

# 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.

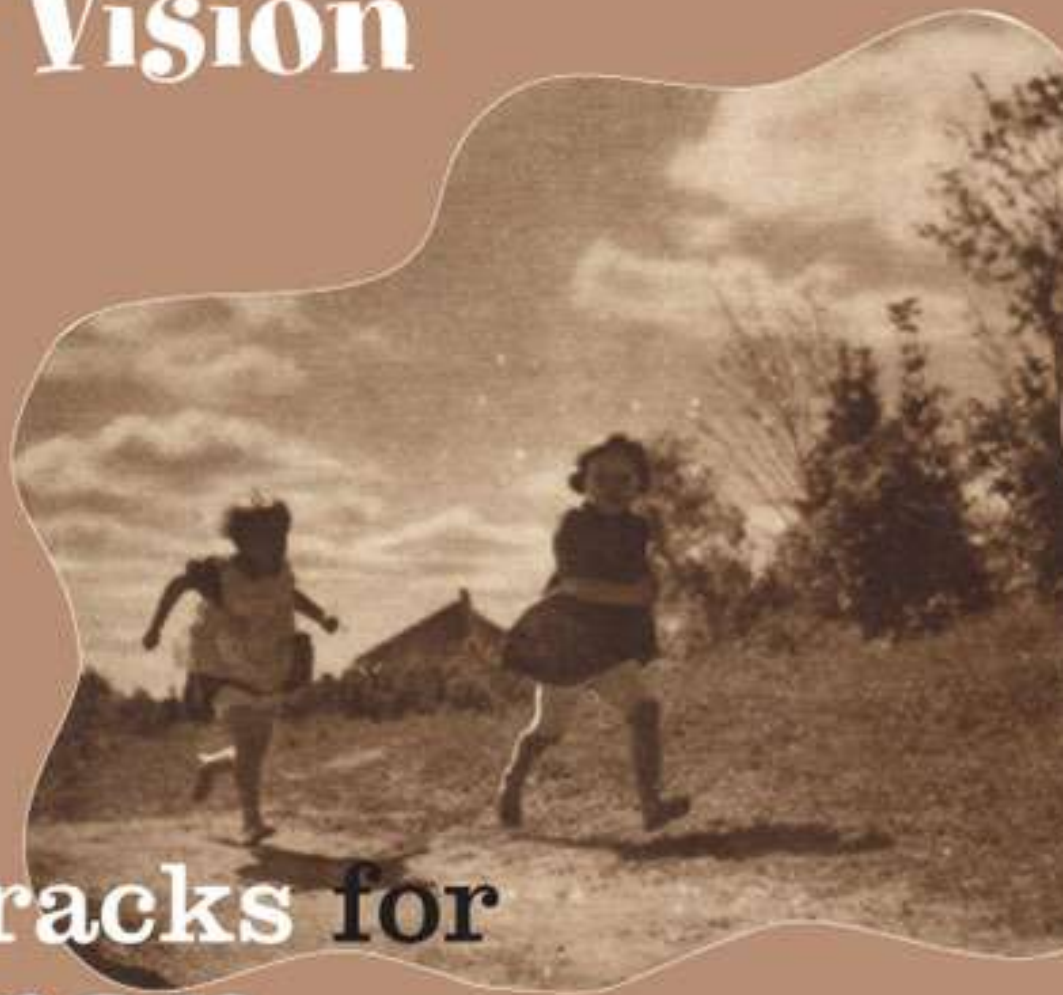
unlimited **energy**, no climate change, **slumless**, smokeless, free of delinquency; isolation, homogeneity, inconvenience, no soul

# Making the ideological infrastructure

Family and childhood : playing outdoors



# Heikki von Hertzen's Vision



Home or Barracks for  
our **Children**

Making the material infrastructure

Hardwiring of everyday life

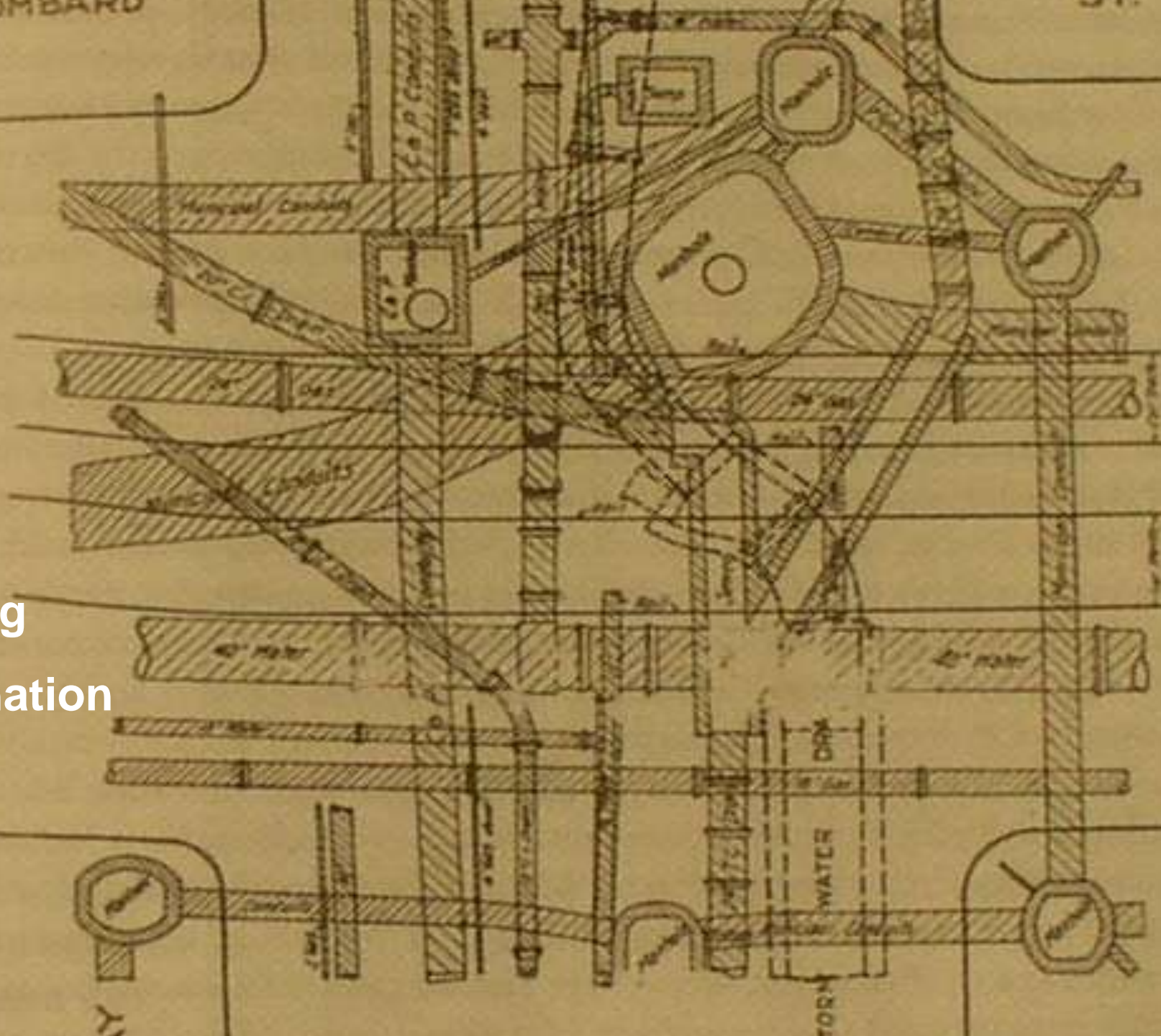
As an outcome of planning and policy; embodied visions of the good life



LOMBARD



planning  
coordination



Welwyn garden city

Reproducing specific ways of life



1195

Youngs Rise

© 2009 Tele Atlas  
© 2009 Europa Technologies  
© 2009 Infoterra Ltd & Bluesky

© 2007 Google

r 51°48'00.46" N 0°13'03.56" W elev 304 ft

Streaming ||||| 100%

Eye alt



Making the  
rhythm of  
suburban life

Week day and week  
end

Home and work

Commuting

Sociality





<http://www.commercialmowers.info/images/history%20img/budding1830.jpg>



<http://www.blogcdn.com/www.diy-life.com/media/2007/10/car-wash.jpg>

Melodi T, SXC



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

Conceptualising suburbia as a system in transition?

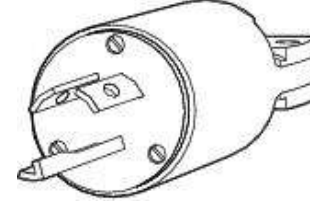
Theories of change that cope with

Co-evolution

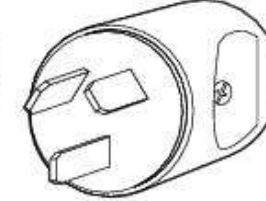
Recursive adaptation

Dynamic selection environments

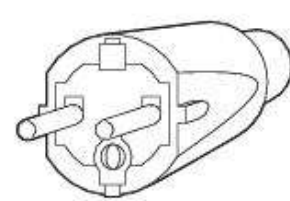
Examples: automobility, electrification, sail to steam



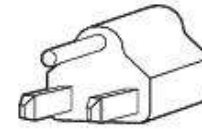
North American plug  
L6-20 20A  
(for 240V units)



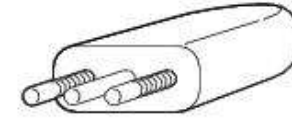
Australian plug  
AS 3112 10A



European plug  
CEE 7/7 16A



North American plug  
5-15 15A

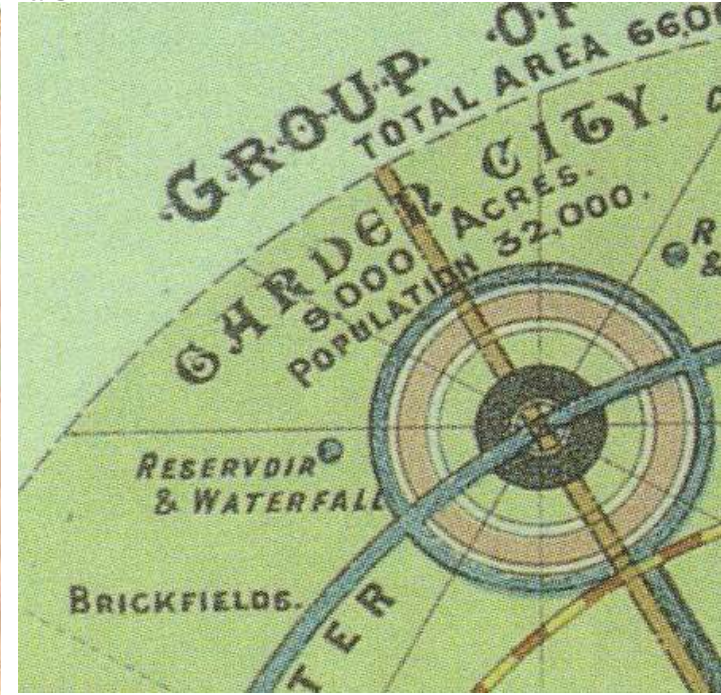


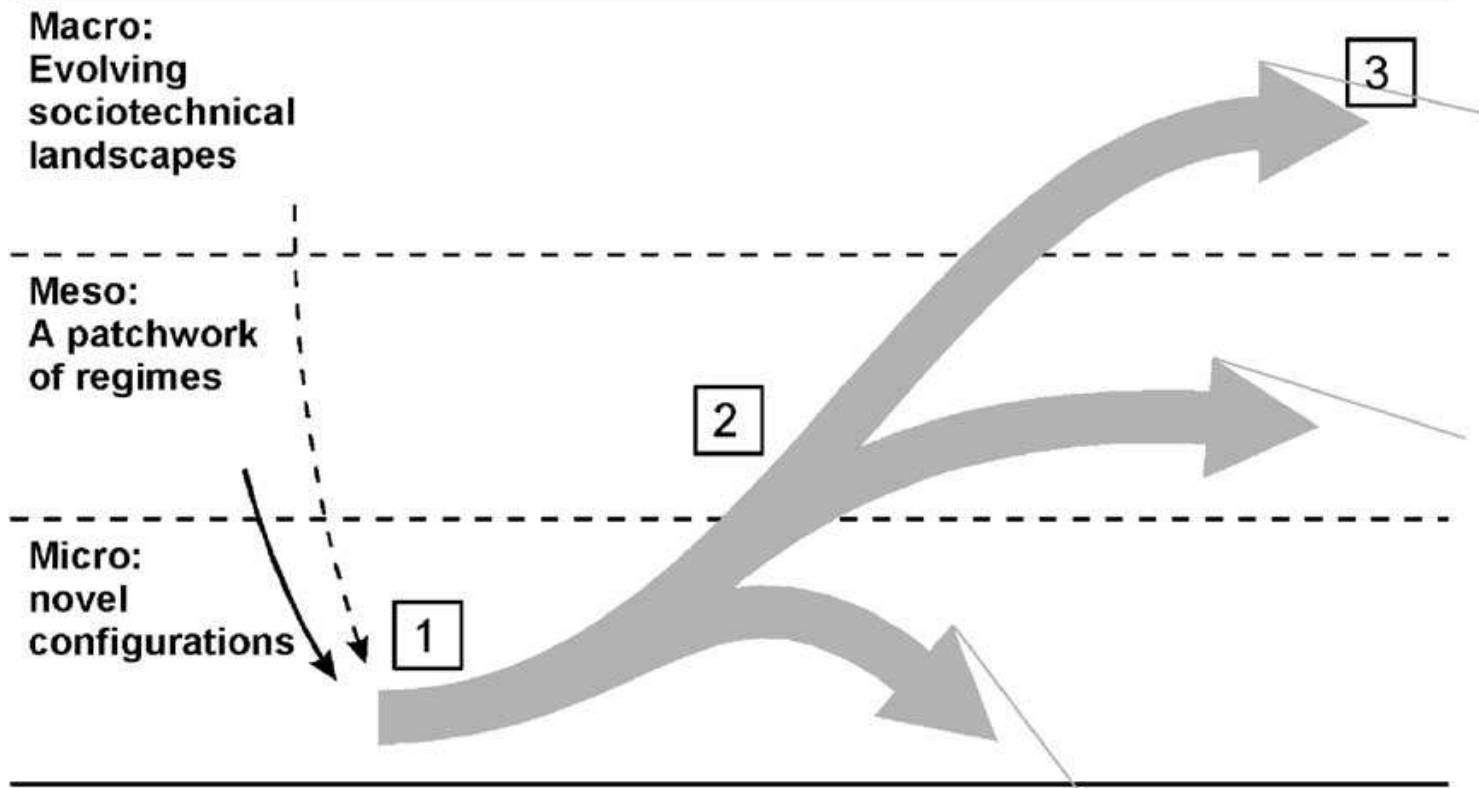
Italian plug  
CEI 23-16/VII 10A



United Kingdom plug  
BS 1363 13A

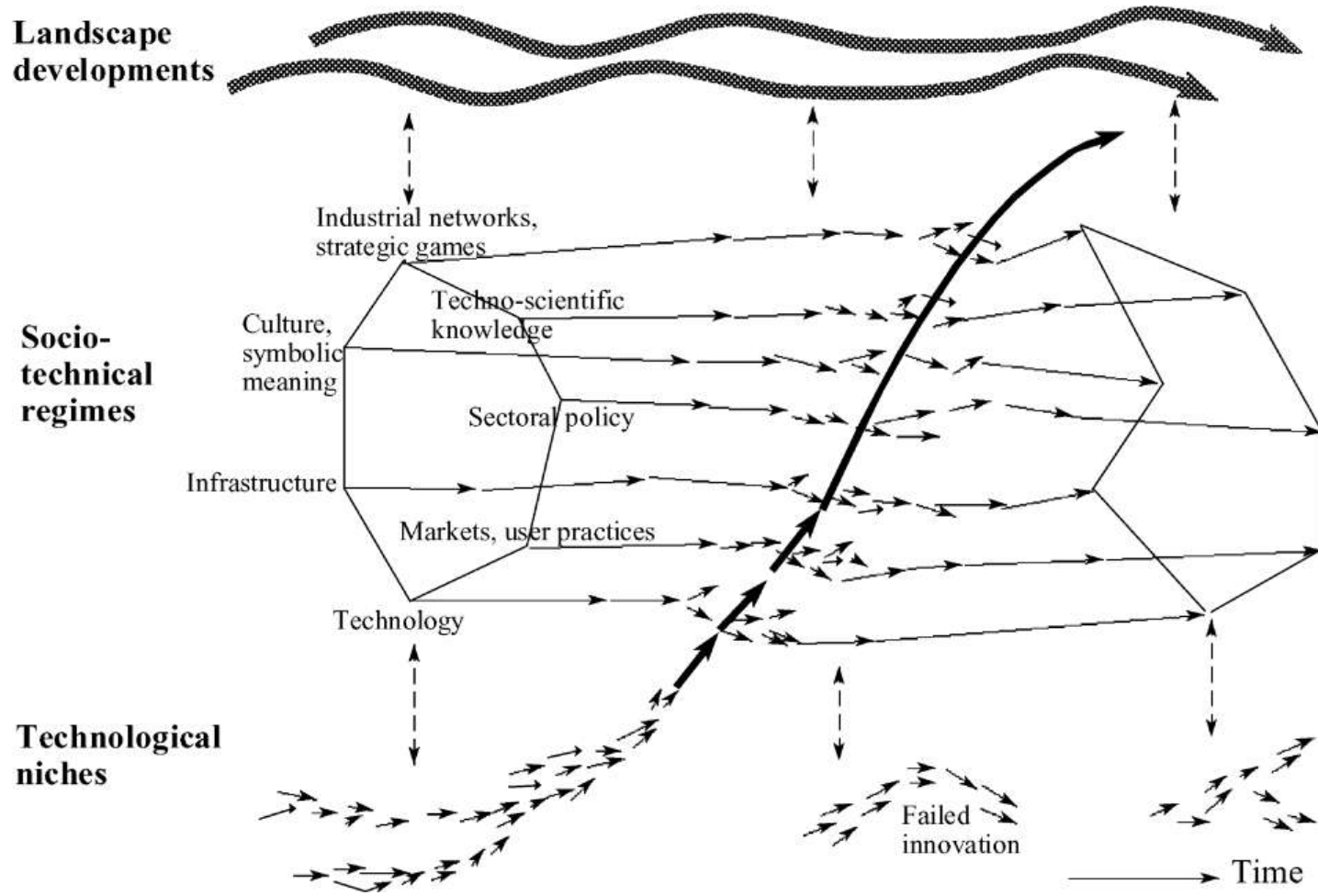
<https://www.cisco.com/en/US/i/000001-100000/65001-70000/66001-67000/66969.jpg>





- [1] Novelty, shaped by existing regime
- [2] Evolves, is taken up, may modify regime
- [3] Landscape is transformed

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

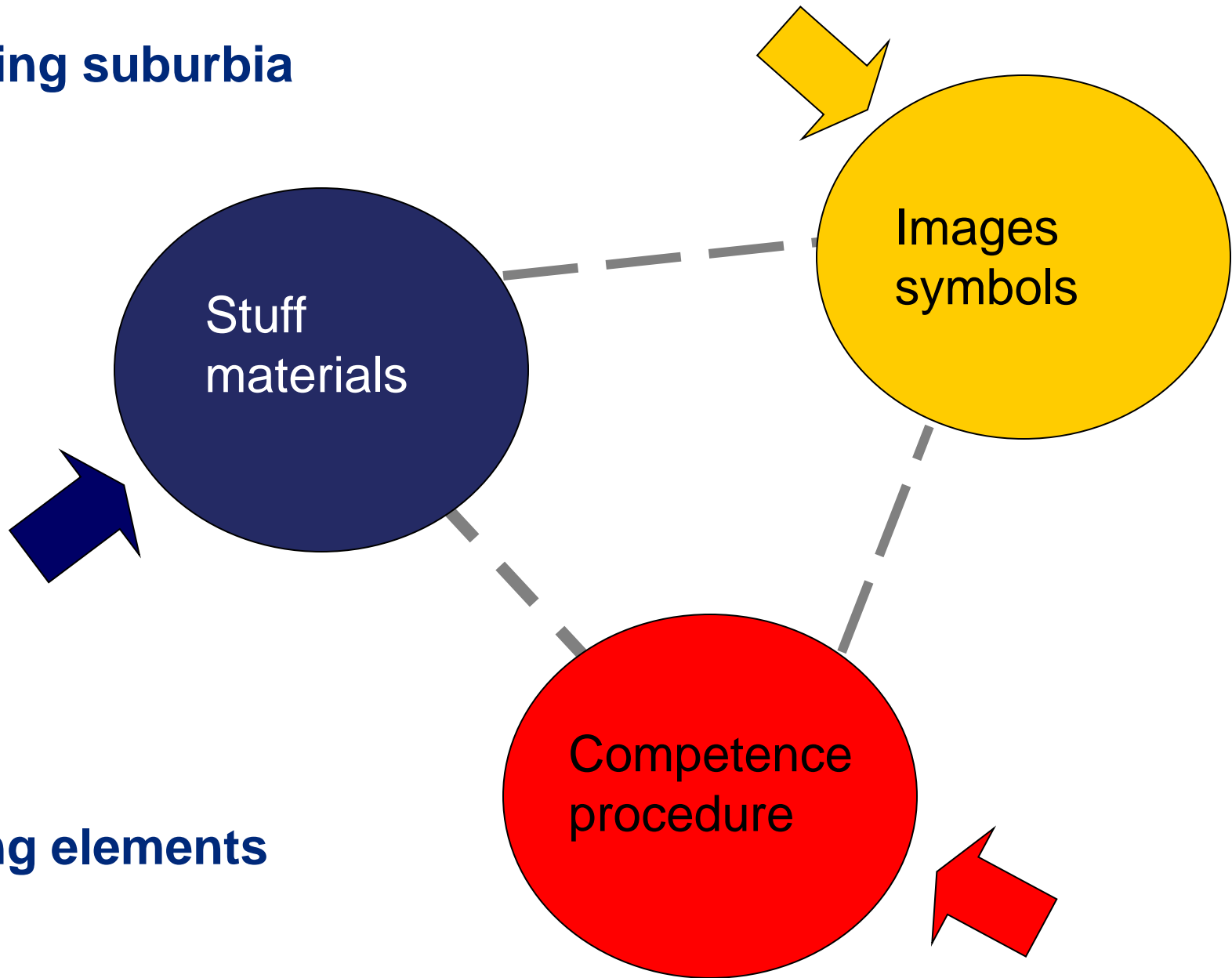


## Generates new questions about the:

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

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

**Remaking suburbia**



**Evolving elements**

A billboard for Australand Eloura Place. The billboard features a photograph of a smiling family (a woman, a man, and a baby) on the left. To the right of the photo, the text reads "New 3,4&amp;5 Bedroom Homes" in black, followed by "NOW SELLING" in red. Below the photo, the slogan "Eloura... you'll love living here!" is written in a cursive font. At the bottom of the billboard, there is a red banner containing the website "www.australand.com.au/eloura", the phone number "13 38 38", the Australand logo, and the name "Eloura Place". The billboard is set in a field of tall grass with houses in the background under a clear sky.

## 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

Parkside living  
by Meletis Homes

Visit the Discovery Pavilion



Stunning 4 bedroom  
homes on sale now



The new standard of living.

**aurora**  
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



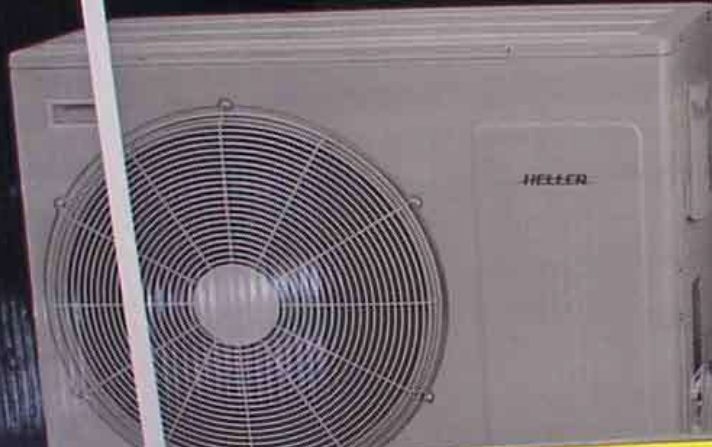
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2.26 2.31

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See My Special Order Book to book an installation.



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6.9kW Heating capacity  
Approximate working capacity for a domestic room size of up to 35-47m<sup>2</sup> (depending on environment)  
Easy to clean panel  
Dimensions Indoor Unit

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Now \$ 499

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High efficiency cooling and heating  
6.5kW Cooling capacity  
6.9kW Heating capacity  
Approximate working capacity for a domestic room size of up to 35-47m<sup>2</sup> (depending on environment)  
Easy to clean panel  
Dimensions Indoor Unit  
109.5 x 31.2 x 20.5cm  
Dimensions Outdoor Unit  
80 x 30 x 69cm



1000L WATER TANK  
1120 EA

LOWEST PRICES ARE JUST THE BEGINNING...

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13.48

ADD-A-TAP

ADD-A-TAP





City of WhiteSea [www.whitesea.la.nz.gov.au](http://www.whitesea.la.nz.gov.au)  
**ENERGY** LA 



Remaking the  
rhythms of  
suburban life

Synchronisation  
and coordination  
required to eat  
together

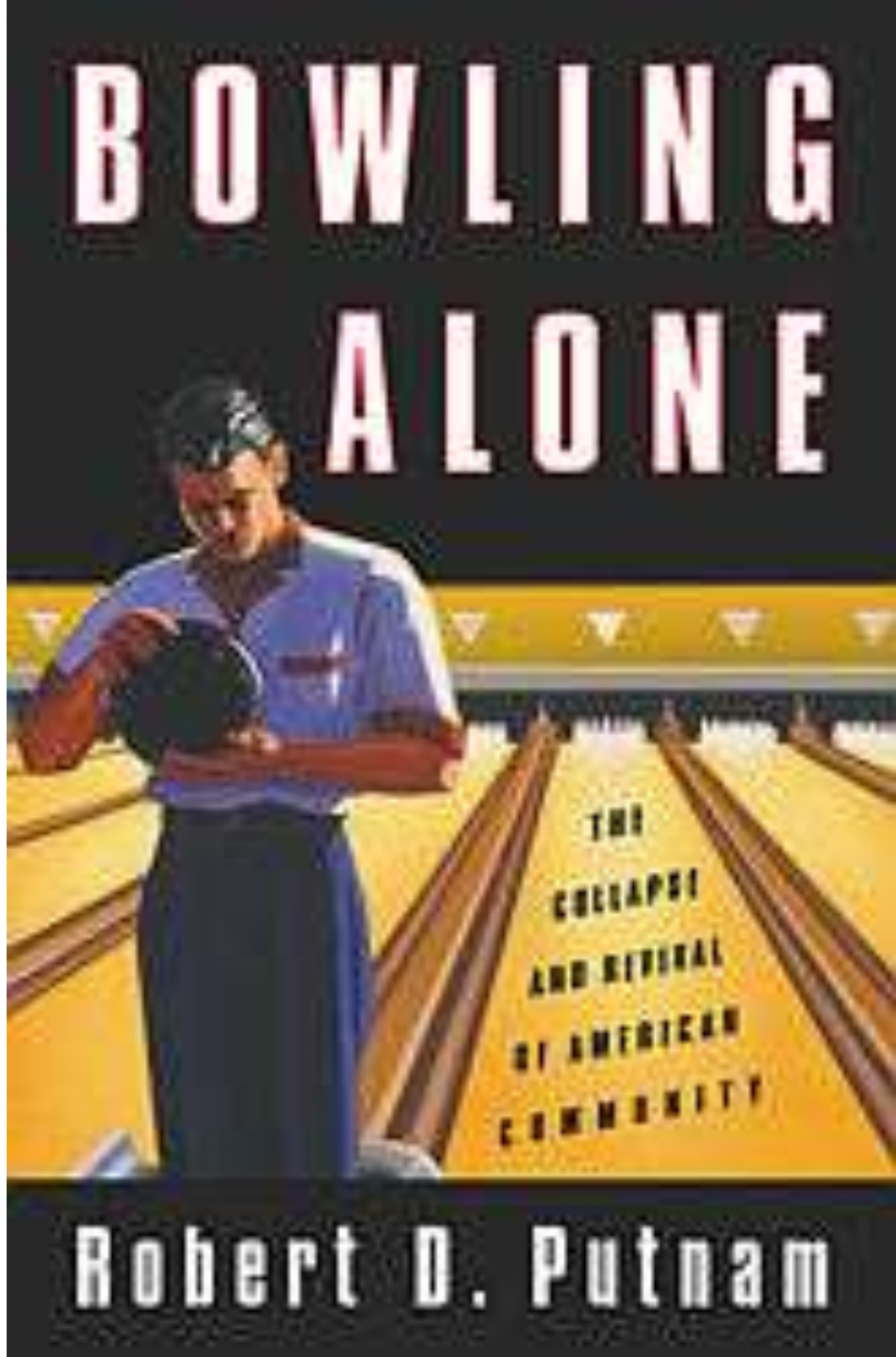
Longer and shorter  
episodes

'costs' of do it  
yourself organising





Remaking  
routines



# Remaking suburbia

24 hour society

Children travelling

Women working

Empty dormitory

New demands

comfort

space

efficiency

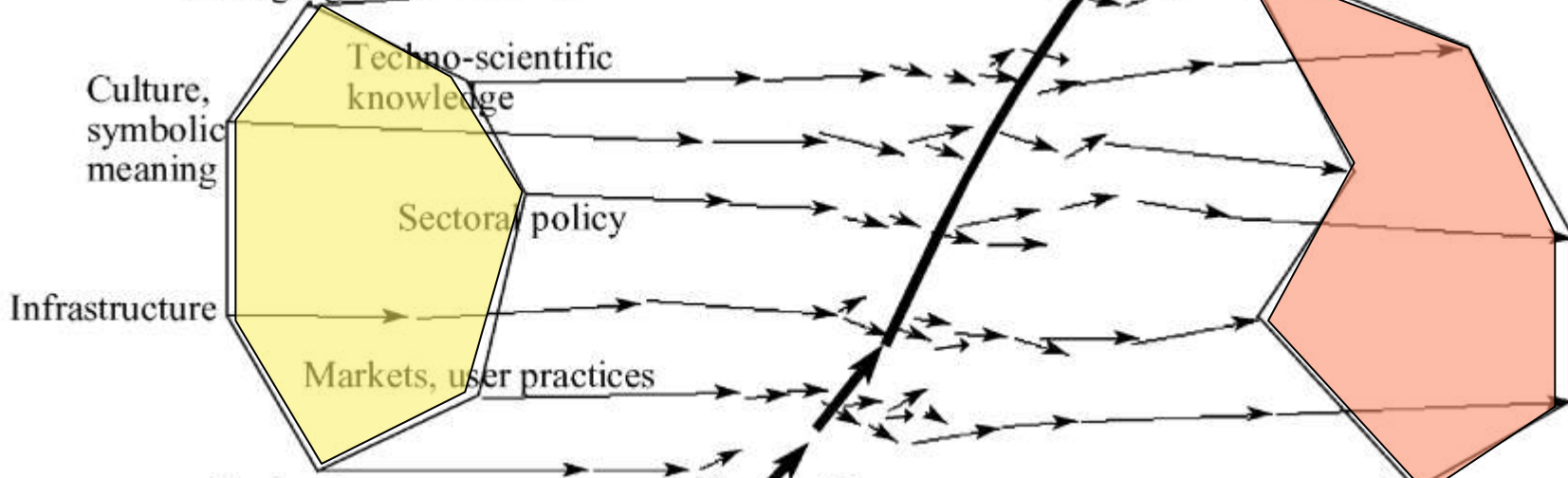


**Landscape developments**



Industrial networks,  
strategic games

**Socio-  
technical  
regimes**



Culture,  
symbolic  
meaning

Techno-scientific  
knowledge

Sectoral policy

Infrastructure

Markets, user practices

Technology

Failed  
innovation

Time

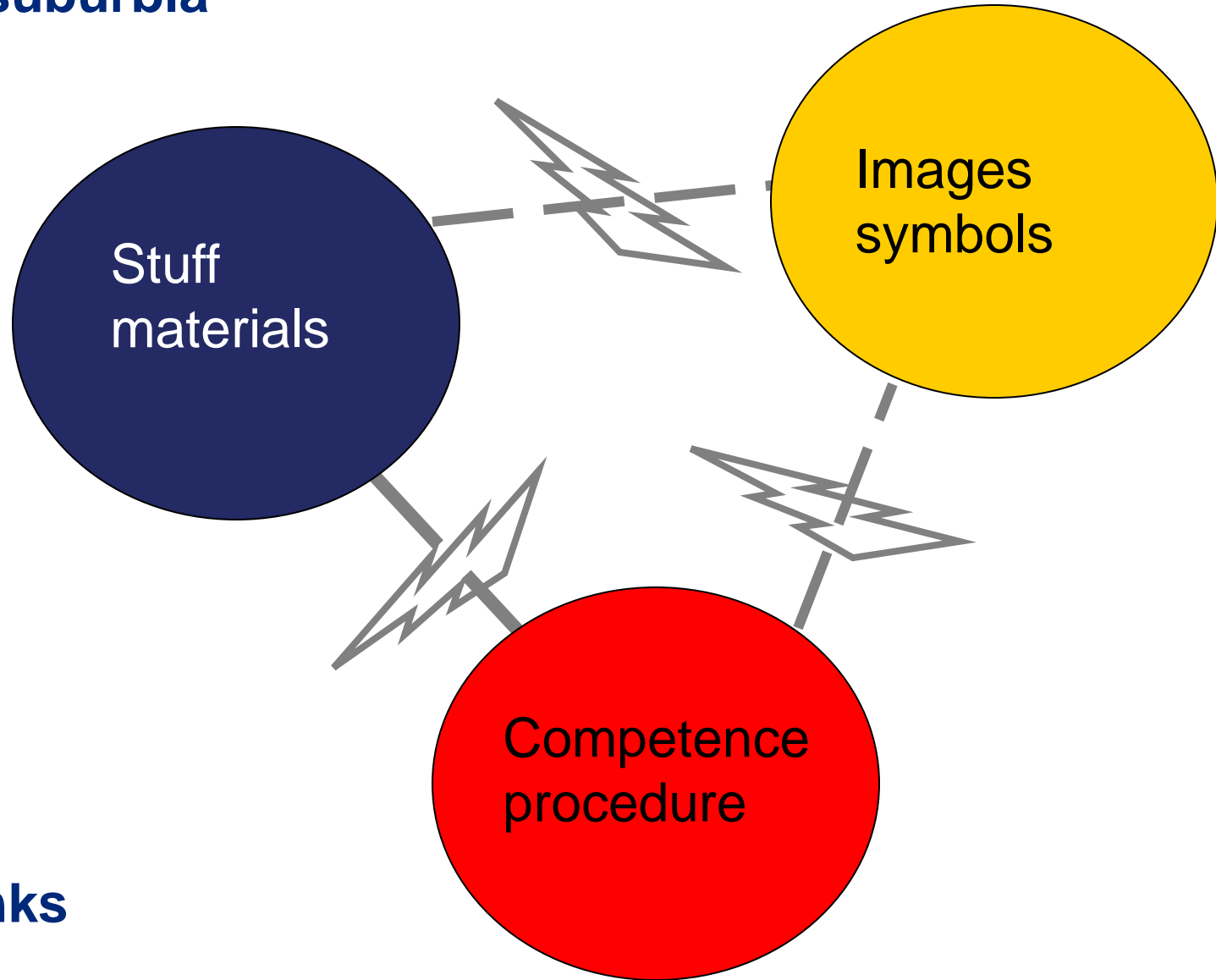
**Technological  
niches**





Transformation  
or fossilisation?

# Unmaking suburbia



**a matter of  
breaking links**

unmaking the ideology, retain  
much of the form





remove the  
fences



Expect multiple occupants



Unmaking the infrastructure,  
retaining the ideology



## Micro suburban infrastructure



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





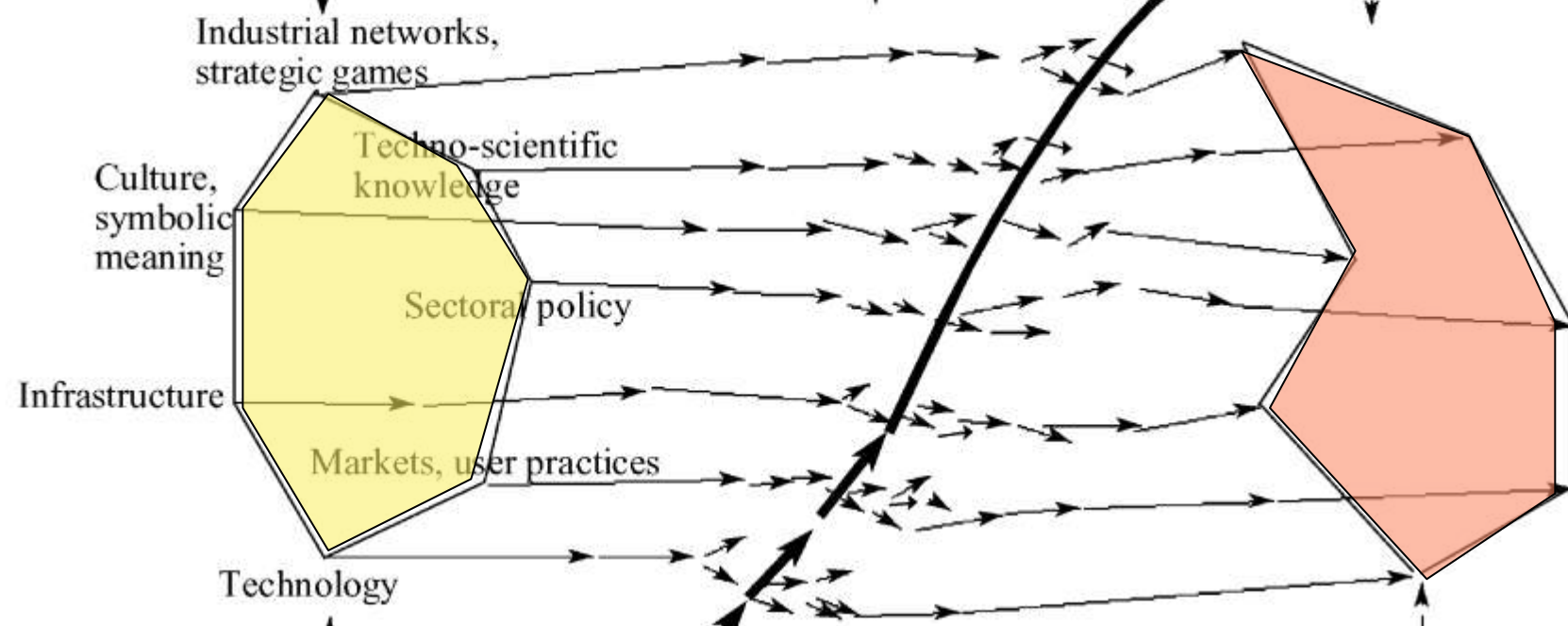
Going, going



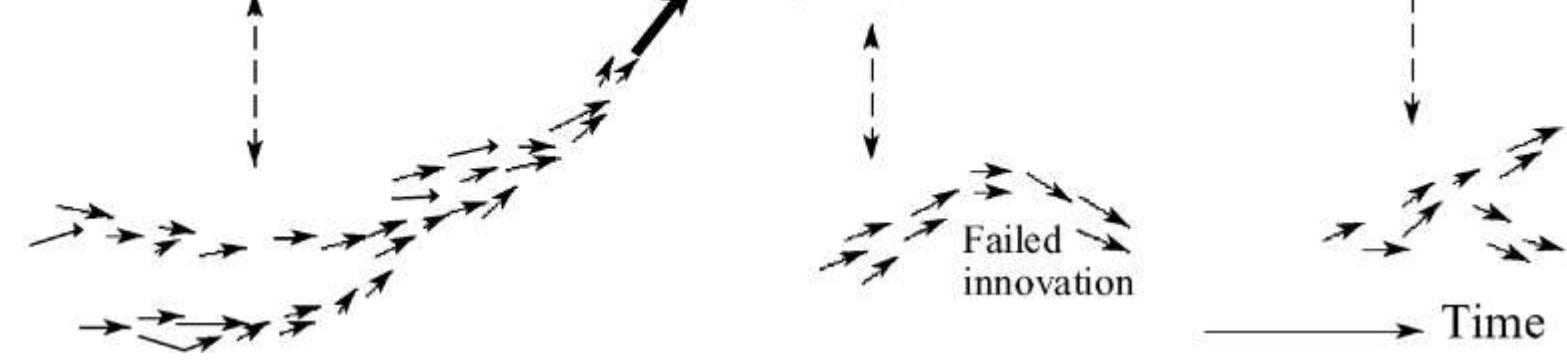
**Landscape developments**



**Socio-technical regimes**

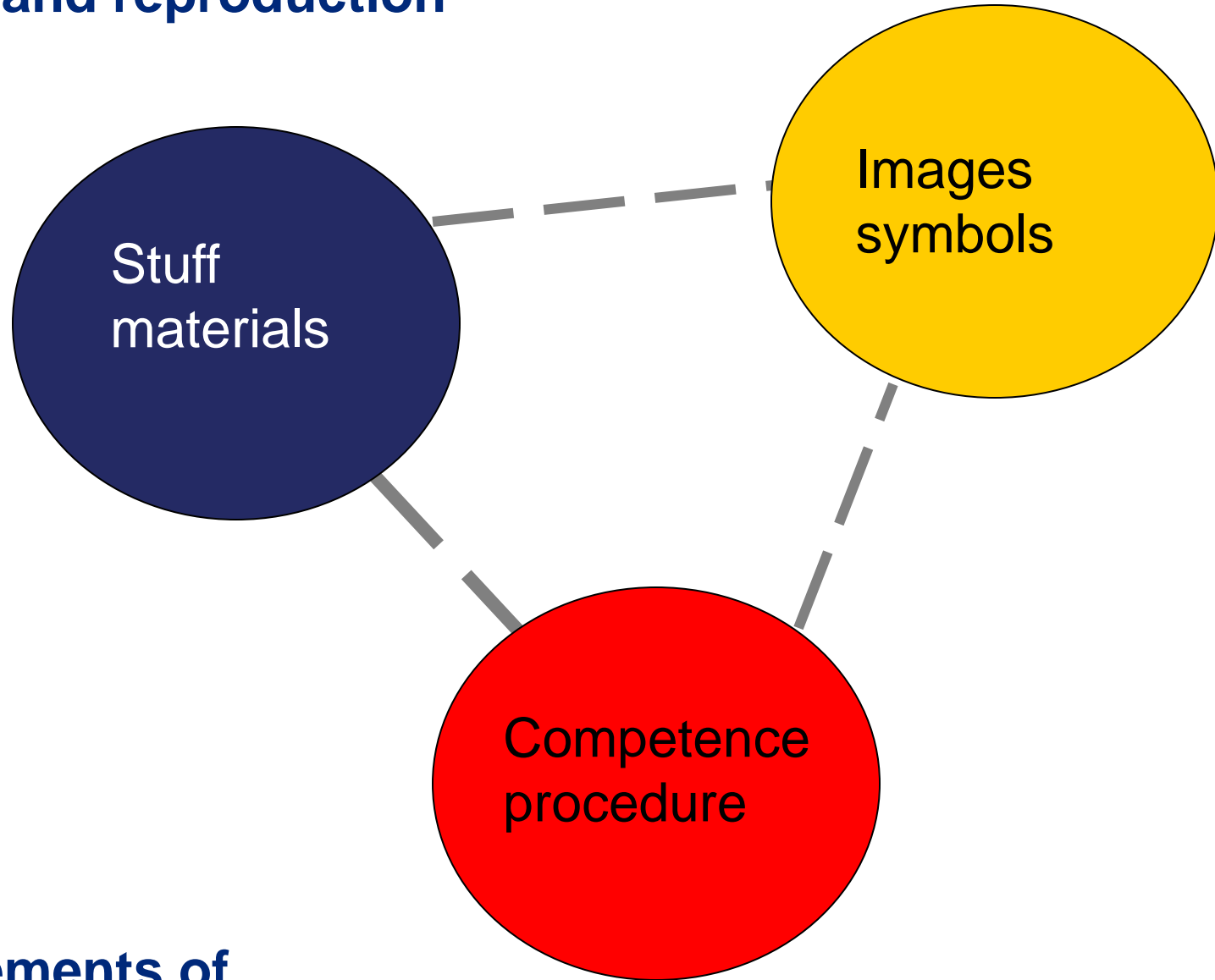


**Technological niches**





## Circulation and reproduction



Of the elements of  
suburban life

Suburbia  
reproduces its  
own  
conditions  
But is also  
part of a wider  
world

