

HIST C182C / STS C100: Human Contexts and Ethics of Data

University of California, Berkeley
Fall 2018

Getting oriented in the datafied world -
Thinking in time

Class 2, 8/24/18

What is history good for?

My current theory:

- History isn't the study of the past.
- It's the study of the structure of human affairs in time

What's tricky in here:

- How do you pick out structure and make it visible?
- How do you deal with your own embedding in human affairs?
- And with the fact that you inevitably start from the unique moment called now?



“Our datafied world”

Ubiquitous data

Data collection
Instruments, sensors,
devices, ...
Signals
Digitization
Compilation
Processing

Instrumentation
Connectivity
Computation

Widespread analytics

Working the data

- display
- slice
- merge
- seek patterns

Make inferences
Retro, real-time, or
predictive
("Data science")

Know the world
through data

Culture of algorithms

Formal step-by-step
processes
Automated
decisionmaking

Specifically, algorithms
that enact analytics on
data and use them to
take action

Sorting, classifying
Machine learning

Autonomous machines

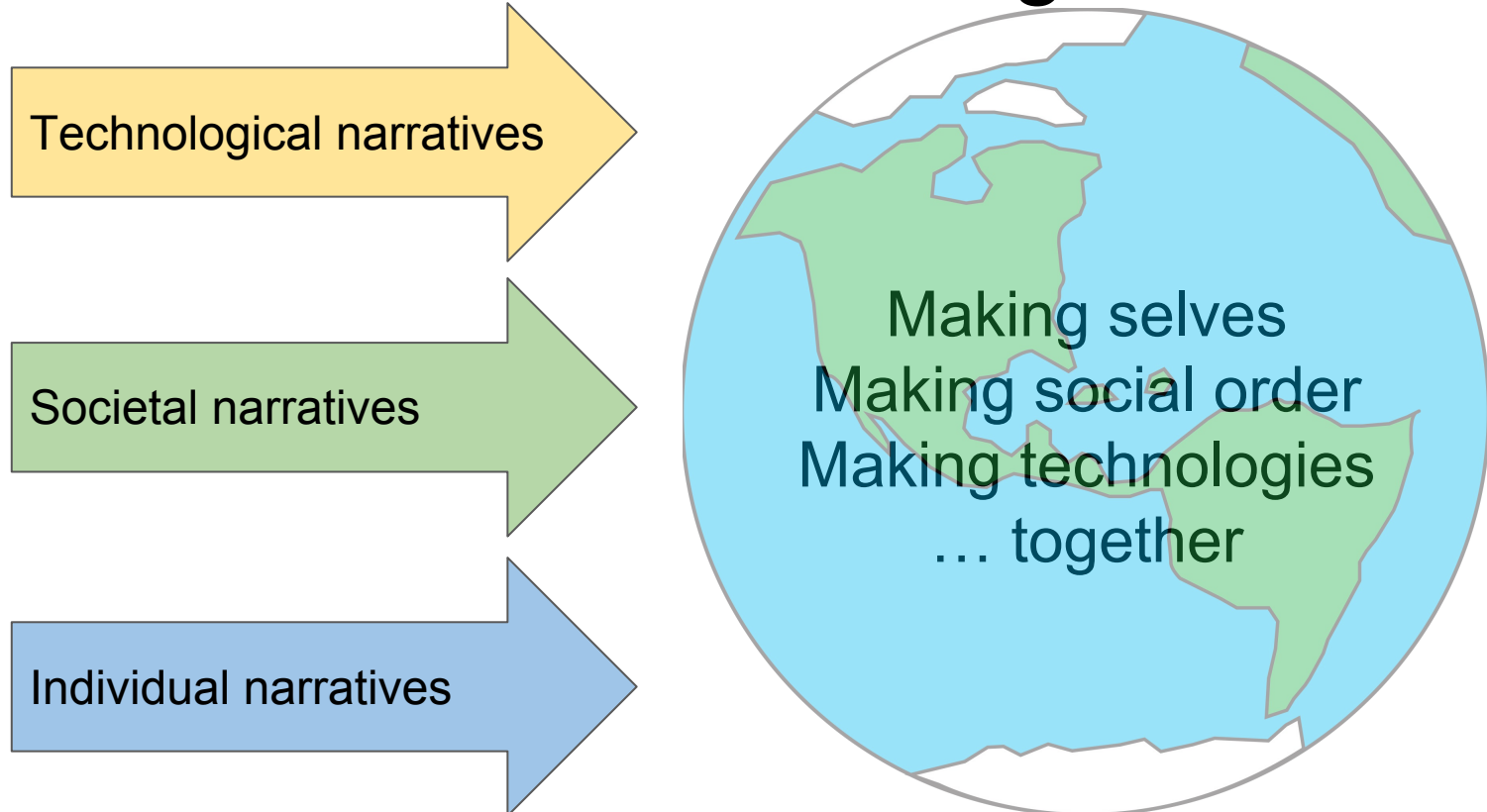
Intelligence

- Drawing conclusions
about the world
- Planning, goal setting
and achieving
- Self-monitoring,
feedback loops

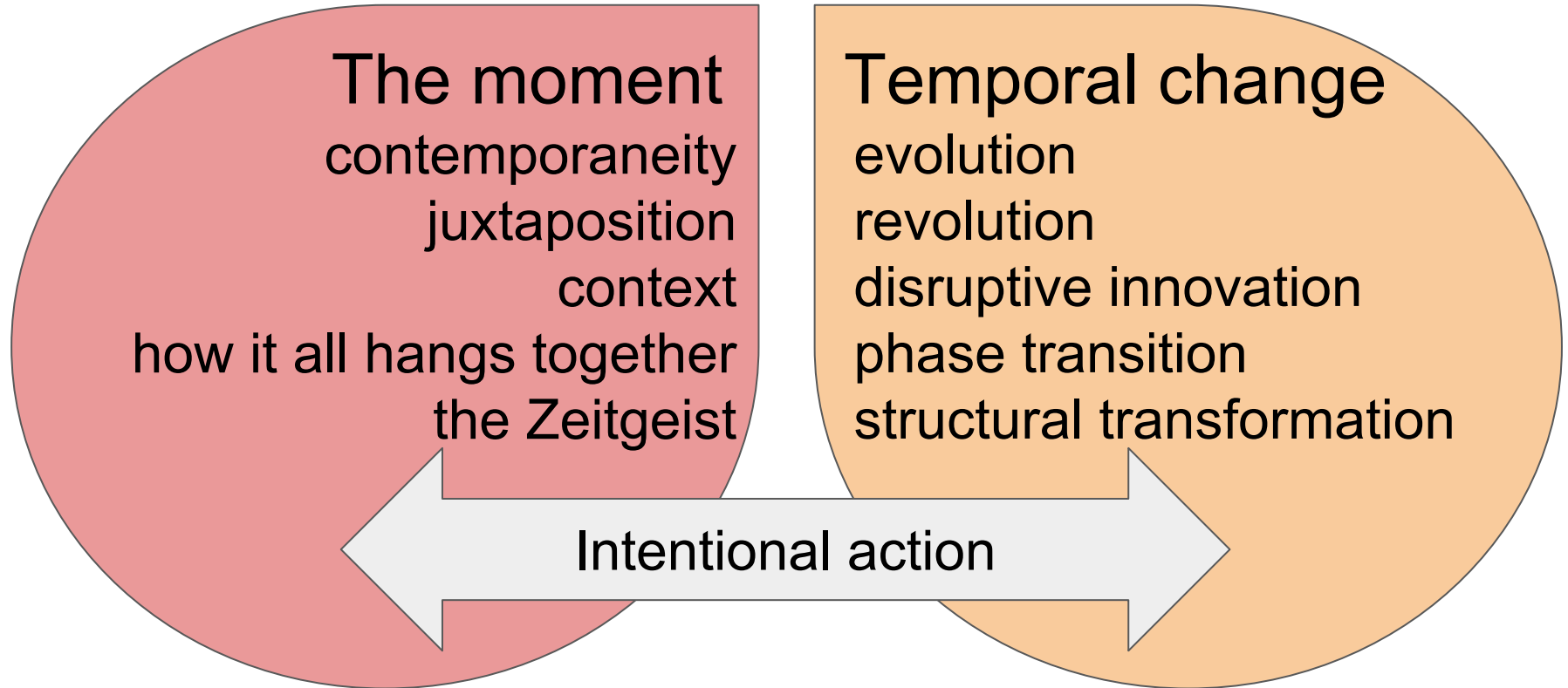
Driven by the explosion
of data

Interfaces with the
material world

How did the datafied world come into being?



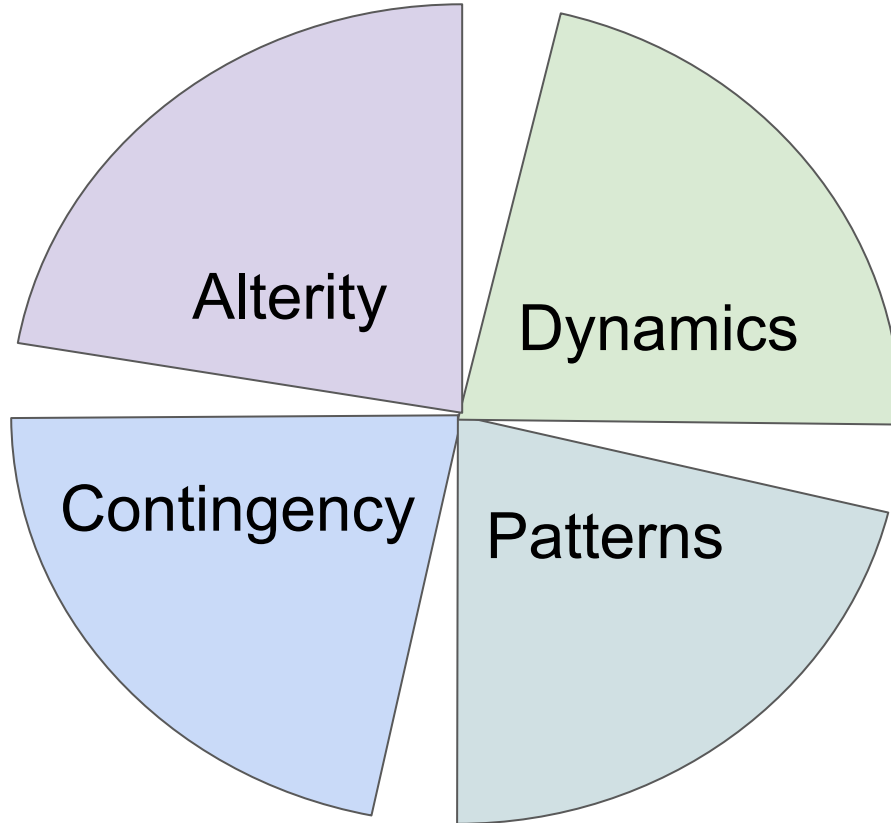
How to think about the historical



Pointers

It once was
different.
It's different
somewhere else.
It could change
again.

It could have
happened
differently.
It's not controllable
or predictable.
(Why?)



What forces are
driving?

What structures are
shaping?

What are the
timescales?

Where can things be
influenced?

Something looks
common here ...

We've seen this
before

What is history good for?

My current theory:

- Collective dataset for pattern recognition
 - Experience beyond our individual own
- A set of stories (narratives) about human beings
 - Like other stories in which we recognize the human (individual or social)

