

“Where we’re going, we don’t need roads”

Methodology as Infrastructure, (In)Visibility, and
the Potential of Disorientation

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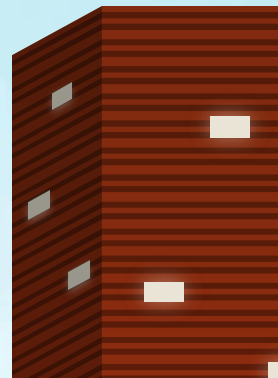
A movie poster for 'Back to the Future'. It features the two main characters, Marty McFly and Doc Brown, in a dynamic pose. Marty is in the foreground, looking slightly to the side with a concerned expression. Doc Brown is behind him, pointing his finger forward with a determined look. They are both wearing their iconic time-traveling attire. The background is a bright blue gradient. The title 'BACK TO THE FUTURE' is prominently displayed in a large, stylized, yellow-to-orange gradient font with a thick blue outline. The word 'BACK' is on the top line, 'TO' is on the second line, and 'THE FUTURE' is on the third line. The 'FUTURE' part of the title has a motion-blur effect at the end. A small 'TM' trademark symbol is located at the bottom right of the title.

BACK TO THE FUTURETM



People commonly envision infrastructure as a system of substrates—railroad lines, pipes and plumbing, electrical power plants, and wires. It is by definition invisible, part of the background for other kinds of work. It is ready-to-hand. This image holds up well enough for many purposes—turn on the faucet for a drink of water and you use a vast infrastructure of plumbing and water regulation without usually thinking much about it.

—Susan Leigh Star



Properties of Infrastructure

1

Embeddedness

2

Transparency

3

Reach or scope

4

Learned as part
of membership

5

Links with conventions
of practice

6

Embodiment
of standards

7

Built on an installed
base

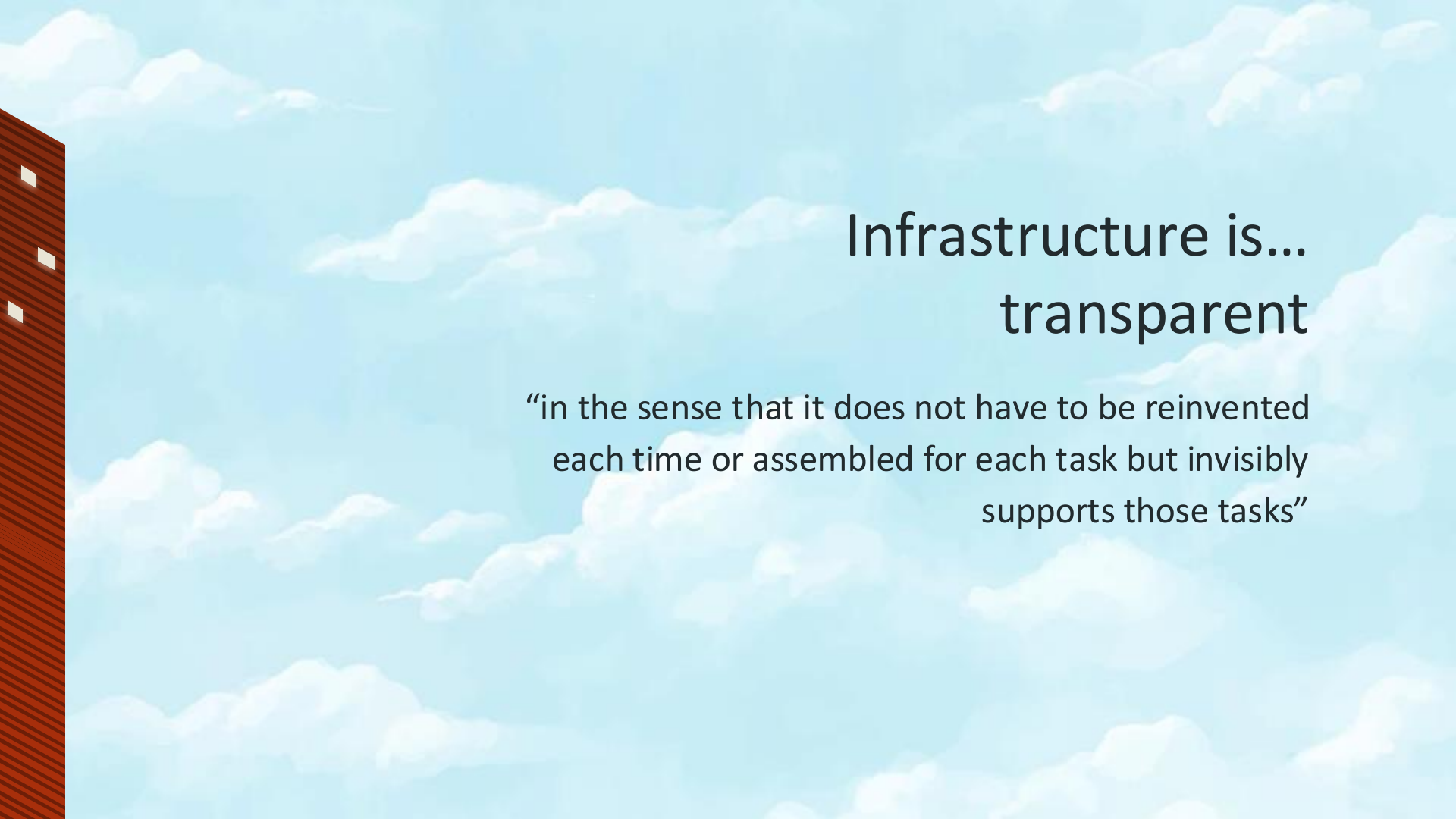
8

Becomes visible
upon breakdown

9

Fixed in modular increments





Infrastructure is... transparent

“in the sense that it does not have to be reinvented
each time or assembled for each task but invisibly
supports those tasks”

Infrastructure... becomes visible when it breaks down


“The image [of infrastructure] becomes more complicated when one begins. . .to examine the situations of those who are *not* served by a particular infrastructure. . .[f]or the person in a wheelchair, the stairs and doorjamb in front of a building are not seamless subtenders of use, but barriers” (Star, 1999)

“When British colonialists built radio networks or mobile cinemas, for instance, they did so with the intention of educating and developing Nigerians into ‘modern’ colonial citizens” (Larkin, 2008)

Infrastructure is... learned as part of membership

“New participants acquire a naturalized familiarity with
[infrastructure’s] objects as they become members.”





Infrastructure is...
fixed in modular increments, not
all at once or globally

“Changes take time and negotiation, and adjustment
with other aspects of the systems are involved.”

Scaffolding



The Road Not Taken

Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
*Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.*
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.



Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

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