Tokens of kindness: explorations in design as a bridge for societal gaps

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Tokens of Kindness: Explorations in design as a bridge for societal gaps

by

Calee Himes

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major: Graphic Design

Program of Study Committee:
Bernard Canniffe, Major Professor
Alex Braidwood
Austin Stewart

Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa
2016

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DEDICATION

To my constant believers — those of you who had the most unfortunate job of reminding me how much I can accomplish when I commit to something …

… (and when there is an impending deadline):

- My mother who has endured a lifetime of my procrastination techniques.
- My future husband, Mark, who believes I am the most brilliant and spectacular person he knows (either I have him duped or he needs to get out more often).
- My partner in crime, Julian, who foolishly decided it would be fun to room together during our last semester of graduate school. *I’m sorry.*
- And, of course, my committee who put up with my rotating list of thesis ideas and pushed me to make lots of good things and put them into the world. I will be forever grateful that we crossed paths.
- Last, but not least, I beg forgiveness from all of those who have been with me along the way and I have failed to mention here, including my loyal band of Twitter cheerleaders, Snapchat stalkers, and blog readers — a list so long it would require a second dedication page, which is not allowed.
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ABSTRACT

Graphic design has long been considered a profession for people interested in creating glossy magazines, posters, and other ephemera. Can graphic design do more for society? Through analysis of social design, wicked problems, and gift economies, this study aims to begin to understand graphic design as a method to bridge societal gaps. This study uses principles of social design, behavior change theory, and immersive community research to experiment within the local communities of Ames and Des Moines, Iowa. Several experimental methods are explored, such as the use of design to create pockets of kind acts through a pseudo gift economy, and pop-up booths that attempt to engage the community in discussion about frank issues through the gifting of food. Although this study starts to uncover valuable information about the aforementioned techniques, more research is needed to refine these methods for use in the professional sector.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A New Method of Design

In the fall of 2014, the researcher was introduced to a relatively new model of design, referred to as social design. This model is drastically different than the traditional client/designer form of graphic design in which a client orders work and the designer delivers. Social design was introduced to the researcher through a class with Bernard Canniffe, the current Chair of Graphic Design and Iowa State University and co-founder of Piece Studio, a social design studio focused on community outreach and activism. Through social design, a designer immerses him- or herself into the community and seeks out problems that are worth solving. Designers practicing this method can use their design skills to directly impact lives, work to solve socioeconomic problems, and create relevant work rather than continuing to churn out endless amounts of ephemera.

Oh, What Wicked Problems We’ve Woven

One cannot study social design without an awareness of wicked problems. In short, wicked problems are large-scale issues that are human created and cannot be solved easily since they are all intertwined — that is, many wicked problems contribute to other wicked problems (Kolko, 2012, p. 10). Examples of wicked problems include, but are not limited to homelessness, pollution, and racism. Consequently, this research attempts to address the
wicked problem of unnecessary disparity between groups of people — the kind of disparity which can result in prejudice, greed, or other forms in which hate manifests.

Can design act as a bridge to bring people of disparate groups together?

Frank Chimero, a contemporary multi-disciplinary designer and author of the book The Shape of Design contends that the definition of design is that it is a bridge. He says, "The best way to describe design is that it seeks to connect things by acting as a bridge between them," (2012, p. 62).

It is the aim of this work is to construct bridges that can mend relationships, create a sense of community, and ultimately bring people together.
To understand how design can bring people together, it is important to look at design for social change — a design movement based in community building. Design for social change, which is sometimes referred to as social design, and design for good, is a relatively recent movement in graphic design. Andrew Shea, designer and writer of Designing for Social Change, explains:

“Graphic design has often been associated with glossy magazines, elaborate advertising campaigns, or fancy book covers, but many designers today use their skills for a very different kind of design work. Known as “design for social impact,” “human-centered design,” or “design for social change,” the field of social design attracts increasingly more graphic designers who crave a chance to work with underserved clients as an alternative to the more traditional design jobs in large corporations and advertising firms. They want to work closely with communities that need their help most and actively participate in combating social problems,” (2012, p. 8).

Furthermore, Jon Kolko, founder of Austin Center for Design (AC4D), a Texas-based interactive and social design education center, talks about social design in business terms. For example, he calls designers and other people drawn to work in the social realm “social entrepreneurs,” (Kolko, 2012, p. 8). Kolko explains,
“Like an entrepreneur, a social entrepreneur starts a company and assumes the risk. The difference, though, is the type of problem. A social entrepreneur works in the context of a humanitarian problem. Rather than efforts directed toward something like … large economic profits … the drive is toward helping people and creating social capital, the non-economic wealth within a community (2012, p.8).

Designers do not have to start a business to practice social entrepreneurship. In fact, the act of beginning a social design project is typically similar to starting a business because it begins with community partnership.

Social Design Case Studies

As Shea and Kolko alluded to, designers acting as social entrepreneurs have already begun to change the graphic design profession, and, most relevant to this research, have successfully used design to bring people together. The following case studies exemplify this power.

Social Design Case Study: Es Tiempo

Designmatters, a program at the Art Center College of Design in California, completed a project in 2009 called “Es Tiempo”, which aimed to bring together the Latina community and medical doctors. Foremost, the concern of this work was cervical cancer screening for Latinas. As stated in Shea’s summary of this work, “Hispanic women have the highest incidence and mortality rates for cervical cancer of any major racial or ethnic group in the United States,” (2012, p. 90). Instead of creating an awareness campaign as outsiders,
the Designmatters crew immersed themselves in the community through interviews, focus groups, and doctor visits. Through social immersion they found that the barriers to the getting screen were “… contrary to [their] assumptions,” (Shea, 2012, p. 92). In addition, the team learned a lot about Hispanic culture through the immersion process, and were able to create a campaign around an appropriate symbol: the Jacaranda tree, “…whose large, purple flowers are a prevalent and welcome sight in Southern California every spring …” (Shea, 2012, p. 93). The team used the tree as a gentle reminder along with the tagline, “Es importante. Es facil. Es tiempo,” (It is important. It is easy. It is time.) (Shea, 2012, p. 93). The campaign resulted in more Latinas getting their cervical cancer checkups. Because of the social immersion, the Designmatters team was able to create a solution that was not only appropriate for the situation, but also garnered the desired results.

**Social Design Case Study: HourSchool**

HourSchool started as a project at AC4D, developed by Ruby Ku and Alex Pappas, who were interested in alleviating some of the issues surrounding homelessness in the Austin area. They met with many homeless people to understand their lives and needs. Pappas and Ku found that, “Over and over, homeless people told us that the best part of their day was when they could help others and share what they know,” (HourSchool, n.d., p. 1). Consequently, it was through this discovery that Ku and Pappas were able to design an outlet for the homeless to share their knowledge and gifts with the public. They realized that social interaction could mean the difference between living on and off the streets; in fact, this discovery is in direct opposition to most homeless programs in which basic needs are met,
but people continue to be homeless. Pappas and Ku argue that this happens because people
need to feel needed to want to live and improve their situation. Again, because of social
immersion the AC4D team was able to create something relevant and ultimately helpful to
the homeless and the community in which they dwell (HourSchool, n.d., p. 1).

Social Design Case Study: PieLab

PieLab is a production of designer and social designer John Bielenberg’s Project M in
Greensboro, Arkansas. Foremost, Greensboro was chosen because it is one of the poorest
cities in the nation and struggles with deep-seeded racism and poverty. Additionally, the
main street area had nearly no businesses open and the community did not have any place to
meet. With that in mind, the designers of Project M immersed themselves in the culture and
came up with a plan: create a space for conversation and serve pie. In fact, “The plan was
simply to open PieLab’s doors, begin conversations with the people of Greensboro and
encourage them to create progressive initiatives of their own,” (Edge, 2010, p. 3). They took
a small bet and the plan seemed to work: “… PieLab was a success. There was music,
courtesy of a customer with an acoustic guitar. The crowd was diverse. Ideas were
exchanged. Intergenerational friendships were forged …” (Edge, 2010, p. 5). Again,
community was created through social design interventions.

In each of these cases designers are using their talents (art, making pie, teaching, etc.)
to create an innovative approach to bringing people together to proliferate a sense of
community. This design approach makes the idea of changing the world seem easier to
achieve. Through social design, designers can use their talents to bring people together and make small changes to big problems.
CHAPTER III

BEHAVIOR CHANGE AND COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

Principles of Behavior Change

Behavior change theory is a crucial part of social design. First, as outlined in “A Behavioral Model for Persuasive Design” by B.J. Fogg, an expert in behavior design, “… behavior is a product of three factors: motivation, ability, and triggers, each of which has subcomponents” (2009, p. 1). Fogg’s model claims that “… for a target behavior to happen, a person must have sufficient motivation, sufficient ability, and an effective trigger. All three factors must be present at the same instant for the behavior to occur,” (2009, p. 1). Therefore, to create a design that elicits a behavior change, the designer must create sufficient motivation and an effective trigger. Fogg suggests making the requested behavior as simple as possible for most people to perform because “… we humans naturally love simplicity,” (2009, p. 6). Additionally, Fogg suggests that designers focus on time. He maintains “The first element of simplicity is time. If a target behavior requires time and we don’t have time available, then the behavior is not simple,” (Fogg, 2009, p. 5). Therefore, the designed interaction should be quick. Finally, Fogg suggests that a successful persuasive design has a facilitator, which “… tells users that the target behavior is easy to do, and that it won’t require a resource that he or she does not have …” (Fogg, 2009, p. 7). Fogg’s model of persuasive behavior design is the basis for most social design work and drives the design experiments outlined in this research.
Community-Based Design Research

In addition to understanding methods of behavior design, designers doing social design projects must understand how to work with a community. Foremost, the work needs to be relevant to the community in which the designer aims to serve. Goldberg-Freeman, et al, experts in community-based design research explain that “Communities have to see the need for the research,” (2007, p. 213). In other words, the interaction that the designer has with community needs to have a clear purpose that is easily understood through the interaction. Furthermore, Goldberg-Freeman, et al, explain that community-based researchers should strive to have a relationship with the community so that “… partners can learn about and understand each other’s needs,” (2007, p. 213). In summation, social designers should use the opportunity to immerse themselves in the community for which they are attempting to design.
CHAPTER IV

WICKED PROBLEMS

Super-Sized Problems

Social designers typically use their knowledge in behavior change to perform community-based research on issues that are referred to as wicked problems. Jon Kolko defines a wicked problem as “… a social or cultural problem that is difficult or impossible to solve for as many as four reasons …” (2012, p. 10). According to Kolko, these four reasons are “… incomplete or contradictory knowledge, the number of people and opinions involved, the large economic burden, and the interconnected nature of these problems …” (2012, p. 10). That is, wicked problems, such as poverty and racism, are large in scale, difficult to diagnose the root cause, and likely impossible to solve with one pass. Furthermore, Kolko lists the ten characteristics of wicked problems (first formalized by Horst Rittel) as they apply to designers:

1. Wicked problems have no definitive formulation. The problem of poverty in Texas is grossly similar but discretely different from poverty in Nairobi, so no practical characteristics describe ‘poverty’.

2. It’s hard, maybe impossible, to measure or claim success with wicked problems because they bleed into one another, unlike the boundaries of traditional design problems that can be articulated or defined.
3. Solutions to wicked problems can only be good or bad, not true or false. There is no idealized end state to arrive at, and so approaches to wicked problems should be tractable ways to improve a solution rather than solve it.

4. There is not a template to follow when tackling a wicked problem, although history may provide a guide. Teams that approach wicked problems must literally make things up as they go along.

5. There is always more than one explanation for a wicked problem, with the appropriateness of the explanation depending greatly on the individual perspective of the designer.

6. Every wicked problem is a symptom of another problem. The interconnected quality of socioeconomic political systems illustrates how, for example, a change in education will cause a new behavior in nutrition.

7. No mitigation strategy for a wicked problem has a definitive scientific test because humans invented wicked problems and science exists to explain natural phenomena.

8. Offering a solution to a wicked problem frequently is a one-shot design effort because a significant intervention changes the design space enough to minimize the ability for trial and error.

9. Every wicked problem is unique.

10. Designers attempting to address a wicked problem must be fully responsible for their actions. (Kolko, 2012, p. 10-11)
As exemplified by social design, designers have begun to attack wicked problems. In consequence, this study began by aiming to tackle the wicked problem of racism by bringing people of different backgrounds together via a shared experience. Racism is highly relevant given the state of race relations in the United States with the the recent Black Lives Matter movement and Donald Trump’s entire 2016 presidential campaign. However, immersive research proved difficult because the sample population in the state of Iowa does not have enough non-white people for the study to successfully take place. Therefore, after some experimentation, the researcher chose a different wicked problem for further examination: greed and capitalism.

Currently, the economy is based in capitalism. This structure is based in the premise that “Less for you is more for me”. In fact, in the United States it is commonly believed that 1% of the population holds the wealth while the rest of the 99% struggle for survival. This is due to the artificiality of scarcity that is produced when wealthy people hoard all the resources and make it hard for others to obtain necessary means to live (Eisenstein, 2011, p. 1).

Through several immersive designed approaches, this study aims to begin to understand how design can bridge the gap between disparate groups. Since wicked problems cannot be solved with a one-shot approach, this study took a malleable direction to begin to understand how design can bring people together, and if design can be a catalyst for people to do good.
In researching greed and capitalism, the researcher discovered an alternative economic model, called a gift economy. Gift economies differ from capitalism in that the premise is “more for you is more for me” rather than “less for you is more for me” (Eisenstein, 2011, p. 11). As such, experience designer and fellow gift economy researcher, Pomme Van Hoof, defines a gift economy as, “… an economy in which goods and services are given to one another without specific agreements for immediate or future returns … [gift economies] can establish new and meaningful relations and a sense of community,” (2013, p. 12). Additionally, it is important to note that, according to several authors, true gift economies typically exist in very tight-knit communities, such as in tribes (Eisenstein, 2011; Hyde, 2007; Mauss, 2000; Van Hoof, 2013), and that capitalism and gift economies usually do not co-exist.

One of the most notable works on gift economies is The Gift by Lewis Hyde. Foremost, Hyde’s work is helpful in outlining the functionality of gifting, its importance to communities, and the main differences between capitalism and gift economy. For example, Hyde explains that a gift needs to keep moving in order for it to maintain its gift status and not become a commodity: “… whatever we have been given is supposed to be given away again, not kept,” (2007, p. 4). Of course, a gift may not always keep its original form — especially in the case of food, which Hyde and Mauss maintain are the most popular forms of
gifts (Hyde, 2007; Mauss, 2000). Hyde explains that the gift can be transformed and the important thing is to continue moving the spirit of the gift (2007). Finally, Hyde explains that gifts are important to a community that functions in capitalism “Because of the bonding power of [gifts] and detached nature of commodity exchange,” (2007, p. 86). In other words, gifts have the power to strengthen community — even one that functions in a market economy.

Further regarding the difference between capitalism and gift economies, Hyde states “In a commodity exchange, it’s as if the buyer and the seller were both in plastic bags; there’s none of the contact of a gift exchange,” (2007, p. 12) and that “… the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange is that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves [none],”. In short: “… a gift makes a connection,” (Hyde, 2007, p. 72).

In addition, gift economy expert and activist, Charles Eisenstein makes it clear why this research is important in today’s society. Foremost, Eisenstein states in Sacred Economics: Money, Gift and Society in the Age of Transition that “Many centuries and millennia have indeed accustomed us to a world of great and growing inequality, violence, ugliness, and struggle.” (2011, p. 1). Given the state of wicked problems that the United States and the rest of the world are currently experiencing (such as economic disparity, crime rates, etc.), Eisenstein’s sentiment rings true. In addition, both Hyde and Eisenstein believe that one of the differences between capitalism and gift economies is greed. In fact, Eisenstein maintains that “… community is nearly impossible in a highly monetized society like our own … because community is woven from gifts, which is ultimately why poor
people often have stronger communities than rich people,” (2011, p. 1). Communities that are economically poor are stronger, he explains, because, “If you are financially independent, then you really don’t depend on your neighbors – or depend on any specific person … You can just pay someone to [do what you need],” (Eisenstein, 2011, p. 1). Clearly, Eisenstein is a proponent of gift economies; however, he believes that society can exchange capitalism for gift economies. This is not a belief that this researcher shares. In addition, this research is not concerned creating a true gift economy but, instead, it is aimed at bringing people together through design and/or spreading good — gift economies seem to hold part of the solution.

Buddhist Practice of Dana

Along with gift economies, the Buddhist practice of Dana also focuses on the act of giving to spread good. By definition, Dana is “The practice of giving, which is universally recognized as one of the most basic human virtues, a quality that testifies to the depth of one's humanity and one's capacity for self-transcendence,” (Bodhi, n.d., p. 1). A collection of Buddhist essays edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi explains “Giving promotes social cohesion and solidarity. It is the best means of bridging the psychological gap, much more than the material economic gap, that exists between haves and have-nots,” (n.d., p. 9). This Buddhist principle aligns with the underlying principles of gift economies as outlined by Eisenstein and Hyde, and helped drive the design of the experiments in this research. Finally, it is the belief of Bodhi that “Good deeds bring about pleasant results and bad deeds bring unpleasant results,” (n.d., p. 15).
Gift Economy Case Studies

Case Studies of Gift Economies: Burning Man

Burning Man is a modern-day example of gift economies at work. In short, Burning Man is an annual festival dedicated to “…community, art, self-expression, and self-reliance,” (Burning Man, n.d., p. 1). Although the gift economy is only active during the time of this festival, it is seeded in the same principles outlined by Hyde and Eisenstein. For example, the Burning Man website summarizes their festival principles, which include things like “Anyone can be a part of Burning Man,” “Burning Man is devoted to acts of gift giving … Gifting does not contemplate a return or an exchange for something of equal value,” “… our community seeks to create social environments that are unmediated by commercial sponsorships, transactions, or advertising,” (in fact, they feel these interventions are exploitative to what Burning Man represents) and, finally, “Our community values creative cooperation and collaboration,” (Burning Man, n.d., p. 1). Although these principles seem idealistic, according to the Making Contact podcast episode “Burning Man and the Gift Economy”, the system works. In fact, those interviewed in the podcast elaborate that when people broke the rules of the gift economy the event was not successful in creating and maintaining a sense of community. They contemplated that this was because some community members felt taken advantage of by those who were looking to commoditize the event (Stelzer, 2009). In short: Burning Man proves that gift economies can create the feeling of community in modern-day society.
Case Studies of Gift Economies: Karma Kitchen

Another modern-day example of a gift economy is a pay-it-forward restaurant called Karma Kitchen. First, Karma Kitchen is based on the premise that the previous customer paid for the current patron’s meal. Karma Kitchen asks the question “What if your meal was paid for by the people who dined before you?” (Cooking Up Karma, 2011, p. 1). Furthermore, Karma Kitchen not only relies on the principle of paying it forward, but also the idea of pay-what-you-want to not only cover the cost of the meal but the cost of the labor involved. Additionally, this project is founded by Nipun Mehta, an expert in gift economies. Mehta says that gift economies start with “… a simple thing—be kind today … even if just for a moment, that’s how the whole pattern emerges” (Kaye, 2011, p.1). This research aims to create a similar pattern of kindness, just as Karma Kitchen proliferated.

Case Studies of Gift Economies: Mediated Peer-to-Peer Giving

Finally, Pomme Van Hoof, another researcher in both design and gift economies experimented with gift economies through her thesis entitled, “Triggering a Gift Economy” (2013). As stated previously, triggering a gift economy is not the aim of this research; however, Van Hoof’s work is relevant because it connects design to gift economies. Her experiments focused on “… possible ways of triggering a gift economy. With a special coin, a concept for a bar and by linking the local bakery …” (Van Hoof, 2013 p.5). Through her research, Van Hoof explored ideas that helped guide the direction of this research. First, she examined the idea of a bar based in mediated peer-to-peer giving. In her experiment, a person could draw a name out of a hat to buy a drink for somebody who was participating in the bar
event. Although this is an interesting premise, it does not prove much in the way of design triggering gift economies. The event was mediated by Van Hoof and attendees were mostly people who were already in her gifting circle. In addition, Van Hoof set up a cookie buying gift exchange in which people could buy cookies for somebody on the college campus. Again, the experiment seems flawed because the campus community was already in Van Hoof’s community and thus more likely to participate. Finally, both experiments involved money, which seems directly in opposition to the principles of a gift economy (Van Hoof, 2013). Although the researcher believes Van Hoof’s research was flawed, her gave precedence on how to set up design experiments for this work.
CHAPTER VI
DESIGN EXPERIMENTS

Intent of Study

As stated previously, this research focuses on how design can be used to bring people together. As the research progressed, the researcher became concerned with the following questions: Is design able to proliferate a sense of community? Can design trigger a system of kind acts? What happens when people are asked to use kindness as currency? The following set of design experiments are an attempt to begin to answer these questions.

Shareotypes

Shareotypes is a design experiment meant to bring two different groups of people together by creating interesting word combinations from existing stereotypes about the groups. Ideally, combinations create relationships (or at the very least conversations) between people of the two groups. First, using P5.js, a “… JS client-side library for creating graphic and interactive experiences …”, the researcher created a word mashup generator (McCarthy, n.d.). Next, the researcher chose the target groups for this test case — two disparate sets of students on campus: College of Agriculture and Life Sciences students and College of Design students, which have a known rift. Then the researcher widely disseminated a survey probing participants about stereotypes about each group. Once collected, the survey results revealed derogatory stereotypes about each group (See: Appendix A). Finally, the researcher loaded these stereotypes into the random word
generator and tested it on participants from both groups. A mini documentary was made from the test results (figure #1).

Shareotypes helped to show the researcher that one small solution is not going to change enemies into friends. In addition, the lack of interest in Shareotypes by participants and the corresponding conversations that it sparked reinforced that stereotypes are beyond what can be changed with a one-shot design effort — in accordance with what Kolko believes (2012). Additionally, through Shareotypes, the researcher learned that it is nearly impossible to get disparate groups into the same room, even when the participants are students and free pizza is offered. Ultimately, Shareotypes was abandoned because of its limited impact and lack of interest. If Shareotypes could not garner interest from participants
with low-level conflict, then how would it interest people with higher-level conflicts to co-mingle?

Taqueria Guerita

Next, the researcher chose to take a more direct approach to attempting to bring people together through design. Through exposure to three different media, the researcher formed a concept for a pop-up taco stand called Taqueria Guerita (or, Little Blondie Tacos, roughly translated), in which tacos are given in exchange for facts about Mexican immigration in Iowa.

As mentioned, the researcher formed this concept through exposure to media, so it is important to give a brief overview of each before talking about the taco stand concept. First, the researcher attended an on-campus lecture by José Antonio Vargas, a journalist, filmmaker, immigration rights activist, and an undocumented immigrant. Vargas’s lecture, titled “Define American” encompassed themes about illegal immigration, how the United States is dealing with immigration laws, and how the white public treats people who look different (Vargas, 2015). Attending this lecture fueled the researcher’s passion for underlying race issues behind immigration, and Vargas’s in-your-face style of journalism helped form the basis for Taqueria Guerita.

Next, an episode of Broad City, in which the main characters, Ilana and Abby, attend a disaster-themed fundraiser, helped the researcher form the idea for the taco stand. In this sketch, the women are offered an appetizer and when they accept the offer, the server says, “Just now a child in South America has died of starvation.” When the two are given a second
appetizer, the server repeats the same fact. When asked if he only had one fact, the server responds, “You two are the first to want a second” (Jacobson, et al, 2014). What if this research could take a similar approach?

Finally, an experiment by Michael Rakowitz, entitled “Enemy Kitchen” helped the researcher form Taqueria Guerita. In Enemy Kitchen, Rakowitz uses food to begin conversations with people about Iraq. He focuses on using Baghdadi recipes to teach different groups of people in order to “… seize the possibility of cultural visibility to produce an alternative discourse.” Rakowitz chose to highlight Iraq because it is nearly invisible to United States citizens, other than the negativity portrayed in the news (Rakowitz, 2006). Could a similar premise start a positive conversation about Latino/a immigration in Iowa?

With these ideas mulling about and the fact that the public is not informed about the facts on Hispanic immigration in Iowa, Taqueria Guerita was born. The aim of Taqueria Guerita is to bring people together through food to talk about immigration facts, to hopefully dispel myths, create understanding and empathy between different groups of people, and to help Latin culture permeate Iowa.

Therefore, the researcher began by collecting authentic taco recipes and facts about Hispanic immigration in Iowa. Next, the researcher aggregated the facts into a random fact generator based on the code used for the Shareotypes experiment; the design of which was updated to mimic Mexican graphic design (Figure #2). These same facts were used as a script for the taco stand, and the generator was posted online to allow participants to view additional facts and take a call to action. Once the script was ready, the researcher got a little taste of Latin culture by purchasing ingredients at the Mexican Tapatia in Des Moines, and
making authentic Mexican tacos to give away. Finally, the stand was in business in Brookside Park in Ames, a location chosen for the possibility of both campus and local traffic (Figure #3).
Taqueria Guerita had many issues as an immersive design technique. Foremost, because tacos need to be kept and served warm, electricity is required to run Taqueria Guerita. Given the nature of the pop-up booth, electricity is hard to find. For this reason, the researcher considered setting up Taqueria Guerita at various locally-sanctioned events by reserving booth space ahead of time, but abandoned this idea because the element of surprise was required to disrupt people’s daily routine. This was intentional as to parody the disruption many Iowans feel immigration impedes on their daily routines. Second, the researcher realized the potential for making people angry rather than changing people’s minds about a hot-button topic. Taqueria Guerita reinforced what Shareotypes and Kolko taught the researcher about wicked problems: one small interaction is not going to solve a wicked problem.

Worst Work Gallery Show

After running Taqueria Guerita and Shareotypes, the researcher decided to test groups that had no known conflict but typically do not mix. This experiment focused on bridging a gap between design students and practicing artists. Subsequently, the researcher devised a gallery show to intentionally feature practicing artist’s self-proclaimed worst work to create a discussion point between practicing artists and design students. Ideally, this show would reinforce the idea that artists have to make bad work in order to make good work, thus instilling confidence in design students and reminding artists that they all started somewhere, and need to continue to make to keep making good work. Finally, both groups benefit from
the reminder that not all work is good and to make good work an artist must make frequently, as exemplified in *Art and Fear* (Bayles, D. & Orland, T., 2001).

Although Worst Work generated much interest, only five people entered the show. Additionally, the people who entered work were students — not practicing artists. Without the appropriate participants, this experiment did not come to fruition.

However, even though Worst Work was not a commercial success, reinforced Fogg’s behavior design model. According to Fogg, hope / fear is an important motivator (Fogg, 2009, p. 4). In the case of Worst Work, artists likely had more fear of their work being seen as bad than they had hope of their work being recognized as important to the students the researcher had aspired to inspire. Clearly, none of these experiments were successful in bringing people together through design, so a different approach must be explored.

**Tokens of Kindness: Development Phase**

While in the midst of running the previous experiments, the researcher attended another on-campus lecture, given by social designer John Bielenberg, director of Project M. Bielenberg gave three points of highly relevant advice. First, Bielenberg said that “…regular people can do amazing things.” In other words, a person does not have to be a millionaire or invent a cure for cancer in order to make a difference in the world. Furthermore, Bielenberg spoke about the importance of making things and putting them into the world. He said, “Be bold. Get out. Let go. Make stuff. Bet small. Move fast.” These ideas reinforced what the researcher learned from the previous design experiments. Finally, Bielenberg gave a game-changing piece of information: “Try not to piss people off … [your work] needs to be wholly
positive,” (Bielenberg, 2015). Bielenberg reinforced what Taqueria Guerita taught the researcher and, thus, completely changed the direction of this work.

Next, the researcher began to think about what she could contribute to society as a regular person. The researcher began to ask, “What can I give?” Consequently, Bielenberg’s advice, “Be bold … Let go … Make stuff,” was further fueled by the discovery of a documentary about Kurt Cobain entitled Montage of Heck (Bielenberg, 2015). Montage of Heck, unlike other Cobain documentaries, focused on Cobain’s sketches, writings, drawings, paintings, and other work that Cobain made in his lifetime. Cobain was fearless in his making, and everything he made was inspired by a desire to change the world (Morgen, 2015). As a result of exposure to these creatives, the researcher began making objects while working towards creating a new immersive design interface to bring people together. Ideally, this interface would entice people to interact with the researcher and — most importantly — the community.

At first, the researcher was intrigued by creating a fundraiser for a local women’s shelter. This idea was dismissed after some thought because fundraisers are commonplace and this research is concerned with developing a new design methodology to bring people together. However, as making progressed, an idea sparked: What if, instead of asking for money in exchange for a handmade item, an act of kindness was requested? Would people be willing to promise an act of kindness? Would people recognize kind acts that they already performed? Would the handmade goods be enough to coerce people into acting kind? Could a sense of community proliferate? Would people’s lives be positively impacted enough to
facilitate additional kind acts? These questions intrigued the researcher; therefore, the research pursued this direction.

Tokens of Kindness: College of Design

In December of 2015, the researcher ran the first iteration of the kindness as currency experiment, entitled Tokens of Kindness. First, the test run of Tokens of Kindness was set up in the College of Design, which is the most convenient and least intimidating test site available. Students are used to interacting with experiments and the college was getting additional traffic due to finals week. Finally, the timing of the booth coincided with Christmas so that ideally, people would participate in hopes of finishing holiday shopping.

In addition, the booth was set up like a craft show vendor, with various handmade items on display. Each item chosen for this experiment holds a secondary community-building purpose: handmade cards — intended for a participant to communicate with the community; mix CDs — meant to spark conversation; and handmade bags — meant to be re-gifted. However, the difference between the Tokens of Kindness booth and other vendors is the way that people pay for goods. In capitalism, money is exchanged for goods and services. In the Tokens of Kindness model, people are asked to write kind acts on pieces of paper, called tokens and exchange tokens for goods. In effect, the tokens act as currency, but they are a representation of the acts that people have done or have promised to do. But, the token design proved to be a confusing for people because the currency mark looked too much like the dollar sign (figure #4). Because of this confusion, some people did not want to participate because they assumed money was involved (See: Appendix B).
[Figure #4, example of the first iteration of a token, which used a symbol that was confused for a dollar sign]

The first round of Tokens of Kindness had a large impact on this research. Foremost, one anonymous participant reported that after the interaction with the Tokens of Kindness booth she fed blind children at an orphanage near her hometown in India. She told the researcher that although she had planned to go to India, she had not planned to go to the orphanage until she interacted with Tokens of Kindness and was thankful for the interaction. Furthermore, not only did Tokens of Kindness facilitate interactions between other people, it facilitated interactions between the researcher and the community. Conversations about the research, music, handmade bags, and other items on the table aided community members in getting to know the researcher, and these items also facilitated discussion about community members’ lives, thus strengthening a sense of community.
Finally, after the experiment was over, the researcher analyzed the kind acts written on the tokens and aggregated them into a random-phrase visualization (Figure #5).

Consequently, the data shows a clear difference between the kinds of kind acts people wrote down as things they had completed versus the types of things that people promised to do. For instance, a green (completed kind act) token might have said that a person bought coffee for another person, and a red (promised kind act) token might have said that a person promised to volunteer time at a homeless shelter. See Appendix E for a list of the kind acts from this experiment.

![Figure #5, screenshot of the Tokens of Kindness data visualization](image)

Tokens of Kindness: Des Moines Skywalk

Although the first experiment with Tokens of Kindness was a success, the researcher needed to gather more information by setting up this booth in different locations.

Subsequently, many pros and cons of this method arose during the first iteration of the booth
— all of which needed further analysis. First, the format of the pop-up booth seemed to work well as a community engagement tool because it took people by surprise and seemed to make people want to talk to the researcher. In addition, another pro of the Tokens of Kindness craft booth method is that people are interested in talking to the researcher in exchange for information about the items on the table, and can seemingly be easily coerced into exchanging something for a gift on the table. Furthermore, another positive aspect of the Tokens of Kindness booth, as found in the first iteration, is that people seem to have a good experience and, from the oral feedback received from participants, the interaction seemed to help people engage with others and have a more positive day.

However, a few cons of the Tokens of Kindness method came up during the first iteration. First, many people had a hard time understanding the method because the price tags had the token symbol, which was easily confused with a dollar sign. Many people did not want to interact because they thought interacting would cost them money. Furthermore, another con of this method is that it is predicated on the researcher making a lot of craft items. The first iteration of the booth completely depleted the researcher’s inventory, which would require a few weeks’ work to replenish.

After analyzing the pros and cons of the first location tested, it became clear that more experimentation was needed at a different location in order to confirm or debunk the pros and cons found in December. So, the researcher set up the Tokens of Kindness booth in the downtown Des Moines Skywalk during the noon hour in February of 2016. The Des Moines Skywalk is a different type of location than the College of Design at Iowa State University for several reasons: people who use the skywalk are not students, skywalk users
are not used to vendors being set up in the skywalk system, and people who use the skywalks are passing from location to location, rather than milling about between classes with potentially extra time on their hands. In addition, the booth was set up in part of the skywalk that seemed to have the most activity, including a guitar player.

The Des Moines Skywalk version of Tokens of Kindness reinforced what the research on gift economies and behavior change stated. First, people who use the skywalk have an agenda, which made interacting with the Tokens of Kindness booth less appealing because their pre-planned activities had more motivators than interacting with the booth did (Fogg, 2009). Typically people rush around during their lunch break, so many people ignored the booth completely by either speedwalking past or by looking at their phones. In addition, nearly all of the people observed during this experiment were talking about money: money owed, spent, earned, or noted at work at the banks and insurance companies nearby. These observations along with the fact that hardly anybody participated in Tokens of Kindness in the Des Moines Skywalk version support the research on gift economies, which clearly states that there are two types of economies: gift economies and capitalism; and that these economies live in disharmony, meaning that people usually act in one realm instead of the other (Hyde, 2007; Gendler, 2014; Stelzer, 2009, Mauss, 2000).

Furthermore, two other obstacles presented themselves at the Des Moines Skywalk version of the Tokens of Kindness booth. Foremost, although the location was chosen for its proximity to the guitar player, the volume at which he was playing made it hard for people to hear what the researcher was saying. People did not seem to like the music the guitar player chose, so they were rushing to get through that section of the skywalk. Additionally, the
speed at which people were passing by the booth coupled with the confusing currency symbol seemingly made the booth look like a for-profit venture, which might have made people less interested in interacting. This proved to be critical, and the researcher regrets not adjusting the currency symbol before the experiment, but wanted to be certain that the symbol was, in fact, confusing before designing a new iteration.

Obstacles aside, four people interacted with the Des Moines Skywalk version of Tokens of Kindness. The first two people were on their way back from lunch and were drawn into the booth by the handmade bags. It was clear that the two people who stopped were shopping on their lunch break, so it was likely why they were drawn in by the handmade items. Both women were excited to participate and filled out several tokens. One of the women told the researcher that her life philosophy is to “…do good because it will only result in good being done to you,” which is almost the exact statement that Eisenstein gives in *Sacred Economies* (2011, p.1). Moreover, two more people — a middle-aged man and woman — stopped by to investigate the booth. Both were interested in the premise of Tokens of Kindness, but the man was hesitant to fill out any tokens because of the time it took to do so and because he could not think of kind acts. He filled out three tokens in exchange for a bag, but then asked if he could pay money for a second bag. The researcher allowed him to pay the monetary value for a second bag, and then the researcher paid this money to a homeless person to keep the spirit of the gift going, as suggested by the research on gift economies (Hyde, 2007; Gendler, 2014; Stelzer, 2009, Mauss, 2000).

Because the Des Moines Skywalk did not garner much participation, the researcher adjusted the experimental approach to Tokens of Kindness. First, the Tokens of Kindness
booth needs to be set up in a location with a willing audience — one that has time to spare. It takes a minute for people to fill out tokens, so it is not appealing to people who are in a hurry. Secondly, the currency mark was easily confused with the dollar, so it needed a redesign to make the intent of the booth clear. Finally, this location proved that the level of noise is important because of the bit of explanation that is required for people to participate in the booth. The guitar made it too loud to explain the premise of the project without shouting.

Tokens of Kindness: Merle Hay Mall in Des Moines

At this point it became clear that a third location is necessary to further investigate. The researcher considered several locations: Wheatsfield Co-op in Ames, Mars Café in Des Moines, Vinyl Café in Ames, and Brookside Park in Ames, among others. All of these spaces are safe for the researcher. Although there is something to be said about researching in safe places, the aim of this research is to “… Be bold …”, as Bielenberg recommended (2015). One way to be bold is to try something new. Therefore, the researcher decided to set up the Tokens of Kindness booth in Minnesota. However, weather did not permit this event to happen. So, instead, the researcher decided to examine the idea that gift economies and capitalism cannot co-exist. Capitalism is most exemplified in a shopping mall. This idea led the researcher to set up in Merle Hay Mall in Des Moines.

First, the researcher assumed that the pop-up booth would be immediately removed from the mall premises because mall security would likely see the booth as a threat to the people who are working in the mall to make money for the large corporations who rent space there. However, to the researcher’s surprise, the booth remained set up for several hours with
no intervention from mall authority. In addition, after experiencing the pop-up boot at the mall location, it seemed that the mall was a hybrid between the skywalk and College of Design scenarios. That is, there were both types of people at Merle Hay: those with an agenda who were looking to spend money, and those with no agenda and interested in having a good time. These things were discovered by the researcher after several attempts to garner attention towards the booth failed. The researcher noticed that people that she was soliciting had shopping bags and were seemingly in a hurry — much like the skywalk situation. In contrast, people who interacted with the booth said that they were at the mall to look around and pass the time.

Interestingly enough, the demographic of people that consistently interacted with the Tokens of Kindness booth at Merle Hay Mall were teenage girls. More research is necessary to confirm these ideas, but the researcher thinks that teenage girls were interested in interacting with the booth for several reasons. First, teens do not have expendable income — if any income at all. Teens are the group of people most marketed to by capitalist enterprises. These teen girls were very interested in the items on the table and filled out several tokens each in order to receive items that they would not have been able to purchase if they were for sale. In addition, since the teen girls who interacted with the booth seemed to have limited or no income, they were at the mall to spend time rather than money, and, therefore, were more likely to interact with the booth. It is interesting to note that the kind acts that the girls promised were more selfish than selfless (for example, one girl wrote that she “let a friend do her hair” as a kind act, figure #6).
Furthermore, this iteration of Tokens of Kindness was the first one in which the currency mark was updated (figure #7). People were less likely to ask how much items on the booth cost because the symbol was new to them; instead, they asked what the project was about and how they could participate, which is the intended outcome of the Tokens of Kindness booth. In addition, people took some of the tokens with them because they liked the symbol on the token and what it represented. However, the researcher has yet to hear feedback from people who took the tokens.
In conclusion, Tokens of Kindness at Merle Hay Mall reinforced things that the researcher learned at both previous iterations of the Tokens of Kindness booth. First, that people with spare time are more likely to interact with a pop-up booth. Secondly, that commerce and gift economies do not mix well. And finally, that the original currency mark was easily confused with a dollar sign.

Pizza for Kindness: Welch Avenue in Ames, Iowa

During the experiment phase of this research, it was suggested that Tokens of Kindness be set up in front of a bar. This idea posed a few questions. First, how would the researcher explain this premise to people under the influence of alcohol? Second, how could
the researcher gain attention of these people? And, third, what types of gifts were appropriate for this audience?

After consulting research on gift economies, the idea of food as a gift arose. In Hyde’s book, *The Gift*, he talks at length about how food is the most common form of a gift in gift economies (2007). Food is social, and is typically part of the drinking ritual in the United States. With these ideas in mind, the premise of Pizza for Kindness emerged. Pizza For Kindness is a spin on the Tokens of Kindness booth that is adapted for the bar crowd, in which pizza — not crafts — is solicited in exchange for kind acts. Pizza was chosen for its portability, price, and appeal to the bar crowd.

Just like with the Tokens of Kindness booth, the researcher took a small bet with the first iteration of Pizza for Kindness and set up on Welch Avenue where interaction is more likely to occur. Pizza for Kindness opened at 9 PM the Thursday before spring break, which was a high-traffic time for Campustown bars. Signage said “Pizza for Kindness”, but after the first experimentation with Pizza for Kindness it became clear that some of the signs should have had a more direct call to action (perhaps “Free Pizza”), as the researcher had to facilitate more interaction than anticipated.

Several people interacted with the Pizza for Kindness booth. It is worth noting that most of the interaction was from males. Although this is speculative, a colleague of the researcher suggested that males were more likely to interact with the booth for two reasons: first, because males are stereotypically less shy about eating in public; and, secondly, because the researcher has been observed as a fairly attractive female who tends to garner male attention. Whatever the case, one female did interact with the booth after some solicitation.
The female participant’s friend was extremely grateful for this outreach, and although she did not take a piece of pizza herself, she filled out a few tokens out of gratitude. Above all, the interaction received through the Pizza for Kindness booth was positive. The researcher had assumed that participants could be malicious since there was a high likelihood they had been drinking and were being asked to do an activity that required insightful thinking. Only one of the tokens had a slightly malicious intent, which was “[I will create kindness by] Blowing homeless guys,” (Figure #8).
Beyond the intended interaction, several unintended positive interactions occurred during the Pizza for Kindness experiment on Welch Avenue. Notably, a passerby (who was not hungry but liked the idea of the booth) offered to buy the researcher a hot tea because he thought she looked cold. Also, another passerby saw the booth, asked about it, and then offered to donate his leftover pizza to the cause. Ultimately, the researcher refused because his pizza was cold, but his gesture was the type that this experiment was aimed at reaping.

Pizza for Kindness on Welch Avenue showed that the method of kindness as currency is transferable. In addition, it showed that although college kids have a reputation for being irresponsible and potentially destructive while drinking, that they are willing to take a minute or two to be kind. However, it is unknown what impact this booth had on the participants as no participants followed up with the online survey with the link on the back of the card that they received. Finally, although the first iteration of Pizza for Kindness seemed successful, testing at another location is necessary to further prove that the method of kindness as currency is transferable.

Pizza for Kindness: Downtown Ames, Iowa

Through the Pizza For Kindness interaction in Campustown, the researcher learned that the pop-up booth method of research is malleable to the audience. People seemed to respond well to the exchange of kind acts for one slice of pizza. However, since the first version of Pizza For Kindness was tested on the student population — who, again, are used to being test subjects for oddball projects — the researcher needed to set up Pizza for Kindness in an additional location to garner more information. Ideally, Pizza for Kindness
should be set up in front of a bar so that the researcher can gather information about what people do when they potentially have lowered inhibitions. Locations considered were downtown Stillwater, Minnesota; downtown Des Moines, Iowa; and downtown Ames, Iowa. Ultimately, weather played into the location choice, so Ames became the test location.

Furthermore, as mentioned, the audience needs to be considered when setting up the pop-up booth. For the first Pizza for Kindness event, the researcher used minimal signage and solicited interaction vocally. This is because the traffic in Campustown is loud and, therefore, needs some facilitation. Downtown Ames has an older crowd of people who are not used to random experiments. This proved to be beneficial as many people interacted with the Pizza for Kindness booth out of sheer curiosity.

Several interesting interactions took place during Pizza for Kindness in downtown Ames. First, a woman who was interested in the project asked “What is the catch?” After explaining that there is no catch — one piece of pizza in exchange for one kind act — the woman said, “Nothing is free. No, really, what’s the catch?” This woman continued to ask what the researcher was getting from the interaction until the researcher explained that the booth was for research purposes. Then, the woman decided to interact by giving a lot of kind acts, but did not take the pizza. It seemed like she did not trust the pop-up booth. This interaction leads to a question: does the pop-up booth need to feel more like a branded event? This is a potential question to explore in further iterations.

In addition to the woman who did not trust the booth, an older gentleman talked to the researcher about the state of the world today. Foremost, this interaction was the type that the researcher was trying to garner with these experiments: a conversation that bridges societal
gaps. This person seemed to feel a disconnect with the younger generation as he asked, “Do you feel that your generation is less kind than other generations?” Clearly, because of the way that he asked the question, this man felt that the younger generation is less kind. The researcher responded that she did not necessarily feel that way, but, instead, she feels that people are generally not kind to each other — especially given the war-ridden state our world is in currently. The man considered this and continued to ask questions about the project. Finally, he said, “Well, I don’t know much about kindness, but we all need to be a little more human.” This statement is the perfect bookend to this project.

**Additional Experiments**

Although the Tokens of Kindness booth in its various iterations moved research forward, the researcher ran other experiments. First, after reading Van Hoof’s research about sparking a gift economy through design, the researcher considered a different method of gifting (2013). Although this research is not focused on sparking a gift economy, but in spreading kindness through design, Van Hoof’s method seemed worth investigating. Instead of setting up mediated gifts, the researcher decided to do a series of planned gift drops to hopefully spark some pockets of kind acts.

Moreover, these additional experiments were performed because of time constraints due to travel as well as inventory requirements for Tokens of Kindness. The researcher was traveling in February and needed something portable to further the research, and because she was unable to make inventory during this time period, she needed a way to expand the Tokens of Kindness booth inventory to continue research after she returned.
Sparking Kindness through Random Giving

As mentioned, Van Hoof’s thesis served as inspiration for the random gift drop experiments. In addition to her work, Dead Drops, an “… anonymous, offline, peer to peer file-sharing network in public space,” also inspired these gift drops. The premise behind Dead Drops is that people stumble upon USB drives and obtain files from these installations (Bartholl, 2010). The idea of a person stumbling upon a gift drop intrigued the researcher. This depersonalized the giving, but that is a variable that was worth investigating. In addition, KindSpring, a website dedicated to gift economies and spreading kindness, has a project called Smile Cards in which an instructional card is left when a person performs a pay-it-forward type of kind act. These cards prompt the person who received the gift to keep the gift moving (KindSpring, n.d.). The researcher became interested in the idea of a trackable Tokens of Kindness version of the Smile Card that is tailored to this research.

Grandmas Rock Cookie + Zine Drops

Foremost, in keeping with the theme of small bets, the first random gift drop entailed dropping gifts of cookies on campus to people that belonged to the researcher’s community. First, the participants for this test were chosen because of their relationship to the researcher, the likelihood of keeping the gift moving, and of reporting back to the researcher. Additionally, since timing of the gift drop was close to Valentine’s Day, food seemed an appropriate choice as people often pass food gifts for that holiday. Finally, a second layer of
community was added through using the researcher’s grandmother’s cookie recipe and sharing it with the cookie package.

As stated, in addition to the cookies, participants received the researcher’s grandmother’s cookie recipe. This recipe was designed in the form of a zine that had additional stories about the researcher’s grandmothers, along with a call-to-action for participants to send in their grandmother’s information. Ideally, this piece would facilitate discussion between participants and their family members, perhaps promoting conversations that would not otherwise happen. At the time of this writing, nobody has sent any information or requests about the Granny Zine, but the publication has not been widely distributed as of this writing.

The participants did not interact with the cookie gift drop in the intended fashion. That is, instead of people logging their Tokens of Kindness card and completing the survey, a few participants thanked the researcher in person or used social media to express gratitude. Because of this, it is hard to say if the gift drop brought people together. Consequently, this level of interaction received reinforces a principle that is stated in all of the gift economy research: gifts with an obligation are no longer gifts. Hyde maintains that “When either the donor or the recipient begins to treat a gift in terms of obligation, it ceases to be a gift, and though many in such a situation will be hurt by the revealed lack of affection, the emotional bond, along with its power, evaporates immediately,” (Hyde, 2007, p. 91). Eisenstein echoes this statement, “… no one should be surprised when any “gifting” tainted with these motives doesn't bring the hoped-for return.” (Eisenstein, 2010, p. 1). Therefore, the spirit of giving,
perhaps, died when a card with an obligation was included in the cookie package, and instead of creating a sense of community, the gift turned to commodity.

Bowie Mixtape Drops

While the cookie drops were happening, the researcher developed a second version of the random gift drop. As mentioned, the researcher needed a portable gift to drop while traveling. Consequently, mix tape (CDs) were already a part of the Tokens of Kindness lexicon, so a mix tape seemed an appropriate medium for the portable gift. Ideally, the mixtape would be found by somebody who was either unfamiliar with the music, or somebody who was a fan and would re-gift the tape to somebody in order to share the included music with another person. In addition, two Tokens of Kindness cards, which were based on the smile cards, were put inside the cassette tape package (Figure #9). These cards encouraged people to do a kind act, pass the card, and log the card’s location. These cards are individually numbered so that they are able to be tracked using an online form.

ToKE NES OF kindness
Smile! Then pass this act of kindness on. Perform an anonymous act of kindness and leave this card. Let’s see just how far good can go.

Log your card’s location by going to: www.is.gd/TOKcard

Use #tokensofkindness on social media and / or connect with @chimes on Twitter or @thechimes on Instagram.

[Figure #9, Tokens of Kindness smile card, version 2]
The researcher dropped these cassette tapes all over Los Angeles, as well as in Des Moines, Ames, and St. Paul. It is unknown what kind of interaction the tapes solicited because nobody followed up with the surveys. This is when the premise of gifts with obligations became clear. However, it is worth noting that one tape was observed as having been taken as the researcher visited a location in which the tape had been dropped. In its place was a Thoreau quote that proved to be helpful to the researcher (Figure #10):

Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you imagined. As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simpler; solitude will not be solitude, poverty will not be poverty, nor weakness weakness.

This quote seems to strengthen the idea that people are happier in gift economies (those economies that function on more for you is more for me). Perhaps, most importantly for the researcher, this quote seemed to reinforce that people are meant to be together.

[Figure #10, Henry David Thoreau quote found in place of Bowie mixtape gift drop]
Kindness Pyramid Scheme: Watercolor Card Workshop

Finally, as mentioned, the researcher needed a way to build inventory for the Tokens of Kindness craft booth and she was short on time due to travel. Because of this, she devised a class to teach how to make watercolor greeting cards (figure #11). The premise of this class was that people would learn how to work with watercolor by making greeting cards and they would either pay $10 for the class or donate the cards that they made to the Tokens of Kindness booth. All participants chose to donate their cards to the Tokens of Kindness booth. Although only a few people participated, enough cards were made during this event to restock the inventory for future iterations of Tokens of Kindness. Furthermore, while the researcher was out of town, one of the class participants taught other people how to make the watercolor greeting cards, and all of these people donated their cards to the Tokens of Kindness inventory. It would be interesting to see if a true pyramid scheme could proliferate from this method, but this idea deviates from the purpose of the research so this idea has been abandoned at this time. Lastly, it’s worth noting that all the artwork created for the cards has been scanned at a high resolution and will be gifted to public domain for designers and artists to use, after this writing.
[Figure #11, image of the watercolor card painting class]
CHAPTER VII
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Design Has the Power to Connect

In conclusion, based on the social design case studies, information about gift economies, and the outcomes of the design experiments conducted by this researcher, one can conclude that design has the power to bring people together. Foremost, social design projects — such as the work found in Andrew Shea’s Designing for Social Change, John Bielenberg’s work with Project M, among others — have successfully bridged gaps in communication between people and have created a sense of community. Furthermore, the design experiments outlined in this research begin to proliferate a sense of community through the exchange of kind acts. In fact, according to Tokens of Kindness participants who answered a survey about their interaction, the booth proliferated a sense of community. Of course, more participants need to be surveyed in order to validate this conclusion, but the four people surveyed answered a resounding “yes” to the interaction with Tokens of Kindness creating a sense of community. As such, the researcher plans to continue experimenting with various iterations of Tokens of Kindness, and has plans to widely distribute templates of the model soon after this writing.

Furthermore, the fact that design can bring people together is hugely important in shaping the future of the design profession. Currently, designers face a career in which they have to compete with websites touting $25 logo designs, a climate full of intellectual property theft, and loads of work for corporations that many consider to be evil. However, designing for good — to create community — offers an alternative route for designers who
do not want to participate in the traditional career route. Design for good also allows the profession to gain relevancy beyond providing marketing aesthetics. This method of design creates space for designers to work alongside community leaders and develop life-changing projects.

Additionally, the format of social outreach via a pop-up booth with giveaways engages the public. People are willing to offer up information when a person is giving something in return. And, in accordance to the gift economy research, when a person gives to another, the two become bonded and can begin to form a sense of community (Hyde, 2007; Mauss, 2000; Eisenstein, 2011; Gendler, 2013). This social design method has the potential to bring disparate groups together.

Moreover, the Tokens of Kindness format is malleable so that people can set it up in other locations and exchange whatever they can contribute for kind acts. That means that designers — and non-designers alike — can use this format along with whatever they can make or give. Tokens of Kindness can become a DJ booth (Tunes for Kindness), a face-painting booth (Spirit for Kindness), or, even a PieLab outlet (PieLab for Kindness).

Finally, it is worth noting that through this process, the researcher’s outlook on life and on people has completely changed. First, by discovering selfless giving, the researcher has learned to place less value on commodities and more value on items without value that have more worth, such as people and experiences. Through this process, the researcher learned to appreciate people for what they can offer, rather than how much time or money they cost her. In fact, the researcher’s original belief that people are inherently evil has been completely dispelled through the course of this research. Because of the positivity the
researcher saw in others, she began to remove all negative outlets in her life — from snarky Pinterest boards to toxic friendships. As such, the researcher began to spread positivity in all realms of her life, not just in this research. She went from being a self-proclaimed hermit who hated people to enjoying the company — and talents — of others. In addition, not only did she start to see other’s talents and company as beneficial, but the researcher finally began to appreciate her own talents and the value of her own societal contributions.

In conclusion, design is a bridge that has the power to connect us all — as long as we understand how to go about constructing it.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

IMAGES FROM THE DESIGN PROCESS

Shareotypes
Shareotype (noun):
A mashup of stereotypes about different groups to create commonalities between members.
Let's Taco Bout It
What does immigration really mean for Iowa?
Over the past decade the Latino/a population in Iowa grew by 104%.

Let's Taco Bout It
What does immigration really mean for Iowa?
Somos aquí.
We are here.

Let's Taco Bout It
What does immigration really mean for Iowa?
Latino/as in Iowa paid $350 million in federal taxes and $205.5 million in state/local taxes in 2013.

Let's Taco Bout It
What does immigration really mean for Iowa?
Although some undocumented workers are paid 'under the table', the majority are paid a paycheck, which has the appropriate tax and Social Security deductions.

Let's Taco Bout It
What does immigration really mean for Iowa?
Estamos trabajando.
We are working.

Let's Taco Bout It
What does immigration really mean for Iowa?
Mexican immigrants are LESS prone to violence than native-born Chica-goans (black or white) of the same socioeconomic status.

Let's Taco Bout It
What does immigration really mean for Iowa?
72% of U.S. citizens feel undocumented immigrants should have a way to stay here legally. 52% of this group identify as Republican.

Let's Taco Bout It
What does immigration really mean for Iowa?
Crime rates are the lowest in U.S. states with the highest immigration growth rate.
Worst Work Gallery Show

Design on Main Gallery
Ames, Iowa
February 16-26

Email worstwork88@pmail.com with:
Up to 3 images of your worst work.
A short, one-paragraph description of how this artwork impacted your career as an artist.
A link to a PDF of your current portfolio.

Application deadline January 16.
Watercolor Greeting Cards
Mix CDs

[Images of music-related content with text and images related to musicians and albums]
65

Welcome to Paradise / (Un)easy / [Un]cork
Vacation / New Temple Faith / [New Year]
I Stay Away / Alice and Chains (End of Nice)
Road and Industrial / Massing temple / (End of Rain)
Homes Kingdom / The Trouble (Talker/Mark)
What’s the Frequency Kenneth / a.a.s. (Glorious)
Call Your Name / [Fever/ing / (Bedded Sam, Creased Case)
Salutations / Double Boys (All Communication)
Black Hole Sun / Tangentones (Superbander)
Star / (Seattle Gold)
Girth & Boys / Star (Rabid)
Spac Out of luck / Shovely (Not World popular)
Zimmers / No (Washington, the West to Plaza)
[ music made the same year as you ]

All Apologies / Altar(s) (an Unplugged New Thank)
Little Zippy Bags
Watercolor Greeting Card SkillShare Class
Grannys [sic] Rock Zine
Cookie + Granny Zine Random Gift Drop
TOKENS OF kindness
Grandma's Oatmeal Cranberry Chip Cookies

Have a lovely day!
Bowie Mixtape Random Gift Drop
Tokens of Kindness: College of Design booth (12/2015)
Tokens of Kindness: Des Moines Skywalk booth (2/2016)
Pizza For Kindness: Welch Avenue, Ames (3/2016)
Signage for Pizza for Kindness
### APPENDIX B

**CURRENCY MARK + REVISIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legit currency &amp; other marks</th>
<th>Beginning to modify marks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$ &amp; €</td>
<td>€ $ t s k</td>
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<tr>
<td>£ € &amp;</td>
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<tr>
<td>t S &amp;</td>
<td>$ $</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Marks to continue with**

- \(\mathcal{M}\)
Original Green (completed act) Token

I CREATED KINDNESS BY:

Revised Green (completed act) Token

I CREATED KINDNESS BY:
Original Red (promised act) Token

I will CREATE KINDNESS BY:

CREDIT

Revised Red (promised act) Token

I will CREATE KINDNESS BY:

CREDIT
APPENDIX C

TOKENS OF KINDNESS BOOTH SIGNAGE + REVISIONS

TOKENS of KINDNESS

THANK YOU [ FOR BEING ]

So Kind
HOW IT WORKS:

How do I get one of these token thingies?

Simply fill out a token with a kind act you have performed recently, such as:

- Helping a friend study for finals.
- Buying somebody a cup of coffee.
- Volunteering at a homeless shelter.

Etc.

DO SOMETHING KIND.

TAKE A TOKEN.

[ PUT IT IN THE JAR ]

TAKE A GIFT.

DO SOMETHING KIND.
I ACCEPT credit!

Haven't been kind lately? Don't fret!

Simply fill out a credit token with a kind act you promise to perform soon. Follow up with @chimes on Twitter or @thechimes on Instagram by using #tokensofkindness and showing / telling your act.
Original Price Guide

TOKENS OF kindness

GREETING CARDS .................. $1
MIX CDS ................................ $2
LITTLE ZIPPY BAGS .............. $3

Revised Price Guide

TOKENS OF kindness

GREETING CARDS .................. 1
MIX CDS ................................ 2
LITTLE ZIPPY BAGS .............. 3
Original Painting Price Tag

mini-painting
GREETING CARDS

$1

Revised Painting Price Tag

mini-painting
GREETING CARDS

❤️1
APPENDIX D

SMILE CARDS + REVISIONS

Version 1 of Tokens of Kindness Smile Card

**TOKENS OF kindness**

Smile! Pass this act of kindness on.
Let’s see just how far good can go.
Use #tokensofkindness on social media
and/or connect with @chimes on Twitter or @thechimes on Instagram.

Version 2 of Tokens of Kindness Smile Card

**TOKENS OF kindness**

Smile! Then pass this act of kindness on.
Perform an anonymous act of kindness and leave this card.
Let’s see just how far good can go.

Log your card’s location by going to www.ls.gf/TOKcard

Use #tokensofkindness on social media and/or connect with @chimes on Twitter or @thechimes on Instagram.

Version 3 of Tokens of Kindness Smile Card

**TOKENS OF kindness**

You just received a gift of kindness.

Keep it flowing by doing something kind & leaving this card.
Connect on social media by using #tokensofkindness and/or following @chimes on Twitter or @thechimes on Instagram.

Curious where this card has been?

Find out, then log this card’s location by visiting www.ls.gf/TOKcard

Version 4 of Tokens of Kindness Smile Card

**TOKENS OF kindness**

You just received a gift of kindness.

Keep it flowing by doing something kind & leaving this card.
Connect on social media by using #tokensofkindness and/or following @chimes on Twitter or @thechimes on Instagram.

Curious where this card has been?

Want to know more about this project?

Find out by visiting www.ls.gf/TOKcard & share your reaction at: www.ls.gf/TOKbooth
### APPENDIX E

**LIST OF KIND ACTS + DATA VISUALIZATION**

Green (completed) kind acts from Tokens of Kindness at College of Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind Act</th>
<th>Kind Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Helped grandma decorate for Christmas</td>
<td>32. Complimented a coworker on her skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Reassured a sad core student who thought she’d failed</td>
<td>33. Helped my friend find information about graduate school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Started a fundraising campaign to rescue dogs from kill shelters</td>
<td>34. Donated money to the Salvation Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Prevented someone’s kiddo from falling off a stool</td>
<td>35. Gave time to help my friend study instead of doing my own work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Opened the gallery for April for a week</td>
<td>36. Left a friend a note on how much she was appreciated—just because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Helped a friend study for finals</td>
<td>37. Went out of my way to jump a friend’s car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Didn’t embarrass a student who did something stupid</td>
<td>38. Gave an opportunity to a design student to design a real company logo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Bought a stranger coffee</td>
<td>39. Comforted my crying friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Shared all my resources with those who wanted them</td>
<td>40. Bought a gift for my friend to say thanks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Helped my wife work</td>
<td>41. Bought my boyfriend a peach tea when he stayed up all night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Gave somebody a ride</td>
<td>42. Offered to help when my friend encountered fraud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Collected money for Syria</td>
<td>43. Made my wife happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Bought Chloe a present</td>
<td>44. Paid somebody’s meal at Wendy’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Provided a venue for the AIA board members</td>
<td>45. Gave money to a homeless person in Chicago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Comforted a friend in need</td>
<td>46. Helped a friend study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Made supper for a friend</td>
<td>47. Watched my friend’s exhibition while she went to an important meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Gave a friend a ride home on a rainy day</td>
<td>48. Bought 100 CDs to share with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Cooked for students</td>
<td>49. Helped a friend study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Bought Chase a gift (I love her)</td>
<td>50. Helped her when she was sick this morning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Helped a friend move</td>
<td>51. Gave information to someone who needed it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. Hosted a party for graphic design grad students</td>
<td>52. Had students sign a sympathy card for a professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. Helped my grandma Christmas shop</td>
<td>53. Complimented and thanked the staff at the venue where we had our board meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. Let my wife get a bunch of sleep</td>
<td>54. Took care of my kids so my wife could rest for a while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. Made a home-cooked meal for my family</td>
<td>55. Bought food for my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Bought a cup of coffee for somebody who forgot their money at home</td>
<td>56. Baked cookies for my coworkers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Invited a coworker to a potluck on Thursday</td>
<td>57. Helped a colleague do some work to help her meet her deadline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. Wrote my roommate a nice note when she was stressed</td>
<td>58. Started an awareness campaign to help end rape and sexual assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. Shared history notes with my friend</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. Let people into the office / studio</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Gave out stuff I don’t need to poor people</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Drove three people home so they wouldn’t have to stand in the rain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Red (promised) kind acts from Tokens of Kindness at College of Design

1. Take Niko out to dinner
2. Watch a movie with Niko that he likes but I don’t
3. Meet up with old friends over break
4. Clean my shared apartment
5. Party with Alexis
6. Give my friend a surprise to help with finals stress
7. Bake holiday goodies for older neighbors
8. Go caroling
9. Carry someone’s bags in for them
10. Help my brothers in any way during the holidays
11. Talk to my roommate about her depression
12. Make scarves for my brothers
13. Try to be as nice as possible over break
14. Give someone a painting that I painted
15. Make a bomb-ass dinner for my hubby
16. Donate toys and time during the holidays
17. Volunteer for underprivileged urban populations
18. Buy someone coffee
19. Stand up for others in the face of adversity
20. Warm up my roommate’s car
21. Give someone a ride in the snow
22. Share my food
23. Give Connor gas $
24. Cook food for the blind
25. Help all my grad student friends with finals
26. Give charity to refugees
27. Provide a healthy meal for my family this evening
28. Buy more beef for studio buddies
29. Write a note to a mentor to thank him
30. Compliment someone today
31. Give five hugs today
32. Support local shops instead of chains
List of kind acts from Tokens of Kindness at Des Moines Skywalk

1. Put a smile on friends face
2. Buying my ex husband furniture for new apt
3. Help set up booth
4. Holding doors open and always picking up things that they drop
5. Said thank you and gave prayer light sign to Marisa
6. Donated 50 dollars to someones family funeral fund
7. Sunday school teacher
8. Stephen ministry leader
9. Paying for someones coffee next Thursday
List of kind acts from Tokens of Kindness in Merle Hay Mall

1. I gave a compliment to a nice person
2. Phone
3. Brother
4. Bought food
5. I participated
6. Gave necklace
7. Got CD for mom
8. Money
9. Gave compliments
10. Luv
11. LUv
12. I helped my friend buy something
13. Feeding the homeless
14. Smiling
15. Calling a friend
16. I let her use my phone
17. Let someone ride board
18. Helped carry things
19. I carried my friend
20. Being generous to my family
21. I adopted a pet
22. DD for friend
23. Gave jacket
24. Let my friend do my hair
25. Participated
26. Filled out a survey for her to get a free donut
27. Teach my grandkids kindness for people
28. Help an elderly person at stone
29. Pay a cup of Starbucks forward
30. Being nice
31. Help others
32. Help my mom
33. Complementing people
34. Being nice
35. Being nice
36. LUve you
37. LUv
38. Being kind
39. I promised a friend I would buy something
40. Help people
List of kind acts from Pizza for Kindness on Welch Avenue

1. Helped friend set up booth
2. Returned 130 dollars I found on the ground
3. Fed a homeless man
4. Blowing homeless guys
5. Legalizing weed
6. Share a brew with a bud
7. Help the cuz move in
8. Say I love you!
9. Complementing someone
10. Give my friend a ride home for break
List of kind acts from Pizza for Kindness in Downtown Ames

1. Built bridges in central America
2. Making sure ppl are safe whether I know them or not
3. Helping an older out and into the store
4. Helping raise $ for the Octagon
5. Helping my ex boyfriend with stuff
6. Helping my neighbor
7. Participating in stash the trash
8. Give money / gift bag to homeless man on exit ramp
9. Helping my friend set up her booth
10. IJoDive
11. Help my parents more
12. Hugging more often
13. Give Natalie a shirt!
14. Tell everyone I see tonight (and know) that they are beautiful
15. Give a hug
Data Visualizations of Kind Acts
APPENDIX F

SURVEYS AND RESULTS

Tokens of Kindness: Card Tracker

Enter the number on the card you found and answer a few questions (as many as you're comfortable with answering). For questions, ideas, or other comments, find me on Twitter @johnes or email johnes@johnesdesign.com.

Once this experiment unfolds, I will create a more interactive tracking system.
Thank you for playing. Let's see how far our kind acts can go!

* Required

What is the number on your Tokens of Kindness card? *

Your answer

Where did you get the card? (city, state / country) *

Your answer

When did you get the card?

mm/dd/yyyy

Did you receive anything with the card? If so, what?

Your answer

How did you feel after this interaction?

1 2 3 4 5

Negative ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Positive

Do you plan to pass on the card?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Not sure yet.

☐ Other:

Additional comments ...

Your answer

Submit 100% You made it.
What is the number on your Tokens of Kindness card? (2 responses)

- 125
- na

Where did you get the card? (city, state / country) (2 responses)

- Annar, Iowa
- na

When did you get the card? (1 response)

- Feb 2016

Did you receive anything with the card? If so, what? (1 response)

- No.

How did you feel after this interaction? (1 response)

- 1 (100%) Positive

Do you plan to pass on the card? (1 response)

- Yes

Additional comments (0 responses)

No responses yet for this question.
Tokens of Kindness Reaction

Thank you for participating in the Tokens of Kindness popup booth. I hope that I changed your day in some way. Please answer any questions you feel comfortable answering.

The answers will be published, but any personal information will remain PRIVATE and will be changed for publication (such as names, places, other identifying remarks). I am not collecting email addresses or other identifying information.

What did you think when you saw the Tokens of Kindness booth?
Your answer

Did you participate by filling out a token?
☐ Yes
☐ No

Did you receive a handmade item from the booth?
☐ Yes
☐ No

If you received a handmade item from the booth, what was it? And what did you do with it after?
Example: I received a CD and I listened to it on the way to work; I received a bag and I gave it to my sister; I received a card and I wrote a note to my mentor; I received a card and threw it in the trash.
Your answer

How did you feel when you were asked to exchange a kind act for an item?
Your answer

Would you rather have paid money for the item than give a kind act?
(Be honest! No judgement. Just research.)
☐ Yes
☐ No

Did the objects motivate you to do a kind act?
☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I was going to do the kind act regardless.
Did you tell others about the experience you had with Tokens of Kindness?
- Yes
- No

If you promised to do a kind act in the future, did you follow through with it?
- Yes
- No
- I’m going to, but haven’t had time yet.

If you promised to do a kind act in the future, and followed through with it, what was the act? How did you feel when you committed it?

Your answer

Did participating in Tokens of Kindness give you a sense of community?
- Yes
- No

What suggestions do you have to make Tokens of Kindness a better experience?
My goal is to spread kindness and create community.

Your answer

Do you have questions for me? If so, what are the questions?

Your answer

Submit
100% You made it.

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.
What did you think when you saw the Tokens of Kindness booth?

- Awesome! Calee!
- What's she selling?
- DMG THOSE ARE SO SWEET.
- How much?
- I pay in nice ness?
- This is amazing!
- That I wanted to be a better person to receive a cool gift.
- Neat idea, cool items.
- Didn’t see the booth. But like the idea.

Did you participate by filling out a token?

- Yes
- Yes
- No

How did you feel when you were asked to exchange a kind act for an item?

- In the recent future.
- That I needed to remind myself to be honest and do that thing later.
- Seemed reasonable.
- N/A

Would you rather have paid money for the item than give a kind act?

- No
- No
- No
- No

Did you receive a handmade item from the booth?

- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- No

If you received a handmade item from the booth, what was it? And what did you do with it after?

- I received 2 bags and gave them to my sisters.
- I received a cool bag that I love to death. I use it to keep my cords from getting tangled.
- Note Card
- N/A

Did the objects motivate you to do a kind act?

- Yes
- Yes
- I was going to do the kind act regardless
- N/A

Did you tell others about the experience you had with Tokens of Kindness?

- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- No

If you promised to do a kind act in the future, did you follow through with it?

- Yes
- Yes
- I'm going to but haven't had time yet.
- N/A

Did participating in Tokens of Kindness give you a sense of community?

- Yes
- Yes
- Yes
- N/A
What suggestions do you have to make Tokens of Kindness a better experience?

- Have some sort of optional component that is fun, like a game, that can act as a signal to people approaching that something social is happening.
- Maybe having a chance to continue to enter in good deeds in a place everyone could see would motivate me to do something, and give me a chance to be proud of my good deeds. Often we shame ourselves for not being modest, when I think if we brag about doing kindness more people will follow or try to keep up.
- Have a hashtag if people post a tweet or photo
- N/A
- I was going to do the kind act regardless
- N/A

Do you have questions for me?

- None 😊
- Are you this awesome or do you have a magic spell attached to you that makes you rock so much?
- No
- How are you?

If you promised to do a kind act in the future and followed through with it, what was the act? How did you feel when you committed it?

- GOOD!
- Like I was being kind twice: once for doing the act and twice for completing the promise.
- Receiving a token was a reminder to follow through with a kind act that had been in the back of my mind. Completing the act was satisfying.
- N/A
APPENDIX G

BIBLIOGRAPHY / ADDITIONAL RESOURCES


Canniffe, B., Keenan, J. Z., & Aberman, M. (2010). This is Not. Retrieved from [http://piecestudio.org/project/this-is-not](http://piecestudio.org/project/this-is-not)


http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.destud.2004.06.005


http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2261721


