

Remaking Suburbia

Keynote address

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Remaking suburbia: unmaking unsustainability

TRANSITIONS IN PRACTICE

climate change and everyday life

Elizabeth Shove, ESRC climate change leadership fellowship



Sustainability

Unsustainability is arguably hard wired into suburbia and into suburban ways of life in the form of:

Severe under-crowding,

Extreme energy and water intensity and

A very high mobility burden.

Suburbia

Is suburbia a blip in the long term evolution of living arrangements, an enduring form or the ghetto of the future?

Systems in transition

Suburbia as a case with which to consider ideas about how large scale, systemic transitions in everyday life come into existence, how they are reproduced and how they are unmade.

Making, remaking, unmaking

‘Good planning means... a child playing in a safe and peaceful world, a love-making couple in a room where the scent of lilacs flows in through an open window, or the song of crickets from the garden down below’

(Mumford, 1949, 362).

Ideas circulate and mutate

Finland not the same as Australia, America, or the UK (ownership, public and private, ‘the garden’, relation to the urban, to transportation, multiple moments of development)

Common concepts

Nature and health; production (vegetables); **childhood** spent safely outdoors fresh air; privatised nuclear family; **work-home** separation; commuting, week-end, paternalistic planning.

unlimited **energy**, no climate change, **slumless**, smokeless, free of delinquency; isolation, homogeneity, inconvenience, no soul

Making the ideological infrastructure

Family and childhood : playing outdoors



Making the material infrastructure

Hardwiring of
everyday life

As an outcome
of planning and
policy;
embodied
visions of the
good life

Making the
rhythm of
suburban life

Week day and week
end

Home and work

Commuting

Sociality



Suburban time and competing practices; lawn-mowing, television viewing, car washing, driving children

Conceptualising suburbia as a system in transition?

Theories of change that cope with

Co-evolution

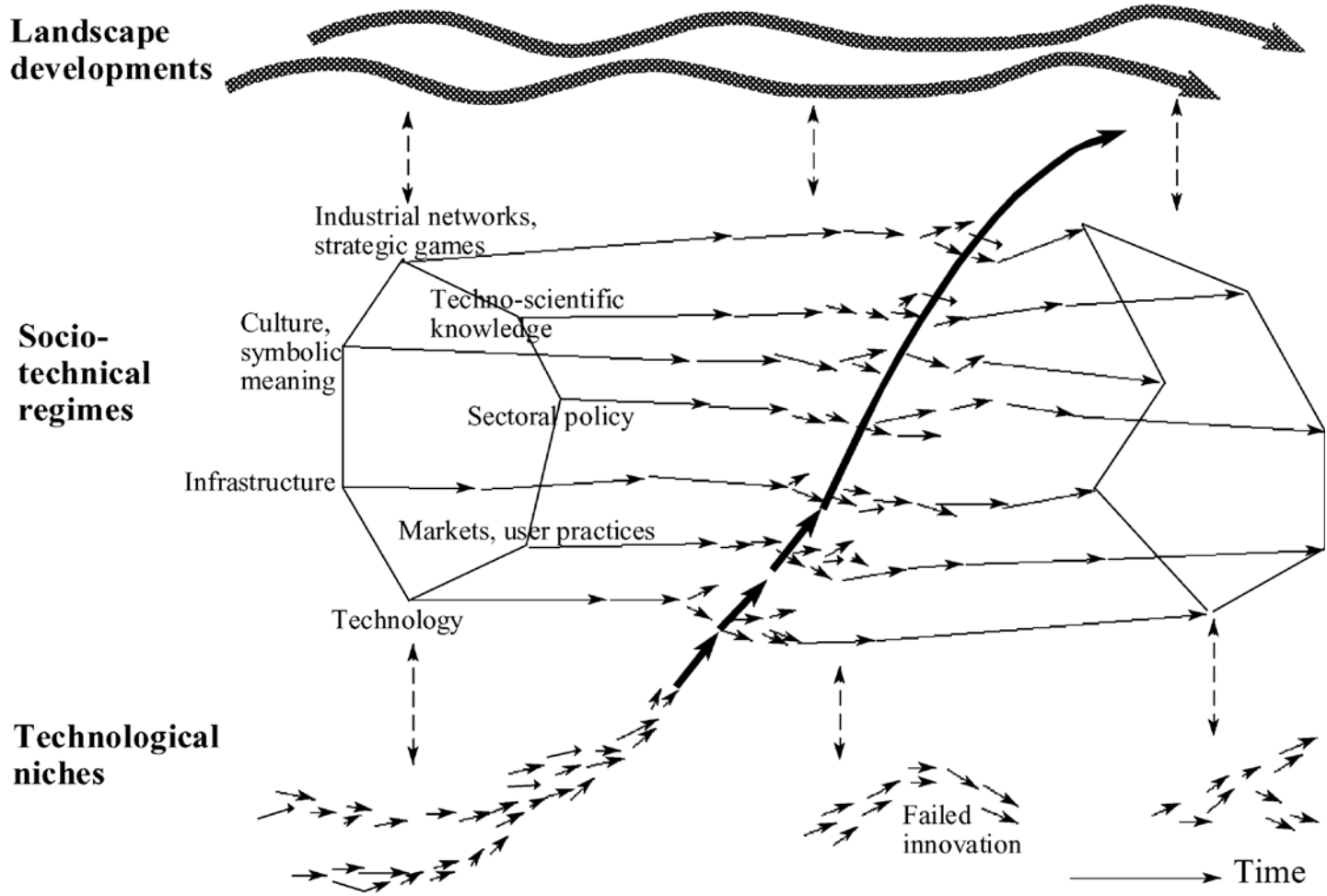
Recursive adaptation

Dynamic selection environments

Examples: automobility, electrification, sail to
steam

<https://www.cisco.com/en/US/i/000001-100000/65001-70000/66001-67000/66969.jpg>

The dynamics of sociotechnical change (Rip and Kemp, 1996; Kemp et al., 2001).



A dynamic multi-level perspective on technological transitions (Geels 2002)

bidirectional arrows vertically; no direct link from landscape to niche; regime is a multidimensional configuration that changes shape, representation of how small movements are aggregated; different 'texture' at each 'level', includes time explicitly

Limitations when applied to suburbia

Suburban in relation to other forms, the urban and the rural

Suburban sustained by and sustains parallel regimes: automobility/railways; childhood, women and work.

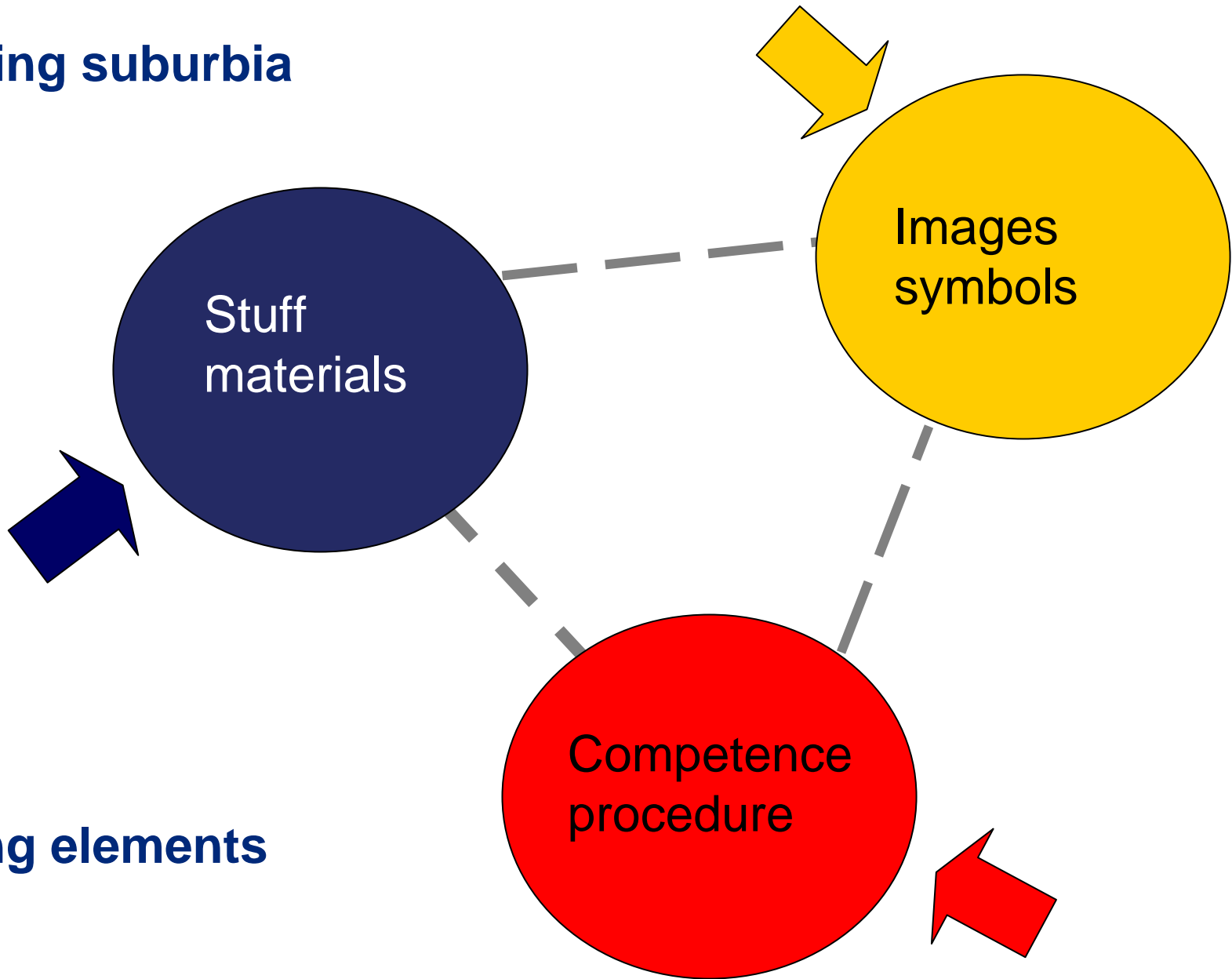
Not so obvious 'closure' or dominance

Generates new questions about the:

Work of reproduction and persistence (images, infrastructures, routines and practices)

Processes of unmaking and fossilisation: what falls by the wayside?

Remaking suburbia



Evolving elements

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Re-making the ideological infrastructure

Changing relation to competing interpretations of the good life

Re making childhood and nature

No community

Inconvenience

Unsustainable

Indoor isolation

New virtual networks

The good life in full view

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by McUrban

Remaking the infrastructure

Extensions

Living-dining-
kitchen

New spaces
'required'

Home office

More
bathrooms

Air
conditioning

Water
recycling

Re-wiring
more sockets

Contemporary trends

dishwashers displace washing machines, freezers take the place of larders, and the tumble dryer underlines the 'need' for a dedicated utility room.

Where possible, functions previously based in the kitchen are being moved out.

Extensions



Shrinking gardens; persistent fences

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Dimensions Indoor Unit

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ENERGY LA 



Remaking the
rhythms of
suburban life

Synchronisation
and coordination
required to eat
together

Longer and shorter
episodes

'costs' of do it
yourself organising



Remaking
routines

Remaking suburbia

24 hour society

Children travelling

Women working

Empty dormitory

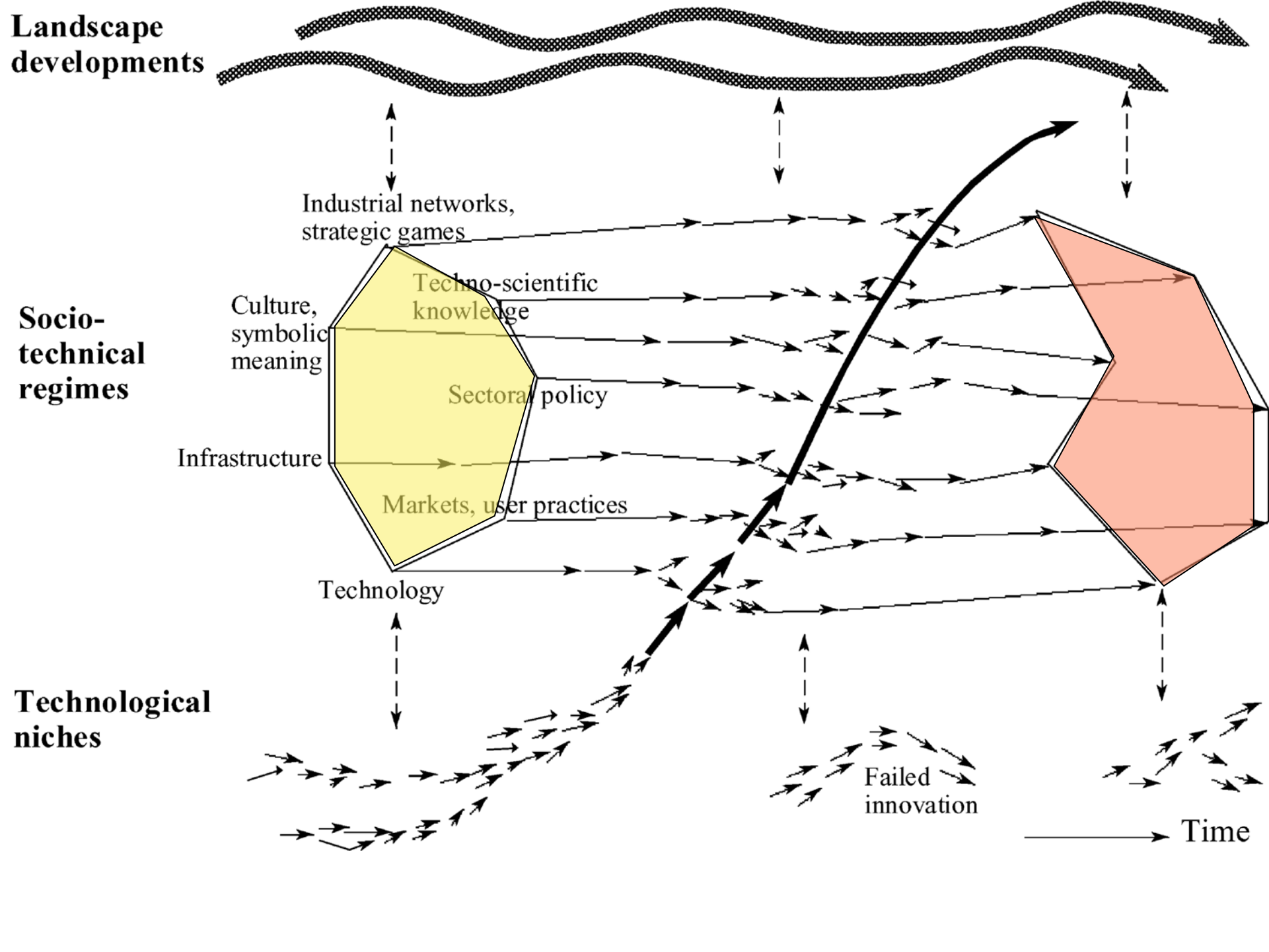
New demands

comfort

space

efficiency

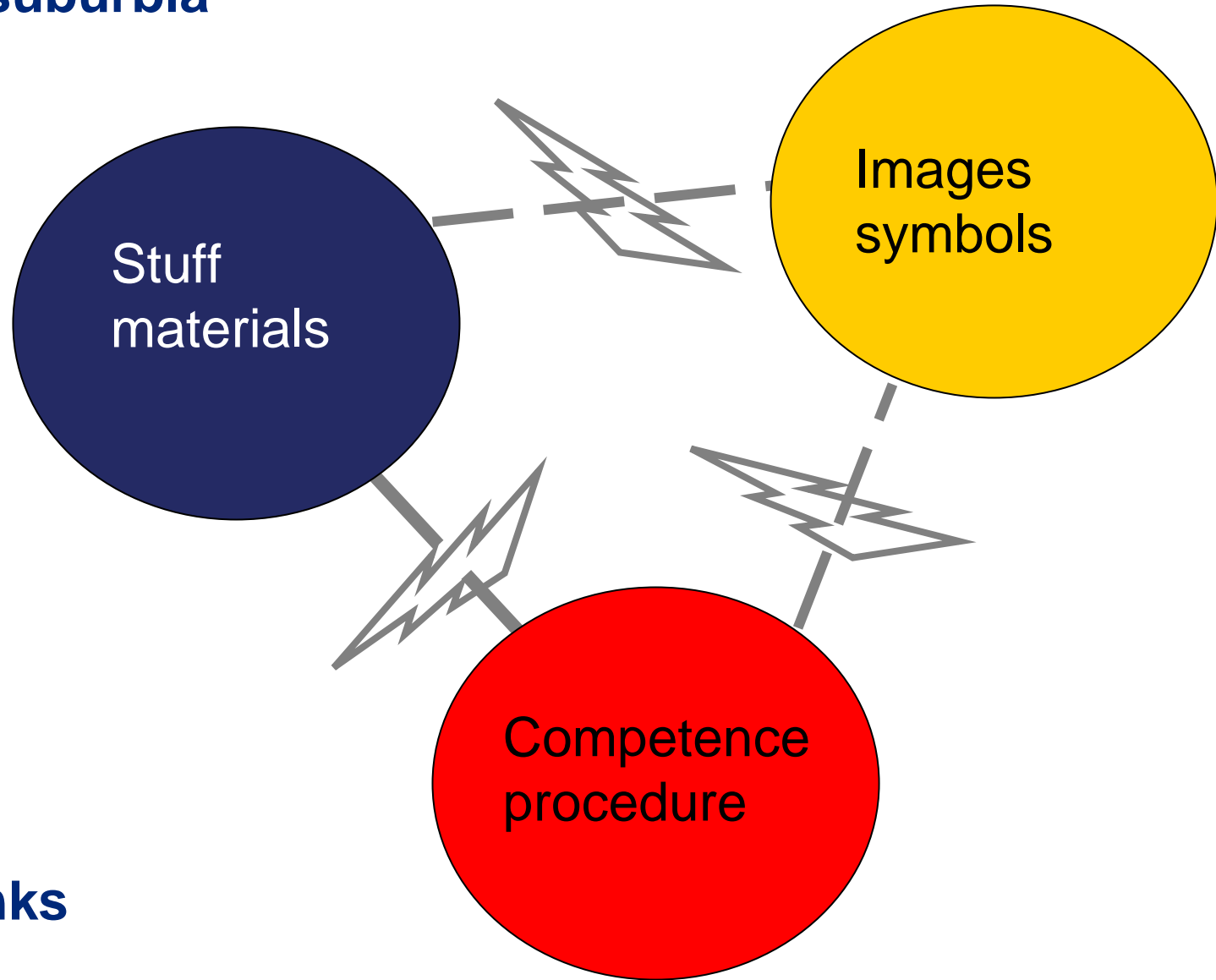






Transformation
or fossilisation?

Unmaking suburbia



**a matter of
breaking links**

unmaking the ideology, retain
much of the form



remove the
fences



Expect multiple occupants



Micro suburban infrastructure

Breaking links:
the infrastructure,
the image and the
way of life

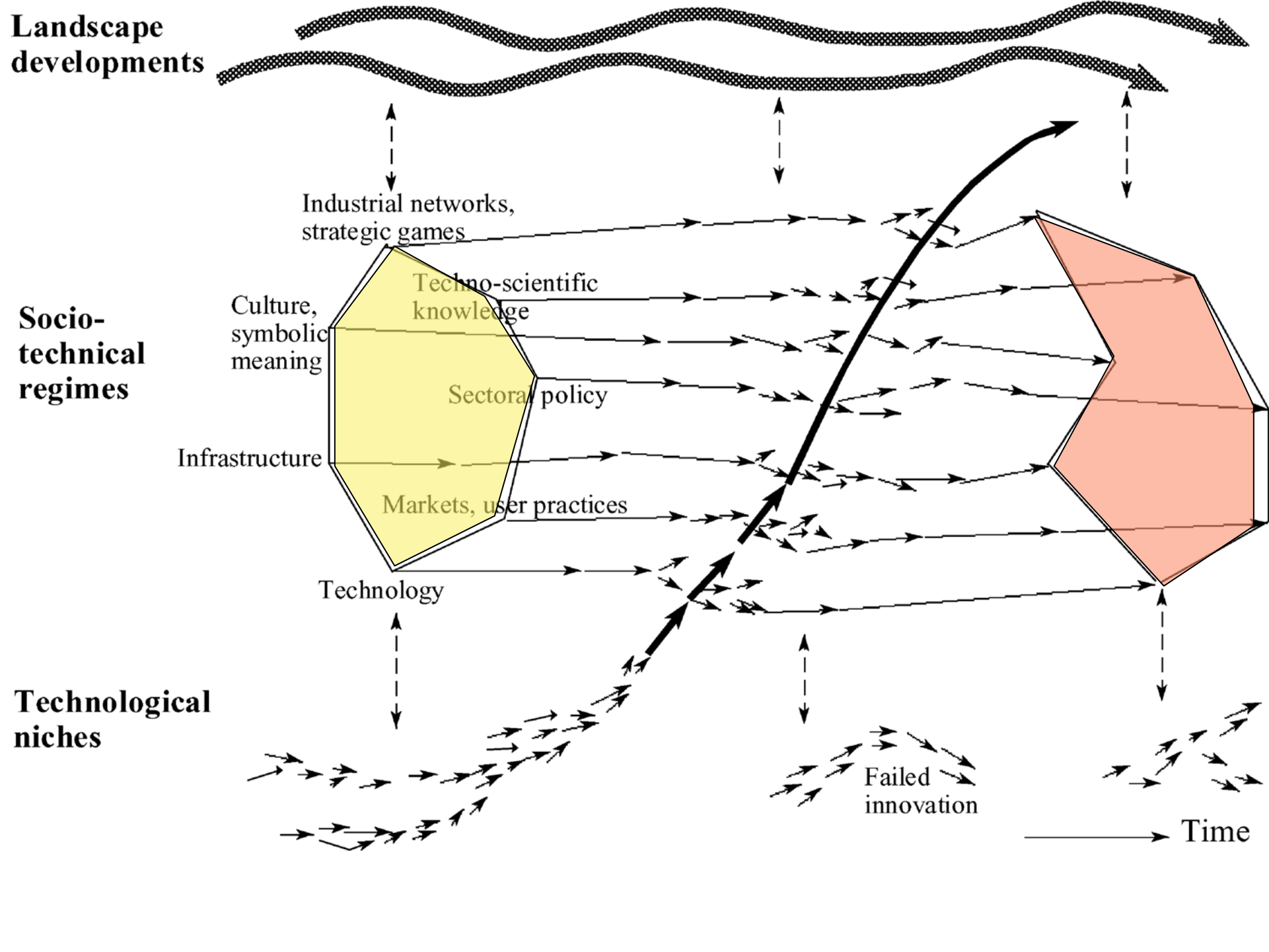




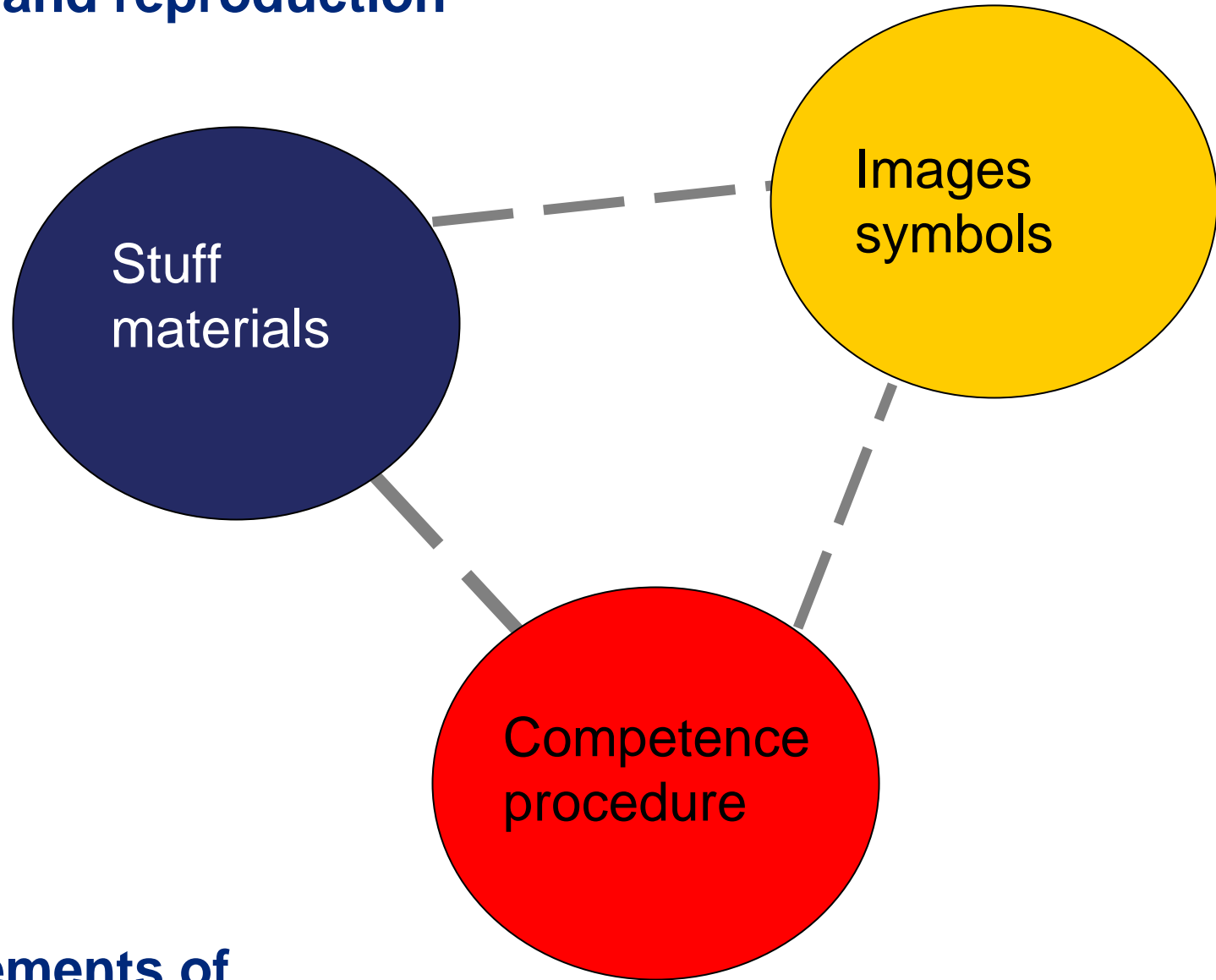
Going, going



Gone



Circulation and reproduction



Of the elements of
suburban life

Suburbia
reproduces its
own
conditions

But is also
part of a wider
world