Intention or Attention?
Humbling Design through 'Systems Changes Learning'

Zaid Khan
Systems Thinking Ontario
May 9, 2022

ONE-WORD TAKEAWAY:

ONE-WORD TAKEAWAY:

rhythm

ONE-WORD TAKEAWAY:

rhythm

THE POINT OF THIS PRESENTATION:
**Invite designers to appreciate
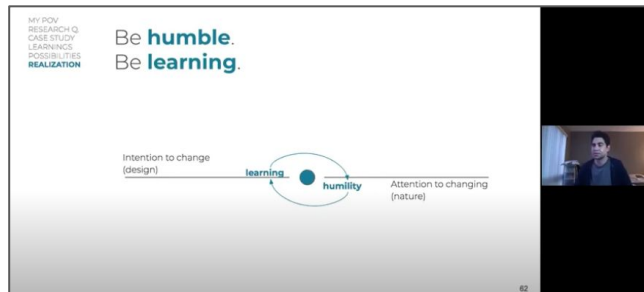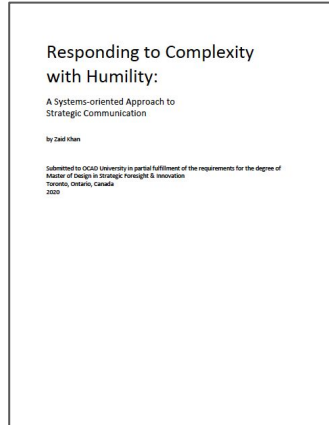when to *act* and
when to *non-act***

CONTEXT

Context:
Picking up from where I left off at the end of my Major Research Project (2020), reflecting on the potential role of humility in design

Responding to Complexity with Humility:

A Systems-oriented Approach to Strategic Communication

by Zaid Khan

Submitted to OCAD University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Design in Strategic Foresight & Innovation
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
2020

MY POV
RESEARCH Q.
CASE STUDY
LEARNINGS
POSSIBILITIES
REALIZATION

Be humble.
Be learning.

Intention to change (design)

learning

humility

Attention to changing (nature)

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(ST-ON, Sept 2020)

REFLECTION

I'm not the same person I was yesterday.
I'm definitely not the same person I was when I started this project and this program.

At the end of my Master of Design program, I've come to realize that design education has a, potentially flawed, bias towards action. The *how might we's*, the design jams and competitions, the theatre of innovation, and other traits show this default-to-action mentality.

It seems to me, that design education assumes that action needs to be taken to address problems. But defining things as *problems* creates a fixed frame on a moving issue. It imposes a convenient way to design actions against the nature of the unfolding, ever-changing world. The consequences of good intentions acted upon through a design framework might be causing the very *problems* that designers set out to *solve*.

So, when I think about reflecting real-world complexity, I now see that it should apply to my own design framework.

Perhaps there's a need for design education to appreciate the value of *inaction*. That is, paying attention to what is changing; the patterns of change, the natural flows of change, the long timelines of change, etc.

In a world of endless interventions, might there be wisdom in deliberate non-intervention?

In the case study of this project, what if instead of proposing a communication strategy, I exposed the multiple patterns of change in the media ecosystems to reveal deeper wisdom on what NOT to do, or what little (in)action can have profound effects.

And for this MRP, instead of offering systems communications as an evolved practice, what if I revealed the dissonance between complex issues and our media ecology. Maybe this approach helps swap the design bias towards action and trains our attention to what is changing.

This brings me to a realization that perhaps the balance between intention to change (design) and attention to changing (nature) is a revolving act of humility and learning.

Be humble.
Always be learning.

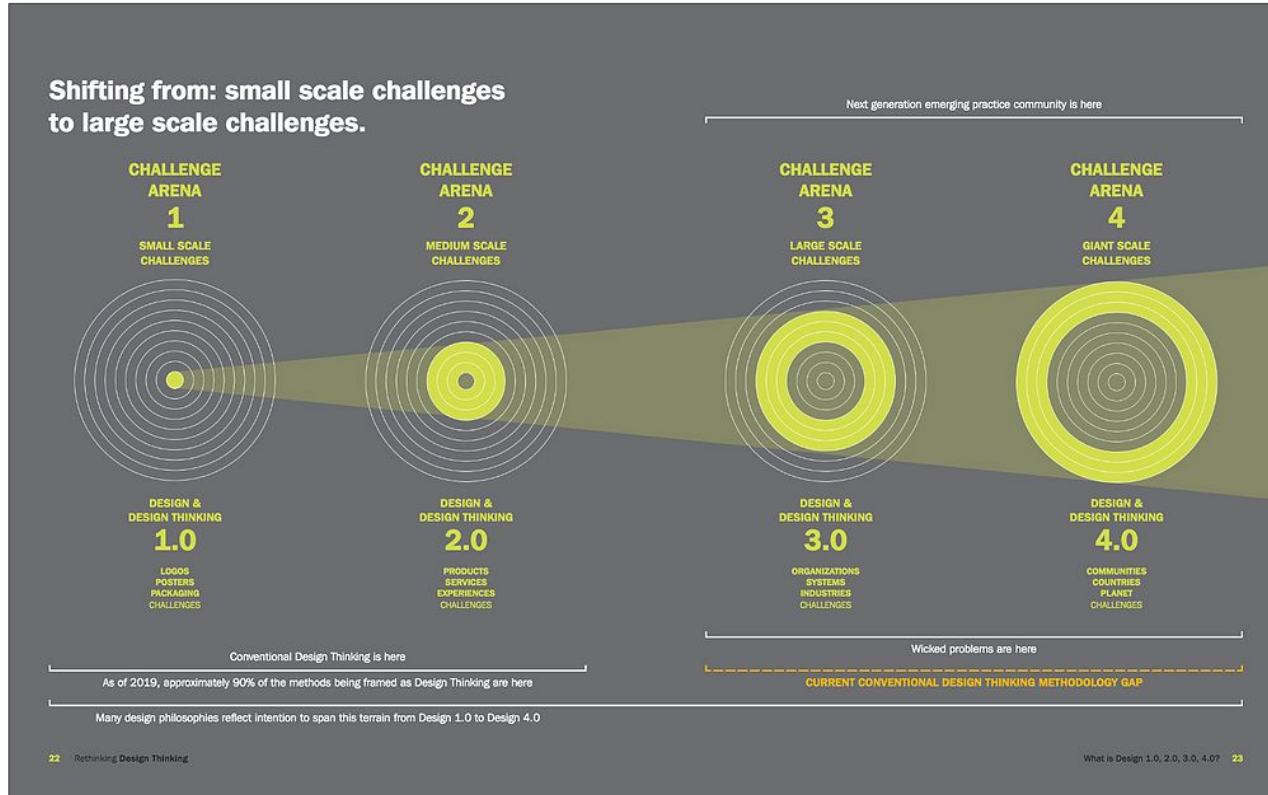This is a realization I take seriously into my future.

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Context:
**"*Design*" will from here on out be referred to as
"*designing*" to reflect process language**

~~**design**~~ **noun** **static**

designing **verb** **process**

Context:
Use of "designing" in presentation refers to domain 3.0 & 4.0 with unstable wicked problems

Shifting from: small scale challenges to large scale challenges.

Next generation emerging practice community is here

CHALLENGE ARENA **1** — SMALL SCALE CHALLENGES

CHALLENGE ARENA **2** — MEDIUM SCALE CHALLENGES

CHALLENGE ARENA **3** — LARGE SCALE CHALLENGES

CHALLENGE ARENA **4** — GIANT SCALE CHALLENGES

DESIGN & DESIGN THINKING **1.0** — LOGOS POSTERS PACKAGING CHALLENGES

DESIGN & DESIGN THINKING **2.0** — PRODUCTS SERVICES EXPERIENCES CHALLENGES

DESIGN & DESIGN THINKING **3.0** — ORGANIZATIONS SYSTEMS INDUSTRIES CHALLENGES

DESIGN & DESIGN THINKING **4.0** — COMMUNITIES COUNTRIES PLANET CHALLENGES

Conventional Design Thinking is here

Wicked problems are here

As of 2019, approximately 90% of the methods being framed as Design Thinking are here

CURRENT CONVENTIONAL DESIGN THINKING METHODOLOGY GAP

Many design philosophies reflect intention to span this terrain from Design 1.0 to Design 4.0

22   Rethinking Design Thinking

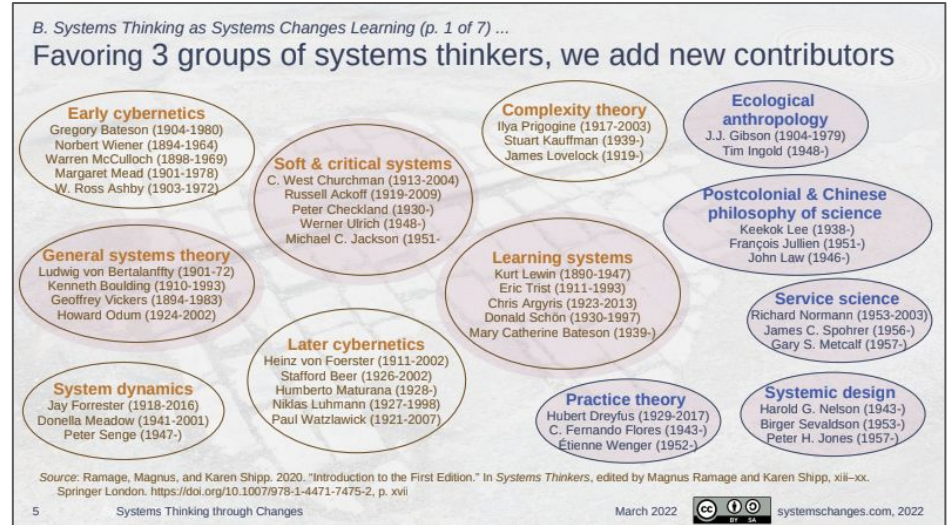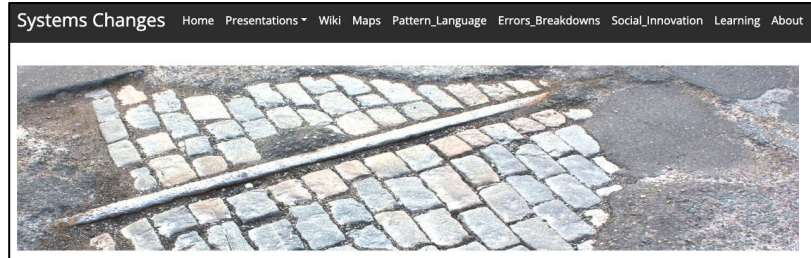What is Design 1.0, 2.0, 3.0, 4.0?   23

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Context:
Use of "designing" in presentation refers to domain 3.0 & 4.0 with unstable wicked problems

Context:
Looking at *designing* through research work called
'Systems Changes Learning' (SCL)

Systems Changes | Home | Presentations | Wiki | Maps | Pattern_Language | Errors_Breakdowns | Social_Innovation | Learning | About

B. Systems Thinking as Systems Changes Learning (p. 1 of 7) …
Favoring 3 groups of systems thinkers, we add new contributors

Early cybernetics
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Norbert Wiener (1894-1964)
Warren McCulloch (1898-1969)
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Source: Ramage, Magnus, and Karen Shipp. 2020. "Introduction to the First Edition." In *Systems Thinkers*, edited by Magnus Ramage and Karen Shipp, xiii–xx. Springer London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4471-7475-2, p. xvii

5   Systems Thinking through Changes   March 2022   systemschanges.com, 2022

Context:

<u>Not</u> a deep-dive into SCL, but it has methodology
you can learn more about by connecting with team
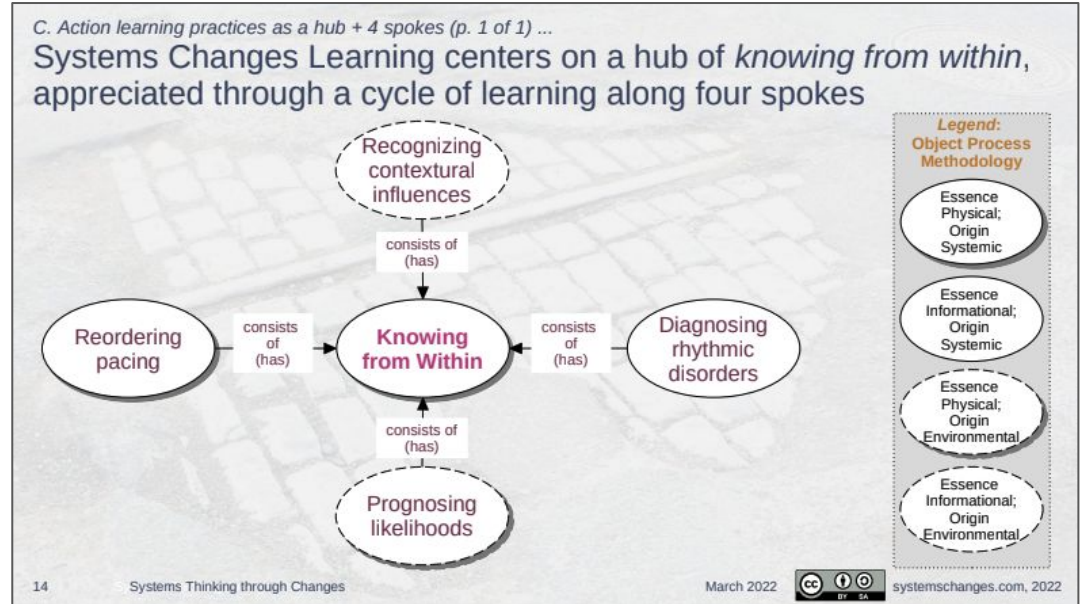
Article

Systems Changes Learning: Recasting and reifying rhythmic shifts for doing, alongside thinking and making

David Ing[1]

**Table 1.** Progressing facility in activities with Systems Changes Learning

	Praxis - Doing	*Theoria - Thinking*	*Poiesis - Making*
Educating of attention	§2.1: Behavioral and/or ecological?	§2.2: Changelessness and/or temporality?	§2.3: Causality and/or propensity?
Learning for co-relating	§3.1: Action-agencing	§3.2: Theory-enskilling	§3.3: Methods-weaving
Learning for articulating	§4.1: Action-guiding	§4.2: Theory-building	§4.3: Methods-composing

C. Action learning practices as a hub + 4 spokes (p. 1 of 1) ...

Systems Changes Learning centers on a hub of *knowing from within*, appreciated through a cycle of learning along four spokes

14   Systems Thinking through Changes   March 2022   systemschanges.com, 2022

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Context:

Ideas and critiques are directed at myself first and foremost, changing oneself before changing else

"When you point your finger at someone, there's three fingers pointing back at you."
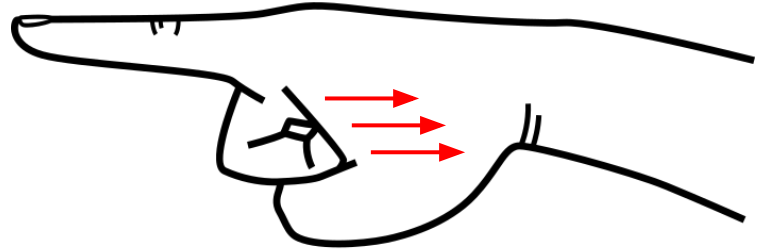
CONTEXT

Continuing to connect humility

Designing, not design

Designing referring to D3.0, D4.0, Wicked Problems

Looking at designing through Systems Changes Learning

Not diving deep into Systems Changes Learning

Exercising self-critique

RHYTHMS

Appreciating rhythms is a story about….

WATER SKIING
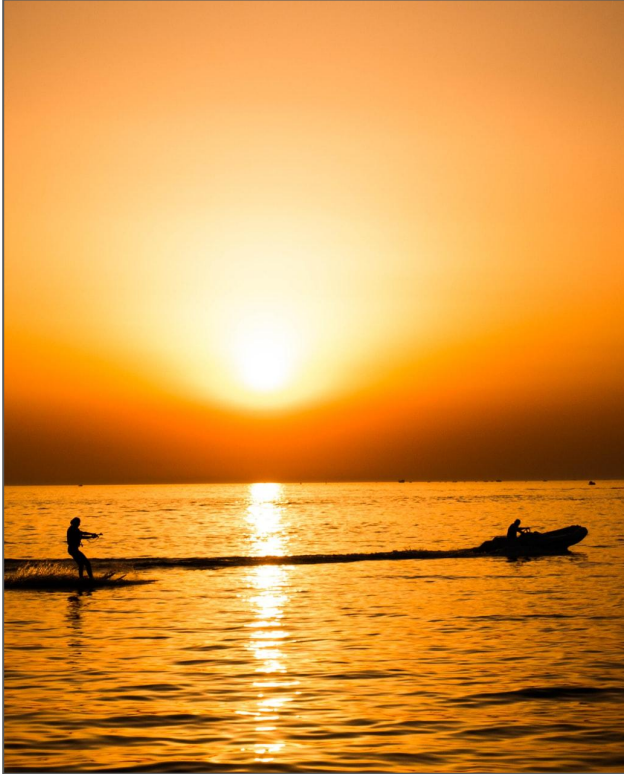
vs.

SURFING

WATER-SKIING EMPHASIZES "INTENTION"
Approaching activity with intention.
Using boat, causes wake, cutting side to side.
Mechanistic.
Causality.

SURFING EMPHASIZES "ATTENTION"

Placing attention on weather, location, currents, winds, etc.
Responding to natural **rhythmic shifts** of ocean.
Living systems.
Propensity.

Unpacking rhythms through three ideas (of the many) that SCL draws upon, which had an impact on my thinking…and maybe my designing.

RHYTHMS

**Seeing reality as
a process**

Seeing reality as a process
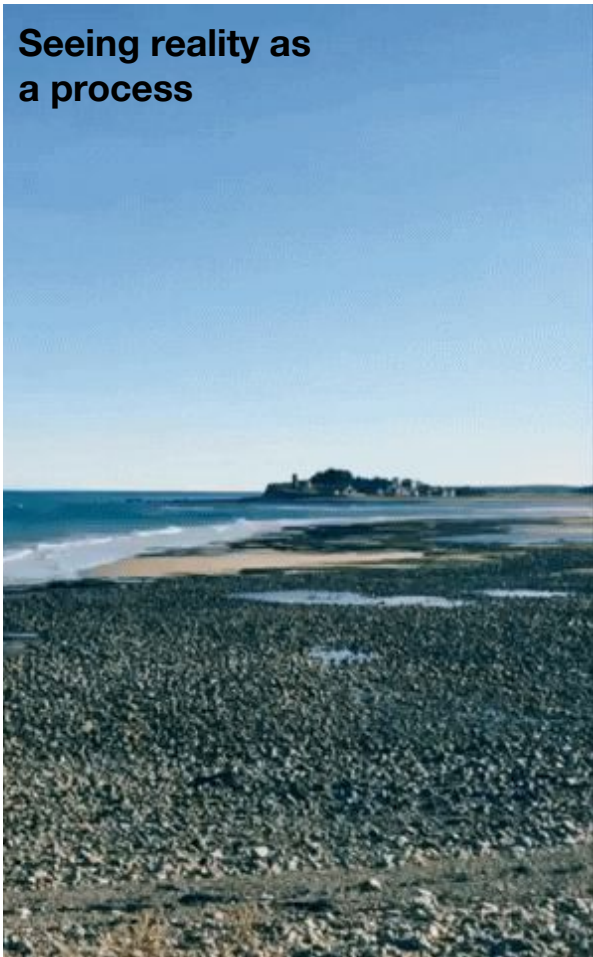
Understanding the potential of a situation

**Seeing reality as
a process**
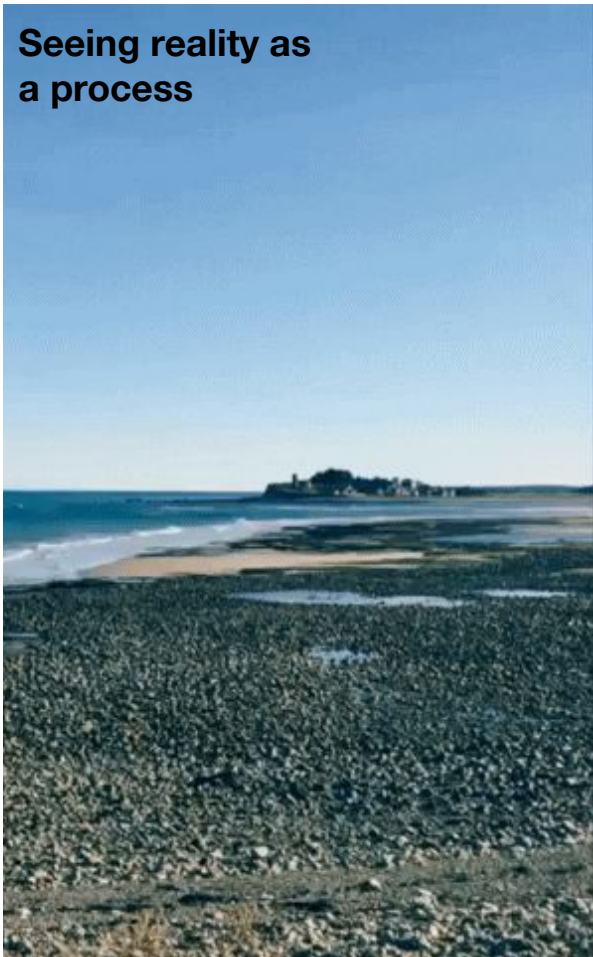
**Understanding the
potential of a situation**

**Knowing from
the inside**

Seeing reality as a process

(*Temporality* -as-opposed-to- changelessness)

The Concept:
Structure is an arrangement in space;
process is an arrangement in time.

Looking at *process* first.

Example:
When we look at a mountain, we should recall that the
structure is actually a slow process.

A Takeaway:
Inserting the thought of "*over time*" as a consideration to
designing, allows you to see potential (next slide)...

Understanding the potential energy of a situation

(*Propensity* -as-opposed-to- causality)

The Concept:
Everything has a natural tendency (predisposition) within them that is inevitable (over time).

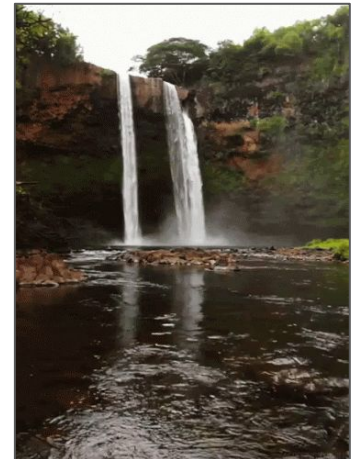So a strategist harnesses that potential energy of a situation (*shi*) to their advantage.
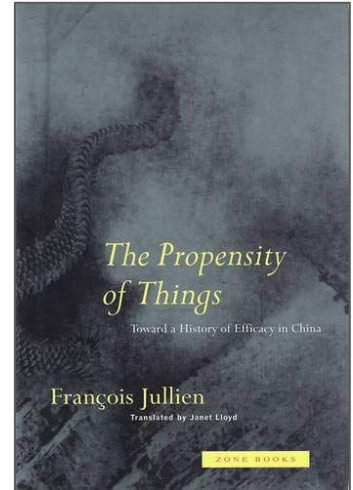
Example:
If a dam breaks, the water has no choice but to rush forth.

A Takeaway:
Trying not to force a change that goes against something's natural tendency.

So it's important to understand a thing's nature…(next slide)

The Propensity of Things
Toward a History of Efficacy in China
François Jullien
Translated by Janet Lloyd
ZONE BOOKS

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Knowing from the inside

(*Knowing* from the inside -as-opposed-to- the outside)

The Idea:
Paying attention to what the system has to tell us about itself.
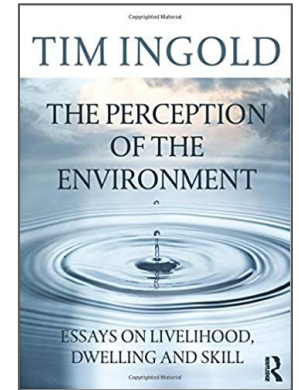
Example:
When a parent is potty training their child, only the child truly knows when they have to go, and can alert the parent.
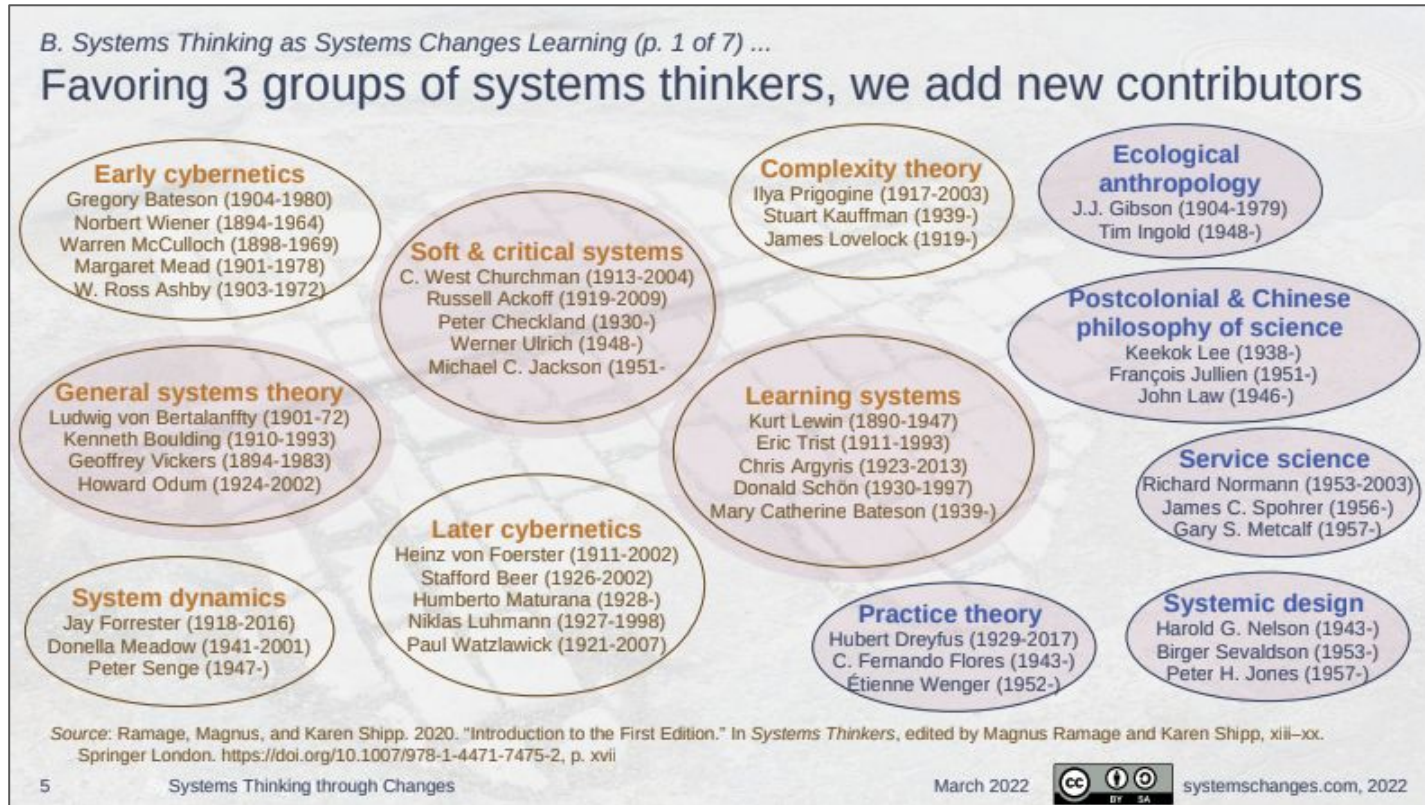
A Takeaway:
Media habits, especially today!

Asking myself "*what's asking for my attention and why…and from where*"

Hard to claim high confidence knowledge of complexity from the outside.

TIM INGOLD

THE PERCEPTION
OF THE
ENVIRONMENT

ESSAYS ON LIVELIHOOD,
DWELLING AND SKILL

Reminder:

Just a few of the many concepts that SCL draws upon

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5   Systems Thinking through Changes
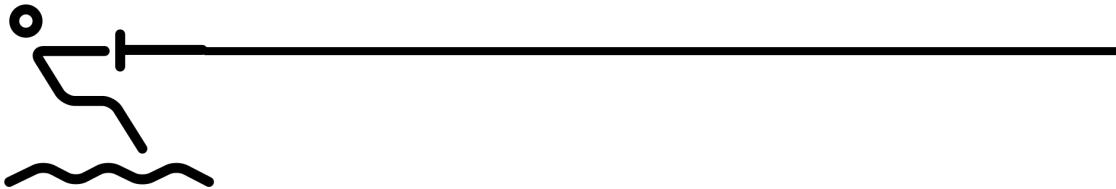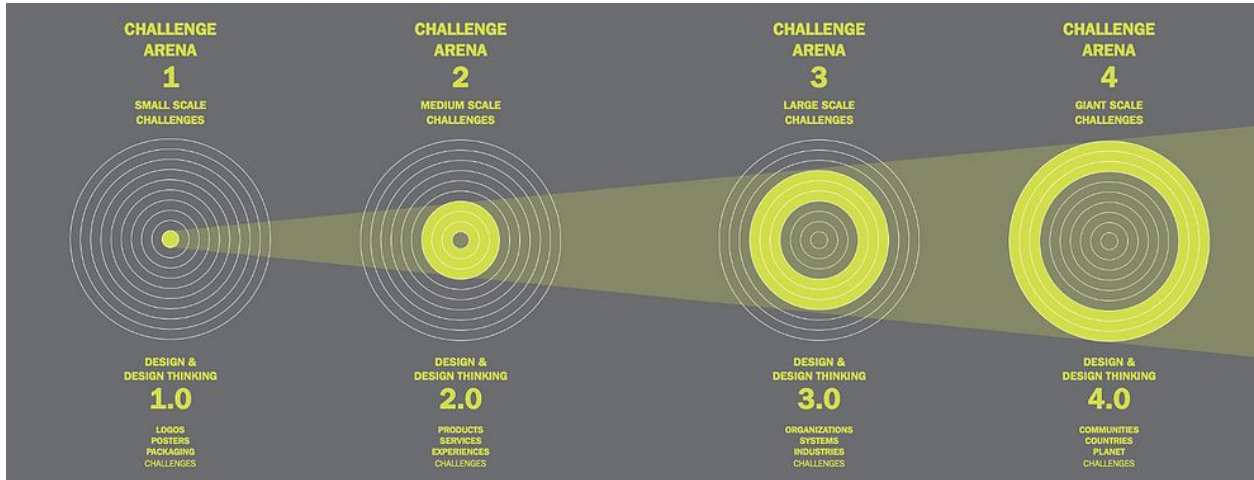
March 2022   systemschanges.com, 2022

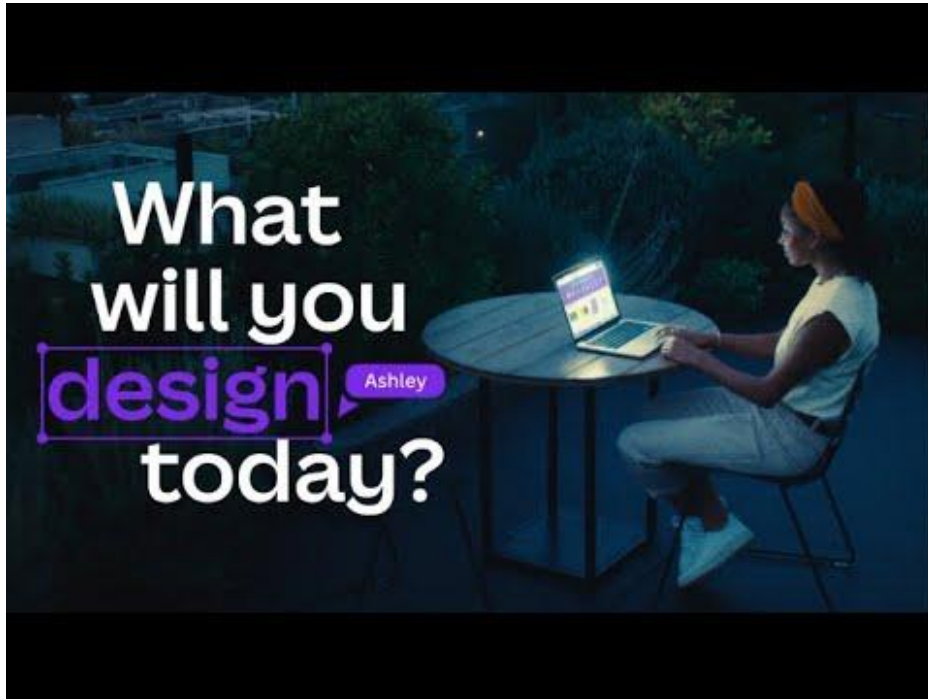SO WHERE DOES *DESIGNING* & *HUMBLING* FIT INTO ALL THIS?

Intending to "Solve" to Wicked Problems:
Designing is trying to water ski - pulled along by the client (boat) - from D1 & D2 into the wicked hurricanes of D3 & D4, when surfing
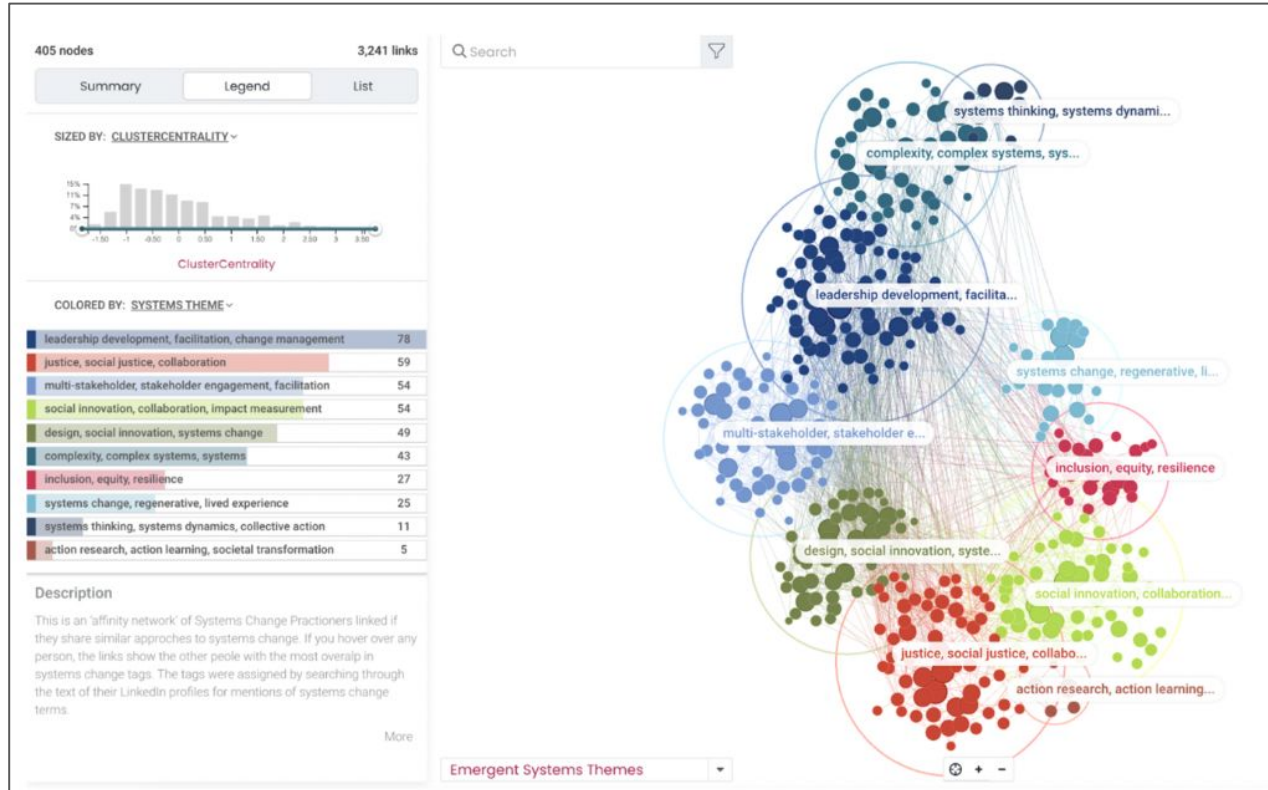
Designing is trying to water ski - pulled along by the client (boat) - from D1 & D2 into the wicked hurricanes of D3 & D4

Systems Change, Social Innovation, etc:

Okay fair, designing at D3, D4 is more about…"*multi-stakeholder engagement*", "*getting the system into the room*", etc. I get it but…

ILLUMINATE

Sense-making from visualising the field of systems change

…but should *designing* buy into that same level of arrog- … err …**confidence of "intent"**?

Can we be designing with greater humility?
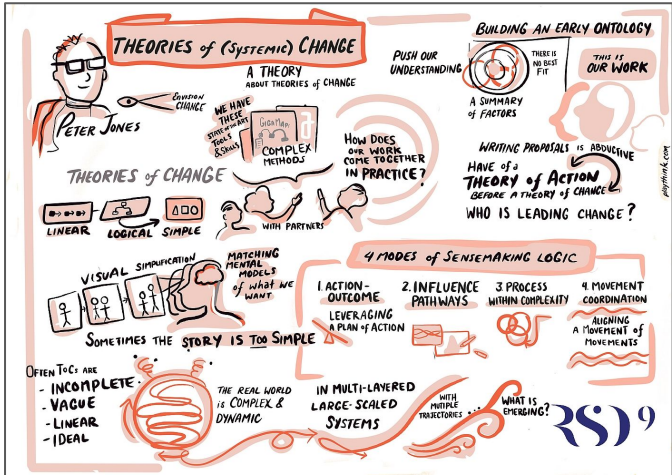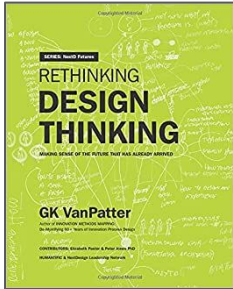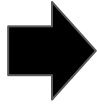..in what we know, do, say, appeal, communicate, act, etc.

A **less contrived**, more like a **sage** guiding attention to what to look for in that ocean: *the tide, the force, hidden currents, other people…*

Can designing be the pursuit of **better question towards practical wisdom**…?

As opposed to the pursuit of "ideals" in short-term?

THE **ARROGANCE** OF **HUMANISM** David Ehrenfeld

DAY 1 - 9 May 2022
Join the world's largest event led by social innovators and entrepreneurs
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Amplify. Accelerate. Action.

CATALYST 2030

kairos
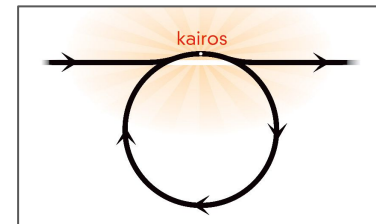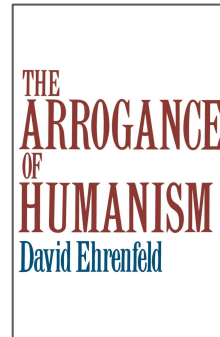
Recent Works to Counter Reductive Tendency:

Starting to see some of that shift in attention

CONNECTING THIS ALL TO HUMILITY

Placing **attention** to **rhythmic shifts**
invites **learning** about the
unfolding nature of situations
to appreciate **when to act,**
and also of value,
when to non-act.

This may require humbling oneself.

Three streams where *humbly designing* is having an impact on me…

Three streams where *humbly designing* is having an impact on me…

NOT communicating with confidence of/from a single perspective

MY RESEARCH - LEARNINGS

Systems communications widens the scope and breadth of strategic communication

STAGE	STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION	SYSTEMS COMMUNICATIONS
Context	Immediate environment	Higher-order system
Objectives	Immediate environment	Higher-order system
Audiences	Narrow ideal	System's variety
Research	Isolated; audience-centric	Connected; relationship-centric
Strategy	Singular pathway set	Multiple pathways emerge
Messaging	Reductive, singular, closed	Reflective, multi-sided, inviting, open

UNDER LAYERED SUSPICION

A REVIEW OF CRA AUDITS OF MUSLIM-LED CHARITIES

Under Layered Suspicion identifies whole-of-government policies and patterns of audit practices that together demonstrate potential biases in Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) audits of Muslim-led charities.

FULL REPORT   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (EN)   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (FR)   INFOGRAPHIC

UNLOCK BAIL REFORM

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UNLOCK BAIL REFORM

Being in awe of & working on the infrastructures that sustain us

MAINTAINERS

The Innovation Delusion

How Our Obsession with the New Has Disrupted the Work That Matters Most

Lee Vinsel and **Andrew L. Russell**

Three streams where *humbly designing* is having an impact on me…

NOT communicating with confidence of/from a single perspective

Being in awe of & working on the infrastructures that sustain us

Reacquiring concepts from traditions that endure & applying to today

MY RESEARCH - LEARNINGS
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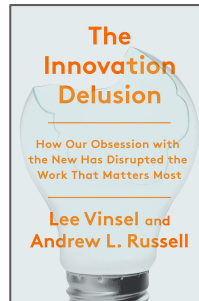| STAGE	STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION	SYSTEMS COMMUNICATIONS
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UNLOCK BAIL REFORM

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KHALIL CENTER
A ZAKAT FOUNDATION PROJECT

Enhancing Modern Designing through Classical Traditions

Islamic Scholarly Tradition → Extracting Knowledge Related to Questions in Designing → Enrichment of Modern Designing

Recap Map:

Recap Map:

Context
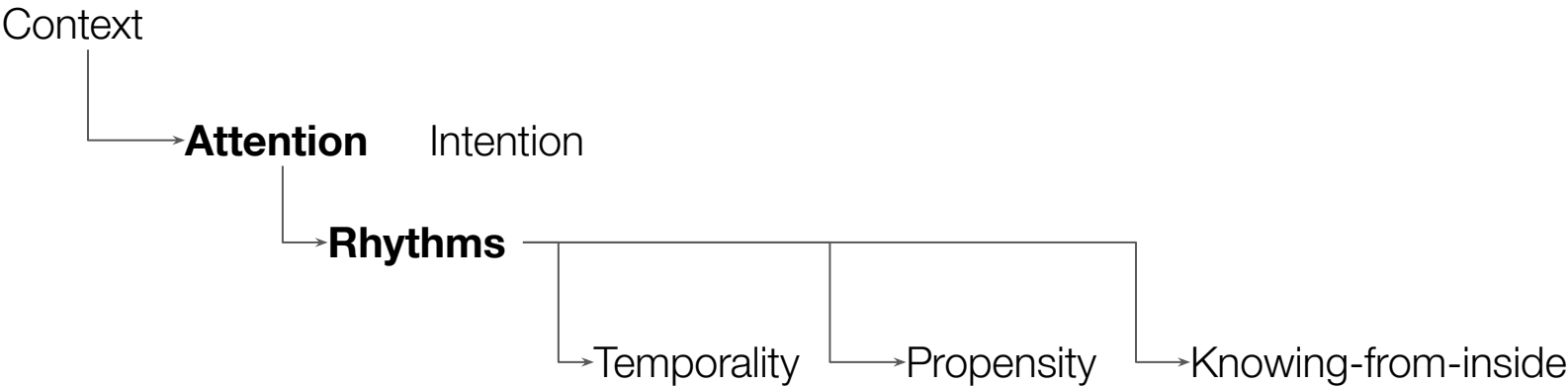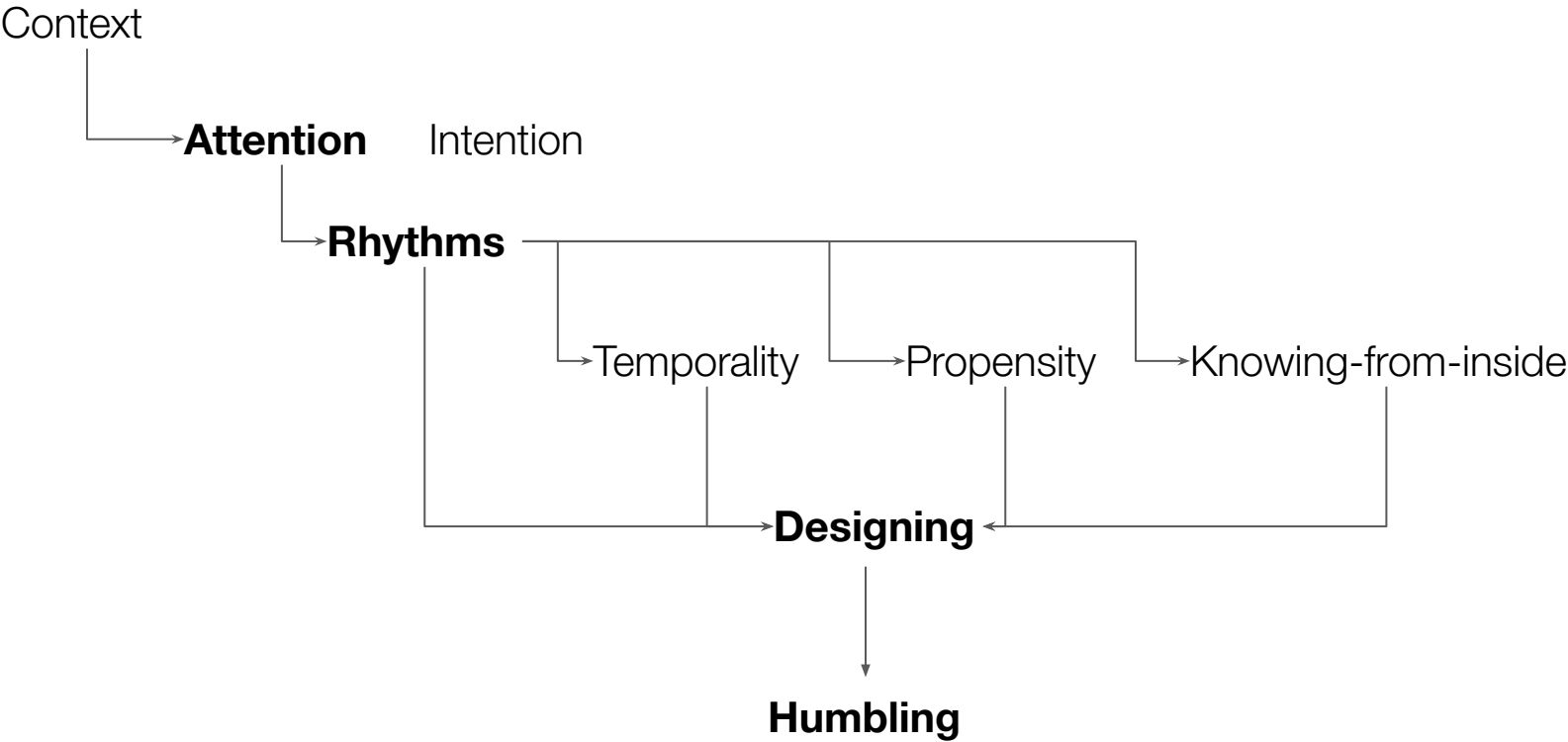
→ **Attention**   Intention

Context

Attention   Intention

Rhythms

Temporality   Propensity   Knowing-from-inside

Recap Map:

Context

Attention   Intention

Rhythms

Temporality   Propensity   Knowing-from-inside

Designing

Humbling
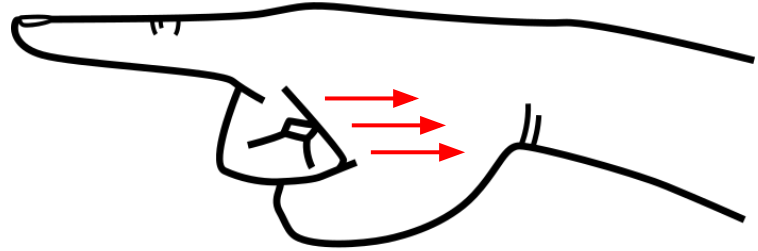
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rhythm

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THE POINT OF THIS PRESENTATION:
**Invite designers to appreciate
when to act and
when to non-act**

Thank you.
Loooooooong list of ideas left on the cutting-room floor.
I'll leave this slide up for a few minutes.
You can ask me (and David Ing and Peter Jones) about…

- Wu-Wei
- Contextual Dyadic Thinking
- Materializing vs. Dematerializing
- Wisdom Studies
- Thingification
- Type 3 and 4 Errors
- Mediated (media) understanding, representations
- Cultural Sustainability
- Teleology vs. Teleonomy / Purposeful vs. Purposive
- Ideal-Seeking vs. Finite Goals
- Urgent vs. Important
- Local vs. Distant
- History as Systems Thinking
- Knowing "when" you are, not just who you are or where you are
- Weave, Weaving, Living Lines, Contexture
- Timeless Strategy
- Islamic Design Philosophy & Systems Thinking (isnad, fiqh, adab, humility)
- Multiple stable states
- …and anything else!

Potential reaction range…

? ———————————————————— **!**

"You lost me at slide #2" "Maybe you should try a bit of humility yourself…" … … "so….surfing?"

zaid@zaidkhan.ca