

MANGROVE MODEL OF CULTURE



VISUAL VOCABULARY OF CULTURE

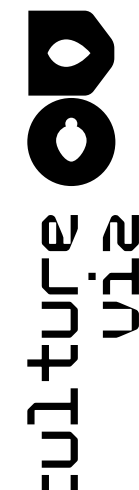


01 OBJECT

02 BEHAVIOR

03 MENTALESE

VERSION 2.0.0

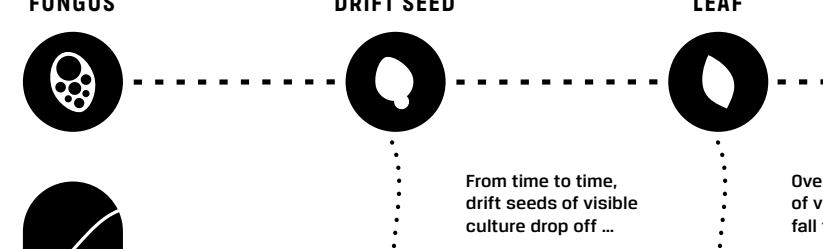


DESIGN + VISUAL THINKING

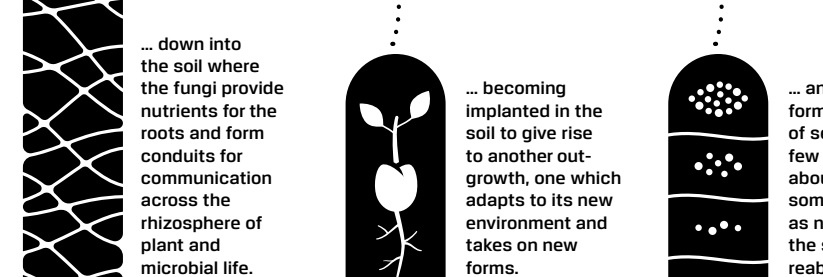
BY PETER STOJKO



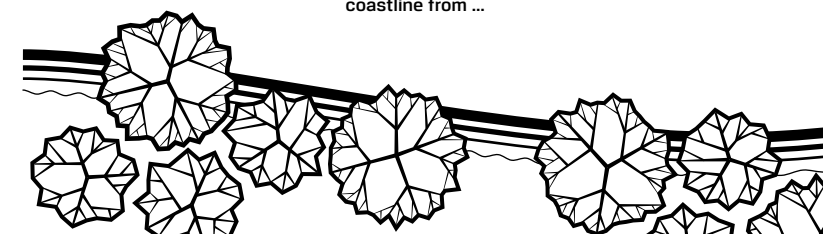
TAIN T FUNGUS



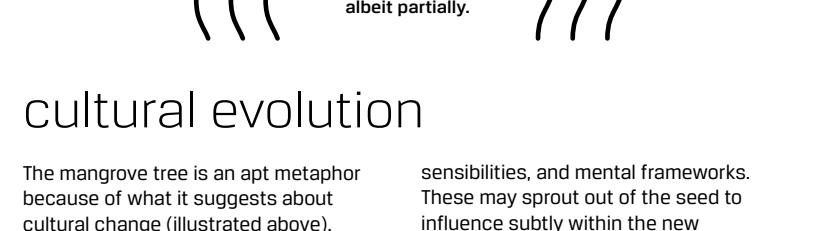
Networks of fungi submycelia spread across branches and roots ...



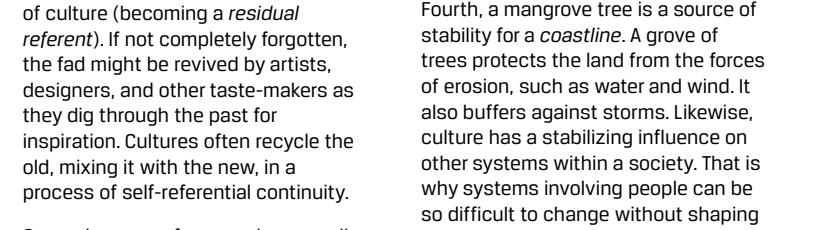
... drifting away to other places each in its own time ...



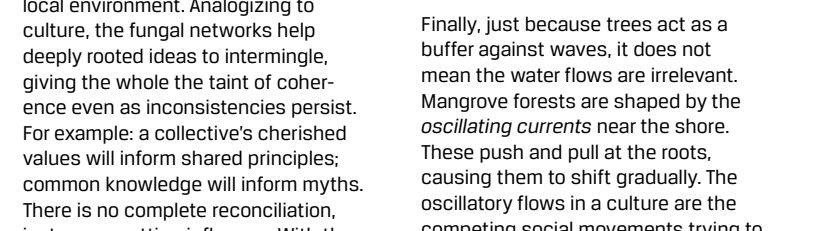
... down into the soil where the fungi provide nutrients for the roots and form conduits for communication across the rhizosphere of plant and microbial life.



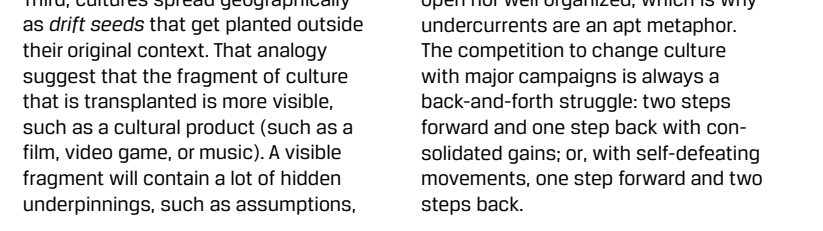
... becoming implanted in the soil to give rise to another outgrowth, one which is adapted to its new environment and takes on new forms.



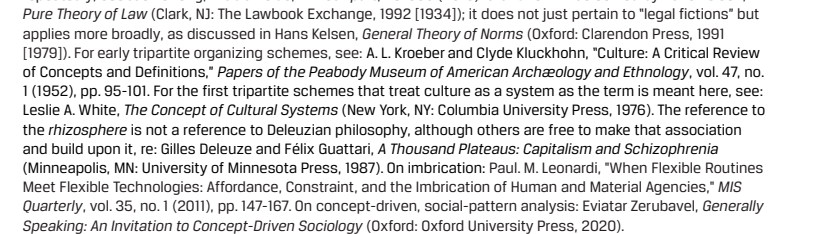
... sinking out of the collective consciousness ...



Over time, leaves of visible culture fall from view ...



... the forces of wind and water erosion ...



... including major upheavals such as storms, albeit partially.

HIGHLY VISIBLE

Like a canopy of leaves, many aspects of culture are out in the open for all to see. These are the most obvious forms of expression that we readily ascribe to culture.

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

The part of the tree below the canopy is also visible but not noticed as significant. Likewise, we have to be sensitized to notice certain visible aspects of culture.

IN MURKY WATERS

Parts of the mangrove below the water line requires extra effort because of debris and the bending of the light. Some aspects of culture are not visible to the eye. Likewise, some aspects of culture have to be inferred indirectly and require intense study to fully suss out.

OUT OF SIGHT

Some of the tree roots are buried below ground and are not visible to the eye. Likewise, some aspects of culture have to be inferred indirectly and require intense study to fully suss out.

SHIFTS OSCILLATORY CURRENTS

Social movements turning cultural change campaigns will create push-back when moving too far, too quickly.

DISPERSED

From time to time, drift seeds of visible culture drop off ...

RECYCLE LEAF

Over time, leaves of visible culture fall from view ...

SPREAD DRIFT SEED

From time to time, drift seeds of visible culture drop off ...

TAINT FUNGUS

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A CULTURAL OBJECT IS ANY MATERIAL THING THAT IS RECOGNIZABLE TO MEMBERS OF A COLLECTIVE. MATERIALITY DOES NOT NECESSARILY IMPLY PHYSICAL TANGIBILITY, AS MANY TRANSITORY THINGS IN THE VIRTUAL DOMAIN (COORDINATIONS OF ELECTRICITY AND LIGHT) ARE INCLUDED. IT IS THE MEANINGS THAT BUILT UP AROUND CONFORMABLE OBJECTS AND INFIRM THEIR TREATMENT THAT MAKE AN OBJECT CULTURAL.

SHAPE : TRAPEZIA

CULTURAL BEHAVIORS ARE PATTERNS OF ACTION THAT ACCUMULATE THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTION WITHIN A COLLECTIVE. THESE PATTERNS ARE DYNAMIC AND ARE EXPRESSED DIFFERENTIALLY DEPENDING ON THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND THE ROLE PERSONS INVOKED. HOWEVER, INDIVIDUALS ARE DIFFERENTIALLY SOCIALIZED, MAKING ADHERENCE TO ASCRIBED BEHAVIORS UNWELCOMED ACROSS A COLLECTIVE.

SHAPE : QUATREFOLI

MENTALESE ARE THE ACQUIRED SENSE-MAKING CAPABILITIES THAT HELP MEMBERS OF A COLLECTIVE INTERPRET THEIR WORLD. THINK OF THEM AS DEFAULT SETTINGS FOR THINKING THAT ACCUMULATE AND SPREAD THROUGH SUSTAINED PERIODS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION. THESE ARE DISTINCT FROM INNATE CAPABILITIES, WHICH CAN BE DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE OUT IN A YOUNG INFANT.

SHAPE : HEXAFOLI

STATUS OBJECT
Conspicuous association with a tangible thing, suggests a rank or role; real or imitation sign of prestige, virtue, or esteem

SIMULACRUM
An idealized imitation of an object that becomes the usual standard in when the original is referenced; an icon, or even iconoclasm

MODIFIERS
Physical qualities (such as color, texture, materiality) that invoke cultural associations; semantic trajectory; overtones

CODE RESTRICTION
Expectation of limited expressiveness based on appropriateness of a role, status, or social context; staging language

(DE)SENSITIZATION
Conditioning the acceptable emotional stance towards a subject; prescribed concern or indifference; "tone policing"; affect-duplication rules

CUSTOM
A behavior pattern with historical significance that symbolizes shared values or themes; tradition preserving the past; idiosyncrasy of conduct

NARRATIVE
Ideas organized into a coherent account to make them persuasive and relate-able; explanatory connections between events; story

SEMANTIC LANGUAGE
Verbal-textual abstraction and general account to communicate, understand, and perceive; words given semantic meaning

BODY LANGUAGE
Gestures, facial expression, and postures used to communicate; meanings attributed to the commonplace ways people act

MONUMENT
An object made sturdy and visible to encourage a people, event, or idea deemed of lasting cultural importance

FOLK OBJECT
Compositional object that represents a collective and visible to a people; event, or idea deemed of lasting cultural importance

VOTIVE
An object used to express a vow, wish, or desire, such as a candle in a fountain, offering or coin in a fountain, offering or dedication

MANNERS
Politeness and courtesy performed to remain in good standing and reduce social friction; etiquette; rules of decorum; or follow

STAGED PERFORMANCE
Dramatic enactments expected of a situation or role; formulaic theatrics to maintain a pretense; levels of performativity; scenes

SOCIAL PROOF
Costly behavior, stance, or association that counts as a verifiable indicator of adherence to a social norm, virtue, or cause

VAISUAL LANGUAGE
Symbols and images used to represent ideas and to convey abstract concepts and tropes used in display media

IDIOM
Informal, metaphorical, or figurative expressions that are recognizable to a group; a dialect; of social speech; figures of speech

FOLK SAYING
Aphorisms intended to convey a collective wisdom, moral insight, common knowledge, or prevailing social attitude; proverbs; folk theory

REPRESENTATION
Actualizing an intangible idea by making it physical or otherwise sensory; operationalization of social/linguistic abstraction

TOKEN
Sacred object with symbolic meaning; emblem of ancestral, natural, or super-natural connection; enchanted object; idol

ORNAMENT
Decorative styles common to a setting or mode of expression; visual patterning recognized for aesthetic qualities

RIGHT OF PASSAGE
Obedience to prove worthiness of status, role, or rank; community sanctioned devotional transition; liminal event

FASHION
Modes of behavior, thought, self-presentation, or expression in good standing by conforming to (or subverting) aesthetic tastes

CULTURAL SHORTHAND
Abbreviated references that point to ideas that are known widely or are familiar to a group; codes of condensations

PROXY BELIEFS
Options that serve as stand-ins for (signed) behavior, or evidence of adherence to a group; codes of clearly false or nonsensical

CULTURAL SHORTHAND
Abbreviated references that point to ideas that are known widely or are familiar to a group; codes of condensations

PRINCIPLE
Ethical decision-rules for mitigating tensions and trade-offs; criteria for evaluating the integrity of conduct and ideas

COLLECTIVE IDEAL
Something deemed worthy of aspiration; an imagined, aspirational goal to strive towards; an exemplar of perfection or excellence

MEME
An idea or message that uses spectacle or humor to spread and speaks to a wide audience; meme-like idea, behavior, or style

FETISH OBJECT
An object that is given extra-ordinary status by virtue of its cultural standing; (sub)cultural exaggeration of an object's appeal

SOCIAL PROP
Forms, themes, or styles that make an object (or social interaction; conversation; pieces; comment; etc.); social facilitators

MODELING
An object of admirable example that one may wish to emulate; role model; setting standard; social management

FAD
A collective enthusiasm that is short-lived but still leave a residual influence; a novelty that appeals to a collective

SOCIAL ENTITLEMENT
A person with a particular social status or procedural standing; an exemption from certain social duties

MYTH
A factually dubious story for explaining that conveys a larger message or "truth"; folklore; popular misconception; urban legend; illusions

AFFILIATION
Identification with a cultural group; a sense of affinity and/or belonging to a coherent group or community; ascribed or voluntary membership

SCRIPT
Standard messages used to demonstrate a role or convey adherence to a group; codes of stock phrases; litany

TROPE
An instantly recognizable storytelling gimmick; a particular reference that evokes a general sentiment or idea; floating signifier

FASHION OBJECT
Stylized items adorning or accompanying a person or space to conform with (or supersede) aesthetic standards; objects trends

PLACE
An area treated as an object with widely observed qualities; an identifiable domain within which certain behaviors are expected

ARCHETYPE
A model of typical version of something; a person or representative example; a version deemed "normal," "average," or "original"

VERNACULAR
Ways of speaking that are used in everyday life; low status, including high status (acrolect) or low status (basilect)

RITUAL
A formulaic or scripted performance of a social act to signal status or intent; ceremonial (formal)

SOCIAL COMMITMENT
A predisposition towards a particular social role or status; social obligation

SOCIAL KINDS
Differentiation of terms into categories, with perceptions attributed to each; extrinsic criteria and conceptual distinctions for sorting

SCHEMATIC IDENTITY
Popular, simplified, fixed mental models or representations used to make sense of particular subjects or tasks; folk- or pop theory

COLLECTIVE TASTE
Aesthetic judgement and discernment, often treated as a reflection of underlying values by others

CULTURAL STANDARD
The criteria and thresholds by which compliance with norms, practices, tastes, (and so forth) are judged; informal benchmarks

TOUCHSTONE
An object or event that to a common point of reference within or between groups (such as generational cohorts)

DISPLAY SYNTAX
Manner of presenting object and/or concepts; suggesting interpretation, view, or emphasis (highlight or downplay)

ENSEMBLE
A collection of things or concepts complementing each other, not random mixtures

BOUNDARY OBJECT
An object that signals where a social boundary lies; spatial demarcation or sign for patterning of social activity

ARTIFACT
A human-made or adapted object with tell-tale signs that indicate something about a collective, or can be interpreted as such; thing

STAPLE
The standard set of goods and services deemed as basic to functioning within a society or maintaining the lifestyle of social peers

ARRANGEMENTS
Spatial ordering of objects within a domain to signify setting or place; or something about the inhabitant of a space

CHRONEMICS
How a collective organizes and uses time; the meanings attached to time, such as gesturing, movement, attitudes towards timing

FACEBOOK
Projecting and preserving a socially desirable, respected persona to be in good standing within valued social relationships

STATUS POSITION
Conspicuous moral or political stances taken to enhance social standing; elevating an actor, action, or prestige opinion

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Projecting and preserving a socially desirable, respected persona to be in good standing within valued social relationships

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cultural evolution

The mangrove tree is an apt metaphor 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 grow 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. Analogous to the fungi, the cultural networks help deeply rooted ideas to intermingle, and to interrelate as a larger whole. These roots 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 mediating cross-cutting influence may be 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 suggests 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 hidden fragment will contain a lot of visible underpinnings, such as assumptions,

derivation

Version 1 of the CultureViz codex (2007) is a streamlined list intended to help people talk more specifically about the basics of culture. Concepts in that simple list are designated with the (a) symbol. Version 2 of the codex is a more elaborate list that highlights a detailed range of cultural components. To name a few, these distinctions may seem rare, perhaps even esoteric. Arguably, many of these less-talked-about distinctions are the ones with the greatest potential to affect cultural change.

The terminology chosen is intended to bridge various disciplinary lenses about culture as a subject, notably: sociology, anthropology, political science, art, design, architecture, legal studies, socio-linguistics, communication theory, leadership, organization and comparative culture studies. Some concepts may seem unfamiliar to experts (or come across as under-theorized) because they exist mostly in another discipline or have been generalized to transcend disciplinary boundaries. Indeed, one aim of The CultureViz Project is to overcome the myopia that sometimes comes from disciplinary specialization. Moreover, the intent is to support many different schools of thought and ontologies. The aim is to encourage a more comprehensive analysis of culture.

Some items are designated with umbrella terms (complex concepts) that encompass a number of sub-topics and variations, the most important of which are included in the description. Given limits of space, these descriptions are not exhaustive.

design

The Visual Vocabulary of Culture uses the visual icons for icons as the Visual Vocabulary of Systems, that syntax has proven helpful for providing an evocative thumbnail illustration (albeit a highly abstract, spatialized one). Moreover, the two codices are designed to interrelate as a larger set. Not only is culture a form of system but both culture and other systems are mutually constitutive. 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 mediating cross-cutting influence may be more broadly higher up in the tree, more visible aspects of culture reference each other more overtly.

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constraint

Ways an object is designed to rule out certain uses prescribed by collective or social features; negative features

INSPIRATIONS
Scripted techniques for how an object is supposed to be used, reinforced by affordances designed into the object itself; "habit fade"

SOCIONOMPH
A non-human object or entity (e.g., robot, pet, or garden) treated as having the social qualities derived from a human culture

ATMOSPHERE
The contextual aesthetics that surrounds an object that evokes a mood and hints at a symbolic meaning; affecting background

TABOO
Strong prohibition against a particular behavior or result that anchors other norms; not others; sociocentric; "dog whistle"

LANGUAGE BOUNDARY
Any invisible or imaginary line that divides space according to linguistic usage or style; regional slang; mod of digrace

THRESHOLD
Boundary past which a norm, custom, or taboo is considered violated; a collective; "drags the line" as to what is acceptable

BLIND-SPOT
Subjects that escape general attention as people are not attuned to their own; or, attribute meaning; socio-cultural invisibility

designation

Specifying the contours of an object or concept as a single unit and assigning a label, distinguishing and labeling; triangulation

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counter signal

An ironic indicator of rank or level (or distinct from the opposite of a person's real status); a warning obtained from status signaling

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protected loop

Social reproduction and repetition shieldness from change pressures; self-referential; insulated meaning-making

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code register

Speaking in a vernacular or style interpretable or resonant for one group or setting but not others; sociocentric; "dog whistle"

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