

backslash

20 **EDGES** 22

36 CULTURAL SHIFTS
SHAPING OUR WORLD



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WHAT IS *AN EDGE?*

EDGE / 'ej / noun

A meaningful cultural shift that has the scale and longevity to propel a brand toward a greater share of the future.

01

Edges must be rooted in human values, be recognizable through consumer behaviors, and lead to clear business implications.

02

Cultural shifts must have sustained relevance for over a year before being declared an Edge, and should continue to matter for the foreseeable future.

03

Edges must be globally relevant, manifesting in over half of Backslash-designated regions.



IN 2022, CULTURE IS INVESTIGATING *NEW DEFINITIONS OF PROGRESS*

BEYOND YEAR ZERO

In 2021, the narrative that defined our Edge glossary was "Year Zero." We anticipated a great reshuffling of global realities, social norms, and personal beliefs that would force a fresh start for the world. A chance to rethink everything. A blank slate for businesses and individuals alike.

But as we reflect on the past year, we can't help but feel somewhat stuck in a special pandemic episode of Groundhog Day. Despite our best efforts to remain optimistic, 2021 had more in common with 2020 than we had hoped—bringing new Covid variants and many familiar frustrations.

FROM INVENTORY TO ACTION

As "Year Zero" bleeds into another calendar year and the clocks restart in 2022, we're being more intentional about what comes next. We've had two years of quarantine to take inventory on culture and our lives—to honestly assess what's working and what's not. And now, it's time to turn those learnings into actions.

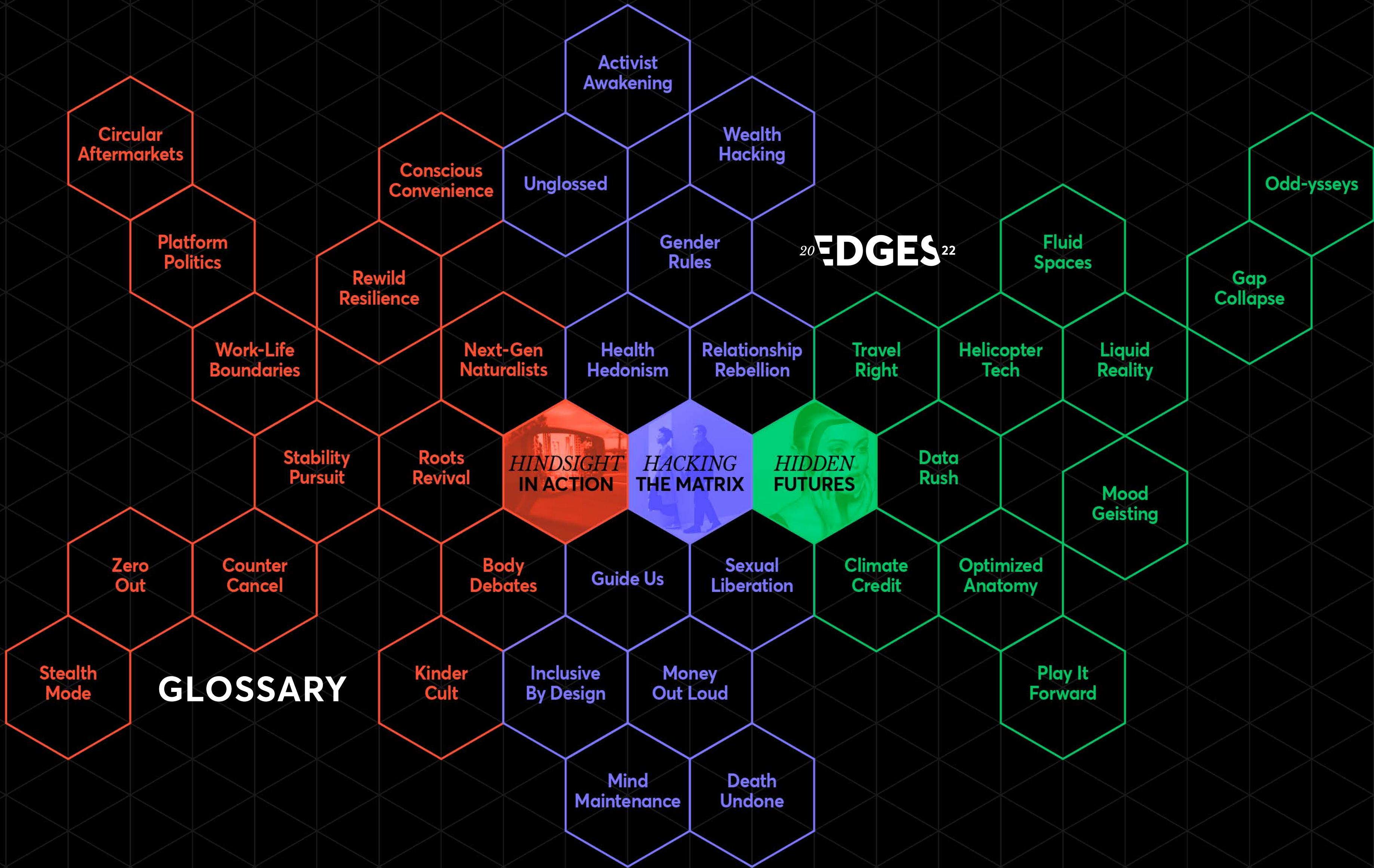
We're ready to make the choices and changes that will push us toward the future we want. And though there will inevitably be disagreements along the way, there will also be tangible steps taken to restructure our world for the better.

A FRESH TAKE ON PROGRESS

With that, the big question we're asking ourselves in 2022 is "what does progress look like?" For too long, progress has meant advancement at all costs. A relentless push toward "more," "faster," "richer," that left a mountain of excess in its wake—further widening inequalities and further endangering our planet.

But that's set to change. As we come to a collective realization that we've been living without foresight, we'll embrace a fresh take on progress. Our 2022 Edge glossary explores this redefinition of progress in three chapters:

1. **HINDSIGHT IN ACTION** \ Looking to the past as our guide forward
2. **HACKING THE MATRIX** \ Liberating ourselves from the rules and institutions that no longer work for us
3. **HIDDEN FUTURES** \ Bravely forging ahead into the unknown





HINDSIGHT *IN ACTION*

To redefine what progress looks like going forward, we're looking backward.

We've spent this past year taking a collective deep breath and cleaning out our metaphorical closets. And in looking at the mess, we've awakened to the fact that we've been living without limits. Convenience has made it all too easy to overconsume. Tech giants have pushed more screen time with insufficient regulation. And rapid urbanization has left little room for nature.

For decades, we've been in such a rush to accelerate the future that we forgot to preserve the best parts of our past. But what if we knew the answers all along? What if some of today's biggest challenges could be solved not by speeding up innovation, but by returning to the old way?

That's the mindset reshaping societal progress in 2022. As we learn to withdraw and reintroduce the rules that once worked for us, we'll see a refreshing shift back to a slower, more responsible way of life. Back to a time when wildlife had a place in our world. When work didn't rule our lives. When circularity was a necessity. And when community was formed at town gatherings rather than on Roblox.

Of course, it's easy to glorify the past. We tend to get caught up in the warm, fuzzy feelings of nostalgia without recalling the harsher realities. But by leveraging history wisely, we can use the critical lessons from our past to balance out the areas in which advancement has gone too far. Because hindsight, as they say, is always 20/20.





ROOTS *REVIVAL*

UN-TOURISM

The rise of anti-tourism is putting power in the hands of locals. Travel app ViaHero ensures that no two trips are the same by letting a local personally plan your trip. Thailand-based Local Alike co-creates journeys with local communities to bring people the most authentic experiences possible. And Mexican startup Rutopía connects visitors with indigenous hosts in rural communities. As travelers look to leave copy-and-paste itineraries behind, these custom-curated experiences will give visitors a true taste of what a destination is all about.

ONE-MINUTE CITY

By 2030, Sweden wants its urban areas to be “one-minute cities”—a hyperlocal variation of Paris’ famous 15-minute city concept. The initiative focuses on creating healthy, vibrant, and more sustainable communities at the street level, with specific focus on the area just outside doorsteps. A key component of implementing the “one-minute city” is community design, where local residents become co-architects of their streets’ layouts.

Globalization’s fall from grace is allowing us to rediscover our roots. While being worldly was once a point of pride, we’re now turning inward and getting in touch with our local and national heritage—gaining newfound appreciation for the people, land, and traditions that came before us. To know who we are, we must first understand our history.

HERITAGE RITUALS

Resorts around the world are leaning into local heritage rituals. At Mexico’s Chablé Hotels, visitors can experience ancient Mayan rituals such as temazcal ceremonies and immunity sessions using copal tree resin. Meanwhile, over in Saudi Arabia, the Six Senses property opening in 2023 will be inspired by Bedouin camps. All rooms will branch off from a central oasis, where guests can gather to learn about traditional crafts.



LOCAL UPLIFT

Over half of consumers globally believe it is more important to shop with local businesses now than it was before the pandemic.¹ Recognizing the move away from mass, big-box retailers like IKEA, Bloomingdale’s, and Target are rolling out smaller community stores fit to local preferences. The “think small” approach is also transforming the role of retail employees. At localized Nike Unite stores, for example, employees are trained to be coaches in the community. In the same vein, U.S. drugstore Rite Aid is empowering pharmacists to act as community health advocates by regularly engaging with customers in between doctor visits.

ENDANGERED LANGUAGE REVIVAL

Motorola is helping keep indigenous languages alive in Brazil. The telco company recently added Kaingang and Nheengatu—two languages deemed endangered by UNESCO—to its Android phones. Hoping that other businesses will follow its lead, Motorola is also open sourcing the data it collected to digitize the languages.

DECOLONIZED HISTORY

A first-of-its-kind museum is offering a decolonized history of Cape identities. The Camissa Museum tells the stories of people of the Cape, challenging the colonial and Apartheid narratives of those classified as “Coloured.” “The making, unmaking, and remaking of history is a calling all citizens should embrace—hence this significant project,” says Castle Control Board chief executive Calvyn Gilfellan.

RECIPROCITY TRUSTS

Canadians may soon be able to pay rent to Indigenous peoples. A nonprofit program called Reciprocity Trusts is encouraging homeowners and businesses that reside on former Indigenous land to dedicate 1% of their property taxes or profits to First Nations. The agency is currently collecting pledges in support of the initiative, which they hope to roll out across Victoria, B.C. in the near future.



NEXT-GEN *NATURALISTS*

With global upheaval on the horizon, self-sufficiency is survival. Dwindling resources and broken supply chains have made the fragility of our planet and the economy impossible to ignore—forcing us to realize that the systems we’ve come to depend on are highly vulnerable. Now, with nature as our teacher and ancient practices as our inspiration, we’re ditching our destructive ways and placing new value on forgotten skills. In unpredictable times, preparedness equals peace of mind.

SURVIVAL SCHOOL

Rising eco-anxiety is driving up demand for survivalist courses like bushcraft. Interest is rising across Australia, Canada, and the U.S., with some schools reporting up to a 60% increase in year-over-year enrollment. At these outdoor schools, lessons might range from how to build a fire, to how to purify water, to how to live with less. Urban-preparedness courses are becoming particularly popular as city dwellers plan for more frequent disasters.

EARTHSHIPS

Off-grid, self-reliant homes built from tires, dirt, and recycled materials are becoming a haven for climate doomers. The homes, called Earthships, are seeing growing interest as people become increasingly conscious of climate change. In the Earthship Academy, potential homeowners learn how to treat their own waste, collect their own water, and grow their own food. A typical Earthship can produce 25-50% of all the food its residents need.²

FORAGING

A shaky global supply chain is inspiring more people to get a taste of the wild. Foraging—the act of collecting edible plants, mushrooms, and foods from nature—is moving into the mainstream, with expert foragers around the world reporting a significant surge in interest in their classes.



HUNTING SPIKE

The pandemic has sparked an unexpected uptick in hunting across the U.S. Officials in nearly every state reported a spike in the activity in 2020, with more young, female, and first-time hunters contributing to the growth.³ The trend is expected to continue in the coming years as rising food security concerns push people to learn how to provide for themselves. Conservationists say the renewed interest is a positive, noting that it helps manage wildlife populations and fund conservation programs.

ECO HACKS

TikTokers are sharing clever ways to go green. The top #ecohack, with over 19 million views, is eco-bricks—plastic bottles that are filled with other used plastics, then turned into reusable building material. Other popular trends include make-your-own deodorant or lip balm, grinding banana peels into plant fertilizer, grow-your-own loofah, and reusing jars and containers.

EMERGENCY KITS

Survival kits are no longer reserved for doomsday preppers. As weather-related disasters intensify, more people are stocking up on emergency supply kits in case of an earthquake, flood, or hurricane. The Global Survival Kit Market was valued at \$1.1 billion in 2020 and is expected to reach \$1.7 billion by 2027, with a CAGR of 7%.⁴

GROW-AT-HOME

While pandemic trends like sourdough starters and Zoom happy hours came and went, gardening is here to stay. GlobalData estimates that spending on all-things gardening will rise by another 7% in 2022.⁵ And several startups are cashing in on the green-fingered boom. Brazil-based Bota offers autonomous home vegetable gardens for foolproof farming. Companies like North Spore are making it easy to grow your own mushrooms at home. And Lettuce Grow sells a vertical, self-fertilizing, self-watering Farmstand that can grow over 200 types of produce—no backyard required.



CONSCIOUS CONVENIENCE

An economy built on “me,” “more,” and “now” is turning a new page. As consumers wake up to the fact that one-click commands come at a cost, they’ll start thinking twice before sacrificing sustainability for speed, or workers’ rights for savings. The convenience economy is growing a conscience.

OPEN-SOURCE CARBON CALCULATOR

Allbirds is calling on the fashion industry to do better with an open-source carbon footprint calculator. The calculator accounts for materials used, manufacturing, transportation, consumer use, and end of life, then uses that information to identify ways to reduce emissions. In addition to providing the calculator, Allbirds is also inviting competitors to use its signature Carbon Footprint labels in order to help shoppers make eco-conscious decisions. “If competition got us into this mess, perhaps collaboration can get us out,” reads the company’s site.

FIELD-TO-PLATE TRACKER

Do you know where your lettuce came from? A \$9 billion dollar startup called Plant-Ag wants to help you find out. The company is building the first fully transparent field-to-plate supply chain in which consumers can track a vegetable’s journey from seed to shelf, meaning companies will have no way of hiding their unsustainable practices or unethical labor practices. Plant Ag customers will also receive their produce within a record 72 hours of harvest—helping prevent foodborne illnesses and reduce reliance on preservatives.

INCONVENIENCE STORE

The Hyperburgers Inconvenience Store is a unique supermarket concept designed to serve communities rather than businesses. At Hyperburgers, all food is supplied directly by locals, and all revenue goes directly to the supplier rather than the store. When you buy something, you’re also expected to give back—whether by cleaning, bringing in reusable containers, or even helping make oat milk. The prototype was created by Netherlands-based social designer Francesca Tambussi, who argues that food should be a civic resource rather than a commercial enterprise.

ETHICAL BOOKINGS ONLY

Housekeeping staff in Spain have seen their salaries, rights, and benefits shrink due to outsourcing and lax enforcement of labor laws. Frustrated with the lack of progress, Spanish workers union Las Kellys is creating their own booking platform that only includes hotels with fair labor practices. The group has raised over €90,000 to build out the site, 150% more than their minimum goal.



ANTI-DEFORESTATION IMPORT BAN

Brussels is seeking to ban imports of foods from areas at risk of deforestation. The draft law would target six agricultural products—beef, soy, palm oil, coffee, cacao and timber—which together account for 19% of commodity imports into the EU. If approved, companies who fail to prove that their products are not linked to deforestation could face fines worth up to 4% of their annual turnover.

MADE-TO-ORDER

Growing backlash against fast fashion is making way for a slower, more precise way of shopping. Enter: made-to-order clothing. While fast fashion is marked by trendy designs, wasteful returns, and short life cycles, bespoke clothing focuses on high-quality, timeless pieces designed to last. And it’s no longer reserved for luxury buyers. Amazon’s “Made for You” service lets customers create custom \$25 T-shirts based on their exact measurements. And H&M is experimenting with 3D scanners that take your measurements in-store, then deliver perfectly fitting jeans to your door just a few weeks later.





CIRCULAR AFTERMARKETS

At the intersection of sustainability, scarcity, and hype culture lies a booming aftermarket economy. Old products are being recycled, reused, repaired, refurbished, and resold, while new products are being created with end-of-life options built in. From food waste innovations to limited-edition drops made entirely from deadstock fabrics, the shift to circularity is unlocking new opportunities for post-sale profits.

FOOD WASTE REIMAGINED

Food waste is the hot new resource. And the good news is, there's plenty of it to go around. UK-based Nutrapharma is making protein powder from food scraps. Singapore-based Insectta is feeding food waste to flies and using the by-products to create animal feed, fertilizer, and chitosan—an ingredient used in cosmetic products. Dole is converting rotten produce into electricity. And Kenyan brand Pine Kazi is turning pineapple leaves into fashionable footwear.

ECO BRICKS

Nairobi-based entrepreneur Nzambi Matee is giving single-use plastic a second life. Her startup, Gjenje Makers, turns discarded plastic bottle tops, bags, and cooking oil containers into affordable bricks that are stronger than concrete. The company has successfully recycled more than 20 tons of plastic waste and created over 100 jobs to date.

TRASHAUS

Beijing traceability tech startup Trashaus is on a mission to reroute trash. Trashause's real-time tracing platform connects businesses using single-use plastic with other brands who can repurpose it, ultimately creating a closed loop. So far, Trashaus has helped businesses make over 45,000 recycled pieces from plastic waste, including keychains, luggage tags, and mobile phone cases.



BLOCKCHAIN VERIFICATION

Authenticity concerns have long kept luxury brands from embracing resale. But blockchain is set to change that. Aura Blockchain Consortium—the world's first global luxury blockchain by LVMH, Prada and Richemont—is combating counterfeits by providing customers with a new level of transparency and traceability. When customers make a purchase, they'll be given login details to a platform that provides the history of the product, including its origin, components, environmental and ethical information, proof of ownership, a warranty, and care instructions. A significant 41% of luxury consumers are excited about these traceability features, with enthusiasm reaching 58% among Chinese shoppers.⁶

BUY BETTER, WEAR LONGER

Levi's is encouraging people to "Buy Better, Wear Longer" in their latest campaign against overconsumption. The campaign emphasizes the brand's SecondHand platform and reminds customers to extend the life of their jeans by taking advantage of Levi's in-store Tailor Shops. Looking ahead, the denim giant's ultimate goal is to create revenue streams that don't rely on selling new products.

DISASSEMBLY INSTRUCTIONS

Ikea has announced that the potential to "repurpose, repair, reuse, resell or recycle will be built-in to every product" by 2030. The furniture giant is delivering on its promise with the launch of disassembly instructions—making it easier for customers to properly break down their products before reusing or reselling them. Other notable initiatives include an ever-expanding buyback service, furniture rental programs, products that adapt to the future (think growing beds), and a service that supplies free spare parts for furniture that needs fixing.

CYCLICAL CENTERS

Stores are transforming into up-close upcycling centers where visitors can watch their trash take on a new form. At select Adidas flagship locations, a green vending machine accepts old plastic bottles in exchange for a discount on new Stan Smiths made from recycled bottles. H&M is also making their sustainability efforts visible with the Looop machine, the world's first in-store upcycling system that turns old garments into new ones right before your eyes.

SELF SERVICE REPAIR

Apple owners can now repair their own products. Through the company's newly launched Self Service Repair program, people can order parts to fix newer Apple products, including the iPhone 12 and 13 and recent Mac computers. Customers who send in their broken parts to be recycled will also receive credit toward the purchase of a new part. "It's a win for repair shops, it's a win for consumers, and it's a win for the planet," said Nathan Proctor, a director for the U.S. Public Interest Research Group.



REWILD *RESILIENCE*

We're letting nature reclaim its place in our world. Science is waking us up to the fact that restoring biodiversity is essential to our survival, and we all have a role to play. Governments are expanding green spaces. Homeowners are incorporating living walls and wildlife-friendly gardens. And global research institutions are working to reintroduce lost species. It's time to welcome back the wild.

BIOPHILIC BUILDINGS

A biophilia boom is giving buildings a green makeover. In Hong Kong, architecture firm RLP is developing an apartment block called The Courtyard, which will serve as an urban forest with views of greenery on every level and a sky garden of indigenous plants. Similarly, over in England, designer Thomas Heatherwick has announced plans to transform the closed, semi-demolished Broadmarsh shopping center into a community garden, climbing wall, and housing complex covered in plant life.

FARM-TO-CLOSET FASHION

Patagonia, Gucci, and Timberland are among a growing list of fashion brands investing in regenerative farming. The nature-enhancing practice works to improve the land by rebuilding organic matter in soil and restoring biodiversity.

UBER FOR BEES

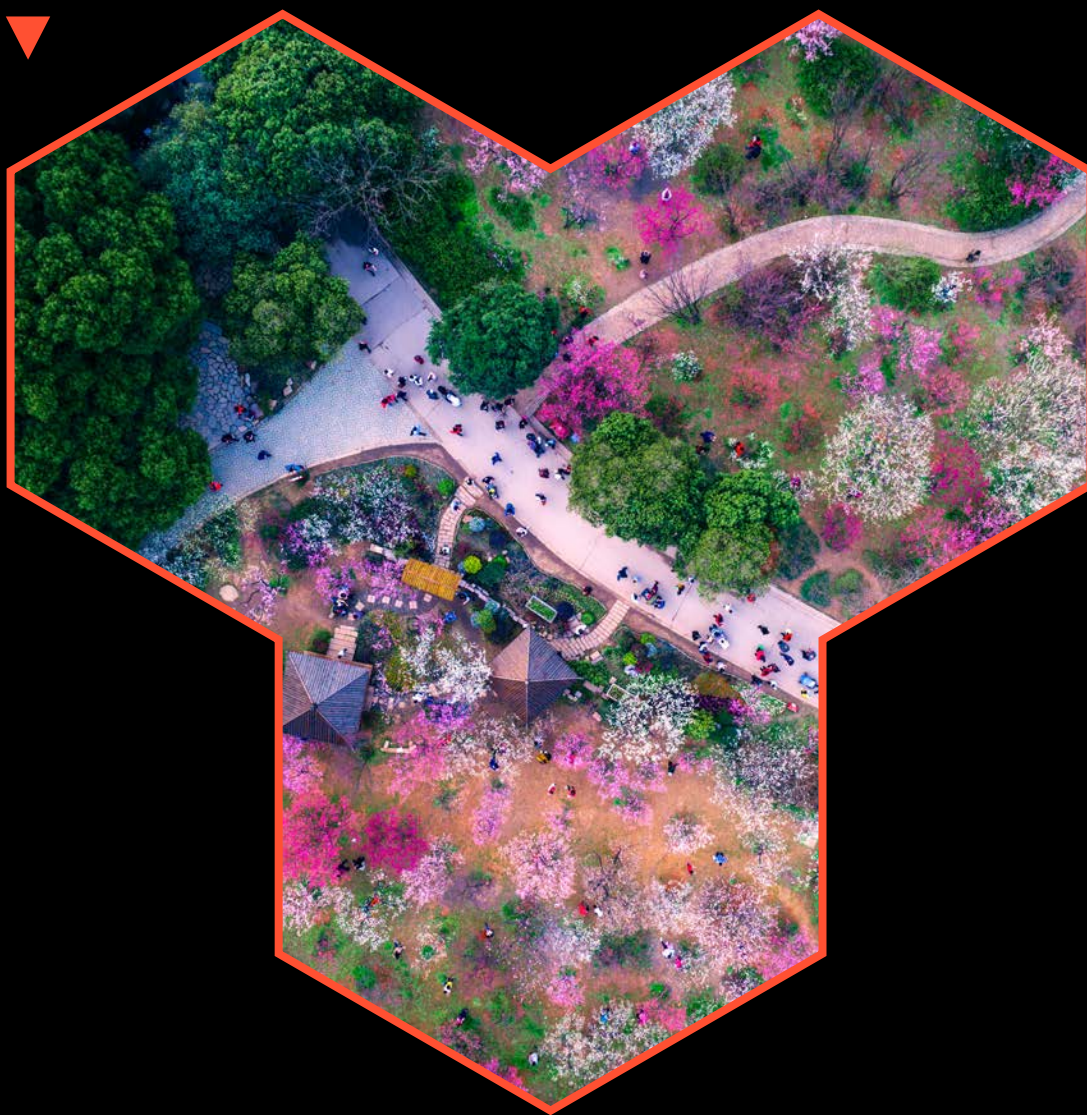
Bee pollination improves produce quality and, in doing so, increases crop profit margins for farmers. Yet over 25,000 beehives in Brazil have died in recent years due to excessive use of pesticides. To help solve the problem, Agrobee has created a "bee-hailing" app that connects beekeepers with farmers who need to fertilize their crops. With more than 30,000 hives in its network, the Brazilian startup hopes to create a farming culture that favors pollination over harmful pesticides.

REWILDING TRAINING TOURISM

A new training program is teaching tour guides around the world about rewilding. The program is run by Rewilding Europe, a nonprofit working to reintroduce lost species across eight regions of Europe. Their goal is to scale up nature-based tourism while also creating jobs for people in rural communities. "If I go wolf-watching with my clients," says operations manager Aukje van Gerven, "am I literally just going wolf-trekking, or will I visit the local shepherd to see how he's protecting his sheep against wolves? [The training] is focused on economic sustainability within a wild area."

URBAN GARDENS

Cities around the globe are transforming from concrete jungles to urban gardens. Throughout Paris, parking spaces will be replaced with vegetable allotments, food composting centers, playgrounds, and trees. In Wales, the government has committed £110 million to ensuring that everyone has a public green space within a four-minute walk. And over in the Netherlands, the city of Arnhem is financing plants and flowers for residents to use in green roofs, community gardens, and neighborhood parklets. The Dutch city is also replacing 10% of its asphalt with grass and other plants.



OCEAN FARMING

Regenerative ocean farming is the next frontier for agriculture. The practice, which involves growing shellfish and other sea crops in underwater gardens, could present a solution to the food crisis while also absorbing carbon dioxide from the ocean. The UN Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that aquaculture will account for about 60% of global food consumption by 2030, compared with 52% now.⁷ One man on a mission to increase our appetite for ocean crops is Michelin chef Ángel León, who believes a common eelgrass could be the next superfood. Not only is the "marine grain" nutrient-dense, but it's also proven to help underwater habitats flourish. "This could be the beginning of a new concept of understanding the sea as a garden," says León.



ZERO OUT

The always-on is getting some much-needed time off. We've overstimulated and overstuffed our lives, and now we're collectively hitting the pause button to reconnect with ourselves. Nothingness is our new ideology, and it's reshaping our values, our systems, and our consumption. Absence is the antidote.

OFF-THE-GRID ESCAPES

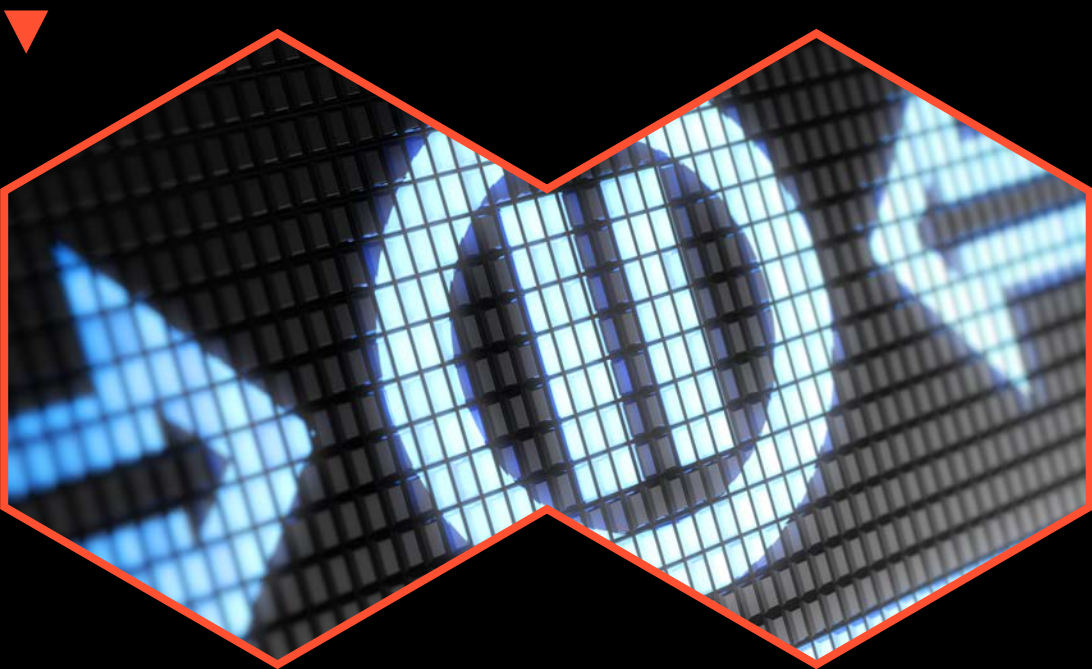
Rural tourism is experiencing heightened demand as more travelers look to avoid hectic crowds and reconnect with nature. Booking.com data shows that over half of global travelers will seek out more rural, off-the-beaten-track experiences in the year ahead.⁸ And rural Airbnb bookings have tripled since 2015, with travelers trading big cities for more remote destinations.⁹ Think fewer Eiffel Tower selfies, and more isolated wilderness yurts and wi-fi-free lakeside cottages.

"LIE FLAT" MOVEMENT

Doing the bare minimum is the latest form of social protest. In China, burnt-out youth are "lying flat" as a rejection of grueling "996" overwork culture, rising home prices, and conspicuous consumption.¹⁰ "Lying flat is a state of mind—that is, I feel that many things are not worthy of my attention and energy," says Luo Huazhong, whose social post helped the movement go viral.

ANTI-ADDICTION PAUSES

"Put the phone down," "go to bed," or "work tomorrow" are a few of the messages Douyin users might see if they've been scrolling for too long. The messages are shown via unskippable five-second pauses that interrupt the otherwise endless stream of bite-sized videos—a move Douyin is hoping will help curb addictive social media behavior.



PLANTS OVER PARTYING

Less partying, more planting. According to a 2021 survey, over half of 18- to 34-year-olds in the UK would rather visit a garden center than go to a nightclub.¹¹ The top three reasons they enjoy gardening are "to improve their living space, boost mental health, and to create somewhere they can get away from it all."

SPENDING ON SLEEP

When exhaustion is the norm, a good night's rest is a luxury. High-end hotels are attracting sleep-deprived guests with smart beds, sound-blocking walls, blackout curtains, hypnotherapy concierges, and magnesium-supplement-stocked minibars. Ultra-luxe mattresses like the Eight Sleep Pod Pro are optimizing sleep with fancy features such as temperature control and personalized data. And sleep retreats are on the rise around the world.

"HITTING MUNG"

South Koreans are "hitting mung"—meaning, totally zoning out—and a growing number of spaces and experiences are helping them do it.¹² Cafes like Mung Hit and Green Lab offer no-activity relaxation areas where silently staring into space is encouraged. Movies like "Flight" are taking viewers on a relaxing 40-minute plane ride through the clouds. And the country's annual Space Out Competition, where participants compete to achieve the lowest heart rate possible while sitting in a healing forest, is spreading internationally to Hong Kong and the Netherlands.

ZERO ADVERTISING

Billboards, begone. Commercial billboards will be banned from public spaces in Geneva by 2025 as part of a "Zero Advertising" initiative. Proponents see the movement as a way to combat excessive consumerism and bring more art and culture back to cities.

HOLD THE ALCOHOL

A desire to drink healthier and socialize sans hangover is giving the no/low category a boost. IWSR forecasts the industry will grow by 31% by 2024 as more bars and restaurants bring in nonalcoholic beverages.¹³ And thanks to emerging players like CleanCo, Ghia, Seedlip, and Lyre's, the mocktail menu is enjoying a new level of sophistication. This rise in demand for no- and low-alcoholic beverages is rapidly gaining momentum in Asia and the Middle East too. Available in 60 countries, Lyre's three biggest markets in Asia are Singapore, Hong Kong, and mainland China.

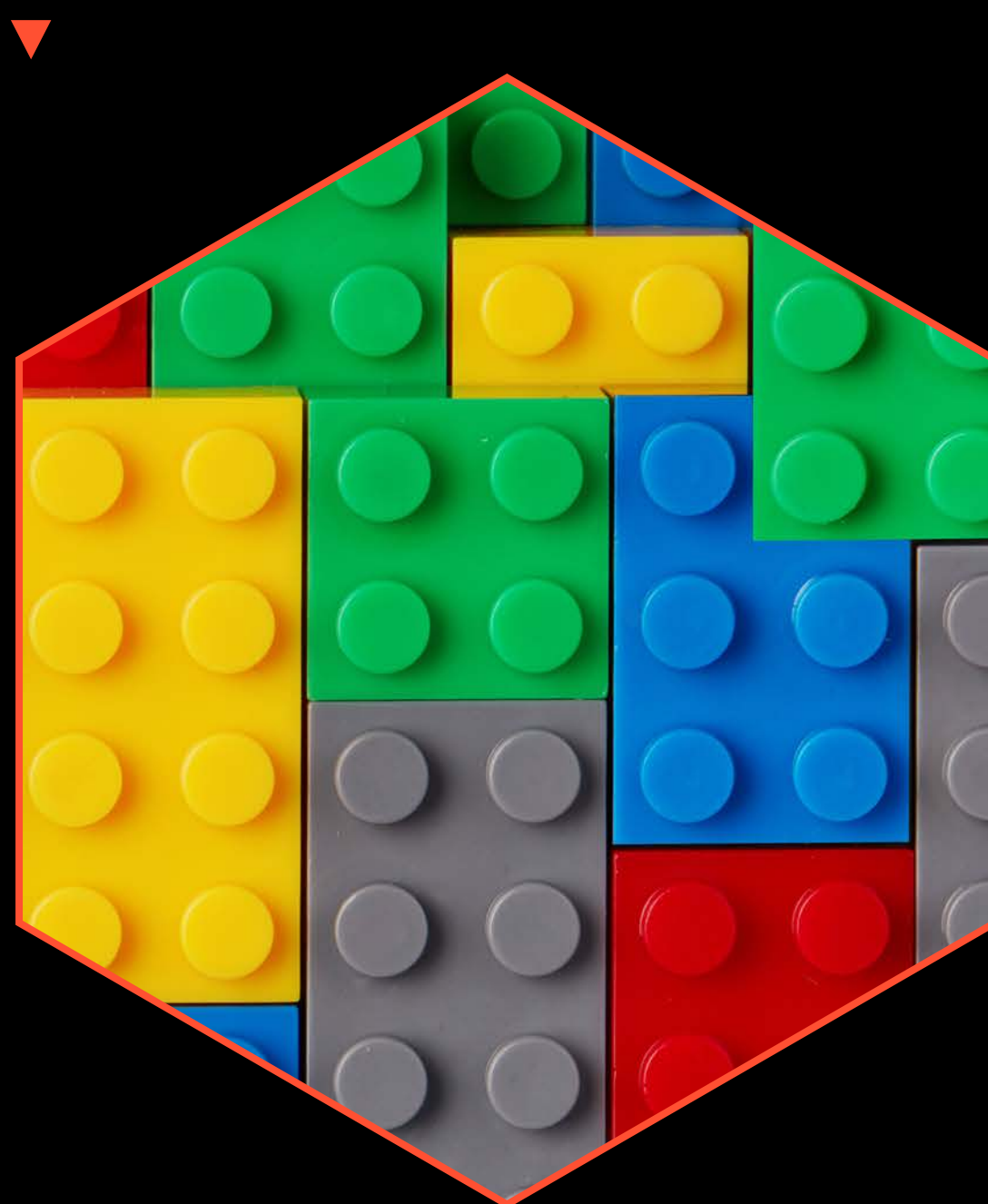


KINDER CULT

The allure of childlike joys is stronger than ever. A generation of adults under pressure is granting itself permission to play—turning juvenile hobbies, old-school comforts, and colorful kid-inspired decor into cheerful acts of resistance against grown-up rules. Nostalgia's stock is going up in price.

ADULT PLAY

LEGO says, "Adults Welcome." The Danish toy brand is using the slogan on a new, sleek catalog targeting grown-ups with more complex brick sets. A growing desire to unplug has driven a fourfold increase in the adult LEGO market over the past decade, with 81% of adults around the world saying that play helps them relax.¹⁴



CHATTER PHONE

Fisher-Price's iconic Chatter Telephone is making a modern comeback. This time, with Bluetooth. The \$60 limited-time novelty collectable was quick to sell out in 2021, taking us back to simpler pre-smartphone times.

TIKTOK THROWBACKS

TikTok users may be young, but they're not too young to yearn for their childhood. The app is full of both distant and not-so-distant memories, with #nostalgia amassing over 22 billion views and popular accounts like @nostalgia__hub and @thr0wback5 attracting hundreds of thousands of followers.

BIG KID SNACKS

Adults are reclaiming Goldfish crackers, also known as "The Snack that Smiles Back." With data showing that 40% of Goldfish packages are purchased by adults without kids, the company is now leaning into grown-up tastes by making its crackers 50% bigger. It's even suggesting "adult beverage" pairings—think Goldfish vanilla-cupcake grahams with an espresso martini. Who says snack time is just for kids?

CANDY LUXE

Our obsession with candy—the ultimate childhood joy—is inspiring luxury brands to sweeten their offerings. Prada has cloned the scent of caramel in its Candy Eau de Parfum, Jimmy Choo created an \$895 "Candy Embellished Crossbody" bag, and Irene Neuwirth's One of a Kind Faceted Beaded Candy Necklace, made out of 18K yellow gold, is priced at \$16,520. Consider it timeless treats, all grown up.

DIGITAL NOSTALGIA

Digital nostalgia is taking us back to the old-school internet. A clone of MySpace recently drew 300,000 subscribers. A band of devoted players are keeping Neopets, an online cartoon game from 1999, alive. Modern social-networking startups like Gather are embracing a retrograde aesthetic. And even high-priced NFTs are drawing upon nineties-style pixel art.

KIDCORE

After months of sweatpants, people are eager to make fashion fun again, and they're doing it with colorful plastic jewelry, neon palettes, crochet tops, and cartoon prints. The rising Kidcore trend is part what Vogue calls "Dopamine Dressing"—a celebration of playful, vibrant, toy-inspired looks that bring out the kid in all of us.¹⁵





WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES

A burnt-out workforce is learning how to put life first. As empowered employees reassess not just where they work—but how and why—rising demand for work-life boundaries will spur a modern day labor movement. Progressive legislation is making it illegal to contact employees after work hours. Workers are protesting by doing the bare minimum. And the four-day workweek is gaining steam across the globe. Work-to-live is the new mentality, and flexibility is the new expectation.

THE GREAT RESIGNATION

A record-breaking 4.3 million Americans quit their jobs in August of last year, with resignations remaining abnormally high in the several months since. "The Great Resignation," driven by a collective renegotiation with work, can be seen across almost every industry. Many people are seeking out jobs that pay more or better align with their values, some are working for themselves, and others are walking away from the job market altogether. "There's now a greater ability for people to fit work into their lives, instead of having lives that squeeze into their work," says Anthony Klotz, who coined the term "The Great Resignation."

THE MOM PROJECT

The talent shortage is forcing employers to get personal, giving rise to niche, human-centric job search platforms. One such platform is The Mom Project, a job site for mothers seeking flexible work. With growing demand, \$80 million in new capital, and support from high-profile investors like Serena Williams, the site is well-positioned to change how moms find work that fits their life.

REDDIT ANTI-WORK

Fed-up workers are sharing their woes on Reddit. On the fast-growing r/anti-work subreddit, over 1.4 million people are venting about working conditions, advocating for better pay, and sharing strategies for a work-free life. And the numbers show that the frustration is much more than social media hype. A March 2021 Microsoft study found that over 41% of global workers were considering leaving their employer, with 54% saying they felt overworked.¹⁶

FOUR-DAY WORKWEEK

Rampant burnout is fueling worldwide support for a shorter workweek. Recent trials of a four-day workweek in Iceland have been called an "overwhelming success," with findings showing promising increases in workers' well-being and productivity. Based on the results, around 85% of workers in Iceland are currently, or are on their way to, working four days a week.¹⁷ A similar theme is shaking out globally as well. The Spanish government is set to trial a 32-hour workweek over three years without cutting workers' compensation. And in New Zealand, Unilever is giving staff a chance to cut their hours by 20% without taking a pay cut.

WORKING TIME

China's tech workers are revealing their grueling work hours in a shared spreadsheet. The anonymous sheet—titled WorkingTime—was viewed over 10 million times in just the first few days of launch, and features entries from employees of China's top biggest internet companies. The document aims to expose the industry's infamous "996" culture—working 9am to 9pm, six days a week.

OFFICE OPTIONAL

The shift toward "virtual first" is accelerating. The model is meant to combine the best of both worlds—offering the flexibility of remote work plus the creativity, ideation, and team bonding that's enabled by in-person collaboration. Dropbox is one of the many companies joining the movement. The file-sharing software company is converting its 13 global offices into meeting studios exclusively for collaboration and community-building, meaning all solo work must be done off-site.

CARETAKER TITLES

Nonprofessional titles like "stay-at-home mom" officially have a place on LinkedIn profiles. The change is part of a larger platform overhaul in support of full-time parents and other caretakers who have stopped working for a period of time. LinkedIn is also rolling out a feature that allows users to create separate resume sections for employment gaps, including "parental leave," "family care leave," or "sabbatical."

WORK-LIFE BALANCE LAWS

Portugal has made it illegal for employers to contact employees after work hours. The move is one of several new labor laws aiming to attract more digital nomads to the country. Related rules include mandatory in-person meetings with a boss every two months to offset loneliness, and the right for parents with kids up to 8 years old to work from home without having to make prior arrangements with their employer.





STABILITY *PURSUIT*

TARGET TUITION

Retailers and restaurant chains are enticing workers with a valuable new benefit: free college tuition. Target is the latest retailer to roll out the perk—offering to cover the cost of undergraduate tuition, fees, and textbooks for part- and full-time U.S. workers. The big box retailer will also pay up to \$10,000 each year for master’s programs. The move will help Target better compete with Walmart, Chipotle, and Starbucks—all of which already cover college tuition for their employees.

THE MOBILE PROF.

Samuel Anyaele, better known as The Mobile Prof., is teaching young Nigerians how to code from their smartphones. While only about 18% of Nigerian households have a computer, smartphones are much more common—making them a perfectly accessible learning tool. Anyaele’s goal is to help his students land high-paying careers with employers anywhere in the world—an especially worthy pursuit considering Nigeria’s 33% unemployment rate.

The era of the disposable employee is coming to a close. People are prioritizing companies that will invest in their future, while employers are wooing workers with debt-free college degrees, upskilling courses, and future-proof education. As disruptive forces make it increasingly difficult to predict the jobs of tomorrow, stability will find fresh desirability.

EMPLOYERS TURN EDUCATORS

As college costs rise and digital innovation becomes increasingly difficult to keep up with, major employers are stepping in as educators. Through Coursera, Google now offers \$39 Professional Certificates that help people land entry-level positions in UX design, data analytics, or project management in under six months. Similarly, Amazon recently opened the Skills Center—a free, accessible space where anyone can drop in to learn about practical applications of cloud computing. The Skills Center is part of Amazon’s larger commitment to train 29 million people globally in cloud computing by 2025.

VISIBLE START

WPP, Brixton Finishing School, and the Uninvisibility Project are teaming up to bring more midlife women into the advertising industry. Through an eight-week program—dubbed VisibleStart—women over 45 will receive access to digital media training, events, and a learning platform. WPP has pledged to hire at least 20 women who complete the course.

ON-DEMAND BUSINESS SCHOOL

Business education is struggling to keep up with a booming \$3 trillion global tech startup economy.¹⁸ Realizing that startup employees don’t have time to sit through long, often irrelevant courses, Framework is championing a new kind of education. Framework members will be able to learn directly from the world’s top tech operators—representing companies including Slack, ASOS, and Netflix—via 15-minute lessons and live office hour session. The “on-demand business school” already has thousands of people on its waitlist ahead of its launch later this year.

CONTRA

Platforms are pivoting to keep up with an increasingly flexible workforce. One such platform is Contra, a startup building referral networks among a growing wave of independent workers. Rather than creating profiles based on previous roles, as is the norm on LinkedIn, Contra profiles are entirely project-based to ensure that qualified candidates aren’t filtered out by recruiters searching for specific job titles. Contra users can also monetize their services and get inbound customers directly through the platform.

TIKTOK RECRUITMENT

TikTok resumes are putting dreaded cover letters to shame. After noticing an organic rise in career-related content (see #CareerTok), TikTok piloted a Resumes program where job seekers could apply for entry-level to experienced positions via short, creative videos. Select sought-after U.S. companies were invited to participate, including Chipotle, Target, WWE, Alo Yoga, Shopify, and more.





BODY DEBATES

Our bodies are officially a hot topic of political debate. As conversations around climate change, collective well-being, and population control escalate, once-personal decisions are no longer private. They're at the center of public culture wars related to individual freedom vs. social responsibility. The implications of whether or not you get vaccinated, go vegan, and have children hold more weight than ever before. And everyone wants to have their say in deciding what's right.

SMOKE-FREE GENERATION

New Zealand is banning smoking for the next generation. The country will increase the legal smoking age every year starting in 2023, meaning those aged 14 years and under today will never be able to legally buy tobacco. Related laws include limiting the number of shops that can sell tobacco, reducing the legal amount of nicotine in tobacco products, and increasing funding of addiction services. While public health experts have applauded the crackdown, others have called it a violation of civil liberties and voiced fears around increased smuggling.

WEIGHT LOSS AD BAN

In July of last year, Pinterest became the first major social platform to ban weight loss ads. The update is an expansion of Pinterest's ad policies that have long prohibited body shaming, pro-eating disorder content, and promotions of weight-loss pills. Psychologists and dietitians supported the move, noting that it will go a long way in protecting teen users who are especially vulnerable to negative self-image.

VACCINE HESITANCY

Misinformation and distrust are slowing vaccination efforts around the globe. Vaccine hesitancy is especially high in Africa, where a history of Western medical experimentation is making skepticism worse. A recent study of 15 African countries found that 45% of respondents believed Africans were being used as guinea pigs in vaccine research trials.¹⁹ And the fear is directly impacting vaccination rates. Late last year, Namibia warned that more than 268,000 doses of AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines were at risk of being destroyed due to slow uptake by citizens.²⁰

ABORTION BOT

Only four of 32 Mexican states allow full and legal access to abortion. To ensure that women living outside of those states have the option to safely terminate their pregnancy, a nonprofit called Women on Web created a robot that delivers abortion pills. The robot, rAborta, is controlled and shipped from Mexico City—where abortion is legal—thus creating a clever legal loophole.

EGG FREEZING BAN

Last year, China's National Health Commission doubled down on a ban that prevents single women from freezing their eggs—sparking heated discussions about women's reproductive rights. Those opposed to the ban say its discriminatory—as single men are legally entitled to freeze their sperm—and consider it an attempt by the government to pressure women to marry and have children early. A much smaller group defends the policy, however, arguing that it helps prevent the commercialization of egg-selling as well as surrogacy—an illegal and highly taboo practice in China.

NEURO-RIGHTS

Chile has become the first country to establish "neuro-rights." The legislation includes rights to personal identity, free will, and mental privacy—protecting individuals from advanced neurotechnologies that have the power to manipulate our minds. Senator Guido Girardi, a vocal promoter of the law, said its aim is to protect "the last frontier" of the human being: the psyche. "We are happy that this is the start of a global assessment on how technology should be used for the good of humanity," Girardi tweeted.

LAB-GROWN MEAT

Lab-grown meat—also known as cultured, cultivated, cell-based, or clean meat—is cooking up controversy in the food world. Supporters of the scientific meat say it'll help fight climate change, lower the risk of disease, and spare millions of animals from being slaughtered. Doubters, on the other hand, warn of high prices and say it could actually have a worse impact on the environment when accounting for energy emissions from the labs. Debates aside, research is moving forward and the cultured meat market is on track to reach \$12.7 billion by 2030.²¹





COUNTER CANCEL

A hyperpolarized society is ready to trade toxic intolerance for a commitment to progress. As the war on “wokeness” rages on and fear of cancel culture silences open debate, a growing group of people are refusing to participate in a divided world. The Counter Cancel movement will call people in to learn rather than calling them out—trading public shaming for healthy, nuanced conversation.

POLEMIX

Polemix is an invite-only app that encourages young people to “listen to the outside.” Its interface is similar to TikTok, but every video features a person making an argument for or against a preset list of controversial questions, from “Should human gene editing be legal?” to “Has political correctness gone too far?” After watching the video, users can either select “Respect But Disagree” or “Convinced By You.” Polemix’s founder and CEO Ian Sielecki sees the app as a tool to combat online echo chambers and prompt healthy debate. While most social platforms serve up content similar to what you’ve already engaged with, Polemix’s algorithm takes both “Convinced By You” and “Respect But Disagree” votes into account when prioritizing the videos you see.



“LOOK, WE F*CKED UP”

Hoping to pave the way for a more transparent eyewear industry, Ace & Tate published an article detailing all of the mistakes they made on their journey to becoming socially responsible. The company, now a Certified B Corp, got real about how they struggled with prioritizing aesthetics over real impact, how they set unrealistic carbon goals, and more. By openly admitting that “look, we f*cked up,” Ace & Tate is hoping to inspire more brands to take accountability rather than hiding behind false claims.

WOKE FATIGUE

Urban Dictionary describes “wokeness fatigue” as “the growing distaste towards displays of online social activism brought about by self-righteous leftists using ‘woke’ culture to browbeat, bully, and police others while assuming the moral high ground.” Calls to end “woke culture” have been intensifying for the past few years, with several celebrities, activists, and even politicians like Barack Obama speaking out.

LORETTA J. ROSS

Loretta J. Ross—Smith College professor and civil and reproductive rights activist—invites us to stand up against injustice with love, respect, and grace. When a person is publicly “called out,” she argues, they’re more likely to defend themselves than to engage in productive conversation. But by listening to another person and “calling them in,” there is a greater opportunity for change, says Ross. Her book, *Calling In the Calling Out Culture*, is scheduled to be released this year.

COUNTERWEIGHT

Counterweight is what The Atlantic calls “a support group for the unwoke.” Its members are a mix of Americans, Brits, Canadians, and Australians who feel that their employers and co-workers are forcing them to endorse social-justice beliefs. In the group, people are given a safe space to defend their values without fear—though discrimination and racist views are not tolerated. Counterweight also runs a Discord server with over 1,000 members and is creating a guide for workers tentatively titled “So You’re About to Be Canceled.”

ANTI-POLARIZATION PROMPTS

Twitter is aiming to combat harassment with a new prompt that warns people about potentially heated conversations. “Heads up,” the message reads, “conversations like this can be intense.” Another pop-up then asks users to “look out for each other,” with reminders to “remember the human,” “facts matter,” and “diverse perspectives have value.” Users must acknowledge these messages by tapping the “Count me in” button before replying.

CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE WHO HATE ME

Ever wonder what would happen if two internet enemies actually talked out their differences offline? The popular “Conversations with People Who Hate Me” podcast provides a platform for people to do just that. Host Dylan Marron connects people who have clashed online—from old friends to complete strangers—to explore why we believe what we believe, how we relate to each other on the internet, and the power of a phone call. The concept is also being turned into a book with the same title, which is set to be published in March.



PLATFORM *POLITICS*

Say goodbye to the Wild West of social media. High-profile battles against misinformation, data collection, screen addiction, and filter bubbles are fueling the “techlash,” and social platforms are public enemy number one. While established players are racing to rewrite their wrongs, a wave of smaller, healthier, community-led platforms are coming to market with a clean slate and shiny new halo. Regulate or be regulated.

TECHLASH

While not entirely new, backlash against big tech companies is certainly heating up. The 2021 Edelman Trust Barometer shows that global trust in the technology sector has dropped from 77% in 2012 to 68% in 2021, with people growing far more suspicious of misinformation, personal privacy, 5G networks, and AI bias.²²

THINKING SMALL

Thinking small is one of the year’s biggest social media trends. Facebook is continuing to focus on Groups, Twitter is testing a Communities feature that makes it easier to connect around shared interests, and Instagram recently started encouraging users to create a second account in order to “keep up with a smaller group of friends.” But while massive platforms work to encourage more personal connection, alternative apps are being built with specificity at their core. One such up-and-comer is PlantLife, the first-ever social platform dedicated to plant parents.

DISINFORMATION FOR HIRE

A secret disinformation-for-hire industry is exploding. Knowing that fake news performs especially well on social media, politicians are increasingly hiring private companies to spread disinformation online—whether to create division, manipulate elections, or spread conspiracies. According to an Oxford University study, commercial firms conducted for-hire disinformation in at least 48 countries in 2020—nearly double from the year before.²³

TIKTOK TICS

Teenage girls across the globe have been showing up at doctors’ offices with tics—physical jerking movements and verbal outbursts—since the start of the pandemic. After months of studying the patients, top pediatric experts found that they all had something in common: they had been watching TikTok videos of people with Tourette syndrome. To unlearn these tics, doctors are recommending cognitive behavioral therapy and telling patients to stay off TikTok for several weeks.

NO TROLLS ALLOWED

Platforms and governments alike are cracking down on trolls. Instagram now lets users automatically filter out offensive DMs, while Twitter’s Safety Mode automatically blocks users who are being aggressive or hateful. And soon, online harassment could come with heavier legal consequences. In the U.S., the federal government is drafting anti-troll laws that would require social media companies to hand over the identities of users to aid defamation cases. “The online world shouldn’t be a Wild West, where bots and bigots and trolls and others can anonymously go around and harm people and hurt people,” says Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

YUBO

French social network Yubo is disrupting all the current platform norms. You can’t follow other users, you can’t like content, and there are no ads. Instead, Yubo users join different livestream rooms based on what they’re looking for, whether that be to meet people across the globe, play games, or talk politics. With a grand total of \$65.7 million in funding and over 50 million worldwide users, Yubo is well-positioned to steal screen time from established apps.

SOCIAL CLEANSE

Following the release of the Facebook Papers—which cited that Instagram makes body image worse for one in three teen girls, among other things—British cosmetics retailer Lush deleted its Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat accounts. CEO Mark Constantine said he’s “happy to lose” \$13 million from the reduced exposure, noting that the accounts will remain inactive until platforms “take action to provide a safer environment for users.”

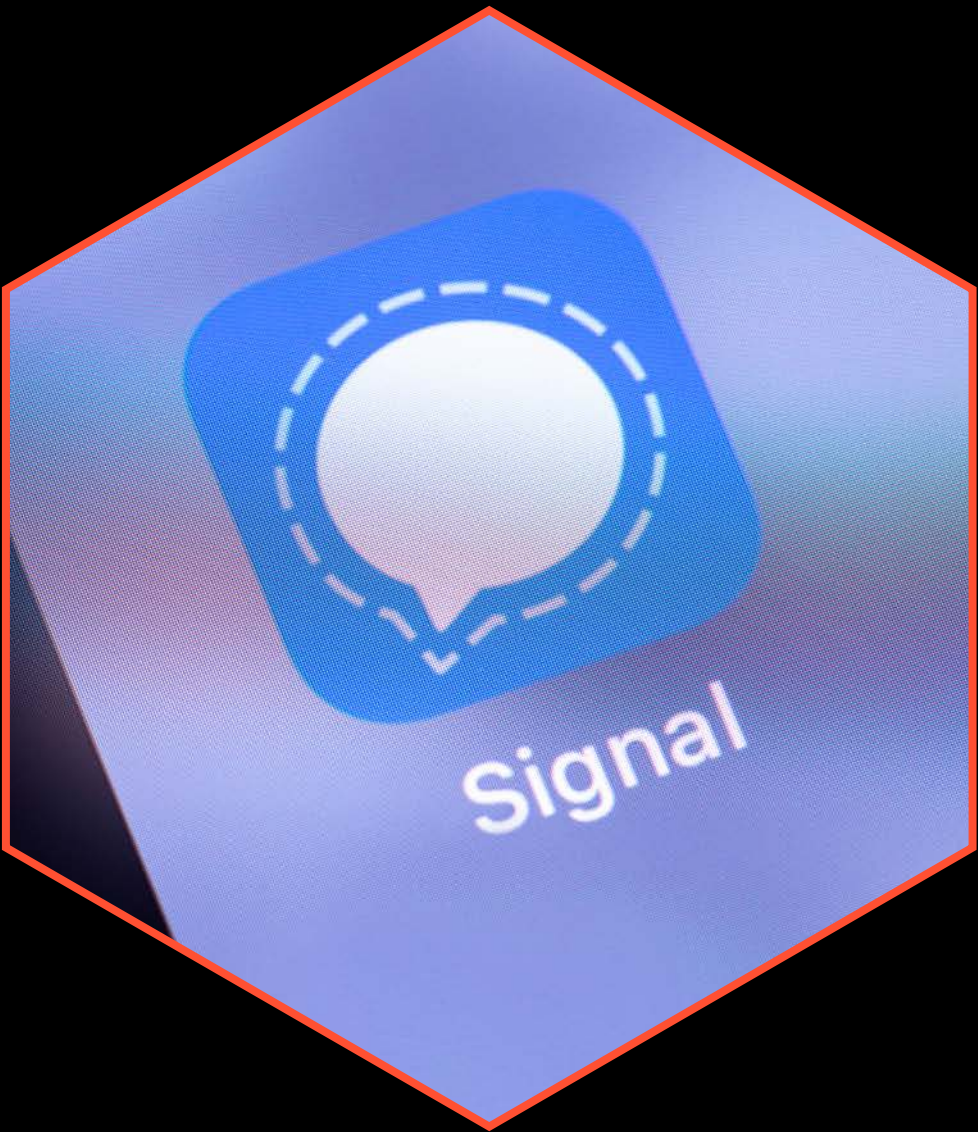




STEALTH MODE

PRIVACY-FIRST PLATFORMS

After news broke that WhatsApp users would be forced to start sharing data with Facebook, encrypted-messaging apps Signal and Telegram experienced an unprecedented surge in downloads. The apps grew 1,200% in the first 4 months of 2021, helped by a simple yet effective “Use Signal” tweet from Elon Musk.²⁴ Growth has remained steady since, with Telegram surpassing 1 billion downloads in August of last year.²⁵



Privacy is a 21st-century luxury. As surveillance spreads, privacy-conscious individuals are protecting their offline and online identities with secure search engines, hidden homes, encrypted apps, and AI-blocking accessories. In the age of 24/7 intrusion, stealth mode is peace of mind, and anonymity is the ambition.

TEEN PRIVACY CONTROLS

After facing an onslaught of criticism, major tech companies are taking steps to make social media safer and more private for teens. Instagram now automatically defaults users under 16 into private accounts, while YouTube is making videos uploaded by users ages 13 to 17 private by default. Likewise, TikTok—which already restricts direct messaging and makes accounts private for users under 16—recently updated its privacy settings to give users ages 13 to 17 more control over who they share videos and messages with.

HIDDEN HOMES

For the ultra-affluent, there’s secluded homes in private gated communities. For the rest of us, there’s a free hack to hide your home from Google Street View. Blurring your residence in Google Maps can be done in just a few simple steps, making it an increasingly popular way to prevent snooping.

SECURE STARTUPS

Every privacy violation by a tech giant is a win for security-focused startups. Swiss-based Proton, the world’s largest secure email provider, reached 50 million worldwide users in 2021. Privacy browser DuckDuckGo reported an average of almost 100 million daily searches in October 2021, up 38% year-over-year. Rival browser Brave saw its monthly active users double for the fifth year in a row in 2021, surpassing 50 million.²⁶ And European counterpart Qwant, which the French government uses as its default search engine, reported a 34% increase in searches in 2021.²⁷

AUTO-DELETE

When in doubt, just delete. WhatsApp now gives users the option to auto-delete all of their messages after 24 hours, 7 days, or 90 days. Similarly, Google recently launched a privacy feature lets you instantly delete your last 15 minutes of search history on mobile. Think of it as an emergency un-do button for any embarrassing or just plain personal searches.

ANTI-AI CLOTHING

From sweatshirts to sunglasses, anti-surveillance is officially en vogue. Adversarial Fashion is just one of several brands fighting tracking with clothing. The Adversarial Fashion collection uses patterned fabric that’s specially designed to trick AI, allowing the wearer to go undetected by facial recognition technology. Similarly, Reflectacles Privacy Eyewear is helping people stay fashionably incognito. The brand’s stylish sunglasses block 3D infrared facial mapping, and include a visible light reflection that makes you anonymous in photos taken with flash.





HACKING **THE MATRIX**

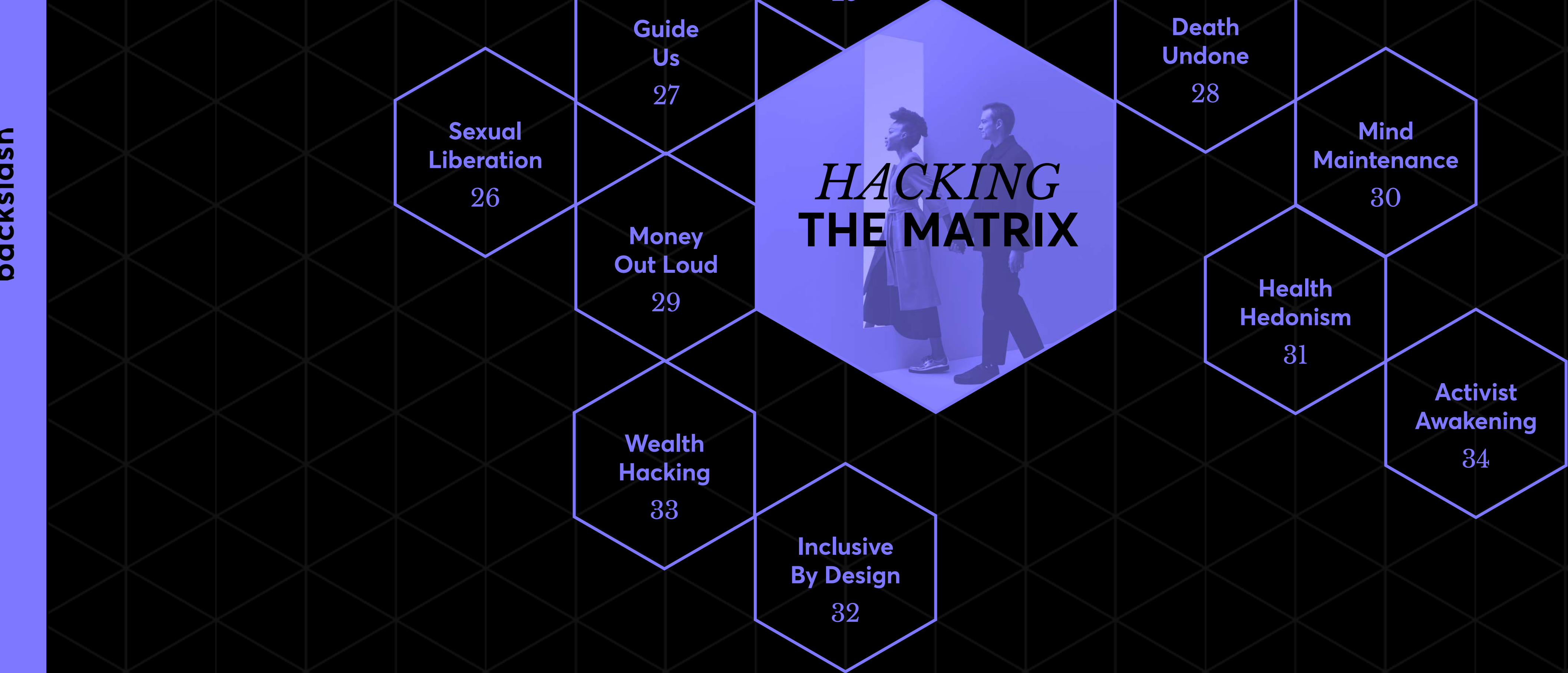
While much of societal progress is being marked by a return to the past, individual progress is largely being defined by liberation.

Throughout history, societal expectations and long-standing traditions have told us how to behave, what to value, and what to keep private. And while in many ways these standards have provided structure, they've also created plenty of limitations.

But in 2022, a culture falling in love with freedom is releasing itself from toxic constraints. Codes of conduct related to gender, beauty, and relationships are being erased. Stigmas around sex, death, money and mental health are being tossed out the window. And a growing group of people are ditching outdated institutions in pursuit of a path that works for them.

Looking forward, securing our individual freedom will be about hacking the matrix—breaking down the unwritten rules that have boxed us in and held us back. The push for personal autonomy is upon us, and it's changing everything from what we wear to how we earn.







UNGLOSSED

An uptight world is ready to loosen up. Society is turning its back on impossible standards around one-note beauty, buttoned-up professionalism, and picture-perfect lifestyles—ushering in a refreshingly unapologetic attitude. We’re collectively breaking free of unrealistic expectations, shamelessly flaunting our flaws, and taking pride in the work-in-progress. Aspiring to perfection is outdated.

RETOUCH DISCLAIMER

In an effort to curb unrealistic beauty standards, Norway has made it illegal to share retouched photos without a disclaimer. The law requires images where the subject’s body size, shape, or skin have been altered—either before or after the photo is taken—to carry a special label designed by the Norwegian government. While the ruling currently only applies to paid posts from advertisers and influencers, many are pushing for the law to extend to all social posts.

GOBLINCORE

Calling all mushroom lovers, frog fanatics, and elf wannabes. Goblincore, also known as “dark cottagecore,” is having a major moment. The aesthetic is all about “chaos, dirt, and mud,” serving as a celebration of the wild and untamed. “There’s something incredibly freeing about goblincore,” says Amanda Brennan, senior director of trends at XX Artists. “It’s just about vibing and existing, not fitting into a mould.” The hashtag has garnered more than 815 million views on TikTok, and members of the r/goblincore subreddit have grown 400% from 2020 to 2021.²⁸

“GENUINFLUENCERS”

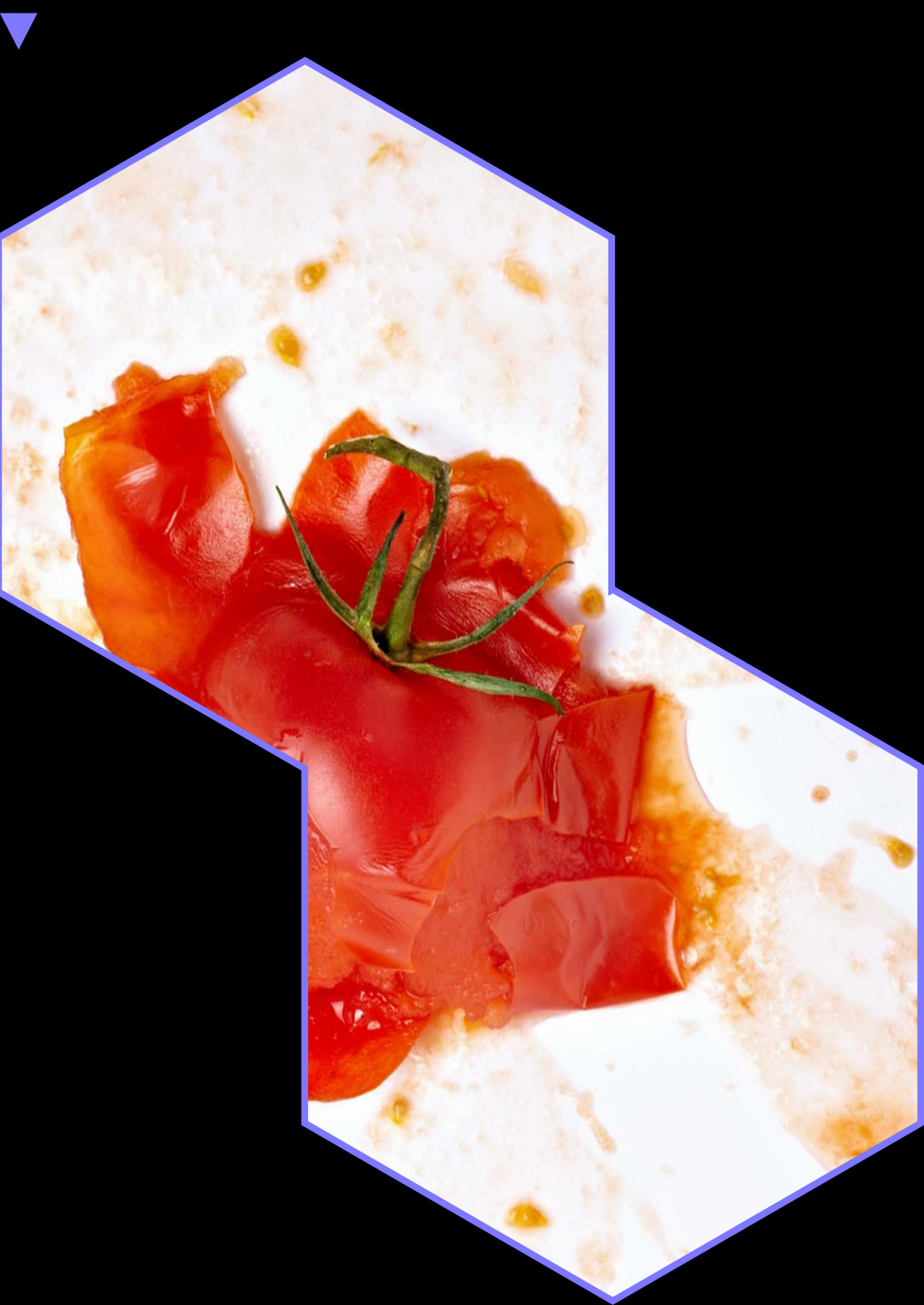
While influencers exist to sell you an (often unattainable) lifestyle or product, “genuinfluencers” exist to spread credible, unbiased information. The term, coined by trend forecasters WGSN, speaks to how governments, businesses, and other large institutions are leveraging genuinfluencers to educate people about relevant topics ranging from vaccination, to mental health, to racial injustice. “Being too ‘aspirational’ is seen as almost repellent now by many generation-Zers, who favor platforms such as TikTok because of this,” says trend forecaster Geraldine Wharry.

DEAR INTERN

When HBO Max accidentally sent out a test email to their subscribers, the company took to Twitter to explain that “Yes, it was the intern. No, really. And we’re helping them through it.” The Tweet inspired hundreds of people to share their own embarrassing workplace mistakes, sparking a refreshingly honest “Dear Intern” trend to remind us that we’re all human, and mistakes happen.

DISTASTEFUL FOOD

Perfectly polished food photography is on its way out. From the moldy Whopper to Karma Kitchen’s rebrand celebrating the “visceral, messy business of cooking and eating,” food brands are putting the au natural back on the table. Bring on the crumbs, sauce spills, and unedited realness.



EMBRACING UGLY

From shoes to cosmetics, ugly is in. Crocs, the long-standing laughingstock of the fashion world, reported record sales in 2021, soaring 93% to an impressive £465m by June.²⁹ Whether worn ironically or purely for comfort, the “world’s ugliest shoes” have continued to win us over by staying true to their iconic clog mold. Meanwhile, “ugly makeup” is making waves in the beauty sector, with Instagram accounts like @uglymakeuprevolution celebrating imperfect, sloppy, chaotic looks worn only to please the wearer—societal expectations aside.

#FREEDOMTOFEED

Proud moms are shamelessly sharing their breastfeeding photos on social media. Armed with the hashtag #freedomtofeed, Indian celebrities including Neha Dhupia, Amrita Rao, and Kareena Kapoor are on a mission to shed the stigma around the natural, healthy act of breastfeeding.



GENDER *RULES*

GENDERLESS PLAY

Lego has pledged to eliminate gender stereotypes from all of its products and marketing. This includes removing phrasing such as “for girls” or “for boys,” and recategorizing toys as gender-agnostic. Internal product teams will also transition from gender-focused groups to groups focused on “passions and interests.” The move was inspired by global research which found that societal norms around play are limiting girls’ career potential. Parents are six times as likely to think of scientists as men than women, for example, and eight times as likely to think of engineers as men than women.³⁰



Our gender no longer defines us. And we don’t want it to. From home life, to personal style, to the workplace, we’re unraveling the roles that gender boxed us into. As we say goodbye to binary gender divisions, we’ll lean into new identity markers that transcend our physical sex.

ENGAGEMENT RINGS FOR MEN

Tiffany & Co. is selling men’s engagement rings for the first time in its 185-year history. The new line’s debut comes as men show increased interest in fine jewelry—a trend driven by more LGBTQ+ couples getting married, an increase in women proposing to their husbands, and celebrities like Timothée Chalamet and A\$AP Rocky inspiring men to wear more bling. The brand says the rings “honor the jeweler’s long-standing legacy in love and inclusivity, paving the way for new traditions.”

PLEASING

Musician and fashion provocateur Harry Styles—known for rocking pearls, feather boas, full-length gowns, and everything in between—is setting out to “dispel the myth of a binary existence” with a new beauty brand called Pleasing. The gender-neutral line debuted with playful nail polish, an illuminating serum, and a dual-end eye gel and lip oil. With the tagline “Find your pleasing,” Styles hopes to “bring joyful experiences and products that excite the senses and blur the boundaries.”

GENDER-FREE IDs

Our legal identifiers are getting an inclusive refresh. The U.S. is the latest country to update its passports to allow for a gender ‘X’ option for those who identify as nonbinary, intersex, or gender-nonconforming. Belgium has gone even one step further, with a draft law aimed at removing mentions of gender from identity cards altogether. The bill is being prepared for implementation this year.

#DOUBLEUP PLEDGE

Workplace benefits are evolving to keep up with changing gender roles in the home. Nine Swedish multinational companies in Singapore, including AstraZeneca and H&M, have pledged to double their paid paternity leave benefits from two to four weeks starting this year. The move is part of the Swedish Chamber of Commerce Singapore’s #DoubleUp pledge, which supports gender equality through policies that encourage fathers to be there for their babies.



HOUSEWORK WORTH

In March 2021, a Beijing divorce court ordered a man to pay his ex-wife 50,000 yuan (\$7,700) for housework she did during their 5-year marriage. The case sparked heated social media debate, with many arguing that the woman was underpaid. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), women in China spend nearly four hours a day doing unpaid work—roughly 2.5 times that of men.³¹



RELATIONSHIP REBELLION

Relationship anarchy is overthrowing old norms. As we separate societal expectations from personal desires, we'll part ways with prescriptive labels and reject restrictive relationship hierarchies. Intimacy is breaking free from institutions. Apps are delivering companionship on demand. And platonic partnerships are promising practical support without the romantic risk. Your relationship, your rules.

FAMILY "ON DEMAND"

Social isolation is linked to serious health effects, such as increased risk of heart disease, and it's estimated to cost the federal government a whopping \$6.7 billion a year.³² To solve the problem, Papa Health is providing lonely seniors with a "family on demand." The company's network of 25,000 "Papa Pals" do all the things a family member would—such as taking people on walks, driving them to the doctor, preparing meals, and more.

PLATONIC SPOUSES

A growing number of people are rejecting the notion that one person should be your "everything" and opting instead for platonic marriages—a lifelong commitment between best friends without romance or sex. TikTok and Reddit have recently seen an uptick in discussion around the topic, with those in favor saying that the arrangement offers all the benefits of marriage—including emotional support and shared responsibilities—without the romantic risk. Most platonic spouses will set their own rules, such as whether or not they can romantically see other people.

BUTLER CAFES

Butler cafes are giving women in China the male attention they crave. For about 400 yuan (\$60) per session, cafe customers will be pampered by handsome young male waiters who listen attentively, fetch drinks, and watch movies or play board games with them, though any kind of sexual contact is forbidden. The cafes have been hugely successful among women who feel that Chinese culture is too patriarchal. According to one patron, the industry exists "because there are too many women that feel the men around them don't respect them or care about their feelings."

AI COMPANIONSHIP

Artificial intelligence is providing very real companionship for a growing number of people. Replika's AI chatbot empowers users to express themselves. Virtual companion platform Hybrid lets people create the friend or romantic partner of their dreams. Ruuh, from Microsoft India, is a personable chatbot that sends you loving messages throughout the day. And Japanese technology company Gatebox is taking it up a notch with 3D holographic characters that "live" within a glass enclosure.

SECRET MARRIAGE SERVICE

Business is booming for India's secret one-stop marriage shops. The semi-legal network of lawyers, agents, and priests conducts illicit weddings for runaway couples looking to escape social pressures. Brokers offer a variety of packages ranging from 7,000-21,000 rupees (US\$100-\$300) depending on the type of marriage—whether intercaste, interfaith or involving non-resident Indians. While not new, clandestine weddings have become even more common under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, as interfaith marriages violate the Hindutva agenda.

MOXIE

A blue, wide-eyed robot called Moxie could be your kid's new best buddy. The friendly bot is designed to support social, emotional, and cognitive development in children, using play-based learning to teach manners such as making eye contact and taking turns. "We literally have the potential to help the next generation have much higher EQ and the soft skills that will help them grow to healthier, more balanced people," says Embodied CEO Paolo Pirjanian.



RELATIONSHIP STUDIES

From parenting to marriage, governments are getting involved in our most personal relationships. The Shangcheng district in the city of Hangzhou offers a free digital "parenting school," where courses range from how to handle temper tantrums to how to cultivate empathy. And on the dating front, Chinese lawmakers are proposing that universities teach mandatory "romance and marriage lessons." The proposed classes—which follow a series of domestic violence cases in China as well as declining marriage rates and rising divorce rates—would focus on building emotional intelligence skills that could be used to tackle disagreements.



SEXUAL LIBERATION

It's time to bring sexy back. Blurred lines between objectification and empowerment have long complicated our relationship with sexuality, but a culture healing from the past is ready to get sexy again—no stigmas attached. Self-sex is being accepted as self-care. Erotica is getting inclusive. And on-screen portrayals of sex are more honest than ever before. Say hello to a new era of pleasure positivity.

"MY BODY"

"My Body," a collection of essays by American model and actress Emily Ratajkowski, serves as a fascinating exploration of society's obsession with and contempt for female sexuality. In it, Ratajkowski grapples with the blessing and curse of her physical beauty. "All women are objectified and sexualized to some degree, I figured, so I might as well do it on my own terms. I thought that there was power in my ability to choose to do so," she writes. But now, as the book concludes, she's not so sure.

SEX-CARE GOES MASS

Sex products have officially made their way to the shelves of mainstream retailers. Luxury department store chains Bloomingdale's and Nordstrom are selling vibrators right alongside classic self-care products like candles and bath bombs. DoorDash users can now order their dinner with a side of condoms and lubricant thanks to partnerships with Lola and Hims & Hers. And sexual wellness brand Unbound is getting Gen Z to buy into "fun, body safe vibes and accessories" through large-scale sellers like Urban Outfitters and Anthropologie.

LIPS

Social platforms aren't very good at differentiating between sexual expression and sexual exploitation, meaning all sex-related content is typically excluded. Factor in biased algorithms, and sexual content from marginalized groups is even more likely to be removed. Annie Brown is setting out to change that with Lips, a new kind of social platform where sexual expression is encouraged. On Lips, sex workers, erotica artists, queer people, and activists are all free to post without fear of censorship or harassment—offering a safe, sex-positive space for those who have been shut out from mainstream platforms.

SEX ED GETS SOCIAL

For many of us, sex education sparks memories of cringey school lessons or scary warnings from our parents. But for the next generation, sex ed is more accessible—and more relatable—than ever before. Sexology influencers like Chantelle Otten, author of "The Sex Ed You Never Had," is normalizing pleasure for her 146k Instagram followers. Japanese YouTuber Shelly is taking a candid and highly personal approach to sex ed—funny anecdotes included. And TikTok users are shamelessly sharing sex tips through detailed video tutorials.

FREE BRITNEY

The end of 2021 marked a victory for #FreeBritney activists when Britney Spears' conservatorship finally came to an end. In addition to helping Britney gain personal and financial independence from her father, the movement also sparked a reckoning with the widespread mistreatment of female celebrities in the media. "Framing Britney Spears," The New York Times documentary that covered the case, exposed this mistreatment through footage of shockingly misogynistic interviews and tabloids from the 1990s and 2000s. "The mainstream media didn't know how to cover stories involving women's sexuality without sensationalizing it and talking about it in lewd terms," notes HuffPost.³³



WHISPA HEALTH

Sex talk still carries a stigma in Nigeria, making it hard for young people to get judgment-free access to sexual health. But Nigerian startup Whispa Health is ready to break that taboo. Through the Whispa app, anyone can anonymously order condoms, lubricants, at-home HIV test kits, and more. After the tests, users can speak directly with trained healthcare professionals via the app or even schedule physical appointments for contraceptives, cervical cancer vaccines, or STD tests.

MESSY SEX SCENES

The predictable sex scene is being put to bed. In a post #MeToo world, actresses are speaking up and calling for a more realistic, intimate, and even messy kind of on-screen sex. Keira Knightly recently stated that she will no longer shoot sex scenes with male directors so as not to "portray the male gaze," adding that she refuses to participate in "those horrible sex scenes where you're all greased up and everybody is grunting." But while the old-school sex scene is disappearing, it's being replaced with plenty of refreshingly honest on-screen portrayals. "Today's sex scenes are first and foremost fun—as ideally sex itself should be—and emphasize the truthful over the tasteful," says Maria San Filippo for The Conversation.³⁴



GUIDE US

SLIPPING INTO SYNCRETISM

Syncretism, the “pick and mix” approach of combining different religious beliefs or practices, is steadily rising across the U.S. A 2021 survey from Arizona Christian University found that only 6% of American adults possess a Biblical worldview, while 88% of Americans cannot be defined by any one predominant worldview.³⁵ A 2021 Gallup poll also found that the proportion of Americans who consider themselves members of a church, synagogue, or mosque has dropped below 50%—a historic low since the study began in 1937.³⁶

#WITCHTOK

Witchcraft is taking over TikTok. #WitchTok—home to magic potions, energy talk, and tarot readings—has over 23 billion views and counting. Young followers of witchcraft say it provides spiritual empowerment and stability in an otherwise unstable world.



In the age of uncertainty, we’re seeking answers on our own terms. Believers are breaking away from rigid religious systems in search of something that resonates more deeply. And even the most secular people are finding comfort, security, and solidarity in something bigger than themselves—whether that be astrology, mysticism, or the supernatural. On the journey to enlightenment, it’s up to you to define your own path.

FAITH ON FACEBOOK

Faith is Facebook’s next frontier. Noticing a rise in spiritual content, the social network recently released a tool that allows users to ask for—and count—prayers. Other efforts to engage religious communities include the development of an Interfaith Advisory Council, courses on how to grow religious engagement online, and future plans to integrate AR and VR into Facebook religious services.

ASTROLOGY OBSESSION

A growing number of people are turning to astrology for answers, whether for finance, romance, or personal insight. TikTok user @marenaltman uses astrology to predict bitcoin prices for her 1.1 million followers. Astrology-based dating apps like Struck are pairing people based on their birth chart, “skeptics welcome.” And Co-Star—an AI-powered app using public NASA data to provide notifications, horoscopes, and birth charts—has been downloaded over 20 million times. “The question isn’t whether astrology is real, the question is whether the effects are real... Is it a legitimate tool for self-care, and the answer is yes,” says Co-Star CEO Banu Guler.

DIVINITY CONSULTANTS

Sacred Design Lab, Ritual Design Lab, and Ritualist are among several consultancies bringing spiritual richness to the corporate world. Through their services, trained “divinity consultants” help businesses establish rituals to improve employee well-being and strengthen company culture. Activities could include team breathing exercises to start the day, or a faux funeral to put a failed new business pitch to rest. “We’ve seen brands enter the political space,” said Casper ter Kuile, co-founder Sacred Design Lab. “The next [opportunity] in advertising and brands is spirituality.”

TECHNOSHAMANISM

A new “Technoshamanism” exhibition in Germany is exploring the intersection between modern technology and ancient beliefs. For artists involved in the show, the combination of technological innovation and esoteric spirituality—which is grounded in a connection with nature—offers a sense of hope in combating the climate crisis.

CRYSTAL HEALING

Crystals are serving as a modern-day coping mechanism for anxious adults. Despite the science saying “they’re just pretty rocks,” Google trends show a steady climb in searches for “crystal healing” throughout the past year.³⁷





DEATH UNDONE

DIGITAL LEGACY

In today's digital age, where everything is encrypted and every account has a unique password, important information and memories can be gone forever when someone passes. Apple is aiming to solve that problem with the iOS 15 update. Through the new Digital Legacy program, you can designate up to five people to access your iCloud when you die, essentially giving them the digital keys to your photos, documents, and even past purchases.

HUMAN COMPOSTING

Recompose, the first full-service human-composting funeral home in the U.S., is officially open for business. The process turns the human body into soil in about six to eight weeks, then "returns the nutrients from our bodies to the natural world" by using the soil to enrich conservation land, forests, or gardens. "You're not being burned up, not being pumped full of embalming chemicals and taking up space in a container," says Charlotte Bontrager, whose mother's body was one of the first to be composted. "It seems like a peaceful way for the body to move on to the next phase."

An aging population looking to relieve the dread of death is forcing an antiquated end-of-life industry to change its tune. Death doulas are normalizing mortality talk, biodegradable burial pods are giving death a sustainable reset, and digital legacy management companies are helping us put our online identities to rest. The reexamination of death is just beginning.

3D-PRINTED ORGANS

Doctors in Taiwan are 3D-printing organs to replace those removed in deceased organ donors. The initiative is helping the Taiwanese become more accepting of organ donation, which many East Asian cultures believe leaves the body empty or incomplete after death. The desire for an intact body mainly stems from the Confucian concept of filial piety: a virtue of respect for one's parents, elders, and ancestors.

DEATH TO POSTHUMOUS ALBUMS

Several late artists including Mac Miller, Pop Smoke, Prince, Aaliyah and Selena have had posthumous albums released after their passing. But Anderson .Paak doesn't want to be next. The American rapper recently debuted a tattoo on his arm with a clear message: "When I'm gone please don't release any posthumous albums or songs with my name attached. Those were just demos and never intended to be heard by the public."

HELL'S MUSEUM

Educational experiences are breaking taboos around death, helping us derive positive meaning from a typically dark topic. In Singapore, visitors of Hell's Museum are invited to explore how views of death and the afterlife vary across religions and cultures. The museum has 10 immersive stations that aim to encourage visitors to "live their life meaningfully."

CHATBOT REINCARNATION

Microsoft has been granted a controversial patent for software that could reincarnate people as a chatbot. The program would essentially pull someone's photos, text messages, voice data, and social media posts, then use that information to teach a chatbot how to imitate their personality and likeness. Though Microsoft has confirmed that there's no plans to bring the technology to life, the news continues to stir up passionate debate around AI ethics and death.



DEATHCARE STARTUPS

Death is breathing new life—and new money—into the startup world. Last year, Empathy, an AI death assistant for grieving families, raised \$13M. Eterneva, a company turning ashes into diamonds, raised \$10M. Cake, an online platform for navigating mortality planning, raised \$3.7M. And GoodTrust, a digital legacy management platform, secured \$2.3M. The success is set to continue, with the global death care services market projected to grow from \$104 billion in 2020 to \$147 billion in 2025 at a CAGR of 7.2%.³⁸



MONEY OUT LOUD

"FINFLUENCERS"

"Finfluencers" around the globe are demystifying complicated finance bro jargon for the masses. The #personalfinance hashtag has amassed over 5.2 billion views on TikTok. "Financial pop stars" like Haley Sacks—better known to her 230k Instagram followers as Mrs. Dow Jones—are merging money smarts with pop culture. And YouTubers like Eduardo Rosas (616k subscribers) are breaking down issues related to the local economy.

SALARY TRANSPARENCY LAWS

Rising awareness of pay inequality is bringing salary talk out of the shadows. In the U.S., six states have already enacted laws that require employers to publicly disclose the salary range for open positions. Meanwhile, the EU has begun drafting pay transparency laws in a bid to tackle wage discrimination and close the gender pay gap. Workers welcome the openness, with a recent LinkedIn survey finding that 66% of people believe that more pay transparency leads to fairer wages.³⁹

Culture is getting candid about the role money plays in our lives. Financial therapists and financial wellness programs are confronting the intersection between money and mental health. The salary transparency movement is exposing long-standing pay disparities. And "finfluencers" are making financial literacy part of pop culture. Money talk is moving outside the bank.

YOUNG MONEY

A fresh wave of finance companies are kick-starting teens' financial journey early, helping them build positive money habits and positive credit from the outset. Fintech startup Step lets Gen Zers manage their money in the same way they manage their social media accounts. Fidelity now offers commission-free brokerage accounts for 13- to 17-year-olds. And Snapchat is teaching its young users how to invest with a virtual trading game called StockStars.



F*** YOU PAY ME

Influencer pay disparities are a widespread problem, with one study from Klear finding that male creators earn an average of \$128 more per post than women.⁴⁰ But a growing number of platforms are set to level the playing field. On 'F*** You Pay Me,' influencers can post reviews of brands they've worked with, share ad rates, and get insight into how to negotiate content deals. Similar platforms like Collabstr encourage creators to list their pay rates, while social media pages like Brands Behaving Badly, We Don't Work for Free, and Influencer Pay Gap all exploit unfair brand deals.

MONEY FITNESS

What if money stress was framed as a health problem, not a finance problem? That's the thinking behind European Healthtech startup ZavFit. The app's MoneyFitness program monitors how different purchases affect your well-being, then suggests ways to use your money to become happier and healthier.



FINANCIAL THERAPY

When you're talking about money, you're talking about so much more—the past, the future, pressure, shame, trauma, status. Financial therapists help people unpack those subconscious hurdles so they can better spend, save and invest in alignment with their values. And the field is gaining global momentum. The Financial Therapy Association has over 300 international members and counting. London-born financial therapy app Emma is "removing anxiety regarding money matters." And all around the world, financial advisors are beginning to look beyond the numbers and adopt a more empathetic approach.



MIND MAINTENANCE

A worldwide mental health crisis is bringing invisible struggles center stage. As shattered stigmas give way to accessible solutions, mental healthcare will go from reactive to proactive, from a nice-to-have to a need-to-have. Governments will recognize therapy as an essential. Brands will innovate with emotional well-being in mind. And workplace policies will get an empathetic rewrite. Mind maintenance is our new common priority, and we’re practicing it daily.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Yana, an acronym for “You Are Not Alone,” is an emotionally intelligent chatbot that helps people through tough times. The Mexico-born startup has attracted 5 million users, making it one of the most-downloaded apps in Mexico, Spain, Chile, Ecuador, Venezuela and seven other countries. With new capital, Yana is looking to become people’s platform of choice not just in the midst of a crisis, but on an ongoing basis. “We want to focus on whole wellness and mental health and transmit something that needs to be built every single day, just like we do with exercise,” says founder Andrea Campos.

ENGINEERAPY

Anxious about climate change? Try “Engineerapy.” Swedish energy supplier Vattenfall is offering free 20-minute online therapy sessions where people can talk to an engineer about their climate concerns. During the session, the engineers will share fact-based climate information as well as updates on positive progress being made toward a fossil-free future.

CRYING ROOM

Spain is breaking mental health stigmas with a public “Crying Room” that offers direct hotlines to psychologists and encourages visitors to express their sadness. The project launched just one week after Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez announced a 100-million-euro (\$116 million) mental health care program, which will include services like a 24-hour suicide helpline.

DREAM HACKING

Scientists believe the emerging field of dream engineering could be closely linked with mental health in ways that we don’t yet fully understand. REM sleep, for example, may play an important role in emotion regulation, which means that manipulating dreams could help treat mental health disorders. This fascination with dream hacking extends to online communities as well. On the Lucid Dreaming subreddit, over 425,000 curious members are actively exchanging tips on how to tap into their subconscious.

FREE THERAPY

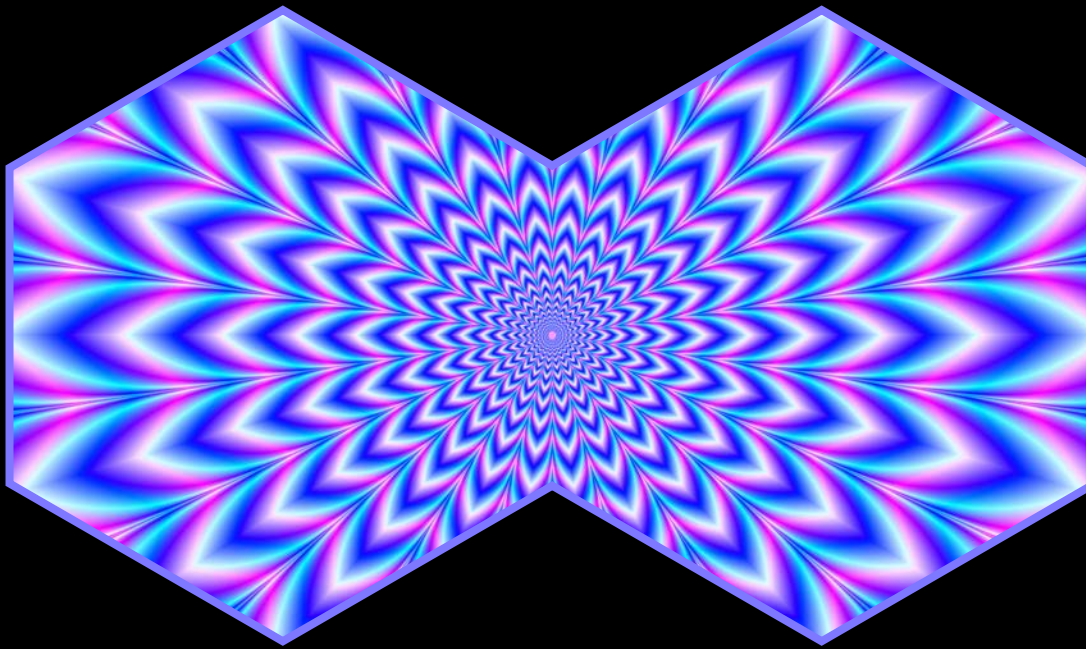
Starting this year, the French government will cover the cost of therapy for all citizens aged three and older. French president Emmanuel Macron says the measure will address “historic demand” for therapy, with research finding that 10% of French residents had suicidal thoughts over the course of the past year—double the usual number.⁴¹

GAMECHANGERS

For decades, elite athletes have inspired us with their will to “just do it,” train harder, and push through the pain. But in 2021, they inspired us in an entirely different way. Tennis star Naomi Osaka shocked the sports world when she withdrew from the French Open in order to preserve her mental health, and just one month later, Olympic gymnast Simone Biles decided to pull out of the Tokyo Games in order to focus on her mental well-being. The athletes’ decisions sparked crucial conversations about mental health issues in sports, bringing the once-taboo topic center stage.

AI DEPRESSION DETECTION

New forms of digital therapeutics are removing barriers to timely mental health care. One example is telehealth app Kintsugi, which uses AI to analyze voice recordings and identify mental health issues. With just 20 seconds of audio, Kintsugi can determine conditions with over 80% clinical accuracy—twice as precise as practitioners’ detection rate.



PSYCHEDELIC TECH

Luminate lets your smartphone take you on a psychedelic trip—no drugs required. The UK-born app uses the light on your phone to put you in a deeply meditative, semi-psychedelic state of consciousness. Almost all users report “some reduction in sense of body, ego and time,” with many saying the app has allowed for personal growth.



HEALTH *HEDONISM*

HOSPITAL REVAMP

Dreary hospitals are getting a homey, nature-rich redesign. China's new Jiaxing Kaiyi Hospital is raising the standard for wellness-oriented healthcare with horizontal and vertical green spaces, living room-like lounge areas, rooftop gardens, outdoor walking paths, a family meeting hub, natural ventilation, and 360° views of the outdoors. The hospital is built around the idea that connection to fresh air, a peaceful environment, and growing things are all crucial elements of good care.

CYCLE SYNCING

Nike's Cycle Syncing is the first fitness program that helps women adapt their training to their menstrual cycle. Using the Nike Training Club app, women can access a collection of workouts modified to the three phases of their cycle. Cycle Syncing's Early phase (Day 1 of your period to approx. Day 13) focuses on speed and power; Middle phase (approx. Day 14 to Day 20) involves endurance and strength training; and End phase (approx. Day 20 to Day 28) centers around mobility and recovery.

A once-sterile healthcare industry is taking cues from the pleasurable parts of wellness, ushering in a more holistic and hyper-personalized approach. Pharmacies are offering in-store yoga. Smart toilets are providing in-app diet recommendations. And nationwide sleep challenges are incentivizing shut-eye. Who says the journey to better health can't be enjoyable?

WELLNESS TOILET

Toto wants to turn bathroom breaks into wellness time. The Japanese company's Wellness Toilet concept uses an array of sensors to analyze your poop, then provides personalized health tips based on an analysis of your stool. For example, the accompanying app might recommend salmon to improve an unbalanced diet.

PELOTON PERKS

Fitness company Peloton has entered into its first relationship with a health plan. UnitedHealthcare, the largest insurer in the U.S., now offers Peloton's fitness classes for its fully insured members at no additional cost. News of the partnership broke just one month after Peloton launched a corporate wellness program for businesses in the U.S., the U.K., Canada, Germany, and Australia—a huge leap towards making digital fitness more accessible.



ORAL TWEAKMENTS

Oral care is now part of the self-care beauty boom. Trendy toothpaste, toothbrushes, and mouthwash—products once considered unglamorous—are becoming the new Millennial must-haves. And people are paying a premium to upgrade their dental routine. Colgate is winning young shoppers over with Co.Colgate, a range of aesthetically pleasing products that provide "a ritual for feeling good." Swiss brand vVardis is creating buzz with a \$29 whitening toothpaste. Kendall Jenner has her own vegan oral hygiene brand called Moon, which offers teeth whitening pens, "cosmic gel toothpaste," and more. And TikTok influencers like @thebentist are making trips to the orthodontist seem a little less dreadful.

SLEEP CHALLENGE

Ready, set, sleep! After a recent study found Singapore to be the most fatigued nation in the world, the country's Health Promotion Board (HPB) is launching a national campaign to incentivize shut-eye. Through the Sleep Challenge, eligible participants who log at least seven hours of sleep per day will be able to redeem points for e-vouchers worth up to \$30. The initiative is an extension of Singapore's ongoing National Steps Challenge.

SPA-MEETS-THEME-PARK

Torn between a self-care day or a fun theme park outing? How about both? Austrian Therme Group's resorts combine the best of wellness spas and theme parks, offering globally inspired hot springs—such as Japanese onsens, Finnish saunas, and Turkish hammams—right alongside exciting wave pools, waterlines, and botanic gardens. New locations are coming to Glasgow, Toronto and New York this year.

NATURE DOSE

Science says that more time in nature can lead to a longer, healthier, happier life. To help people optimize the benefits of outdoor time, tech startup NatureQuant created a personalized nature prescription. Through an integration with the Strava cycling and running app, users can see how they're faring against the recommended 120 minutes in nature per week. The app will even rate locations from "Nature Deficient" to "Nature Rich" based on surrounding natural elements that correlate with good health.



INCLUSIVE BY DESIGN

OLAY EASY OPEN LID

Olay's Easy Open Lid is paving the way for more inclusive product design. The lid has wings on both sides, a raised top with texture for grip, higher-contrast product labels, and Braille text that reads "face cream." The thoughtful updates will better assist people with dexterity conditions, vision impairment, joint pain, and limb differences. Olay has shared the design widely with the beauty industry in the hopes that others will follow their lead.

LETTING DIVERSITY LEAD

A slew of businesses are making serious commitments to diversify their workforce. One of the latest to do so is fast-fashion retailer ASOS, which said that at least half of all leadership roles will be filled by women by 2030. The British business also committed to ensuring that people of ethnic minorities account for at least 15% of leadership roles within the next decade.

Inclusivity isn't a checkbox, it's a form of design thinking. As expectations around inclusivity skyrocket, hyper-critical consumers will sniff out tokenism and expose empty promises. Genuine inclusion requires an entirely new blueprint—building systems, laws, spaces, experiences, and products to be equitable and accessible from the bottom up. A fairer future awaits.

ASIAN AMERICAN MUPPET

After over 50 years on TV, "Sesame Street" has finally welcomed its first Asian American Muppet to the neighborhood. Sesame Workshop created Ji-Young to support families of Asian and Pacific Islander heritage as part of its racial justice initiative, Coming Together. In addition to sharing her love of electric guitar and skateboarding, Ji-Young will also help educate viewers about Korean-American culture and spread awareness of anti-Asian bias.

PLAYER APPROVAL

Is your video game truly accessible? Let players with disabilities decide. Microsoft is encouraging developers to have their Xbox and PC games tested by players with disabilities. Game test reports include detailed player feedback as well as links to information on inclusive design, relevant nonprofits, and accessibility experts.

IT'S ON US

Seventy percent of women don't feel represented in media and advertising, which takes a serious toll on mental health, careers, and relationships.⁴² Dove is aiming to shatter those beauty stereotypes with "It's On Us." Through the campaign, which launched in South Africa, Dove infiltrated international casting calls with real beauty models. Each model delivered a simple message to encourage inclusion—"If you choose me, and show me as I really am, Dove will cover the cost of my appearance fee." Magnum, Krispy Kreme, Cif and Nedbank were among the many brands to accept Dove's offer.

NEURODIVERSITY AT WORK

Employers everywhere are redesigning their offices and programs to better accommodate the 15-20% of the global population that are neurodiverse.⁴³ Barclay's new Glasgow campus incorporates adaptable lighting systems, smart acoustics, creative spaces, and private spots to suit neurodiverse employees. And Ernst & Young is expanding its Neuro-Diverse Centers of Excellence, which aim to boost innovation by recruiting neurodivergent individuals across India, Spain, Poland, Canada, the U.S. and the UK.

LGBTQ+ HEALTHCARE

Folx is the world's first LGBTQIA-focused telehealth platform. The U.S. startup centers around three pillars: identity, sex, and family creation, with custom health plans for hormone therapy (HRT), STI testing, PrEP for HIV, erectile dysfunction care, and more. Folx's founder and CEO, A.G. Breitenstein, hopes the company can become a model for how the U.S. healthcare system can work for other marginalized communities that lack access to health services.





WEALTH HACKING

A society disillusioned with false promises of prosperity is generating wealth its own way. As trust in financial institutions declines and calls for accessibility intensify, a growing group of people will opt for the unconventional. Cryptocurrencies are enabling global financial inclusion. Equity crowdfunding platforms are breaking down barriers to investing and entrepreneurship. And play-to-earn gaming is unlocking valuable income. On the route to financial freedom, the rules of the road no longer apply.

PLAY-TO-EARN GAMING

Play-to-earn games are proving to be a lifeline for many. One of the most popular P2E games is Axie Infinity, where about two million daily players breed, battle, and trade digital pets in order to earn income through NFTs and cryptocurrencies.⁴⁴ People in countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Venezuela have turned play-to-earn gaming into a full-time career, with dedicated players earning a few hundred U.S. dollars a month.

OVEREMPLOYED

Working hard, or hardly working? Overemployed is a fast-growing online community of people who secretly work multiple jobs from home in order to maximize their income. On the platform, users share advice on how to juggle overlapping Zoom meetings, give tips for mitigating tax and legal risks, and open up about their past mistakes. Some users claim the hack has helped them more than double their net income—earning as much as \$600,000 per year at the top end.

NFT ART CRAZE

NFT marketplaces are giving creators a new way to cash in on their work. Digital artists are selling originals of their work as NFTs on platforms like OpenSea, SuperRare, Nifty Gateway, and Foundation. An app called S'ng is letting creators mint NFTs of their work for free in seconds. And even meme creators are auctioning off NFTs of their most famous work for thousands of dollars.

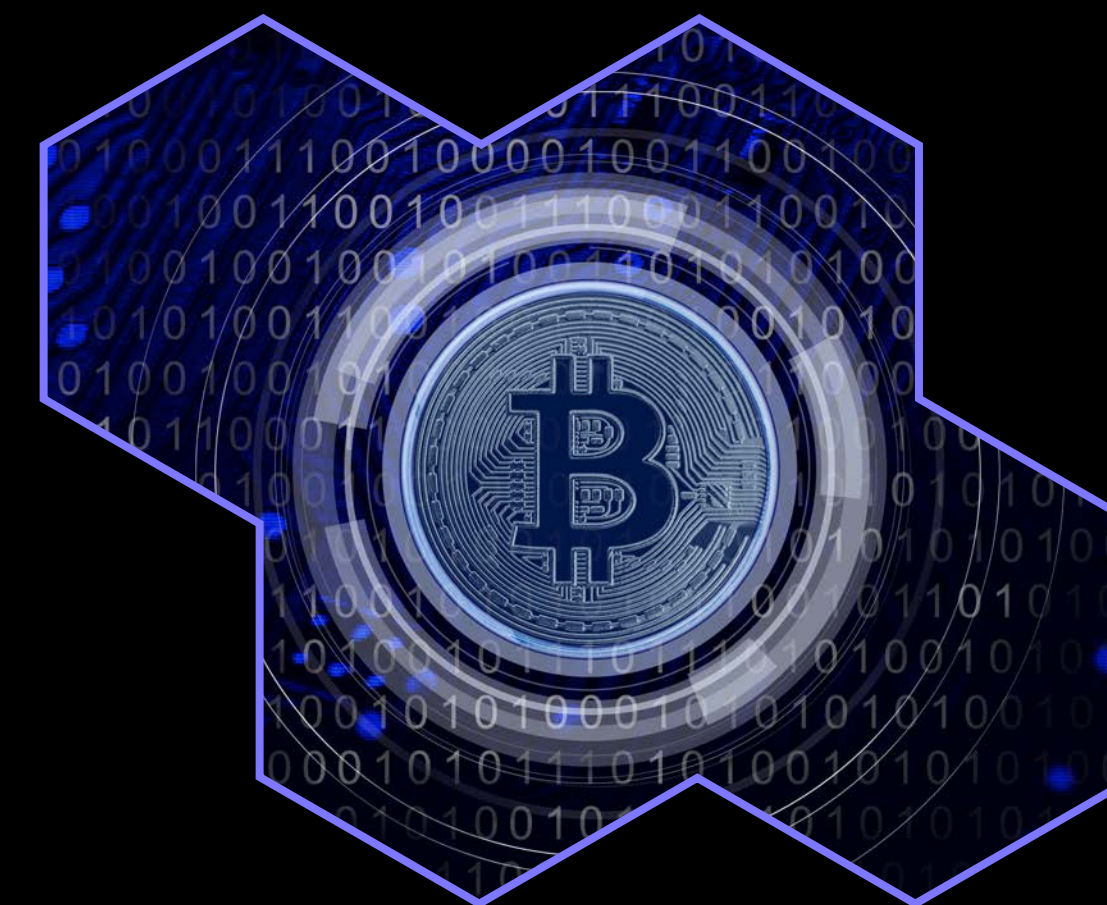


KOCOMO

A Mexico City-based startup called Kocomo is upending vacation home ownership with a marketplace that allows people to purchase, own, and sell fractional interests in luxury homes. In other words, owning a vacation home just got a lot more affordable. Unlike timeshares, Kocomo participants actually own a part of the real estate, not just the use of time. So if the property value goes up, so does someone's investment.

EQUITY CROWDFUNDING

Equity crowdfunding, whereby private companies sell shares in their business to the public, is experiencing record growth. For entrepreneurs, it's a way to raise interest-free capital, get the word out, and build a loyal customer base. For supporters, it's a chance to invest early at an accessible price point. The industry is expected to grow by \$196 billion from 2021 to 2025 at a CAGR of over 15%.⁴⁵ The uptick is already evident in Australia, where Zero Co. recently used equity crowdfunding to raise \$3m in just 47 minutes—marking the country's fastest raise ever.



WORLDCOIN

While a global cryptocurrency would open economic doors for billions of people, crypto users still only account for 3% of the world's population. A new startup called Worldcoin is working to expand access with an orb-shaped device that scans people's eyes in exchange for free cryptocurrency. The company has already amassed over 100,000 worldwide users, and is aiming to hit 1 billion users by 2023. Worldcoin CEO Alex Blania has even hinted that the model could be used as the infrastructure for universal basic income in the future.



ACTIVIST AWAKENING

From climate change to inequality, the world's most urgent issues are reaching a critical tipping point. And inaction is no longer an option. Frustrated by the limits of individual choice, informed citizens are calling out corporate and government indolence and demanding immediate, large-scale change. With the threat of societal collapse right around the corner, accountability is inescapable. We're all activists now.

CLIMATE COURT

Young people around the world are taking governments to court over climate inaction. Lawsuits have been filed in the UK, Brazil, Portugal, and Australia, with eco-anxious teens demanding that governments do more to reduce emissions and protect their future. In May of last year, a historic ruling by the federal court of Australia found that the environment minister, Sussan Ley, has a duty of care to protect young people from the climate crisis. The landmark case will make it harder for politicians to approve large-scale fossil fuel projects going forward.



PROTEST IN PINK

Life is imitating art. Last October, 80,000 South Korean union workers went on strike in 13 different cities demanding better workers' rights—all while dressed in "Squid Game" costumes. "In 'Squid Game,' you see characters scrambling to survive after being laid off at work..." says former labor worker Lee Chang-keun. "That reminded me of my co-workers who died." The rally was organized by the South Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, with 27,000 people gathered in Seoul alone.

ICE CREAM ACTIVISM

Ben & Jerry's, known for taking stands on hot-button social issues, announced that it would stop selling ice cream in Israeli-occupied territories. "The company's stated decision to more fully align its operations with its values is not a rejection of Israel. It is a rejection of Israeli policy, which perpetuates an illegal occupation that is a barrier to peace and violates the basic human rights of the Palestinian people who live under the occupation," said Ben & Jerry's co-founders for the New York Times.

TIKTOK POLITICS

If you think TikTok is just for silly dances, think again. When Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny was arrested last year, anti-Putin protestors flooded the platform with videos of themselves cutting their passports in half, swapping portraits of Putin with portraits of Navalny, and sharing #ForNavalny protest tips. Another wave of political activism hit TikTok months later when U.S. TikTokers banded together to fight back against Texas' abortion ban. To demonstrate their opposition, thousands of users spammed an anti-abortion whistleblower website with fake tips and random memes—making it difficult for the system to filter through junk submissions.

FASHION FURY

Activists are the new cultural icons. While Vogue covers are typically reserved for models and glamorous celebrities, the publication took a different approach when it featured Greta Thunberg on the front of Vogue Scandinavia's very first issue. The teen climate activist used the platform to call out the fashion industry for promoting sustainability without taking adequate action to back it up.

COLOMBIANS AGAINST TAX REFORM

In April 2021, tens of thousands of Colombians joined protest marches against a proposed \$6.4 billion tax reform, saying it would leave them worse off. When a smaller but still significant \$4 billion tax plan was presented in July, protests against poverty and inequality resumed. Protesters said the new plan does not do enough to boost spending on education and job creation in Colombia, where the economy shrunk 7% in 2020 and pushed three million more people into poverty.⁴⁶

ANTI-SPORTSWASHING

Norwegian football club Tromsø is using its jerseys to spotlight human rights issues in Qatar, home of the 2022 World Cup. The uniforms will be designed as a QR code that links to a website educating people about Qatar's harsh mistreatment of migrant workers. Last year, The Guardian reported that 6,500 migrant workers have died in the country since Qatar won its bid to host the World Cup in 2010, most of whom were involved in dangerous, low-wage labor.⁴⁷



HIDDEN **FUTURES**



The third and final chapter explores the cultural shifts leading us into the great unknown.

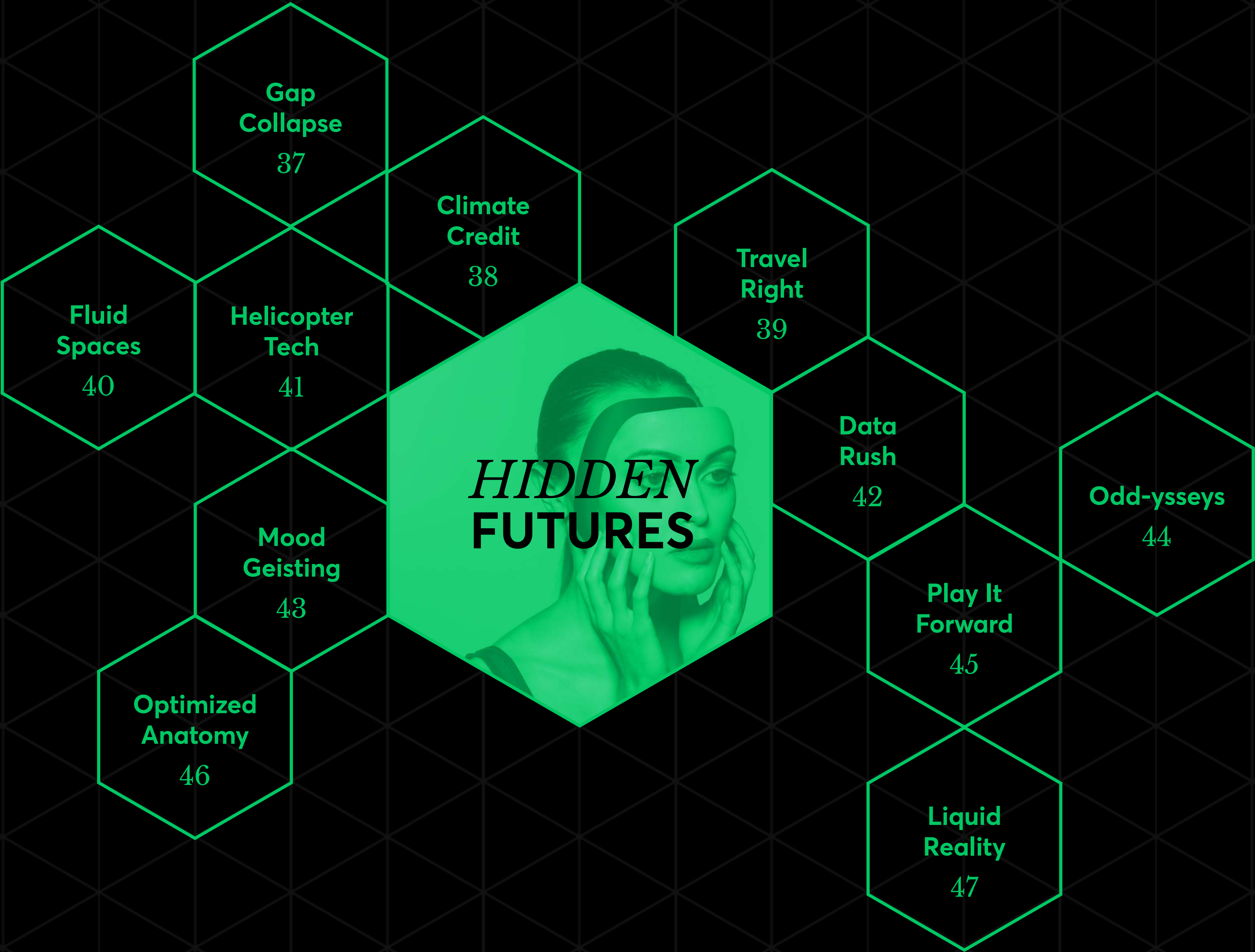
These are the areas too nascent to be informed by the past—the beta tests, the brave new world, the impending question marks. There are not yet rules around them to be broken, and it remains to be seen if they will require corrective action in the future. But nonetheless, our curiosity and need for novelty is pushing us to forge ahead.

We're experimenting with new ways to optimize our mind and body, rethinking the use of physical space in a digital-first world, using the power of play to tackle our most serious challenges, and diving head first into the metaverse—for better or for worse.

As with any kind of trial, missteps will most certainly be made. But right now, we're just taking the first step. Because as human beings, we'll always chase some form of progress.

We have an innate desire to peek around the next corner, to put our wildest hypotheses to the test, to make entirely new discoveries. And as we do, it'll be up to businesses to ensure that ethics are guiding the way forward.

Here's to uncovering the next chapter of our future. May it be even better than the last.





GAP COLLAPSE

Worsening inequality is bringing new divides to light. No longer just a wealth gap—the heat gap, health gap, education gap, and digital divide are exposing the very real consequences of rising inequality. And human rights are at stake. In the race to rebalance the scales, unlocking access is the next big market opportunity. Welcome to the great democratization.

ENDING ENERGY POVERTY

The IKEA Foundation and The Rockefeller Foundation set up a \$1 billion global platform to lift one billion people out of energy poverty by the end of the decade. With 800 million people worldwide lacking electricity, and a further 2.8 billion having unreliable access, the platform will help countries such as India, Nigeria, and Ethiopia make the jump to renewable energy.

THE GYAAN CENTER

In the heart of the Thar Desert in Rajasthan, India, sits The Rajkumari Ratnavati Girl's School, where more than 400 girls that live below the poverty line will be educated. The school is the first part of the GYAAN center, a three-phase project that will also eventually include an exhibition space as well as a women's cooperative where local artisans will teach weaving and embroidery techniques. The Center will help women establish economic independence in a region where the female literacy rate sits at just 57% compared to 80% for males.⁴⁸

CULTURALLY-COMPETENT HEALTHCARE

While healthcare disparities among minority populations are not new, the pandemic further exposed the need for a more inclusive system. In fact, COVID-19 hospitalization rates among Black and Latinx people are both 4.7 times the rate of their white counterparts.⁴⁹ Facing the health equity challenge head on is HUED, a platform that connects Black and Latino patients with culturally competent healthcare providers who relate to their specific needs. Kimberly Wilson founded HUED after receiving disproportionate treatment from white providers. Now, with \$1.6 million in seed funding, Wilson is setting out to provide 500,000 people with access to quality care by 2025.

WI-FRÍO

HEINEKEN México, Coca-Cola FEMSA, and the Government of the State of Querétaro are on a mission to shrink the digital divide in rural Mexico—where over one-third of people are without internet access.⁵⁰ Last year, the trio installed coolers equipped with wi-fi in thirty local corner shops, providing free internet for more than 800,000 residents.

FREE PERIOD PRODUCTS

Last year, Lidl Ireland became the world's first major retailer to offer free menstrual products to women and girls via monthly in-app coupons. To ensure those without smartphone access weren't excluded, the grocery giant also committed to making quarterly donations of tampons and pads to The Simon Communities homelessness charity. As many as 85,000 women and girls are at risk of period poverty in Ireland alone,⁵¹ with that number increasing to over 500 million women globally.⁵²

WORLD MOBILE TOKEN

World Mobile Group is on a mission to bring remote regions online, starting with Africa. Communities will be able to access the World Mobile network via "air nodes" that can be as simple as a solar panel, a pole and a wireless access point. The company then sells these affordable network nodes to local business owners and implements blockchain-based digital IDs, in turn providing Africans with greater economic freedom, digital inclusion, and blockchain access.

TREE EQUITY SCORE

Countless studies show that trees bring mental and physical health benefits, while also combating the threat of rising heat. But not all trees are planted equally. Across the U.S., wealthier neighborhoods get 65% more canopy than less-wealthy ones.⁵³ American Forests is aiming to change that with Tree Equity Scores. The conservation organization uses the score to determine where trees should be planted based on where the most vulnerable live, where their cooling effect is most needed, and where the scarcities are. It's already working with 12 U.S. cities, and aims to partner with 100 more by 2030.





CLIMATE CREDIT

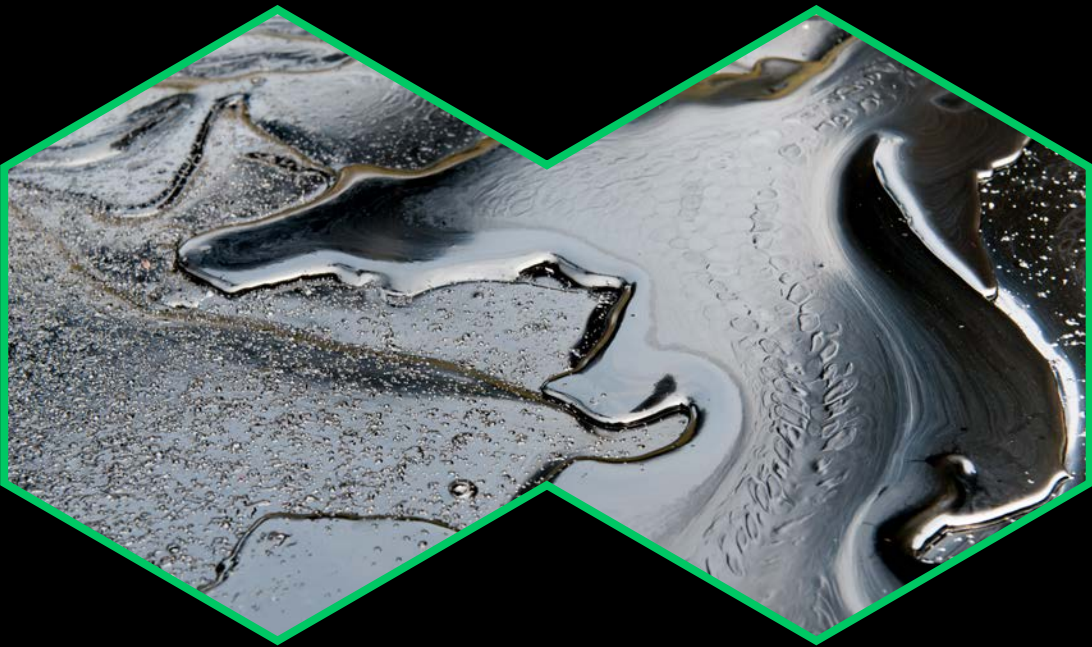
CLIMATE-CONSCIOUS CREDIT CARDS

A new credit card is rewarding “climate smart spending.” Introduced by U.S. startup Future, the Visa FutureCard gives you instant 5% cash back on eco-friendly purchases such as secondhand clothing, plant-based groceries, and public transportation passes. The company’s proprietary FutureScore also shows customers how they’re contributing to climate change and offers tips on how to reduce their footprint. FutureCard joins a growing list of climate-friendly credit cards. DO Black by Mastercard is the world’s first card with a carbon limit, and the Aspiration Zero credit card offsets your carbon emissions by planting a tree for every purchase.

LOW-CARBON KICKS

Competing footwear brands Allbirds and Adidas have teamed up to create the lowest-carbon-footprint sneaker ever. The Futurecraft.Footprint performance running shoe produces a minimal 2.94kg CO₂e throughout its life cycle—an impressively low number compared to about 13.5kg of CO₂ created from manufacturing synthetic sneakers. “We wanted to demonstrate how collaboration and an open-source mindset can create a halo effect across the industry,” said Brian Grevy, executive board member of global brands at Adidas.

Capitalism is getting a green spin. Across the globe, the growth of net-zero banks, ESG investing, carbon capture companies, and eco-centric partnerships are all evidence of the burgeoning business of climate action. Sustainability is the springboard for innovation and investment, and those who don’t take the plunge will be taken down. The pressure to gain climate credit is on.



FOSSIL FUEL TAKEDOWN

The fossil fuel industry is going down, and no one wants to be taken down with them. Companies from ad agencies to banks are taking clear—and often costly—steps to distance themselves from major oil and gas producers. Dozens of ad agencies have signed the Clean Creatives pledge to stop working with oil and gas companies. Several publications including The Guardian and the British Medical Journal have limited or stopped accepting fossil fuel ads. European banks are beginning to drop major fossil fuel clients. And Nest, the UK government-backed workplace pension scheme, recently sold its holdings worth £40 million in ExxonMobil and four other energy companies due to their lack of climate action.

GROSS ECOSYSTEM PRODUCT

After a six-year pilot, Shenzhen has become the first Chinese city to establish a system to measure its “gross ecosystem product” or GEP—a greener alternative to GDP. By placing a value on all the goods and services produced by ecosystems, GEP aims to incentivize officials to improve, rather than ignore, the environment. Shenzhen evaluates its GEP using 19 indicators, including agricultural production, climate regulation, water conservation, air purification, recreation, and tourism. Though the concept isn’t new, China is the first country to implement it at a large scale.

CARBON CAPTURE CONTEST

Elon Musk is awarding a total of \$100 million dollars to innovators that come up with the best carbon capture technologies. The four-year competition, orchestrated by the XPRIZE Foundation, is the largest incentive prize in history. To win, teams must be able to demonstrate how their innovation can be scaled up to eventually remove gigatons (1 gigaton = 1 billion metric tons) of carbon dioxide per year. According to the organizer’s estimates, we need to remove around six gigatons of CO₂ per year by 2030 and 10 gigatons per year by 2050 to reach the climate goals outlined in the Paris Agreement.

B-CORP BOOM

The number of certified B Corporations has tripled in the past 5 years to over 3,500 in more than 70 countries.⁵⁴ The highly esteemed B Corp status is no longer just reserved for small startups, either, with more large, established corporations contributing to the category’s growth. Take Chloé, which became the first luxury fashion house to earn B Corp status in October of last year. Chloé’s certification was granted based on a number of factors, such as their use of recycled textiles, carbon-neutral runway shows, Fair Trade sourcing, and circularity training for employees.

FOREVER FUND

Emerging electric vehicle company Rivian is quite literally investing in nature. As part of its new Forever fund, the American automaker will contribute 1% of equity toward “high-impact climate initiatives.” The money will primarily support the preservation and restoration of wildlands and oceans, while also funding environmental education programs for producers and consumers.



TRAVEL RIGHT

Mobility is undergoing a mass reappraisal. As we collectively rethink the flow of people, cars, planes, and goods, large-scale infrastructure overhauls will reduce emissions and maximize efficiencies. Air taxis and delivery drones are promising to ease road congestion. Public transit systems are becoming electrified. And cities are combating over-tourism with visitor limits. We're betting on mobility to move the world in the right direction.

DELIVERY DRONES

German aircraft developer Wingcopter has designed the first delivery drone capable of carrying three packages at once. The all-electric Wingcopter 198 will help optimize courier workflows so people can get their goods fast and cheaper, while also cutting down the labor required to oversee fleets of delivery drones. The startup's latest device is key to its larger goal of providing businesses with drones that can distribute hot meals, groceries, medical supplies, or other lightweight goods.

AIR TAXIS

Flying cars are no longer just a science-fiction dream. But while several companies—including Uber—have been racing to build the flying taxi of the future, infrastructure has not yet caught up to innovation. In a push to accelerate adoption, Urban-Air Port and Hyundai are building flying-taxi hubs in 65 cities across the globe. Meanwhile, Joby Aviation is planning to launch its U.S. air-taxi service as soon as 2024. Morgan Stanley has predicted the flying car sector to be worth \$1.5 trillion by 2040, emphasizing their role in easing road congestion and lowering emissions.⁵⁵



TRAFFIC BAN

Paris' city center will soon be traffic-free. As part of her ongoing campaign to reduce car use, Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo announced a plan to ban most vehicles from the city center starting this year. The plan would stop through traffic from a large zone covering Paris' core, eliminating 55% of total traffic—more than 100,000 cars—passing through this zone on average per day.



ELECTRIFYING MASS TRANSIT

Cities around the globe are taking creative steps to cut gas and diesel from their public transit systems. Berlin is reviving electric tram lines that were ripped out when the Berlin Wall went up. Bogotá is building cable cars that connect working-class communities on faraway hills. And Bergen, Norway, is electrifying its public ferries and busses. In many cases, cities have been able to take climate action faster than national governments, an important pursuit considering transportation accounts for a third of a city's carbon dioxide emissions on average.⁵⁶

CLEAN AIR ROUTES

Health-conscious navigation tools are helping people commute in cleaner air. Hong Kong-based app PRAISE-HK suggests routes with the lowest levels of air pollution, and European e-bike company Cowboy shows a real-time map of air quality within its app—allowing bikers to choose the cleanest route rather than the quickest one.

RESPONSIBLE RESTRICTIONS

Travel restrictions are ramping up, ushering in a healthier, slower, more balanced era of travel. In April 2021, France banned domestic flights on routes that can be covered by train in under 2.5 hours. And most recently—just one month after banning large cruise ships from the Venice lagoon—Venice announced plans to set quotas and charge visitors for admission starting this summer.

EV-CHARGING ROADS

What if you could charge your electric car while you were driving it? The Indiana Department of Transportation and Purdue University are working on just that, with plans to develop the world's first EV-charging road. The multiyear project will address two of the biggest hurdles to electric car adoption—battery range and charging availability.

REGENERATIVE TRAVEL

"Regenerative travel" is reshaping the future of tourism. While sustainable tourism aims to counterbalance the social and environmental impacts associated with travel, regenerative travel takes the goal one step further—pushing us to leave a place better than we found it.



FLUID SPACES

RETAIL OASIS

Ikea’s future Copenhagen store will serve as a “green lounge.” The store, coming in 2023, will feature a rooftop garden with native plants, walking trails, resting areas, meeting spaces, and bug hotels to support biodiversity. Covering the exterior will be greenery and 1,450-square-meters of solar panels, while water from the local canals will be reused to help cool the building. The multi-use space is helping support Copenhagen’s goal of becoming the world’s first carbon-neutral city by 2025.

FLOATING CITY

A floating, flood-proof city is coming to South Korea in 2025. Oceanix City will be able to house 10,000 residents and will be completely self-sustaining—producing its own food, energy and freshwater. Seafood and aquatic plants can even be grown underneath the buoyant platforms that make up the city’s foundation, serving a dual purpose of ocean farming. The innovative prototype presents a potential solution to rising sea levels brought about by climate change. The project’s founders are already in talks with 10 other governments about implementing the idea, meaning more floating cities may very well be in our future.



A waste-not world is giving physical spaces a second life. As work and shopping move online, offices and storefronts are being remixed for round-the-clock purpose and profit. New sharing services are helping homeowners monetize their unused spaces. Stores are doubling as entertainment venues and community centers. And hydroponic skyscrapers are merging farming with architecture. In a digital-first world, physical spaces are setting out to prove their worth.

GARDEN SHARING

According to the National Allotment Society, allotment waitlists can reach up to 40 years in London⁵⁷. To help solve for the shortage of outdoor space, London-based AllotMe created an app that lets urbanites rent out homeowners’ unused gardens for as little as £5 per month. Consider it the Airbnb of vegetable patches.

TELECUBES

When COVID-19 killed the office, Telecube took the cubicle to the streets. The individual teleworking booths—complete with a desk, PC, power outlets, and video conferencing software—are popping up in metro stations across Japan, where on-the-go workers can rent the pods for ¥250 (\$2.42) every 15 minutes. The solo work stations are set to stick around, with Telecube aiming to install 1,000 units by 2023.



HYDROPONIC FARMSCRAPER

The next era of urban development is merging architecture with agriculture. Innovation and design firm Carlo Ratti Associati has unveiled plans to build a 51-story hydroponic skyscraper in Shenzhen, China. The exterior of the building will be covered in greenery and landscaped terraces, while the inside will be home to a supermarket, food courts, and offices. Daily farming operations will all be managed by an “AI-supported virtual agronomist.” It’s estimated that the building could yield 270 tons of produce annually—enough to feed approximately 40,000 people.

RETAIL RENTAL HOMES

John Lewis is becoming a landlord. The upmarket British retail group is building 10,000 rental homes on its properties, including above Waitrose supermarkets, next to its distribution centers, and on parking lots. The units range from studio flats to four-bedroom houses, and come fully furnished with John Lewis products. The plan serves a dual purpose of addressing Britain’s housing shortage while also boosting John Lewis’ post-pandemic profits.

OIL RIG THEME PARK

Saudi Arabia is converting an offshore oil rig into an extreme sports amusement park. Known as “The Rig,” the luxury park will cover 150,000 square meters of the Arabian Gulf and will be home to three hotels, a plethora of adventurous activities such as skydiving and bungee jumping, and 11 restaurants, including one offering “undersea dining.” The park is part of Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to reduce the country’s reliance on oil by further developing public sector services such as tourism.

SWIMPLY

Swimply wants to help you turn your empty pool into easy income. The fast-growing online marketplace lets homeowners rent out their pools to local swimmers—with some earning up to \$30,000 a year. Even more amenities are set to be added in the coming year, including hot tubs, tennis courts, spacious backyards, rooftops, and home gyms. A fresh \$50 million in funding will also allow Swimply to further expand across the U.S., Canada, and Australia.



HELICOPTER TECH

Governments, brands, and devices are monitoring our every move. From apps discreetly tracking our data to fast-growing facial recognition systems, surveillance is becoming inescapable. But an increasingly skeptical society is carefully calculating risk and reward. It's privacy vs. convenience, public safety, and productivity, and what we value most remains to be seen.

EMOTION-RECOGNITION TECH

Emotion-recognition tech is being rolled out across China. The technology goes far beyond what regular facial recognition software tracks—analyzing facial expressions, vocal tone, body movements, and other biometric signals to determine a person's mood. Authorities say emotion-recognition can be used to predict dangerous behavior in prisons, detect potential criminals at police checkpoints, and even identity disobedient students in schools. Critics, on the other hand, say it has serious implications for human rights, privacy, and freedom of expression.

BIOMETRIC PAYMENTS

Biometric tech is making paying quicker and easier than ever. With greater convenience, however, comes more sensors, cameras, and data collection. Amazon and Tesco are scaling up "Just Walk Out" technology that lets shoppers buy groceries by simply scanning a QR card or waving their palm—no checkout line required. A similar system has also made its way to the Moscow metro, where the world's first mass-scale facial recognition system ("Face Pay") was recently rolled out.

AMAZON ASTRO

Watchful bots are moving in. Amazon's first full home robot—a wheeled device named Astro—monitors your house with the help of sensors and cameras. Astro can scan people's faces to determine if there's an intruder inside your home, alert you if you left the stove on, check in on a loved one at home, and lots more. But while Astro's eyes may be adorable, privacy experts warn that they're always watching.

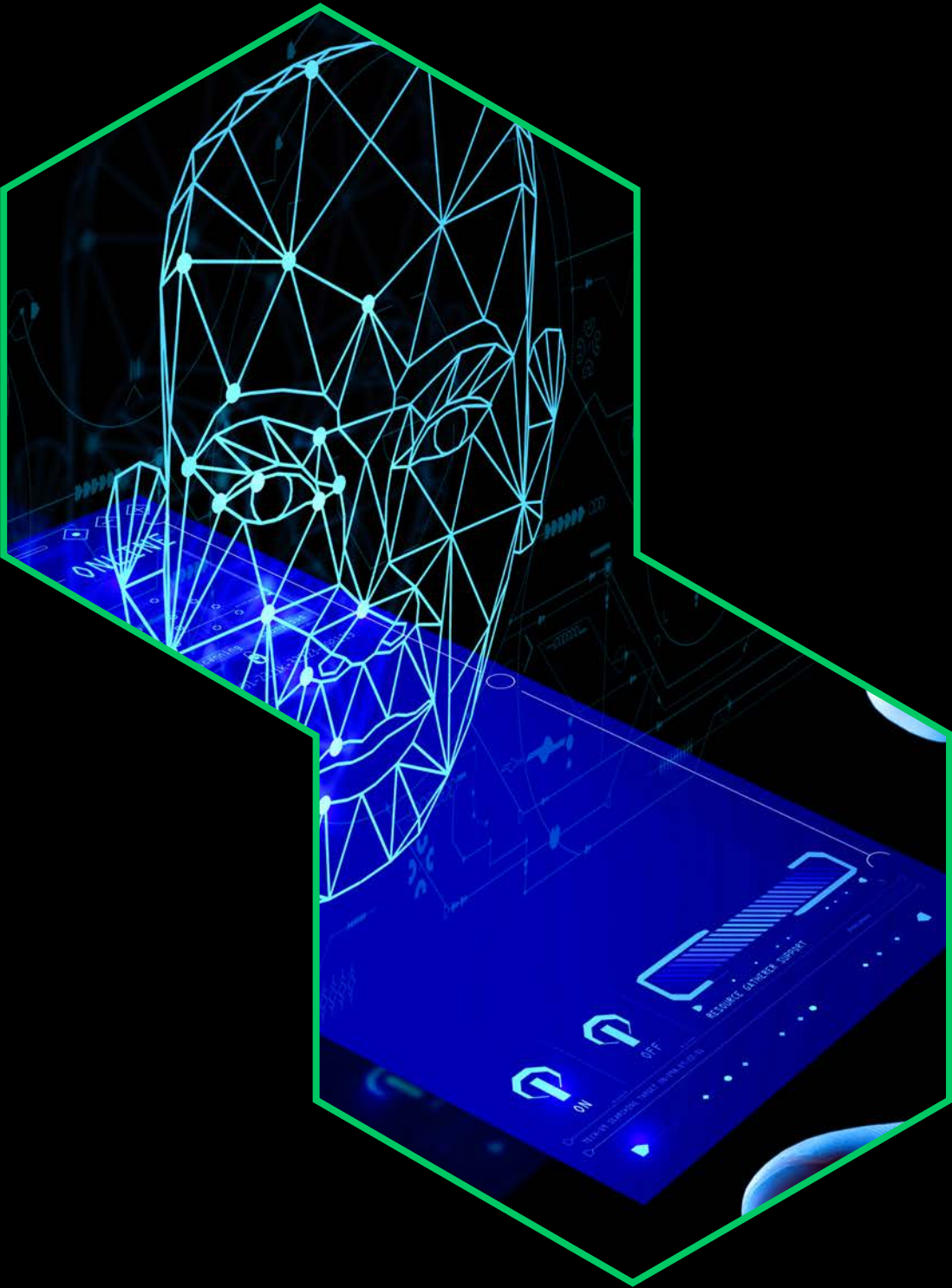
MIDNIGHT PATROL

China is cracking down on gaming addiction, limiting under-18s to just one hour of play on Fridays and weekends, from 8 to 9 p.m. Chinese gaming giant Tencent is enforcing the curfew via a facial recognition system called "Midnight Patrol." The system scans users' faces to identify minors who are playing video games late into the night, then boots them off the platform.



SURVEILLANCE SUNGLASSES

With Facebook's smart Ray-Ban sunglasses, you can take photos or videos hands-free. The stylish specs feature a front-mounted camera with a discreet LED light that switches on when a video is being recorded. Regulators worry that the light is a little too discreet, however, making it easy for Ray-Ban wearers to record without others noticing.



WFH SURVEILLANCE

Surveillance tech is making its way into remote workers' homes. Teleperformance—one of the world's largest call center companies whose clients include Amazon, Apple, and Uber—recently issued a contract that asks employees to have cameras installed near their at-home workspace. They must also agree to sharing data and images of any family members who live with them, including minors. But Teleperformance isn't the only company keeping a closer eye on its workers. According to a 2020 report by the Joint Research Centre, online searches for "how to monitor employees while working from home" increased by 1,705% in April compared to the year before.⁵⁸

ROBOCOP

Police officers might not catch everything, but robots certainly can. Last September, a robot named Xavier was deployed to keep an eye on Singapore's Toa Payoh Central neighborhood as part of a three-week trial. The robot came equipped with four wheels and seven 360-degree cameras, allowing it to alert officers about "undesirable social behaviors" in real-time. Singapore currently has about 90,000 police cameras, a number set to double by 2030.⁵⁹



DATA RUSH

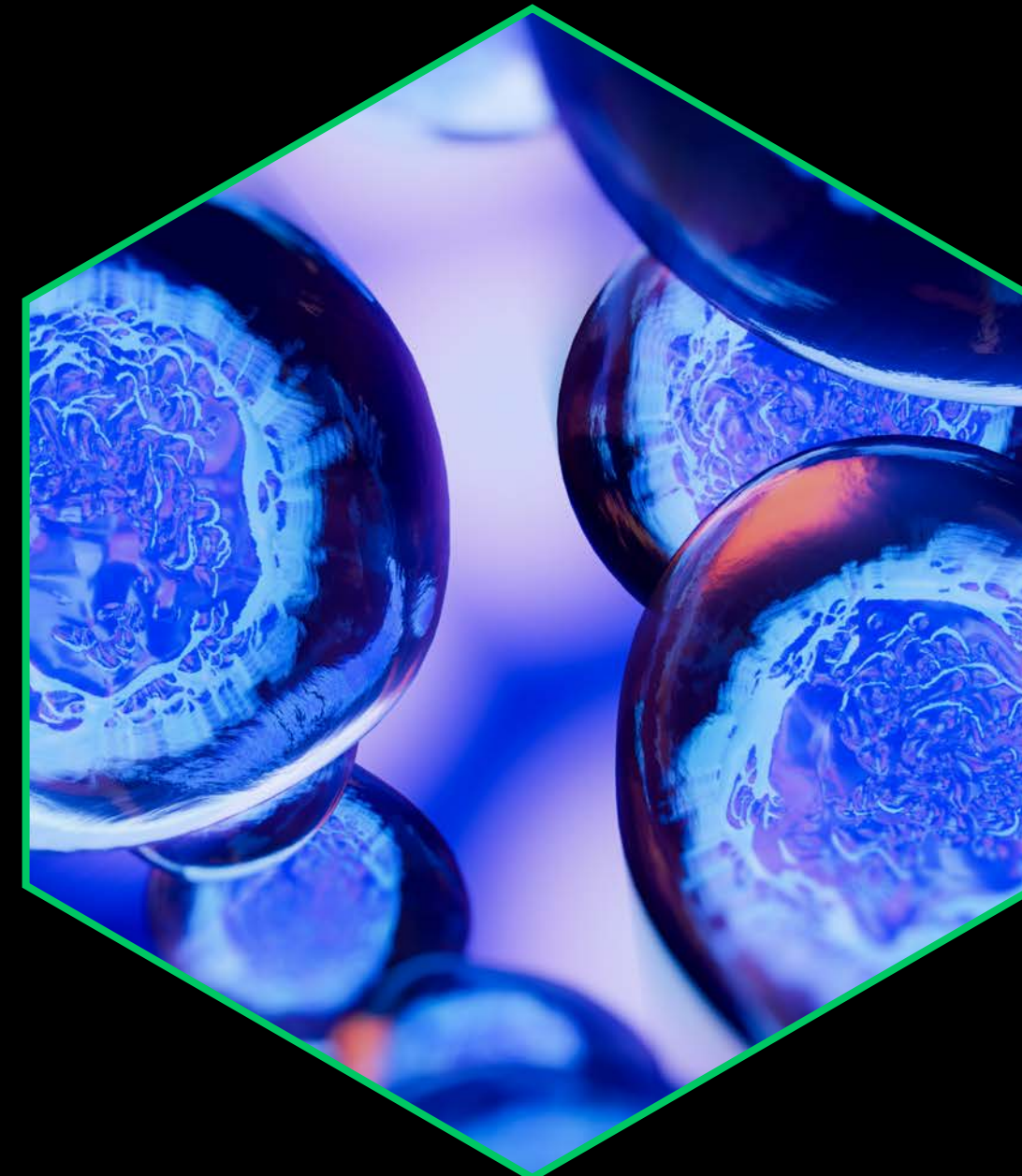
The data rush is underway, and everyone's in fierce competition to get their share. Savvy users are cashing in on their data exhaust. Governments are investing billions in data systems that know us better than we know ourselves. And businesses are banking on data mining as the path to prosperity. As data's value skyrockets, we'll see the end of unchecked data grabs and vague permissions, and the start of a more formal data exchange economy.

DATA FOR DOLLARS

Datacy is one of several emerging startups helping people protect and profit from their online data. The tool allows users to collect, manage, anonymize, and sell their data for 85% of the resulting revenue, while Datacy takes 15%. In turn, businesses get better, more ethically sourced consumer insights.

PRECISE INSURANCE

Personal data is replacing traditional factors that once determined your insurance rate. In the Netherlands, private health insurers such as A.S.R. Vitality and Menzis offer plans where customers hand over health data from their smartphone or wearable in exchange for points or gift cards. The more steps you take, for example, the lower your premium. Tesla is taking the concept even further with insurance based on "real-time driving behavior." The product, which is currently only available in two U.S. states, uses in-car features to evaluate your premium based on your actual driving. Hard braking, aggressive turning, and forward collision warnings are just a few of the metrics taken into account. According to the automaker, drivers with the safest scores could save between 30% to 60%.



DNA NFT

Last year, Harvard Medical professor George Church auctioned off his DNA as an NFT. The NFT encoded the digital location of his full genome, and was depicted as a high-res artistic representation of his DNA and likeness. While proceeds from the sale were donated to rare-disease research, Church's larger goal was to highlight how blockchain technology can help people realize the value of their own genetic information.

PAPERLESS GOVERNMENT

Dubai is the first government in the world to go 100% paperless—an important milestone in its smart city roadmap. No more paper means wider use of digital identity and electronic signature services, as well as improvements in the 130+ smart city services available through the DubaiNow app.

CLOUD'S CARBON TRACKER

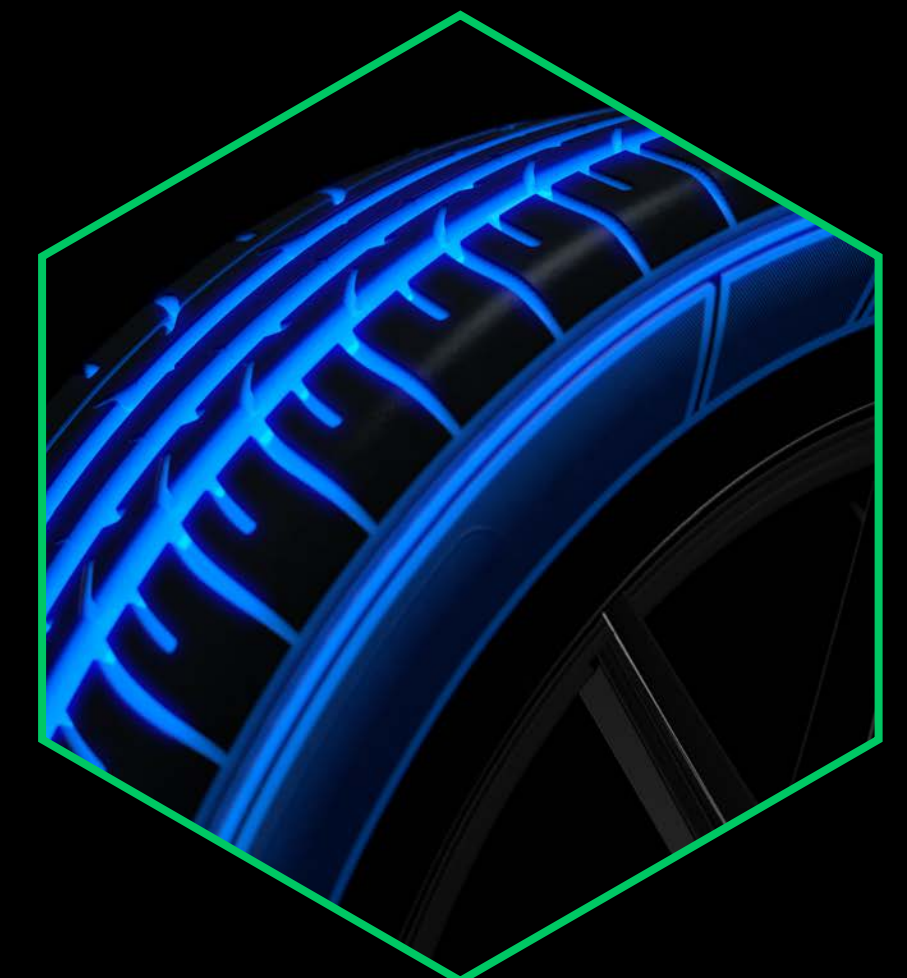
Google Cloud is going green(er). The platform's recently released Carbon Footprint feature will show businesses the gross carbon emissions linked to their Cloud usage. Organizations can break the data down by project, product, and region, then use those insights for reporting, internal audits, and carbon reduction efforts. The feature will also nudge clients to delete unused apps.

DATA VENDING MACHINE

Accenture has created the first vending machine where you pay with personal data. The machine is intended for B2B environments and allows users to purchase items by completing a questionnaire or providing their contact information. For example, you can buy a smoothie with your email address, a snack by answering a few questions, or AirPods by filling out a survey.

SMART TIRES

"Think of it like a Fitbit for the tire." That's how Goodyear's chief technology officer describes the company's new smart tires. The SightLine tires have internal sensors that pick up information about road temperature, tire pressure, traction, and vehicle acceleration. Goodyear can then sell this data to governments looking to improve road infrastructure, or to logistics companies looking to optimize their fleet's operations. The data also provides drivers with real-time analytics that can predict breakdowns and maintenance needs.





MOOD GEISTING

ASICS MIND UPLIFTER

ASICS is launching the first live study into how movement impacts the mind. The company's "Mind Uplifter" tool analyzes an individual's face before and after exercising, then asks them a series of questions to gauge their overall mood. The data will feed into an interactive World Uplift Map that shows how sport is boosting the collective mood of cities, nations, and the world as a whole. According to their preliminary research, people who went on a 20-minute run experienced a 16% increase in calmness and a 13% increase in alertness.⁶⁰

DEPARTMENT STORE FOR THE MIND

Why shop by category when you can shop by mood? The Department Store for the Mind is an online shop that allows you to browse products according to how you're feeling in the moment, whether that be vulnerable, curious, playful, or even unhinged. Collections of products include First Aid for the Mind, which is designed to help with a crisis of confidence, the Nature Collection, which explores how the natural world can soothe and stimulate the mind, and Modern Living, which is a range of household objects designed to help people live more fully in the moment. The site's creator, Sophie Howarth, hopes it "encourages more of us to see the complexity of our minds as a wonder to be celebrated, not a problem to be solved."

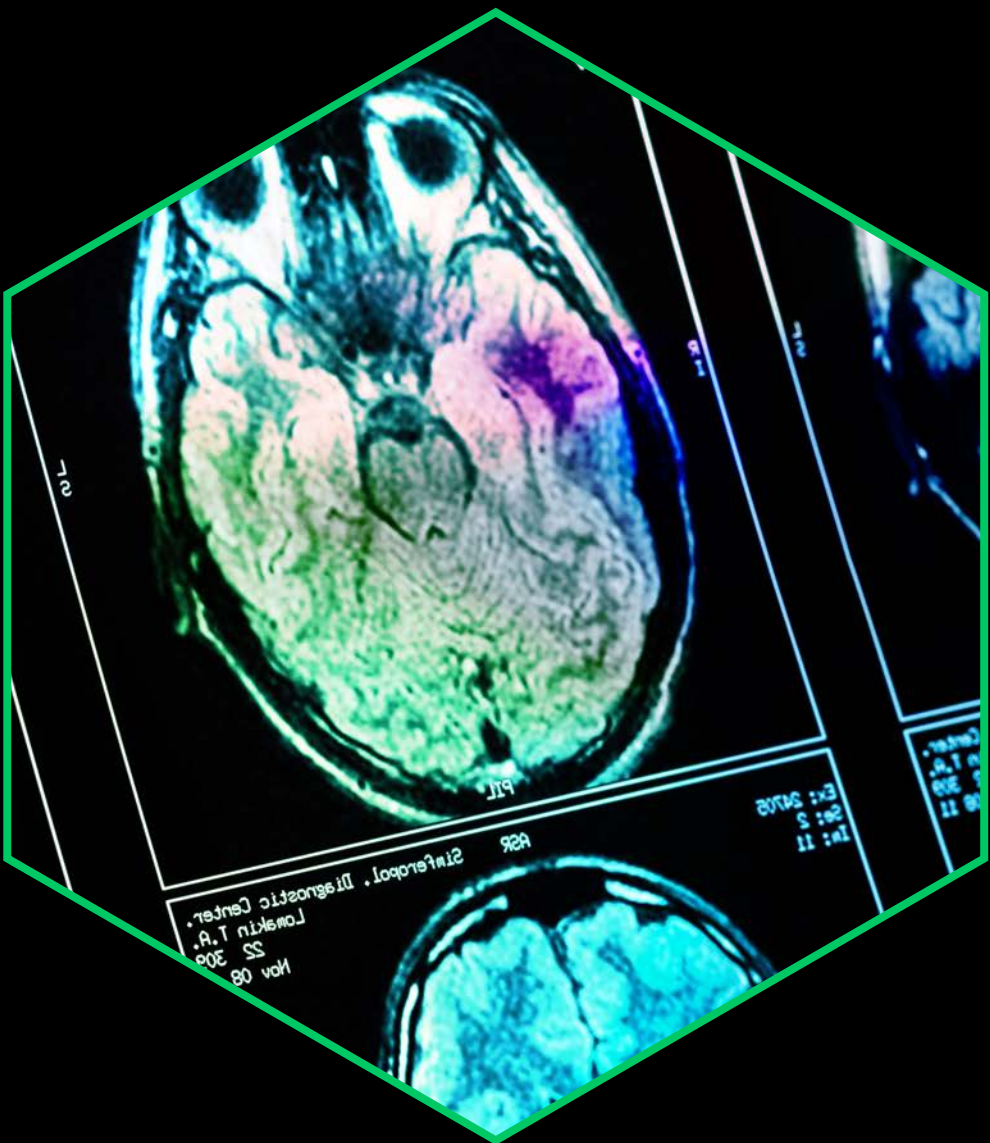
Human emotions are being analyzed and enhanced in entirely new ways. A modern wave of mood-boosting products and experiences are promising to make us calmer, happier, or even euphoric. And the emerging field of emotion AI is giving us—and the brands we buy into—advanced insight into how we feel. From functional fragrances to emotion-monitoring wearables, the market for mood modulation is booming.

SPEECH RECOGNITION CONTROVERSY

Spotify is under fire for a patent that would allow them to monitor users' speech. Through speech recognition technology, Spotify could identify someone's mood, gender, age, and whether they're alone or with a group of people—then recommend music based on that data. News of the patent sparked serious concerns about emotional manipulation and discrimination, prompting nearly 200 musicians to sign an open letter asking Spotify never to use or profit from the patent. The streaming giant has since responded to the letter, promising that they "have no plans to do so."

SCENT-ENABLED VR THERAPY

Health and wellness company Ketamine One has partnered with OVR Technology to allow people to virtually experience scents. The idea is that triggering scents during VR experiences will stimulate patients' memories, serving as a tool for cognitive and behavioral therapy. The "INHALE Wellness Platform" technology also makes VR more immersive, helping ease stress and promote deeper relaxation.



MOOD-DETECTING TECH

Apple and UCLA are teaming up on a three-year study that uses iPhone and Apple Watch data to detect mood. Researchers will monitor people's vital signs, movements, speech, sleep, and typing habits—including the frequency of typos—in order to detect stress, depression, and anxiety. Apple says the research could mark a big win for mental health, but some scientists aren't so sure. Critics warn that emotion AI infringes on our privacy and has a long way to go before it's accurate.

PSYCHEDELIC ESCAPES

A growing number of travelers are joining psychedelic retreats in pursuit of a life-changing trip. Silo Wellness offers a series of mushroom-assisted journeys across Jamaica. Costa Rica's Soltara Healing Center hosts an ayahuasca ceremony led by native Shipibo healers. And in Vancouver, the Journeyman Collective helps business leaders find purpose through guided mushroom retreats.





ODD- YSSEYS

A world exhausted by rationality is embracing the absurd. With so few roads left untraveled and questions left unanswered, we're increasingly seeking amusement in the unknown. From alt-TikTok to middle-of-nowhere expeditions, our quest for escapism will push us further into obscure and uncharted territory—giving rise to alternative forms of art, culture, and entertainment along the way.

ABSURDIST SOCIAL

For many young people, the weirder the social media rabbit hole the better. Alt-TikTok—the antithesis of mainstream or “Straight TikTok”—is where artful, absurdist, and irreverent content shines. Think trippy animations, dark humor, satire, and lots of surrealism. A similar love of the obscure is also carrying over to Instagram, with 29% of Gen Z respondents expecting to see more absurdist humor hit the platform this year.⁶¹

HUMAN ZOO

After nearly two years of limited vacation and lots of staying in, travelers are desperate for eccentric experiences that give them something to write home about. One such experience is Bill Bensley's sustainable “human zoo” hotel concept. The property—opening in China in 2023—will act as a wildlife sanctuary, letting wild animals roam free while humans stay in cage-like rooms covering just 5% of the land.

STORYLIVING

The metaverse is set to open up our imaginations in entirely new ways. Vicki Dobbs Beck and Siobhan Reddy, two creators of the VR experience “Star Wars: Tales From Galaxy's Edge,” see an opportunity for the metaverse to turn storytelling into “storyliving.” The creative duo focuses on placing the player at the center of the experience and letting them drive the narrative forward. “By addressing those things that are at the core of the metaverse—the desire to engage, create, share—VR offered us a means of stepping inside of Star Wars that never existed before,” Dobbs Beck explained.

MAXIMALISM'S MOMENT

From home design to personal style, people are trading a stale minimalist aesthetic for a refreshingly bold look. Pinterest Predicts 2022 data shows a surge in searches for rainbow fashion, tooth gems, space buns, and crystal eye makeup.⁶² Over 35,000 Airbnb listings now include maximalism keywords like “velvet,” “mixed patterns,” and “animal prints” in their descriptions.⁶³ And luxury fashion houses like Louis Vuitton, Fendi, and Hermès are all experimenting with playful graphics, color-clashing combinations, and psychedelic prints in their latest collections and brand spaces.

SPACE RACE

2022 is set to be the first year in which more people go to space as paying passengers than as government employees, with both Blue Origin and Virgin Galactic promising “regular, predictable, reliable” space flights this year. And while space tourism will be reserved for the elite for the foreseeable future, that's not stopping everyday people from saving up. New data from Ally Bank shows that Americans have already started setting money aside for zero-gravity vacations, designating funding buckets with names like “space vacations,” “a trip to space,” and “SpaceX.”⁶⁴

HIGH-SPIRITED CINEMA

After years of naturalism, brutality, and quiet subtlety dominating the big screen, an international appetite for excitement and intense emotion is setting in. “The major films of 2021 encapsulate this snapback against the downbeat sensibilities of the past year and a half, emphasizing joy and melodrama,” notes The Hollywood Reporter.⁶⁵ As people look to cinema as a means of catharsis, we can expect the big hits of 2022 to both delight and transport us.

GET LOST

The new luxury vacation isn't about lounging poolside, it's about being pushed outside your comfort zone. Premium travel firm Black Tomato is satisfying this thirst for adventure with Get Lost—an experience where participants are dropped in the middle of a remote landscape and challenged to find their way out within a given time period. While the package has been around for a few years, Black Tomato co-founder Tom Marchant said the concept “struck a chord” among people seeking unforgettable experiences during the pandemic.





PLAY IT *FORWARD*

A society done sitting on the sidelines is embracing play as a strategy for real-world progress. In-game therapy sessions and prescription video games are making mental health services more accessible. Gamified education is giving complex topics an interactive spin. And innovation challenges are crowdsourcing solutions to some of our most pressing issues. The change-maker generation is getting its head in the game.

SYNTHESIS SCHOOL

Synthesis School is teaching kids critical thinking, collaboration, and decision-making skills through a medium that comes naturally to them: games. Students join a cohort that meets online once a week to play novel, complex games and simulations. The sessions are moderated by an adult facilitator, whose main role is to encourage collaboration and rigorous analytical thinking. Perhaps the most notable detail is that the Synthesis model is based on games played at Ad Strata, the lab school located on the SpaceX campus. CEO of Synthesis, Chrisman Frank, says the play-based school is aiming to “cultivate human ingenuity at scale.”

THERAPEUTIC PLAY

Tovertafel—Dutch for “magic table”—is a popular therapeutic play system designed for people in the mid-to-late stages of dementia. The game projects light onto a table while sensors capture the players’ hand movements, allowing them to interact with different images. While it’s not a complete cure for dementia, it could help slow the progression of the disease.

AI BIAS CHALLENGE

Calling all hackers. After users accused Twitter of racist image cropping, the platform conducted internal research and openly acknowledged the flaw—noting that their image-cropping algorithm favored white individuals over Black individuals 4% of the time, and women over men 8% of the time. After making updates to the algorithm, Twitter invited coders to take a closer look and identify any remaining biases. Contestants in the “algorithmic bias bounty competition” received points based on the severity of the harms they uncovered, with the winner taking home \$3,500.

GAMING FOR GOOD

Digital games are making a real-world difference. TikTok teamed up with Feeding America to launch Garden of Good, an in-app mini game where players grow and care for crops. For every pound of virtual crop harvested, TikTok donated \$0.10 toward hunger relief efforts. Similarly, The Eleanor Cook Foundation is fighting malnutrition through a game called LifePack. Every \$0.25 raised through in-game purchases provides one lifesaving Ready to Use Therapeutic Food (RUTF) packet to a child in need. Thanks to LifePack, over 92,000 RUTF packets have been delivered thus far.

ROBLOX.EDU

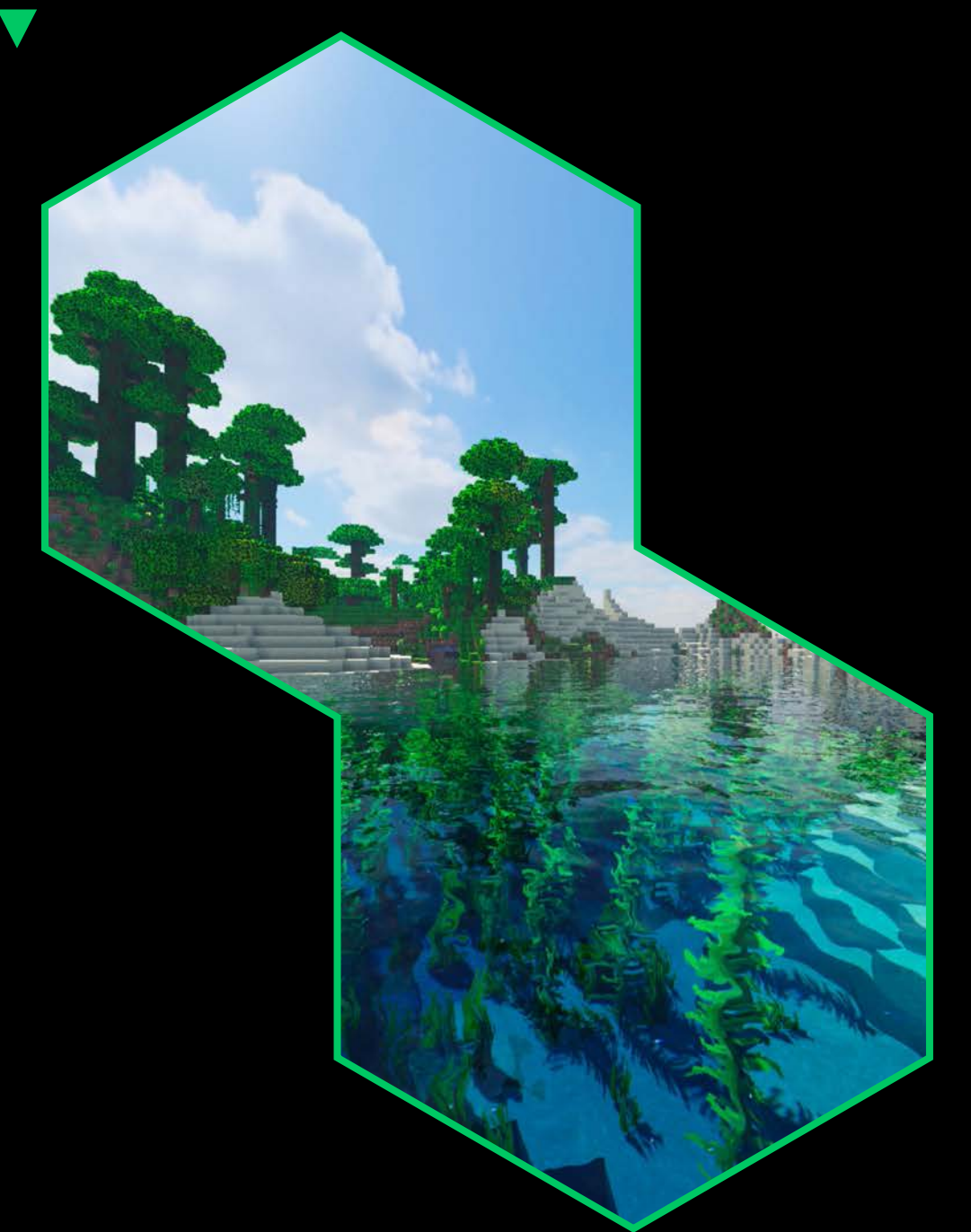
The metaverse is set to have us trading textbooks for video games. Roblox has invested \$10 million to develop three educational video games for middle-school, high school, and college classrooms. One game will teach robotics, another will focus on space exploration, and the third will explore careers in computer science, engineering, and biomedical science.

TRAIN-BUILDING SIMULATOR

NIMBY Rails is a train-building simulator that lets you build the transit system of your dreams. NIMBY stands for “Not In My Backyard,” a term for people opposed to public transportation systems being built in their area. The game allows users to build transit systems on an open source version of Google Maps, as well as set ticket prices, train speed, schedules, and countless other variables. If it sounds complicated, that’s the point. The game’s developer, Carlos Carrasco, wanted to blur the lines between a game and real world design tool—giving people with strong opinions on rail projects a way to test their own ideas. Looking forward, such detail-oriented simulations could help settle actual transportation policy disputes.

MINECRAFT NATURAL DISASTER PREP

Australia-based NRMA Insurance is using Minecraft to teach kids about the importance of preparing for natural disasters. In “Climate Warriors,” players save wildlife, evacuate communities, and proactively install sprinkler systems. The game is based on actual NRMA Insurance data and climate change research, which predicts that extreme weather events will become more frequent and damaging as global temperatures rise.





OPTIMIZED ANATOMY

A desire for control has us taking biology into our own hands. From the all-natural to the ultra high-tech, a growing category of treatments and products are helping people hack their way to a healthier, smarter, younger version of themselves. In the business of self-optimization, no upgrade is out of reach.

ALTOS LABS

Altos Labs is setting out to reverse the aging process. The Silicon Valley startup is researching biological reprogramming technology, a way to rejuvenate cells that could potentially prolong human life. With at least \$270 million in funding and backing from high-profile investors including Jeff Bezos, the quest for eternal youth is on.

VIOLENT BEAUTY

Surgical cosmetic procedures have increased by 5% globally in the past year, with women accounting for 86% of all procedures.⁶⁶ And yet, little is said about the damaging side effects that plastic surgery has on a person's physical and mental health. A recent New York Times article refers to this as the "violence of beauty culture," noting that "five minutes at Sephora is all you need to grasp the ever-multiplying categories of things we can do to improve our bodies."⁶⁷



BRAIN COMPUTER INTERFACES

Brain computer interfaces—devices that directly connect your brain to AI—are unlocking new possibilities for disabled people. A wireless transmitter developed by BrainGate allowed a paralyzed man to successfully point, click and type on a computer using only his mind. And Elon Musk recently announced that Neuralink hopes to start implanting computer chips into spinal cord injury patients as soon as this year, pending FDA approval. While such initial use cases are applaudable, however, many are fearful of a future where BCIs are available to the masses.

NOOTROPIC BEVERAGES

Out with the sugary energy drinks, in with the all-natural nootropic beverages. The fast-growing category describes drinks that boost brain function, whether by sharpening focus, enhancing memory, boosting creativity, or improving alertness. Rising demand for these better-for-you drinks is expected to catapult the global functional beverages market to \$216.7 billion by 2028.⁶⁸

TECH TWEAKING

Technology is increasingly being used to solve problems that were caused by technology in the first place. For instance, Berlin startup Dopavision is building an app to fight myopia in children—a vision condition that's ironically becoming more common due to an uptick in screen time. Another example is Amazfit's earbuds designed to improve posture and remind people to step away from their screens and move their body. And then there's Neurable's Eten headphones, which monitor brain activity to figure out how and when your brain focuses best, then automatically mute digital notifications when you're in peak performance mode.

CONSUMER EXOSKELETONS

Wearable robotic exoskeletons—once reserved for laborers, injured people, the elderly, or the disabled—are now being used to boost athletic performance for the able-bodied. Chinese company Enhanced Robotics has created the Sportsmate 5, soon to be the first consumer exoskeleton ever. The futuristic wearable can help you run faster or longer without getting too fatigued, and uses added torque to ramp up your bodyweight workouts. If all goes according to plan, the first devices will be shipped this May with a price tag of \$1,458.

ANTI-AGING APP

Humanity is a breakthrough health app claiming to "add years of fully functional, healthy life." The app tracks your heart rate, step rate, sleep, diet, and activity levels to determine your "rate of aging" and your "biological age," then compares your personal data to real-world data from biobanks. Based on those inputs, Humanity suggests ways to slow aging, like going for a run, meditating, or getting more sleep.

QUANTIFIED LIFE

Wearables are fueling an obsession with 24/7 quantification. From smartwatches that reward us for burning calories to headbands that track our sleep patterns, once-mindless actions are now personal scores we're determined to beat. Deloitte Global predicts that 320 million consumer health and wellness wearable devices will ship worldwide in 2022. By 2024, that figure will likely reach 440 million units.⁶⁹



LIQUID REALITY

FRICTIONLESS (OVER)SPENDING

The fintech revolution has made paying as pain-free as possible. The easier it is to pay, however, the easier it is to overspend. One experiment found that those who pay by cash overestimated their expenses by 9%, while those who paid through contactless means underestimated how much they spent by 5%.⁷⁰ Add in complications of cryptocurrencies, digital wallets, “buy now pay later” programs, and one-click purchases, and the bad money habits get even worse. Looking forward, reintroducing moments of friction will help us keep our spending in check. Imagine, for example, if your digital wallet felt lighter as you spent money.

VR HARASSMENT

Digital watchdogs are expressing concern over rising harassment on platforms like VRChat, Oculus, Echo VR, Fortnite, and Roblox. Despite several players reporting accounts of racism, homophobia, and sexual harassment, moderation of AR and VR-powered worlds remains scarce. Of course, online misconduct is not new, but users say that the sense of presence in VR makes harassment feel more “intense” compared to toxic behavior on social media. The problem is stirring up tricky conversations about legal accountability for the actions of our avatars.

On/off-line blur is becoming our new reality. Shared virtual spaces are upending old ways of living, earning, and connecting. And digital doppelgängers are shattering the limits of self-expression and identity. But as all things physical dissipate, it will become increasingly difficult to distinguish where the real world ends and the metaverse begins. In a progressively fluid and seemingly limitless world, tangibility, intentional friction, and boundaries will keep us grounded.

VIRTUAL LAND RUSH

The metaverse real-estate market is heating up. NFT land sales topped \$100 million in a single week of November 2021 alone.⁷¹ And just two weeks later, video game giant Atari purchased a plot of virtual real estate for \$4.3 million—the most expensive metaverse property sale ever. So, what exactly is this nonexistent land good for? Some possibilities include building out properties just as you would in Minecraft, monetizing your metaverse land through ads, hosting virtual events like concerts or parties, creating a space for brands and creators to sell their work, or developing a blockchain-based game.

DEEPPAKES FOR HIRE

Deepfakes are overhauling the way digital content is produced. One startup taking the technology mainstream is Hour One, which uses people’s likeness to create AI-voiced characters that appear in various videos for organizations around the world. Through the service, clients can choose a face from Hour One’s pool of “characters,” upload the text they want it to say, and get back a video of what looks like a real person delivering that script. Hundreds of videos can be generated in minutes—no film crew, study technicians, or live acting required. While certainly efficient, however, some are worried about what deepfake content production will mean for the future of work.

FORTNITE PARTY WORLDS

Video games are becoming the new social hotspots. In the new Fortnite “Party Worlds,” players can hang out, make friends, and play mini-games—all without any of the usual combat. Party Worlds launched with an amusement park and a late night lounge, but future spaces will be developed based on user submissions. To be accepted, the spaces must encourage social interaction and “have a high focus on self-expression.”

ADVANCED HAPTICS

As haptic technology advances, it won’t be long before we can “feel” our way through virtual worlds. Meta recently revealed a prototype for haptic gloves that would add the sensation of touch to VR experiences—meaning picking up objects and holding hands in the metaverse will feel pretty darn close to the real thing. Meanwhile, Spanish company Owo is taking immersive gaming to the extreme with haptic vests. The skintight vests are fitted with electrodes that stimulate your muscles to mimic common gaming scenarios such as falling through the air or being shot.



ALTER EGO

In the U.S., contestants on Fox TV’s newest singing show, “Alter Ego,” never actually show their real faces. Instead, they perform backstage while motion capture technology creates their dream digital avatar—allowing them to appear how they’ve always wanted to be seen. “I know a lot of people who feel a lot more accepted in the digital realm, I know I do,” said Grimes, one of the show’s celebrity judges.

METAVVERSE MARRIAGE

At the end of last year, a U.S. couple made history with the first fully virtual wedding staged by Virbela. The bride, groom, and their guests all attended as avatars, and while not legally recognized, the ceremony demonstrated how future metaverse weddings will shatter the limits of creativity, cost, and reality. Think NFT gift registries, guest lists in the thousands, or even destination weddings on the moon.





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TO THE FUTURE WITH US



ABOUT *US*

Backslash is a cultural intelligence unit powered by a global network of over 300 Culture Spotters from 70 offices across the TBWA collective. Together, we closely observe and analyze worldwide developments so that TBWA—and our clients—can better understand and anticipate cultural change.

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