure 60, the composer created a postcard from Starburst candy wrappers. The wrappers are placed in random order, and are both horizontal and vertical in placement. The alphabetic text is written in a thick black ink that is placed both at the top left and the bottom right of the postcard. Clear adhesive tape covers much of the postcard. Despite the tape, the wrinkles in the candy wrappers can be seen raising different parts of the postcard. The waxiness of the candy wrappers has also caused the alphabetic text to take on faded qualities compared to when it is written on the tape. That the composer chose to use a candy wrapper that is not only popular in the United States, but is also popular in Europe and Japan, creates a connection with an international audience. In addition, this ensures that a large number of the audience will be familiar with how the wrappers feel, connecting them in that more visceral way to the composition. The tape contains a similar communal materiality. Transparent adhesive tape is used around the world, in various contexts, and would undoubtedly create a tangible connection to the postcard. That this particular artifact contains several elements that are nearly universal in appeal makes this a good example of how multimodal digital compositions contain material connections.

The second example in this section, Figure 61, is also comprised of a common element: newspaper. This postcard is composed with the layering of newspaper print with a human heart drawn on the layered newspaper. The bottom half of the

179

heart has had the newspaper print removed to create a white space in which the

alphabetic text is handwritten in black ink that has been traced over (there are

shadow elements of the tracing). The use of newspaper in this compositions

gives it a universal appeal. Nearly anyone who saw this composition would

appreciate the difficulty in working with newspaper print, from it's ink properties

that smudge easily, to the thinness of newspaper that tears easily.

Figure 61: Anonymous. heart.jpeg

Very little of the text in the newspaper is smudged. The newspaper itself looks as

if each tear was intentional instead of accidental, increasing the complexity of the

design of this composition. The connection between the materiality of traditional

newspapers to the digital representation in this postcard is the sense of touch

and understanding the properties of newspaper.
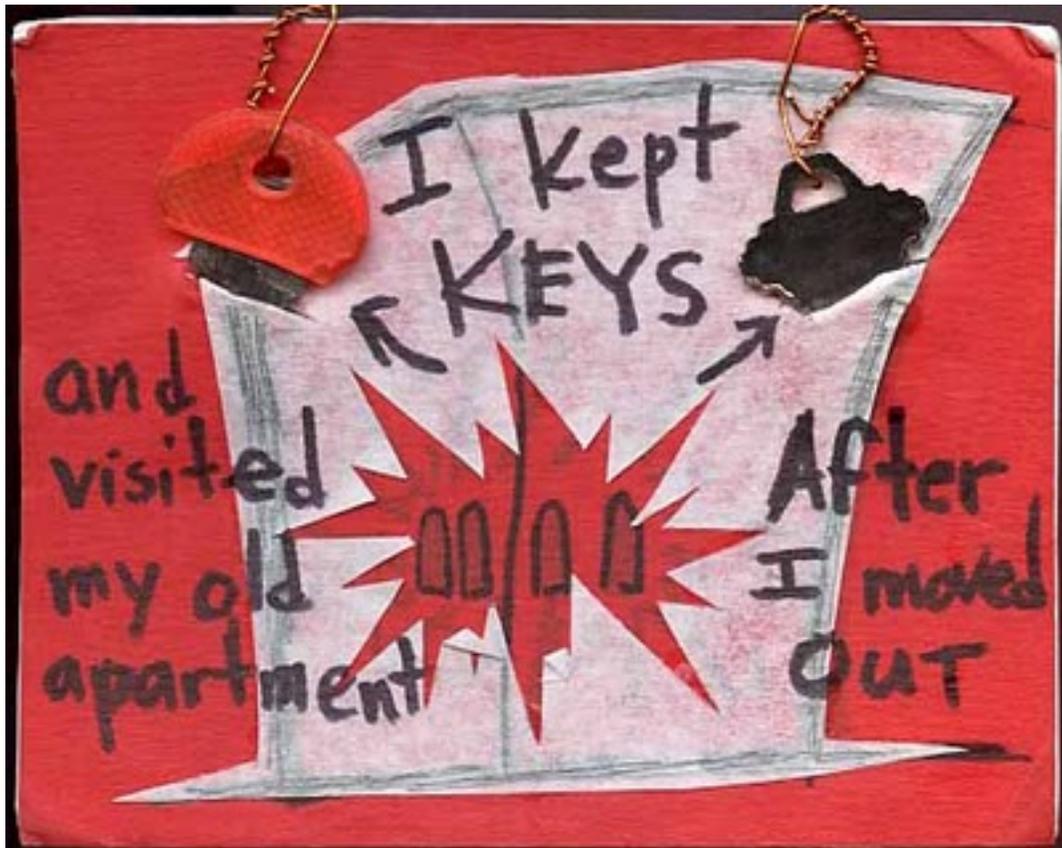
Figure 62: Anonymous. keys.jpeg

The final postcard of this chapter, Figure 62, is constructed of multiple materials.

This postcard is composed of a red background that seems to be affixed to a

white background (the top corners are folding over, revealing a white underlayer),

with a cut-out drawing of a building on white paper affixed to the center of the

background. Within the cut-out drawing, slots have been cut and keys have been inserted into the slots. The keys are definitely three dimensional, one with a key cover and both with copper wires attached through the keyholes. Alphabetic text is written in thick black ink around and on the cut-out section. The multidimensionality of this composition creates a materiality for an audience who has an understanding of these types of house keys, the ways paper fold up at corners, and the ways copper wires twist. When I looked at this composition in digital form, I wanted to reach through to grab the keys. This compulsion increased when looking at the composition in paper format. I understood how the keys would feel between my fingers. I knew the tightness of the twisted wire from experience. Every piece of this composition appealed to my physical self, making me an accomplice in the piece as someone who understood the physical materials of it (if not the sentiment).

The multimodal postcards in this section take the materiality of PostSecret postcards to another level. These postcards, above all others, create a physical space that includes the audience. They require audience connectivity to the artifacts in order to make their point. That understanding of what the artifacts are creates the material space.

Chapter Summary
Materiality of digital artifacts is often something that requires a researcher or audience members to see the physical artifact in order to understand the

materiality of it. Although I am not writing a digital humanities dissertation,

discussions in the Digital Humanities about preservation and material forms, as

ways material forms can be made available to audiences, is of interest here. In

the case of PostSecret, the materials used in the postcards create materiality.

Whether this is in the computational design/function of PostSecret and the

postcards or in the design and composition of the postcards themselves,

PostSecret provides a unique perspective of how a multimodal composition

becomes a material object. The remediation of the compositions in this case

necessitates materiality -- it is extended from the traditional format to the digital

because of how audiences connect with certain elements, whether it is paper, the

act of drawing, or the way a metal key feels in one's hand, the connections with

PostSecret are tangible. As previous chapters have shown, remediating a well

known traditional print medium into a digital space does not do away with the

traditional rhetorical characteristics of that original form, and in some cases,

digitization enhances these features.

In the next chapter, I will explore the analysis done in Chapters Four, Five, and

Six. I will offer a look into the remediation within current online environments and

will, finally, provide a look to the future of remediation and how it will affect further

research in the area of multimodal compositions.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In this chapter, I will explore the interpretations of the previous analysis chapters, further discuss remediation in other online environments, and provide a pathway of further research in the area of remediated multimodal compositions.

As I worked through each of the chapters, the ways I read the postcards changed. Part of the change was in how I was reading the postcards, part of it was from outside influences (my advisor, the RSA workshop, colleagues, and so on), and part of it was in how I engaged with the postcards. This final way of engaging encouraged me to look beyond the digital and meet the compositions in that boundary area of remediation. The postcards then became not only digital compositions, but became something of their former selves that was rooted in the physical world. They took on greater meaning, constructing a space that was neither physical nor digital, but somewhere in-between in the remediated area that held no restrictions on time, space, or place. This, I think, is one of the greatest contributions of remediation. Artifacts, like the postcards, are contextual and important in their context, but are also compositions in their own right that could stand alone and create cultural significance.

In order to see how my analysis has contributed to understanding remediation from a long-lived traditional communication medium to an instantaneous digital medium, it's important to revisit my initial research questions.

1. How do alphabetic and graphic elements, viewed separately and in combination, demonstrate the rhetorical significance of the PostSecret postcards?

    a. Identity and ethos: How are identity and ethos constructed through the postcards?

    b. Space and Place: Why is online posting significant in PostSecret? How do composers connect with ideas of space and place?

    c. Materiality: How is materiality affected by the remediation of the postcards?

In this section of this chapter, I will explain how I answered these questions.

Ethos

When first approaching ethos, and in the subsequent years in which I've presented on this topic and written about it extensively, my understanding of how ethos is developed in the postcards of PostSecret has grown. Not only was this influence by the in depth analysis, but in the juxtaposing of the ethos postcards to those of habitus and materiality. In doing so, ethos became even more apparent. It also became apparent that how ethos is represented in other online communications like blogs, social media (Google+, Twitter, and Facebook), and sites like Tumblr (a mix between blog and social media sites), is different from

185

the postcards on PostSecret – even when the composers on the other sites are anonymous (which they aren't, usually – especially on the social media sites). While it is true that some of the most accepted theories on ethos development are at work with the case of PostSecret (that the lack of social cues encourages different motives than those of offline communications, for example), it is also important to note that the composers of the PostSecret postcards often had specific audiences in mind, even while creating the postcards for a site that is broadcast to a worldwide audience.

The relationships the composers have with their intended audiences is often much important than the implications of the postcards being posted to a broader audience. The composers create more specific messages, incorporating specific cultural references to convey their messages. They used their identities, their connections to ways of being, and ways of being seen, to develop complex messages that, while personal, were also anonymous. To create this complexity in a single artifact, and to do it in the various ways the composers did suggests some understanding of how the various components of the compositions would come together to affect their audiences. Even when those components did not seem to connect to one another, the whole composition conveyed ethos and a connection between composer and audience.

The composers seemed, as a whole, to be intent on using specific concepts to

convey ethos – and this was typically something that connected the composer to his/her physical self, whether it was a drawing, a photograph, or some other image of physicality. This conveyance tied the concept of identity to the concept of ethos within the ways that the composers defined themselves and their authority. Each postcard within the set used some way of conveying ethos by establishing the composer's identity within the alphabetic, graphic, or multimodal composition. While this is not true in all of the postcards, the connection is used more often than not, implying that while the postcards would be digitized, the original composition was an extension of the composer's self, that a connection between the composer and composition was tangible at the time of creation.

Habitus

This section is, perhaps, the most complex because the concept of habitus is pervasive within each composition in the ways they are composed, created, and disseminated. Because habitus incorporates the use of the everyday as cultural signifiers, it is necessary to look into the compositions to see how they are constructed, rather than who is composing them. When we look at the postmarks, for instance, it is the inclusion of those that develops a fuller understanding of the composers and audiences (and that they are often one and the same) that make up the community of PostSecret. That postmarks from around the world are included in the weekly postings shows that place and space are important and yet ever changing, that boundaries of place become flexible, especially when the medium is digitized. The digitization of the postcards, the

187

remediation of them, creates a space in which place is at once accessible and tangible and yet isn't the nexus of importance that it may have been when postcards were first introduced in the 1800s. The postmarks imply a connectedness between nations, political states, the idea of place, but the postcards themselves imply connectedness between the people of those nation states, superseding the political boundaries, indicating that the virtual space in which the composers and audiences connect may be equally important to physical spaces.

However, if that space is not well defined, the audiences may not understand the connections to the degree the composer originally intended. As we saw in some of the postcards, the messages were culturally specific, and these may not translate well to international audiences. If this is the case, how then does the connectedness transcend place into space? In some ways, this is the crux of this dissertation. There may not be a transcendence, but, instead, the ever-present connections to the physical world may have some ways of binding us to the virtual, that a symbiosis between the physical and virtual is always inherent in communicating through the postcards on PostSecret. The very act of remediating the postcards necessitates a continuation of that binding, forever connecting traditional to digital, place to space, and physical to virtual.

Materiality
Materiality furthers the arguments that the physical and virtual are inherently

bound together in this case. As a natural progression, materiality brings together

the ideas of ethos and how the composer developed character, and habitus in

which the cultural significance of the postcard artifacts creates a connectedness

between composer and audience. The very materials of the systems and

postcards conveyed that the physical artifact was intentionally bound to the

virtual, that the remediation of the compositions not only extended the physicality

of the postcards, but, at times, enhanced the postcards' physical qualities to

make them material for wider audiences.

The ways that digital artifacts are stored, shared, and displayed are as important

as the artifacts themselves. The very naming of an artifact can give shape to a

different understanding of that artifact. It can affect the ways ethos is viewed, the

ways habitus is understood, and the final acceptance by an audience. Continuity

and consistency in both the naming conventions and site designs develop ethos

for not only the composers of the postcards, but for the community that revolves

around the site. When these are at odds, ethos is often damaged and habitus is

confusing. The material conditions of the site and its development are important

factors in how audience approaches the postcards.

The postcards themselves, and the composition of them, through remediation,

are often more tangible to a wider audience than they would be had they

remained traditional postcards. Because the digitization of the postcards retains

the physical depth of the composition, in both its physical shape and size, the sharpness of the digitization process enhances the materiality of the compositions. It is this enhancement that makes the connection between audience and composition, to allow for a more complex reading of the postcards, and to create a more unified understanding of the community that engages in PostSecret.

Remediation in Online Environments

In online spaces, multimodality has become the main way in which composers and audiences engage in communicating ideas. This may be best exemplified by the ways in which the animated GIF has made such a large resurgence in popularity in the last year. Tumblr, a site once known as a microblogging site that was not quite Facebook and not quite Twitter, has become the online home of the animated GIF. Entire sites are set up in Tumblr to produce, share, and disseminated animated GIFs around certain themes (including academic themes). Even mainstream media turns to Tumblr to find animated GIFs that will convey a message in the truncated, often humorous, multimodal medium. Twitter and Instagram have incorporated tools to allow composers to create filters on images, constructing ways of seeing and creating meaning through sepia and Polaroid tones. Facebook is on the verge of introducing new ways of presenting images and has, recently, incorporated large format images into profiles. Google+, since its inception, has placed a premium on image galleries and presentations of multimodal compositions as communication devices. Recently,

Google+ has incorporated new ways of editing digital compositions to produce more professional results.

While these examples are all indicative of how important multimodal communication is to online communication, they are not extending the concepts of tradition to digital remediation. Most often, the compositions displayed on these sites are taken with digital cameras, smartphones, or similar devices that automatically upload to the sites, displaying the compositions within minutes, if not seconds, of the original composing. Even when the sharing is not instantaneous, it is often a product of digitization-to-digitization processing. There is not connection to the physical making of the composition.

When there is a connection between the physical and digital creations, on sites like Life Magazine's Tumblr blog or the Slate's Vault, in which traditional film photography is digitized to present older images from the past, the connection between composer and audience is nebulous, and, most often, two-dimensional. Rarely are there sites like PostSecret that take what is made in the physical world, remediate it in a way that binds the physical world to the digital, and reproduces it for a wider audience. This is a unique process in PostSecret, but one that, I imagine, will become ever more important as so much of what we do becomes more and more digital and less remediated from the physical to the digital.

Future Research

In Remediation

The future of remediation is not in jeopardy, as I may have implied in the last paragraph. Remediation is occurring everywhere in digital spaces, from the animated GIFs to the Tumblr sites for Life and Slate. In many of these cases, however, it is a remediation of one digital form to another and rarely from a traditional form to the digital. Research in the area of remediation will, I think, grow in different ways depending on the different types of compositions. For instance, recently images from the Boston bombings were uploaded to Reddit where members studied, assessed, and deconstructed the images in order to assist authorities in finding the alleged bombers. During this process, digital processing, like circles, lines, and alphabetic texts were applied over the images to point out specifics within the images. There are already researchers looking into these artifacts to see how the remediated forms have affected the ways they are viewed, disseminated, and, ultimately, led to the capture of the alleged bombers. Digital remediation is alive and well and research in this area will only increase.

As more physical artifacts, like the PostSecret postcards, become digitized, the realm of research in this area will also increase. Indeed, the U.S. Library of Congress has also begun digitizing its vast archives of postcards from the late 1800s and early 1900s and posting them in online spaces to be viewed by worldwide audiences. These postcards offer a wealth of information for research

on how postcards from one era translate into another, how their rhetorical

appeals hold up, and why the shift in presentation matters.

In PostSecret

Research in the area of PostSecret is far from exhausted. Understanding the

entire PostSecret community and enterprise, assessing the curation of the

postcards (why and how they are chosen each week), how these postcards are a

cultural signifier to a grander aspect of sharing everything through social media

(private to public dialogues), and how emailed comments help to construct

different lenses of rhetorical analysis (comments have been saved in my data

sets) are all areas that could be studied within this data set alone.

PostSecret is more than this data set, however. It is a vast enterprise that

includes various websites, books, art exhibits, public and private talks (including

a TEDTalk), apps, and social media connections. The ways and approaches to

researching PostSecret are as extensive as the enterprise itself.

In Academia

In technical communication instruction, a key component of lessons is

understanding and working with diverse and complex audiences. The shift from

traditional to digital communications plays an important role in understanding

how complex understanding audience is, and how the differences may need to

be viewed in different ways because of the remediation of common documents.

Rarely do we see the use of memos in workplaces, but a clear shift to the memo-

like email has occurred. Understanding the ways remediation works between traditional and digital mediums, how it is conveyed to audience, and why this knowledge is invaluable in both the classroom and workplace experience, is important to what we do in our technical communications classrooms.

Finally, while this dissertation is not based in the digital humanities, many of the concepts that occur here are important in that realm. The concepts of ethos, habitus, and materiality play strong roles in understanding how digital communications occur. In addition, the work in this dissertation could have a place in digital humanities scholarship because of the ways it bridges the physical to digital environments.

Chapter Summary

The case of PostSecret and the remediation done while in the development of each week's postings provides invaluable insight into the ways rhetorical dynamics are established and continued from physical to digital environments. The means by which composers establish ethos, habitus, and materiality are continuity from the physical to the digital and enhance our understandings of what it means to communicate in various environments simultaneously. As we move forward, these understandings will be important in adjusting the ways we look at audience, composer, and purpose, and will affect the ways in which messages are not only created, but received.

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203

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