



Mix Sustentável



Hacking / Upcycling: O amanhã se costura hoje

Hacking / Upcycling: Tomorrow is sewn today

Hacking / Suprareciclaje: El mañana se cose hoy.

Lucilene Mizue Hidaka¹

Lara Leite Barbosa²

¹ Universidade de São Paulo (Faculdade de Arquitetura, Urbanismo e Design (FAUD/USP), PhD Candidate in Design.

² Universidade de São Paulo (Faculdade de Arquitetura, Urbanismo e Design (FAUD/USP) Associate Professor.

Correspondência para: lucihidaka@usp.br

Resumo: O Manifesto Hacker, de McKenzie Wark, e as práticas de upcycling de resíduos têxteis pós-consumo compartilham uma essência política comum: ambos constituem formas de resistência criativa contra sistemas exploratórios. Enquanto o movimento hacker, no âmbito digital, questiona as estruturas de controle da informação; ativistas do upcycling transformam vestuários descartados em suportes materiais de ressignificação, abordando roupas usadas como softwares livres. Nesse contexto, o upcycling revela-se uma prática política emancipatória, protagonizada majoritariamente por mulheres que, por meio do design, das manualidades e das artes, contestam os sistemas capitalista, patriarcal e colonial. Este trabalho busca tecer um manifesto, ao demonstrar como upcyclers subvertem a lógica do descarte, transformando resíduos em narrativas de luta. O estudo

**ORIGINAL ARTICLE –
SCIENTIFIC SECTION
RESPONSIBLE EDI-
TORS:** Lisiane Ilha
Librelotto, Dr. Eng., Paulo
Cesar Machado Ferroli, Dr.
Eng.

SUBMITTED ON

02/03/2026

ACCEPTED ON

27/03/2026

PUBLISHED ON

14/09/2026

PID

10.29183/2447-

3073.MIX2026.v12.n2.184-200

Standard License Text

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.



Copyright Statement

Authors retain the copyright and grant the journal the right of first publication, with the work simultaneously licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution

fundamenta-se em referenciais teóricos feministas interseccionais, tendo conceitos do Manifesto Hacker como eixo conceitual central.

Palavras-chave: Hacking; História das mulheres; Upcycling.

Abstract: McKenzie Wark's *A Hacker Manifesto* and post-consumer textile upcycling practices share a common political essence: both constitute forms of creative resistance against exploitative systems. While the hacker movement, in the digital realm, challenges information control structures, upcycling activists transform discarded clothing into material vehicles of re-signification, treating used garments as free software. In this context, upcycling emerges as an emancipatory political practice, predominantly led by women who, through design, manual arts, and the arts, confront capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial systems. This work aims to weave a manifesto by demonstrating how upcyclers subvert the logic of waste, transforming discarded materials into narratives of struggle. Grounded in intersectional feminist theory, the study uses concepts from *A Hacker Manifesto* as its central conceptual framework.

Keywords: Hacking; women's history; upcycling.

Resumen: El Manifiesto Hacker de McKenzie Wark y las prácticas de reciclaje textil posconsumo comparten una esencia política común: ambas constituyen formas de resistencia creativa contra los sistemas explotadores. Mientras que el movimiento hacker, en el ámbito digital, desafía las estructuras de control de la información, las activistas del reciclaje transforman la ropa desechada en vehículos materiales de resignificación, tratando las prendas usadas como software libre. En este contexto, el reciclaje emerge como una práctica política emancipadora, liderada principalmente por mujeres que, a través del diseño, las artes manuales y las artes plásticas, confrontan los sistemas capitalistas, patriarcales y coloniales. Este trabajo busca tejer un manifiesto demostrando cómo las personas que practican el reciclaje subvierten la lógica del desecho, transformando los materiales desechados en narrativas de lucha. Basado en la teoría feminista interseccional, el estudio utiliza conceptos del Manifiesto Hacker como su marco conceptual central.

Palabras clave: Hacking; historia de las mujeres; reciclaje.

Como citar: HIDAKA, Lucilene Mizue; BARBOSA, Lara Leite. Hacking / Upcycling: Tomorrow is sewn today. *Mix Sustentável*, Florianópolis, v. 12, n. 2, p. 19-35, 2026. DOI: 10.29183/2447-3073.MIX2026.v12.n2.184-200

Conflict declaration

Nothing to declare.

Funding source

This study was financed in part by the Brazilian agencies CNPq.

1 INTRODUCTION

A Hacker Manifesto (Wark, 2022) and post-consumer textile upcycling practices may, at first glance, appear to occupy distinct universes: one speaks in bits, the other in fabrics; one operates in the virtual, the other in the material. However, both share the same political gesture—creative disobedience against systems of exploitation. If hackers disassemble codes to liberate information, upcyclers disassemble clothes to liberate memories and waste materials. Discarded used garments can be re-signified through manual techniques and the creative process of upcycling. While fast fashion platforms use artificial intelligence to accelerate production, consumption, and disposal, upcyclers—or, as some are known, *suprarecicladoras*¹ or textile transmuters² — use social media to disseminate repurposing techniques. Large corporations co-opt hacker innovations, while major fashion brands appropriate ancestral techniques without providing due credit or remuneration to creator communities. Just as free software (Free Software Foundation, 2025) can be modified, a discarded shirt can be transformed into a banner of struggle.

Annually, the fashion industry discards approximately 92 million metric tons of textile waste worldwide. In Brazil alone, 4.6 million metric tons are disposed of each year. Each household discarded approximately 44 kilograms of clothing and footwear, according to S2F Partners, an intelligence hub specializing in waste management and circular economy (Brasil, 2025). In the city of São Paulo, more than 94,000 metric tons of textile waste (both pre- and post-consumer) have been sent to landfills from September 2017 through June 2025 (SUSTEXMODA, 2025). This scenario is caused by excessive production, consumption, and disposal inherent to the fast fashion system. Building on this context, this work frames upcycling practice not merely as an ecological activity, but as a field of political action where many women challenge the structures of capitalism, patriarchy, and colonialism, uniting art, education, and activism. If, on the one hand, the fast fashion system consumes and discards bodies and materials, then on the other, upcyclers re-signify these remains, creating new epistemologies of making³.

The association of hacking with the fashion field was addressed by researcher Otto von Busch (2008) in his thesis defended at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. The author employs the term "Fashion Hacking," drawing an analogy to hacking in digital culture, to propose a participatory reinvention of fashion where people are not mere consumers but active in the co-creation of clothing. One of the pillars of his research is the idea of making people "fashion-able" (capable of engaging with fashion) with what is sitting in their wardrobes.

¹ Suprareciclaje in Spanish, used in some Latin American countries for upcycling (Suprareciclaje, 2025).

² Textile Transmutation (Transmutação Têxtil), a term proposed by Brazilian artist Vicenta Perrota.

³ "New" in quotation marks, because the act of reusing and recreating used clothing from available materials has always existed throughout history, often out of necessity.

This involves disseminating practical skills such as sewing and garment alteration, enabling individuals to actively intervene in their clothing and gain autonomy from the conventional fashion system. In his perspective, fashion is viewed as an “operating system of contemporary capitalism” that can be reprogrammed for more democratic and inclusive purposes. According to Busch (cited in Brien, 2008, n.p.), “it is better to make change from within the system, not by destroying it but by building on it.” The author connects this approach with those of Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and John Dewey in *Democracy and Education*, treating the teaching of manual skills as a path toward building individual agency (Colburn, 2012). In this article, we expand upon Busch's perspective, incorporating feminist and popular approaches from the standpoint of Brazil and Latin America.

The term "Fashion Hacker" was also associated with upcycling by the Chilean brand Docena, in a project that was part of Fashion Revolution Global's Open Studio movement in 2022. The work involved lectures and a documentary showing an extraterrestrial being in their spaceship arriving in Valparaíso, Chile. In the video, a narration describes human behavior, Chile's characteristics, the textile waste scenario, and upcycling as a creative process. The production highlights the annual migration of 59,000 metric tons of post-consumer clothing from the Global North to Chile, of which at least 39,000 metric tons are discarded in the Atacama Desert (Docena, 2022). The narration also states that the brand Docena was founded in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2004, and that its members' activism predates upcycling “becoming a profession on social media.” They mention using “fashion hackers because they use the speed of fashion to create a timeless fashion” (Docena, 2022, author's translation).

Another perspective on the topic is proposed by the feminist collective SSL Nagbot (2016)⁴, which questions the dominant notion of the hacker as a white, heterosexual male programmer from the Global North. SSL Nagbot (2016) builds on this idea of hacking by incorporating Making—manual practices associated with textile and decorative arts, historically constructed as feminine. Thus, the collective proposes that, for women, the act of hacking is intrinsically linked to “making.” Feminist Hacking/Making (SSL Nagbot, 2016) analyzes technology, gender, and social justice through the lens of intersectionality, considering gender, race, class, and other social markers. The relevance of this discussion lies in its potential to challenge hegemonic narratives, highlighting histories, voices, and experiences frequently silenced, as well as confronting oppressive technological structures. The authors point out that Feminist Hacking/Making seeks to reposition women's history in sewing, “reclaiming their place in the fields of design and computing” (SSL Nagbot, 2016, n.p.). According to SSL Nagbot (2016), this approach crosses various areas, including design, craft, cultural

⁴ SSL Nagbot is a pseudonym created by the authors to challenge the idea of hierarchical singular authorship, placing greater importance on collaborative academic writing. It was formed from the initials of the authors' first names (SSL) and the first two letters of their scrambled surnames. They were inspired by feminist political economists J.K. Gibson-Graham and Sara Ahmed's (2010) concept of “feminist killjoys” (SSL Nagbot, 2016).

anthropology, sociology, gender studies, computer science, and cultural studies.

This article, part of an ongoing doctoral research project, aims to offer introductory reflections on the search for alternative perspectives and vocabularies to analyze upcycling practices as political acts, drawing inspiration from *A Hacker Manifesto* (Wark, 2022). We understand this practice as a subversive gesture that converts waste into narratives of resistance that bring into discussion hierarchies of gender, race, class, and other oppressive structures. Therefore, we approach upcycling⁵ not as a technical solution but as an emancipatory political and educational practice that cannot go unnoticed.

To facilitate the methodological approach, we adopt the term "upcyclers" to designate individuals who engage in sewing, visual arts, design, and textile crafts as a political practice, through the repurposing of post-consumer clothing. We recognize that not all people identify with this nomenclature, aligning with the perspective of feminist theorist bell hooks (2013, p. 86, author's translation) when she writes that "one can theorize without mastering academic vocabulary, just as the possession of a term does not by itself create a practice or process."

The sources used are bibliographic, drawing on contributions from authors consulted in books, theses, and scientific articles (Severino, 2016), and documentary, encompassing various types of records such as publications, online journalistic articles, press releases, social media content, and video documentaries (Yin, 2003). Intersectional feminist, decolonial, and anticapitalist perspectives from critical dialogical education were used as analytical lenses, with concepts from *A Hacker Manifesto* (Wark, 2022, p. 28, author's translation), such as hacking "the new out of the old," serving as the guiding thread.

Upcycling as Praxis

We live immersed in a capitalist system that prioritizes profit above any human value, other life forms, and the preservation of nature. Although this article does not aim to delve deeply into this topic, it is important to note that our analysis, interpretation, and theoretical understanding is permeated by an understanding of how systems operate, connecting Marxian perspectives with intersectional feminism and ecological, political, anti-imperialist, and antiracist theorizations. To this end, we consider the perspective of Fraser (2024), who develops the concept of "cannibal capitalism"—a system that devours bodies, territories, and cultures, converting them into commodities. According to the author, capitalism is defined as:

an economic system defined by private property, the accumulation of self-expanding value, the market allocation of social surplus and essential inputs for commodity production including 'doubly free' labor, is enabled by four crucial background conditions concerning, respectively, social reproduction, the planet's ecology, political power, and continuous infusions of wealth expropriated from racialized peoples

⁵ The term upcycling was coined by German engineer Reine Pilz, published in *Salvo* (1994), a journal specializing in the reuse of demolition and construction materials, to contrast with downcycling—recycling in which the final value of the product remains equal or lower (McDonough; Braungart, 2013; Fletcher; Grose, 2011; Salcedo, 2014).

(Fraser, 2024, p. 40, author's translation).

Fraser (2024, p. 39, author's translation) expands this conception by analyzing capitalism as a society that dominates and oppresses both racially and imperially, by dividing “the producing classes into two distinct categories of persons: one suited for ‘mere’ exploitation, and others destined for brute expropriation.” This established, we understand that fast fashion materializes capitalist logic in fashion through a vicious cycle: it voraciously consumes natural resources, exploits workers, reproduces trends rapidly and on a large scale, stimulates consumption via persuasive advertising strategies through digital and financial means, culminating in the disposal of tons of garments—their planned obsolescence—all in the name of accelerated profit.

The history of the textile and fashion industry is inseparable from the social reproduction work performed by women. Federici (2021) demonstrates how, since the Industrial Revolution, women were confined to domestic spheres and sewing machine work, sustaining an economy that exploited them without recognition—a situation that continues to this day. Work that previously involved crafts, when transitioning “from needle to machine” (Saffioti, 1981, p. 177, author's translation), became superfluous, becoming more “manipulable according to the needs of each socioeconomic conjuncture,” (Saffioti, 1981, p. 1177, author's translation)⁶ which also ended up excluding many women from the formal productive process. In contemporaneity, in a globalized world, transnational brands outsource production to poor countries in the Global South, where female workers face exhausting workdays for meager wages or piece-rate pay. At the other end, at the end of the textile chain, we have working women, many of them racialized and on the margins of capitalism, repurposing textile waste as a survival strategy and not merely as an environmental concern.

The concept of sustainability, co-opted by media and large corporations, often reduces the debate to “conscious consumption,” ignoring the colonialist roots of production and waste, and blaming individuals labeled as consumers. True repurposing, which is political, demands dignified work: justly remunerating seamstresses and artisans; restituting lands and knowledges to traditional communities; slowing down, deglobalizing (Solón, 2019). It means stopping the logic of the new at any cost, the lack of care, individualism, and competition. It also means breaking with the extraction of natural resources, with anthropocentrism, with the project of modernity, unlimited progress, and the “compartmentalized, mechanistic, and patriarchal vision of reality” (Boff, 2016, p. 79, author's translation).

In the contemporary context, upcycling emerges as a practice that re-signifies narratives in the market sphere, in the production of consumer goods, in the arts, and in education, transforming waste into new pieces laden with meaning. It offers an approach that challenges the logic of mass consumption and is also part of a

⁶ The work *Do artesanal ao Industrial: A exploração da mulher — Um estudo de operárias têxteis e de confecções no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos* was the result of Saffioti's habilitation thesis, defended in 1967. The author presents data confirming the marginalization of women in the textile and garment sector, with the development of industrial technology and late capitalism in the Brazilian context.

broad movement of resistance to homogenization and stereotyping, advocating for the multiplicity of stories and experiences through Do It Yourself (DIY). The creative upcycling process allows connection with individual and collective memories inscribed in clothing. Each piece carries with it traces of bodies, times, and places, becoming a repository of subjectivities and experiences, as will be discussed below.

Post-Consumer Textile Waste Becomes Source Code

The intersection of used clothing upcycling, fashion, and technology invites us to reflect on the aesthetic and social hierarchies that permeate the textile universe. As Simioni (2019) points out, textile practices have historically been associated with marginalized subjects, especially women, workers, and artisans. Upcycling, by valuing manual labor and creativity, challenges these hierarchies, re-inscribing textile arts at the center of debates on art, design, and sustainability. Social media, in this context, become hacktivist tools: platforms that make visible practices previously confined to the domestic sphere and women's gatherings, connecting them to global circuits of valorization. The same algorithms that standardize and modulate consumption behaviors also allow for the subversive dissemination of knowledges. Short videos teaching repurposing techniques operate as living archives, democratizing ancestral knowledges that previously circulated only within specific communities. Technology here does not erase memories but multiplies them, creating layers of meaning that connect past and present. However, it also decontextualizes, systematizing knowledge as a task, a quick fix, as something simple—which it is not.

We believe that the use of the term upcycling, as something that transforms waste into objects of aesthetic value and as a political act, contributes to placing the topic in debate, with the power to contest the industrial logic that has been defining what and who deserves to be preserved. Upcycling, then, can be seen as an archaeology of the present, unearthing what was discarded and returning it as critical questioning to the present. By working with remnants, upcycling confronts us with questions about what is preserved and what is discarded, both materially and symbolically. This reflection is particularly relevant when considering social inequalities: while some have the privilege of discarding, others are forced to appropriate remnants as a survival strategy. Upcycling, therefore, also has the capacity to reveal power asymmetries within society. This debate requires intersectional lenses: gender, race, and class often determine who has the privilege of choosing upcycling and who already practiced it out of necessity.

In the essay "Marx's Coat," Stallybrass (2016) explores how everyday objects can become vehicles of memory and affect. Marx's coat, pawned and redeemed multiple times, serves as a metaphor for the relationship between objects, histories, and identities, positioning objects not as merely passive but as active agents in the construction of personal and collective narratives. In the context of upcycling, this perspective

helps us understand how reused materials carry with them histories that are reinterpreted and re-inscribed in new historical contexts. A dress made of scraps, for example, can tell the story of several generations of women, their struggles and achievements.

Within this logic, there are artists such as the British-Colombian Carolina Caycedo, whose research focuses on women's resistance movements and the socio-environmental impacts of development in Latin America. In 2019, her work "Mujeres en Mi" (Women in Me) was part of the exhibition "Women's Histories, Feminist Histories" at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo Assis Chateaubriand (MASP). Caycedo gathered pieces donated by women from her personal circle and other women. Each item of clothing, sewn together like a social fabric, bore embroidery with the names of the garment donors, transforming the ensemble into a textile memorial of feminine presences (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Mujeres en Mi – Carolina Caycedo



Source: Authors' archive (2019).

The resilience of textiles mirrors the resistance of the bodies that engage with them. As Bryan-Wilson (2019) states, fabrics are means of feminist insurgency—but their exclusion from artistic canons reveals deep hierarchies. In recent years, various exhibitions have given visibility to women artists and textile art, addressing political agendas of gender and sustainability. In the following table, we highlight three exhibitions:

Table 1 – Exhibitions with Works Made from Textile Repurposing

Exhibition	Description
Scraps: Fashion, Textiles, and Creative Reuse – Three Stories of Sustainable Design. New York, United States. (Scraps, 2016).	Held between 2016 and 2017 at the Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum. The show presented the work of three designers who reuse textile waste, preserving local artisanal traditions: Luisa Cevese, founder of Riedzioni, from Milan; Christina Kim, of dosa inc., from Los Angeles; and Reiko Sudo, director of NUNO, from Tokyo
Women’s Histories, Feminist Histories. São Paulo, Brazil. (MASP, 2019).	Two exhibitions held in 2019 at the Museu de Arte de São Paulo (MASP). In “Women’s Histories,” works by women artists up to 1900 were displayed. In “Feminist Histories,” works from the 2000s onward were exhibited, addressing discussions of gender, body, sexuality, social class, ethnicity, and race.
The Fabric of Felicity. Moscow, Russia. (The Fabric, 2018).	Held between September 2018 and January 2019 at the Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, the exhibition explored the geographic and historical connections of fabrics, often subjugated to capitalism. The works addressed themes of clothing as metaphors for the masses, abstract painting, sociological wear, and cultural and sexual identity.

Source: Developed by the authors (2025).

Clothing, above all, is a concrete element with which we constantly interact— we do not leave home without it. It constitutes the initial barrier between our body and the external environment, covering and giving movement to our physical form. These same garments function as vehicles of social communication, carrying meanings that demarcate cultural distinctions and integrating us into the complex production and consumption networks of the capitalist system.

Upcycling as a practice of preservation and re-signification of memory and history can be seen in the work “O Manto dos Sonhos Adiados” (The Mantle of Postponed Dreams) (Figure 2), by the Rio de Janeiro-based textile artist and art therapist Thais Ribeiro. This work was presented at Ateliê Alê, with a performance by Thatiana Cardoso, and exhibited at Traffic(o) da Uncool Artist in São Paulo. The work evokes, according to the artist, “everything we postpone in our lives, things kept stored for a special moment or for the right time, which never comes.” (author’s translation from the Brazilian). It is an interactive work that only comes to life with audience participation. “By removing a button, the weight of the Mantle decreases, and the spectator takes on a commitment to themselves to accomplish something they have been postponing for a long time,” writes Ribeiro (2022, author’s translation from the Brazilian).

Figure 2: O Manto dos Sonhos Adiados (The Mantle of Postponed Dreams)



Source: Thaisribeiroafaria (2022).

In the installation *La Mer Morte* (The Dead Sea), presented at the exhibition *The Fabric of Felicity* in Moscow in 2019, Kader Attia creates a poignant memorial to victims of migratory crossings in the Mediterranean in 2015. The work dialogues with a 2008 photographic series showing young Algerians contemplating the same sea. Through this temporal montage, Attia establishes a pointed critique of the contradiction of the globalized world: while there is free circulation of consumer items and efficient, agile transport logistics, rigid migratory policies at borders are increasingly militarized (Baciak, 2019). His work transforms fabrics into silent testimonies of this unequal and oppressive geopolitics. In a world marked by ecological crisis and social inequality, upcycling, although unable to fully counteract the quantity of waste generated by the fast fashion industry, offers us paths to imagine possible futures.

Figure 3 presents upcycling work created by the designer and co-author of this research. It involves the redesign of jeans and tailored trousers. The pieces usually incorporate her memories and identity as a Japanese-Latin American, blending references from her Japanese ancestry with influences from the cyberpunk universe—a science fiction genre presenting a dystopian world with “high technology and low quality of life” (author’s translation from the Brazilian), and a cybernetic aesthetic combined with an alternative punk sensibility. The skirt and kimono in Figure 3 were part of the exhibition “É Consciente & Coletivo – Práticas de Upcycling” (Conscious & Collective – Upcycling Practices) at the Instituto Europeo di Design in São Paulo during Fashion Revolution Week 2025 (Hidaka_upcycling, 2025).

Figure 3: Clothing Redesign – Hidaka Upcycling



Source: Author's collection (2025).

By transforming old trousers into new garments, one not only avoids waste but also reactivates a history, retelling it in a singular manner. Redesign, as the recreation of waste, decolonizes materials; used clothes gain new meanings through the practice of reactivating ancestral knowledges.

Interlacings: Upcycling/Hacking

A Hacker Manifesto proposes a critique of informational capitalism, advocating for the liberation of knowledge and the creation of alternatives by the hacker class to the control structures of the vectoral class—the dominant class, “so named because they control the vectors along which information is abstracted” (Wark, 2022, p. 37, author's translation). Thus, we seek to articulate *A Hacker Manifesto* to the context and practices of resistance through textile material. This is a preliminary study, and we currently understand that these interconnections can manifest in three different ways:

1. “Hacking is the production of production” (Wark, 2022, p. 87, author's translation): According to Wark (2022), hackers subvert codes and closed systems, transforming information into common goods. Hacker

ethics values collaboration, modification, and the free circulation of knowledge. Upcycling, as a practice of transforming waste into products of greater value, has increasingly become a collective and open movement, similar to the principles of free software. On digital platforms like Instagram and TikTok, individuals who sew share creative textile repurposing techniques, democratizing knowledge and promoting a form of hacktivism. The act of mending and repairing clothes is a material hack that challenges the linear logic of production-consumption-disposal. Just as hackers “disassemble” and reverse-engineer software to understand and rewrite its logic, upcyclers disassemble clothes to rewrite their histories.

A group of trans and cis women hacks the fast fashion system with their sewing machines, social media communication, non-formal education through workshops, product sales, and significant resistance. The Coletivo Tem Sentimento⁷ (Collective Has Feeling), currently located in the Santa Efigênia neighborhood, in the center of São Paulo, transforms textile waste into income generation and community care. The group emerged from the actions of Carmem Lopes, who in 2013 worked as a socio-educational counselor and later as a social worker during the implementation of the Braços Abertos (Open Arms) project (Lopes, 2020). Carmem held self-care and underwear-making workshops for homeless women—an item they rarely receive as donations. During the pandemic, between 2020 and 2021, the collective produced masks, bags for storing blankets made from fabric scraps, and distributed hygiene kits and meals to the socially vulnerable population. Carmem recounts that the idea for sewing workshops came from her childhood memories, remembering her mother and grandmother sewing. “I think that’s it, right? Sewing stories,” Carmem recounts (Lopes, 2021, author’s translation from the Brazilian).

2. “To hack is to abstract. To abstract is to produce the plane upon which different things may enter into relation” (Wark, 2022, p. 59, author’s translation). For Wark (2022), technology is not neutral; it can be used, for example, for surveillance by the vectorial class, or for emancipation by hackers. If, on the one hand, social media reproduces content that homogenizes bodies and trends through fast fashion influencers, then on the other, upcyclers enable the dissemination of manual techniques that expose different identities.

The Colombian collective Artesanal Tecnológica (Artisanal Technological) defines itself on Instagram as a “seamstress/collective/intergenerational and interdisciplinary feminist laboratory” with the objective of investigating textile making and technology (Artesanal, 2025). It is a project proposed by Professor Tania Pérez Bustos that seeks to question the socially constructed imaginaries that separate the digital from the textile, without imposing new dichotomies. According to members of Artesanal Tecnológica, the connection between the computational and the textile is vast and historical. They mention that when humanity went to the Moon in the late 1960s, the memories that stored information were hand-woven.

⁷ Tem-Sentimento. Disponível em: <<https://www.coletivotemsentimento.com.br/>>. Acesso em: 1 mar. 2026.

According to Professor Tania, “there is a relationship between textiles and digital technologies that has been expropriated and that we need to reclaim” (Artesanal, 2022, 3:27, author’s translation from Spanish). The professor adds that under capitalism, by expropriating experiences, we are made to easily forget the central place that textiles occupy in our lives, including their material, identity-building, and political importance. Fabrics represent us — the clothes we wear communicate who we are, but they also fulfill other functions. By recognizing textiles as technology, we can rethink what we consider “technological,” not as separate paths but as convergent modes of knowledge production (Artesanal, 2022). Increasingly, textile metaphors permeate the digital universe: “following the thread,” “unraveling the line,” according to anthropologist, embroiderer, and weaver Isabel Cristina González Arango (Artesanal, 2022, 4:30).

In the project “El Costurero Viajero” (The Traveling Sewing Kit), the first experiment integrating physical and digital components, Laura Juliana Cortés Rico, an electronic engineer and professor, recounts that the collective developed a mobile sewing kit with textile and digital elements to disseminate information from communities that use weaving as resistance and historical memory construction. The pieces, which traveled physically, were documented in an app, creating an archive accessible online. The Artesanal Tecnológica collective documented conflicts through textiles, generating what they termed “testimonial digital textiles.” “El Ojo de la Aguja” (The Eye of the Needle), for example, is a textile memorial and archive honoring leaders, defenders, and peace signatories. These practices show how textiles—as both ancestral and contemporary technology—preserve stories that other formats cannot capture (Artesanal, 2022).

3. **“The interest of the hacker class lies first and foremost in a free circulation of information”** (Wark, 2022, p. 58, author’s translation): For Wark (2022), the manifesto denounces the exploitation of immaterial labor by corporations that monetize creativity. And just as hackers challenge vectoral accumulation and promote free software against Big Tech monopoly, upcyclers/hackers expose the precarization of feminized and racialized labor in the textile industry while freely sharing upcycling techniques.

On September 15, 2024, at the invitation of Fashion Revolution, the collective Upcycling é Resistência (Upcycling is Resistance) occupied part of the Galeria Metrôpoles in São Paulo during the global action “Second-Hand September” (Figure 4). The space was transformed into what we can call a hacker-atelier for clothing. Just as hackers disassemble codes to subvert the logic of digital capitalism, the collective challenged the disposable fashion system, reprogramming clothes and accessories in a gesture of creative sabotage for people passing through the gallery. While Wark (2022) denounces the vectoral class that controls information via platforms, the upcyclers of the open atelier exposed the exploitation of women’s labor by the fast fashion industry.

Figure 4: Second-Hand September Event – Open Customization Workshop



Source: Upcyclingeresistencia (2024).

Thus, we assert that every garment is a system to be hacked. If hackers liberate information, upcyclers liberate memories from post-consumer waste. The gallery became a temporary server where people could be creative co-authors, collectively repairing the logic of linear production.

Final Considerations

This work presents itself as a writing exercise that accompanies the movement of upcyclers/hackers of post-consumer textile waste. A manifesto that is sewn into the process, accompanying the gestures of those who transform, stitch by stitch, the garbage of capital into a language of resistance.

The revolutionary power of upcycling, repair, and mending clothes signifies, above all, an act of re-existence. If capitalism cannibalizes lives, the gesture of mending is a way of sewing new epistemologies, where trash becomes art and art becomes protest. Repurposing clothes as a political act is to rewrite, line by line, a future where sustainability is not separated from historical reparation. As Kilomba (2016, author's translation) teaches, epistemology “defines not only how, but also who produces true knowledge and whom we should believe”. Therefore, we consider that each mended scrap is a gesture of “epistemic disobedience” against the capitalist/patriarchal/colonial project that insists on discarding individuals, other forms of life, and nature.

In the hands of upcyclers who practice political activism, cloth becomes poem, thread becomes manifesto, and the needle—sharpened by urgency—embroiders a new imaginary: just, plural, and impossible to tear. Textile arts, in their complexity and multiplicity, continue to interpellate us, inviting us to weave new plots of women's histories, memories, and resistances to what is established.

Upcycling leads to yarns that intertwine in this web, challenging us to rethink not only what we wear and recreate but also the systems in which we are embedded. It matters how we tell our stories, how we connect them to the world and to others, without detaching ourselves from reality (Freire, 2019). Upcycling/hacking, as creative and political practice, resists by weaving codes, sewing futures.

REFERENCES

- Artesanal Tecnológica. #InterfazAbierta. Universidad Nacional de Colombia – UNAL, 2022. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gWpK1xJ2NBI&t=81s>. Accessed: May 3, 2025.
- Baciak, Mirela; Szabelski, Tytus. "If I Were a Sneaker: 'The Fabric of Felicity' at GARAGE Museum of Contemporary Art in Moscow." *Blok Magazine*, 2019. Available at: <https://blokmagazine.com/if-i-were-a-sneaker-the-fabric-of-felicity-at-garage-museum-of-contemporary-art-in-moscow/>. Accessed: April 26, 2025.
- Boff, Leonardo. **Sustentabilidade: O que é – O que não é**. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2016.
- Brasil. "Brasil descarta 4 milhões de toneladas de resíduos têxteis por ano." *Agência Brasil*, 2025. Available at: <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/economia/noticia/2025-04/brasil-descarta-4-milhoes-de-toneladas-de-residuos-texteis-por-ano>. Accessed: July 3, 2025.
- Brien, Patricia. "Otto Von Busch: Fashion Hactivism." *Dazed*, 2008. Available at: <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/article/1466/1/otto-von-busch-fashion-hactivism>. Accessed: March 1, 2025.
- Bryan-Wilson, Julia; Leme, Mariana; Pedrosa, Adriano; Rjeille, Isabella (eds.). **Histórias das Mulheres, Histórias Feministas**. Vol. 1. São Paulo: MASP, 2019.
- Busch, Otto von. **FASHION-able: Hactivism and Engaged Fashion Design**. PhD thesis. School of Design and Crafts (HDK), Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg, Sweden, 2008.
- Colburn, Mae. "Interview with Otto von Busch: Fashion+Sustainability—**Lines of Research Series**." Fashion Projects, 2012. Available at: <https://www.fashionprojects.org/blog/3858>. Accessed: March 2, 2025.
- Docena. **Fashion Hackers**. 2022. Available at: <https://docena.net/fashion-hacker/>. Accessed: February 20, 2025.
- Federici, Silvia. **Patriarcado do Salário**. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2021.
- Fletcher, Kate; Grose, Lynda. **Moda & sustentabilidade: Design para mudança**. São Paulo: Senac, 2011.
- Fraser, Nancy. **Capitalismo Canibal: Como nosso sistema está devorando a democracia, o cuidado e o planeta e o que podemos fazer a respeito disso**. São Paulo: Autonomia Literária, 2024.
- Free Software Foundation. "**Free Software Is a Matter of Liberty, Not Price**—Working Together for Free
-

Software.” Available at: <https://www.fsf.org/about/>. Accessed: July 12, 2025.

Freire, Paulo. **Pedagogia do oprimido**. 45. ed. Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 2019.

Hidaka Upcycling. “Exposição | É Consciente & Coletivo – Práticas de Upcycling.” Instagram, April 25, 2022. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DI48QaKR11n/>. Accessed: July 30, 2025.

hooks, bell. **Ensinando a Transgredir**: Educação como prática de liberdade. São Paulo: Martins Fontes, 2013.

Kilomba, Grada. “Decolonizing Knowledge: A Lecture-Performance.” Translated by Jéssica Oliveira, 2016. Available at: <https://joacamillopenna.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/kilomba-grada-ensinando-a-transgredir.pdf>. Accessed: April 10, 2025.

Lopes, Carmen. [doc] [ativismo] **Coletivo Tem Sentimento**. “Teia Documenta.” Directed by Cassandra Melo and Paulo Pereira, 2020. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DZK_aaNyGCA. Accessed: February 1, 2025.

Lopes, Carmen. “**Coletivo Tem Sentimento fala sobre seu trabalho no centro da cidade**.” Canal da Via, 2021. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3R5FzmHdsI>. Accessed: January 1, 2025.

MASP. **Histórias das Mulheres, Histórias Feministas**. 2019. Available at: <https://masp.br/publicacoes/historias-das-mulheres-historias-feministas>. Accessed: June 1, 2025.

McDonough, William; Braungart, Michael. **Cradle to Cradle - Criar e reciclar ilimitadamente**. São Paulo: Editora G. Gili, 2013.

Saffioti, Heleieth I. B. **Do Artesanal ao Industrial: A Exploração da Mulher** – Um Estudo de Operárias Têxteis e de Confecções no Brasil e nos Estados Unidos. São Paulo: Hucitec, 1981.

Salcedo, Elena. **Moda Ética para um Futuro Sustentável**. São Paulo: Editora G. Gili, 2014.

Salvo. “Reine Pilz’s Interview.” October 11, 1994. Available at: <https://www.salvoweb.com/files/sn99sm24y94tk181119.pdf>. Accessed: December 13, 2022.

Scraps. “Scraps: Fashion, Textiles, and Creative Reuse.” 2016. Available at: <https://www.cooperhewitt.org/channel/scraps/>. Accessed: May 10, 2025.

Severino, Antônio Joaquim. **Metodologia do Trabalho Científico**. 24th ed. São Paulo: Cortez, 2016.

Simioni, Ana Paula. In: Leme, Mariana; Pedrosa, Adriano; Rjeille, Isabella (eds.). **Histórias das Mulheres, Histórias Feministas**. Vol. 1. São Paulo: MASP, 2019.

“**Software Woven into Wire: Core Rope and the Apollo Guidance Computer**.” 2019. Available at: <https://www.righto.com/2019/07/software-woven-into-wire-core-rope-and.html>. Accessed: March 10, 2025.

Solón, Pablo (ed.). **Alternativas sistêmicas**: Bem viver, decrescimento, comuns, ecofeminismo, direitos da Mãe Terra e desglobalização. São Paulo: Editora Elefante, 2019.

SSL Nagbot. “Feminist Hacking/Making: Exploring New Gender Horizons of Possibility.” **Peer Production**, no. 8, 2016. Available at: <http://peerproduction.net/issues/issue-8-feminism-and-unhacking-2/feminist-hackingmaking-exploring-new-gender-horizons-of-possibility/>. Accessed: February 1, 2025.

Stallybrass, Peter. **O Casaco de Marx**: roupa, memória, dor. 5. ed. São Paulo: Autêntica, 2016.

Suprareciclaje. “**Si sos suprareciclador súmate al movimiento**.” Instagram, 2025. Available at: https://www.instagram.com/supra_org. Accessed: February 1, 2025.

SUSTEXMODA. Instituto Sustentabilidade Têxtil e Moda – Residômetro. 2025. Available at: <https://www.sustexmoda.org/resid%C3%B4metro>. Accessed: July 7, 2025.

Thaisribeiroafaria. “O Manto dos Sonhos Adiados.” Instagram, April 21, 2022. Available at:

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CcoHCDaFICc/>. Accessed: February 1, 2025.

“The Fabric of Felicity.” Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, 2018. Available at: <https://garagemca.org/en/exhibition/i-the-fabric-of-felicity-2018-i>. Accessed: June 30, 2025.

Upcyclingeresistencia. “Setembro de segunda mão.” Instagram, September 25, 2024. Available at: <https://www.instagram.com/p/DAWI8HBxorh/>. Accessed: April 10, 2025.

Wark, McKenzie. **Um manifesto Hacker**. São Paulo: Funilaria e Sobinfluência Edições, 2022.

Yin, Robert K. **Estudo de Caso: Planejamento e Métodos**. 2. ed. Porto Alegre: Bookman, 2003.

Acknowledgments

To the support of the Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico (National Council for Scientific and Technological Development) (CNPq) since May 2024.

Translation and revision: Walter Lippold – Email: prof.walter@proton.me
