## cultural evolution

. the forces of

wind and water

erosion ...

... including

major upheavals

such as storms,

because of what it suggests about cultural change (illustrated above). First, like a fallen leaf, old cultural remnants persist as layers of sediment at the base of the tree. For example, a high profile fad may fall out of favor within the cultural mainstream. It gradually sinks out of view as fewer people pay attention. The fad may leave a lasting mark on other aspects of culture (becoming a residual referent). If not completely forgotten the fad might be revived by artists, designers, and other taste-makers as they dig through the past for inspiration. Cultures often recycle the old, mixing it with the new, in a process of self-referential continuity.

Second, cross-references happen all the time between different aspects of culture. Fungi grows in the soil around the roots of the tree, an area called the *rhizosphere*. All the microbial life there helps nourish the soil by causing the decay of detritus (such as fallen leaves). The fungi facilitate communication across roots and the local environment. Analogizing to culture, the fungal networks help deeply rooted ideas to intermingle giving the whole the taint of coherence even as inconsistencies persis For example: a collective's cherished values will inform shared principles; common knowledge will inform myths.

There is no complete reconciliation, just cross-cutting influence. With the mangrove tree in particular, the (manglicolous) fungi inhabits roots, stem, and branches above the soil, mediating cross-cutting influences more broadly. Higher up in the tree, more visible aspects of culture reference each other more overtly. Third, cultures spread geographically as drift seeds that get planted outside

their original context. That analogy suggest that the fragment of culture that is transplanted is more visible, such as a cultural product (such as a film, video game, or music). A visible fragment will contain a lot of hidden underpinnings, such as assumptions,

Fourth, a mangrove tree is a source of stability for a *coastline*. A grove of trees protects the land from the forces of erosion, such as water and wind. It also buffers against storms. Likewise, culture has a stabilizing influence on other systems within a society. That is why systems involving people can be so difficult to change without shaping culture in tandem. Culture dictates what is considered a legitimate (broadly acceptable) move. For wouldbe change agents, there is no substitute for the slow cultivation of the forest (cultures) and landscaping of the coast (other systems) in a way that is sensitive to how both types of system reinforce each other.

These may sprout out of the seed to

set-ting. The sapling that grows will

have a strong resemblance to the

original but will have to adapt to the

new context, which adds pressure to

evolve and change shape. Eventually,

new species of a single culture

existing local cultures.

proliferate, sometimes supplanting

influence subtly within the new

Finally, just because trees act as a buffer against waves, it does not nean the water flows are irrelevant Mangrove forests are shaped by the oscillating currents near the shore. These push and pull at the roots, causing them to shift gradually. The oscillatory flows in a culture are the competing social movements trying to change prevailing attitudes, values, and so forth. Oscillation is an important dynamic because even a rampant novement (such as a Maoist Cultural Revolution) will create a political backlash by opposing social forces whenever a culture shifts too far too quickly The backlash may not be out in the open nor well organized, which is why undercurrents are an apt metaphor. The competition to change culture with major campaigns is always a back-and-forth struggle: two steps forward and one step back with con solidated gains; or, with self-defeating

movements, one step forward and two

steps back.

**REFERENCE.** The *Diderot effect* (affiliation marker) was coined by Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988). For sociomorph and related concepts, see Joanna Seibt, tina Vestergaard, and Malene Damholdt, "Sociomorphing, Not Anthropomorphizing: Towards a Typology of erienced Sociality," in Marco Nørskov et al., eds., *Culturally Sustainable Social Robotics* (Amsterdam: IOS Press, 2021). "Cultural holes" (in occlusions) are elaborated in Mark A. Pachucki and Ronald L. Breiger, "Cultural Holes: Beyond Relationality in Social Networks and Culture," Annual Review of Sociology, vol. 36 (2010), pp. 205-224. "Habitus" (in practices) comes from Pierre Bourdieu. Outline of a Theory of Practice (Cambridge (suggestive usage of an object, such as a tool) to a force field, one which encourages habits when used peatedly; see Jack Cheng, "Habit Fields," A List Apart, no. 305 (2010). Grundnorm was coined by Hans Kelse Pure Theory of Law (Clark, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, 1992 [1934]); it does not just pertain to "legal fictions" but applies more broadly, as discussed in Hans Kelsen, General Theory of Norms (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) . 79]). For early tripartite organizing schemes, see: A. L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, "Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions," Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archæology and Ethnology, vol. 47, no. (1952), pp. 95-101. For the first tripartite schemes that treat culture as a system as the term is meant here, see Leslie A. White, *The Concept of Cultural Systems* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1976). The reference to the *rhizosphere* is not a reference to Deleuzian philosophy, although others are free to make that association and build upon it, re: Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). On imbrication: Paul. M. Leonardi, "When Flexible Routine Meet Flexible Technologies: Affordance. Constraint, and the Imbrication of Human and Material Agencies," MIS

Quarterly, vol. 35, no. 1 (2011), pp. 147-167. On concept-driven, social-pattern analysis: Eviatar Zerubavel, Generally

Speaking: An Invitation to Concept-Driven Sociology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

much like the

oscillatory flows

under the water.

. which shape the

mangrove forest

gradually through

successive pushes

ersion 1 of the CultureViz codex comparative culture studies. Some (2007) is a streamlined list intended to concepts may seem unfamiliar to help people talk more specifically experts (or come across as underabout the basics of culture. Concepts theorized) because they exist mostly in that simple list are designated with in another discipline or have been the ( $\triangle$ ) symbol. Version 2 of the codex genericized to transcend disciplinary is a more elaborate list that highlights boundaries. Indeed, one aim of The a detailed range of cultural compon-CultureViz Project is to overcome the ents. To some, these distinctions may myopia that sometimes comes from seem rarefied, perhaps even esoteric. disciplinary specialization. Moreover, Arguably, many of these less-talkedthe intent is to support many different about distinctions are the ones with schools of thought and ontologies. the greatest potential to affect cultural The aim is to encourage a more comprehensive analysis of culture. change.

Some items are designated with

umbrella terms (complex concepts)

important of which are included in the

these descriptions are not exhaustive

that encompass a number of sub-

description. Given limits of space,

map out a culture, the descriptions

will be replaced by descriptors and

examples that are specific to the

culture under-going analysis.

topics and variations, the most

The terminology chosen to intended to bridge various disciplines that adopt culture as a subject, notably; sociology, anthropology, political science, art, design, architecture, legal studies, socio-linguistics, communication theory, leadership, organization, and

The Visual Vocabulary of Culture uses syntax using basic symbols, it is unrealistic to expect the meanings to the same visual syntax for icons as the Visual Vocabulary of Systems. That be self-evident. Each item comes with a label and brief description to clarify. syntax has proven helpful for providing a evocative thumbnail illustration The icons are merely illustrative (albiet a highly abstract, spatialized instantiations of each concept, albeit one). Moreover, the two codices are ones that are highly spatial in orientation. Once the viewer has designed to interoperate as a larger set. Not only is culture a form of learned the concept, the icon has a system but both culture and other reference value. That is, it is expected systems are mutually constituative: that the icon will serve as a more systems rely on things like language compact stand-in that will be and mental models to operate; remembered more readily. The compactness makes it ideal for use conversely, culture relies on system regularities (such as boundaries that within dialogue exercises and visual group people and form networks) to maps. Indeed, the icon, label, and form practices, rituals, norms, and so description are compact enough to fit forth. Thus, holistic analysis of how on small chips or cards. These can be arranged and rearranged into various culture and systems interrelate is enabled by the combined codices. displays and maps to better make sense of particular cultures. Ideally The graphic-design specifications of when using the icons and lables to

the visual syntax can be found in the document "Icon Design: Visual Vocabulary Specifications" (archived at the CultureViz website). That is an open-sourced specification that

Even though the icons have been designed according to a unified

## cultural antenna

particular types of plant. In that spirit,

their "antenna" with which to notice

cultural patterns across contexts and

situations. After knowing what to look

for by keying-in on a cultural concept,

the sensitized observer is more likely

this codex helps the observer develop

Eviatar Zarabavel (2020) advocates for to identify instances out in the world a concept-driven approach to social- of the everyday. Collecting instances from varying contexts provides a firm pattern analysis. The idea is to foundation for making generalizations sensitize an observer's attention to particular social phenomena that about cultural phenomena. That is a would otherwise be overlooked withvenerable approach to social theorizing that Zarabavel traces from Georg out some sort of generic concept (or "mental magnate"). In other words, the Simmel through to Everett Hughes and regularities of the social world would Erving Goffman. be abstracted from various cultures and contexts to be more broadly applicable. That helps observers appreciate certain patterns, as a nature lover might while foraging through the cluttered forest for

**OBJEC1** 

0

CULTURAL BEHAVIORS ARE PATTERNS OF ACTION THAT ACCUMULATE THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTION WITHIN A COLLECTIVE. THESE PATTERNS ARE DYNAMIC AND ARE EXPRESSED DIFFERENTLY DEPENDING ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE ROLE PERSONAS INVOKED REOVER, INDIVIDUALS ARE IMPERFECTLY SOCIALIZED, MAKING ADHERENCE TO ASCRIBED

BEHAVIORS UNEVEN ACROSS A COLLECTIVE.

status, or social context;

CODE RESTRICTION expressiveness based on appropriateness of a role,

associations; semantic vow, wish, or desire, such as a candle at a vigil or a

coin in a fountain; offering

Objects that enable (or

provide excuse for) social

interaction; conversation

A model or typical version of

something; a pervasive and

representative example; a

version deemed "normal,'

Forms, themes, or styles

recognizable as a type of

The lateral associations and

political valences that build

up around an object or con-

cept; historical baggage;

object with tell-tale signs

about a collective, or can be

The standard set of goods

basic to functioning within

a society or maintaining the

and services deemed as

Spatial orientation of

signify setting or place, or

signify something about the

that indicate something

that make an object

standing and reduce social friction; etiquette, rules of Decorative styles common to a setting or mode of expres-

subjects of recurring Projecting an admirable example for others to imitate; role model; setting standard of taste; impres

still leave a residual performance of a social task; a proscribed act to signal status or intent;

emotional stance towards a

subject; prescribed concern

or indifference; "tone polic-

expected of a situation or

role: formulaic theatrics to

maintain a pretence; levels

Ordeal to prove worthiness

of status, role, or rank; com-

munity sanctified develop-

mental transition; liminal

A collective enthusiasm

that is short-lived but may

Conventional behavior

Communication aimed at

establishing relations, not

communicating information

per se; obligatory "small

prestige, virtue, or rank; a

conspicuous signal aimed

at enhancing social stand-

The terms and concepts

used within a collective to

culture (or parts thereof) as

enhance social standing by

signaling personal virtue;

Sprinkling messages with

references and vernacular

from different sub-culture

groups to gain credibility or

Social reproduction and

repetition shielded from

change pressures; self-

Speaking in a vernacular or

style interpretable or reson-

ant for one group or setting

but not others; sociolect,

referential iteration;

prestige opinion

binding to a coherent group or community; ascribed or 

 $\rightarrow$ 

**(3)** 

expected to adopt to remai n good standing; reciproca Boundaries and tactics to preserve a group culture from outside contaminatio amplifying and stigmatizing

historical significance or

SOCIAL PROOF

symbolizes shared values of

hemes; tradition preserving

association that counts as

adherence to a social norm

Modes of behavior, thought,

sion in good standing by

conforming to (or super-

A benefit granted to a

person with a particular

standing; an exemption

social status or procedural

ceding) aesthetic tastes

self-presentation, or expres-

a verifiable indicator of

volume, rhythm, tone) that modify the meaning or suggest subtle shades of

A useful, refined way of per forming a task, one socially acknowledged for its value; recommended technique

Differentiation of items into categories, with properties criteria and conceptual FRAMEWORK

IDEOLOGY

simplifying world view that

explains happenings,

quides conduct, and

OPEN SECRET

Information taken as given

but which is forbidden to be

talked about openly due to

stigma or unsettled conflict

the "elephant in the room"

TACIT AGREEMENTS

A nodding or implicit under-

standing that everyone is

NARRATIVE STYLES

Families of narratives that

share particular premise,

emotional tenor, and rea-

the basis for an understand

ing; premises, often hidden

soning approach; story-

assumed to ascribe to:

unstated or undiscussed

folklore; popular misconcer

conceptual explanations 0 used to make sense of particular subjects or tasks;

preconceptions about a group, type of person, or type of thing; stereotype or

ciation of certain subjects siveness and emotional

Culture is a set of meanings shared objects, and so forth) and through practices, customs, and such). or *meaning system* – that shapes (and is shaped by) the way people adaptations and anomalies, that interact in identifiable patterns.

can have their own culture if the membership is stable enough and a sufficient amount of shared experience and interaction has occurred For example, individuals can be citizens of a nation and residents of a local town or city. They can work in an organization and be a member of an occupational association. They can interact regularly with various groups and communities they belong to. These can be nearby or span vast geographies (thanks to technology and travel). Thus, there is no single cultural grouping that a person becomes affiliated with; a variety of super- and sub-cultures co-exist. How distinctive a culture becomes depends on how it is seperated and distinguished from alternatives. Indeed, it is common to have many

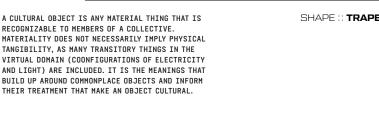
youth sub-cultures and criminal undergrounds. The complexity of culture makes it all very difficult to fully grasp. There are so many forms of cultural expression and overlapping cultural groupings. Culture is like the water a fish swims in: so mundane and omnipresent that t is taken for granted and hardly noticed. Only through exposure to other cultures does a person become intensely aware of their own cultural priors. Even then, the influence of

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△ STATUS OBJECT

MONUMEN.

emembrance of a people.

event, or idea deemed of

Actualizing an intangible

ionalization of socio-

A visual message that uses

space to conform with (or

An object or event that is a

(surroundings and enclo-

sures) suggesting interpre-

FOLK REPURPOSING

erform a valued task by a

collective; object hack to

An object that extends the

oody or mind, allowing for

beyond its intended design

AFFILIATION MARKER

An object or symbol that

signifies membership in a

identity class; group brand

or emblem; Diderot effect

roup, sub-culture, or

and the coherence given to

action; socio-technical

supercede) aesthetic stand-

spectacle or humor to

spread and speaks to a

idea by making it physical or

SIMULACRUM with a tangible thing that object that becomes the suggests a rank or role; real usual stand-in when the or imitation sign of prestige, original is referenced; an FOLK OBJECT

epresents a collective and

its character in an iconic

way; an object typically

Sacred object with svm

bolic meaning; emblem of

super-natural connection

An object that is been given

virtue of its cultural stand-

ing; (sub)cultural exagger

extra-ordinary status by

with widely observed

Superficial indicator of

A collection of things

recognized as comprising a

omplementing each other

coherent set or otherwise

BOUNDARY OBJECT

where a social boundary

lies; spatial demarcation o

sign for patterning of social

Dividing a domain into social

settings in which different

place areas designated for

Social performances that

as an object is used, often

in service of some role or

qualities: an identifiable

domain within which certai

color, texture, materiality, scent) that invoke cultura

MANNERS performed to remain in good

Points of interest that repeatedly captivate members of a collective;

Ways of speaking that

signal a person's back-

ground or status, including

high status (acrolect) or low

A routine behavior pattern

enforced with social pres

Expected spatial distance

public conduct and social

CODE SWITCHING

(e.g., informal vs. formal,

low- vs. high-brow) depend-

ing on role, status, or social

Overcompensating for per-

ceived social vulnerabilities

or shortcomings; exagger-

ated issue stances or per-

risk of exiting) a collective

How a collective organizes

ings attached to time, such

and uses time; the mean-

as periods or moments;

attitudes towards timing

Projecting and preserving a

socially dignified, respected

persona to be in good

standing within valued

COUNTER SIGNAL

An ironic indicator of rank or

(un)fashionableness is the

status; a winking abstaining

opposite of a person's real

from status signalling

affiliation; deterrence to

and positional orientation for

interaction; implicit personal

or informal rule backed up

•••••

**TO** 

pattern that spreads across others that people are a collective by mimicry, not moral injunction, reinforced

The explaining away of transgressions as forgive-

group membership, or social standing; a loyalty- or purity others stances on an issue

SANCTIFICATION beyond scrutiny or debate; elevating an actor, action, or

object as beyond repute

NO-GO ZONES

TRANSFERRAL

Acquiring an aspect of

cultural appropriation;

culture from elsewhere and

incorporating or adapting it;

Something with a negative

tive judgement or assoc-

iation with controversy;

connotation due to collec-

Ideas or conversational

provoke conflict and, thus,

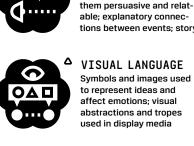
are downplayed or actively

avoided: cordon sanitaire

topics widely known to







MENTALESE ARE THE ACQUIRED SENSE-MAKING

SETTINGS FOR THINKING THAT ACCUMULATE AND

SPREAD THROUGH SUSTAINED PERIODS OF SOCIAL

INTERACTION. THESE ARE DISTINCT FROM INNAT

CAPABILITIES, WHICH CAN BE DIFFICULT TO

SEPARATE OUT IN A TIDY WAY.

CAPABILITIES THAT HELP MEMBERS OF A COLLECTIVE

INTERPRET THEIR WORLD. THINK OF THEM AS DEFAULT

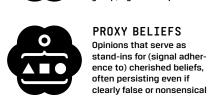
NARRATIVE

coherent account to make









SEMANTIC LANGUAGE

communicate, understand,

and perceive; words given





BODY LANGUAGE

ommunicate: meanings

attributed to the common

ollective wisdom, moral

nsight, common knowledge

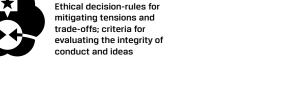
or prevailing social attitude;

place ways people act





**MENTALESE** 



flexibly to demonstrate role

shared beliefs: reusable

△ COMMON KNOWLEDGE

Information and under-

**PRETENCE** 

THEME

standings that virtually

everyone shares and can be

assumed that others hold

Arguable claims that cover

for (or distract from) errors

and contradictions in pre-

A larger message woven

through a story or narrative

to help it cohere and reson-

ate; a recognizable stylistic

motif, allegory, topos

vailing beliefs; accept-





SOCIAL ATTITUDE

Settled posture (consensus)

that affects how a topic is

position or affective tenor

Interpretive guides to make

sense of observations and

equivalence, labels, and

A committed stance about

upon which other issue

positions rest; a founda-

MIRAGE BELIEF

The mistaken impression a

yet can be self-fulfilling if

advocacy drives adoption

minority belief is widely held

△ CORE BELIEF

ideas; premises, references,

alances for position taking

An instantly recognizable

evokes a general sentiment

storytelling gimmick; a



can be seen as culture in one way or by people in a collective. These meananother. Or perhaps only the most ings are expressed symbolically (via obvious manifestations (such as language, mental models, stylized dress, food, and musical tastes) are treated as culture. Neither way of patterns of behavior (norms, rituals, perceiving culture is enlightening. This codex was developed to improve Culture is a kind of system – a beliefthe way we notice and think about culture. A codex is a formal collection that brings together items of import live their lives and think about themance in one place for reference selves. In other words, culture has nurnoses. This codex is also a visual various functions and dysfunctions, vocabulary, a guide for making conceptual distinctions that assigns Virtually everyone belongs to more than one collective. Each collective

a visual mnemonic (an illustrative icon) to each one. These icons can then act as handy placeholders within various learning, mapping, and dialogue activities. The aim is to support indepth, nuanced conversa tions about culture. That includes dialogue within multi-disciplinary teams of experts and non-experts. Indeed, we all have an interest in familiarizing ourselves with culture to expand our personal autonomy and social influence. In order to organize all these cultural concepts, two major classification

schemes are used. First, culture is broken down into three marquee dimensions according to form (objects, behavior, and mentalese). Versions of that tripartite scheme date back to 1927 and the work of Alfred Weber (Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952: 95-101). Of interest is Leslie A. White's version (technology, sociocounter-cultures (or contra-cultures) logy, and ideology; 1976), the first to opposing a mainstream one, as with also conceive of culture as an interacting system. Second, the Mangrove Model of Culture organizes the parts of culture according to tangibility and change dynamics. Culture is originally a plant metaphor. (The Latin colere, later cultura, means cultivation and growth.) The waterborne mangrove tree preserves that analogy while showing that some parts of culture are more obvious than others. Both organizing schemes are crucial for revealing the fullness of real-world cultures using careful observationa culture is so widespread, everything methods (such as ethnography).

VISUAL VOCABULAR) OF CULTURE

Author. Peter Stovko is an interdisciplinary social scientist and information designer at and download materials at: Elanica, a consultancy with an international remit that specializes in service design, systems, and governance. Citation. Please site this document as:

www.cultureviz.com The Visual Vocabulary of Culture was designed to complement the Visual Peter Stoyko, CultureViz Codex Version 2.0 – Vocabulary of Systems, part of the Poster (Ottawa: The CultureViz Project, SystemViz project. To learn more, visit: 2022). For purposes of open-source licensing, see citation guidelines below.

The visual vocabulary icons, icon labels, marquee categories, and basic descriptions associated with each, as well as the Mangrove Model of Culture

△ Items from version 1.0 of the codex (2007)

CONSTRAINT DESIGNATION Ways an object is designed Specifying the contours of a to rule out certain uses prescribed by collective or INSCRIPTIONS

ised, reinforced by afford-

ances designed into the

SOCIOMORPH Scripted techniques for how A non-human object or an object is supposed to be the social qualities derived

an object or concept as a single unit and assigning a label; distinguishing and entity (e.g., robot, pet, or •••• garden) treated as having

out-dated utility (or are otherwise behind the

Objects considered to have times), often suggesting

The contextual aesthetics

evokes a mood and hints at

or surrounding aura that

Strong prohibition against a particular behavior or signal, punishable by severe social sanction; forbidden act or

A mental hurdle or attentional friction that jolts a person out of an unmind-

Boundary past which a

norm, custom, or taboo is

considered violated; how a

as to what is acceptable

Subject that escape general

attention as people are not

attuned to notice, care, or

Any invisible or imaginary line that divides space according to linguistic ful, habitual action to act in less scripted ways

usage or style; regional understanding or behavior

A dubious but widespread that anchors other norms; a comforting or convenie

fiction, like a legal fiction

Collectively concealing a

norm or ideal; blocking

deviation from an espoused

•• mark of disgrace

Actions considered allowable because of unstated understandings, including

JOINT DISATTENTION

Subjects seen by everyone

but deliberately ignored to

avoid contentious or

telling formula

The attitudinal and intellectual disposition that define a

collective in a time period or place; zeitgeist or volks-OCCLUSIONS







PARADIGM

Basic understandings about

how to judge the validity of

arguments and theories;



