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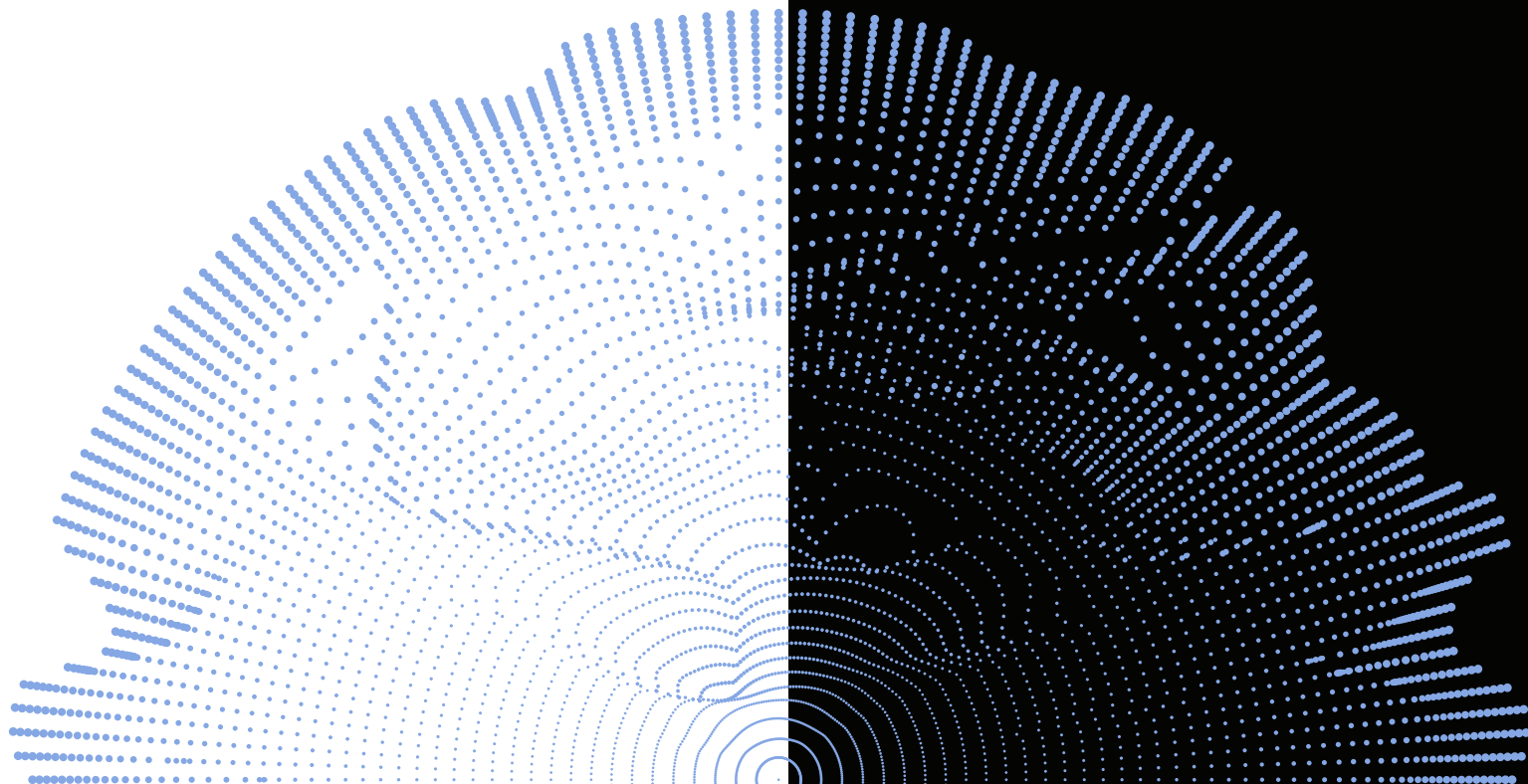
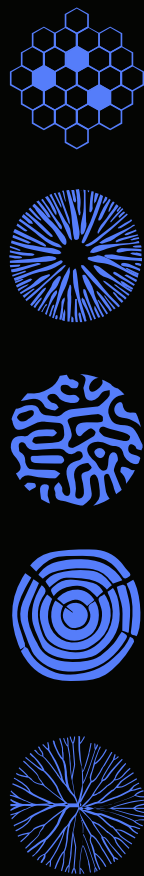
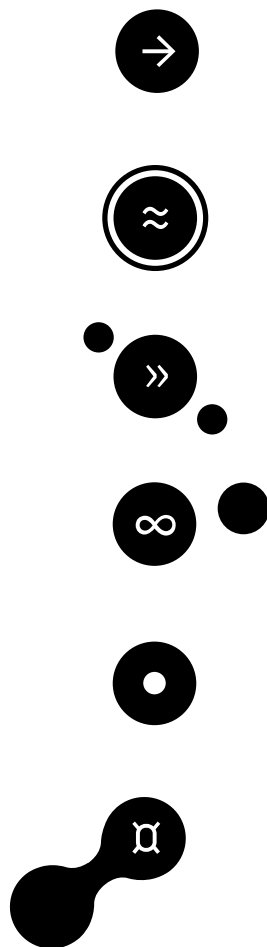
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## About

[Culture Hack Labs](#) is a cooperative consultancy with a mission to capacitate the narrative change field through in-depth research, novel frameworks and tools. This executive summary gives an overview of Transforming The Transition, a project sponsored by [New World Foundation](#) and the [Schumacher Center for a New Economics](#). The full report can be found [\[here\]](#).

## Introduction

All struggles are connected. The adage carried by social movements across the world has never been more true. The climate crisis, capitalist exploitation of the Global South by the Global North, the encroachment of authoritarianism -- these familiar threats have made convinced many that the inevitable transition from the age of neoliberal capitalism to what comes next is well underway. Others are caught in a loop of denial and argument in favor of the status quo, where a deeply rooted mainstream Western worldview breeds an Us vs Them logic and disables the kind of expansive thinking needed to course correct.

2020 has proven a momentous inflection point. The global impact of the Covid pandemic has cracked open any pretense to “normalcy”. So has the global movement for Black lives. Now we are wondering: is 2020 an opportunity to fundamentally shift narratives -- deep narratives, operating at the level of culture -- toward enabling and supporting life rather than destroying it, and if so, how?

It’s time for something different. If we are to survive this, a shift must occur away from the zero-sum, win/lose logics that pervade today’s dominant narratives, towards a view of winning. Away from entropy, and toward syntropy.

## Objectives

### *Identify the dominant narratives of the moment*

What narratives are currently helping people make sense of recent events and comprehend reality. We are interested in identifying what this tells us about our current humanity: Where are we? What do we want?

### *Identify the narratives for transition*

Not all narrative forms have equal capacity for a collective evolution; some are better suited than others. We assess the capacity of narratives to support a transition away from the extractive logic to an ecologically, culturally regenerative and life affirming system.

## Data Analysis

Framing and storytelling takes place within specific contexts. For this reason, we have operationalized four codes to which narratives within this moment orient: **life, power, identity and time**. These codes allow us to grasp nuances that connect disparate stories. Each code can be broken down into two main frames which offer opposite outlooks of the moment. How these frames show up teaches us about the resistance and the tensions that currently exist in the narrative space. The eight frames are **life: creation, destruction; power: over, with; identity: interdependence, us vs them; time: past, future**.

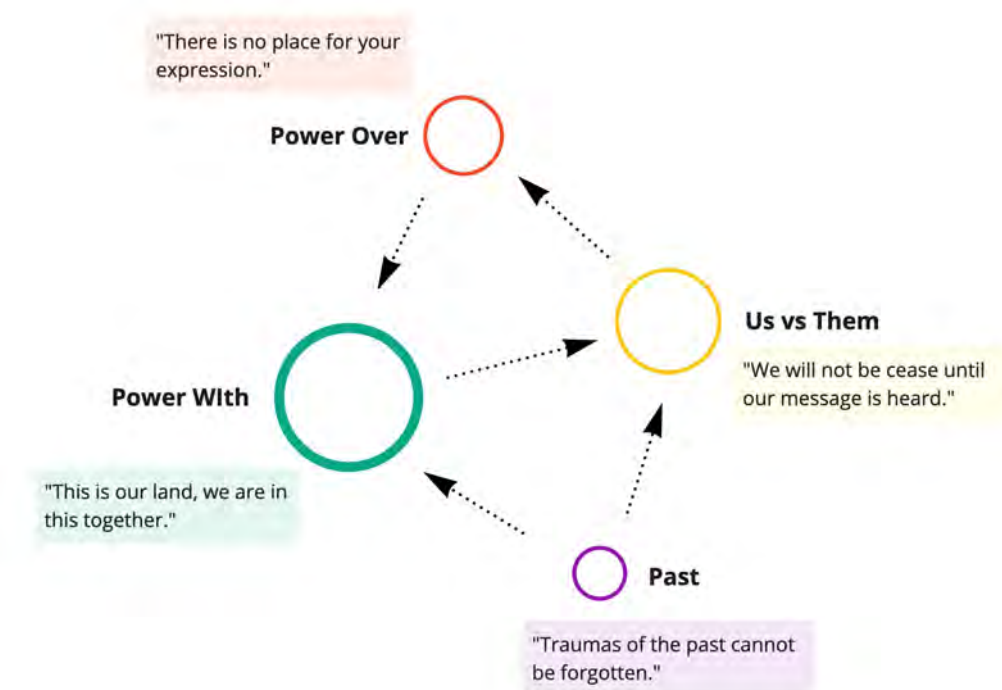
## Key Findings

### Small listening.

We conducted content analysis of mainstream news media (incl. NYT, The Guardian) and widely used social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter) between June 17th and July 6th 2020.

!

The small listening makes it clear: **The stories of Covid and BLM are intertwined expressions of the same story:** one of systemic racism, structural inequalities, environmental destruction, and relentless pursuit of profit. “I can’t breathe”, the message of the BLM movement since Eric Garner’s murder by police in 2014, has been coopted by the current anti-mask movement. This emergent web of stories speaks to something deeper and broader:: **a visceral chasm between one worldview rooted in reverence for individual freedom and one rooted in collective solidarity.**



## Big listening

We captured the broad contours of influencer networks, prominent keywords and hashtags, and framing in media discourse between March and July 2020. Early on, “can do” messages encouraged people to follow public health guidelines. In April, this **life/creation** framing was usurped by a nationalist backlash. By May, the **life/destruction** frame proliferated, telling of devastated communities, economies, and ways of life. Pandemic lockdowns imposed by governments were cast as mechanisms of control, framed as **power/over** the individual. On May 25th, after George Floyd’s murder by police, the **power/over** framing shifted toward calling out police brutality and systemic racism. A **power/with** framing emerged through actions by K-Pop fans and BLM activists calling for a reckoning with the **past** and fortifying against increasingly brutal policing, solidifying **us vs them** as a powerful frame.

## Survey

We polled a representative (by gender, age and region) sample of 1,640 US-based participants, aiming to validate the codes and frames articulated above. Participants overwhelmingly believe that **imagining a new future is more important than questioning history**, suggesting a tension and struggle for meaning in a moment when reckoning with history is a pillar of the BLM movement. Dissonance is a major theme throughout the survey. While many believe **this moment will bring more power to the people**, away from the concentration we see today, they also believe that **the Us vs Them mentality and division are hallmarks of this moment**. The destructive **Us vs Them** logic lurks in the background and threatens aspirations for transformation. **Power Over** framings get in the way of bringing interdependence front and center in this imagined future of power sharing.

## Conclusions

### Two belief systems, at odds.

We find two dominant belief systems that anchor the narrative space which ultimately stem from two distinct core values and world views.

1. The narrative form of **individual freedom**, exemplified by American values of individualism, the ‘freedom to’ movement in the wake of the Covid pandemic, and its darker aspects found in QAnon conspiracies.
2. The narrative form of **collective solidarity**, found within the BLM movement that led to expressions of unity through global uprisings, the rise of community support in the wake of state failure, and the virus revealing our interconnection.





### One message, two meanings

“I can’t breathe” was the cross-over message heard in the different narrative spaces. It has a very different meaning depending on the deep logic of the original messenger. From its origins, a rallying cry that demands the respect of Black lives, it has become the chant of those who proclaim that individualism is the ultimate value to uphold. **This indicates that we must excavate deeper than the level of messaging to create a cultural shift.**

### Analysis summary: Narrative stagnation

Existing narratives are not allowing us to move collectively towards a transition. As of now, we are still vulnerable to any upcoming crisis, which should cause further death and further deepen inequalities. If we want to lift up the narratives that will support our society’s evolution, we need to turn our attention to the values. The value divide prevents us from moving toward caring about our collective survival. **This research reveals an opportunity to expand our definition of narrative and deepen our understanding of how narratives behave so that we can activate their evolutionary potential.**

### Our response: A framework for narrative dynamics

At Culture Hack, we see narratives as heterogeneous, complex, **social capacities** that allow for collective sense-making. Moreover, these narrative forms have their own genealogies and evolve, mutate, terminate and converge. All narratives live within an ecosystem of mutually-embedded narrative bodies - we call this ecosystem the narrative space. For example, as we studied the Covid and BLM ***narrative spaces*** we found multiple, sometimes commensurate, sometimes competing ***narrative forms***, that live side-by-side. Narratives are virtual repositories for belief systems and can be shaped with intention toward evolution.

### Cultural evolution is necessary

Science (and even Truth) has failed to guide us away from the sheer face of extinction. To address this **we must develop heuristics that can function as a better set of truth criteria for our narratives - thought-forms that govern every aspect of our lives.** Narratives are not only sense making machines in the face of uncertainty, they are the very substance of our social reality. Therefore it is critical that we understand what cultural evolution means. The current moment of transition indeed requires a much greater shift in our collective consciousness. This shift requires transforming our understanding of our world, **not merely as interdependent but deeply entangled and animistic.** This view of reality reveals the world not as interconnected but as ***mutually caused***; for example we do not see nature as something we must save but as something that we are. Examples of this type of narrative environment are found in ancient wisdom cultures around the world, and the few remaining ones display the highest levels of social, ecological and cultural resilience.

### Reframing

We view frames as the meaning-making operations of a narrative form, infusing underlying logics into memes and communicable ideas -- messages. Therefore the frame rather than the message is an important intervention point in any culture hack. We propose a framework for elucidating existing frames in a narrative space through empirical research. Further, we propose a framework for interrogating and producing evolutionarily fruitful frames that contribute to system syntropy.



### Evolutionary narratives

We can define the following criteria/heuristics for narratives for the transition or, given our journey into the narrative forms, what we now rather call “evolutionary narrative frames”:

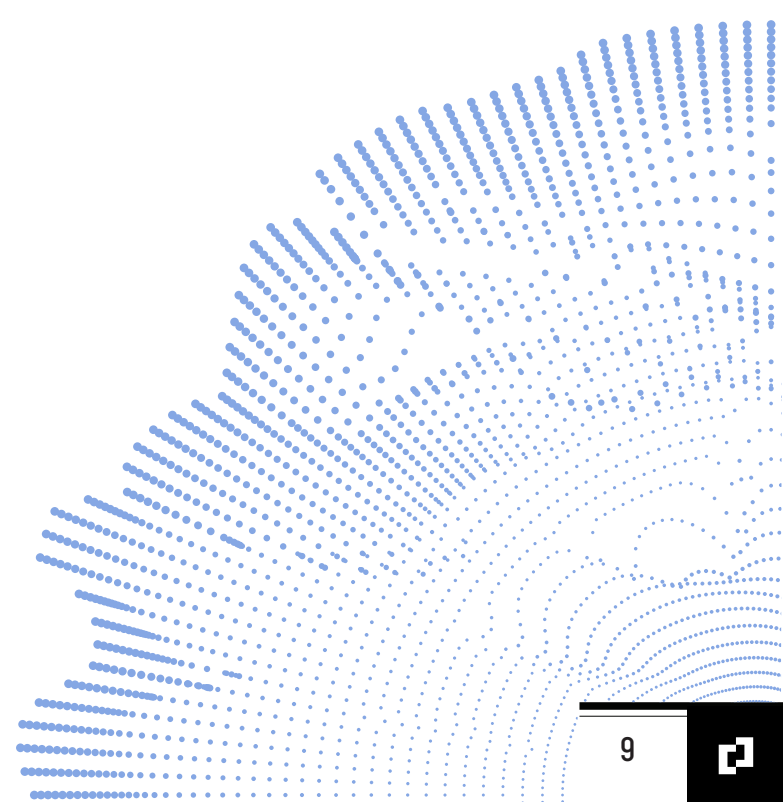
- 1. Does it privilege the possibility for system syntropy?
- 2. Does it bring attention to the structural drivers of the situation of concern?
- 3. Can it integrate the narrative forms that are observed within the narrative space? In the case of our current analysis: individual freedom and collective solidarity.
- 4. Can it elicit deeper levels of empathy?

### Syntropic Reframes

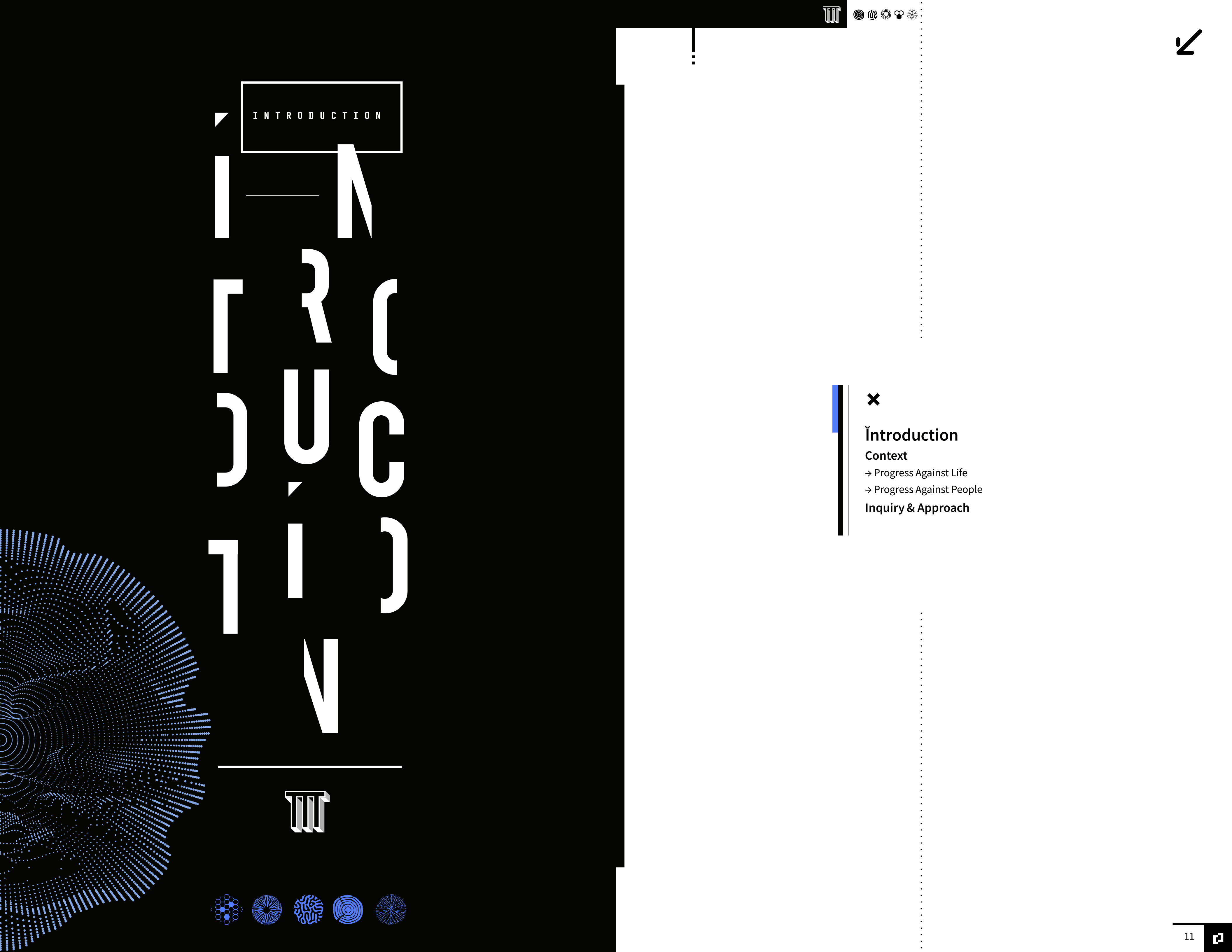
Through the shift of the basic understanding of identity within these narrative environments we can evolve to a post-anthropocentric paradigm. This will lead our cultural forms into greater levels of entrainment and order to achieve the overall outcome of system syntropy, as it pertains both to social and ecological issues.

From our perspective, this is what cultural evolution means: the constant phasic shift from entropic narrative environments to syntropic narrative environments, through a widening definition of identity; the emerging phase being an animistic/quantum view of Self.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION



## Introduction

### Context

- Progress Against Life
- Progress Against People

### Inquiry & Approach







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“

There are certain words in the technical vocabulary of every academic discipline that tend after a while to become stereotype and clichés, there is a word in modern psychology which is now probably more familiar than any other word in psychology. It is the word maladjusted; it is the ringing cry of the new child, psychology – maladjusted. And as a minister seeing and counseling with people every day concerning their problems and their maladjustments, I’m certainly concerned with those who are maladjusted, concerned to see everybody as adjusted as possible. But I want to leave this evening saying to you that there are some things in our social system that I’m proud to be maladjusted to, and I call upon you to be maladjusted too. I never intend to adjust myself to the viciousness of lynch mobs; I never intend to become adjusted to the evils of segregation and discrimination; I never intend to become adjusted to the tragic inequalities of the economic system which will take necessity from the masses to give luxury to the classes; I never intend to become adjusted to the insanity of militarism, the self-defeating method of physical violence. There are some things that I never intend to become adjusted too, and I call upon you to continue to be maladjusted.”

~ Martin Luther King, Jr



# INTRODUCTION

## ✕ About

The motivation for this work has emerged from a gathering at The Schumacher Center for New Economics in February 2020. This gathering, The Esoteric Dimensions of Climate Change, brought together a group of practitioners to think together about critical issues around climate change.

Given the global pandemic of Covid-19 that dominated the global stage from March 2020, we believe this work is more critical than ever. As the old adage goes, “We are prisoners of context in the absence of meaning.” As we all grapple with this unprecedented time of death, economic recession, and an unfolding climate crisis, we are, particularly now, in search of meaning that can help us understand our role, our mission and what we ought to do to survive as a civilization.

However, what we currently observe is a growing polarization, at multiple levels of society, almost everywhere. Crudely speaking, there are two opposing ideological reactions to a common underlying sense of crisis. On one side, rising authoritarianism, powered by reactive and heavily propagandized nationalism that weaponizes deep reservoirs of fear, resentment, racism and xenophobia; on the other side, a new wave of progressive ‘resistance’ movements that increasingly target the fundamental logic of the systems we live within, and seek to dismantle or in other ways replace them. Each sees the other as a prime disturber of the peace and/or principal barrier to the change they believe necessary. Thus, there is a deep zero-sum logic at play - one wins only if the other loses.

Herein lies the most essential challenge. To survive collectively, a shift must occur, at some level and with an as yet unspecified degree of clarity and force, away from the zero-sum, win/lose logics that pervade today’s dominant narratives, towards win/win. This requires new senses of meaning to emerge in the collective narrative space that can ‘organically’ bridge divides and help make the instinct to peacefully transition away from the extractive logic of neoliberal capitalism to an ecologically and culturally regenerative operating system appear as common-sense to the greatest possible number of people, because our fates are bound together by the fact that we are all facing the same existential threats. These are narratives of transition.

## ✕ Why is this important?

2020 will almost certainly be remembered as a seminal year in human affairs. In less than six months, we have witnessed a succession of events that perfectly illustrate the interlocking challenges of our times: the **Australian and the Amazon fires, a pandemic, a global movement for Black lives, an unfolding global economic recession.**

The media environment - just like, in some ways, individual consciousnesses - has been overwhelmed by this onslaught. As each wave crashes over us, and is refracted through the near-infinite number of hyper-personalized media bubbles social media has created, the ability to make or sustain the collective sense of meaning required to make progress is further undermined. That’s the bad news.

However, there is also good news. Just as polarization is definitely and currently a source of chaos and fear, it can also be a source of hope, when seen in narrative terms. For genuinely new narratives to emerge, old ones must first lose logical coherence. We are certainly witnessing that right now, and so that pre-condition can be said to exist. Then, as the two (albeit crude) narratives described above stretch ever-further from each other - each pushed apart by their opposing senses of what is wrong and why, while agreeing that something is - the tension created is a powerful condition that may prove precisely what is required for profoundly original win/win narratives to emerge and take hold. The tension is a space of dynamic creativity and it contains, at least in potential, a powerful survival imperative to not allow political polarization to descend into full-blown conflict, within and/or between countries. New narratives of this depth and scale can only emerge, they cannot be created in any simple sense or with much specificity, but we can posit with some confidence that they must be held together by realizations of interconnectedness; the interconnectedness of the crises, and the corresponding interconnectedness of our fates.







Thus, the existential depths of the crises also represent the transformational scale of opportunities before us.

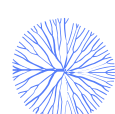
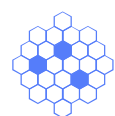
This is a race against time. Can peaceful transition narratives emerge before any descent into generalized conflict, or the system as a whole is overwhelmed by ecological or other shocks? It is, of course, impossible to know, and so the only option is to do what we can to support the emergence of narratives that make peaceful transition more probable than wars and collapse.

## ✕ Who are we?

We are a small team of narrative researchers from [Culture Hack Labs](#) seeking to develop a collective base of knowledge for actions within ‘the transition’.

We represent a network of people located in different locations, embedded in different cultures. We are therefore able to tune to different narrative ecosystems, and yet, we are trained to see the convergence and the bridges between systems, beyond Nation States and borders.

As citizens, humans, and members of this generation, we are very much part of this moment. We have felt, experienced and witnessed together - yet in isolation - the global lockdown starting in the spring of 2020, the BLM uprisings, the following crackdowns, and we see our own lives being impacted by this moment.



## CONTEXT

“ If the new belligerent discourses about the alleged superiority of the West are expressed in terms of the legacy of secular Humanism, while the most vehement opposition to them takes the form of post-secular practices of politicized religion, where can an anti-humanist position rest? To be simply secular would be complicitous with neo-colonial Western supremacist positions, while rejecting the Enlightenment legacy would be inherently contradictory for any critical project. The vicious circle is stifling.”

**Rosi Braidotti**, *The Posthuman*.

## Humanist Foundations of Progress

As we grapple with unprecedented ecological and social crises, there can be no doubt that human progress has amounted to a more precarious existence for all of us. In the face of the last four hundred years of unrestricted 'human progress', we must ask questions about the actual meaning of 'being human' and, as we envision this transition to a post Anthropocentric world; what it will mean to be 'post human'. As [Rosi Braidotti](#) has explained in *The Posthuman*, the question of what it means to be 'human' was first asked (in the Western tradition) by Foucault in *The Order of Things*; who uncouples the values of individualism and rationality from human nature. It is through this incision in the armor of progress that we must search for new life affirming alternatives and post-Anthropocentric codes to live by - this is the only recourse at this late hour.

The *humanist ideology* found its roots in Ancient Greek, Vedic and Proto European belief systems that rejected the deities of our collective animistic mythologies in favor of a new value system of pragmatism, individualism and self determinacy. This newfound individualist fervor fueled a new understanding of Man (as it explicitly refers to White European Men), that as Braidotti emphasizes, instills a set of mental, discursive and spiritual values. These values, which emphasize human agency, freedom and a misplaced notion of absolute morality, became the emblem of Europeans as an unparalleled colonial and imperial force in the world. The currency of this maneuver is rooted in the demotion of other - that is, Man is defined in what he is not: *female, black, poor, heretic, etc.* Similarly, in the Enlightenment that followed this, Europeans not only considered Europe to be the site of genesis of a higher form of reason, but also of a perfect Newtonian physics and a superior Kantian morality. This in turn, became the irrevocable license for the limitless expansion of Man towards his own perfection - the ultimate goal of the humanistic impulse.

“ This makes Eurocentrism into more than just a contingent matter of attitude: it is a structural element of our cultural practice, which is also embedded in both theory and institutional and pedagogical practices.”

**Rosi Braidotti**, *The Posthuman*.

This structural, cultural and political system has become the dominant force behind progress in all its forms and has infected every part of our lives. Therefore, we must make a critical distinction between its espoused and intrinsic values and ultimately deconstruct the deep belief systems that justify it. It is clear that [progress is against life](#) and [against people](#); and the espoused values of freedom, pragmatism and unbounded human potential have not been realized. However we see instead, a life-destroying impulse that is driven by a cultural code of ‘survival of the fittest’. This drive, which has had a multitude of expressions in the last four hundred years, is rooted in a [metaphysics of presence](#) that frames the world as merely resource (standing reserve) for human endeavor. It is this specific [mind virus of consumption](#), which is blind to the interdependence and contingency of human life, that must be addressed and transformed.

This cultural pattern, has evolved and transformed into many different human activity systems, and moved through distinct phases and two control systems. As we have seen, the demotion of the other is the fuel upon which this cultural system thrives, and so a key mechanism of these systems are the development of control systems that aim to extract biopower from human and non-human life.



“We are taught that corporations have a soul, which is the most terrifying news in the world.” Gilles Deleuze. Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953 - 1974. [Semiotext(e) 2004]

The History of The Control System

An often overlooked part of the cultural analysis that is at the heart of our work, is the identification of *narrative environments*. Narrative environments are habitats in which a certain species of narrative forms my live and flourish, creating the basic conditions for them to thrive. Within the above analysis of the humanist foundations of progress we can see that the very oxygen of this environment is the ‘demotion of other’ (see [Nonlinear & Ecosystemic Forms](#)). We can extrapolate from this three evolutionary phases of the narrative of progress, described below.

A. Control System One - The Disciplinary Narrative Environment

This environment is typified by enclosures of human and non-human life as means of control and more specifically the transformation of life force into power. Foucault, in his description of modern European societies, shows that the basic unit of these societies are apparatuses of psychological and biological control through perpetual surveillance and behavior modification. This distinction creates a power relationship between those who are under surveillance and those who are executing the surveillance.

B. Reforming Control System One - Collective Identity Narrative Environment

The second environment developed in response to many of the cultural and social effects of the disciplinary narrative environment. In this system, we have the emergence of new forms of collective identity that aim to transcend the inherent logic of ‘control over’, coveted by control system one. We see these epitomized by the fascist and marxist cultural codes that emerged strongly in the 20th Century. However, because these systems maintained the metaphysics of presence and therefore the corollary of ‘power over’ (nature, other) these systems in no way transcended its basic cultural code. Indeed these systems have only become perverse and exponentially extended disciplinary systems that achieved the greatest expression of the ‘control over’ impulse.

C. Control System Two - The Control Narrative Environment

This evolution in the disciplinary environment aims to modulate ‘freedoms’ through the co-optation of the basic motivational and competitive force that pervades these societies. This drive itself is born from an innate understanding of the world as other, as reserve and as capital - an unavoidable result of the metaphysics of presence. In this motivational, incentivized control society we are measured by our performance metrics, revenue quotas and are mediated by intricate competitive algorithms that pervade every measure of our life. In this society we are not controlled directly but deeply by the very fundamental assertions of what is real, true and sane.

Control is not discipline. you do not confine people with a highway. But by making highways, you multiply the means of control, people can travel infinitely and “freely” without being confined while being perfectly controlled. Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953 - 1974. [Semiotext(e) 2004]

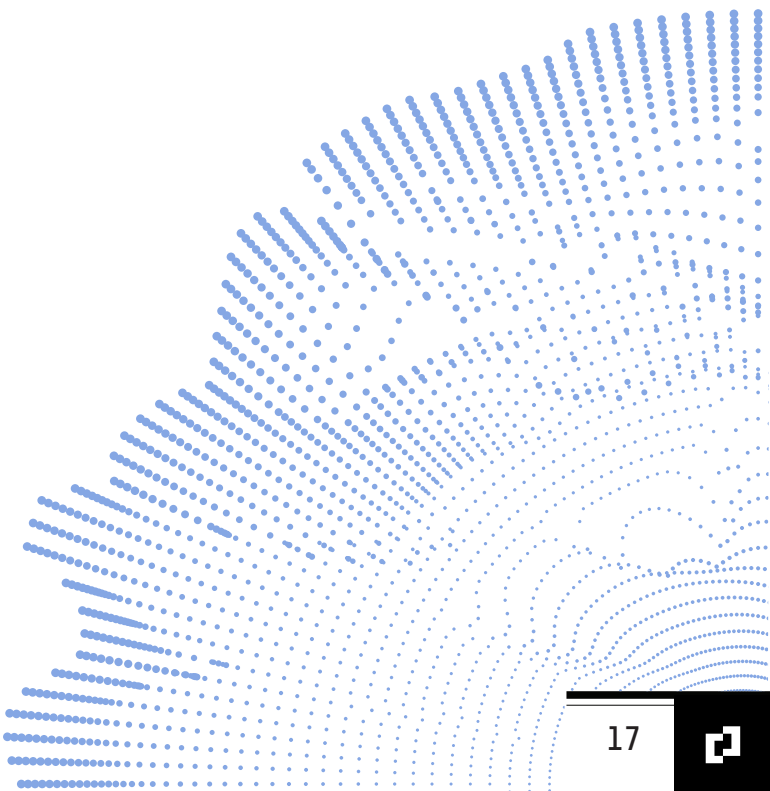
The question we sit with now, in these times of transition, is how can we deconstruct this system of [necropolitics](#) and [institutionalized cognitive capitalism](#); and from this orientate ourselves towards life-centric and life-affirming alternatives. It is specifically this problem that this report hopes to address, at this critical moment of transformation.

Imagining the Posthuman

The new challenge for critical discourse in general and narrative work specifically is not more merely the deconstruction and analysis of the subject but the development of a posthuman and life affirming ethics. This quantum view of the world sees that subjects, individuals and all things as intimately bound - we are not together but we are united in our differentiation, united in our diversity and united in our fate.

The post-anthropocentric shift away from the hierarchical relations that had privileged ‘Man’ requires a form of estrangement and a radical repositioning on the part of the subject. The best method to accomplish this is through the strategy of de-familiarization or critical distance from the dominant vision of the subject. Dis-identification involves the loss of familiar habits of thought and representation in order to pave the way for creative alternatives. Deleuze would call it an active ‘deterritorialization’. Race and post-colonial theories have also made important contributions to the methodology and the political strategy of de-familiarization. Rosi Braidotti. The Posthuman.2005

These times of catastrophe, collapse and breakdown show that our understanding of who we are and what our purpose is in this web of life needs a critical reappraisal. To imagine what will come will require a new set of values, belief systems and narratives yet it will reinstantiate many of the archaic values at the roots of our cultures.

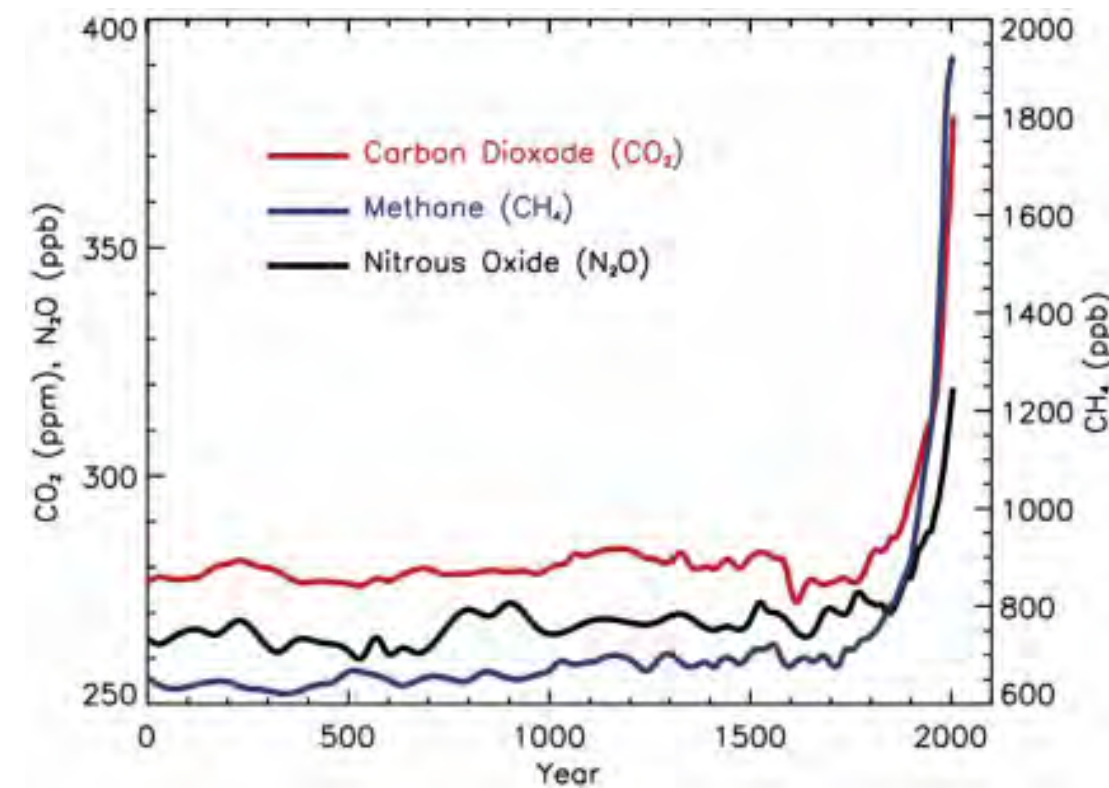




## ✕ Progress Against Life

Although there is evidence that we can measure [anthropogenic effects from pre-industrial times](#), we see the greatest anthropogenic effects from the [beginning of the industrial revolution](#). It is human activity that is now pushing the planet to the sixth mass extinction:

- Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> has increased due to the burning of fossil fuels from 120 ppm before the industrial revolution to 400 ppm today.
- The amount of nitrogen and phosphorous in our soils has doubled due to agricultural products - an event unprecedented in 2.5 billion years.
- The age of nuclear experimentation during the 1950's and 60's has left an indelible mark of toxic radio isotopes on the world and facilitated what we today call [carbon dating](#).



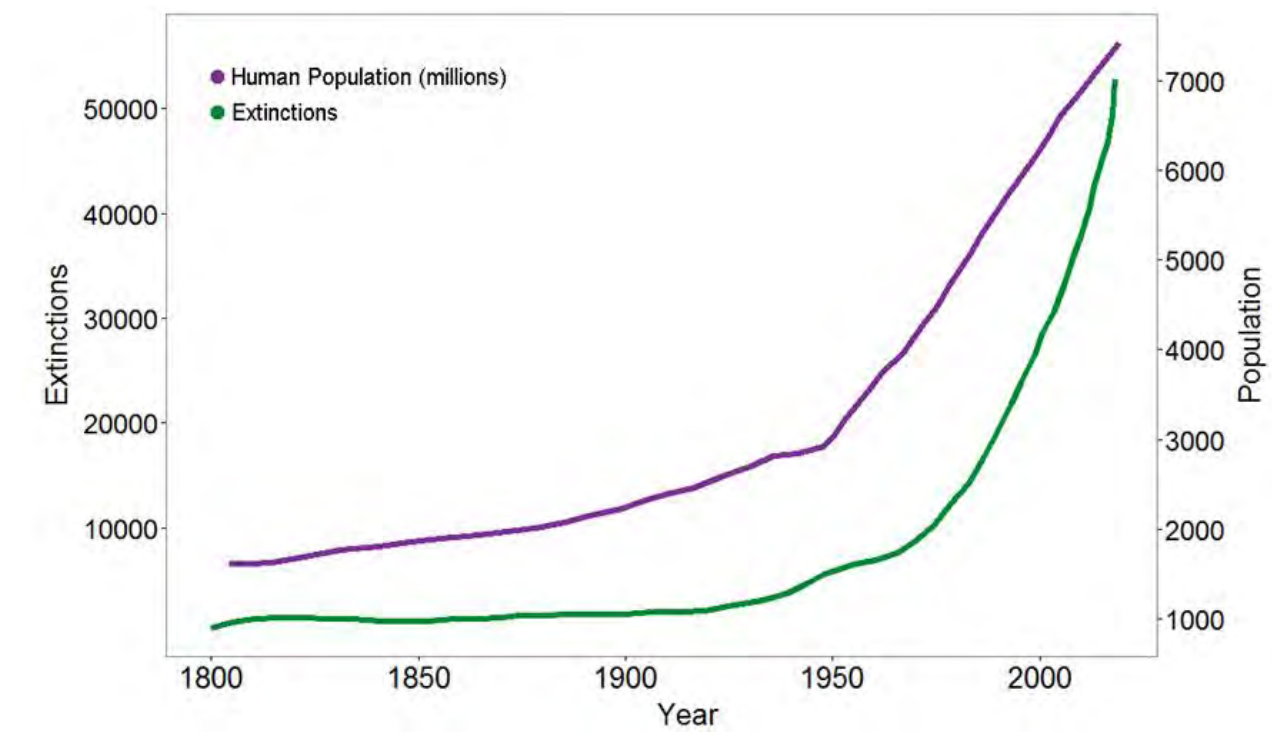
- In this graph taken from the IPCC's fourth report (2007) we can see that in the last 2000 years concentrations of CO<sub>2</sub>, CH<sub>4</sub>, and N<sub>2</sub>O – three important long-lived greenhouse gases – have increased substantially since about 1750. This largely due to the increase in human activity from the beginning of the industrial revolution (1800).
- The current increases in these gases is largely due to a [competition between emissions and sinks](#). However even as emissions increase we continue to destroy the essential sinks that counteract these. Of critical importance are the wildfires in the Amazon. These fires that are principally caused by illegal land grabs for agricultural expansion, and has affected one fifth of the Amazon - the world's largest carbon sink.
- [20% of the amazon in now a net carbon emitter](#).

With these significant increases in factors we also see a huge reduction in species diversity:

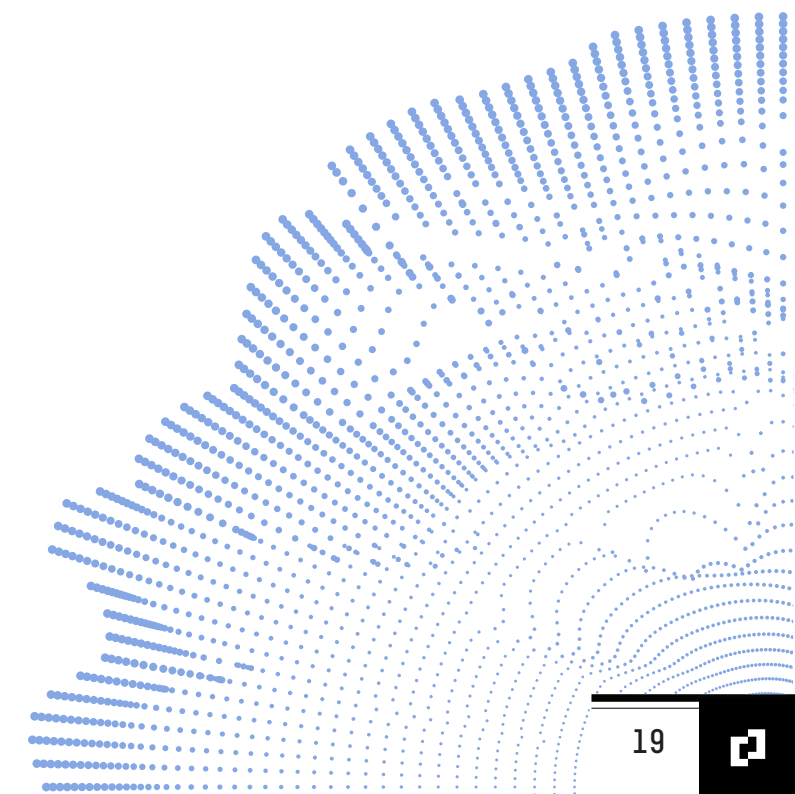
- 1 million animal and plant species are now threatened with extinction, many within decades, more than ever before in human history.  
According to [this study](#):
- Humans make up just 0.01 percent of the biomass on Earth, but have managed to wipe out 83 percent of all wild mammals and cut the plant biomass in half during our time on this planet.
- When you look at mammals specifically, humans make up 36 percent of all the mammals on the planet, with just 4 percent being wild animals. This means that humans and their livestock make up 96% of mammalian biomass.
- Today, the biomass of humans and the biomass of livestock far surpass that of wild mammals.
- This is also true for wild and domesticated birds, for which the biomass of domesticated poultry is about threefold higher than that of wild birds. In fact, humans and livestock outweigh all vertebrates combined, with the exception of fish.
- Let's say that again. **The biomass of humans and the biomass of livestock far surpass that of wild mammals.** Most of this mass is the mass of animals that we slaughter for food:
- It is estimated that [72 billion land animals](#) are slaughtered every year, that is 10 times the human population of this planet.

- Furthermore, although meat uses [77% of agricultural land](#) (40 million square kilometers) it only makes up 18% of the global calorie supply.
- We also find a strong correlation showing that [the greater the GDP per capita](#), the higher meat consumption.

Finally, as we can see here, there is a direct correlation between species extinction and human population growth:



Since the industrial revolution, and then at exponential rates since the 1960's, we have destroyed species in favor of unrestricted growth.

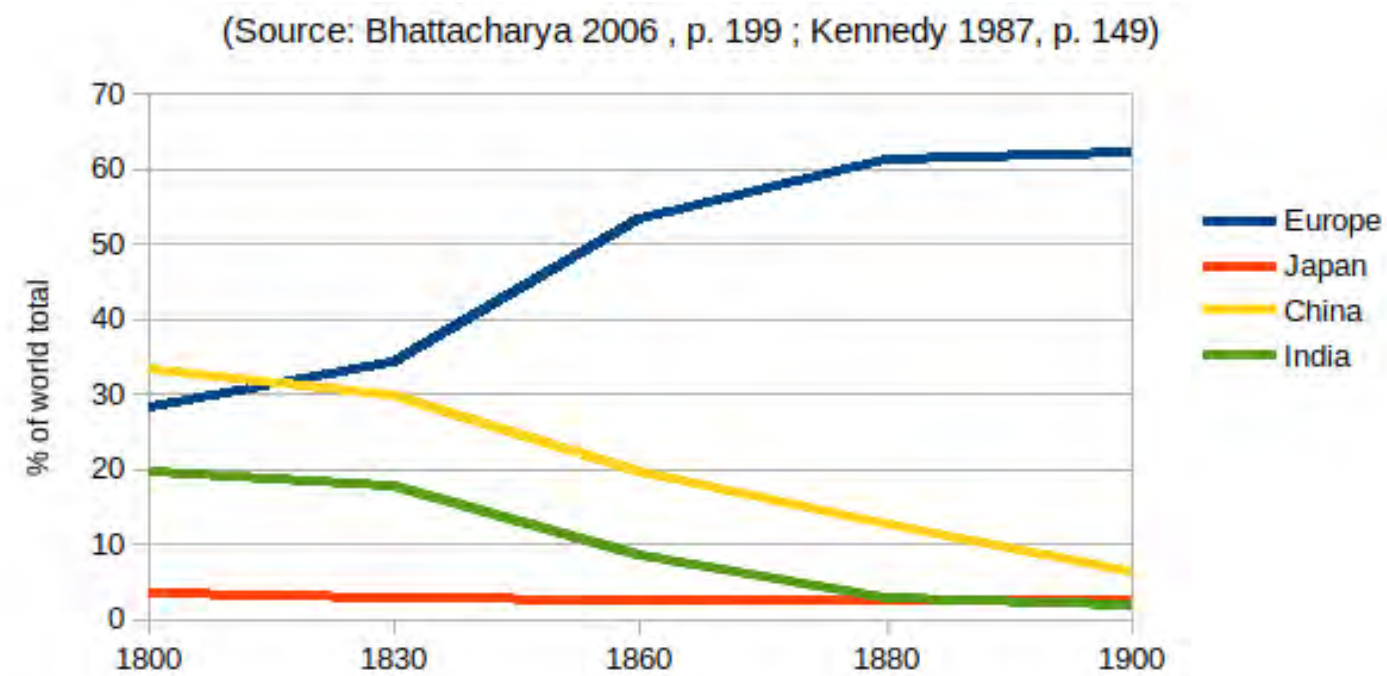




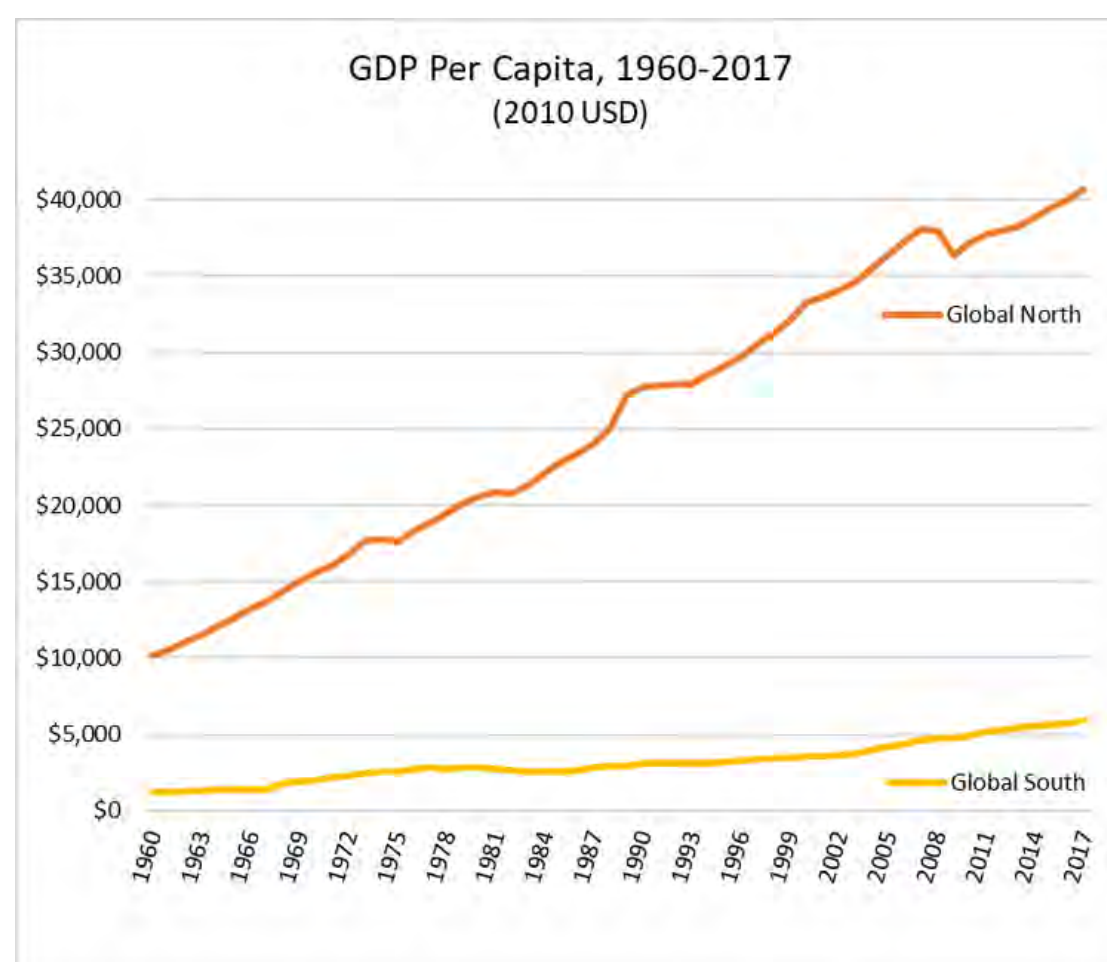
## ✗ Progress Against People

Contrary to what the rosy narrative of progress would have you believe, the immense cost of progress has not come at the benefit of all. Conversely only a small fraction have benefitted from the desecration and destruction of our planet.

1. Since the start of the Industrial Revolution global inequality was fueled by increased manufacturing output by

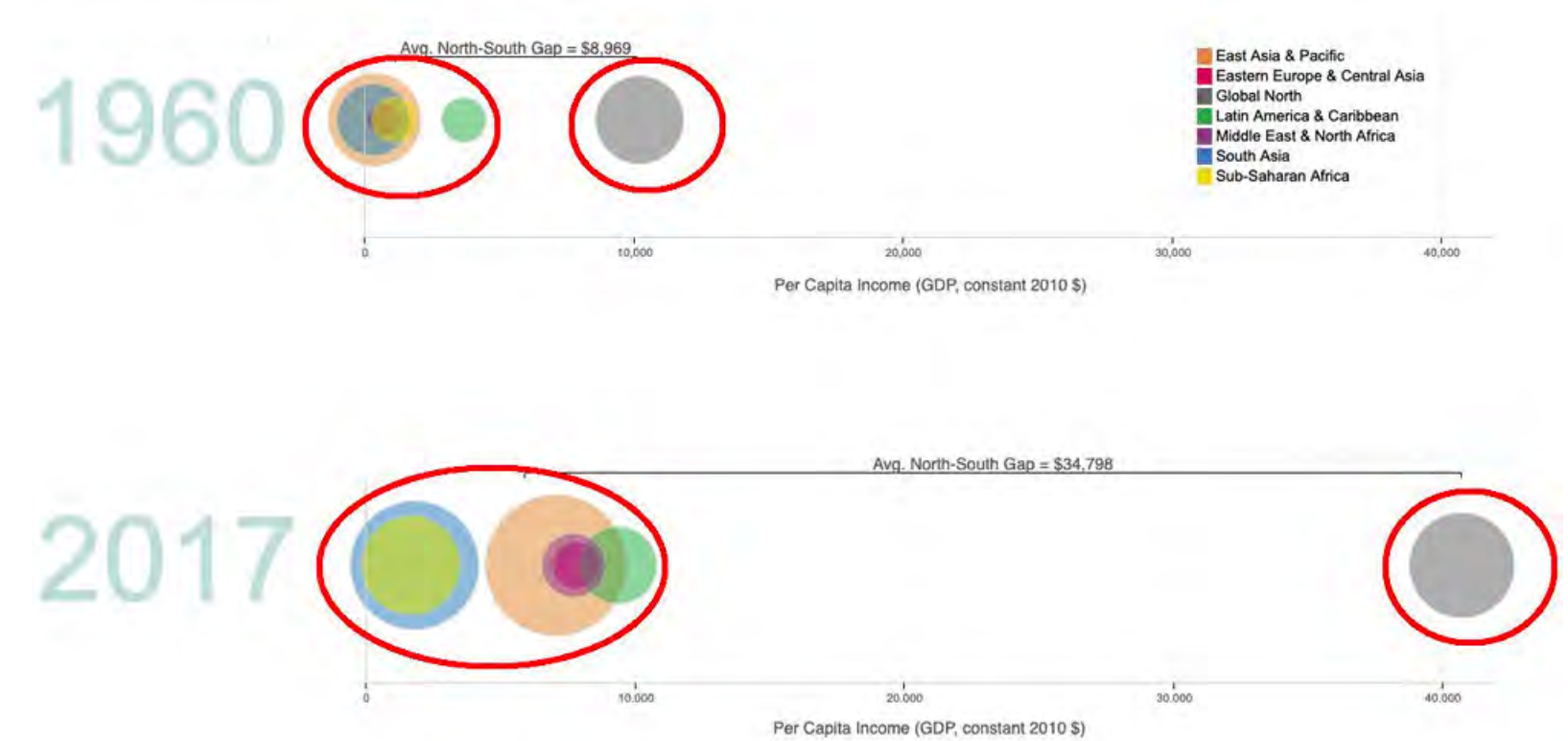


2. This inequality has increased inordinately in the Neoliberal era in absolute terms. As we can see from the graph below in 2017 we there is a \$35,000 difference in GDP per capita between the Global North and Global South. This difference in absolute terms, transcends any relative improvements in GDP per capita in the Global South.



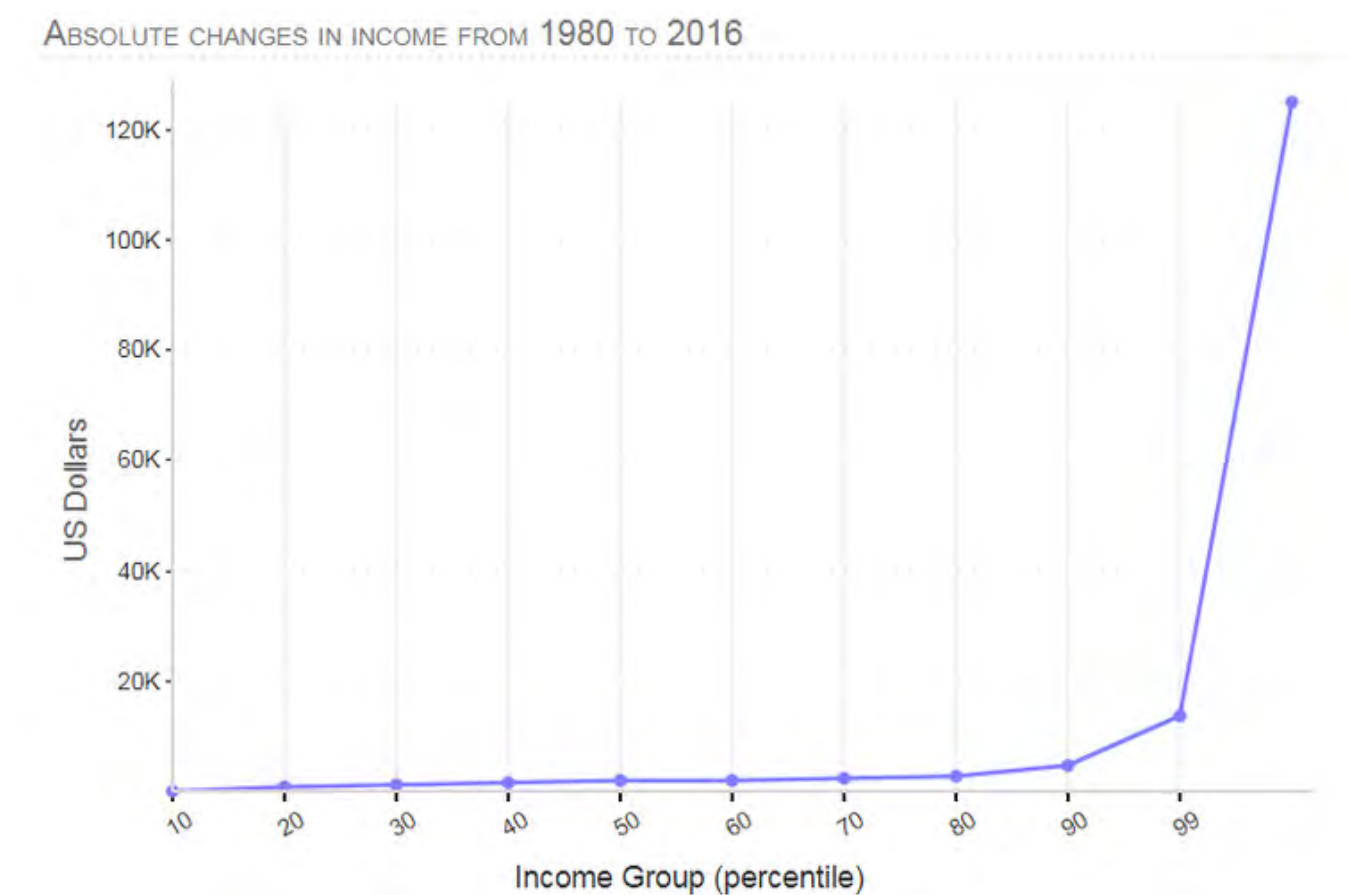
“Take for example a poor country whose average income goes from \$500 to \$1,000 (a 100% increase), and a rich country whose income goes from \$50,000 to \$75,000 (a 50% increase). The poor country's income has grown twice as fast as the rich country's, relative to its starting point. According to the relative metric, this is a decline in inequality (and is represented as such in the Gini index, the elephant graph, and the log scale). But the gap between them has nonetheless exploded, from \$45,500 to \$74,000. According to the absolute metric, inequality has worsened.” Jason Hickel. [How not to measure inequality](#).2019

3. Even though per capita income has increased in the global South, the North has captured the vast majority of new income generated by global growth since the 1960's.



“The global economy has been organized to facilitate the North's access to cheap labour, raw materials, and captive markets in the South - today just as during the colonial period. Sure, some important things have obviously changed. But the countries of the North still control a vastly disproportionate share of voting power in the World Bank and the IMF, the institutions that control the rules of the global economy. They control a disproportionate share of bargaining power in the World Trade Organization. They wield leverage over the economic policy of poorer countries through debt. They control the majority of the world's secrecy jurisdictions, which enable multinational companies to extract untaxed profits out of the South. They retain the ability to topple foreign governments whose economic policies they don't like, and occupy countries they consider to be strategic in terms of resources and geography.” Jason Hickel. [Two Hump World](#).2019

4. It is the richest 1% who have been the sole beneficiaries of GDP growth in the last 35 years - a period where the biggest anthropogenic effects have been incurred on planetary life.



As we can see in the side graph, if we look at the absolute changes in income, we can see that the inordinate inequality of income between the 99th percentile and any other income group.



The detail, in absolute terms, can be seen in more detail below:

Percentile	1980	2016	Absolute change	% change
0 – 10	\$423	\$616	\$193	46%
10 – 20	\$876	\$1,592	\$716	82%
20 – 30	\$1,203	\$2,426	\$1,223	102%
30 – 40	\$1,762	\$3,426	\$1,664	94%
40 – 50	\$2,848	\$4,715	\$1,867	66%
50 – 60	\$4,495	\$6,440	\$1,944	43%
60 – 70	\$6,845	\$9,015	\$2,170	32%
70 – 80	\$10,581	\$13,447	\$2,866	27%
80 – 90	\$16,780	\$21,565	\$4,785	29%
90 – 99	\$32,753	\$46,492	\$13,739	42%
99 – 100	\$145,094	\$269,991	\$124,897	86%
And if we disaggregate the 1%...				
99 – 99.9	\$100,754	\$169,744	\$68,990	68%
99.9 – 99.99	\$373,253	\$694,666	\$321,414	86%
99.99 – 99.999	\$1,400,730	\$3,252,951	\$1,852,221	132%
99.999 – 100	\$8,216,276	\$25,425,483	\$17,209,207	209%

- From this we can see that between 1980 and 2016 (36 years):
- For the poorest 60% of humanity, the average person saw a \$1,200 increase in their income
  - The 70-80th percentile gained more than twice that amount
  - The 80-90th percentile gained four times more
  - The richest 1% gained one hundred times more
  - Finally for the richest individuals earning up to 14,000 times more than the poorest

It is important from this perspective to remember at what cost this has come at, as we have shown in [Progress Against Life](#) this has brought about widespread ecological devastation, species extinction and climate collapse.

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# INQUIRY & APPROACH

## ✕ Our Inquiry

Based on the context we described, and the current moment we are witnessing, this report revolves around one essential inquiry that we believe is determining to seize the transformational opportunity of this time in history: How can we best leverage the power of narratives to transform culture in order to bring society to transition from a life-destructive and life-exploitative system towards a life-centric and life-affirming future?

## ✕ Our approach

We believe that how we do something is as important as what we do. Therefore, we are implementing two approaches to this research.

1. Practicing deep listening
2. Taking a systems view

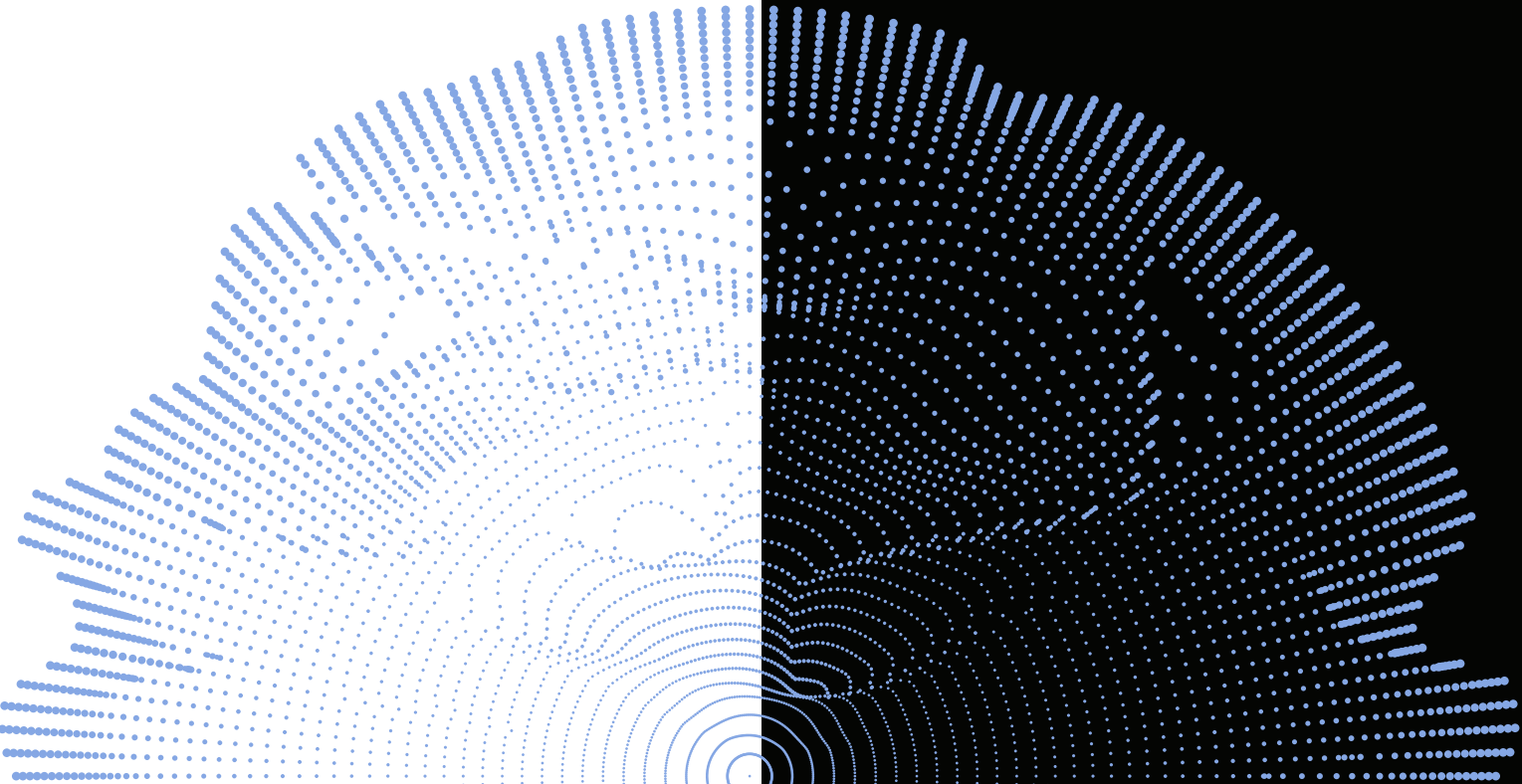
### Deep Listening

Rather than attempting to control or intervene in the narrative landscape, we first must understand it. We do not aim to develop a model that asserts it already knows what needs to be done, one that still employs old logics of centralized ‘command and control’. We believe that we must begin this process through deep listening into where the new moments of change are occurring and what they are revealing to us. In this way a collective body of knowledge, common understanding and shared purpose can be forged.

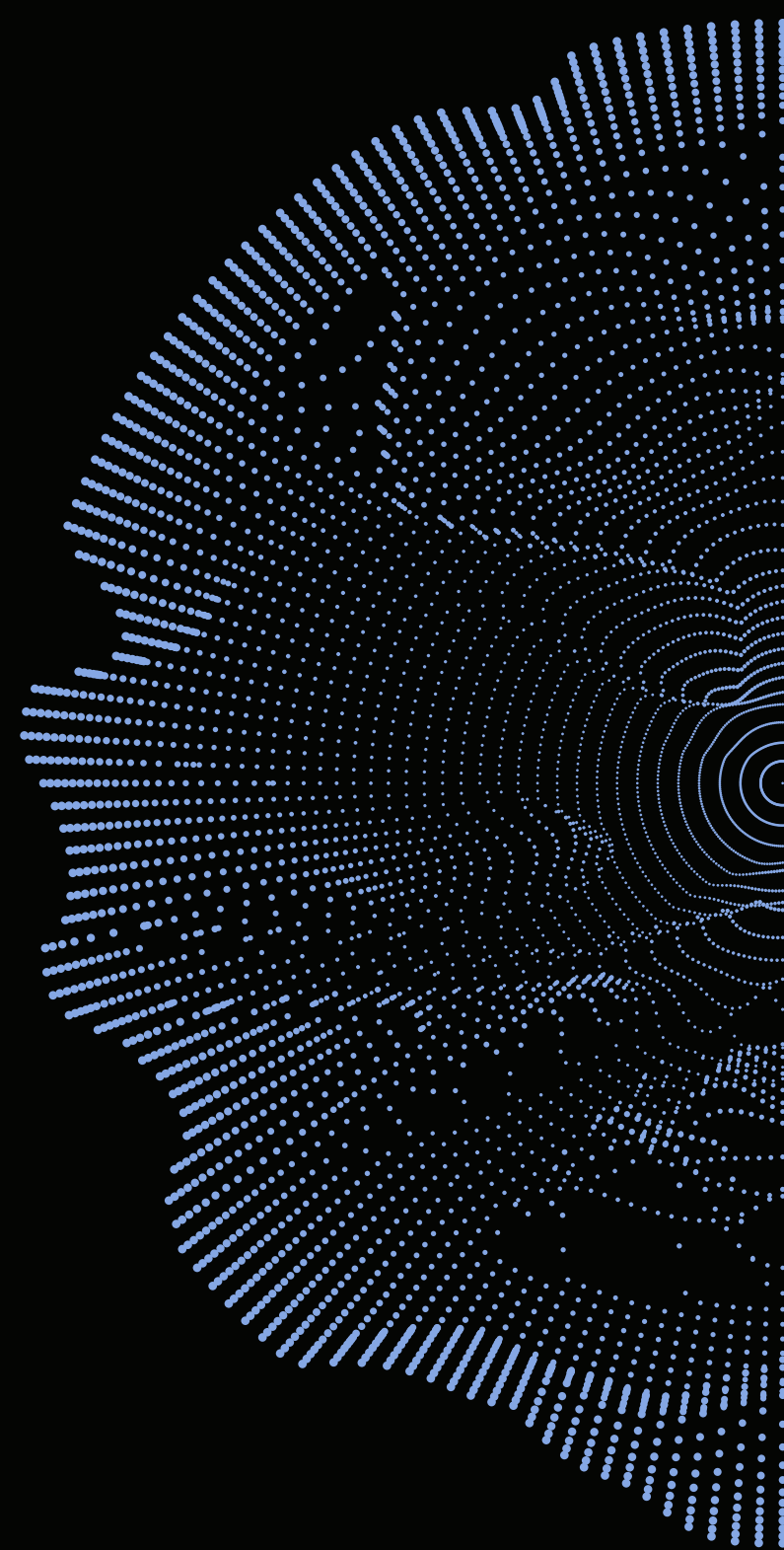
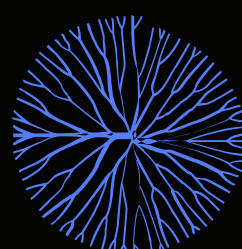
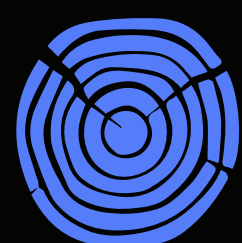
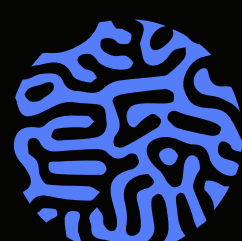
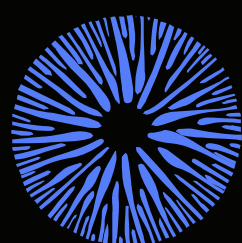
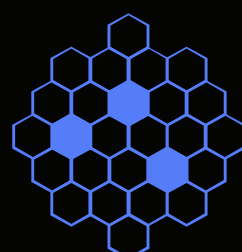
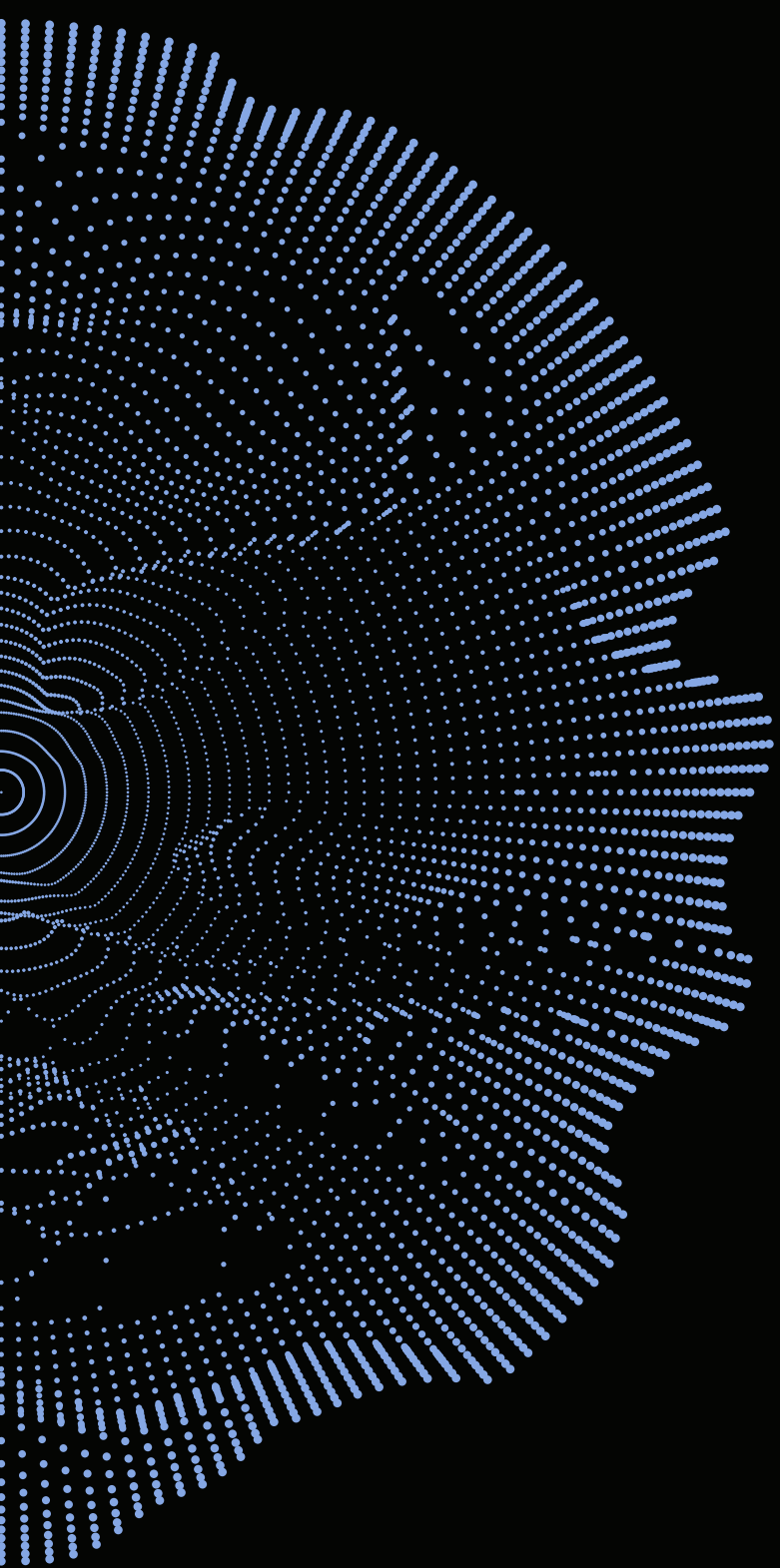
### Systems View

The [Overview Effect](#) refers to the phenomenon that many astronauts experience when they go up in space and look back at the Earth as a whole. From this perspective, they see interconnectedness instead of separation. They see that all things are connected, that the earth is one system. Astronauts that experience this have a profound mind-shift and return to Earth as changed people dedicating their lives to sharing this now embodied wisdom.

Our approach with this research is to apply the concept of the Overview Effect to the symbolic landscape that defines our culture. Depending on the level of granularity in a system that we look at, we see different things. This approach leads with taking a systems view, connecting the dots, and seeing the whole. This allows us to expand our definition of what a narrative is and deepen our understanding of how it behaves. This gives way to broadening our perspective to see the metaphysical level of culture and how it is constructed so that we may better understand how to evolve it.











LISTENING MODEL

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# LISTENING MODEL

We have created a listening model to guide our search into the narrative space.

The listening model sets the parameters of our search.

It contains:

- 1. The objectives that structures our search
- 2. Our hypotheses that guides our inquiry
- 3. The research methodology for our data collection and analysis



## Listening Model

→ Objectives

→ Hypotheses

- ≈ The Transition is Imminent
- ≈ A Cultural Shift: A Shift of Consciousness
- ≈ A Rupture in Time: birthing a new future, addressing the past

→ Research Approach

- ≈ Methodology: data collection
- ≈ Methodology: data analysis
- ≈ Research process

# OBJECTIVES

Our listening model is anchored in our objectives for this report which are two-fold.

## 1. Identify the dominant narratives of the moment

Through a descriptive analysis our objective is to surface the narratives of this moment, the narratives that are currently helping people make sense of recent events and comprehend reality. We are interested in identifying what this tells us about our current humanity: Where are we? What do we want?

## 2. Identify the narratives for transition

Not all narrative forms have equal capacity for a collective evolution, some are better suited than others. Once we have surveyed the narratives of the moment, through a prescriptive analysis, we will then seek to assess their capacity to support a transition away from the extractive logic of neoliberal capitalism to an ecologically, culturally regenerative and life affirming system.





# HYPOTHESES

To anchor our inquiry, we offer three hypotheses to describe the current moment. We believe they ultimately inform the narratives that are emerging in this moment and could guide us towards the narratives that can support our evolution.

**The transition is imminent.** We cannot forget Covid-19 was preceded by other significant crisis that had mobilized our attention and spurred us to take actions. It has been followed by a global wave of anti-racist protests that seem to maintain and accelerate the life-changing nature of the year 2020. We believe that these crisis connect and that narratives are intersecting to create the new narrative(s) for the world we are collectively envisioning.

**A cultural shift: the evolution of consciousness.** We have collectively experienced the imminence of our death as humans. What the climate justice movement keeps bringing to our awareness, Covid-19 has made very vivid and tangible. Our existence is transient. We believe this has altered our collective consciousness; a new mindset is appearing with a renewed sense of urgency for change. This, in turn, unlocks many possibilities for radical changes.

**A rupture in time.** As a result of the evolution of consciousness, we are seeing a rupture in time: a new world trying to break away from the old world. Those seeking the rupture from the past are summoning us to believe an alternative future is possible and necessary. They question the past and want to address its legacy of traumas and injustice. However, we also see a surge of forces seeking to protect the status quo. As a result, we are at a juncture with multiple bifurcations for the world that will come next.

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## ✕ The Transition is Imminent

Like other major and historical moments, the public health crisis that originated in the Covid-19 pandemic did not happen in a vacuum. Like earthquakes, historical moments are preceded by tremors and followed by aftershocks. They do not really come unannounced. They are in the making and once they happen, they crystallize the shift; there is no turning back. We believe the Covid-19 pandemic is our generation's earthquake.

It is easy to forget, for instance, that a couple of months prior to Covid-19, we were all holding our breath over a possible third world war as tensions escalated between the US and Iran. 2020 started with the drought-induced fires that ravaged the Australian bush. Then came Covid-19, and the world paused until George Floyd, a Black American man, was killed at the hands of the police. His murder has spurred a wave of global protests against racism. All of this has happened while the world was already witnessing the rise of authoritarianism, a spike in nationalism and a dramatic global rollback of our human rights. As these events are unfolding, climate change is the next crisis we all have in mind.

To make sense of the moment we are living, and how it will shift the global conversation and the new era, it will potentially usher us in, it is therefore important to consider the continuum of many events that have surrounded and created the conditions for the changes we are witnessing. They are telling us something beyond their individual occurrence. Together, they are telling us our collective story; they are telling us the transition is imminent.

If we were to map most recent events that have shaken our society, we could thus identify four major tectonic shifts or 'paradigm shifts' that have been underway, and which may be accelerated by the pandemic.

- **Our identity:** marginalized identities (race, gender, religion, etc.) are requesting justice, visibility and representation. The monopoly of dominant identities (white, male, cisgender, Euro/Anglo Saxon) is being challenged.
- **Our collective survival:** the climate crisis (fires, hurricanes, earthquakes, etc.) and the destruction of our environment (air pollution, water and soil pollution, etc.) are increasingly imperiling human lives. Covid and similar pandemics are additions to the list of life-threatening events.
- **Our political system:** across the globe, democracy is growingly at risk. Authoritarianism, populism, rigged elections have been common currency in the past ten years and more.
- **Our global economy:** the neoliberal economic model is not exempt of criticisms any longer. The 2008 economic crisis put a dent into the economic paradigm that characterized our global economies since the 1980s. High unemployment rates, widening inequalities, staggering poverty - these are some of the symptoms of a failing economic model.

Each paradigm shift is evolving separately presenting its own opportunities and aspirations for what the future could look like. However, they also overlap, feed into each other and eventually coalesce, showing that the transition is global and collective.

Where these paradigms intersect, we believe we can find the narratives that not only reveal our collective story but also indicate where we are going next.

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# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## ✕ A Cultural Shift: A Shift of Consciousness

With people having gone from social distancing to taking the streets and protesting against racism en masse, and as BLM is manifesting transnationally, it feels that we are going through a global awakening, an evolution of our collective consciousness. While we have already seen worldwide movements in action such as the March for Climate, something different is at play. There seems to be a sense of urgency for change.

We have indeed been reminded of our mortality. We have collectively experienced mourning at a scale our generation had never seen. This current moment is prompting us to re-think the meaning of our existence and our purpose on the planet.

We also seem to have re-activated our sense of outrage and refusal to accept the status quo. Covid-19 has brought new light to existing disparities, inequalities and vulnerabilities that many advocates and organizers had long been fighting. A renewed sense of collective solidarity and responsibility has emerged. People have organized through mutual aid groups often stepping in as leadership was failing.

Ultimately, what these profound changes signal is a cultural shift that will redefine what seems possible and what does not. It will most likely also change how we see and experience the present and plan the future.

## ✕ A Rupture in Time: Birthing a new future, addressing the past

There have been many defining moments in modern history. To name a few: The 20th century world wars which shaped the world order as we know it, the economic crashes of the 80s, the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Cold War, 9/11 and the beginning of the War on Terror, and so on.

These moments have marked their generation and shape the future. They represented turning points where the world we knew was altered forever. We believe the Covid-19 pandemic which has brought the world to pause will be remembered as one of these moments. In fact, the global spread of the movement for Black Lives is perhaps the first sign that the world has already shifted: there will be a before and an after.

As we experience a collective awakening, we are also unlocking the possibility of a new future. Through calls to defund the police to mutual aid actions and inter-solidarity between protests, we are witnessing people's capacity to tap into the power of imagination to build the new future. Yet, the promise of a new future is not without any opposition. Anti-BLM protesters, defenders of a "white European identity" are some of the manifestations that show the status quo is not easily shifted. As we conduct our analysis, we know we have to pay attention to this active side of the narrative space.

In fact, as we turn towards the future, we must also look at the past and make sense of its relationship with the present. How is the past informing the present, and how are they together determining the future? The taking down of colonial monuments that is happening across the globe must prompt us to consider this relationship. What will stay? What will change? The current moment also reminds us of our relationship with collective memory. Collectively and individually, we have honored the memory of those who died from Covid. Likewise, BLM protesters shout the names of those who died from police brutality. Narratives are also to be found in the memory we inherit from the past. They take form in our body and mind. There cannot be transition to a new future without considering the traumas and injustices of the past that exist in our collective consciousness and inform present behaviors, values and narratives.

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To conduct our research, we must proceed to collect and analyze the data we collected. The data will allow us to verify our hypotheses.

## ✕ Methodology: data collection

### What data communities are we listening to?

We our plugging our listening around three major data communities:

1. Covid
2. Black Lives Matter
3. Larger Narrative Moment

What we mean by data communities are the conversations occurring online around specific themes. Given our hypotheses and inquiry, we are focusing our listening to the two most recent key moments of 2020 - the Covid pandemic and the BLM uprisings - in the hope to capture the changes, the feelings, ideas but also the language that are characterizing the most the present moment.

We also tune our listening to online data that speaks more broadly about what this moment represents in the broader context of history - how is this moment talked about? Specifically, and by way of example, we are attentive to language or conversations around "the new normal", "transition", "the future", "cultural shift". Thus, we aim to seize a sample of data that can help us understand the symbolic significance of this time.

### How do we collect this data?

To collect this data, we have set out to conduct three types of data collection:

1. Big listening
2. Small listening
3. A Survey

**The big listening** relies fully on the use of data collection software to mine narratives. It will look at news media headlines and Twitter to lift up data around Covid, BLM and the Bigger Narrative Moment. The big listening also reveals a network analysis which shows who are the most influential voices.

**The small listening** consists of an individual user review of news media outlets (NYT, The Guardian, etc.) and the most used social media platforms (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter). In comparison to the Big listening, it is a manual inquiry into the data. Where the big listening provides us with a direction of where to look, the small listening revels textures and nuances to the date.

**The survey** is another way to obtain data through directly questioning a sample of the population. Through the design of questions, it acts as confirmation and validation of the data found in the big and small listening.

### Where did we listen and for how long?

The data was collected over four weeks starting from June 17 and ending with the week of July 6. However, we captured information that dates as far back as March of 2020 and runs up until the end of July.

We limited our research to the Global North with a focus on the US. We principally looked at the narrative landscape that is expressed in the English language.





✕ Methodology: data analysis

How are we making sense of the data?

For the purpose of our data inquiry, coding is the process that allows us to parse the data into meaningful information. By establishing codes, we can sort and structure the information prior to analyzing.

To identify and analyze narratives of the moment - we will be looking for narratives emerging or evolving within four codes: life, power, identity and time. We believe these codes allow us to grasp what is profoundly at stake in the current sense-making process, and we also believe this is where we will find the most profound changes in the narrative space.

We also acknowledge that narratives are battling each other for the role of defining this moment. As a result, each code can be broken down into two main frames which offer opposite outlooks of the moment. How these frames face each other teaches us about the resistance and the tensions that currently exist in the narrative space.

LIFE

This code encompasses the narratives that define our relationship with life. It allows us to grasp our sense-making at a time of many challenges to our collective survival (the pandemic, climate change, etc.). “Life” carries an evident tension: life can be preserved or it can be destroyed. We see the following tension:

- **Destruction frame:**  
Narratives describing and/or encouraging destruction and death of the planet, humans and species
- **Creation frame:**  
Narratives supporting and/or valuing life, health, and the survival of of the planet, humans and any other species

POWER

“Power” is meant to encompass matters related to government in the broad sense: government, law enforcement, corporations. We seek to understand how people answer the following questions: who makes the rules? How do they make the rules? Do we have a say? This code will allow us to understand the changes that affect our political system, how active we are vis-à-vis these changes and what the aspirations of the moment are. We see the following tension:

- **Power Over frame:**  
Narratives that sustain and define governing structures and top-down systems.
- **Power With frame:**  
Narratives that favor community-driven power, power accountability, and solidarity.

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IDENTITY

“Identity” allows us to capture narratives emerging that enables us to ask: how do we define our relationships to one another? How is individuality defined vis-à-vis the collective? Is society a mere aggregation of individuals that go about their own business or is society a body that take its shape from the active contribution of its members? We see the following tension:

- **Us vs Them frame:**  
Narratives that define identity in opposition and separation - our identity vs yours, my side vs yours.
- **Interdependence frame:**  
Narratives that define identity in relation to the other or the community, we are interdependent and interconnected, we are part of one whole.

TIME

“Time” relates to the significance of this moment in our history: what we believe is a rupture. We are looking for narratives that evidence how we understand time, and more precisely, how we understand the relationship between past, present and future. We see the following tension:

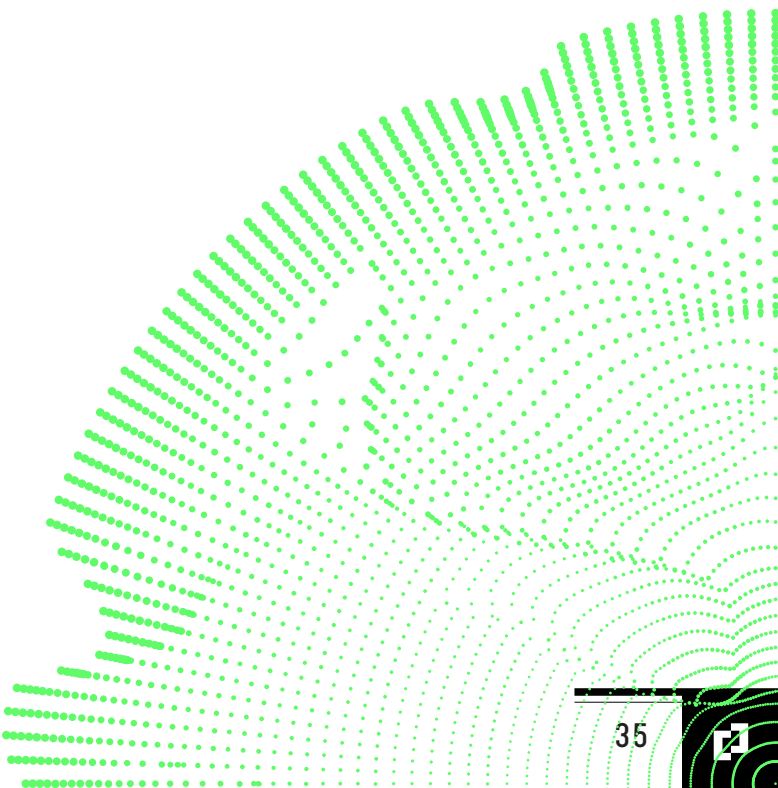
- **Past frame:**  
Narratives that describe and/or revisit the past and how the past informs the future. A focus on memory and the place of trauma that lives in the individual and the collective.
- **Future frame:**  
Narratives that define the future: how do we get there, and what does it look like?

✕ Research Process

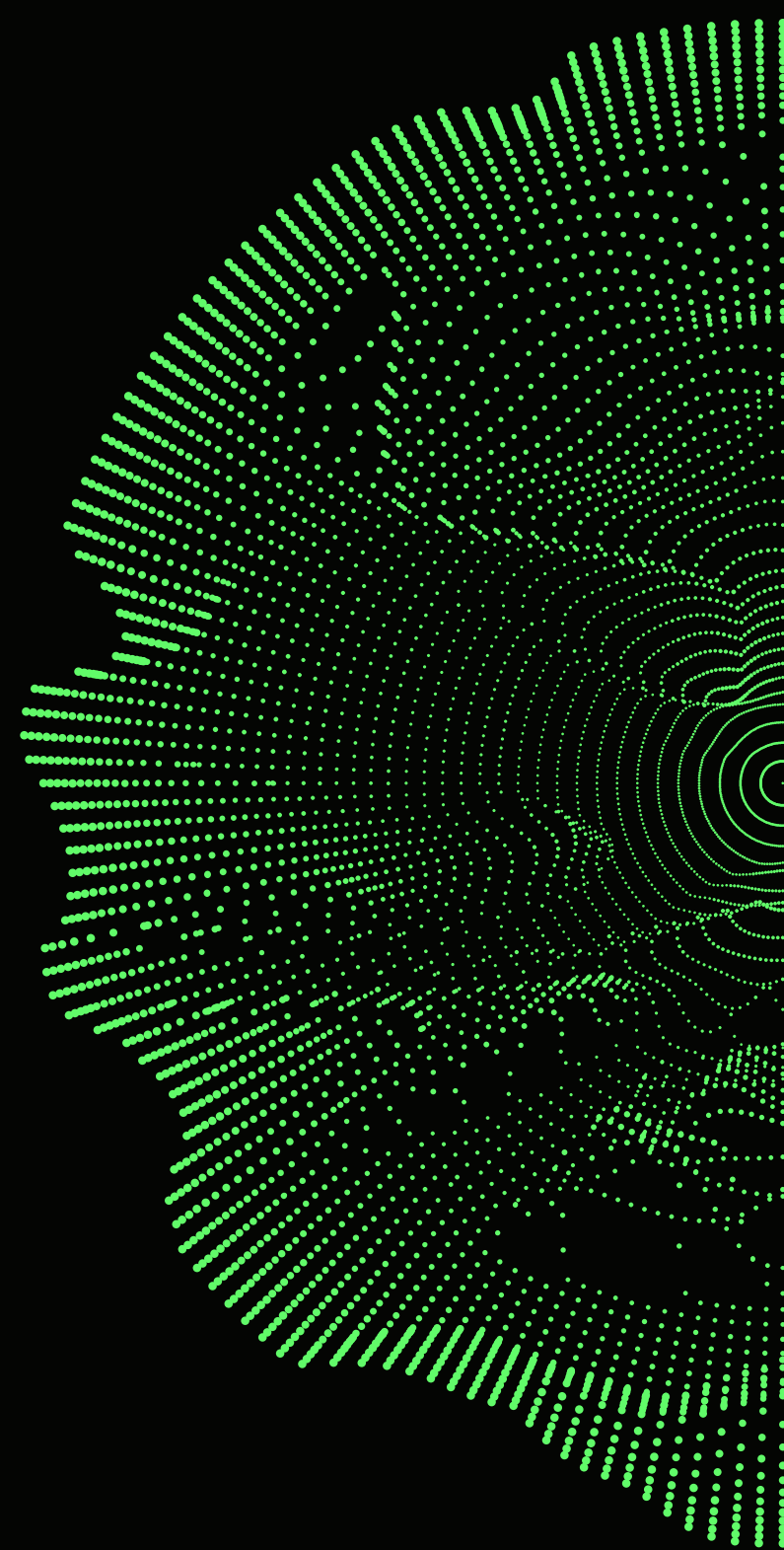
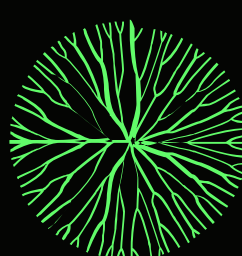
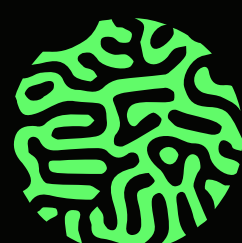
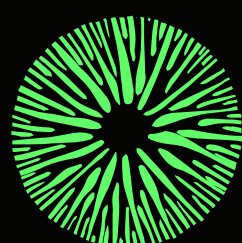
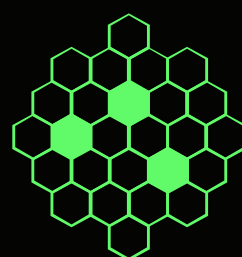
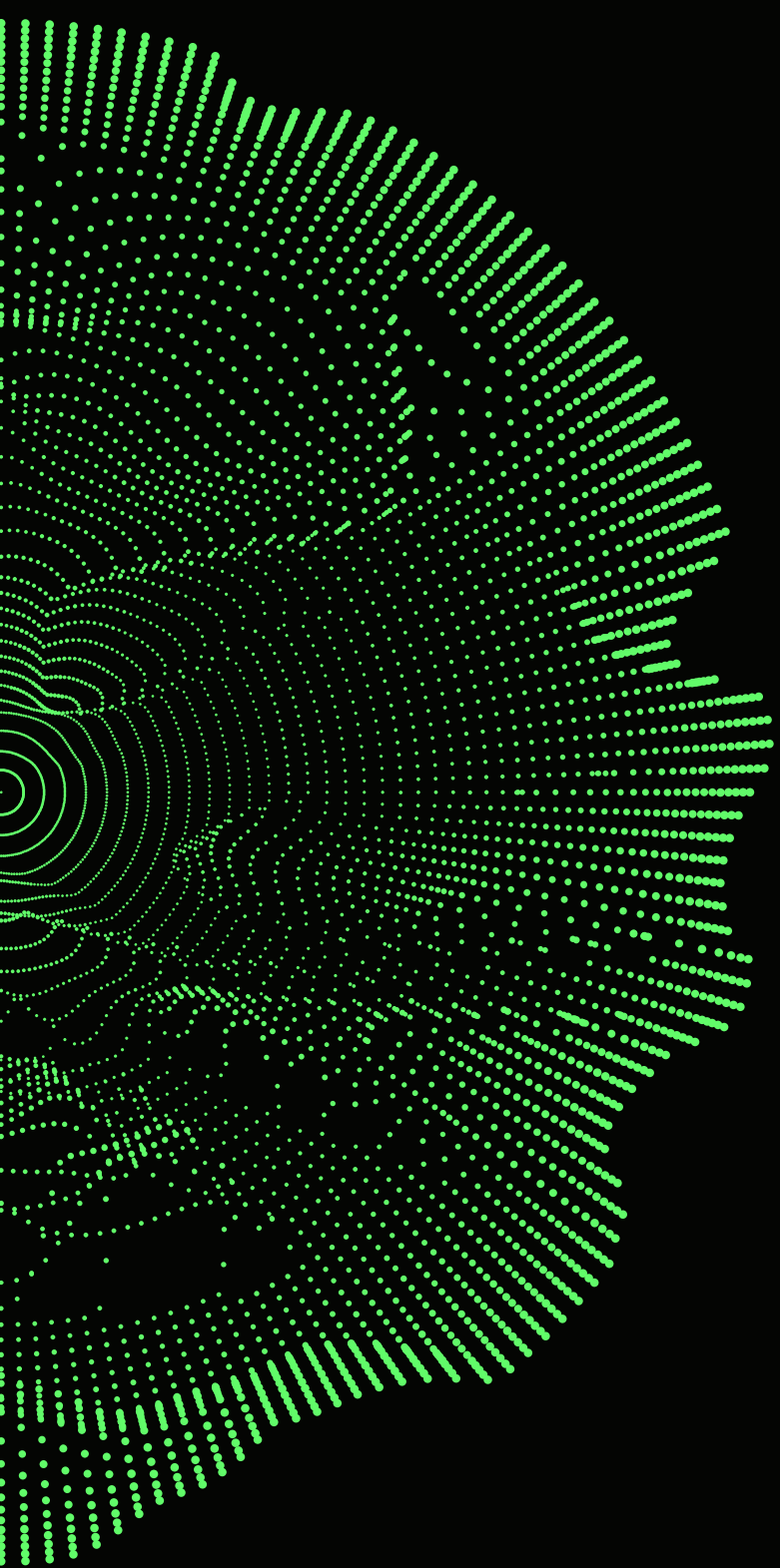
Our research process is as follows:

1. **Data collection using three methodologies** (big listening, small listening, survey)
2. **Code the data:**
  - a. **Life/Destruction • Life/Creation**
  - b. **Power/Over • Power/With**
  - c. **Identity/Us vs Them • Identity/Interdependence**
  - d. **Time/Past • Time/Future**
3. **Descriptive & prescriptive analysis:** Summarize insights and sense-making through critical discourse analysis to assess the capacity of narratives for collective evolution.

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ANALYSIS

# ANALYSIS





# ANALYSIS

The following section shows the collected data from our different streams of research: small listening, big listening and the survey. Each section describes the objective of the research, the methodology used, the findings and finally, a summary.



## Analysis

### → Small Listening

- ≈ Objective & Methodology
- ≈ Findings
  - » Life
  - » Power
  - » Identity
  - » Time
  - » A cross over message
    - ∞ “I can’t breathe” - a progressive plea for life
    - ∞ “I can’t breathe” - a right-wing resistance
    - ∞ One message, two meanings
  - » Summary

### → Big Listening - Covid

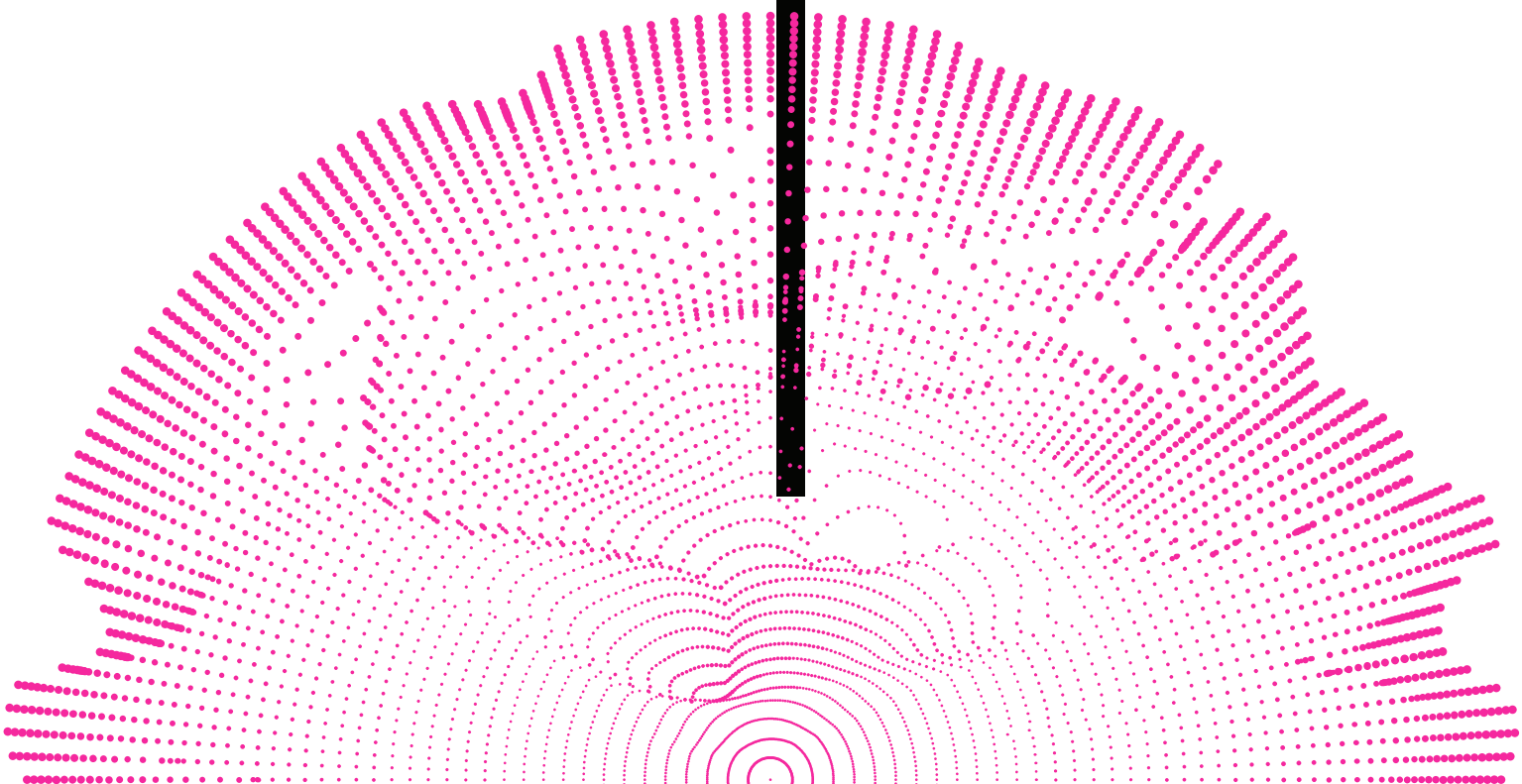
- ≈ Objective & Methodology
- ≈ Findings
  - » From Creation to Us vs Them - March 2020
  - » Us vs Them bolstered by US influencers - April 2020
  - » Framing in a narrative transition - May 2020
- ≈ Summary

### → Big Listening - BLM

- ≈ Objective & Methodology
- ≈ Findings
  - » Attention: Overall Twitter Data
    - ∞ Attention: Twitter Attention [100k Sample]
    - ∞ Attention Themes
  - » Network: Overview
    - ∞ Network Centrality
  - » Power: Echo Chambers (by date)
    - ∞ Echo Chamber (EC) Analysis
    - ∞ Power: Population
    - ∞ Power: Unity
    - ∞ Power: Commitment
- ≈ Summary

### → Survey

- ≈ Objective & Methodology
- ≈ Findings
- ≈ Integrating the narrative
- ≈ Summary





# SMALL LISTENING

## ✕ Objective & Methodology

### Objective

The objective of the small listening is to capture the complexities, nuances, textures and patterns of the emerging frames and narratives.

### Methodology

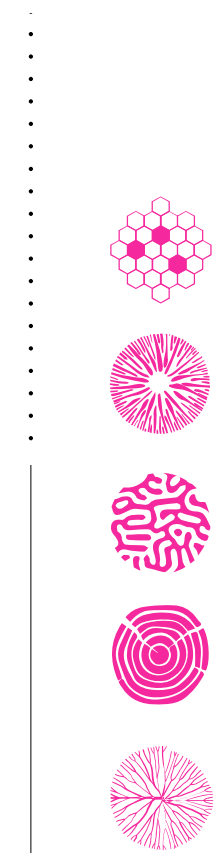
Through the small listening, we dive into the narrative space by reading stories, opinions, news and conversations happening on social media.

We carried out our small listening inquiry by surveying daily our social media networks and the news over four weeks starting from June 17 and ending with the week of July 6. However, we captured information that dates as far back as March of 2020 and runs up until the end of July. The data we collected comprised news media articles from various outlets, but also podcasts, webinars, video clips and social media posts from Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok.

After collecting all the data from our small listening, we proceeded to code the information manually: for each data or piece of data (social media posts, news media, podcast episode, etc.), we assigned the relevant codes: life, power, identity, memory. This, in turn, has allowed us to understand what frames (creation, destruction, power over, power with, etc.) are standing out from these past months and how our culture has been evolving. Additionally, we noted keywords and language that provided further insights into the evolution of the narrative space.

It is important to note that, because the small listening relies on on a manual review (as opposed to a data collection software), the narrative space we accessed is based on our own networks. As a result, progressive networks are overly represented in the data we collected. We are also aware of the weight our personal bias and perceptions play in selecting, reading and interpreting the data.

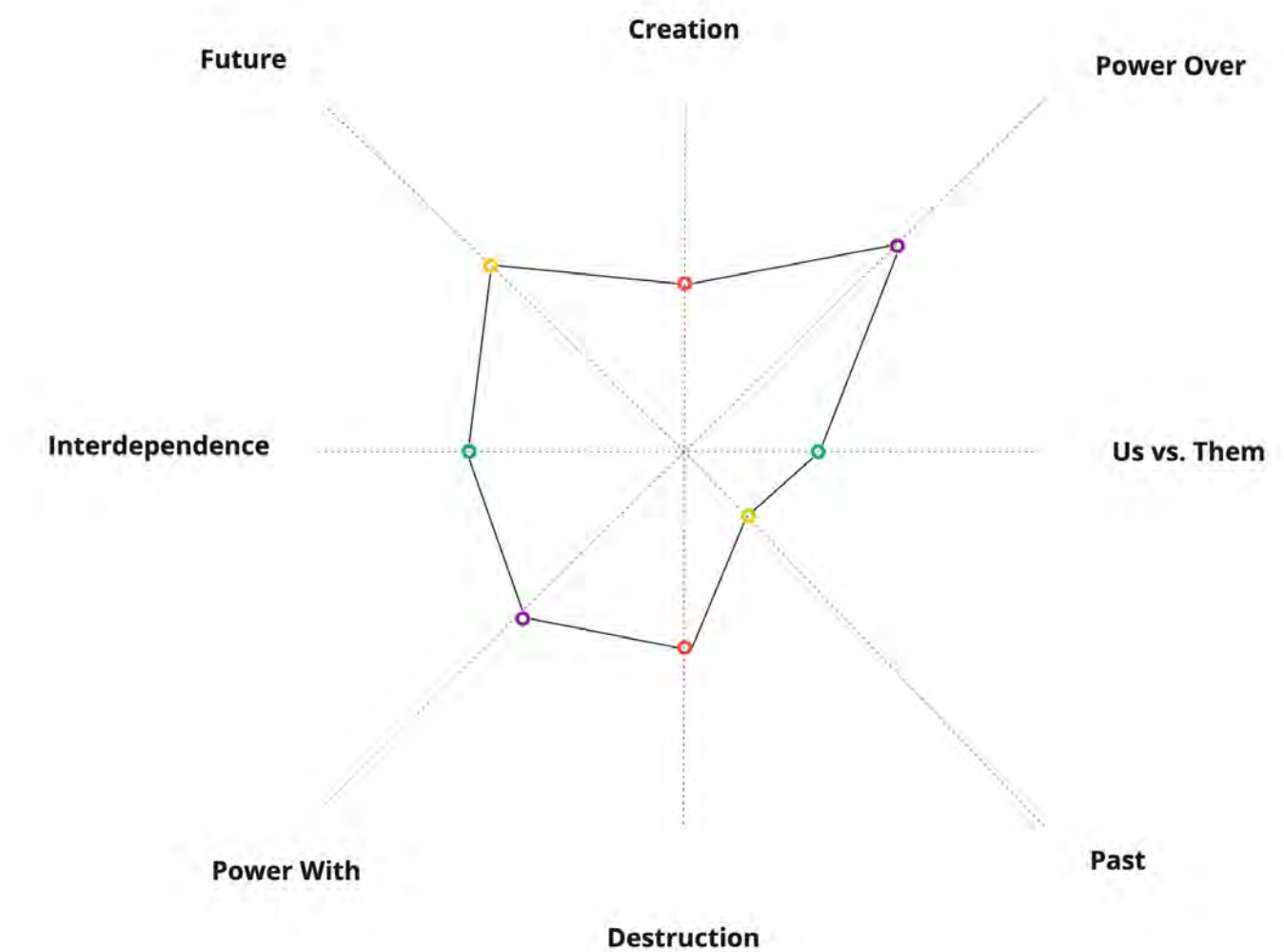
Nonetheless, we made a conscious effort to look for stories conveyed by conservative news outlets and social media networks. We also saw our networks react to conservative stories, which gave us a secondary access to other narrative spaces containing different political views.



## ✕ Findings

### Summary of Findings

Through our small listening, we were able to understand which frames are gaining prominence in the public discourse.



The period of time we captured (March-July) initiated with the moment the virus was declared a pandemic (March 11). It covers the historical period where most of the world was under lockdown (March-May). It encompasses the start of the BLM uprisings and the global reckoning on racism it has spurred. This timeframe also includes the end of lockdown measures in countries first affected by the pandemic, in Europe and Asia. We have thus been able to see the conversations change and evolve along these different stages.

In the first months of our listening (March-April-May), our networks were concerned and talkative about the life and the future of humankind on the planet. They reacted to the increasing death rate due to Covid, shared reflections on the experience of mourning and the consequences for our existence. At the same time, we started seeing manifestos and visions for a new society, a new economy and new institutions that could save us from future threats. May and June were the apex of conversations on our identity, prompted by the BLM protests. Reflections on memory - how to deal with the past and what future we want - stayed consistent throughout our inquiry. They are furthered by the cumulative effect of Covid and the movement for Black lives.

However, what struck us the most and what transpires more vividly from our small listening is the growing importance of stories, conversations and narratives around Power. All over the world, people are raising the alarm on the rise of authoritarianism, and the threat it poses to democracy. We believe that how Power is ultimately framed and how we, the people, challenge it, will probably come to define our culture in the near future.



»

# LIFE

## CREATION

0 < +

REDEFINING THE VALUE OF LIFE  
(HUMAN, NATURE, WILDLIFE)

BLM:  
VALUING  
BLACK LIVES

PROTECT  
INDIGENOUS  
LIVES & NATURE

NATURE AS  
A SOURCE OF HEALTH

BEHAVIORAL CHANGES  
TO PRESERVE LIFE

WE CAN CHANGE  
WE CAN SAVE THIS PLANET

## DESTRUCTION

- > 1

DEATH AND ACTS OF  
VIOLENCE ARE THE NEW NORMAL

DEATH IS EVERYWHERE  
IMPACTS THE  
MOST VULNERABLE

COVID-19 IS THE DRESS  
REHEARSAL FOR WHAT'S  
TO COME

UNSUSTAINABLE AND  
DESTRUCTIVE ECONOMIC SYSTEM

CAPITALISM  
IS THE VIRUS

COLLAPSE OF  
THE NEOLIBERAL ECONOMY



## LIFE

The uniqueness of this moment lies in the fact that we have experienced death collectively, at a large scale and at a global level - something that generations since Baby Boomers in the West had been spared from. In the small listening, we found, unsurprisingly, the expression of despair, mourning and sadness (*Destruction*). Signs of increasing racial violence & life-threatening events tied to climate change remind us that death is to feature prominently in our lives from now on.

However, we observe narratives and stories that interpret the destruction brought up by Covid as an opportunity for rebirth (*Creation*). As Pablo Picasso said, “every act of creation is first an act of destruction.” The small listening thus reveals a need to redefine the value of life in light of so much death. We have demonstrated a collective readiness to adapt, to be resilient and change our behaviors for the sake of our own survival.

Transitions threaten the status quo and push us beyond our comfort zones. The narrative taking force, in our small listening, is that the current destruction of life must be countered by the destruction of the systems (in particular, the economy and dominant structure of capitalism) that make this a reality.

## ✕ Destruction

### Death and acts of violence are the new normal

#### Death is everywhere, and it impacts the most vulnerable

This is a time of death and increased violence, and it has first and mostly impacted the most vulnerable. Covid continues to reach new alarming peaks. A hunger crisis is looming. With mandatory lockdowns, there have been increased reports of domestic abuse. There are also mental health consequences to Covid: insomnia, depression and anxiety are common as financial instability and future uncertainty looms large. At the same time, we see a rise in brutal acts of racial violence.

“  
 : Latino and African-American residents of the United States have been three times as  
 : likely to become infected as their white neighbors, according to the new data, which  
 : provides detailed characteristics of 640,000 infections detected in nearly 1,000 U.S.  
 : counties. And Black and Latino people have been nearly twice as likely to die from the  
 : virus as white people, the data shows.”  
 : [Corona virus disproportionately affects more Latino and Black populations](#)

“  
 : Indigenous peoples in isolation are at great risk from infectious diseases because they  
 : do not have the immunological defenses the general population has developed over the  
 : years, the country’s indigenous and health authorities have said. Respiratory diseases  
 : are already one of the leading causes of death among Brazil’s native peoples, according  
 : to the Ministry of Health.”  
 : [COVID-19 fears grow for isolated indigenous people in Brazil](#)

“  
 : The pandemic could drive 130 million more people into that state by December. More than  
 : a quarter of a billion people are likely to be acutely hungry in 2020.”  
 : [Opinion | After the Pandemic, a Global Hunger Crisis](#)

“  
 : Four white men approached the car, used a spray bottle to douse her with lighter fluid,  
 : then tossed a lighter at her. “My neck caught fire and I tried to put it out, but I  
 : brushed it up onto my face,” she said. The incident comes amid nationwide protests  
 : against anti-Black racism and police brutality following the death of George Floyd...  
 : The protests have triggered several incidents of racist backlash involving white people  
 : taunting or attacking Black people, including Black Lives Matter protesters  
 : [Biracial woman says she was set on fire by white men in Wisconsin](#)

#### Covid is the dress rehearsal for what’s to come

There is a connection between Covid and the environmental crisis. Despite the still obscure origins of Covid, what is clear is that our disrespect for Nature and wildlife increases threats to human life, like pathogens originated in wildlife passing onto humans. This same disrespect is bound to cause many more global catastrophes and claim further lives. In fact, while the pandemic continues, the trajectory of climate change is increasing in severity. In June 2020, the Arctic reached record high temperatures, signaling it is melting at an alarming rate putting people, wildlife and habitats at major risk. Rising temperatures, more frequent natural disasters, and the cascading consequences of climate change are a global trend that is leading to climate apartheid. With the trajectory we are on, the worst is yet to come.

“  
 : Pandemic response is simply trying to mitigate a disaster, while urgent climate response  
 : is not only mitigating disaster, but actively creating a better world.”  
 : [We Must Respond to Climate Change Like We’re Responding to Coronavirus](#)

“  
 : Climate change seemed to some politicians to be more of a slowly evolving issue that  
 : could be kicked down the road or ignored, but I can now see how it might be possible to  
 : leverage the learnings here from COVID-19 - which has been fast-paced - to alert more to  
 : this even bigger threat to human civilization. And the need to act big and act fast.”  
 : [Exploring Foresight, Epidemiology and the Coronavirus Pandemic with Dr. Peter Black \\*  
 : Journal of Futures Studies](#)

“  
 : Warming in the Arctic is leading to the thawing of once permanently frozen permafrost  
 : below ground. This is alarming scientists because as permafrost thaws, carbon dioxide  
 : and methane previously locked up below ground is released.  
 : These greenhouse gases can cause further warming, and further thawing of the permafrost,  
 : in a vicious cycle known as positive feedback. The higher temperatures also cause land  
 : ice in the Arctic to melt at a faster rate, leading to greater run-off into the ocean  
 : where it contributes to sea-level rise.”  
 : [Arctic Circle sees ‘highest-ever’ temperatures](#)

“  
 : A UN expert has warned of a possible climate apartheid, where the rich pay to escape  
 : from hunger, while the rest of the world is left to suffer...Developing nations are  
 : expected to suffer at least 75% of the costs of climate change - despite the fact that  
 : the poorer half of the world’s population generate just 10% of emissions.”  
 : [‘Climate apartheid’ looms, UN expert warns](#)



## Unsustainable and destructive economic system

### Capitalism is the Virus

Capitalism's relentless exploitation of natural resources is what created the conditions for Covid. The endless pursuit of productivity & accumulation of wealth pays no regard to the wellbeing of species in this planet, whether it is humans, Nature or wildlife. After Covid, either we save ourselves from the excesses of capitalism, or we will face further catastrophes and irreparable harm. We see growing calls to push for a de-growth model and new alternatives that value life.

“  
Capitalism must undergo structural change. Rethinking American capitalism means  
overcoming an addiction to infinite economic growth that is plundering the planet and  
imposing unbearable environmental and societal costs.”  
[The Pandemic Shows It's Time for an Alternative to American Capitalism](#)

“  
Hopes that the pandemic will accelerate the transition to a cleaner world are already  
running into a political wall: the “shock doctrine” of disaster capitalism outlined by  
the author and activist Naomi Klein. the Canadian writer describes how a powerful global  
elite exploits national crises to push through unpopular and extreme measures on the  
environment and labour rights.”  
[Climate crisis: in coronavirus lockdown, nature bounces back - but for how long?](#)

### Collapse of the Neoliberal Economy

Tied to the previous narrative is the understanding that the neoliberal economic system is responsible for aggravating the precariousness of human life's existence and, as result, made it harder to overcome the Covid health crisis. People have lost their livelihoods and are left without security entangled in a system that prioritizes profit over health, benefits only the economic elite and makes the richest richer. By design, the neoliberal economy does not serve public interest. This becomes apparent in the tension between protecting life and containing the spread of the virus versus reopening businesses so the economy can recover.

“  
This coronavirus is revealing the structural faults of a system that have been papered  
over for decades as they've been steadily worsening. Gaping economic inequalities,  
rampant ecological destruction, and pervasive political corruption are all results  
of unbalanced systems relying on each other to remain precariously poised. [...] The  
Neoliberal Era has set civilization's course directly toward a precipice [...]”  
[Coronavirus Spells the End of the Neoliberal Era. What's Next? | MAHB](#)

“  
We have the resources to remake the United States, but it will have to come at the  
expense of the plutocrats and the plunderers, and therein lies the three-hundred-  
year-old conundrum: America's professed values of life, liberty, and the pursuit of  
happiness, continually undone by the reality of debt, despair, and the human degradation  
of racism and inequality.”  
[How Do We Change America?](#)

“  
Just a reminder: the system in what is currently known as the US isn't “broken”. It was  
designed by male, white supremacist, slaveowners on stolen indigenous land to protect  
their interests. It's working as it was designed.  
[Jillianspeer: The United States was founded by white protestant/white supremist racist  
men who didn't murder just...](#)

## ✕ Creation

### Redefining the value of life (human, nature, wildlife)

#### Nature as a source of health

With mandatory lockdowns and closures of public spaces like beaches and parks to mitigate the spread of Covid, people have a newfound appreciation for Nature. The small listening reveals stories around reestablishing a relationship with Nature as a vital aspect of health and wellbeing. The promotion of Nature as medicine' or renewed interest in growing food or consuming local produce show a need to reclaim a relationship interrupted by the agro-industry, modern food markets and the capitalist system.

“  
If we aren't being taught how to grow our own food, how to take care of ourselves  
and our families, and how to live without the need for huge governments, banks or  
corporations - as our ancestors once did- then we aren't being educated; we are being  
indoctrinated to be dependent and subservient to the system.”  
[plantpoweredsistas: This is a great time for introspection and for making changes that  
promote growth and advancement. What changes are you making???](#)

#### Black Lives Matter: valuing Black lives

Covid has shed a new light on the importance of valuing Black lives. People saw how Covid disproportionately affected Black people, people of color and other marginalized communities. This was the case in the US and other countries too. And, then, in the midst of the pandemic, police brutality and racism took the lives of many more Black people. In the times of Covid, Black Lives Matter has taken on a new meaning.

“  
As in the United States, the coronavirus has disproportionately affected black people and  
other minorities.”  
[‘Get Rid of Them’: A Statue Falls as Britain Confronts Its Racist History](#)

#### Protect indigenous lives and protect Nature

On July 7, 2020, a federal judge ordered the Dakota Access pipeline shut down until a more extensive environmental review is completed. On July 10, the US Supreme Court declared about half of the land in the state of Oklahoma tribal. These decisions, among other stories, seem to indicate growing consensus on the importance to protect the lives of indigenous and the protection of sacred, tribal land. At its heart is the recognition that protecting native people and protecting nature are interrelated.

“  
[Brazil court orders eviction of illegal gold miners from Yanomami reservation](#)”  
“  
[Dakota Access Pipeline to Shut Down Pending Review, Federal Judge Rules](#)”  
 “  
[Supreme Court ruled that nearly half of Oklahoma is an Indian reservation](#)”


#### Behavioral Changes to Preserve Life

##### We can change. We can save this planet.

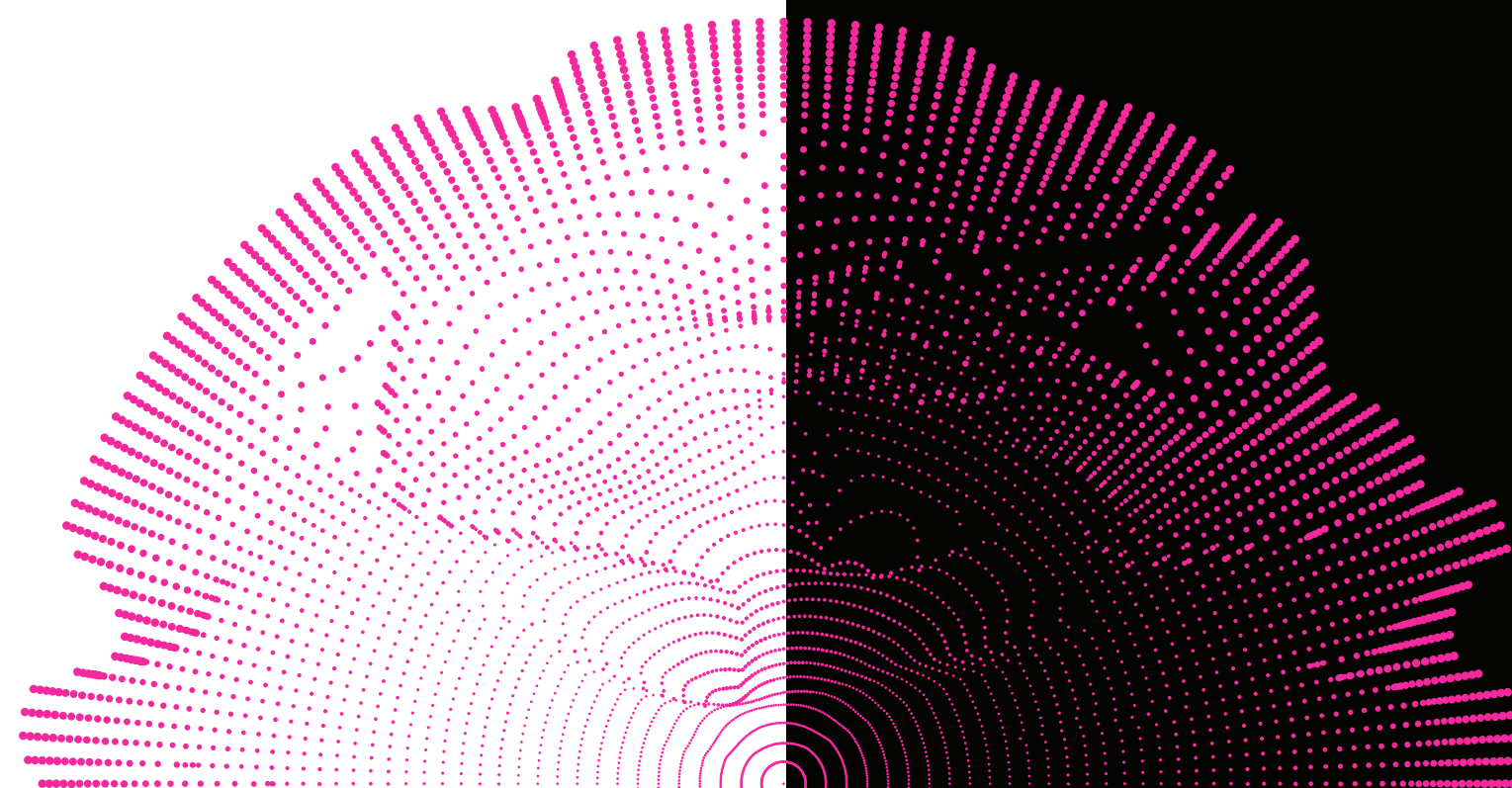
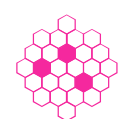
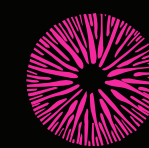
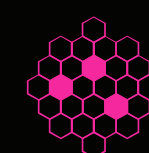
In times of Covid, we have shown capacity to change behaviors faster than ever. Mandatory lockdowns, social distancing, and masks in public have become the ‘new normal’. Restrictions on travel have decreased emissions, which benefitted the environment and wildlife. This capacity we have demonstrated collectively is likely to have important implications. If we can change behaviors to preserve life during a pandemic, we can change behaviors for the next crisis, including the largest looming crisis: climate change.



“  
 : A more expansive and braver approach to everyday existence is now crucial so that we  
 : don't fall in line with Trump-like tyrannies, chant and orthodoxy, and environmentally  
 : and physiologically devastating behaviors [including our favorites: driving cars, eating  
 : meat, burning electricity]. This current plague time might see a recharged commitment to  
 : a closer-to-the-bone worldview that recognizes we have a short time on earth.”  
 : [Coronavirus Will Change the World Permanently. Here's How.](#)

“  
 : French philosopher Bruno Latour tweeted: “Next time, when ecologists are ridiculed  
 : because ‘the economy cannot be slowed down’, they should remember that it can grind to a  
 : halt in a matter of weeks worldwide when it is urgent enough.”  
 : <https://twitter.com/BrunoLatourAIME/status/1241659151215968257> 

“  
 : To survive the next century, we need to start valuing the planet more, too, It will  
 : be hard to make these values durable. Valuing the right things and wanting to keep on  
 : valuing them—maybe that's also part of our new structure of feeling. The spring of 2020  
 : is suggestive of how much, and how quickly, we can change.”  
 : [The Coronavirus Is Rewriting Our Imaginations](#)







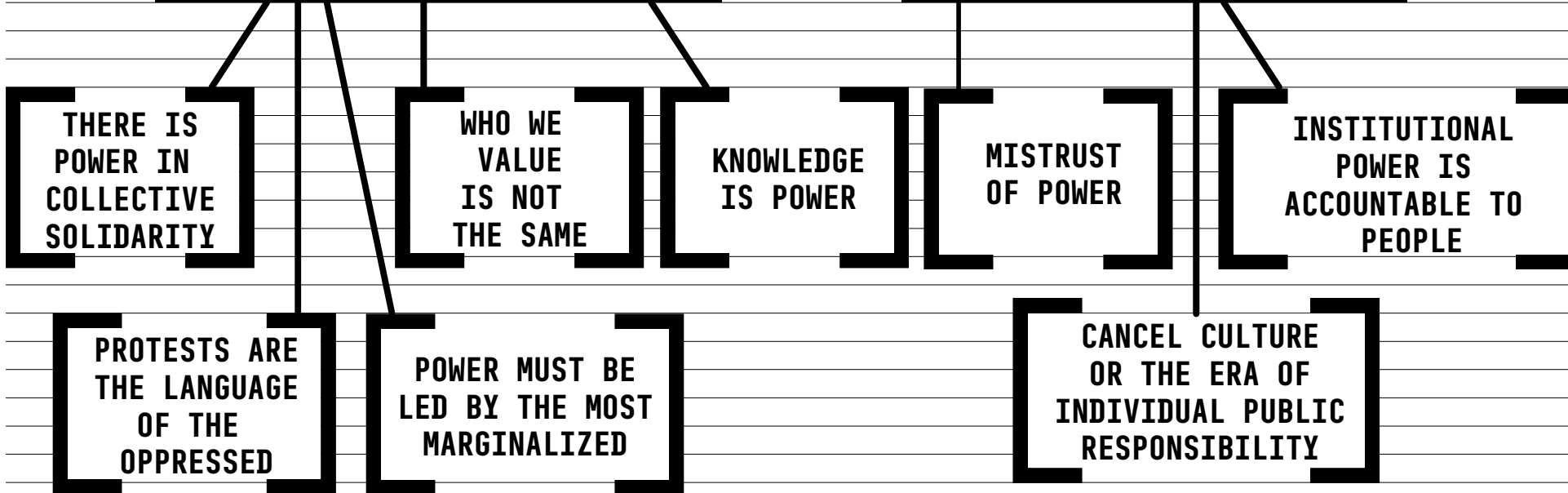
# POWER

## POWER WITH

0 < +

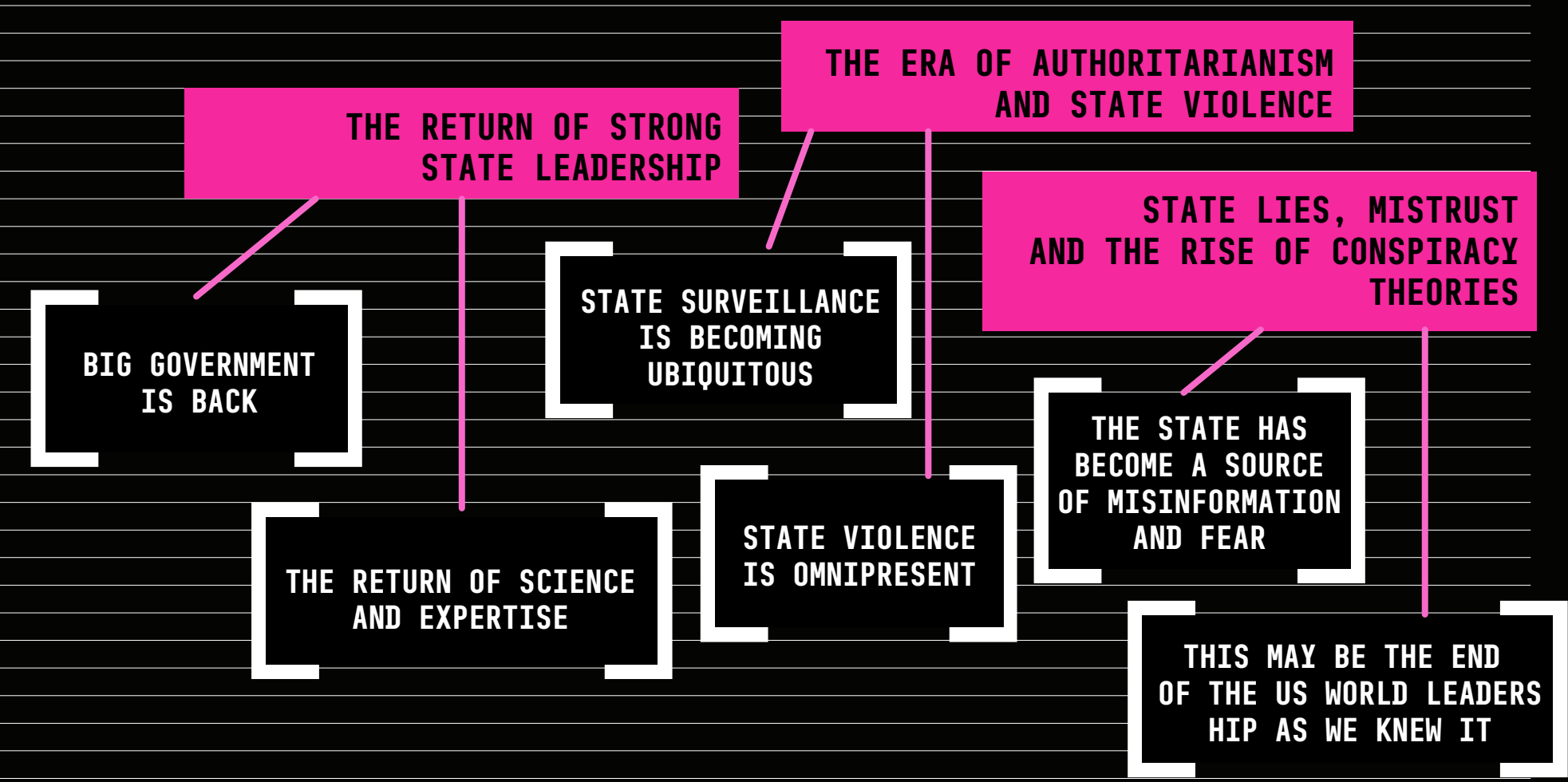
PEOPLE'S POWER IS THE ULTIMATE POWER

CALLING OUT POWER



## POWER OVER

- > 1





## POWER

Frames around Power are changing fast and profoundly. Often, they contradict each other. This is an area where our global culture may significantly shift in the upcoming months and years.

The small listening is showing that Covid pandemic may have brought back the idea that the State has a key role to play in ensuring equitable, fair and sustainable societies (Power Over). Yet, on the other side of the coin, a strong State is also increasingly carrying the risk of abuse of power and a normalization of State violence. The small listening detected this alarming trend both in the Global North and the Global South. Additionally, there is growing awareness that the State cannot be trusted.

With the beginning of the BLM protests, the Power With frame is bubbling. We have seen our networks voicing and emphasizing the collective power of people to effect social change and birth a model of society that represents and protects its most vulnerable. We have seen public demands for change increase. These demands are being catalyzed by the power of mass protests, but also by our social media culture which has democratized the public debate and given the people a voice to criticize the most powerful. Calling out power has become more ubiquitous, whether on the left or the right. In our modern culture, more than ever, people want institutions and the powerful to be made accountable. They also want change in power.

### ✕ Power Over

#### The return of strong State leadership

##### Big Government is back

In stark contrast from the neoliberal philosophy that seeks to reduce the role of the State to its bare minimum, we saw, through the small listening, glimpses of a possible reversal whereby the State is not only considered useful but also necessary for a fair, just and sustainable society. The many measures deployed by States to respond to the pandemic (lockdowns, social distancing, masks, etc.) and to keep the economy afloat show that we cannot survive crisis without Government intervention. Wherever the State (Brazil, certain US States) failed in taking these measures, the consequences of the pandemic have been dramatic. Welfare States have also been more able to respond to the crisis.

“Big government makes a come-back. We are seeing the critical role that “big government” plays in our lives and our health. We also see the deadly consequences of four decades of disinvestment in public infrastructure and dismissal of public experts. [Coronavirus Will Change the World Permanently. Here's How.](#)”

##### The return of science and expertise: Governing with facts

In the past years, we have seen a rise of populists who rule through stoking fears and emotions. They often criticize or deny science, as evidenced by the climate-denial movement. Trump, Orban, Modi and the likes epitomize this trend. Many have commented that Covid may have interrupted this evolution, as Governments have had to rely on the advice of scientists and experts to inform their decisions.

“Without naming any specific nations, Merkel said: “We are seeing at the moment that the pandemic can't be fought with lies and disinformation, and neither can it be with hatred and agitation.” [Merkel says pandemic reveals limits of 'fact-denying populism'](#)”

## The era of authoritarianism and State violence

### State surveillance is becoming ubiquitous

We have seen an acceleration and a normalization of State surveillance. The pandemic has given a new pretext to track people's movements, and the rise of the BLM movement in the US has been met with a deployment of law enforcement surveillance techniques that target and repress protesters: facial recognition, phone interception, etc. This trend is not new, as important protests and civil society movements around the world, such as in China and Egypt, have also been increasingly cracked down by growing State surveillance apparatus.

“Yet even now, as we mobilize for Black lives, local, state, and federal police – as well as other agencies such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), and various U.S. military forces – are deploying a wide range of surveillance technologies to collect, share, and analyze information about protesters. [...] law enforcement agencies are also gathering photo and video documentation of protesters by filming protesters with body cameras, smartphones, video cameras, and drones; using both government and commercial software systems to scrape social media for photos and videos; gathering footage from CCTV systems; gathering footage from media coverage; and more. [We Must Fight Face Surveillance to Protect Black Lives](#)”

“Surveillance is not about public safety, mass surveillance is about power and control.” [Surveillance Pandemic: Mijente in Conversation with Naomi Klein and Edward Snowden. Webinar, June 24, 2020](#)

### State violence is omnipresent

Stories of police crackdowns during BLM protests in Portland, Chicago and many other cities in the US remind us that the State can exert physical violence in the exercise of power. There is however a noticeable escalation. State violence also manifests in language. Leaders like Trump or Bolsonaro have incited violence against protesters and marginalized communities (immigrants, LGBTQ, indigenous, etc.) through hate speech. “When looting starts, shooting starts,” tweeted Trump in reference to BLM protests. We also see a growing normalization of military language: “We are at war”, said French president referring to Covid.

“Trump tweeted the phrase Friday morning in reference to the clashes between protesters and police in Minneapolis following George Floyd's death. It dates back to the civil rights era and is known to have been invoked by a white police chief cracking down on protests and a segregationist politician. [The History Behind 'When The Looting Starts, The Shooting Starts'](#)”

### State lies, mistrust and the rise of conspiracy theories

#### The State has become a source of misinformation and fear

This is contrary to the idea that Power is again understood as a serious matter that requires expertise and technical competences. With Covid, we have seen a rise of conspiracy theories and false information spread by populist leaders who seek to tap into people's fear to exert power. In the US, for instance, Trump has used the fear of the virus, fear of the other and the fear of the economic recession as legitimate reasons to push his anti-migration agenda. The US president has also spread hoaxes on the coronavirus.



“I’m in shock at this report! People actually drank bleach because of the misinformation from [#Trump](#). BBC News - A study published in the American Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene also estimates that about 5,800 people were admitted to hospital as a result of false information on social media.”  
”<https://twitter.com/GarciaFamilyUK/status/1293810683772010496>

### This may be the end of the US world leadership as we knew it

Interestingly, we have seen signs of a reversal of the world order. Covid has confirmed the impression that the US leadership in the world is in decline. Trump’s erratic handling of the crisis and the extensive spread of the virus in the US are making the world wonder if the US will remain in the position of power it has held on the world’s stage.

“This has been in the making (Iraq war, economic recession,) but Trump era is a culminating point where the US and the West are coming to a point of decline. Covid has shown institutional failing and now we are seeing a rapid descent. (...) Bruno Maceas, Portugal’s former Europe minister, whose book The Dawn of Eurasia looks at the rise of Chinese power, told me, “The collapse of the American Empire is a given; we are just trying to figure out what will replace it.” [The Decline of the American World](#)

“Even amid a chorus of warnings, President Trump and a small group of aides pushed responsibility for the fight against the pandemic to the state. They referred to this as “state authority handoff,” and it was at the heart of what would become at once a catastrophic policy blunder and an attempt to escape blame for a crisis that had engulfed the country – perhaps one of the greatest failures of presidential leadership in generations.”  
[nytimes: The roots of the U.S’s current inability to control the coronavirus pandemic can be traced to mid-A...](#)



## ✕ Power with

### People’s power is the ultimate power

#### There is power in collective solidarity

The multiplication of mutual aid groups in Covid times and the demonstration of community solidarity has brought to the surface the inherent power that there is in humans coming together to address social problems. It is the same solidarity that showed up in the national strikes organized by Amazon and Target warehouse workers to protest their working conditions amidst the pandemic. Consumers were called to join by not purchasing online. Two months after, the same workers were extending their own solidarity towards BLM protesters by walking out of their jobs. It is also the same solidarity that manifests in the BLM protests that have spread across the US. Never have the protests been so racially diverse since the movement started in 2013.

“When employees at Amazon and FedEx were deemed essential in the midst of a coronavirus pandemic, they formed a national organizing effort to press for workplace safety, hazard pay, and a voice on the job. When protests against police brutality spread across the country after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, essential workers took to the streets, calling out their bosses for trying to turn Black Lives Matter into a corporate PR slogan.”

[Pandemic to Protests: How Amazon, FedEx Drivers Fought Exploitation](#)

“As trust in the federal government has fallen rapidly over time, we [The US] have become a nation that has been taught to respond to great challenges by avoiding them, rather than bringing people together and working toward a solution. This approach has meant that the most pressing challenges facing us have gone unaddressed, the burdens of our national problems have been shifted toward the most disadvantaged, and inequality has continued to grow.” [Why Coronavirus Is a Call for Collective Action](#)

“People are really trying to show up in this moment for black people, but I think they are also doing it because they have been mad for a minute, almost like this pandemic was a pause, and they were able to think about what would justice look like, and what is actually going on, and they have been able to reflect on what is going on. I think they have been not O.K. for so many years, and they are finally saying, “Hey, we are going to take it to the streets and say we are going to show up in solidarity with you.”  
[A Black Lives Matter Co-Founder Explains Why This Time Is Different](#)

“Today’s protests are stunning in their racial solidarity. The whitest states in the country, including Maine and Idaho, have had protests involving thousands of people. And it’s not just students or activists; the demands for an end to this racist violence have mobilized a broad range of ordinary people who are fed up.”  
<https://www.newyorker.com/news/our-columnists/how-do-we-change-america>

#### Protests are the language of the oppressed

The 2020 BLM protests that have shaken the US and rippled across most of the Global North and parts of the Global South demonstrate that protest is still one of the strongest expressions of people’s power. Despite a series of crackdowns (Hong Kong, Lebanon, Chile, etc.), protests are still a way to be heard by power and to change power. Many are comparing the 2020 BLM protests to the 1960’s civil rights movement, invoking the vision of Martin Luther King (“riots are the language of the oppressed”).



“Riots are not only the voice of the unheard, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., famously said; they are the rowdy entry of the oppressed into the political realm. They become a stage of political theatre where joy, revulsion, sadness, anger, and excitement clash wildly in a cathartic dance. They are a festival of the oppressed.”

[A Black Lives Matter Co-Founder Explains Why This Time Is Different](#)

### Power must be led by the most marginalized

The BLM movement seems to be announcing a new kind of leadership. People are intentionally committed to following new leaders, in particular black women, LGBTQ people of color, and whoever has been marginalized by society. Power must better reflect society. This change in power is becoming apparent in the highest institutions of Power. The first openly black, gay man was elected to the US Congress along with many more women of color. Biden's VP is very likely to be a black woman. This evolution is showing up in other parts of the Global North where more women and more people of color are taking charge of elected positions or leading social justice movements.

“We are seeing one of the largest uprisings in US history, and Black leftist organizers and Black working-class people are leading it. [...]While protesters hold up the simple message “Black Lives Matter,” organizers in the Movement for Black Lives make clear that this fight is as much about ending racial capitalism as it is anything else. The white left needs to understand that this is what class struggle in the 21st century looks like. [...] In 2017, M4BL launched a multiracial formation of over 80 organizations called the Rising Majority. This alone is a reversal of the usual practice of large white-led formations calling together groups, framing the conversation, and then adding Black-led organizations to the mix after the foundations are laid. Rising Majority is anti-racist, anti-capitalist, and Black-, indigenous- and people-of-color-led.

[The White Left Needs to Embrace Black Leadership](#)

### Who we value is not the same

During Covid, we have witnessed the importance of essential workers who we often value the least in our economy - both in terms of economic retribution and prestige. In our small listening, we have seen a greater readiness to question our cult and admiration of the wealthy and the famous. Billionaires like Jeff Bezos have been criticized for scoring higher profits during the pandemic while many lost their jobs or worked in dire conditions. Many Hollywood celebrities were called out for complaining about their lockdown conditions whereas many working class people did not have the privilege of sheltering in place.

“[Jeff Bezos huge increase in net worth explained by grains of rice on TikTok goes viral](#)

Humphrey Yang a Youtuber and finance pundit explains the net worth of Jeff Bezos with rice. This went viral on the last week of February and the beginning of March.

“The work force that powers our economy today – in times of stability and in crisis – is a low-wage service work force that is disproportionately made up of black women and other women of color, and largely unprotected by our safety net. These workers take care of us in different ways, and it took a pandemic for the nation to recognize they are the critical engine of our economy.

[Opinion | The Future of Work Isn't What People Think It Is](#)

“A transformational narrative would begin with the idea that society's wealth belongs to everyone. We all have a part in creating it, whether as workers, consumers, or taxpayers who underwrite the education, infrastructure, and safety net that make profits possible. Once we see our society's prosperity as a collective product, it's a short step to making democratic decisions about what to do with this wealth, so that everyone can thrive. [How to Prepare for the Next Pandemic](#)

### Knowledge is power

The BLM uprisings have prompted a large yearning for political education, in particular in the areas of racial justice, decolonization and white privilege. The NYT reported a spike in racial justice book orders in the first weeks of the protests. We saw our social media networks becoming platforms for political, public, peer-to-peer and free education. We saw appetite and callings to unlearn what sustains the systems and structures of power in place (colonialism, patriarchy, white supremacy) and dive into knowledge that proposes an alternative to this current configuration of power.

“Education is the foundation of progress. Access to education is an act of resistance and an act of redistribution of power.”

“We want to learn from our own people and dismantle thousands of years of colonial discourse together. We want to unlearn what the oppressor taught us. White supremacy has created the chaotic world we live in today. From racial injustice to climate chaos, we must prioritize unlearning colonial discourse and center Black, Brown, Indigenous, and minority ethnic people, scholars, thinkers, philosophers, scientists and start decentralizing power, wealth in order to effectively drive humanity towards progress.”

[celinecelines: Joining my team @theslowfactory for our Open Education fundraiser.](#)

“We have a collective responsibility to design new systems. We cannot be successful until we re-examine our values, our relationships, and how we practice design itself. We acknowledge the long journey we have ahead of us as a company—to stand in full humility, reckon with white privilege, and unlearn the ways in which we have been socialized to maintain systems of racism.”

[ideo: Systemic racism is by design. It is the product of intentional choices made by individuals...](#)

### Calling out Power

#### Mistrust of Power


We also observed the growing mistrust of Power, namely the State and the elites. This is present on the left where people are calling out the State for perpetuating systemic racism, repressing protests or favoring corporation interests. It is also apparent on the right where conservatives, in particular Trump supporters, call out the State for being fraudulent and corrupted. This mistrust has given rise to a number of conspiracy theories, one of them being the notion of “deep State”: a government within the government that is pursuing its own private agenda and hiding truth from people. Qanon, the rising conspiracy theory community is an another example of this profound questioning and mistrust of the State. evolution is showing up in other parts of the Global North where more women and more people of color are taking charge of elected positions or leading social justice movements.



“  
: In the past 40 years, our society has systematically made it easier for the most  
: powerful individuals and corporations to stash socially produced wealth for their own  
: benefit and accumulate it at prodigious levels. [...]Bailing out financial firms after  
: the Great Recession of 2008 socialized corporate losses. When the bailout enriched  
: executives and investors, it privatized profits. We anticipate the same outcome from  
: the Covid-19 outbreak. In good times, the rich get richer. In poor times, the poor get  
: poorer. [How to Prepare for the Next Pandemic](#)  
”  
: The real issue is that corporations and complicit governments have done everything  
: in their power to break that bond with nature. [...] Believing the myth that we are  
: separate from nature, though, means buying into the lie fossil fuel corporations have  
: told for decades. [What the ‘Humans Are the Virus’ Meme Gets So Wrong](#)  
”  
: To believe Q requires rejecting mainstream institutions, ignoring government officials,  
: battling apostates, and despising the press. [...] Many of the people most prone to  
: believing conspiracy theories see themselves as victim-warriors fighting against corrupt  
: and powerful forces. They share a hatred of mainstream elites [...] [The Prophecies of Q](#)

**Institutional power is accountable to people**

With the BLM protests, we are being reminded that the State officials must serve the people who have elected them and respond to their demands. In the US, the movement to defund the police has gained strength, and already, many local governments have pledged to divest funds from law enforcement’s budgets. Similarly, under the impulse of BLM, we have seen how corporations, another form of power, can be made accountable. Brands who displayed support for BLM were immediately called out for putting up a marketing stint and not speaking truth to power by increasing racial representation in their leadership

“  
: The American Spring has not toppled a power, but it has led to a reassessment of the  
: relationship between that power and the citizens from whom it is derived. It has  
: resolved any remaining questions regarding Donald Trump’s utter ineptitude as President;  
: it has laid bare the contradictory and partial democracy that the United States holds  
: before the world as exemplary.” [An American Spring of Reckoning](#)  
”  
: We are demanding immediate relief for our communities. We want community control.  
: We want an end to this war against black people.”  
: [A Black Lives Matter Co-Founder Explains Why This Time Is Different](#)  
”  
: When we shared anti-racism resources last week on Instagram, it was centered on white  
: guilt and it was wrong. We should have said clearly: Black Lives Matter. We should  
: have called out the white dominance of the design industry, and recognized the harsh  
: truths of our industry’s role in perpetuating inequity. And we should have acknowledged  
: directly that IDEO, as a leader, has been part of the problem.”  
: [ideo: Systemic racism is by design. It is the product of intentional choices made by individuals...](#) 

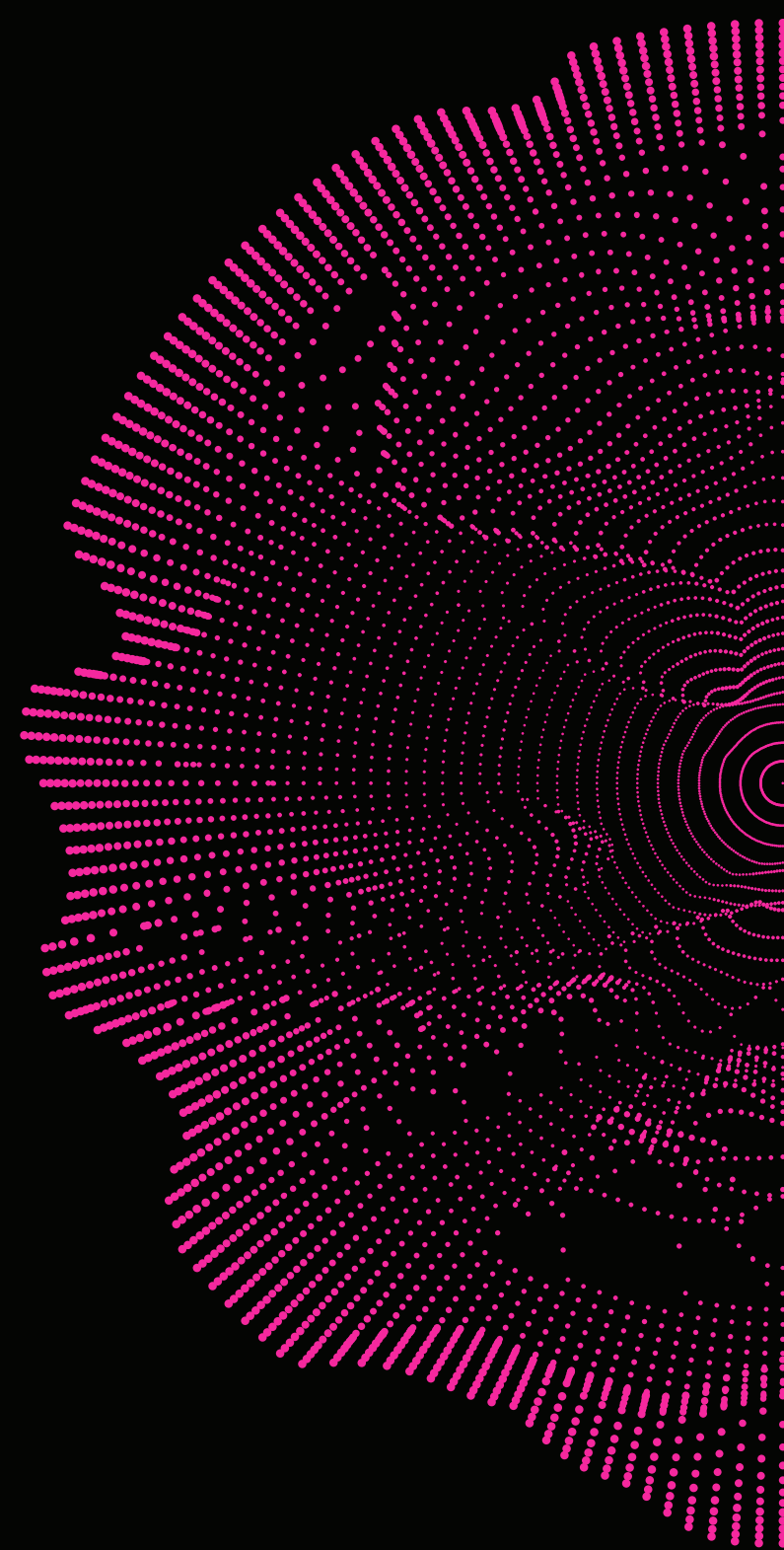
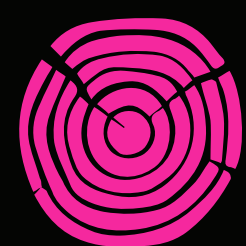
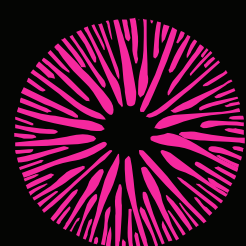
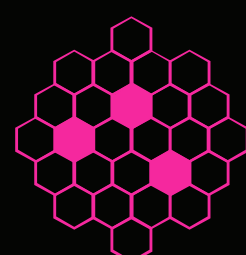
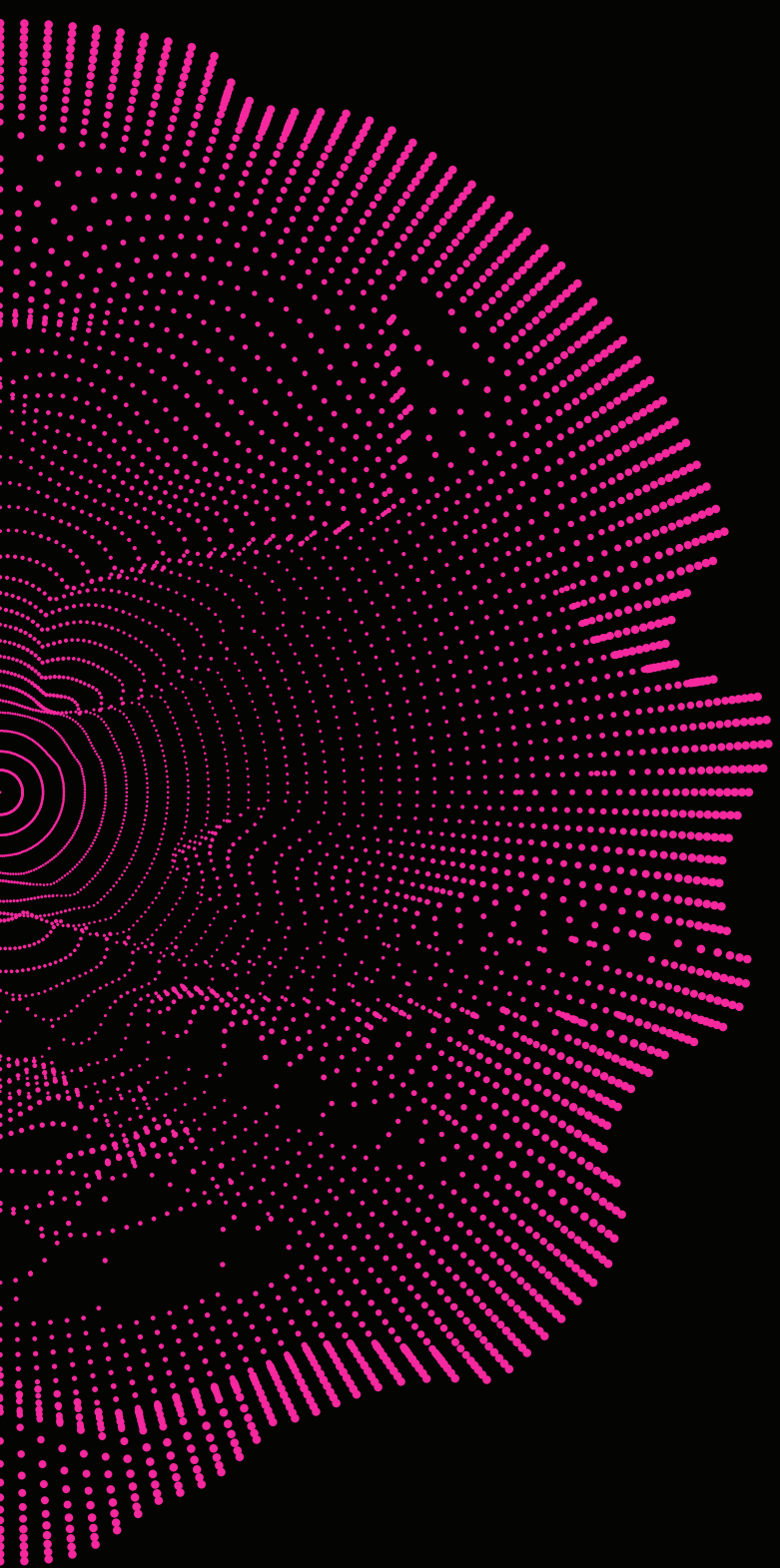
**Cancel culture or the era of individual public responsibility**

Social media has become a tool in the hands of the public to intervene in shaping our culture and values. On social media, individuals have been made accountable. Racist, xenophobic or anti-LGBTQ opinions, for instance, have been called out, and those responsible have had to issue apologies and sometimes quit influential positions. In times of Covid and BLM, ‘call-out culture’ or ‘cancel culture’ has taken a new meaning. It is an opportunity to define the type of society we want. It has also been criticized for becoming a tool of censorship and a threat to democratic debates.

“  
: There is so much conversation happening right now around call out culture and trying  
: to cancel cancel culture. Obviously I have opinions on how anti-cancel culture is just  
: white supremacy and how there are ways in which we can hold people accountable to help  
: them evolve.”  
: [maryamajayi:There is so much conversation happening right now around](#)  
”  
: Our cultural institutions are facing a moment of trial. But this needed reckoning has  
: also intensified a new set of moral attitudes and political commitments that tend to  
: weaken our norms of open debate and toleration of differences in favor of ideological  
: conformity.”  
: [A Letter on Justice and Open Debate | Harper’s Magazine](#)







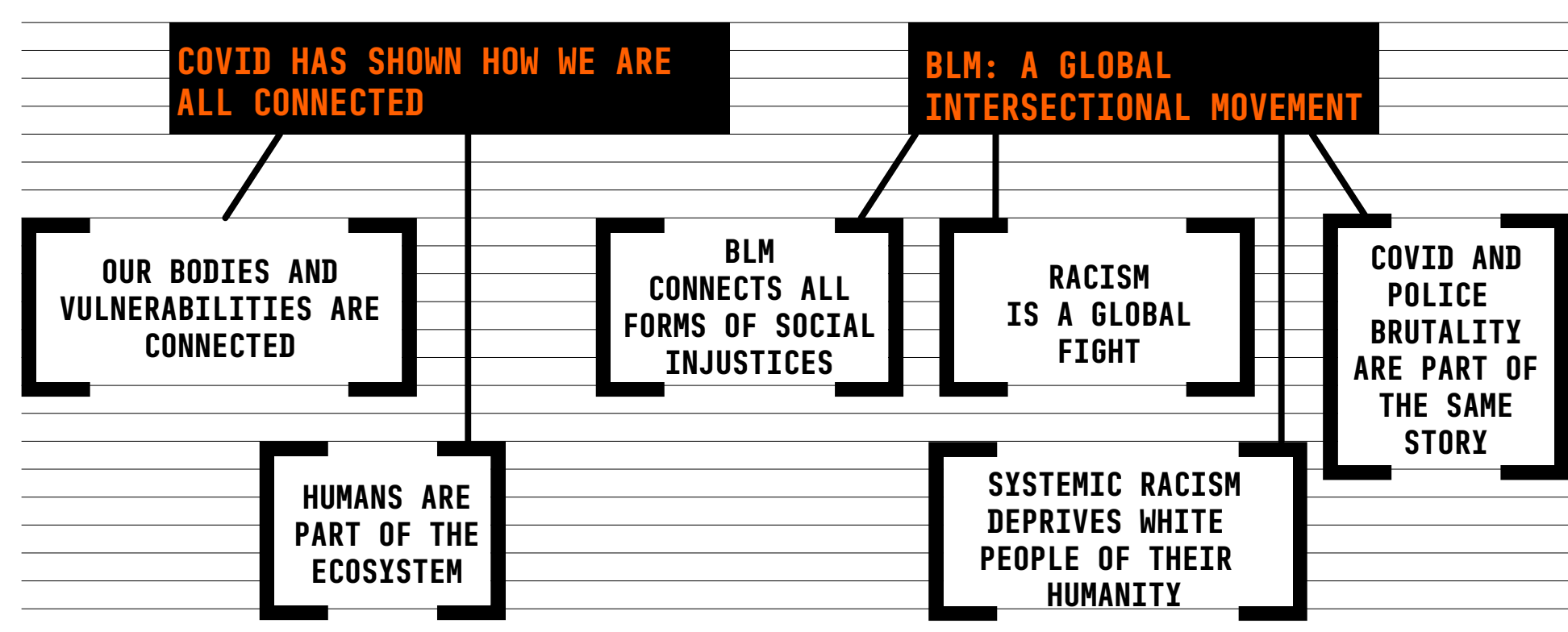




# IDENTITY

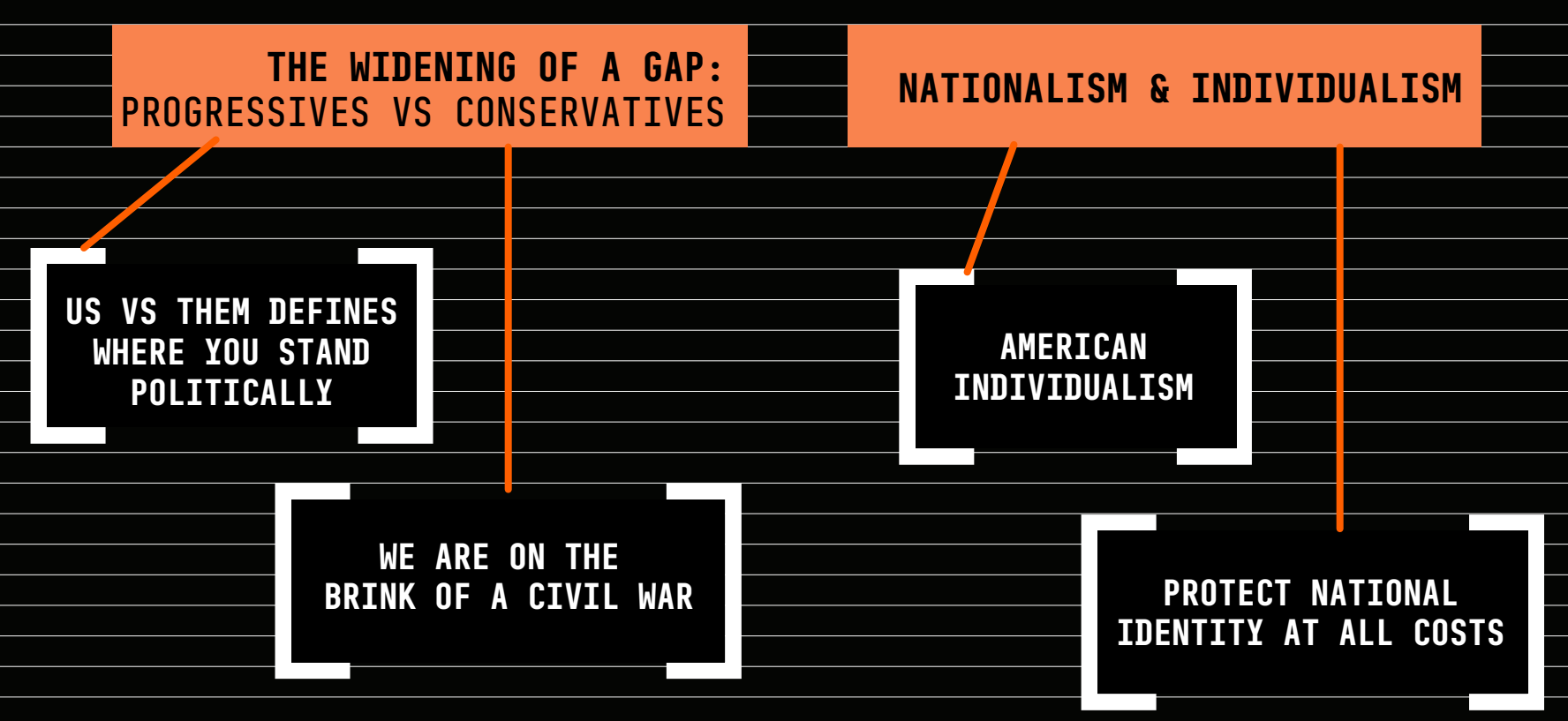
## INTERDEPENDENCE

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## US VS THEM

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## IDENTITY

The small listening has left us with the impression that the world is growing more polarized (US vs Them). Progressive and conservative ideas and aspirations increasingly stand in opposition. We can see a growing wedge between these two political sides with no middle ground possible. This is true in the US, but also elsewhere. We have seen language of mistrust, anger and rejection on either side. In fact, what this reveals is a profound chasm of value systems: one rooted in individuality and the other one in the collective.

At the same time, another framing of this moment seeks to emerge and claim a part of the current story. Covid has reminded us our lives are interdependent and connected (Interdependence). Our fates are linked, and we depend on the collective wellbeing to thrive as individuals. The movement for Black Lives is contributing to this framing by pushing intersectionality and emphasizing that the liberation of Black lives is the liberation of us all.

### ✕ Us vs Them

#### The widening of a gap: progressives vs conservatives

##### Us vs Them defines where you stand politically

In our search, we have seen a number of narratives and stories use the frame of Us vs Them. This framing is particularly used by BLM and racial justice activists to denounce police brutality and systemic racism. The police and the system are “them”. “Us” refers to anyone who has been a victim of injustices or who is dedicated to fighting the opposition galvanizing the movement for racial justice.

“Part of the process of militarisation is to dehumanise both the forces and the target groups. So, it’s no longer, ‘if this person is doing something wrong and I, as an individual, I do my duty to arrest them’,” he added, but rather the militarisation creates a scenario of one group against the other.  
[‘I lost my eye’: The price of protesting US police brutality](#)

“It is not random that the protest in Chicago that experienced the most police brutality was the black + indigenous solidarity rally. The biggest threat to US empire is not anti racist corporate incentives, the biggest threat is total solidarity among oppressed people.”

##### We are on the brink of a civil war

With the BLM movement and the ascent of new, modern and stronger progressive opposition, comes the rise of a hard-fringe conservatism in the form of white nationalism, religious extremism, and a profound hatred for the other. In the US, under the lead of Trump, anti-progressive narratives are reaching new peaks and translating into physical acts; conservatives have defaced BLM paintings, threatened and clashed with BLM protesters. US republicans and conservatives have not hesitated to equate this situation with a civil war, legitimizing the resort to violence to defend one’s position.

*(Addendum - August 2020: at the time of finalizing this report, the news development appeared to confirm this observation. The events in Kenosha where a 17 years old white boy, known to be a Trump supporter, shot and killed two BLM protesters, are the most vivid illustration that civil violence is becoming widespread.)*

“This period of national crisis has not inspired unity. Americans are aiming their anger at each other, talking past each other, invoking race, class and culture. [...] The president has emphatically kept his promise to upend American politics, but in the process has ripped at racial wounds, antagonized allies and courted foes, been impeached and acquitted, and flouted norms of presidential leadership.



[...] A majority of Americans believe the country is off track and in a June poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, about two-thirds said they believe Trump is making America more divided.  
[AMERICA DISRUPTED: Troubles cleave a nation, and a city](#)

“To his legions of listeners, Rush Limbaugh calls the demonstrators in Portland, Ore., “anarchists” who [“hate Americans and America.”](#) He recently made an ominous prediction: “I can see secession coming.”  
....  
Tucker Carlson, on his Monday Fox News show, said Portland was “another beautiful city destroyed by the mob”; he called the protesters “rioters” and “the armed wing of the Democratic Party.” Mark Levin, the right-wing radio star, described the situation in Portland bluntly: “Another city goes to hell,” [he declared on Tuesday.](#)  
[Right-Wing Media Stars Amplify Trump’s ‘Law and Order’ Campaign Message](#)

#### Nationalism & Individualism

##### Protect national identity at all costs

While this was already underway before Covid, we have seen more displays of nationalism. In the US, Trump has stoked American nationalism and fueled xenophobia. His anti-immigration agenda is coming to full fruition with his latest measures further restricting access to the US territory to migrants. Global South powers like India or China have used the distraction of the pandemic to enforce their nationalist agenda and identity cleansing (Anti-muslim campaigns in India, the internment of uighurs in China and the annexation of Hong Kong).

“The United States will be powerfully supporting those industries, like Airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the Chinese Virus. We will be stronger than ever before!,” he wrote. Many officials, including the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, have criticized the phrase as inaccurate and potentially harmful in promoting racist associations between the virus and those from China. [Trump tweets about coronavirus using term ‘Chinese Virus’](#)

##### American individualism

We have seen stories and messages framed around the individual freedom to choose in the protests against lockdown measures or the obligation to wear a mask. These protests are couched in the constitutional right to freedom. Protesters defend an idea of freedom that is essentially rooted in the protection of individual liberty to do and decide as one pleases. Any intervention of the State is seen as a violation of that freedom. In the US, individualism & freedom are deeply engrained in the culture, and anti-mask protesters - often Tump republicans - claim to protect this legacy. However, we note similar protests spread to other countries (France, UK, etc.).

“The dispute over masks embodies the political dynamics of the campaign. It also reflects a classic American struggle between those who defend public safety and those who believe just as deeply in personal liberty.  
[Coronavirus: Why are Americans so angry about masks?](#)

“More than any other country, the United States in the post-war era lionized the individual at the expense of community and family...What was gained in terms of mobility and personal freedom came at the expense of common purpose...In a complete abandonment of the collective good, U.S. laws define freedom as an individual’s inalienable right to own a personal arsenal of weaponry, a natural entitlement that trumps even the safety of children...The American cult of the individual denies not just community but the very idea of society. [The Unraveling of America](#)



## ✕ Interdependence

### Covid has shown how we are all connected

#### Our bodies and vulnerabilities are connected

The pandemic has made it clear that our bodies, health and wellbeing are interlinked. The virus is airborne and spreads through the proximity of bodies and sharing of common space - which we do everyday. It has also become clear that social inequalities, vulnerabilities and disparities are a matter of collective concern. The fact that someone cannot get access to healthcare and is more prone to get sick directly impacts my health. It does not discriminate on the class, race or gender. Our fates are bound.

“  
 . The pandemic exposes the heightened vulnerability to the illness of all those for whom  
 . health care is neither accessible nor affordable. Perhaps there are at least two lessons  
 . about vulnerability that follow: it describes a shared condition of social life, of  
 . interdependency, exposure and porosity; it names the greater likelihood of dying,  
 . understood as the fatal consequence of a pervasive social inequality.  
 . [Judith Butler: Mourning Is a Political Act Amid the Pandemic and Its Disparities](#)

“  
 . The cheap burger I eat from a restaurant that denies paid sick leave to its cashiers and  
 . kitchen staff makes me more vulnerable to illness.  
 . [Coronavirus Will Change the World Permanently. Here's How.](#)

“  
 . Our world has been forced into solidarity by a virus which ignores all borders; our  
 . deep interdependence has never been more undeniable. In such a crisis rethinking and  
 . reimagining our economic model is inescapable. [Making a Planet Worth Saving](#)

“  
 . People who are in a position of privilege are largely removed from the ramifications of  
 . COVID. People with higher incomes have better access to preventative medical care, gyms,  
 . and healthy food and are, not surprisingly, [healthier at baseline](#). Hence, if they or  
 . their loved ones do catch the virus, they are less likely to have severe symptoms...I  
 . have also noticed an increased sense of entitlement in some members of the community. I  
 . met several patients with white-collar, non-essential jobs who did not meet criteria for  
 . testing, due to the initial need to ration tests for those with severe symptoms.

“  
 . Several of them refused to strictly self-quarantine unless they received a test despite  
 . having mild symptoms. Moreover, there have also been several reports of the [super-rich](#)  
 . [paying their way to accessing tests](#), many of whom did not even have any symptoms. This  
 . is a gross miscarriage of appropriate medical care in a resource-limited system.  
 . [Covid 19 isn't the Great Equalizer](#)

#### Humans are part of the ecosystem

This is a counter argument to the idea that 'humans are the virus'. Many have blamed humans for their role in the pandemic; the treatment of wildlife, the over exploitation of natural resources, the behaviors that have contributed to spreading the disease. However, we have seen growing concerns that this framing of the current moment is not sustainable. Humans exist on the planet. They are not gone. For humanity to survive, we need to start seeing ourselves as part of Nature rather than separate.

“  
 . Saying that the coronavirus is a “we’re the virus” moment kicks all of that to the curb.  
 . It erases our agency and the fact that this is a moment when, more than ever, we need to  
 . acknowledge our partnership with the planet.”  
 . [What the ‘Humans Are the Virus’ Meme Gets So Wrong](#)

“  
 . We’re beginning to understand that this “we” includes many other creatures and societies  
 . in our biosphere and even in ourselves. Even as an individual, you are a biome, an  
 . ecosystem, much like a forest or a swamp or a coral reef. Your skin holds inside it all  
 . kinds of unlikely coöperations, and to survive you depend on any number of interspecies  
 . operations going on within you all at once. We are societies made of societies; there  
 . are nothing but societies.  
 . [The Coronavirus Is Rewriting Our Imaginations](#)

### BLM: a global intersectional movement

#### Covid and police brutality are part of the same story

The story of the BLM movement is not disconnected from the story of Covid. Black people and people of color have disproportionately been affected by the virus; both in the US and elsewhere, they have died at higher rates than others. Unequal access to health and racial inequalities indeed go hand in hand. Poor people of color have been denied access to fundamental healthcare, and they often have to live in conditions that are harmful to their health.

“  
 . Race is not the underlying condition. Racism is. Racism kills in many ways. It kills  
 . through police brutality. It kills through lack of health care. It kills with bullets.  
 . It kills with toxins, pathogens and disease. It smothers its victims until they can't  
 . breathe, either by a knee on their necks or a virus in their lungs.  
 . [COVID-19 and Black Lives Matter aren't competing stories. They're the same story.](#)

#### Systemic racism deprives white people of their humanity

Racial justice is not only about and for Black people. Systemic racism hurts Black people and people of color directly, but it also hurts white people by depriving them of their ability to care for the other. Racial justice is about recovering humanity for all and stopping the process of othering that creates violence, hatred and hurt.

“  
 . White supremacy – which has harmed everyone, including robbing white people of their own  
 . humanity – needs anti-blackness to thrive. Centering blackness removes both the fuel  
 . and the constraints of white supremacy, allowing everyone to be free of its tyranny. It  
 . requires us to imagine how our rules and structures would be reorganized and envision a  
 . world where we all thrive because the bottom is removed. When we remove blackness from  
 . the bottom, everybody gets to be seen.  
 . [What Does It Mean to ‘Center Black People’?](#)

“  
 . [...] Floyd's death, and the agonizing, protracted manner in which it occurred, has  
 . produced a different reaction. Seventy-one per cent of white Americans now say that  
 . racial discrimination is a “big problem.” They, too, rushed into the streets.  
 . [An American Spring of Reckoning](#)

“  
 . The first step of getting free is admitting you have a colonized mind. You have to  
 . accept that pretty much everything you come to understand about the human experience was  
 . taught to you from a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist frame of thinking.  
 . [natali.nicole: reconsider what you deem to be fact & reality. this is necessary for EVERYONE.](#)



### Racism is a global fight

BLM is spreading globally and spurring a global reckoning about anti-Blackness. We have seen BLM protests taking place in so many distinct countries: in Spain, France, the UK, Belgium, Germany, Colombia, etc. In our search, we have witnessed how most cultures and communities, including communities that have experienced racism, have gone inward to reflect on how they themselves contribute to anti-blackness. This has been particularly vivid among Latinx in the US and Latin Americans.

“Historically we’ve tended to aspire to the American dream, to aspire to whiteness,” said Mr. Jayes-Green, who is Afro-Latino. “Latinos have a real active role to play in this fight. We can show that these fights are not separated and that we can be active conspirators in fights against anti-Blackness.”  
[Latinos Back Black Lives Matter Protests. They Want Change for Themselves, Too.](#)

“In the wake of a worldwide reckoning with the deep-seated legacies of historical racism, Berlin’s public transit authority BVG announced on Friday that it would rename the Mohrenstrasse (“Moor Street”) stop on the U2 metro line.  
[What’s in a name? Berlin wrestles with past in metro station row](#)

### BLM connects all forms of social injustices

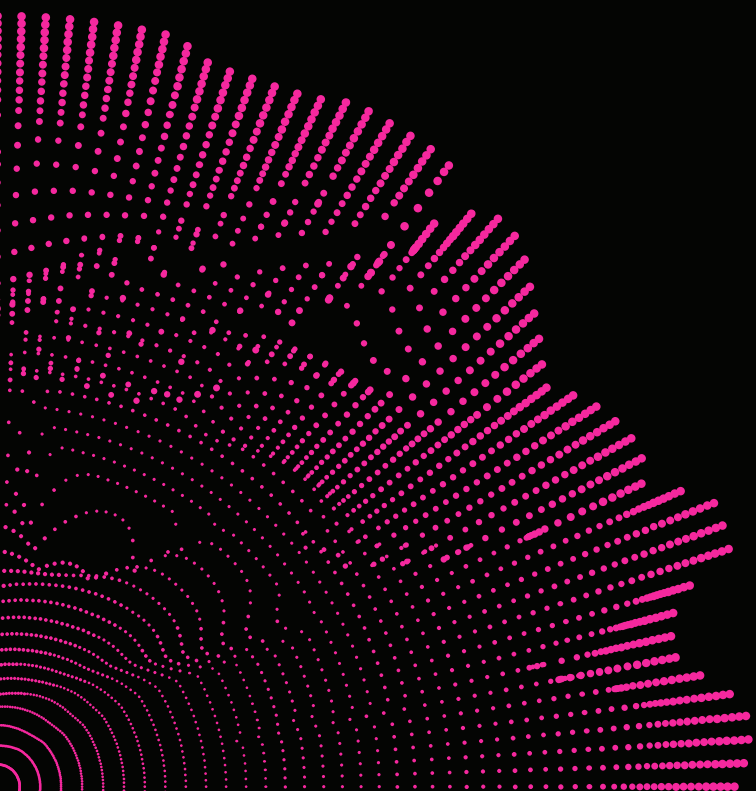
The movement for Black lives is a movement for racial justice that seeks to end the cycle of State violence against Black people, but it is also a movement that seeks to end all forms of injustices that have surely affected everyone, but have impacted Black people disproportionately because of deep-rooted racism and long-standing marginalization. BLM activists remind us that all forms of social injustices are linked to each other: environment, housing, health, poverty, gender, etc. Defending Black lives and fighting these injustices is a movement for society.

“As the black lives matter movement demands fundamental changes to our society, we’re reminded how systemic racism shapes environmental harm. People of color disproportionately shoulder the risks of waste, pollution, and the climate crisis.  
[Fighting for a clean planet means fighting for racial justice.](#)

“As policymakers take steps to ensure immediate relief and long-term recovery, it is imperative that they consider the interrelated crises of wealth inequality, racism, and ecological decline, which were in place long before COVID-19, and now risk being intensified.” [People’s Bailout](#)

“Climate change and police brutality are directly linked together, because the communities who are most impacted and vulnerable to police brutality are also the same communities that are most vulnerable to climate change. [Making a Planet Worth Saving](#)

“The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL)—which emerged out of the protests of the 2014 murders of Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and Michael Brown—is building broad-based support for a set of policies coming out of the coalition’s own policy and research team. It has updated the 2016 Vision for Black Lives document, which Robin D.G. Kelley called nothing less than “a plan for ending structural racism, saving the planet, and transforming the entire nation.  
[The White Left Needs to Embrace Black Leadership](#)







# TIME

## THE PAST

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DEPENDING ON HOW WE ADDRESS THE PAST,  
WE DON'T ACHIEVE THE SAME FUTURE

HISTORY MUST BE  
DECOLONIZED

THE PAST LIVES  
IN OUR BODIES;  
IT NEEDS HEALING

A FIGHT  
FOR THE PAST

## THE FUTURE

- > 1

A REVOLUTION IN VALUES

BLM PROTESTS REVEAL A  
NEW TYPE SOCIETY  
THAT WILL PROMPT  
CHANGE

VALUES THAT  
RESPECT LIFE

IMAGINING A NEW NORMAL

A RADICALLY  
DIFFERENT FUTURE

STAYING HOPEFUL  
IN HARD TIMES



## TIME

Unsurprisingly, BLM and Covid have prompted reflections on what brought us here (The Past) and what we want next (The Future). In the conversations we listened to, past and future are linked; the past weighs significantly on the future we seek to build.

Yet, we see a rising tension on how we tell the story of our past. BLM activists and anyone who has embraced the movement have questioned a version of the past that has cemented systemic racism, white supremacy and a hierarchical order of whose life is valued. Opposite this movement is the resurgence of white nationalism spearheaded by Trump and his closest acolytes. At the roots of this movement is the refusal to change the story of the past, and a defense of white European identity at all costs.

When it came to conversations about the future, the small listening has been more skewed to the progressive side of the narrative space. Yet, it is important to see an evolution in how progressives paint the future. It is radical and features prominently young and marginalized people. The future looks like the BLM movement. In order to emerge, this future will need to disrupt the deepest foundations of our culture - the value system upon which our world rests. It is also imperative that we fight our urge to go back to the old normal whose ineluctable outcome will be the extinction of human species. For this, we need to allow ourselves to believe a radically different future is possible.

## ✕ The Past

*Depending on how we address the past, we don't achieve the same future*

### History must be decolonized

In times of death and racial injustices, our culture has been reckoning with its colonial past & the legacy of slavery. Black people, people of color but also white people are questioning the history they have been told as well as a culture that centers European identity and whiteness. More than ever, it seems people are conscious of the link between systems in place (economic, culture, values) and history. An alternative history is asking to be told, as we have seen with the removal of colonial statutes and the celebration of Juneteenth and the rejection of July 4th in the US.

“ (...)coming to terms with the past is impossible without an essential step: taking the perspective of the victim, the oppressed, the occupied, the humiliated. And being able to apologise.”  
 (...) “Keeping memory alive is not a moral accessory to look good. It helps us, together, to shape the future. It guides us to understand the world instead of suffer it, to avoid mistakes, to identify dangers - those that come from others but, above all, those that come from ourselves. It helps us to live more consciously.”  
[Germans know that toppling a few statues isn't enough to confront the past | Géraldine Schwarz](#)

“ The current attacks on statues are a sign that what's in question is not just our future but our past, I think, as a nation, as a society, as a world. These attacks show how deeply white supremacy is rooted in our national structure - that we need to question everything about the way we understand the world, even the past, in order to get to a better future. [What Does It Mean to Tear Down a Statue?](#)

“ Many decades after most African nations gained independence, there has been no complete coming to terms with that history, either in Europe or in Africa. Caught in the silence are people of African origin in Europe, where enduring racism, near-hysterical fear over migration and the failure to integrate generations of immigrants cannot be separated from that unresolved past.”

“ More broadly, the notion of “systemic racism,” once confined to academic and activist circles on the left of the spectrum, has become the phrase du jour, with Google searches for the term rising a hundredfold in a matter of months and mainstream conservatives like former President George W. Bush joining historically moderate Democrats like Joe Biden in embracing the term to call for a national reckoning. [America's Long Overdue Awakening to Systemic Racism](#)

### The past lives in our bodies; it needs healing

We have observed more conversations acknowledging the role and place of our bodies when we consider the legacies of the past. Black activists recall that history also exists in their bodies: how they look, who they look like, but also through trans-generational transmission of trauma. Amidst a pandemic, as we grow accustomed to death and sickness, it may not be a coincidence that bodies take a central place in how we deal with memory. In fact, this conversation also includes the importance of healing. There are wounds from the past that must be healed in order to build the future.

“ What is a monument but a standing memory? An artifact to make tangible the truth of the past. My body and blood are a tangible truth of the South and its past. The black people I come from were owned by the white people I come from. The white people I come from fought and died for their Lost Cause.”  
[Opinion | You Want a Confederate Monument? My Body Is a Confederate Monument](#)

“ While research around an individual's trauma is more established, the research on “intergenerational trauma” - trauma passed on through the generations - and its impact, is still emerging. maybe alters the genes? what's sure is that behaviors are passed down. [Rest as Reparations](#)

“ Seeing and understanding the world through the black experience is the basis for our individual and collective healing,”. [What Does It Mean to 'Center Black People'?](#)

### A flight for our past

As our history is being questioned and dominant culture is challenged, we observe a resistance from those who feel this will question their own version of history. Trump has become the spokesperson of a white Americanism that believes European identity is being threatened. This is a trend that also prevails in other countries of the Global North. In the Global South, we see this “fight for the past” manifests in the way authoritarian governments use history to assert their authority. It is no surprise that Erdogan, a leader who has not hidden his rejection of Turkey's historical Secularism, has decided to turn the Hagia Sophia into a mosque.

“ The story of what happened will take hold in the public's mind, true or not. Even though what really happened is factual, what sticks is perceptual. The story that stays with us matches our world views. It leaves us with a big historic lesson on what we can learn from a mistake so that we are not, in the words of philosopher George Santayana, “condemned to repeat it.”  
[A Better World Ahead Means Shaping Emerging Narratives Now \[SSIR\]](#)



“ Trump and his followers stand in a long lineage of such people, who use a certain understanding of the past to reinforce the injustices of the present. Baldwin’s vision demanded a reckoning with this understanding—not to posit the greatness of America but to establish the ground upon which that greatness could be built. [...] True freedom, for all Americans, requires that we tell a better story, a true story, about how we arrived here. [The History That James Baldwin Wanted America to See](#)

“ President Donald Trump continues to portray himself as a disrupter, with a wrecking-ball agenda that is rooted in nationalism and roils racial divisions – taking the stage over the July Fourth weekend to warn of “new far-left fascism” that would tear down “our national heritage.” [AMERICA DISRUPTED: Troubles cleave a nation, and a city](#)

## ✕ The Future

### A revolution in values

#### BLM protests reveal a new type of society that will prompt change

We have noticed that the description of the BLM protests are, in fact, depicting a type of society that is asking to emerge from the movement. The protests are principally led and joined by a young, multiracial crowd. BLM follows a decentralized approach to organization where local groups can sprout throughout the country and organize. There is no cult of leader and no imposed hierarchy. The unprecedented number of people that have joined the movement in the US and elsewhere speaks more broadly about a generation that seeks to manifest a different kind of society – one that looks like them.

“ History may look back on this period as a comparable transition in the nation’s politics and culture, driven primarily by the largest generation of young Americans since the Baby Boomers who flooded the streets decades ago. [...] “I think these protests, made up of multiethnic Millennials and Gen Zers, are the tipping point of this shift.” Like the Baby Boomers during the 1960s, the younger generations dissatisfied with those arrangements have demonstrated, year after year, that they can fill the streets in protest. [The Rage Unifying Boomers and Gen Z](#)

#### Values that Respect Life

In our review of social media and news media, we spotted the recurrence of a set of values that have always existed, but that are taking on new importance in these times of high vulnerability and collective despair. They are the values that we will need to uphold if we are to survive our current crisis, and those to come. Solidarity & community care are the values that feature more prominently in aspirations for the future. A capacity to hope and trust one another must also be nurtured. These values hold at the core a respect for human lives.

“ If we are truly to “shift course away from our failing trajectory,” the new era must be defined, at its deepest level, not merely by the political or economic choices being made, but by a revolution in values. It must be an era where the core human values of fairness, mutual aid, and compassion are paramount—extending beyond the local neighborhood to state and national government, to the global community of humans, and ultimately to the community of all life.” [Coronavirus Spells the End of the Neoliberal Era. What’s Next? | MAHB](#)

“ Getting through coronavirus will be an exercise not just in building societal resilience, but relearning the values of cooperation, compassion, generosity and kindness, and building systems which institutionalize these values. It is high time to recognize that such ethical values are not simply human constructs, products of socialization. They are cognitive categories which reflect patterns of behavior in individuals and organizations that have an evolutionary, adaptive function. In the global phase shift, systems which fail to incorporate these values into their structures will eventually die. [Coronavirus, synchronous failure and the global phase-shift](#)

### Imagining a New Normal

#### Normal is no longer acceptable; This is an opportunity for real change.

Throughout history, wars, pandemics, and other crises have acted as agents for social change. In other words, this moment is a choice point for humanity to imagine a new world. The future cannot look like the present nor the past. This moment of great despair must be harnessed in order to prompt the changes that are necessary for our civilization and species to survive. It is a unique opportunity to start anew with the lessons of the past in mind.

“ Covid-19 has blown the Overton window wide open. A crisis such as the coronavirus pandemic has a way of massively amplifying and accelerating changes that were already underway: shifts that might have taken decades can occur in weeks. Like a crucible, it has the potential to melt down the structures that currently exist, and reshape them, perhaps unrecognizably.” [Coronavirus Spells the End of the Neoliberal Era. What’s Next? | MAHB](#)

“ Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to “normality”, trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality. [...] Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.” [Arundhati Roy: ‘The pandemic is a portal’ | Free to read](#)

“ In such a crisis rethinking and reimagining our economic model is inescapable. [A New Normal | Una Nueva Normalidad](#)

#### A radically different future

If we want to change society, humans need to allow themselves to imagine a future outside of the box, and outside of the limitations that our current system has put in place. Radical imagination is a concept advanced by Black activists that is acquiring more acute resonance nowadays. In our progressive networks, we also saw more emphasis on the importance of Black people, in particular Black women, leading this radical reimagining. Black women especially have had to remain resilient and strong to dream in a world that is not built for their success.



“What we are witnessing now is the opening up of imaginations, where people are beginning to think more expansively about what the solutions could be. We have our solutions. We want the rights of protesters to be respected. We want a divestment from the police and an investment in black communities. We are demanding immediate relief for our communities. We want community control. We want an end to this war against black people. [A Black Lives Matter Co-Founder Explains Why This Time Is Different](#)

“When you give to our communities the tools to envision and imagine what the future should look like, [...] they come up with visions that are more expansive and resilient, because they are trying to figure out by necessity how to solve the many challenges that this society has laid at their doorstep.” [Turn Rikers Island Into a Solar Farm](#)

“Reestablishing, transforming and reconfiguring the whole social structures and economics would be fantastic. But it will take some real imagination and drive for people to achieve that. I'm living in hope that, that can happen. [Exploring Foresight, Epidemiology and the Coronavirus Pandemic with Dr. Peter Black \\* Journal of Futures Studies](#)

“Maybe, as in Camus’ time, it will take the dual specters of autocracy and disease to get us to listen to our common sense, our imaginations, our eccentricities—and not our programming. [Coronavirus Will Change the World Permanently. Here’s How.](#)

Staying hopeful in hard times

In the conversations we listened to, we saw hope. However, we have also spotted cautionary tales and anticipated resignation. As our global economy and society are about to undergo unprecedented precariousness and economic recession, it will be hard to garner hope and muster the radical imagination for change. Our imagination also risks being stifled by consumerism and material comfort (encouraged by capitalism), which are appealing to maintain some sense of normalcy at a time where meaning is absent. The challenge will be to convince people that we cannot go back to what we knew. An even bigger challenge will be to keep the momentum of solidarity alive.

“For many of us, this will make the world’s monstrous inequality increasingly unbearable, the environmental catastrophe something to be addressed at all costs, just like the cesspit of racialised history. But not for all of us. “We struggle to pay our bills, we might be jobless soon and our wife just filed for divorce. Now, on top of all that, we are meant to feel guilty and repent?” The resentment at being defined as “privileged” will lead some of us to hate those whose existence reminds us that, yes, even if only relatively to them, we were dealt a better hand. And we’ll vote for anyone who promises to allow us to feel separate, superior and not responsible in any way for their pain. [Letter from Italy: this pandemic is showing us who we really are](#)

✕ A cross over message

Through the small listening, we noticed the recurrence of a message that seemed to connect all stories of the moment: “I can’t breathe”.

We noted the ability of this message to tie together progressive narratives to form a plea for life that encompasses racial justice, public health and the protection of the environment.

We also noted this message in the conservative narrative space in what appears to show an intention to co-opt the BLM rallying cry.

Ultimately, “I can’t breathe” demonstrates that messages can move across the narrative space to lend a different meaning depending on who speaks it, their values and beliefs.

--- “I can’t breathe” - a progressive plea for life

“I can’t breathe” began as a rallying cry of the BLM movement. There are the last words of Eric Garner, a black man who was killed in 2014 after being put in a chokehold by New York City Police. There are also the last words of many victims of police brutality, including George Floyd. Like “Black Lives Matter”, these three words have become the symbol of the fight against police brutality and systemic racism across the world.

The symbol is recognized by The Breathe Act, a bill proposed by the Movement for Black Lives.

“This visionary bill divests our taxpayer dollars from brutal and discriminatory policing and invests in a new vision of public safety—a vision that answers the call to defund the police and allows all communities to finally BREATHE free”

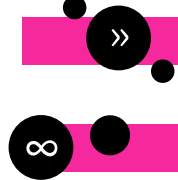
Not only does the bill seek to defund the police, it also aims to end all forms of oppression that have affected Black people and ultimately impacts everyone. The bill thus addresses all forms of injustices: housing, economic justice, access to health, access to a clean and healthy environment as well as the importance of making public officials accountable. Only when all issues are addressed can we breathe.

The importance of breathing has gained new meaning during the COVID pandemic. The virus is airborne, transmitted through the air we breathe.

“What another breathes out, I can breathe in, and something of my breath can find its way into yet another person.” **Judith Butler, Mourning is a political act amid the pandemic and the disparities.**

“I can’t breathe” also often the words of those who suffer from this disease. The virus attacks the lungs and create a condition of respiratory failure where the person must be intubated and connected to a ventilator.

“I can’t breathe” is also relevant in times of climate change and environmental destruction accelerated by the relentless exploitation of resources by an neoliberal capitalist system that does not serve human life nor nature.





“ The same European colonialism that colonised and plundered entire nations through the logic of white supremacy, was the same project that sought to control and exploit nature. This is the origin of the ecological collapse we are witnessing today. It is the same logic of imposition, extraction, exploitation and silencing that continues today. As a result of these systems, black, brown and indigenous communities have endured hundreds of years of oppression and continue to be looted of even the most essential conditions to human life – the freedom to breathe – we say no more and make the following demands!”  
: [Today’s climate crisis is also a result of oppression and exploitation.](#)

What we see is the articulation of how all these phenomenon are connected, and how the importance of breathing is the common thread that weaves them all.

“ In a time where the Amazon rainforest which represents the lungs of the Earth have suffered great loses, Covid affects our ability to inhale, and people are being choked to death on the streets by police, we choose to say “I Can Breathe.” May no one, or no thing take away our inherit right of oxygen, and at the same time may we listen and be in solidarity with our brothers & sisters around the world who stand up for all of our civil liberties and equality!”  
: [Jbravel: Words have power, and we are always casting spells with the vibration we hold and the mantras we express into the Universe.](#) 📷

If one pays attention to the story of Eric Garner, it appears clear that the story of the environment and the story of police brutality were are all tied from the beginning. Together they reveal the overarching story of structural racism. Victims of police brutality - black people, for the large majority - are often the same people that are the most affected by the health consequences of environmental harm.

“ (...) one of the things that’s important to know about Eric Garner is that he had asthma, as did most people in the Garner family, including his daughter Erica, who would die after suffering an asthma-induced heart attack and a broken heart fighting for justice for her father. Even though Eric Garner was killed by an illegal choke hold by the New York City Police Department, it’s important to note that the borough he lived in (which has the highest tree density in N.Y.C.) also received an F for ozone pollution, per the American Lung Association’s 2018 report. The way that we can actually fight pollution and police brutality is by fighting them together.”  
: [Making a Planet Worth Saving](#)

At the time of writing this report, California has been ravaged by widespread fires. Once again, the breath ties all stories together: racism, climate change, poverty, pandemic. It is the narrative that show how structural causes collide together to form a perfect storm.

“ California is witnessing this exponential relationship firsthand. Smoke now blankets much of the state-on Wednesday, air quality in the Bay Area was the worst in the world- but N95 masks, essential for going outside in such conditions, have proved almost impossible to acquire since COVID-19 emerged. That shortage could in turn worsen the pandemic, since studies have found that breathing polluted air leaves the lungs more vulnerable to the coronavirus. Firefighting forces, which in California rely heavily on inmate labor, have been depleted by both COVID-19 outbreaks in prisons and the early-release policies instituted to prevent them.”  
: [Two Disasters Are Exponentially Worse Than One](#)

--- “I can’t breathe” - a right-wing resistance

Quite strikingly, “I can’t breathe” has been coopted by some conservatives in support of the anti-mask movement.



As we noted previously in our analysis, this movement is rooted in the idea that the mask amounts to a violation of their freedom.



It is also important to note that defenders of this position are founding their arguments in the US constitution: the freedom they claim is a human right, and the State is seen as an enemy threatening this right. It is an essentially libertarian position where individual freedom is revered.

As such, it is the duty of citizens to fight against this Government’s encroachment.



Anti-mask protesters addressing Palm Beach County commissioner’s meeting after an unanimous vote to make masks mandatory.

Source: [Florida’s Anti-Maskers Are Taking a Stand | NowThis](#)



It is important to note that the anti-mask movement is tied to the rise of conspiracy theories furthered by groups like the Qanon community, which has started online, but which is now moving to the political sphere.

“QAnon is emblematic of modern America’s susceptibility to conspiracy theories, and its enthusiasm for them. But it is also already much more than a loose collection of conspiracy-minded chat-room inhabitants. It is a movement united in mass rejection of reason, objectivity, and other Enlightenment values”  
[The Prophecies of Q](#)

Like most conspiracy theories, their central tenet is that the State, the establishment and the liberal elites - often the wealthy - are constantly lying and plotting together to submit and control the population. It is important to push back and resist.



Source: [Florida’s Anti-Maskers Are Taking a Stand | NowThis](#)



--- One message, two meaning

Between the two versions of “I can’t breathe” lies a profound and stark difference in how society is understood.



How the “I can’t breathe” message is promoted by conservatives and anti-mask protesters is inherently individualistic and justifies other reasonings such as “I must be able to choose for myself whether or not to wear a mask” or “whether or not to stay in lockdown” that we witnessed during the Covid crisis.

On the other side, “I can’t breathe”, as voiced in the BLM movement, exhorts solidarity and collective action to fight against all forms of social harms, whether it is racial injustice, poverty, health inequalities or environmental harm. All fights are connected because everyone must be concerned by how the other lives in society. It is a message rooted in a collectivist approach.

This individualism vs collectivism tension is not new. The individualism of the anti-mask movement follows the neoliberal logic which has pervaded all aspects of society: culture, economy, social relationships, etc.

“The neoliberal worldview, which has dominated public policy-making across the world for the last 40 years, celebrates the liberation of a nimble market free from the oppressive constraints of the lumbering government. Neoliberalism’s prescriptions are rooted in a radical individualism. In the words of British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, “There’s no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families.” Corporations, wealthy elites, and their political allies have turned this narrative-along with a healthy serving of racism and xenophobia-into self-fulfilling prophecy: Slash government funding so the public sector no longer works well, erode public confidence in government, justify further funding cuts, and reap the benefits in lower taxes on wealth and profits.”  
[How to Prepare for the Next Pandemic](#)

Collectivism is a push back to this vision of society.

In fact, the very concept of freedom is not the monopoly of the individualism logic. The BLM movement also speaks of freedom. It is a freedom that cannot be separated from the history of Black people.

“Juneteenth is a historically powerful day because it lends itself to a deeper conversation about FREEDOM. For almost two-and-a-half years after the Emancipation Proclamation, Black people in Texas were still enslaved. They didn’t know that their FREEDOM had been legislated. On this Juneteenth, let’s think about the role that police play in keeping Black people from being FREE. Let’s think about the role jails play in keeping Black people from being FREE. Let’s think about whether this country truly wants Black people to be FREE?  
Patrisse Cullors, co-founder of Black Lives Matter  
[osopepatrisse: What does it mean when your community’s freedom is a legislative act?](#) 📷



However, it is a collectivist freedom which seeks to liberate society from a system that is designed to exploit and oppress everyone. Yet, Black people are at the front and center of that oppression and exploitation. Hence, when Black people are free and racial justice is achieved, everyone is free. As we saw in the rest of the small listening, white people also need to be freed from the system that benefits from the exploitation of Black people and other marginalized people.

“ White supremacy – which has harmed everyone, including robbing white people of their own humanity – needs anti-blackness to thrive. Centering blackness removes both the fuel and the constraints of white supremacy, allowing everyone to be free of its tyranny. What [Does It Mean to ‘Center Black People’?](#)

“ The first step of getting free is admitting you have a colonized mind. You have to accept that pretty much everything you come to understand about the human experience was taught to you from a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist frame of thinking. [natali.nicole: reconsider what you deem to be fact & reality. this is necessary for EVERYONE.](#) 📷

In a collectivist vision of society and unlike what is contended by the anti-mask movement, freedom is a collective endeavor.

“ The function of freedom is to free someone else.” **Toni Morrison**

“ None of us are free until all of us are.” **Martin Luther King Jr.**

**This contention between two paradigms ultimately explains why one message can lead to two different meanings depending on which logic or which values drive the beholder of the message.**

Thus, two persons or two sets of people can share similar concerns, and yet, come to a different conclusion on how to go about addressing it. We saw in the small listening that conservatives and progressives share a mistrust of the elites and the current Government institutions. Across the political lines, what we observe is the wish to see power change and for it to look more like “everyday people.”



Reba Sherril, Trump supporter, Qanon believer & former Republican US congressional candidate to represent Florida 21st district

Source: [QAnon Has Moved Off The Internet And Is Coming For Congress](#)

Despite shared concerns - a look at Reba Sherril’s political program includes concern for land pollution, election frauds - the response is strikingly different. Trump supporters denounce the fraud & corruption of the Government and blames the establishment, in particular Democrats, for the evils of society. They have fallen prey to conspiracy theories (Pizzagate,...) amplified by communities like Qanon. Their vision of society is deeply rooted in the defense of one group over the other. Freedom is to be upheld, and the State must therefore have a minimal role.

On the other hand, progressives are denouncing how the State sustains flawed systems such as systemic racism, law enforcement violence, and neoliberal economic policies. However, In sharp contrast with Republicans, they advocate for community-rooted initiatives to change the State. The bill proposed by the Movement for Black lives, the Breathe act, proposes solutions that involve the State and improve its response by guaranteeing public participation, instead of getting rid of it of institutions altogether.

.....





✕ Summary

The small listening makes it clear: the story of Covid and the story of BLM are intertwined and are different expressions of the same pulse. In fact, along with other events, Covid and BLM are part of a single larger story that is asking to be told: one of systemic racism, structural inequalities, environmental destruction, and relentless pursuit of profit.

Death has prompted people to re-think life and what life - people, nature, wildlife - we take for granted.

People understand the gravity of the moment. Whether it is the neoliberal economic model, the power in place that perpetuates inequalities, racism and exploitation, more and more people understand the current systems are deeply flawed and responsible for the amount of death and destruction that we are currently witnessing. There needs to be an overhaul.

In fact, the surge of the Power With frame shows that people are energized to challenge power and propose new forms of governance that are rooted in solidarity and mutual care. On both sides of the political spectrum, we also note a growing defiance and mistrust of the system in place; institutions and the elites are criticized for being self-serving and corrupted. We see the appeal for conspiracy theories as a direct symptom of this phenomenon.

However, Power Over is the dominant frame of our small listening. We understand this as a reaction to the resurgence of Power/With. Whenever the status quo is challenged, it will show resistance. We see this in full display with the instances of State violence, protest crackdowns and other forms of control over of the expression of Power/With.

Importantly, the small listening has allowed us to surface fundamental tensions in the narrative space. This becomes very salient in the stories and narratives addressing our identity and our relationship with time.

While Covid has shown our interdependencies, and BLM has proved we can and should band together for change, the Us Vs Them frame has nonetheless taken force. Towards the end of our small listening, we were under the impression - bearing in mind the sensational tendency of news media - that the United States was on the brink of a civil war. Progressives and Conservatives have entered a face-off, and the divide has led to physical violence.

When looking at the future, there are wishes for a radical departure from the past expressed, for example, as taking down statues of colonial history. There are also wishes to heal and repair the past, its traumas and injustices. Overall, there is a growing feeling of collective responsibility to imagine a future together that is ridded of systemic racism, environmental destruction, and human suffering. However, this thirst for radical change is met by a surge of reactionary forces that wishes to protect the past.

What is emerging, in fact, speaks to something deeper and broader: how we make sense of this moment is ultimately defined by what values we hold most dearly.

What the small listening reveals is a visceral chasm of values; one rooted in individualism and the other rooted in collectivism.

This is exemplified by the dual meaning of the “I can’t breathe” message. For anti-mask supporters and conservatives, “I can’t breathe” is the expression of individual freedom. For BLM supporters and progressives, “I can’t breathe” is a message of solidarity with people victims of oppression. Freedom matters, but it is a collectivist freedom which connects all sufferings and considers that no one is free, until all of us are free.

Ultimately, this is a competition for two different kinds of society - one that perpetuates the status quo and rewards individualism or one that wishes to radically transform society through a collective vision of liberation. We are at a choice point.

BIG LISTENING - COVID

✕ Objective & Methodology

Objective

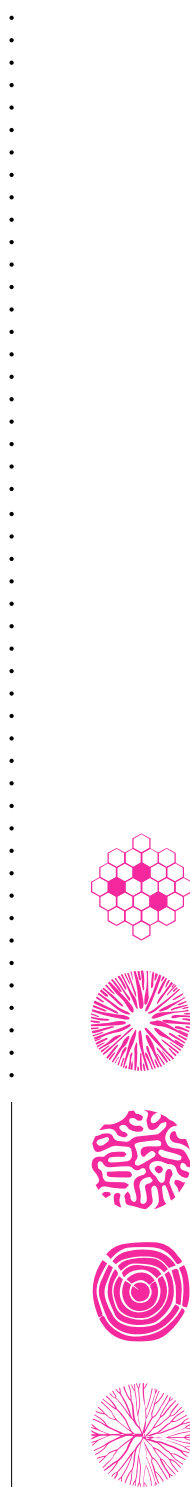
News media and Twitter are important spaces for circulating narratives throughout the public sphere. We tracked prominent keywords, networks and influencers between March and May 2020 to better understand which codes and frames were operating in mainstream spaces, as well as which narratives - and their prominent frames - can be fit for evolution.

Methodology

Our big listening approach looks at textual evidence of narratives in the public domain, creating insights into:

- Keywords in news media - the frames used to describe this moment
- Influential participants and networks - the influencers and influencer networks transmitting the frames

In this exercise, we tracked news media and Twitter conversations on the topic of Covid beginning in early March 2020, when the pandemic first became global, and ending in late May 2020, when the uprisings over centuries of racism and subjugation spread from Minneapolis to cities all over the world.different political views.





## Findings

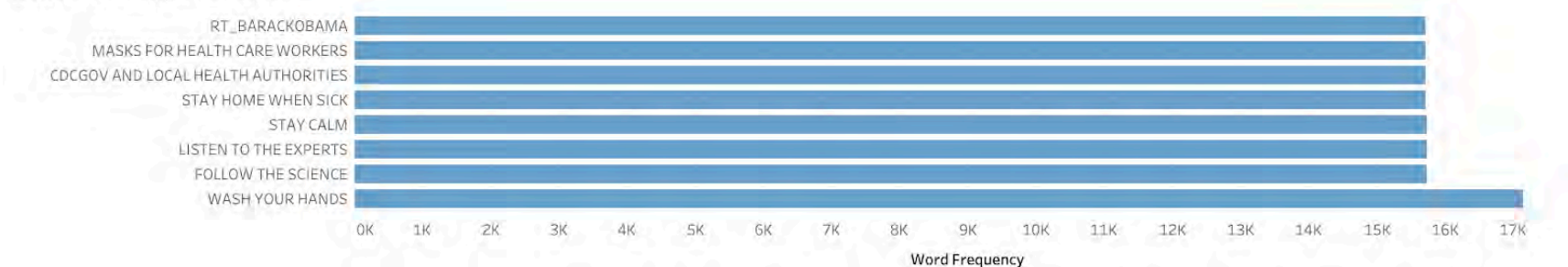
### --- From Creation to Us Vs Them - March 2020

The eight frames identified in our [listening model](#) provide a roadmap for analyzing news media and Twitter, giving an overview of the frames that dominated public discourse at this time. While Twitter conversations in March largely operated within the Life/Creation frame, April shows a quick descent into Identity/Us Vs Them framing with nationalism taking over Twitter.

#### Top phrases in March

##### March 2020, week 1

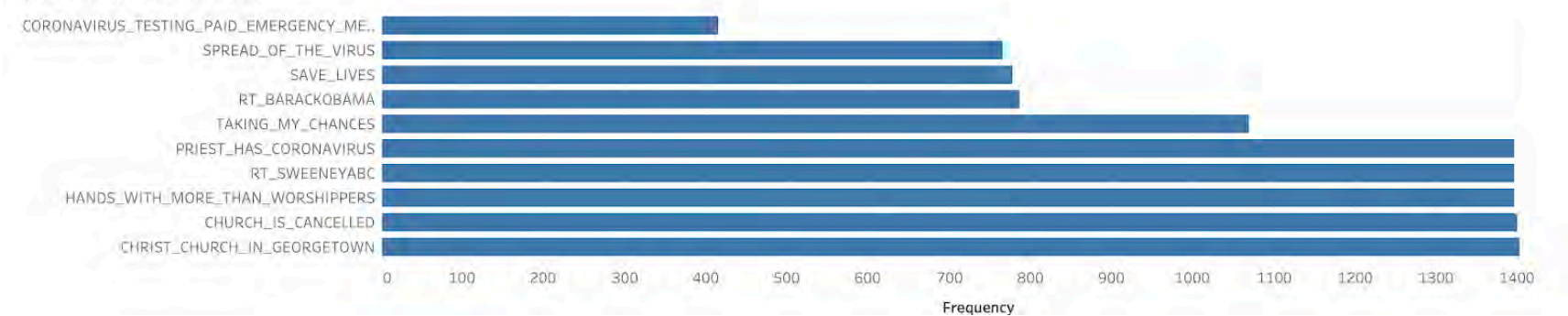
###### Module 10 Top Phrases



Early in March, encouragement to follow public health guidelines dominate the corpus, particularly as they are bolstered by major public figures like Barack Obama.

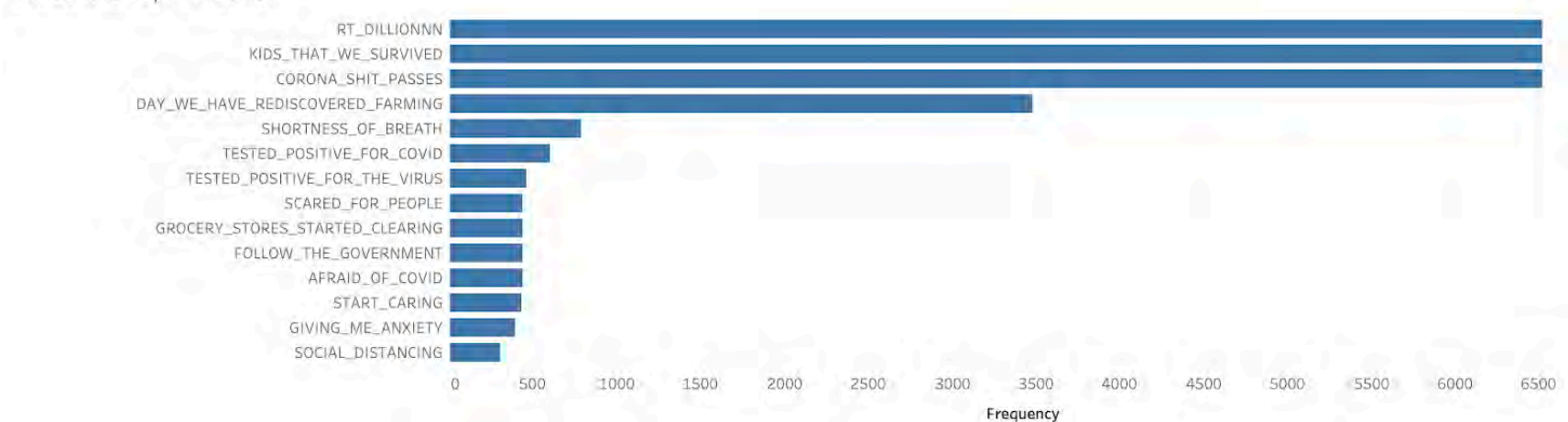
##### March 2020, week 2

###### Module 0 Top Phrases



##### March 2020, week 3

###### Module 2 Top Phrases



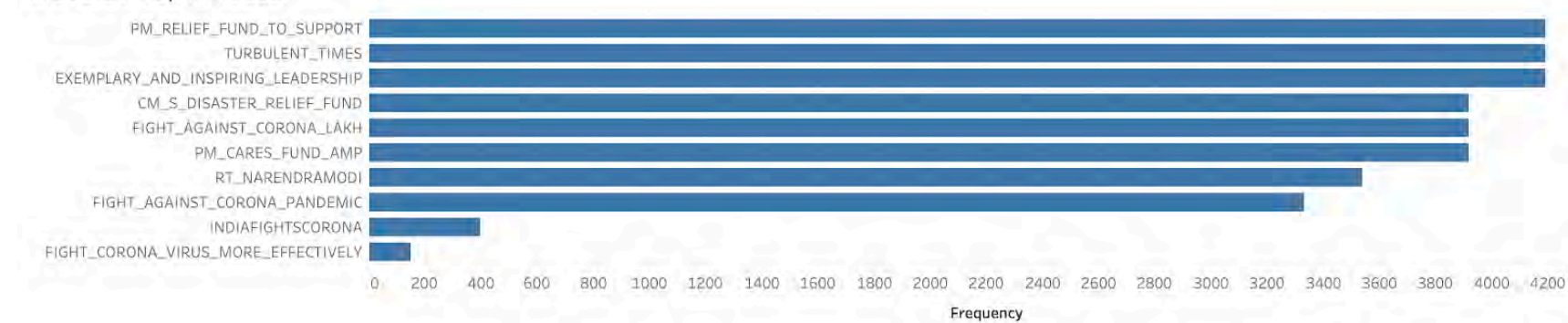
#### Top hashtags

In March, the top hashtags across the Twitter dataset showed a focus on the rallying cries that came to dominate the pandemic: **#socialdistancing**, **#washyourhands**, **#stayhome** began trending at this tie. Life/Creation also showed up on Twitter in the form of highlighting the behavioral changes needed to overcome the worsening crisis: **#churchiscancelled**, **#sportiscancelled**. Sacrifices, even from significant institutions, were needed to promote collective wellbeing.

At the end of March, **#PraiseModi**, **#ChineseVirus** began trending, suggesting a shift from the Life/Creation frame - and its stories of collective solidarity - into an Identity/Us Vs Them frame. As the novelty of the pandemic gave way to a realization of its severity and global impact, nationalist rhetoric is used to attribute blame and responsibility and deflect criticism. Trump fuels nationalism in the US in order to avoid responsibility for the mishandling of the crisis. His criticism of WHO, and subsequent withdrawal from the organization, is part of this strategy. Interestingly, as India entered lockdown, pro-Modi influencers and messages of support flooded Twitter. Covid provided nationalists a pretext to bolster their agenda.

##### March 2020, week 3

###### Module 7 Top Phrases





## --- Us vs Them bolstered by US influencers - April 2020

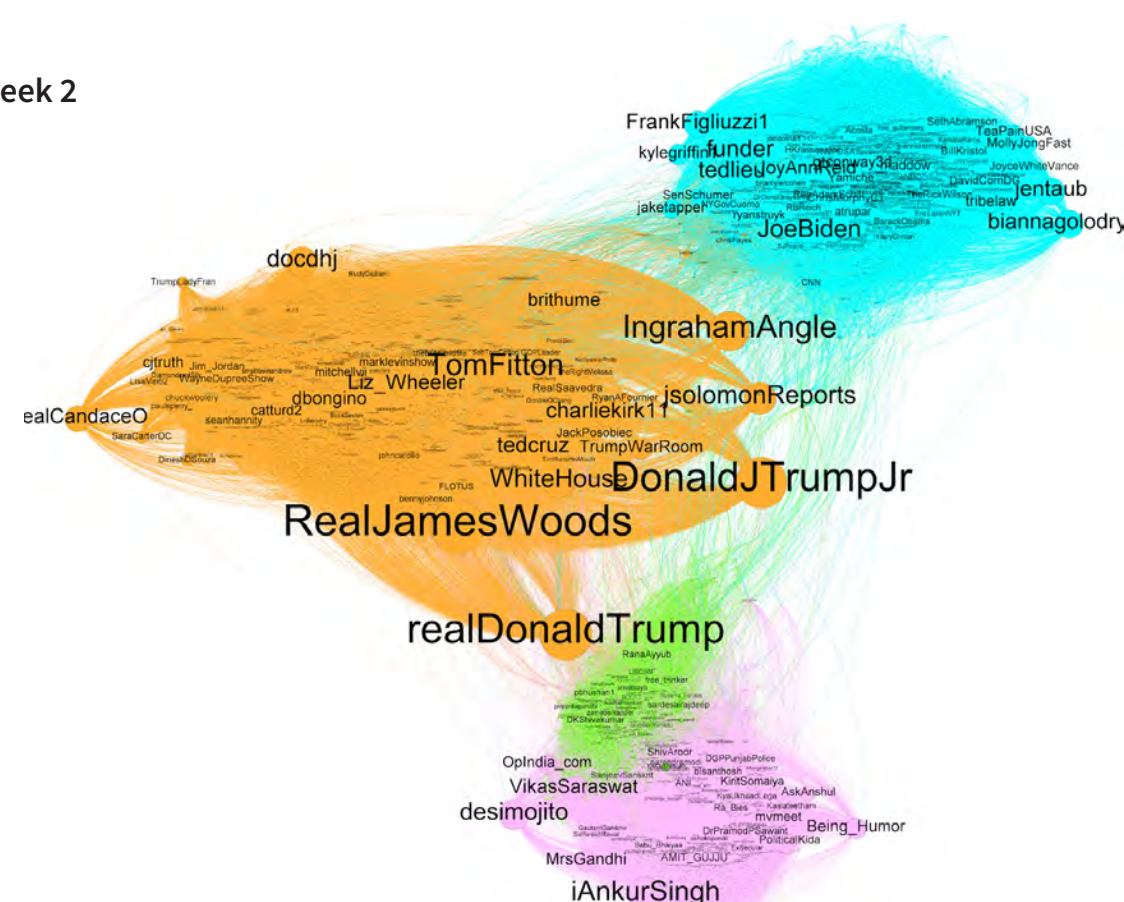
### US politics set the tone on Covid

The frame shift from Life/Creation to Identity/Us vs Them co-occurred with a shift in major influencers in the Twitter corpus.

For most of March and April, Twitter was a US-centered conversation, with public officials as the major influencers

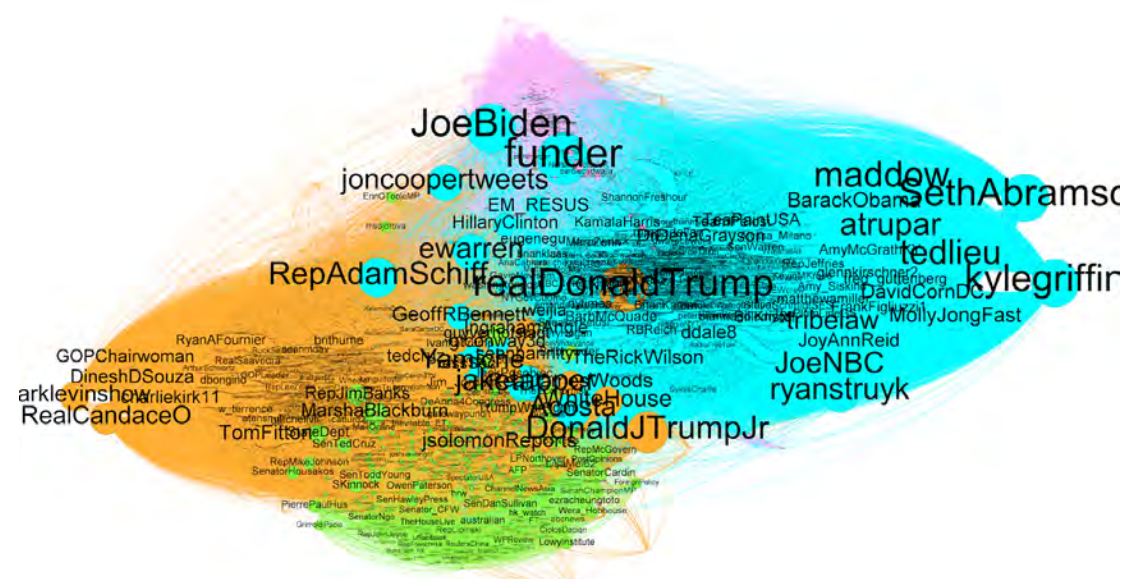
In March, US democrats including Barack Obama delivered encouragement to follow public health guidelines (social distancing, washing hands, etc.). In April, Donald Trump and the Republican party claimed the narrative space, promoting the Identity/Us vs Them framing for understanding the moment. We see this in the network graphs below. The most influential accounts and Tweets (in the orange bubble) are conservative politicians, entertainers, and media figures.

#### April 2020, week 2



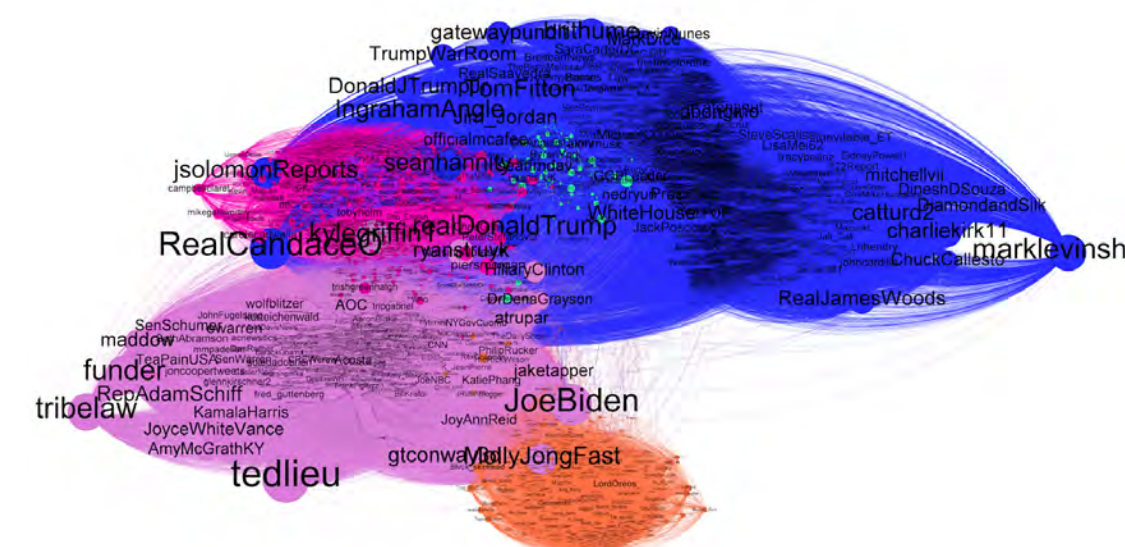
#### April 2020, week 3

A tension arises with the progressive (light blue) bubble, whose influence increases over the course of the month.



#### April 2020, week 4

The dark blue bubble shows the continued influence of conservatives. In addition to the accounts that remained influential throughout the month of April (Donald Trump, Laura Ingraham and James Woods), The Gateway Pundit - a far-right propaganda outlet - has entered the conversation, suggesting a further move away from the Life/Creation frame and public health encouragement we saw in March.



At the end of April 2020, the discourse on Twitter had taken a turn, away from immediate attempts to mobilize the US population to take drastic and necessary public health measures, to the conservative backlash and denial of Covid realities spearheaded by Donald Trump. Simmering along parallel to this US-centric conversation is the continued influence of pro-Modi accounts, spreading similarly nationalistic messages.





### --- Framing in a narrative transition - May 2020

#### Language of a pivotal moment

In March and April, we saw Twitter and news media discourse move through a reframing of the crisis; from an optimistic Life/Creation frame focused on collective action and wellbeing, to a reactive, nationalist Identity/Us vs Them frame.

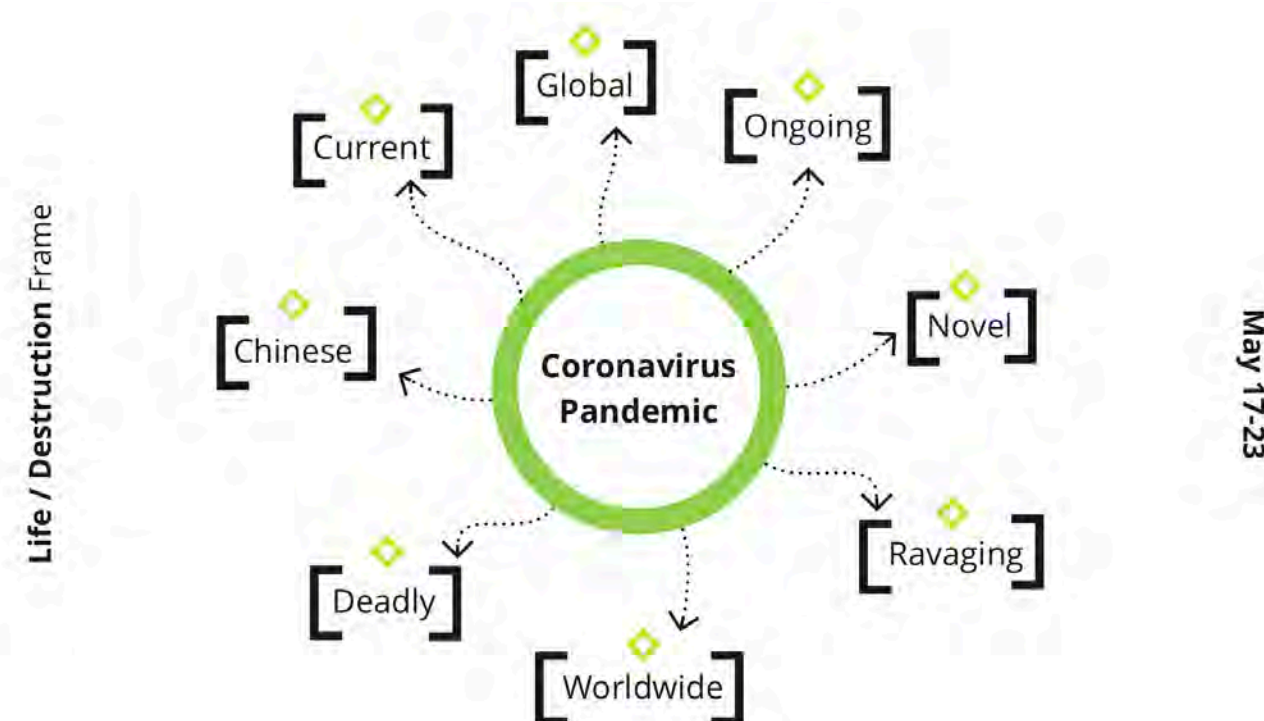
On May 25th 2020, Minneapolis police killed 46-year-old George Floyd. Floyd's murder was documented in a viral video, causing shockwaves around the globe. Revelations about the police killing of Breonna Taylor on March 13th caused both of their names to become the rallying cry for intense protests. To many in the US none of this came as a surprise. Police brutality and the murders of Black Americans by police and white supremacists are after all nothing new. In the past decade alone, the cruel murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile, Atatiana Jefferson, Ahmaud Arbery and many others have sparked protests and demands for reform and abolition.

What was different this time? It has become clear as the months have worn on that the Black Lives Matter movement in its 2020 incarnation is "[the largest movement in history](#)". This mass mobilization happened in the context of Covid, a rupture in time in which people from all strata of society saw their "normal" disrupted, laying bare the fundamental injustice suffered by so many in this inherently white supremacist system.

In this exercise, we look at frame shifts in news media that happened at the moment of narrative transition, when the dominant narratives and frames of Covid were halted by the start of the BLM uprisings. This analysis shows both a snapshot in time - the moment of narrative confluence between Covid and BLM - and suggests some opportunities for evolution based on the specific changes observed.

#### Frame: "Life/Destruction" May 17-23

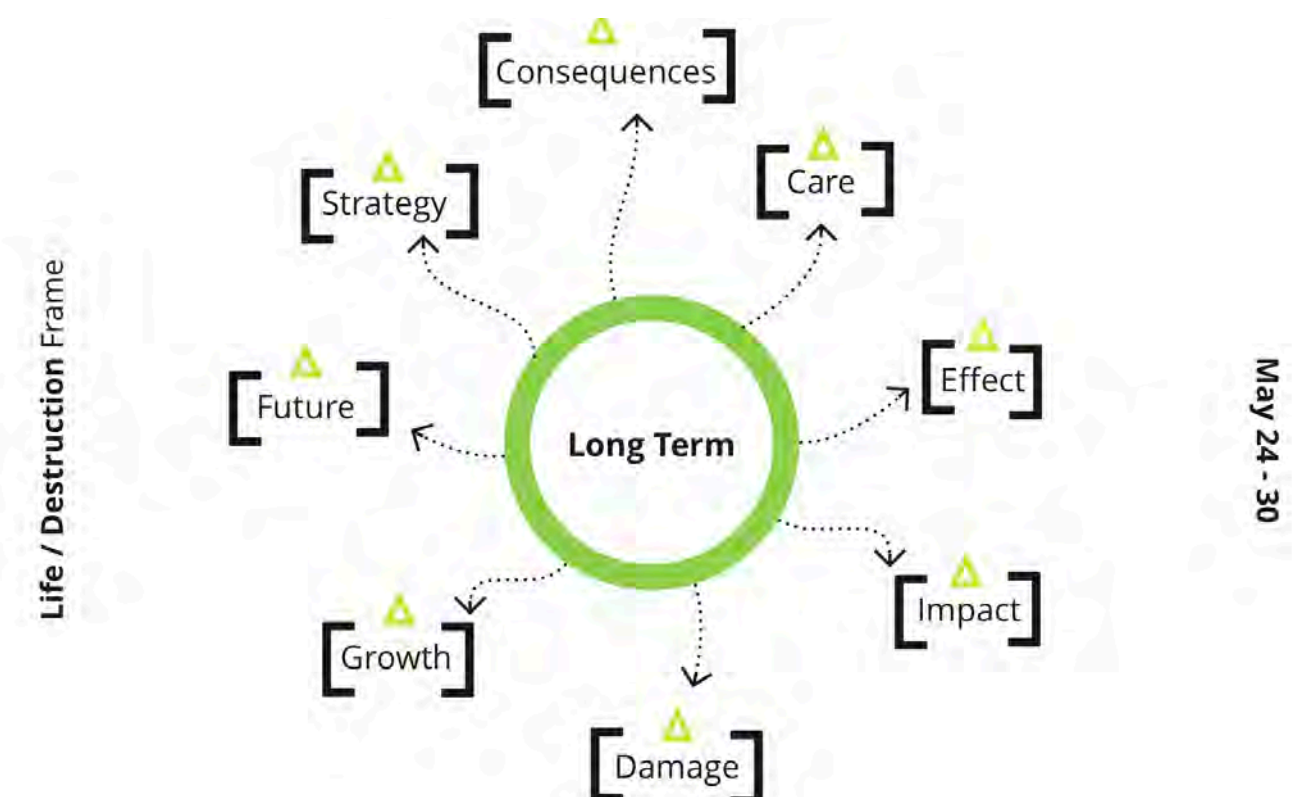
The situation is described as an outbreak, a pandemic and a crisis. Collocates speak to its global reach and far-reaching devastation.



The magnitude of the destruction of life is also felt in the frequent mentions of what a "post-Covid world" or the "post-Covid era" will look like. In attempting to imagine global concepts (world, era) beyond Covid, the media corpus shows that Covid is imagined as spatial (world) but also temporal (era). Here, the Life/Destruction frame blends with the Time/Future frame that we observed in the [small listening](#). The pandemic has at this point in May reached such a magnitude that imagining a return back to normal is no longer possible. It's not just a bad flu season; it's an era-defining moment in time.

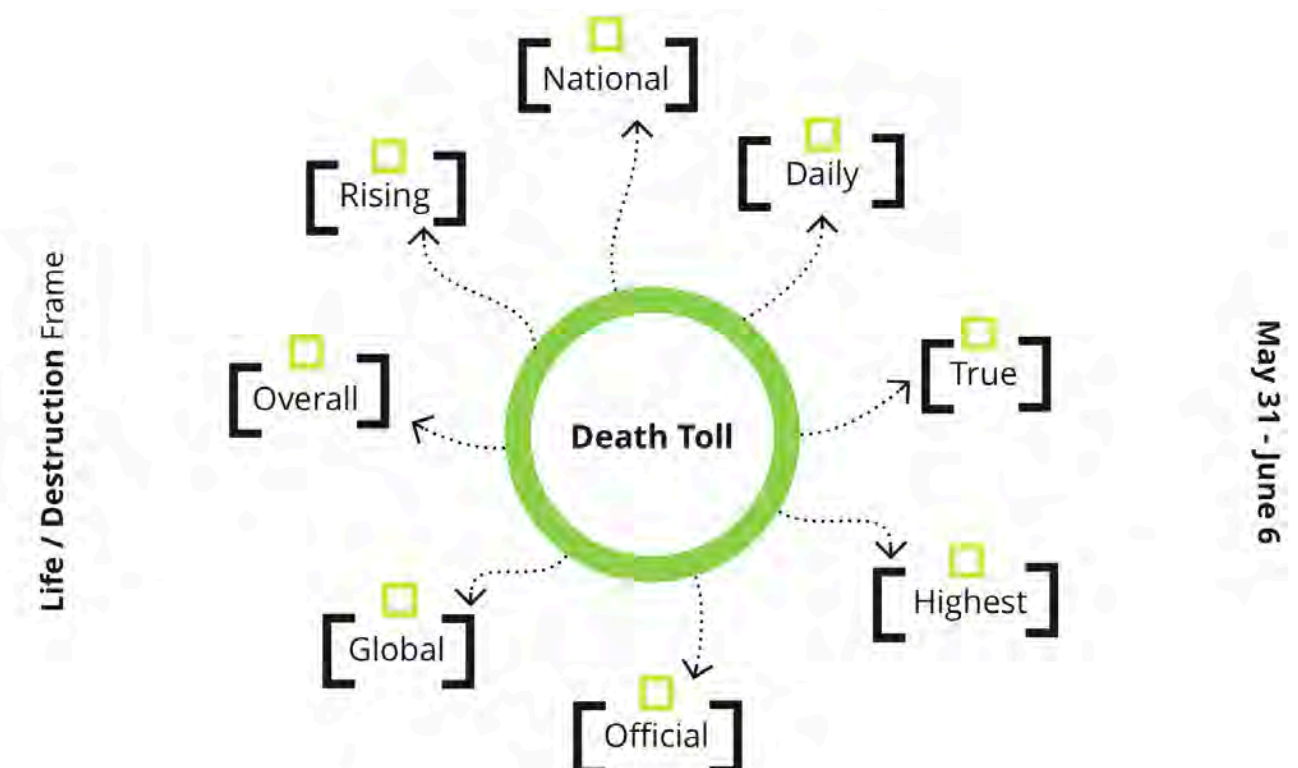
#### Frame: Life/Destruction May 24-30

This week, *long term* shows up as a keyword in Covid reporting. Covid's impact is felt across all areas of society (health, economy, care), and the Life/ Destruction frame provides a vessel within which to draw parallels between these different domains.



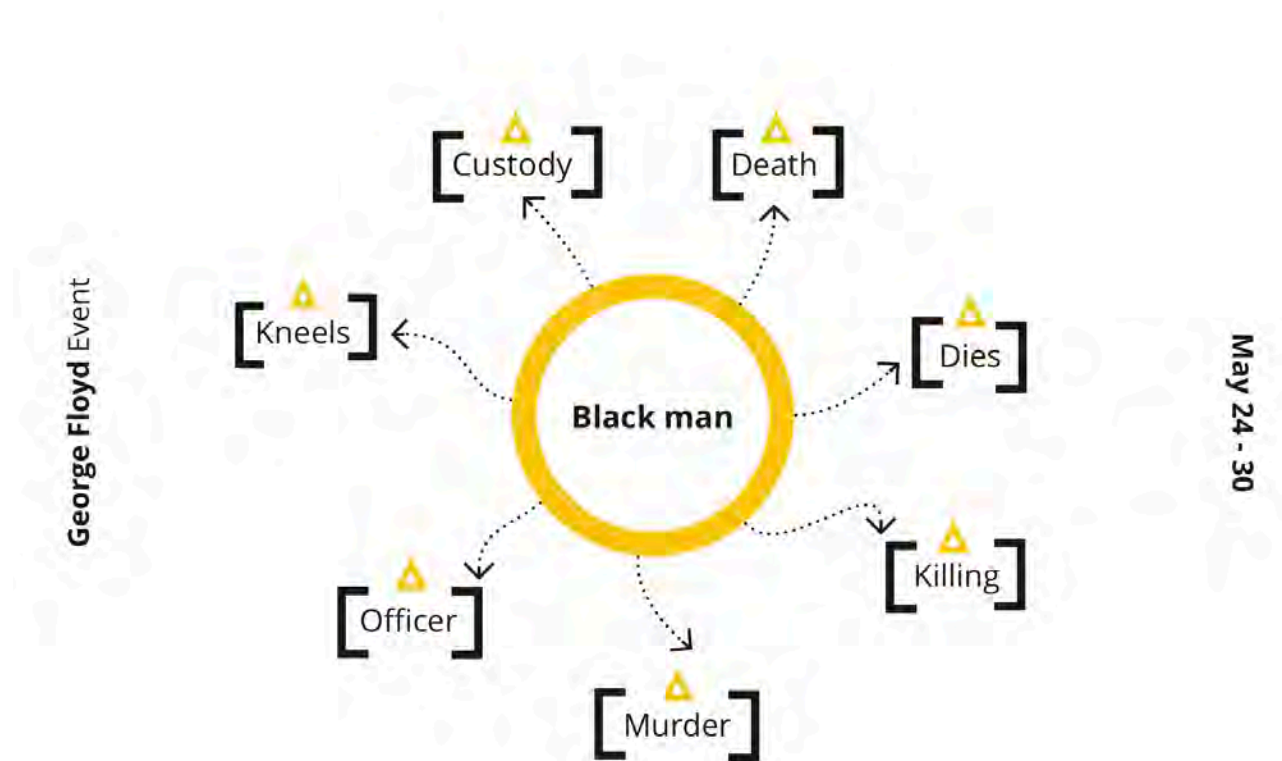
#### Frame: Life/Destruction May 31-June 6

This week, *death toll* is the most prominent keyword, suggesting that the true loss of human life is entering the media corpus conversation. The data shows a focus on statistics, quantifying and comparing the devastation of Covid. During this time, George Floyd's murder has also entered the media conversation and, sparked by a mass mobilization of Black Lives Matter activism, shone a spotlight on the death toll of Black people at the hands of police and the state. The Life/Destruction frame this week allows conversations to address both Covid and anti-Black violence.

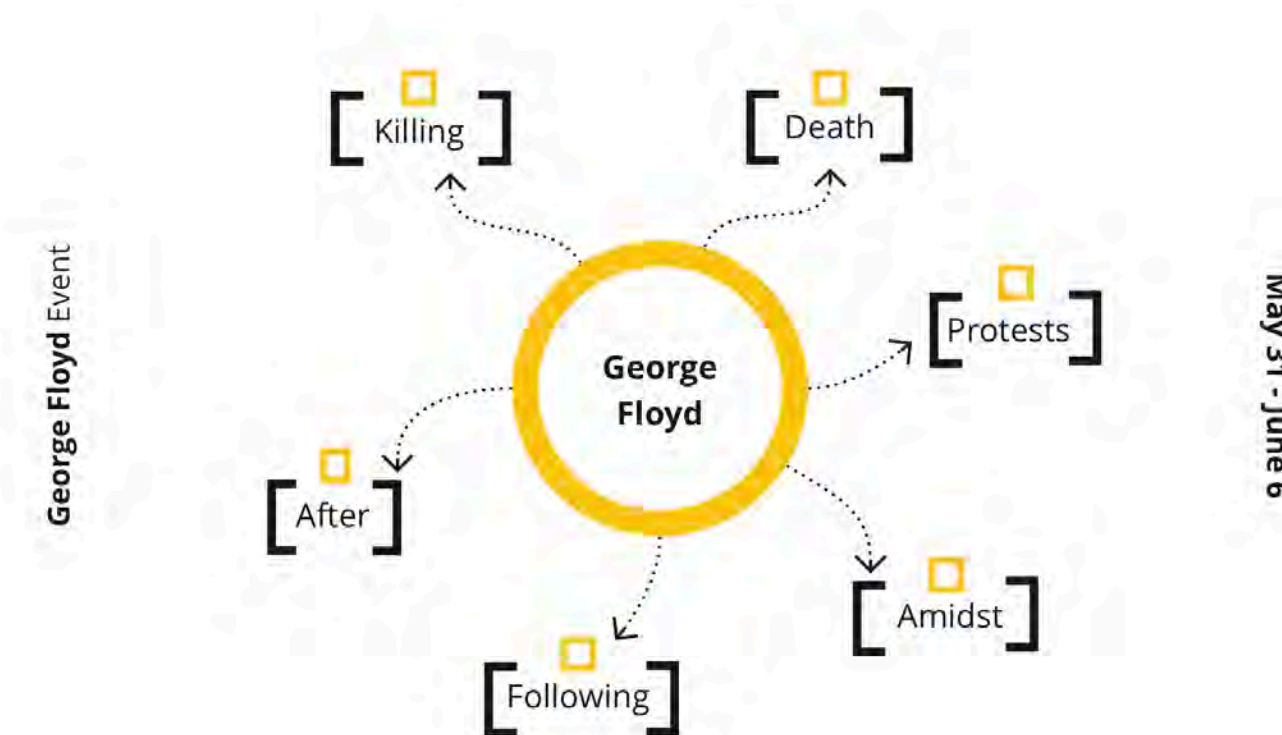


## George Floyd May 17-23

After George Floyd was killed on May 25th, reports initially named him as an anonymous “Black man”, but his name quickly became a rallying cry, showing the power of **#SayTheirNames** as a key demand of the Movement For Black Lives. In this week, the circumstances of the murder were reported and debated, with the expected passive constructions highlighting where he died (in police custody) but not who killed him. The near-instant spread of the video showing the last minutes of Floyd’s life, this anonymity and passivity did not last long.



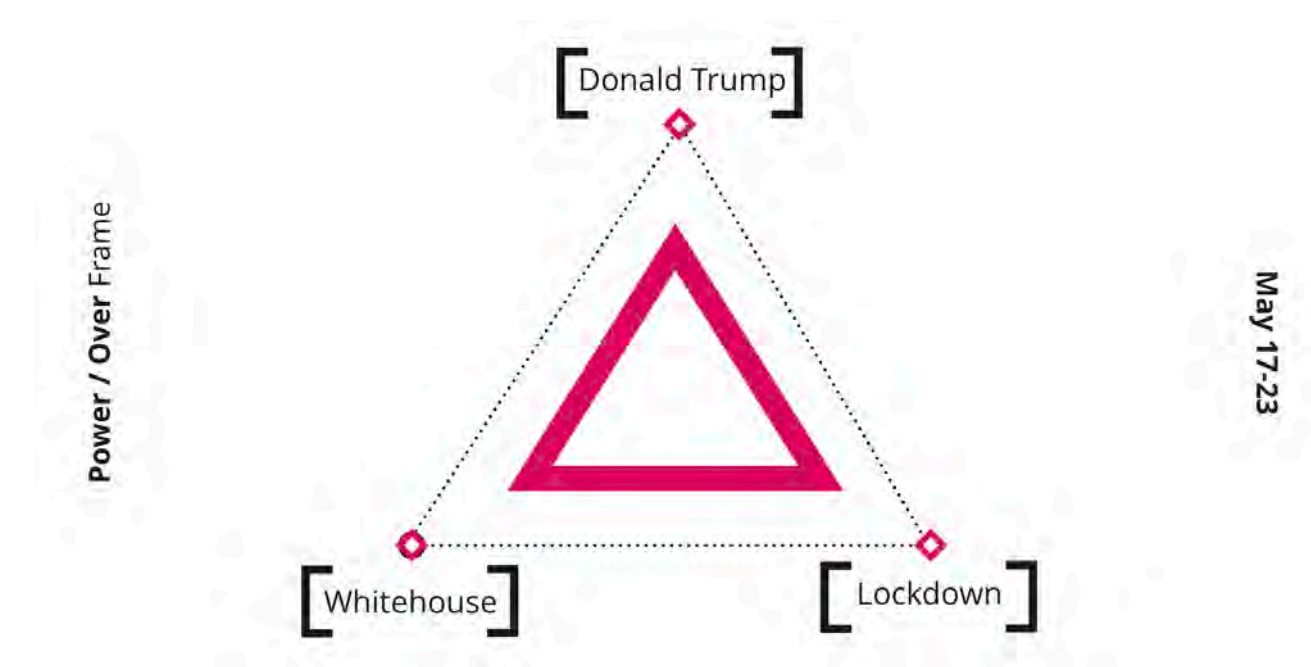
## George Floyd Week 23 - May 31st - June 6th



The week following Floyd’s murder, his name, rather than the anonymous “Black man”, was everywhere, setting the tone for the protests that quickly followed. He is identified as the genesis of the protests, as the spark that ignited this mass

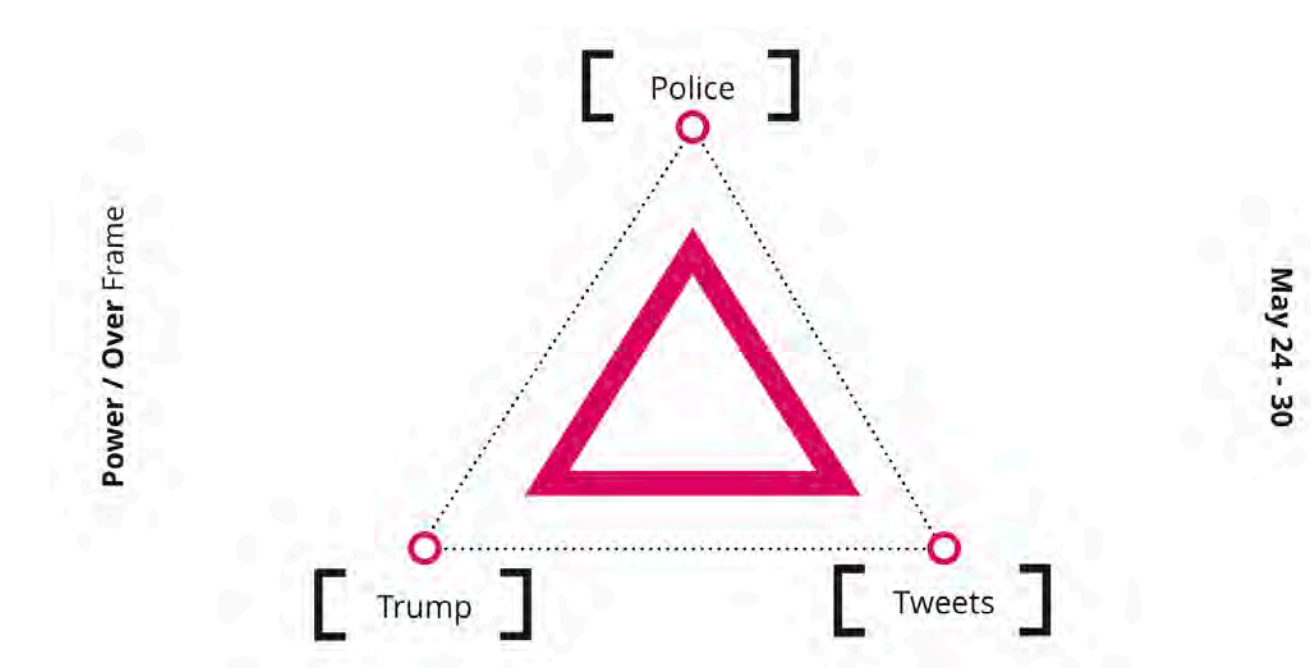
## Frame: Power/Over May 17-23

*Donald Trump, the White House and coronavirus lockdown* are high frequency keywords showing up and building the Power/Over frame this week. *The lockdown* - meaning the various stay-at-home orders that in many places had been in place since late March - is portrayed as having power over individuals and communities.



## Power/Over May 24-30

The conversation within the Power/Over frame shifted quickly away from the lockdown and onto police.

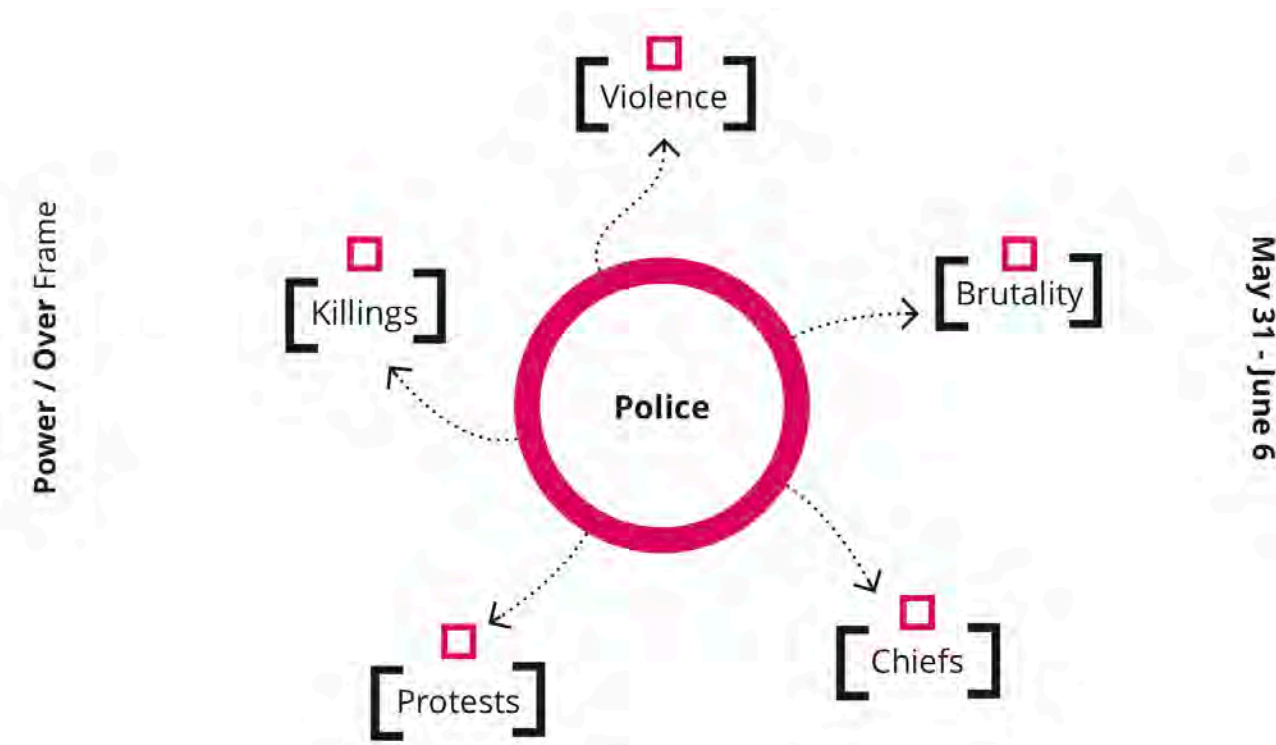






## Power/Over May 31 - June 6

Police continue to dominate the Power/Over frame this week, following the rapid shift of the frame from Covid-centric to BLM-centric stories.

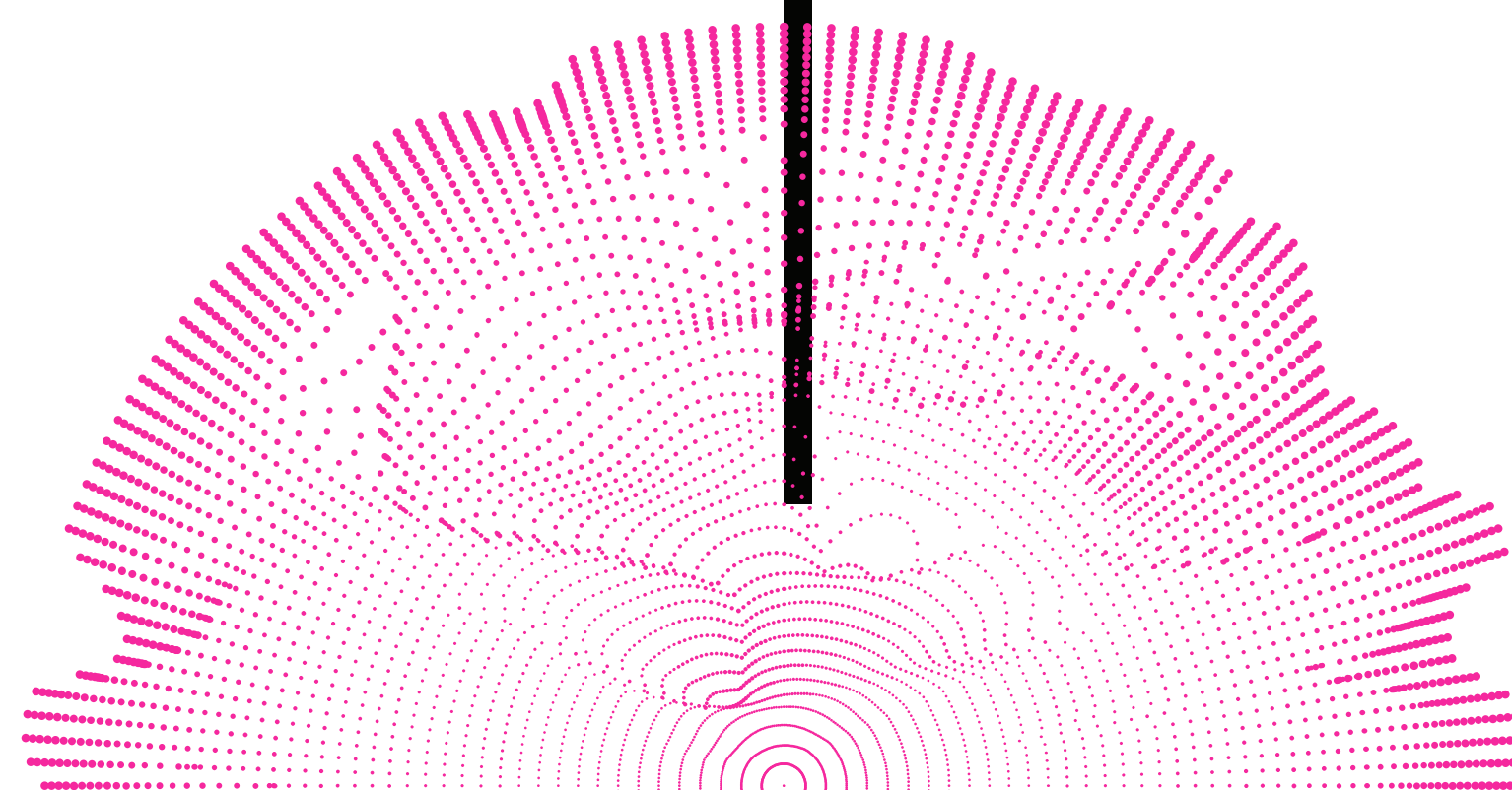


Opportunity to join the two narratives (Covid and BLM) by strategically **denaturalizing** both causes of the high death toll. Mass death from Covid is not natural, and was caused by human decisions. Mass death from police brutality is not natural, it too is caused by human decisions. The cause-and-effect logic links the grief of one to the grief of the other, and opens up space for solidarity.

## ✕ Summary

Our big listening captures the broad contours of influencer networks, prominent keywords and hashtags, and linguistic constructions. We see the trends of March and April 2020, during which time the Twitter conversations went from spreading a “can do” message in the Life/Creation frame, encouraging people to follow public health guidelines, to the nationalist backlash from conservatives, both in the US and in India.

By May, the effects of the pandemic could no longer be denied, as we documented by looking at the language of the news media in late May. The Life/Destruction frame holds stories of devastated individuals, communities, economies, and ways of life. And on May 25th, George Floyd was killed by police. His murder set off a massive wave of protests across the world, demanding the protection of Black lives. Calling out police brutality and systemic racism across domains of society took center stage, framed as Power/Over, taking (if momentarily) the focus off pandemic lockdowns as mechanisms of control.



# BIG LISTENING - BLM

## ✕ Objective & Methodology

During the first week of June 2020, we collected over 30 million tweets. We used this dataset to do the following data processing:

### A. Attention Analysis

**Objective:** To get a high level overview of the narrative space during this turning point.

**Methodology:** We selected a random, 100k sample from the original 30 million tweets to decipher Overall Attention, Themes and Hashtags.

### B. Network Analysis

**Objective:** To show us the most influential voices in the space.

**Methodology:** Using the dataset we generated a giant network that we then parsed this into communities/modules. Each module was plotted according to its influence within the overall network. We then analyzed the most influential nodes and tweets.

### C. Power Analysis

**Objective:** to understand the narrative in terms of the echo chambers and their influence in the conversation.

**Methodology:** Taking the full dataset we parsed the tweets into echo chamber communities. We then ran several analyses to measure the power of communities using several metrics including:

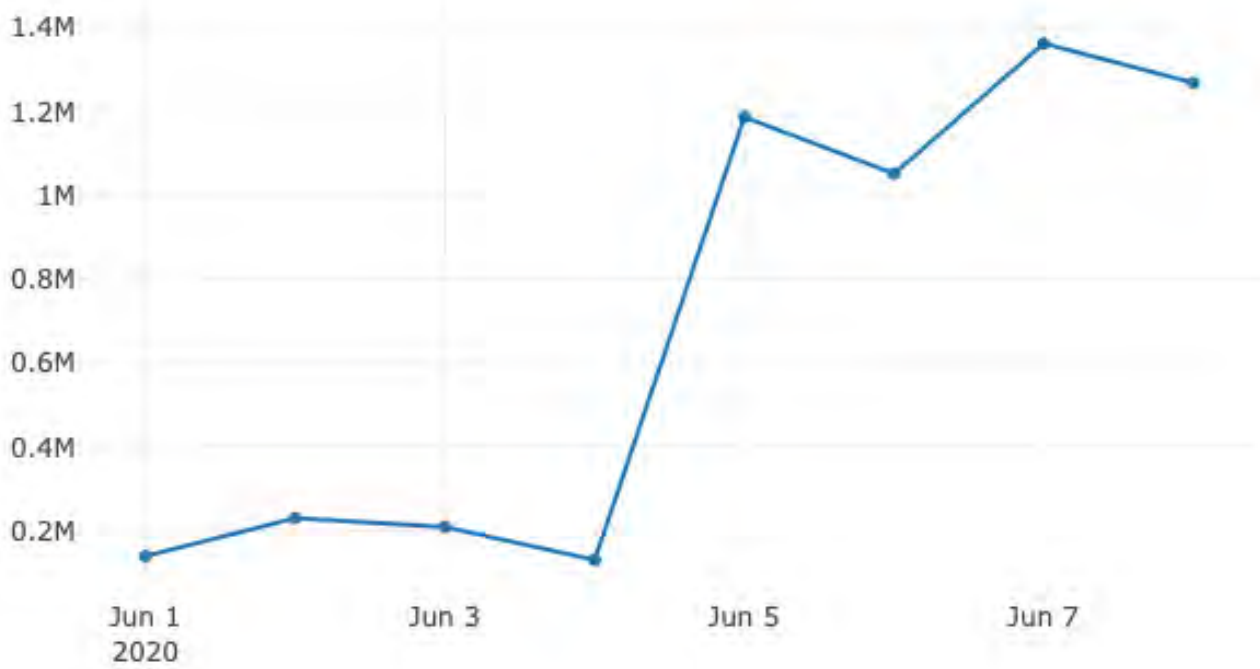
- ° Unity (shared voice)
- ° Population (community presence)
- ° Commitment (continued engagement)

## ✕ Findings

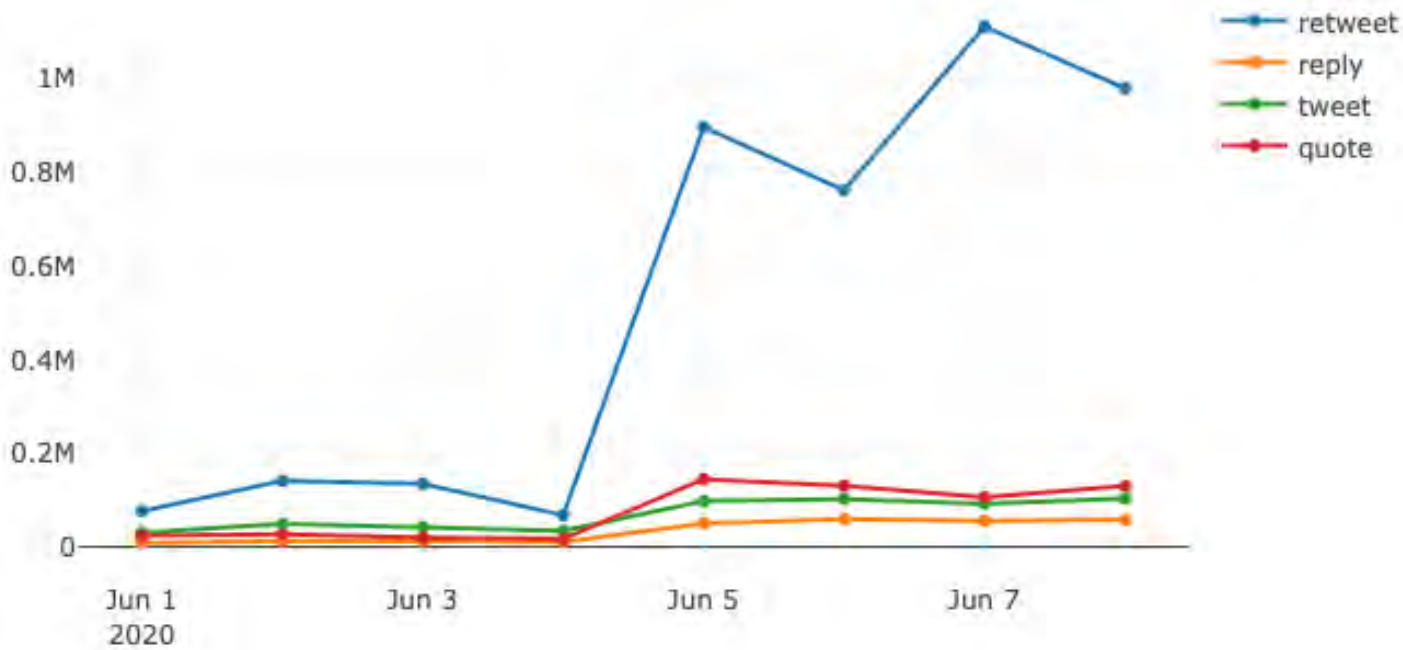
### --- Attention: Overall Twitter Data

Hashtags: #BLM #BlackLivesMatter

As we can see from the data below, the BLM narrative space saw a huge increase activity over this week in June. This increase in activity reflected the many direct actions, protests and dissidence across the United States over this period.

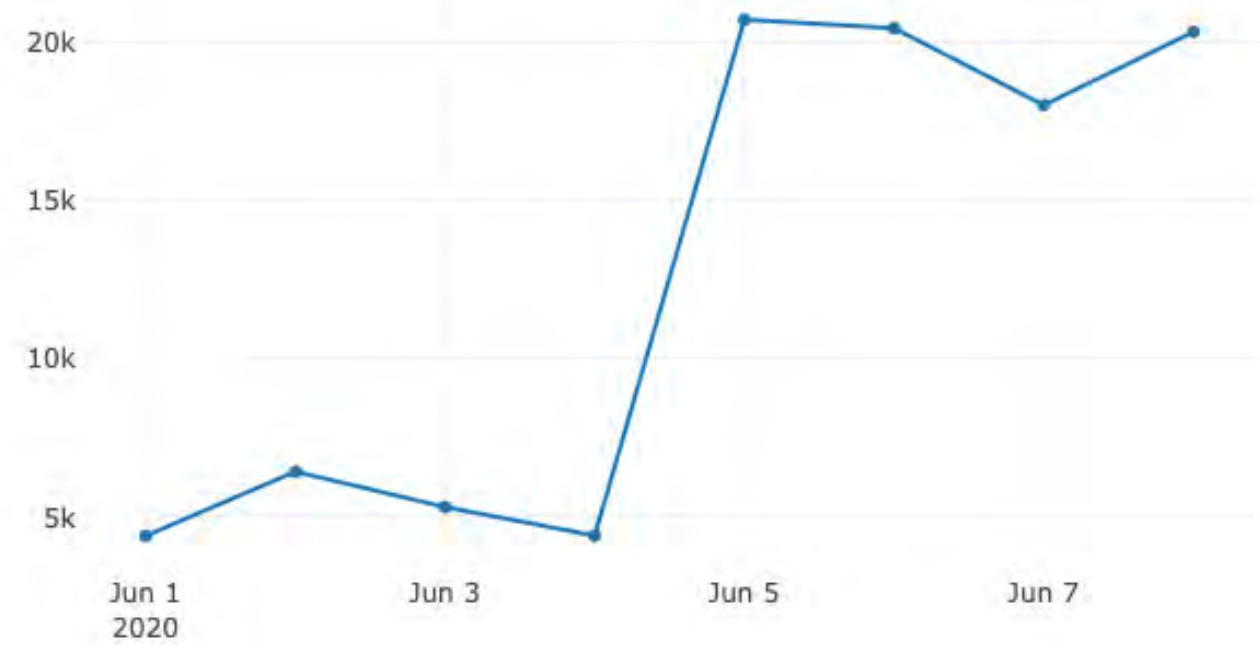


On Twitter, the majority of activity was amplification several core messages as can be seen by the disproportionate retweet count. Specifically we see that from June 4th the space became principally an amplification network.



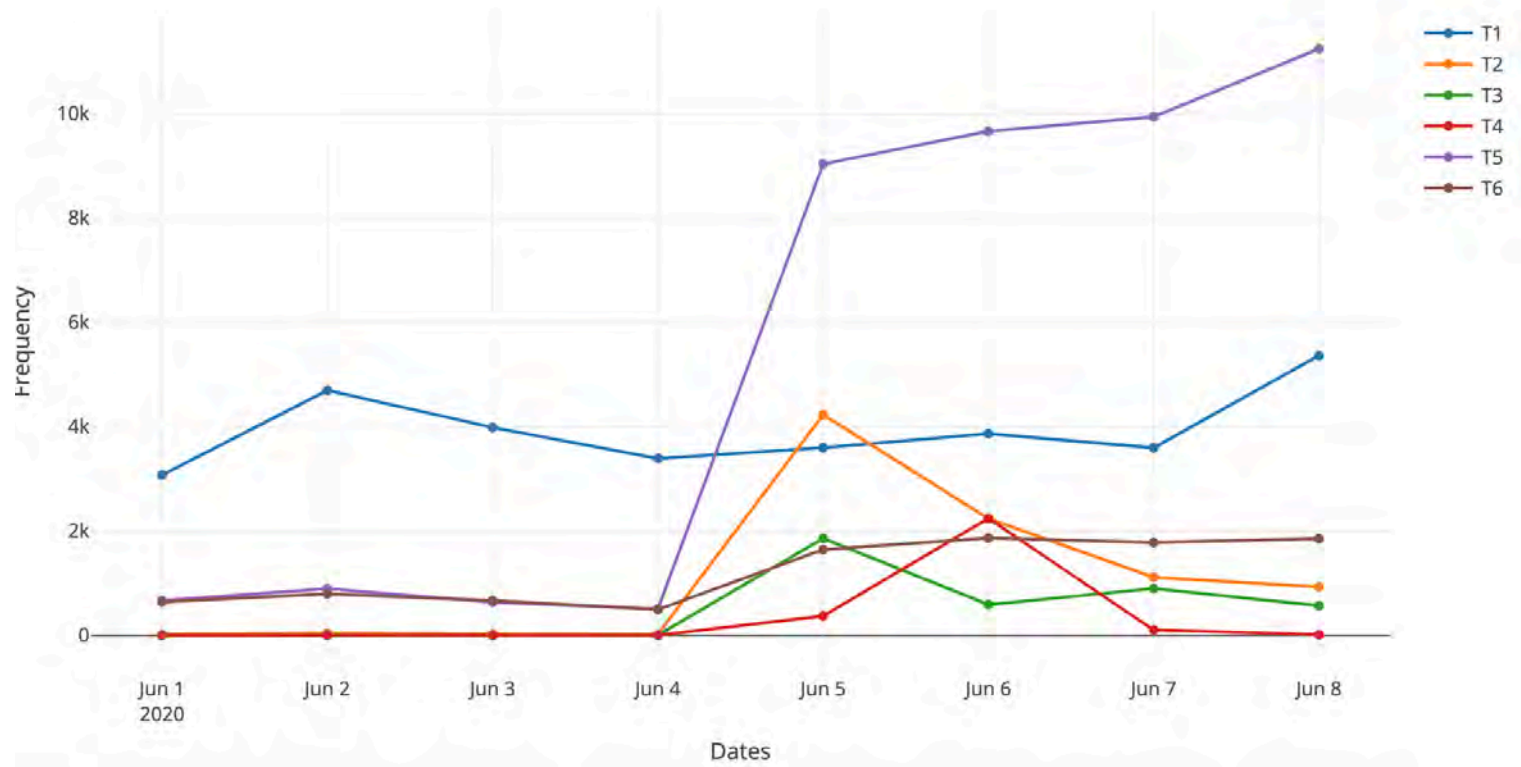
### Attention: Twitter Attention [100k Sample]

In total, we collected over 30 million tweets from this week in June.





Attention Themes



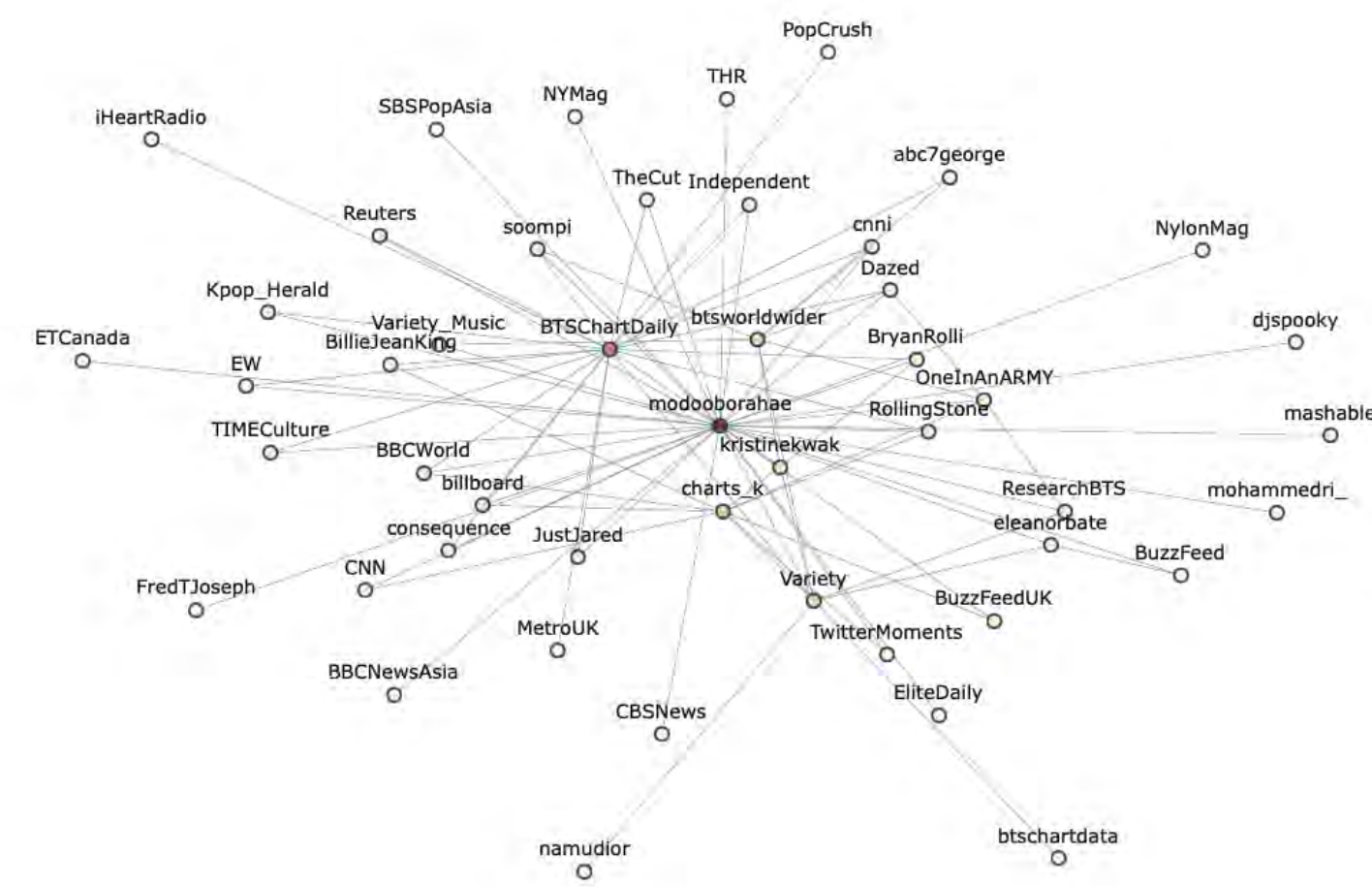
Coded Themes

Theme	Description	Frames
Theme One	This theme had threads: 1) Radical Disruption, 2)White Privilege and 3)Against Us. Each of these threads collectively emphasized and justified the need for 'radical disruption' in reaction to George Floyd's Death.	Identity/Us vs Them Power/With
Theme Two	Not a significant theme, with most attention on posts with a lighter theme.	Power/With
Theme Three	This theme focused on tracking the direct actions in Washington, DC. Including the mural on the streets of DC. The theme emphasized the peaceful nature of the protests at this early stage.	Identity/Interdependence Power/With
Theme Four	Emphasized the commodification of the BLM movement on social media.	Identity/Us vs Them Power/Over
Theme Five	The largest and most influential theme in the narrative was composed of many interwoven threads. The common foundation between them is justification and defence of the BLM movement.	Power/With Identity/Us vs Them Power/Over
Theme Six	This minor theme, emphasizes the absurdity and violence of the death of George Floyd.	Identity/Us vs Them Power/Over

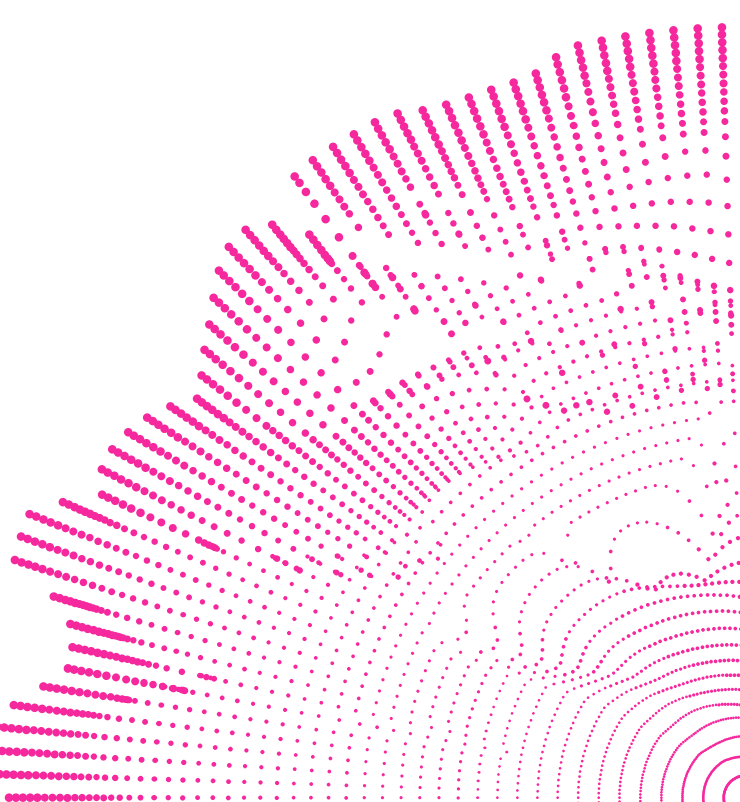
For more details on each of these themes, follow the link on the Theme titles.

--- Network: Overview

This view of the network shows the most influential 50 nodes within the network, ordered by eigenvector centrality.



This network, of the most influential nodes were those relating to the entertainment industry. With a little investigation and as we will see in later in the analysis, this community was formed with news of a large donation by K-Pop band BTS to Black Lives Matter. The central node as we can see above belongs to a fan account:

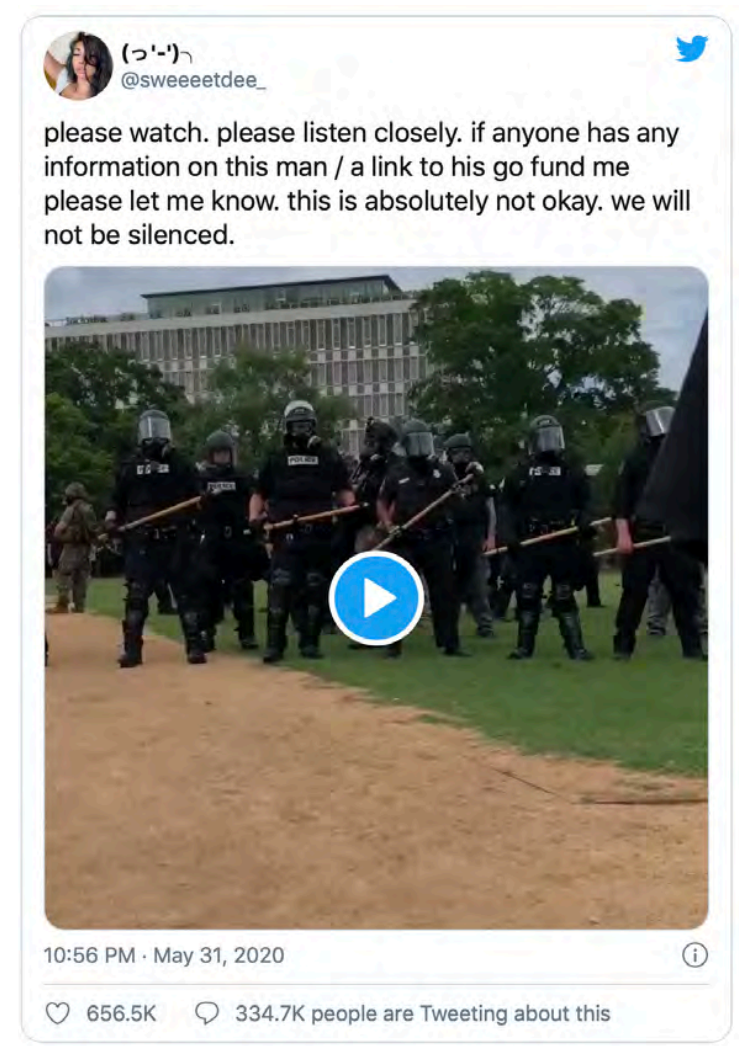




“ A common misconception about K-pop fandom in the U.S. is that it is largely made up of teenage Korean-Americans – an image that is outdated by about two decades. Since the early 2000s when K-pop arrived in the U.S. largely through young Korean-American immigrants, the music spread to other immigrant and POC communities who were marginalized from mainstream entertainment and sought refuge in Korean pop culture. Today, the K-pop fandom in the U.S. is not very Korean, and not that young either. By most accounts, these K-pop fans are commonly in their 20s and 30s or older, and exist across a broad racial spectrum that includes a big following of Black fans”.

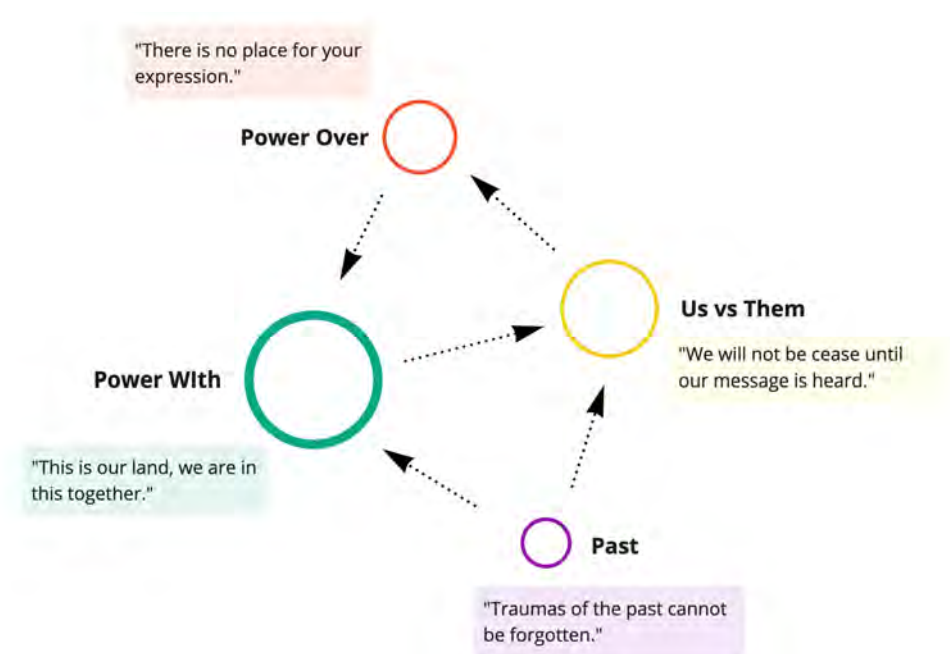
[K-POP](#)

Later in this week, this same network would become principally an amplification network for the following tweet:



Whereas the first evolution of this network emphasized the Power/With frame, this second most viral tweet, while emphasizing the same Power/With frame, contrasted it with the Power/Over frame. Through this contrast we also find the emergence of the Identity/Us vs Them frame within this network. **This contrast between these three frames typify the network in particular and the twitter data set in general.**

We can typify this interaction with the following diagram:

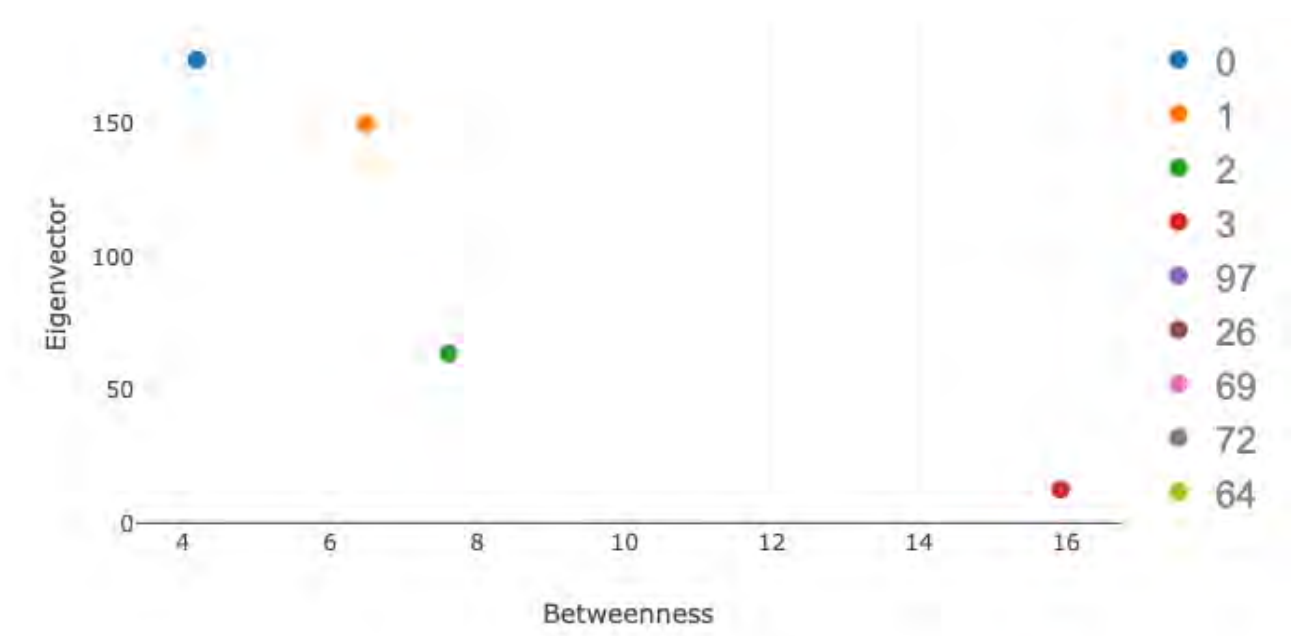


The Power/With frame is the foundational theme within the dataset, for this first week of June. However as this codes is expressed in the many direct actions and protests and met with often brutal and violent reactions from government and police; and seemingly dismissive statements by governmental officials. In reaction to this much of the energy behind the narrative evolved into an Identity/Us vs Them theme - which dominated the narrative space into the latter part of the week, and indeed the rest of the movement throughout June.

### Network Centrality

The following diagrams show communities within the BLM narrative space, twitter during the first week of June 2020. Each dot is represented with a different color and mapped along two axes:

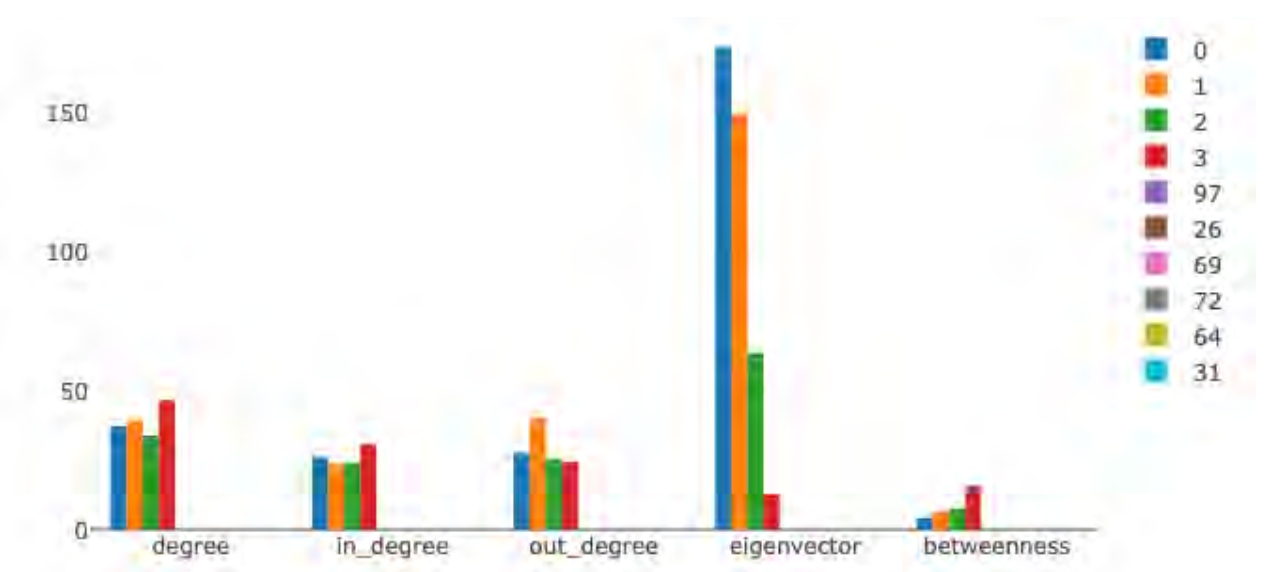
[Eigenvector Centrality](#) - the measure of the influence of the community within the overall network  
[Betweenness Centrality](#) - the measure of how central, from an information perspective, the community is



We can see from the above graph that, Community 0 is by far the most influential community. Following this is community 1, 2 and 3. However, from a network perspective, community 3 is the most central but relatively not influential.

In the diagram below we three additional centrality measures:

**Degree** - the amount of connections to each community  
**In degree** - the amount of connections leading into this community (retweets)  
**Out degree** - the amount of connections leading out of the community (retweets)



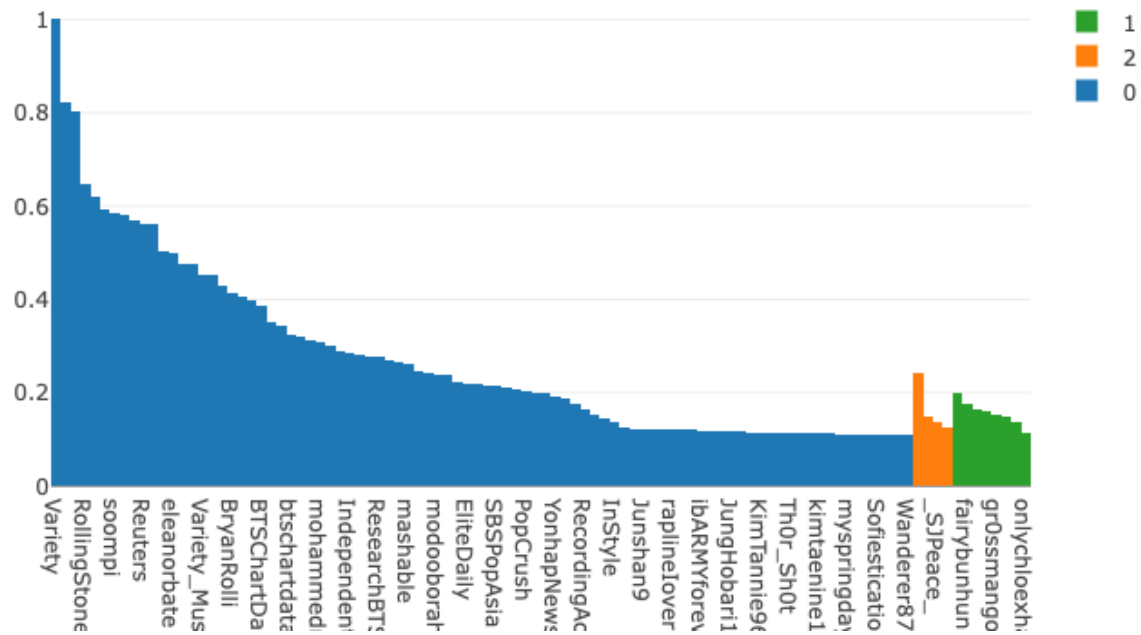


As was borne out by the centrality graph, this graph shows that groups 0,1 and 2 are the most influential but that group 3 is the most central. We could look to groups 0-2 as reflecting the messages, or external expression of the narrative; while we can look to group 3 for indications of deeper, more resilient logics within the narrative space. This is borne out in our deeper analysis, which can be summarized as follows:

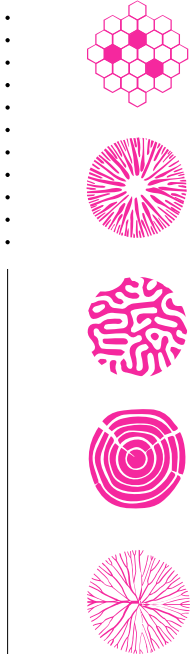
Community Descriptions

Community Number	Description	Frames
Community 0	This was the most influential community within in the space and two predominant threads. 1) The BTS donation to BLM, 2) The arrest of Givionne Jordan the “Im not your enemy” protestor.	Power/With
Community 1	This community and underlying community tracked the protests and direct actions in real time, and emphasized the peaceful and necessary aspects of them.	Power/With
Community 2	This was mostly an amplification network for the same tweet (as in Comm. 0) about the arrest of Givione Jordan.	Power/With
Community 3	As we can see from centrality measures, we can look to this community to see the ‘baseline’ of the narrative space. The most influential tweet is a strong message of solidarity in times of crisis, from Obama. However, as we delve deeper we find a persistent expressions of defiance in the face of misplaced authority. This becomes the core dynamic within this network.	Power/With Power/Over Identity/Us vs Them

For more details on each community, follow the link in the Community title.



We see in the above diagram, showing the 100 nodes by community, that community 0 dominates the space. Furthermore, the majority of nodes(accounts) are related to entertainment media - we will see later that most of this activity is related to a large donation by K-Pop band BTS.

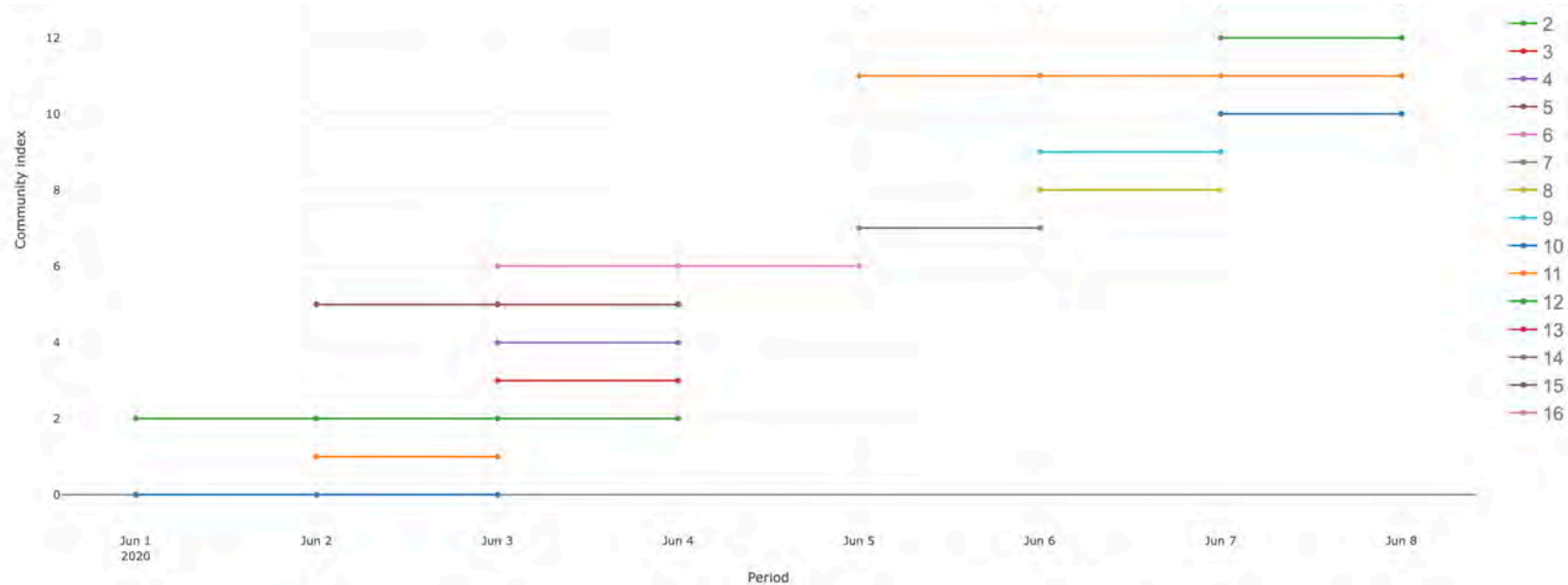


--- Power: Echo Chambers (by date)

Our echo chamber analysis is derived from the work of [Deen Freelon](#), who has developed a set of tools that map online movements using [Charles Tilly's](#) framework of Worthiness, Unity, Numbers and Commitment. In the following subsections you will see graphs that measure the quality of the echo chamber as:

- Numbers - measuring the changes in the population of the communities
- Unity - measures the semantic similarity within each community
- Commitment - measuring specifically how often the same members within a community participate

Note, due to the principally qualitative of ‘worthiness’ in Tilly’s framework, this cannot be mapped by qualitative means but in turn requires critical analyses.



In the above diagram we can see that during this week in June there were 16 echo chambers, and it seems that naturally there was a narrative shift on June 5th. This likely due to the change in sentiment of the protests shifted, from one tracking the protests in real time to one recoiling to the violence with which protestors were met.

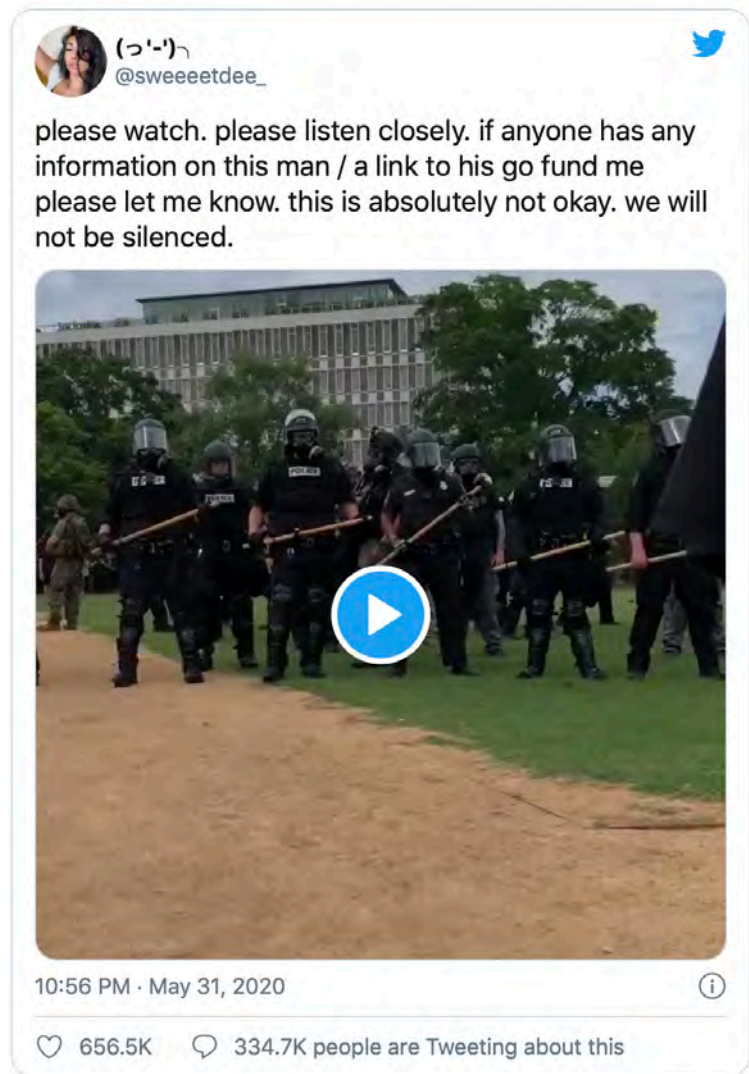
Echo Chamber (EC) Analysis  
EC Description

Community Number	Description	Frames
1 Community 0 & 2	Both these communities are principally amplification networks for the “I am not your enemy message”.	Power/With
2 Community 6	This community is an echo chamber that amplifies the message, “BLM is not political it is a human right.” The stakes the form of a video clip from a Duke University coach.	Power/With
3 Community 10	“when were the last time you were dehumanized, its about time - the riot is the language of the unheard.”	Identity/Us vs Them
4 Community 13	This community holds the core sentiment that the BLM protests were unnecessary, unwarranted and ultimately unjustified.	Power/Over Identity/Us vs Them
5 Community 15	This community is an amplification network of the large donation of Korean KPOP band BTS to BLM.	Power/With



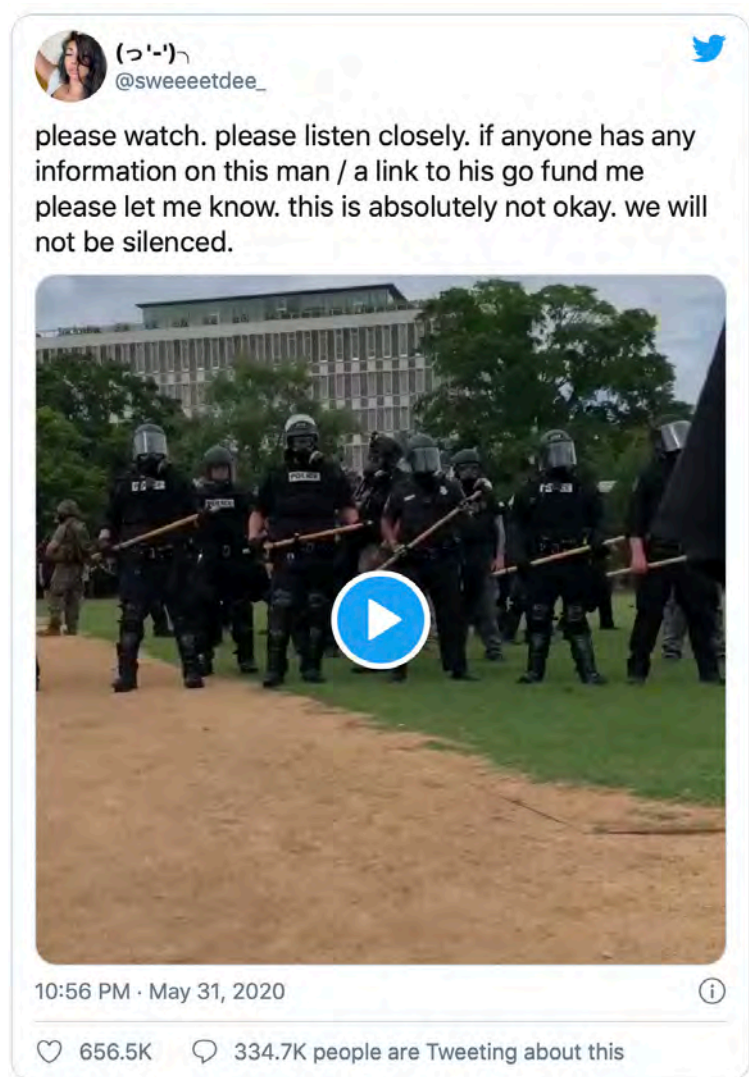
Community 0: This community is an amplification network for the following tweet:

RT @dylanobrien: This man is on one knee. Bearing his heart & his soul. He possesses pain they could never know. Anger they could never fathom. Yet he is on one knee, pleading, peacefully. And he is taken away in handcuffs. This has to stop #BLM



Community 2: This community is an amplification network for the following tweet:

RT @dylanobrien: This man is on one knee. Bearing his heart & his soul. He possesses pain they could never know. Anger they could never fathom. Yet he is on one knee, pleading, peacefully. And he is taken away in handcuffs. This has to stop #BLM



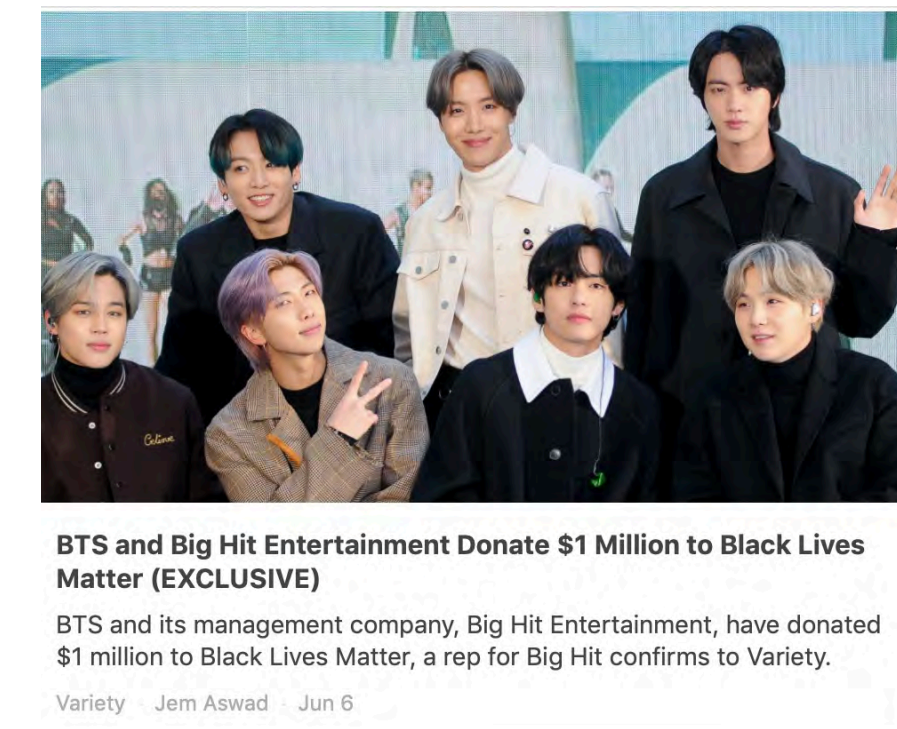
Community 6: This community is centered on a statement from a coach from Duke's university. The core message: " just a reminder: black lives matter is not political. it's human rights."



[Duke's Coach K Says 'Black Lives Matter' Is 'Not A Political Statement; It's A Human Rights Statement'](#)

Community 15: This community is an amplification network for this article in Variety magazine, about the donation by K-pop band BTS.

RT @Variety: BTS and Big Hit Entertainment Donate \$1 Million to Black Lives Matter (EXCLUSIVE) @bts\_bighit @bts\_twt



Community 10: No Justice!

RT @iChanteee: It,Ãs been taken off of my Facebook, share before it's deleted again. #NoJusticNoPeace #BLM <https://t.co/ggoSLKP7F2>





Community 13:

**Paul Sperry**  
 @paulsperry\_

BREAKING: Minnesota Attorney General Keith "X" Ellison refuses to publicly release video footage from the body cams of accused cops who struggled with 6-4, 235-lb George Floyd. Footage is said to reveal Floyd violently resisting arrest and fighting with cops inside police vehicle

12:28 PM · Jun 8, 2020

23.8K 18.1K people are Tweeting about this

In comments:

**Zhivago of Tookland**  
 @raywatts

Replying to @paulsperry\_

I would like to see the connection between CAIR and Antifa. If that connection exists, it's over.

12:42 PM · Jun 8, 2020

263 103 people are Tweeting about this

**R. Lamartiniere, MD**  
 @rlamartini

Replying to @paulsperry\_

Of course they would not want to release any evidence of why he ended up on the ground. He was likely high as a kite as his drug screen revealed. Also barely mentioned by media. All about a sociopolitical agenda.

2:11 PM · Jun 8, 2020

43 See R. Lamartiniere, MD's other Tweets

**Quantum Wayfarer**  
 @fergi2479

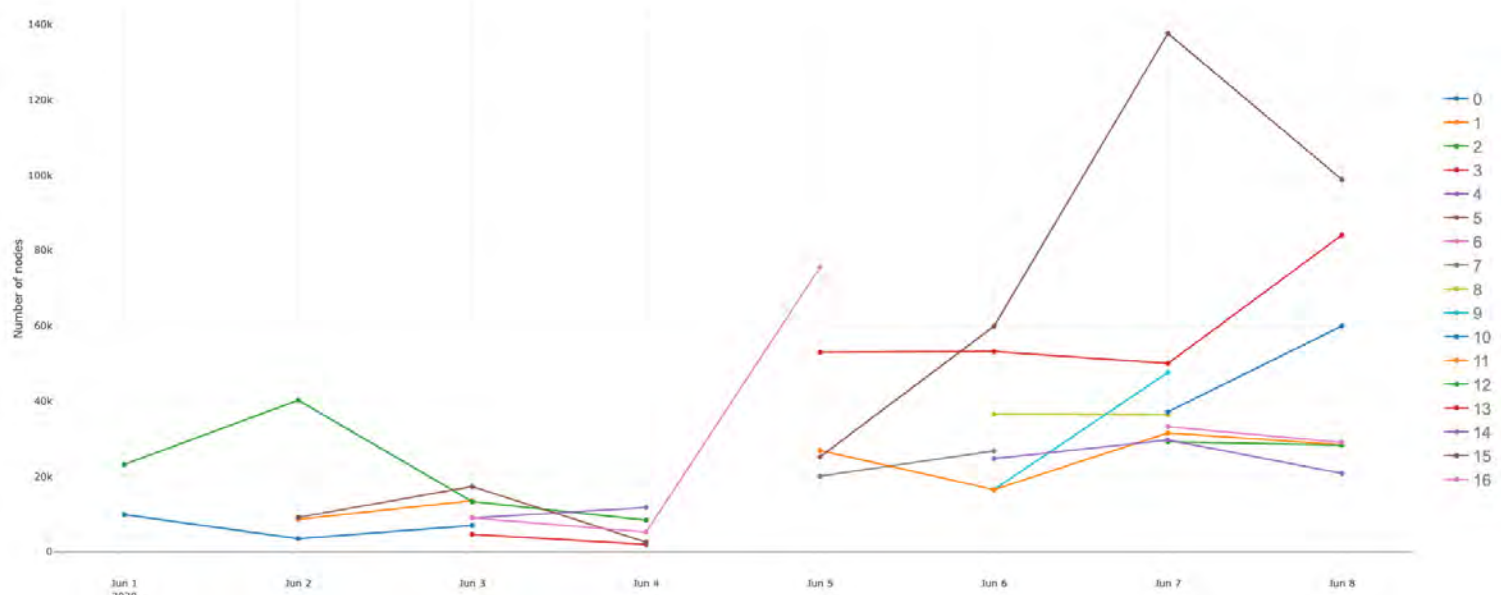
Replying to @raywatts and @paulsperry\_

Look at who owned the nightclub where where Chauvin and Floyd both worked. That is your connection to CAIR. The whole insurrection is funded by Communist (CCP) with coordination from Iranian proxies including Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah. So yes CAIR is going to be implicated

1:07 PM · Jun 8, 2020

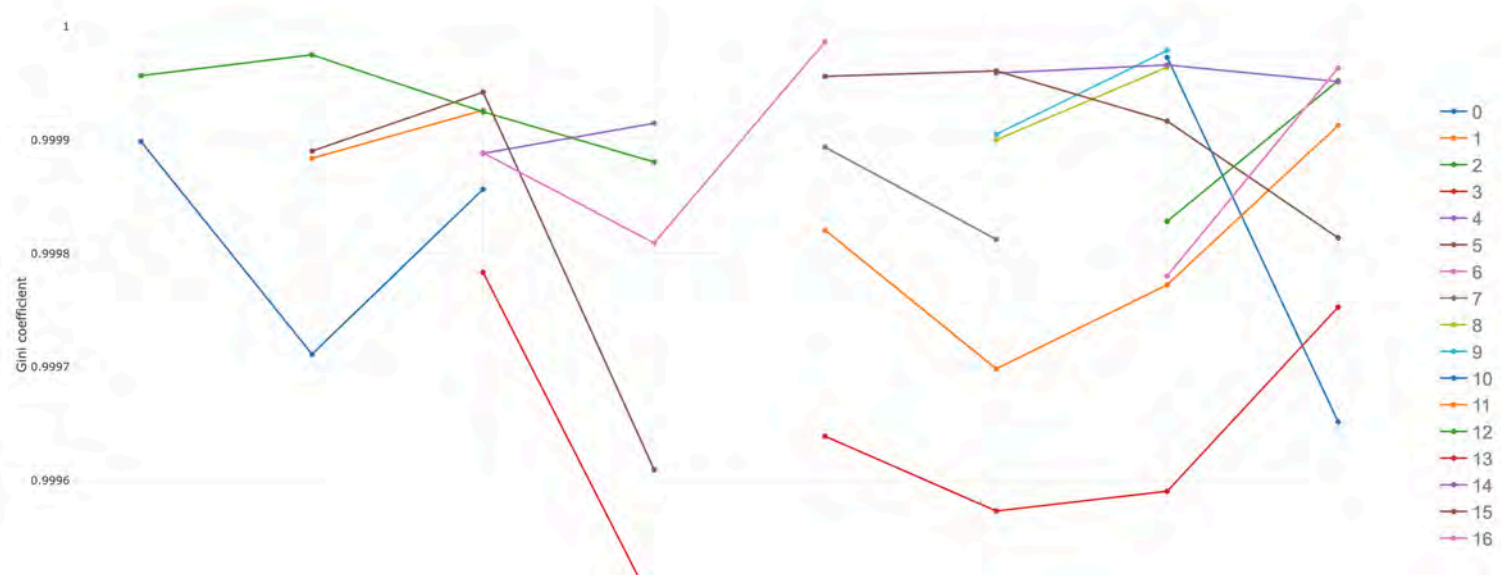
269 144 people are Tweeting about this

Power: Population



We can see from the above population diagram that the community 15 and 13 are the most influential ones in the narrative space and emerge after the 5th of June. These communities reflect the Power/Over (13) and Power/With(15) positions respectively.

Power: Unity



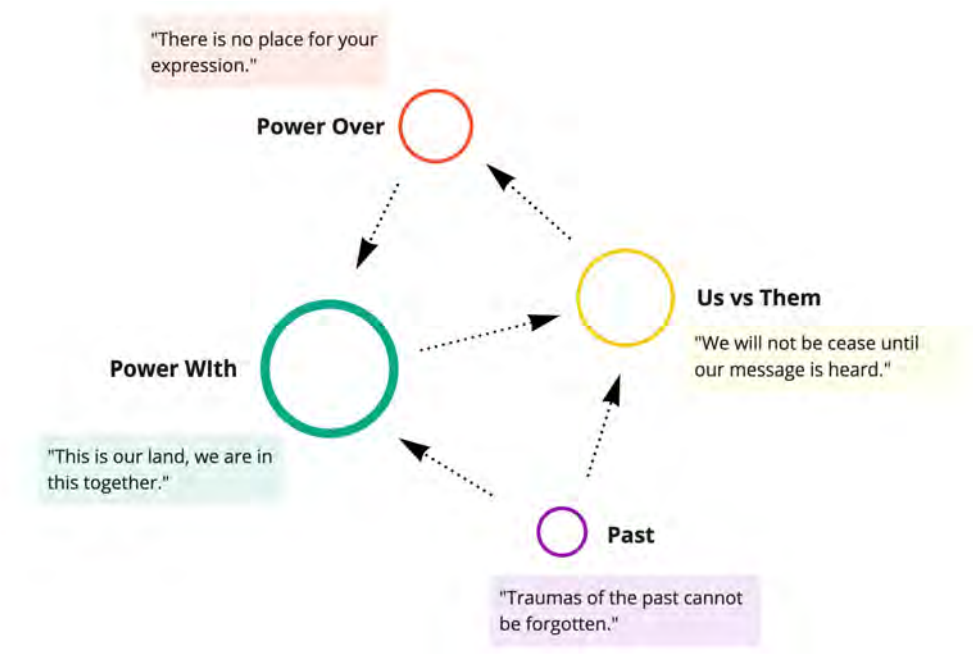
This unity graph shows the measure of semantic similarity within echo chambers and also between them. As is shown here, all of the communities score high (between 0.9995 and 0.9999), supporting the insight that most of the networks were amplification networks. Interestingly, we find community 13 has the lowest consistent semantic similarity indicating a more discursive community with many differing points of view. If we look deeper here we can see that this community exemplifies the Power/Over stance and shows many heterogeneous voices that are critical of the BLM movement.





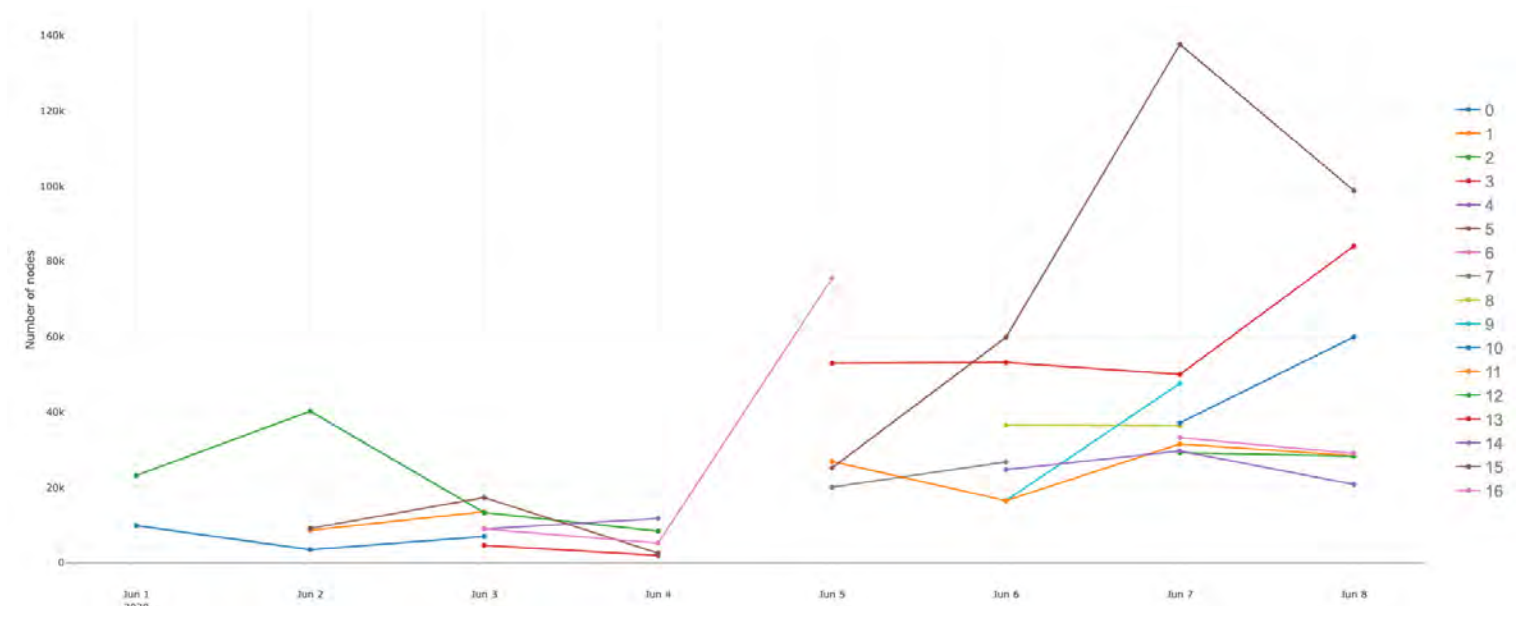
## Summary

Through the analysis of attention, networks and power of the narrative space we see an emerging dynamic between communities representing Power/Over and Power/With. We can generalize this interaction with the following diagram:

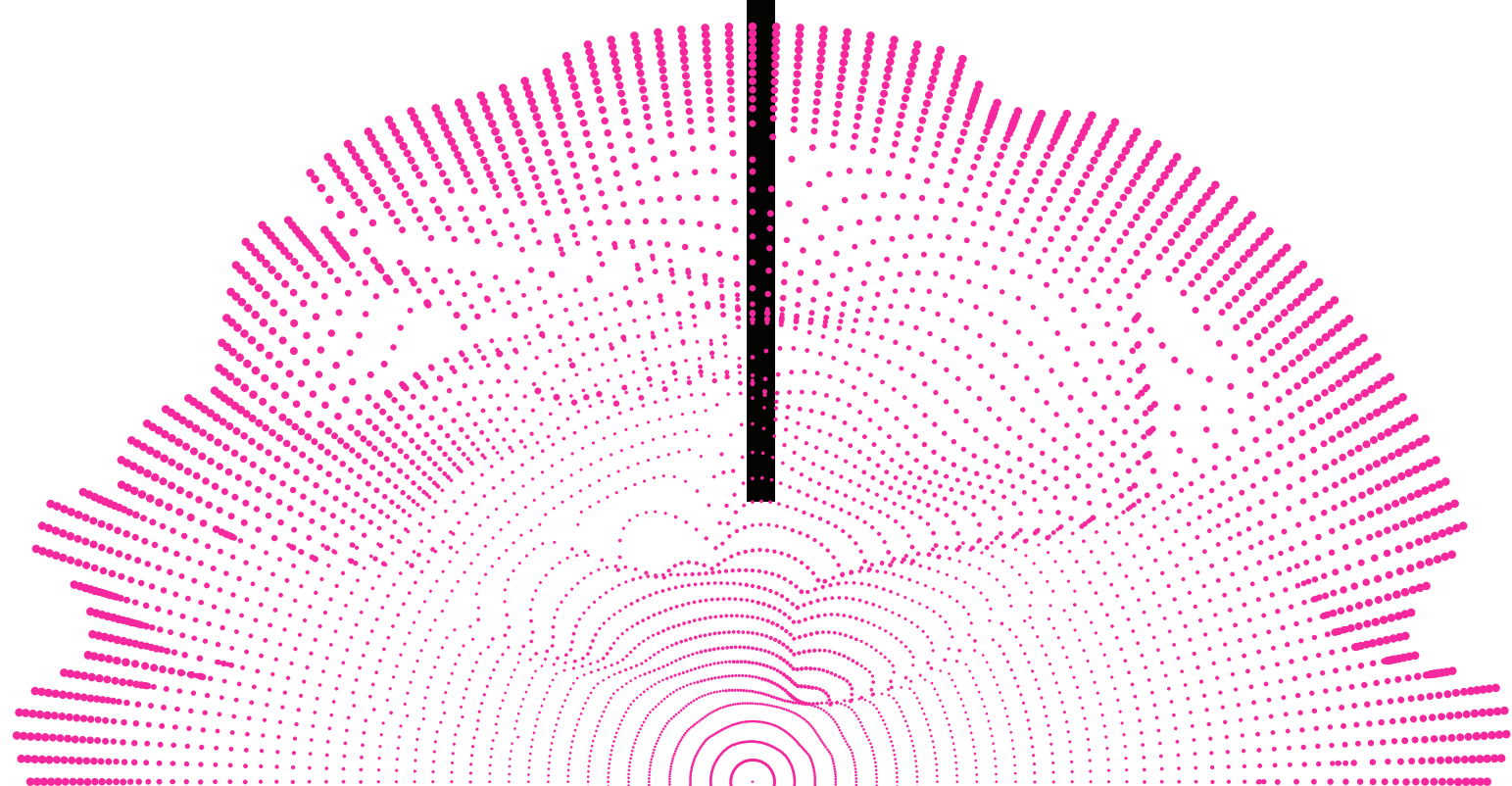


The Power/With frame is the foundational theme within the dataset, for this first week of June. However as these codes are expressed in the many direct actions and protests they are met with often brutal and violent reactions from government and police; and seemingly dismissive statements by governmental officials. In reaction to this much of the energy behind the narrative evolved into an Identity/Us vs Them theme, which dominated the narrative space into the latter part of the week, and indeed the rest of the movement throughout June.

## Power: Commitment



The above diagram shows that even though there were 16 different echo chambers of conversation during this time period, very few showed consistent engagement. Communities 13 and 15 show by far the most consistent engagement over a three day period. Interestingly we can see that the Power/Over community (13) shows the most consistent engagement even though the population size remains smaller that the Power/With community (15).





# SURVEY

## ✕ Objective & Methodology

### Objective

The goal of the survey was to gain a “general public” perspective on this moment, and to validate the codes and frames articulated in our [listening model](#) and [small listening analysis](#). Basically put, we wanted to find out how members of the general public in the United States think and feel about the current moment, in terms of its relationship to Life, Power, Identity and Time. Which codes resonate most with members of the public, and which frames might provide the most fertile ground for seeding lasting narrative change in this moment?

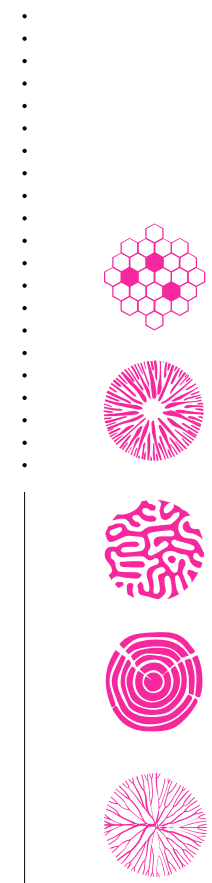
### Methodology

1,640 US-based participants were recruited through Google Surveys. The sampling is representative across two genders (male and female), four defined regions in the US (Northeast, South, Midwest and West), and across age groups (from 18 to 65+).

We also asked participants to share their racial/ethnic identities and political/ideological identities, metadata which Google does not provide. 69% of the participants identify as White, making them somewhat overrepresented compared to the US population as a whole. Black and African American participants are underrepresented (4.2% of the survey participants vs 12% of the US population). The participants also self-identify across the mainstream US political spectrum (Independent 31%; Democrat/progressive 30%; Republican/conservative 24%, Libertarian 5%; None or Other 10%).

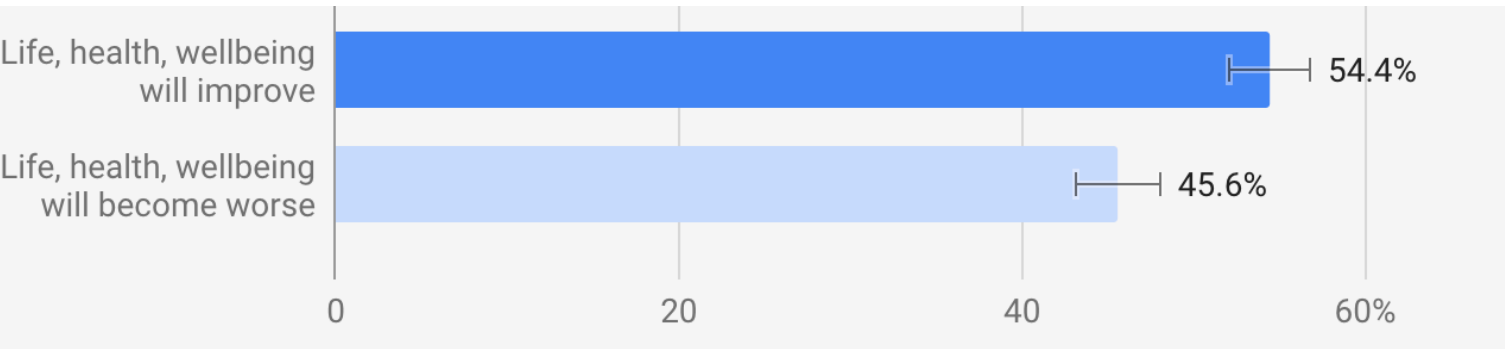
In order to test how people think about and whether they accept the narrative elements of this moment, we asked a series of questions that spoke to sentiments about how Life, Power, Identity and Time are playing out in this moment. We asked participants to choose between two statements, each written to reflect a potential opinion about where we are headed. Each statement corresponded with an element of the four themes. The codes that resonate most with participants can be read as salient parts of the narratives playing out in participants’ lives, as well as potentially fruitful directions for seeding into communities in order to support transformative narrative strategy.

Finally, we asked two questions assessing participants’ energy and commitment to transformation during Covid and the BLM movement. Knowing whether participants feel more called to action due to the pandemic or the moment of reckoning with racism can help us better understand the evolutionary potential of elements of these narratives.



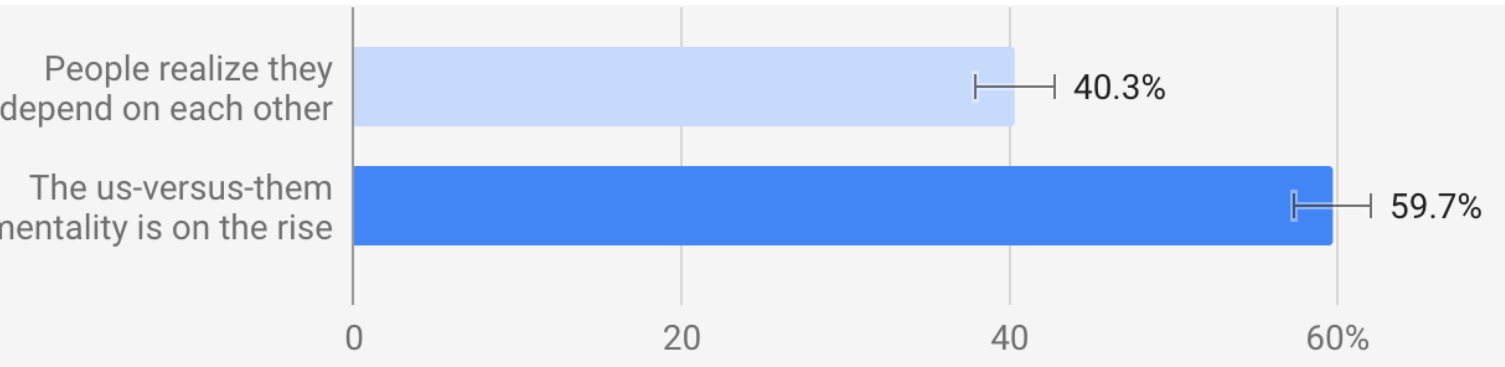
## ✕ Findings

### Life



When asked about how this moment will impact life, health and wellbeing in the future, a majority of participants chose life creation, by answering that life, health and wellbeing will improve in the future. This attitude stands in contrast to the high prevalence of life destruction stories found in the media/big listening on Covid. These participants are more in line with the small listening of progressive activist online spaces where life creation sentiments dominate.

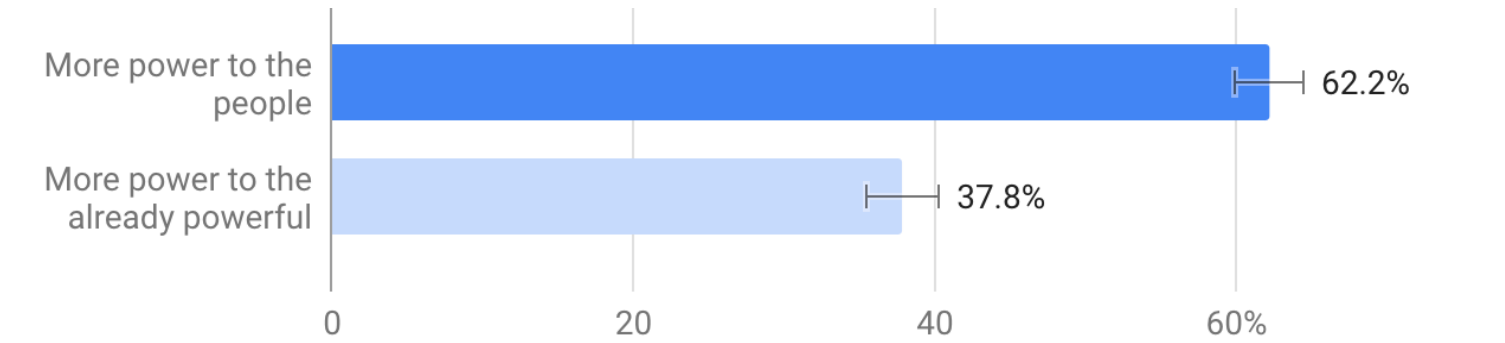
### Identity



In order to elicit opinions about the theme of Identity, participants were asked to choose between two statements on how this moment is affecting relationships. A majority of participants said that the Us vs Them mentality is on the rise, putting the survey participants’ sentiment squarely in the Us vs Them. Them camp. Given the dominance of narratives of division in US public discourse, this isn’t surprising. This finding is echoing the urging by US-based progressive communicators, such as the [Race-Class Narrative Action](#) group, to create messages of unity that acknowledge, rather than obscuring or whitewashing, distinctive identities while emphasizing shared goals.

One interesting note here is that although not statistically significant, participants 65+ were more likely than any other age group to choose the interdependence option. Why are older folks gravitating toward interdependence as a concept in this moment? Perhaps due to an appreciation of mutual aid and solidarity in a time when they are finding themselves most vulnerable to the virus and therefore in need of finding new ways of being.

### Power

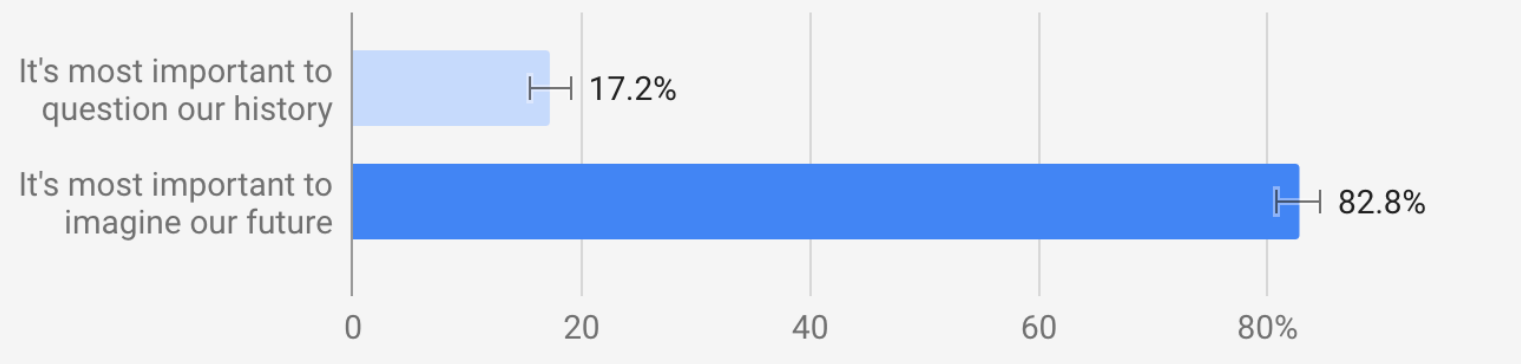


Participants think that power will be shared and redistributed to the people as a result of this moment; a stark contrast to the dominance of Power/Over discourse we found in the small and big listening. There is clearly room for forward momentum, transforming the current Power/Over regime as embodied by repression, capitalism and police brutality, into a Power/With future as the uprisings continue to demand justice.

## Time

If we are to learn from this moment, which of these options is most important to you?

1,630 respondents



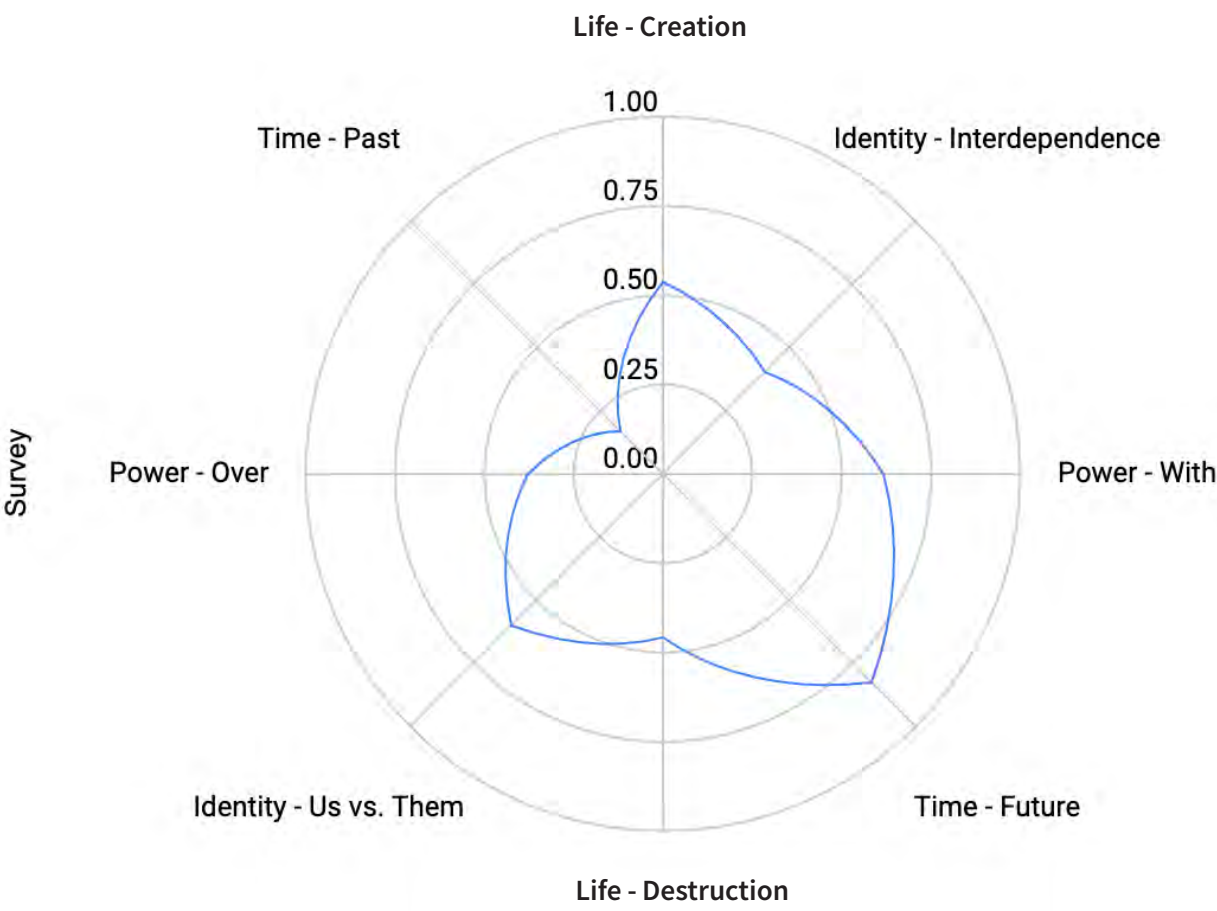
When asked whether questioning our history or imagining our future will help us learn from this moment, participants overwhelmingly orient to imagining the future. This moment has brought into stark relief the failings of the current system, while also turning everyday life upside down for even the most comfortable, those who previously believed they lived in a system that worked for them. Naturally, this prompts the imagination to focus on what comes next.

The desire to imagine the future holds both promise and caution from a narrative perspective. Imagining a future after Covid can look like a true transformation of the system to serve all; it can also look like a desire for a return to a “normal” whose flaws we can’t unsee. The broad movement for Black lives, importantly, is calling for a thorough reckoning with the 400-year history of subjugation of Black people in the settler colonial projects that became the United States. Without a reckoning, a true transformative future is not possible. So while future-oriented framings present real opportunities to capture imaginations and inspire action, they cannot be without a foundation in history. Just like mainstream “colorblind” ideology builds a racist world without any racists, there is no history in a “return to normal” future, only a tepid and willfully whitewashed present, upholding a system that works for the few by design.

.....



## ✕ Integrating the narrative



### The location of the Covid and BLM narratives in the July 2020 survey of US participants

The survey participants - a group of US residents, diverse in gender, age, region, and political affiliation - believe that in this moment, us-versus-them thinking is on the rise in their communities and the country, although older folks more readily believe that people are realizing their interdependence.

The participants believe, despite all the destruction that’s around them, that health and wellbeing will improve and people will gain more power.

They overwhelmingly believe that imagining a new future is more important than questioning history -- a finding that perhaps is illuminated by the fact that these nearly 70% of these participants self-identified as White.

Reckoning with history in this moment is charged, while imagining a future is something everyone can sign on to; after all, after Covid, a return to “normal” is simply not possible. Perhaps this result is a reflection of the profound discomfort of this moment, when we as a society are being called upon to turn the mainstream understanding of power and privilege, history and future, completely on its head. Participants’ desire to imagine a new future is an opportunity for narrative change, but we should proceed with caution so as not to erase the necessary reckoning without which lasting change cannot happen.

### A moment of narrative maturation?

An important point here is that the survey represents opinions in one moment in time, namely, July 2020. At this moment, the Covid pandemic has been raging in the US since March. Since late May, protests against police brutality and systemic racism have swept probably every single community in this country. These narratives are intimately interlinked, weaving through all aspects of everyday life. The survey shows how the narrative themes are moving through the world.

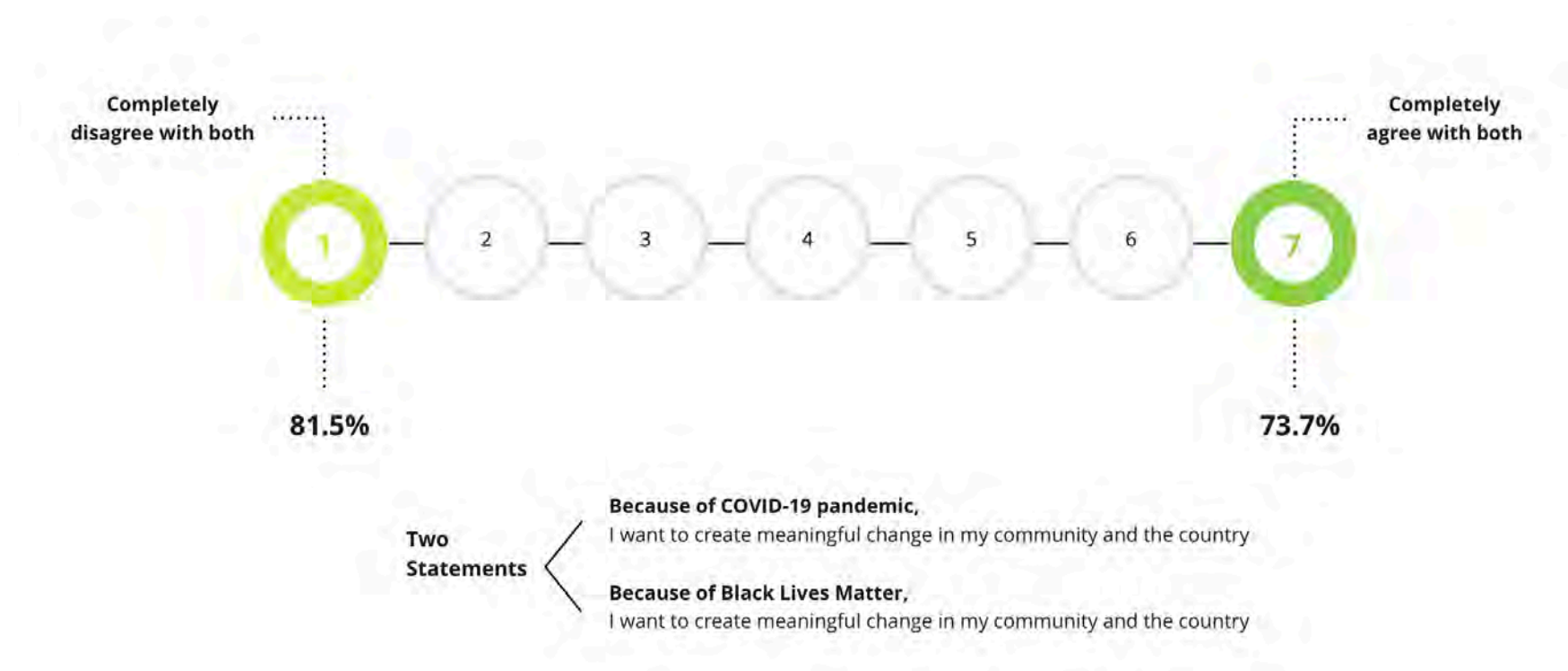
In the big listening, we saw the shift from a focus on Life/Destruction to Power/Over as Covid and BLM each entered the narrative space. With the survey we potentially see a narrative maturation, a view of what happened next, as the weeks have worn on and a broader narrative has coalesced in the wake of all these events.

While ideas of the destruction of life dominated news media early on, the majority of participants in the survey orient to the Life/Creation theme, responding that they believe this moment will lead to improvements in life, health and wellbeing.



The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and too many others lit the spark of nationwide protests - intimate and embodied events even in the throes of a pandemic that has necessitated social separation - and calls for a true reckoning with white supremacy and its legacy, not only in the US, but across the world. In late July, after nearly two months of uprising, the participants in our survey oriented to the Power/With theme, responding that they believe this moment will bring more power to the people rather than being retained by the already powerful.

### What motivates people? Covid and BLM intertwined



We feel that Covid and BLM narratives are one and the same, intimately intertwined strands of a bigger meta-narrative, the need for transformative change in a world that's collapsing under the weight of a global pandemic and the ongoing weight of white supremacy. In order to see whether participants in our survey agree, we asked two questions gauging people's motivation to create change in their communities due to Covid and the uprisings.

The results are clear: Participants who answer (7 - Completely agree) to one question are overwhelmingly likely to also choose (7) for the other question. Participants who choose (1 - completely disagree) on one also choose it on the other. Any combination in between - e.g. being inspired to action by Covid but not by BLM or vice versa - is much less frequent.

In short - folks either actively don't care, or they actively do care. The inspiration and calls to action are driven by the whole scope of this moment.

This shows that the underlying logics drive both Covid and BLM narratives, and that they have been taken up in tandem. "I can't breathe" is about both police brutality and state terror and about disparate health outcomes driven by centuries of racist violence. This narrative wave is unfolding before our eyes, and there is plenty of room to continue riding it.



### Summary

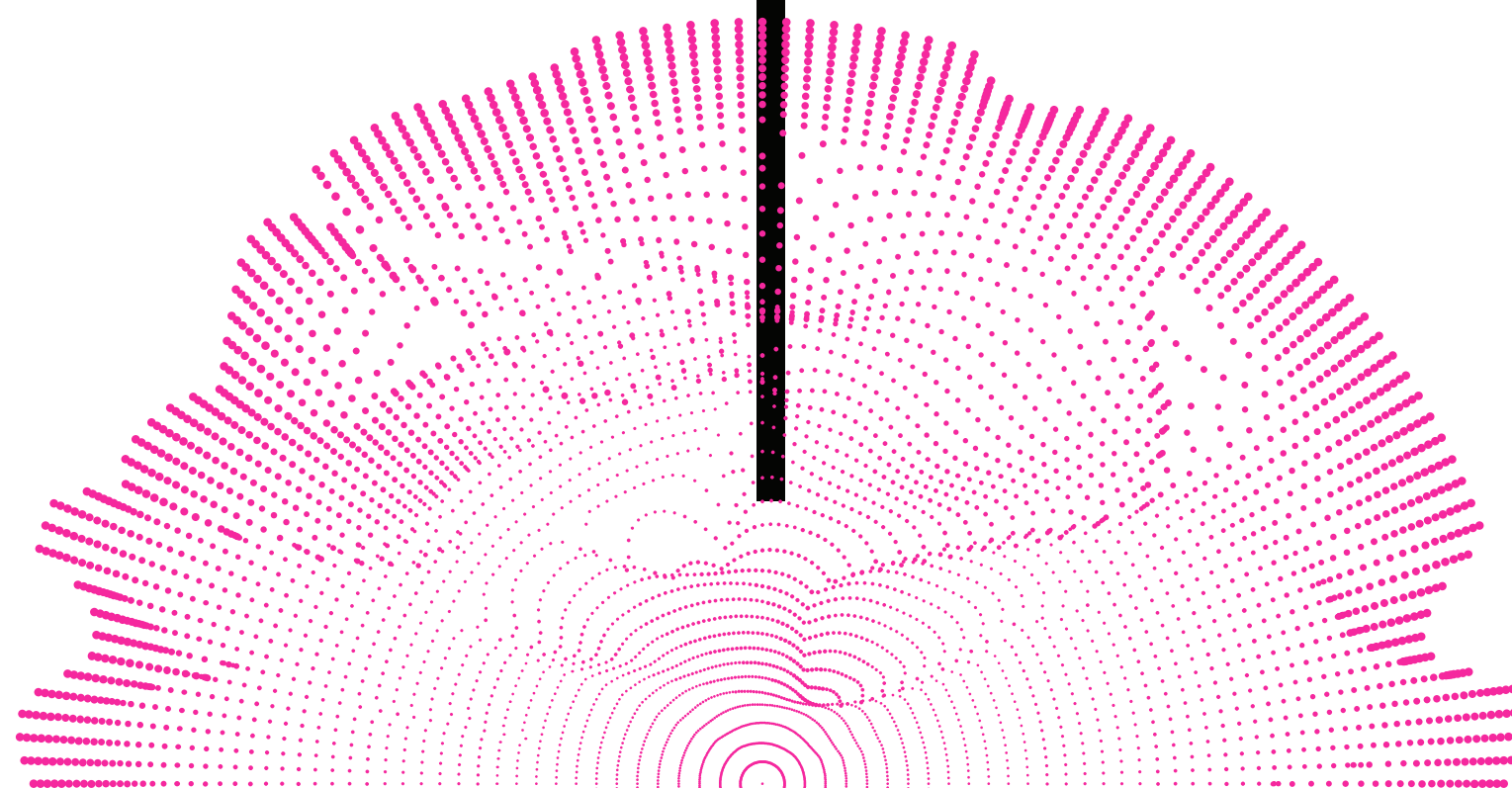
The participants in our survey show us a snapshot of narrative forming and reforming in the midst of the ongoing pandemic and uprisings. We see that Covid and BLM narratives are one and the same, intimately intertwined strands of a deeper narrative, the need for transformative change in a world that's collapsing under, both under the weight of a global pandemic and the ongoing weight of white supremacy.

We elucidated an assumption early in this project, that this moment represents a potential shift of consciousness, laying the groundwork for a transformation in imagination that will take us beyond a "return to normal" which simply is not possible. The survey participants let us know that they believe life will improve in the future, suggesting a confirmation of this assumption.

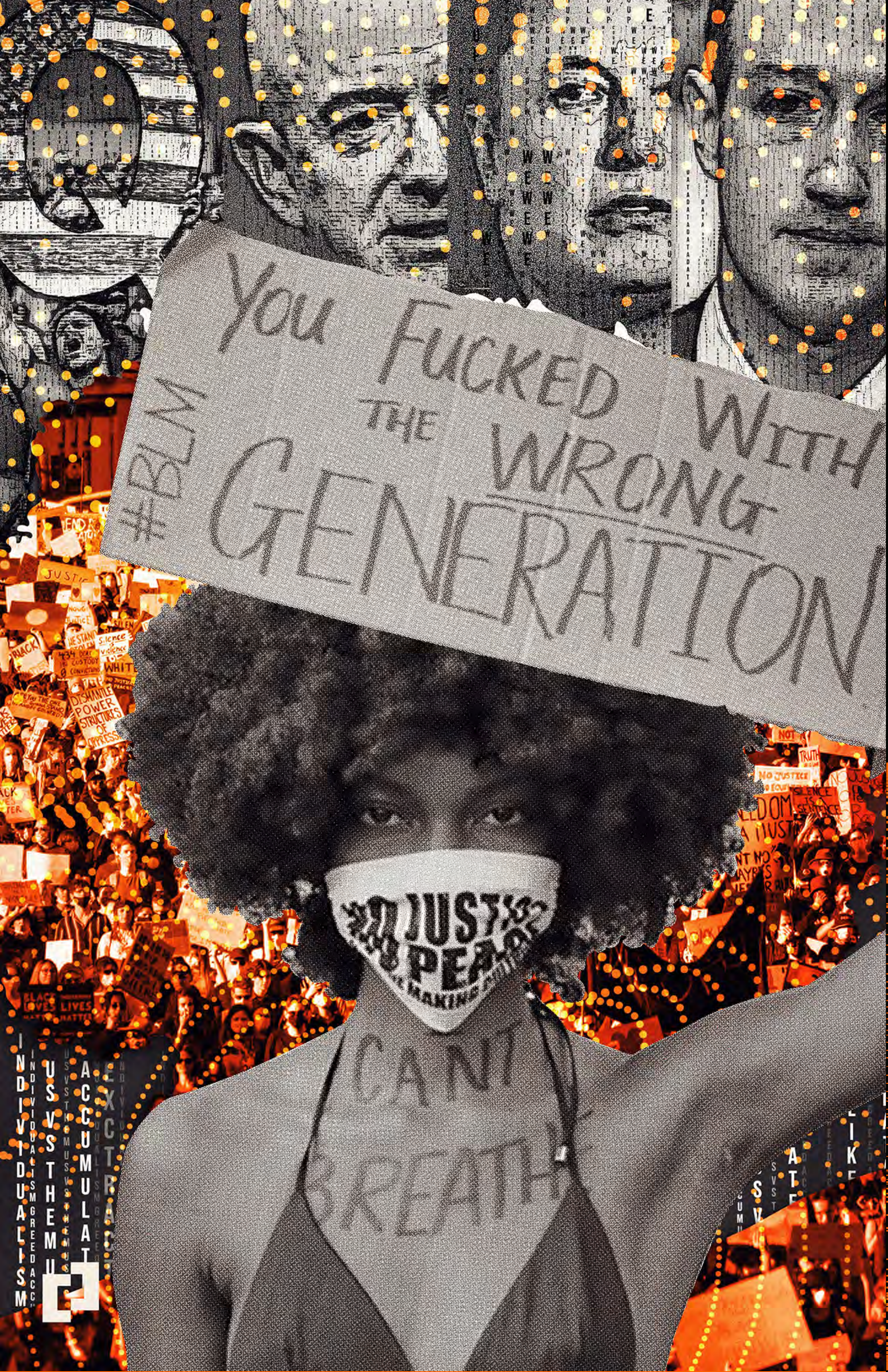
The participants overwhelmingly believe that imagining a new future is more important than questioning history, a finding that suggests a tension and struggle for the meaning of this moment. While BLM activists are pushing for a truly transformative reckoning, it appears that survey participants believe imagining a new future without said reckoning is possible. We are not seeing a full uptake of the progressive discourse found in the small listening, which calls for reckoning and doing away with destructive legacies of the past in order to create the foundation for the future.

The survey also shows some dissonance when participants think about identity and power. While they believe that this moment will bring more power to the people, away from the concentration we are seeing today, they also believe that the Us vs Them mentality and division are hallmarks of this moment.

In the survey, we see hope, renewed attention paid to life and more importance given to the future, but we also see contradictions: the Us vs Them logic lurking in the background and threatening aspirations for transformation. Power/Over framings get in the way of bringing interdependence front and center in this imagined future of power sharing. Interdependence is lagging behind and needs to be activated.

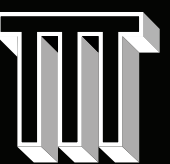






INSIGHTS

# INSIGHTS







# INSIGHTS



## Insights

→ Insights Summary

→ Insights Summary Chart

→ Critical Discourse

~ Facing a Narrative Stagnation

~ Digging deeper: the universe of values



# INSIGHTS SUMMARY

This section summarizes the insights throughout the data collected from our Small Listening, Big Listening and Survey research. The diagram depicted on the previous page visually represents the most relevant insights and their relationships.



## Trigger Events

### Murder of George Floyd + Wuhan Incidence

To have a holistic perspective, it is important to note the events that triggered the cascade of consequence of our times.

George Floyd was a Black man killed on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis during an arrest after a store clerk alleged he had passed a counterfeit \$20 bill. A white [police officer named Derek Chauvin](#) knelt on Floyd's neck for a period of 8 minutes and 46 seconds. This injustice was filmed by witnesses and released on social media for the world to see.

The Covid virus was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. A wet market -where fresh meat, fish and sometimes live animals are sold- in Guangdong has been speculated to be where the virus originated. Although the precise vector and location of contamination of the disease is still being disputed, it is confirmed that [Covid has a zoonotic source](#), meaning it originates in animals and was transmitted to humans.

These two historical events are where our journey begins to understand the deeper meaning of the moment.

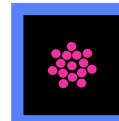


## Catalyst Effect

### Resurgence of BLM + Covid Pandemic

The effect of these two events catalyze ripples into our collective reality. The murder of George Floyd triggered the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter Movement. This wave took the US by storm and reverberated on to the world stage demanding racial justice and equality.

The Covid virus quickly became a widespread pandemic with unprecedented effects. According to the [report of the World Health Organization](#) (as of April 18 2020), the current outbreak of Covid, has affected over 2,164,111 people and killed more than 146,198 people in more than 200 countries. The pandemic poses enormous health, economic, environmental and social challenges to the entire human population.



## What the Research is Showing

### BLM and Covid are Intertwined Narratives

The survey gathered responses from 1,640 US-based participants. The goal of the survey was to gain a perspective on how members of the general public in the United States think and feel about the current moment, in terms of its relationship to codes: Life, Power, Identity and Time.

The survey confirmed our hypothesis that the Covid and BLM narratives are one and the same, intimately intertwined strands of a bigger meta-narrative. Participants in the survey showed to be not inspired to action by either issue, or are inspired to action by both.

## Both are Revealing the Structural Causes of Breakdown

To derive deeper meaning of these two events, we use the logic of the [Overview Effect](#) and look at the systems view of these narratives.

Depicting the Identity code, the image on the previous page features a Black Lives Matter protestor and the crowd behind her to symbolize our interdependence and collective solidarity. The white, patriarchal, figures looming overhead are (from the right) Mark Zuckerberg to represent the rise of surveillance capitalism, Elon Musk to represent the obsession of conquering space while Earth is being destroyed and Jeff Bezos to represent the growing inequality as the rich get richer and poor get poorer. In addition, the Q conspiracies (far left) represents the cult of Individualism which is engrained in American values. The tension in this visual shows the two polarities of the Identity code - Us vs Them and Interdependence.



COVID PANDEMIC

The virus has hacked the system and brought the entire globalized machinery to a halt impacting us all through mandates to lockdown and shelter-in-place. It doesn't discriminate about gender, age, race, or political views. [We are all at risk](#). That said, disproportionately people of color and those from lower socioeconomic groups are the most vulnerable and most greatly impacted. Black, Latino and Indigenous communities are [suffering the most](#). It's easy to attribute the unequal effect that Covid has had on these populations to traditionally identified barriers and disparities, such as lack of access to medical care and higher rates of pre-existing medical conditions. However, this pandemic has brought to the surface so many more inequalities and inherent privileges that are systemic to our society.

“  
: People who are in a position of privilege are largely removed from the ramifications of  
: COVID. People with higher incomes have better access to preventative medical care, gyms,  
: and healthy food and are, not surprisingly, [healthier at baseline](#). Hence, if they or  
: their loved ones do catch the virus, they are less likely to have severe symptoms...I  
: have also noticed an increased sense of entitlement in some members of the community. I  
: met several patients with white-collar, non-essential jobs who did not meet criteria for  
: testing, due to the initial need to ration tests for those with severe symptoms. Several  
: of them refused to strictly self-quarantine unless they received a test despite having  
: mild symptoms. Moreover, there have also been several reports of the  
: [super-rich paying their way to accessing tests](#), many of whom did not even have any  
: symptoms. This is a gross miscarriage of appropriate medical care in a resource-limited  
: system.  
: [Covid 19 isn't the Great Equalizer](#)  
:

BLACK LIVES MATTER

More than ever the narratives that are emerging about race are revealing the deeper structural causes and the foundation on which the US is built.

“  
: Just a reminder: the system in what is currently known as the US isn't “broken”. It was  
: designed by male, white supremacist, slaveowners on stolen indigenous land to protect  
: their interests. It's working as it was designed.  
: [jillianspeer: The United States was founded by white protestant/white supremacist racist](#)  
: [men...](#) 📷

Taking the systems view is an important step in culture to see these incidents not as isolated events but as the logical outcome of colonialism and capitalism.

“  
: The first step of getting free is admitting you have a colonized mind. You have to  
: accept that pretty much everything you come to understand about the human experience was  
: taught to you from a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist frame of thinking.  
: [natali.nicole: reconsider what you deem to be fact & reality. this is necessary for](#)  
: [EVERYONE.](#) 📷

Meta-Narrative

This is the Moment for Societal Change

Described as the break, the rupture, the shock to the system, the meta-narrative that has emerged is a reckoning that this is the moment for change. As society experiences so much instability, destruction and suffering there is an understanding that the system is flawed and must undergo an overhaul. It is an overdue awakening and an opportunity to imagine a new world.

Two Dominant Belief Systems

Individual Freedom / Collective Solidarity

We find two dominant belief systems that anchor the narrative space which ultimately stem from two distinct core values and world views.

1. The narrative form of **individual freedom**, exemplified by American values of individualism, the ‘freedom to’ movement in the wake of the Covid pandemic, and its darker aspects found in QAnon conspiracies.
2. The narrative form of **collective solidarity**, found within the BLM movement that led to expressions of unity through global uprisings, the rise of community support in the wake of state failure, and the virus revealing our interconnection.

The Frames Perpetuating these Belief Systems

INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

The following are examples of frames that are expressions of the belief system of Individual Freedom. These frames are found in the Small Listening research. They are summarized here but can be found in greater detail in the Small Listening section of this report.

1. American Individualism

The expression of the belief system of Individual Freedom can be attributed in part to the values of individualism which are engrained in American culture. As America unravels, these values are being examined.

“  
: More than any other country, the United States in the post-war era lionized the  
: individual at the expense of community and family...In a complete abandonment of the  
: collective good, U.S. laws define freedom as an individual's inalienable right to own  
: a personal arsenal of weaponry, a natural entitlement that trumps even the safety of  
: children.  
: [The Unraveling of America](#)  
:

2. ‘Freedom to’ movement

We have seen the ‘freedom to’ movement in the wake of the Covid pandemic reinforced by protests against lockdown measures or the obligation to wear a mask. These protests are couched in constitutional rights and defend an idea of freedom that is rooted in the protection of individual liberty.

“  
: The dispute over masks embodies the political dynamics of the campaign. It also reflects  
: a classic American struggle between those who defend public safety and those who believe  
: just as deeply in personal liberty.  
: [Why are Americans so angry about masks?](#)

3. The Rise of Q

In times of change and uncertainty, people need to believe in something. The QAnon conspiracy theory harnesses paranoia to hope and is a movement united in mass rejection of reason and objectivity. Their central tenet is that the establishment, the elites, are lying and constantly plotting to submit and control the population. It is important to push back by resisting and acting to protect freedom.



“ Only in the U.S.A. does a large section of the population think owning an assault weapon is a sacred right, but wearing a mask in a pandemic is a restriction on liberty. It’s no accident that – besides the Coronavirus – the QAnon conspiracy theory is spreading among the disdain-for-facts-and-science sector of the U.S. people. According to QAnon, a cabal of Satan-worshipping pedophiles rule the world and are only prevented from consolidating total control by the heroic efforts of Donald Trump. [Guns? Yes. Masks? No. And Gestapo in Portland.](#) ”

## COLLECTIVE SOLIDARITY

The following are examples of frames that are expressions of the belief system of Collective Solidarity. These frames are found in the Small Listening research. They are summarized here but can be found in greater detail in the Small Listening section of this report.



### 1. Protests Demonstrate Solidarity

The 2020 BLM protests that have shaken the US and rippled across the globe demonstrate that protest is still one of the strongest expressions of people’s power. These uprisings are still a way to be heard by power and to change power. What is also revealing is that these protests are bringing a diverse range of people together.

“ Today’s protests are stunning in their racial solidarity. The whitest states in the country, including Maine and Idaho, have had protests involving thousands of people. And it’s not just students or activists; the demands for an end to this racist violence have mobilized a broad range of ordinary people who are fed up. [Crying, Laughing, Crying at the George Floyd Protests in Minneapolis](#) ”



### 2. The Virus has shown how interconnected we are

The pandemic has revealed that our bodies, health and wellbeing are interlinked. The virus is airborne and spreads through proximity and sharing of common space. It has also become clear that social inequalities, vulnerabilities and disparities are a matter of collective concern. The fact that someone cannot get access to healthcare and is more prone to get sick directly impacts my health.

“ Our world has been forced into solidarity by a virus which ignores all borders; our deep interdependence has never been more undeniable... The solutions to the COVID-19 and climate crises are the same: solidarity, redistribution, collaboration, equity, and social protection. It is our opportunity and responsibility to join the dots, and use this political moment to confront corporate power, and build a more just and sustainable society. [A New Normal | Una Nueva Normalidad](#) ”



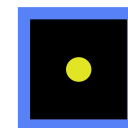
### 3. Failure of Government + Rise of the Community

During the pandemic we have seen governments and systems that are in place to provide safety and security to the people fail. The result has been the multiplication of mutual aid groups and the demonstration of community solidarity bringing to the surface the inherent power in people coming together to support one another.

“ As trust in the federal government has fallen rapidly over time, we [The US] have become a nation that has been taught to respond to great challenges by avoiding them, rather than bringing people together and working toward a solution. This approach has meant that the most pressing challenges facing us have gone unaddressed, the burdens of our national problems have been shifted toward the most disadvantaged, and inequality has continued to grow. [Why Coronavirus Is a Call for Collective Action](#) ”

## The Most Influential Voices

Our Big Listening research produced a network analysis which shows us who are the most influential and dominant voices in the space.



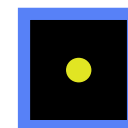
### Power/Over: Trump, Modi, Musk

The voices perpetuating the logic of Individual Freedom tend to be mostly representative of right-wing politics. These voices also tend to align with narratives that fall within the Power/Over frame.

In the conversation around Covid, Trump and republicans dominate the narrative space. They have politicized the conversation so much so that in April, Twitter has become a political chess match.

The press, individual influencers and other sources are not as vocal. The only notable exception to this is when in late March, Pro-Modi influencers (not State officials) took over twitter to spread pro-modi, nationalist narratives.

Amidst this evolution, it is also worth noting that disbelief and doubts seem to be a common feature of human nature when presented with a life-changing situation. On March 6, Elon Musk tweeted “The Coronavirus panic is dumb”, which seemed to be a feeling shared by most people at that time considering the number of retweets this garnered. This dismissal can be attributed to power, privilege and signals a lack of empathy for those who are impacted and greatly suffering. It is also interesting to note that [Musk’s net worth tripled](#) during the pandemic.

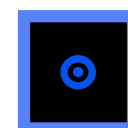


### Power/With: Obama, KPop, Athletes

The belief system of Collective Solidarity is being amplified by progressive voices and influential communities like KPop fans and athletes. These voices are aligning with narratives that fall within the Power/With frame.

During the onset of Covid in March, US democrats, in particular, former President Barack Obama, were delivering the instructions on behaviors that would preserve life (social distancing, wash your hands, etc.) and keep communities safe. In response to the murder of George Floyd, Obama issued a statement of solidarity.

The most influential community in our BLM analysis was formed with news of a large donation by K-Pop band BTS to the Black Lives Matter movement. The central node within this community belongs to a fan account. K-pop fandoms are making [headlines with their activism](#) and we are seeing their potential as a political force and disruptor. A common misconception about K-pop fandom in the U.S. is that it is largely made up of teenage Korean-Americans. The K-pop fans of America are disproportionately young, female, and multicultural including a big following of Black fans.



### Cross-Over Message

#### “I can’t breathe”

This refers to the same message, in this case, “I can’t breathe” emerging from two fundamentally different belief systems - same message, different meanings. We saw “I can’t breathe” expressed from both the personal freedom and the collective solidarity logic.

### Individual Freedom Logic

#### I can’t breathe: a right-wing resistance

The message “I can’t breathe” has been used by some conservatives in support of their anti-mask movement. This movement is rooted in the idea that the mask amounts to a violation of their freedom. Their arguments are rooted in the constitution: the freedom they claim is a human right, and the State is seen as an enemy threatening this right. As such, it is the duty of citizens to fight against this Government’s encroachment.





### Collective Solidarity Logic

#### I can't breathe: a progressive plea for life

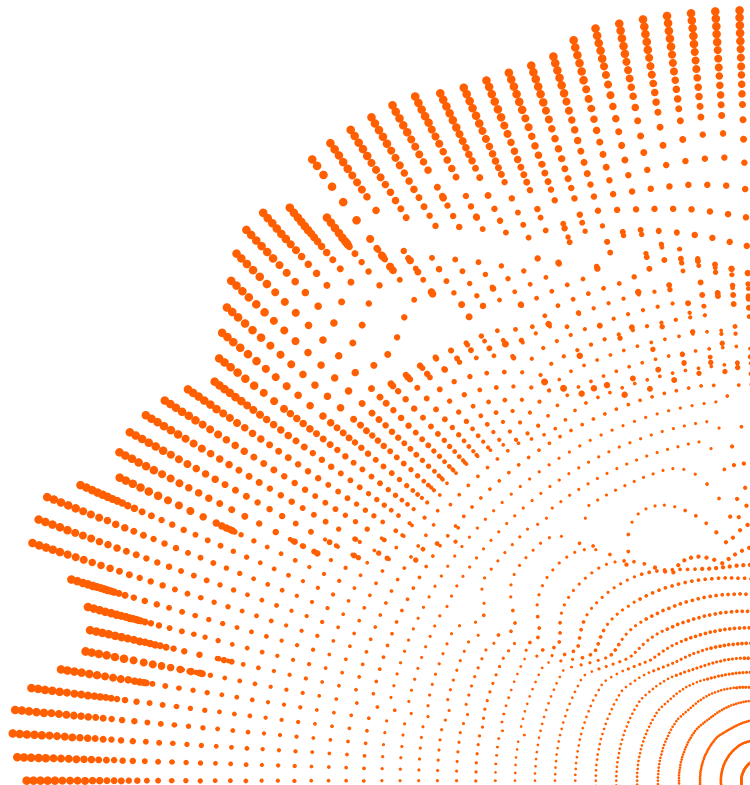
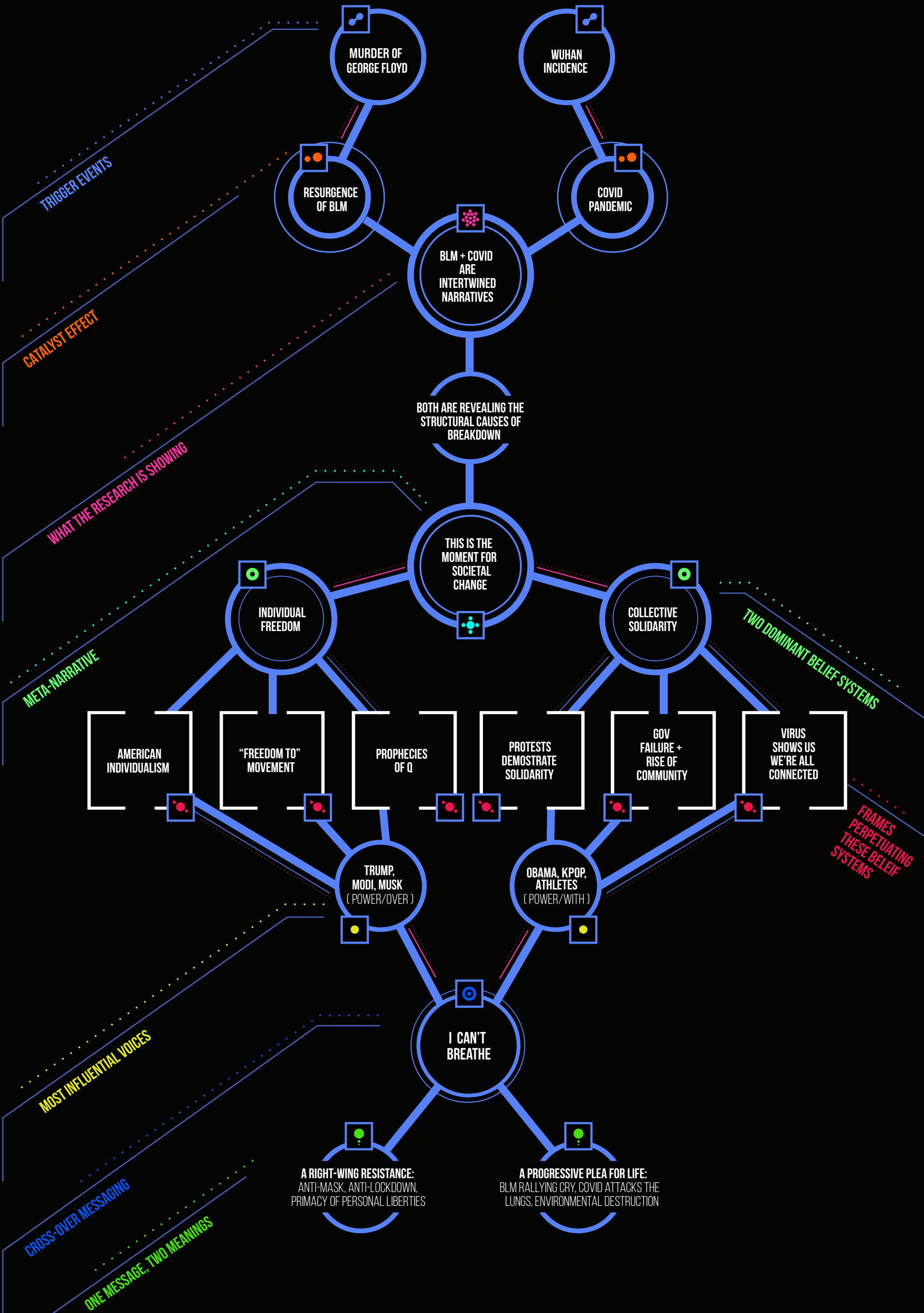
Through our research, we saw seemingly distinct occurrences - a global pandemic, a racial justice movement, and the climate crisis - have more in common than it seems.

We saw this connection exemplified through "I can't breathe" - a message that begins to weave these events to highlight the deeper meaning of the moment.

"I can't breathe" connects the BLM movement (George Floyd's last words), the Covid pandemic (the virus attacks the lungs) and the climate crisis (wildfires and air pollution). Our breath, our life force, is being constricted, suffocated and oppressed. As we start to see how all oppression is connected, we can also start to see how all healing is connected. And that our own liberation is not only bound up with that of others but that our integrated evolution is dependent on it.



# INSIGHTS SUMMARY CHART





CRITICAL  
DISCOURSE

Now that we have established the narratives of the moment, the second stage of our analysis - prescriptive analysis - is to consider the capacity of narratives to support the transition.

**We recall the purpose of our research and inquiry:**

How can narratives help us deconstruct a system that perpetuates exploitation, oppression and death; the system of necropolitics and institutionalized cognitive capitalism we described earlier. If we are to support the transition, we must elevate and support life-centric and life-affirming narratives. These are the narratives of the transition.

While we hoped to find these narratives emerging from our descriptive inquiry, we must observe the following:

- We have reached narrative stagnation. Our data shows that current narratives are not allowing us to move collectively towards a transition. We could not confirm the hopeful promises of our hypotheses. Instead, we have hit a wall where we surfaced divisions and a deepening Us vs Them logic that stands in the way of a transition. As of now, we, as a society, are still vulnerable to any upcoming crisis, which is likely to cause further death and widen more deeply our inequalities.
- We must dig deeper. If we have hit a wall, then we must dig deeper to understand where we should intervene in the narrative space. What our data inquiry proves is that if we want to lift up the narratives that will support our society's evolution, we need to turn our attention to the belief systems that seem to be at the heart of the division. We also must take account of the dynamics occurring between narratives, which also jeopardize common sense-

### ✘ Facing a Narrative Stagnation

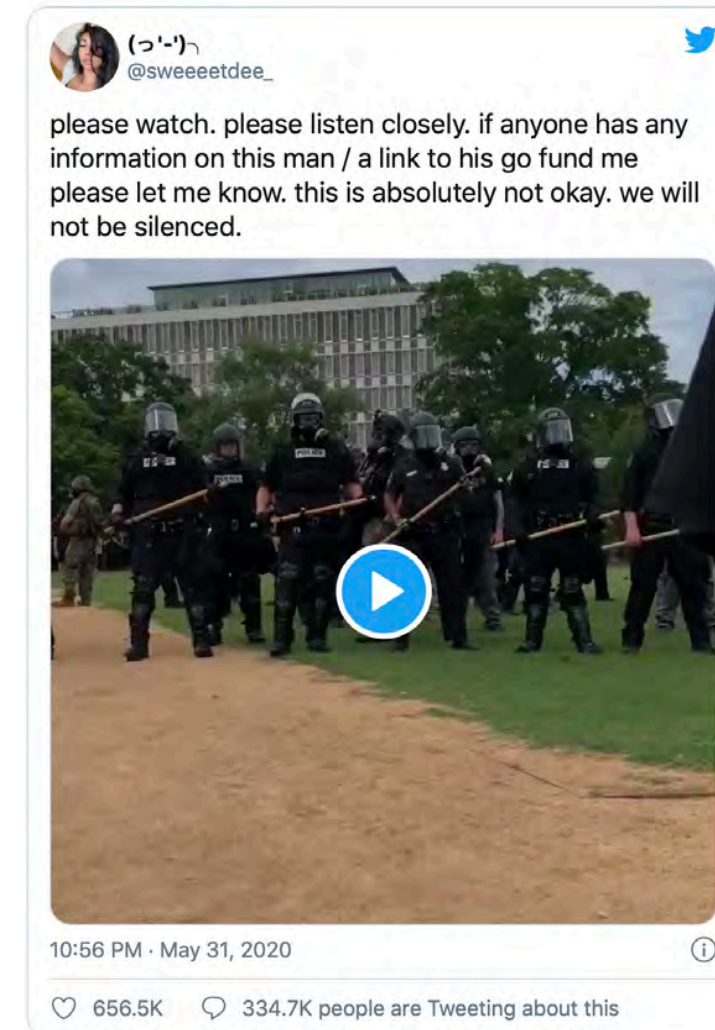
Early in our inquiry, we had posited three hypotheses for what this moment represents.

We presumed we would find evidence that 1) the transition is upon us, as the effects of Covid and the resurgence of the BLM movement illustrate the culmination of a series of crises that are all connected and converging, pushing towards an overall paradigm shift. This paradigm shift is facilitated by 2) the collective evolution of consciousness. Ultimately, we assumed this moment triggered by 3) a rupture in time where humans desire to move away from the trajectory set for them by the past, and instead imagine a different future. If verified, these hypotheses would point towards the reinvention of our society, an opportunity to survive the next coming crisis.

We observe that our data only partially confirms these hypotheses.

We did find that narratives are connecting to reveal the systemic ideologies of our system (hypothesis 1). Through the emergence of narratives within the Power/With frame, we observed that people are becoming more aware of the structural flaws and willing to challenge the elites that benefit from them. We could interpret this as a shift of consciousness (hypothesis 2). Indeed, the omnipresence of death brings about a new urgency to protect life collectively and dismantle whatever threatens it. However, we found that this collective power is being countered by the rise of State power, violence and authoritarianism.

In the data, we saw the expression of future thinking, radical imagination and hope, which seem to signal a rupture, a willingness to break away with the injustices and wrongdoings from the past (hypothesis 3). However, we are not able to confirm this hypothesis, as we surfaced deep tensions and disagreements over how we deal with the past.



The data shows us that messaging is not sufficient.

In this narrative landscape, we see that the same message, “I can’t breathe”, has a very different meaning depending on the deep logic of the original messenger. From its origins, a rallying cry that demands the respect of Black lives, it has become the chant of those who proclaim that individualism is the ultimate value to uphold.

Ultimately, what our data is showing is stagnation. This is the time for societal change, yet we cannot see whether and how this change can indeed happen. On the contrary, and more preoccupying, we are seeing a descent into more divide and regressive behaviors that compete for their own version of society.





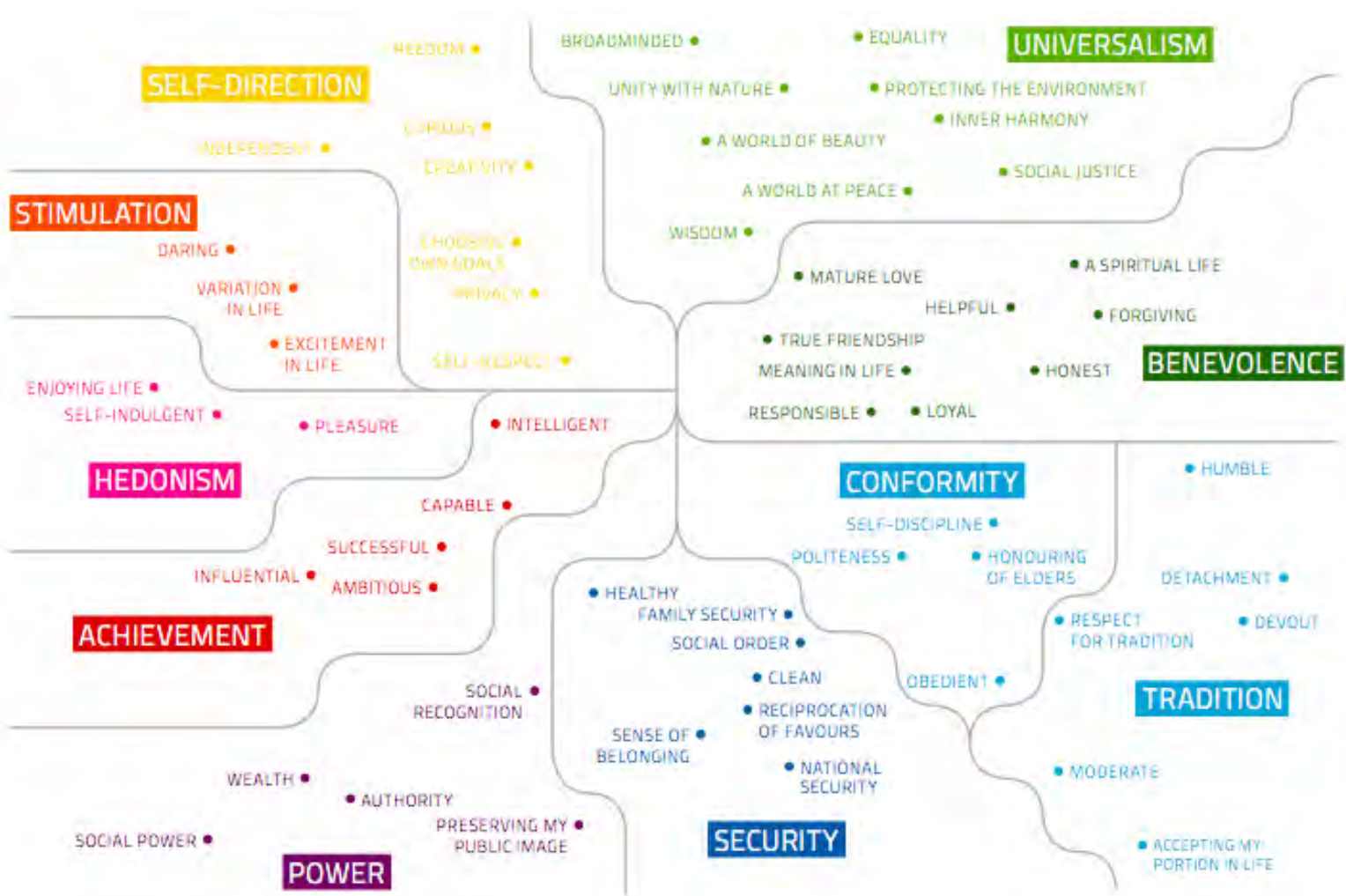
## ✕ Digging deeper: the universe of values

As we realize the shortcomings of messaging and the different belief systems that stand in the way of the transition, we are compelled to go deeper into the narrative space to understand where and how it can be hacked. We turn our inquiry towards the value level of the narrative space.

### What are values?

Values are central in understanding human behavior. They explain why we think and act a certain way. As a result, they are ultimately expressed through narratives, messages and stories that we can hear every day. Values are also indispensable for us to make decisions or to issue a judgement. The Covid pandemic and BLM are, in fact, such moments that activate our values as we tap into them to take a stand on these issues, but also, as we adapt our behaviors to respond and overcome a novel crisis. Values underpin how we make sense of the moment. They are constructed from our belief systems, our conditioning and our context.

Values have been the subject of much theoretical consideration in many disciplines and areas of study including 'education, political science, economics, anthropology, and theology, as well as psychology and sociology' (Kluckhohn, 1951; Rokeach, 1973). The value map developed by the [Common Cause Foundation](#) - "a network of people working to rebalance cultural values, creating a more equitable, sustainable and democratic society" - is particularly useful to understand the universe of values within which humans operate their sense-making.



Source: [the Common Cause](#)

The map shows that humans hold a similar set of values. Where we differ is how we prioritize these values. While they are ten groups of values, they can be grouped in two principal categories: extrinsic and intrinsic values. Extrinsic values favor hedonism, achievement, power, security, conformity and tradition. They are more turned towards the self and external approval: success, social recognition, belonging, family traditions, etc. On the contrary, intrinsic values are self-rewarding and oriented towards relationships i.e. satisfaction is obtained through relationships and interdependence. They include values tied to benevolence and universalism, for instance.

In the context of our report, it appears clear that individualism is an extrinsic value whereas collective solidarity is an intrinsic value. Emerging progressive narratives have thus encompassed values that place the achievement of happiness in the fulfillment of collective wellbeing. On the other hand, current conservative narratives are prioritizing self-enhancement over interdependence.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that the value map does not necessarily follow political allegiances. Values move and transcend political affiliations. Politics usually address issue areas from a problem-solution-tactics approach. When we come from a values-based approach we can anchor ourselves in the world we are fighting for, not just the systems we're fighting against.

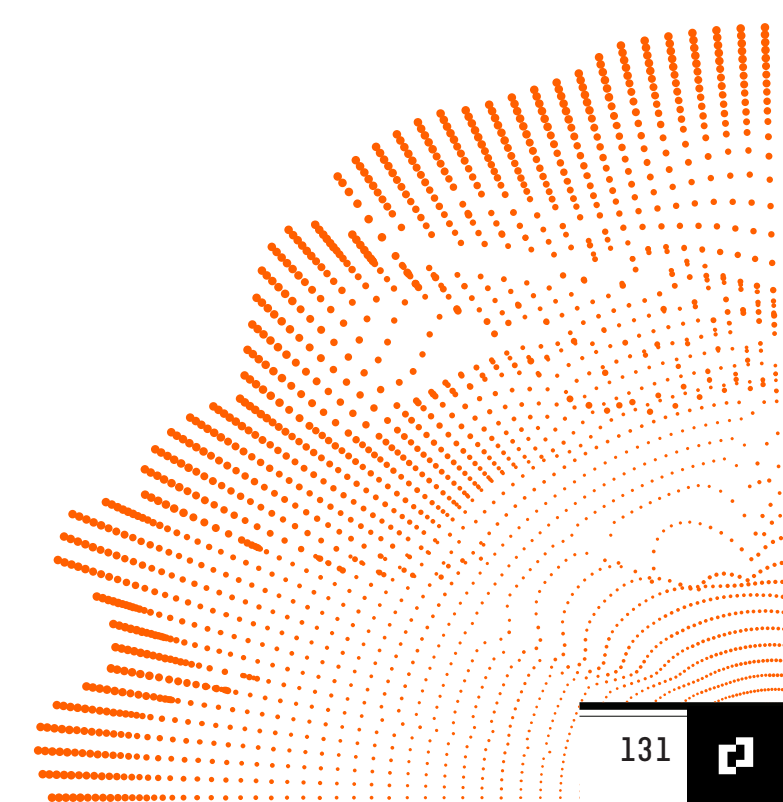
### Intervention: Deep Logics and Dynamics

This analysis allows us to uncover a new layer in our findings. What we are grappling with goes beyond the political divide and beyond the messaging. The Common Cause's analysis of the value map stress that values react to each other. A message anchored in both intrinsic and extrinsic values will end up activating extrinsic values in people's minds. In addition, some values are compatible with others, but not with all. Compatible values are closer to each other on the value map. When advanced together, they can strengthen and consolidate each other.

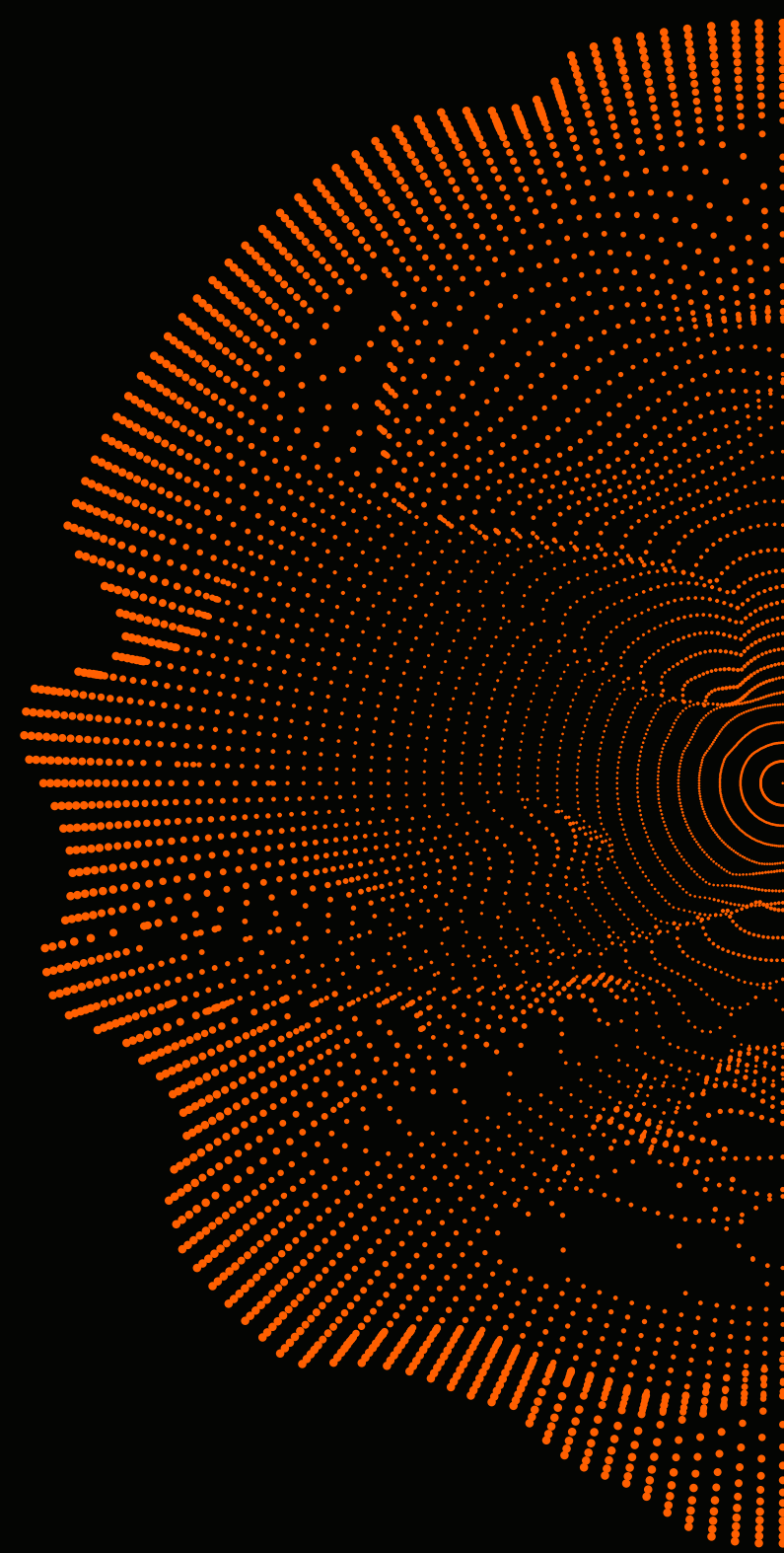
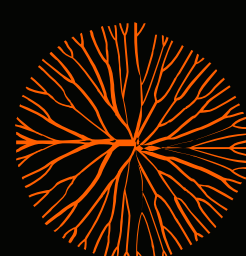
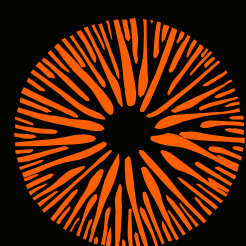
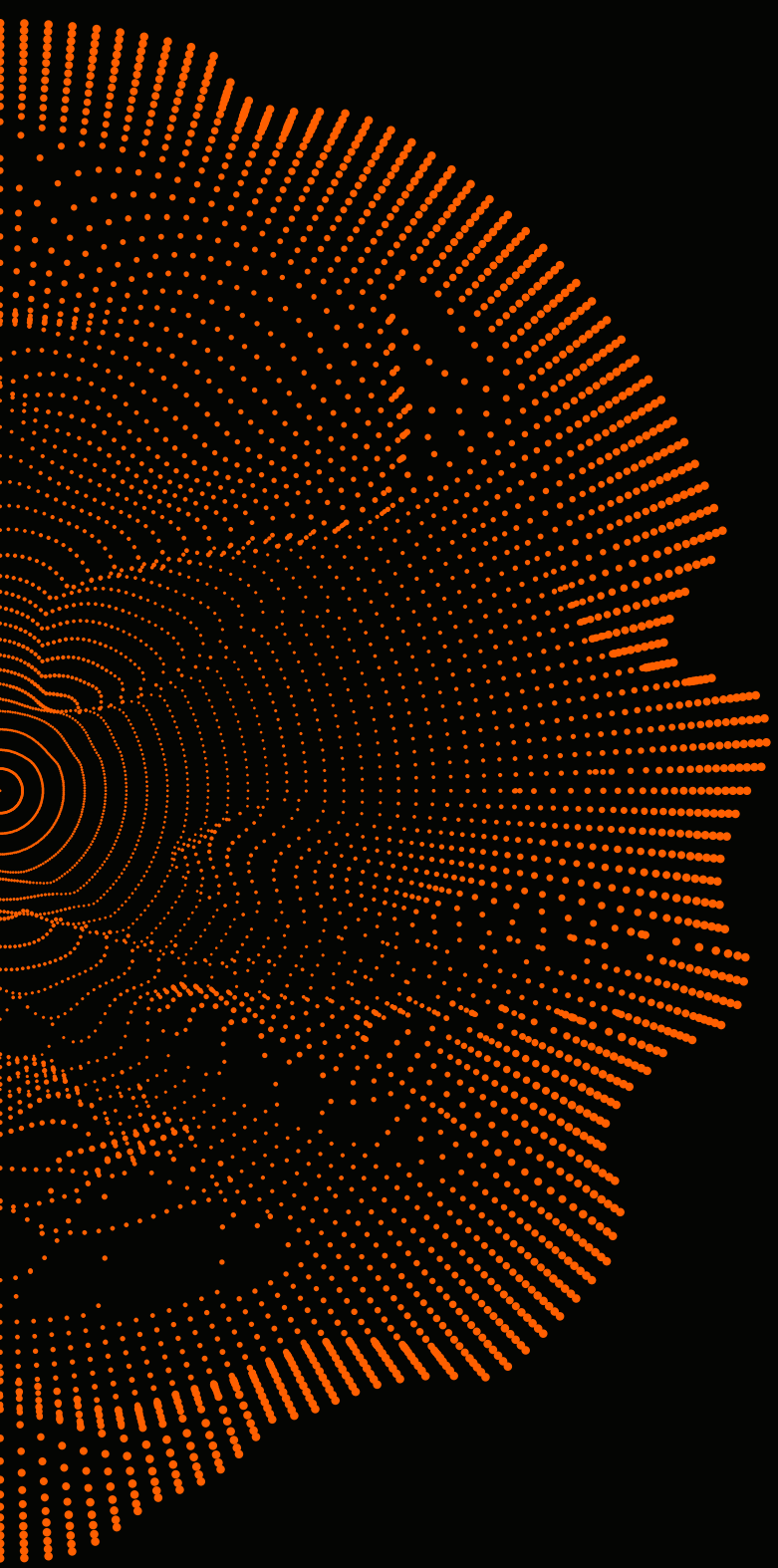
Ultimately, not only do we require an intervention at the level of values, or even more accurately, at the level of deep logic from where our values stem, but we require an understanding of the dynamics of narratives. How do narratives shift and change. How do they compete against or reinforce one another?

### Conclusion: Where to go next?

In order to move towards a future of unity, equality and peace, we must strive to move past the too simple opposition: individualism versus collectivism, which does not account for the narrative dynamics at play or the deep logics that shape our values and underpin our reality.





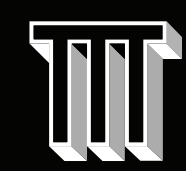






NARRATIVE DYNAMICS

# NARRATIVE DYNAMICS





# NARRATIVE DYNAMICS

We have observed that this research reveals a necessity to expand our understanding of how narratives form and behave so that we can move past current deadlocks. Short of this, we will not be able to identify the narratives that can bring us collectively to a point of transition, and we seem condemned to repeat the Us vs Them logic that currently pervade our narrative space.

With this in mind, the following section seeks to propose an expansive framework to understand the narrative space in a way that reflects its complexity, its dynamics and interactions with the tangible world - the world we experience everyday through life events, stories, etc. - but, also, and importantly, it seeks to offer an additional avenue to help us overcome the current win/lose deadlock we are in.



## Narrative Dynamics

- Sense Making Machines
- Nonlinear & Ecosystemic Forms
- Two Belief Systems, One Moment
- Cultural Evolution

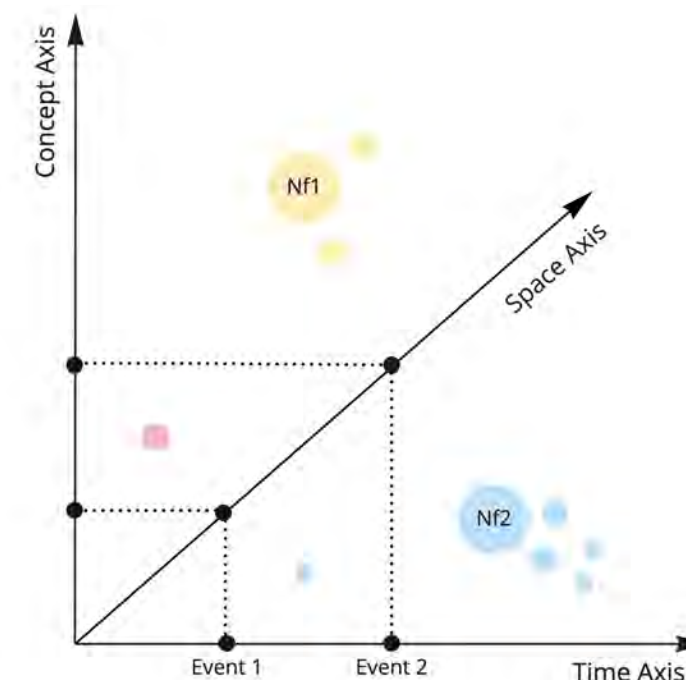
Depicting the Time code, the image on the previous page features the Misak people whose territory is in Cauca, high in the Andes mountains of Colombia. Their land was colonized by the Spanish, but in the 1980s they started a process of reclaiming their land rectifying the injustices of the past and securing a just future.



# SENSE MAKING MACHINES

At Culture Hack, we see narratives as heterogeneous, complex, **social capacities** that allow for collective sense-making. Moreover, these **narrative forms** have their own genealogies and evolve, mutate, terminate and converge. All narratives live within an ecosystem of mutually-embedded narrative bodies - we call this ecosystem the **narrative space**. For example, as we studied the Covid & BLM narrative spaces we found multiple, sometimes commensurate, sometimes competing narrative forms, that live side-by-side.

The diagram below visualizes the narrative space as an ecosystem of narrative forms, that is structured by three axes: time, space and concepts.

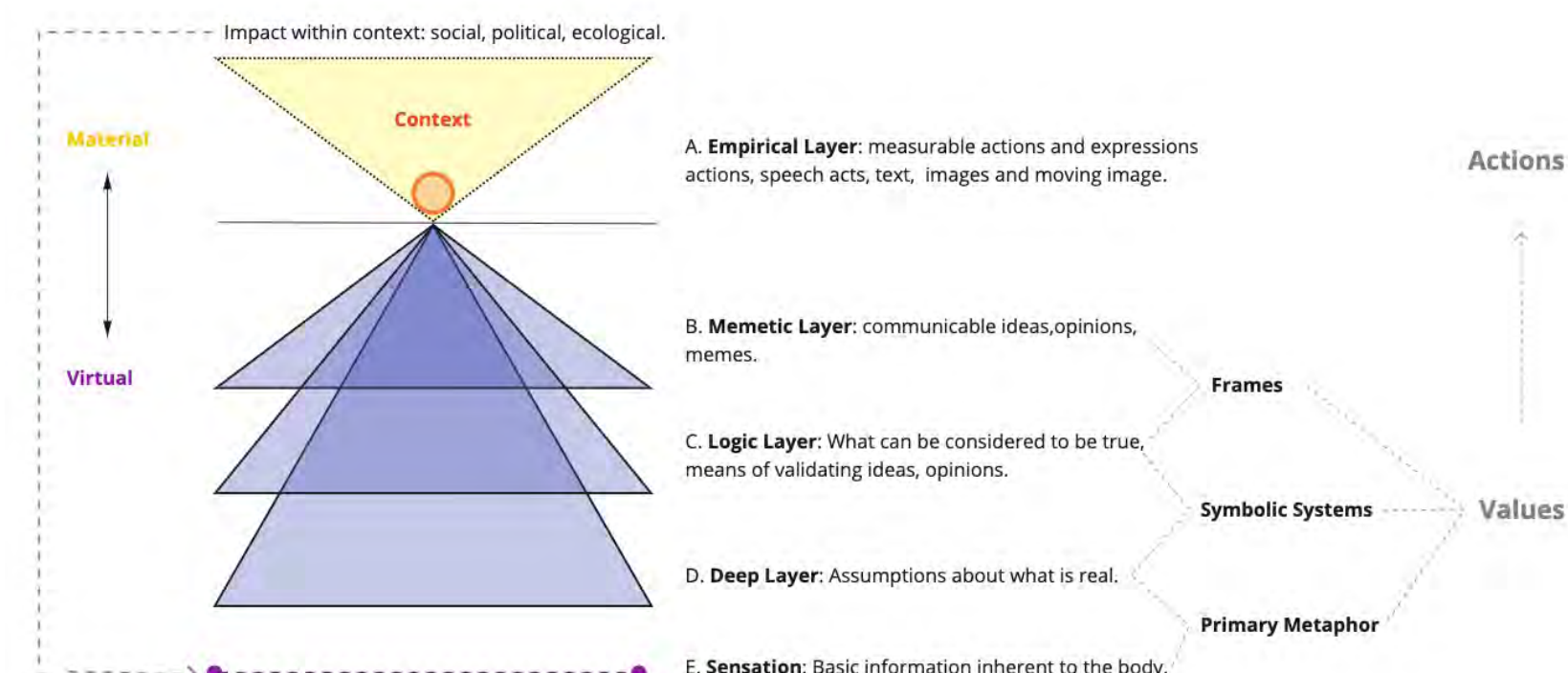


These three dimensions define a narrative space as:

- Existing within a genealogy or history, and that is duplicated, replicated and diffracted over time
- Having linguistic correlates (concepts) that are structured and codified in language
- Having empirical coordinates, that can be measured in material space

It is important to note here that narrative forms exist predominantly as virtual properties of [social assemblages](#). This means that we are only able to create descriptions of the narrative forms through events, that can be measured empirically. In the above diagram of the narrative space we can see that narrative forms (Nf1, Nf2) exist virtually as intensive processes within the space. However we cannot describe these processes without empirical events such as text, words, images and so forth. In our analysis we have collected data from social media and news media to develop complex and codified representations of these spaces.

We can look at the diagram below to better describe this relationship, between the virtual and material dimensions of **narrative forms**.



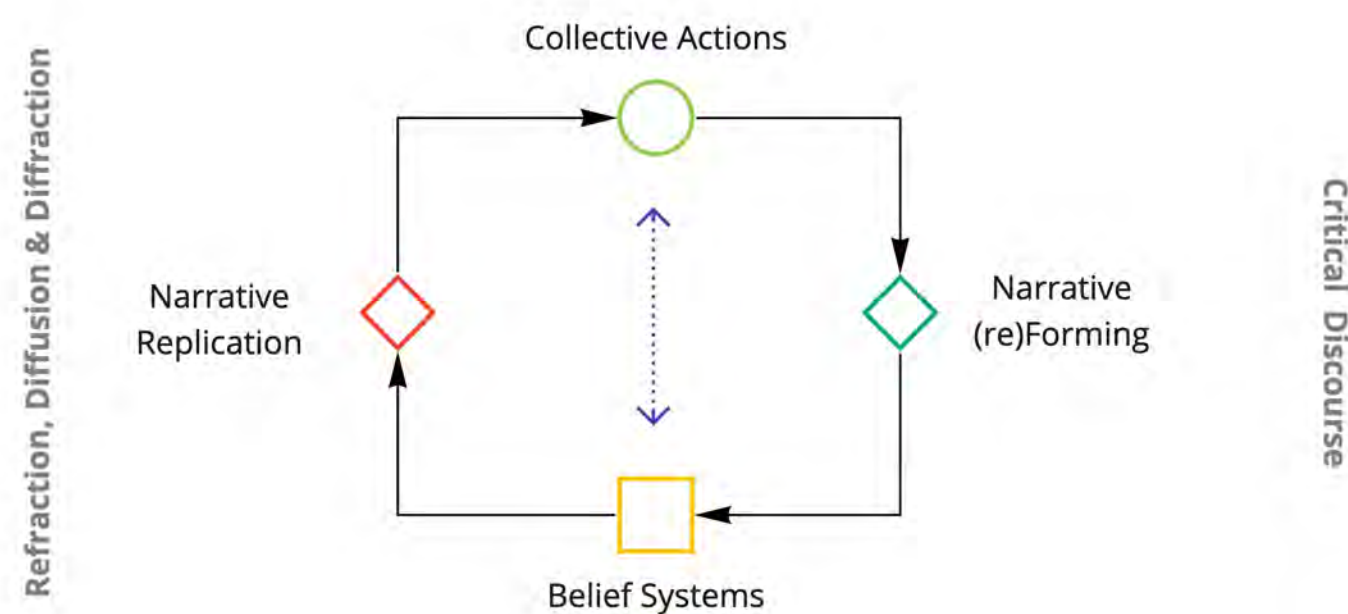


This mapping of the virtual and material aspects of narrative forms describes the reciprocal relationship between: 1) the representation of the narrative in social media, news media and other cultural products and 2) the virtual, immeasurable spaces of the narrative. Critically this shows that the representations - the utterances, words and speech acts - that we make of the narrative and its underlying logics are **narrative events** that in turn, effect the virtual spaces themselves.

**Therefore, we find that the most effective means to effect these virtual spaces is through the creation of new measurable actions and expressions. However, these new representations must have the following characteristics to affect the narrative context:**

1. Messages must be 'fit' for the **narrative niche** which it is made to effect. This includes being commensurate with the mediums it hopes to effect, e.g. Twitter, news articles, etc.
2. The messages must utilize the same **validatory mechanisms** within the logic layer; that is they must fulfill the truth criteria for the narrative niche.
3. Finally, the messages must address the **deep layer** either through reframing the logics or by supporting existing logics.

To better understand how these narrative forms affect social actions we can look to the following mapping of their key material and virtual processes.



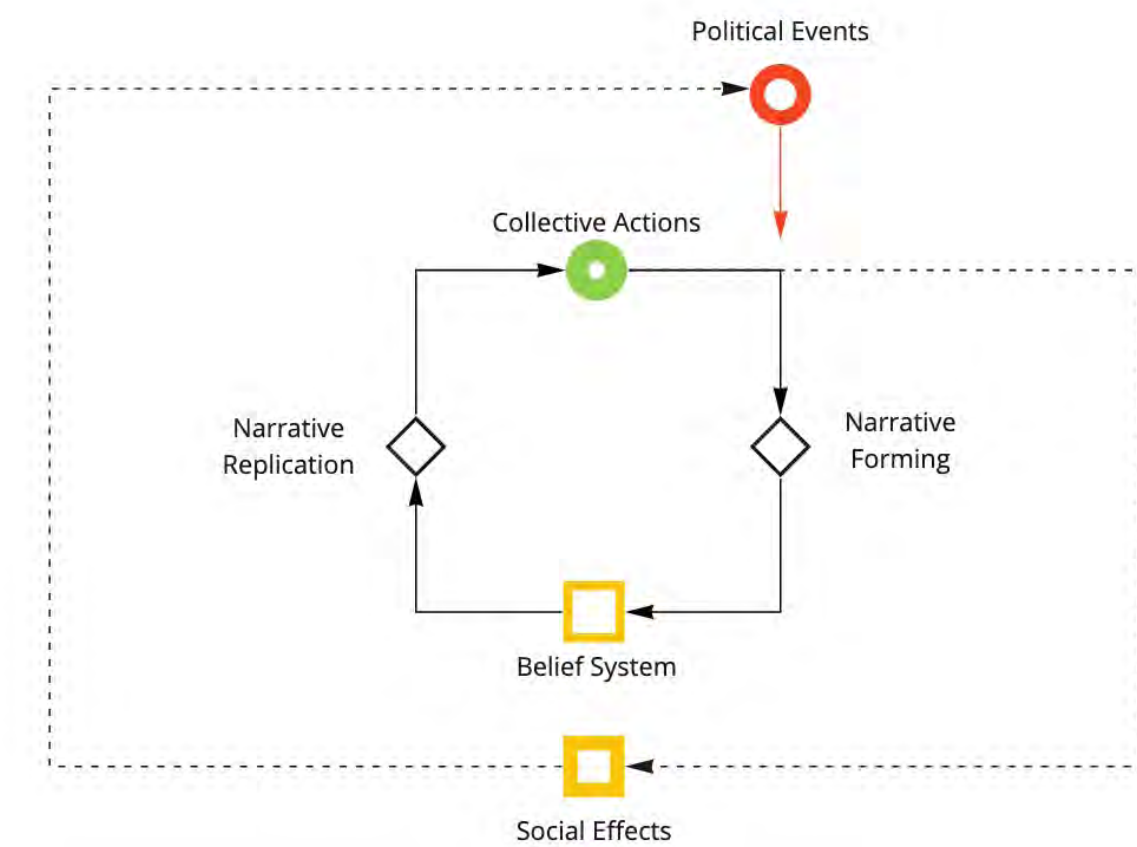
**These processes can be described as follows:**

1. Belief systems underpin the narrative form, however they remain virtual, intensive processes until they are expressed through narrative replication.
2. In the narrative replication process, belief systems are brought into actuality through the creation of multiple representations of the underlying belief system.
3. The refraction, diffusion and diffraction of the underlying belief systems determine collective actions or social behavior.
4. Through immediate and delayed effects of these collective actions, confrontations and confirmations of the underlying belief system are brought into the light. This is often the through the activity of a critical community, that actively works to reframe and question belief systems.

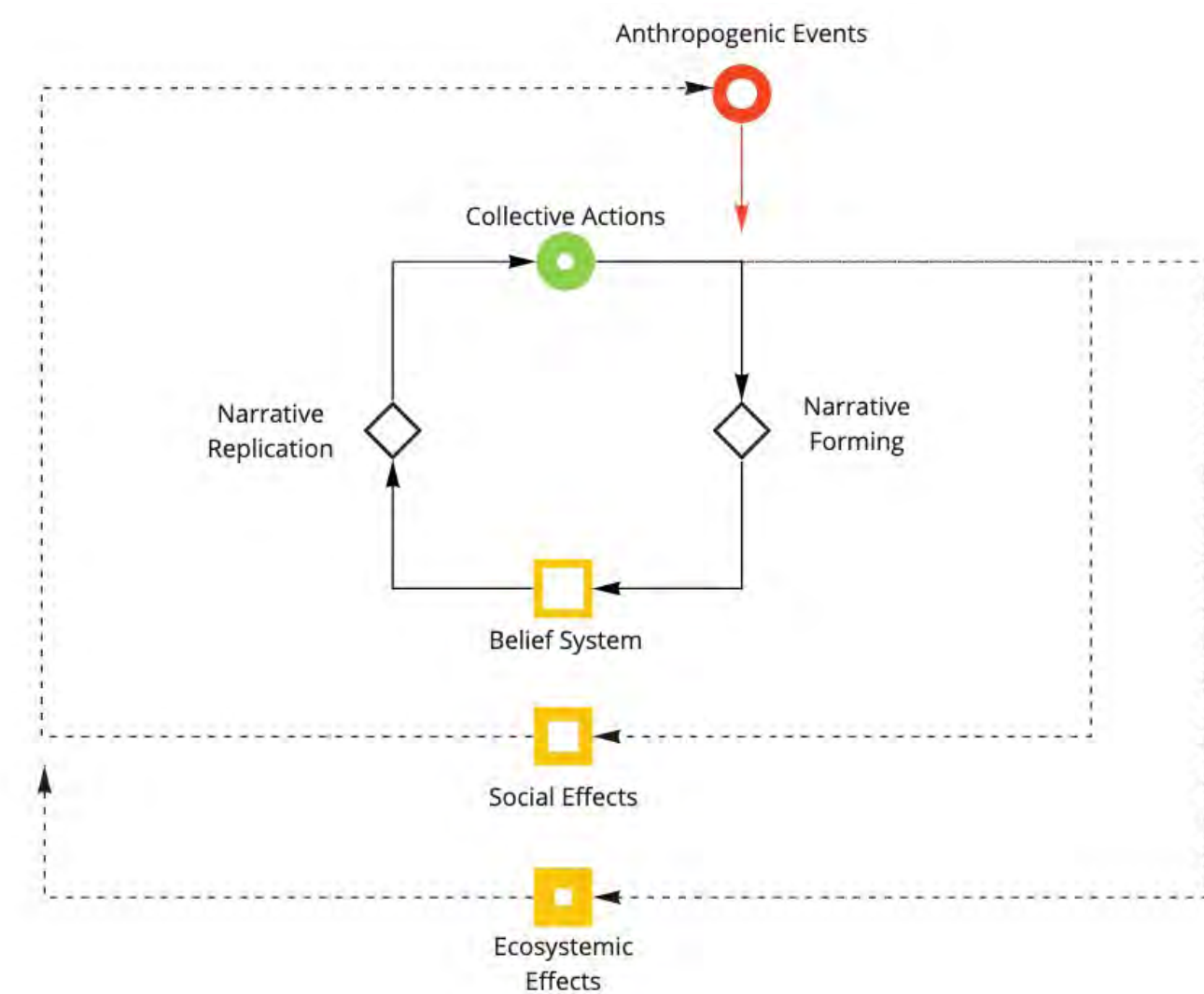
Through this mapping, we can see that narrative systems function as virtual repositories for belief systems that are enacted, replicated and evolved through social actions. Moreover, because narrative replication and narrative forming are the processes whereby these belief systems are actualized or reframed, they are key points of intervention for culture hacking.

# NONLINEAR & ECOSYSTEMIC FORMS

In the previous section, we described how narratives are virtual repositories for belief systems. Using this framework, the current section shows the nonlinear and delayed effects of these narrative forms.

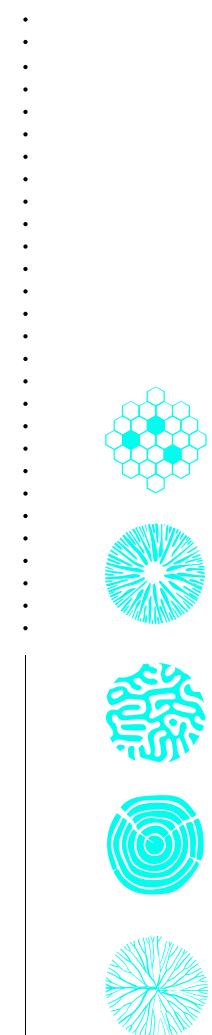
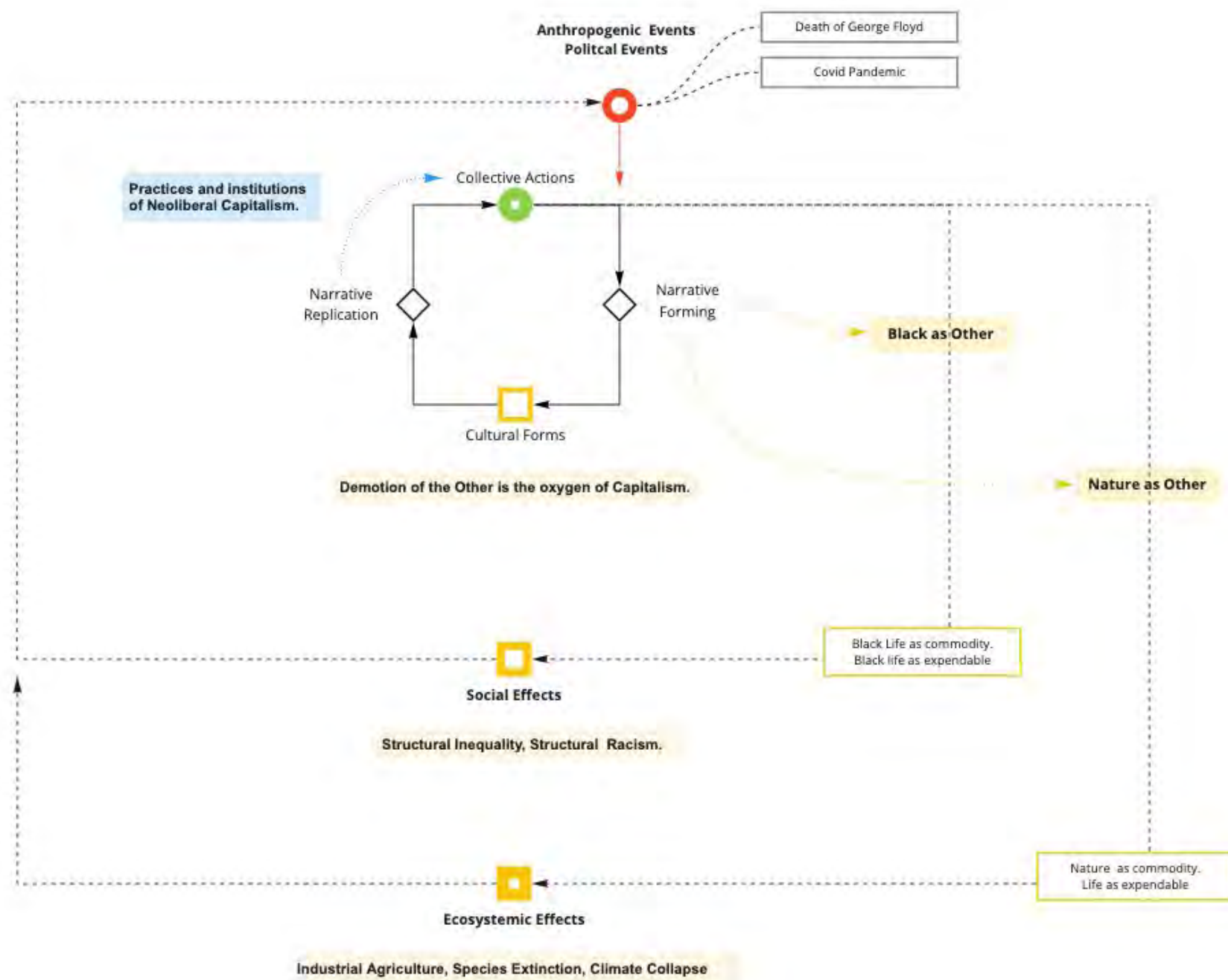


In this mapping we can decipher the relationships between virtual, belief systems that are value laden and political events. We can extrapolate this mapping to show the ecological impact of narrative forms as follows.





Although this mapping is rather reductive, it shows the nonlinear and complex relationship between belief systems and their effects. Within the current context of our analysis, we can track the effects of both to the fabric of the neoliberal belief system. This long term narrative dynamic is reflected in the mapping below and is described in detail in the section, *The Structural Causes of this Moment*.



## TWO BELIEF SYSTEMS, ONE MOMENT

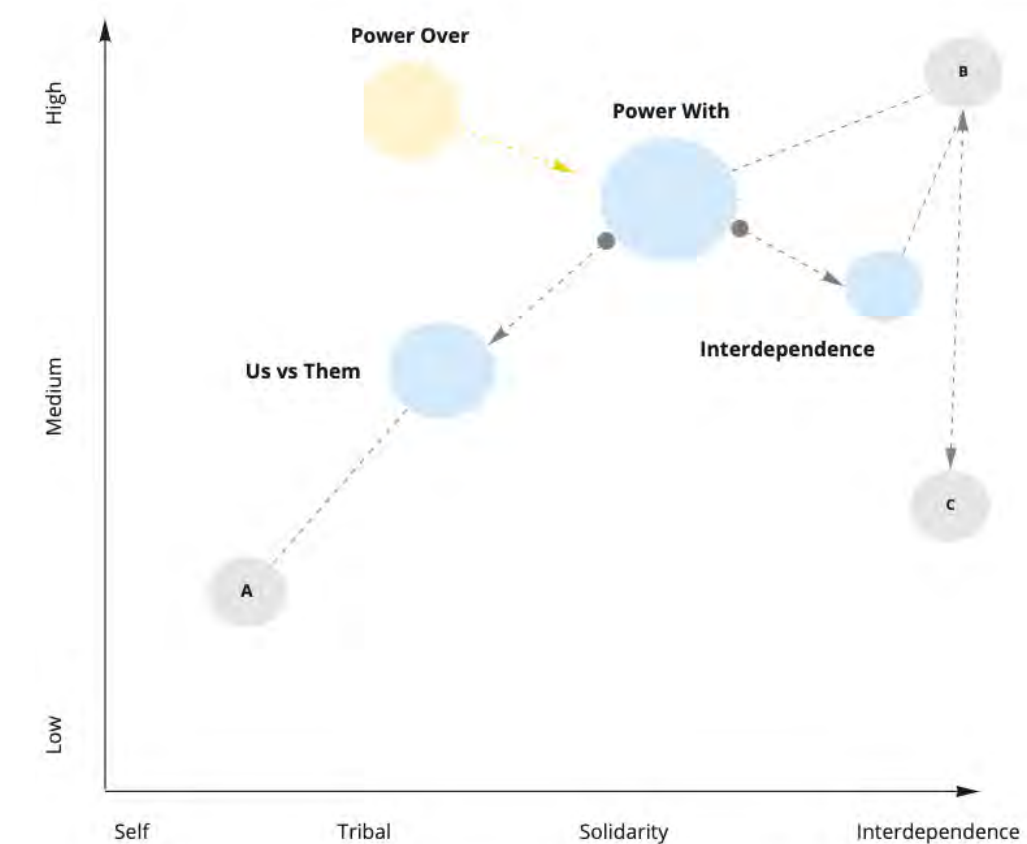
In the analysis of this time of transition we find two dominant narrative forms:

1. The narrative form of **collective solidarity**, found within the BLM movement that emerged in the wake of George Floyd's murder in late May and early June.
2. The narrative form of **individual freedom**, exemplified by the 'freedom to' movement in the wake of the Covid pandemic, with its darker aspects found in QAnon conspiracies.

Through our detailed analysis we can map these narrative forms along two dimensions:

- **Coherence** - the similarity between each of semantic expressions within each community
- **Identity** - the degree to which semantic and linguistic expressions are alike

For the solidarity narrative form, we can map our coding as follows, in these two dimensions:

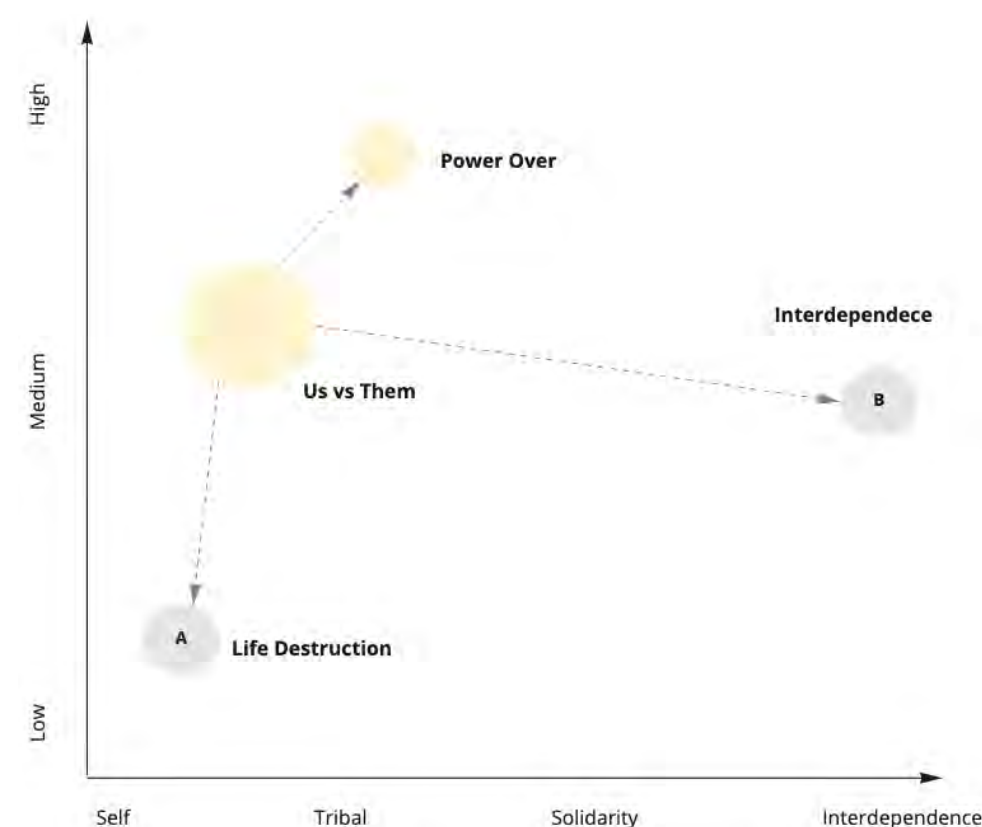


- As we can see from the above, the majority of codes within the BLM narrative space were for the Power/With frame. These expressions of solidarity were the foundational logics and sentiment of the movement in our analyzed data,
- From this point, and largely due to the emergence of a strong Power/Over frame within the narrative, we see the emergence of an Identity/Us vs Them frame. In this dynamic, we also see a reaffirming of the Power/With frame and the presence of a strong Identity/Interdependence theme.
- Viewing this mapping as a depiction of the 'phase-space' of the BLM narrative form, we can describe the following potential trajectories:
  - ° On the shadow aspect, the movement can quickly degenerate to point A, the Life/Destruction station.
  - ° On the evolutionary aspect, we can see the continued development of the 'empathic field' of the narrative form to point B, where we can find life centric and communitarian logics.
  - ° Similarly we can see a potential relationship between point B, and point C where we can find dialogic and democratic logics and ways of organizing.



Through this mapping and understanding we can see that the BLM narrative form is principally one of collective solidarity. In the United States today this is seen as a radical position, however the goals of the movement can only be achieved through much greater radical structural analysis. It must work to expose, the deep logics of neoliberalism that feeds on the demotion of Other. Through this shift, the narrative form may have the potential to evolve, to display higher and higher forms of interdependence, as such that it finally disrupts the insidious logic of tribalism and self-determinism.

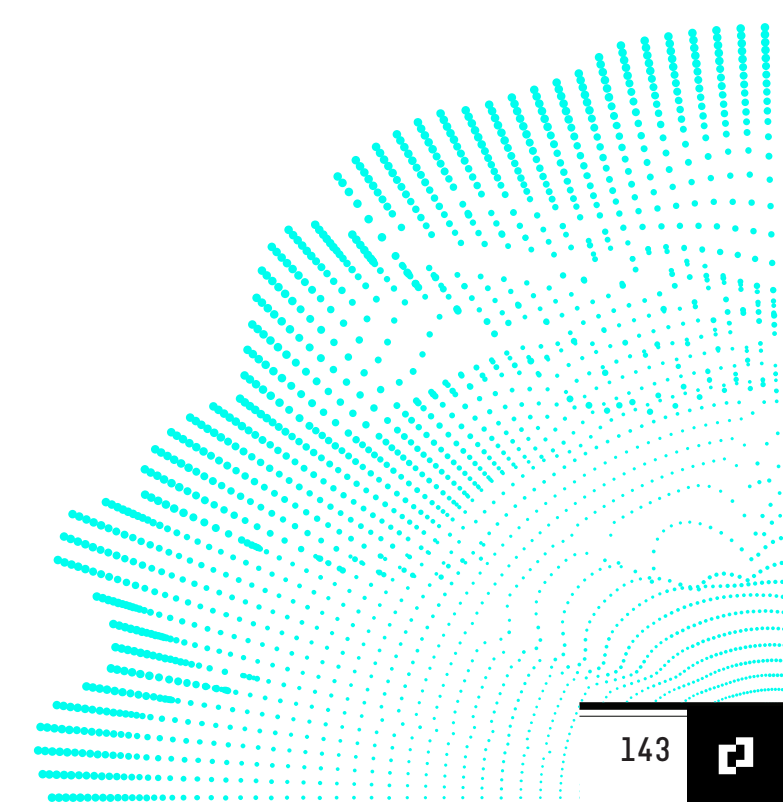
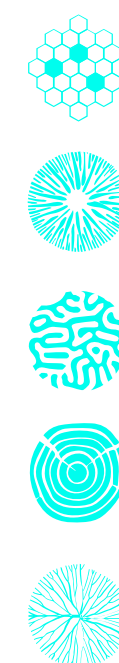
In parallel to this we can map the 'individual freedom' narrative form in the following way.



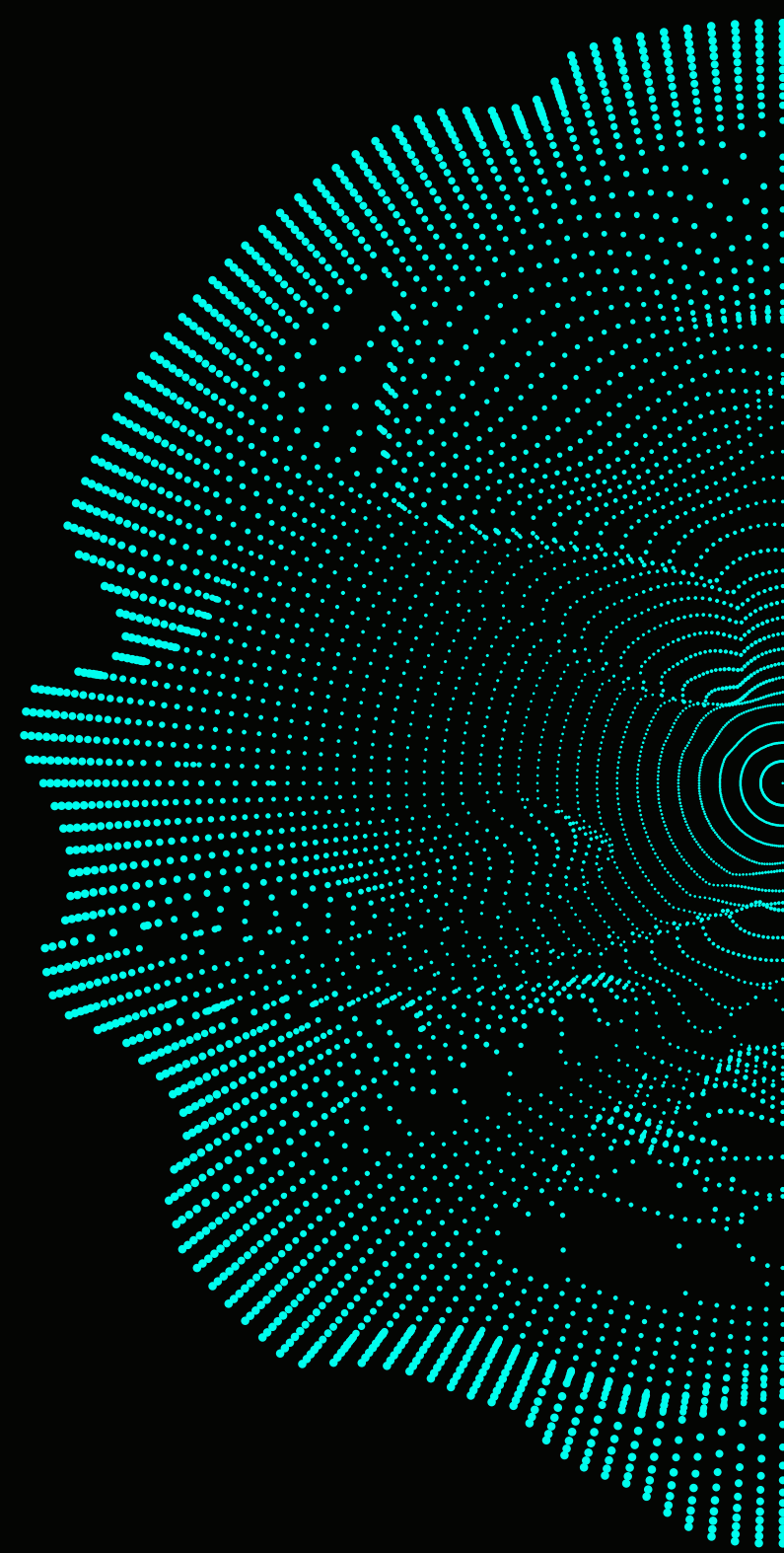
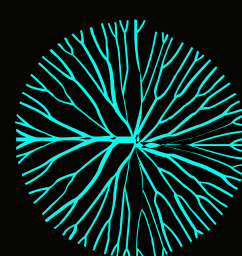
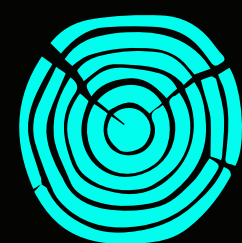
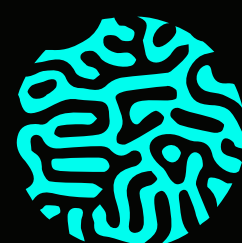
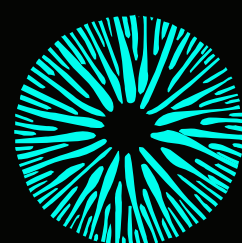
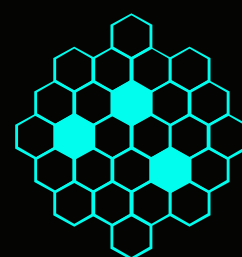
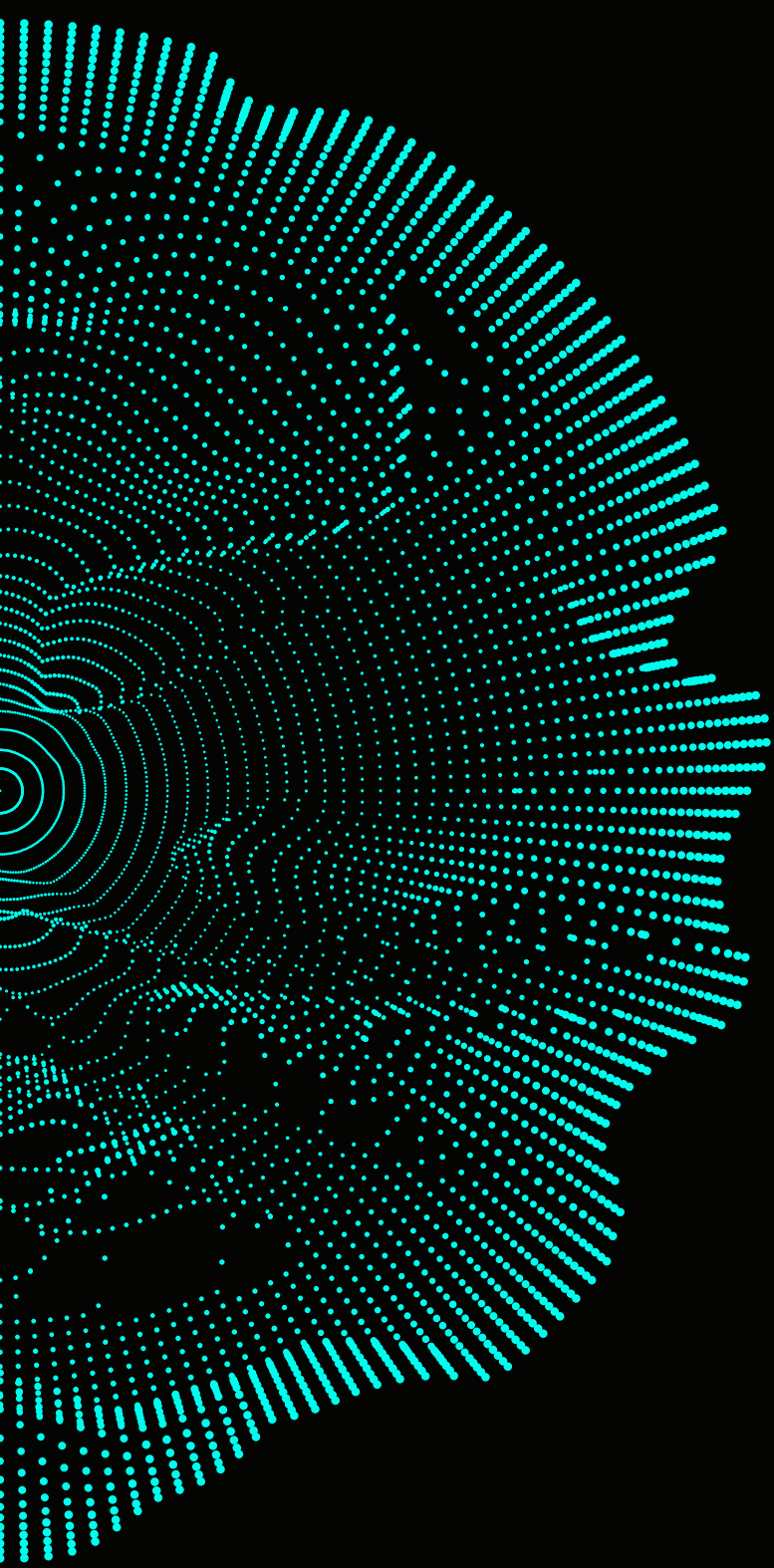
- In this mapping we can see that the Identity/Us vs Them frame is the most predominant. This, unsurprisingly is rooted in deep logics of self-determinism, nationalism and a misplaced notion of personal liberty.
- In reaction to both Covid and BLM narrative events, this narrative form quickly evolved into a Power/Over disposition, that was exemplified by the discrediting of both the BLM movement and the severity of the Covid pandemic.
- This narrative form displays many symptoms of a failing system, and could easily slip into either point A, the Life/ Destruction impulse or greater levels of dominance through the Power/Over state.
- Since the core theme of this movement is freedom, the only hope for evolution will come through reassessing what freedom means. If this reframing of freedom is defined in the contingency of all members of society, and even further, to all life; the narrative may have the potential to evolve to point B, Identity/Interdependence.

It is worth mentioning that the 'critical community' driving this narrative form is the QAnon community. This community has its currency in the formation of conspiracy theories and specifically, capitalizing on the Post-Truth, hyperreal digital world. The reaction from many within the mainstream media and politics, have been measures to discredit this community using a set of truth criteria that call to the authority of science, for example. However this movement is driven by the logics of perceived personal liberty, tribalism and self determinism - in whatever mutated form they now exist. However, through the mapping of these movements along an axis of identity as above, we can see clearly the cognitive development of each of these narrative forms.

- Within the BLM narrative form, there are clear indications towards life-centric and life-preserving social paradigms, essential for the current times of transition. These evolutionary shifts can only be engendered by a deconstruction of the core logic of Neoliberalism, that of the demotion of Other. The very impulse of the BLM movement is already a deep and unrelenting critique of this, however much of the cultural discourse is not pointing to this.
- For the individual freedom form, we see a typical example of the logic of neoliberalism - that is the demotion of Other, through the overstating of personal liberty and tribal power. As we can see in the above mapping, this narrative form is shifting into the Life/Destruction state, and finally pulling the ecosystem into a state of entropy.





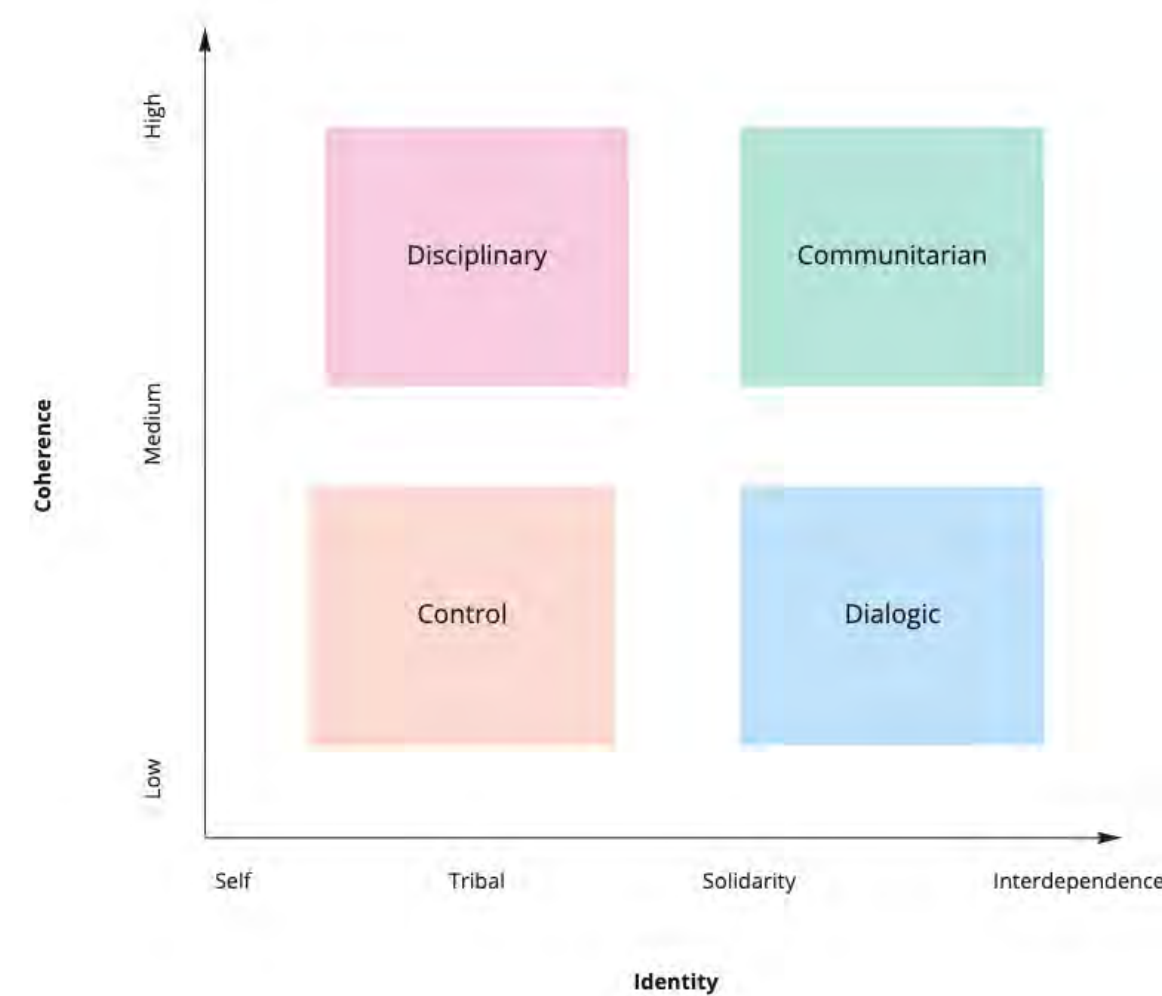




# CULTURAL EVOLUTION

In these times of unprecedented crises it is critical that we collectively develop a set of orienting coordinates, that help us navigate the uncertain and complex terrain of the inevitable transition. We find in this time of instant messaging, endless pixels of information, sponsored research posts and labyrinthine conspiracy theories, Science (and even Truth) has failed to guide us away from the sheer face of extinction. To address this we must develop heuristics that can function as a better set of truth criteria for our narratives - thought-forms that govern every aspect of our lives. Narratives are not only sense making machines in the face of uncertainty, they are the very substance of our social reality; and therefore it is critical that we can understand what cultural evolution means.

Through our analysis, and mapping of the phenomena of narrative forms in this moment of transition, we have developed the following mapping:



In this mapping we can see that using the two axes of Coherence and Identity, we find four narrative environments: Disciplinary, Control, Dialogic, Communitarian.

**A. Disciplinary** - In this quadrant, we find narrative forms that show a high degree of coherence but that express a low empathy field, that is, they are within the ‘self’, tribal’ range. The narrative environment of the disciplinary society was first articulated by Foucault, as the means by which state apparatuses would gain power over society through an enclosure (of space-time), typified by the factory, hospital and asylum.

**B. Control** - In the control society, individuals are given ‘modulated’ freedoms that give the illusion of personal freedom and liberty, but that are ultimately grounded in control.

“ In the disciplinary societies one was always starting again (from school to the barracks, from the barracks to the factory), while in the societies of control one is never finished with anything - the corporation, the educational system, the armed services being metastable states coexisting in one and the same modulation, like a universal system of deformation.”  
Deleuze, Postscript on the Societies of Control.

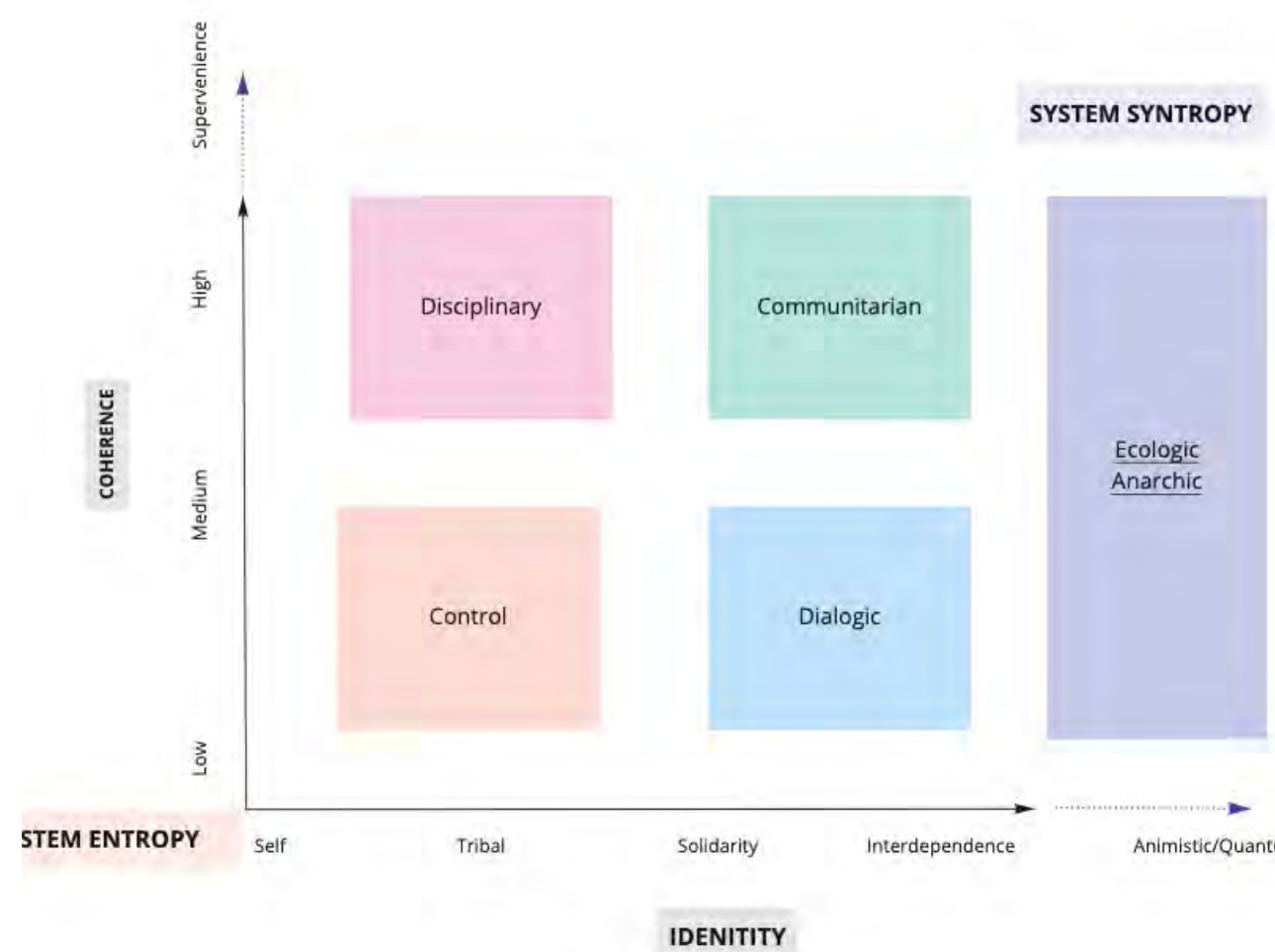
**C. Dialogic** - the basis of the dialogic narrative environment is deep diversity, that cultural resilience may be obtained by dialogic means between many heterogeneous viewpoints. This capacity is particularly suited to developing discourses between varying cultural codes and spaces.

**D. Communitarian** - the communitarian narrative environment displays high levels of coherence with high levels of interdependence. This logic is particularly suited to local resilient communities that work together to preserve life, and thrive together.

In this exposition we can see a natural phasic shift between environments A & B in neoliberal systems, and also between C & D in resilient systems. In its ideal form, narrative environments that display the highest level of resilience will move between capacities C & D, as needed. These capacities are founded in a basic value of interdependence.

However, we believe, that the current moment of transition indeed requires a much greater shift in our collective consciousness. This shift requires a transformation of the understanding our world, not merely as interdependent but deeply entangled and animistic. This view of reality reveals the world not as interconnected but as **mutually caused**; for example we do not see ‘nature’ as something we must save but as something that we ‘are’. Examples of this type of narrative environment are found in ancient wisdom cultures around the world, and the few remaining ones display the highest levels of social, ecological and cultural resilience.

The mapping below attempts to describe a fifth narrative environment, a shift to a post-anthropocentric paradigm, that we may term interbeing. The interbeing paradigm can be best described by two integrated qualities - post-anthropocentric and pre-dualistic (before any conception of separation).



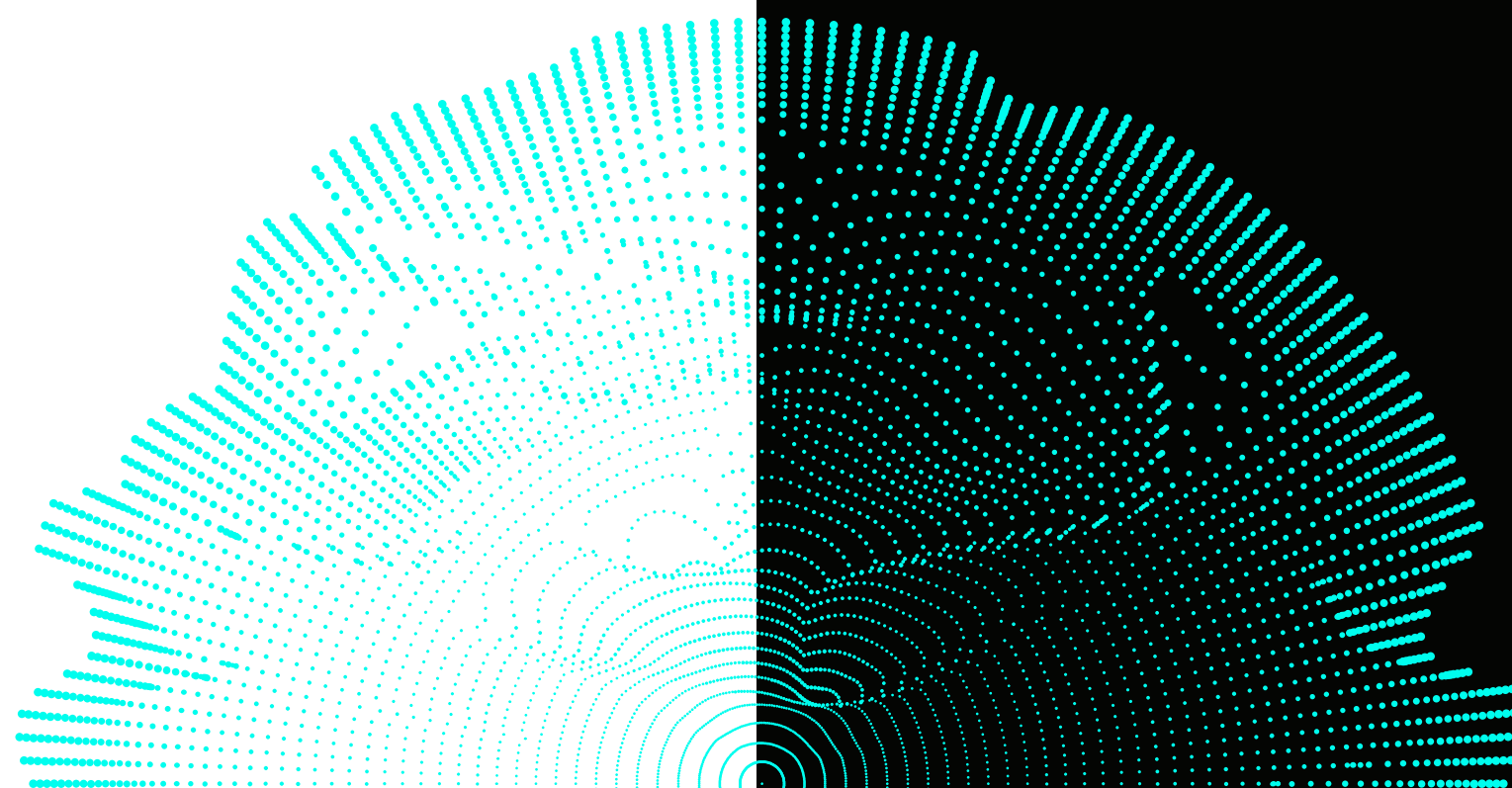
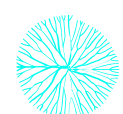
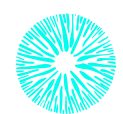
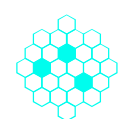
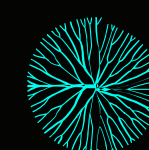
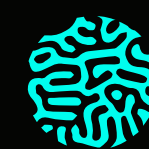
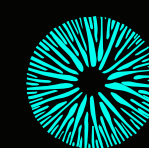
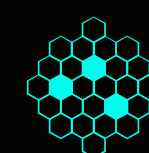
Using the above diagram as a map we can give the following current examples for each quadrant:

Quadrant	Aspect	Exemplars
Disciplinary	Religious Nationalism	India, Israel
Control	Secular Authoritarianism	USA, China, Russia
Communitarian	Democratic Confederatism	Rojava, Chiapas
Dialogic	Pluralist Democracy	Sweden, Canada
Interbeing	Ecological Anarchism	Temporary Autonomous Zones, Indigenous Communities



Through the shift of the basic understanding of identity within these narrative environments we can evolve to the Interbeing paradigm. This is interrelated with a more animistic and quantum understanding of human identity based on entanglement, co-agency, interdependence and dependent origination (i.e. "if this exists, that exists; if this ceases to exist, that also ceases to exist"). This will lead our cultural forms into greater levels of entrainment and order to achieve the overall outcome of system syntropy, as it pertains both to social and ecological issues.

From our perspective, this is what cultural evolution means: the constant phasic shift from entropic narrative environments to syntropic narrative environments, through a widening definition of identity; the emerging phase being an animistic/quantum view of Self.







EVOLUTIONARY NARRATIVE FRAMES

EVOLUTIONARY

# NARRATIVE FIVE— FRAMES





# EVOLUTIONARY NARRATIVE FRAMES

Given the insights ([insights](#)) and dynamics ([Narrative dynamics](#)) that we have shown in the above analysis, our inquiry is concerned with not ‘what’ but ‘how’. This ‘how’ asks naturally, ‘how can we move these narrative forms towards more syntropic and life-centric modes?’



## ✕ Evolutionary Narrative Frames

The image on the previous page represents the syntropic future we strive for. Featuring an indigenous woman from Ecuador carrying child, this is the ultimate representation of the Mother and all life which we must protect and honor.



As we have seen in [Sense Making Machines](#), frames are emergent between the logic and memetic layers of a narrative form. Therefore the frame layer is an important intervention point in any culture hack:

- Frames are richly embedded with ontological claims, belief systems and values
- The frame layer acts as a trope for messages, actions and expressions
- Observable frames within the narrative landscape expose narrative forms (specifically the systems of justification) and therefore create opportunities for re-framing.
- Reframing, as the key intervention mechanism of any culture hack, is an act that:
  - Introduces new values and belief systems embedded within a unifying trope or idea
  - Exposes inconsistencies within a current frame or knowledge system
  - Maintains the qualifying criteria for action inherent to the narrative form

Therefore, we can define the following criteria/heuristics for narratives for the transition or, given our journey into the narrative forms, what we now rather call “evolutionary narrative frames”:

1. Does it privilege the possibility for system syntropy?
2. Does it bring attention to the structural drivers of the situation of concern?
3. Can it integrate the narrative forms that are observed within the narrative space? In the case of our current analysis: individual freedom and collective solidarity.
4. Can it elicit deeper levels of empathy?

We can observe that most narrative interventions do not even begin to ask these questions in their strategies; rather these interventions are often antagonistic, deepening the us-versus-them divide, and remain interventions at the message layer. The following examples offer two syntropic frames and their potential for moving narrative forms as they pertain to the above criteria.

## We Prefer the Lake

**Context:** A new 13-billion dollar airport threatens Mexico City's largest watershed and will also displace thousands of people inhabiting the area. A national discourse emerged as to whether the airport should be built there or at another location - a binary choice that did not address the deeper structural causes.

**Syntropic Reframe:** “I Prefer the Lake”.

The local affected community of Atenco, just outside of Mexico City, creates a “third option”. The reframe of Yo Prefiero El Lago (“I Prefer the Lake”) has two key aspects: 1) it uses the inherent logic of choice to point to something deeper, that ‘we prefer the lake’ (many ‘I’s’ saying the same thing at the same time creates the effect of ‘we’) and 2) employing an animistic worldview - it gave a voice to the lake ecosystem itself through various cultural interventions such as the “Lake Charter”. such as the [“Lake Charter”](#).





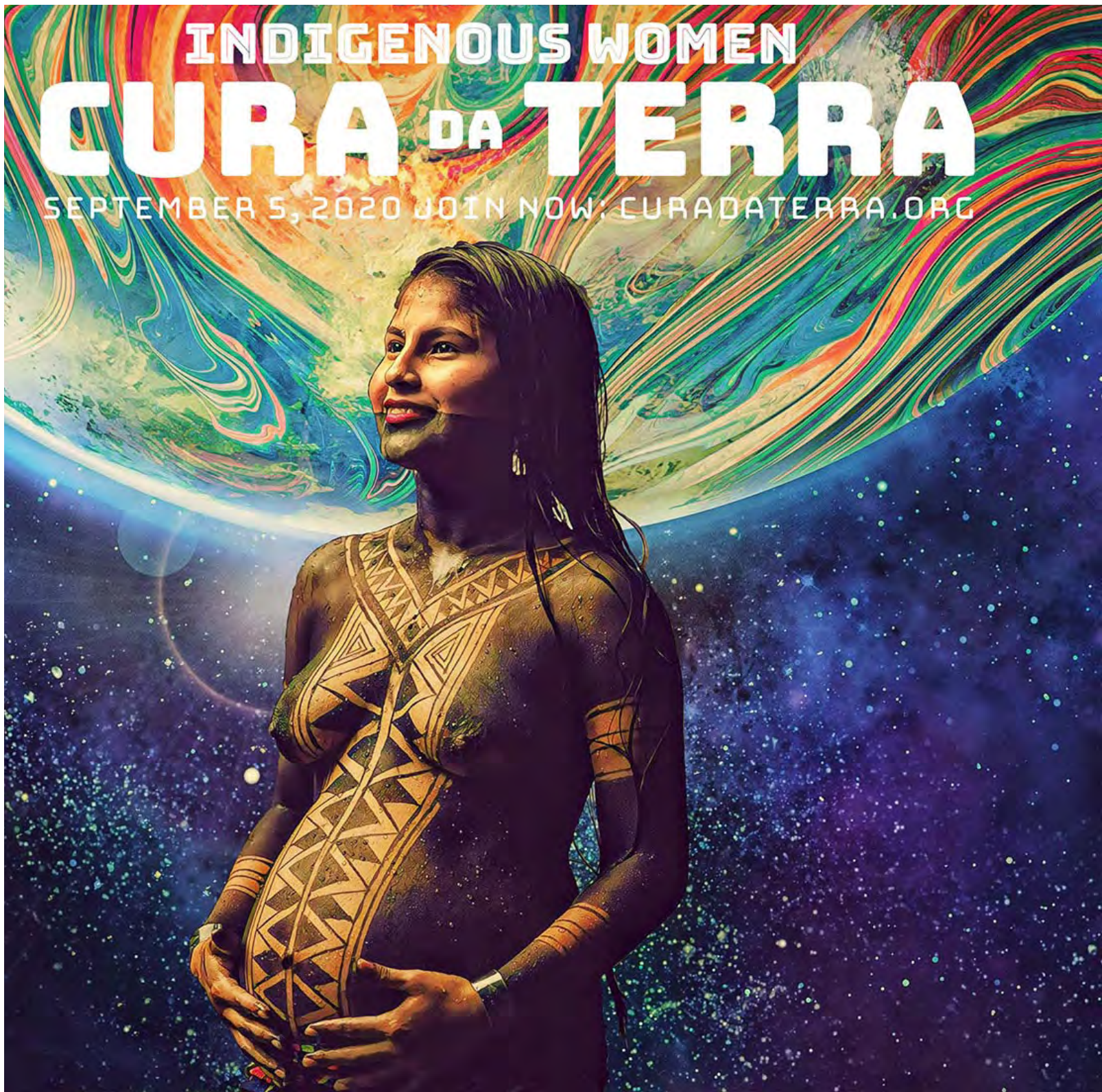
Cura de Terra

**Context:** The Amazon Rainforest, ravaged by human induced wildfires, is reaching a critical tipping point making the largest carbon sink in the world, a carbon emitter. This issue is indelibly bound up with Indigenous rights because the largest areas of preserved natural forrest is under the guardianship of Indigenous peoples.

**Syntropic Reframe:** “We [Indigenous women] Are The Cure”

“  
Mother Earth is sick, our peoples too. These are times of pandemic and climate  
emergency, ecocide and genocide. Today we live the consequences of an economic, social  
and spiritual model that has infected our territories and bodies. A virus that puts  
money above life. In the midst of the extermination, Indigenous women make the fight a  
melody, we recover the stolen land, we insist on celebrating our existence, we sow hope,  
because we are the Earth healing itself.”  
- Celia Xakriba

In this powerful reframe, ‘the cure’ to our current moment of climate catastrophe and social collapse is framed as the capacity to protect, nourish and support all life - in all its diverse forms. This specifically transcends both the frames of ‘saving the Amazon’ and ‘the Amazon as resource’ to a universal principle of life honoring custodianship; an understanding of the world preserved in ancient Indigenous wisdom traditions.



In the context of our current analysis we can see that both the BLM and Covid narrative spaces are embedded within a discourse on power and freedom at these times of crisis.

✕ Evolutionary Frames

Narrative Aspect	Description
Issue Area	Race & Power in the USA
Existing Frames	<p>Within the narrative space we see two dominant narrative forms: 1) collective solidarity and 2) individual freedom.</p> <p>The <b>collective solidarity</b> form can be said to be typified by the frame “<i>we are more powerful together</i>,” a frame that places importance on decoupling and deconstructing a legacy of structural racism and inequality for the benefit of all citizens. However this narrative form is oppositional and critical in its operation, in that it takes aim at structural and cultural forms of oppression; and so by its very operation is implicated in the narrative form of ‘Us vs Them’.</p> <p>The <b>individual freedom</b> form is typified by the belief that all things equal, the world is Darwinian - that is, it is based on “<i>survival of the fittest</i>”. This frame makes the structural effects of climate crisis, systemic racism and economic inequality invisible and are relegated to the inhospitable environment in which evolution occurs. In this narrative form power is not given by life, but earned, won and taken. Moreover it is ‘freedom’ as a right of every human that enables power to be made.</p>

**Emerging Dynamics** As we can see from [Two Belief Systems, One Moment](#), both narrative forms display a phase space that shows evidence for evolution and degeneration.

**Collective Solidarity:** This narrative form shows its evolutionary capacity as it moves into a discourse on social interdependence - that our healing is all bound together. It degenerates often into an antagonistic phase when in confrontation with the Power Over frame. Therefore the opportunities of evolution here are to reframe collective solidarity in ever widening terms, through a life affirming and life centric frame (not an ‘against oppression’ frame).

**Individual Freedom:** This narrative form often degenerates into a life-destruction mode, as it privileges the freedoms of an elite group of individuals; simultaneously it often scales up to the power over mode that operates to gain control over others to preserve individual freedoms. Quite clearly this narrative form does not offer a great capacity for evolution and typifies an entropic narrative form. However, if there were opportunities for evolution they would emerge within a redefinition of both freedom and power.

Both narrative forms are deeply concerned with power and freedom, a quintessentially American concern. Evidence of this can be found in the “I can’t breath” crossover message that was used by both narrative forms to express their underlying belief systems - discourses about power and freedom in the transition.

However because both models believe that power is acquired through the means of opposition (collective solidarity) or by ‘freedom-to’ they are blinded by the ecosystemic feedback in these times of crisis. A key strategic measure then is to define power within the terms of the transition and to show that these belief systems are no more sufficient justification for action in the transition times.



Deep Logic

All power comes from life, therefore it is our (renewed) purpose to protect all forms of life, including human and more-than-human life. A corollary of this is that true freedom can only be found in the protection of others freedom, and even further in the protection of all life’s need to flourish. In this way *Power* is defined in its *Accountability*, and not in its taking or competitive gain. It is the fundamental inversion of the “will to power” drive that has underpinned Western “progress” and dominion for the last five hundred years. This logic deconstructs and decouples the fundamental ground upon which the systems of control are built on - the demotion of Other. This inversion of the control logic, honors Other as the very means of individual freedom, happiness and power.

Reframe Expressions

“Life Force”

We try to control nature - the environment and our human nature - in order to dominate and acquire power. Instead of dominating and forcing nature, we have the opportunity to align and become a force of/for nature.

“Life before Power”

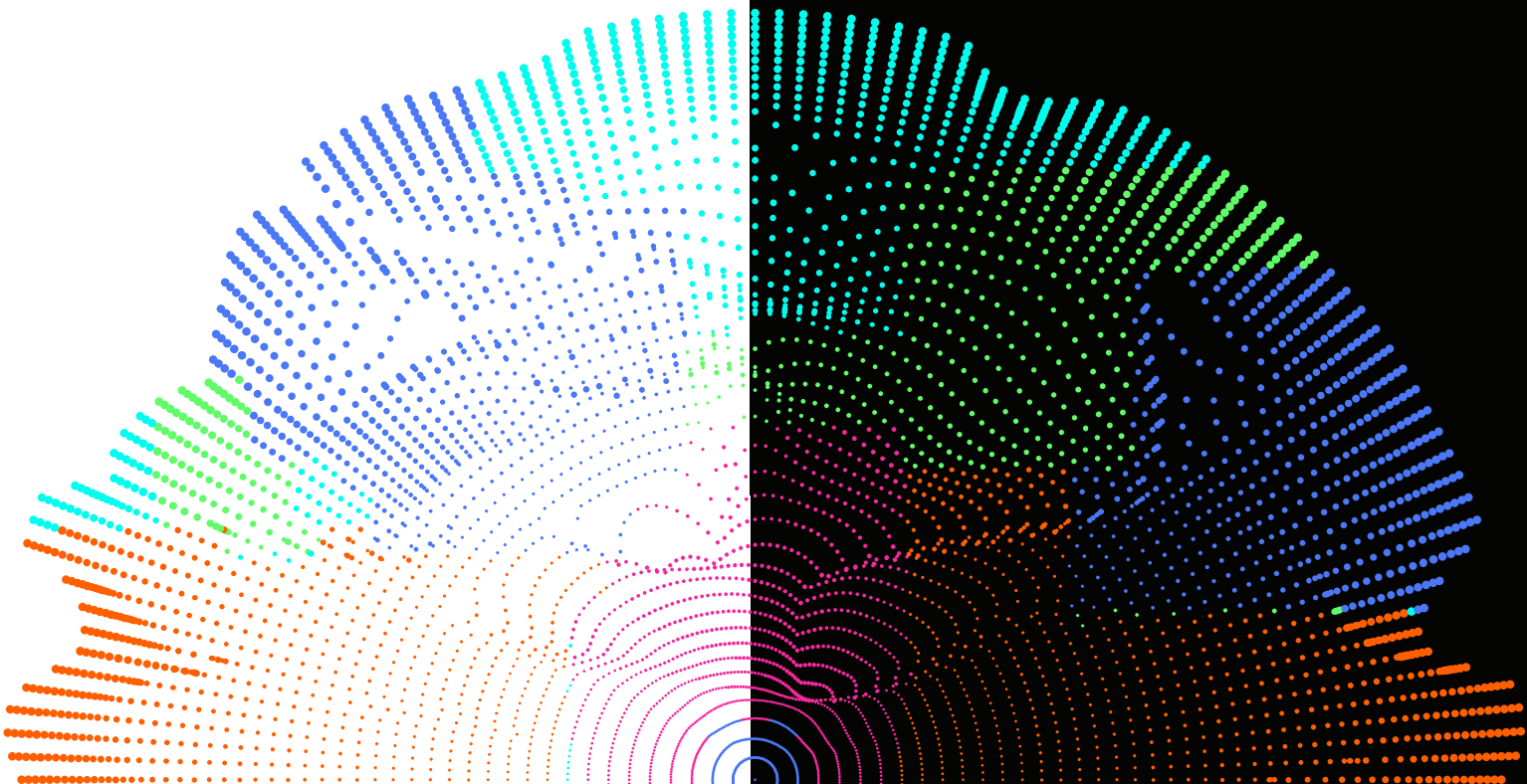
Many Powerful institutions, States or people imbued with Power feel invested in a mission to protect Life. The problem is that they are not accountable in doing so and only pursue their own version of ‘Life’. Accountability is crucial if we actually want Life to prevail and not have these self-appointed saviors show us the way. Life must come before power.

“Life to Power”

The West’s ascent to power has been built a belief on the supreme force of the human will (“will to power”), however this has only brought about an unequal and precarious world. This is because the logic of “will to power” excludes all that is not human (as is defined within a set of sociocultural values) and relegates it as fuel for limitless human agency. The corollary, Life to Power indicates that the inverse logic is true - honoring all life in all its forms brings true power.

“Our healing is bound is together”

As we start to see how all oppression is connected, we can also start to see how all healing is connected. And that our own liberation is not only bound up with that of others but that our integrated evolution is dependent on it. When we serve Life for the benefit of all we are in service to the living planet.







## AFTERWORD

“ All time is calculable, laid out, the entirety of the past, of all that lays behind us, and the entirety of the future, of all that is before us, starting with but one moment, any moment, all moments made equal . . . All time in no time at all.”

- Karen Barad. Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations.



### Afterword

→ Queer Space & Quasi Cause



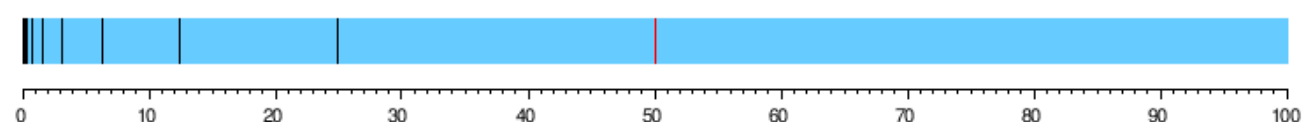


# QUEER SPACE & QUASI CAUSE

As we have shown in the sections Progress Against Life and Progress Against People, anthropogenic effects grew exponentially from about 1800 - the beginning of the industrial revolution. In the time approaching this point, we see a development of a refined European metaphysics: a new way of viewing the world that would make it ‘infinitely accessible’ and as ‘standing reserve’ for human endeavor. We can ascribe this metaphysical revolution to a particular constellation of thinkers and scientific discoveries that came to be known as The Enlightenment: a scientific and cultural movement that was the key driving force of the narrative of “progress”.

This tradition, as lineal successors to the Platonic schools, were driven by a central paradox of causation. This paradox, which some would argue is never fully resolved in the Western philosophical tradition, expresses itself in several foundational beliefs in reality. The first of these, is the understanding of the ‘prime mover’ or uncaused cause posited by Aristotle, which frames space/time in two ways: 1) as an arrow that begins in the past and moves into the future and 2) as initiated by a prime mover that is itself uncaused. Space and time then are mutually reinforcing metrics of this linear model of reality. Aristotle, a student of Plato, may have developed these ideas from the core metaphysics of Plato - that instituted a plane of ‘ideas’, ‘more real’ and more substantial than the material, partly due to its enduring qualities; for example a person (an ideal form) endures longer than any one of its states: birth, childhood, etc. These are just two examples of the lineage of linear causation so inherited, that may be expressed by the paradox: Something uncaused (outside the realm of time) can cause something real (within space and time). This performative paradox, was described in those ancient times as Zeno’s paradoxes, but was largely relegated to philosophical musing rather than serious critique, by later successors of this lineage.

“ That which is in locomotion must arrive at the half-way stage before it arrives at the goal. -as recounted by Aristotle, Physics VI:9, 239b10



The above figure describes Zeno’s paradox: to move from point 0 to point 100, one must first move to point 50, then point 25, 12.5 and so on, ad infinitum. It is therefore not possible that a body moves through space in time, an ontological claim that became integral to the metaphysics of Aristotle and laid the foundations of the metaphysics of presence.

During The Enlightenment we see further development of these principle foundations in this *metaphysics of presence*. The first major development can be observed in Descartes’ shift in emphasis from ‘what is’ to ‘what can be known’, a move that didn’t necessarily need to be anthropocentric but inevitably was. In this philosophical maneuver Descartes begins the work of the Enlightenment: to frame that which is valuable as the pursuit of human knowledge. In this epistemological turn, metaphysics is reframed from an inquiry into the nature of *being* to an inquiry into the conditions for *knowing*. Furthermore without a sufficient distinction between merely human knowing and other types of knowing, this became a pursuit solely concerned with human knowledge, and granted this meant specifically Eurocentric knowledge systems.

A secondary implication of this turn was ‘the mind-body’ problem, an exemplification of the principle paradox above, it divides the world into two parts: the immeasurable mind and the empirical material (body). With this Descartes first defines the mind as ‘beyond the natural’ and nature as governed by the deterministic and measurable mechanics, and as expressed by Newton’s Principia.

The principles outlined in Newtons set of equations hold the assumptions of the metaphysics of presence:

- Space as an empty void, through which the movement of objects can be quantified
- Time as a linear progression of a series of moments between the past and the future
- Causality as a deterministic and ultimately quantifiable dynamic of matter, in space and time

It is important to differentiate between Descartes and Newton as two figures in this Neo-Platonic movement; we can trace these differences by describing the ways they understood the metaphysics of space. As inheritors of the Platonic worldview, both were dedicated to explaining physics from a mathematical approach rather than a qualitative one, as Aristotle had. For Descartes, the confounding experience of the world and its physics could be explained through *pure geometry*: God not only creates the world and its (mathematical) laws of motion but also endows Man with the mind-body composite allowing him to sense the material world and then use pure mathematical knowledge to correct his knowledge of it (assuming that our senses are actually unfaithful or flawed). Descartes’ *principle of extension*, sees space as identical to matter and as the pure emanation of a universal God that is present everywhere and creates spaces and times as the modulation of his thought and will. In this view, the senses are problematized and it is their flawed rendering of a perfect world that must be corrected by a perfect mathematical mind. In contrast to this Newton does not see the physics of the world as the object of pure geometry but emphasizes the space in which the objects of the world exist as that which ‘frames the world’. In this Newtonian world view space and matter are two distinct ontological categories and further, it is space that makes matter and the world possible. It is this *empty* space that is a object of perfect geometry and it is for this reason that mathematics can be applied to deciphering the hidden metaphysics of the world - for example: it is the empty space that allows both matter and its motion (as a function of the will of God) to be determined.

What is significant in this elaboration of the Neo-Platonic worldview is the central concern with reconciling the fundamental paradox of the Platonic world view - the schism between *general* and *specific*, and more specifically their causal relationship. In the case of both Newton and Descartes, there is a melding of these two views that essentially relegate the difference as error: that which is material must ultimately be overcome through perfect understanding. Most importantly in this exegesis, was Newton’s attempt to address *the fundamental paradox* with the invention of calculus; an epistemological apparatus that aimed to address the disjuncture between the continuous and the discontinuous (Zeno’s Paradoxes).

“ The presumed radical disjuncture between continuity and discontinuity is the gateway to Man’s stewardship, giving him full knowability and control over nature. Calculus is revealed as the escape hatch through which Man can take flight from his own finitude. Man’s reward: a God’s eye view of the universe, the universal viewpoint, the escape from perspective, with all the rights and privileges accorded therein. Vision that goes right to the heart of matter, unmediated sight, knowledge without end, without responsibility. Individuals with inherent properties there for the knowing, there for the taking. Matter is discrete, time is continuous. Place knows its place. Time too has its place. Nature and culture are split by this continuity, and objectivity is secured as externality. We know this story well, it is written into our bones, in many ways we inhabit it and it inhabits us. - Karen Barad. Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations.

In essence, calculus is a technological apparatus that provides a different level of granularity of information for this problem of experience, but is still firmly rooted within the metaphysics of *presence*: that we can infer the *continuous* through the measuring of moments of presence. However, does this really resolve the fundamental paradox or rather instantiate a more elaborate taxonomy of measurement? For Bohrian Quantum Mechanics these very moments of presence are determined by the (inter)subjective apparatus that measures it and therefore are not moments of presence, but emergent information, based on intra-action between entangled bodies.



Therefore, Newton’s calculus and also physics, provides a middling explanation but part of the deeper problem with The Enlightenment as a philosophical movement, was it’s belief in an absolute and unitary truth and therefore its inability to critically analyze the genealogy of understanding it was embedded within. The real question vis-à-vis modernity is, what does this ‘technology’ enable, what world does it produce and who does it empower? This is a critical and political appraisal that is completely absent from the whole philosophical movement.

**However, we do not have to stray far from the tradition to find its unravelling. In Gödel’s incompleteness theorem for example, we see a proof in two parts:**

1. No consistent system of axioms whose theorems can be listed by an effective procedure (i.e. an algorithm) is capable of proving all truths about the arithmetic of natural numbers. For any such consistent formal system, there will always be statements about natural numbers that are true, but that are unprovable within the system.
2. Furthermore, no system can demonstrate its own consistency and is therefore incomplete.

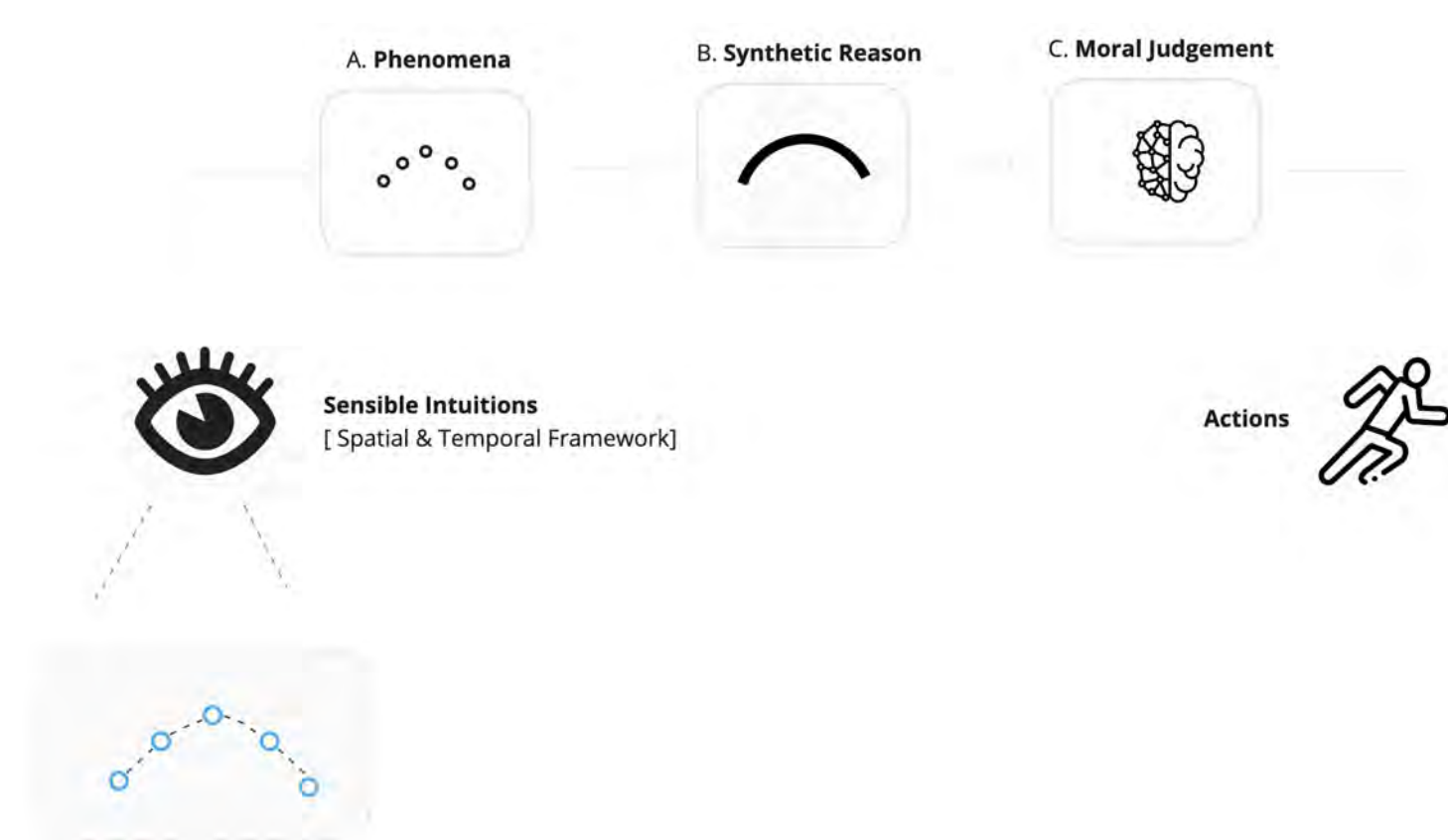
In the above proof it is given that ‘natural numbers’ represent the potential variability of empirical measurements in applied algorithms, and therefore point to the contextual limitations in any set of algebraic, abstract formulations as complex representations of the world. This holds for Newton’s formulas, and also for the proceeding equations of thermodynamics, electromagnetism and quantum mechanics. The creation of these representations of ‘nature’ reflect the political and social agency of the time, they are socio-political narrative forms: specifically the means of power over nature or what became to be known as *progress*.

In particular, these formulae are not sterile observations nor absolute truths, but are the means for harnessing what they frame as forces of nature: the gravitational, electromagnetic and the weak and strong nuclear forces. These forces are also only representations of reality consistent with the position of *power over nature*; or that which is other than the immeasurable field of the mind. The *creation* of these representations of nature place nature as a potential resource for the exploration of unlimited human potential, where human potential is defined by a set of social and political characteristics. Deeper than this, these representations of reality are borne from a fundamental disjuncture between the continuous and discontinuous, the empirical and the immaterial, between self and other; they are borne from the *metaphysics of presence*.

The crowning achievement of The Enlightenment in general and for this constellation of philosophical thinkers specifically was Kant’s *Transcendental Idealism*. Kant critically addresses the central paradox of human understanding in lineal succession of Aristotle, Descartes and Newton by delving into the possibility for human knowledge, specifically *synthetic a priori*. In other words, *how is it possible to have synthetic knowledge without having empirical observation?* This object of his critique is what he terms *pure reason* or the positing of an abstract and ideal field of mind. Kant describes the problem famously through the analysis of mathematical understanding in his example of  $7 + 5 = 12$ . In this example he explains that no amount of analysis of the empirical truths of ‘5’ and ‘7’ will yield ‘12’, but it is through synthetic *a priori* or the formal system of arithmetic that we can determine its truth. In response to this problem, Kant explains that purely intellectual knowledge, that is knowledge independent from the (human) forms of sensibility of space and time, is in fact impossible.

“ The synthesis of spaces and time, as the essential form of all intuition, is that which  
 . also makes possible the apprehension of the appearance, and thus all outer experience,  
 . and therefore all cognition of the objects of experience; and what mathematics in its  
 . pure use demonstrates of the former [the essential form of all intuition], it is also  
 . necessarily valid for the latter [all outer experience, etc.]  
 . - Immanuel Kant, **Axioms of Intuition** [A 165-166/B 206]  
 .

In this revolution in understanding, pure metaphysical concepts can be used in the pursuit of (genuine) theoretical knowledge only when schematized within the intuitions of linear space-time: substance as impermanence, causality in terms of succession etc. As Friedman (2009) shows, Newton and his discoveries had a profound impact on Kant and we see this in his explanation of this epigenesis model of pure reason. In fact, the development of Newton’s calculus and also laws of universal gravitation or ‘action at a distance’ exemplify the epigenetic process that Kant points to. However in the analysis of this model it is important that we parse out exactly what is being claimed as true and what is being falsified. Kant is showing that ideal forms are ‘empty’ and that our spatial ‘intuitions’ are necessary and required to make these forms meaningful - all human knowledge is contextual.



**In the above figure, we can see a reductive model of Kant’s Transcendental Idealism, having the following parts and processes:**

- A. The spatial and temporal schema inherent to the body, structures data into information about the world, what Kant calls *intuitions*. These primitive units of information are considered as accurate transcriptions - Kant holds the belief that our spatial and temporal intuitions are true, our senses do not lie.
- B. Through higher forms of synthetic reasoning, the human mind is able to expand the capacity of mind to *know*, and thereby create new possibilities for human action.
- C. It is precisely through this enhanced cognition, that Man is given the capacity and license to pursue ultimate dominion over nature (and Other); and it is through this that ultimate moral judgement is ultimately given.

However, is the fundamental paradox of this lineage addressed? Since the locus of explanation, like Aristotle, Descartes and Newton before him, remains human subjectivity in general and therefore the metaphysics of presence in particular, it remains unchanged. Once again, without sufficient analysis of this ‘human subjectivity’, Kant’s model of ‘human judgement’ is attributed to a very specific measure of ‘human’ that is correlated to a specific set of sociocultural values, in their boundless expansion of human potential. Derived from this position was a new form of pragmatism that placed human subjectivity at the very center of moralistic judgement, and further, placed this synthetic reason as the ultimate arbiter of truth. It is this system of understanding that cognitive empire of the West was borne. As [Boaventura](#) describes, this has been the license for social and ecological destruction for the last two hundred years:



B. Intensive forces are parsed into discrete bits of information by the sense making apparatus inherent to the system - its subjectivity. Deleuze makes a key distinction here, pointing to the fact that the qualities of these intensive forces - rapidities, periodicity, etc. are parsed by pervasive and intersubjective, cultural bodies. These bodies are interpretive, sense making machines that are non-local, extending transversally between subjectivities and that function to parse intensive forces into information. They are what we call narrative forms.

If we extrapolate this model to multiple adjacent systems (above), we can see that narrative forms emerge between discrete system trajectories. These narrative forms are the discursive capacities of culture and have embedded within them regimes of power that are enabled by deep ontological claims - as they pertain to time, space and consciousness.



These system trajectories (a,b,c) are embedded within n-dimensional space (x,y,z), however the information/ novelty that emerges as narrative forms also reformulates the very fundamental dimensions (x,y,z) that enable them. Therefore narrative forms, or virtual models of reality, are the highest level of constraint on human activity systems because they determine the possibility of molecular social interactions of everyday life. These narrative forms act as ‘strange attractors’ that coordinate the activity of billions but that paradoxically remain in virtual abeyance, and that may only be inferred through their material traces of language and action.

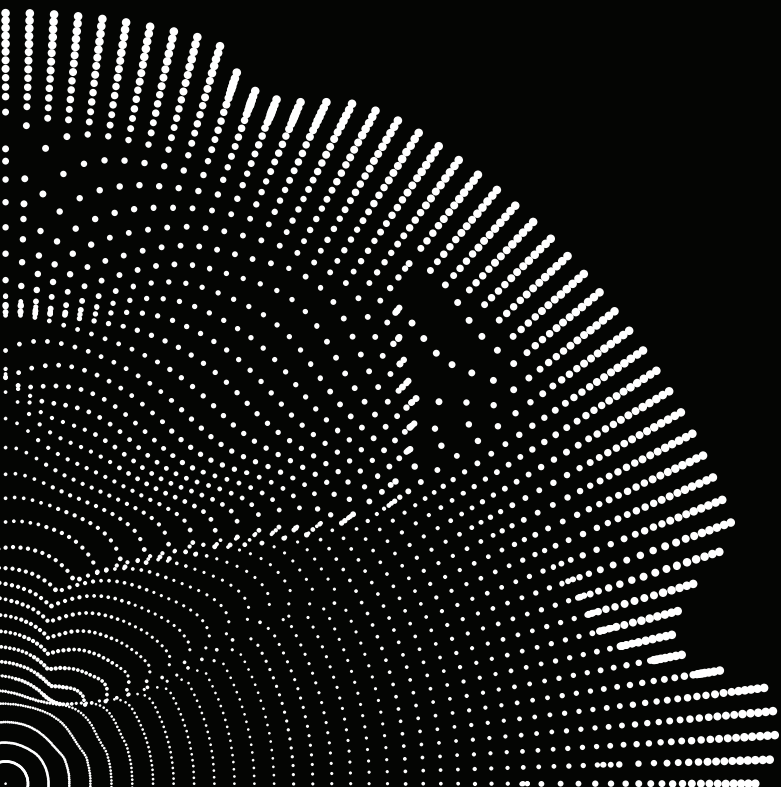
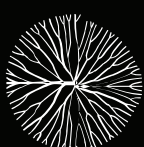
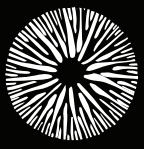
We can develop this by turning to Barad’s model of agential realism. In this model, any act of observation is a collapsing of an exhaustible amount of potentialities through a specific observational apparatus. The observation is the result of epigenesis of the apparatus itself, produced by social and political history, and further produces territories of potential action. Observation therefore makes an ‘agential cut’ between that which is meaningful and that which is not; that which is and that which is not - it is not so much that all things are connected nor that they are separate, but rather that we create that distinction itself. Barad believes that this worldview calls for a “ethico-onto-epistem-ology” - that what we observe (ontology), how we validate its truth (epistemology) and what the potential realm of action, and its implications (ethics) are deeply contingent and inseparable. This model is a true revolution in understanding from the human centered model that grounded The Enlightenment and its humanist values - subjectivity itself is defined in its contingency and dependence to all other life and not through its distinction or privileged capacity for higher forms of thinking.

In the establishment of a post-human ethics, Braidotti develops an ethical framework through a lens of power and articulates two predominant forms of power devoid of the human arbiter of truth - potestas (entrapment) and potentia (potential).

“ A more complex vision of the subject is introduced within a materialist process ontology  
: that sustains an open, relational self-other entity framed by embodiment, sexuality,  
: affectivity, empathy and desire. Social constructivist binary oppositions are replaced by  
: rhizomic dynamics of repetition and difference ... within a nature-culture continuum that  
: approaches power as both a restrictive [potestas] and productive [potentia] force.  
: The task of critical thinkers is defined accordingly as the creation of new concepts.  
: These ideas provide the navigational tools that help us across the differential  
: modulations of a monistic universe which overcomes the opposition ‘materialism/idealism’  
: and moves towards a dynamic brand of materialist vitalism.  
: - Rosi Braidotti. Posthuman Critical Theory.2016

Potestas as a political form enacts the dominion over the number, the object, the subject; through the distinction of self and other, real and not, etc. This system, as we have seen, is established through a fundamental misapprehension of metaphysical principles of time, space and causality; exemplified by the metaphysics of presence. This form of power leads to greater and greater levels of system entropy and fragility. In contrast, potentia as a political form places life (life as potential) at its center, and therefore compels human activity to preserve and ever widening definition of life in all its forms. As a structural pattern, and due to its concern for the potential of expressions of all life this form of power leads to higher levels of resilience and system syntropy.

Braidotti goes on to describe this as an affirmative ethics because it demands that we develop narrative forms and cultural systems that affirm the life centric qualities of potentia and not merely negate the forms of potestas. It is precisely in this assertion that we can see the need for a praxis that can analyze, deconstruct and intervene in dominant narratives and reframe their fundamental axioms of truth towards life-centric goals. This is what we call Culture Hacking.







# TRANS FORMING THE TRANS ITION

