A CULTURAL STRATEGY TOOLKIT
This body of work is for people who are deeply interested in how culture lays the foundation for liberation. As a “toolkit,” this doesn’t name a specific cultural strategy. Instead, this offering is a framework of considerations that I believe are important to think about when developing a cultural strategy.

This is a collection of thought has been developed and iterated through observation and study. It is not meant to be definitive. My hope is that this will be a starting point and that this framework is engaged, stretched and pushed. That the contradictions and intentions of it be highlighted and uplifted so that we are in a collective act of culture making together.

Whether you are posting in the conversations at culturalstrategy.space or walking through these ideas with a group of friends, colleagues, or comrades — sit with it. Expand on what you see here. Argue with it. Then let it guide you to action. Develop your own strategy towards justice and liberation.

That is my wish.
Sage Crump

as a part of The Opportunity Agenda’s Creative Change Innovation Fellowship, supported in part by the Pop Culture Collaborative.
Stabilizing the Event Horizon

As we move from the Gregorian year 2020 during which we experienced cultural disruption on a global scale, we simultaneously hold the deep grief of so much loss and have an opportunity to shape what we move towards, the culture we want to build.

The title of this offering “Stabilizing the Event Horizon” is a nod to the energy field that surrounds a black hole. The gravitational pull of a black hole will absorb everything around it into itself creating a singularity. The Event Horizon is the threshold that stops that from happening. The impulse to return, to find normalcy, to find the comfort of familiarity to reengage in the tinkering of how we “fix” racialized capitalism, cis-heteropatriarchy and the like, has the gravitational pull of a black hole. We must resist this impulse and build an event horizon, a place of possibility for something new.

In Conversations in Maine, a book of discussions between Jimmy Boggs, Grace Lee Boggs, Freddi and Lyman Paine, we are invited to think about revolution as the emergence and evolution of a new “man” that is to say essentially a new way of being. This aligns with Amilcar Cabral’s definition of culture as

“Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people’s history and a determinant of history, by the positive or negative influence which it exerts on the evolution of relationships between man and his environment, among men or groups of men within a society, as well as among different societies.”

A way I tend to understand culture is that it determines “How we be together”. The shape of our families, how we treat the Earth, and access to the resources. How we be together is both strategy in and of itself and impacts strategy for everything else we do. Looking at Culture through these definitions opens a conversation that - if we think in terms of scale - has us building cultural strategy with the relationship between the intimate and the systemic, and all the interstitial spaces between in mind.
To further clarify what I mean by Cultural Strategy, I want to make a few distinctions. Not everything cultural is cultural strategy.

First there is cultural work/production. This is what people often think of when seeing the phrase “art & culture”. This is the expression and mode of transmission of culture. This includes so much. It is the independent film shot on an iPhone or the handwritten index card with grandma’s yeast roll recipe.

Second, there are cultural interventions. These are frameworks that encourage a “different” way of being than the dominant culture. Examples of cultural interventions are Emergent Strategy, Socialism, Afrofuturism and Saidiya Hartman’s development and use of Critical Fabulation.

Interpersonal engagements with each other are not the sole space for the discussion of culture. Emergence asks us to think about complex systems through simple interaction. This doesn’t mean eschewing the systemic for the interpersonal or vice versa. Emergence is an invitation to hold a dual focus. In the same way the black hole/singularity and the event horizon are interconnected and necessary for the other to exist, so are our personal lives and the proliferation and maintenance of systems that are determinants of that life. In his work, Culture, Power and Resistance, Kenyan activist Firoze Manji writes

“Culture is not a mere artefact or expression of aesthetics, custom or tradition. It is a means by which people assert their opposition to domination, a means to proclaim and invent their humanity, a means to assert agency and the capacity to make history. In a word, culture is one of the fundamental tools of the struggle for emancipation.”
- Firoze Manji Source Link

So to develop cultural strategy is to reimagine and exercise internal shifts in ourselves in our most intimate spaces while reimagining and experimenting ways of being that shift the conditions under which we all live in order to grow our capacity for care, dignity, justice and liberation.

There are four considerations that I’m positing that will help us begin to grapple with the concert of culture creation as an intentional act. These are Social Relations, Economic Systems, History, and Imagination. By engaging in ideological development and experimentation in these four areas, we will collectively build our way towards more sustainable strategies to transforming the world we live in.

This Cultural Strategy Toolkit can help you navigate and explore four considerations through high-level questions that you can return to again and again. They are starting points for conversations with yourself and in relation to others. They aren’t a cultural strategy – they can help you create one.
4 CONSIDERATIONS
“If Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.”
- The Combahee River Collective

Social Relations refers to the structures and values that guide a collective of people.

These are things like the construction of family, ideas of fairness, gender constructs, the value of education, etc. Everyday we receive messages, sometimes violent and coercive, of penalties of not following the norms and the privileges when you do. Having social relations as a primary point of investigation underlines the importance of thinking about the interconnectedness of the human condition but it doesn’t end there. We must think about the interconnectedness of all things. Social relations can also include our relationships that extend beyond humanism to all life on this planet and beyond. We also center social relations because it has the important role as a space of generational cultural dissemination. Social relations reinforce and legitimize individual and collective behaviors.

Social Relations Questions

• What are potential systemic outgrowths from local community?
• What deems a community? What are the tangible examples of interconnectedness?
• What is valued? How do we understand value?
• What are measures of accountability? To whom? Why?
• What mechanism for living and learning rely on generational engagement? Where and how does this happen?
• What modes of communication with self and others are recognized and accessible?
ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

Economic structure invites us to think about how resources are distributed.

Economic structures can be seen as how we exchange for goods and services. It can be explained as moving from a barter systems to the exchange of paper money to financialization and the proliferation of credit and by extension the current incarnation of cryptocurrency. Yet it also includes our relationship to extractive industries and our relationship to the planet. Economic systems help us think through the arrangements (the how) needed to meet the needs of these living systems, including the sharing of resources amongst the populace. The development of economic systems also open us to a discussion of how value is assigned and our relationship to time.

Economic Systems Questions

• What is the relationship to property and private ownership?
• Who owns/determines the means of production? Who authorizes/makes possible for people to care for self, loved ones and live a life that feels purposeful?
• What types of labor are visible, valued and compensated?
• How do we build a reparatory relationship with the Earth?
• Is there exploitation present? If so, who and why?
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HISTORY

“I wanted to make visible the production of disposable lives (in the Atlantic slave trade and, as well, in the discipline of history), to describe ‘the resistance of the object,’ if only by first imagining it, and to listen for the mutters and oaths and cries of the commodity.” - Saidiya Hartman on Critical Fabulation

Source Link

History is an important component because it doesn’t let us only move forward without a reckoning of past injustices and other cultural influences.

Ensuring history is a consideration leads to a deeper analysis of how we got to the current moment, grounds our assessments and provides fodder for future ideas and practices. History is not a tether that holds us inside strategies that are simply iterations of past ways of being. It is offered within this framework to center accountability, reflection, ancestor wisdom and legacy. The influence and shape of cultural practice and hegemony must understood through an analysis of the times in which people were living. Concurrently in the development of strategy the implications of historical practices and ways of being must be placed within a current context to understand its value and implications.

History Questions
• What are key moments in history that have shifted means of production and social reproduction?
• When reviewing any cannon with a race, class, power analysis, what voices are missing?
• What does that mean about how people engage with each other?
• How are people able to engage, given the systems and structures that govern their society?
• What role has violence, coercion and complicity played in development and maintenance of the conditions?

Join the conversation online culturestrategy.space
IMAGINATION

To have imagination as an element for cultural strategy is asking to keep boundaries fluid and make room for complexity and multiplicities.

The event horizon is not an impenetrable barrier. Some celestial phenomenon are pulled into the Black hole but not everything. So there is a whole universe that is exploding, literally at times, with creative energy. New stars are born even in solar systems that are older than time. Imagination sparks the creative energy we need to propel us into trying new systems. These new systems and ways of relating to each other will produce a new set of contradictions and tensions. Ways that work for some people and not others. So inside this framework, Imagination is our tool for iteration and therefore must be developed and internationally strengthened to balance the tendency to create the same oppressive systems we currently live under over and over with small shifts. Imagination grows a culture of curiosity. It is the seat of vision. It helps us develop our way forward.

Imagination Questions

• What do you believe is impossible and why?
• How do you know when it is time to pivot or reimagine?
• How does what we imagine shift current oppressive material conditions?
• What is an active engagement with Nature and other living beings that goes beyond “do no harm?”
• How is imagination given space in all sectors of living, not just the creative industruies?
• What is centralized in our living?

“There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places - places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.”

- Michel Foucault, Of Other Spaces

Source Link
This project is a cultural strategy foundation that can be used to support the cultural visioning we need to develop a new world.

This framework asks us to consider four key points in the development of culture. These are Social Relations, Economic Systems, History, and Imagination. I’m proposing that thoughtful investigation and connection between these areas will begin to provide a direction upon which we can build a praxis and narrative strategy. In order to engage these ideas dialectically, we must be willing to make visible and discuss the tensions and contradictions that are involved. This involves interrogating concepts like “common sense” and even our motivation for a new hegemony. Is it possible to build a new hegemonic framework that doesn’t limit but generates more possibility and sets a culture that can healthily engage iteration and change? At every step, there will be new questions. However, the goal of this offering isn’t to keep us in the spinning cycle of thoughts while the world continues to be pulled into the singularity.

It is meant to be the building blocks of a new society, and a different world - that we can reconfigure as we learn.

“All strategy is cultural strategy.”
Wendi Moore- O’Neal
Nothing is created in a vacuum. To believe that ideas just magically appear, is to deny the validity of our interconnectedness and ignore a sense of legacy. This offering found its form through study, observation and lived experience. With the document, are quotes and links to some of the study. Here I will call the role of people in my life who have contributed to my thinking and practice in ways I can never fully convey. Of the many ancestors that have influenced me, when it comes to this work I want to give thanks to my dear sister/friend/comrade Elandria Williams. It was through conversation with Elandria that I began a deeper dive into the role of economics in cultural development. I know she would have so much to say about what’s in these pages. I am grateful for the thoughtful questions, kitchen table discussions and ongoing support of muthi reed. To be in a love that is scholarly is a gift. The work of Complex Movements has been the primary practice space for almost a decade. Wes, ill, Los and Waajeed have been my closest collaborators. I have learned so much from their individual and collective brilliance. Big thanks to my cultural studies group, Hannah Pepper Cunningham, Roxanne Lawson and Joy Emoto. So much richness every time we talk. The Black Surrealist study group led by Kai Barrow was location of deep study and my years as a member of Alternate ROOTS. Lastly, the cohort members of Leveraging a Network for Equity have been deep teachers and comrades. Through the Opportunity Agenda Fellowship, I was able to host a gathering creative wise activists, theoreticians and cultural workers who were omen the first people to see this work. The dialogue and feedback from this was instrumental.

“There is nothing new under the sun but there are new suns.”
Octavia Butler

THANK YOU
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