



Hunters and farmers

Social Research Association summer
meeting

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7th July 2009

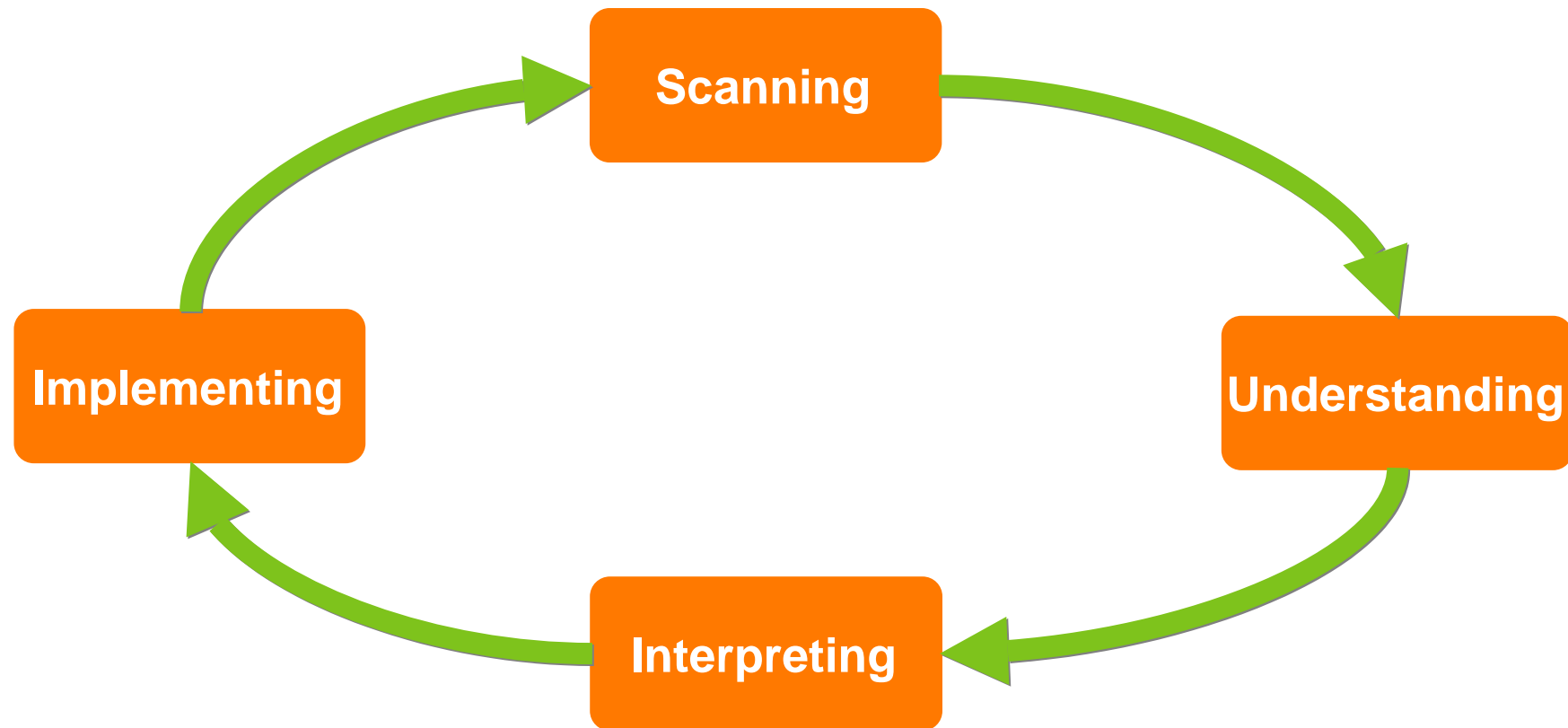
The question..

What do futures researchers do which is different from social researchers – and why?

Futures assumption No. 1

Own your own
assumptions

What do futurists do?



Bricks and birds



Bricks and birds

Complicated

- all components are knowable and definable
- they can be catalogued
- all relationships can be listed
- cause and effect can be understood and replicated
- It is the sum of its parts



Complex

- many interacting agents with multiple identities
- if you alter an agent the effect is unpredictable
- cause and effect are intertwined
- it is not the exact sum of its parts



Bricks and birds

Social research

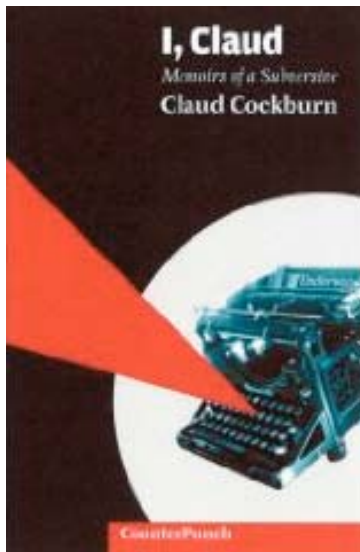
- Positivist
- Structuralist
- Modernist
- Methodologically conservative
- “Social facts”

Futures research

- Critical theory
- Post-modernist
- Problematises everything
- “Social construction of knowledge”

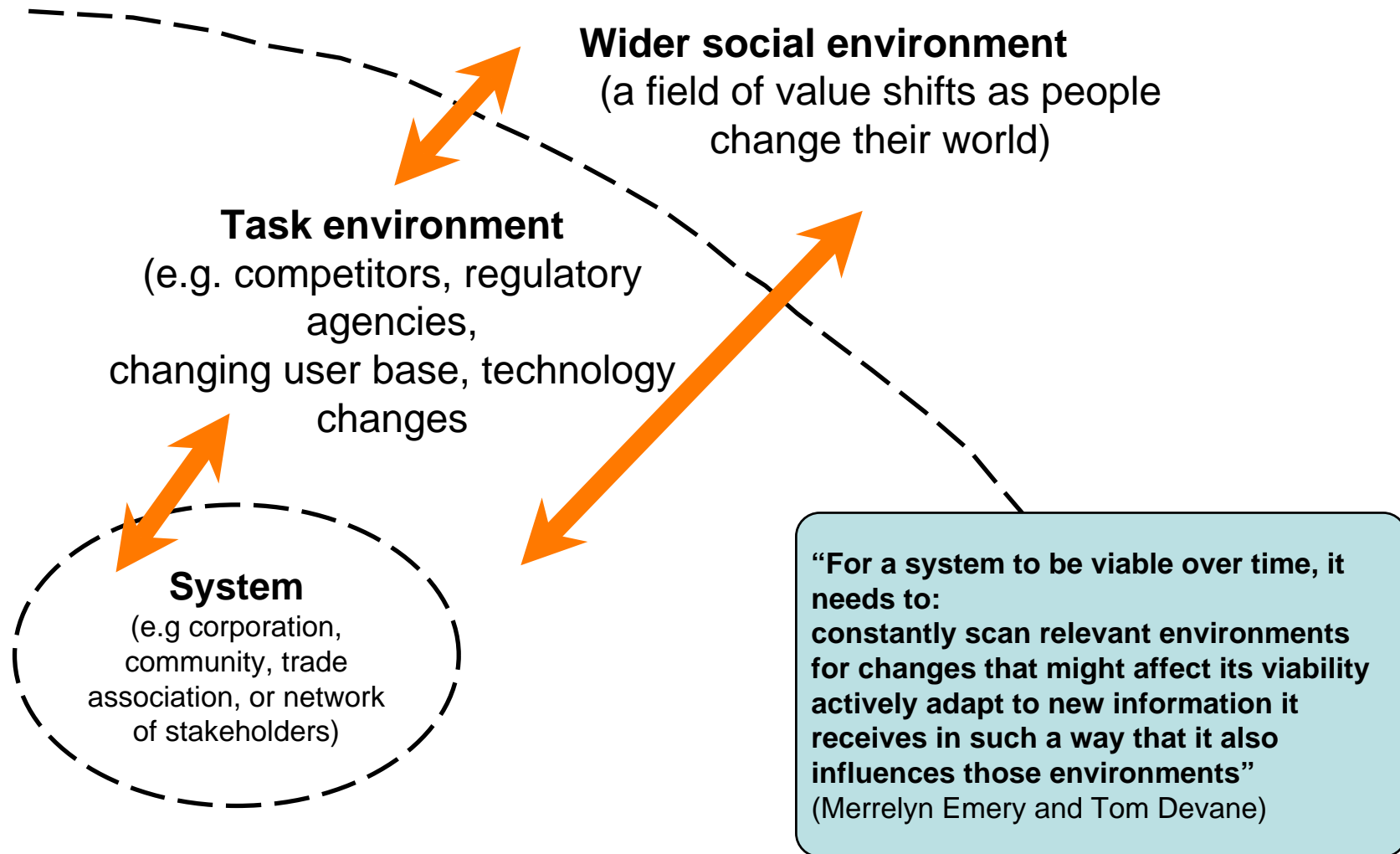


Facts aren't just lying around



To hear people talking about facts, you would think that they lay about like pieces of gold ore waiting to be picked up ... by strenuous prospectors whose subsequent problem was only to get them to market. ... There are no such facts. Or if they are, they are meaningless and certainly ineffective; they might in fact just as well not be lying about at all until the prospector – the journalist – puts them into relation with other facts.”

Organisations as open systems



Farmers and hunters



Farmers and hunters

Social research

- Detailed and accurate
- Data and method central
- Looks back
- Continuity
- “Rigorous within context”



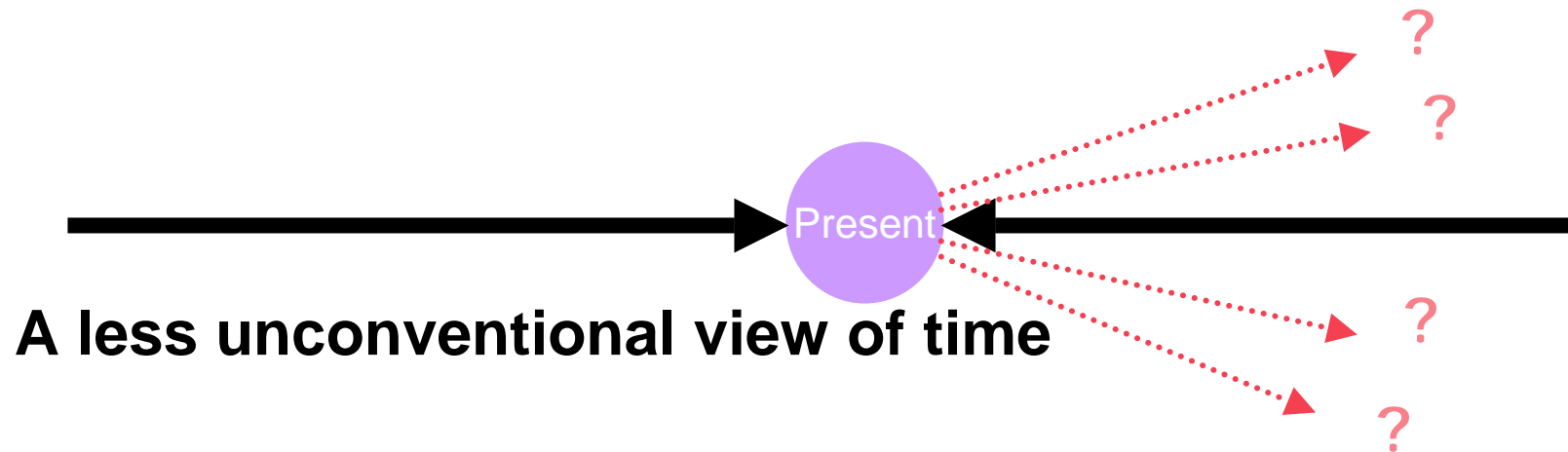
Futures research

- Pattern finding
- Few first principles
- ‘Makes the present strange’
- Emphasis on change/novelty
- Methods mixed and matched

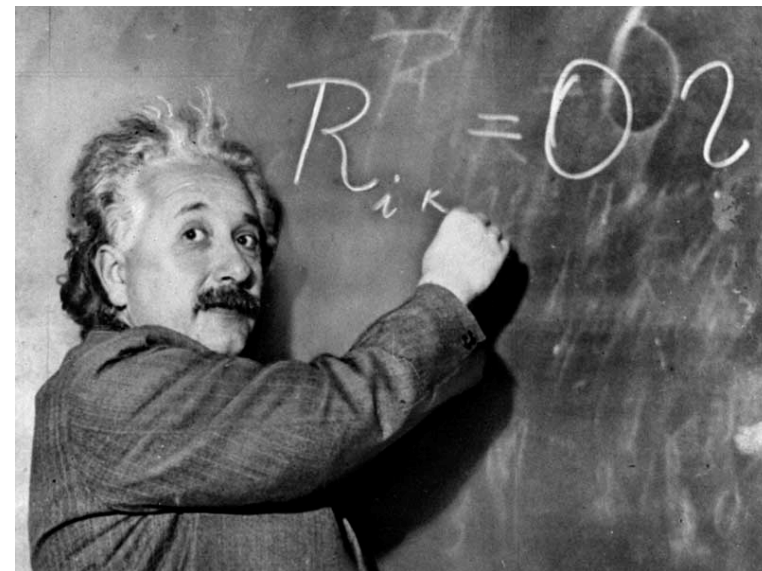
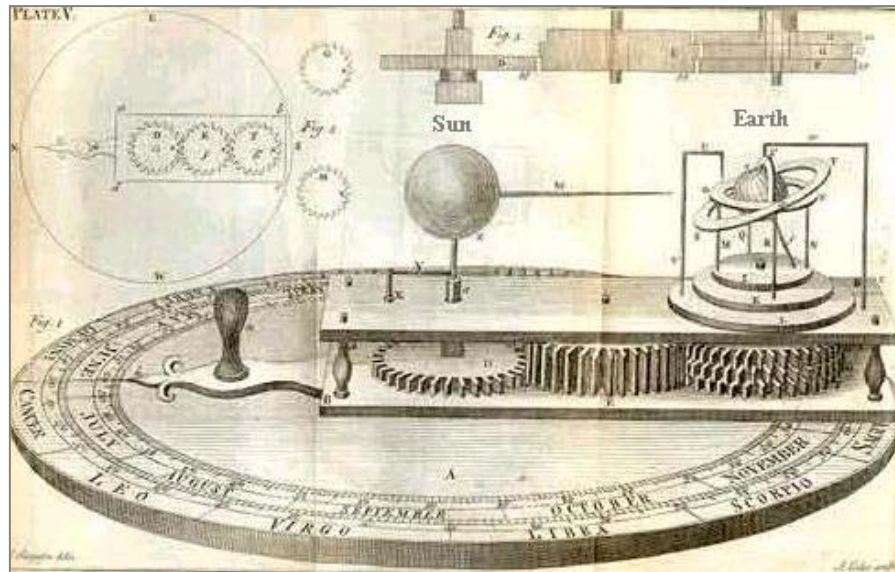


To understand the future we need to re-frame the way we think about time

The conventional view of time



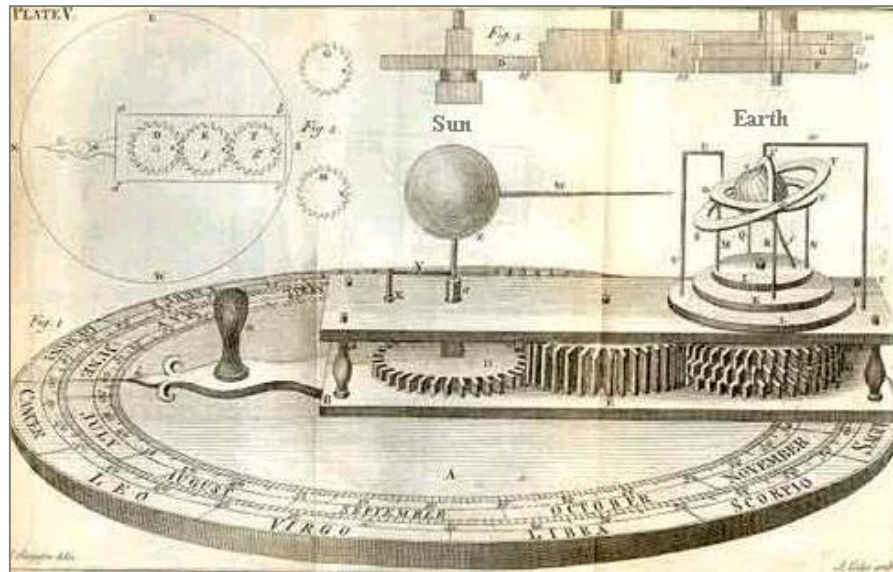
Newton and Einstein



Newton and Einstein

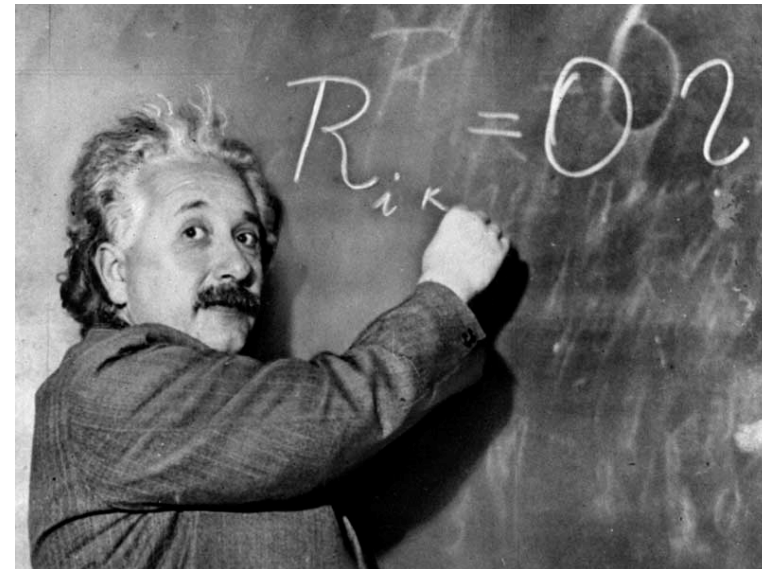
Social research

- “Evidence-based”
- Informing policy agenda
- Policy making integrity
- Policy makers are Newtonians - “pulling levers”

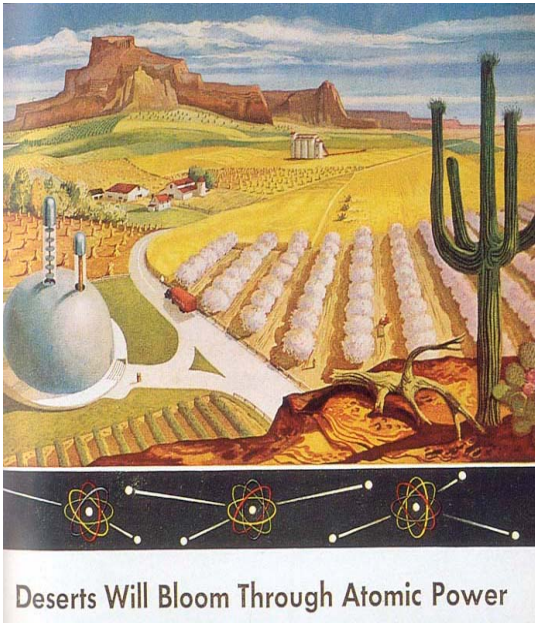


Futures research

- Scanning different type of evidence
- Managing uncertainty
- Understanding turbulence
- Cause and effect inter-related

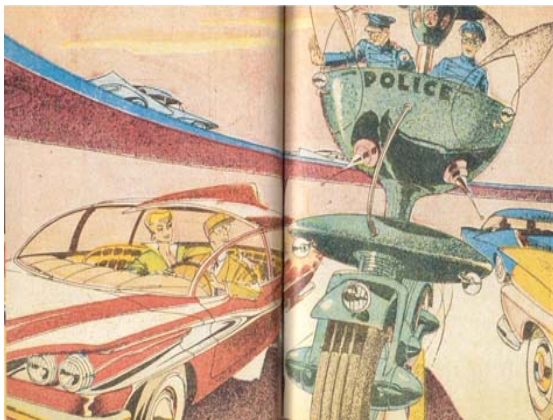


Challenging the ‘legacy future’



Every organisation – and every person – carries around a collection of ideas about the future in their heads.

Jaime Cascio calls these ‘legacy futures’ – ideas about the future which we still believe are likely, but which aren’t going to happen.



Or, as Mark Twain put it



***“It ain't what you don't know
that gets you into trouble.
It's what you know for sure
that just ain't so.”***

the
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company

Thank you

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the coming together of
Henley Centre HeadlightVision
and Yankelovich