

Last lecture

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IDC School of Design, IIT Bombay

[S1] **Re: Design** – Shifting into lower gear

Notes

Thank you. I would like to begin by thanking the Head of the Department, Prof. Venkatesh, for inviting me to speak today – for offering me an opportunity not only to share what I might about education, and design, and design thinking, but also, and particularly, an opportunity to thank all of you here, and others, especially students, friends, who have left IDC and who remain an integral part of my journey in this place, and so of my life. Thank you for all I have received from here, from you, from this place, and from the idea of this place.

Last week, I had an encounter I'd like to share with you. I was at a talk on the evolving design process – architectural, in this instance – of a group of students working in the Palghar district, where the Warli live and work and play.

My encounter was with the word *bigha* [S2 – *Do Bigha Zameen poster*]. It wasn't the first time I'd heard the word, of course – it's right here on the screen – and I know, too, as most of you do, that this is a measure for *zameen*, for land. Most of us think of *bigha* as an old measure of area, same as *tolas* are of weight. But, unlike *tola*, *bigha* is not a standard measure. By that, I mean that the equivalent of a *bigha* in acres or square meters, as we choose to measure land now, changes from region to region.

A *bigha* is non-standard not because it is whimsical. It does not so much measure the size of the land as it measures its productivity. Depending on region, a *bigha* in one place can be as much as twice the area of land as in another place. How much can grow on it... this depends on so many things in its turn: land features – whether mountainous or flat, soil quality, weather – arid or rainy, the availability of alternate systems of water retrieval and distribution: irrigation networks, lakes, rivers, water tables, and the sum of it all is that a community, local to a region, calculates a size and designates a measure as a stand-in for an *intention* [S3] – and the intention is of productivity as a measure, and sustenance as a marker for land. So, while the urban mind sneers at the non-standard-ness of its definition, at the flexibility in the area measured by a *bigha*, the farming community's mind reads fixity in it – a reliable measure that is a unit of sustenance.

And the continuing use of this measure reminds me that there are many ways of seeing the world, many ways of citing it, slicing it, making it reflect values of equality and sustenance, of social and individual justice, that we hold dear to any idea of civilization. It also reminds me through its marginalization that *the loss of a measure can become our mismeasure*.

We must pay attention to such minutiae as the idea behind a measure. The underpinning of the word *bigha* is: *yeh zameen kitni upjaao hai?*

An understanding of what and how much a land can give,
measured against what and how much is needed to live.

And then, maybe, we can think of what makes a civilization more civilized than that it envisions a system of stewardship and effort that takes responsibility to feed us, embeds that immensity in the mundaneness of a measure of land. What is the power of an idea like that? What is the possibility within it? And how do our design minds assimilate and harness such ways of seeing, of knowing? Because the idea, the *intent*, behind what is measured and *how* is bigger than the vagaries of its usage, and the periodic failures of its implementation. With *bigha*, intent is *the standard*, and measure follows.

Why did I begin with this slide? [S4 same as S2]

As designers, and as humans – not mutually exclusive conditions – as designers, it behooves us to be intensely focused on the world around us. If we wish to intervene in ways that better others' lives or to address the injustice and malaise that arises in all societies, we must take the time to immerse ourselves in studying and in creating cultural artifacts, because the germinating impulse of any artifact arises from the cultural ethos of a civilization.

To trace one thread: *Dui Bigha Jomi* is a poem by Rabindranath Tagore that depicts rural Bengal's agrarian hardship and the systemic exploitation of the poor by the powerful through the story of an individual who has lost his land, and so his home, and wanders through a thickening mist of misfortune and longing. It inspired Bimal Roy's eponymous film, *Do Bigha Zameen* in 1953, which wrapped the Tagore poem in the vestment of film. 1953 is almost three-quarters of a century ago, yet this is a story still being written in many ways, as the rosters of farmer suicides across our country continue to repeat and recount. We know it more recently also from the farmer protests of 2020-21 against agricultural liberalization laws that invoked all the old demons of land loss, of the destruction of community, of the abandoning of old ways – underscoring the continuing tensions between much-required market-oriented reforms and collective, indigenous understandings of local systems of production and sustenance. These understandings don't have to be old in time, they may be new, but the important thing is that they arise from context, from the need on the ground.

And cultural artifacts – films, music, ritual, art – are things that serve a reflective purpose. They represent a deep understanding of the ground from which they arise. Which means they mirror and reflect the intentions that underlie cultural mores and long-held beliefs.

If I were to ask you to speak of the values that define us, as a culture, a civilization – attend to them with seriousness, without play, without art, or film, without music or poetry, you may realize after some thought that that is not an easy enterprise. We humans are makers of

things. In our expressiveness is not only our identity, but also our vision for ourselves, for our communities and, perchance, for our shared humanity.

For what is at stake in the making of things is not just economic, it is existential.

When we look closely and with care at the farmers agitating on the outskirts of New Delhi [S5-6], designing a way for themselves to cook and eat, and launder and bathe, and live together roadside in the tens of thousands for weeks and months – think of the system design, think of each nugget of need met by someone putting together a solution that will last, think of networks of care and consolation, because that is what it takes to implement resistance. There is no predictable timeline. Look closely at how they're communicating, within the group and with all interested parties outside the group – their farmer kin in other states, their extended families, city dwellers, the government – think of how they disseminate their dissent, through dialogue and discussion, through writing and raging, through prayer and play, and what you have is art and film, and maps and machines, and design and poetry that draw the outline of our collective selves, and make us think of who we are, what we do, and where we want to go. This is not burden, this is beauty, this is brilliance. But it carries an obligation.

Our obligation is the transmission of this ethos. We do not transmit a cultural, social ethos through heredity; we pass it along because we teach it. It grows when we speak of it, becomes stronger when we question it – periodically, regularly. And as a learning institution deeply embedded in the making of things – This. Us. Here – propagating change through the design and dissemination of ideas and artifacts – because that is what we do – it behooves us to locate our actions on a continuum, to explain the necessity for change, to express what we gain from it, to elaborate what is or may be lost, so that we may reconsider, and if we choose change then we tread slowly, listen carefully, decide deliberately.

What I want us to take away from the word *bigha* is that *social intent is critical* [S7]. Intent for community, for larger society, which is also a kind of grounding. Intent defines us in the world we create – the world we make, which then makes us in its own reflection.

Emilio Ambasz (b. 1943, Argentina): *Green Over Gray*

What we're seeing next is a short clip from a documentary on the work of the architect, Emilio Ambasz. We'll talk about him after.

[S8 – clip from documentary on Emilio Ambasz' work: the ACROS building of 1990]

[S9] As you saw in the film, Emilio Ambasz is renowned for buildings that incorporate greenery. This two-and-a-half-minute clip that we just saw comes from a documentary called *Green Over Gray*, the title a slogan that embodies Ambasz' architectural approach, as he also said in the film.

[S10] In Fukuoka, Japan, the ACROS building includes a Step Garden/a small hill, in fact, that boasts 120 varieties and approximately 50,000 plants, creating a public park on and around the complex. There are two moments in this clip that particularly stay with me. One is when he says with quiet certainty, “they mustn’t lose the park.” And the other, when he thanks the birds for their help in converting the 35,000 originally planted trees and shrubs into 50,000 within a few years. This spirit of communion with the denizens of the city, as with the birds and plants that populate it, is vital to the architecture that emerges in response. [S11] It is as important as the technical fact that this greenery acts as a passive cooling feature that enables the building to be more energy efficient by lowering temperatures (by nearly 15 degrees F/8 degrees C) during the city’s warmer months.

“Every building is an intrusion into the plant kingdom and is a challenge to nature: we must devise an architecture that stands as the embodiment of a *covenant of reconciliation* between nature and construction, designing buildings so intrinsically connected to the surrounding environment that they cannot be separated from each other.”

Intent as aesthetic.

Intent as architecture.

Intent as measure – not only of purposiveness, but also of an enhanced quality of life.

“*They mustn’t lose the park,*” he said. It is a simple thought, and an act of love.

Simplicity is not just the removal of clutter from an idea, or a product. As Jon Ive (ex- of Apple) has said, “Simplicity, to me, is trying to succinctly express the essence of something, and its purpose, and its role in our life.” Merely solving a functional imperative – even with the characteristics of simplicity, clarity, and purposiveness – is insufficient, in his view. We need to attend to love, and joy, and humor in our designs.

This, to me, is a profundity *beyond all profundities* – to attend to love, joy, and humor when designing for people.

Whatever your relationship with Apple products, and I know people hold very strong views in both directions on those... but, whatever that may be, I think we can still take these thoughts and use them in designer-ly ways that we find worthwhile.

We’re not talking personal love here, although that has its place too. The more interesting question is *can love connect the personal to the ethical – where love begins not with desire, but with responsibility?* I am referencing the work Emmanuel Levinas, a 20th c. French philosopher (known for his contributions to existentialism and phenomenology), who focused particularly on ethics, philosophy, and the nature of human relationships.

When you’re creating something not just for yourself, but for a broader population, and when you offer it to them – as this office building designed by Ambasz – and then you offer it not only to the people who will work in it and experience it, sensorially and functionally,

but also to the rest of the city, to others who will enjoy the space outside the building as if it belonged to them all, offered sanctuary. A kind of urban forest, a place to meet with friends, or be alone, a path to use as scenic route for other business one might have... when you do that with an architectural space, a building, that not only serves functional requirement, but creates delight, and joy, and respite for a broader audience, you create joy that defies definition because it belongs to so many. The people who use it connect to the author of the design through their persistent use of that space. And one could argue that the frisson of excitement that Ambasz may have felt as he designed the building, is the frisson that they must experience too when using it, and there's the connection... the recognition that, through design, someone has sought to better their collective life, with intent, and also with love. And with care.

Time

[S12] *A River Vanished*

This is a story of time.

[S13] Of the disappearance of a river.

[S14] Of the denuding of a mountain range – the Aravallis – through logging, of its evisceration through mining. Of an already vulnerable arid region descending into drought and desertification.

[S15, same as 13] And this is the kind of patchy water body that is strewn over the course of the Arvari river bed by the 1980s. It has ceased to exist as river, gone for 60 years.

In the 18th century, the Arvari was the main groundwater recharge stream for hundreds of villages along its banks. Of the two sources of the river, one stream originated near the twin villages of Bhaonta-Koylala. Forgive the intense detail – this nugget is important to the story, because this is where the climactic moment of the later drama originates... in the twin villages of Bhaonta-Koylala, where one of the sources of the river abides, but which fact had been completely forgotten in these villages by the 1980s, because the river had vanished some 60 years earlier – more than two generations prior.

Poof! River gone, even memory of river gone.

We'll return to this in a moment.

One of the things that anyone among you who has any interest in water conservation issues in our country will almost certainly know is the incredible story of [S16] the *Waterman of India*, Rajendra Singh. For those among you who don't know of him, he trained as an *Ayurvedic* doctor, and worked in a government job for a few years in the rural parts of the Alwar district of Rajasthan – which is where we are with the Arvari river – while also

working for education as a National Service volunteer, and participating in the work of an NGO called the *Tarun Bharat Sangha*. This was a transformative phase in his life. Mangu kaka, an older man in the village where Rajendra Singh lived and worked, told him that all his medicine and education were of no use to the land where rivers ran dry, and people were forced to abandon agriculture and migrate to towns and cities to survive. That if he wanted truly to help, he ought to work to get water back in this land.

Mangu kaka was among the few who remembered stories from their parents' and grandparents' days, of rivers running through this land in days of yore. He trained Rajendra Singh's eyes to the terrain, [S17] spoke to him of the tradition of small dams, built as call-and-answer to terrain – convex on steep slopes, straight on gentle land, concave where there was a natural depression – he trained him in the use of local materials and basic engineering principles.

[S18] Together with other villagers, Rajendra Singh began to work on dams and catchment areas, creating *jobads*, the first of which was an existing, though abandoned *jobad* which was silted over and needed rescue. When the monsoons arrived that year, something magical happened. Not only did the *jobad* hold water, but downstream of it a well that had gone dry became filled with water again. Groundwater was being recharged too!

It took a while. I remember meeting him in the late 1990s, when he had been involved in this work for about a decade and a half, and heard him speak of the revival of a near-dead river that was now a perennial, of the surprising outpouring of seasonal rivers, showing up as groundwater was recharged year after year, of foxes and other fauna returning to forests that didn't exist 15 years ago... It sounded magical. It was magic! And it took time.

In the 40+ years since he first began with the *Tarun Bharat Sangha*, affected villages and villagers have constructed almost 12,000 *jobads*, mostly in Rajasthan, which has over 60% of the country's desert area. [S19] Rivers have been revived, [S20] land and mountains reforested, underground aquifers recharged, migrant youth returned home, agriculture revived, villages transformed.

[S21 – clip from documentary on Rajendra Singh's work: *Reviving Rivers*]

So many of us know this story of near-utter devastation and astonishing revival through community coming together, networks forming and mobilizing to bring back to life a kind of life that was being lost, to revive a land that had given in to desertification. And we know this story through the lens of Rajendra Singh's amazing life.

I want to speak for a moment of other lives, lesser known, but equally potent in their effect on this land and its ethos. You will remember I mentioned the twin villages of Bhaonta-Koylala a few minutes ago. It was the first of the villages upstream of the Arvari, hosting one of the sources of the river. Several years of drought had emptied it of its men, who had migrated to cities for work and survival by the 1980s. Located on the periphery of the

Sariska Tiger Reserve, and sandwiched between two mountain chains, these villages had only barren lands to show, and empty wells.

In 1986, they heard the story of Gopalpura, 20 kms away, where the villagers along with Rajendra Singh had already begun to transform the story of their land and their waters. They had formed *Gram Sabhas* here and in neighboring villages, and begun to repair old *jobads* and protect forests around them through voluntary labor, even bearing up to 75% of the cost of these projects.

The name of a man called Roodamal Meena crops up here. The *Meena* is an indigenous tribe – people that have lived on these lands for a long, long time. They moved from nomadic existence to agrarian practice, and were being driven off the land by these changes now – not back to a nomadic existence, where families and communities travel together carrying their sense of rootedness in and owing it to the group. This disrupted families, emptied villages of men. Roodamal had become a migrant worker too. But he became convinced to remain in his village and work to revive the land after visiting a relative in Gopalpura and seeing how “a single *jobad* had changed the lives of the villagers. There was water,” he remembers, “and hope of a better life.” And so he stayed, and convinced others to work together on water management.

By the time the first monsoon arrived, the new *jobads* were filled with water too. Where soil erosion threatened their functional integrity, it became time to pay attention to reforestation. As *jobads* were built, with the voluntary labor of villagers who also paid the bulk of their cost, toiled for days and months, they began to see water levels rise downstream too. In places where water hadn't been available even as far down as 90 meters in the ground, it slowly rose to first 2, then 4.5 meters.

As community came together, community became paramount. People worked in villages upstream and down, understanding then harnessing the geoscience of water – “if we capture water upstream, it would percolate faster downhill, benefitting villages downstream,” said one villager, now invested in the water needs of the larger landscape and other communities, without which it would not be possible to nurture the watershed of Arvari, bring it back to life.

As this effort grew, so did the ambitions of the cohort of villages and villagers. Aware now of the movement of groundwater, they kept the network of *jobads* in mind when selecting a site for a new one. After one such estimation of the submergence area in new plans, it was found that 5 *bighas* of Roodamal's agricultural land would be submerged. “I agreed without hesitation,” he says. “After all, it was for the benefit of the village.” This sacrifice was unprecedented, according to Rajendra Singh, inspirational even, and set the tone for a stronger communal bond among the villagers.

It took three, and four, and six years before the Arvari began to flow again as a perennial river.

[S22] “I am proud,” said Roodamal, “that the Arvari got a new lease of life on my land. It gives me a never-ending attachment with the river.”

[S23] From this dry river bed [S24] to a full flowing river took time, and intent.

But, as we know only too well, there are other ways that time can be, too... becoming so short, and splintered, and swift, that we are left with very little besides the possibility of rapid-fire reasoning and short-term thinking.

[S25] Time runs fast, and intent runs narrow.

We have companies that only respond to the term shareholder value. They daren't even include stakeholder value, which might broaden the field a little. The pithy punchline of *move fast and break things* or *build fast and break things* dictates our designing days and nights. There are some segments in a design process that could avail of an exhortation like that, benefit from it, but, “breaking stuff and moving quickly leaves us surrounded by carnage.” Jon Ive again. More and more design voices now speaking up against it. “Unless destruction is the consequence of actually creating something better.”

Disruption and destruction are not synonyms. And speed should not be mistaken for progress.

I wonder if one of the reasons that technology has become so dependent upon exploiting the addictive tendencies of our bodies and brains – if one of the reasons is that we have set up speed as the measure for winning whatever game it is we think we are playing. We need to get there first, we need to beat the competition, we say, and we measure the health of companies by their quarterly statements – quarterly – what can you do of any merit in just three months? Where is the time for us, as individuals, as a society, as a species, to stop and consider the merits and demerits of what is unfolding before us, unraveling our social systems, untethering us from community that is near to hand, while our consciousness escapes to places far away?

When cornered by an ethos like that, with speed as the only or primary measure, how can we not feel compelled to follow any path that makes us come out ahead? And so, we look for short cuts. Why consider the ethics of exploiting addictive tendencies when that would slow you down, and meanwhile someone else gets the numbers required for the next cycle of funding or profiteering. This pursuit doesn't always have to be malicious; it need only be care-less. And it isn't as if there is no discussion. It's all around us – we can hear it in shouts and in whispers, but the concern and the ways of addressing such concern come too late, from all evidence currently available. Because cogitation, reflection needs time as much as it needs intent.

And how did we get here? What is it that we have acceded for this insatiable competitiveness, this sense that only ONE can win – and that, by wiping out competition. That it is acceptable for the winner to take all. How did we get here? We will not know unless we quieten our own desire, we will not reflect unless we slow the pace of our power to transform and consume, we will not change until we listen to sounds, to voices that are not ours.

Moving on.

[S26 – clip from documentary on Warli dances]

Space and Place

Those hands at the edge of the frame, sticks in readiness to join the circle, will not stand in that corner for long. The chain of dancing humans will open to the intent of the outsider wishing to join mid-dance, to include him or her as another link in the chain. Equally effortlessly, when someone wishes to step out of the circle, the remaining chain will shift to close the gap again. This coming and going is contained in the steps, the movement, the beat of the dance, without ceremony or convulsion or clamor. This is not an ‘accommodation’, it is an attitude – an ethos of embrace and inclusivity through dance.

It may take an anthropologist’s eye to speak of meaning in gesture and ritual, but the environment thus created makes it easy for anyone to interpret correctly a kind of communal openness and inclusivity in this dance of easy integration and release.

Environment is not merely physical, it is also attitudinal. Talk to a wheel-chair bound person, or a person who is blind, and they will tell you that impairment and disability are two separate things. Vision impairment does not prevent a person from having other faculties; they can think, and hear, and do. It is societal expectation which, when lowered, makes that person seem and feel disabled. An affliction of the lower limbs that makes a person wheelchair-bound does not prevent her from participating in public life; the lack of ramps and elevators in a public building does. She has already addressed her impairment: wheels for legs. But the environment makes her disabled. If there is a class, or a seminar, on the second floor of a building and the building has a ramp and an elevator, then we’re all getting to the same place, whether we’re using wheels or legs.

Let’s look at a wider context: when we design for cars to run on flat ground, while insisting, through imaginatively named sky-walks [S27], that people should climb two stories to cross a road [S28], then climb down again, we disable even those with temporary impairments – such as a person who may have had an accident and is recovering from a broken leg, or a pregnant woman, or an older person, or even a little child who is excited about walking having just recently learned to do so – but is uncertain on her feet. If, on the other hand, a motorized vehicle is made to use a flyover while pedestrians use flat ground to cross the road, and if that flat ground is made green with trees and plants, everyone wins.

[S29] Here's a quick look at what is possible when transportation intent meets broader social good. The Cheonggyecheon river in Seoul ran underground for almost three-quarters of a century, because mid-20th century urban development in South Korea focused on economic development which did not include any understanding of or concern for ecological impact. So this river, that ran through the heart of the city, was filled over, roads built on it – a major artery, in fact. We see that in our own city today, with the wetlands filled in so that we can have a major business hub in BKC; we have a river called Mithi, the irony of its name completely lost on those that permit industrial sludge and untreated sewage to run into it unhindered.

As infrastructure crumbled and citizen health deteriorated, Seoul decided to free its imprisoned river, divert traffic away from the heart of the city, and offer its citizens a space of respite and recreation instead. Right there, in the middle of the city. [S30] Here's a before and after picture. It is a designed urban waterfront now, rather than the natural stream it was before... but it has had a salubrious effect on life in the city, and there have been no complaints about the diversion of traffic.

Good design is inclusive design, and inclusive design is for everyone.

[S31] Returning to the rejuvenation of rivers in the Alwar district: in order to sustain both stake in and responsibility for the health of these rivers, [S32] a river panchayat was set up. Representatives from each and all villages on the banks of these rivers would meet regularly to determine how much water could be drawn by upstream villages and for what purpose, so that neither the river nor those that lived downstream suffered. These decisions depended also on the strength of the monsoon in a given year, and on the choice of native crops over water-intensive agriculture. At village level, gram panchayats discussed these matters too, in a form of direct democracy – where everyone in the village could participate in the discussion.

As we go from village populations to towns, and towns to metro cities, it begins to seem impossible to practice anything but representational democracy, given that populations become really large and unwieldy. We have enormous diversity in the socio-economic matrix, and it doesn't seem easy to find common ground.

But there is an experiment being attempted in New York City as I speak. There are these hearings being organized by the mayor's office, called *Rental Ripoff* hearings. They are being set up all around the city [S33] to allow tenants to talk directly to city officials and describe the dangerous or unhealthy conditions that their landlords refuse to fix – rats, mold, construction issues, or the hidden fees they are charged in their rents. There has been a long period of neglect of rental housing in NYC, and the new mayor, Zohran Mamdani, campaigned on making the city safer and more livable for its many denizens. Look at the list of promises on his campaign poster. His first 100 days have already shown him working on several of these, and rental pain is one of them.

He is also asking people to participate in establishing policy priorities! [S34] Around the room are arrayed poster boards, which seek inputs on policy proposals like fining landlords who do not make timely repairs, allowing tenants to form unions, and other such ideas. People are also encouraged to offer their own policy initiatives or alternatives to address the everyday concerns of living in one of the largest cities in the US. It prioritizes people over powerful lobbyists, changes how the success of the city may be measured. Every promise on the campaign poster is directed at bettering the life of the ordinary citizen, each promise an act of caring.

And it is a daring idea to involve people in an interactive process with city officials for policy development in as large and diverse a city as New York. [S35] These are *shabar panchayats* in a city of 8 million people!

[S36] Not so different from the gram or river panchayats in our Alwar district, are they!

It is brilliant as strategy – to build hope in process, have people suggest ideas then see them come to fruition; it is brilliant as a community building tool – to make neighbor friend to neighbor, as tenant unions sprout and blossom; and it is brilliant in its underpinning of trust in people, in process, in shared social intent.

I have talked about three things: intent, time, and place, in that order. Each intersects the other, overlaps, imbricates.

Time and place make context.

Time and place and *intent* make ethos – social and cultural.

From Emilio Ambasz’s architecture – green over grey: “They must not lose the park,” to the villages in Alwar district and the design of modular, spread out, communally built infrastructure, using not only local materials and local labor, but also designing local networks of care and sustenance, to NYC and its experiment of system design that upends the ways in which representative government has so far been used for large population groups, one thing shines through every such shift in perspective: people coming together for a common cause, where *caring for another* is the driving impulse behind design and decision making.

When this happens, we find also that the ideas that people bring to the table become more sophisticated. Look closely at the design process followed by Ambasz, and how at every step it is not only his client, in the narrow sense of who is paying for the project, but also the context of his building, and a concern for all other stakeholders affected by its presence; watch the villagers in Alwar district as more and more villages become involved in water conservation, and you see how decisions about the *johad* become decisions about its network, so that the water table in the entire area around and along the river may be raised sufficiently to rejuvenate underground aquifers – which do not respect village boundaries so

much as they do local geology, but that breathe life into the river that will sustain that entire geography – villages both upstream and down. At such scale, looking out for one another becomes responsibility, becomes obligation.

This kind of coming together is also an aggregation of humans attached to a shared ethos of caring, which creates the space for course-correction when conclusions arrived at or decisions taken turn out to be inadequate or incorrect. Cooperation rather than competition is at its core.

Through design and by design, to care, and be cared for, is everything.

Thank you

Re: Design

Moving into lower gear

Abstract:

Design, today, is compelled to reconfigure its complicated relationship with nature. Human activity since the industrial revolution has sought to tame and subjugate nature, harness it to the point where sustainability has become a matter of stewardship of a *human-transformed* natural environment, not of nature as such. Design carries part of that responsibility. Social and political dimensions also direct design, and this coming together of realms makes of design a cultural system – shaped not only by formal and material considerations, but also by ideas in social, political, philosophical and environmental contexts. Its contribution to consumer capitalism gives us pause, not only to think, but also to tackle this uphill task by moving into lower gear: less speed, more torque. In this talk I will share my thoughts on the role of intent, time, and place, in design.