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Thank you to the organizers who have put together a remarkable conference [[Emergence 2007](#)]. A very frustrating conference, I've got to tell you, I'm frustrated. But, it's good. The way conferences should be. So, I'm happy about this. Now please understand, I'm not going to try to summarize what's happened the last two days. This would be suicidal and very foolish. I am going to try to do — oh, how do I say this? Oliver [[King](#)] had a really clever idea. Bring everyone down to the first three or four rows and getting everyone to participate. A kind of collective summary of the conference. You might think of it that way because he's pulling key phrases that are used widely and everyone participates. It's great. I'm going to do just the opposite. Instead of a collective sense of the meeting, I'm going to give you a personal sense. My own read of what I've seen. It won't be a summary, but I'm going to pull out the themes that make sense to me. And Kip [[Lee](#)], of course, "what, how and a why." When in doubt, fall back on the places of the method.

So I want to begin by saying that the purpose of the conference you remember was to explore the boundaries of Service Design. And I took that quite seriously. It was evident in Shelley [[Evenson's](#)] comments at the beginning and also in yours Jamin [[Hegeman](#)]. We want to look at the boundaries. So what are the boundaries of service design? As I watched over the last two days, I found four boundary areas that strike me as critically important and I wanted to identify those and point them out as a way to begin to focus in on what service design is about.

The first boundary zone is information visualization. Graphic Design. You remember our very first presentation [[Many Eyes from IBM Research](#)], I walked in, I talked to the people afterward, I said, where did you get the idea to do this? And they said, "Well, we are graphic designers. We visualize information. That's what we did. But we had the sense of the consequences. We observed people using some of the visualizations and we thought there were consequences. We became interested in the conversations that began to follow from the presentation of information." Notice the very subtle move away from graphic design into something totally new. They were interested in the conversations and they were explicit about this in their presentations. And then they added the final word which we need to keep in mind — and really is most important for them: Community. How the conversations emerge and how do the conversations begin to build community? That's what that project is all about, despite the nice visualizations. They really want to watch how this presentation of visualization, this service of visualization evolves in action. Conversation — action. That's one boundary zone. This is not about graphic design. Although quite a lot of the presentations begin with graphic design. Joe [[Bailey](#)] where are you at? From IBM? He was having great trouble with his little stick figures of people and he needed help he said. Oh there you are, okay. I'm sorry, John. I'm thinking about another Joe Bailey I know. John also was doing visualization matters but he knew the context. In any case, that's one boundary zone. The old discipline of graphic design.

The second boundary zone that surfaced had to do with products. Industrial Design. And you remember this is a theme that has run throughout the two days of work. How do we deal with industrial design — with artifacts? The linkage is this: the artifacts begin to have context and consequences. How do we use artifacts in establishing relationships among people? Now this is not something that's a news flash for industrial designers. But to shift the focus toward the use of the artifact and its role in experience or activities or being together. That's different. A boundary was crossed.

The third boundary came out in a comment from Robert, particularly a tense one, very very significant. The difference between a system designer and a service designer. This has not been picked up adequately through the conversations in the meeting, but it's a terribly important one. And if you think about this it's not just system designer in the sense of the technical systems. In fact, organization

designer has come up repeatedly. Do we design organizations? What's the boundary between designing a service and designing the entire organization? Organization is a kind of system and in fact a kind of environment. Environment is a really weird word for sliding back from system design or organization design back into service. Because we think of services as within environments. But in fact the issue of organization or environmental design seems to go a little bit beyond service design. That's another boundary zone.

Now if you think carefully — my students will know — these are the four orders of design. I'm sorry about this. I have to. Graphic Design. Industrial Design. Great design disciplines of the early part of the 20th century. The latter part of the 20th century and now in the 21st century: Interactions, in particular human interactions and environments, organizations, systems. That third boundary zone is moving into those systems issues. How do we interface or connect the design of a service which is very personalized with the design of a system or environment that allows many many interactions? Tough problem. This goes into it in spades very much.

There is a fourth boundary zone that I detected. And it came through frequently in both days, and in fact even in our conversations just now concerning entrepreneurship and so forth. And the boundary zone is this. What is the relationship between service design and management? In fact, is good service design simply good management? Historically this is where the big groups, operations work. Not the operations work they do at CMU, that's a whole other kind of operations research. But in terms of making the workflow and dealing with customers and so forth. It's a classic management problem. There's no big new thing here. And yet there's some difference apparently between service design and management. Well this fits into a bigger theme in the entire design community. We're now talking about management itself as a kind of design activity. That's emerged at Case Western. It emerged at NYU a couple of years ago. We'll have a special issue of *Design Issues* as well that somehow design is moving in relationship to management. And is there a boundary zone there? How do we establish the boundary zone? And I guess I put the question this way: What do designers do differently than managers typically do? If managers have been designing services from the beginning of the 20th century, what is different in what we do as designers?

I picked up several themes that try to characterize this. No single formulation captured the entire package, but I can give you three or four elements to be thinking about more. One was a comment that had to do with the wholeness. Designers' ability to see the "whole." Now, why have managers lost that? It used to be that managers understood the entire organization. This was the nature of entrepreneurship. To grasp everything and make it work. Somehow that's been lost in management practice. Design is bringing that back, that sense of wholeness. Second, the ability to visualize. It's not just a numbers and words culture, but the visualization reaches people with effective, meaningful communication and for some reason design is effective in this. A thread: Embodiment. Embodiment. With the movement through management education in the 20th century a gradual disembodiment of company operations. Losing contact with the shop floor. This is a point that Herb Simon has made, and not only Herb, as far back as the 60s, they're saying that engineering has somehow lost touch with the things people make and the work of making. Powerful point. Engineering programs are trying to overcome that and so is management. In fact, our joint program with engineering, management and design — you'll find this at a number of schools — it's our effort to overcome this. In any case, the embodiment of work and customer relations in tangibilities. The call center for instance is a place, a physical place. Yeah you're on the telephone, but the observations of the workers are made in the call site. And in fact we see the products in some sense as an embodiment of this service relationship. I like the point that was made earlier by Todd [\[Wilkins\]](#) that with the Kokak camera — you push the button, leave the work to them — the artifact is the access to the service, which is performed by the company. Embodiment though is one thing that designers can do and

we embody in images, but also through dimensionalities and we embody in the tangibilities of action. “Hello, I liked your presentation.” The relationships are tangible. They’re not abstract or bloodless. We live these connections. That’s why we’re human. Design has access to this embodiment. And understand, I’m not telling you exactly how we’re doing it because I’m not sure how we’re doing it. It isn’t quite industrial design, isn’t quite graphic design, but both are involved in this new activity.

Those are the boundary issues to me. It tells me about the scope. The possible scope. And I’m still searching. Let’s go another step now. Got scope realized by boundaries. I want to ask you, throughout the conference, did you find a definition of service design? And I’m sorry, I don’t mean casual descriptions — we saw lots. Did you find a definition? And I take definitions as serious work. Now I know that there was one. Claudio [[Pinhanez](#)] where are you at? Ah, you gave a definition. I’m not sure I liked your definition, but you tried to define the sucker. And that would have led — that did lead to good conversations in the meeting. But did you find any definition of service design? I didn’t find much, and I’ll tell you, I wasn’t bothered by that. I think we’re making a big mistake if we’re anxious to define service design. I’m been troubled by efforts to define graphic design, to define industrial design, to define systems design even. I’m troubled by those efforts. I’m interested in design. A definition of design itself, that I like. But the definition of the sub-branches, to me is of less value. Precisely because of the cross-overs and the boundary ambiguities.

Instead of trying to define service design, I would say: What is the product of service design? Whoa — I used the word product. I’m going to have a hemorrhage. I’m going to — Now what am I going to do? Look. We’re in the 21st century. At the beginning of the 20th century “product” meant an artifact; something you could thump. Today, a product is a result. In mathematics 2×2 gives you a product; you remember this from school. It’s a result. So what is the result of service design? What do we make? I’m not going to say “an experience,” because I like the challenge to the phrase experience. I joined the AIGA advance for design group for a while. When we were just beginning to talk about human interactions and experiences. And after about two years, I got really bored with that — can I say that? — I got really bored with that group. You were there Dan [Boyarski], you and I were there together. And it got kind of boring — you were there too! My God, a lot of us were there. That’s some of the first programs in interaction. Why shouldn’t we be there? But you know, it got co-opted off into some sidetrack and experience design became too soft and malleable. It had too little meaning. And one of the characterizations during the conference was that it meant event design... I love event design, but — don’t mistake me, I love that kind of work — but human experiences are not captured in event design. I go back to the foundational texts of interaction design, to John Dewey: *Having an Experience*. He’s not talking about going to the carnival. He’s talking about our human relations, about our social relations. Our efforts to think and do things together. How we feel together in our activities. Experience design seems to have lost that for me. I don’t want to be harsh on people, they’re all great people, but you know, maybe this is a clue for us. That we need to be careful not to define by the categories, our categories get tighter and tighter (as I get older my pants get tighter and tighter). You know, I’m old enough that a lot of things connect and I don’t worry about it. And I’ll tell you, I do some serious work in philosophy too, and I don’t worry about the categories or confusions of graphic design and industrial design and... service design. I don’t worry about that. I think we read too much about the categories and not about the places where the work is being done and what we’re trying to accomplish. So I say, be real careful about feeling a need to define this area. To be honest, I’m not sure what this area is about either.

There was talk during the conference of the “core” of service design. That, I thought, was very intriguing. And they were referring to health care delivery, to social services delivery. They were referring to certain kinds of education. And remember the speaker, Todd, who said they’re never going to go away. Of course they’re never going to go away — those things are the core of human society. Those are not going to go

away, right? Duh. But the metaphors that products are services, yeah, there's some truth in this, the metaphor is fun to play with and we learn something from it. I like metaphors. Ms [\[Jennifer\]](#) Leonard, you liked analogical thinking. Yeah, I understand that. And it's fun at the edges of service design to talk about the metaphors and I'm real interested in how service design goes back into an understanding of product design. Real interested in that. And I think I'm most interested in a core, that core of service delivery. And I'm going to come back to this in a minute, on principles, ethics and values. So be patient with me please.

Boy, I may have already made some people angry. Gosh. And part of the reason is that I don't worry about service design. I take that as an aspect of a broader area of human interaction. And how we treat each other, taking good care of ourselves. By the way, do you all know who George Nelson was? Anyone here who doesn't know who George Nelson was? Oh, be still my heart — none of my students! George Nelson was one of the most important designers, I would say, for a lot of reasons, of the 20th century. He worked with Herman Miller, he was an architect who did a lot of things. George was important not only for his own design work, which was excellent, but he brought the Eames in, he had the courage to bring other designers to work for Herman Miller, and George was the most articulate spokesman for Design that the United States has ever had. He wrote simple, clear prose about everything that needed to be addressed. And one of his comments, about Design, he said, "Design, don't get too pretentious. We have a humble occupation. We serve people. On the order of Jesus Christ, philosophers, designers are low down. All we do is serve. All design is a kind of service, and Shelley is nodding because she knows this too. Exactly. When we surface this word, it brings us to think about some things that maybe we've forgotten, just as management forgot about some things. It helps us to think about some things. And also to look at an area where designers have neglected their responsibilities (or their capabilities). Namely these core services. I want to make a special case though, for the internet. And let that hang for a little while longer. What is that surface. What is that surface?

Now we know that during the conference a lot of discussion about technology and information flowed into service, proper service. Information is the lifeblood of good service. And for reasons that we may well understand. Service as well. I'm going to talk about that in a minute, but not right now though. So the point I'm getting at here is be careful about trying to put service design into too tight a box. It serves for a while to keep our attention focused, but we're going to breathe out again. It's another one of those terms that's going to come and go. We want to gather the learnings we can now, affect the discipline and move ourselves forward.

This is related to a further point I found in the conference. Not something said, but something not said. That astonished me, just astonished me. And I find this time after again in design meetings. And it really pisses me off. It's getting to the point where I'm becoming obsessive compulsive. Designers love to talk about techniques, and we talked about a lot of techniques. That's cool, no problem. We talk about methods. And we get a little bit funny on method. Don't seem to understand it real well. The thing we don't talk about is what sits on top of methods and techniques. The bigger strategies that guide the many methods that we use. Think of it this way. There are dozens and dozens of techniques, everything from how to use an x-acto knife to the proper way to kern. There are many. Many, many techniques. Probably hundreds. Methods involve a conceptual framework. Often from another discipline. Sociology, anthropology, you name it. Lots of methods. But sitting on top of that are a very few strategies. Strategies of thinking for how we use the methods. How we use the techniques. To what purpose do we deploy them, and involve them. Those strategies — and we've lost this word — they are "arts." The intellectual and practical arts. There are only a few of them, maybe as few as four. Three or four. It's hard for designers to focus and understand how those have shaped the 20th century and how they're shaping the 21st century. But a comment from someone in the group regarding last year's meeting. The change from last year to this year I thought was quite significant. I won't point them out. He pointed out that last

year, well, good conversations. This year, almost a conscious awareness of dialectic. Collective conversation. Collaboration. Participation. Dialectic is emerging. And boy if you've been following design trends over the last ten or 15 years you understand that there's been a massive shift in the design community from talking about grammars and logics of product solutions. A shift from that to rhetoric and dialectic. Arts of communication. Strategies for involving other people. And he found that this year's conference was emphasizing that more than last year. I'm not sure that's true. I think it probably is. Because I'm picking this up at lots of other design conferences too. A rediscovery of dialectic. Not Marxist. Not idealist. Just a pragmatic, skeptical, asking questions about working together. How do we work together? That kind of dialectic. Well I don't want to beat that one to death, you're probably all asleep by this point. Driving you crazy. I do that to my students too. What can I say?

But you know, adding it all up for me, a comment that was made again and again, in subtle ways, referenced, sometimes out loud, sometimes just hinted, was how important values are in service design. How critically important they are. That service design seems to take shape and surface, it surfaces those value issues. I know Dan's panel, I wasn't able to go to it, but it dealt with cultural issues. And my hunch there — our conversation sort of suggested this — that diversity of values were emerging. Now I think of our colleague from Switzerland [[Bettina von Kupsch](#)] and I found this to be a wonderful presentation, built around Swiss values. True? Yes, maybe. And Dan and I were talking, I think that maybe you made the observation that maybe companies ought to articulate their values and not always try to accommodate and manipulate an audience. That sometimes we have to say that these are the values of our company. And this is how we're going to do our work. Judge us as you will, by the consistency. Values are central.

Now here's where I want to come home on this for me. There are two aspects of this. One: The central feature of what we're calling service design (and that I might use another broader term for). But this whole area of human action and experience, interplay, interaction, relationships. All of this is about making people more active. No longer passive in their communities. No longer passive in their lives. To give them in some way the capability of acting. To become agents, and not passive. That in some way, service activates people. In some way it gives them power. Now Kip had a very shrewd observation a minute ago. He said that we talk about giving up control but he said somebody always takes control. And that's true. It may be an ideal of service design to give up control and let other people act but we must be very, very self-critical in an awareness of how much control we may retain. Or our clients may retain.

Now why is making people active important? Well, it comes back to the point I tried to make a couple of days ago. And here's where I'll put myself; not somebody else. I think one of the purposes of spending so much time on service design has to do with justice. I mentioned the observation by serious people in interaction in the United States that within two years we may see a shift away from the rule of law in more countries, even in our own country we may see questions about the role of the law. Bad questions. Losing the law means losing justice. What has that got to do with service? Think of it this way. Services are all about the distribution of resources. Resources and the tools to use those resources. Services are all about that. If you're poor, and you need some medical care, do you have access to that? Are they going to give you the information that allows you to interact with the agency and get the help you need? Complex insurance companies, same thing. Whether you're at any place in the social structure you need information and knowledge in order to act. Service design is about the equitable distribution of resources and tools to make decisions.

That's what it's all about to me. Now maybe it's about other things to other people. I don't know. But this is the privilege I have of giving a talk. I can have my own opinion. And I take this opinion real serious. I have committed my life — my career — to design. I didn't do it because I like pretty things, although I love pretty things. I didn't do it because I think we're the smartest discipline on Earth. We're not. I did it because design is a discipline that everybody can participate in. Everyone is affected by, and if we do it

right, we increase human's access to their own rights. Economic, cultural and social rights. That's that special place that I mentioned for the internet. And maybe the way for me to close is to say this. I studied with a great philosopher of the 20th century [Richard McKeon], and I'm just now in the process of writing an introduction to a collection of his essays having to do with political action and value. And I came across some passages that were very puzzling to me. I thought, Jesus, he wrote this forty or fifty years ago and I'm seeing this as if it's fresh today. What he's saying is this: There have been two or three times in human culture — western culture — where we have as a group found it important to write encyclopedias. Only two or three times. It occurred just before the Roman empire. The Hellenistic period. It occurred at another point and another point. His argument was that we are now in a period of expanding encyclopedia attention. Now why? Encyclopedias in the old forms, they're about compendia of information. Lot's of information. The reason they did that was that information had built up to such a point that everyone was confused and they decided that they had to make it actionable by putting it into a school or giving access to people to make decisions. We need knowledge to do things. Today, if you think about this. What we have is a gigantic, living encyclopedia. I don't mean Wikipedia. Jesus. That's small potatoes. That the entire structure of the net and its connectiveness back into the embodied forms of human service and service relationships is essentially a vast encyclopedia whose purpose is to make available the information and tools to act. We can only act well if we have the information and know how to use it wisely. In fact to teach it. But suppose you think that the value of service design is not just, not just to help with the turnpike pass, nice to have it, but the real deeper purpose behind it is to change the social relationships. To give information and the tools to construct knowledge, to make it actionable to use, to use it wisely or foolishly. That's what service design is about. Now yeah, there are a lot of steps along the way, and a lot of local interests, economic interests and so forth. But suppose our world today has become a gigantic living encyclopedia. Not with dead facts and dead information, but with access to ideas and the materials that could make us live differently. Live as we would choose.

I found that as a thread running through this conference. Kind of quiet. It was a big deal for me. That's why I'm here. I love and appreciate the invitation, but I care about the subject. And it's this sense of its commitment to us I guess that has pushed me over the edge. I'm not interested in the frills and the fads, I've lived through too many of those things. I don't care. But I'm interested in the core that persists after the fad is gone. And to me, finally, service design is adding another bit of understanding to this evolving practice of design thinking. The umbrella for all of the disciplinary orientations and methods. I've talked way, way too long. Thank you very much.

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