

THINKING ABOUT RESILIENCE AS A WICKED PROBLEM

Some challenges for urban planning, social policy, and
cultural practice

THE FOLLOWING PRESENTATION IS RATED

SL STRONG LANGUAGE

GG GRAND GENERALIZATIONS

MH MILDLY HERETICAL

LISTENER DISCRETION IS ADVISED

DD STEREO/SURROUND SOUND WHERE AVAILABLE

GG CLOSED CAPTIONED

ESP EN ESPAÑOL / IN SPANISH WHERE AVAILABLE



“The city as we might imagine it , the soft city of illusion, myth, aspiration and nightmare, is as real, may be more real than the hard city one can locate in maps and statistics, in monographs on urban sociology, demography and architecture”

--Jonathan Raban

“The imaginary institution of the city defines the scope—the possibilities and their limits—within which at any particular time, we can imagine, think and experience city life; it defines the aesthetic and intellectual field within which cities will be designed, planned and engineered”

--Kevin Robbins

A FEW OBSERVATIONS AND QUESTIONS ABOUT RESILIENCE

- Intuitively appealing
- Multiple registers and inherent ambiguity
- A radical notion
- Scientific paradigm or social movement?
- Focused on the big one
- Resilience of what to what for what ends?
- A means to an end or an end in itself?
- Relation to other core ideas/principles?

WHAT IS A WICKED PROBLEM?

(RITTEL AND WEBER)

- No definitive formulation of problem or solutions
- No stopping rule
- Solutions are better/worse, not true/false
- No limit to or immediate/ultimate test of solutions
- No do-overs
- Every problem is unique
- Densely-layered, chronically-interconnected
- Extreme social fragmentation, value conflict
- No right to be wrong

“The professionalized cognitive and operational styles that were refined in the first half of the [20th Century] based in Newtonian mechanistic physics are not readily adapted to contemporary conceptions of interacting open systems **and to contemporary concerns with equity** (emp. added).”

“The search for scientific bases for confronting problems of social policy is bound to fail because of the nature of these problems”

RELATED CONCEPTS

Social Messes (Ackoff, Horn)

- Missing data
- Rampant uncertainty/ambiguity
- Institutional inertia/resistance to change

Super-wicked Problems (Levin et al.)

- Clock is ticking
- No centralized authority
- Solvers are causers
- “Hyperbolic discounting”

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF WICKED PROBLEM FRAMING

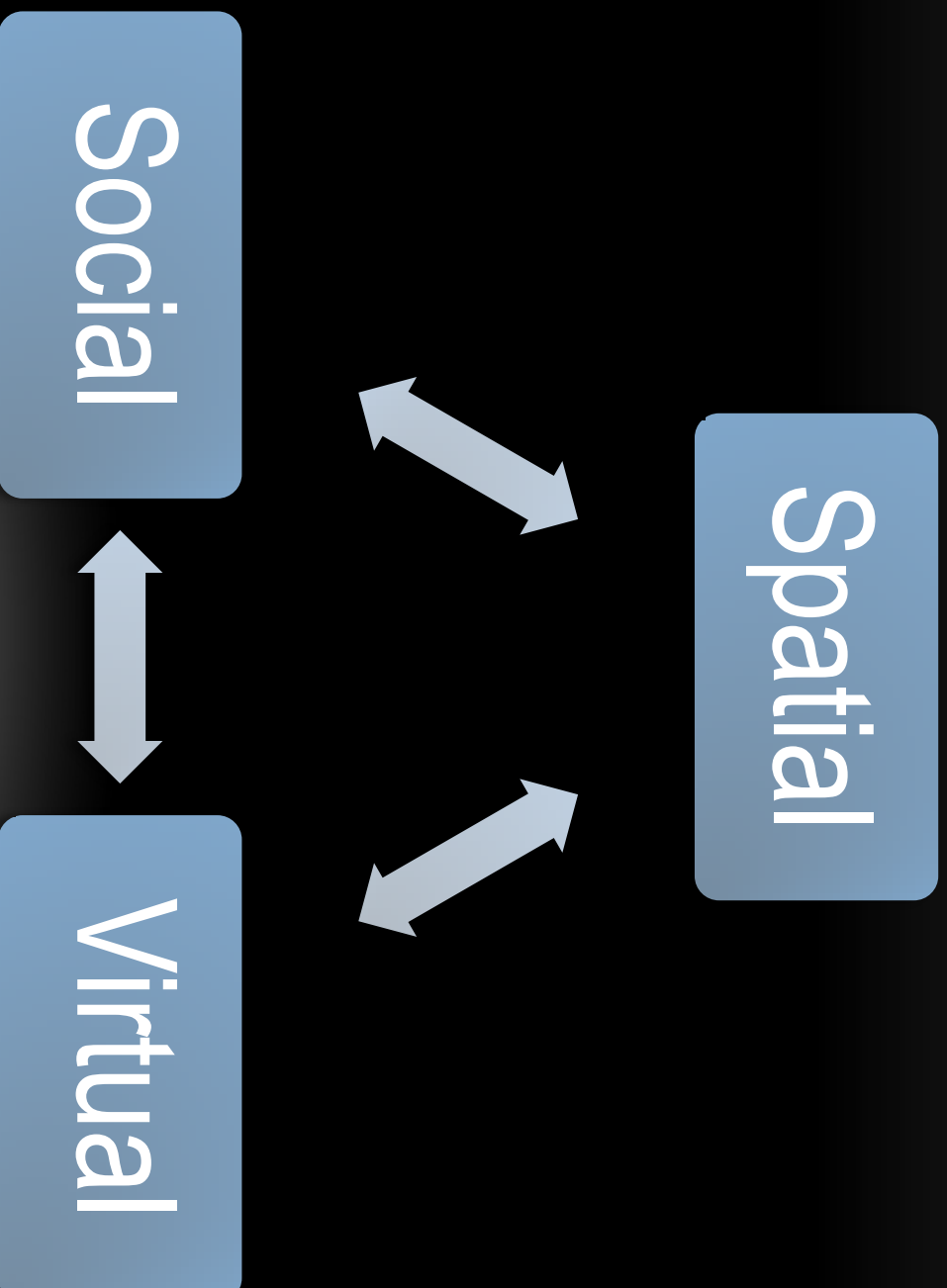
- Recent advances in technology seem to have given rise to the notion that wicked problems might be obsolete
- ?
- Haven't answered the question, we've just stopped asking it.

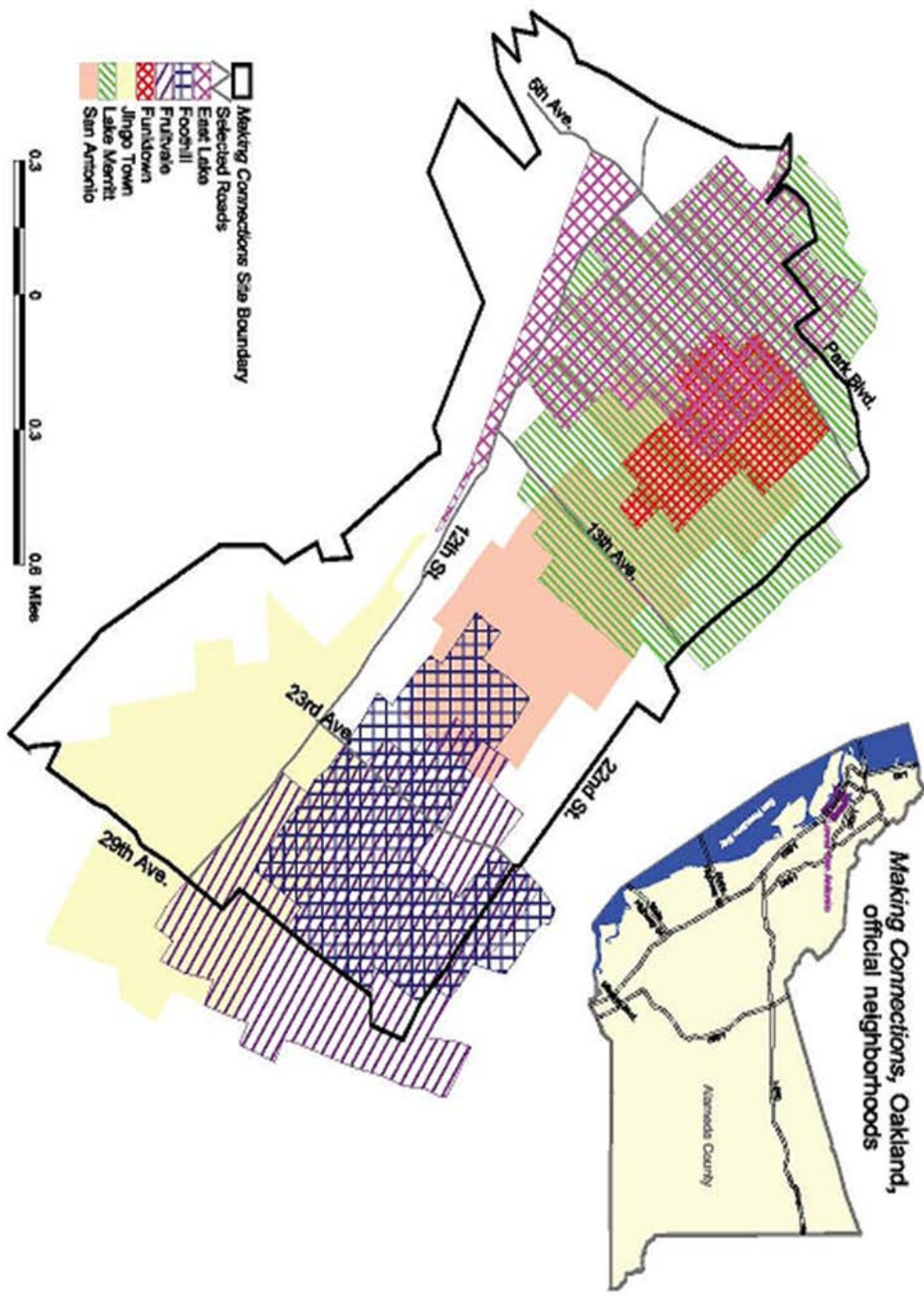
COMMUNITY AS A WICKED WORD

- Good to think
- Intensely romanticized, rarely defined
- Definitions are often vague or problematic:

“a group of individuals and organizations bound together by geography and perceived self-interest to efficiently carry out common functions.” --CARRI

MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF COMMUNITY



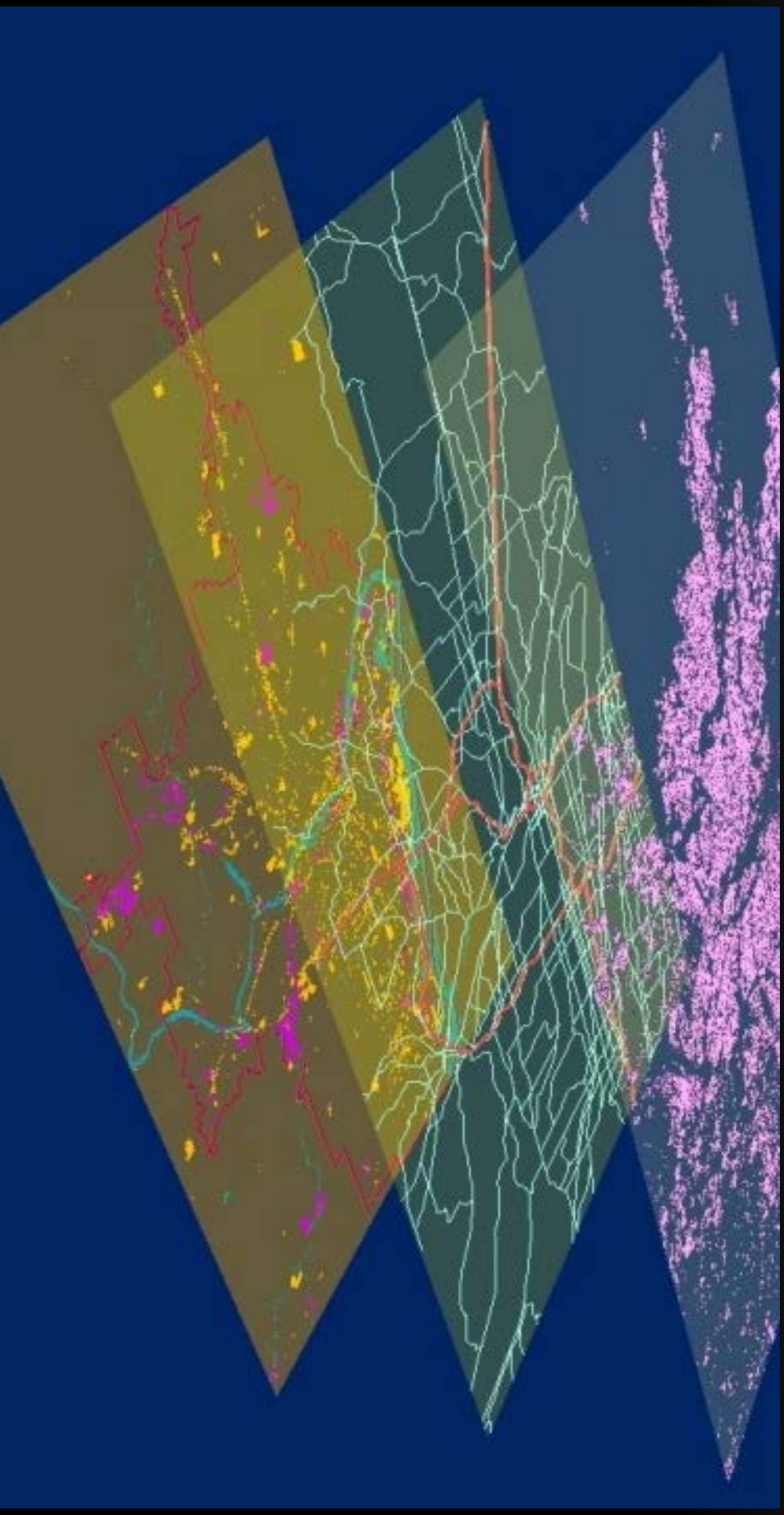


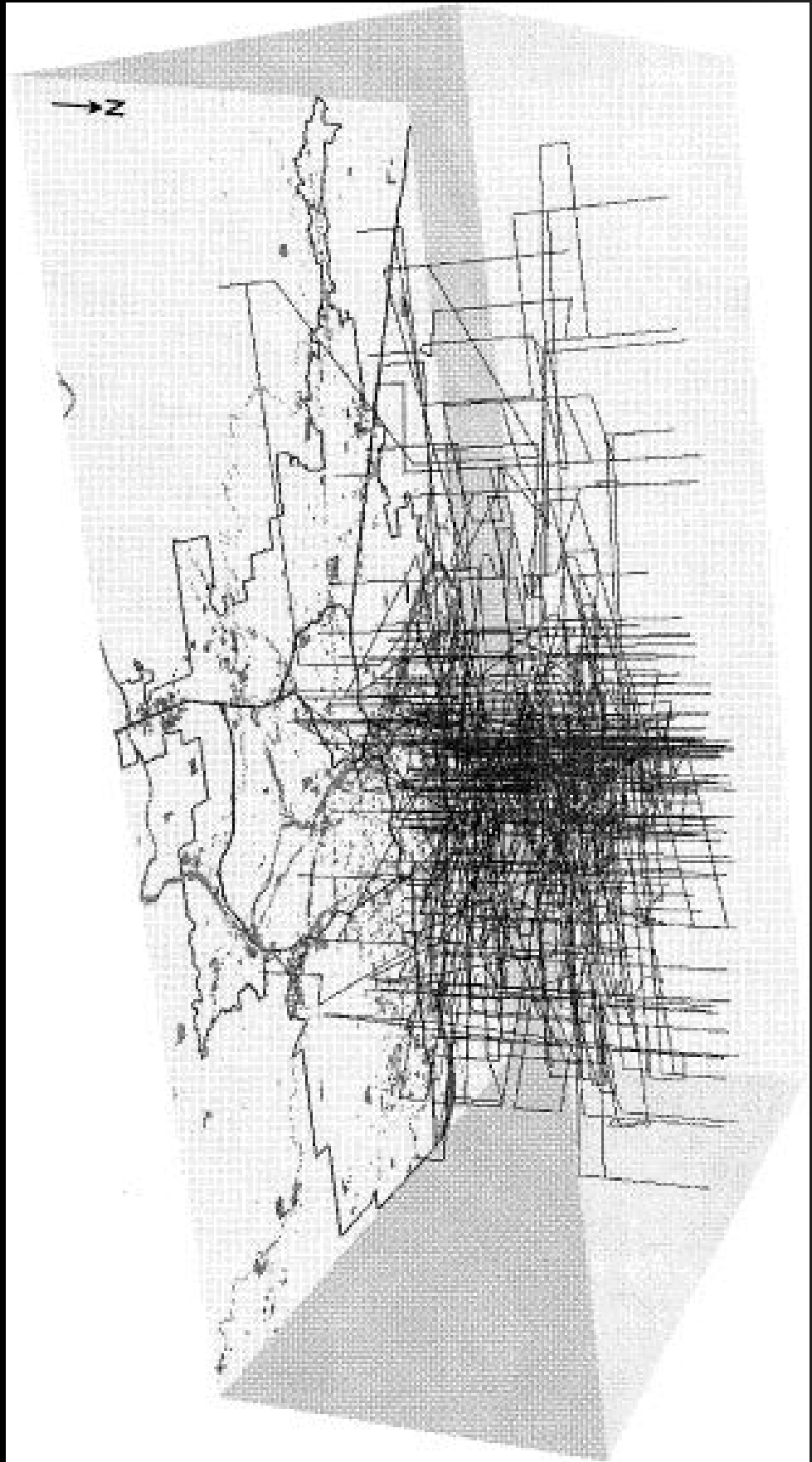
Making Connections, Oakland,
official neighborhoods

Alameda County

A CITY IS A MANY-LAYERED THING

(MEI-PO KWAN)





SOME CHALLENGES

- Tendency to think of “official” communities as natural systems
- Overlap/intersection/disconnect between panoply of systems geographies
- Unintended consequences of formal systems integration
- Limitations of traditional data

MORE CHALLENGES

- “Big data” has potential to deal with these challenges, **but**
 - Can create whole new categories of administrative invisibility/exclusion **and**
 - New modalities of control, bias and oppression **as well as** opportunity and inclusion
- Requires new ways of setting and implementing social goals and managing trade-offs between ideal/real, fairness/ expedience, immediate/long-term