

backslash

EDGES

2023

**39 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.

CULTURE IS MORE CHAOTIC THAN EVER

In 2023, culture is introducing a new benchmark for chaos and complexity. We're living in a time of crypto fraud and deepfakes of dead celebrities. "Permacrisis," "goblin mode," and "gaslighting" were deemed 2022's less-than-inspiring words of the year. Twitter is in absolute turmoil. And even Marie Kondo, the queen of tidying up, has admitted that her house is now a mess.

Not only are the headlines hectic in nature—they're also coming and going at a nauseating pace. The social media stage has turned everything into a "-core" and made it nearly impossible for subcultures to stay subcultures. And as soon as something gets big enough to feel relevant, Gen Z decides it's no longer cool and moves onto the next thing. In short, it's becoming harder to decipher what's actually worth paying attention to, and all too easy to fall into the trap of "vibe shifts," aesthetics, and buzzy terminology.

EDGES OFFER A STRATEGIC BLUEPRINT

BACKSLASH

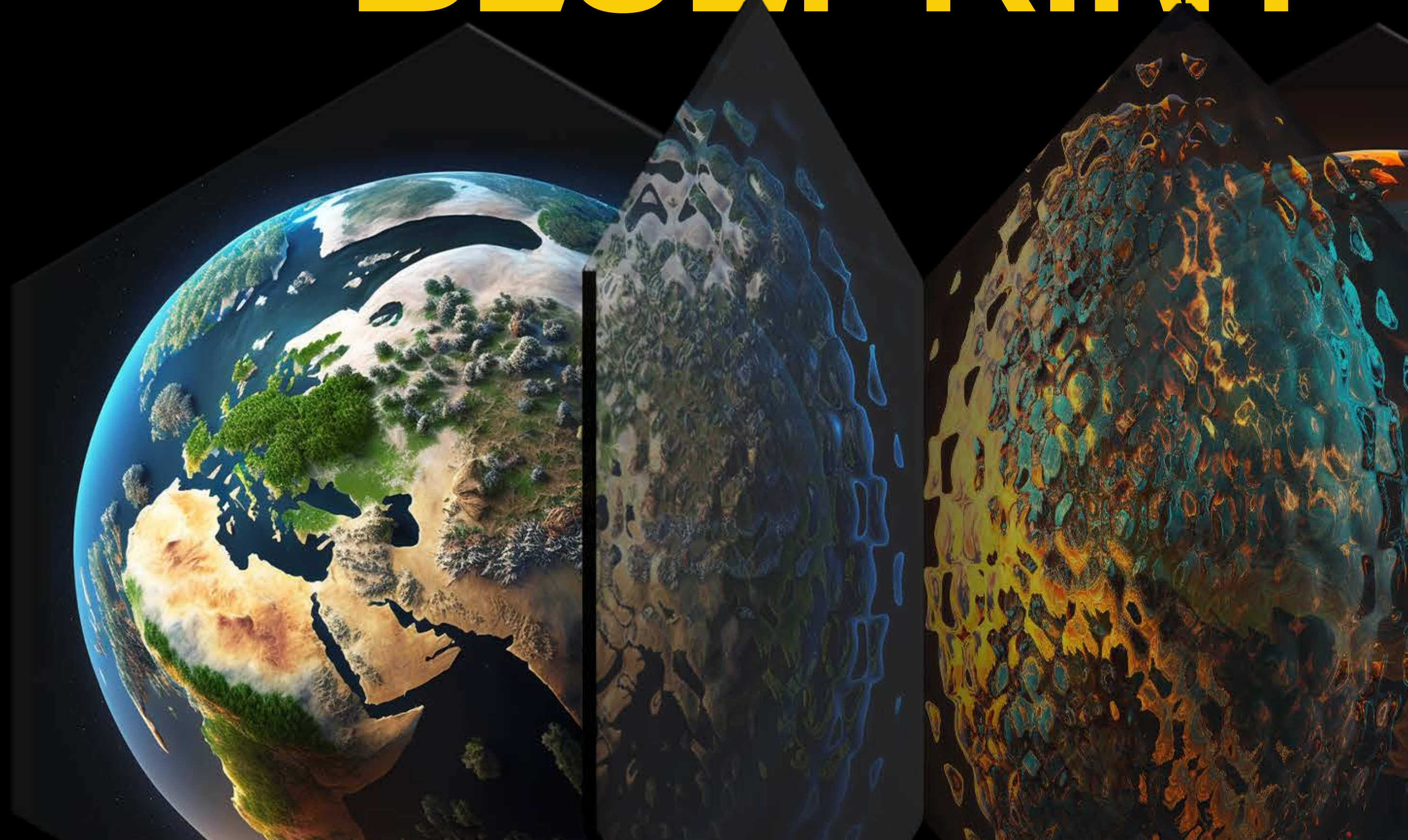


2023

In the face of cultural complexity, our Edges offer a way to codify the chaos and map out a blueprint for the future. They also provide plenty of reasons to be optimistic about the year ahead, as you'll see in this year's 39 cultural shifts. A push to redistribute power at scale (pg. 78); growing calls for less polarization and more understanding (pg. 30); a refreshing resurgence of play (pg. 60); and a worldwide movement to future-proof our cities (pg. 42) are just a few of the Edges pointing to a very promising 2023.

When looking across this year's Edges, you'll also find that major topics like climate change, mental health, and tech backlash now sit at the root of several separate but related shifts. Each of these conversations have become seismic pressures underpinning the rest. For instance, Crisis Hacking, Next-Gen Naturalists, and Lab-Made World illustrate how we're adapting to resource scarcity. Death Undone, Mind Maintenance, Money Out Loud, and Sexual Liberation together tell a larger story of cultural taboo toppling. And Artificial Creativity and Liquid Reality point to new debates around what's "real" in an AI-dominated world.

Contradictions between our Edges provide a different perspective: a plotting of cultural battlegrounds. Take Stealth Mode (rising demand for privacy) versus Helicopter Tech (the normalization of surveillance) as an example of the push and pull between the risks and benefits that come with increased tracking. Or, look to Optimized Anatomy and Death Undone as a nod to the battle between our desire to cheat death and embrace it. In matching, mixing, and remixing these cultural shifts, you can uncover even more compelling narratives.



WHAT'S A BRAND TO DO?

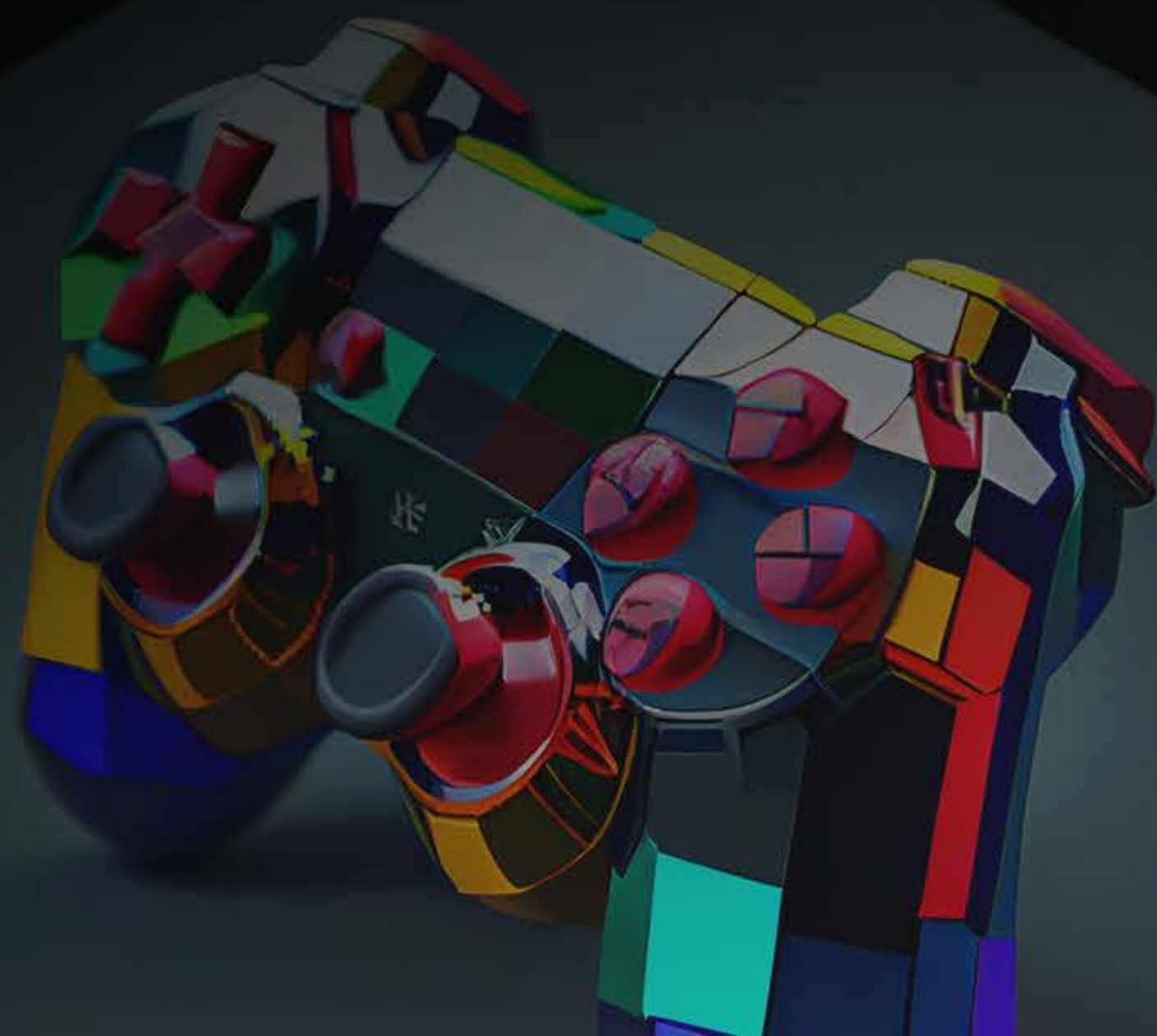
So, what are brands to make of all this overlap and incongruity? Just as Edges are multilayered and ever-evolving, so too are the opportunities for businesses. We see this as a positive. The nuance means there are several ways to solve a problem, and countless possibilities for collaboration.

To help start the conversation, we teamed up with NEXT, TBWA's global innovation practice, to include provocations for the future of brand experiences. See the "WHAT'S NEXT" section of each Edge for specific calls to action, then consider what they might mean for your particular business.

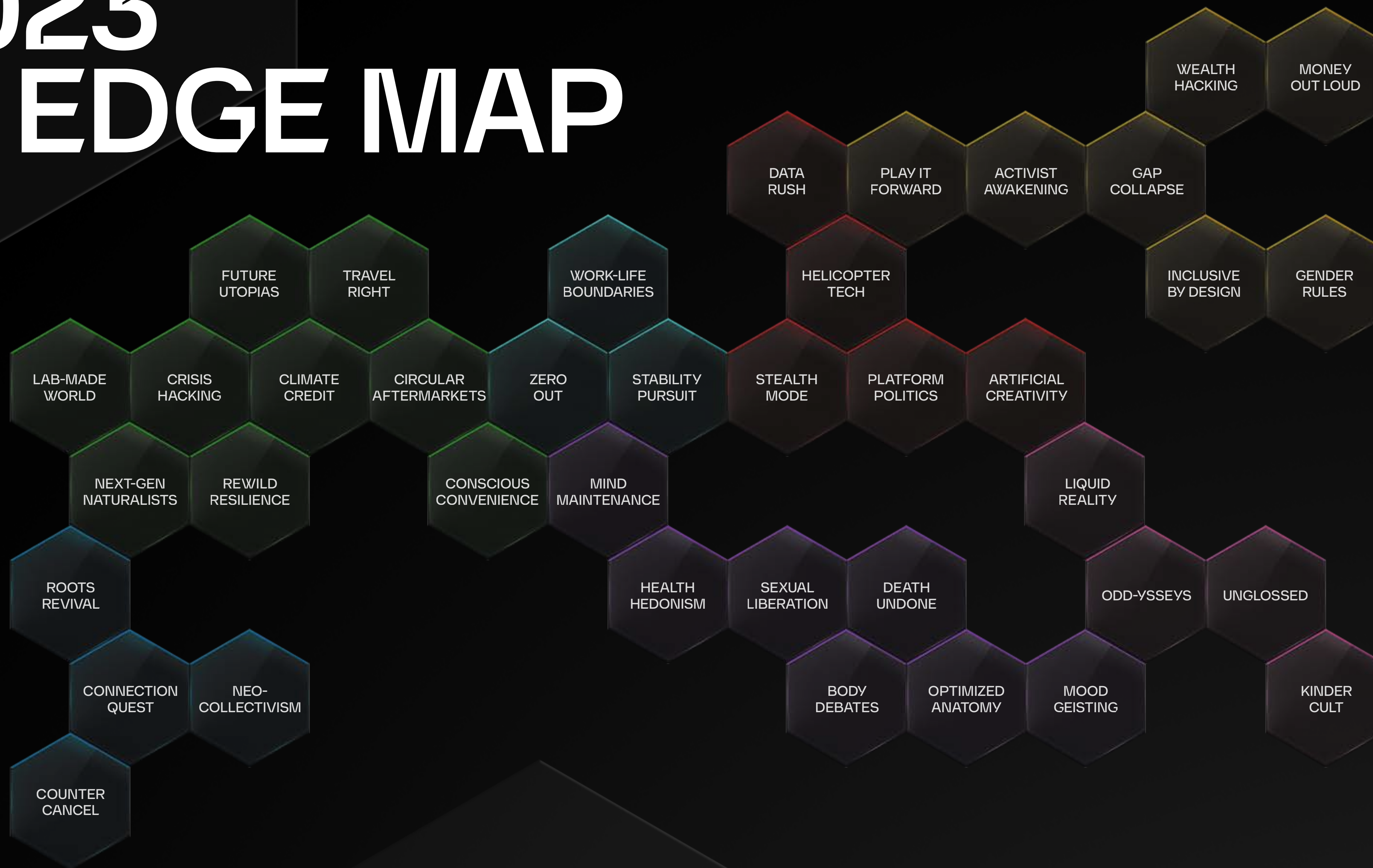
With all 39 Edges, there's a massive opportunity to shape our shared future — a feat that comes with great excitement, and even greater responsibility. So go forth, innovate wisely, and let Edges be your guide to the year ahead.

A NOTE ON IMAGERY...

All of this year's images were generated by text-to-image AI Midjourney. All of the prompts and page layouts were generated by our 100% human design team.



2023 EDGE MAP



ACTIVIST AWAKENING

BACKSLASH



2023

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.

ACTIVIST AWAKENING

WORLD CUP CONTROVERSY

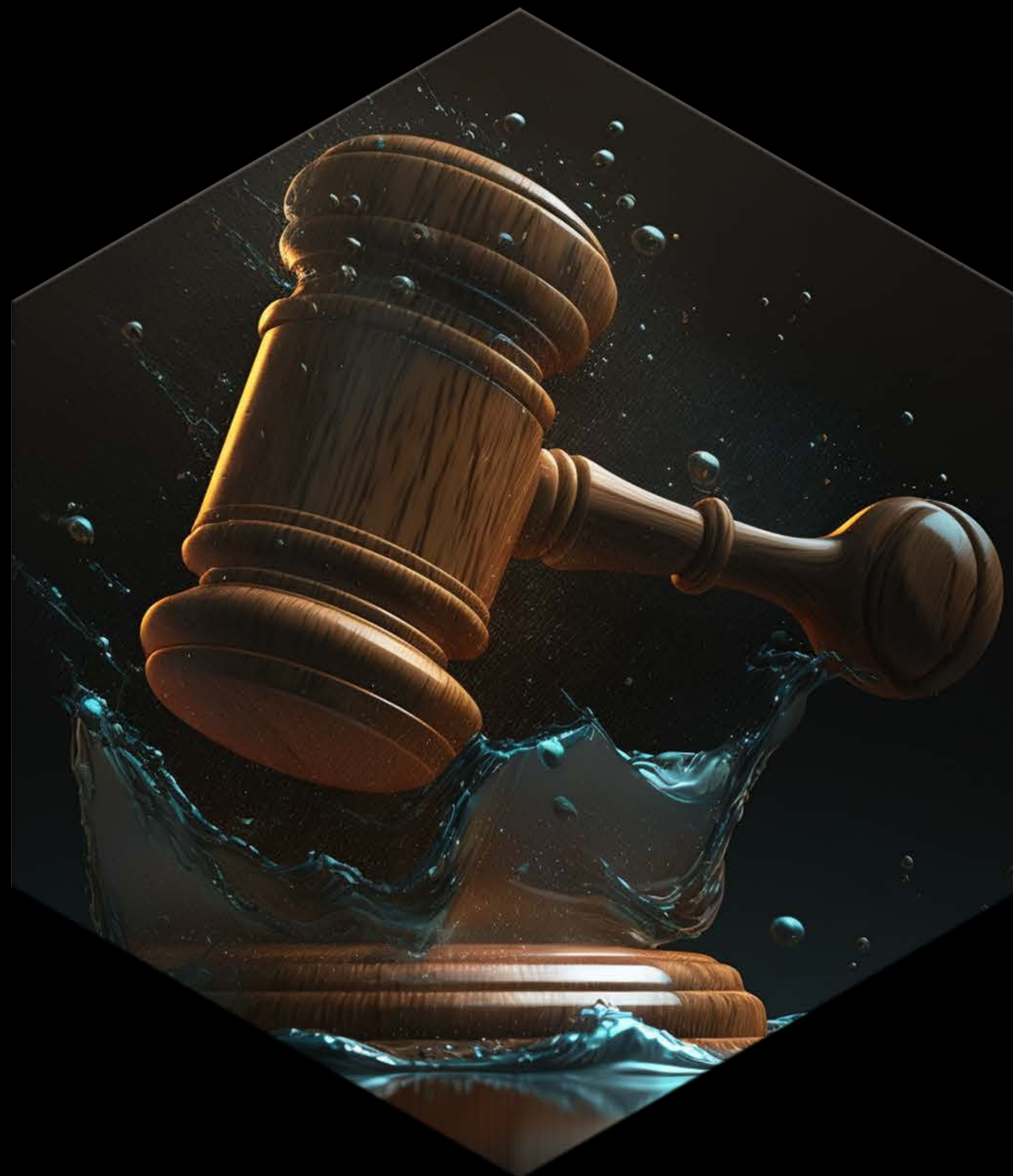
Players weren't just scoring points to win at the World Cup in Qatar, they were also scoring points for human rights globally. Denmark wore black jerseys, the color of mourning, to honor the migrant workers who died while building the World Cup stadiums. Welsh players flew rainbow flags at their training camp to call out Qatar's anti-LGBTQ policies. And the Australian Socceroos shared a video collectively denouncing Qatar's World Cup "suffering" and calling for greater reforms. As sports become increasingly politicized, players and countries will be expected to use their influence to bring social issues center field.

Worldwide, 61% of people trust businesses above government, media, and even NGOs—giving brands an advantage, and the onus, to make positive societal changes.

— Edelman, 2022

CLIMATE COURT

In October, Greta Thunberg made headlines yet again when she joined a group of 600 young adults in suing the Swedish government for insufficient climate policies. The news was just the latest example of how young people are bringing their climate concerns to court. Earlier last year, five people between the ages of 17 and 31 brought a case to the European court of human rights, where they asked their governments to exit an energy charter that protects fossil fuel investors from financial loss, but fails to protect those directly impacted by climate disasters. For these young activists, the concern is that their generation will be impacted most by the climate crisis—yet older generations aren't doing enough to stop it. Over in Australia and New Zealand, this argument has led some lawmakers to push for a lower voting age, meaning 16-year-olds could finally have a say in shaping climate policies. While these lawsuits differ in specifics, one thing remains constant: Gen Z and Millennials are demanding that governments put the planet before corporate profits.



TINDER SAYS CARING IS SEXY

Daters are swiping right on activism. According to Tinder's 2022 Year in Swipe report, 75% of all singles worldwide were looking for partners who are invested in or respectful of social issues. In the U.S. specifically, one of the biggest turnoffs is not voting, with nearly 50% of U.S. singles saying that an unregistered voter is an immediate deal breaker. Once a dating no-no, discussing politics is now a must as daters search for their morally compatible match.

CHINA'S BLANK PAPER PROTESTS

A4 paper got a political rebrand as thousands of people across China took to the streets holding up plain, white sheets of paper in protest of the country's ongoing zero-Covid policy. The protests kicked off after a fire killed ten people who were stuck in an apartment due to lockdown restrictions. But what initially started as a symbol of mourning turned into a widespread display of anger against the Chinese government. According to one protestor, the blank paper is worth a thousand words: "It means 'We are the voiceless, but we are also powerful.'"

ACTIVIST AWAKENING

WOMEN, LIFE, FREEDOM

More borders are dissolving as women and men across the world join Iranians in their [fight](#) against oppressive gendered laws. Sisterhood is showing itself through [viral haircutting](#) and worldwide marches. And with Iranian women silenced, others are using their platform to give the cause a voice. One noteworthy example came from [Joko and Klaas](#)—two of Germany’s biggest entertainers who handed over their Instagram accounts to Iranian activists “forever.” The women hosting the accounts now use the space to share live updates from Iran and educate their combined 2.3 million followers about the movement.

THE TYRE EXTINGUISHERS

SUV owners beware—activists are coming for your tires. A climate activism group called [The Tyre Extinguishers](#) has been going around streets and deflating the tires of SUVs. The group has “disarmed” over 9,000 vehicles since launching in early 2022, and is currently active in the U.K., U.S., Austria, Germany, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Sweden, and New Zealand. The group’s ultimate aim is to make it impossible to own an SUV in urban areas, saying the large vehicles are “unnecessary ‘luxury emissions’ flaunted by the wealthy.” Needless to say, the movement hasn’t gone over well with SUV owners. But the Tyre Extinguishers are firm in their belief that “sabotage to save lives is legitimate and we need more of it.”

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Provide utility:** Social movements need support, not empty platitudes. So don’t just take a stand, engage with the issue and provide the resources and tools needed to provoke action.
- ▶ **Right your wrongs:** Ensure your stance on a topic aligns with or acknowledges your history. As the call for brand reparations intensifies, cause-related actions born from past missteps can be the most powerful of all.
- ▶ **Think like an employee:** Would I want to work at a company that engages in this action, or treats their workers this way? Make sure you are walking the walk.

BRANDS SUPPORTING UKRAINE

With each bomb dropped on Ukraine, more and more companies [pulled out](#) of Russia to make their stance clear. Australian retailers took Russian vodka off their shelves, film studios cancelled movie releases in Russia, and automakers including Volkswagen and Renault halted production and sales in Russia. But boycotting Russian business wasn’t the only way brands showed their support. [Airbnb](#) was quick to act in a different way—setting up a way for people to “book” stays in Ukrainian Airbnbs in order to facilitate direct donations to those living in Ukraine. The brand also pledged to provide short-term housing for 100,000 Ukrainian refugees.

EMPLOYEE ACTIVISM

Employee activism can no longer be ignored. Worker-led protests related to everything from [surveillance](#) to [climate inaction](#) are only getting louder and more public, forcing employers to correct bad behavior or pay the consequences. At the same time, new tools are making it easier for prospective talent to find companies that align with their personal values. Glassdoor recently rolled out [advanced features](#) that allow people to search for jobs by factors such as DEI, LGBTQ-friendly policies, and more—motivating businesses to rethink their activism agenda.

BACKSLASH



2023

ARTIFICIAL CREATIVITY

Creativity is undergoing an AI revolution. Giant leaps in the progression and availability of generative AI tools are driving a shift from purely logical, task-oriented applications to more artful, previously impossible outputs. As AI pushes further into creative industries, culture wars around ownership, value, and definitions of “real” creativity will ensue. Say goodbye to the creative process as you know it.

ARTIFICIAL CREATIVITY



“Creativity has been this last bastion of something that seemed untouchable from robots and AI—a precious process believed to be deeply human. But AI has myth-busted the belief that creativity is a protected entity.”

— Cecelia Girr, Backslash’s Director of Cultural Strategy

ARTISTS VS. AI

Fearful that AI will render their jobs obsolete, artists around the world are rallying together in support of [#artbyhumans](#). An early wave of outrage came in September when an AI-generated picture took home [first place](#) at a state-fair art competition. Then came the bans. Online art communities including Fur Affinity, Newgrounds, and Inkblot have all [outlawed](#) the submission of AI-created work, arguing that the creations “lack artistic merit” since they are generated using existing art. Anime and manga illustrators in [Japan](#) are using similar arguments in their protests against AI, highlighting the high risk of copyright infringement. As platforms begin writing their own rules, we could see a sharp divide between the communities that do and do not welcome AI’s influence.

DYNAMIC DESIGNS

AI is taking the design world by storm—inspiring fantastical new ideas for [architecture](#), [fashion](#), consumer products, and more. And not all of these concepts are staying in the brainstorming phase. Branding agency Tasarit took things even further with the launch of the world’s first [AI-designed fragrance](#). Midjourney created the product images, while the Rytr writing bot came up with the branding, the names of the three different scents, and the product descriptions. Tasarit’s Creative Director, Musa Çelik, believes it won’t be long before the majority of products are designed by AI. “With AI, we can leave the ‘dirty’ work behind and focus on creativity instead,” he notes. → [For more, watch Backslash’s episode of Life on the Edge: AI’s Creative Revolution](#)

PROMPTS FOR SALE

Text-to-image generators like DALL-E 2 and Midjourney have made it easy to churn out masterpieces in a flash. What’s not so easy, however, is coming up with a prompt that will deliver the exact look and feel you have in mind. That’s where [PromptBase](#) comes in. Rather than selling the art itself, PromptBase is selling tried and tested prompts starting at \$1.99 each. Some top sellers include a vintage avatar generator, animal T-shirt designs, and impressions of the future. With AI taking care of image creation, generating the perfect prompt will become its very own art form.

TEXT-TO-VIDEO GENERATORS

You’ve heard of text-to-image generators, but what about text-to-video generators? Meta’s [Make-a-Video](#) and Google’s [Imagen Video](#) are upending the production process with systems that let anyone turn text prompts into short, unique video clips. While the current outputs are still a little fuzzy and GIF-like, the tools will only become more impressive as the AI learns over time. We might also see an open source model emerge in the near future—supercharging creativity while also fueling concerns around deepfakes and misinformation.

ARTIFICIAL CREATIVITY

CHATGPT SCARES & EXCITES

AI has entered the chat. ChatGPT wowed the world when it became available for public use in December, with over a million people signing up for the chatbot in just five days and countless ChatGPT conversations going viral on social media. Some challenged it to write jokes, others put its programming skills to the test, and a few people even used it as a therapist. But not everyone was so impressed. Google recently issued a “Code Red” over fears that ChatGPT could reinvent or even replace traditional search engines as we know them. And universities and academic conferences have been quick to ban the tech due to “concerns about negative impacts on student learning.” In an effort to quell concerns, OpenAI is developing a watermark that will prevent people from passing off ChatGPT writing as their own—though we can expect workarounds to be found.

AI DRUG DESIGN

AI isn't just shaking up art design—it's also disrupting drug design. Drug developers are using the same type of generative AI as DALL-E 2 to come up with designs for new proteins not found in nature. Boston startup Generate Biomedicines revealed a program called Chroma, which they describe as the “DALL-E 2 of biology,” and a team at the University of Washington has built a similar program called RoseTTAFold Diffusion. These programs can be directed to produce designs for proteins with specific properties, such as size, shape, or function. This makes it possible to come up with new proteins to do very specific jobs on demand—ultimately leading to faster development of more effective drugs. “We can discover in minutes what took evolution millions of years,” says Gevorg Grigoryan, CTO of Generate Biomedicines.

CULINARY CREATIVITY

From inspiring Michelin-worthy dishes to developing original recipes, AI is stirring up anticipation in the food world. To put AI's culinary chops to the test, New York Times cooking columnists challenged a chatbot called GPT-3 to come up with a Thanksgiving menu fit to their personal tastes. While the AI-authored recipes sounded plausible, the end results weren't so appetizing. The disconnect between the imagined food and the actual food highlighted the schism between AI and human capabilities. Sure, AI has the advantage of being able to reference thousands of online recipes in an instant, but that's very different from tasting and experiencing what actually works. Humans might have an edge on AI in the kitchen for now, but the tech is certainly pushing chefs to think bigger.

WHOSE CODE IS IT ANYWAY?

AI Training, the design technique used to train and build AI's knowledge, is under legal scrutiny thanks to a new lawsuit accusing Microsoft's Co-Pilot of piracy. Co-Pilot—a tool that suggests blocks of code in order to help programmers code faster—learned its skills by analyzing billions of lines of computer code posted online. But who does that code belong to? The lawsuit claims it belongs to the programmers, and that “Microsoft violated the legal rights of millions of programmers who spent years writing the original code.” While this is the first lawsuit of its kind, it certainly won't be the last. As AI pushes further into other sectors, deeper questions around data ownership copyright infringement will follow.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Embrace AI for inspiration:** AI is becoming another tool for rapid creative exploration—allowing us to access an infinite source of imagination, push the limits of the human mind, and execute the unexpected.
- ▶ **Democratize creativity:** The masses can now create complex outputs previously reserved for highly skilled artists—opening up new opportunities for co-creation and inclusivity.
- ▶ **Unlock efficiency:** Think of AI as an additional team member who is incredibly fast and never needs coffee or sleep. AI can take care of the mundane tasks and churn out hundreds of content variations in an instant.



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BACKSLASH



2023

DEBATES

Our bodies are officially up for discussion. As conversations around reproductive rights, collective well-being, and population planning escalate, once-personal decisions will move to the center of very public debates. It's individual freedom vs. social responsibility, and everyone wants to have their say in deciding what's right.



BODY DEBATES

SOUTH KOREA'S TATTOO UNDERGROUND

While tattoos are accepted in most parts of the world, South Korea is one of the few countries where tattooing remains illegal. Even with the ban, however, South Korea's tattoo underground is thriving. Tattoo artists say shifting social norms have caused the industry to explode over the past decade. This rising interest is largely driven by younger generations who are regularly exposed to tattoo art on social media, as well as strong international demand for "k-tattoos." Artists and customers alike remain hopeful for change, and are continuing to fight for legalization of the art form. "I can't wait for the moment where people feel safe or free to show their tattoos and express their feelings through tattoos," says Kim Ae-min, a tattooed teacher in Dongducheon.

SMOKE-FREE GENERATION

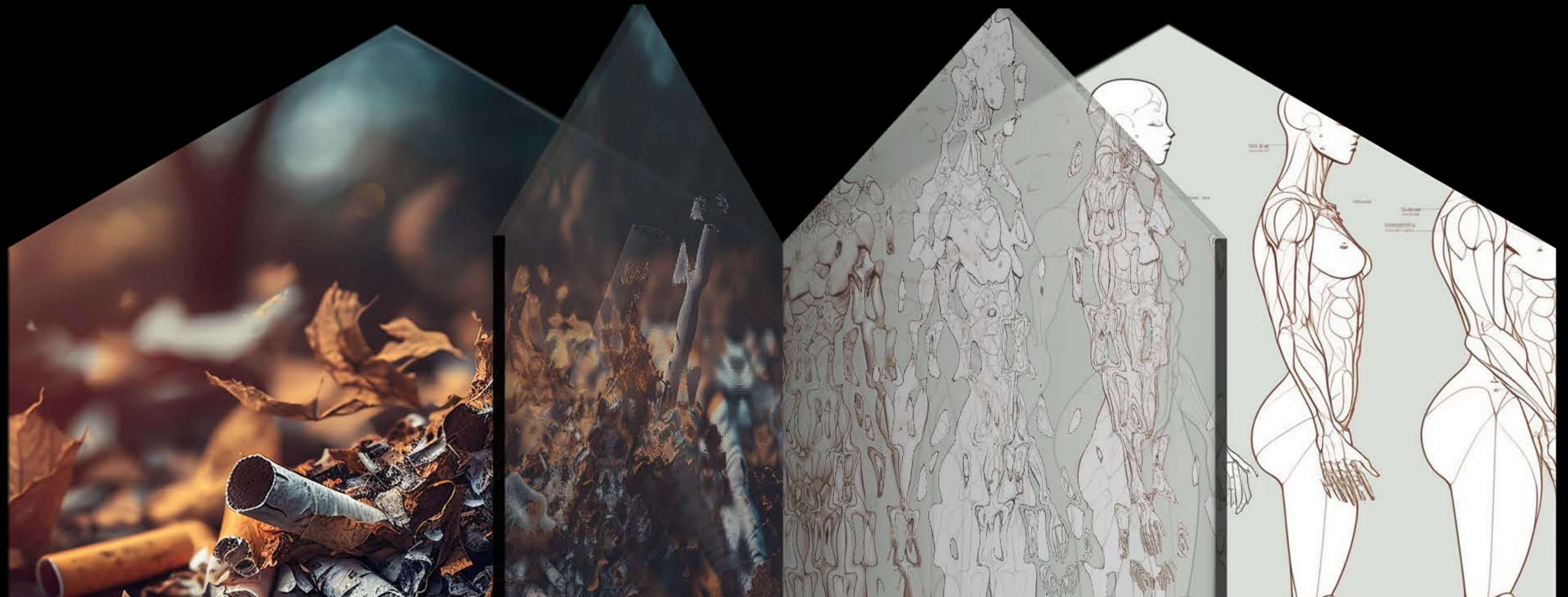
Last year, Malaysia became the second country after New Zealand to announce plans to completely ban the sale of tobacco for future generations. If passed, the bill would prevent anyone born after 2007 from buying cigarettes and tobacco products. But reactions are mixed. Supporters say it will be a big win for the country's collective health, where one in five adults smoke and there are more than 27,000 smoking-related deaths each year. Skeptics, on the other hand, worry that enforcement will be too lax to effectively curb the illicit tobacco market. Unsurprisingly, the nation's leading tobacco industry group is also heavily opposed. The group called the bill a breach of basic human rights, insisting that "instead of creating a smoke-free generation, we are creating a generation of criminals who are being punished for buying a product others can buy."

BYPASSING ABORTION BANS

When the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to abortion in June, businesses and healthcare providers rallied together to come up with workarounds. Following the decision, several major companies including Starbucks, Amazon, Meta, Microsoft, and more reaffirmed their commitment to covering travel expenses for employees who no longer could get access to reproductive care in their state. Weeks later, doctors proposed another solution to preserve abortion access: a floating clinic in the Gulf of Mexico, where bans don't apply. And thirdly, in November, Planned Parenthood teamed up with a physician to offer free vasectomies via a traveling mobile clinic.

RESPONSIBLE FOOD MARKETING

Unilever—owner of Hellman's, Ben & Jerry's, Magnum, and more—is tightening its restrictions on food marketing targeted at kids. Under their new commitment, the FMCG giant will not target anyone under the age of 16 with food or refreshment ads, and will stop working with influencers who appeal to children. Though the UK has strict marketing rules for the food and beverage industry when it comes to minors, most countries only restrict marketing to children under 13 years old. By taking it upon themselves to up the age limit, Unilever is raising the bar for the entire industry.



BODY DEBATES



NFL SAFETY

The U.S. National Football League is no stranger to criticism over recurring player injuries. But calls for better protections become more urgent than ever before when Damar Hamlin, a 24-year-old safety for the Buffalo Bills, went into [cardiac arrest](#) during a game on January 2, 2023. As fans and players prayed for Hamlin's recovery, much larger questions about the future of the sport still remain unanswered. "Should a civilized culture really be sanctioning this? Can a game played by men of such size and speed ever be safe?" [asks Mark Leibovich](#) in The New York Times.

DECRIMINALIZED DRUGS

British Columbia will become the first province in Canada to [decriminalize](#) the possession of small amounts of cocaine, MDMA, meth, heroin, and fentanyl starting this year. As part of the three-year experiment, people over the age of 18 will be able to carry up to 2.5 grams of drugs without being arrested, sent for treatment, or having the drugs confiscated. The move is one of several efforts to combat Canada's worsening drug overdose crisis, marking what the Mayor of Vancouver calls "a fundamental rethinking of drug policy that favors healthcare over handcuffs." In a similar vein, Thailand became the first country in Asia to [decriminalize](#) marijuana in June of last year, while U.S. President Joe Biden took his first major [steps](#) toward decriminalizing marijuana in October.

WHAT'S NEXT

► **Audit your ingredients:** Food, beverage, and beauty brands—inspect your ingredients and rethink your packaging. With an overload of buzzwords and a lack of regulation, clear, informative labeling will be a must.

THE POPULATION PARADOX

On November 15, 2022, the [8 billionth](#) person on the planet was born—reigniting population debates around the globe. While some countries are desperately trying to turn around rock-bottom fertility rates, others are bracing themselves for decades of booming population growth. China famously sits in the first camp, and is continuing its attempts to boost birth rates with everything from tax breaks, to more generous maternity leave policies, to housing subsidies. Japan, faced with a similar dilemma, has experimented with AI matchmaking schemes, fertility treatment coverage, and more.

Meanwhile, places like sub-Saharan Africa find themselves on the opposite end of the spectrum. The region's population is expected to double between now and 2050, sparking serious concerns over resource scarcity. "We are already overstressing what we have—the housing, roads, the hospitals, schools. Everything is overstretched," [says Gyang Dalyop](#), an urban planning and development consultant in Nigeria.

Though it's unlikely that we'll reach a global consensus on overpopulation vs. underpopulation debates any time soon, we can certainly expect more experiments and conversations to come.

► **Lend employee support:** Where governments take away rights or fail to provide resources, employers can—and will be expected to—fill in the gaps.



BACKSLASH



2023

AFTERMARKETS CIRCULAR

At the intersection of sustainability, scarcity, and hype culture lies a booming aftermarket economy. Old products are being recycled, reused, repaired, and resold, while new products are being created with end-of-life options built in. From modular tech to food waste fashion, the shift to circularity is unlocking ample opportunities for post-sale profits.

CIRCULAR AFTERMARKETS

The global secondhand apparel market is expected to grow 3X faster than the global apparel market overall, reaching \$218 billion by 2026.

— Thredup's [2022 Resale Report](#)

TRACEABLE LUXURY

As counterfeits continue to be a major problem for high-end labels, the world's largest luxury groups are turning to blockchain technology to verify the authenticity of their products. Just a few months ago, Prada [launched](#) its very first fine jewelry collection made of recycled gold and traceable pavé diamonds. Each piece of jewelry comes with an authentication card that verifies its material and manufacturing origins through the [Aura Consortium Blockchain](#) technology. With this digital stamp of authenticity, owners will be able to confidently resell the custom pieces further down the line.

SELLING SURPLUS

Asia is responsible for more than half of all food wasted around the world. Slowly but surely, however, startups are bridging the food waste gap with tech—developing [apps](#) that offer surplus food at a discount. Singapore app [treasure](#) partners with hotel chains to sell “buffets-in-a-box” that would otherwise be thrown out. Hong Kong food rescue app [Phenix](#) allows users to pick up a “mystery basket” of food from local shops for a minimum 50% discount. And in Japan, [Kurdashi](#) sells imperfect or seasonally themed food from manufacturers for up to 97% off.

RESELL TAGS

Fashion brand Samsøe Samsøe is putting QR codes on its clothing tags to facilitate [easier resale](#). When scanned, the QR code will automatically create a product listing on Facebook Marketplace and Instagram Shopping that details the garment's style, price, size, picture, location, and date of purchase. To sweeten the deal, Samsøe Samsøe will even pay for the reseller's post to run across Facebook and Instagram through its “in-clothing media budget.” The feature will initially be tested in Denmark before rolling out across 100% of Samsøe Samsøe products worldwide—making the resale process much simpler for Facebook Marketplace's 1 billion monthly active users.

REPAIRABLE TECH

The premise of the right-to-repair movement is simple: people should be able to fix their stuff. While consumers have been pushing for the right to repair for several years, lawmakers and businesses are finally catching up. In the U.S., New York recently became the first state to pass the [Digital Fair Repair Act](#)—forcing manufacturers to offer documentation, tools, and parts to customers and independent repair stores. And the impact is already apparent. Apple now offers an online Self Service Repair Store, and its latest iPhone 14 is the easiest to fix since 2016. Meanwhile, Framework is taking the concept even further with a fully modular, repairable, upgradeable laptop. The company launched an upgraded version of the laptop at the end of last year, which has been praised as a “[right-to-repair refreshment](#).”

CIRCULAR AFTERMARKETS

PLASTIC EXPORT RESTRICTIONS

The world's third-largest container shipping company, CMA CGM, banned scrap plastic from its ships in April 2022. Consequently, the U.S. will have one less avenue to export its plastic waste overseas, forcing the country to rethink its waste management system and invest in more circular infrastructure for the long-term.

CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SUBSCRIPTIONS

Tech rentals are becoming an increasingly attractive option for consumers who care about the planet and want to save some money. Berlin-based startup Grover is evidence of this shift, recently raising \$330 million to expand its consumer electronics subscription service. Through Grover, subscribers can rent out used phones, monitors, GoPros, electric scooters and more, giving every product multiple lives

FOOD WASTE FASHION

With both fashion and food under fire for wreaking havoc on our planet, the two industries are teaming up to transform waste into stylish fabrics. Danish cool-girl brand Ganni recently launched a tracksuit made entirely from banana waste, while Filipino brand Lakat Sustainable Sneakers is making sleek shoes out of handwoven pineapple fabrics. Other up-and-coming solutions include coconut shell fabrics, silky textiles made from citrus juice by-products, and mycelium leathers.


WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Rethink your physical footprint:** What if stores stopped selling new products altogether? Serving instead as destinations for upcycling, secondhand swaps, and repairs.
- ▶ **Incentivize circularity:** Reward people for recycling and create programs that make it cool to turn trash into treasure.
- ▶ **Embrace organic niches:** This trend is pioneered by obsessive collectors, creators, and thrifters. Involve them in your brand and turn them into your biggest advocates.





CLIMATE CREDIT

BACKSLASH  2023

With climate projections painting a bleak future, superficial solutions and empty promises will no longer cut it. Environmental initiatives we once applauded are now being put under the microscope—raising the bar for sustainability and exposing the urgent need for alternative solutions. Earning climate credit is more difficult—and more necessary—than ever.

CLIMATE CREDIT

"Anyone who believes in indefinite growth of anything physical on a physically finite planet is either a madman or an economist."

—Kenneth Boulding, Economist

ESG INVESTING FACES SCRUTINY

One of the buzziest phrases in finance—environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investing—is a scam. At least, according to [Hans Taparia](#) and other economists who are calling for more scrutiny. Their argument is that while ESG investing sounds like a good idea, current impact measurements don't actually account for how a company affects the environment or society. In fact, it does quite the opposite. ESG ratings are determined by the impact that society will have on a company's bottom line. With such a lenient rating system, it's not difficult for a company to be deemed environmentally or socially responsible. Just take one look at the [Just 100 list](#)—an annual list of the top ESG companies—and you'll see a range of questionable names. Taparia argues that "instead of measuring the risks that environmental and social developments pose to companies, raters and investors should measure the risks to humanity posed by companies." With more consumers wising up to corporate hypocrisy, we can expect this position to shape future investment strategies.

DEGROWTH BRANDS

Fast fashion is out, "degrowth" is in. Degrowth, the latest buzzword in the world of sustainable fashion, urges consumers to buy less. [Early Majority](#), known as the first degrowth brand, goes a step further and encourages shoppers to only buy an item once. Their designs are adaptable for a range of activities, weather conditions, and weight changes, thus reducing the need for multiple items. Other well-known labels like Ralph Lauren are also exploring the potential of degrowth. Halide Alagöz, Ralph Lauren's chief product and sustainability officer, [says](#) that they "have seen our financials getting better although we produce less units compared to five years ago." With global apparel consumption continuing to rise, degrowth could be the business strategy that gets us back on track.

PATAGONIA'S CLIMATE PHILANTHROPY

Patagonia set the ultimate bar for climate philanthropy when they [announced](#) that "ALL profits, in perpetuity, will go to our mission to save our home planet." Founder Yvon Chouinard made it clear that the only shareholder Patagonia would report to from here on out is the Earth. In an environment where brands make [empty promises](#) and are exposed for [greenwashing](#), Patagonia stands out for turning company values into actions. Patagonia's board chair, Charles Conn, [wrote](#) that the company is disproving the old shareholder capitalism axiom that corporate goals other than profit will just confuse investors.

TREE BANKING

Money may not grow on trees, but trees might just make you money thanks to "[tree banking](#)." In Meenangadi, India, farmers are incentivized to grow and protect trees in the quest to be India's first carbon neutral village by 2025. Farmers who join the tree banking scheme are not only given free saplings to plant and grow, they're also paid to look after them. As the trees mature and blossom, their fruits and byproducts then create new revenue sources for the farmers. Meenangadi's tree banking program highlights the importance of integrating local communities into climate initiatives. As the executive director of the program says, "the message here is that climate change is being linked with climate justice."



CLIMATE CREDIT

“OK DOOMER”

“OK Doomer” is the new climate activist rallying cry. The phrase, a play on “OK Boomer,” is being used by a growing number of social media eco-creators to fight climate doomism—the idea that it’s too late to save the planet. These creators argue that spreading climate doom leads to inaction, whereas sharing climate wins actually creates positive change. “It’s too late’ means ‘I don’t have to do anything, and the responsibility is off me, and I can continue existing however I want,’” says Philip Aiken, a podcaster who intentionally focuses on solutions instead of fear. “OK Doomer” could be the movement that turns apathy into action.

THE BRIDGETOWN INITIATIVE

Barbados, one of the Caribbean’s most vulnerable nations to climate change, wants to change how rich countries finance poor countries in a climate crisis. Named the [Bridgetown Initiative](#), the plan takes aim at a central problem: wealthy countries pay 1 to 4% interest when they borrow money, while developing nations face rates of 12 to 14%. The Bridgetown Initiative wants to fix the broken system by changing the terms around how funding is loaned and repaid, asking development banks to lend an additional \$1 trillion to developing nations for climate resilience, and setting up a new way to fund climate mitigation and reconstruction after a climate disaster. The plan made waves at the COP27 U.N. Climate Summit, generating support from World Bank shareholders like French President Emmanuel Macron and US special presidential envoy for climate, John Kerry.

UNIVERSAL CHARGING

A single charging cable is coming to rule them all. Both the [EU](#) and [India](#) have finally approved a ruling that will require one common charging port to be used in nearly every electronic device—a law that’s been in the works for 10 years now. The legislation aims to reduce electronic waste by allowing people to own fewer tech accessories. We generate about 50 million tons of e-waste a year, which is the same as throwing away 1,000 laptops every second. With waste in the spotlight, “buy more” business models will be traded out for sustainable, multifunctional designs.

CARBON REMOVAL

Once extremely expensive, recent tech advancements have helped make carbon removal more feasible. The world’s largest carbon removal project, dubbed [Project Bison](#), is set to launch later this year. The project will take carbon from the air and compress it into water stored underground—ultimately removing amounts of carbon equivalent to driving 1 million cars in a year. Carbon removal isn’t limited to land, either. Hawaiian startup [Heimdal](#) is removing carbon from the ocean, a mighty feat considering the ocean has absorbed a third of human-generated excess carbon.

WHAT’S NEXT

- ▶ **Be prepared to make sacrifices:** Goodbye to making lofty climate goals that you’ll inevitably fail to meet. With higher standards for what’s considered “sustainable,” brands will be forced to rebuild their entire business model around environmental priorities.
- ▶ **Reward everyday actions:** What if loyalty programs rewarded consumers for reducing emissions in their daily lives? Reframing climate action as an everyday decision rather than an insurmountable task.
- ▶ **Invite people in:** What if companies opened up participation in carbon capture projects? Creating new business partnerships and allowing locals to get involved on the ground.



CONNECTION QUEST

BACKSLASH **E** 2023

We're simultaneously more connected and more isolated than ever before. With our world no longer built to facilitate face-to-face interactions, businesses are stepping in to fill the void with new social spaces, community concepts, and apps for intentional companionship. The connection economy is booming, and our collective well-being is at stake.



CONNECTION QUEST



GOODNIGHT TEXTS FOR SALE

Knowing that a simple message could make someone's night, Wong Biyang started "[A Person Selling A Good Night in a Deserted Land.](#)" For \$0.15, people across the world can request a personal goodnight text from Biyang. Biyang crafts a special message based on what people share with her. The content and depth of what people share varies, but all 30,000+ requests are rooted in a common desire to connect and be seen. Biyang explains the power of a text best: "A simple good night is a lighthouse for every lonely person at night."

SPONTANEOUS SOCIALIZING

[Uimity](#) is making meetups more casual and carefree. The app offers a real-time interactive map of social experiences, ideas, and events around you—making it easy to find people to join you for a hike, lunch hangout, museum tour, or whatever you're in the mood for. Just specify your preferred activity, location, and group size, and be prepared to meet up with someone in as little as five minutes. It's spontaneous socializing on demand.

About one-third of adults worldwide experience feelings of loneliness.

— [Statista, 2022](#)

AI COMPANIONSHIP

AI is being trained to become your new BFF. Voice-activated care companion [ElliQ](#) is eliminating loneliness for aging populations. AI chatbot [Replika](#) is trained to be your confidante, therapist, life coach, or friend. And Japanese startup [Gatebox](#) is taking things a step further with personified AI. Their 3D holographic characters adapt to you and your needs, becoming a live-in best friend. With all of these technologies, the more you interact with the AI, the more it gets to know who you are and what's important to you—allowing it to become just the companion you need. But while these tools have been proven to boost mental health, they also carry a risk. The more personalized they become the more addictive they are, which can potentially cause human relationships to fall by the wayside.



MEN'S SHEDS

In Tasmania, [Men's Sheds](#) have become key locations for older males to find friendships through collaborative activities and skill-based work. Though the concept started in the 1990s, it's continuing to increase in popularity in the wake of the pandemic. The number of Men's Sheds in Tasmania has risen by 30% over the last three years, and [Australia](#) and [Ireland](#) are a few of the countries ramping up government funding for these projects.

CONNECTION QUEST

“There aren’t great places to meet new people as an adult these days. Dating apps are really image-focused, and spaces that used to serve important functions in society, like religious institutions, aren’t resonating as much.”

— Luna Ray, Founder Of [Bloom Community](#)

RELATIONAL FITNESS

We talk a lot about physical fitness, but what about relational fitness? The founders of SoulCycle are aiming to make relational fitness a priority with [Peoplehood](#), a new physical space where people gather to open up and listen to others do the same. The concept—dubbed “modern medicine for the loneliness epidemic”—is being piloted in NYC with plans to expand elsewhere. “We are thinking about a way to put this in the zeitgeist that makes it joyful and uplifting and meaningful, also create a brand around it that makes it cool to work on your relationships” the founders say. In our busy, increasingly siloed lives, creating dedicated time and space for connection will become a common practice.

CORPORATE DATING APP

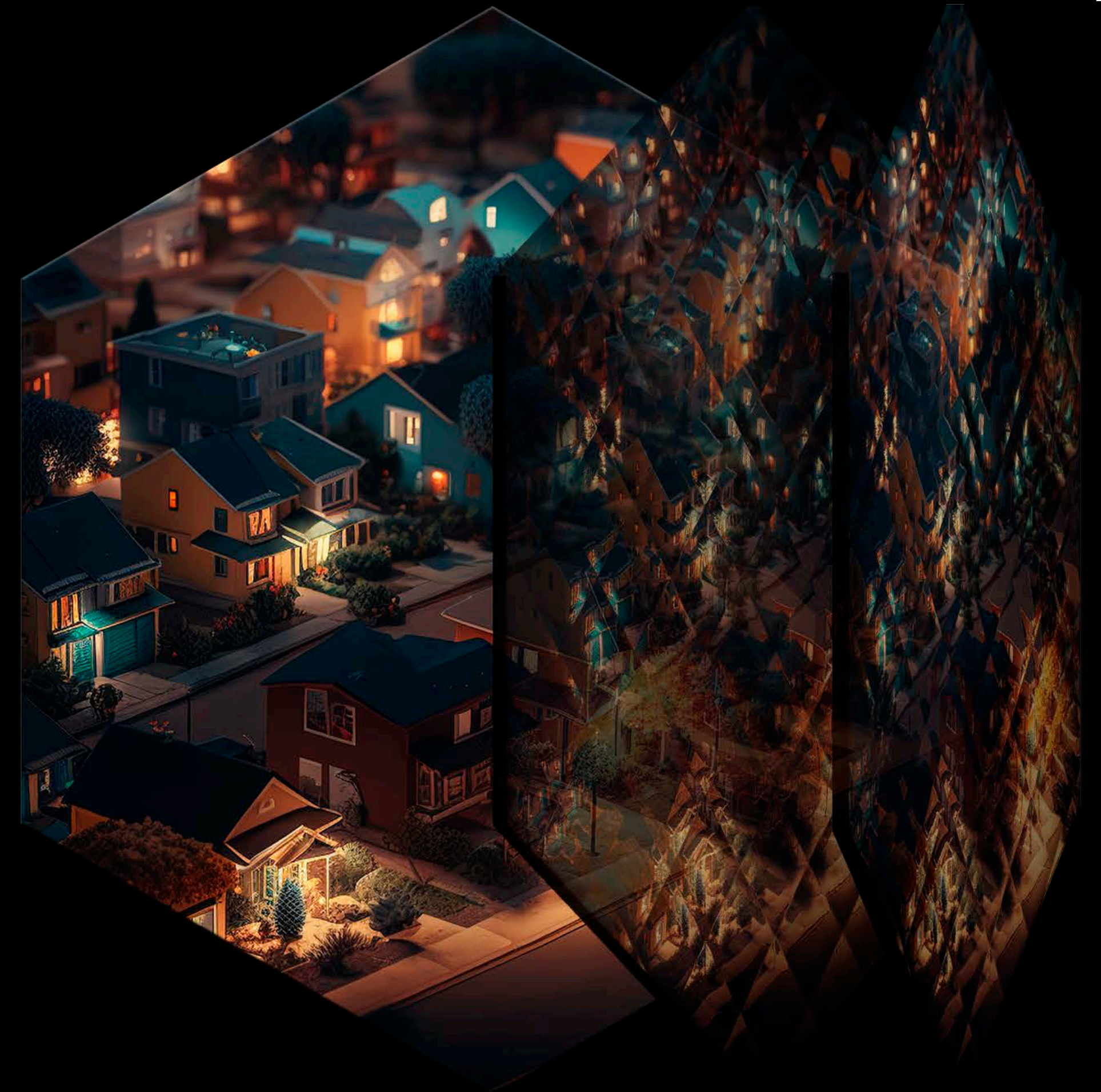
Over 800 companies in Japan are using an AI-powered dating app to help their employees find love. The app, [Aill goen](#), usually costs about \$52 per month, but many of the country’s largest businesses are adding the service as a free employee benefit. Aill goen believes that finding romance through a professional network will boost worker productivity and happiness. “Employers were worried about the mental health of their workers, who were largely staying at home with almost no physical interaction during the pandemic,” says China Toyoshima, CEO of Aill Inc.

NEIGHBORHOOD REVIVAL

Remember when neighbors actually met up and talked to each other? Israeli app [Venn](#) wants to re-create that sense of local community. Through the app, apartment dwellers in Tel Aviv and Brooklyn can find and plan in-person activities with those who live around them. According to Venn’s research, having more local friendships strengthens residents’ sense of belonging and decreases the likelihood that they’ll move. There’s a strong commercial case for building community too. Venn Neighborhoods contributed a 240% boost in local spending, and the company recently raised [\\$60 million](#) to expand to new cities around the globe.

NICHE SOCIAL

If the first generation of social networks was about connecting you with anyone and everyone, the next generation of social media will focus on cultivating smaller, more meaningful online communities. A prime example is [Niche](#), a new decentralized social app that organizes users around shared interests. The app has a group for everything from rock climbing enthusiasts to Star Wars memorabilia collectors—leading to richer interactions among more intimate crews. Other community-focused players to watch include Chinese social network [Souu](#) and inclusive audio app [Somewhere Good](#).



WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Quality over quantity:** We’re done resting our laurels on how many likes, matches, and followers we rack up. Individuals are desperate for interpersonal relationships that bring substance and depth.
- ▶ **Create common ground:** Break people out of filter bubbles based solely on similar interests. How can you bring people together who would have otherwise never met?
- ▶ **Experiment with formats:** Go beyond talking, texting, and typing, and find more immersive ways to connect people.

CONSCIOUS

BACKSLASH



2023

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.

CONVENIENCE



CONSCIOUS CONVENIENCE

CARBON RECEIPTS

When grocery shopping, it can be tempting to quickly grab whatever looks good without much thought. But would shoppers think twice about buying steak if they knew its carbon footprint? Based on findings from Oda, one of Norway's largest online grocers, the answer is yes. In 2021, the company partnered with climate research institute Cicero to categorize products as either high, medium, or low-emission generators. Since then, Oda customers have purchased over 50% more fresh produce than the typical Norwegian consumer. Meat alternatives have also seen an 80% increase in popularity, which is above the national average. "Our customers told us that they find it close to impossible to know what is eco-friendly, climate receipts arrived because of what they asked for," says Oda's sustainability director Louise Fuchs.

SOLVING FOR SHIPPING WASTE

While there's been a great deal of e-commerce innovation aimed at delivering more goods, faster, the infrastructure has not evolved to keep pace with all the waste being created. Boox is hoping to change that with reusable shipping boxes and bags. The company supplies brands with multi-use packages as well as the reverse logistics services to collect, refurbish, and redistribute those packages. Lululemon, REN Clean Skincare, Boyish Jeans and Ouai are among the several brands that have already made the switch.

MADE-TO-ORDER MANUFACTURING

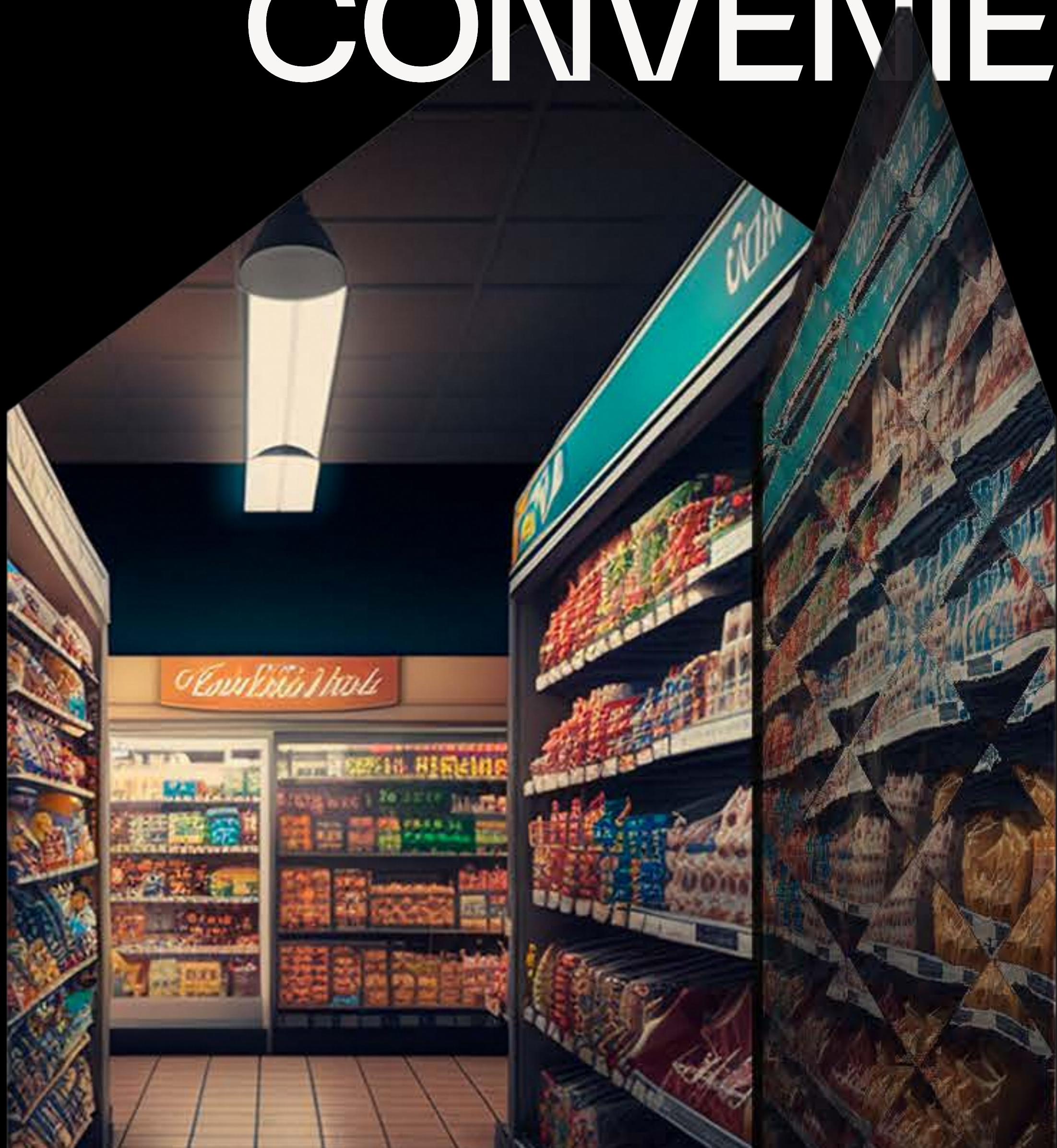
Most clothing brands place orders at factories six to nine months in advance, making educated guesses about which styles and sizes will be in demand. But those guesses result in a lot of wasted inventory. Of the more than 100 billion garments made every year, an estimated 30% is never sold. Enter: made-to-order clothing. While most shoppers assume that customized clothing is out of their price range, companies like Unspun are making it more accessible with the help of 3D body scanning technology. The brand recently launched their first-ever physical store in Hong Kong, where shoppers can get scanned for custom-fit jeans and bring in an old pair to be repurposed.

"Our elevated eco consciousness will shape purchase behaviours towards buying less, but we will have high expectations of the products we do buy. New levels of multifunctionality will obliterate the need for multiple bottles, jars and tubs and category-specific products. Imagine foundation packed with serum actives, head-to-toe beauty bars, and sunscreen supplements."

— Lisa Payne, Head of Beauty, Stylus



CONSCIOUS CONVENIENCE



TRUE PRICE

True Price is a Netherlands-based nonprofit helping businesses realize the hidden social and environmental costs of their products. To get these costs, they evaluate the harms related to raw materials, labor, and the environment, then calculate how much it would cost to balance out the negative impact. In addition to driving awareness, True Price also contributes to global policy changes. In 2021, they worked with the United Nations Food Systems Summit to calculate the cost of all the food produced in the world. They found that the true cost of the global food system is more than \$20 trillion—nearly double the world’s “normal” food expenditure of \$11 trillion. With more transparent pricing, shoppers will come to realize that cheap goods come at much larger cost.

GREEN LABEL CERTIFICATION

Foodpanda, Asia’s leading on-demand delivery platform, is making it easier to eat green. Through their Green Label initiative, foodpanda will assess restaurants against a detailed set of sustainability criteria—such as whether they offer vegan or plant-based alternatives, use single-use plastic, engage in carbon-offsetting, donate food waste, offer reusable packaging, and more. Restaurants who meet the requirements will be granted a Green Label certification and will show up under the app’s “sustainability made simple” section.

FAST-FASHION WARNING LABELS

What if fast fashion came with a warning label? ThredUp’s CEO, James Reinhart, thinks it should. His argument is that if fast fashion continues to go unregulated, it will end up becoming the next Big Tobacco. Just as tobacco was marketed as cool to young adults, Reinhart says, fast fashion is intentionally designed to keep teens hooked. According to ThredUp data, half of college students watch fast-fashion hauls on social media on a weekly basis. And though it won’t end fast fashion’s reign altogether, tighter government regulation and transparent labeling could prompt more mindful consumption. At the very least, it would help young shoppers weigh the environmental costs of cheap clothing.

THE END OF FREE RETURNS


Despite what we might want to think, our returns don’t always end up in another happy shopper’s hands. Nearly half of all returned stock gets discarded, adding 2.3 million tons of waste to landfills annually. To mitigate the high business and environmental cost, fashion giants like Zara, Boohoo, and Uniqlo have all recently introduced a return fee—forcing shoppers to purchase more mindfully. Other brands are taking a slightly different approach. Canadian clothing company Good for Sunday offers an EcoDrop option, whereby customers can get a full refund for their returns by shipping the product directly to the next customer. Otherwise, they’ll have to pay a \$12 return fee.

WHAT’S NEXT

- ▶ **Enable mindful shopping:** Empower people to choose wisely with product labels and digital platforms that detail carbon emissions, worker treatment, product lifespan, and more.
- ▶ **Get smart:** Solutions like made-to-order manufacturing, AR clothing try-ons, and smarter demand forecasting will help retailers minimize returns and reduce excess inventory.

A hyperpolarized society is ready to trade toxic intolerance for a commitment to progress. As the war on "wokeness" rages on, 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.

COUNTER CANCEL

BACKSLASH  2023



COUNTER CANCEL

I WAS WRONG ABOUT...

In our age of public criticism and polarization, it can be hard to admit when you're wrong. It's especially hard for journalists, who are constantly called upon to shape our ideas, share truths, and get it right every time. But The New York Times challenged that idea by sharing [eight columns](#) titled "I was wrong about..." In the essays, Opinion writers reflect on why they have changed their minds about previously published predictions and advice—covering topics from "I was wrong about Trump voters" to "I was wrong about Chinese censorship." "Here at Times Opinion, we still hold on to the idea that good-faith intellectual debate is possible, that we should all be able to rethink our positions on issues," reads the site. In doing so, they hope we can all see the value of admitting when we're wrong.

RETROACTIVE MEDIA EDITS

Last year, both Beyoncé and Lizzo altered their lyrics after listeners took offense to their use of the word "spaz," which has been described as a slur against those with disabilities. The changes signal a wider theme emerging across the media landscape. For example, Disney+ has famously tried to erase its racist history by pulling some old cartoons and adding [disclaimers](#) to others, Stranger Things fans have [called out](#) the Duffer brothers for retroactively editing past episodes, and in 2020, Netflix hid search results for award-winning independent film Cuties after it was [accused](#) of promoting pedophilia. While many people have applauded these changes, it also begs the question of how far we'll go to cover up controversy.



"Social media is trying to erase imperfection—and imperfection is who we are. To see this tidied-up world, it's going to make everybody feel like a failure, constantly. People have to be able to redeem themselves; they have to be able to make mistakes."

— [Marilyn Minter](#), Educator and Artist

"YOU DON'T HAVE TO POST ABOUT EVERY TRAGEDY"

Cole Arthur Riley wants people to know that [they don't have to post about every tragedy](#). With 24/7 real-time access to the terrors of the world, it's become expected for people to weigh in on every tragic or controversial event via social media. In fact, the pressure has become so great that many people fear their values will be brought into question if they don't post. But by trading this performative social media theater for moments of silence, Riley says, we can heal in a different way. "In the silence, we can wrap our wounds. What do we hear when we listen?" she asks.

"I NEVER THOUGHT OF IT THAT WAY"

If there's one question Mónica Guzmán wants you to ask more often, it's "What am I missing?" Guzmán is part of Braver Angels, a nonprofit dedicated to political depolarization. In her new book, ["I Never Thought of It That Way"](#), she lays out how to have difficult conversations with people at the opposite end of the political spectrum—urging people to replace certainty with curiosity, and to stop dismissing people we don't see eye-to-eye with. Only then, says Guzmán, can we engage in respectful dialogue that allows us to see the person behind the politics.

CANCEL CULTURE LAWS

Singapore may include rules around cancel culture in future legislation. The consideration comes as the country repeals a law that criminalizes gay sex, which has led to both religious groups and LGBTQ groups being attacked online for sharing their reactions. "We should be encouraging people to be able to express their viewpoints on all sides as long as it's not offensive and doesn't descend to hate speech," [said](#) Law Minister K Shanmugam. "If we find the right solutions, yes, that should be something that we could see in legislation in the near future."

COUNTER CANCEL

GAY RODEO ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

When you think of American cowboys, you probably think of straight, conservative white men. The reality, however, is that one in four rural Americans are people of color, and 15-20% of LGBTQ people in the U.S. live in rural regions. Historian and researcher Rebecca Scofield is highlighting this more diverse narrative through the [Gay Rodeo Oral History Project](#) —which collects interviews from members of the International Gay Rodeo Association. Dr. Scofield argues that by erasing skewed perceptions of America's rural cultures, we can stop viewing the country through the lens of an urban-rural divide, and start humanizing each other.

THERAPISTS AGAINST CANCEL CULTURE

A growing number of therapists are [speaking out](#) about the dangers of cancel culture after seeing the toll it takes on people's mental health. Shirani M. Pathak, a psychotherapist and DEI consultant, argues that cancel culture creates an us-versus-them dynamic that "amplifies the problem rather than addressing it." Other experts warn that it can quickly become more about entertainment than accountability, and that it can even backfire by causing people to double down on their claims out of retaliation.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Break the echo chamber:** Cultivate platforms, features, and IRL experiences that expose people to diverse viewpoints and foster open, respectful dialogue.
- ▶ **Be thoughtful, not reactive:** Before rushing to weigh in on every tragedy, brands would be wise to do thorough research, consider the issue from various perspectives, and craft a meaningful plan of action. Oftentimes, being effective is more beneficial than being first.
- ▶ **Own your mistakes:** Brands, don't be afraid to acknowledge your past wrongdoings in the pursuit of a better way forward. Taking accountability requires full transparency.



People around the world are settling in for a prolonged period of less: less energy, less resources, less of all they were used to. As we say goodbye to abundance, new eco-innovations will be born from the scarcity. Whether reactive or proactive—crisis hacking is officially an essential practice.

CRISIS HACKING

BACKSLASH  2023

CRISIS HACKING

"We are living the end of what could have seemed an era of abundance...the end of the abundance of products and technologies that seemed always available...the end of the abundance of land and materials including water."

— [Emmanuel Macron](#), President of France

LOAD-SHEDDING SPIKES

South Africa is taking a load off. While not new, load shedding—the practice of temporarily turning off parts of a power grid to prevent major blackouts and shutdowns—is continuing to [rapidly increase](#) in South Africa. The country experienced [150 days](#) of load shedding last year, which was three times higher than in 2020. Though necessary, this practice comes with detrimental social and economic impacts. Companies will be expected to come up with solutions that reduce our reliance on finite energy sources in response, such as [hand-powered lights](#) from Deciwatt.

UNDERWATER GREENHOUSES

In the depths of the ocean, Sergio Gamberini is growing the future. His project, [Nemo's Garden](#), is testing the viability of underwater greenhouses as a sustainable, water-conserving alternative to on-land agricultural practices. Only requiring a bit of water to get started, these submerged biospheres are rigged with plant seeds, fans, and hydroponic equipment that make them self-sustaining. With droughts challenging our food system, sustainable agriculture solutions will be what feeds us in the years ahead.

GOODBYE ABUNDANCE

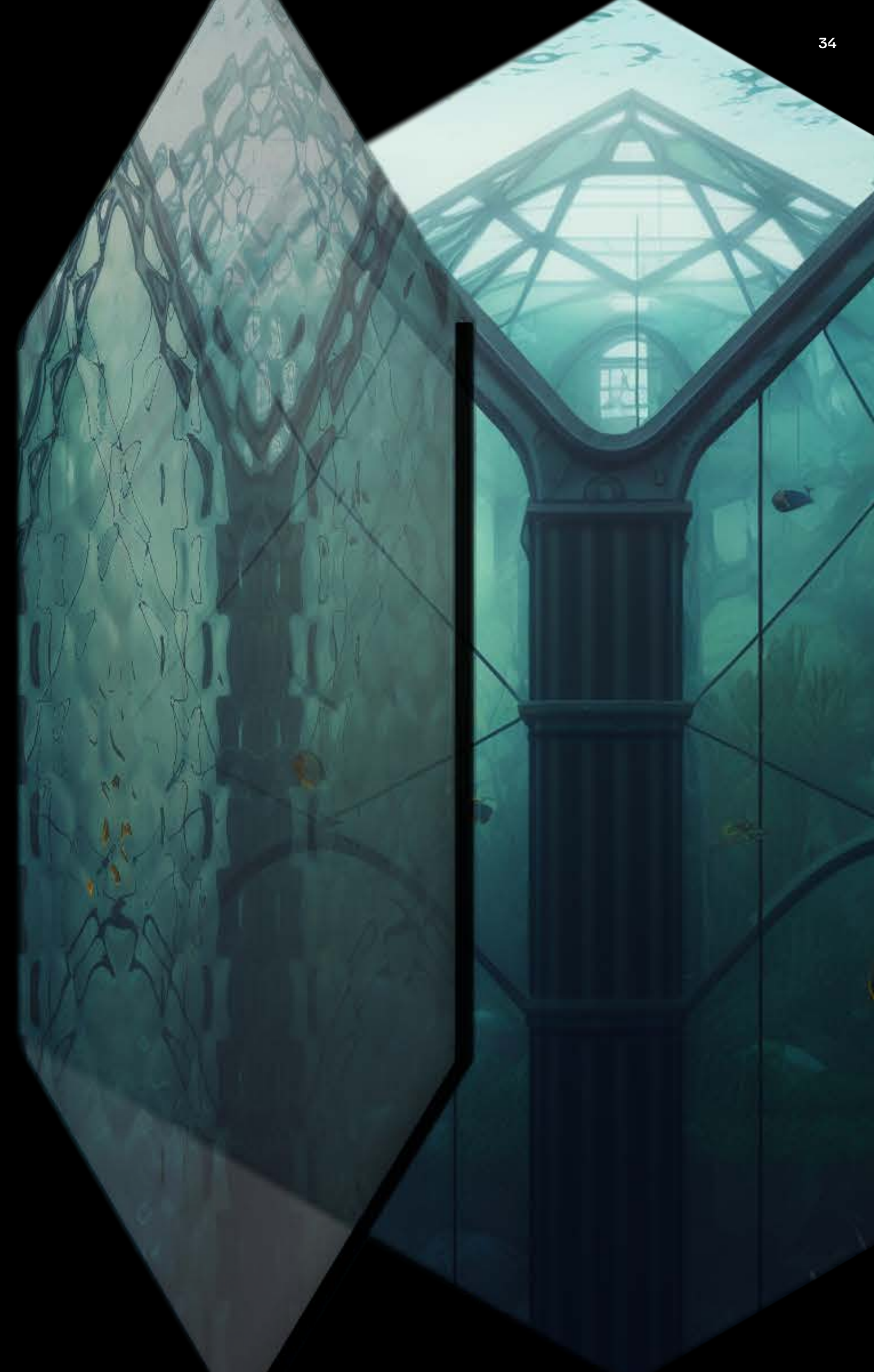
With climate change and Russia's invasion of Ukraine disrupting the energy supply, Europe is saying [goodbye to abundance](#). Paris is just one of the [several](#) European cities turning the lights off and enforcing blackouts in order to conserve dwindling resources, while [Germany](#) and [Spain](#) have both implemented restrictions on the use of heating and AC units. Beyond households, the energy crisis is also forcing businesses to reconsider their habits. Italy's biggest bank, [Intensa Sanpaolo](#), is considering moving to a four-day work week in order to save energy. And [LVMH](#) has committed itself and its employees to reducing energy consumption by 10% between October 2022 and October 2023.

WATER TARIFFS

Nature-based solutions (NbS) are helping cities fight water scarcity. One city leading by example is [Moyobamba](#), Peru, where a water tariff helps fund watershed and rainforest conservation projects. Since implementing the tax in 2007, the city has reforested some 500 hectares (1,236 acres) of land and developed awareness programs to teach locals the importance of conservation. Inspired by the success of Moyobamba, Peru is now investing in policies to scale up similar nature-based solutions on a national level.

OFF-GRID AIR CONDITIONING

Israeli company Green Kinoko is trialing the world's first liquid nitrogen-powered air conditioner. Because it is not connected to the grid and doesn't blow out heat, the [electricity-free system](#) is more easily transported and less harsh on the environment compared to conventional AC units. The company already has interest from at least 40 different countries, and is gearing up for mass market production by mid-to-late 2023. It's expected that demand will only continue to grow as our world gets hotter.



CRISIS HACKING

ENERGY TOURISTS

While going on holiday to escape the cold is nothing new, a growing number of travelers are now also fleeing their high energy bills. These “[energy nomads](#)” are mostly Northern Europeans who have come to realize that a winter holiday in Spain is cheaper than paying to heat their own home—causing bookings at some Spanish hotels to increase by 50%. This spike in energy costs is largely due to the soaring price of natural gas triggered by the war in Ukraine. And it’s only getting worse. In October, U.K. residents’ annual energy bills increased by an average of 80%. While energy tourism offers a creative short-term solution, more sustainable coping strategies will be needed going forward.

PEECYCLING

Our [urine](#) might save agriculture as we know it. Fertilizer shortages caused by the war in Ukraine are driving up global food prices, and researchers believe human urine could be the next best alternative. It’s nutrient-dense with nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium, is less polluting than synthetic fertilizers, and best of all—there’s plenty of it to go around. Urine-collecting toilets are already being deployed in the U.S., and Paris is planning to install 600 toilets that can divert pee into separate basins for the city’s tree nurseries and green spaces. As similar projects scale up around the globe, we could all soon save resources with a single flush.

AT-HOME KITCHEN HACKS

With utility bills through the roof, clever solutions are helping people cook faster and more responsibly. In the UK, grocery retailer Iceland and power supplier Utilita are hosting free in-person [workshops](#) that teach people how to save money by using less power in the kitchen. Elsewhere, designers at the University of Nigeria have come up with a [solar cooking system](#) that can be used outdoors, while Indian Oil Corporation has created a [solar-powered stove](#) for indoor use. And finally, more meals are being planned with an eye toward efficiency. Blue Apron and Panasonic are promoting dishes that can be prepared in Panasonic’s energy-saving four-in-one oven, and influential British chef Jamie Oliver is putting a spotlight on [One-Pan Wonders](#) that save both energy and water by using fewer dishes.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Play within constraints:** Limitations can fuel creativity and spark ingenuity. Start by reimagining what your product or experience would look like if it used as few resources as possible.
- ▶ **Unlock DIY solutions:** Give consumers the tips and tools to use less—from simple ways to cut back their energy consumption to grow-your-own produce kits.



DATA

BACKSLASH  2023

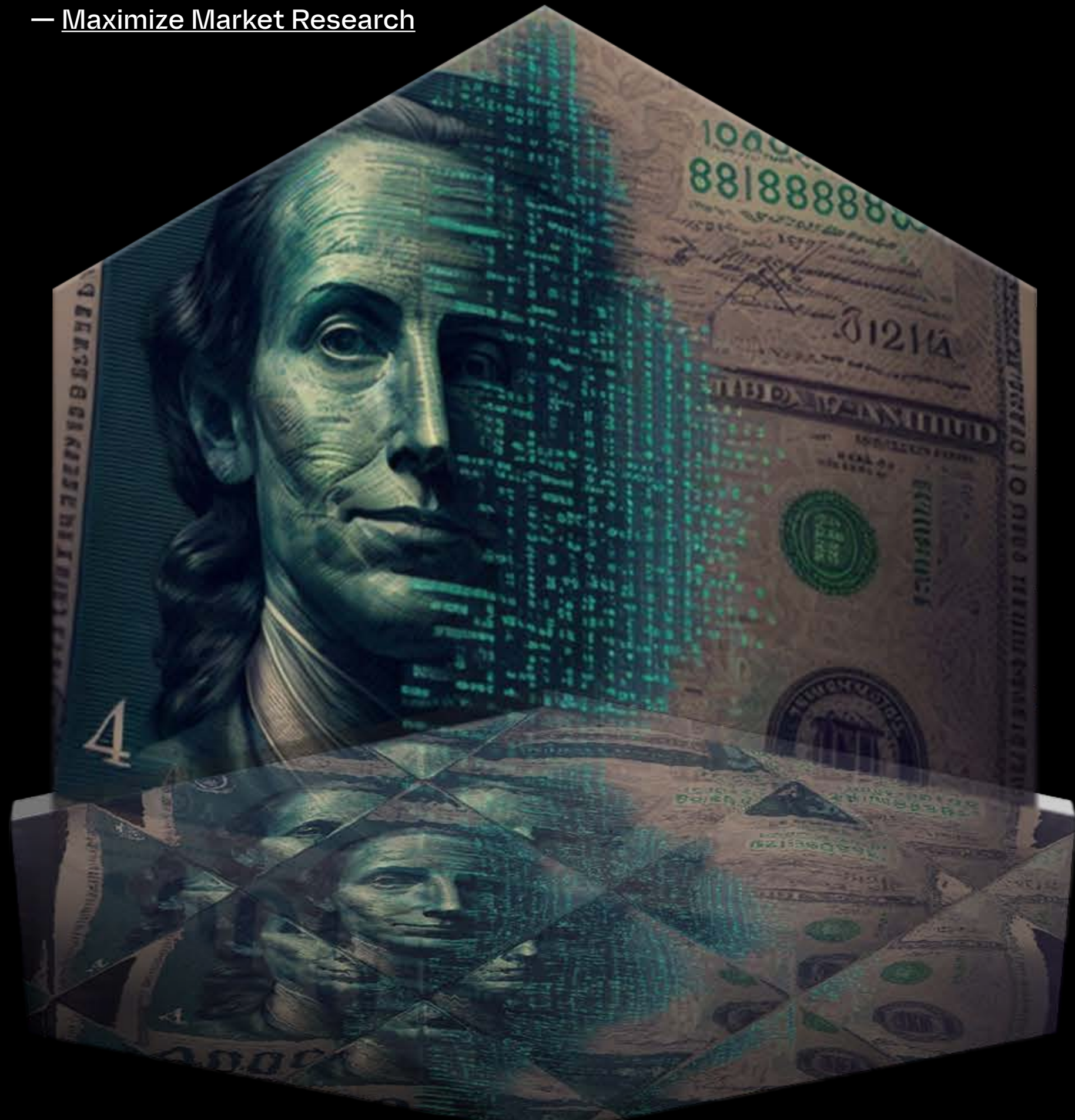
RUSH

The days of data free-for-alls are coming to a close. As regulation tightens and power shifts in favor of users, we'll see the end of vague privacy policies and the start of a more formalized data exchange economy. One where data is assigned an indisputable value. And where users own their data from the start.

DATA RUSH

The global Data Broker market is expected to grow at 4.5% from 2022 to 2029, reaching nearly \$365.71 billion.

— [Maximize Market Research](#)



DATA FOR DOLLARS

A growing number of companies are turning the data power dynamic on its head—allowing everyday people to control and profit from their data. Privacy-focused web browser [Brave](#) pays its 42 million worldwide users 70% of the revenue it generates from the ads they see. The [Foursquare Labs](#) app, where people can share and save the places they visit, rewards people with gift cards for sharing their location. [Datacy](#) allows people to profit from their browsing data. And the [Clture](#) app pays Black users to upload their data from sites like Netflix, Amazon, YouTube, and Uber—then sells that data to businesses seeking insight into Black consumers' habits.

PREPPING FOR A COOKIELESS FUTURE

In the latest update on its plans to replace third-party cookies for advertising, Google says it will now hold off until 2024 in order to allow more time for proper testing. The second delay comes as digital advertising giants and e-commerce companies take a hit from Apple's operating system privacy updates, which limits advertisers from accessing an iPhone user identifier. Though it remains to be seen how a cookie-free future will play out, Google's majority [63%](#) share of the global browser market means we can expect the company's actions to set the data tracking standard.

"An unprecedented amount of value is being created by everyone's data. And yet there's a total disconnect between the creation of that value and who receives it."

— [Frank McCourt, Founder of Project Liberty](#)

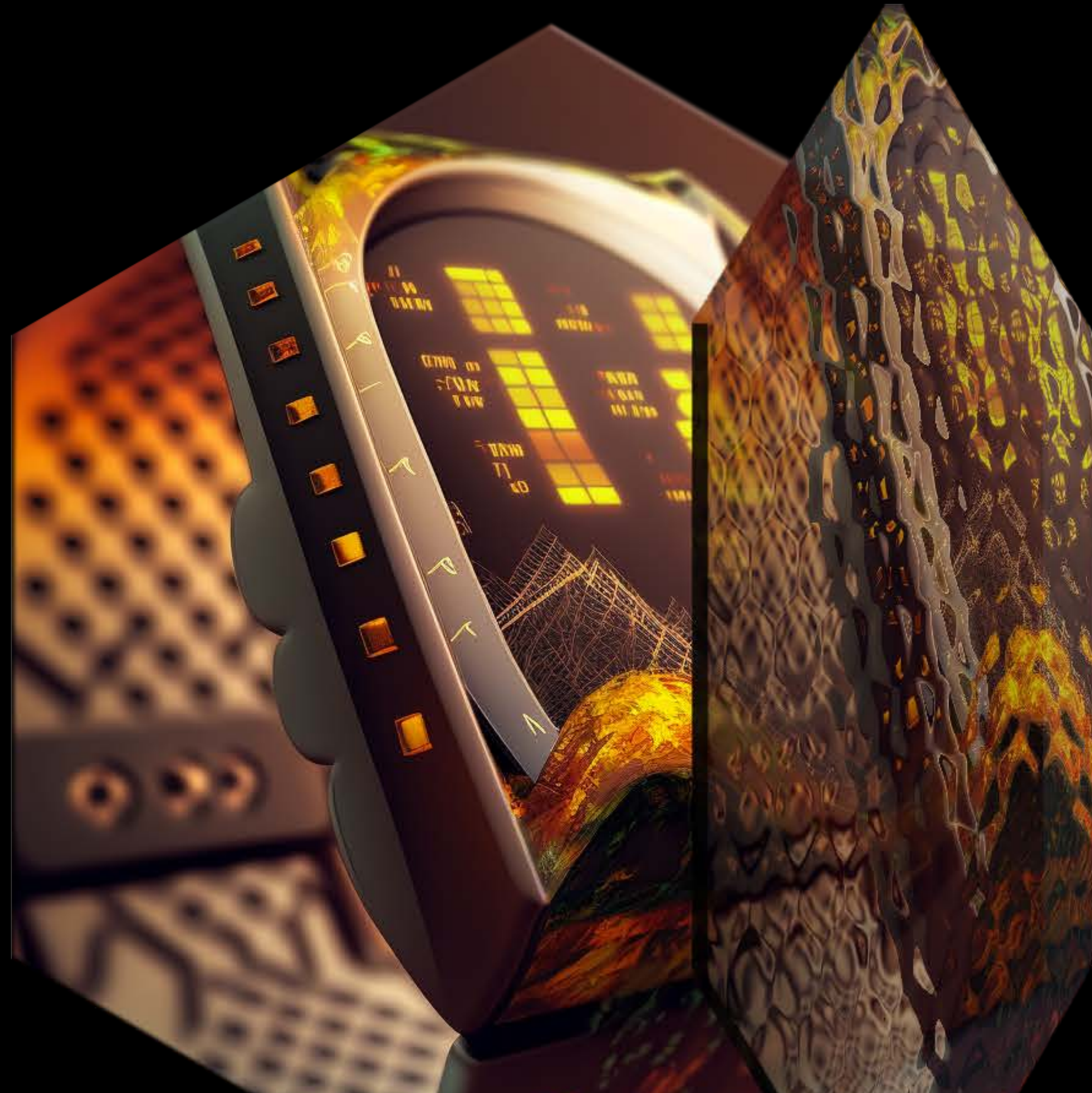
PERSONAL ONLINE DATA STORES ("PODS")

Sir Tim Berners-Lee, the man who invented the World Wide Web over 30 years ago, isn't too happy with how things have turned out. With his latest project, [Solid](#), Berners-Lee is aiming to put data back in the hands of users. The core idea is that instead of your personal data being scattered all over the internet for anyone to grab, it should all be stored in one place under your control. That one place is called a Pod ("personal online data store"). It would then be up to individuals to give businesses access to their data on a case-by-case basis, such as to deliver a personalized ad or process an online application. While skeptics say his vision is too ambitious, several supporters are optimistic that Sir Tim Berners-Lee could once again change how the internet works.

ABORTION DATA DELETION

When news broke that the U.S. Supreme Court could overturn *Roe v. Wade*, government access to reproductive health data was urgently called into question. Concerned privacy experts were quick to point out that everything from search history, to [personal messages](#), to period-tracking app data could now be used to identify people who try to get an abortion. One location data firm was even caught selling information about abortion clinic visits for about [\\$160](#). In response, Senator Elizabeth Warren [announced sweeping legislation](#) to ban the sale of location and health data. "With this extremist Supreme Court poised to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and states seeking to criminalize essential health care, it is more crucial than ever for Congress to protect consumers' sensitive data," said Warren. Soon after, Google also [announced](#) that it would delete location data that shows when a user visits abortion clinics as well as other sensitive locations like domestic violence shelters and addiction treatment facilities.

DATA RUSH



MARRIOTT MEDIA NETWORK

With third-party cookies on their way out, a slew of companies have launched their own advertising networks. Walmart, for example, is letting advertisers use its data to send targeted digital ads to online shoppers, while DoorDash, Kroger, and CVS Health have also been offering advertisers more ways to reach customers using retailer data. Marriott International joined that list last year with the launch of the [Marriott Media Network](#). The network will allow advertisers to use the hotel chain's data to target consumers on Marriott's app, website, the TVs in their room, and in hotel lobbies, gyms, and bars. For brands, this opens up a massive opportunity to target travelers who have very specific needs—like ground transportations, personal items they may have forgot to pack, entertainment options, restaurant recommendations, etc. And with 164 million Marriott rewards members, the potential is not to be underestimated.

PERSONAL DATA VALUATION

How much would you be willing to sell your data for? For the average American, the answer is \$1,452.25 according to a [2022 survey](#) by CouponBirds. The study raised key questions around how we might begin putting a price tag on personal data. Is \$1,450 fair? Should some people's data be worth more than others based on things like gender, spending power, and location? As we inch closer to a world where people have ownership over their data from the start, these questions will only become more important.

SYNCING HEALTH & FITNESS DATA


Google and Samsung are making it easier to sync data across health and fitness apps. Through their jointly-released [Health Connect](#) app, users can choose which apps have access to which types of data through centralized privacy controls. "For example, Android users will now be able to sync and get credit for their Peloton workouts in apps like Oura, MyFitnessPal, WeightWatchers and Lifesum," said Google. This means one health app could integrate data from your workouts, your sleep tracker, your nutrition app, and more—providing a more holistic picture of your overall health. In a future full of even more apps and smart devices, these types of integrations will be key to helping people get the most out of their data.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Make it tangible:** Help users visualize and quantify their data, turning something abstract into something more comprehensible.
- ▶ **Enable exchanges:** When users own their data, it'll be up to them how they spend it. Prepare to give people the option to monetize their data, exchange it for discounts, or even donate it to a good cause.
- ▶ **Be transparent:** Consumers may be willing to trade their data for a more personalized experience, but only if you're upfront about the benefits and implications.

DEATH

The push to die better is forcing an antiquated end-of-life industry to change its tune. Unsatisfied with current limitations, society is breaking the stigma and ushering in a more proactive, personalized, and experimental approach. The reexamination of death is just beginning.

BACKSLASH  2023

UNDO ONE

DEATH UNDONE

GRIEF TALK

The days of keeping your grief to yourself are coming to a close. CNN Anchor Anderson Cooper is sharing his personal stories of loss through an emotionally charged podcast called "All There Is." On it, he discusses his own experience with losing family members, and invites guests to open up about their own grief. The podcast reached [No. 1](#) on the Apple Podcasts charts upon its 2022 release, with the eight episodes exceeding 4 million downloads. Other popular podcasts demystifying grief include "Griefcast" and "What's Your Grief."

HUMAN COMPOSTING

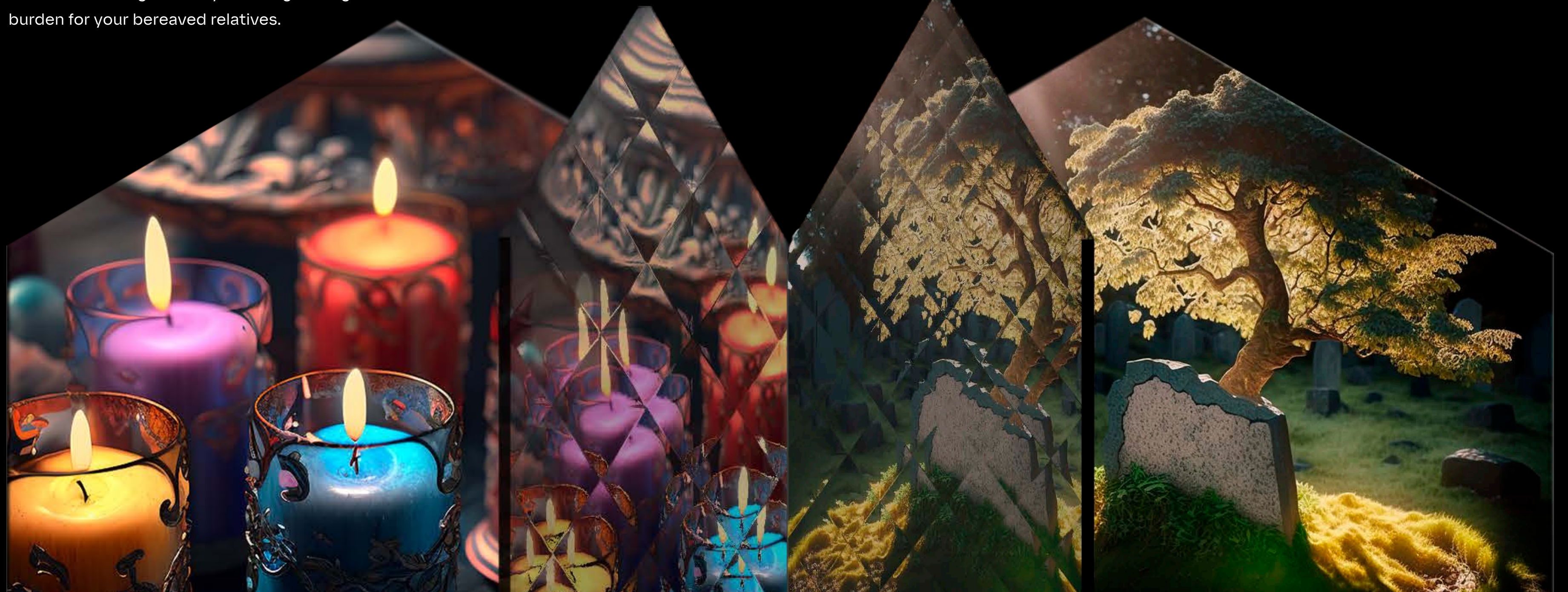
As death wellness comes out of the shadows, we're seeing a growing number of people opt for nontraditional burials. One such alternative is human composting—whereby human remains are transformed into nutrient-rich soil that's given back to the earth. The process is currently legal in five U.S. states and is steadily gaining acceptance from lawmakers elsewhere. Besides the emotional appeal of being able to return to nature, human composting offers some practical benefits as well. For one, it's much more sustainable—saving about [a metric ton of CO₂](#) per person compared to conventional burial or cremation. And secondly, it doesn't take up land, which is an increasingly important factor considering we're running out of space for burials. → [For more, watch Backslash's episode of *Life on the Edge: Dying Green*](#)

DIY DEATH PREP

In the push to die well, more people are preparing for their death on their own terms. One way to do that is by planning your funeral in advance—a process made easy thanks to apps like [Everdays](#), which allow you to prearrange your end-of-life service within minutes. Similarly, [Cake](#) lets people organize all their death wishes in one place. This includes everything from healthcare wishes, to financial planning, to how you want to be remembered—significantly reducing the logistical burden for your bereaved relatives.

Gen Zers are four times more likely than boomers to talk to family about mortality, create a bucket list, and visit a death café.

— [Aura](#), 2021



DEATH UNDONE



DIGITAL IMMORTALITY

Thanks to modern tech, we're closer than ever to bringing the dead back to life. Companies like [HereAfter AI](#) and [Somnium Space](#) are using people's data to reincarnate them in the form of a chatbot or avatar—thus allowing loved ones to interact with your digital replica long after you're gone. Similarly, Amazon recently unveiled a [feature](#) where Alexa can read stories aloud in a deceased loved one's voice after hearing just one minute of that person's speech. "While AI can't eliminate that pain of loss, it can definitely make their memories last," said Rohit Prasad, senior vice president and head scientist for Amazon Alexa.

PSYCHEDELIC END-OF-LIFE COMFORT

A [2022 study](#) has revealed that much like a near-death experience, psychedelics can dramatically reduce fears of death. The researchers hope the results will advance efforts to medically treat end-of-life anxiety with substances like psilocybin. For example, to offer comfort to cancer patients who are depressed due to their life-threatening diagnosis. "There will be many within our culture who are going to face that existential crisis and be very distressed by it, so it's a hugely applicable therapeutic indication," says Roland Griffiths, the senior author of the study.

DIGITAL LEGACY PLANNING

Between social media accounts, digital currencies, photos, and online subscriptions, digital assets really add up over the course of someone's life. Thankfully, more people are beginning to think about what happens to all that data when they die. More than [two-thirds](#) of estate planners are now incorporating digital tools and assets into their clients' plans. And companies like [GoodTrust](#) are offering a simplified one-stop shop for digital legacy planning. With the dead [expected](#) to outnumber the living on Facebook by 2070, these types of services will be essential to helping us put our digital footprint to rest.

UNCONVENTIONAL MEMENTOS

[Save My Ink Forever](#) is offering a new way to remember your loved ones: postmortem body ink recovery. The company preserves people's tattoos after they die, then has them framed like artwork—thus immortalizing a symbol that the deceased's loved ones saw regularly. Tattoo preservation is just one of several unconventional offerings being explored in the deathcare space. Other startups are turning ashes into everything from fireworks, to diamonds, to vinyl records. And design companies are creating [colorful urns](#) that double as art objects. Looking forward, memorial offerings will be as unique as the individuals themselves.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Open the conversation:** Reframing death in a realistic yet approachable light will turn avoidance into action. Brands can help by creating moments for open conversation, and uniting unlikely partners to facilitate proactive planning (think financial advisors X death doulas).
- ▶ **Digital inheritance:** What if declaring your post-death account wishes was a mandatory part of every sign-up process—from cloud storage services, to social media profiles, to crypto wallets? Ensuring that digital inheritance was never an afterthought.

Cities around the world are being reimagined for an uncertain future—accounting for rising sea levels, declining health, and dwindling resources. With these urban planning experiments will come a mix of old and new ideas, and a fresh appreciation for resilient, self-sustaining designs. Expect future-proof cities to redefine aspirational living.

FUTURE UTOPIAS

BACKSLASH



2023



FUTURE UTOPIAS

Without curbing emissions, it's predicted more than 800 million people, living in 570 cities around the world, could be at risk from sea level rise by 2050.

— [C40 Cities](#)



FLOATING CITIES

Floating city concepts are gaining popularity as rising sea levels threaten communities around the world. Construction has already begun on a [floating city](#) in the Maldives, and another is set to be built in the waters off [South Korea](#) this year. Similarly, the world's first [eco-friendly floating homes](#) are currently being developed on Panama's north coast. Beyond just moving from land to water, these floating cities are also serving as a model for a more sustainable way of life. South Korea's OCEANIX Busan, for example, will have urban farm areas to grow food, will be 100% powered by solar, and each neighborhood will be responsible for recycling resources and replenishing its own water.

META-UTOPIAS

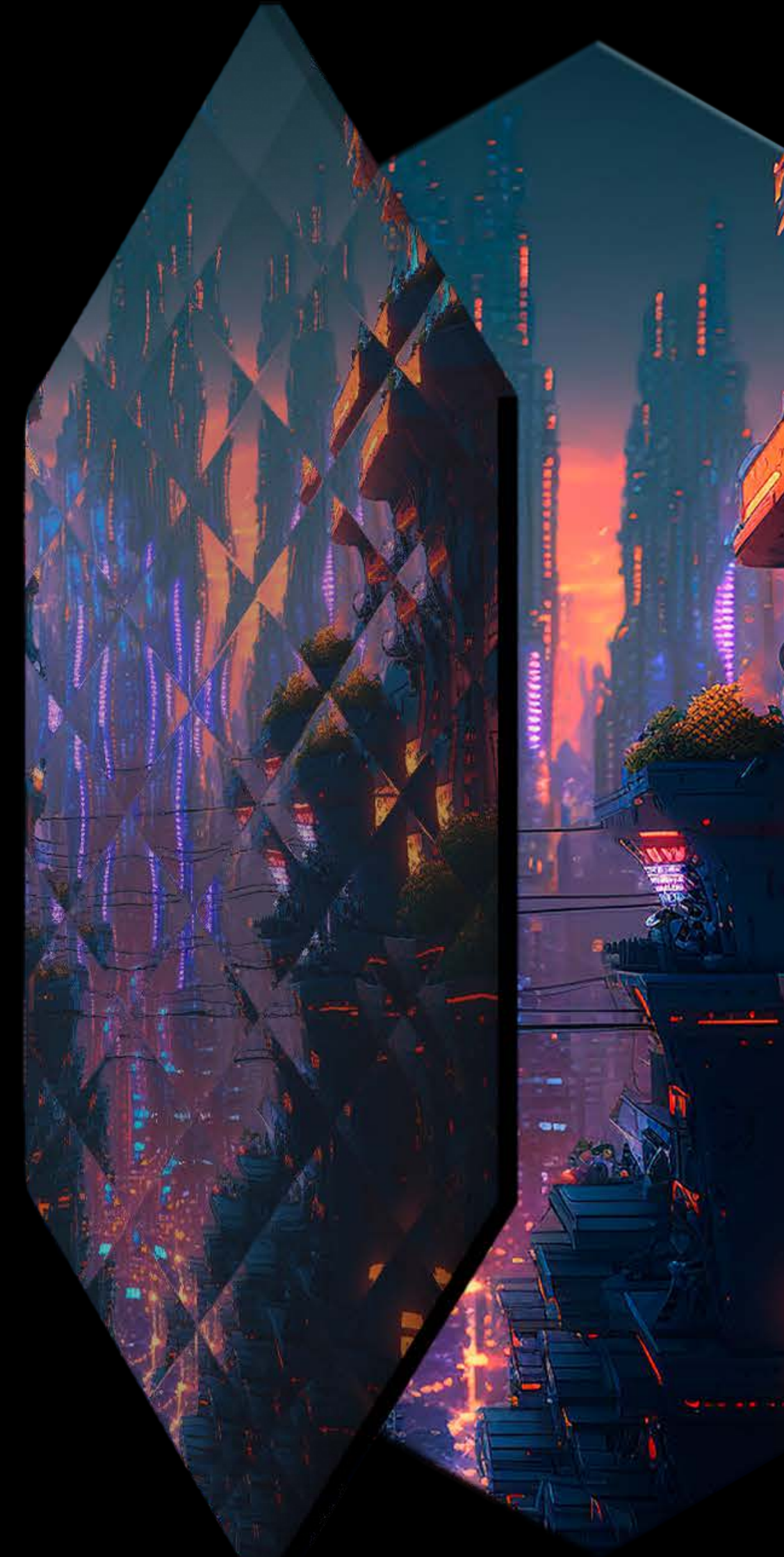
South Korea is going all in on the metaverse—offering a new blueprint for civic engagement. Last year, [Seoul](#) launched a first-of-its-kind virtual platform that allows residents to get in touch with city officials, access public services, join community events, and explore historical landmarks. The same plan is also shaking out in the South Korean city of Seongman, where virtual residents will soon be able to access civil services and events via an NFT token. Governments around the globe are now following South Korea's lead, with [Dubai](#), [Madeira](#), and [Shanghai](#) among the several other cities investing in metaverse developments.

SAUDI ARABIA'S WALLED CITY

The Saudi Arabian desert will be home to a futuristic walled city by 2030. Called "[The Line](#)," the city will stretch 170 kilometers long, 500 meters tall, and only 200 meters wide, and will be enclosed by a mirrored façade in order to maintain an ideal temperature year-round. The city will also run entirely on renewable energy, and is expected to house nine million people once completed. Transportation is another unique element. Everything residents need will be no more than a five-minute walk away, and a high-speed rail will be able to transport people from one end of the city to the other in just 20 minutes—completely eliminating the need for cars or roads.

15-MINUTE CITIES

Calls for "15-minute cities"—whereby residents can access the essentials of daily life within a 15-minute walk or bike ride—are growing louder. Though the concept has been around for a while, it was most recently popularized by [Paris](#). Sweden even pushed the idea one step further with plans for a hyperlocal "[one-minute city](#)." Now, the C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group is partnering with Nordic Real Estate Partners (NREP) [to bring](#) the concept to life in at least five additional cities around the world. The goal is to cut emissions and prove the benefits of "reclaiming space in cities from polluting vehicles back to people." Through the pilot programs, C40 and NREP will establish hyperlocal design standards that can be replicated globally.



FUTURE UTOPIAS

SMART LIVING

South Korea's [Eco Delta Smart City](#) offers a glimpse into the future of data-driven living. Residents are required to wear a smartwatch that tracks their household energy consumption, lets them engage with the city, alerts them when food in their refrigerator is expiring, and more. The device also monitors their health data, which can be displayed across the home's smart mirrors. The Eco Delta Smart City is currently home to 56 tenants who live rent-free in exchange for giving up their data. Once the three-year pilot is over, the learnings will be used to demonstrate how an entire smart city could eventually be built from scratch. Globally, investments in smart cities have doubled since 2018, reaching [\\$158 billion](#) in 2022. Other projects to watch include Japan's [Woven City](#) (developed by Toyota), the [Suito Sustainable Smart Town](#) (developed by Panasonic), and government smart home pilots in [Helsinki](#) and [Amsterdam](#).

3D-PRINTED ECO VILLAGE

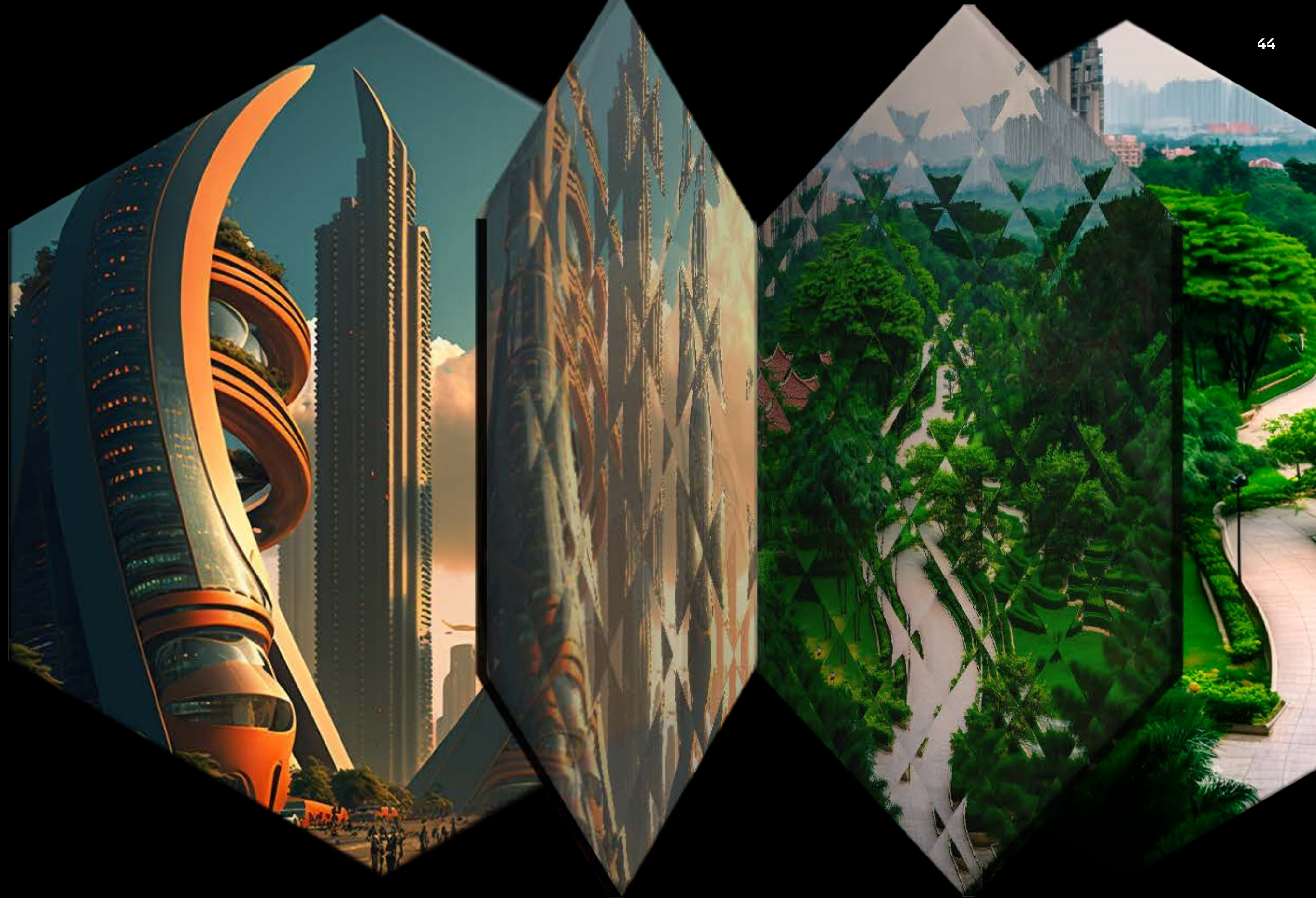
A 3D-printed village made from recycled cacao is coming to Ecuador's coast. Poised to be "the Silicon Valley for circular economy innovators," the [Cacao Eco Village](#) will house a chocolate factory, an education and research center, and co-working and co-living spaces. The village's modular design—made from cacao shell waste and local materials—also makes it self-sufficient. The roofs will facilitate rainwater collection, for instance, and the buildings will have natural ventilation systems. "In the not so distant future, we will be able to design buildings made entirely of natural materials and recycle them at the end of their life cycle," says renowned architect Valentino Gareri.

#CITIESTOK

Urban planning talk is thriving on social media. On TikTok, a [growing number](#) of architecture and city planning enthusiasts are breaking down topics like housing and transportation—often with an activist spin. Dispelling the myth of the suburban utopia, advocating for car-free policies, and explaining gentrification are just a few popular themes. Meanwhile, over on Twitter, some amateur urban planners are using DALL-E to [visualize](#) what cities would look like if they were built for pedestrians instead of cars. With growing access to knowledge and online tools, everyone can have a say in the future of urban development.

METVERSE PALEONTOLOGY

Threatened by rising sea levels, the island nation of Tuvalu is replicating itself in the metaverse. The idea is that going digital will allow Tuvalu to preserve its likeness and culture in the event that the island is wiped out due to climate change. Doing so, says Tuvalu's foreign minister, "is the only way they can remind their children and grandchildren what their home once was." Up to 40% of the island's capital is already underwater at high tide, and the entire country is expected to be fully submerged by the end of the century. If global warming continues unchecked, Tuvalu won't be the last nation to go digital.



The global market for smart cities—encompassing the AI, IoT and data management systems that will enable many of their promised functions—is expected to top \$2.7 trillion by 2027.

— [Business Wire](#), 2022

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Prototype and test:** Use this as an opportunity to trial new technologies and ways of living. From smart appliances to disaster-proof building materials, the time to shape the next era of urban planning is now.
- ▶ **Expand the role of your physical footprint:** As citizens strive for a happier, greener way of life, businesses should reevaluate which emerging needs and desires their stores and office spaces can fulfill.
- ▶ **Go local:** Consider smaller store formats closer to places of residence—reducing the need for transportation.



BACKSLASH



2023

GAP COLLAPSE

The fight against inequality is growing more nuanced. No longer just a wealth gap—the climate 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.

GAP COLLAPSE

BRAZIL'S URBAN GARDEN

With 811 million people around the world facing hunger, it's clear that our current food system is broken. One example of how we might begin fixing it lies in Brazil's efforts to build the world's largest urban garden by 2024. The project is part of Hortas Cariocas, a government program that aims to bring healthy produce to disadvantaged communities. Once complete, the garden will be as large as 15 soccer fields and will be able to produce about 160 tons of food a year—benefitting up to 100,000 families every month. In addition to being a fresh source of produce, the garden also provides a helpful source of income. Those who work in the garden receive anywhere from R\$500 (\$98) to R\$1,000 (\$192) a month depending on their involvement. Only about half of the produce is actually sold, however. The other half is donated directly to those in need.

FREE PERIOD PRODUCTS

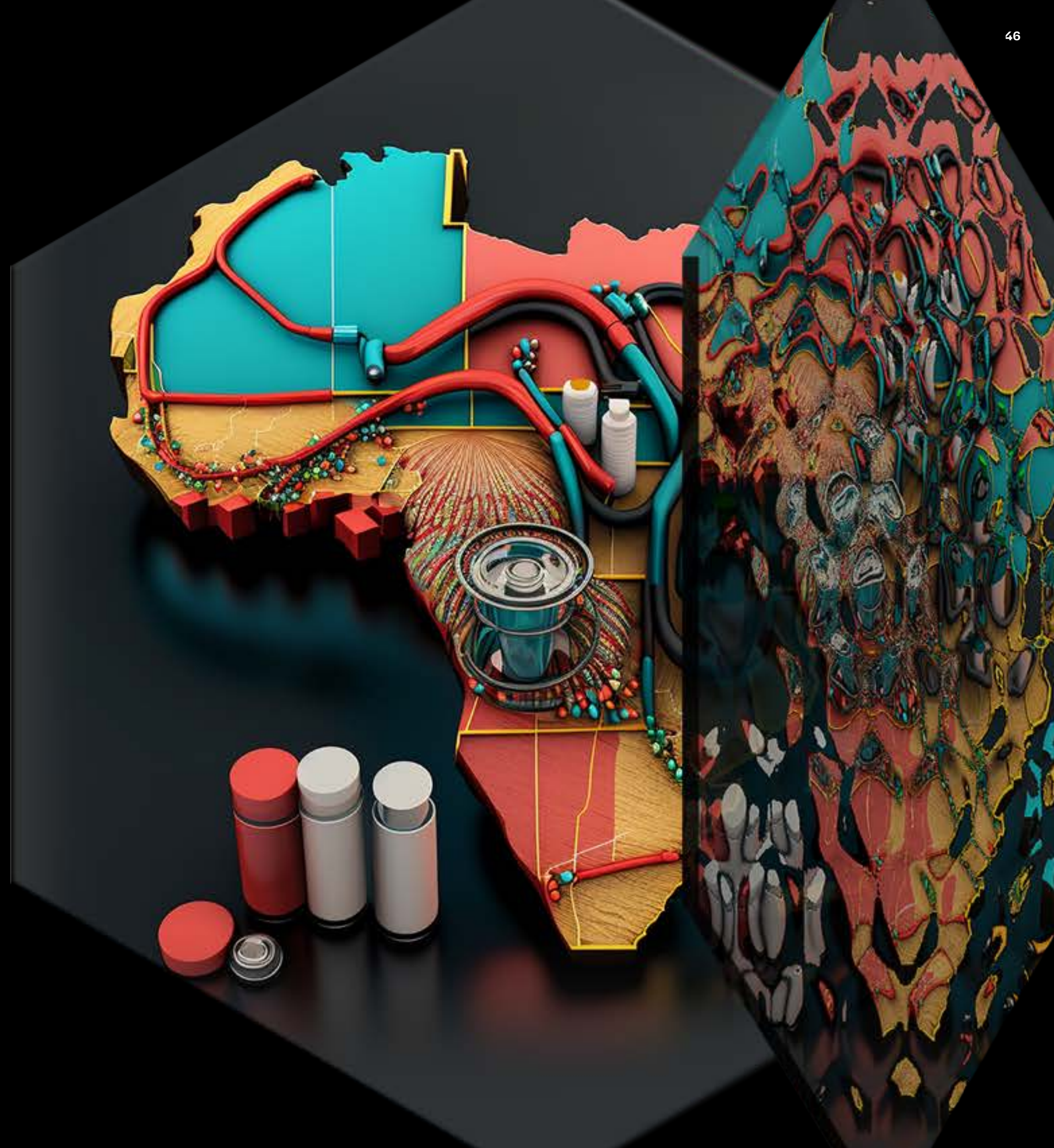
Scotland made waves when it became the first country in the world to offer free period products last year. A survey of more than 1,000 women in Scotland, which helped drive support for the bill, found that a fifth of them had experienced period poverty at some point in their lives. Those who couldn't afford tampons or pads often resorted to using less sanitary alternatives like toilet paper or rags. While Scotland is the first to make menstrual products free on a national scale, it won't be the last. Northern Ireland is considering a similar measure, and New Zealand and Seoul already offer free menstrual products in schools.

SHRINKING SOUTH AFRICA'S HEALTHCARE GAP

Only 16% of South Africans have access to private healthcare, putting major strain on an already overextended public healthcare system. Oyi is helping South Africans save up for private treatment with a prepaid medical card that's accepted by every healthcare provider in the country. Savings on the card can only be used to cover medical expenses, ensuring that users have a safety net in times of need. Another benefit is that the card can pay for the treatment of family members or dependents—offering a major advantage over most insurance schemes.

DEMOCRATIZED DISASTER PREP

One-third of people globally live without access to natural disaster warning systems, putting them at much greater risk of dying from extreme weather events. The UN is setting out to close the preparedness gap by ensuring that everyone on the planet is protected by early warning systems within the next five years. The Global Commission on Adaptation found that just 24 hours notice of an impending hazard can reduce the ensuing damage by 30%, creating huge potential to save lives and prevent economic loss. The aggressive goal will require partnerships not only between the UN and state governments, but also with forward-thinking businesses.



GAP COLLAPSE



FINANCIAL INCLUSION

It might be all about the money, but having a place to save that money? Not so easy. Especially if you are unhoused, undocumented, or unemployed. Filipino state bank [Landbank](#) is looking to bring more Filipinos into the financial system with the Piso account—a product that allows customers to open a savings account with a minimum deposit of just one peso. In a similar vein, the UAE's [Now Bank](#) is opening financial doors for migrants by removing documentation and account balance requirements.

FACILITATING RICH-POOR FRIENDSHIPS

Reducing inequality? That's what friends are for. A study released in [Nature](#) found that friendships between rich and poor individuals are a better predictor of upward mobility than any other characteristic studied yet. To help cultivate cross-class friendships, school districts are urging more low-income students to participate in sports by offering free equipment, physical exams, and transportation to practice. Similarly, on a college level, Yale University places incoming students with groups of roommates from a variety of backgrounds.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Unlock access to the essentials:** Health, food, education, finance, energy, and telecom brands, listen up. As inequality worsens, businesses will increasingly be expected to make up for gaps in government services.
- ▶ **Think beyond one-time aid:** What kind of tools and resources will continue to provide and protect for the long term?
- ▶ **Open-source generosity:** In addition to spreading physical resources, businesses can spread intel and ideas in order to solve shared problems.

E-COMMERCE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

India's online shopping scene is mainly reserved for the biggest cities. To bring e-commerce to rural Indians, CityMall is championing a localized model that empowers micro-entrepreneurs to run and grow their own virtual stores. The retail app has so far recruited over 100,000 community leaders who are able to learn the business by assisting with local sales, marketing, and last-mile delivery. With over [\\$110 million](#) in funding, CityMall could very well change how India shops.

TIKTOK PILOTS FREE WI-FI

[Thirty percent](#) of the world still lives without access to the internet—a stark divide between developed and developing nations. To help bridge the digital divide, [TikTok](#) partnered with ThinkWifi to pilot 50 free wifi hotspots throughout South Africa. "With this pilot, we hope to encourage more people to join digital spaces such as ours, to not only create content but to learn new skills and educate fellow community members about their passion and interests," [said](#) TikTok director Fortune Mgwili-Sibanda.



Our gender no longer defines us. And we don't want it to. From fashion to family dynamics, we're unraveling the roles that gender boxed us into and doing away with binary gender divisions. As we move past male/female stereotypes, we'll lean into new identity markers that transcend our physical sex.

GENDER RULES

GENDER RULES

56% of millennials and 50% of Gen Z agree that traditional gender roles and binary gender labels are outdated. — [Bigeye](#), 2021

THE BAD BUNNY EFFECT

Disrupting an industry is no easy feat, but Bad Bunny makes it look easy with every single he drops. He's elevated reggaeton to the mainstream and shattered the genre's sexist and violent stereotypes along the way. From writing songs in the female perspective, to calling out the murder of a Puerto Rican transgender woman on live TV, the Puerto Rican artist has continued to challenge ideas of what a male reggaeton star can stand for. Fellow Puerto Rican singer Ricky Martin [says](#) Bad Bunny "resonates with a generation that is, at the moment, discovering who they really are." "It is very refreshing to witness in an industry known for its machismo," he continued.

"SINGLE AND PROUD"

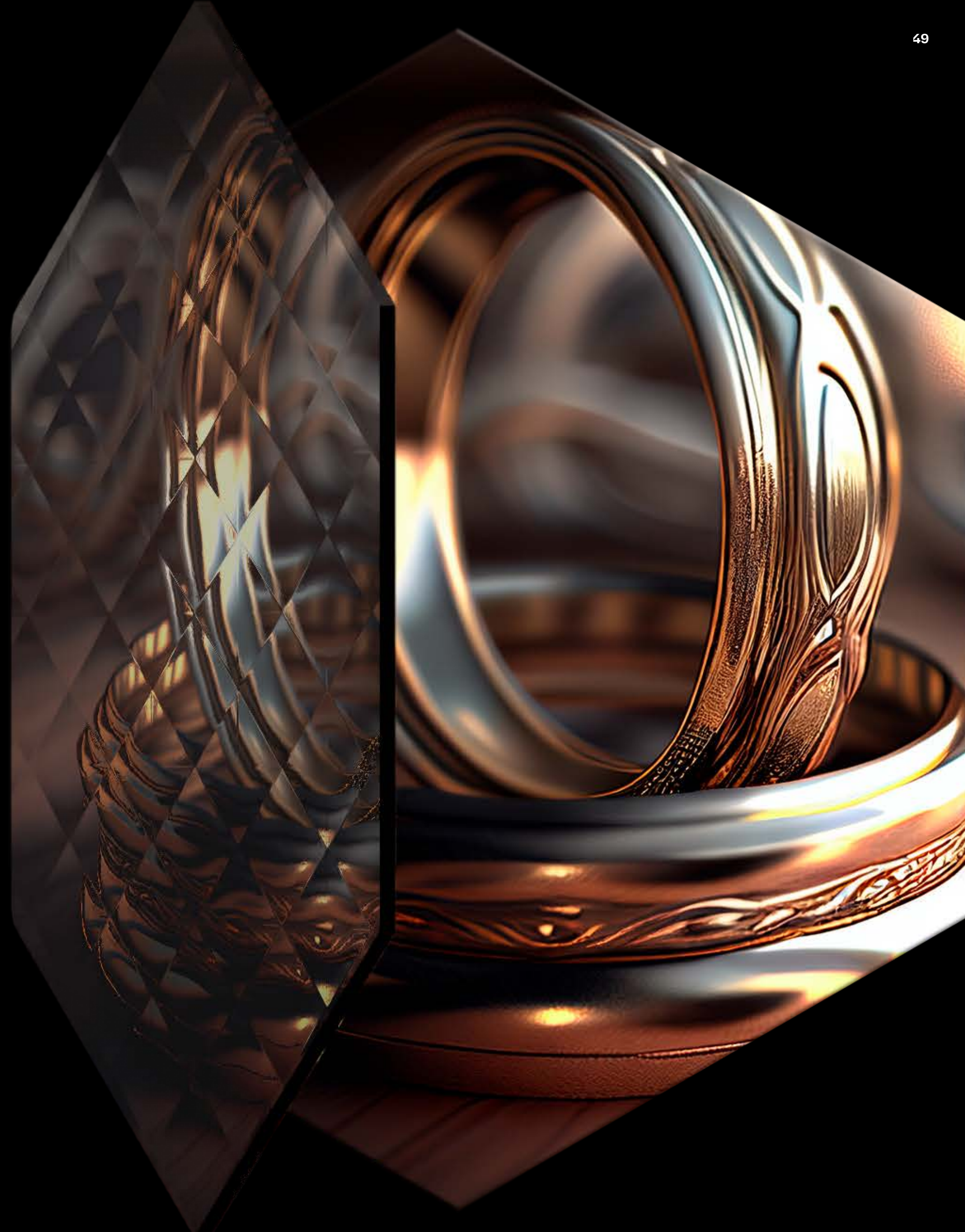
India remains a largely patriarchal society where women are taught to aspire to marriage and motherhood. This is especially true in rural India, where single women are considered a burden and thousands of widows are banished to holy towns. But a growing number of Indian women are now flipping the script and choosing to be "[proudly single](#)." Some of these women have banded together through a Facebook group called Status Single, where they celebrate their independence and bond over their shared values. "I meet a lot of women who say they are single by choice, they reject the notion of marriage because it's a patriarchal institution that's unjust to women and is used to oppress them," says Sreemoyee Piu Kundu, founder of Status Single.

HOUSEWORK SCHOOLS

Strict gender roles have long governed domestic life in Japan. So much so, that it's common for men to retire without ever having cooked, cleaned, or washed a dish. But fed up wives are demanding change. The only problem? Most men don't know where to start. In search of guidance, a growing number of men are now attending [housework schools](#) where they learn to clean, iron, do laundry, and cook. In addition to men who want to be better husbands, courses have become especially popular among older widowers and divorcees who are figuring out how to look after themselves in the absence of a partner.

SURNAME EQUALITY

A top Italian court has [ruled](#) that newborn children should carry both parents' surnames by default. The court said that automatically assigning children just the surname of their father is constitutionally illegitimate. Instead, parents can now decide whose surname comes first (as Italian women typically keep their last name when they marry) or, they can choose just one of their names—marking the first time it's possible for children to carry their mothers' last names. With Italy's gender equality score currently falling below the EU average, supporters believe the landmark judgment will help erase outdated ideas of a patriarchal family.



GENDER RULES

UNGENERATED TOYS

Spain is banning gender stereotypes from children's toy ads. The new ruling, which came into effect in December 2022, prohibits the "exclusive association" of girls with toys that reproduce roles of "caregiving, domestic work, or beauty" and boys with "action, physical activity, or technology." It will also ban ads that use blue or pink to imply that their products are for boys or girls. The ruling follows the lead of several other European nations, including France and Britain, who have recently adopted similar rules. For the next generation, breaking the gender binary starts with fostering more inclusive play.

GENDER-NEUTRAL SIRI

The stereotype of the female assistant might be gone in the workplace, but it persists virtually with the onslaught of female digital assistants like Alexa, Siri, and Cortana. Seemingly innocuous, the feminization of digital assistants reflects biases toward women being submissive caretakers. Apple heard the criticism and responded with a gender-neutral voice option for Siri. Voiced by a member of the LGBTQ+ community, the genderless solution sounds more human and less robotic. As gender constructs continue to unravel, businesses will be forced to reflect on how their designs may be reinforcing outdated ideals.

FLUID FASHION

Chinese label Pronounce is challenging fashion's gender norms. Though widely considered a menswear brand, Pronounce refuses to be put in a box and says it is designed for anyone "who is curious, who loves new and desirable stuff, who wants to be confident." Gender fluid in form and function, Pronounce's larger goal is to combat old-school ideas of masculinity in China—where the state media has banned "effeminate" men on TV.

FAIR PLAY

Under new guidelines, New Zealand is allowing transgender athletes to play community sports in the gender they identify with—no proof or justification required. While transgender participation has proved controversial at both amateur and elite levels, New Zealand's move marks a big leap toward fair play. As part of the update, Sport New Zealand is also encouraging local sport leaders to appoint inclusion officers, rethink gender-specific uniforms, and make bathrooms and changing rooms trans-friendly.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Flip the script:** Beyond just avoiding stereotypes, brands can spur positive cultural change with advertisements that completely turn gender norms on their head.
- ▶ **Check yourself:** Are you categorizing products "for men" or "for women" in a way that's limiting? Is your branding or packaging reinforcing outdated gender ideals?
- ▶ **Break the bias:** Host experiences that cross gender lines and prove biases wrong. A lived experience can be more powerful than a digital message.

HEALTH

BACKSLASH



2023

HEDONISM

A once-sterile healthcare industry is taking cues from the pleasurable parts of wellness, ushering in a more holistic and hyper-personalized approach. As wellness fuses with everything from beauty, to entertainment, to fashion, everyday rituals will get a self-care makeover. Who says the journey to better health can't be enjoyable?

HEALTH HEDONISM

3D-PRINTED PERSONALIZED MEDS

Traditionally made in small batches and carrying a hefty price tag, personalized medication has been largely inaccessible. Until now, that is. Finnish healthtech startup CurifyLabs is democratizing the process with a 3D printer that allows hospitals to print pills according to a patient's exact needs and preferences. Global spending on precision medicine is expected to surpass \$132 million by 2027 (a 270% increase from 2022), further proving that bespoke solutions are the future of healthcare.

MENOPAUSE VACATIONS

Between hot flashes, mood changes, and insomnia, menopause is no walk in the park. To help women navigate the changes of midlife and cope with its symptoms, a growing number of wellness resorts and spas are now offering menopause-specific retreats. Hormone lectures, nutrition tips, and intuitive dance sessions are just a few of the services you'll find there. While menopausal women have previously been underserved by the medical community, these vacations reflect a new level of attention around the topic. One renowned wellness resort, Canyon Ranch, has seen a 50% increase in the number of inquiries about menopause-related concerns over the past three years.

MICROBIOME BEAUTY

The line between health and beauty is blending away with the advent of microbiome skincare lines. Studies out of China and Japan have revealed that problematic skin can be caused by low microbiome diversity, encouraging people to test their skin microbiome with at-home testing kits from the likes of Singapore-based Sequential Skin. Renown German brand Dr. Strum and Indian line LactoSporin are also capitalizing on these insights with new acne treatments that use pro-, pre-, and postbiotics to rebalance skin rather than harming it with harsh chemicals. But with ingredient consciousness on the rise, brands will need to ensure that their claims are well-proven before tapping into beauty buzzwords.

CANNABIS PHARMACY

South Africa has legalized its first cannabis-only pharmacy. Located in Johannesburg, THC Pharmacy supplies card-carrying medicinal cannabis users with up to 120 grams per month. But it's not your average pharmacy. In a unique twist, the pharmacy also employs a chef that shows customers how to use cannabis in different recipes. As healthcare becomes more lifestyle-oriented, we could see more partnerships between doctors and chefs in the future.



“Products and services claiming well-being benefits are thriving in a world dominated by health-related fear and uncertainty. Shrewd brands are finding ways of injecting little pockets of wellness into the everyday lives of their consumers.” — Lisa Payne, Head of Beauty, Stylus

HEALTH HEDONISM

WORKOUT LIVESTREAMS

Stuck inside due to ongoing Covid lockdowns, people in China are turning to workout livestreams to make fitness fun. The current star of the livestream scene is singer and actor Liu Genghong, who gained more than [64 million](#) followers in a single month last year. And the growth is set to continue. According to smart fitness platform [Keep](#), revenue from China's online fitness market is expected to increase from 786.6 billion yuan in 2021 to 1,479.3 billion yuan in 2026, with a CAGR of 13.5% (versus the global growth rate of 4.8%). Even further down the line, the digital fitness space could get a VR makeover. Meta is already making its VR headsets "[sweat-proof](#)" in anticipation.

GUCCI X OURA RING

Feeling "Gucci" never looked so good. Wearable health tracking startup [Oura Ring](#) teamed up with Gucci to create a specially branded [18 carat gold smart ring](#) that tracks heart rate, sleep quality, fitness levels, and more for a premium price of \$950. While other labels like [Tory Burch](#) have made flashy FitBit accessories in the past, the design partnership between Gucci and [Oura Ring](#) suggests that more cross-industry collabs are on the horizon.

CIRCADIAN HACKING

Between endless screen time, far too little sleep, and indoor living—modern life is somewhat of a circadian rhythm nightmare. But a new wave of solutions are aiming to reset our internal clocks for better overall health. Tech company [Arcascope](#) is using customized circadian rhythm recommendations to help shift workers get better sleep; Polar's [Ignite 3 fitness watch](#) is designed to help balance your workout schedule with your unique circadian rhythm, pinpointing the specific time of day you'll be most alert; and beauty brand [Nobel Panacea](#) created a [Chronobiology Sleep Mask](#) that releases ingredients according to your overnight circadian rhythm.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Lend some motivation:** Monetary incentives, playful challenges, and gamification can make the more dreaded aspects of healthcare fun.
- ▶ **Avoid elitism:** To shed its exclusionary reputation, health and wellness brands will need to unlock affordable forms of self-care for the masses.
- ▶ **Provide proof:** When everything is being sold as "wellness," the word can quickly lose its meaning. Wellness brands can gain credibility by partnering with medical professionals and backing up their claims with clear scientific evidence.

HEALTHY LIVING REWARDS

Wellness apps [Ness](#) in the US and [Caterpillar](#) in the UK are rewarding healthy choices. From working out to buying vegetables, every healthy action is tracked and turned into points that can be redeemed for shopping and entertainment discounts. Meanwhile, Romania and Moldavia are taking wellness incentives one step further with the creation of a special [healthy rewards currency](#). With preventative care as a common priority, we can expect to see more health-driven loyalty schemes from retail, finance, and health brands going forward.



HELICOPTER ÉCH

Governments and brands are monitoring our every move. Whether via smart devices in our homes or cameras on our street corners, surveillance is being normalized both with and without our consent. But while 24/7 tracking is becoming the price of admission into modern society, the fight for privacy isn't over just yet.

BACKSLASH  2023



HELICOPTER TECH

MENTAL HEALTH APP VIOLATIONS

Sharing your deepest fears and concerns shouldn't come at a cost. Unfortunately, seeking help and guidance from mental health apps is indeed costing people one very precious thing: their privacy. [Mozilla](#) found that most mental health apps track, share, and capitalize on user's recorded moods and biometrics, often selling this personal information to advertisers. Some of the worst offenders even save private therapy chat transcripts. To regain trust, apps will need to implement safeguards and practice radical transparency.

GREECE'S SPYWARE BAN

Greece is saying "no thanks" to surveillance by becoming the first country to explicitly ban commercial spyware. Under the law, anyone caught selling, using, or purchasing spyware will face a prison sentence of up to two years. But Greek lawmakers are not stopping there. They're also reforming rules for legally sanctioned spyware (AKA wiretapping). After revelations that multiple party leaders and journalists had been the victims of targeted spyware surveillance—possibly at the bequest of the government—calls for interventions from outside and inside the government forced an external investigation.

FACIAL RECOGNITION ROLLOUTS

Your face could very well serve as both your ID and credit card in the not-so-far future. Squeezed by staffing shortages, more airports around the world are now using face-scanning tech to verify people's identity before letting them on a plane. Similarly, on the retail front, Mastercard has begun rolling out trials of a facial recognition payment system in brick-and-mortar stores. The program, which aims to reduce fraud, will launch worldwide following an initial test run in Brazil. In the case of both airports and stores, facial recognition is being reframed as a normal part of everyday life. Prepare for biometric tech to be the new entry point into modern life.

PROTESTOR TRACKING

Protestors beware: your activism is being carefully monitored. When protests broke out against China's zero-Covid policy, the government leveraged location and messaging data to track down those who took part and make arrests. While China's surveillance state is nothing new, pandemic protocols have taken things to a whole new level. In response, human rights activists are putting pressure on Big Tech to pull out of China, where many companies helped the government build and implement much of the current tracking systems. As personal devices become tools for state surveillance, citizens will resist by taking strict privacy precautions.

"The widespread adoption of surveillance technologies—even ones that offer supposed benefits—creates an environment where even more surveillance is deemed acceptable. After all, there are already cameras and microphones everywhere." — Chris Gilliard, [The Atlantic](#)



HELICOPTER TECH

LUXURY SURVEILLANCE

Smart devices have made us all obsessed with tracking. We have wearables that monitor our health metrics, smart speakers that memorize our shopping lists, and smartphones that can quantify pretty much every detail of our daily lives. These devices all fall under the umbrella of what digital-studies scholars David Golumbia and Chris Gilliard call *luxury surveillance*—that is, “surveillance that people pay for and whose tracking, monitoring, and quantification features are understood by the user as benefits.” Golumbia and Gilliard caution people to look beyond the clever branding of these products, and instead consider how the data gathered might be used against them.

EMPLOYEE SURVEILLANCE

Surveillance is ramping up as employers aim to keep a closer eye on their remote workers. In a recent study by a UK workers union, 60% of employees reported being subject to some form of tech surveillance in their job. This can include email and call monitoring, webcam spying, systems that track how much a worker is typing, and even eye movement detectors. Unsurprisingly, pushback from workers has already begun. Some employees are hacking the system by buying mouse jigglers that make it look like they’re online. And others are taking the issue to court. In October, a Dutch court ruled that requiring employees to keep their webcam on is a violation of human rights—stating that “video surveillance of an employee in the workplace, be it covert or not, must be considered as a considerable intrusion into the employee’s private life.”

“SHAMEWARE”

Religious organizations and parents are encouraging people to install “shameware” apps that closely monitor their online activity. The idea is that these apps can hold people accountable for behavior deemed immoral or sinful. For instance, Covenant Eyes, which calls itself an anti-porn app, quietly takes screenshots of your smartphone every minute, then flags any “mature content” to an accountability partner. Similar apps like Bark, NetNanny, Accountable2You, and EverAccountable are also gaining traction. But according to an investigation by *Wired*, these apps are monitoring even more than people realize—including online purchases, articles read, social media interactions, and more.

RING NATION

What has Wanda Sykes, security camera footage, and a load of controversy? Welcome to *Ring Nation*—a new reality TV series from Amazon. The show will feature user-submitted footage from Ring home security cameras—ranging from heartwarming marriage proposals to silly animals—but is expected to bring more privacy problems than laughs. The show is especially contentious considering Amazon’s existing partnerships with law enforcement agencies. Though it remains to be seen if Amazon’s attempt to normalize surveillance will result in more Ring sales, it does make one thing very clear: we’re always being watched.

WHAT’S NEXT

- ▶ **Practice radical transparency:** Don’t collect or leverage people’s personal information in ways that you wouldn’t be proud to advertise.
- ▶ **Present options:** While some people may choose to opt in to tracking in exchange for convenience or personalization, others won’t be so willing. Present customers with clear choices, or be prepared for them to go elsewhere.



INCLUSIVE BY DESIGN

BACKSLASH



2023

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, products, and experiences to be accessible from the bottom up. A fairer future awaits.

INCLUSIVE BY DESIGN

"Far too often, inclusive design is seen as other or niche and doesn't get the fanfare it deserves. Yet body shapes, human needs, and individual attitudes differ from the mainstream images and ideals we are prescribed to." — Forbes, 2022

REAL VIRTUAL BEAUTY

Dove is on a mission to make gaming avatars more inclusive. The company recently partnered with the Center for Appearance Research and Epic Games to develop an online training course called Real Virtual Beauty. Through the course, game designers will be challenged to create a diverse range of avatars that avoid the hyper-sexualization of female characters. The final avatars will be available for free via Epic Games' Art Station, and the best ones will be featured in upcoming games. Dove hopes that the course will result in more authentic avatars that female gamers can relate to. According to the brand's [research](#), 74% of women wish more female video game characters looked like women in real life, while 62% of women feel misrepresented in gaming.

ISLAMIC FINANCE

Haram no more. Australia is opening financial doors for Muslims with the introduction of the country's [first Islamic bank](#). This means that the 800,000+ Muslims who live in Australia will be able to become homeowners, a goal that was previously impossible since paying or receiving interest is prohibited in Islam. In accordance with Islam, the bank is also forbidden from dealing with industries like gambling, alcohol, and pornography. These halal-compliant offerings have attracted interest from both Muslim and non-Muslims alike, driving over 8,000 people to join the waitlist before the bank opens publicly in 2024.

GERMANY'S LGBTQ+ COMMISSIONER

At the start of last year, Germany appointed Sven Lehmann as the country's first-ever [commissioner for queer affairs](#). In his role, officially titled "Federal Government Commissioner for the Acceptance of Sexual and Gender Diversity," Lehmann will be responsible for helping Germany "become a pioneer country in the fight against sexual and gender discrimination." This includes coverage of transition-related medical care, an end to restrictions on blood donations by gay men, and legal changes that allow trans people to determine their own gender. Lehmann will also develop strategies to combat queerphobia.

ACCESSIBLE HOME COLLECTION

Gone are the days of makeshift furniture fixes for injured, disabled, and aging populations thanks to Pottery Barn's new [Accessible Home](#) collection. As the first luxury home retailer to offer such a line, Pottery Barn is showing what it means to merge style with functional, inclusive design. Standout items include a wheelchair accessible desk, nonbreakable tabletop products, remotes with easy-to-read buttons, adjustable beds, and more.

INCLUSIVE BY DESIGN

\$2.8 billion is lost every month by businesses only catering to “normal” people. — Scope UK

DISNEY'S “LOVE LETTER TO NIGERIA”

Disney is teaming up with African animation studio Kugali Media to bring Nigeria's first major animation series to Disney+ viewers around the world. The upcoming sci-fi series—called *Ìwájú*—is set in Lagos, and will explore the universally relevant themes of inequality, class divide, and coming of age. It also marks the first time Disney is collaborating with an outside studio in its 100-year history.

SPEECH ACCESSIBILITY PROJECT

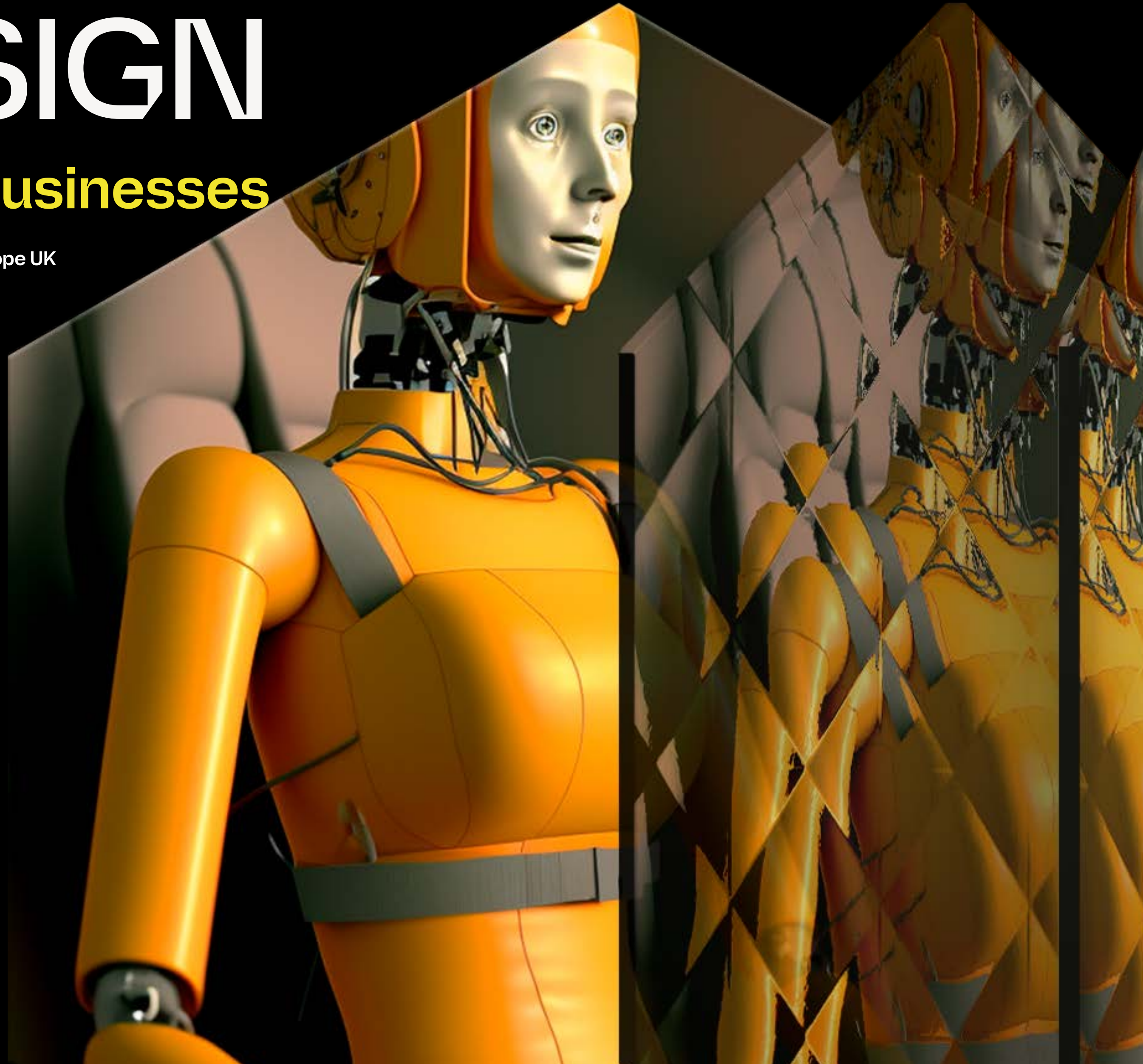
Tech competitors Apple, Amazon, Google, Meta, and Microsoft are coming together in the name of inclusive innovation. Their joint [Speech Accessibility Project](#) will train AI to recognize more diverse speech patterns—thus making voice-centric products accessible for the millions of people with Parkinson's, Down's syndrome, and other conditions that impact speech. The companies have also pledged to use the project learnings to improve their own voice recognition products, meaning future digital assistants and smart home tech will be developed with differences in mind.

FEMALE CRASH TEST DUMMY

Compared to men, women are 17% more likely to die in a car crash and 73% more likely to sustain serious injuries from a front-end collision. Yet car companies are only required to test vehicle safety using crash dummies modeled after the average man. To close the safety gap, a team of Swedish researchers led by Dr. Astrid Linder has finally developed the first-ever [female crash dummy](#). Beyond just height and weight, the dummy has been designed to account for anatomical differences in torso shape, center of gravity, muscle build, joint stiffness, and more. The next step is for governments to actually mandate female crash dummy safety tests. Until then, it'll be up to automakers to initiate more inclusive testing on their own.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Start small:** Address practical and functional accessibility issues first. To do so, work hand-in-hand with the community you're designing for to identify the problems and prototype solutions.
- ▶ **Be specific:** Unlock innovation by optimizing places, products, services, and communications for specific users with specific needs. Different kinds of design—whether for people with disabilities or underrepresented groups—will unlock different outcomes.



KINDER

BACKSLASH



2023

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

CULT



KINDER CULT



KIDULTS

“Kidults”—adults who buy toys for themselves—are now the biggest driver of growth for the toy industry. While inflation is causing most families to spend less on toys for their kids, kidults are dropping more money than ever—making up about one-fourth of all toy sales this past year. Some of the more popular items are collectibles that feed into nostalgia, such as Lego sets, Barbie dolls, and Star Wars action figures. If only landlords accepted Monopoly money...

THROWBACK EATS

Who said healthy food had to be boring? With more people looking to bring joy back to mealtime, brands are giving our favorite childhood foods a guilt-free glow-up. Magic Spoon is serving up high-protein, low-sugar cereals in nostalgic flavors like Sugar Cookie and Cinnamon Roll. And Goodles—which recently raised \$6.4 million in funding—is making a nutritious mac and cheese for adults. Packed with protein, prebiotics, and over 21 plant-based ingredients, Goodles’ mac and cheese is a prime example of comfort food all grown up.

NOSTALGIC NFTs

The old is new again thanks to the rise of retro NFTs. Classic games like Pokemon, Pogs, and Topps Mars Attack are being reimaged as digital collectibles; Dapper Labs launched Dr. Seuss-themed digital stickers and trading cards; and Nickelodeon released an NFT collection featuring beloved cartoon characters from Hey Arnold! and Rugrats. As the NFT craze continues, combining novelty and nostalgia can help brands stand out in a crowded landscape.

“Against the backdrop of a changing world, people have been escaping to more comfortable territories as the antidote to everyday life. Looking at this year’s trending items, it’s clear that people have been turning to products that remind them of happier, more carefree times.”

— Agus Panzoni, Trend Expert

KINDER CULT

LEGO LATES

Recent Lego [research](#) has confirmed what we already know: pretty much all adults (or at least, 93% of them) are stressed. To help people take a load off, Lego launched a series of adult-only events in partnership with Universal Music Group, BAFTA Masterclass, and Grace Chen. The events took place in Lego stores from Shanghai to London, where adults were invited to play, make new friends, and find their flow. By creating a dedicated time and space to unwind, Lego allowed people to experience the benefits of play firsthand.

BARBIECORE

You don't have to be on [#Barbiecore](#) TikTok to know we're living in a Barbie World. From Greta Gerwig's upcoming Barbie film to Mattel's [Barbie amusement park](#), the childhood fashion icon [is back](#) in a big way. But this isn't the blonde, perfectly proportioned doll of your youth. While still undeniably stylish, the re-emergence of bright pinks and girly style is for now for all of us—giving people everywhere the confidence to embrace a bright, playful aesthetic. "[Barbiecore is] a feminist statement that empowers women to dress how they want without fear of judgment," says Dublin-based blogger [@itsprincessbitchx](#).

OLD-SCHOOL TECH

According to Klarna's [global 2022 purchase summary](#), throwback tech is flying off the shelves like never before. Compared to an average month in 2021, worldwide sales of wired headphones were up 317%, vinyl was up 144%, flip phone sales increased by 81%, and turntables were up by 69%. For global consumers, these retro gadgets get the job done while adding a welcome touch of old-school style.

ADULT SUMMER CAMPS

Adulting is hard. So hard, that adults across Europe and the U.S. are escaping the stress by heading back to [summer camps](#) (craft cocktails included). These camps feature all the childhood essentials like morning wake-up calls, outdoor activities, and nighttime bonfires, plus some elevated grown-up amenities. It's self-care with a carefree twist.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Disrupt boring:** Experiment with ways to make your brand touch points more playful and imaginative. Unexpected moments of joy can be found in anything from a store layout to an in-app experience.
- ▶ **Niche nostalgia:** Nostalgia doesn't just look to the previous decade anymore. Use it as a mechanism to transport people to an ultra-specific time and place.
- ▶ **Make it participatory:** Use the power of free-flowing creative play to your advantage.



LAB-MADE

WORLD

BACKSLASH



2023

Beef, blood, building materials: the future is being grown in a lab. While "all-natural" was once thought to be better for people and the planet, our current environmental reality calls for a different approach. One that begins with science. As resources run out and supply chains fall under scrutiny, "lab-made" will go from sterile and apologetic to responsible and aspirational.



LAB-MADE WORLD

LAB-TO-TABLE

A long list of startups are banking on lab-grown meat as the future of food. And investors are eating it up. The lab grown meat industry is expected to be worth \$25 billion by 2030, with growth coming from unexpected offerings like lab-grown foie gras out of France, slaughter-free wildebeest from South Africa's Mogale Meat Co., and cell-cultivated zebra by Australian company Vow Foods. However, not everyone is ready to bite. Around the world, religious communities and animal rights groups are left grappling with the ethics of cultured meat. For instance, Jewish Rabbis are debating whether or not lab-grown meat should be considered kosher, while Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, has decided that lab-grown meat is not halal.

SOLVING FOR MEDICAL SHORTAGES

Worldwide, about 12 million people are blind because of disease or damage to the cornea, yet demand for corneal transplants is so high that only about one in 70 patients receive one. Hoping to bridge the gap, researchers in Sweden have developed a bioengineered cornea made from pig collagen. The lab-made cornea has a longer shelf life compared to donated corneas, meaning there's less risk that the implant will expire before it can actually be used. A similar solution is also being eyed for blood transfusions. Two individuals were recently injected with lab-grown red blood cells for the first time ever, marking a huge milestone for people with disorders like sickle cell anemia and those with rare blood types that aren't typically found in donations.

NOT-SO-NATURAL RESOURCES

Natural resource production is moving to the lab. One example is lab-made coral reefs, which are helping restore ocean ecosystems in waters that have suffered greatly from global warming. Similarly, back on land, researchers at MIT are looking to save the trees with a wood alternative that's cultivated using plant stem cells and hormones. The eco-friendly timber can also be produced in any desired shape, size, stiffness, and density—making it usable for a wide variety of projects.

LAB-GROWN DIAMONDS

Lab-made diamonds are getting a glow-up. Even though lab-made gems are structurally identical to diamonds mined from the earth, buyers have long considered them to be inferior to the "real" thing. But that's now changing with the help of endorsements from high-end labels and influential tastemakers. In a notable departure from their "natural only" stance, LVMH recently invested \$90 million in Israeli lab-grown diamond company Lusix. And they're not the only ones making the switch. Ex-Cartier execs relaunched Anna Wintour's favorite Oscar Massin using only lab-grown diamonds at the start of 2022, while Frank Ocean is pushing lab-made bling with his hip jewelry brand Homer. As perceptions shift, lab-grown will become a new marker of conscious luxury.

We're currently using up the renewable resources of 1.75 Earths. If things don't change, we'll need three Earths by 2050. — The World Counts



LAB-MADE WORLD

BIOTECH BEAUTY

With rising demand, “biotech beauty” is well on its way to becoming the new “clean beauty.” Put most simply, biotech beauty replaces natural ingredients with vegan, lab-grown alternatives that are better for the environment. Some brands to watch include UK company [Cellular Goods](#), which sells moisturizers and serums made with lab-made cannabinoids, [Codex Beauty Labs](#), and [Ourself](#). Big names are jumping on the trend, too, with [Estée Lauder](#) and [Unilever](#) both investing millions in the space.

ANIMAL-FREE DAIRY

A lab-grown dairy revolution is brewing. All your creamy favorites (yes, even [ice cream](#)) can now be created in the lab using precision fermentation, pushing regulators to reconsider what qualifies as “real” dairy products. French startup [Standing Ovation](#) and U.S.-based [Superfood](#) are making animal-free dairy cheese; [Opalia Foods](#) is making “milk minus the cow”; and even familiar food giants like [Nestlé](#) are entering the market. While this switch to low-impact dairy is a win for the environment, it poses some serious challenges for the future of the dairy industry. In the U.S. alone, demand for cow products is expected to decline by [80-90%](#) by 2035. As we move away from traditional farming practices in favor of more sustainable ones, businesses ranging from family farms to mass supermarket chains will be forced to adapt their practices and products accordingly.

LUXURY BIO-TEXTILES

Unethical materials are officially out of style. Just ask LVMH and Fendi, both of whom are part of a two-year research [initiative](#) that will develop lab-grown fur fibers for luxury fashion. For further proof, you can also look to Kering—home of Gucci, YSL, Balenciaga, and more—which recently [funded](#) a pilot program for lab-made leather startup [VitroLabs](#). Unlike pleather or vegan leather, leather from VitroLabs is the real deal. It’s generated from actual cow cells but doesn’t harm any animals in the process—making it 100% PETA-approved.

LAB-MADE BABIES

Globally, [186 million](#) people experience infertility and an estimated [23 million](#) miscarriages occur every year. Japanese biotech startup [Dioseve](#) is looking to bring those numbers down with tech that grows human egg cells from other tissue. While there’s still a ways to go, the company is pushing forward with a fresh [\\$3 million](#) in funding in order to first prove the concept on mice. In other related news, the [Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia](#) (U.S.) and [EctoLife](#) (Germany) are both testing the viability of artificial wombs that can grow human embryos. The idea is that artificial wombs will allow the embryo to be closely monitored and managed, thus preventing miscarriages and stillbirths. All of these developments—though potentially advantageous for people who have difficulty becoming parents—are also birthing new ethical debates around designer babies, genetics, and body autonomy.



WHAT’S NEXT

- ▶ **Audit your manufacturing process:** Is the creation of your product contributing to resource depletion? How might you reduce your impact with lab-made materials?
- ▶ **Understand the barriers:** What is the consumer reaction to lab-made? Research will help unlock understanding around where lab-made alienates or concerns the people you are trying to reach.
- ▶ **Fight skepticism with education:** To scale up demand for lab-made alternatives, businesses will need to address any misconceptions head-on. Think public lab tours, full transparency into the production process, and sign-off from trusted third parties.

BACKSLASH

E

2023

LIQUID

REALITY

It's the end of reality as we know it. From synthetic media to the rise of virtual everything, metaverse tech is ushering in a heightened era of on/off-line blur. As the limits of our physical world are shattered, new possibilities for self-expression and deeper immersion abound.

LIQUID REALITY

Gartner predicts that one in four people will spend at least one hour a day in the metaverse for work, shopping, education, and/or entertainment by 2026.

— [Gartner, 2022](#)

VR REALISM

Virtual environments are well on their way to looking and feeling “[indistinguishable from reality](#).” At least, that’s the goal for Mark Zuckerberg, who recently unveiled four VR headset prototypes designed to “create displays that are as vivid and realistic as the physical world.” At the same time, very real sensations are making their way to virtual environments with the help of vibrating [haptic suits](#), [VR scent masks](#), and more. If and when these innovations go mass, and the physical and virtual worlds converge once and for all, our ideas of what’s “real” will never be the same.

VIRTUAL IDENTITY

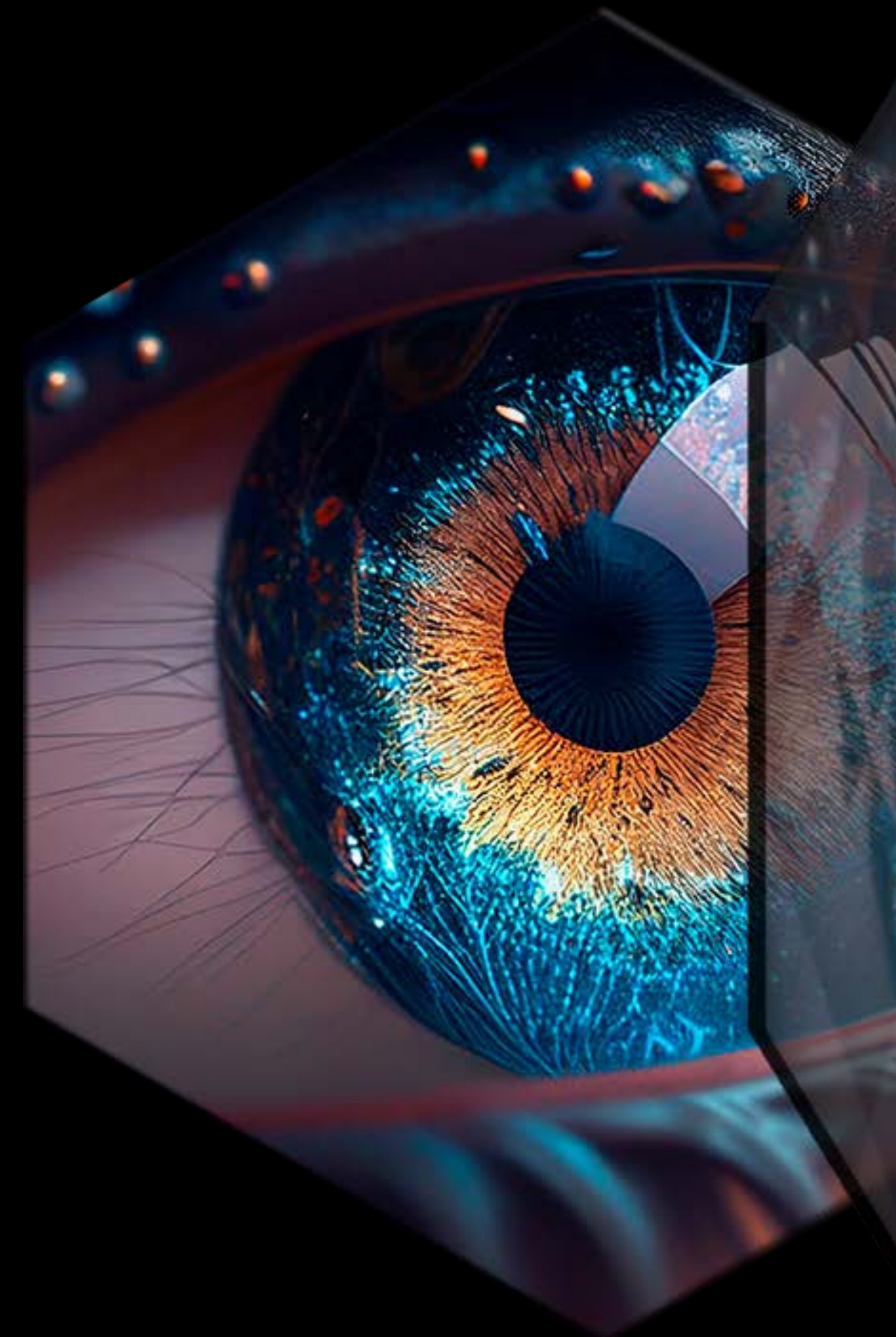
Tech giants around the world are turning their attention to customizable avatar features—marking a huge shift in how we show up online. Last year, both [Instagram](#) and [TikTok](#) became the latest social platforms to launch avatars as a new way for users to showcase their individuality. Hoping to compete, Google also recently dropped around \$100 million to [acquire](#) Alter, an AI avatar startup that helps creators and brands express their virtual identities. And last but not least, Douyin (China’s TikTok) released “[Douyin Zaizai](#)”—a very popular virtual human that users can personalize to match their look and mood.

DEEPPAKE ENTERTAINMENT

Actors in movies, [podcasts](#), and [promo videos](#) may not be as real as they appear. Deepfakes—once thought to be purely nefarious—are increasingly being used in digital content production. And it’s not all bad. Take Bruce Willis as an example. The actor recently announced his retirement after being diagnosed with a language disorder called aphasia. Through an agreement with AI company Deepcake, however, Willis can continue to appear in films for years to come. Similarly, ninety-one year old James Earl Jones—the voice of Darth Vader—is allowing Ukrainian startup Respeecher to use an AI-powered replica of his voice for future Star Wars films.

AR CONTACT LENSES

Sure, [mixed reality headsets](#) and [smart glasses](#) are cool and all. But what if you could ditch the hardware altogether? Mojo Vision is bringing that idea to life with [AR contacts](#)—the world’s first invisible computing device that overlays digital information directly onto our physical world. The contact lenses can project crucial information right when you need it, so you can navigate the trails on a ski slope, see your talking points during a presentation, or check out reviews for the café across the street—all without holding a device or looking down at a screen. The company even recently teamed up with [Amazon](#) to add Alexa Shopping Lists to its smart contact lenses, signaling a future of automatic, hands-free grocery shopping.



LIQUID REALITY

METaverse LAW ENFORCEMENT

A new [report](#) from the Europol Innovation Lab is urging law enforcement agencies to prepare for a rise in crime in virtual worlds. The report covers everything from identity theft to sexual harassment, detailing the potential dangers ahead and warning that “it will be important to have a clear idea of what is to be considered criminal behavior in the metaverse and to have matching laws to provide the means to prosecute these transgressions.” As virtual environments become legitimized, the days of an unregulated, anything-goes metaverse will soon be behind us.

VIRTUAL INFLUENCERS

While not new, virtual influencers are growing increasingly influential. So influential, in fact, that Japan’s top VTubers (virtual YouTubers) are earning up to [\\$1 million](#) a year from fan donations. And brands are taking note. According to Kantar data, [45%](#) of advertisers are considering sponsoring virtual influencers this year—with many finding comfort in the fact that these AI humans are completely predictable and scandal-free. It also helps that people can’t get enough of them. Brazil’s Lu from Magalu—the most famous virtual influencer in the world—has racked up an impressive 24.5 million followers across all her channels. → [For more, watch Backslash’s episode of Life on the Edge: VTubers](#)

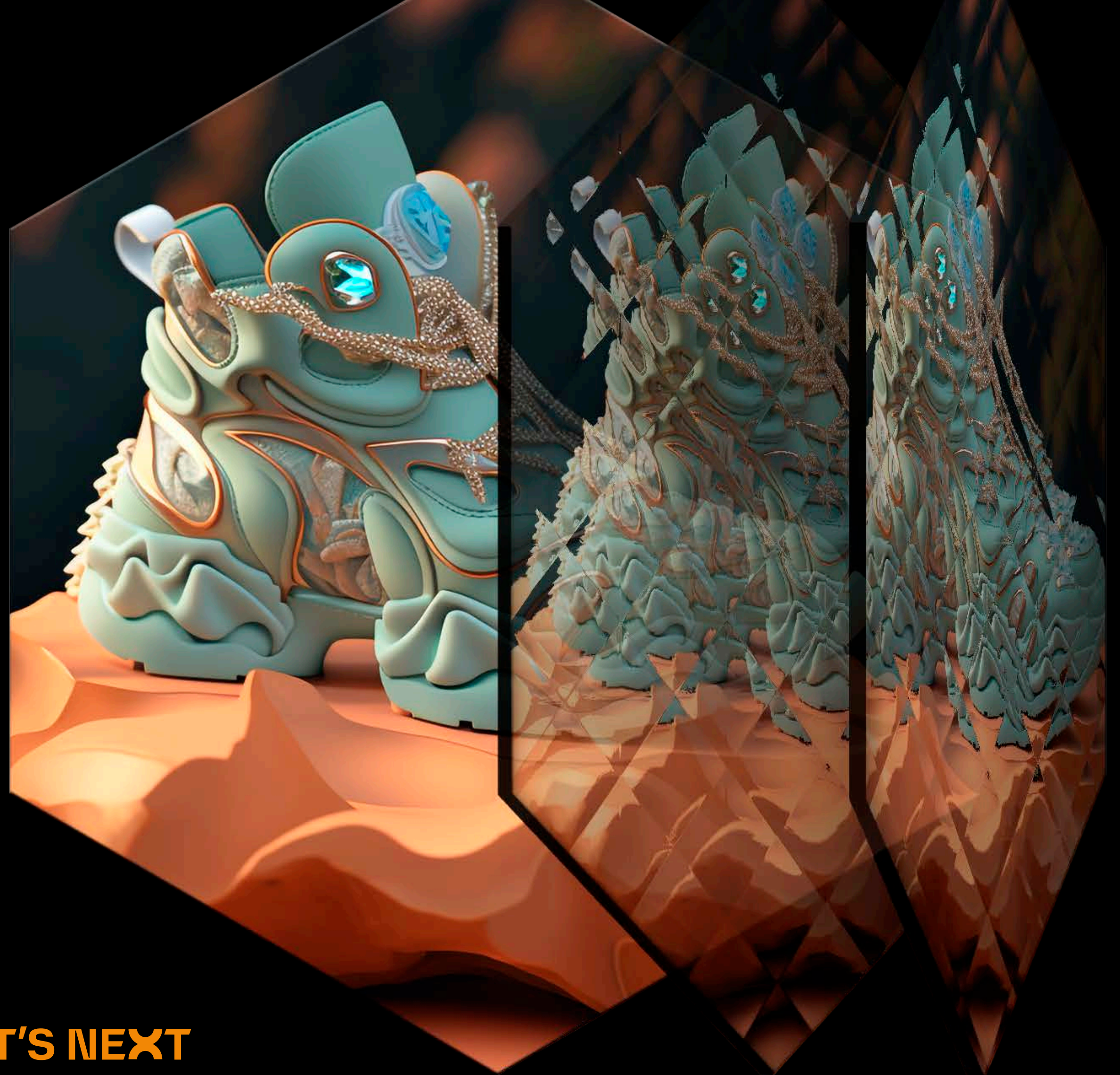
DIGITAL FASHION

If you’re planning on spending more time in the metaverse, you’re going to want to make sure your avatar is dressed to impress. Thankfully, there are now plenty of resources to help you do just that. Meta recently launched a [digital fashion marketplace](#) where people can buy clothing for their avatars to wear on Instagram, Facebook, and Messenger. Meanwhile, [DressX](#), a virtual fashion store whose motto is “don’t shop less, shop digital fashion,” carries nearly 300 digital fashion brands.

And it’s not just real-life looks that are inspiring virtual outfits. Digital style is influencing physical fashion, too. Forever21 [debuted](#) a physical clothing collection inspired by its metaverse shop on Roblox, while Gucci pop-up stores are selling physical items with an NFT twin. For even more proof of digital fashion’s staying power, look no further than the growing industry of [metaverse fashion stylists](#) available for hire. → [For more, watch Backslash’s episode of Life on the Edge: Fashion’s Digital Flex](#)

WHAT’S NEXT

- ▶ **Embrace unreality:** Don’t just replicate our physical reality—create worlds, characters, and narratives that push beyond the bounds of what we can experience IRL.
- ▶ **Give people a reality check:** It’s easy to get carried away when you’re immersed in a virtual world. But online actions (such as spending money in a video game or engaging in toxic behavior) can have very real consequences. Brands can keep people in check with real-time nudges when necessary.
- ▶ **Connect IRL to URL:** As our online and offline lives blur, people will look for tangible connections between the two worlds.





MIND MAINTENANCE

Once-invisible mental health struggles are moving center stage. As the taboo is broken, mental healthcare will go from reactive to proactive, from a nice-to-have to a need-to-have. Mind maintenance is our new common priority, and we're practicing it daily.

BACKSLASH



2023

MIND MAINTENANCE

MENTAL HEALTH SHOP

Self Space is running the UK's first mental health shop. The startup's goal is to allow anyone to stop by the London space and book a same-day appointment with a psychologist or therapist, much like they might pop in for a haircut. According to Self Space, their service is "not just for when people are feeling bad or overwhelmed—but for when they want to proactively work on their mental health. Just like they would go to the gym for their physical health."

BURNOUT BADGES

What if you could see your coworker's burnout level? That's the experiment being put to the test at Tokyo logistics company Onken. Employees are given three badges representing their "hit points," much like video game health meters. They can choose to wear a green badge when they're feeling good, a yellow one if they're feeling so-so, or a red one if they're at the end of their rope. The idea is that employees can easily get a sense of who is struggling mentally, then offer help as needed. And Onken says it's working. According to the company, the badges have strengthened employee relationships and created a more positive overall work environment. Now, more companies are looking to follow Onken's lead.

#POSTYOURPILL

Dr. Alex George wants you to #PostYourPill. The movement, which challenges people to post a photo of their mental health medication on social media, aims to shatter the stigma around antidepressants and other prescription drugs. Over 10,000 people have taken part in the trend since it began just over a year ago—dissolving the shame one pill picture at a time.

MUSIC STARS FOR MINDFULNESS

Music stars are pushing mindfulness into pop culture. Best-selling Latin artist J Balvin has launched Oye, a bilingual app that aims to inspire people to use creativity as an emotional outlet. And rapper Megan Thee Stallion is behind a mental health site called Bad Bitches Have Bad Days Too, which connects people to therapy platforms and helplines, and hosts special directories for Black people and the LGBTQ+ community.



Gallup's 2022 Global Emotions report revealed historic highs for stress, sadness, and loneliness—with a record 41% of people experiencing high levels of daily stress.

— Gallup, 2022

MIND MAINTENANCE



PSYCHEDELIC ACCEPTANCE

Psychedelics—once limited to a fringe of mystics and hippies—are approaching mainstream acceptance as further research confirms their mental health benefits. In the U.S., Oregon will become the first state to widely legalize psychedelics this year, with other states expected to follow. MDMA could also be available for medical treatment in U.S. hospitals as soon as [2024](#). Elsewhere, a growing number of people are traveling across the globe to attend psychedelic wellness retreats in countries like the Netherlands, Brazil, Colombia, Jamaica, and Costa Rica. And it's just the beginning. One recent report projects that the global market for pharmaceutical psychedelics—led by companies such as Johnson & Johnson—will reach [\\$6.9 billion](#) by 2027. → [For more, watch Backslash's episode of *Life on the Edge: Ketamine Therapy*](#)

IVF SUPPORT

U.K.-based Aura Fertility knows that the in vitro fertilization (IVF) process takes a massive toll on emotional health. In fact, [42%](#) of people undergoing IVF treatment have suicidal thoughts—yet very few talk about it. Aura is addressing the problem head-on with a mood-tracking psychological support app. The app follows a patient's mood through the course of IVF treatments, then uses that information to customize content and help doctors tailor their care accordingly.

STAND-UP COMEDY FOR MEN AT RISK OF SUICIDE

If you think comedy and therapy don't go together, think again. A stand-up comedy course called [Comedy on Referral](#) is helping men in England recover from emotional problems like mental illness, postnatal depression, PTSD, and anxiety disorders. Through the program, clients learn how to turn their personal stories into a five-minute comedy set using games, group work, and one-on-one counseling. After running a highly successful course for trauma survivors in Bristol, Comedy on Referral has now won National Health Service funding to help men at risk of suicide in London.

BRAIN CARE

You've heard of self-care, but what about [brain care](#)? The rising wellness category addresses "events that impair brain's health, both neurological and mental health, and impacts the ability to pay attention, solve problems and resist stress." This can be achieved via things like nootropic supplements, breath work, movement, or whatever helps you reach your meditative flow state. According to Dr. Bowen Jiang, M.D., taking care of our brain is something we should tend to daily, in the same way we take care of our teeth.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Start early:** Give kids the tools to articulate and manage their emotions—ensuring that open discussion is normalized from a young age.
- ▶ **Make it accessible:** How can your brand not only break down barriers to mental healthcare, but actively check on people who are typically alienated from the conversation?
- ▶ **Mindful design:** From UX design to office design, online and offline experiences will be built with mental health in mind.



MONEY

BACKSLASH  2023

OUT LOUD

Money is being taken off the do-not-discuss list. From salary transparency to financial therapy, culture is getting candid about the role money plays in our lives. The end of secrecy will mark the start of a more honest, equal, and holistic approach to all things finance.

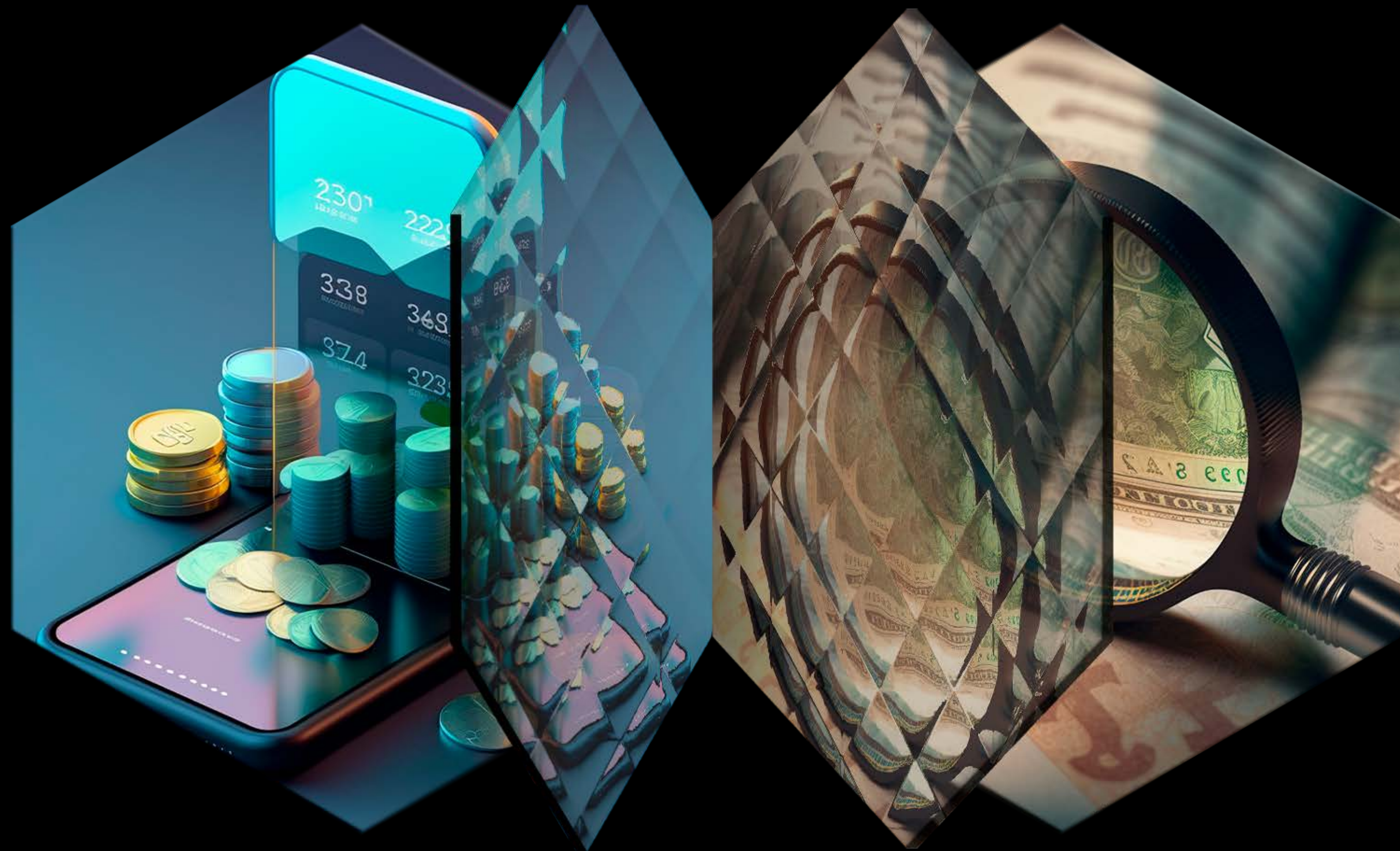
MONEY OUT LOUD

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 with financial uncertainty on the rise, the field is gaining global momentum. The Financial Therapy Association has over 300 international members and counting, and last year marked the launch of the first-ever educational textbook highlighting the connection between finance and personal psychology.

WIDE-OPEN FINANCE

Radical transparency is in and businesses are following suit. Legal freelancing app [Lawtrades](#) is just one of several companies beginning to regularly tweet their sensitive financial metrics—including total revenue, gross profit, supply-side earning, and number of customers. For companies not tweeting or self-reporting, a new investor relations app called [Quartr](#) is centralizing investor documents and transcripts of earnings calls in one easy-to-access place.



MUJER FINANCIERA

With one of the world's most significant gender pay gaps, it's no surprise that LATAM suffers from severe financial exclusion with only 51% of women having a bank account and just 33% of women making financial decisions at home. To bring more women into the financial fold, [Mujer Financiera](#) is blending practical advice with community-building via an app and Instagram channel. With over 500K Instagram followers, [Mujer Financiera](#) is one of several growing social media accounts taking a more personal approach to financial literacy.

SALARY TRANSPARENCY

Asking strangers how much they make is no longer taboo, thanks to social media accounts like [@SalaryTransparencyStreet](#). Offline, salary transparency is also being heavily championed by governments and private businesses. California, New York, and the Canadian province of Prince Edward Island were among the states to pass pay transparency laws last year. And Microsoft has also pledged to include salary ranges for all positions based in the U.S. As salary secrecy is broken, we'll finally begin to break the long-standing cycle of discriminatory pay.

MONEY OUT LOUD

LIFESTYLE BANKING

Singapore's OCBC Bank is disrupting the conventional bank layout with their new integrated lifestyle concept. Rather than creating bland bank branches full of desks and ATMs, OCBC's physical locations include restaurants, art galleries, books, and entertainment spaces to host financial wellness talks and other workshops. The goal of the design is to facilitate deeper customer relationships that go beyond finance. By creating spaces for conversation, OCBC hopes visitors will stay longer and feel more comfortable talking money.

POLITICIAN FASHION FOR SALE

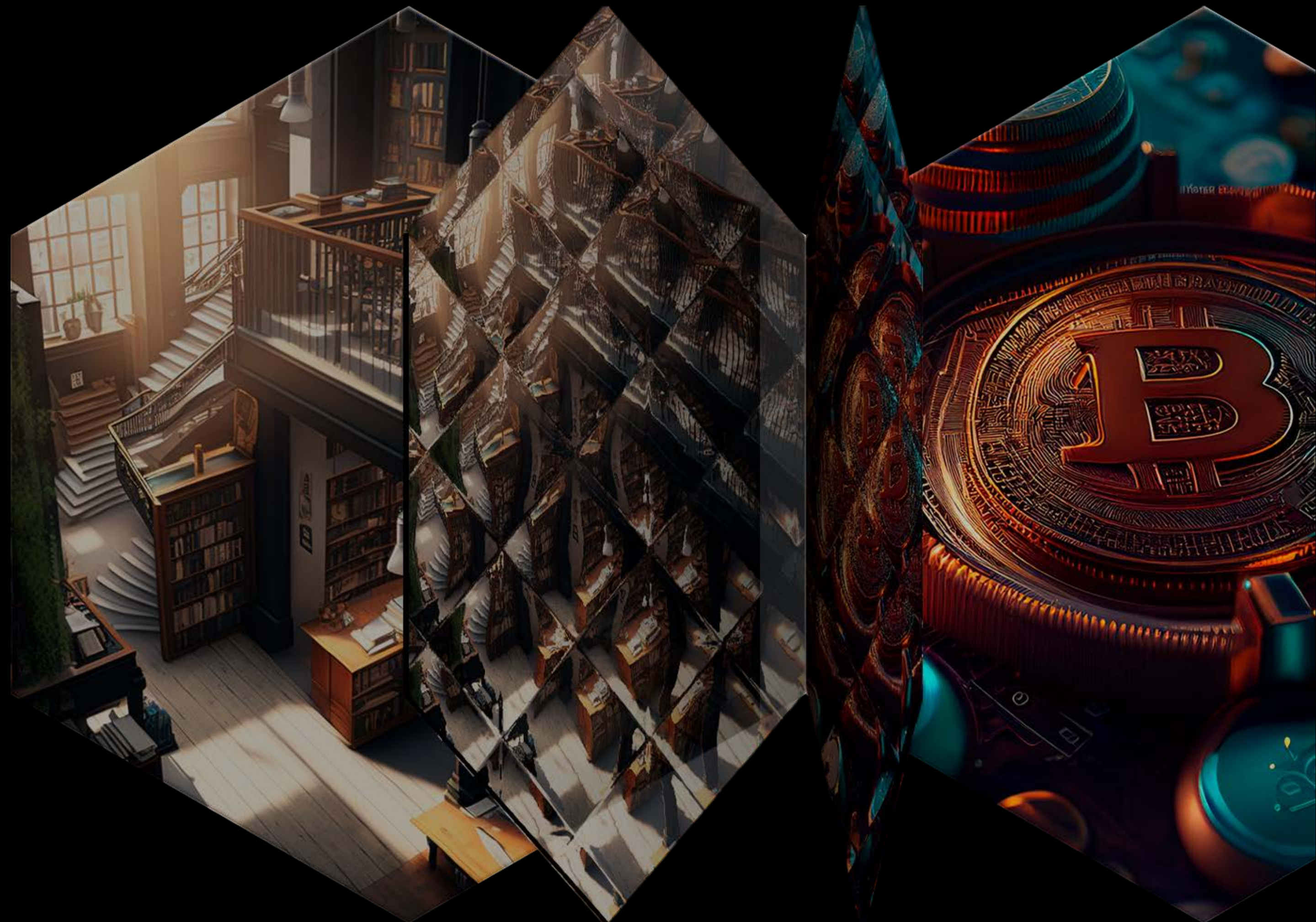
Malaysian website Voteordie is making a political fashion statement. Styled like a high-end online boutique, Voteordie lists the costs of items worn by different Malaysian politicians, then compares those prices to the cost of initiatives that would benefit the public. The cost of a Cartier Love Bracelet set worn by Yana Najib, for example, could provide early schooling assistance for 1,000 parents. With 60% of Malaysian households making less than RM 4,850 (1k USD), the website puts Malaysia's wealth disparity on full display and encourages people to vote wisely. As calls for equity continue to ring, people will be looking even more closely at how the political elite spend their money—and what it says about their values.


CRYPTO REHAB

Crypto addiction is making its way to rehab. A growing number of mental health professionals are comparing the problem with gambling disorder, though crypto's novelty and volatility make it uniquely troublesome. According to Swiss addiction treatment center Paracelsus Recovery, inquiries about crypto problems increased 300% between 2018 and 2021. And though the crypto hype has since died down, more holistic support will be needed as people now cope with losses from the market downturn or platform bankruptcies.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Lead the movement:** Practice salary transparency in your own organization.
- ▶ **Drop the jargon:** Take the intimidation out of finance by using clear language that everyone can understand, or try explaining complex concepts through the lens of pop culture.
- ▶ **Make it personal:** What if every bank offered financial therapy? And financial wellness tools were baked into every money management platform?





Human emotions are being analyzed and enhanced in entirely new ways. A modern wave of mood-boosting products 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 from—advanced insight into how we feel. The market for mood modulation is booming.

MOOD GEIS-TING

BACKSLASH



2023

MOOD GEISTING

The emotion detection and recognition market is expected to reach \$103 billion by 2030. — [Allied Market Research](#)



EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT APPLIANCES

Your future household appliances will be able to adapt to your mood. One example is [Mitsubishi's](#) newly released smart air conditioner, which sends out small radio waves to check your pulse and automatically adjusts the temperature based on whether you're feeling relaxed, tense, or distracted. Another example is a [smart tea pot](#) from Yanko Design in Japan. The tea pot has a fingerprint sensor that can read your heart rate and body temperature, allowing it to brew a hot cuppa that complements your current mood. And finally, [Inhalio](#) offers IoT scent diffusers that can gauge your mood based on the sound of your voice, then release scents accordingly. If you sound angsty, for instance, Inhalio will send out a calming aroma.

MOOD FUEL

You are what you eat. With mental health declining globally, more people are looking to snack and sip their way to a calmer, happier, or more balanced state. [Qpod](#) in Brazil and [Unwind Bars](#) in Ireland are just two of the many brands making functional, nighttime-friendly foods that help you relax. But as shoppers get fed up with wellness-washing, only products with scientifically proven ingredients will make it into their cart. Brands can win over the skeptics by putting the proof front and center. Look to Hong Kong's mood-boosting beverage brand [Eve](#) as an example of how to be truly science-led.

BRAIN PAINTING

Portugal's [MuLabs](#) is turning neurofeedback into art. Through brain-computer interaction, MuLabs uses sensors to show people their own emotions, then translates those emotions into music and visual art. This allows people to better understand how they're feeling and to realize the power of their own thoughts. "When the brain is working in a more healthy, harmonious, and coherent way, the audio-visual feedback becomes more pleasant," says MuLabs. While brain painting is undeniably cool, it also serves a greater purpose. The art generated is an impactful and tangible way to remind people of the importance of mental health.

FEEL-GOOD MARKETPLACE

Channelling your vibe just got easier with [Woo's](#) online marketplace. Whether you're feeling like the main character or like you need a reset, Woo's "shop by mood" feature will help you pick out the products that fit your vibe. While a simple concept, Woo's strategy is tapping into our desire for products and experiences that validate, enhance, or change our emotions. Imagine being able to browse movies, events, or menus by mood in the future.

MOOD GEISTING

THE EMOTIONAL FRONTIER

Mood-based marketing is on the rise. Taking note of rising stress levels, Croatia Insurance launched the [AI Anxiety Meter](#): a digital billboard that scans the faces of passersby to measure their anxiety levels in real time. Those who ranked high on the anxiety scale were directed to book a free health checkup, whereas those with lower stress were reminded of the importance of maintaining mental health. A similar tactic is also making its way to retail spaces. At flagship Yves Saint Laurent stores, customers can now put on a brain-scanning EEG headset in order to find the L'Oréal fragrance [best suited](#) to their emotions.

MOOD-MONITORING WEARABLES

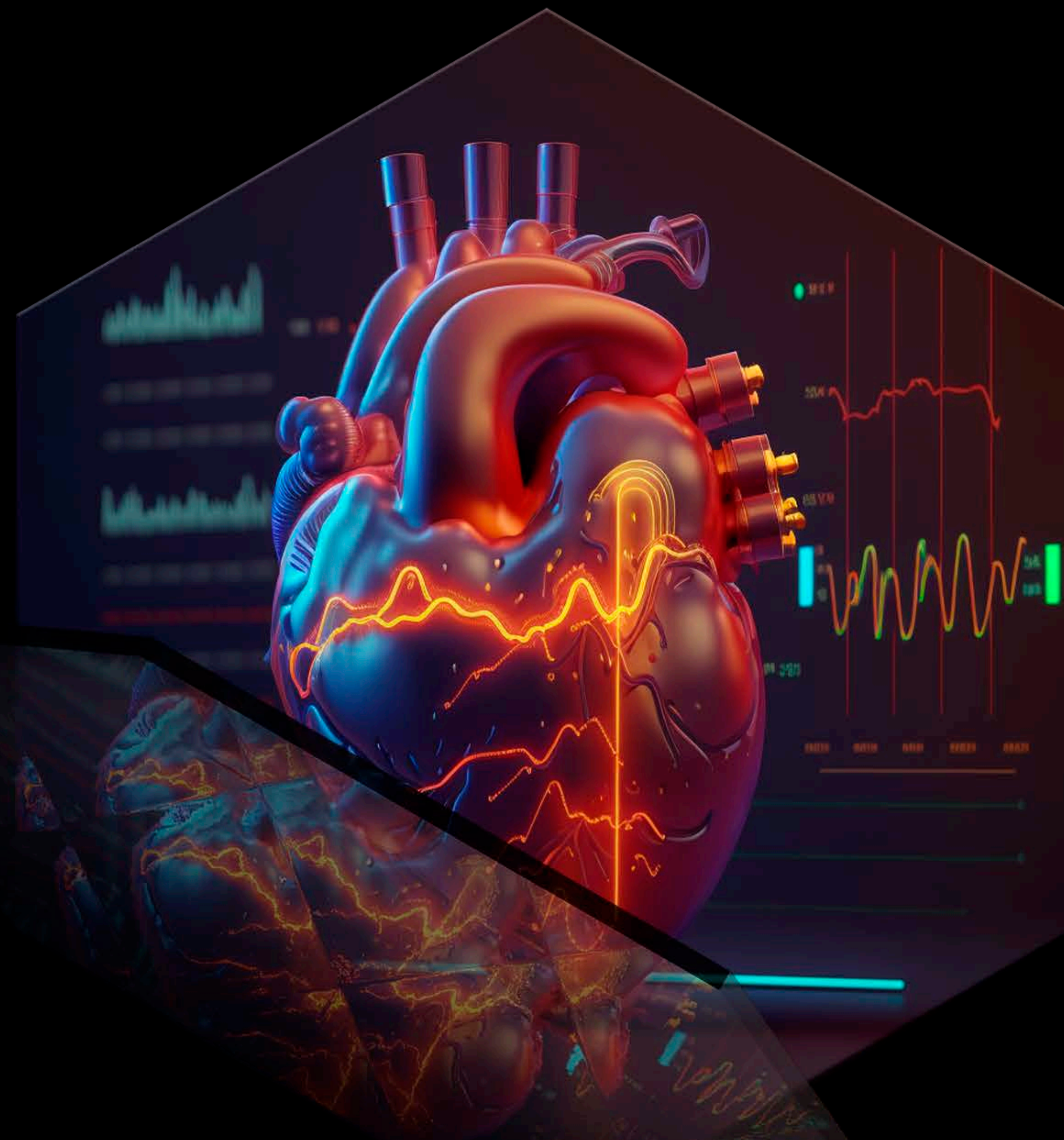
We already have fitness wearables. Next, make way for mood wearables. [Happy Ring](#)—the “wearable for your mind”—measures vitals connected to mental well-being and suggests proven ways to get your mood back on track. Similarly, both FitBit and Amsterdam-based [NOWATCH](#) have launched accessories that notify you when you're stressed. With more people looking to understand and control their emotions, real-time mood monitoring will become a common practice.

BRAIN-SCANNING HEADSET

Your VR headset can do more than just transport you to the metaverse—it can now scan your biometrics. [OpenBCI's Varjo Aero headset](#) uses sensors to measure wearers' brain activity, heart rate, temperature, eye movements, and muscle activity, then uses that data to create more stimulating games. Heart rate data can be used to improve moments of intensity, for instance, while brain activity could help developers know when to make a task more or less challenging.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Allow for sensory shifts:** Give users the ability to tap into different moods and modes—from totally relaxed to high energy.
- ▶ **Make it personal, not promotional:** While emotion recognition tech can unlock a new level of personalization, it can also easily lead to foul play. Brands that use mood data to manipulate or emotionally profile people will quickly lose trust.
- ▶ **Get granular:** Review every brand touch point through a new lens. Does this action spark the desired vibe?



NEO-COLLECTIVISM

BACKSLASH



2023

A renewed emphasis on collectivism is redistributing power at scale. Realizing that individualism can only get us so far, brands and organizations are relinquishing control and inviting participation in the form of decentralization, crowdsourcing, and co-creation. The future belongs to all of us.



NEO-COLLECTIVISM

REWARDING FANDOM

Try Your Best is shaking up the business-consumer relationship. Through the platform, brand fans are able to speak directly with companies, provide real-time product feedback, ideate on future products, and share thoughts on the overall brand direction. In exchange, customers are awarded with NFTs and brand coins that can be used toward future purchases. "The idea is that brands and fans build together, and the concept is to share value with those who create it," explains Try Your Best founder Ty Haney (formerly of Outdoor Voices). Rooted in community building, Try Your Best is a win-win for both brands and buyers.

MEDICAL MATCHMAKING

Matchmakers have been introducing romantic partners for centuries. Now, businesses are matching up medical twins with the goal of crowdsourcing health insights. Healthtech startup Alike uses machine learning to connect people suffering from the same or similar medical conditions. Once connected, patients are able to share advice, support each other, and compare treatments. A similar community-led platform is StuffThatWorks. With the help of AI, user-inputted medical data is sorted and categorized based on condition, helping people narrow down the list of treatments that might work for them.

COLLABORATIVE ARTWORK

Last year, Reddit demonstrated the magic of collective creation when it brought back the r/Place art experiment that first surfaced in 2017. The subreddit acted as an open canvas where each user could post a single, tiny, colored pixel every five minutes—forcing online communities to work together to make the tiles form a picture. Altogether, the final collage contained 72 million tiles placed by over 6 million users. While the internet is often condemned for dividing us, Reddit's annual group project showed that people everywhere are hungry to connect and create together.

COLLECTIVE INVESTING

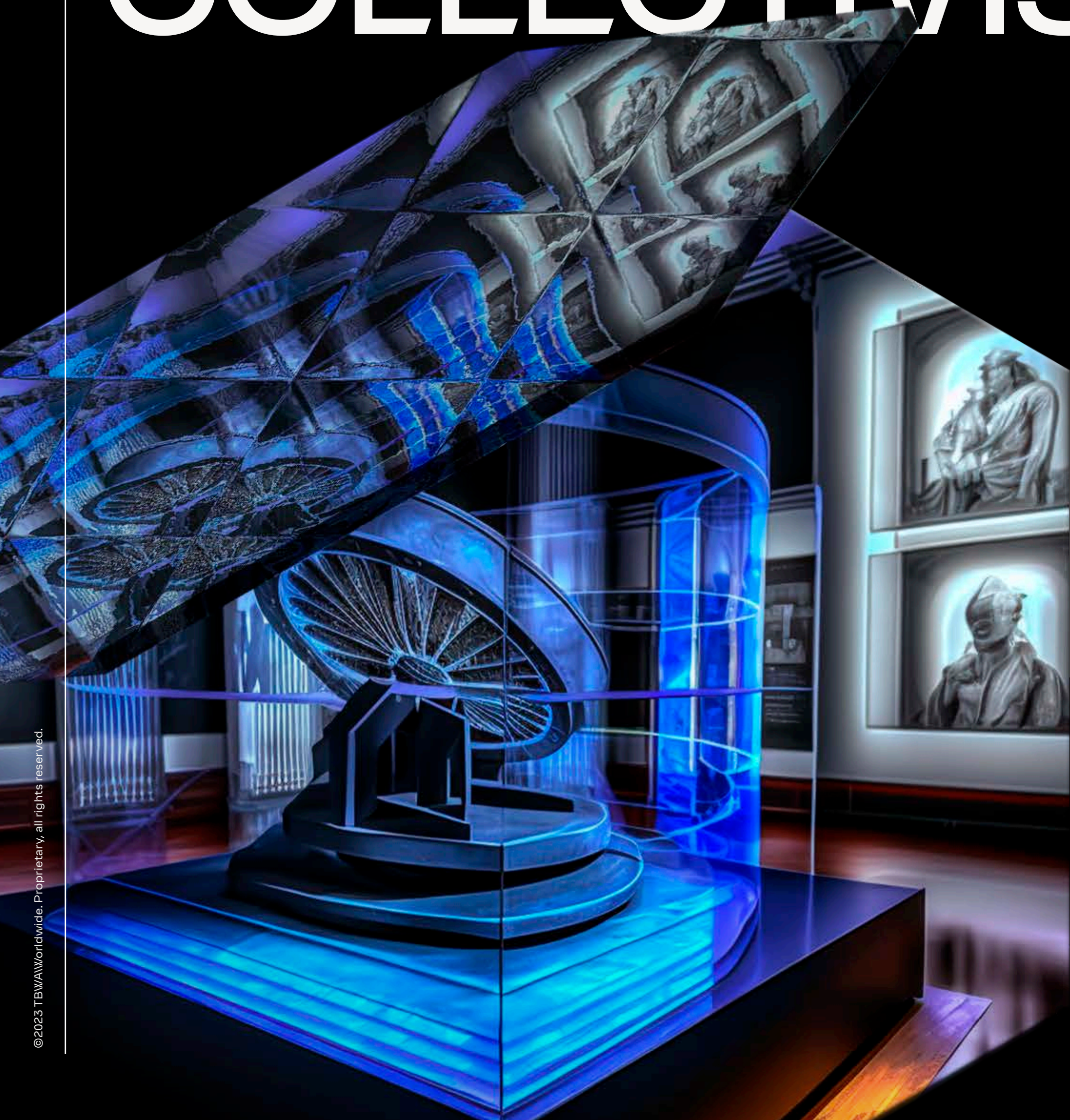
"You would need a lot of shares as an individual to have a voice, but we pool shares so we can work together for change." That's the idea behind Tulipshare, an ethical investment company that allows people to collectively buy stock in companies. The aggregated community shares are putting social and environmental issues at the forefront—forcing companies to change for the better from the inside out. Current shareholder proposals range from reducing single-use plastic bottles at Coca-Cola, to ensuring safe working conditions at Amazon. By moving activism from the streets to the boardroom, Tulipshare is proving the power of pooled funds.

"The best businesses see the people formerly known as consumers as sources of ideas and energy, not consuming units. When you involve people in your organization's purpose, you create more valuable relationships. That opens up genuine answers to big challenges as well as creating a stronger business."

— Jon Alexander, author of *Citizens: Why the Key to Fixing Everything Is All of Us*



NEO-COLLECTIVISM



DECENTRALIZED MUSEUM

Ever wanted to decide what goes in a museum? Well now you can, thanks to [Arkive](#), the world's first decentralized museum. It's powered by a decentralized autonomous organization (DAO), which enables members to vote on historical items to acquire for its catalog. Traditionally, museums are in charge of what is displayed and preserved, leaving a majority of historical items out of public view. By sharing this power among "everyday people," more pieces can be loaned to other museums that make sense—for instance, religious artifacts in a temple or native art in a native museum. The use of blockchain technology also allows an artifact's metadata—such as historical information, authentication, quality, and condition—to be assigned to an NFT. Doing so allows for fractional ownership of the artifact, giving individuals a larger role in the item's future.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Build community:** Give people a reason to connect and work toward a common goal.
- ▶ **Be open:** Open source your ideas and invite fans to access the exclusive parts of your brand—empowering others to solve problems on your behalf.
- ▶ **Be egalitarian:** Align on shared community values and allow for autonomous decision-making.

OPEN-SOURCE TECH

OpenNext—a program funded by the EU and led by the Danish Design Centre—is on a mission to make open source innovation the norm. One of OpenNext's first projects is the [Minimax](#), an interactive handheld projector shaped like a game controller. Minimax's entire development process was documented on the collaborative manufacturing platform [Wikifactory](#), where makers around the world shared ideas and worked together to refine the design. Minimax might be the first product out of OpenNext, but it certainly won't be the last. Looking ahead, better products will be born from less gatekeeping, and more transparency.

FAN CLUB AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

Maroon 5 is reinventing the "fan club" with a DAO (Decentralized Autonomous Organization) that aims to fight climate change. Hosted on [YellowHeart](#), fans joined the DAO by purchasing phased NFT assets that allowed them to vote on how the funds are spent toward their common goal. The DAO serves a dual purpose of connecting artists and fans, while also taking steps to protect our environment. If Maroon 5 can do that, what can the entire music industry do together?

CO-DESIGNED COMMUNITIES

Co-housing communities across Europe and elsewhere are giving residents a role in the development process. In Barcelona, for instance, cooperative housing block [La Borda](#) worked with future residents to not only design the spaces according to their specific needs, but also to plan construction, construct spaces, and manage the building process. Co-design has major implications for public spaces too. In St. Louis, a youth advisory committee was consulted in the development of a new, 17-acre outdoor play environment to ensure that every detail was kid-approved.

BACKSLASH  2023

NEXT-GEN NATURALISTS

With global upheaval on the horizon, self-sufficiency is survival. The fragility of our planet and the economy is becoming 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.

NEXT-GEN NATURALISTS

ROOTED MEDICINE

Though about 80% of Africa's population relies on traditional medicine for their basic healthcare needs, most people still doubt their effectiveness in treating serious and chronic illnesses. To ease people's doubts, the University of the Free State is conducting [research](#) to confirm the potential of African traditional medicines. The university will also build an herbal medicine production facility to ramp up traditional medicine manufacturing and training. In the face of rising healthcare costs and lingering pandemic fears, timeless treatments will help us get healthy the natural way.

FORAGING GETS FEASIBLE

Thanks to the global cost of living crisis and shaky global supply chains, foraging—the act of collecting edible foods from nature—has entered the mainstream. In the U.K., foraging has moved from the countryside to the city, with urban foragers in [Manchester](#) and [London](#) saving money on groceries by hunting for wild foods instead. Meanwhile, other foragers are profiting from their hobby by selling their finds on [Foraged](#), a global online marketplace for foraged foods. The site is growing at [434%](#) quarter over quarter, and is gaining an active TikTok following thanks to popular foragers like [Alexis Nikole](#).

RURAL REJUVENATION

While older generations were focused on moving to cities and getting jobs at prestigious companies, today's young people are seeking a different path. In South Korea, this alternative route is coming to life through Kwichon, the return to rural life and farming. The government is encouraging young people to make the move from Seoul to the countryside in order to revive dwindling rural areas. And the plan seems to be working. Nearly [half](#) of the almost 400,000 South Koreans who have moved to rural areas are under the age of 40.



NEXT-GEN NATURALISTS

REGENERATIVE CONSUMER COURSE

If you're looking to shop smarter on your next grocery trip, you may want to enroll in Rodale Institute's "[Being a Regenerative Consumer](#)" course. The free course was created "for anyone seeking out more information about what the labels on their food mean, or the true impacts of farming on our health and planet." With people growing more curious about where their food comes from, expect to see an uptick in educational courses that help us eat and shop more sustainably.

BRAIDING SWEETGRASS

Robin Wall Kimmerer argues that our "sense of not belonging here contributes to the way we treat the land." In her book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer combines her scientific training with her Indigenous roots to teach people how to live in harmony with nature. Released more than eight years ago, *Braiding Sweetgrass* has recently grown from a secret find to an international [bestseller](#) with over 1.4 million copies sold. As we reflect on how modern life is harming the planet, we'll increasingly look to the wisdom of those most connected to the land.

PREPPERS IN PARADISE

Tomorrow's travelers aren't just looking for a relaxing, all-inclusive beach-side vacation—they're eager to go off-grid and get their hands dirty. According to global data from [Booking.com](#), 58% of people said they want to use their 2023 vacations as a chance to learn survival skills. This includes learning how to source clean water (53%), light a fire from scratch (42%), forage for food in the wild (39%) and even how to prep for an apocalypse (39%).

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **"Do it Yourself":** With less emphasis on consumption, we're learning how to create and fix things ourselves. Brands can support by providing the know-how while still allowing people to flex their skills.
- ▶ **Inspire no-frills wellness:** As we aim to say goodbye to woo-woo wellness, brands can help us get back to basics. Think homegrown produce, experiences that teach you how to live off the land, and all-natural health remedies.
- ▶ **Uplift outside voices:** Indigenous communities, farmers, and elderly populations are experts in self-sufficiency. Rather than trying to be the hero, give them a platform to share their wisdom.



ODD-YSSSEYS

BACKSLASH

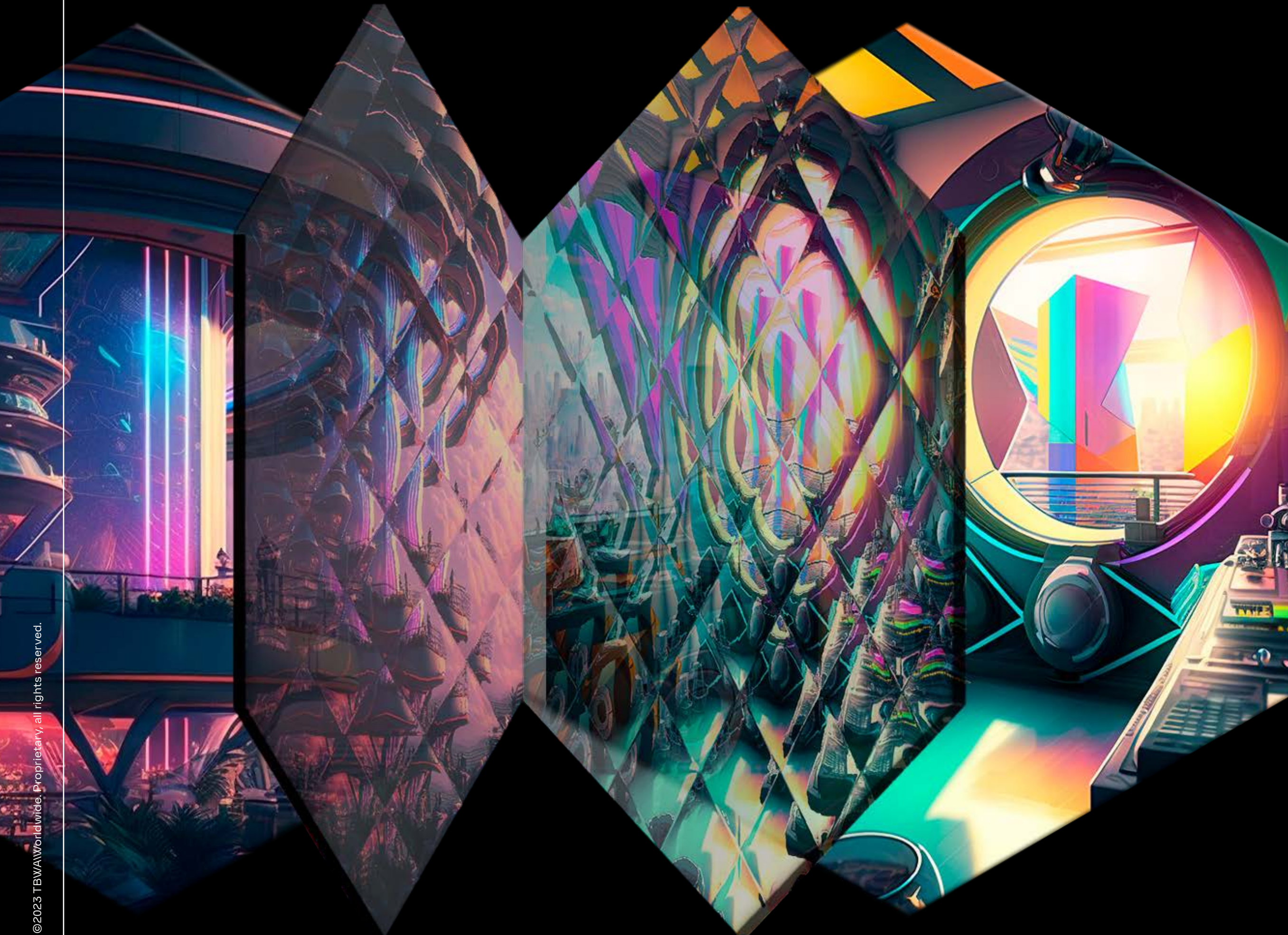


2023

A world exhausted by rationality is finding delight in the discomfort zone. With so few roads left untraveled and questions left unanswered, alternate realities and out-of-this-world adventures will feed our hunger for escapism. It's time to revive our sense of wonder.



ODD- YSSEYS



CLOUD CLUBBING

China's hottest new club is wonderfully bizarre and 100% online. On any given night, 20,000 to 30,000 clubbers log on to [Xiugou Nightclub](#), transform into Cheems (the internet's favorite doge), and groove to livestreamed DJ sets. Inspired by memes and interactive games, Xiugou's cloud club is a love letter to the internet. The lively experience is also designed to be interactive and full of personality. With bullet chats, partiers can send live comments across the screen, play games, and personalize their Cheems to be totally unique. As the metaverse takes off, so too will experiences that bring out our inner wild child.

“Our franchise-dominated media environment is rife with worlds and extended universes, straddling the physical and the virtual, the fictional and the real. There is a palpable desire to manifest “reality,” however skewed or insular, from one’s own imagination.”

— Terry Nguyen, [Dirt](#)

OUT-THERE ARCHITECTURE

From a dolphin-shaped island to an offshore oil rig turned amusement park, Saudi Arabia has become a testing ground for totally out-there architecture. The standout developments are all part of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's plan to make Saudi Arabia one of the world's most visited countries. To achieve that, he's spending roughly [\\$1 trillion](#) on resorts, a cruise industry, and an airline. In the push to attract tourists who have been there and done that, countries are going all in on never-before-seen attractions.

WORLDBUILDING FRENZY

The magic of worldbuilding—whereby audiences are thrust into an imaginary universe—has officially seeped into every aspect of popular culture. Taylor Swift created an experiential [“virtual universe”](#) for her latest album release; billionaires like Peter Thiel and Marc Lore have expressed dreams of creating their own off-grid [techno-societies](#); and luxury fashion houses like Louis Vuitton have launched [spin-off clothing collections](#) that build upon previous shows to tell a larger story. In a congested-content landscape, these alternative worlds are serving as a much-needed source of escapism.

ODD- YSSEYS

AIRBNB'S OMG! FUND

Airbnb is embracing the weird and wonderful. Last year, the company challenged people to submit their wackiest ideas for an Airbnb, with the promise that 100 winners would each get \$100,000 to turn their crazy concept into a reality. The recipients were chosen based on their "originality, feasibility, the experience the space will provide guests, and sustainability." Some of the standout [winning ideas](#) include an "ancestral lava cave in a volcano" in Chile, a "liveable giant mushroom spaceship" in Mexico, and a "mischievous mango mansion" in India. The creations will be guest-ready this year, and will be listed under Airbnb's unique OMG! Category—which consistently receives the highest engagement on the site.

PLANET CITY

VR has the power to transport us to entirely unfamiliar worlds. Liam Young, the creator of [Planet City](#), is using that power to inspire people to build a better future. Through an immersive film, VR experience, and book, Planet City invites participants to explore a world where there's no colonization or industrialization. Instead, the entire human population is contained in one small area of Earth, while the rest of the planet is left untouched in order to allow nature to thrive. Though a radical idea, Young's hope is that participants will begin to think about what's possible when we collectively prioritize nature.

OUT-OF-THIS-WORLD DINING

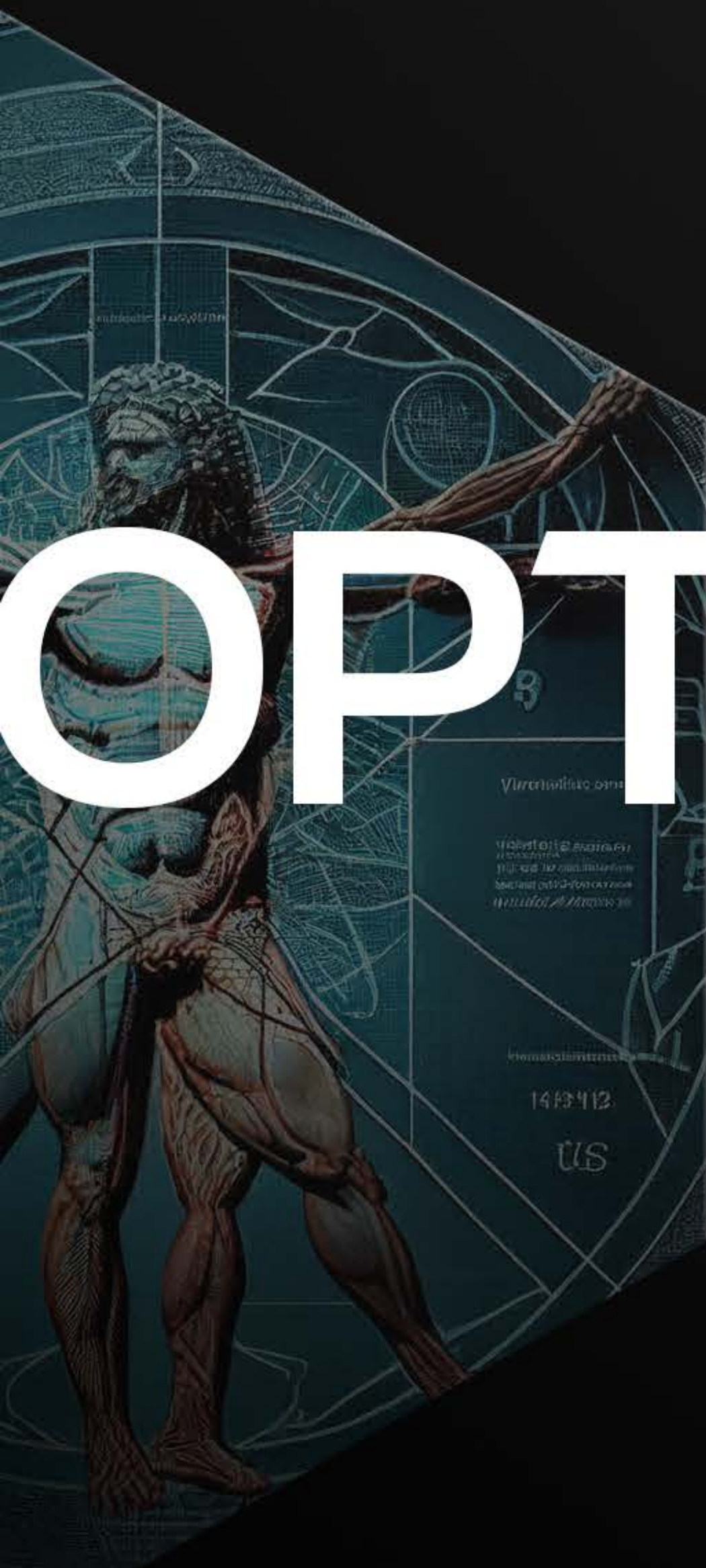
"A meal to remember" is taking on a whole new meaning. In a hot take on farm-to-table, London-based design studio Bompas & Parr hosted [dinner](#) at the AlUla volcano in Saudi Arabia, where guests were served locally sourced produce charred over molten lava. A chillier example comes from Ocean Sky Cruises, which allows travelers to experience open-air dining on the snow at the North Pole. With today's diners having seen it all, delivering a truly extraordinary meal will require businesses to think outside the box.

SPACE STUDIO

Our fascination with space isn't fading away any time soon. We're building [hotels](#) in space, putting [billboards](#) in space, sending [nude illustrations](#) of humans into space, and soon—we'll even be [filming](#) in space. Space Entertainment Enterprise (S.E.E.) has revealed plans to launch a TV and film studio in space in December 2024. The SEE-1 studio will be an inflatable module that stretches up to 6 meters in diameter, and will host music and sporting events in addition to serving as a production studio. Third-party content creators will also be able to rent out the studio for their own projects. "From Jules Verne to 'Star Trek,' science fiction entertainment has inspired millions of people around the world to dream about what the future might bring. Creating a next generation entertainment venue in space opens countless doors to create incredible new content and make these dreams a reality," says Richard Johnston, COO of S.E.E.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Enable escapism:** Think like a worldbuilder or game designer to create immersive worlds that help people unplug from reality.
- ▶ **Co-create:** Work with creators to tap into fringe sub-cultures and absurdist genres.
- ▶ **Turn your brand inside out:** Nothing makes sense anymore. Just go with it.



BACKSLASH  2023

OPTIMIZED ANATOMY

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



OPTIMIZED ANATOMY

THE LONGEVITY QUEST

Throughout history, people have hunted for magical elixirs that promised eternal life. The actual Fountain of Youth might still elude us, but we're now looking to extend our lifespan in more modern ways. Longevity startups like [Avea](#) in Switzerland and [Altos Labs](#) in the U.S. are just two of the many up-and-comers that are researching supplements and rejuvenation treatments for commercial use. In our rapidly aging world, governments are also joining the quest to help people live longer, healthier lives. The Hevolution Foundation, sponsored by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, plans to spend upward of [\\$1 billion](#) a year to slow aging among Saudi Arabians. With cheating death as the ultimate goal, life extension pursuits will continue to attract major investments. → [For more, watch Backslash's episode of *Life on the Edge: Aging in Reverse*.](#)

"In the future, it is likely that the smartphone will not be separated from you at all. It may be embedded in your body or brain, constantly scanning your biometric data and your emotions."

— Yuval Noah Harari

PET WEARABLES

While you may not know what your dog is thinking, you will soon be able to know how they're feeling due to the advent of pet wearables. One standout product leading the pack is Invoxia's [smart collar](#) for dogs. On top of monitoring key vitals like respiratory and heart rate, the collar can also track their location, monitor daily activity, and tell when your dog is walking, running, scratching, eating, barking, and resting. As for why all this insight is necessary, Invoxia says the data is especially useful for pets that are either recovering from surgery, on a new medication, or suffering from illnesses. It could even help detect health problems early—meaning more time with your furry friend. With the global pet wearable market on track to reach [\\$5.8 billion](#) by 2027, expect more competing collars to come.

HEALTH NEUROTICISM

In the continual quest to become better versions of ourselves, we've inadvertently created a new unhealthy addiction: obsessive tracking. From our steps taken to calories burned, health trackers have invaded nearly every hour of our day. But all this knowledge isn't necessarily power. In the case of sleep, experts have noticed a rise in [orthosomnia](#)—the obsessive pursuit of optimal sleep driven by sleep trackers. And on the fitness front, more people are [opening up](#) about how wearables have driven them to exercise compulsively. With tracking fatigue on the rise, we could see more people opt to go device-free.

SMART APPAREL

Health trackers are moving from your wrist to your clothes. Sensoria Health is designing pants that alert you when your posture is off, jackets that can measure air quality, and shirts that let you know when you're dehydrated. In the same vein, [Whoop](#) recently introduced a [line](#) of leggings, sports bras, and tops that can track your heart rate. And smart apparel is just the beginning. As technology advances and chips get even smaller, trackers could eventually go from on our skin to inside it. The CEO of [Whoop](#) [predicts](#) it best: "If you're wondering if one day invisible also means implantable, you're likely correct."

OPTIMIZED ANATOMY

WEARABLE MUSCLES

Myoshirt—a wearable exomuscle developed out of [ETH Zurich](#)—is helping people with restricted mobility build strength. The shirt has sensors that detect intended movements and activate a cord running parallel to the wearer's muscle to support the action.

The next version of Myoshirt aims to be lighter and smaller so that it can fit more easily under clothing—becoming an everyday accessory rather than just a physical therapy tool.

BRAIN COMPUTER INTERFACES

You've likely heard of Neuralink, Elon Musk's company working on brain-computer interfaces (BCIs). But you might not have heard of Synchron, a similar startup that recently overtook Neuralink when it implanted its [first device](#) in a U.S. patient in July. The hope is that the device will allow the ALS patient, who has lost the ability to move and speak, to communicate via text and surf the web simply by thinking—as the BCI will translate his thoughts into commands sent to a computer. Not only is Synchron ahead of Neuralink's schedule, it also doesn't require open-brain surgery or any drilling into the skull. With a fresh [\\$75 million](#) in funding, Synchron is well positioned to change the lives of people with disabilities.

CHRONIC DISEASE REVERSAL

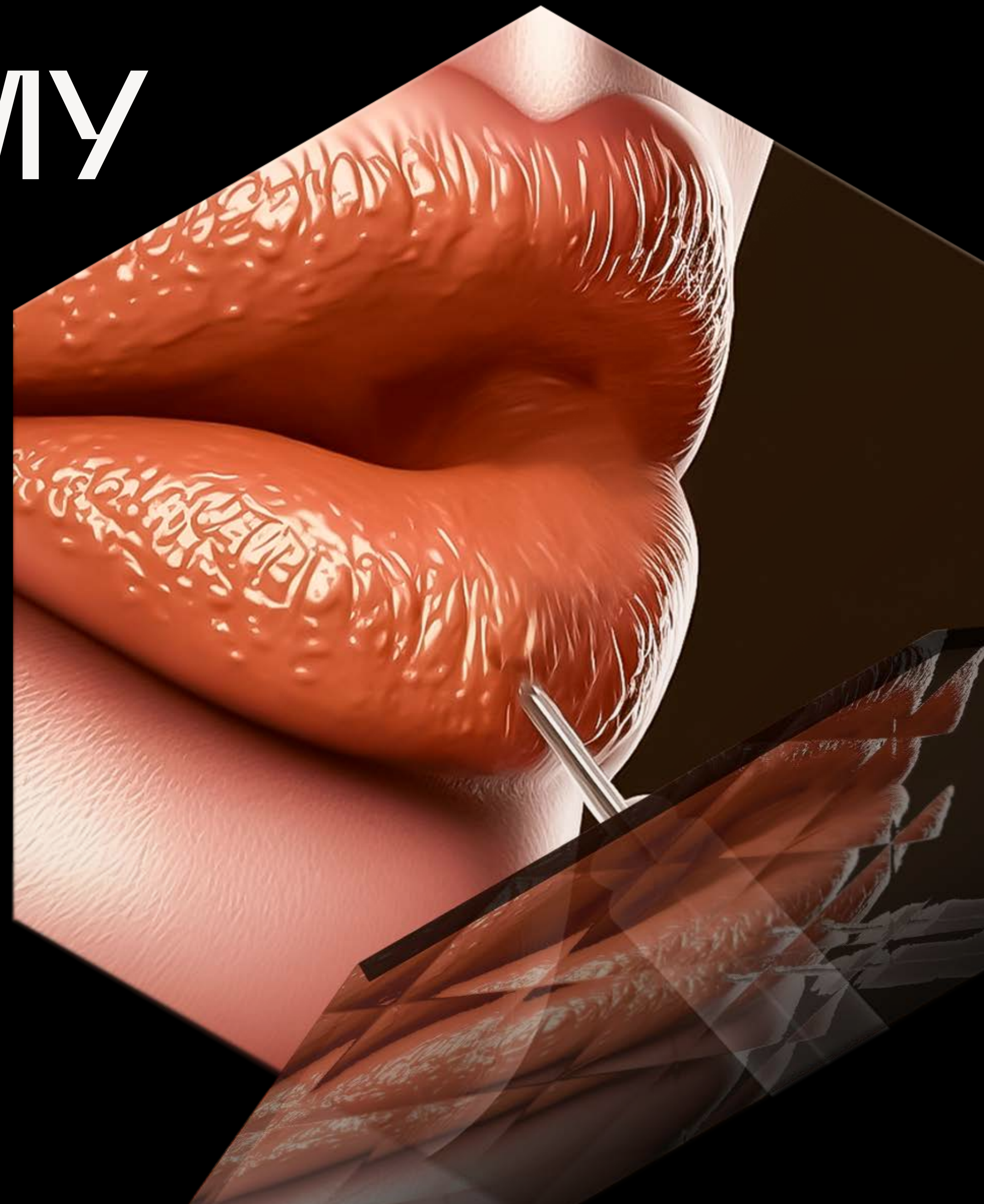
The global cost of chronic disease reached [\\$140 billion](#) last year—an unsustainable figure for individuals, governments, and healthcare systems alike. But the cost of chronic disease isn't just financial, it's personal. Revero is looking to reduce these costs through its affordable and easy-to-use platform. The AI-driven platform targets the root cause of chronic disease through a combination of precision nutrition, machine learning, and personalized clinician care. And it's highly effective. More than 79% of patients have stopped their medication since using Revero. As more platforms combine AI with traditional therapies, incurable illnesses might just be cured.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Simplify:** Think beyond tech-heavy wearables. There are plenty of natural ways to alter performance of the mind and body.
- ▶ **Be realistic:** Consumers will see through empty or exaggerated claims—gain trust by practicing full transparency.
- ▶ **Self-evaluate:** Is your offering solving a real problem? Or just fueling unhealthy obsessions?

BEAUTY ON DEMAND

Plumping your lips just got easier thanks to an on-demand beauty booking app called [Upkeep](#). Focused on neurotoxin and filler services, Upkeep allows users to compare and book procedures from a carefully vetted list of providers. The app's active users have grown by 24% each month since launching last year—highlighting not only the rise in cosmetic procedures, but a shift in how those procedures are received by society. On [TikTok](#) and Instagram, it has become common for influencers to document everything from botox injections to lip fillers, breaking down the process in shameless detail. What was once taboo is now rising to the top of our newsfeed.



BACKSLASH  2023

PLATFORM POLITICS

Social media's power is coming into question. High-profile battles against everything from moderation to screen addiction are fueling the "techlash," and social platforms are public enemy number one. While established players are racing to rewrite their wrongs, a wave of ethical alternatives are coming to market with a clean slate and a shiny new halo. Self-regulate or be regulated.



PLATFORM POLITICS

ALGOSPEAK

In order to evade content moderation on platforms like TikTok, Twitter, and YouTube, users are replacing common words with euphemisms or complex alternatives. “Pandemic,” for instance, was commonly referred to as “panini” when YouTube was down-ranking videos about the pandemic in order to combat misinformation. Other common swaps include saying “unalive” rather than “dead,” “leg booty” instead of “LGBTQ,” and referring to sex workers as “accountants.” The trend is tied to demands for more transparency around how TikTok moderates content—with users and advocacy groups arguing that heavy moderation is silencing marginalized communities and preventing taboo topics from gaining visibility. Meanwhile, many Big Tech critics are pointing to algospeak as proof that aggressive AI moderation will never solve social media’s harms. While some censorship is certainly needed, better protocols and more human analysis will be required in order to get it right.

EU DIGITAL SERVICES ACT

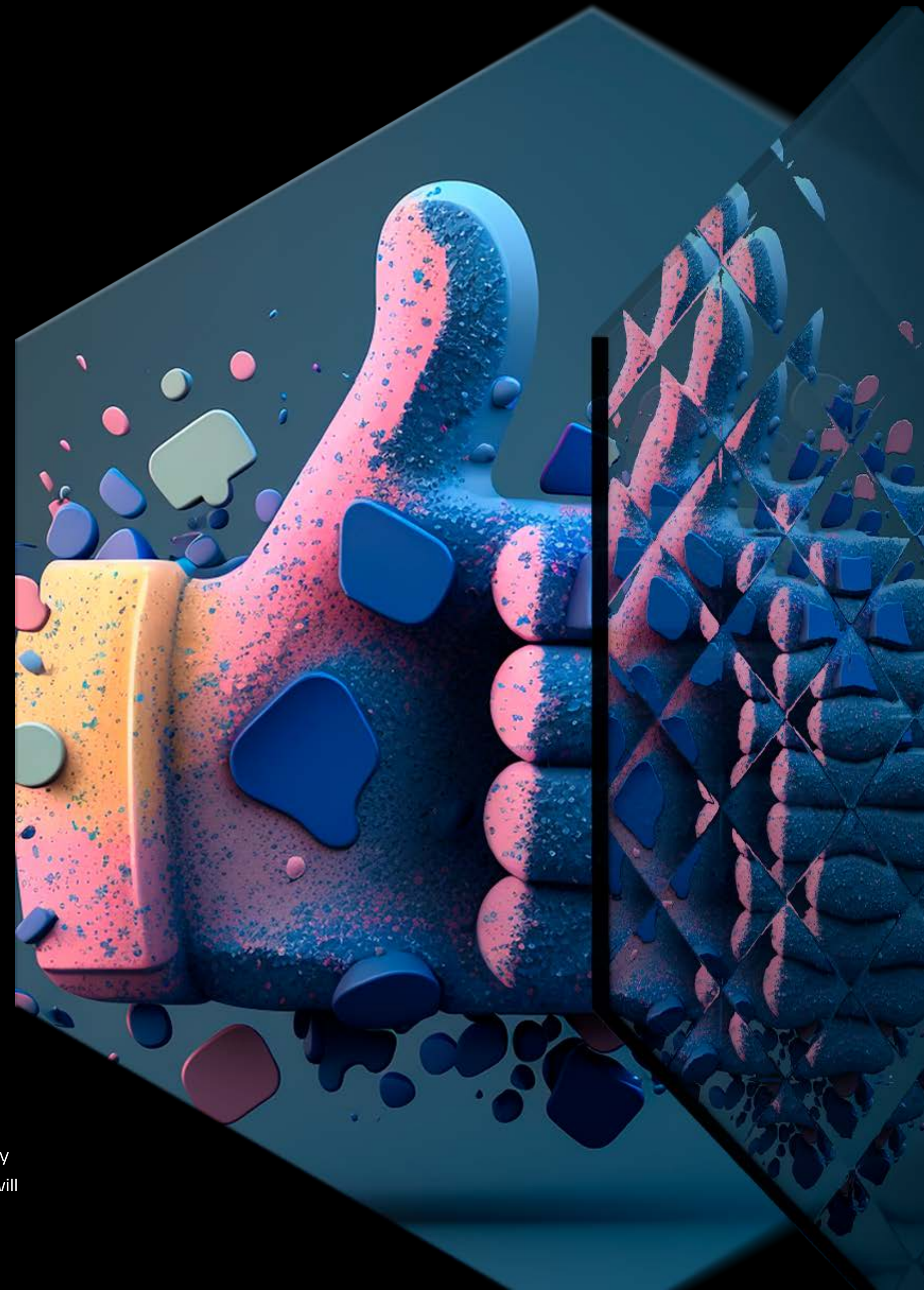
The EU’s newly agreed upon Digital Services Act (DSA) is ushering in a new era of tech regulation. Among other things, the landmark legislation will force tech companies to remove illegal content more quickly, explain their algorithms to users and researchers, and take stricter action against misinformation. Failure to comply with these rules by 2024 will result in a fine of 6% of their annual turnover. Although the legislation only applies to EU citizens, it’s very possible that tech companies will take the DSA as a new global standard. And if they don’t, it may only be a matter of time before other countries enact similar laws—leaving them no other choice.

MISINFORMATION LABELS

From labels, to bans, to AI-powered tools, platforms are continuing to experiment with a range of anti-misinformation strategies in the face of mounting criticism. In April of last year, Pinterest set a new gold standard when it became the first major platform to outright ban climate misinformation. A few months later, Meta launched Sphere—which it says is “the first AI model capable of automatically scanning hundreds of thousands of citations at once to check whether they truly support the corresponding claims.” And in October, YouTube rolled out a new feature that allows licensed healthcare professionals to apply to be labelled as reliable sources of health information. Though some degree of misinformation will always exist, sharing the results of these efforts across platforms will push us one step closer to a trustworthy internet.

“It’s seemingly as hard to give up social media as it was to give up smoking en masse...quitting that habit took decades of regulatory intervention, public-relations campaigning, social shaming, and aesthetic shifts. That process must now begin in earnest for social media.”

—Ian Bogost, The Atlantic



PLATFORM POLITICS

WHISTLEBLOWER TO WATCHDOG

Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen is on a mission to create a safer kind of social media. Through her new nonprofit, [Behind the Screen](#), Haugen is aiming to boost accountability within companies like Meta. The nonprofit will initially focus on three main goals: educating lawyers who could be going up against social media companies, incentivizing investors to look into how socially responsible a tech company is before funding it, and giving regulators and researchers an inside look at how platforms work. Eventually, Haugen also wants to create a mock social network that can be used to test different ideas. This would in turn help researchers, who have previously received [inaccurate data](#) from Facebook and others. Haugen says her ultimate goal is to get to a point where this type of organization isn't necessary: "my greatest hope is that I'm not relevant anymore."

MASTODON'S BIG BREAK

Twitter's dumpster fire is creating a huge opportunity for alternative platforms. The biggest winner to emerge from the chaos is Mastodon, a decentralized, open-source network that describes itself as a "radically different social media, back in the hands of the people." Following Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter on October 27, Mastodon's active-user count jumped from [381,113](#) on October 28 to over [1 million](#) by November 7. For frustrated Twitter users, Mastodon was the next-best alternative—offering a familiar microblogging format with a community-oriented feel. As Mastodon works to keep up with the influx of new users, many are viewing its efforts as the first real test of how well decentralized tech can work for the masses.

ANTI-TROLL LAWS

If you've spent more than five minutes on social media, you know that it's not all sunshine and rainbows. From hateful private DMs to very public takedowns, rampant online abuse is forcing governments to get serious about cyberbullying. Last year, for example, Japan [passed](#) legislation making "online insults" punishable by up to a year in prison or a fine of 300,000 yen (about \$2,200). Another country cracking down on online trolls is [Germany](#)—where authorities criminally prosecute people for online hate speech. The police have raided homes and confiscated electronics, and judges have sent offenders to jail. While most Western democracies have avoided policing the internet in the name of free speech, authorities in Japan and Germany have a different point of view. They argue that these real-world consequences are actually defending free speech by allowing people to share their opinions without fear of being attacked.


WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Welcome feedback:** What if platforms shared the inner workings of their algorithms and allowed users to give real-time feedback? Making algorithm reviews as common as restaurant reviews.
- ▶ **Design for boundaries:** Even beyond social platforms, every brand with a digital presence should be exploring ways to foster healthier tech habits. Think self-imposed limits, intentional points of friction, and mindful notifications.



Gamification is no longer just for our entertainment, it's a tool for real-world progress. Whether as a means of improving health or addressing environmental challenges, a new class of gaming initiatives are proving the power of purposeful play. The change-maker generation is getting its head in the game.

FORWARD PLAY IT

BACKSLASH  2023

PLAY IT FORWARD

There are 3.03 billion gamers worldwide, meaning nearly 40% of the global population plays video games.

— Statista, 2022

GAMING'S COGNITIVE BENEFITS

Forget what your parents told you back in the day, playing video games might make actually you smarter. More studies are confirming that regular game playing offers cognitive benefits and enhanced function in brain areas controlling memory, impulse control, and attention. And the impact is not going unnoticed. Companies like Akili Interactive and DeepWellThereapeutics are currently working developing games that could help with conditions like ADHD and depression.



VR SURVIVALISM

When you grow up in Australia, the driest country in the world, the threat of bushfires is imminent. So how do you best prepare children for the ever-looming danger? The University of South Australia believes the answer lies in a gamified VR experience. Through the experience, kids take part in a series of problem-solving activities in order to save themselves and a dog from a deadly fire. The game has proven successful, with more than 80% of participants feeling more confident to calmly evaluate the options and make wise decisions to protect themselves from a bushfire. With natural disasters becoming more frequent, expect to see similar games preparing us for floods, earthquakes, and more.

THE GAMING PROFILE

Seven out of ten credit card applications are rejected because banks don't have enough information to analyze someone's risk. Hoping to help more young and unbanked Colombians get their first credit card, Bancolombia launched [The Gaming Profile](#). Through the initiative, people were invited to play video games and share their performance data with Bancolombia. The bank then used that data to determine people's risk levels by assessing soft skills like stress management, discipline, goal setting, organizational skills, and more. The tool—a literal game changer for those without credit history—unlocked financial access while helping Bancolombia connect with the country's 15 million gamers.

“Gaming has so often been painted with the wrong brush—stereotyped as being isolating and unsociable. However, the pandemic has shown this could not be further from the truth.” — [Bartosz Skwarczek](#), Co-founder and CEO of G2A.com

PLAY IT FORWARD

VIDEO GAMES FOR DOGS

UK startup [JoiPaw](#) is developing a new series of video games for man's best friend. Besides being insanely entertaining to watch, the games are helping to provide further research into dementia among dogs. They're also showing the world how smart dogs truly are. "We humans tend to empathize and take better care of others when we realize they're closer to us than we think," says JoiPaw founder Dersim Avdar.

EMPATHETIC GAMEPLAY

2DogGames is saying no to games that reward compulsive behavior, and yes to play that fosters empathy. In the sci-fi adventure [Destiny's Sword](#), players command a squad of peace-keeping troops. But it's not just about winning on the battlefield. It's about monitoring and taking care of your squad's mental health. As the commander, it's your job to pay attention to whether someone is suffering from conditions like PTSD, anxiety, or exhaustion. Research shows that "adolescents are far less likely to imitate video game violence when the consequences of the behavior are shown," encouraging more empathy both online and IRL.

PLAY AND PLANT

For the release of [Horizon Forbidden West](#), PlayStation collaborated with the Arbor Foundation to launch the "[Play and Plant](#)" program. The idea was simple: every time a player unlocked a special trophy in the game, PlayStation planted an actual tree to help complete reforestation projects across the U.S. With access to one in three people on the planet, the gaming industry has a massive opportunity to turn digital actions into real-world impact.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Make "play" mean something:** Embrace tactics and formats that drive real-world impact—whether through gaming scenarios that teach valuable lessons or in-game actions that are tied to actual philanthropy.
- ▶ **Play for progress:** Use gamification to crowdsource solutions.
- ▶ **Make it participatory:** Gaming is inherently social. Use it as a way to deepen existing relationships or to connect people who wouldn't otherwise have crossed paths IRL.

METEOR BLASTERS

There are an estimated 4.65 million people in Japan with glaucoma—making it the country's leading cause of irreversible blindness. Researchers from Tohoku University are aiming to turn that statistic around with a video game that detects glaucoma from home in just five minutes. The game, called [Meteor Blasters](#), assesses players' reactions as they blast meteors and capture white dots on the screen. Those with a poor score are encouraged to visit a doctor, leading to early detection that just might save your eyesight.



We're letting nature reclaim its place in our world. As we wake up to the fact that restoring biodiversity is essential to our survival, we'll see rewilding become a common priority among lawmakers, businesses, and local residents. In the push to welcome back the wild, everyone has a role to play.

REWILD RESILIENCE

BACKSLASH



2023

REWILD RESILIENCE

WILDLIFE REINTRODUCTION

Across the globe, endangered animals are being reintroduced in order to restore complex habitats and create a more resilient landscape. Black vultures, lynx, and wild horses are among the several animals being reintroduced to eastern Spain. Berlin's former Tegel Airport is being transformed into a sanctuary for 14 endangered species. Wild bison were recently released into the U.K. for the first time in thousands of years. Saudi Arabia is working to bring back Arabian leopards—of which there are only about 200 remaining in the world. And conservationists are pushing governments to relocate animals from forests in mainland China to the woodlands of Hong Kong.

BEE BRICKS

Buildings in Brighton and Hove, England, are becoming bird and bee friendly. According to the UK city's new planning laws, buildings taller than five meters must include hollow bricks that can house birds, as well as bricks with small holes where bees can nest. The law is part of the government's biodiversity net gain proposals, which say that future developments must improve wildlife habitats. As nature loses ground to human development, spaces designed to help wildlife thrive will ensure that essential species stick around.

BEAUTY BRANDS FOR BIODIVERSITY

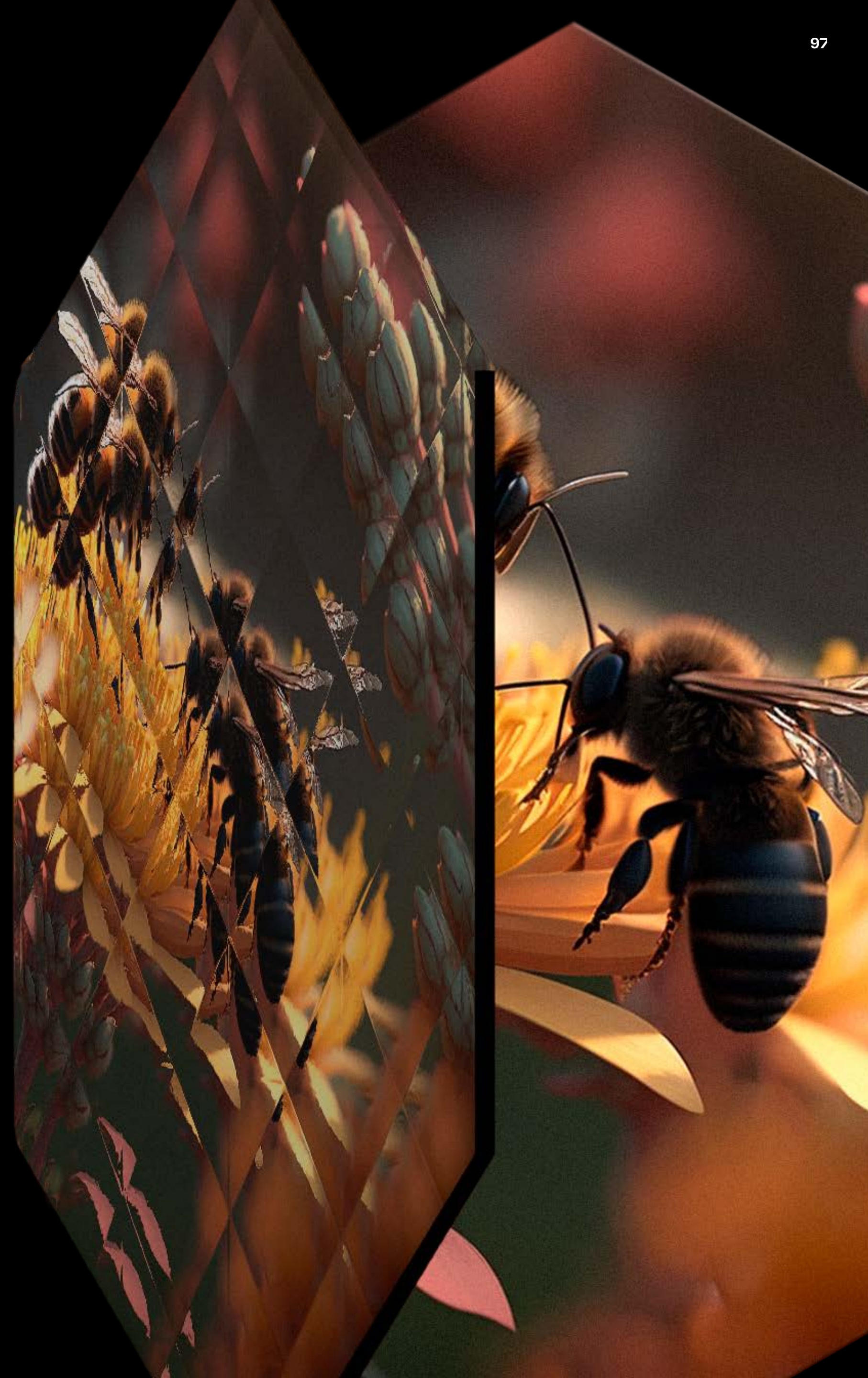
Recognizing that natural beauty products can't be made without natural ingredients, eco-conscious brands are using their resources to protect the planet. French luxury brand YSL Beauty joined forces with global nonprofit Re:wild to launch Rewild Our Earth—a program aiming to restore 100,000 hectares of nature's most threatened areas around the world by 2030. Similarly, Swiss brand Weleda has committed £330,000 to preventing soil degradation through its Save the Earth's Skin campaign. "Weleda has been growing the plants used to make its skin and healthcare products organically for over a century," said Eileen Smith, global brand equity head of Weleda. "Commitment to soil is at the heart of our product sourcing."

DE-EXTINCTION EFFORTS

Colossal Biosciences is using gene-editing tech to de-extinct the Tasmanian tiger. The tiger's return would rebalance the Australian ecosystem, which has suffered since the predator went extinct in 1936. In addition to bringing back the Tasmanian tiger, Colossal says its technology could also help conserve existing but threatened species. Not everyone is on board, however. Several experts have raised biological and ethical concerns about using tech to bring back lost animals, noting that the effects would be hard to predict. Today's animals may react poorly to an animal they've never encountered before, for instance, and there's also a risk of introducing new diseases.

WWF'S 2022 Living Planet Report reveals an average decline of 69% in species populations since 1970. "Our future depends on reversing the loss of nature just as much as it depends on addressing climate change. And you can't solve one without solving the other."

— Carter Roberts, President and CEO of WWF-US



REWILD RESILIENCE

REWILDING TOURISM

While tourism has mainly been known to damage our planet, a new wave of companies is setting out to prove that travel can be a force for good. One such company is Rewilding Europe Travel, which aims to “make Europe a wilder place” through adventurous, nature-based excursions that combine culture, community engagement, and local cuisine. The company’s co-founder, Neil Rogers, also insists that putting people at the center is key. “Rewilding experiences are important, but so is a good local wine shared with enthusiastic hosts,” he says. “We start planning with the local rewilding teams, our connectors to the local community and the environment. They know everyone, monitor the wildlife, and support local producers and tourism enterprises.”

BIODIVERSITY CREDITS MARKET

A biodiversity credits market could be the new carbon offset market. Economists at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), a UK think tank, and the UN Development Program are pushing for the shift. The idea is that conservation groups working to protect natural habitats could convert their efforts into tradable credits. These could then be purchased by companies, investors, or individuals looking to support conservation or fulfill a sustainability mandate—just as carbon credits offer a way to invest in projects that cut emissions.

URBAN GREENING

Urban areas around the world are getting a rewilding makeover—giving way to cooler, more resilient, and more attractive cities. Ghana recently launched a plan to restore the country’s lost forest cover by planting resilient, fast-growing trees in urban areas. Melbourne has laid out plans to have 40% tree coverage by 2040, and is asking for residents’ help in monitoring tree health. Seoul, Paris, and Oslo are all planting urban forests to improve air quality and reduce the urban heat island effect. Shanghai has introduced a shopping center covered in over 1,000 trees and 250,000 plants. And in May, London committed £600,000 to a Rewild London fund that will restore 20 to 30 natural sites. Residents of these cities are also encouraged to do their part by restoring biodiversity in their home gardens and on green roofs.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Protect the planet:** If your supply chain relies on natural ingredients, consider your brand responsible for restoring nature.
- ▶ **Empower individual action:** Encourage everyone to get involved—whether by planting native species in their own backyard or taking part in local volunteer programs.
- ▶ **Examine your footprint:** Are your offices, retail spaces, or manufacturing facilities contributing to the destruction of nature? How can you scale back or rebuild in a way that supports biodiversity?

BACKSLASH



2023

ROOTS REVIVAL

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.

ROOTS REVIVAL

NIGERIA'S FOREIGN MODEL BAN

Last year, Nigeria became the first country in the world to ban foreign models and voice-over artists from its ads. For decades, Nigerian brands would use white, non-Nigerian models and British voice-over artists, while international brands would simply recycle ads that had run in other markets—resulting in a serious lack of native representation. With this new ruling, the country hopes to develop local talent and grow the Nigerian advertising industry. According to Steve Babaeko, president of the Association of Advertising Agencies of Nigeria, the law is in line with a “new sense of pride” among young Nigerians. “I think the law is just catching up with national sentiment.”

ETHICAL RETURNS POLICY

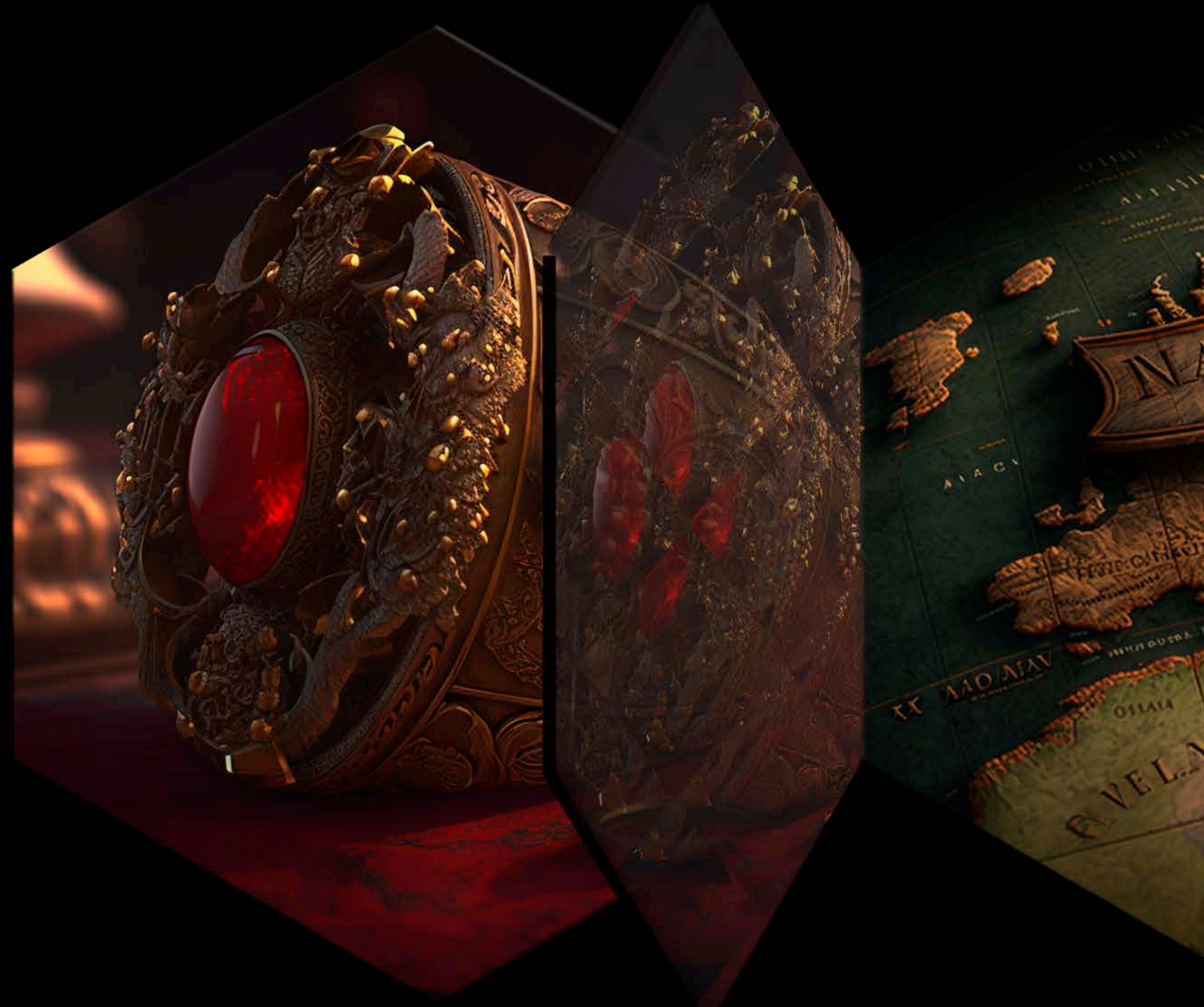
Under its recently adopted ethical returns policy, the Smithsonian is giving back items that were looted or acquired by “coercion, duress, assertion of power, or forcible taking.” While ethical debates around museum holdings have come up in the past, most museums have asserted that they were justified in keeping the items as their legal owner. With this new policy, however, the world’s largest museum organization is putting morality above legality. As ethical restitution redefines collection practices, we’ll reassess how we revisit our history.

RECLAIMING INDIGENOUS NAMES

A growing number of parents in New Zealand are giving their children indigenous names. The number of Māori names registered in the country has nearly doubled over the past 10 years—coinciding with a larger fight to reclaim the language. “We live in a country that actively oppressed Māori culture, naming her makes a statement that her identity is something to be proud of,” says Emma Whiley, mother to Ruataupare Te Ropuhina Florence Whiley-Whaipooti.

HERITAGE MADE HIP

Gufajin—ancient Chinese-style gold jewelry—is making a modern comeback in China. The pieces are made from 24k gold, jade, or silk, and often feature creatures from Chinese mythology. Gen Z is largely driving the demand for this traditional jewelry, fueled by a strong sense of nationalism and a desire to reconnect with their heritage in uncertain times. “The younger generation is patriotic and willing to spend on domestic brands over the foreign brands that had enjoyed more prestige in the past,” says Chan Sai-Cheong, managing director of China’s biggest jewelry retailer Chow Tai Fook.



ROOTS REVIVAL

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Close to 90% of Puerto Rico's food comes from the continental United States. In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, which devastated the island in 2017, more Puerto Ricans are now becoming aware of the importance of a local food supply—fueling a growing fight for food sovereignty. "Agriculture is part of a larger fight for an identity that has been whitewashed by the foreign and mainland U.S. industries that have come to Puerto Rico," says food activist Tara Rodríguez Besosa. "The vision and the dream is for more Puerto Ricans to be able to feed Puerto Rico and to connect with ancestral practices and decolonial practices."

INDOFUTURISM

Indofuturism—an increasingly popular aesthetic and genre—is imagining a world that's unapologetically Indian and free from Western tropes. Video games, music, and art that fall into this category are rooted in staples of traditional Indian culture such as spirituality or folk customs. But they also have a modern spin thanks to cutting-edge technology and an emphasis on diversity. Other non-Western futurisms to watch include Gulf Futurism, Sinofuturism, Indigenous Futurisms, and Afrofuturism, the catalyst for it all.



LAND BACK MOVEMENT

While Indigenous peoples have been fighting to reclaim land since colonization, governments across Australia, Canada, and the U.S. are finally taking notice. This is all thanks to the land back movement—a call to not just acknowledge the original keepers of the land we reside on, but to actively put resources, authority, and jurisdiction back in the hands of Native populations. The movement experienced major momentum when more than 500 acres of land in Northern California were returned to 10 Indigenous tribes at the start of last year. The land was given back its original name: Tc'ih-Léh-Dũñ ("Fish Run Place"), and will be protected through Indigenous guardianship principles moving forward. → [For more, watch Backslash's episode of Life on the Edge: Land Back](#)

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Remix it:** Bring ancient traditions and stories to modern platforms—reaching younger generations by making the old feel new.
- ▶ **Avoid small-washing:** To be truly local-led, work hand-in-hand with the residents and communities that came before you. Think locally inspired store designs and partnerships with local makers and Indigenous peoples.



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 shame attached. Say hello to a new era of pleasure positivity.

BACKSLASH



2023

SEXUAL LIBERATION

The global sexual wellness market was valued at \$77 billion in 2021, and is expected to reach \$112 billion by 2030.

— [Market Research Future, 2022](#)

#BIMBOTOK

On TikTok, self-proclaimed “bimbos” are finding power in expressing their femininity. While the word has historically been used put women down for caring “too much” about their appearance or being unintelligent, today’s bimbos are reclaiming the label on their own terms. Across social media, these self-professed bimbos are educating people about gender inequality and the flaws of late-stage capitalism while wearing hot pink latex and winged eyeliner. To [Chrissy Chlapecka](#), one of TikTok’s most prominent bimbos with over five million followers, being a bimbo means “being confident, loving your own version of femininity, and sexuality.” “It’s being the full and honest version of who you are aside from societal judgments that look down upon the beauty and power of femininity,” she continues.

SELLING SEX WELLNESS

Once reserved to specialized stores with names like “secrets” and “pleasure boutique,” sex wellness products are now being proudly displayed on the shelves of mainstream stores. Mass retailers including Sephora, Bloomingdales, Target, and Walmart are selling vibrators and lubricants right alongside moisturizer and mascara. CVS pharmacy now offers toys and more from hip sex wellness brand [Cake](#). And lingerie retailers are boosting revenues by expanding their offerings to include sex wellness products. As sex is reframed as self-care, we’ll see pleasure-forward products become a staple of health and wellness aisles.

→ For more, watch Backslash’s episode of [Life on the Edge: Pleasure Revolution](#)

PLANET SEX

If you have questions about sex, they’ll likely be answered in a new Hulu/BBC docuseries called “[Planet Sex](#).” In the six-part series, model, actress, and overall cool girl Cara Delevingne explores the ins and outs of human sexuality. And everything is up for discussion. Cara helps make an ethical, feminist porn film in Spain; attends a sex party in New York; makes “vaginal art” in Japan; donates an orgasm to a research lab in Germany; and talks body positivity and plastic surgery in Colombia.

EROTIC ESCAPES

Travel is a great way to see new sights, experience different cultures, and apparently —to explore your sexual desires. According to Booking.com’s [2023 travel predictions](#), 36% of global travelers were interested in taking a holiday centered around sexual well-being. The company expects that experiences such as polyamorous retreats, bondage camps, and resorts dedicated to exploring specific fetishes and kinks will become more popular in the years ahead.

SEXUAL LIBERATION

FEELD

Feeld describes itself as a hookup app for “open-minded singles and couples who want to explore their sexuality.” Every person’s profile clearly lists their intimate desires and interests—ranging from sexual arrangements to fetishes—so that users can easily find the specific kind of hookup they’re looking for. The app also allows you to choose from among twenty different categories of gender and sexuality, making it popular among the nonbinary and trans community.

BREAKING CHINA'S SEX STIGMA

Sex is rarely talked about in China, with the media even censoring subtitles in Friends to remove sexual innuendo. But OSUGA is trying to change that. The Chinese sex toy brand opened a pop-up store in Shanghai to show off their products, host workshops about women’s pleasure, and encourage moms and daughters to talk about sex together—taking a bold step to bring pleasure into the public eye.

IRELAND'S SEX ED REVAMP

Hit the books: porn is now part of Ireland’s public education curriculum. Beginning this September, revamped Relationships and Sexual Education courses for Ireland’s Junior Cert curriculum will include lessons about pornography, consent, sharing sexual images, abusive relationships, gender identity, sexual orientation, and more. Demand to include these topics has largely been student-led, but the Department of Education has also agreed that there’s a need for more discussion around the “positive, healthy, and enjoyable aspects [of sex]” compared to the existing courses focused on the “risks and dangers associated with relationships and sexuality.”

FEMTECH FUNDING

As the sex wellness stigma is broken, more money is being funneled into progressive femtech startups. One such startup is Feel, a Brazilian business that recently raised over BRL 1 million (\$190,000) from all-female pool of angel investors. In addition to selling erotic products like lubricants, soaps, and vibrators, Feel also offers information and digital services about women’s health issues. “We are realizing that the girl who has a taboo around using tampons is the same woman who feels shame in having a moment of pleasurable intimacy, and is the same woman who has difficulties talking to her doctor about menopausal vaginal dryness,” says Feel co-founder Marília Ponte.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Check your tone:** Are you portraying sex in a healthy, positive, inclusive manner? Brands can break the stigma by normalizing pleasure as an act of self-care and fostering a more open and honest sex conversation.





STABILITY PURSUIT

BACKSLASH  2023

With disruptive forces making it harder to predict the jobs of tomorrow, stability is in high demand. Workers are chasing companies that will invest in their future, while employers are aiming to attract and retain talent with practical perks and upskilling opportunities. The new dream job is the one that's future-proof.

STABILITY PURSUIT

"In conversations with more than a dozen young job seekers, many said years of uncertainty and upheaval had left them feeling that they should freeze or delay the search for a dream job and focus on finding a secure one."

— [The New York Times](#)

HUKOU HANDOUTS

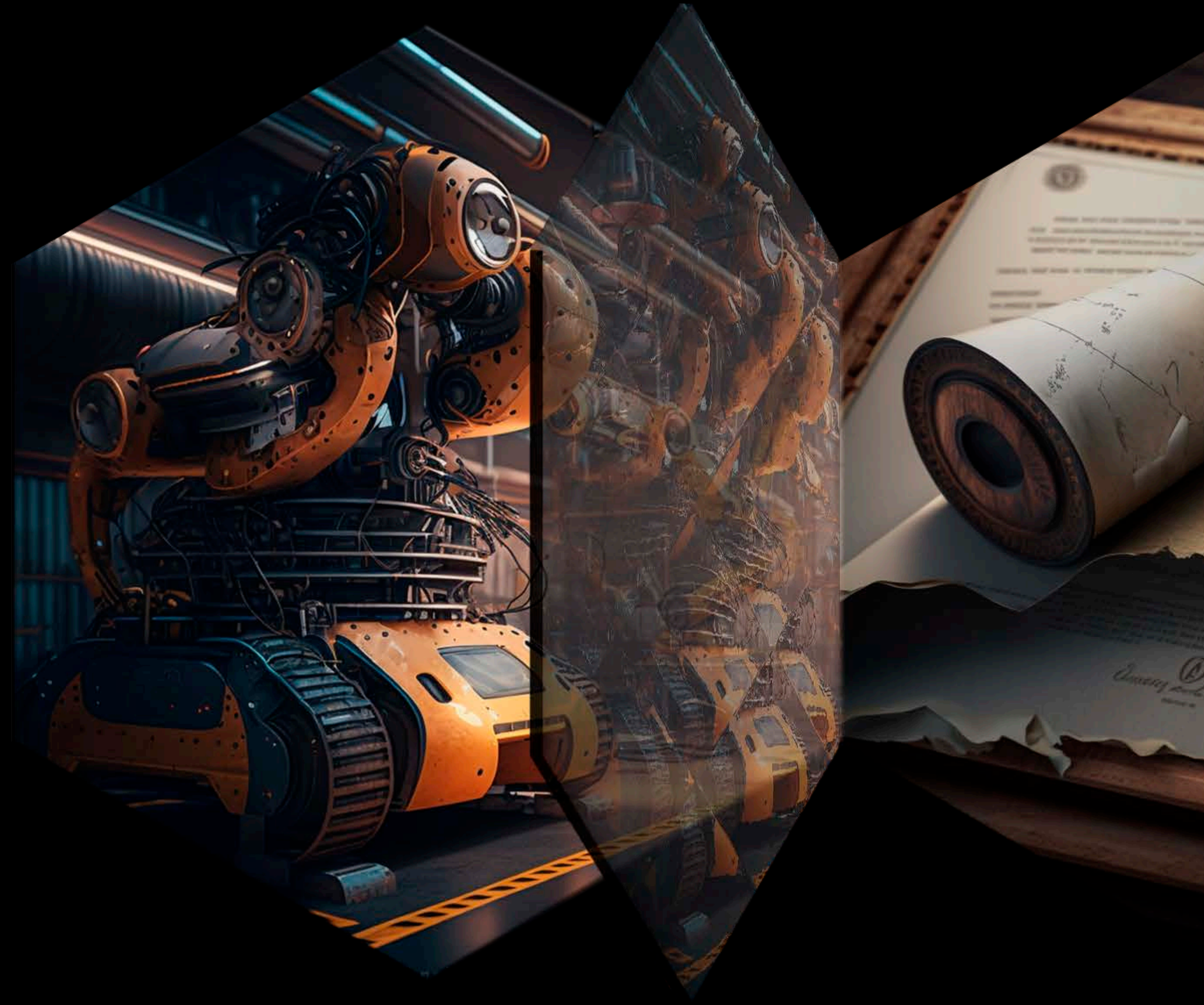
Covid's impact on cities is continuing to linger, with many still struggling to attract workers. In a bid to stand out, Shanghai is offering top Chinese graduates a hard-to-get hukou document, which unlocks access to social benefits like public education, health insurance, and the ability to buy property. Before this new perk was introduced it could take years for out-of-town graduates to secure a document, but this updated policy is expected to lure in some much-needed talent

ALT. EDUCATION

College is no longer the obvious or expected next step. Data from 2022 revealed that only 4% of people in the UK believe college leads to a better future, with a growing portion of the population seeing increased value in apprenticeships and short-term programs. This shift is also mirrored in Malaysia, where 72% do not want to continue their education after state exams, preferring to immediately work or train instead. Companies, too, are rebuking conventional education by investing in their own training programs. One example comes from Google Philippines, which is aiming to close the digital skills gap by offering 39,000 Career Certificate scholarships to Filipino jobseekers.

ROBOT REVOLUTION

South Korea already has the highest "robot density" in the world—a measure for the number of industrial robots per 10,000 employees. And thanks to the newly introduced Serious Disasters Punishment Act, even more workers in the country are now being replaced by automation. The intent of the law was to better protect employees by holding CEOs responsible for factory deaths. The unintended outcome, however, was that businesses actually better protected themselves by erasing staff and adding robots. The shift toward automation seen in South Korea is already a growing concern across the globe, and is only becoming more worrisome as robots get smarter and more human-like. In response, we can expect to see more people chasing future-proof jobs.



STABILITY PURSUIT

LABOR UNION BOOM

2022 was the year of labor unions. And with growing pay disparities and lingering societal rifts left by Covid, it's no surprise that workers are rising up. Starbucks, Amazon, Apple, Chipotle, Microsoft, and Etsy were among the several major companies whose employees either attempted to, or successfully formed a union last year. Employer responses to these efforts were varied. Microsoft expressed support for workers who wanted to unionize, for instance, while Amazon actively fought against them. With the highest number (71%) of Americans supporting unionization since the 1960s, a company's response to unionization will be watched closely by both workers and customers.

CAREER CUSHIONING

Talks of economic uncertainty are blowing up on LinkedIn, where posts mentioning "recession" are up 879%. To gain some peace of mind, employees are saying goodbye to "Quiet Quitting" and hello to "Career Cushioning." This typically involves planning for the worst—whether by looking for a more stable backup job, networking, exploring alternative revenue streams, or upskilling through certificate programs. The financial uncertainty of 2023 will prompt more employees—and businesses—to expect the unexpected.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **Invest in upskilling:** Build educational programs in-house to help current and prospective employees keep up with the latest skills.
- ▶ **Level-up benefits:** Are your employee benefits offering stability in both work and life?
- ▶ **Lend protections:** Brands can offer stability to their consumers through locked-in rates, safe investment options, and long-term promises.

EARNED WAGE ACCESS

Hourly rate employees can now access their pay on demand, thanks to the rollout of "Earned Wage Access" (EWA) programs. Target, Walmart, and McDonald's are just a few of the companies using EWA platforms, allowing employees to get paid instantly for their accrued hours rather than waiting for a biweekly paycheck. Advocates say EWA gives workers more financial security, thus reducing turnover. One study by Mercator Advisory Group found that the average tenure of retail workers increased 24% when using EWA.

STEALTH

A privacy renegotiation is underway. Fed up with inescapable surveillance, citizens are taking back their identities and demanding better protections both online and offline. In the age of constant intrusion, Stealth Mode is peace of mind and anonymity is the ambition.

BACKSLASH



2023

MODE



STEALTH MODE

PROTESTOR IDENTITY PROTECTION

To protect the identity of anti-government protestors featured in the new BBC documentary “Hong Kong’s Fight for Freedom,” filmmakers used AI to swap their real faces for faces of actors. The AI face-swapping technique allowed the interviewees’ real mannerisms and facial expressions to still be conveyed while keeping them totally anonymous.

CLOAKED

According to Abhijay Bhatnagar, “people like the idea of feeling known, but not surveilled.” Abhijay and his brother co-founded Cloaked, a company that generates original, ready-to-use contact information and passwords so that people can stay anonymous when creating online accounts. The app operates like a password manager, but rather than saving people’s passwords, the platform creates and replaces personal information with “cloaked” data. The startup closed on \$25 million in Series A funding in 2022.

TIGHTENING TEEN PRIVACY

Last year, both Instagram and Facebook enabled more private settings by default for any new users under the age of 16. Instagram is also testing prompts for teens that suggest limiting who can interact with their content, while Facebook is working on a feature that would prevent teens from messaging adults who have recently been blocked or reported by a young person. The hope is that these updates will help protect teens from predatory adults—making platforms safer for their most vulnerable users.

Just 40% of global consumers say they trust brands to keep their personal data secure and use it responsibly.

— Twilio Segment, 2022

FRANCE’S CYBERSCORE

France wants to make assessing online security as simple as reading a nutrition label. Starting this year, the country will assign a “Cyberscore” to public digital platforms including search engines, marketplaces, social networks, and video conferencing software. A cybersecurity audit will investigate factors such as where data is being hosted, the use of end-to-end encryption, and the speed at which security flaws are patched. Platforms will then receive a score between “A” to “E” along with a color code ranging from green to red, which will be shown before someone opens a website. The scoring system will bring clarity to complex tech jargon—empowering users to make safer digital decisions and forcing businesses to step up their security practices.

TIKTOK PRIVACY TIPS

Everyday privacy hacks are making waves on social media. One TikTok user, @naomibrookwell (also known as Privacy Tips Naomi), is empowering her 128,000 followers with “tips on how to live a modern, privacy-conscious lifestyle.” Her videos cover helpful topics like how to de-Google your phone, why we should be careful of “encryption” as a buzzword, and how smart fridges are spying on you.

STEALTH MODE

METaverse INCOGNITO MODE

Most metaverse platforms bring all the same privacy risks as the internet, but none of the defense mechanisms. A small team of researchers are aiming to change that with a system called [MetaGuard](#). The tool is an open-source plug-in for Unity, a popular game engine used to create VR content. Similar to web browsers' private modes, MetaGuard adds digital noise to obscure sensitive user data—thus making it difficult for companies to link data back to a particular user.

PRIVACY LUXE

Privacy doesn't come cheap. With onlookers now behind every platform and on every street corner, keeping them out is becoming a nearly impossible—and increasingly expensive—task. Virtual private networks (VPNs) like [ExpressVPN](#) cost \$13/month for secure browsing. [DeleteMe](#) charges \$129 per year to wipe your personal information from search engines. Some facial-recognition-blocking [sunglasses](#) go for \$168. And homes in private, gated communities sell for millions. But anonymity can no longer be reserved for the elite. Until privacy is treated as an essential, the gap between the privacy rich and the privacy poor will only continue to grow.

Crunchbase lists 271 privacy startups that have together raised more than \$4.5 billion.


"CAMOUFLAGS"

Privacy-conscious citizens are finding clever ways to evade surveillance. At the 2022 World Cup—which was the most heavily surveilled tournament in history—attendees rocked face-paint patterns designed to fool facial recognition systems. The patterns were created using an AI text-to-image generator, which was prompted to create a mashup of Juggalo artwork and country flags. And it was a success. According to a test by [Vice](#), the patterns made people unrecognizable to popular face-tracking tools like Apple's Face ID and Betaface API. → [For more, watch Backslash's episode of *Life on the Edge: Anti-Surveillance Activism*](#)

WHAT'S NEXT


- ▶ **Innovate wisely:** Develop privacy solutions for the most vulnerable citizens first.
- ▶ **Avoid abstraction:** Simple, straightforward privacy policies make for stronger trust and better-informed decisions.
- ▶ **Rebuild for privacy:** What if entire spaces, products, and experiences were completely redesigned around privacy?





TRAVEL RIGHT

Mobility is undergoing a mass reappraisal. As we rethink the flow of people and goods, we'll trade fossil fuels and overtourism for a greener, more efficient, and well-balanced future. We're betting on mobility to move the world in the right direction.

BACKSLASH  2023

TRAVEL RIGHT

ELECTRIFICATION ACCELERATES

With [52%](#) of global consumers preferring an EV/hybrid to a gas car, companies and governments are racing to accelerate adoption.

In [Mexico](#), General Motors is increasing EV access by transitioning all vehicle manufacturing from gas to electric. Italy and the [Philippines](#) are making EVs less costly to purchase and produce through tax breaks and reduced tariffs. Uganda President Museveni [announced](#) that all motorcycle riders, including boda boda riders, will get free electric motorcycles. And in the most radical adaptation, California is completely banning the sale of new gasoline cars by 2035.

TOURIST FEES

Thinking of traveling to Venice this year? If so, prepare to pay a daily [tourist fee](#) of three to 10 euros and be sure to reserve your spot in advance. As the poster child for overtourism, Venice hopes this new reservation system will limit visitors and help the city properly staff and allocate resources for the anticipated number of tourists. "Covid made us realize that what was an everyday occurrence before Covid isn't acceptable anymore — the mentality has changed," says Venice's councilor for tourism. Fourteen other nearby islands will also join Venice in putting entrance fees in place, marking a new era of responsible travel restrictions.

DRONE DELIVERIES

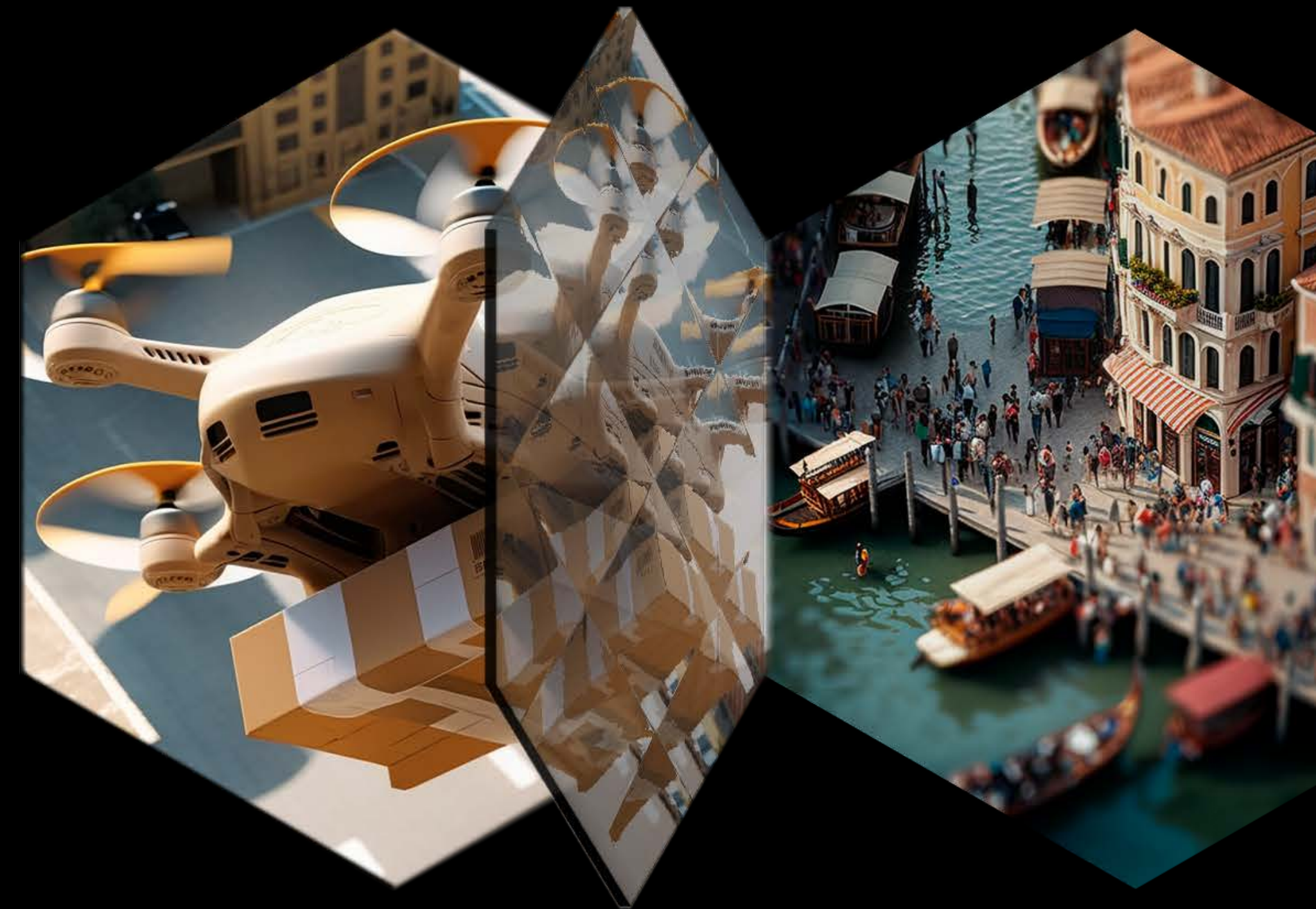
It's not a bird or a plane, it's your Amazon delivery! [Amazon](#) is one of the first major companies to launch drone deliveries in an effort to get people their orders faster. Speed isn't the only driving force behind the shift, however. Delivery drones also mean fewer vehicles on the road, which results in fewer accidents and lower CO2 emissions. The [proven benefits](#) of airborne delivery have huge implications for cities where efficient, sustainable logistics is a pressing need as populations continue to grow. And beyond densely populated cities, drones are also appealing to remote communities. In December, the Rwandan government partnered with drone startup [Zipline](#) to deliver medical, emergency, and nutritional supplies to rural populations.

DIGITAL TWINS

[Digital twins](#)—real-time digital copies of physical objects—are set to transform our transportation systems. By collecting real-time data, transportation departments can create virtual replicas of roadway systems, then respond to events as they happen. Imagine, for instance, that a tree falls and obstructs a highway. Rather than relying on someone to report it, a digital twin could automatically notify appropriate agencies and re-reroute drivers to ease traffic. Digital twins also provide insight into how people are getting around, thus allowing cities to plan infrastructure more efficiently. One country taking advantage of the benefits is the U.K., where [National Highways](#) is mapping out digital twins of all roadways by 2050.

"Going forward, we're reimagining our transportation solutions to save time, money, and emissions. Movement has turned mindful."

— Agathe Guerrier, Global Chief Strategy Officer, TBWAWorldwide



TRAVEL RIGHT

HOVERBIKES

We've already seen flying taxis and jetpacks. Next, get ready for flying bikes. The XTURISMO hoverbike, which comes from Japanese air mobility startup AERWINS, is already on sale in Japan and will launch in the U.S. as soon as next year. It's currently priced at a whopping \$777,000, though the company is aiming to get the cost down to \$50,000 for a smaller electric version. Many are already calling it the "future of urban mobility" due to its ability to reduce road congestion. But before we're all zooming around on flying motorbikes, we'll first need to establish laws and infrastructure to keep riders safe.

UNDERGROUND CARGO DELIVERY

What if freight deliveries—large and small—could be transported below ground? Switzerland is making this "what if" a reality with their [proposal](#) to build underground cargo delivery tunnels. Through the project, major Swiss logistics hubs will be connected via an automated underground tunnel network that runs on renewable energy. The shipping pods would also run on a self-charging rail system, making freight travel more sustainable. Altogether, the project is estimated to reduce 40% of cargo traffic from Swiss roadways in a way that doesn't involve clearing any land for additional roads.

SOLAR-POWERED CARS

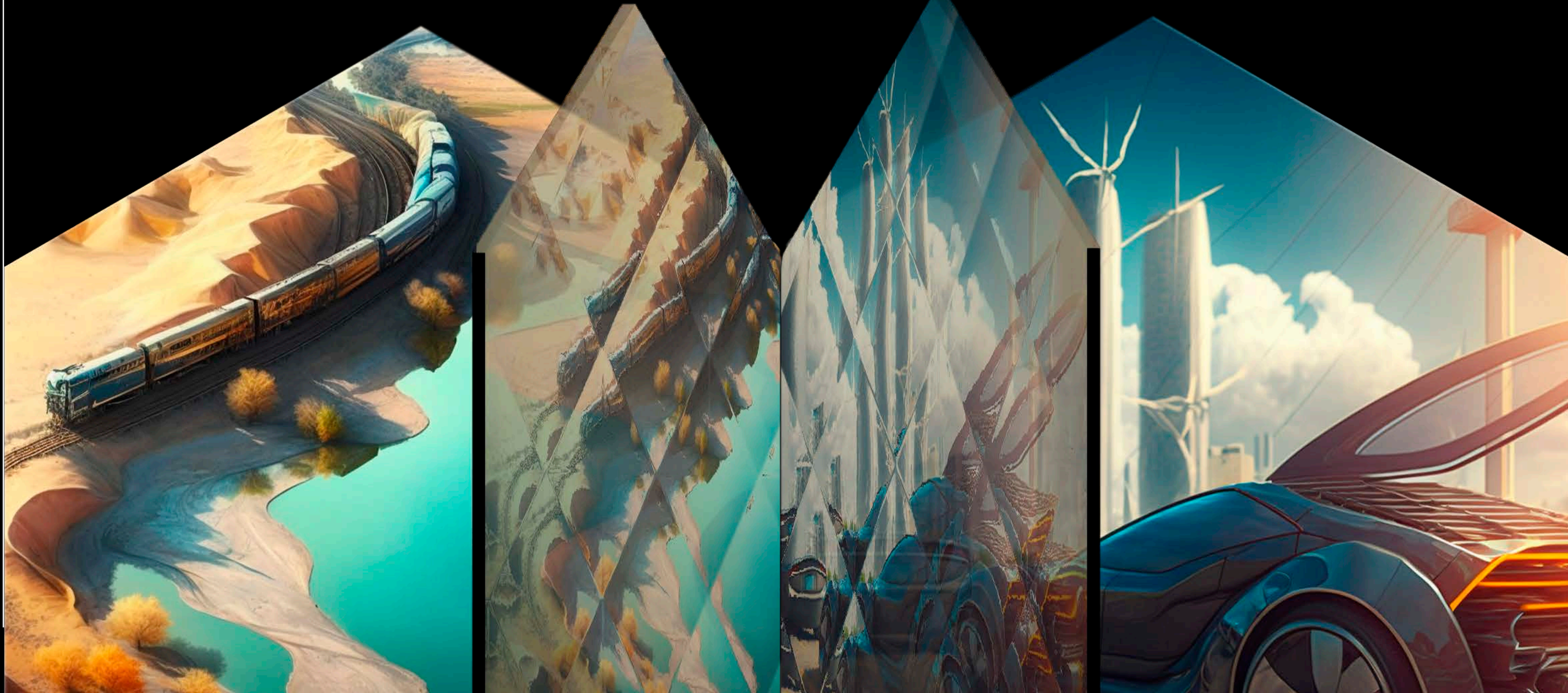
Dutch mobility startup Lightyear has kicked off production of the [world's first solar car](#). With curved solar panels across the hood and roof, Lightyear 0 can drive for two full months in sunny Amsterdam without direct charging. That number jumps to an even more impressive seven months in Portugal. Those compelling stats are expected to motivate a solid portion of drivers to make the switch, especially as Lightyear scales up production and reduces the current price tag of €250,000. Lightyear isn't the only player in the solar-powered EV, either. German company Sono Motors and California-based Aptera Motors are also working on producing solar vehicles in the €50,000 price range.

SHORT-HAUL FLIGHT BAN

In an effort to combat climate change, France has [banned](#) short-haul domestic flights between cities that can be reached by train in less than two and a half hours. With quick flights off the table, France is pushing more people to opt for train travel instead—a much more energy-efficient alternative. Other countries throughout Europe are ramping up their high-speed railways as well, signaling a future with more trains and fewer planes.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Incentivize responsible choices:** What if airline rewards programs were tied to emissions? What if automotive companies rewarded people for carpooling or taking the most fuel-efficient route?
- ▶ **Team up:** Solving transportation's biggest challenges will require partnerships between mobility and tech companies.



BACKSLASH  2023

An uptight world is ready to loosen up. Exhausted by impossible standards and bored of perfection, society is embracing all things messy and unfiltered—and refusing to apologize for it. Aspirational culture is out, and flaws are welcome.

UNMUGGLED

UNGLOSSSED

BEREAL

BeReal is the hottest new app heeding the call for more authentic social media. The French app, which follows an anti-Instagram strategy, only allows you to post once a day at a completely random time. Catching people off guard forces them to share whatever they're doing in that exact moment—like lounging in bed or doing chores—rather than curating the best photos. The app also prevents lurking by only allowing you to see other people's posts once you share your own BeReal moment of the day. BeReal soared to the number one spot on the App Store last year, proving demand for low-pressure platforms and inspiring copycat features from [TikTok](#), [Snapchat](#), and [Instagram](#).

REJECTED ALES

It took Australian craft brewery Matilda Bay 27 attempts to create their perfect golden ale. But rather than throwing out the brews that didn't meet their standards, the company released those 27 beers as a limited-edition beer collection called Rejected Ales. The goal of the campaign was to reframe failures as "failures in pursuit of perfection." The cans reflected that idea with names like "Missed the point," "Keep Dreaming," and "Ballpark," and the stories behind each attempt were shared online. Embracing the brand's human side paid off—resulting in an [11-fold increase](#) in sales of Original Ale.

UNEDITED INFLUENCERS

In April 2022, Ogilvy UK [announced](#) that they will no longer work with influencers who distort or retouch their bodies or faces for brand campaigns. Ogilvy's policy was announced just weeks before the UK government approved the [Digitally Altered Body Image Bill](#), which requires influencers to disclose edited content. As more research confirms social media's mental health harms, brands will be forced to rethink their role in selling unattainable standards.

"It may sound dangerous to celebrate all this narcissism, fecklessness and sloth, but it's also liberating: Who among us has not wanted to ditch a boring job and set their wellness plans on fire?"

— Dr. Sarah Hagelin and Dr. Gillian Silverman, authors of *The New Female Antihero*

UNGLOSSED

TIKTOK ANTI-AESTHETICS

For all the overly ambitious, totally out-of-touch trends out there, there seems to be just as many—if not more—subcultures rejecting self-betterment. One example is goblin mode, a hugely popular anti-aesthetic associated with imperfection and comfort. Think bingeing reality TV, eating fistfuls of raw pasta in the middle of the night, wearing mismatched sweat suits, and generally living like a slob. In a similar corner of TikTok, “[gross girlies](#)” are taking pride in their nasty habits. “My account is for the kinda gross girlies. The ones that rely on dry shampoo. The ones that let their underwear take care of the last day of their period. The ones that sometimes start their day at 4pm,” reads TikTok user [@j.oot's video](#). Where social media once reflected our very best highlights, optimization fatigue now has us putting our messiest selves forward.

FEMALE ANTIHEROES

While the women of TV's past were polite and cheerful, the female protagonists of today tend to be anti-aspirational and deeply unlikeable. “The New Female Antihero” explores this shift in television storytelling—celebrating female characters who turn their backs on ambition and societal expectations. “At a time when women are being encouraged to rule the world, or, at the very least, expected to keep it together in a still-shaky Covid economy, the ‘unbecoming’ heroine is a timely reminder that women need not be responsible, self-improving and productive to be valued,” [say](#) authors Dr. Sarah Hagelin and Dr. Gillian Silverman. These characters—seen in shows like “Fleabag,” “Broad City,” “Russian Doll,” “Girls,” and “Single Drunk Female”—offer a refreshingly honest look into the lives of modern women.

UN-GUILTY PLEASURES

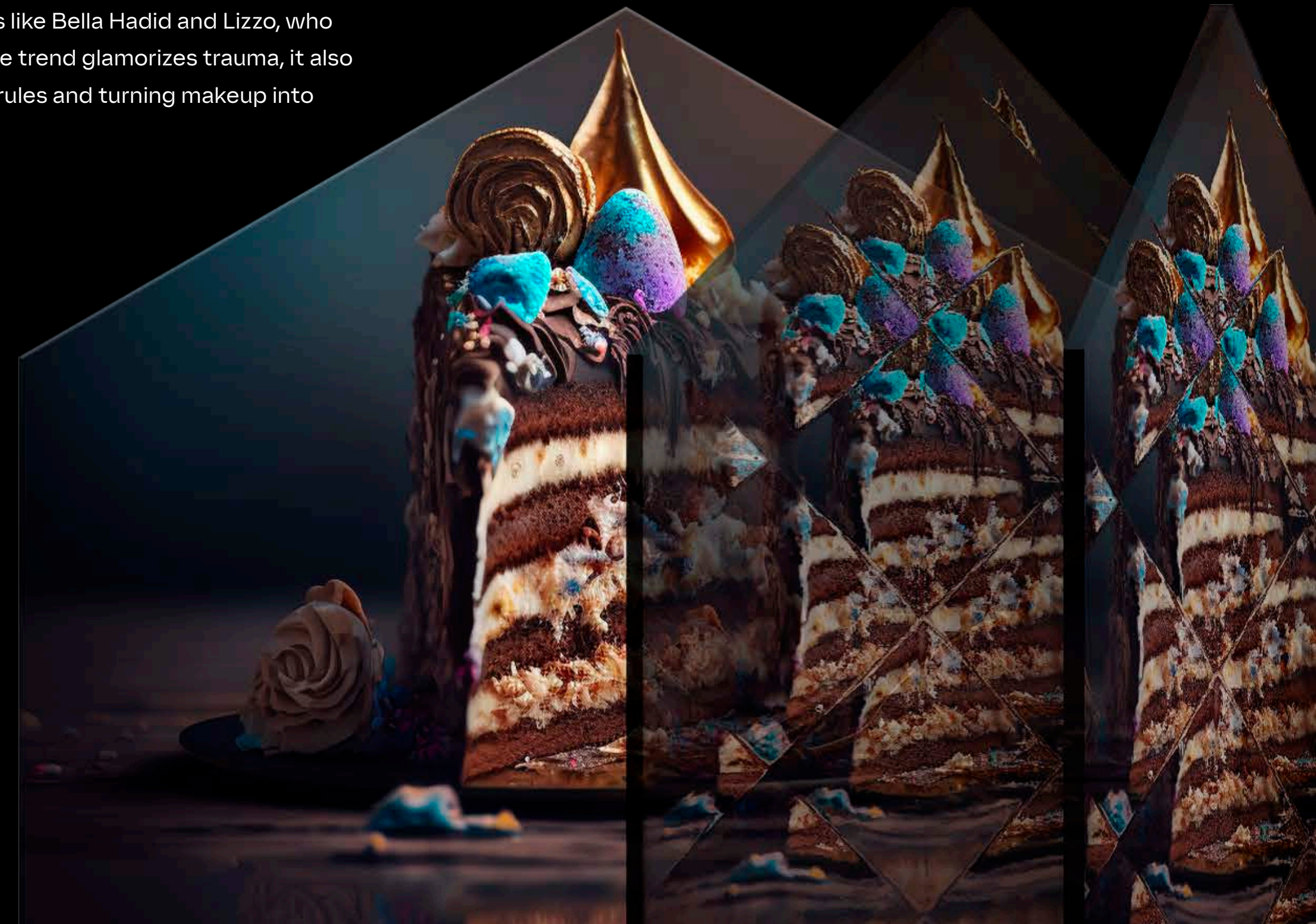
Strict food rules are on their way out. In speaking to Britons about their take on comfort food, Canvas8 [found](#) that more people are rejecting the notion of guilty pleasures and embracing food as a form of escapism. This explains why [chaotic, ugly cakes](#) are in, why Gen Z is rebelling against calorie counting, and why [57%](#) of Gen Zers and Yers describe their diet as “unrestricted.” Brands, too, are tapping into indulgence in unexpected ways. Last year, Burger King Germany celebrated Mother's Day by giving out free [Pregnancy Whoppers](#) to expecting mothers. The Whoppers were created based on a survey of the most popular pregnancy cravings, and things got weird. Some of the wonderfully bizarre flavor combos included fried egg and banana, vanilla ice cream and olives, and fish sticks and applesauce.

SAD GIRL BEAUTY

Sad girl makeup—marked by puffy eyes and lips, glistening under eyes, a red nose and cheeks, and a sorrowful stare—is taking the internet by storm. The trend blew up late last year when beauty influencer Zoe Kenealy posted a now-viral [TikTok tutorial](#) for the “unstable girlies.” The look's popularity is also attributed to celebs like Bella Hadid and Lizzo, who have normalized crying selfies and candid mental health talk. While some worry that the trend glamorizes trauma, it also proves that perfection is no longer aspirational. The next generation is tossing out the rules and turning makeup into a tool for authentic self-expression—tears and anxiety included.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Take pride in the work-in-progress:** Give customers a behind-the-scenes look at your brand (the good, the bad, the ugly), and be honest about what you're trying to improve.
- ▶ **Lower the bar:** Are your ads or product claims reinforcing unattainable ideals? Rewrite your language to be less about meeting societal expectations, and more about doing things just for you.
- ▶ **Challenge the status quo:** In a time of copy-and-paste branding and overdone trends, disruption is refreshing. Stand out by turning category conventions on their head.



WEALTH HACKING

BACKSLASH

E

2023

A society disillusioned with false promises of wealth is getting rich its own way. As trust in financial institutions declines and calls for accessibility intensify, a growing group of people will opt for the unconventional. On the route to financial freedom, the rules of the road no longer apply.



WEALTH HACKING

Across 17 industries, public trust in the financial services sector ranks second-lowest—ahead of only social media companies. — 2023 Edelman Global Trust Barometer

FRACTIONAL HOME OWNERSHIP

In today's high-priced real estate market, buying a home feels like a pipe dream for many. Proptech platforms [Landa](#) and [Fractional](#) are looking to change this with fractional ownership models. For as little as \$5, prospective buyers can join investment pools and co-purchase a property. Meanwhile, other platforms are helping wealthier individuals acquire second homes. Athens-based [Flyway](#) offers a marketplace to buy and sell shares of second homes in international cities, while London startup [Sonhaus](#) offers fractional ownership of multimillion dollar properties in popular European destinations. As the cost of living continues to increase, we're likely to see fractional ownership expand beyond real estate.

TROUBLE FOR CHINESE BANKS

Imagine trying to withdraw money from your bank account only to find out that all withdrawals have been suspended. This horror plagued thousands across China, prompting mass [bank runs](#). While the panic was initially contained among small village and town banks (VBTs), the fear quickly began to spread—and for good reason. VBTs account for [84%](#) of China's banking system, and have been the pillars of the state's small business policies. So when things took a turn for the worse, people grew concerned about the economic future of rural regions. This declining trust in banks is not unique to China, it's a global phenomenon impacting other countries like Australia and Brazil as well. With confidence dropping, we could see alternative finance solutions shine.

LUXURY BRANDS EMBRACE CRYPTO

With the metaverse promising revenue of up to [\\$50 billion](#) for the luxury sector, it's no surprise that high-end brands like Gucci, Farfetch, Equinox and Off-White are now [accepting crypto](#) as payment. Doing so allows them to appeal to young, affluent, tech-savvy consumers who are making up a growing portion of their sales. Luxury companies need to be "where the luxury customer is today and where they'll be tomorrow," says Farfetch Chief Executive José Neves.

ANTI-CAPITALIST INVESTING

Frustrated by worsening global inequality, young millionaires are aiming to change the game through [anti-capitalist investing](#). Anti-capitalist investing practices range from investments in worker cooperatives to investments in the regenerative economy—but all strategies share one common goal: shifting the balance of financial power from the few to the many. While anti-capitalist investing might be new in name, investments focused on social responsibility aren't. And though well-intentioned, they've recently fallen under scrutiny. Looking ahead, similar practices (looking at you, ESG investing) will be up for re-evaluation.



WEALTH HACKING



SELLING SHARES IN YOURSELF

Investing in yourself has taken on a new meaning thanks to the entrepreneurial Liberman siblings. Frustrated by the inequality between companies and people, the siblings took inspiration from corporate investing to create The Libermans Company. Instead of selling company shares on the promise of increased product value, [Libermans Co.](#) sells shares in themselves and the promise of their financial futures. So far, the Libermans have traded 3% of their futures, which investors have valued at \$400 million. Turning people and their potential into investment opportunities opens up new income streams. But it also raises questions about commodification and equality: How do we determine the worth of someone and their potential?

MOVE-TO-EARN

First, wearables normalized fitness tracking. Now, move-to-earn apps want to normalize getting paid to work out. While there are tons of competing apps out there, the current leader is StepN, which pays users in NFTs for logging their walking mileage. The idea is simple: the more you walk, the more you earn. Several other apps are also entering the market, fueling a global move-to-earn fitness app market that's expected to reach [\\$1.2 billion](#) by 2028. And with the concept quickly expanding to include [learn-to-earn](#) and even [sex-to-earn](#) apps, this growth is just the beginning.

SAVE NOW, BUY LATER

With "buy now, pay later" schemes falling from grace, Malaysian startup Sugar is encouraging people to "[save now, buy later](#)" instead. The app lets you make small periodic pre-payments toward a big purchase, only allowing you to buy the item once you have the full amount saved. So why not just save yourself? Besides making it easier to organize your finances, Sugar's plan also allows you to book the purchase directly with the seller and collect cashback rewards.

DEMOCRATIZED CREDIT ACCESS

In a world where credit is essential to securing loans, buying homes, and more, the millions without it are left disenfranchised. [Altro](#) is solving this problem with a free app that allows users to build credit using pre-existing subscription payments for platforms like Netflix and Spotify. Altro's system detects these payments and connects them to a trade line, which helps improve their credit score over time. With over one million users, Altro is proving the demand for more accessible forms of credit building.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Make it attainable:** Explore alternative ownership models or flexible purchasing options that cater to a wide range of incomes.
- ▶ **Be responsible:** What if businesses incentivized saving over spending?

WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES

BACKSLASH



2023

A burnt-out workforce is putting life first. As employees reassess their relationship with work, rising demand for clear boundaries and better protections will spur a modern-day labor movement. *Work-to-live* is the new mentality, and flexibility is the new expectation.



WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES

“What we used to think of as traditional work—very specific location, very specific ways of working together, very well-defined work metrics—those are changing. There’s the opportunity for flexibility. There’s also the opportunity to make us miserable.”

— Javier Hernandez, Microsoft Research



#SHOWUSYOURLEAVE

The U.S. is the only industrialized country without a national paid family leave policy, meaning one in four mothers return to work just 10 days after giving birth. Frustrated with the lack of support, co-founders of media company theSkimm shared a LinkedIn post challenging companies to #ShowUsYourLeave. The post quickly turned into a nationwide movement, and one year later, nearly 600 companies have responded by sharing their leave policy. theSkimm’s founders are keeping the momentum going with a shared database as well as proposal deck templates that people can use to advocate for change within their own organization.

WORK FROM HOME RIGHTS

In July 2022, the Dutch parliament approved legislation to establish work-from-home as a legal right, making the Netherlands one of the first countries to grant remote working flexibility by law. The law forces employers to consider employee requests to work from home as long as their profession allows it, marking a new chapter of flexible working.

FOUR-DAY WORKWEEK

While not a new idea, support for the four-day workweek continues to gain momentum across the globe following successful trials in Iceland. Seventy employers in the U.K.—ranging from charities to tech firms—experimented with shortened hours in 2022, while Unilever recently expanded its pilot program to Australia following encouraging results in New Zealand. Over in the U.S., tech unicorn Bolt has already made the permanent switch to a four-day week after a promising three-month trial period.

LET IT ROT

Gen Z is taking down hustle culture yet again. In China, youth are no longer just “lying flat” (doing the bare minimum required to get by), they’re now “letting it rot” (giving up completely). “I have been taught since childhood to be diligent and never give up. But I discovered in adulthood that this is extremely exhausting. Why can’t we slow down? Why do we always have to fight to get ahead?” asks 28-year-old Yan Jie. This same sentiment is being reflected in one of the biggest buzzwords of 2022, Quiet Quitting, whereby Gen Z is protecting their mental health by refusing to go above and beyond at work.

WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES



SEVERANCE

Apple TV+'s global hit "Severance" is an unsettling satire about work-life balance. The show follows employees who agree to have their memories surgically divided between their work and personal lives—allowing them to live their life free from job stress. As the story unfolds, however, severed employees are not quite so willing to work forever in exchange for sad corporate perks. "Severance" shines a light on other ridiculous aspects of corporate culture along the way, forcing viewers to reckon with their own relationship with work.

CAREER BREAKS

According to a recent [survey](#), more than half of professionals have taken a break from work, yet 60% of people believe there is a negative stigma associated with a work gap. But that's not exactly the case. Rather, 46% of hiring managers find that applicants who take time off actually gain unique life experiences that make them stronger candidates. To shed the stigma, LinkedIn introduced "[Career Breaks](#)." The feature allows users to choose between 13 different reasons for time away from work—including travel, health and well-being, bereavement, personal projects, and more. These hiatuses are shown in the Experience section of your profile, positioning them as a normal part of one's career journey.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Practice what you preach:** Policies and benefits only go so far. If the company culture doesn't foster clear work-life boundaries, employees will feel the pressure.
- ▶ **Be flexible:** Give employees the freedom to choose the work structure that works for them.

COMPANY-WIDE VACATIONS

With constant pings and pop-ups, it's no surprise that so many people find it hard to truly disconnect from work while on vacation. Even if workers do turn off their notifications, many say they end up checking emails either for their own peace of mind or because they feel obligated to. Recognizing the struggle, more employers are beginning to offer company-wide time off in hopes that everyone will be able to enjoy a collective reset. Last year, for example, accounting and consulting firm PwC gave its 60,000 U.S. employees two annual week-long breaks in addition to their vacation time, while Spotify shut down all of its offices for a paid "[wellness week](#)" in November. An even more novel experiment is being run by Indian tech company Dream 11, which forces its employees to [pay a fee](#) of lakh (\$1,200 USD) if they disturb their coworkers who are on leave.

ZERO OUT

BACKSLASH E 2023

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.

ZERO OUT

SOBRIETY SOARS

With more people prioritizing their well-being, getting wasted is losing its appeal. Sixty-percent of alcohol drinkers in Europe are actively reducing their alcohol intake, while 71% of Australians kicked off 2022 with an intent to drink less. And non-alcoholic beverage brands are thriving as a result. Take Latin America as an example, where the zero-proof beverage market is projected to reach \$119bn by 2025 (up from \$100bn in 2020). Some standout beverages to watch include South African brand Mahala Botanical's triple-distilled tipples Australia-based T.I.N.A's tart canned drinks; and Japanese beverage companies Kirin and Suntory, who have declared nolo drinks as their focus for future innovations.

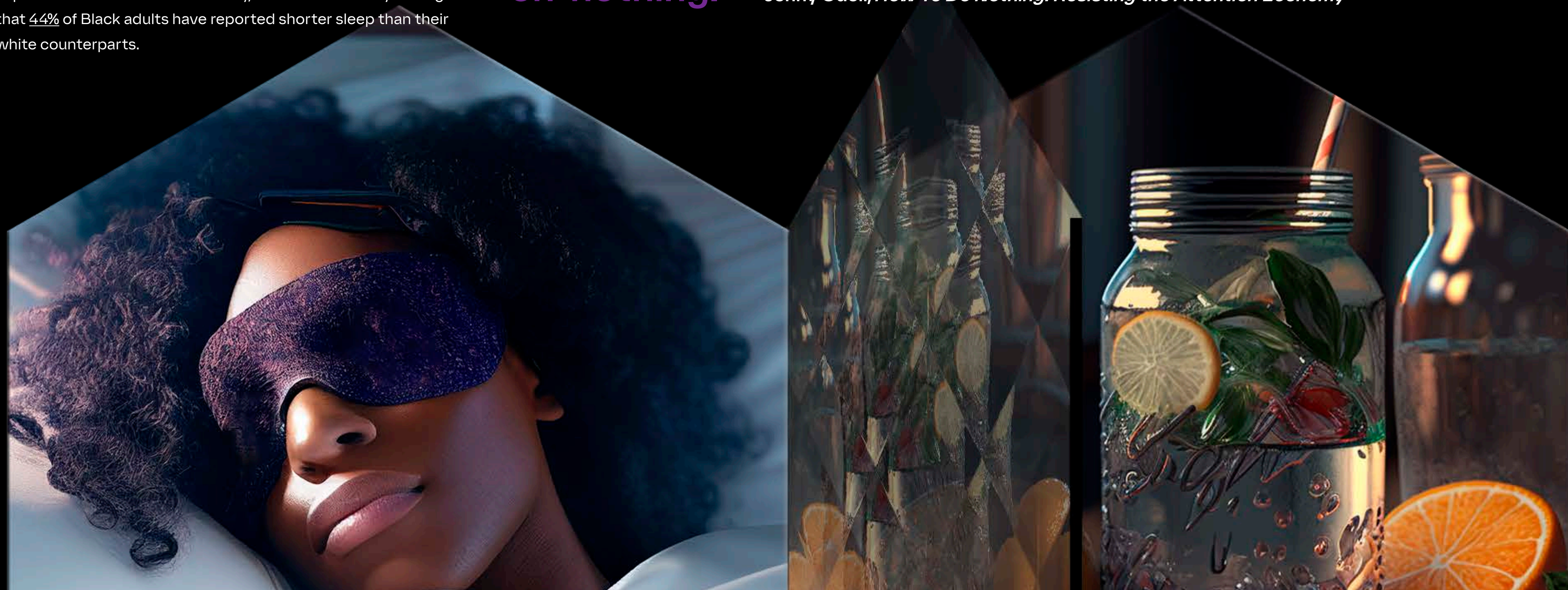
"SOSIKJWA"

Sosikjwa, a new kind of mukbang where YouTubers film themselves eating very small portions, is blowing up online. The trend comes as traditional mukbangs—which typically feature people binge eating massive portions—face criticism for promoting overeating and contributing to food waste. Sosikjwa, on the other hand, is all about slow, minimalist dining. "People are tired of watching mukbang videos where people gobble up food as if they are in an eating contest. Those who feel uncomfortable about it are turning their attention to 'sosikjwa,'" said critic Ha Jae-keun.

THE NAP BISHOP

With burnout at an all-time high, rest is resistance. That's the message being spread by Tricia Hersey, also known as the Nap Bishop, who's on a mission to make rest a collective priority. The concept began with group nap sessions, where Hersey would share sermons about the power of sleep and dreaming. Now, nearly a decade later, the Nap Ministry is a full-blown movement complete with a podcast series, book tour, coaching services, and over 500,000 Instagram followers. Hersey's work is especially important for the Black community, with a 2020 survey finding that 44% of Black adults have reported shorter sleep than their white counterparts.

"Nothing is harder to do than nothing. In a world where our value is determined by our productivity, where we submit even our leisure for numerical evaluation via likes, time becomes an economic resource that we can no longer justify spending on 'nothing.' — Jenny Odell, *How To Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*



ZERO OUT



DIGITAL MINIMALISM

A growing number of people are ditching addictive tech in favor of simpler, no-frills devices. Globally, sales of “basic” feature phones (AKA phones that can’t connect to the internet) increased 81% from 2021 to 2022. This desire to detach from tech is especially strong in China, where a full-blown movement is at play. On Douban, over 35,000 people have joined the “Anti-Technology Dependency Group,” while a similar “Digital Minimalists Group” has over 20,000 members. Some of these members have gotten rid of their mobile phones altogether, while others are deleting social media and cutting back on screen time. Key motivators are a desire to improve concentration, be more present, and reduce anxiety.

LAIID-BACK FITNESS

Today’s gym goers are doing less lifting, and more laying. Fitness centers across the U.S. are seeing an uptick in demand for gentler classes like meditation and restorative yoga. They’re also investing in recovery rooms complete with spa-like items such as massage lounge chairs and pillows. The shift is largely due to people emerging from Covid lockdowns with a greater focus on how they feel rather than how they look. “Leaving it all on the gym floor doesn’t seem like a priority as much,” says Marc Santa Maria, national director of group fitness for Crunch Signature. “People are no longer taking a no pain, no gain approach to fitness.”

MONOTASKING

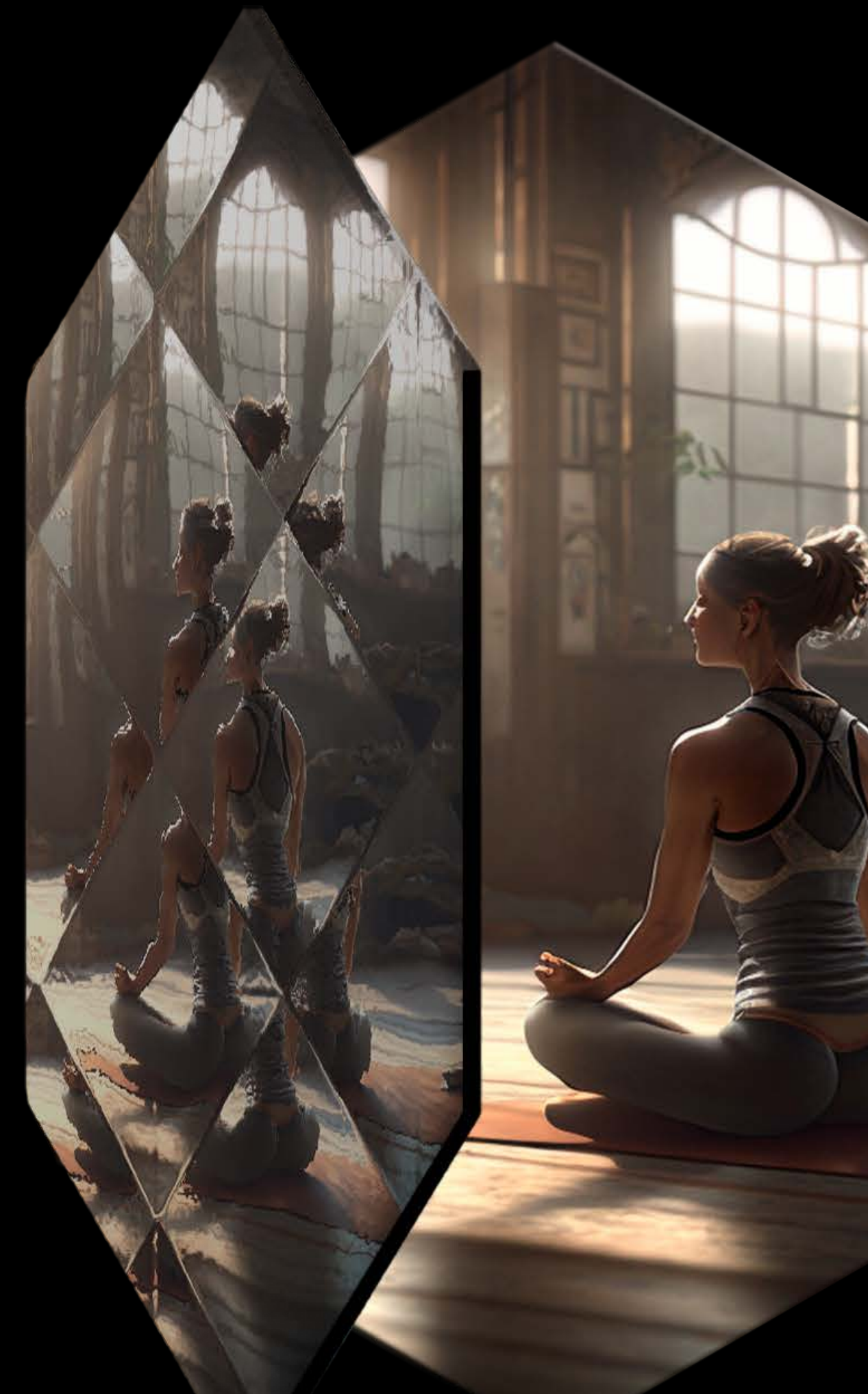
Spacetime Monotasking is prioritizing single-tasking over multitasking. The company operates as a virtual coworkers’ space where creators and entrepreneurs can come together on Zoom and close themselves from everything except the singular task they want to accomplish. The idea is that people can work more intentionally while having an extra boost of accountability from other focused monotasking partners. As people look to relieve themselves of intensified mental loads, systems that offer structure and concentration will be in high demand.

#SOFTLIFE

Why work so hard when you could be taking it easy instead? On TikTok, users are encouraging each other to slow down, limit stress, and embrace rest. Also known as the #softlife (613M views), this lifestyle trend is the antithesis to grind culture. Black female creators are largely popularizing the term, insisting that they’re done accepting strength and work ethic as their sole identities.

WHAT'S NEXT

- ▶ **Tone it down:** What is the “Zero Out” version of your product or experience? Think quieter, simpler, sober, or totally unplugged.
- ▶ **Permission to do less:** Encourage people to say goodbye to abundance in every area of their life—whether by living with less or cutting back on commitments.



THE TEAM

BACKSLASH STRATEGY

Cecelia Girr \ Director of Cultural Strategy \ Staff Writer

Skyler Hubler \ Senior Cultural Strategist \ Lead Writer

Madison Poulter \ Cultural Strategist \ Staff Writer

Johnny Thai \ Junior Cultural Strategist \ Staff Writer

BACKSLASH OPERATIONS & PRODUCTION

Dana Fors \ Director of Operations

Derrick DeBlasis \ Producer

Jason Lauckner \ Producer \ Editor

DxD DESIGN BY DISRUPTION

Bruno Regalo \ Chief Design Officer

Monica Gelbecke \ Brand Director, Design

Alessandra Horn \ Craft Production Manager

Thiago Matsunaga \ Associate Digital Design Director

TBWA\WORLDWIDE

Agathe Guerrier \ Global Chief Strategy Officer

Alyson Stevens \ Head of Connected Intelligence

Michael Horn \ Global Head of Data Product

Luke Eid \ Chief Innovation Officer \ NEXT

Troy Ruhanen \ President & CEO

Ben Williams \ Chief Creative Experience Officer

Regional Leads & Key Contributors

AFRICA + MIDDLE EAST

Ntombi Mkhwanazi, TBWA\South Africa

Ekta Parsotam, TBWA\South Africa

NORTH ASIA

Bob Wang, TBWA\Shanghai

Yee Ching Wong, TBWA\Hong Kong

Andrea Yao, TBWA\China

LATAM

Sofia Hoffman, TBWA\Worldwide

Damasia Merbilhaa, TBWA\Worldwide

Lorena Salmeron, Terán\TBWA

María Fernanda Campuzano, TBWA\Colombia

NORTH AMERICA

Sam Nipius, Juniper Park\TBWA

Hannah Schweitzer, TBWA\Chiat\Day

SOUTH + SOUTH EAST ASIA

Jin Wong, TBWA\Worldwide

EUROPE

Wyron Abrajano, TBWA\Düsseldorf

Peter Kormanyos, TBWA\Neboko

Raul Moreno, TBWA\España

Toygun Yilmazer, TBWA\Istanbul

OCEANIA

Charlotte Huntley, TBWA\Worldwide, NEXT

Matthew Moran, TBWA\Worldwide, NEXT

Renata Yannoulis, TBWA\Sydney

**To our dedicated
Spotter Network,
our engine of
global insight —
thank you for
looking 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.

Through a dynamic hybrid of strategy, data, and journalism, Backslash turns today's stories into tomorrow's opportunities.

Discover more at backslash.com and find us on Instagram **@tbwabackslash**.

For inquiries, please contact **dana.fors@tbwaworld.com**.