

CULTURE HACK

METHOD

TOOLKIT 1.0



BY THE RULES

Culture Hack Method: Toolkit 1.0

Make the radical, common sense.

The Culture Hack Method as a process in which we intervene and change dominant culture narratives through questioning, analysis (discourse analysis, network analysis, content analysis), de-codification, recodification, and creative intervention.

Who?

For those who want to respond to political conjunctures while at the same time creating sustainable change. For those who imagine and create the inevitable transition to a non-capitalist, non-patriarcal, non-colonialist and non-racist world.

/ Culture Hack Method - Intro Index

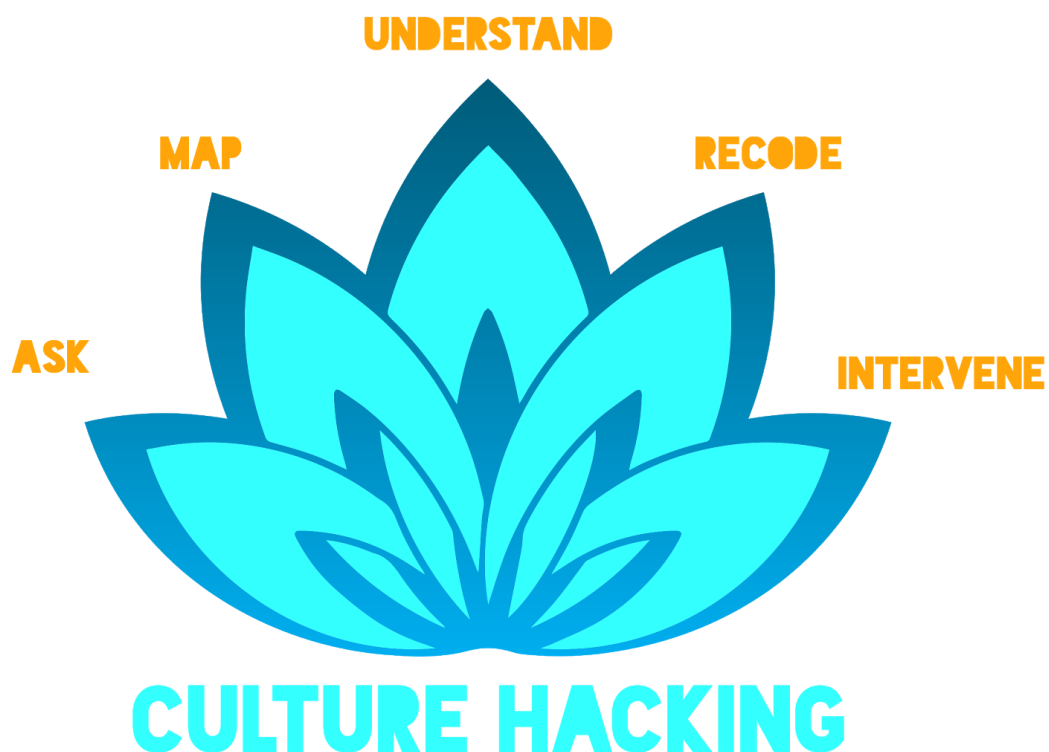
Who?	1
How Does Culture Hacking Work?	2
How To Use These Workbooks?	3
How To Engage?	4
By The Rules	4
2012-2016	4
2017	4
2018	5
2019	5
Action in the Anthropocene	5
Creative Commons License	5

/ How Does Culture Hacking Work?

Culture Hacking is the act of flipping a narrative on its side, revealing the systems of thought that support it, and intervening in those systems to allow new ones to emerge. Culture hacking happens all the time and all around us, both on the left and right, and on both sides of the political divide between the so called “global north and global south”. It’s essentially a way discourses evolve, and symbols are contested. Many communities and activists have hacked culture throughout the history of resistance. Nobody owns one method of doing so.

Our work on this method is founded on two core insights: power rests in the ability to control language, and humans make sense of their world through stories. The stories we tell shape the way we see the world and guide our responses to the problems we face. The best way to change the world is to change the stories at the heart of our cultures.

The Culture Hack method emerged from all the narrative interventions TR and our allies have been part of throughout our eight years of existence, in the context of a changing world that has seen recent uprisings and protests from Palestine to Standing Rock, to Wallmapu, to YoSoy132. The ways in which communities and activists have responded to crisis have mutated and adapted to new technologies, and new languages. Therefore, this method has seen many iterations and it will probably see more as it is evolving with the spaces that it serves and draws knowledge from: various disciplines, constant experimentation, and most importantly the communities that have engaged with it. It’s to them that we dedicate this work.





Ask - How to create a common ground without erasing diversity.



Map - How to make relationships amongst people and power visible.



Understand - How to show the way media and public discourse are constructed.



Recode - How to break apart and reconstruct a message.



Intervene - How to make a message relevant to your community and the landscape of the struggle.

/ How To Use These Workbooks?

The Culture Hack method is open source and creative commons. Basically -- do with it what you will, and hopefully, use it to change the rules.

It was created for use in planning and running existing campaigns, interventions in discourse, symbol hacking, meme creation, etc.

The method can be applied to large-scale campaigns but also to more immediate interventions. The contexts of each intervention and issue will determine which parts of the method are relevant, when, and how. We invite you to be creative in using the toolkit!

It is composed of modules which can be followed step-by-step or as discrete units.

The Culture Hacking toolkit is adaptable. It is a series of principles, exercises, suggestions and hopefully “A-ha!” moments. When combined, they foster deep understanding of a dominant cultural narrative and how to dismantle or intervene in it. The method is flexible and adaptable to your context. The method can be followed from start to finish (and back again) as a full curriculum. Each step or module can also stand on its own, depending on its utility.

It brings together analog and digital tools and techniques.

Some technologies have been used by communities of resistance for thousands of years, from braiding hair, to the *nahuatl* numeric system. The notion of technology as wires and screens is restrictive and deeply colonial. Different technologies have been developed throughout the history of the world and they look and feel extremely dissimilar to the digital space we have grown accustomed to.

The Culture Hack toolkit proposes a set of principles that can be applied with the technologies available and acknowledging the needs of different interventions. Narratives are created and promoted in all kinds of spaces, both digital and analog, and people hacking them don't necessarily need to be experts in managing the latest technology.

/ How To Engage?

Some groups will find that they are great at creating interventions but they don't necessarily know how to map their performance. Others might need to interrogate their collective motivations for the work. Yet others might be on the brink of producing something but not quite know how to shape it for their audiences. Here you will find five workbooks and some worksheets, one for each stage of the Culture Hacking process. They can be followed "in order" or you can mix-and-match the modules that feel closest to the process you are taking on. You can always go back and forth - culture is not linear and neither is the hacking of it!

/ By The Rules

The Rules (TR) was an activist collective that existed from 2012 to 2019. In its eight years of existence it focused on addressing the root causes of inequality, poverty and ecological break down through narrative and cultural interventions. TR worked directly with social movements to inform the nature of interventions, and worked with journalists, think tanks, independent researchers and others to reframe and amplify alternatives to help midwife post-capitalist realities.

2012-2016

The Rules have developed a method and toolkit to help social movements bring about narrative and structural change. We call it Culture Hacking.

2017

The Rules tried different tools and methods for creating cultural shift over the course of several years. In 2017 we facilitated a meeting between a group of activists from different parts of the world, to imagine what Culture Hacking could look like.

2018

With Atenco and the communities around the ancient lake of Texcoco, we tested for the first time the methodology and tools at its full potential. Culture Hacking proved to be a very powerful set of tools for grassroots movements and activists in the fight to create narrative shift and sustainable change.

2019

Together with young people from Guatemala, Culture Hacking took a second chance to demonstrate its power, creating a big narrative intervention in the middle of Guatemala's electoral process, putting in the center of the conversation the defense of life and the voices of indigenous women who defend their territory.

/ Action in the Anthropocene

When TR was formed in 2011, we knew we wanted to focus on a specific challenge, and not to have an organisation that exists for its own sake. In 2015 this instinct solidified into a firm close down date of December, 2019. We hoped that living for a time-bound period would free us from preconceived structures of how we work, play and make trouble together; that it would enable us to develop creative and nimble configurations, and empower us to respond in fresh and relevant ways to the troubles of our time.

For a brief flavour of all the ways the world has changed in this time, we are leaving this documentary behind.

We are also publishing a set of tools and case studies that we will continue to use as individual narrative practitioners, and we encourage others to explore, use and make their own.

- A method and practical toolkit for narrative campaigning.
- A number of case studies on how TR campaigns were designed and run.
- A media archive of many articles and videos we published over the years.
- An FAQ explaining everything from why we were originally formed to why we chose to die as and when we did.

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You are Free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

Adapt — remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially.

All The Rules content is Creative Commons Share Alike 4.0. TR is now closed, but we will keep developing Culture Hacking from other places and spaces, any comment or contribution please write us here.



Culture Hack Method: **Ask**

How to create a common ground without erasing diversity.

This process is directed towards finding a common ground in a group that plans to organize around a shared struggle (this group can be diverse in roles and belong to different pre established teams) with the intention of listening to all the voices in the room, sharing the personal experiences and the emotions around the struggle, and finding the common motivation to organize.

Who?

Organizers, activists, land defenders, etcetera who are either working with a group for the first time, or who have come to a point where the collective commitments must be reiterated to continue the work

/ CHM - Ask Index

Who?	0
CHM - Ask Index	0
How to engage with this step	1
ASK	1
Theory	2
Further Reading	3
Stories	3
Letter of the Lake	3
Narrative practice	4
Glossary	7



How to engage with this step

This process requires for the whole group engaging to be in the same physical space. It requires two facilitators, something to write with and a space big enough for people to sit in circle. The time frame for this process can vary depending on the number of questions asked, the length of the answers and the number of people involved; however, we recommend at least a full hour for small groups and at least two hours for large groups.

ASK

The step of “asking” is a political and strategic entrypoint into narrative work. When we “ask”, we situate ourselves in the narrative landscape and the struggles that we are fighting. We ask questions of ourselves. Who are we? What brought us together? What are our dreams and fears? What is the outcome we expect and what is the future we imagine?

Organizers work in diverse coalitions and come to work with diverse experiences. The process of asking holds two principles: (1) people are experts on their own lives and struggles (2) among the people we have in the room we can begin a shared process of seeing, understanding and then reframing the narratives that tangibly impact our struggle. The desired outcome of this step is simply to locate us in relation to the narrative and generate a sort of ‘manifesto’ for an intended intervention. Our goal is not to homogenize the collective but rather help uncover the common ground we are starting from . We do this through an exercise of interrogating our existing narrative practices, which incorporates aspects of playback theatre and counter-narrative journalism.



Theory

Narrative practices, playback theatre and counter-narrative journalism are frameworks focusing on stories that individuals or groups of people tell about themselves and about their struggles. Each approach holds a different perspective: Narrative practices focus heavily on re-authoring; playback focuses on empathy building and seeing the story outside of yourself; and counter-narrative journalism deconstructs mainstream “news stories” telling the variety of counternarratives as people live them.

The focus of narrative practices is on narrating, witnessing/asking, documenting, and connecting. Through these steps a conversation becomes an exercise of deep listening and opening new diverse stories that help us understand how we are, where we are and why.

Some principles that help guide the exercises and help us listen well and always question ourselves:

1. Only together we all know everything.
2. People are experts in their own lives. Local knowledge is legitimate knowledge.
3. The problem is the problem; the person or community is never the problem. The problems to which we respond have their origin in a structural inequity.
4. We are not neutral. We want to contribute to creating stories that strengthen people and communities, in which it is possible to recognize their dignity rather than highlight their marginalization.
5. Identity is a collective achievement, not an individual one.
6. Identities are multi-historical, not monolithic.
7. We document knowledge to transcend the moment.
8. Create links to help enable the worlds we want to see.



/ Further Reading

Maps of the Narrative Practice by Michale White is the foundational book of the discipline of narrative practices and it explains its principles as well as its method.

The Colectivo de Practicas Narrativas has a repository of exercises and material around their labour in narrative practices; [this is the exercise of externalization](#).

/ Stories

Letter of the Lake

The Letter of the Lake is a political poetic exercise that is intended to broaden the resonance of the experience of the peoples who defend the territory of the Texcoco Lake watershed. It emerged from a conversation made through narrative practices with 15 women, men, girls and boys from the lakeside towns of the watershed of Texcoco.



/ Narrative practice

The first step towards situating us in relation to a narrative has to do with the story that we tell about ourselves as groups who organize, who resist and who communicate. Our collective story is our starting point. It is where we can question our preconceived notions, find our points of connection and our differences.

This exercise is fundamentally about creating space for collective storytelling. It should bring to surface our intentions, our desires and our fears.

Questions

The first step towards building a narrative practice exercise has to do with defining the questions that will guide the practice. The facilitators gather and decide on the intention of each practice.

To start situating a very diverse group in a struggle, it can be useful to ask initial questions like: What brought us here?

If the intention is to retell a collective lived experience - for example within a group that has just emerged from an intervention/campaign, or that has experienced something traumatic, like an event of state repression - participants can respond to questions like: How do we feel about this event? What are the consequences for me coming from this situation? How have I been dealing with this?

If a group is stuck creatively and need a starting point to an action, asking questions like: What is my dream for this struggle? can help initiate a creative conversation.

Roles

There are three participant roles in this exercise: facilitators will take on the role of Conductor and Editor, while the rest of the group will be Narrators.

The Conductor is the facilitator who oversees posing the questions. They need to be aware of their own body: they need to be grounded and in connection to how they are feeling at the moment, and what the exercise means to them, otherwise they might be projecting a particular emotional response to the stories they are about to hear or they might even come out disturbed by those stories.

The conductor pays continuous attention to the narrators' body language: the volume at which they speak, the pauses they use, their posture, etc. This somatic information can communicate to the conductor when is time to move to a different question, or if it's necessary to linger, perhaps to rephrase the question or specify what is being asked.

The editor's role is first to witness, listen and document the practice. The editor's job is not to write down word by word as every narrator tells it, but rather hold in mind the intention of the practice, listen actively and catch phrases that either elaborate significantly on the question or open up new paths and stories around the question. From this act of listening, a text of collective voices will be crafted.



Documenting is the first part of editing, but there will also be a later moment to further edit the piece that comes out of the practice so that the text is readable and can be shared with everyone.

There are a few rules of thumb for documenting

1. Do not put words in the mouth of the narrators. Often when people narrate their stories, they are not very clear, they do not explain things in a consistent manner, or they have trouble finding the right words for their feelings. Do not try to compensate these things by adding a pronoun there, a preposition here or rephrasing all together. The task is to weave the language into prose or verse that gives account of the narrators' stories, not to make an award-winning text. It's the job of the conductor to make sure that narrators fully express themselves or clarify their meaning throughout the exercise. You can cut and paste, but don't rephrase and reinterpret.
2. Look for the connectors. In a narrative practice that is essentially a collective interview with conduction and a specific intention, there will be myriad voices and opinions about the same topic. Narrators might have radically different responses for every question, but there will very likely be themes that are significant to more than one narrator. Maybe they mention their family, or their upbringing, maybe they mention dreams or specific feeling of anger or love, finding these themes and documenting them will help weave their voices; it will help to find the points of connection.
3. Beware to not revive trauma. A narrator might refer to painful or traumatic experiences. It's important to document what relates to the question, acknowledge it in the text, but there is no need to reiterate it. If one narrator has already talked about the events of this trauma, maybe in what you collect from the next narration you can focus on feelings, reactions, aftermath, etc. It's the job of the conductor to shape a conversation that is not focused on reviving trauma, but it's also on the editor to not dwell on it throughout the text.
4. Poetic license. While the editor shouldn't change or reword the stories, it's often said that editors should have a poet's ear. To craft the text of collective voices the editor can use some resources from poetry, like repetition, or cadence (joining groups of words that create a rhythm), highlighting the metaphors and most poetic phrases too.
- 5.

The practice

The conductor will ask the group that is about to become narrators to sit facing each other, preferably in a circle, with enough space to not be touching but close enough so everyone can hear the person narrating. Once everyone is comfortable, the conductor explains the exercise: We are going to ask some questions that helps us connect to why we are doing the work we are doing around this struggle; We are going to ask questions that help us retell the process that we have lived together this past couple of



months. The conductor should also explain the sort of conversation that the group is looking for; if we are looking to make an exercise of collective memory, it's important to focus on events that have been meaningful and resonated throughout the community. If the focus is on what we want as an organized group, the focus can be on desires and fears.

The conductor should not guide the conversation completely, but rather explain the collective goal and offer options for achieving it, while mentioning that there are many ways to get to the objective of the conversation.

Some other things to consider is how large is the group as this will dictate how much people should extend on their answers, and things like language barriers, or even just the space. "Speak clearly and loudly" can be an important indication depending on the place.

The practice is divided into two parts: narrating and retelling.

Narrating

As the questions and replies unfold the conductor will be tasked with keeping a flow to the practice. This effectively means speeding up and slowing down the process, as a music conductor would an orchestra. It's perfectly okay to say, "There are many of us in the room, and we need to be conscientious of everyone's turn, please tell as much as you feel is necessary to answer the question and stop when you feel you've said enough"; at the same time it's the conductor's task to ask follow up questions if the narrator has been too brief: "What do you mean by this?" or "Is that all you wish to say in response to this question?" are also valid approaches.

Throughout the practice there might be stories told that have to do with pain or trauma, conflict or disagreement. The conductor's role is not solve this kind of issues, they are neither therapist nor mediator, however this does not mean that they have no resources to respond to this situation. There is where 'returns' come in practice

Retelling

Once all the narrators have replied to all the questions comes the moment when the editor reads out loud the text they've been crafting. This is a powerful moment in which narrators will listen to their own words as someone else hears them, and together with the chorus of voices of their peers, so it's important to make a distinction between the moment of narrating and retelling, this can be done by standing up or changing the location.

In the retelling the editor will read their edited version of the practice, a lot of more performative elements can come into play for example mic-check, or a choral reading of the text, etcetera



/ Glossary

Counterculture-journalism is written outside of the mainstream media, usually on a small budget and often unpaid, at times heroic in the face of severe repression by the establishment. Driven by a strong sense of urgency, fair play and social justice, these writers, artists, photographers are often working unpaid and marginalized on the fringes of society.

Playback Theatre is an interactive form of improvisational theatre in which audience members tell stories from their lives and watch them enacted on the spot.

Returns are a concept taken from Playback theatre. This refers to the moment where a theatrical group “returns” the story it’s been told via performance. What is applicable to the narrative exercise is not the performative aspect but the ethics of returns: the idea is to echo what you as an individual (in this case the conductor) is listening being enunciated, it includes no judgement of what’s being said and it doesn’t necessarily tries to express to perfection the narrators sentiment; rather a return says “This is what I am hearing, these events, these feelings, these reactions”



Culture Hack Method: **Map**

How to make relationships amongst people and power visible.

This process is directed towards locating actors and their power dynamics in a conversation with the intention of creating map with clear agents and relationships where the main actors, messages, spaces of engagement and frequency of participation can be pointed out.

Who

This process is directed towards listening to a narrative with the intention of locating the participating actors and their power dynamics. The result from this process should be a map where the main actors, messages, spaces of engagement and frequency of participation can be pointed out.

/ CHM - Ask Index

Who	0
CHM - Ask Index	0
How to engage with this step	1
MAP	1
Theory	4
Further Reading	5
Stories	5
Fees Must Fall	5
Wallmapu	5
Embodied Networks	6
Listening Network	8



The Narrative Map	9
Topography	10
Communities	11
Momentum	11
Sentiment	11
Symbols	12
Tech Tools	13
Culture Hack Labs	13
Gephi	13
Small data	13
Teachings	14
Glossary	14

How to engage with this step

The nature of this process requires a defined time frame for listening and analysis. It requires people committed to gathering (either digitally or analogically), systematizing it, and analyzing data. For digital data it requires access to a computer, a software that can help arrange databases (spreadsheet) and sometimes connection to internet; for analogical data it requires a system for gathering information (like polling or collective mapping), something to write with and a mounting to represent your map.

MAP

During the process of mapping, we take both a broad and a granular look at the shape of the narrative we're engaging with. Mapping explores the relationship of interlocking parts of a narrative, such as the spaces, actors, and struggles.

Narratives are all around us and, to a large extent, we can identify them intuitively. Narratives are systems of how stories are told. Any aspect of life is told and imagined a certain way, depending on the narrative that dominates its space. There are big, overarching, fundamental narratives, like the narrative of colonialism. More specific narratives - what we often think of as "issues" - instantiate the fundamental narratives in real life. The systems of stories told about business and success are downstream from the narrative of capitalism.

Mapping aims to find out how the narratives (at whatever scale) we are engaging with or fighting come alive in the world. We construct a listening model to set the parameters for an inquiry, this is a sort of entry points for the narrative we want to analyze.

Once we find the conversation, we use network theory to analyze the relationship between the actors and the messages they are engaging with. Depending on capacity and the nature of the conversations tracked we can use various forms of analog or digital mapping tools. Either way the important thing is to be able to see the landscape of a narrative, the main actors involved, the spaces (physical and digital) where it takes place, and the most shared messages that are being exchanged.



Theory

As social movements become increasingly plugged into technologies, both for organizing and communicating, there is a need to understand the ways in which this involvement shapes social movements and in turn how they are hacked and reinterpreted for the purposes of mobilization. Contemporary social movements insert themselves in processes of technopolitics where the use of networks is key to expanding and feeding a movement.

The practice of analyzing networks to understand patterns and social configurations has been applied in anthropology for a long time, however it has a parallel development in mathematics. The terms used in this field come from math and are developed in graph and network theory.

A network is a group or system of interconnected people or things, connected through nodes and vectors. Taking a conversation as an example: the nodes are people and the vectors are interactions among those people. In mathematics having one node connected to another node is enough to maintain a network; but in social networks connections are nurtured and maintained differently.

One useful analogy is that of two people - two nodes - in a relationship. If these two nodes only have connection with each other, lacking vectors to any other nodes, they are not only factually disconnected from the rest of the world, but the relationship between them will soon wear out, information sent back and forth along the same vector will be redundant. In their isolation, the nodes might become overly dependent on one another, getting stuck. Social networks are dynamic and need nurturing to endure. If the relationship breaks, these nodes will become completely isolated.

When we analyze networks for narrative change and social movements, we are able to locate echo chambers, narrative communities (as well as their growth throughout time) and nodes who enact heavy influence in a conversation. Through this analysis, we get to see the landscape of the narrative. Once we know what the landscape looks like, we can begin to understand what languages are spoken in the place we find ourselves, who the influential people are, and the size and politics of each city, village, and outpost.



Further Reading

Linked: **The New Science of Social Networks** by **Albert-László Barabási** is a simple introduction to graph science. As the first edition was written prior to the invention of internet 2.0, this book explains concepts we usually associate with digital spaces using everyday, analogue examples.

Radical Cartography: [This is Not an Atlas](#) is a project by the Oranotango collective that gathers knowledge from the global South and North about counter-cartography and collective mapping. Their book with the same title includes tactics, numerous case studies and theory around radical cartography.

[Iconoclasistas](#) Is a Chilean collective that dedicates to critical cartography, using collective itinerant mapping, collaborative investigation and open source graphic resources.

Stories

Fees Must Fall

Fees must fall We conducted and designed a model of listening for the fees must fall conversation in the movements of Fees Must Fall and Zuma Must Fall on twitter which later allow us to articulate key areas of intervention and opportunities for transformation.

Wallmapu

Decolonizing the map of Wallmapu , building cultural cartography in Mapuche territory, is a case study of a group of activists and critical cartographers who took on the task of gathering stories about the territory from different Mapuche communities, in order to create an alternative map of the region known to them as Wallmapu.



Embodied Networks

We often forget that networks have been a key aspect of social interaction throughout human history and that the ways in which we connect, on and offline, adhere to some basic principles of graph theory:

1. A node needs at least one connection with another node to be considered connected and have the possibility to be part of a network.
2. Different topographies emerge from different interactions, and these topographies show different possibilities of connection.
3. Different levels of connection translate into pathways through which information can travel.



This exercise is designed to show that the groups in which we socialize are organized by our interaction networks; that we can make visible these networks using our own bodies; that the messages that travel through these connections are not exclusively verbal. The exercise helps us consider the basic network topographies that can be found in our everyday life, and asks us to question how network theory applies to organizing.

Gather the group you are working with in a large room, or an open space. Ask them the following:

Who brought us to this space/workshop/collective?

It can be the person who physically brought us here, or perhaps the person through whom we got word of this space/event. If we found out about this space/event through some form of media, who was responsible for putting out that information? Or even who posted it?

Instruct the participants to:



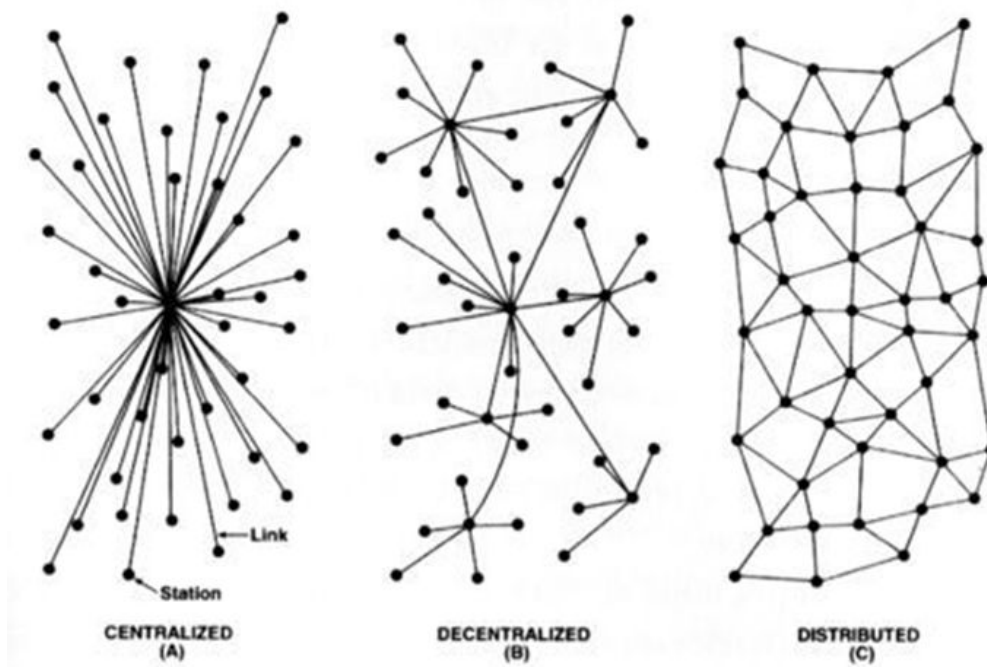
Find that person in the room, grab their arm lightly. If more than one individual brought you here, find and grab them both.

Once the whole group is linked to at least one person, choose either a very well-connected node (aka a person that is being grabbed by or grabbing the most people) or a node that is far away from the main hub - a less connected person, and gently squeeze their arm.

If you feel someone squeezing your arm pass it on and squeeze the arm of the people you are grabbing as well.

How long did it take for the message/squeeze to travel through the whole network? Did everyone receive the message? Where there individuals separated from the network who didn't get the message? Was there a part of the network where the message got mixed up? What happened in the most connected parts of the network?

The resulting grouping will most likely take one of three forms which represent the basic topographic structures of networks: centralized, decentralized, distributed. Identify the shape that best fits the grouping and name it, explain the characteristics of said form/topography; if you can identify more than one shape explain its characteristics as well.



The next part is trickier as it depends on the context of your group, but the idea is to ask a question similar to the first that forces the people to reconnect in a different shape or under a different scheme; useful questions can be:

Who here speaks a language other than English (or Spanish or the language that the group is using to communicate) as a first language?

Who here is a parent?



Who here lives in (country, continent)?

With the different groups that form you can explain the concept of communities and clusters.

With the example of language, you can explain how code makes a significant impact on the ways in which a message can reach a network.

Takeaways: the goal of this exercise is to show an analog version of networks which helps to make the connection between social interactions and the visual representations of social media networks. The intention is to show how a narrative is a web of social interactions and can therefore be mapped and utilized as such.

Listening Network

Where is the narrative that you want to listen to?

When we talk about big narratives like capitalism or colonialism, it's useful to make a distinction between the system and the narrative. A system might operate on a large scale in different contexts, but the conversation about said system emerges from somewhere.

In the social discourse a narrative is made up by a number of conversations that occur on the public space, public opinion develops from the way in which different social groups engage with and value events. In mapping a narrative there is a need to listen to the current conversations relating to it.

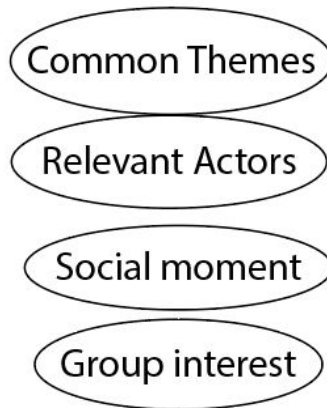
How to find your conversation

*What have been the moments when the public opinion about an issue changed? From here will emerge themes.

*Who has been influential in bringing this narrative to the general public? From here will emerge relevant actors.

*Is there a momentum around a narrative you are interested in? This can help us show the social moment in which the narrative is insert.

*What do we want to know about mainstream/public opinion about a subject? This shows the main goal we have in analyzing the narrative.



On the other hand when we are starting from a specific **issue** there might be “no conversation” about it on the public discourse, but there are always elements that pertain to the bigger narrative.

- *What is the system of oppression that this issue relates to?
- *Who is the manifestation of that system? Institutions, people, social dynamics
- *Who is against this system? What are they talking about?

/ The Narrative Map

Independently of the kind of conversation you find there are certain aspects that will be present in any social discourse:



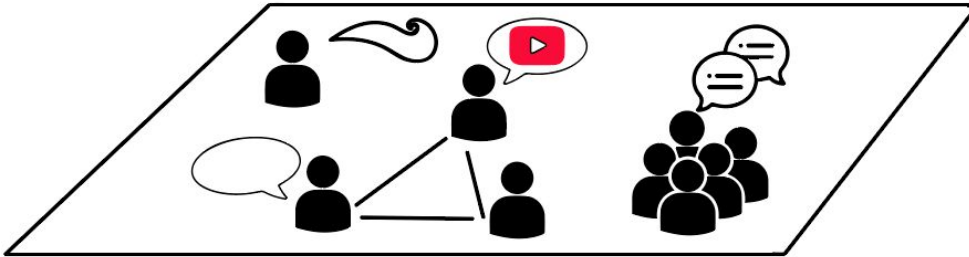
There is a platform in which this conversation is occurring, this can be a social media platform, of course, but it can also be communitarian radio, it can be public assemblies, even less direct forms of communication like academic papers and a universities curriculum.



There are actors who are stating messages throughout the conversation.



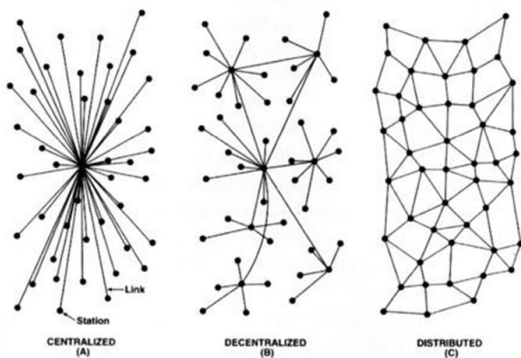
These messages are set on a specific media: audiovisual (late night shows, youtube, film, documentaries, etc), visual (illustration, vignettes, photography, memes, etc), text (tweets, academic papers, headlines, articles in journals etc) oral (radio, podcasts, audios on whatsapp, participation in assemblies and even peer to peer talk)



In a way we can say that this responds to the where, The who, and the what of a conversation as in the basic questions of journalism.

However the notion of mapping conversations has to do with adding the element of network theory to this analysis that answers the question: How do these elements interact?

Mapping networks is essentially locating the sort of interactions that nodes have with one another and the shapes that these interactions take. There are many ways to do network analysis and some are through statistics software and big data, gephi and R are some useful tools for that, but the basis of network analysis is not so much in the bulk of data to analyze or in specific functions, it has to do with locating specific aspects that all groups of human (and non-human) interactions occur.



Topography

The topography of a network is quite simply the shape that it takes when it's nodes interact, there are many shapes that interactions from living things look; these are the most common shapes you will find in a public conversation.

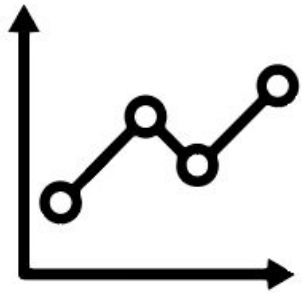
Communities

The most important aspect of network mapping we are going to focus on is the formation of communities. This happens when a number of users interact amongst each other and hence form clusters. Communities are not necessarily formed by like minded individuals or specific social groups, in this case a





community is a group of people that interact with each other at a time in the conversation.



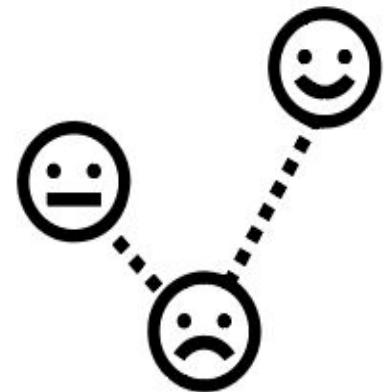
Momentum

Conversations evolve over time, they have peaks of engagement, they have lull periods and then they might die out completely. The key for an intervention on a narrative has a lot to do with identifying the pivotal moments of a conversation, for example: when does a subject become widely discussed? when do people engage with an issue?

Sentiment

The sentiment relates to how emotionally charged a conversation is and the sort of emotions that are present in the conversation. In processes of organization the sentiment component of the conversation is hugely important to decide interventions; for example: after a massive repression from the government the atmosphere might be charged with fear, anxiety and grief, but they might also be heavy with anger and indignation. These two sentiments create different atmospheres and the tone of communication must necessarily be a tune with this.

Opposing emotions might also be present; it's our experience that feminist protests in latin america can combine anger and grief for the violent situation, but also share a common aspect of joy and celebration for the act of being together as women in a protest.



Symbols

Symbols are signs that represent a relation with a reality, often in an abstract way, what this means is that while a sign or an icon might be directly related to a visual cue or fact about an event or object, the relationship between a symbol and what it represents is less direct and it is socially built. The green scarf in latin america relates to the campaign for the legalization of abortion, the feminists that created this symbol (which has



become a meme) did it as a tribute to the white scarf that the Abuelas de la Plaza de Mayo used (a collective of grandmothers looking for their stolen grandchildren). What does a green scarf has to do with abortion? Nothing technically, but in the collective imaginary and public opinion green scarf now mean abortion in Latin America.

Looking for the symbols in conversations is key to understanding what the communities value, what political spectrum they are in and especially what they consider legitimate or with authority in the matter.





/ Tech Tools

Culture Hack Labs

The Culture Hack Labs tools investigate a narrative through its online or digital trail. This trail of data and information allows us to make hypotheses about the narrative a means for strategic action.

It starts by collecting data about a narrative and then generates topics and other key analytics, showing how these topics change over time. Our algorithms collect data about three dimensions of the narrative - Network, Topics and Dynamics.

Network - Analyzing the networks and structures within a narrative, the platform generates a topology of the key network features.

Topics - Analyzing the linguistic content of the narrative gives us a cluster of related tweets or articles that define the key topics present in the conversations we are analyzing.

Dynamics - Segmenting data collected over different time periods, the platform begins to develop a map of the changes that occur within the shape of the narrative, how communities form and and, and the unity/diversity of expression within the narrative. These are the morphogenetic features of the narrative.

These three data processes allow us to determine the Power, Themes and Change within the narrative.

Gephi

Gephi is a free open source software for visualization of networks and graphs. It can handle big-data sets, reading files in .csv, .gexf and .gephi. It includes a number of useful metrics such as centrality, community detection and random layouts. It can do real time visualization as well as over time comparisons of data.

Small data

Is a repository of methodologies and tools that takes you through the process of gathering and analyzing data, all with free open code software.



/ Teachings

Gephi basic tutorial: Explains the basic notions in which network analysis via gephi is done, explains the uses of gephi as well as some basic features and layouts:

/ Glossary

Node Unity, the user/subject who is connecting.

Technopolitics It's the tactical and strategic use of networks and collective identities online for organization and collective communication; the particularity of tactics of Technopolitics is that it can turn sympathizers, voters, militants into activists and that into groups.

Visualization/Graph 2d or 3d visual representation of a network.

Analogue mapping A community's knowledge of the narrative field they're engaged in provides fertile ground for collective mapping. Mapping comes naturally: defining the who, what, where, how, why

Digital mapping This method is sometimes known as "social listening" and involves using software to observe and collect data online, in the communities and outlets that propagate a narrative. The tools we have developed (linked below) focus on making relationships in online networks visible and usable for strategic social justice work.



Culture Hack Method: **Understand**

How to show the way media and public discourse are constructed.

This process is directed towards analyzing the dominant messages of a narrative, with the intention of revealing who or what is being talked about and in what terms, as well as who or what is being ignored in the discourse.

Who

Journalists, linguists, students, the person or the group of people in an organization who are tasked with analyzing the media discourse and producing insights for a broader political discussion.

/ CHM - Ask Index

Who	0
CHM - Ask Index	0
How to engage with this step	1
UNDERSTAND	1
Theory	2
Further Reading	4
Stories	4
#GrowthOrLife	4
The language of immigration reporting: Normalizing vs Watchdogging in a nativist age	4
Media Analysis 101 Worksheet	5
What to look for when we analyze media	5
Questions we ask	5
Based on these questions, analyze the content in media articles:	6



How climate change is driving emigration from Central America	6
Climate refugees fleeing drought were part of the migrant caravan from Central America	6
How climate change drives migration to the U.S	6
Simple Language Analysis	7
Analyzing language	7
Where and how we look for data	7
Questions we ask	7
Example- Concepts	8
Example- Agency	8
Example- Evaluation	9
Tech Tools	10
MediaCloud	10
Antconc	10
Teachings	10
Glossary	11

How to engage with this step

This process requires samples of media or academic articles around a specific subject, this can be gathered through manual or automatized tracking. If this process is done analogically it can be done with a worksheet, if done digitally it will require a software like antconc and the previous creation of a corpus.

UNDERSTAND

During the Mapping process, we collect valuable data on the shape of a narrative, made up of the stories that shape opinion and experience. The Understand process takes these building blocks and transforms them into insights. How is meaning made by participants in an online conversation? How do messages with a particular ideological bent travel through media? How are the stickiest memes used? How can we identify gaps in the range of stories being told that we can fill with alternative counter-narratives?

This analysis is done through analyzing media content and social discourse. The media analysis is used mostly to understand the hegemonic narrative, the mainstream take on the issue we are tackling and the evolution of this topic in the public sphere. This sort of analysis is mostly content based, answering the basic journalistic questions around media discourse: Who? What? Where? When? How? Why? What for?

The discourse analysis uses tools from linguistics to understand the language in how messages are conveyed and opinions expressed, to surface the underlying logic of the narrative - how the world makes sense through a narrative lens. It focuses on understanding the dominant concepts, agency and evaluation within and across pieces of language: tweets, opinion pieces, policy documents, manifestoes, and so on.



Theory

Analyzing media

The media ecosystem has an effect on the perception, comprehension, sensation and creation of social values in a community. Mass media provides tools for individuals to understand their social, political and cultural reality, enabling them to express their opinions and thus form a socially constructed imaginary.

As culture hackers we know there is an ongoing struggle for the symbols that render society understandable, symbols that are constantly changing and moving. The dominant narratives that surround us are propagated by dominant networks and counter-narratives are created and propagated by networks of resistance to hegemonic power. To make sense of what is behind messages created and propagated by capital, we need to scrutinize the concept of power.

Practically, we understand power as an imbalanced relationship, a tension between the powerful and campaigners, activists and all of those who oppose power. While the “powerful” a.k.a nations, politicians, capitalists; have the means to dictate and assert dominant narratives subjects do maintain certain amount of agency to revert that, by disputing the dominant narratives that are important references for our life in society, we call that arena of dispute public space, but let’s not forget that public space is linked to a capitalist mode of production and with regard to media production, it’s up to the journalist to reproduce the discussion amongst citizens of those issues of collective interest, that is called public opinion. Public opinion comes from the

symbolic world and participates in social dynamics in the sense that representations are shared around reality.

Understanding public opinion and the content of mass media is relevant for culture hackers because this process allows us to identify the dominant narratives around our subject, and through discourse analysis we can take a deeper dive into these narratives to look for opportunities to change them.

Analyzing language

As culture hackers, we have an intuitive sense of the inherent power of language, and its ability to create stories that endure. Naming a thing is calling it into being, and defining a narrative is creating a piece of reality.

Understanding language in cultural narratives is about more than word-smithing or creating effective and sticky messaging. The goal is more basic, and more radical: to understand the underlying logic of a narrative -- how the worldview presented in a narrative make sense; and the pieces of language that can cause damaging narratives to stop making sense.

In the Understand step, we take the insights gained from Mapping and use linguistic analysis tools and techniques to make a panorama of how a narrative is talked about, that is, how it lives in the world. We look at the small linguistic building blocks (words, phrasings, references) to see how they create the frames (see Re-Code) through which we understand the world.



We use tools from critical discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics to pinpoint the most meaningful units of language; we can then manipulate these units to create persuasive, daring frames that get to the heart of an issue and inspire new ways of imagining the world.

Critical discourse analysis holds that all language is inherently ideological; all expressions are there to present a particular point of view. We find evidence for points of view and the narratives which they create in aggregate in, among others, these linguistic elements:

- Reference
- Frequency
- Evaluation

Agency

Understanding which references are chosen to talk about issues, events, and people, as well as how frequently they occur, gives us an answer to the questions, “Who are the characters in the stories told - and who are not?” and “What are the basic premises of this narrative?”. Seeing how issues, events and people are evaluated lets us know “What values are prioritized in this narrative?” Determining who has agency in a narrative gives us a sense of how dominant powers want us to see the world. All these insights are key to crafting powerful counter-frames to challenge the dominant narratives.



/ Further Reading

Content Analysis. An Introduction to its Method. By Klaus Krippendorff is examines the conceptual aspects of content analysis and shows how to apply evaluative techniques that can be helpful when we do media analysis.

/ Stories

#GrowthOrLife

It's a case study we wrote on how to hack the logic of economic growth and the trendy notion of "green growth" with a video and a series of articles in key media outlets.

The language of immigration reporting: Normalizing vs Watchdogging in a nativist age

The language of immigration reporting: Normalizing vs Watchdogging in a nativist age. This study harnesses journalism collections at Media Cloud to test if the language used in immigration has changed over the Trump campaign and administration.



/ Media Analysis 101 Worksheet

What to look for when we analyze media

Every media piece is made from different elements, identifying each one is the first step towards content analysis.

Media outlet	
Name of the outlet	
Headlines (What)	
Main actors (Who)	
Places (Where)	
Time (When)	
Framing (How)	
Themes (Why)	

Questions we ask

There are different things that we interrogate in different parts of the media piece we are engaging with:

Headlines

Do the headlines match the story told in the body of the article?

Main actors

Who are the actors in the stories portrayed in the article?

How are they described?

How many times are they mentioned?



Places

What are the main places mentioned in the article?

What spaces or territories are being made invisible by the article?

Time

Is the story written in present or past tense? What does this indicate?

Is the note about something that is happening now or does it recount past events?

Framing

Whose side do you think the writer or outlet telling the story is on?

Does the article show different perspectives on the story? Should it?

Themes

What are the main topics and subtopics of the note?

Based on these questions, analyze the content in media articles:

How climate change is driving emigration from Central America

Climate refugees fleeing drought were part of the migrant caravan from Central America

How climate change drives migration to the U.S

1. Write one sentence about the main issue of the articles
2. Identify the main actor(s) and place(s) of this articles
3. Describe how these actor(s) are being represented (are they victims or culprits, how much agency do they have, are they multidimensional protagonists)
4. Think over if these three media pieces are representative of the issue in question (climate refugees)
5. Identify the frames around the relationships on land-subjects, land-migration and land-climate change.



/ Simple Language Analysis

Analyzing language

Why language

Understanding language gives us an insight into the underlying logic of a narrative. This is an exercise in reading closely and coding linguistic elements to make them available for direct comparison and critical analysis.

Accessing the core logics

If we understand the logics at the core of dominant narratives, we can intervene and change them

How do we know?

- * Dominant concepts (what's important)
- * Agency (who does what to whom)
- * Evaluation (how we're supposed to feel)

Where and how we look for data

Social media

For example, discussions on Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, other channels

Media

For example, national, international, regional media

Other sources

Focus groups, surveys, art, campaign materials, policy documents... the sky is the limit!

Questions we ask

Dominant concepts

- How do the concepts important to your issue show up (e.g. through word choice)
- If they don't -- what does this mean about the ideology of the data source?

Agency

- Who are the actors in the stories told?



- Who is in a position of agency?
- Who is left out or misrepresented?

Evaluation

- How are the important events described?
- What adjectives appear alongside which actors?

Example- Concepts

Word choice

- Concepts can be described using a variety of words
- Word choice reflects ideology
- Try searching for your preferred term in your data set
- If it's there, this could be an opportunity to amplify; if not, it's the dominant narrative

What's different in these sentences?

“The protesters created a powerful direct action”

“The police protected private property from the rioters”

Analysis

The author of the 1st sentence is aligned with...

The author of the 2nd sentence is aligned with...

Example- Agency

Subjects/objects

- Subject = “doer” of the sentence
- Object = “result” or “recipient” of the action of the subject
- The position in a sentence indicates the logic of the message
- Who is active/central/important and who is passive/secondary in this story

What's the difference in these sentences?

“The protesters created a powerful demonstration”

“The police stopped and beat back the protesters”

Analysis

The author of the 1st sentence is aligned with...

The author of the 2nd sentence is aligned with...



Example- Evaluation

Describing qualities

- Word choice about HOW something is shows the reader how to think about something
- Describing qualities is never neutral, always ideological
- Adjectives are evaluative
- The voice of the author decides how to evaluate parts of the story

What's different in these sentences?

“The protesters created a beautiful intervention”

“The police forcefully controlled the vicious rioters”

Analysis

The author of the 1st sentence is aligned with...

The author of the 2nd sentence is aligned with...





/ Tech Tools

MediaCloud

Is an open-source platform for studying media ecosystems. The tools of this software are designed to analyze, visualize and deliver information to answer quantitative and qualitative questions about the content of online media, it collects most of its content through the RSS feeds of media sources they follow, they only have data from the media sources from the time they started scraping its RSS feeds.

Antconc

AntConc is an open-source, user-friendly piece of software which gives overviews of word frequencies, modifiers, locations, and sentiments of words and phrases within any type of text.

/ Teachings

Heather Froehlich's AntConc tutorial This in-depth tutorial walks a new AntConc user through every step of startup, how to build a corpus, how to run searches, how to ask questions of the data and interpret findings. Created by Literary Informatics Librarian and Assistant Professor Heather Froehlich of Penn State University (Pennsylvania, USA).

Culture Hacking AntConc exercise This is a practical exercise for culture hackers, focused on familiarizing you with the basic steps of analyzing language with AntConc. Use it as a first step toward your narrative inquiries!

Getting started with Media Cloud guide this page provides basic information for doing basic research with Media Cloud, it's free and you can access through Media Cloud web page.

Media Cloud Intro Webinar An Introduction to the platform Media Cloud made presented by Anushka Sha, Natalie Gyenes, Cindy Bishop and Rahul Bhargava, it's free.



/ Glossary

Agency is the expression of who has the power in a narrative, compared to who is powerless or not even mentioned at all. Dominant narratives can also refuse to take responsibility by stripping away agency (i.e. “Mistakes were made”).

Critical discourse analysis is the study of linguistic patterns through an ideological lens. The goal is to understand how ideologies are reflected in and created through specific linguistic elements within and across texts.

Discourse can be defined in a number of ways. Most simply, it is language about some issue. It can encompass any genre of speech and writing. All discourse is available for critical study and culture hacking.

Evaluation is how a speaker/writer chooses to portray a referent, through choice of adjectives and adverbs.

Frequency is how often a particular reference is used, particularly in comparison to other possible references.

Media ecosystem Is the set of institutions that develop activities around production, distribution and knowledge of information and data. The mass media communication industry can refer to print media, digital media and broadcasting.

Reference is how a writer/speaker chooses to refer to an entity, state, action, or event (e.g. global warming vs. climate change).



Culture Hack Method: **Recode**

How to break apart and reconstruct a message.

This process is directed towards deconstructing the elements of a discourse, and de-coding the deep meaning of the messages with the intention of analyzing the frames being used in dominant narratives and then changing them for frames that are politically in sync with the group' struggle.

Who

Activists, journalists, students, organizers, land defenders, etc. groups of people organizing who need to change the story being told about their struggle.

/ CHM - Ask Index

Executive Summary	0
CHM - Ask Index	0
How to engage with this step	1
RECODE	1
Theory	2
Further Reading	4
Stories	4
SDG Hack	4
Troy Library Campaign	4
The Iceberg	5
Teachings	9
Glossary	9



How to engage with this step

In this process it's key to have both experienced participants on discourse analysis as well as voices that represent the political intentions of the group. This process requires a clear message to decode as well as a clear political intention to recode the message with. It's an analogue process and it's preferred for the people participating to be physically in the group. The time frame for this exercise depends on the amount of people participating; we recommend at least a full hour for small groups and at least two hours for large groups.

RECODE

In the step of Re-coding we articulate an emblematic message of the dominant narrative we are tackling. We arrive at what this message is through the processes of analyzing networks and the language available, and through finding the frames that allow the narrative to make sense. This is done through an exercise that places the emblematic message as the 'tip of the iceberg' and goes through the metaphors, actions, subjects and suppositions that sustain it, decoding the logic that sustains the narrative. We then apply the inverse process, building up a message from the ground up that contains our desired counter-narrative.



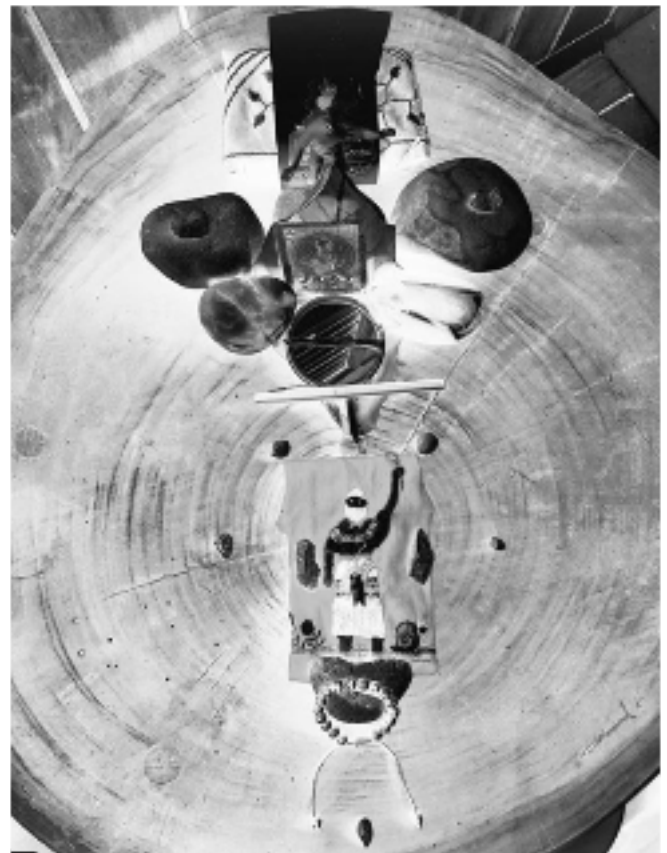
/ Theory

Frames are mental models, sometimes called schemas, that we use to interpret the world. They are made up of a complex mix of facts, experience, emotions, memories and assumptions. We have a frame for almost every word, but we also have frames for concepts, people and objects. We know we have them because we can look, for example, at a cup and see not only the physical entity called a 'cup' (a piece of factual knowledge) but we also understand its purpose and how to use it (process knowledge). We may also have lots of assumptions or emotions about them too, depending on our history with cups.

Changing frames, especially around significant social or political ideas or concepts, can be hugely influential. If we take the example of the concept of 'gay', we all have a set of facts, assumptions and emotions that immediately arise in our minds. In many Western countries, as little as 30 years ago, most people in society held frames that contained a good deal of negative 'facts', assumptions or emotions around the idea. This was an era where LGBTQ people suffered a lot of social and political oppression.

In the last 30 years, the dominant frames in many countries has shifted to become much more positive. It is almost as if common sense has changed. Where the majority of people used to instinctively feel a dominance of negative associations with the concept, now, very crudely speaking, those negative associations have, at the societal level, been replaced with neutral or more positive associations.

As these frames have shifted, the lived experience of being gay has also shifted profoundly. The LGBTQ liberation movement affected a change in the dominant frames around the idea of being LGBTQ.





To understand a frame, it is useful to ask two questions of it:

1. **What's inside, and therefore what's also outside it?** It can be helpful to think of a cognitive frame like a picture frame: some things are captured and some things are left out. In a cognitive frame, this tells you what is important to the communicator (be it a person, a company, a government or even a whole society) and thus how they conceive of this 'thing'. This conception is the determining factor in what they do about it. So if, for example, their frame contains a lot of negative information and leaves out a lot of positives, they will be more likely to react against it in some form. Similarly, if the contents of the frame are focus on the positive and leave out any negatives, the reaction to it will also be more likely to be positive.

2. **How is what is inside constructed?** What facts and assumptions does it contain, both on the surface and in the construction of the language? By breaking down the language of a frame, we can tell a lot about what is really going on there, and then, in theory, address those things that we may agree or disagree with, or want to change. This can be a question of grammar - where, for example, are active vs passive verbs used; word or phrase choice - climate change vs global warming; or even imagery used - is a person shown as active in the situation or a passive recipient of someone else's action?

Please refer to the Iceberg exercise for help in how to practice asking and answering these questions.



Further Reading

An example of a frame shift: [The Accessible Icon Project](#) has championed a revision to the depiction of wheelchair users in public space since 2009. Several US states have formally adopted the new icon. Seeing the old and new icons side by side, can you identify the two different frames at play? What facts, emotions, experiences and assumptions are at play in each?

[“Framing The Economy”](#) is a comprehensive framing report from the New Economy Organisers’ Network and collaborators in the UK

Stories

[SDG Hack](#)

Is a case study on how we hacked the UN Sustainable Development Goals and show how the economic model they promote accelerates ecological collapse.

[Troy Library Campaign](#)

The Troy Library Campaign became international news as outcry over the idea of burning one library’s books drowned out the opposition and galvanized support for this library.



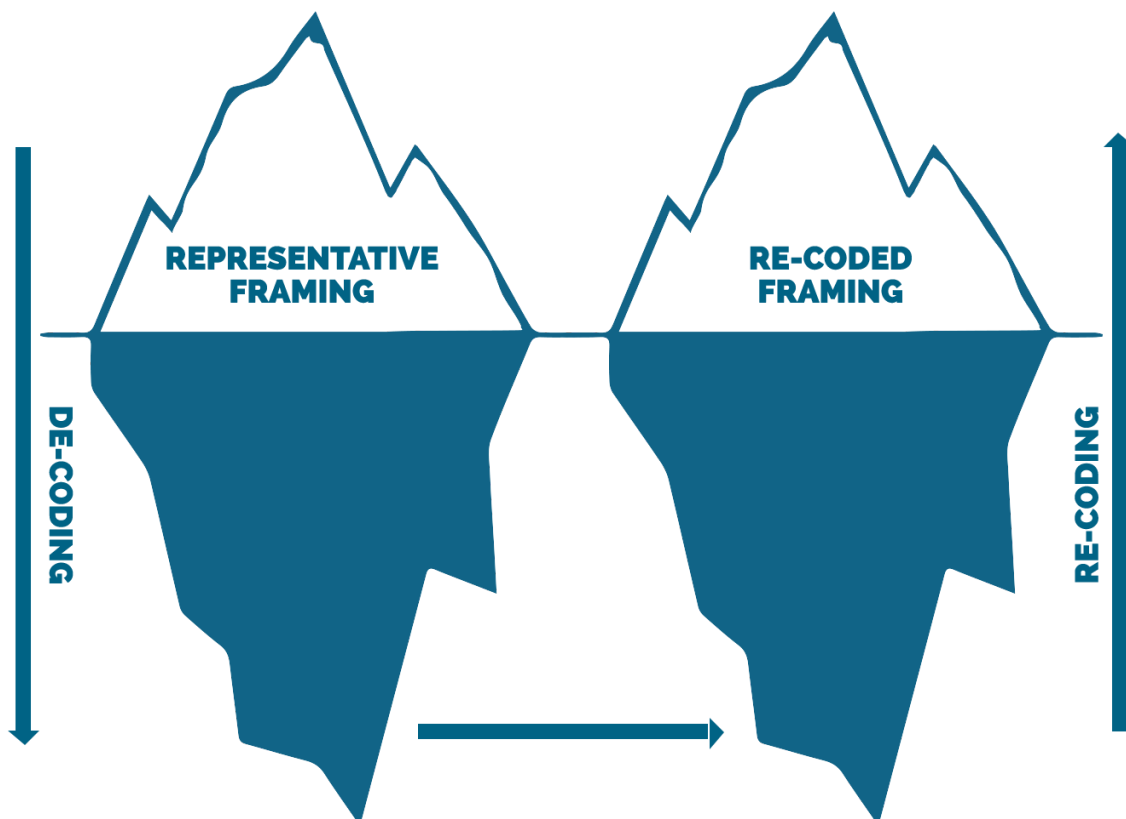
/ The Iceberg

The purpose of this worksheet is to outline a process for understanding what is coded into narratives we care about, and how to re-code them in ways that align with our values and agendas.

The basic way we do this is to 'decode' the existing framing piece by piece, and then 're-code' for our purposes.

We use the metaphor of an iceberg, as this focuses our minds on the fact that there are things that are on the surface of language, AND that beneath the surface there is a whole lot of vital information and choices being made which determine the core meaning. We decode using one iceberg, and re-code using a new one.

This is the way it flows:



1. Select a short (max 2 sentences) statement that you think reflects the essential or representative logic of the narrative you want to engage.



2. Place that statement on the top of your first iceberg, like this:

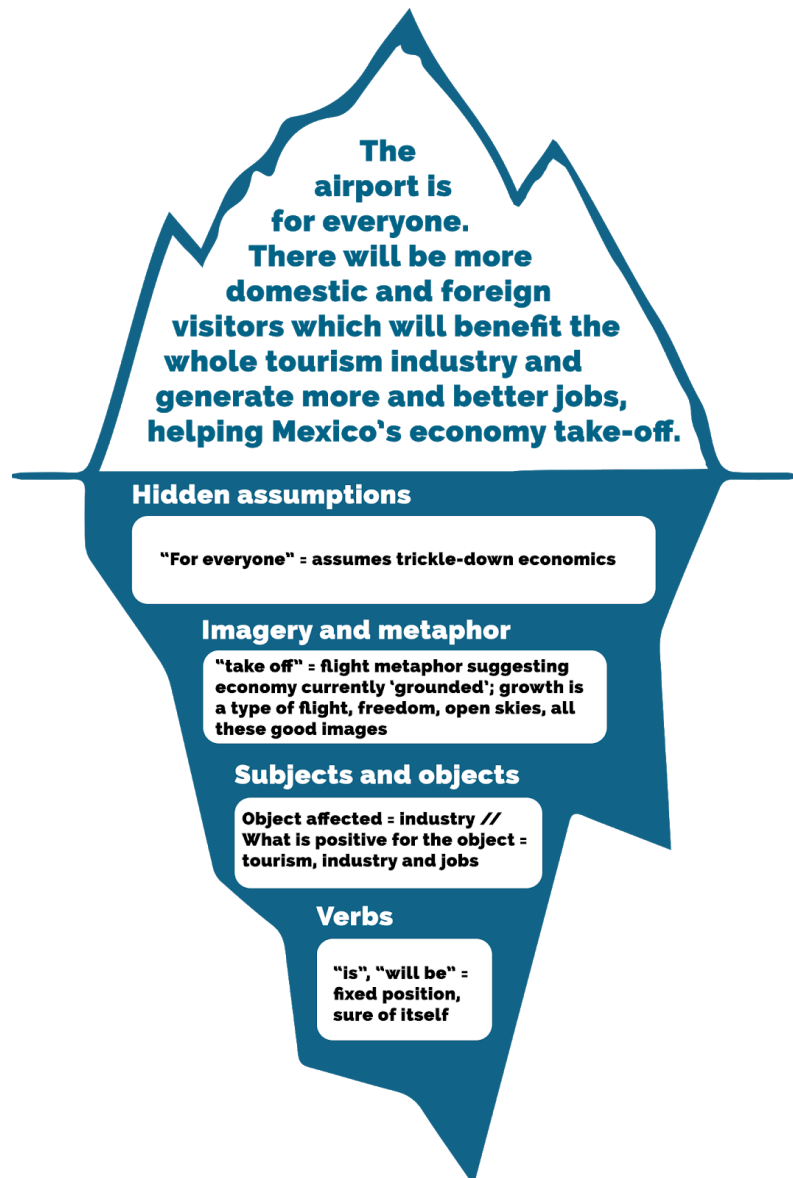
3. To break the language down, we can start to look for some basic things in the content of the message:

Verbs – what action is being represented? Is it static, dynamic, fast, slow, “serious”, “playful”, etc?

“Hidden” assumptions – what is represented as positive, and what is negative? How can we tell? (Hint: think about the role of adjectives)

Imagery and metaphor – what figurative language, artful comparisons, and very basic metaphors are present? What images does the language conjure in the mind?

Subjects and objects – who is the active agent, and who is passive? Who is doing the work, and who is being done to? Who has the power? If there are no agents, why?



The airport is for everyone. There will be more domestic and foreign visitors which will benefit the whole tourism industry and generate more and better jobs, helping Mexico's economy take-off.

Hidden assumptions

"For everyone" - assumes trickle-down economics

Imagery and metaphor

"take off" - flight metaphor suggesting economy currently 'grounded'; growth is a type of flight, freedom, open skies, all these good images

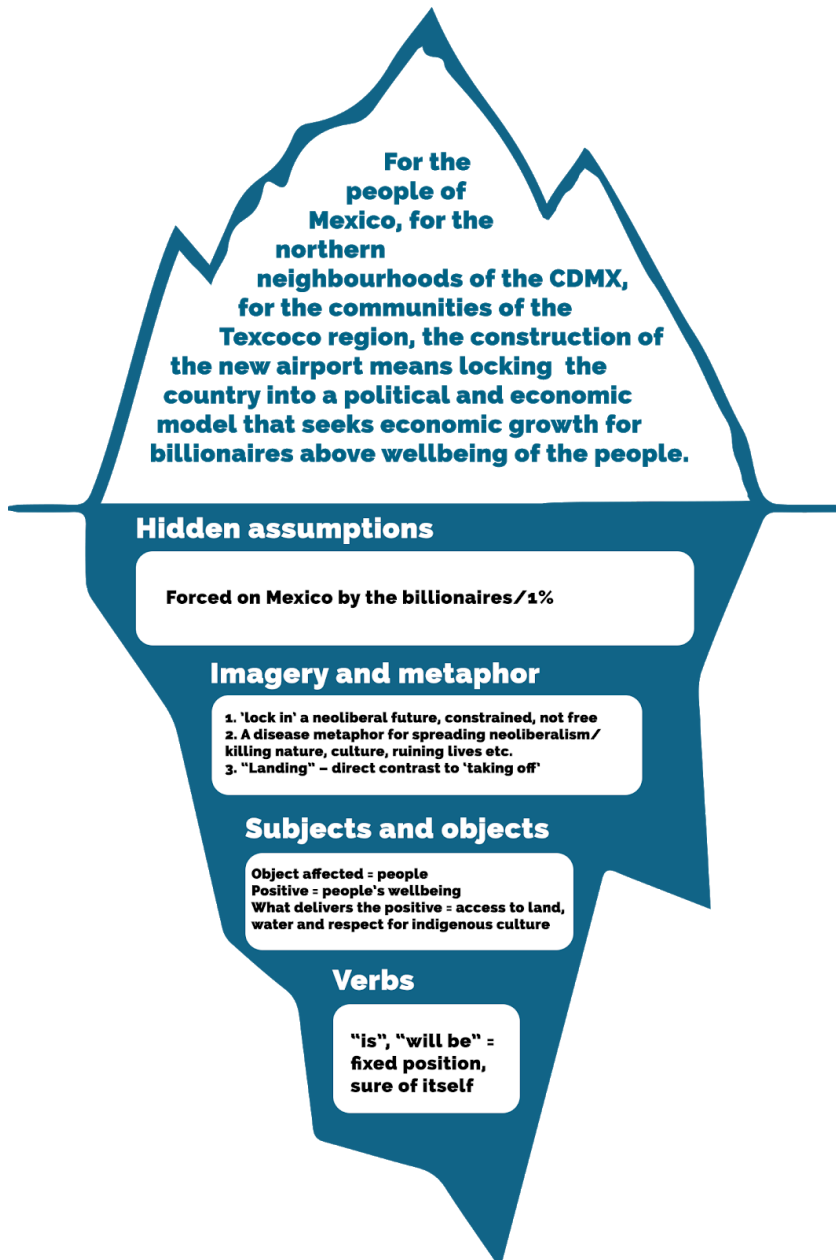
Subjects and objects

Object affected = industry // What is positive for the object = tourism, industry and jobs

Verbs

"is", "will be" - fixed position, sure of itself

4. Decide which components of the language can and should be changed, and put your preferred logic -i.e. the new components - in the 2nd iceberg. This is what you will build your new statement from:



5. Write a new sentence from the component pieces. Remember, there is no such things as a single, perfect statement. Different people will write things differently. The same intervention can have several versions of the statement, tailored to different audiences' needs. What's important is that you reflect the logic you intend to convey from within the iceberg. At this stage we're dealing in logic, not poetry. That comes next, with creative expression.

Lock in metaphor - For the people of Mexico, for the northern neighbourhoods of the CDMX, for the communities of the Texcoco region, the construction of the new airport means locking the country into a political and economic model that seeks economic growth for billionaires above wellbeing of the people.

Disease metaphor - the new airport of Mexico city represents a disease for people living on the indigenous and common lands where it is being constructed, it will contaminate the water, cause floods and undermine people's wellbeing

Landing metaphor - People's water is under attack by the landing of the aerotropolis and the macro-project of NAICM. Billionaires like Carlos Slim and their political enablers like Pena are failing to respect the people's most basic rights to land, water and dignified life.



/ Teachings

This needs to be filled in, do we have a specific teaching that we can add here?

/ Glossary

Code A system of symbols or conventions that are used to convey meaning.

Deconstruct to break something down into its separate parts in order to understand its meaning, especially when this is different from how it was previously understood.

Narrative narratives provide society a foundational framework to understand history and current events. Transmit our basic concepts of identity and belonging.



Culture Hack Method: **Intervene**

How to make a message relevant to your community and the landscape of the struggle.

This process is directed towards generating the meaningful messages to convey the intention of the struggle for the chosen audiences.

Who

Creators, artists, writers, communicators, the people in an organization tasked with generating the communication products; be them graphic, audiovisual, in written format etc. Also community organizers, the people in an organization tasked with coordinating with involved communities.

/ CHM - Ask Index

Who	0
CHM - Ask Index	0
How to engage with this step	1
INTERVENE	1
Theory	3
Further reading	4
Stories	5
#YoPrefieroElLago	5
#ElijoDignidad	5
Style Wars	5
The narrative intervention tree	6



1. Choose the Language 7
2. Find the meme 7
3. Choose the emotional tone of the meme. 8
4. Plan the Hack (intervene the right place at the right time). 9

Spread the seeds, worksheet 10

Persona - what are the implications for me as an individual? 12

Community - what implications does it have for my community? 12

Ecosystem - what implications does it have for the ecosystem? 12

Tech Tools 13

Gimp 13

Inkscape 13

Blender 13

FontForge 13

Shortcut 13

Audacity 13

Mixxx 14

Glossary 14

How to engage with this step

This process requires a group of people capable of creating communication products of various kinds, as well as people connected with communities that are committed to disseminating and remixing said communication products. This process has a variable timeline because it depends on the scope of the intervention, but it usually necessitates at least a couple of days, but it can go to be a process of weeks.

/ INTERVENE

The Intervene step interprets the messages that we've recoded - our intended counter-narratives - to language and imagery that resonate with our intended audience(s), and then disseminates them in spaces our mapping analysis has identified as crossroads for the narratives. We're looking for influential nodes, engaged communities, and conversations that align or have the potential to align with our counter-narrative.





Theory

Culture Hacking holds a cyclical theory of systems change. Patterns of communication, social codes, thoughts, norms and even concepts of culture itself influence each other in a never-ending, emergent process. Intervention in one area cascades through the others, hacking the deep logic of hegemonic narratives and allowing alternatives to emerge.

In the Intervene stage of the work, we are taking the recoded frames/memes/messages and creating content vehicles for these ideas. Guiding questions for Intervening are: "What content vehicle will be most effective and memorable for putting narrative intention into practice: tweet, a fanzine, an infographic, a video, an encounter, an open letter, a press briefing, a hashtag... or all of the above?"

We then marry these content vehicles with an understanding of which media or nodes would be the most effective content channels for dispersion and amplification. We use an exercise called The Hacking Matrix, which helps us locate the public conversation in a matrix of (a) affinity to the hegemonic system and (b) type of knowledge or communication style that the conversation uses or represents. Using this matrix, we also define where we wish to move the conversation towards.

The process of Intervening is one of trial-and-error, incorporating learnings from the Culture Hacking process and echoes of other interventions. The goal is to craft interventions that make sense in the context of each struggle and provide feedback loops so we can

continuously learn and re-apply new lessons to refine our Culture Hacking practice.

CREATIVE TRANSLATION: BUILDING ALTERNATIVES

Creative translation seeks to evoke the alternative worlds we imagine while still attacking the oppressive structures that sustain the hegemonic systems of today.

It starts by questioning ourselves, diving into questions like: "What does a world that is not patriarchal, not capitalistic, and not colonial, look like? What does its art look like? And how does the process of creating this art make way to this kind of world?"

By focusing on the concepts of intersectionality, transdisciplinary and transgenerational knowledge, we start laying an alternative path, one that breeds alternatives.

DISSEMINATION

Whenever we refer to disseminate a message we refer to the ecosystem that we are part of and through an idea spreads. Its either social media, digital technologies or a combination of both. We evoke the metaphor of disseminating seeds because it's a process that breeds life and across millions of years has shared and recombined genetic material, stories and relationships to the land.

A good idea is not enough to create change. This is where collective knowledge of social movements and native peoples surface the most in Culture Hacking. Communication is an organizing process; the creation of emergent



narratives must be linked to those who will actively create and embody sustainable change.

(Anex II Communitarian strategies in time of resistance)

✓ Further reading

Rexiste collective project of political and artistic interventions in the public space that was born in the political context of the disappearances of 43 students in Mexico.

Artistas Aliados Organization of art school students and independent artists born in May 2012 during the # YoSoy132 movement. Currently formed as a group that includes people from various political and artistic positions.

Beautiful Rising a repository of tools, techniques and stories around activist interventions and campaigns in the global south.

Escola de Ativismo is an independent, non-partisan collective based in São Paulo and active in various regions of Brazil. The school provides training in grassroots and campaign strategies to organizations, collectives, movements and individuals working for greater democracy.

Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics connects scholars, artists, and activists working at the intersection of artistic practice and social transformation. Focusing on urgent issues of our time—from human rights and migration to racial, economic, and gender inequalities—we research politically engaged performance through gatherings, publications, and digital platforms in order to create new avenues for thought and action.

Not An Alternative NY-based collective and non-profit organization that works at the intersection of art, activism and pedagogy. It has a mission to affect popular understandings of events, symbols, institutions, and history.

The Center for Artistic Activism is a place to explore, analyze, and strengthen connections between social activism and artistic practice.

This projects have emerged from the collaborations of the group of activist and performers **Yesmen** who have systematized various ways of intervention

Beautiful Trouble Is a book, web toolbox and international network of artist-activist trainers whose mission is to make grassroots movements more creative and more effective.

Yes Lab A series of brainstorming and trainings to help activist groups carry out media-getting creative actions, focused on their own campaign goals.

Actipedia An open-access, community-generated wiki to document, share, and inspire Creative Activism.



Radical Imagination Project was founded in 2010 as a platform to study, analyze, foment, broadcast and promote the radical ideas that emerge from social movements.

Destructables A DIY site for projects of protest and creative dissent.

/ Stories

[#YoPrefieroELago](#)

The #YoPrefieroELago campaign (“I prefer the lake”) helped reframe the debate around the new airport of Mexico City and secure a win in a public consultation, resulting in the cancellation of the project. Change the frame, change the outcome.

[#ElijoDignidad](#)

The electoral season in Guatemala ran from June to August 2019, and a nationwide survey showed that one third of the country thought there would be fraud. But in the middle of a hopeless electoral process, a Mayan woman made us look to an alternative way. Thelma Cabrera, an indigenous peasant leader, who inspired a group of young people to start a culture hacking process to name the defense of life at the center of the electoral narrative.

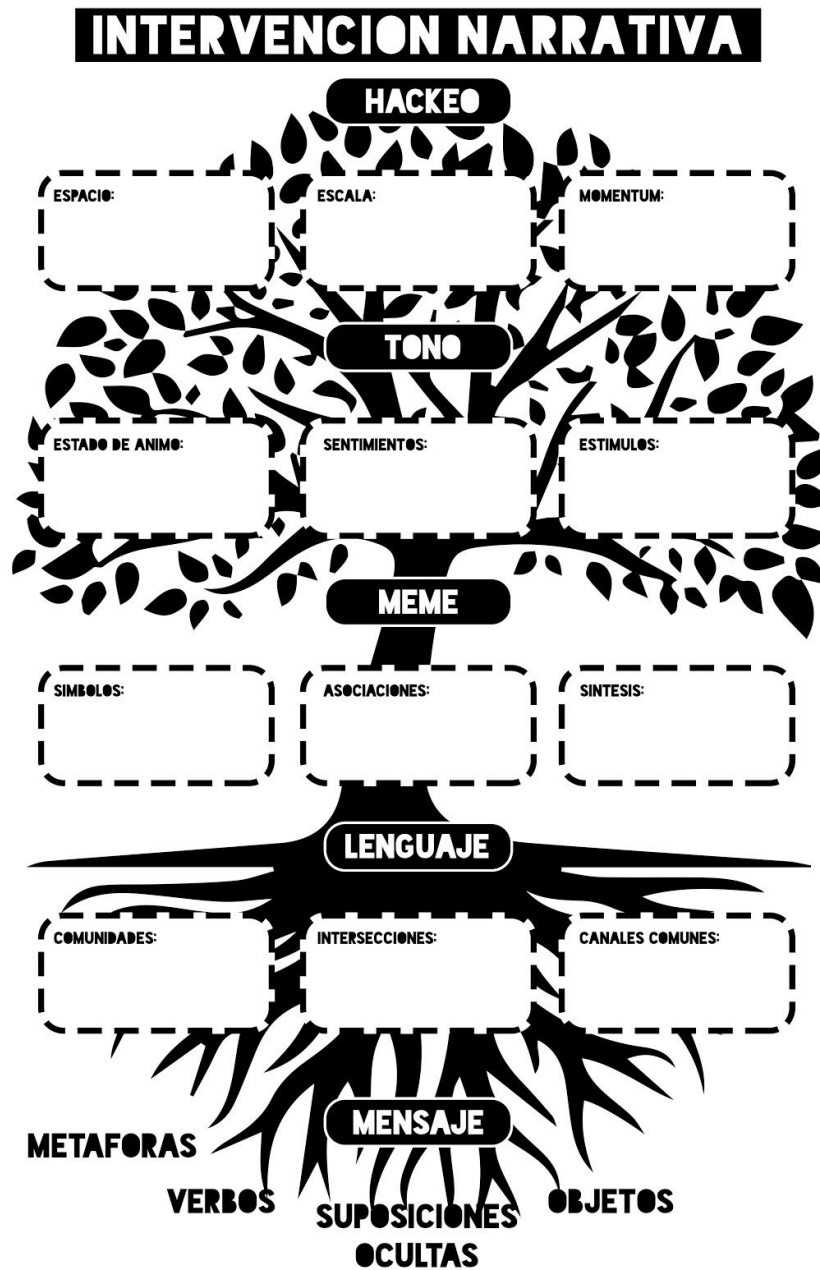
[Style Wars](#)

Documentary is considered as the indispensable document of the New York street culture of the early 80s, the filmic record of a golden age of youth creativity that broke out in the world from a city in crisis.



/ The narrative intervention tree

A narrative intervention is like planting a tree. Through using The Hacking Matrix, we chose the most fertile narrative terrain to sow our interventions. Now is the time to choose and germinate the right tree. This exercise is the guide to design each of the practices that make up our strategy.





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At the roots of the tree is the **Recorded Message** which contains the logic we want to share. Inside the trunk we have the **Language** or the means by which the message travels: the **Meme** or the synthesis of the message that will be shared from person to person and the tone or the emotional and aesthetic profile of the intervention. Filling out the crown of the tree is the **Hack**: the place, the scale and time for the intervention.

1. Choose the Language

The right channel for the message to travel. As part of the mapping process, we have identified what type of communication mechanisms are being used in the conversation, as well as which are the most replicated, the most effective, the most connective. Now we have to choose the most appropriate channel to carry our message.

Communities are a group of people who share narratives. What communities coexist on the narrative field we chose? What profile does each of them have? Describe them: who compose them, what age, gender, tastes, political positions and socio-economic situations.

Intersections (Crossroads) are the points in common between the communities. What are the points in common, do people talk about the same topic? What discourses exist in common? What kind of posts do you share? Who are the influential people in these communities?

Common channels are the specific means to express and represent ideas and feelings. At the intersections, what contents are the most shared, those that have more interaction, that generate more controversy? What language is appropriate? What creative language do we choose to be able to speak to the target audience: written, visual, audiovisual, sound, kinetic, gastronomic ...?

2. Find the meme

“Meme” refers to something broader than funny Internet images: a meme is a cultural unit that has the capacity of self-replicate. Memes are everywhere around us: sayings, hashtags, images, clothes, metaphors, traditions, economic models are all memes. The “virality of ideas” long predates online memes as we’re used to thinking about them.

Through Re-Coding, we identified a series of discourse elements that are important in the narrative we want to hack. These are the symbols, associations and essential building blocks of memes.

Symbols the perceptible representation of an idea. Symbols are visual, aural, linguistic and physical representations of some concept or identity (for example, symbols of nation states



include flags and national anthems). Other symbolic relationships include habitual associations between two concepts, ideas or memories (the color blue is symbolic of the sky, although the color of the sky changes). We're looking to create a meme that intervenes, reconfigures, and remixes or vandalizes the symbols identified in the Re-Coding process, using actions that can transmit the message. Guiding questions: What symbols are important for the narrative communities we aim to reach? What symbols are important in the narrative we'd like to hack? What symbols we can intervene-reconfigure-remix-vandalize to generate a reaction in our audience?

Associations they're the reactions between ideas. How can we relate those pre-existing symbols with metaphors and hidden logics of our re-code message? What elements does our message have that can be used in different contexts and with the language chosen to evoke them?

Synthesis means to use small and precise elements to transmit an idea. Less is more, a meme is more shareable while simpler and comprehensible to a broader audience: is easier to share a gif than a thesis. How can I better transmit my message in a few words-ideas? How can I better suit the symbols, associations and the synthesis to create a meme that viralizes my message?

3. Choose the emotional tone of the meme.

We already have the meme, but the same idea can generate different reactions in the same group of people. The same anecdote generates different emotional reactions depending on the genre in which it is told. The same photo generates different reactions depending on the saturation of the color; the same rhythm of a song evokes different emotions depending on the progression of the melody.

On one hand, we must understand how emotionally charged the conversation is - if our message evokes grief, we must be sensitive to the fact that has different stages: denial, anger, depression, acceptance. Our goal may be to accentuate a mood or modify it, this is part of the strategy we want to develop. Part of the decoding and linguistic processing helped us understand the moment in which the conversation is. Moods are lasting emotional situations that stand out from the rest of the emotional ups and downs, feelings are the most specific emotional reactions, stimuli activate feelings and emotions.

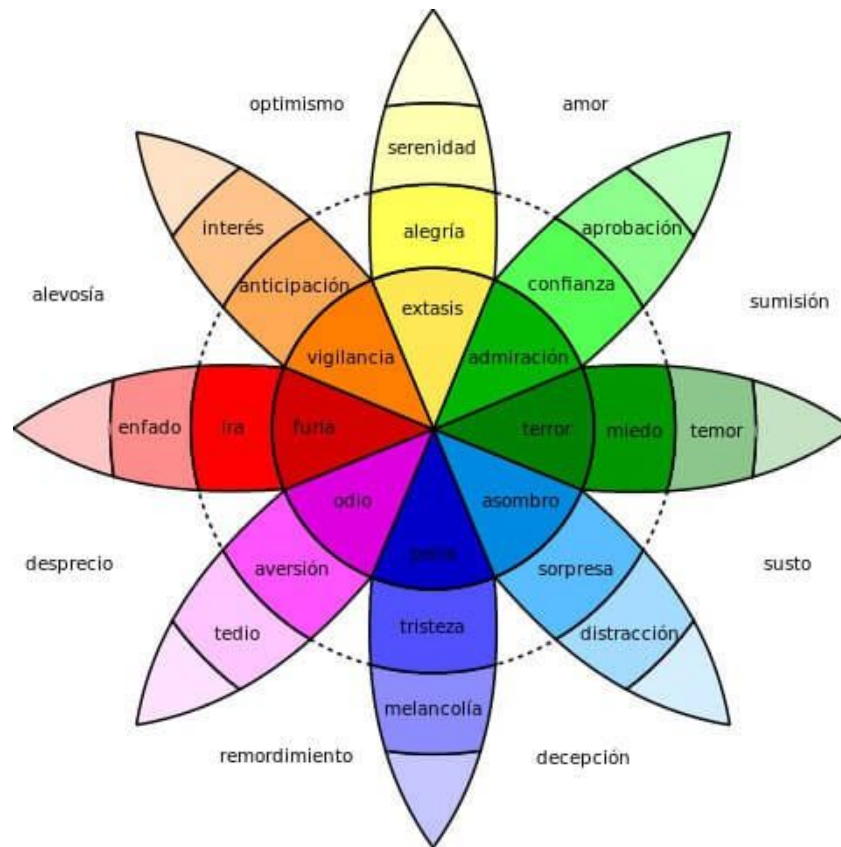
Mood the underlying feeling that persists over time. What is the fluctuation of the conversation (expansive, neutral or depressive)? What are the basic emotions that we can identify in this mood (optimism, love, submission, fright, disappointment, remorse ...)? Identify where it is on the emotional map.

Feelings the emotional reaction of people. Do we want to generate a positive or negative feeling? What feelings do we want to generate, where do we want to take the mood? Choose one or a combination of the emotional map and choose the intensity.

Stimuli external or internal signal capable of causing a reaction. This is a good time to invite to the process the people who have been trained and have experience in creative translation processes, but we must identify the people for the project. Are we going to invite a rapper or a cumbia group? If it were a movie or a song, what genre would we choose? What elements of the



form can also convey the structure? With what elements of communication can we generate the feelings we want to evoke?



4. Plan the Hack (intervene the right place at the right time).

Time, space and scale are components equally important as the message for the culture hacking, they're the treetop. The considerations for planning a hack include:

Space: point of intervention Where does the intervention happen? Is it a public or private space? Is it a physical or virtual space? What political statement are we making at a specific point of intervention?

Here are some possible points of intervention:

- Points of production (a monoculture plantation, a maquiladora factory)
- Points of destruction (a mine, a place of deforestation)
- Points of consumerism (a store, a bank)
- Points of decision making (government offices, a corporate office)
- Points of assumption (a place where a narrative is based: a square where a flag is raised, a place heavy with symbolism: a statue or monument)
- Points of communication (social networks, TV stations)
- Points of counterculture (spaces that have been taken by the social organization and reappropriate power: anti-monuments, memorials, alternative culture spaces)
- Points of active imagination (spaces where networks and streets converse. In online movements like Indignados, Occupy Wall Street and #Yosoy132, public spaces have



become spots to activate and imagine other worlds possible. Unlike traditional vertical structures, they are decentralized and self-affiliated places.)

Scale: how big or small it must be to be relevant Think like a graffiti artist! A tag on the interior of a subway car will be seen by people traveling in that car, over and over again; a graffiti bomb on a street corner will be seen by passers-by. A large, colorful piece on the exterior of the car will as well, but those who go inside that car cannot see it.

The same thing happens in the virtual space. Do we want to communicate by impact or repetition? Do we want a message that fits everywhere or that'll be monumental?

Momentum: what is the right political moment As part of the active listening of the narratives we want to hack, we uncover if we are in a valley where the conversation is static or if we are in a peak where there's a lot of movement and exchange. It is useful to know the political agenda or the events that can untie the peaks in the conversation, people can be more open to talk about climate change if a natural disaster just happened, or they will talk about economy if a budget bill is being debated.

Sometimes we need to generate that momentum with our interventions. Is the conversation limp or active? How relevant is our message in this moment of the conversation? Do we foresee that the conversation will be more effervescent in the near future or should we create the momentum ourselves? (This could have an effect on the decision in the scale of the intervention)

Taking action

Back to the metaphor of the tree, an intervention grows from the bottom up, like life. We've chosen the language, found the meme, decided the tone and planned the hack. **It's now time to take action.**

It's important to mention that this is part of a process of trial and error, where we generate prototypes. We create opportunities to test these prototypes without using all of our energy on one intervention that we aren't sure will work. By using this method, we are able to take fewer uninformed chances and be more confident in the soundness of the work, but success will depend on knowing the narrative space we're hacking. When implementing a hack, it's important to have the tools to measure the impact of our actions in the narrative.

Let's plan as much as possible but be ready to improvise along the way.

Spread the seeds, worksheet

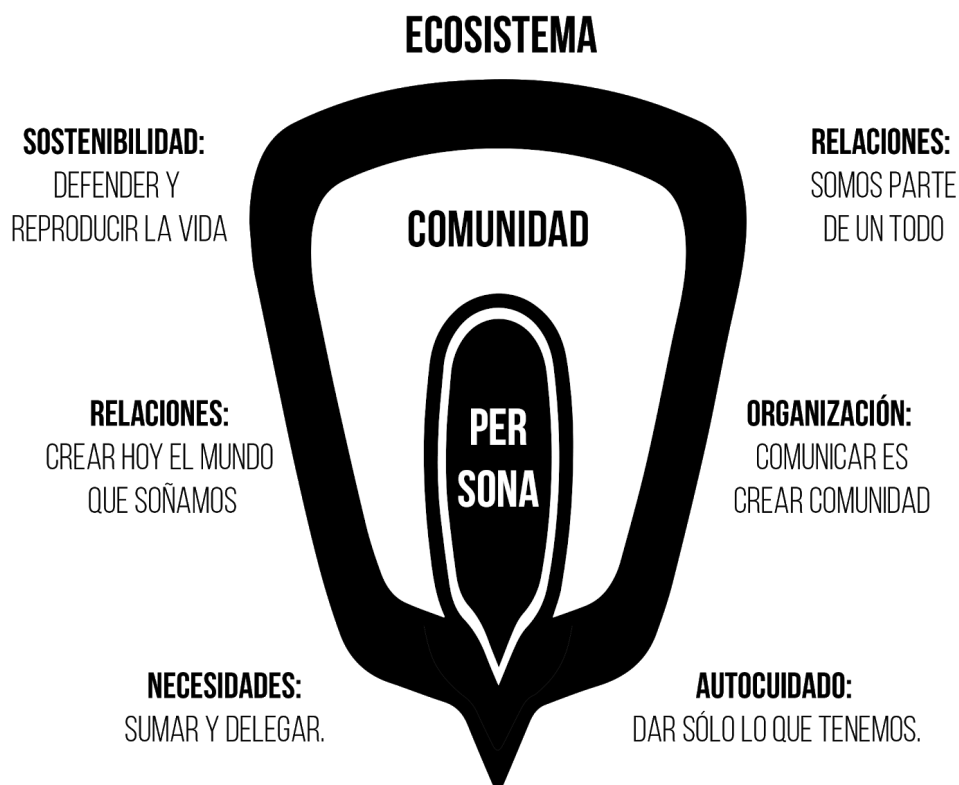
Culture Hacking is a modular method that can be used by a small group of activists and by mass social movement alike. It's a series of steps and exercises that can be used as a complete process or as separate modules. In that sense, there is no recipe when it comes to dissemination and we trust that the accumulated knowledge of each social action space knows its means of communication-organization-sustainability best.



Here we propose an exercise that can be conducted collectively, however in the first question there should be room for self-criticism and honesty in terms of individual abilities and needs. We can go back to the intervention tree to identify **how are we going to operate the intervention.**

Above all, pay attention to:

- 1 Language > Common Channels:** Do we have access to these languages and channels or should we partner with someone who is part of them?
- 3 Tone > Stimulus:** For the tone we have chosen, do we have the capabilities within our community or do we need to invite other people who have these developed skills?
- 4 Hacking > Space:** Does the intervention point we have chosen have security implications or the potential to jeopardize our integrity?
- 4 Hacking > Scale:** Depending on the scope of the hack, do we have the capacity within our collective to act or should we ask for support?
- 4 Hacking > Momentum:** What impact can our narrative intervention have if it works well? Are we prepared for what may come next? Should we fail, do we have a resilient community?





Persona - what are the implications for me as an individual?

Self care: to give what we have. Rarely do we stop to wonder if we have the spiritual, emotional and bodily capacity to do the work. It is essential to ask ourselves how we are healing the pain that comes from being close to life's defense processes. As a Mayan healer says: "We cannot give what we do not have." We must assume the body and spirit as the first territory to defend. What measures of healing and security am I taking personally to take care of myself?

Needs: add on and delegate. We don't have to carry the weight of the world on our backs. We have to be self-critical and know how to accept when we don't have the skills for a certain task or that we need support to achieve it. By bringing others in, we are forming a community. What are my skills and what are my limits? Where do I need to seek support to continue working?

Community - what implications does it have for my community?

Relationships: create the world we dream today. On the one hand, it is necessary to be consistent and apply our political demands to the way we relate to our communities. The Zapatistas say, "I do what I say and say what I do." On the other hand, Culture Hacking should make it possible to generate networks of life and solidarity. Sometimes the simple exercise of inviting other people to be part of an intervention is the change we are looking for: to meet and create community. How are we generating and strengthening a consistent and resilient community?

Organizing: to communicate is to create community. Narratives shape how we understand and act in the world, but organizing is what sustains cultures. There are technological tools that allow us to organize in real time despite the distance, generate consensus and decentralized decision-making, but there are also similar technologies that have sustained resistance in communities for hundreds of years. What forms of organizing am I promoting? Who has access and who doesn't? What tools do I use that allow me to organize during short-term moments but also in latency?

Ecosystem - what implications does it have for the ecosystem?

Sustainability: defend and reproduce life. Connect local action with global interconnection. Our actions and narratives can weave new relationships between our communities and our common home, the planet. We must defend those cultures that have defended life for thousands of years. 80% of the world's biodiversity is in the territories of indigenous cultures. How do we learn and join these struggles that have existed for hundreds or thousands of years? What communication channels do we use and strengthen and what are their implications for my community and the environment? What possibilities do narrative interventions open to show how oppressions are connected but also that resistances are too?

Interdependence: we are part of a whole. The relationship between person, community and territory is more complex than the sum of its parts and can only be understood in interdependence. It is worth



asking at what time we are strengthening narratives, organization and individualistic, anthropocentric and patriarchal action, what limits it has and how we can open ourselves to other ways of being-thinking-doing. How do we promote new ethical references such as water and land? How can we take only what is necessary and be reciprocal with the planet? What implications does an interdependent conception of the world have for our reflection - organization - communication?

Tech Tools

Gimp

One of the most popular and open-source graphics design and photo editing tools. It is a featured-packed graphic design suite and image editor. It's the same as Adobe Photoshop layout. A great tool for any beginner or advanced designer who primarily works with photos.

Inkscape

Is much like Adobe Illustrator and Corel Draw. It is also one of the most powerful tools, available free to everyone. It is also known as the counterpart of vector graphics creator Adobe Illustrator. Inkscape basic and default file format is in Scalable Vector Graphics (SVG). It's available for Linux, Mac and Windows operating systems.

Blender

Is a 3D drawing creation software. Topmost famous animators use Blender to make short films, feature films, and TV shows, etc. Its interface is quite complex at first. It has a lot of customizable features; you can also create your extensions and features that the way you want to design.

FontForge

Is a font editor that supports many font formats for designers. It is lightweight and enables to create smooth designs of your own-type, true-type, and PostScript. It is free software.

Shortcut

Is a robust non-linear video editor with enough tools to satisfy most levels of video editing skill. The free cross-platform program—available on Windows, Mac, and Linux—opens up to a clean, minimal interface, ideal for new or casual editors who want to keep things simple.

Audacity

Is an easy-to-use, multi-track audio editor and recorder for Windows, Mac OS X, GNU/Linux and other operating systems. Developed by a group of volunteers as open source



Mixxx

If you are into DJing then Mixxx is one of the best free and open source software, it is designed to be friendly for both beginners and professionals alike. Getting started with Mixxx is nothing hard, simply drag a song into Mixxx and you can start manipulating it using beats, cue points, and scrollable and scratchable waveforms among other things.

Glossary

Alternatives a method to do/learn together, deschool and experiment while we struggle.

Creative Translation its like translating a text but instead of taking words from one language and substitute with words from another; creative translation uses a source text to create an equally compelling copy using expressions, wording and memes unique to the audience we want to reach.

Content Channels These are the media or nodes where the content vehicle is places. Think of it as the location you place the vase in the room itself.

Content Vehicle A form that holds the ability to communicate an idea. Think of it as a vase that holds the memetic flower. For example, an open-letter is a content vehicle which allows a certain type of more formal, op-ed style, group voice to communicate an idea in a public domain like a newspaper or online magazine or open letter.

Language a systematic means of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized signs, sounds, gestures, or marks having understood meanings.

Meme Memes are to cultures what genes are to biology. Memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making posts or building arches.

Narrative Communities groups of people who self-consciously regard themselves as members of a community defined by believing a particular narrative.

Narrative Intervention Creation of special content to make an intervention on a specific space (physical or digital) with a narrative objective and a political strategy.

Points of intervention A point of intervention is a physical or conceptual place within a system where pressure can be put to disrupt its smooth functioning and push for change.

CULTURE HACK METHOD



1. ASK



2. MAP



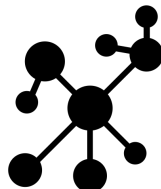
3. UNDERSTAND



4. RECODE



4. INTERVENE



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You are Free to:

Share — copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format

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The Rules (TR) was an activist collective that existed from 2012 to 2019. In its eight years of existence it focused on addressing the root causes of inequality, poverty and ecological break down through narrative and cultural interventions. TR worked directly with social movements to inform the nature of interventions, and worked with journalists, think tanks, independent researchers and others to reframe and amplify alternatives to help midwife post-capitalist realities.

TR is now closed, but we will keep developing Culture Hacking from other places and spaces, any comment or contribution please [write us here](#).

**THE
RULES**

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