The March 2005 installation “The King Has...” offered individuals the opportunity to anonymously unburden themselves of secrets responsible for producing unnecessary stress in their lives. Through the public revealing of these secrets a larger community discourse was facilitated about the content of the secrets, and at a macro level, why the secrets were “secret” in the first place.

Throughout history numerous authors have written about the consequences of repressed secrets. Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen’s famous play “The Wild Duck” has at its core an elaborate network of skeletons hidden behind the façade of a happy home. Anton Chekhov—a contemporary of Ibsen—also wrote extensively about the consequences of concealing and revealing secrets within the context of prevailing Victorian family values.

“The King Has...” takes its title from an older European fable about a king who possessed donkey's ears. Only the king's barber was aware of the abnormality. In order to unburden himself of the secret, the barber spoke to a tree, “The king has donkey’s ears!” Later, the tree was cut down by a member of the court and made into a harp. To the surprise of the king and his subjects, when the harp was played it whispered, “The king has donkey's ears.”

Over the course of one week individuals were encouraged to SMS repressed secrets to a computer-controlled Bluetooth cell phone. Each message sent to the phone was formatted by the computer, saved to PDF, and added to a print queue. A fabricated slab printer was used to print each message on a panel of oiled plywood. Once a day the output of the printer was shellacked and mounted at construction sites in Downtown Los Angeles. Over the life of the installation a forest of text appeared in areas of very high foot traffic.

The aesthetics of the piece were based on both its namesake and installation
geography. The use of wood referenced the tree spoken to by the barber. The use of plywood referenced the guerrilla installation process: under the cover of night panels were placed over existing construction site advertising (itself on flimsy plywood). The thickness of the plywood was critical as it made the messages stand out and encouraged interaction. Had the secrets been printed on paper they would have been lost in advertising detritus.

While the project hoped to engage all of Los Angeles, the advertising strategy for soliciting content targeted Downtown locals first: the SMS number was printed on panels painted white (rather than oiled) and mounted adjacent to installation sites. The goal was to create an attraction that engaged the immediate community first, outlying Angelenos second, and tourists third.

Upon completion of the installation the panels remained mounted and the general public was encouraged to take them. The act of distributing the panels represented the dissemination of the secrets into the community and the corresponding dilution of associated stresses.