

an integrative project

confused emotions, said directly

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What if, in some way we could cut through the nonsense? A visual investigation of interpersonal communication through typography and graphic design, the project has been a study of greeting cards and the way people—my peers in particular—communicate emotions. Research regarding the role of greeting cards, commodity versus gift exchange, interpersonal relations and business cards combined with observation inspired my thesis and a line of paper products, used to aid those of us who lack the ability to directly communicate our mixed sentiments. Simply put, this line of products is for those who need some help shooting it straight. The work is not just a critique of but also an appreciation of the nature of interpersonal communication. If we were direct all the time and there was no nonsense, no mystery and no confusion, life would lack personality and the world of communication would not exist as we know it. If there was no option in the nature of communication to be anything but direct, things would be pretty boring. To combine my contradicting opinions on the nature of interpersonal communication, the four sets of cards combine evidence of both ambiguity and straightforwardness. In order to serve as intermediary communicators, the messages are for confused emotions, said directly.

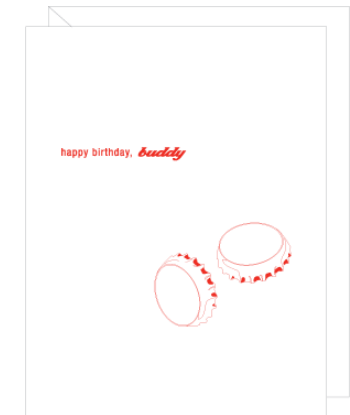
Time after time, when I observe people talking and interacting socially, I have noticed people not saying what they want or mean to say. I, too, notice myself not being able to articulate my thoughts and emotions and purposely avoiding directness for a variety of reasons. I observe others having trouble being explicit and honest, therefore finding themselves caught in a web of ambivalent phrases, which lead to further conflict and misunderstanding (conflict which is even further complicated when via electronic communication). When I fail to clearly communicate or observe others doing the same, I become extremely frustrated.

Sometimes mixed emotions are caused because someone simply does not know what it truly is they are trying to communicate because he or she doesn't understand their own feelings. Sometimes people cannot be up front because they are afraid, as exposing true emotions can lead to pain and rejection. It is scary to divulge and exhibit oneself so openly. Sometimes people fail to be direct because they are manipulating someone else, and ambiguously communicate, as a convenient tool.

Sometimes people are too shy or lack the courage to say what they mean to say. Sometimes, people do not want to encounter a confrontation or offend others. Regardless of the reason, there are countless motives for why, as humans, we often struggle to communicate clearly. It is simply part of human nature. Considering how intelligent our species is acknowledged to be in comparison to other creatures on earth, the rest of the animal kingdom rarely will behave in this conflicting manner. What insights might we find in the meaning behind this behavior? Can it ever be useful? The intention of my thesis work is to question the effect of directness in effective communication, and to find insight into the way we communicate with others through an inquiry into ambiguity. Combining directness and confusion, the work explores how we can communicate through the medium of graphic design and typography on a two dimensional plane.

The project originated in my interest in greeting cards as a method of communicating and showing emotion. I am interested in greeting cards because they are a part of interpersonal communication, encompassing their own set of societal limitations, connotations and expectations. By definition, a greeting card is an expression of friendship or other sentiment. A greeting card is not the venue to show unacceptable or mixed emotion, but to portray customary expressions.

The three letterpressed cards shown here are examples of the type of work that first caught my eye and tempted my interest in greeting cards. I was interested in the topic of greeting cards because there are so many clever, sentimental and thoughtful ways to express emotion for a wide variety of occasions, which offers plenty of potential for creativity. However, it became clear very quickly in the process of the Integrative Project that though I would be able to make thoughtful and creative greeting cards, I would have a hard time creating a project that differed from existing work if I were to remain in the category of the greeting card and not investigate other genres. I later decided to broaden the scope of my project, but found my research into greeting cards useful as a venue for understanding interpersonal relations.



credit pancake and franks, san francisco



credit bella muse cards



credit snow and graham, chicago

A greeting card is a card meant to express a personal sentiment and is similar to gift giving as it can qualify a relationship, yet is not the same as giving a gift. Alexandra Jaffe writes about greeting cards in her paper *The Social Meaning of Greeting Cards* and states that “the card’s ambiguous status is...at the heart of its unique communicative potential” as users can send cards to both state subtle and complex messages, as well as to authenticate previously understood notions about a relationship. Jaffe defines greeting cards as occupying the space in between a gift and a commodity. The idea of the gift versus commodity exchange has been discussed by anthropologists and is important in terms of social relations. Marcel Mauss, the famous French anthropologist in particular, discusses gift and commodity relations in his book *The Gift*. The same types of communication that occur in the exchange of greeting cards can take place within the act of giving a gift. In terms of gift giving, Mauss states “the objects are never completely separated from the men who exchange them” thus creating a type of bond between the giver and the receiver. The bond between the giver and receiver includes the necessity to reciprocate, with certain consequences otherwise. To not return the gift says one thing, while to return the gift says another. A commodity has stricter, more defined boundaries. Gift giving qualifies a relationship—a lunch at a deli will say one thing while a meal at an expensive restaurant says another—while commodity exchange has no commitment or long term understanding involved—you make the purchase, take your item, and the transaction ends.

I see greeting cards as an oversimplified version of gift giving because both involve similar motivations and results. How the sender chose the card and what message it contains, in addition to what the sender hand writes inside, will have impact on the receiver. If I were to buy a friend a lunch at a neighborhood deli on campus, the expectation would be that the friend return the favor at another restaurant at another time. If the friend did not ever reciprocate, did not reciprocate soon enough, or over reciprocated by treating me to a much more expensive meal, then the expectations and relations between me and my friend would change. If I were to write a kind birthday card to a friend, there is no expectation that they write me back immediately, or perhaps ever. However, at the same time, if my birthday came around and they did not give me a card or acknowledge the day, then the relationship would change. In the case of the greeting card, the expectation to reciprocate is less severe, and less serious. The gravity of the two situations is different, which is why the greeting card lives in a place in between the gift and the commodity and can act as both.

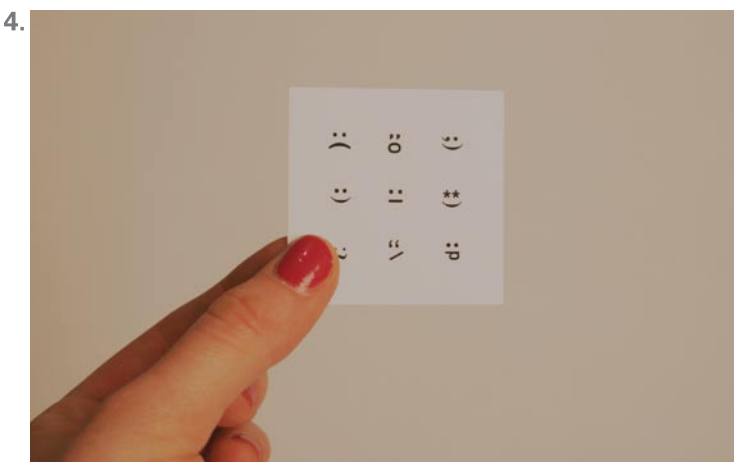
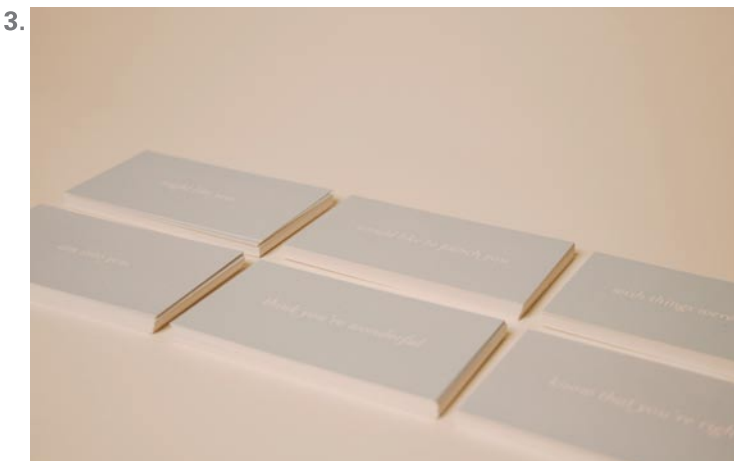
To push the boundary and concept of non-verbal, visual, interpersonal communication, I realized I needed to reach further than the genre of the greeting card because of the expectations attached to them. What I was more interested in were the confused moments in human communication aforementioned, rather than emotions and discourses exchanged via greeting card, which are standardized and laden with expectation. As mentioned previously, I am intrigued by the combination of ambivalence and direct communication. If there was a way to directly communicate confused emotions, what would that look like?

My work combines the function of a greeting card with the function of a business card and communicates simple messages that can be used in a variety of situations. Business card exchange is another genre of interpersonal, communicative engagement that I have investigated. By definition, a business card is a small card printed or engraved with a person's name and business affiliation, including such information as title, address and telephone number and serves as an identity card. Business cards represent a person or business in a simple, clear visual manner, and are not meant to signify an emotion or a relationship, the way that a greeting card could or a gift surely would. A business card is unambiguous, while a greeting card as Jaffe states is ambiguous and can be interpreted and used in a variety of ways. On a business card, the information provided is clear and concise. The same set of facts are given on nearly every business card in existence. A business card is a placeholder and representation of a greater idea. Companies, designers, people of all professions, obsess over their brand image and how they are represented on paper. However, an identity is a huge concept, and to try and put it into a logo, slogan or business card is a huge challenge and only portrays a section of an identity in reality. In terms of size, a greeting card is much larger while the business card can be transported and exchanged easily, from wallet to case to wallet.

For these reasons, I created cards in the format of the business card or in similar dimensions. I want my cards to be exchanged from person to person, when moment is right. Figure one shows a one by two inch card stating *I'm not ready for this* in a small sliding box that could be carried easily. The Cards for All Types of Shit shown in Figure 2 offers four three and half by two inch cards with different phrases to be used when an unfortunate, stupid or ridiculous situation arises. How many times do I just wanted to say to someone *no shit*, but instead play the fool, when I should have been realistic about the situation. Figure 3 shows the Cards for the Ambivalent and Confused, which combine the hesitant and ambivalent words *kinda*, *sorta*, *maybe* with strong sentiments such as *think you're wonderful* and *would like to punch you*. Figure 4 shows the Cards for the Emotionally Challenged. These two by two inch cards allow the giver to circle an emoticon to represent how they are currently feeling.



1. Cards for Fear of Commitment
2. Cards for All Types of Shit
3. Cards for the Ambivalent and Confused
4. Cards for the Emotionally Challenged





gallery installation



entire grouping of cards

It is clear that human nature is far more complicated than a business card, or a greeting card, and it is unrealistic to actually apply that kind of communication to all human emotion. Communication depends on a variety of things, and depends on a mutual understanding and agreement between two people to enter a discourse with one another. However, with that said, my goal was to create something that addressed communication in a surprising way and speak to the ambivalent, ambiguous and confusing nature of expressing emotion. By combining the emotion of a greeting card with accuracy of a business card I aimed to create cards that are simultaneously direct and representative of mixed emotions.

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Special Thanks:
Elona Van Gent
John Marshall
Jennifer Metsker