

“The Dark Sides of the Web”

Final Project Proposal Megan Hoogenboom

For my final project I want to continue my previous thematic projects. In my last project I have focused on Rotterdam and I have selected existing phobias to see what the most experienced phobias were. Then I made them Rotterdam specific, changed their name and added a location to it. This process and approach work best for looking at the phobias in a city, but now I want to take it to the net. The only thing that I can use from my previous project is the fact that people experience fears. Naming these fears gives people more awareness of their fears. The outcome was a series of 6 posters, divided in categories and the last poster was the Rotterdam specific one.

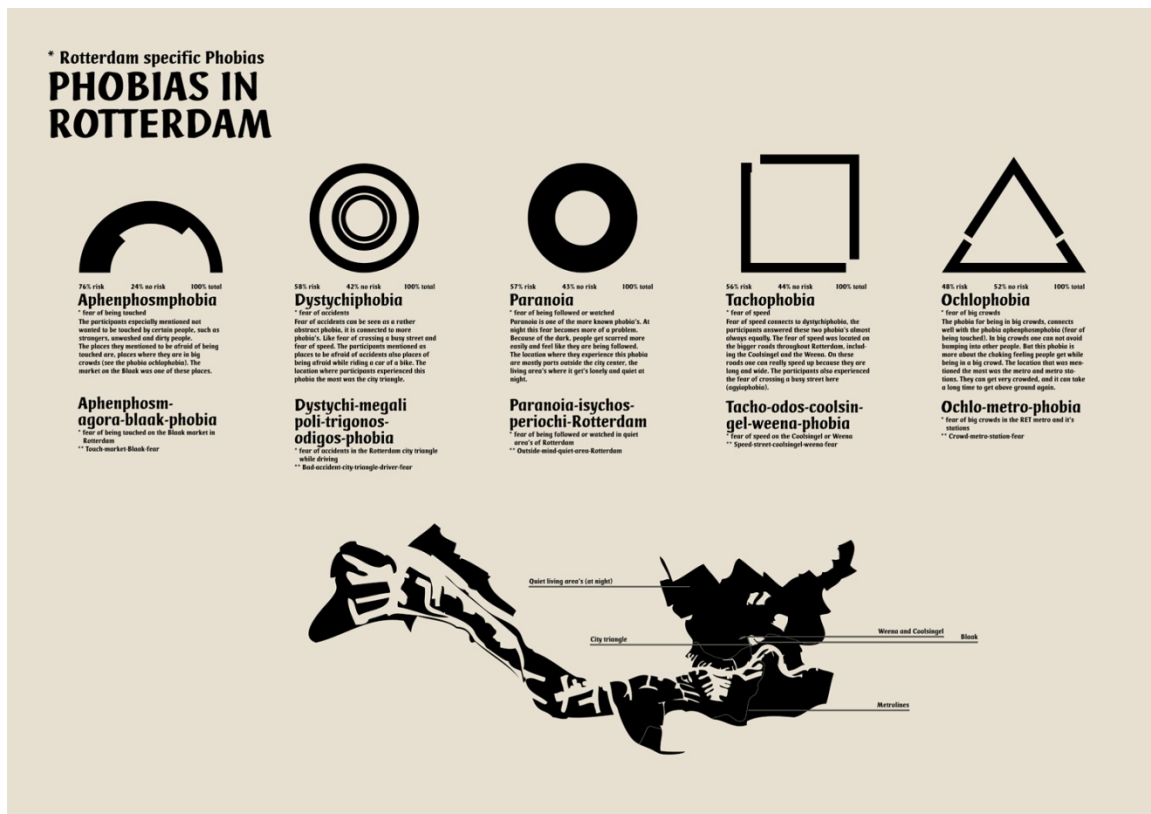


Image 1: The Rotterdam specific phobias poster

As an add-on for this project I made stickers of the Rotterdam specific phobias. These stickers I placed on the locations where the respondents experienced these fears.

With my first thematic project I looked at abandoned spaces online, and in my essay I compared these spaces to abandoned spaces in the physical world. This also is something I want to use from

my final project, the fact that the online and the offline world have a relation to each other. The outcome was an online book, which contained all the elements of 6 abandoned websites taken apart. I researched the elements that make a website into an abandoned website. I showed of each website a screenshot, the domain-name, links and parts in the HTML-code, the meta-data of the images and the part where you can see that this website is abandoned. At the second part of the book I made a template on how to make your own website look abandoned. This is because a lot of people use online, standard templates for their own website. And with this template you can make your website look unique, with a new approach.

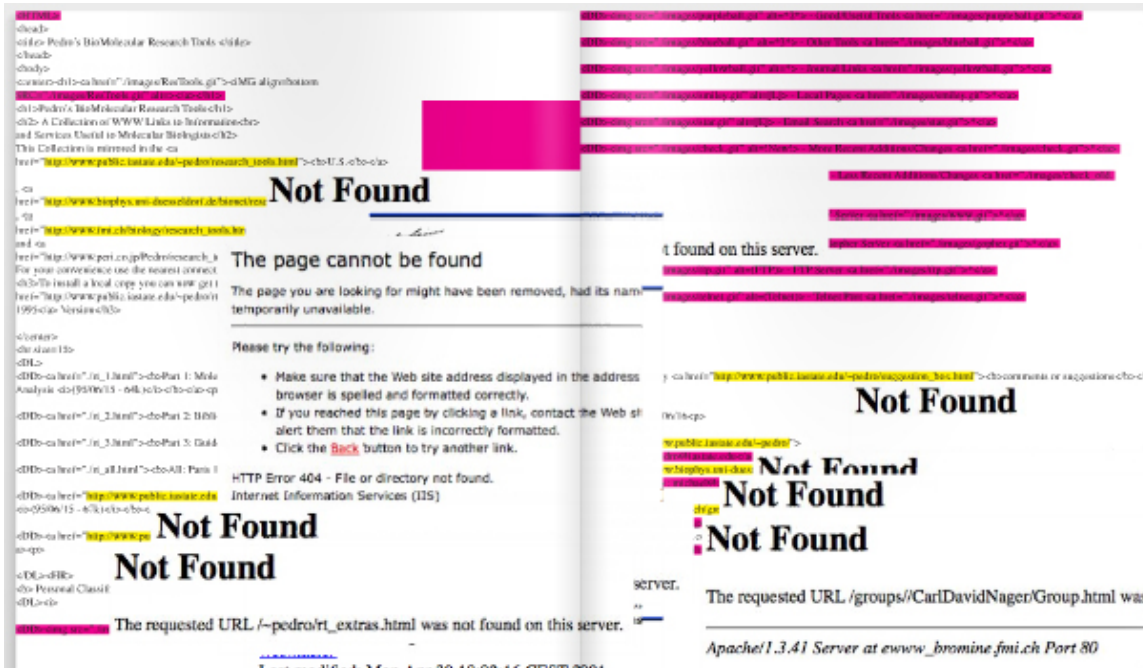


Image 2: A spread from the book "Online abandoned spaces."

http://issuu.com/onlineabandonedspaces/docs/template_boek2_losepaginas_vooronline

The abandoned websites cover an alternative place on the net. These places are hard to find, you can only reach them by surfing the net, not by searching with a search engine like Google. Because these places are somewhat hidden, they become more interesting and special. In both projects I gathered information, edited it and gave it back to the users. But I also did something else, a small add-on to the project. I think this is a nice element to add to my final project, but this is something to decide when the project is developed further.

For my final project I want to focus on the darker places on the net. This has already played a role in my work before, especially in my project on the abandoned websites. Fears and phobias also flourish on these online places, people are afraid of all sorts of things here. The fear of getting a virus from a torrent website, fear of getting caught on a porn website, and so on, this is another element to research. These places are not commonly accepted as normal websites to visit. I wonder who the people are that visit websites that are part of a darker side of the internet.

The internet is divided in the surface and the invisible or dark web (Dr. Jill Ellsworth). This dark

web has information that is hidden to normal search engines like Google. One cannot easily access the dark web, you have to know where you are going or surf the web, deeper and deeper into its dark places.

Several companies have tried to map these dark sides of the web, or create search engines that search or crawl them. These places are not all legal or appropriate to visit, the content may be dangerous, illegal or harmful. With Freeweb, created by Ian Clarke, you can visit the dark side of the web without being found, you surf anonymously. This program is also used by several criminal users. But this doesn't mean that all of the dark sides of the web are used by criminals. Some examples of what you kind find in these places are; child-porn (also criminal), porn, the exchange of music (newsgroups, torrent websites), databases with all sorts of information and so on. But not all of these 'weird' websites are hidden. What about the places you can visit and are not appropriate to really visit? Like the websites where people only use nicknames, the forums, the websites (like Hungrig-Online) and the torrent websites? In my essay about "Nicknames and the Shadow web", I define them with the term the Shadow web. This is a definition for the findable places on the internet which are not commonly accepted as 'normal' places to visit. They are NSFW (Not Suitable For Work) and people often use nicknames and no personal information to keep their offline identity secret. The websites are not about one person, but are most of the time being kept alive by its users. They provide the content, and it is the content that defines that it is in the shadow web.

According to the definition of Dr. Jill Ellsworth of the Dark Web, the websites I mention are part of the surface web. But most people do their best to try to (at least in public) avoid these websites. People keep it a secret, and use nicknames to cover their identity. So, who are these people who visit these places, what is their specific internet behavior? What nicknames do the users choose, and why? What kind of these shadow websites do your friends and family visit? What elements of the shadow side do also exist on the surface web? Making categories and then looking more into these categories.

So the starting point will be to look for these shadow places on the internet. How do search engines crawl and how can you look for the most interesting websites/databases that are not the first results in Google? The second part will be to categorize what I've found and find the next direction to take. Also important is to collect the dark webpages that exist on the surface web, these are not hidden but not easily found either. Collecting and categorizing will be the most important thing in the beginning of this project, together with a comparison between deep/dark, surface and shadow web.

I want to take a step back from being the user of the internet. Making people more aware of what this medium is doing to us, and why this is a bad or good thing. I want to make something that comes out of research to the relationship between people when they are online and offline. What is the difference between these worlds (looking at the user, not at the world they are in). These worlds are not (yet?) the same, because lots of people act differently in both worlds. They see one or the other as a free world, where they can be themselves, and in the other world they cannot. What users operate on the surface web and what users operate in the darker web?

I want to make the user more aware of themselves and of others. For me one of the problems the internet raises is that you become less aware of your physical self. I don't know, yet, if this is the case. But it is worth looking into. The user must be made more aware of the shadow and deep sides of the web and what you can find there - they must leave their phobias and fears behind. I

also want to communicate that there is more than the surface web. In the NRC Next, a Dutch newspaper, I read an article that young people don't surf the web anymore, and can't search properly for something they need. Is this because the surface web is getting more and more commercial? Or because the hidden dark web is getting more and more hidden? Do your friends surf the shadow and deep web, what websites do the people you know visit? The people behind the screens, who are these people and what is their online behavior? These are all questions I ask myself, while thinking of this project.

I want to bring the fears and phobias in, in a later state of the project. Because I think that a lot of the fact that there is a dark, deep and shadow web has to do with fears and phobias people experience. But this can only come out of my research.

For the outcome it has to have a message for the user. I don't only want to collect information but also modify it. So the outcome will be the information I gathered and then give it back to the users and let them or me do something with it. The modified information can be presented in all sorts of ways. This could be, for instance, on a webpage or application, available for every user. An offline publication or installation can also be added to the outcome. It can be added, because it is really important that this project is online. The offline element of the outcome can be a publication of the findings and a connection to the offline world, something I also want to have into my project. The relation between online and offline and the surface web and the darker/deeper web are important elements.

The graphic design is also important for me. The design has to be conceptual connected to the project and the other works that are on this subject. It would also be nice to, while researching the dark side of the web, also research the visual language that is used.

One of the most important things of the project is the process towards the end result. This process I want to be smooth and with a lot of research and reading. Because I didn't have this much time for my previous projects, I finally feel like I can do more reading on the subject and go in more depth. But I have to make the borders of this research clear, for myself, in order not to get stuck in my research. With my last thematic project I got to a point where I wasn't making any decisions, and I do not want to end up at this point with my final project. I had to make it into a project, but couldn't decide what the best outcome would be. Nothing really felt like the right decision.

Like I mentioned before, the outcome itself plays a very big role in this project. I want to do something with the users or viewers. I want to reach the users. In my previous work, the user has always played a big role. In my first project, the user was gone, and I looked at what happened to websites when the user had left. In my last project the user was the starting point. What fears and phobias does the user of a city have. These two projects were both based on the user, and the outcome was to make them also more aware of what they do or feel as a user. This is something that I want to keep as a big role in my final project. They were all subjects of concern and I invited people to participate. The ordering of information in certain ways and not just revealing information has also always been important to me. I want to make something unique.

With my previous project about the phobias, the people who viewed the posters and stickers gave really good and interesting reactions. Most of the people also lived in Rotterdam and were surprised that their fellow citizens (and they also) felt these fears. The design of the project fitted the subject and was clear for everybody, which is also an important element. The design is the representation of the project, this is what the people see of your project.

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