



backslash

EDGES

2024

41 CULTURAL SHIFTS
SHAPING OUR WORLD

A YEAR FOR ADAPTATION

Before you read any further, you should know that this is not a trend report.

It does not highlight the latest TikTok challenges (they would be irrelevant by the time this was published anyhow), nor does it cover the hot new aesthetics or here-today-gone-tomorrow fads. Instead, at Backslash, we focus on the deeper cultural shifts that have the scale and longevity to help brands gain a greater share of the future. And those shifts don't renew themselves on an annual basis just because the calendar said so. With that in mind, our 2024 Edge glossary offers a refreshed look at major global cultural shifts—taking a nuanced dive into the manifestations and tensions that are changing their trajectory.

This year, we debut five new Edges that offer encouraging solutions to the thornier realities on the horizon. Realities like the need for protections against extreme weather ([pg. 62](#)), the need to hold onto our humanness in the age of personal AI ([pg. 65](#)), the need to reimagine tourism ([pg. 122](#)) and mobility ([pg. 101](#)) at scale, and the need to reinspire hope as end-of-times thinking takes root ([pg. 41](#)).

In many ways, these emerging shifts represent the new faces of survivalism in a rapidly changing and increasingly chaotic world. And as history tells us, to survive you must adapt. That's why we believe 2024 is a year not for rapid innovation, but for adaptation. Because in many cases, we already have the answers to today's biggest problems. It has become abundantly clear that we need to consume less, repair and recycle more, work hand-in-hand with vulnerable and underrepresented groups to design for their needs, get back to IRL connection, and give people complete autonomy over their bodies and their data, among many other things. For businesses, the big challenge now is putting these solutions into action and pulling the right levers to change habits at scale—focusing on incentivizing positive behaviors as much as selling products.

We hope our Edges serve as a blueprint for adapting to the inevitable twists and turns that lie ahead. Not just in 2024, but in the many years to come.

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.

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* = New for 2024



LOOKING TO WHAT'S NEXT

Culture drives technology, and technology drives culture. That's why this year, we worked hand-in-hand with TBWA's global innovation practice, NEXT, to show how cultural shifts are both born from and elevated by technology.

Each Edge has been tagged with the Emerging Technologies that we believe will unlock the greatest opportunities for innovation. These are not all inclusive, but rather should serve as a starting point that inspires new ways to activate each Edge.

Complete definitions for all Emerging Technologies can be found in the appendix on pages 134-135. To learn more about how NEXT turns intel into action, visit tbwa.com/next/.



INTRODUCING THE DISRUPTION INDEX

This year, we are proud to introduce proprietary data powered by TBWA's Disruption Index—an industry-first data product spanning 29 countries. The Disruption Index allows us to quantify the Strength, Speed, and Spend of our 41 Edges.

Strength measures how important an Edge is to someone personally. **Speed** measures velocity in the market, or how important an Edge is to people around them. And **Spend** measures the percentage of respondents that would spend more on products or services related to a particular Edge in a particular category. Together, these metrics show us the disruptive potential of an Edge for a specific country, industry, or audience.

For specific inquiries about the latest Disruption Index data, please reach out to dana.fors@tbwaworld.com.

EDGES AROUND THE WORLD

A snapshot of key Edges to watch in countries across the globe, powered by data from TBWA's proprietary Disruption Index.

UNITED STATES \ Optimized Anatomy

Between Ozempic mania and a growing obsession with reverse aging, US adults are stopping at nothing to overcome the limits of their biology. → 71% of adults say it is important to them to "optimize their body to become healthier, stronger, or more attractive."

ARGENTINA \ Stealth Mode

As the country experiencing the greatest YoY increase in cyberattacks in Latin America, Argentina's privacy paranoia is well justified. → 46% of adults would pay more or switch brands for technologies that "protect their work and identity from being tracked, stolen, or manipulated online."

BRAZIL \ Future Utopias

With over 16 million Brazilians living in favelas, the country is exploring radical approaches to transformation. → 82% of adults say it is important to them to "support the development of more sustainable, livable, future-proof cities and towns."

NIGERIA \ Mind Maintenance

With money problems as a leading cause of stress, finance brands are in a unique position to help close Nigeria's mental health care gap. → 48% of adults would pay more or switch brands for financial services that help them "proactively take care of their mental health."

SOUTH AFRICA \ Data Rush

As the world's most internet-addicted country, South Africa has much to gain from its online footprint. Services that allow people to own and monetize their data will offer a sense of stability. → 55% of adults would pay more or switch brands for technologies that allow them to "take back control and ownership of their personal data."

EDGES AROUND THE WORLD

UNITED KINGDOM \ Untourism

UK citizens are looking to leave their unfavorable "Brits abroad" reputation behind them, opening the door to a new market of richer, greener travel experiences. → 35% of adults would pay more or switch brands for travel and hospitality offerings that help them "travel in a way that minimizes disturbances to the local culture, landmarks, and the environment."

SINGAPORE \ Body Debates

From sales of lab-made meat to the recent approval of elective egg freezing, discussions around body autonomy are heating up in Singapore. → 52% of adults would pay more or switch brands for health and wellness offerings that help them "make decisions about their body and their health in their own best interest."

GERMANY \ Crisis Hacking

As Germany emerges from an energy crisis, households will continue to look for ways to save resources while saving money. → 63% of adults say it is important to them to "make lifestyle adjustments and find DIY hacks that help them respond to natural resource shortages."

JAPAN \ Mood Geisting

A culture known for masking emotions is looking to go deeper. → 51% of adults say it is important to them to "find new ways to understand and optimize their mood."

CHINA \ Zero Out

For China's notoriously burnt-out workforce, the ability to tune out the noise of the world is priceless. → 43% of adults would pay more or switch brands for media & entertainment that helps them "destress and simplify their life so they can reconnect with themselves."

AUSTRALIA \ Rewild Resilience

Rewilding projects are flourishing in Australia, coinciding with a collective embrace of Aboriginal culture. → 70% of adults say it is important to them to "protect biodiversity and take actions to help nature thrive."

GENERATIONS, DECODED

A single generation can propel a cultural shift forward. Using the Disruption Index, we selected a few of the unexpected Edges that resonated with each generation more than any other age group.

DEATH UNDONE

60% say it is important to them to “break the taboo around death and be open to new end-of-life approaches.”

MONEY OUT LOUD

65% say it is important to them to “reevaluate my relationship with money and talk about it openly.”

NEXT-GEN NATURALISTS

74% say it is important to them to “learn forgotten survival skills and become more self-sufficient.”

CRISIS HACKING

66% say it is important to them to “make lifestyle adjustments and find DIY hacks that help me respond to natural resource shortages.”

HEALTH HEDONISM

86% say it is important to them to “make health and wellness an enjoyable part of my lifestyle.”

OPTIMIZED ANATOMY

82% say it is important to them to “optimize my body to become healthier, stronger, or more attractive.”

BODY DEBATES

93% say it is important to them to “be able to make decisions about my body and my health in my own best interest.”

DATA RUSH

82% say it is important to them to “take back control and ownership of my personal data.”

Gen Z is toppling taboos and redrawing the boundaries of social norms—bringing once-private topics like money and death into public discourse.

Millennials are just as survivalist-savvy as they are tech-savvy, proving their resourcefulness and tackling uncertainty head-on.

Gen X is the most open to pleasurable and experimental health hacks—dispelling ideas that the wellness craze is being led by today’s youth.

Baby Boomers are all about autonomy. From their data to their bodies, personal empowerment is paramount for this generation.

2024 EDGES



ARTIFICIAL CREATIVITY



AI is proving itself as a creative force to be reckoned with—pushing the boundaries of our imagination and enabling the masses to become makers. As previously held notions of creativity are shattered, matters of ownership, the value of human-made vs. AI-made, and the preciousness of the creative process will continue to come into question.

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“MAKE IT MORE”

ChatGPT’s “make it more” trend is pushing images to the extreme. Here’s how it works: users ask ChatGPT to amp up its first draft of an image, then ask again and again until the output reaches max absurdity. For example, if you ask the tool to create a spicy bowl of ramen, you would keep asking it to be spicier until it’s so hot that it’s literally setting the world on fire. Other examples include a bodybuilder getting progressively more muscular, and a quaint scene in Switzerland becoming “more Swiss.” The trend is proving that when it comes to AI’s imagination, the limit does not exist.

COPYRIGHT CONUNDRUM

In a legal first for China, a Beijing court granted copyright protection to artwork created using AI with human guidance. Over 170,000 viewers tuned in to watch the livestream of the proceedings, where the court ultimately ruled that AI-generated images should be legally protected “as long as they demonstrate human originality and intellectual input.” According to the court, a machine cannot be considered an author since it has no free will. This decision is in stark contrast to the US, where the Copyright Office has ruled that AI-generated art cannot be copyrighted.

CLASSROOM CHATBOTS

Schools and universities around the world are divided over their stance on ChatGPT. Some are reverting back to paper exams and handwritten essays in order to prevent plagiarism, while others are leaning in and using chatbots to fuel creativity and foster critical thinking skills. For those embracing the technology, use cases include asking students to critically evaluate the chatbot’s replies, or using ChatGPT to generate essay outlines before writing them longhand. Teachers incorporating ChatGPT say it has helped lead to richer discussions and pushed students to think differently. And it’s not only students who are taking advantage. According to a 2023 survey, one-third of teachers have used ChatGPT to come up with “creative ideas for classes.”

“AI thrives when our need for originality is low and our demand for mediocrity is high.”

— Ray Nayler, Time Magazine

THE UNCREATIVE AGENCY

‘The Uncreative Agency’ is the world’s first fully automated creative agency, powered by AI. The initiative launched last year courtesy of global creative network DDB, and has since been used by some of the world’s most famous brands as well as leaders of the biggest ad agencies. The process is relatively straightforward: users submit a simple one-sentence brief, and the tool churns out a unique creative proposal in a matter of minutes—no budget or human input required. While the ideas generated aren’t yet award-worthy, the tool is proving out the potential for AI to become a useful (and much more affordable) partner in the creative ideation process.

AI-GENERATED CONTENT LABELS

While some platforms have flat-out banned AI-generated content, others are putting rules in place to ensure AI’s role is clearly called out. Both YouTube and TikTok now require creators to label their AI-generated content, especially if it looks realistic. And over in the publishing world, Amazon is requiring authors to disclose when self-published content is “AI-generated” or “AI-assisted.” Amazon’s move came after hundreds of e-books crediting ChatGPT as an author flooded the site, which sparked serious backlash among literary circles.



TEXT-TO-MUSIC

You’ve heard of AI text-to-image and text-to-video generators. Next up: text-to-music. In May, Google released MusicLM—an experimental AI tool that creates original songs based on users’ text and sound prompts. In search of post-modern latin jazz-rap? How about chill acoustic vibes for a dinner party? MusicLM can do it all, homing in on requests for certain instruments, genres, and emotions. For now, MusicLM won’t generate any songs with specific artists or vocals in order to avoid rising concerns around deepfaked music. That said, though, some still argue that text-to-music generators violate music copyright by “learning” from other artists’ works—a debate that could soon be settled via several ongoing lawsuits.

FUTURISTIC FLAVORS

AI may not have taste buds, but that's not stopping companies from trusting it to come up with futuristic flavors. One example comes from German beer brand Becks, which celebrated its 150-year anniversary with the world's first [AI-made beer](#). The technology was not only used to generate the recipe and the name, but also to design the logo, container and advertising campaign. Similarly, Coke leaned on AI to co-create its latest mystery flavor and understands "how fans envision the future through emotions, aspirations, colors, flavors and more." The drink—called [Coca-Cola Y3000 Zero Sugar](#)—was meant to represent what Coke would taste like if we jumped ahead to the year 3000. But according to some [critics](#), the flavor should stay in the past.

DREAM PRODUCT GENERATOR

Have an idea for what you want to purchase but don't know where to start your search? Google's new [shopping tool](#) is aiming to speed up that process by allowing users to type in a description of what they're looking for, then generating images of imaginary products based on that prompt. Users can then select the AI image that's closest to what they're looking for, and shop actual products that resemble it. Beyond personalizing the online shopping experience, search data gained from the tool could also inspire the creation of entirely new products or designs.

80% of Americans think presenting AI content as human-made should be illegal.

— [AIPI Survey, 2023](#)



WHAT'S NEXT

→ CALL IT OUT

The use of watermarks, disclaimers, and labels will be essential to clearly differentiate AI-made outputs from human-made ones.

→ EMBRACE CO-CREATION

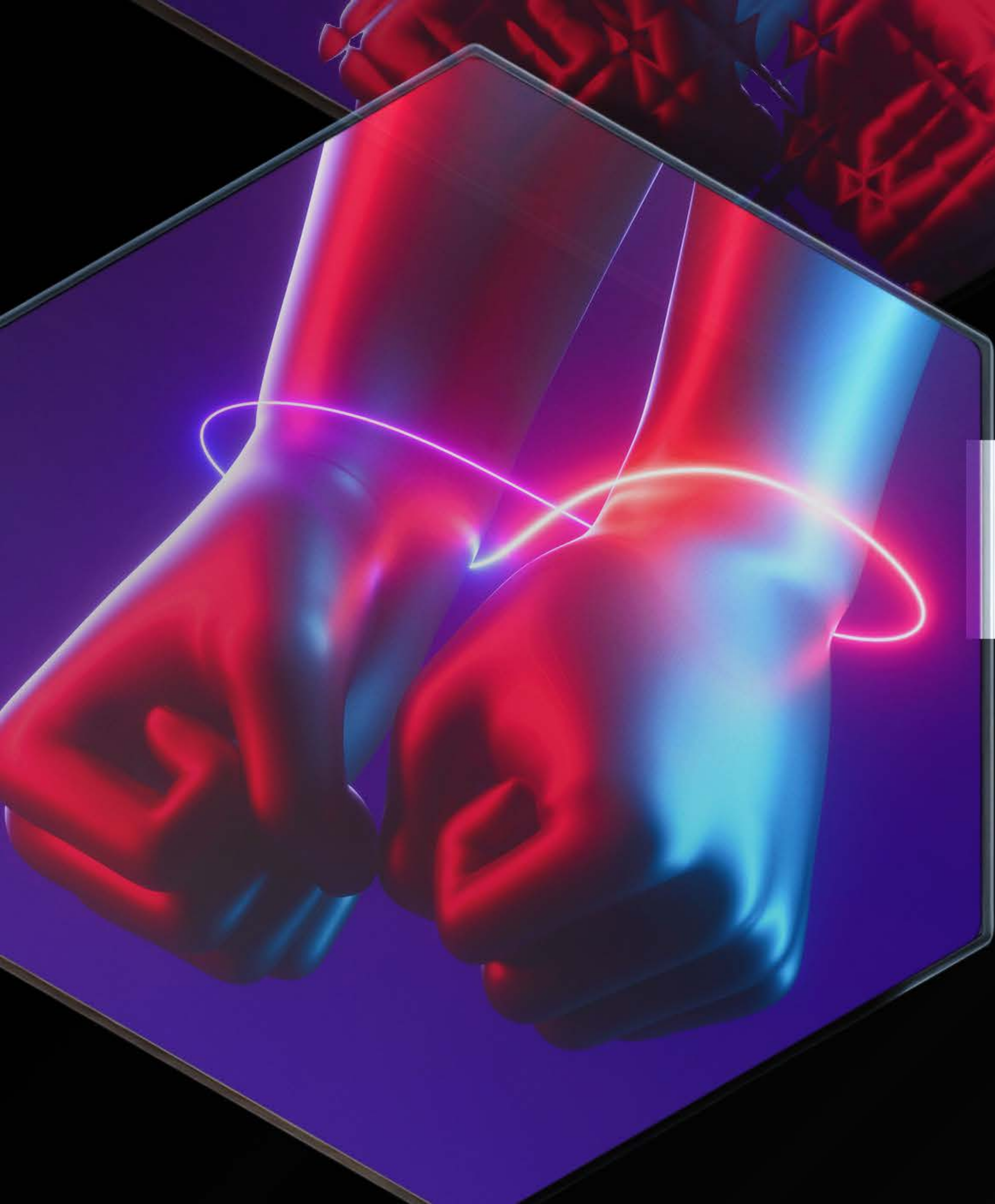
Invite fans to leverage AI to come up with your next product design, campaign, or out-of-the-box idea.

→ UNLOCK EFFICIENCY

Lean on AI to take care of the mundane tasks and churn out hundreds of content variations in an instant, so that your human team members can focus on the truly creative tasks.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ GENERATIVE AI
- ✗ AVATAR IDENTITIES
- ✗ UNTETHERED AUDIO
- ✗ EXTENDED REALITY



BODY DEBATES

Our bodies are officially up for discussion—and there's little consensus on what's right. As conversations around everything from drugs to diets escalate, once-personal decisions will move to the center of very public debates around the right to bodily autonomy vs. the need for regulation.

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CONSPIRITUALITY

Covid may have jump-started conversations around health-related conspiracy theories, but the conversation hasn't ended there. There are now conspiracies about [sunscreens](#), [the causes of cancer](#), and [wifi](#)—among other alleged ills—and they are going global. This merging of New Age spirituality and extreme right-wing anti-science activism is known as “[conspirituality](#),” or, as British journalist James Ball [calls it](#), “the-wellness-to-fascism pipeline.” People attracted to this movement are generally skeptical of mainstream medicine and are in search of alternative explanations. As for the people spreading the lies, there's another motivation: profit. Many promoters of anti-vaccine falsehoods, for example, are making millions selling their own “natural” wellness products. The first step in fighting back against conspirituality? Improving health literacy among the general public and arming people with scientific counter-arguments.

SCHOOL DRESS CODE DEBACLES

Goodbye plaid skirts and stiff collared shirts—Bangkok is [easing](#) school dress codes. An order issued by the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration is requiring all 437 schools within the Bangkok metro area to let students wear casual clothes at least one day a week and to loosen restrictions on hairstyles. The move aims to respect children's “individuality, diversity, religious beliefs and gender preference,” and comes in response to recent protests against strict uniform policies. Last June, an uproar was sparked when a 15-year-old student was barred from enrolling in a prestigious school because she dyed her hair pink and refused to wear a uniform. Some Thai teachers have also been known to humiliate students by chopping off their hair in front of the entire school. The strong reactions to the new order—both positive and negative—are highlighting deeper cultural tensions around discipline versus freedom of self-expression.

DIETITIAN CORRUPTION

Dietitians on TikTok are getting [paid off](#) by the food industry. Earlier this year, the World Health Organization warned consumers about using artificial sweeteners like aspartame to control their weight. Following that announcement, groups like American Beverage (a trade and lobbying group representing Coca-Cola, PepsiCo, and more) and Canadian Sugar Institute hired dietitians to post videos debunking the WHO's findings, driving over 2.7 million views of [#safetyofaspartame](#) videos on TikTok. It's estimated that at least 35 popular creators have been paid to encourage viewers to continue drinking diet soda and consuming other highly processed foods or unproven supplements. With this kind of manipulation undermining the credibility of the wider health industry, consumers will be looking for trusted brands to clear up the confusion with science-backed facts.

OZEMPIC SIDE DISHES

Barclays predicts the global market for obesity drugs will reach \$100 billion by around 2030. For food companies, this raises an interesting question: will lower appetites result in lower sales? [According to Walmart execs](#), the answer is yes. And some big name brands are already creating new products in anticipation. Nestle, the world's largest food company, is working on companion products like shakes and bars that would supplement vitamins and minerals and reduce loss of muscle mass. Abbott Laboratories is developing a new protein drink specifically for weight loss drug patients. And even General Mills is experimenting with high-protein products that will pair well with the drugs. As these drugs become cheaper and more widely available, we can expect even more brands—from fitness companies to restaurants—to begin introducing Ozempic-inspired innovations.

84% of adults globally say it's important to “be able to make decisions about my body and my health in my own best interest.”

— TBWA Disruption Index Proprietary Research in 29 countries, Q1 2024 (n=13,100)





TRANSGENDER SURGERY REQUIREMENTS

A growing number of human rights advocates in Japan are campaigning for the abolition of a clause that requires transgender individuals to undergo sterilization surgery in order to have their gender changed on official papers. While the law has been in place since 2003, Japanese courts are now moving to declare the surgery requirement unconstitutional, with a family court recently saying that forcing such “grave and irreversible” operations on people violates their human rights. One man personally affected by the law, Kanata Kimoto, currently runs a popular YouTube channel, where he answers questions about his life as a trans man and shares his experience undergoing mandatory sterilization surgery. “I don’t want to see the future of younger people ruined by the lack of choices,” he says.

FINANCIAL BLOCKS

Finance companies are no stranger to controversial industries. But as laws and cultural norms related to body autonomy continue to evolve, so too will their policies. In July, for instance, MasterCard told payment processors and banks in the US to stop allowing marijuana transactions on debit cards—a move that will certainly make it less convenient for MasterCard holders to buy weed, but won’t stop them from finding crafty workarounds. Another attempt to block transactions is underway in Texas, where Republicans are introducing bills that would ban credit card companies from processing payments for abortion pills.

TOXIC PRODUCT DETOX

In a time when every day brings a new headline about a food or household product that could be slowly killing you, it’s no wonder why people are rethinking what they put in and on their bodies. This is especially true in places like the US where loose and out-of-date government regulation is forcing consumers to do their own research around what’s safe versus what’s toxic. Some of the latest products being put under the microscope include scented candles, Skittles, anti-aging creams, and cleaning products. Resources like the Environmental Working Group’s Healthy Living app are aiming to clear up the confusion by allowing people to search for a product and identify ingredients of concern. It also provides a score based on the number of hazards linked to various chemicals.

SMOKE-FREE FUTURE

While efforts are underway to ban smoking for the next generation, the path to a smoke-free future isn’t exactly straightforward. Last year, for example, New Zealand made headlines when it passed a groundbreaking law that would effectively ban smoking for the next generation. Now, the country’s new right-leaning coalition government is scrapping that plan in a move that health experts say will cost the country billions in health care. Similarly, Malaysia’s proposed smoking ban is facing continued delays. On the other hand, England, Ireland, Wales and Hong Kong are all exploring ways to become smoke-free within the decade. And until laws in Hong Kong are made official, the health chief is encouraging a less conventional strategy—asking citizens to stare judgmentally at anyone who lights up a cigarette in areas where it is banned.

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.

→ LOOK OUT FOR YOUR EMPLOYEES

Where governments take away rights or fail to provide resources, employers can—and will be expected to—step in and support.

→ UNPACK THE TENSION

What the science says isn’t always in alignment with what society believes. Openly acknowledging the tensions is the first step to bridging the gap.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ BIO-MATERIALS
- ✗ EMOTION AI
- ✗ NEURAL CONTROL





At the intersection of sustainability, scarcity, and hype culture lies a booming aftermarket economy. Old products are being recycled, 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.

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CIRCULAR AFTERMARKETS

CLOTHING REPAIR BONUS

Ripped jeans? Shirts with missing buttons? Broken heels? If you live in France, don't throw those items in the trash. As of October 2023, the French government offers a "repair bonus" that allows people to reclaim between €6 to €25 of the cost of mending their clothes and shoes. With an estimated 700,000 tons of clothing thrown away in France each year, the new waste-cutting scheme will have a major impact.

RESALE STORYTELLING

On Xianyu, China's biggest secondhand trading app, sellers share personal memories about the items they've listed. These entries are often so lengthy and detailed that they've given rise to a special genre: "Xianyu Literature." Some might share the special memories they made in a beloved outfit; others might talk about what a particular toy meant to them as a kid; or maybe they'll post a story about the games they used to play on a laptop they're now passing on. While most people consider pre-loved items to be worth less than new ones, this element of organic storytelling adds significant emotional value to what might have otherwise been a forgettable purchase.

TRASHY EATS

Squash scraps, ugly shrooms, leftover dough, and beautiful surplus greens are just a few of the ingredients you might find on the menu at Shuggie's Trash Pie. The San Francisco restaurant builds its entire menu around foods that would otherwise go to waste—such as irregular or surplus produce, byproducts from food manufacturing, or offcuts from the meat or fish industry. Though other restaurants are also incorporating food-saving strategies where possible, very few have proudly made waste their primary focus.

PROFESSIONAL THRIFTERS

The style box craze is getting a circular upgrade. Thanks to the rising popularity of thrifting, fashion influencers are curating personalized thrift hauls for their followers. The process kicks off with customers sharing a Pinterest-style mood board of their ideal looks. Then, the shopper will scour the thrift stores on their behalf and ship a box of unique, specially selected finds straight to their door. These thrifted style boxes have become so popular on TikTok that stylists are struggling to keep up with demand. By personalizing the secondhand shopping experience, thrifted items are elevated from a stranger's discard to an exclusive find.

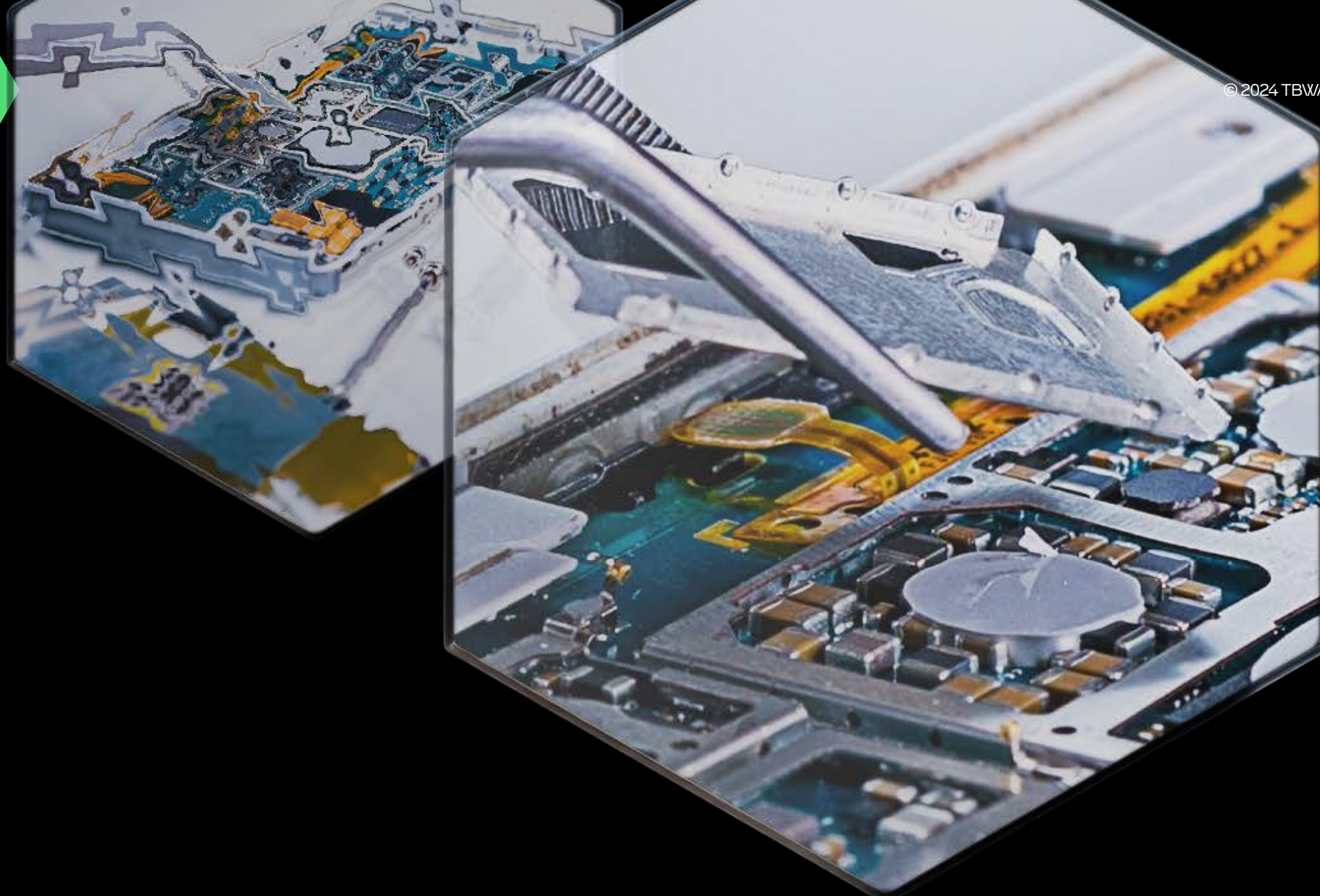
WEDDING RENTAL SERVICES

With many brides and grooms wanting to hold on to their wedding outfits and decor as a keepsake, it may not be the first industry you'd imagine to move into the rental business. But planet-conscious and price-conscious couples are proving everyone wrong—as evidenced by wedding rental companies reporting significant increases in sales. This includes services like Australia-based Stillwhite, an online marketplace for pre-worn wedding dresses; Bloomerent, which allows people to reuse florals from someone else's wedding while they're still fresh; and Verstolo, which offers rentable diamond bling. Who says sentimental events can't go circular?

"Circular and ethical practices are a necessary prerequisite for the new luxury—not a luxury of thought in themselves."

Vogue UK





THE FOOTWEAR COLLECTIVE

Footwear competitors New Balance, On, Reformation, Target, Crocs, Inc., Brooks Running, Ecco and Vibram are teaming up to transition the industry from a linear system to a circular one. The initiative, called the [Footwear Collective](#), outlines three pillars for collaboration: circular materials, where companies agree to use sustainable materials into their supply chains; infrastructure, where the brands commit to changing their infrastructure to allow more circularity at scale; and consumer behavior, where brands fuel enthusiasm around circular consumption. While plenty of shoe brands have set out to make more sustainable shoes on their own, this marks a major—and very necessary—push toward cross-company collaboration.

MODULAR HEADPHONES

The [Kibu Headphones](#) are promoting circularity for the next generation of consumers. These modular headphones are made from 100% recycled materials and are designed to be assembled and customized by children, so the product can grow alongside them. If a wire breaks or a headband no longer fits, replacement parts can be ordered directly from Kibu. Kibu is also committed to remanufacturing, renewing, disassembling or recycling the headphone at the end of their lifespan—teaching kids that the best electronics are ones that last a lifetime.

HAIRY TEXTILES

Hair clippings are proving to be a useful (albeit unusual) waste source. In the Netherlands, a company called [Human Material Loop](#) works with participating hairdressers to collect human hair, which it processes into textiles and sometimes turns into garments. And it's not just human hair that's being given a second life. So too is pet hair, with efforts [underway](#) to turn wasted dog and cat fur into fine fabric.

FIXIT CULTURE

Don't be so quick to give up on your broken goods. Instead, take them to a Repair Café and enjoy some coffee while volunteer "fixers" go to work. These community repair sites are on the rise globally as more people look to salvage their stuff, ranging from broken vacuum cleaners to lamps and even phones. In 2023, [55%](#) of British adults chose to repair an item rather than replacing it. For Australians, it's [79%](#). Online communities for handy folks are thriving as well, with subreddits like [r/fixit](#) attracting over 300k worldwide members.

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.
- **TELL A STORY**
Consider how the backstories of pre-loved items could add value and build emotional appeal.
- **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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **BIO-MATERIALS**
- ✗ **COMMUNITY COMMERCE**
- ✗ **MODULAR DESIGN**
- ✗ **ASSISTIVE ROBOTICS**



CLIMATE CREDIT

Superficial sustainability solutions and empty environmental promises no longer cut it. With climate projections painting a bleak future, efforts we once applauded are now being put under the microscope—raising the bar for sustainability and exposing the urgent need for large-scale change. Earning climate credit is both more difficult and more necessary than ever.

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GREENHUSHING

Fear of being called out for greenwashing is giving rise to a counter trend: “[greenhushing](#).” The term refers to companies keeping quiet about their sustainability practices—even if plausible or well-intentioned—in order to avoid criticism. For instance, if 50% of a company’s hotels are using fully renewable energy, they might decide not to publicize their progress out of fear that people will question why it’s not yet 100%. But this kind of silence could be slowing momentum. Research has shown that sharing environmental updates creates a positive ripple effect, often inspiring laggards to take action. So rather than avoiding the conversation, companies should practice full transparency—explaining what’s already been done, and being upfront about how far they still have to go.

CARBON CREDIT CATASTROPHE

Verra, the world’s leading carbon credit certifier for major corporations like Disney, Gucci, and Shell, is facing a credibility crisis. Findings from a nine-month investigation have [revealed](#) that more than 90% of Verra’s rainforest offset credits do not represent genuine carbon reductions. In fact, according to the investigation, the projects have had no measurable impact, and in some cases where the impact has been measurable, the projects have actually resulted in deforestation. While Verra challenges the conclusions drawn by the investigation, they’ve since announced that they will be transitioning to a new model. The Verra scandal is adding serious pressure for regulatory bodies to set clear and measurable standards not just for the unregulated carbon credit industry, but also for the growing carbon label market.

PLANT-BASED ACTION PLAN

As a follow-up to a 2021 climate agreement, Denmark recently unveiled the world’s first national [action plan](#) to promote plant-based foods. The plan involves training chefs in both public and private kitchens on how to prepare vegan meals, as well as prioritizing plant-based diets in schools and the education system. It also outlines initiatives to expand the exports of locally produced vegan food through embassies, and to invest more in plant-based research and development. If successful, Denmark’s plan could very well serve as inspiration for the rest of world.

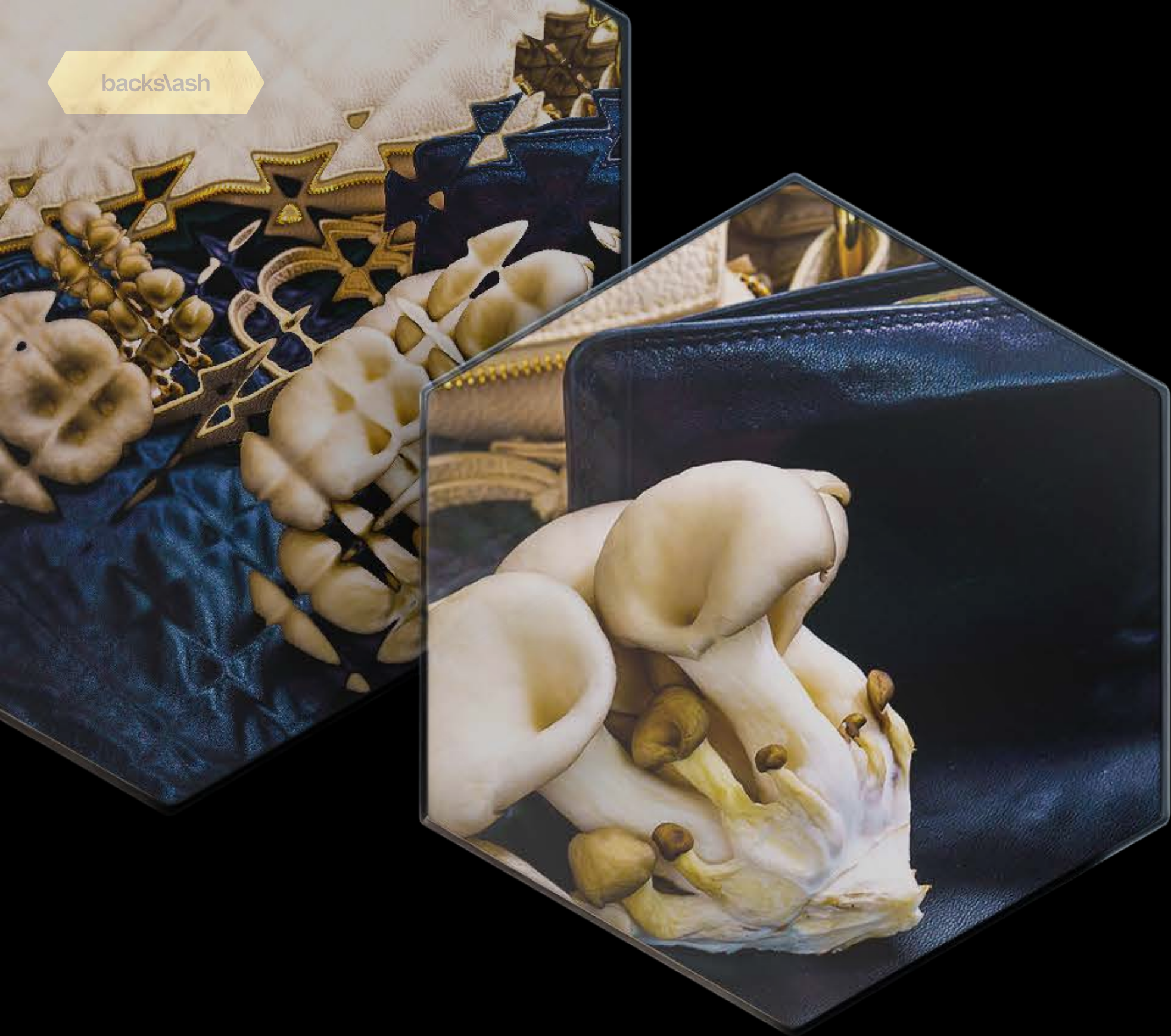
CONSERVATION BASIC INCOME

Imagine if governments paid people a basic income to protect nature. That’s the idea behind [conservation basic income](#) (CBI), which would transfer money to people living in or using key conservation areas throughout the world, from Indigenous people in the Amazon to cattle herders in East Africa. The researchers behind the proposal estimate that a global CBI would cost at least \$351 billion in order to pay about 232 million people annually, which is significantly less than the estimated \$500 billion that governments spend to subsidize harmful industries each year. The main goal of a CBI would be to alleviate the poverty traps that often force conservationists to overexploit natural resources and sell their labor to destructive industries. While there is not yet evidence that a global CBI would work, evidence from similar programs is promising. In Indonesia, for example, unconditional payments to hundreds of thousands of the poorest families also reduced deforestation. As a next step, the researchers are pushing for locally led pilot programs that put the concept to the test.

More than half of consumers globally (55%) are skeptical of brands' sustainability claims.

— [YouGov, 2023](#)





PLASTIC FREE DATABASE

Designers aiming to ditch plastic should look no further than PlasticFree, an online platform that provides subscribers with in-depth reports on over 100 sustainable plastic alternatives. Part material library, part design tool, the platform helps people avoid the “minefield of misinformation” around alternative materials and highlights applaudable case studies from projects around the globe. The most impressive materials included in the database are fossil-free “nutrient-based” materials such as [Notpla's edible seaweed packaging](#) or [Mirum plant leather](#), which are able to go back to the earth as nutrients.

CLIMATE CHANGE WORKSHOPS

The hottest ticket for a night out in Paris? [Climate change workshops](#). During these three-hour sessions, attendees are asked to arrange 42 cards representing the different causes and consequences of climate change—from the use of fossil fuels to the melting of glaciers. They're hosted by a nonprofit called Climate Fresk, and they've become so popular in France that they're now part of introductory courses at several [elite French universities](#) and are taught at major companies such as the bank BNP Paribas. Participants say they leave feeling empowered to make changes in their personal lives, whether by cutting back on their meat consumption or lobbying their employers to institute greener practices.

LEGO'S LEARNING LESSON

Not every sustainability goal goes according to plan. Just ask Lego, which recently [abandoned](#) its plans to make bricks from recycled plastic bottles—a move they first announced back in 2021. Upon further testing, the toy giant found that switching to recycled bricks would require extra ingredients for durability as well as greater energy for processing and drying. On top of that, they'd have to switch to all new manufacturing equipment, which ultimately would have led to a higher carbon footprint. Although disappointing, the reality is that the path to sustainability isn't always straightforward. By practicing transparency and giving consumers full insight into the reasoning behind their decision, Lego is building trust for the long term.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **BE PREPARED TO MAKE SACRIFICES**
It's the end of 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 everyday lives? Reframing climate action as a daily decision rather than an insurmountable task.
- **PROGRESS OVER PERFECTION**
Rather than waiting until a big climate goal is reached, businesses can inspire action by publishing regular progress reports—detailing the intermediate wins as well as the mistakes and ongoing challenges.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **BIO-MATERIALS**
- ✗ **MODULAR DESIGN**



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CONNECTION QUEST

We're simultaneously more connected and more isolated than ever before. With our world no longer built to facilitate face-to-face interaction, new social spaces, apps, and business models are stepping in to fill the void. The connection economy is booming, and it might just heal our collective well-being.



COMMISSION ON SOCIAL CONNECTION

The World Health Organization is making loneliness a global health priority with the launch of a new [Commission on Social Connection](#). For the next three years, the commission will focus on ways to address the global epidemic of loneliness, reviewing the latest science and designing strategies to help people deepen their social connections. "For too long, loneliness has existed behind the shadows, unseen and underappreciated, driving mental and physical illness," said US Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy. "Now, we have an opportunity to change that."

HUMAN REBOOT

Between Covid isolation and increasingly online lifestyles, things one thought to be basic human skills are no longer proving to be so basic. Just look to the workplace, where more employers have started [incorporating](#) "soft skills training" after noticing that Gen Zers were struggling to make conversation and give face-to-face presentations. Or, look to Japan, where some people are taking [classes](#) to relearn how to perfect their smile after three years of pandemic masking. For a society desperate to reconnect with confidence, updating our social software will be an essential first step.

MEN'S RETREATS

While women have long been taught to open up and embrace their emotions, the same can't be said for men—a problem that's now being attributed to a worsening [male friendship recession](#). Not only do men around the world have fewer friends than women, but men also report being less emotionally connected to the friends they do have, making them much more susceptible to feelings of loneliness. Men's retreats are hoping to reverse that trend by giving men dedicated time and space to meaningfully connect. These retreats come in a wide array of styles—ranging from those focused on emotional literacy, such as [EVRYMAN](#) and [Junto](#), to those that create connection through physical activity, like [Rewilding Surf Retreats](#) in Cornwall. As interest in these gatherings rises, we could one day see men's retreats be prescribed for both mental and physical health.



Pinterest data confirms our craving for deeper connections, showing significant increases in searches for "questions for couples to reconnect" (+480% YoY), "deep conversation starters" (+185% YoY) and "emotional intimacy" (+40% YoY).

— [Pinterest Predicts, 2024](#)

THOUGHTFUL APP

We already have apps that remind us to drink more water, meditate, and meet our daily fitness goals. But what about an app that reminds you to check in with your friends? That's the idea behind [Thoughtful](#), a new app that assesses your connection style then offers personalized daily suggestions for reaching out, acknowledging important dates, and deepening your connections. This might mean getting a notification to wish someone good luck before an important event, or being asked to reply to a prompt such as "Who was the last person you gave a compliment to?" "Relationships are a marathon, not a sprint," says psychiatrist Samantha Boardman, MD, who advised on the app's development. "It's [by way of] those micro-moments of checking in and showing up for people that friendships are sustained over time."

DAZI

As China's Gen Z looks to reclaim their social lives post-Covid, the search for "[dazi](#)" (activity partners) is on. The majority of these relationships are formed by inviting strangers to hangout through social platforms like Xiaohongshu and WeChat, with activities ranging from hiking to weekend travel. But don't confuse dazi with friends. The goal isn't necessarily to get to know one another on a deeper level or to develop a lasting relationship, it's to simply enjoy an activity together and move on. Participants say the activity-focused approach is a practical, low-pressure way to connect IRL with no strings attached.



FAKE IT, FOR REAL

For those struggling to find friends, new social spaces are helping people fake it until they make it. In South Korea, for example, nonprofit NEET Connect has created a program for unemployed people to come together and “play office” in a simulated work environment. The goal isn’t to get rich (in fact, you don’t get paid a dime), but rather to connect with people in a similar situation and see that you’re not alone. Similarly, at Tokyo’s Tomodachi ga Yatteru Cafe (‘Cafe Run by Friends’), the staff are actors who pretend like they’ve known you for years. They’ll greet you with a smile and an “It’s been a while!” And they might even ask how your mom is doing (never mind the fact that they’ve never actually met her). The familiarity doesn’t stop at the staff, either. From drinks with names like “the same thing as last time,” to the single, long table that forces people to sit together and chat, the entire experience is designed to make guests feel like they’re at home and among friends. While the idea of manufactured friendships might seem a little sad, people who visit these spaces often end up forming very real relationships along the way.

MATCHMAKING REVIVAL

Dating apps gave people access to a seemingly infinite pool of potential suitors. Now, choice overload is sparking a contemporary return to old-school matchmaking services. While such services typically cost thousands of dollars, modern apps like Lox Club—“a members club for Jew-ish ppl with ridiculously high standards”—are aiming to make it more accessible. A Lox Club membership costs \$96 for a full year, and comes with access to professional matchmakers who set users up with one another and give personalized feedback on your profile. As it turns out, finding “the one” may just get easier when you ditch the algorithm and focus on quality over quantity.

CROSS-GENERATIONAL GATHERINGS

A daycare center for the elderly in Chiba has won Japan’s highly prestigious Good Design Grand Award. The facility draws inspiration from the traditional Japanese porch known as “Engawa,” which encourages members of the community to visit in a relaxed, informal manner. Most notable, though, is that the center welcomes people of all ages rather than keeping seniors isolated from the rest of society. Families are encouraged to visit the residents and help out with their daily lives, while children are taught to assist with tasks like watering the garden. “Everyone helps each other,” says architect Hiroshi Naito. “It reminds us of old times.”

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.



NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ AVATAR IDENTITIES
- ✗ COMMUNITY COMMERCE
- ✗ DECENTRALIZED SOCIAL
- ✗ THIRD PLACE GAMING



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 think twice before sacrificing sustainability for speed, or workers' rights for savings. The convenience economy is growing a conscience.

CONSCIOUS CONVENIENCE

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THE END OF “FREE” RETURNS

As it turns out, “free” returns are extremely costly for the environment and for retailers. Millions of tons of returned stock end up in landfills each year, and for the items that do get resold, the process of shipping, unpacking, reviewing, and reselling them (often at a discount) ends up costing companies an average of \$30 per return. This harsh reality prompted almost 90% of retailers to revise their return policies in one way or another last year. About 44% of companies now charge return shipping fees, which is up from 33% in 2021. Other companies are preventing returns by simply making more items final sale. And in the most extreme move, a growing number of retailers are adopting “keep it” policies for the cases where the cost of returning the item would exceed its value. According to returns services firm goTRG, a whopping 59% of retailers have adopted these so-called “return-less refunds,” though few publicize it for obvious reasons.

CONSCIOUS SHOPPING TOOLS

New features from Klarna are making it easier for people to shop based on their personal values. They include a new conscious shopping dashboard, which offers access to sustainable products as well as environmental educational content; additional sustainability certification filters from third parties like PETA; and an enhanced CO2 tracker with data for over 122 million products. In addition, the global fintech giant added a dedicated filter in the search and compare tool to highlight conscious brands that have earned sustainability ratings of 4 (good) or 5 (great) according to partner organization, [Good On You](#). These updates were made based on findings that despite a widespread desire to shop ethically, almost 80% of consumers say they are struggling to identify environmentally friendly companies that align with their interests and values.

FITCHIX

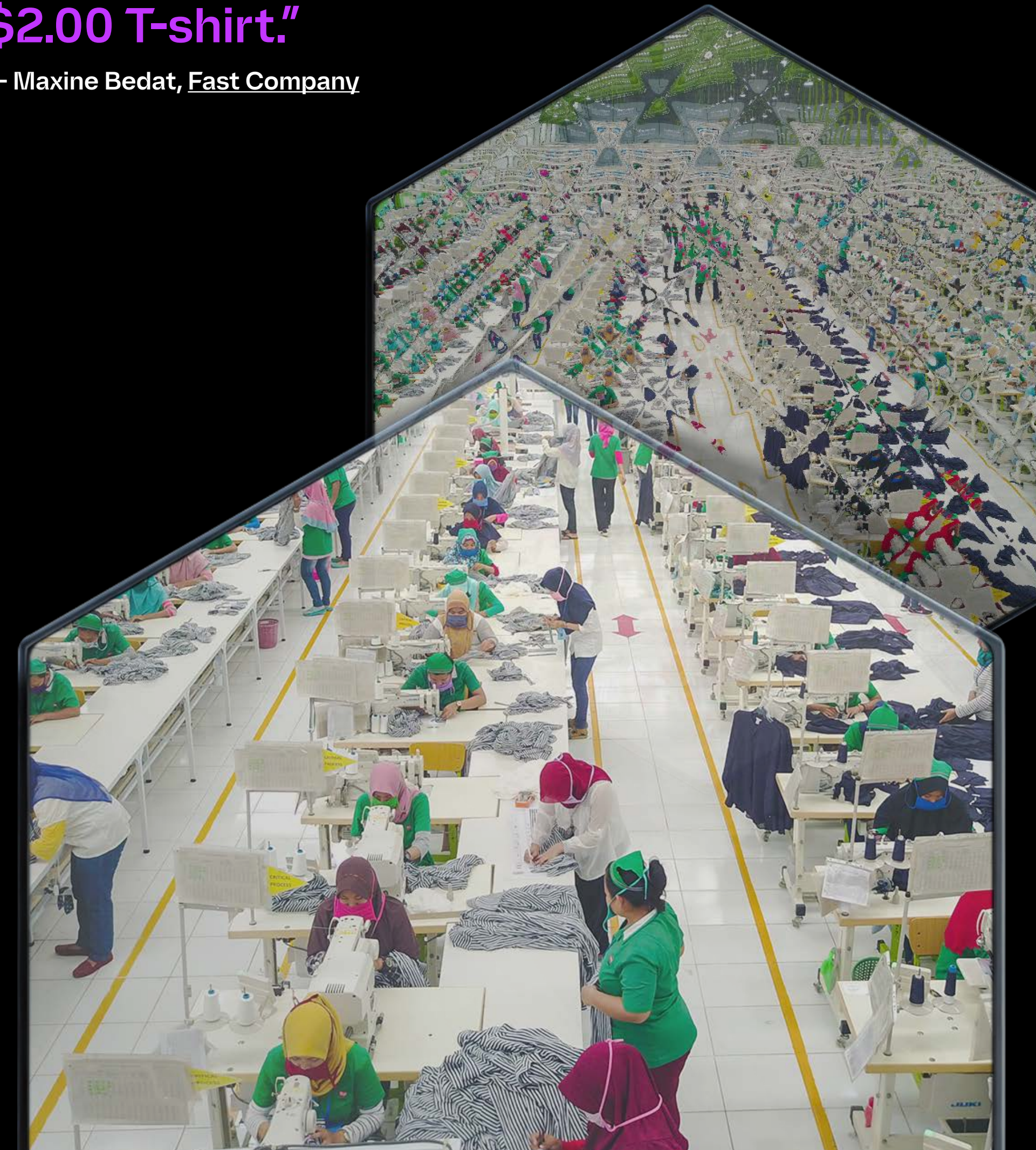
How free are free-range chickens, really? Thanks to a new [chicken fitness tracker](#) from Australia-based Honest Eggs Co., you no longer have to guess. The company is using the FitChix trackers to measure exactly how many steps their chickens take, then printing that number directly on the eggs you find at the supermarket. Besides making for a memorable campaign, FitChix is drawing attention to the fact that the category is full of empty marketing terms that make it seem like animals are being treated better than they actually are. The next era of transparent labeling is about letting the numbers do the talking.

GEN Z SHUNS SHEIN

Despite Shein’s not-so-shiny reputation, the fast fashion giant has continued to generate growing sales from price-sensitive, trend-obsessed Gen Zers. But the tide is slowly turning. One notable wave of backlash came in June, when Shein invited a group of American influencers to share footage from their tour of a Shein factory located in Guangzhou, China. “I expected this facility to be so filled with people just slaving away...but honestly, everybody was just working like normal, like, chill, sitting down. They weren’t even sweating,” one influencer said in a video that has since been heavily parodied. This attempt to improve the brand’s image ended up having the opposite effect, with many describing the content as propaganda. That month, the brand’s net favorability among Gen Z consumers fell nearly 20 points year over year. Purchase consideration also fell 10 points. Despite this data suggesting an ethical awakening, experts worry that Shein’s recent move to [go public](#) in the U.S. could help it evade necessary scrutiny on its labor and production practices.

“In the midst of global climate and biodiversity crises, the planet does not need another \$2.00 T-shirt.”

— Maxine Bedat, [Fast Company](#)





ETHICAL PRICE TRANSPARENCY

The largest supermarket chain in the Netherlands, Albert Heijn, is making hidden costs visible. Between April and June 2023, customers who bought a self-service cup of coffee at select 'AH to go' stores saw two prices: the standard retail price, and the True Price. The latter accounts for CO2 emissions, water use, resource consumption, and labor conditions related to the production of the coffee and milk. If a double espresso usually costs EUR 2.25, for example, its True Price might come to EUR 2.33. This also means that oat milk was actually cheaper than cow's milk due to its smaller environmental footprint. All extra revenue generated from the 15% of shoppers who opted to pay the True Price was donated to the Rainforest Alliance. As similar pricing models are eventually integrated across entire business models, we could finally see ethically made products become the obvious choice.

PLANT-BASED PRICE PARITY

Lidl is making sure that cost isn't a barrier to plant-based eating. The German supermarket chain recently lowered the prices of its own Venmondo vegan products to match their animal-based equivalents. Besides being a win for vegans, Lidl hopes the price parity will encourage more shoppers to give sustainable alternatives a try. According to the Federal Association of the German Food Trade, 41% of Germans identify as flexitarian, and 43% say they'd buy more plant-based foods if they were offered at a cheaper price.

SO LONG, SINGLE USE

While plastic has long been associated with convenience, new laws are marking the end of throwaway culture and the start of a more mindful era of consumption. England and France were the latest countries to ban plastic packaging of food and drinks from restaurants last year, forcing familiar fast food favorites like McDonald's, Burger King, Subway, and Starbucks to pivot to reusable tableware. For France, this development is just one step in a much larger plan to ban all single-use plastic waste by 2040.

WHAT'S NEXT

→ ENABLE MINDFUL SHOPPING

Empower people to choose wisely with product labels and digital platforms that detail carbon emissions, supply chain processes, worker treatment, and more. It can be as simple as scanning a QR code on a food wrapper or clothing tag.

→ 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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

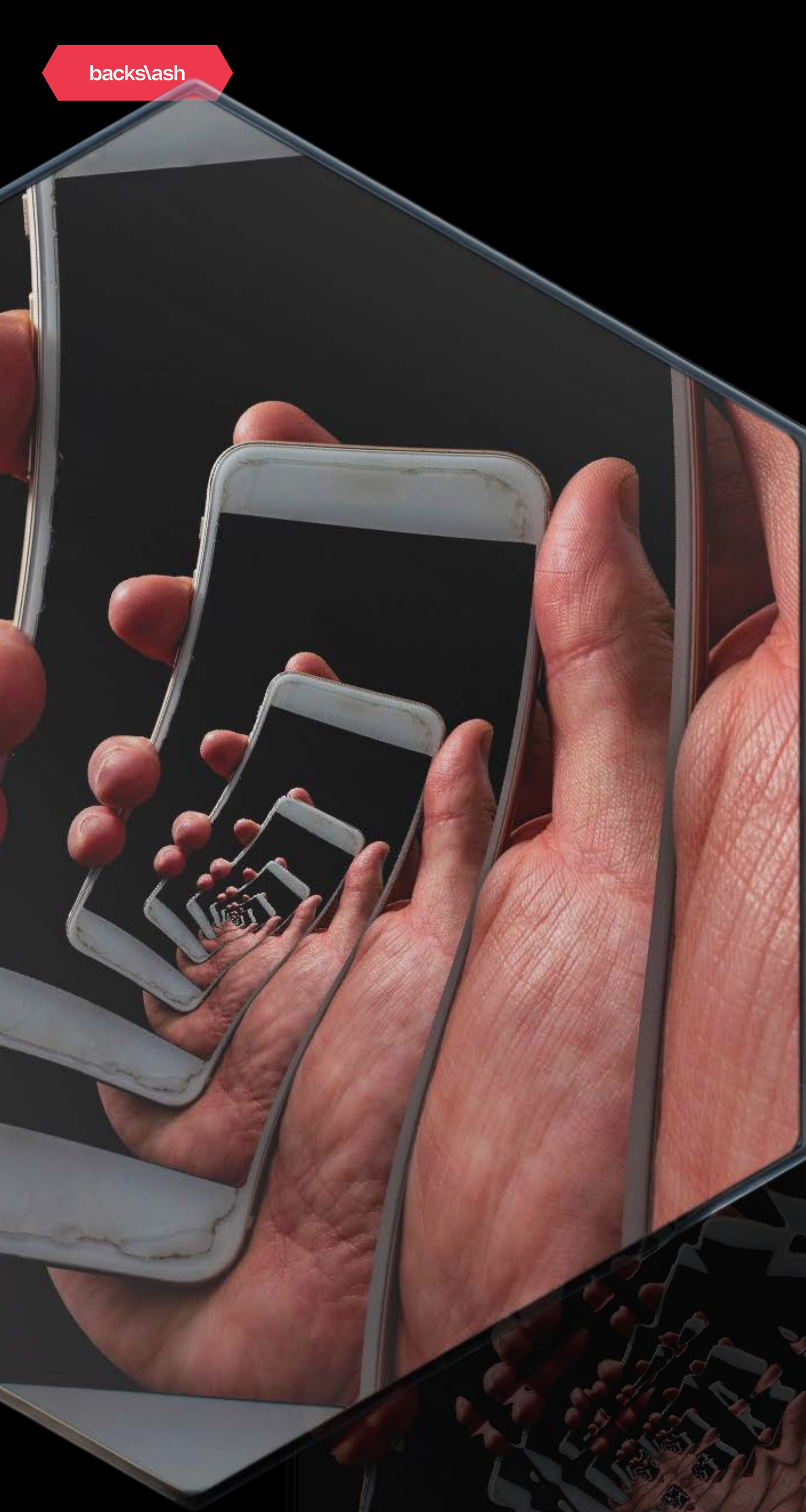
- ✗ CONNECTED OBJECTS
- ✗ BIO-MATERIALS
- ✗ COMMUNITY COMMERCE

COUNTER CANCEL

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.

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BUBBEL CHAT

If you tend to avoid interacting with people on the opposite end of the political spectrum, you're not alone. But a new Dutch app called Bubbel Chat wants you to give it a shot. When you first sign up, you select which party you're planning to vote for and are assigned an anonymous username. Bubbel Chat then matches you with someone from an opposing political party, and presents you both with a statement such as "Nature conservation zones should be established on land currently used for agriculture." Users are encouraged to respectfully discuss their stance, but are free to switch topics at any point. Bubbel Chat's goal isn't necessarily to change people's minds about a particular issue—although that does sometimes happen—but rather, it aims to break people out of their echo chambers and get them to see value in diverse viewpoints.

RETROACTIVE REWRITES

Earlier last year, news broke that Puffin Books would make hundreds of changes to Roald Dahl's most popular children's books in order to align his language with modern sensitivities. In *The Twits*, Mrs. Twit is no longer "ugly and beastly" but rather just "beastly"; in the latest *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, Augustus Gloop is not "enormously fat" but rather "enormous"; and in *Matilda*, "mothers and fathers" are now "parents." The news struck a major nerve, reigniting questions around who decides what's offensive, whether it's ever okay to make posthumous edits, and how far we'll go to sanitize our past. In the wake of the backlash, Puffin Books U.K. decided to release Dahl's original texts as a separate "Classic Collection" alongside the updated editions—ultimately leaving it up to individuals to decide which version they want to read.



"People ought to be free to express their views without fear of being attacked on both sides."

— K. Shanmugam, Minister for Law of Singapore

INTERCEPTING THE MANOSPHERE

In response to a recent surge in male supremacist content, a growing number of groups are aiming to show men and boys a better path. And they're doing it through an unexpected method: compassion. One such group is called Diverting Hate. Launched summer 2023, Diverting Hate meets younger men on social media with targeted posts that are designed to appeal to a man's anger. But rather than directing them to a hate group, the posts link to educational articles, men's retreats, and mental health resources. "What could they have seen in their social-media feed that would have led to connection with other men in a healthier place?" asks Kaitlyn Tierney, Diverting Hate's chief. In a time when men globally are more than twice as likely to die from suicide than women, the value of such efforts cannot be overstated.

CONTESTED CUISINES

Controversies around cultural appropriation in food may not be new, but they're far from being settled. Just look to British food retailer Marks & Spencer, which sparked outrage among Spaniards when it launched a new product called Spanish Chorizo Paella Croquetas—a real cultural mishmash that critics said was an insult to all three dishes referenced in the name. To avoid making the same mistake in the future, we might see more companies like M&S start hiring “cultural appropriation specialists.” At least, that’s the route that celebrity chef Jamie Oliver is taking after coming under fire for his inauthentic takes on classic cuisines like Jollof rice and Caribbean jerk chicken and rice. These specialists now vet all of Oliver’s recipes before they’re published, ensuring that the flavors are authentic and the origins of each dish are properly acknowledged.

DISCORD'S REFORM MOVEMENT

An intensified social media landscape has led most platforms to establish a zero-tolerance policy for trolls. But Discord is taking a different approach. Rather than banning offenders for life, the gaming giant wants to rehabilitate them. According to new rules announced in October, users who break the rules will first receive a direct message from Discord letting them know that they received either a warning or violation. From there, they'll be guided to a detailed breakdown of whichever policies were broken and which platform features will be restricted as a result. If you post a bunch of gore in a server, for example, Discord will temporarily limit your ability to upload media. “As an industry we’ve had a lot of hammers at our disposal. We’re trying to introduce more scalpels into our approach,” said John Redgrave, Discord’s vice president of trust and safety. “That doesn’t just benefit Discord. It benefits all platforms, if users can actually change their behavior.”

REVIEW BOMBING

These days, the ability to rate and review everything we consume has turned everyone into a critic—and some people are abusing the power. From TikTokers who exclusively post scathing restaurant reviews, to people leaving one-star ratings of books they haven’t even bothered to read, the rise of “review bombing” is having a very real impact on restaurant owners and authors whose livelihoods are at the mercy of public feedback. This pervasive negativity is what inspired John Legend to launch a new kind of social app called It’s Good. Rather than allowing anyone and everyone to share their take, the app curates personalized recommendations from users’ own contacts, as well as from legitimate critics and public figures. The best part? No hate allowed. “It’s actually not even built for negative comments,” says Legend. “Either you recommend it or you don’t.”

MEDIATOR TRAINING

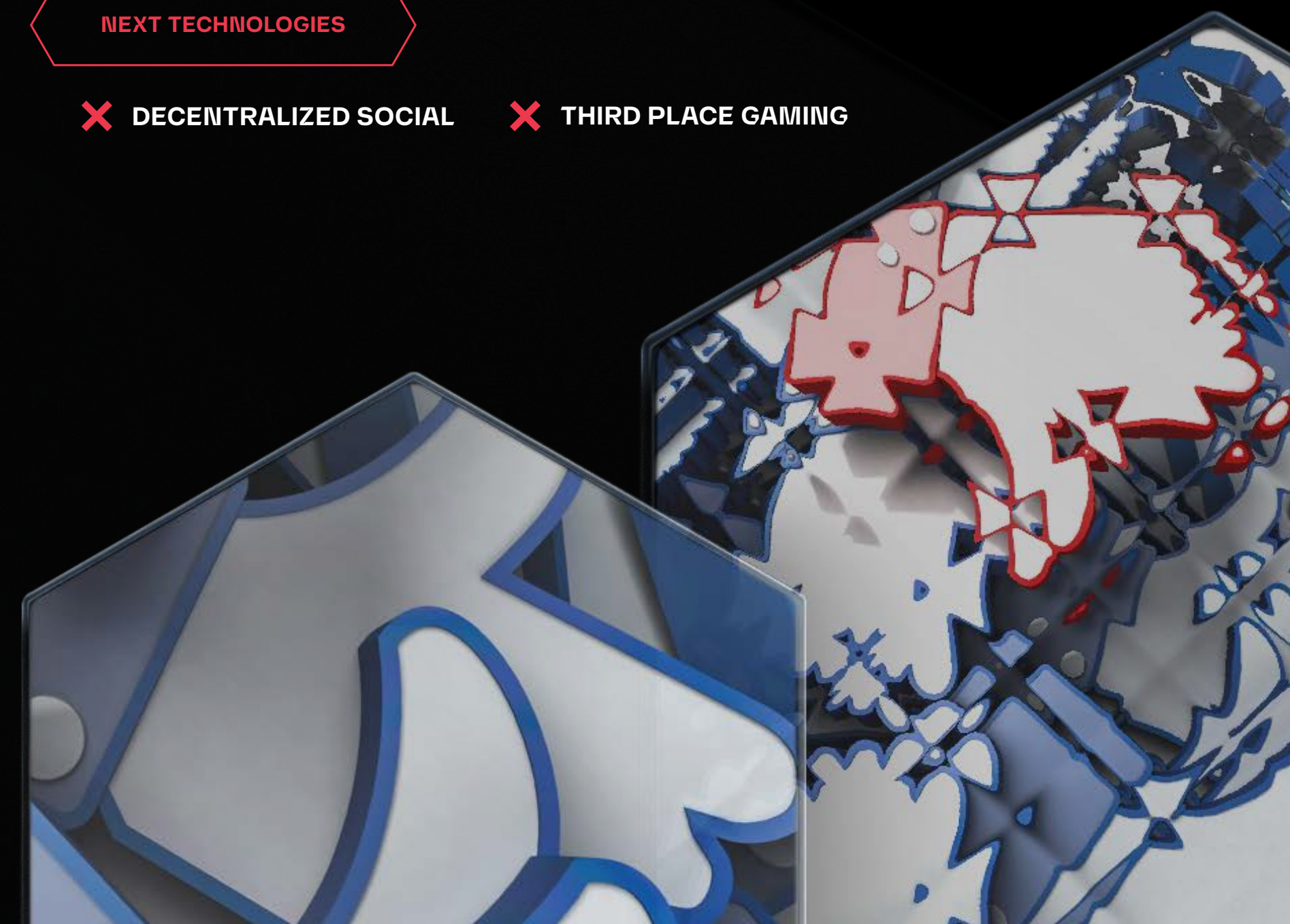
As the United States injects hundreds of billions of dollars into clean energy through the Inflation Reduction Act, criticism is growing louder about where, how, and whether new development should be allowed. Some communities are worried about landscape changes, some property values, and others wildlife preservation. And all of these fears are only being made worse by rampant misinformation. A new class at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is aiming to resolve these clean energy conflicts by training students to be mediators. The students get outside of the classroom and gain real-world experience working directly with developers, local officials, and residents—taking care to understand their diverse perspectives then figuring out how to create a fair outcome for all involved. With more industries becoming polarized, these kind of mediation skills will become increasingly valuable going forward.

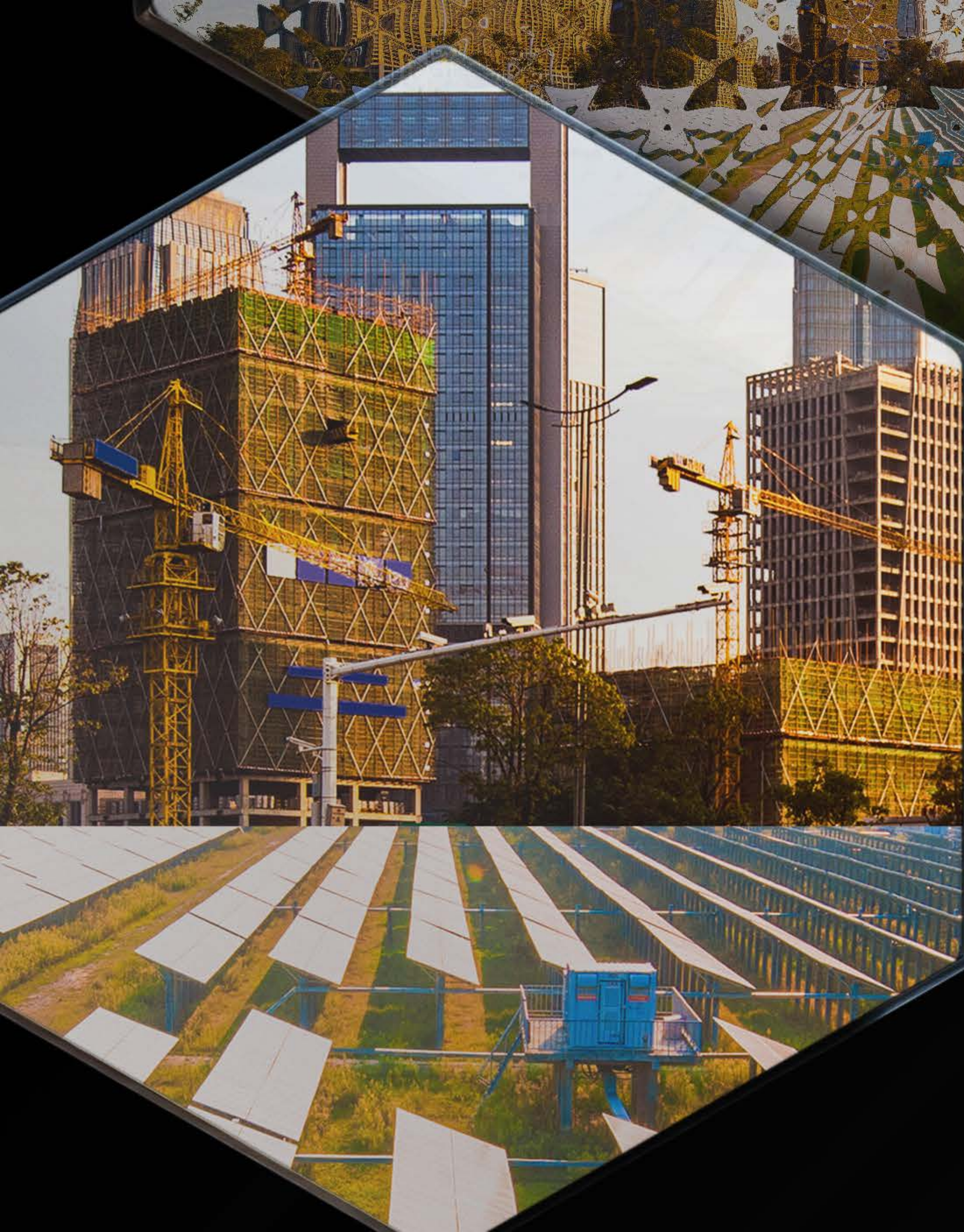
WHAT'S NEXT

- **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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **DECENTRALIZED SOCIAL**
- ✗ **THIRD PLACE GAMING**





CRISIS HACKING

A world trapped in permacrisis is determined to find its way out. In response to resource scarcity, political instability, and ongoing inflation, people are embracing lo-fi hacks and eco-innovations that make the most of the limitations. As we say goodbye to abundance, human ingenuity will elevate and endure.

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ENERGY-SAVING ICE CREAM

Retailers typically store their ice cream at a frigid -18°C . In a push to reduce energy consumption, Unilever has been developing new recipes that can remain stable at a warmer temperature of -12°C without impacting taste or texture. This six degree difference requires 20-30% less energy—which amounts to big savings when you account for the 3 million ice cream freezers that Unilever maintains around the world. But the consumer goods giant isn't stopping there. Unilever is sharing this updated ice cream patent with its competitors in hopes that retailers will be able to turn up the temperature dial on freezers everywhere.

GRASSROOTS BULK-SHOPPING GROUPS

As food prices continue to rise in Nigeria, savvy shoppers are fighting inflation by cutting out the middleman. Savvy middle-class Nigerians are forming [WhatsApp groups](#) that source food items in bulk directly from producers and then sharing the products among themselves. These grassroots groups, several of which have over 500 members, are helping people cut grocery costs by up to 22%.

GAZAN INGENUITY

Facing dire shortages of basic necessities, the people of Gaza are responding with ingenuity. With no fuel for cooking, people are building clay ovens ("tabuns") and heating them by burning wood, leaves, or animal dung; "DIY Desalination" guides have also been circulating that show people how to convert seawater into fresh water suitable for drinking or cooking; and as Israel shuts off the internet and local phone providers cease operations, people around the world are donating eSIM cards so that Palestinians can create new cellular plans without a physical SIM card.

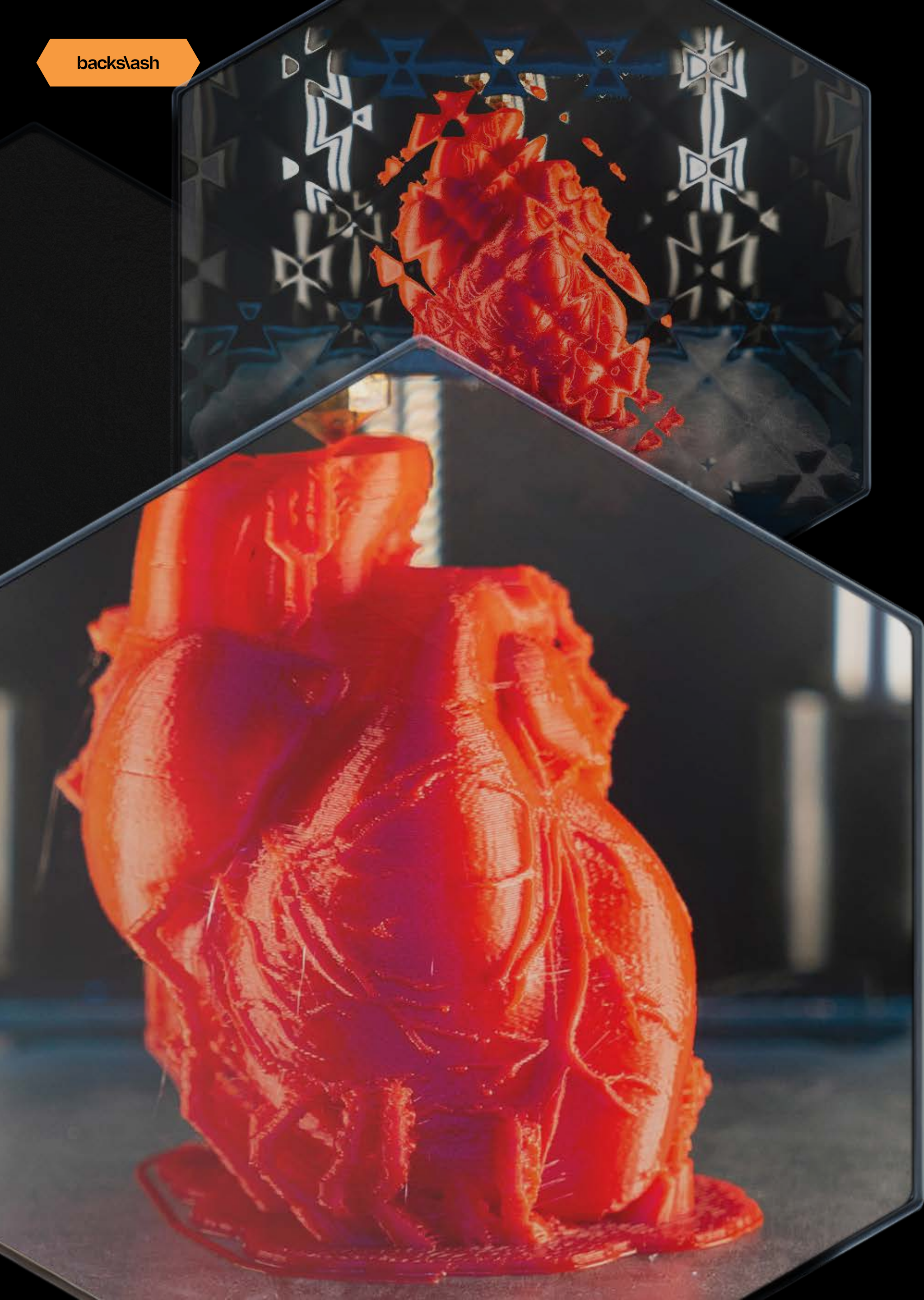
AFRI-PLASTICS CHALLENGE

For inspiration on how to make the most of waste, look no further than the Afri-Plastics Challenge. The competition, which is put on by the Canadian government and social enterprise Challenge Works, awards a total of £4.1 million in funding to companies across sub-Saharan Africa that are working to end plastic pollution. The biggest cut of the 2023 prize fund went to Green Industry Plast, an initiative setting up plastic donation bins across Togo and training young dropouts and women in sorting and recycling the waste to make bricks and paving stones for the local community. Other notable winners include Kenyan company [EcoCoCo](#), which makes scrubbing brushes from discarded coconut fibres; and Nairobi-based [Mega Gas](#), which converts plastic waste into clean energy.

INFLATION COOKBOOK

Canadian food delivery service SkipTheDishes has developed the country's first [Inflation Cookbook](#). The online tool tracks weekly pricing of over 400 items from retailers at over 80 locations, helping people maximize their grocery budget by keeping tabs on price reductions. Users simply select their province, household size, and weekly grocery budget, and the cookbook leverages real-time pricing data to highlight items that are on sale, like a 20% price cut for cheddar cheese or a 13% discount on potatoes. Next, the Inflation Cookbook displays a week's worth of recipes that incorporate those ingredients in order to make meal planning as simple as possible. The recipes are generated with the help of AI and curated by real human chefs and nutritionists.





COMMUNITY-OWNED SOLAR

Residents of Adjuntas, Puerto Rico, have built the island’s first community-owned solar microgrid. The microgrids are the latest example of a grassroots fight for energy security in Puerto Rico, where power outages have become increasingly common since Hurricane Maria damaged 80% of the island’s power grid seven years ago. The microgrids can run solely on locally generated power in the event of an outage, meaning they’re much more reliable than the central grid. They also make electricity significantly cheaper. On average, Puerto Ricans spend a whopping 8% of their income on electricity (vs. 2.4% for the average American).

PIG-TO-MAN KIDNEY TRANSPLANTS

The scarcity of donor kidneys means that nearly 40% of individuals on transplant waiting lists die within five years. With human donors unable to meet demand, research groups are looking to an unexpected source: pigs. Last year, two research groups successfully implanted genetically modified pig kidneys into human recipients for the first time—marking a medical breakthrough that could save millions of lives. And that’s not the only reason to be optimistic. Researchers are also working on 3D-printed organs, which are expected to be available for transplantation within the next 10 years.

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 make-your-own product guides.

BIOCEMENT

The world currently uses enough concrete to build a Paris every week—a not-so-fun fact that accounts for around 8% of the world’s climate-warming CO2 emissions. And a growing population means we’ll need even more buildings in the future. Hoping to meet these growing concrete demands in a more sustainable way is US-based Prometheus Materials, a company making biocement out of blue-green algae (aka pond scum). Because algae live and grow through photosynthesis, biocement made through this process absorbs carbon rather than emitting it. Prometheus recently raised \$8 million in its first round of funding, and is now hoping to widen its impact by licensing the use of its biocement to other companies who could make their own concrete with it.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **BIO-MATERIALS**
- ✗ **LO-FI DESIGN**
- ✗ **MODULAR DESIGN**

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DATA

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 individuals own their data from the start.

ZERO-PARTY DATA SHARING

A growing crop of startups are allowing people to trade their data for cash, discounts, or other perks. These include [Tapestri](#), which pays people about \$8 to \$25 a month for sharing their location; [Invisibly](#), which offers access to paywalled news articles in exchange for demographic and behavioral data; and [Datacy](#), which lets users collect their browsing data, aggregate it with data from other users, and then sell it to the highest bidder. An especially unique proposition comes from a new app called [Caden](#). Caden helps users download their data from apps like Amazon and Netflix and put it into a “vault.” Users who agree to share that data for advertising purposes can then earn a cut of the revenue that the app generates from it, which could be up to \$50 a month. But reactions to these new business models are mixed. While some argue that they’re allowing users to profit from data they otherwise would be giving away for free, others say the lack of standardization makes it impossible for consumers to know if they’re getting a fair deal.

“PODS” (PERSONAL ONLINE DATA STORES)

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. His [solution](#) is a startup called Inrupt that aims 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.

AD-FREE SOCIAL MEDIA SUBSCRIPTIONS

Meta users in Europe now have the [option](#) of paying €12.99 a month to browse Facebook and Instagram without ads—marking the largest-ever test of how many people are willing to pay to escape data-hungry advertisers. The subscription is meant to address the European Union’s concerns about Meta’s data collection processes. To be clear, users who pay will still have the same amount of data collected on them. Meta just won’t use that information to show ads. Critics say this is just a distraction from a larger issue: the fact that companies are collecting way too much personal data to begin with. But learnings from other platforms suggest that the ad-free option may have wide appeal. At the end of 2022, for example, about 80 million people had signed up for a premium version of YouTube that allows them to turn off ads. TikTok is among the many apps [testing](#) the same thing.

DNA DATA EXCHANGE

One company’s unused data is another company’s ticket to success. Just weeks after disclosing a [data breach](#), genetic testing company 23andMe announced that it would be [selling](#) one year of anonymized DNA data to drugmaker GSK for \$20 million. GSK will comb the data for hints about genetic pathways that might be at the root of the disease, which could significantly speed up the long, slow process of drug development. And with 23andMe holding DNA details from more than 14 million customers, the implications are significant.

“People and companies should be able to own, use, and price their data the same way they control money. They only need to define it, quantify it, hold it in a vault, and manage it.”

— Arka Ray, cofounder of The Data Economics Company

WORLDCOIN CONTROVERSY

In July of last year, people around the world stood in line to have their eyeballs scanned by a shiny silver orb. In return, they were promised free cryptocurrency and a digital ID that, among other things, would serve as proof online that they're a human and not a bot. This is all part of Sam Altman's heavily hyped [Worldcoin](#) project, which has amassed over [4M](#) app downloads and raised plenty of red flags along the way. Worldcoin has attempted to quell privacy concerns by reassuring people that the data is either deleted or encrypted. But governments aren't quite convinced. Kenya made the decision to [suspend](#) enrollment in August, and data regulators in Argentina, Britain, France, and Portugal are all currently launching their own [investigations](#).

DATA AFTER DEATH

According to a global Backslash survey, the majority (52%) of people are concerned about who will have access to their digital assets and accounts after they die, but only 33% of people have actually done something about it. That means millions of people's social media accounts, digital currencies, creative work, email logins, and photos could all be at risk of being left behind—or worse, stolen—once they pass away. The good news, though, is that more estate planners and businesses are starting to pay attention. One example is [Keylu](#), which provides a central place to safely store and manage all of your important online assets—making it easy to ensure that your information ends up in trusted hands.

EVERYDAY DATA COLLECTION

Giving up our data is a cost of modern living. From smart speakers to health trackers, we've gradually become accustomed to handing over our data in exchange for personalization and convenience—fueling an industry worth upward of [\\$227 billion](#) a year. And if you think it's tough to avoid data collection now, best of luck in the future. As the Internet of Things expands, there will be even more devices monitoring even more personal aspects of our lives. Think [smart mirrors](#) in store fitting rooms, [toilets](#) that make diet recommendations based on an analysis of your poop, and even [VR headsets](#) that measure brain activity. Of course, all this tracking will certainly bring some solid perks, but in order to enjoy those perks with any peace of mind, we'll need to have a greater say in who can access our data and what they do with it.

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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **CONNECTED OBJECTS**
- ✗ **DECENTRALIZED SOCIAL**
- ✗ **NON-FUNGIBLE EVERYTHING**





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.

DEATH UNDONE

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GRIEF TECH

A growing crop of startups are making it possible to continue interacting with your loved ones long after they're gone. A digital version of them, that is. This includes companies like Replika, HereAfter AI, StoryFile, and Seance AI, whose offerings range from audio legacies, to interactive video conversations with the dead, to chatbot "companions" that you can text back and-orth with. But while some welcome the opportunity to keep the conversation going, others argue that it's just allowing people to avoid the very human, and very necessary, process of grieving. Some technology and cybersecurity experts are even advocating for the addition of a "Do not bot me" clause in the estate-planning process, which is just one of many ongoing debates around the need for post-mortem protections.

SHUKATSU FESTIVAL

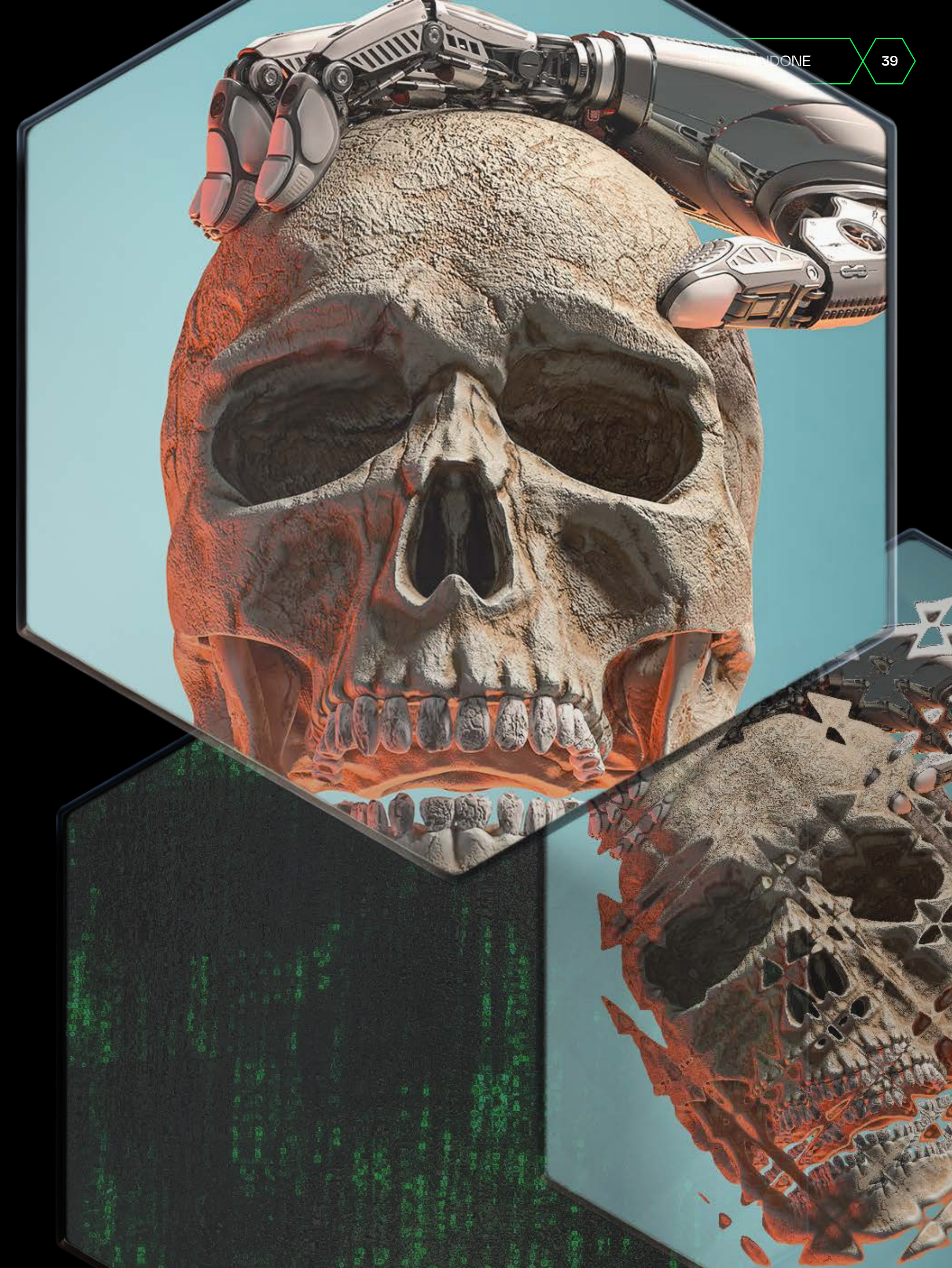
In rapidly aging societies like Japan—where more than one in 10 people are now 80 or older—starting conversations around end-of-life planning is an especially important but especially daunting task. Events like the Shukatsu Festival are aiming to make it less dreadful. In addition to attending workshops on how to practically and psychologically prepare for death, participants can plan their ideal funeral by trying out different coffins, sampling makeup products and hairstyles for when they're laid to rest, and even taking burial portraits. And surprisingly, it's not just the elderly who attend. The festival attracts thousands of people each year, many of whom are in their 20s and 30s.

DIGITAL CEMETERIES

Urban land scarcity and rapidly aging populations are forcing physical cemeteries in China to go digital. At Beijing's Taiziyu Cemetery, for instance, ashes are stored in a small compartment similar to a safe deposit box at a bank. On the door of the compartment is an electronic screen that displays pictures and videos of the deceased, creating a personalized digital memoir for friends and family to visit. Similarly, over in Shanghai, a recently opened online mausoleum called Fu Shou Yuan allows people to create "virtual islands" with their loved ones' pictures, digital assets, and sound files. While these digital solutions are slowly gaining traction, making them the norm will require businesses to convince people that online rituals are just as meaningful, if not more, than the physical traditions that have dominated for centuries.

DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER CASKETS

We have direct-to-consumer everything else, so why not D2C caskets? Typically, caskets are sold via funeral homes and cost an average of about \$3,000, though they can go all the way up to \$9,000+. A company called Titan is aiming to disrupt the market with a cheaper, more customizable option that can be ordered from major retailers like Costco, Walmart, and Amazon and shipped directly to your door (or wherever you want it to go). And knowing that caskets aren't exactly a sexy topic, Titan is using star power to spread awareness. It recently hired actor David Dastmalchian as its brand ambassador, and even got its products placed in Taylor Swift's "Anti-Hero" music video.





52% of adults globally say it is important to them to "break the taboo around death and be open to new end-of-life approaches."

- TBWA Disruption Index Proprietary Research in 29 countries, Q1 2024 (n=13,100)

DEATH DOCU-SERIES

A new docu-series called "Questa cassa non è un albergo" is aiming to dispel taboos around death in Italy. The show goes behind the scenes of a funeral services company called Taffo, which has become famous on social media for using humor to make the tough conversations a little easier. This is even more challenging in Italy due to rigid religious and cultural traditions. By giving viewers a behind-the-scenes look at the Taffo family's work—including the late-night calls, mixed emotions, and difficult decisions that go into it—the series is humanizing a historically heavy topic.

GREEN BURIALS

As interest in green burials continues to increase, so too do the number of available options. One such option is water cremation, whereby the body is slowly dissolved in a bag of 160°C water. The UK's largest funeral provider started offering water cremation at the end of last year, marking the first time it was made widely available in the country. Meanwhile, a group of craftswomen in the US are making biodegradable caskets out of locally sourced willow—serving as a natural, homegrown alternative to imported coffins.

CEMETERIES TURNED LIFESTYLE CENTERS

A cemetery isn't generally high on the list of places people want to spend their afternoon. But what if they catered not just to those in mourning, but to ordinary citizens? That's the mindset shift happening in South Korea, where cemeteries and columbariums are evolving to incorporate art galleries, cafes and green spaces. One notable example comes from Nakwon Memorial Park, a columbarium located in Gimhae, which recently made headlines for featuring art from popular photographer Oh Joong-seok. The goal was to "make memorial parks less dark and serious and develop them into a cultural ground where visitors can come with "a relaxed mind," signaling an opportunity for death to breathe new life into cities.

WHAT'S NEXT

→ START THE CONVERSATION

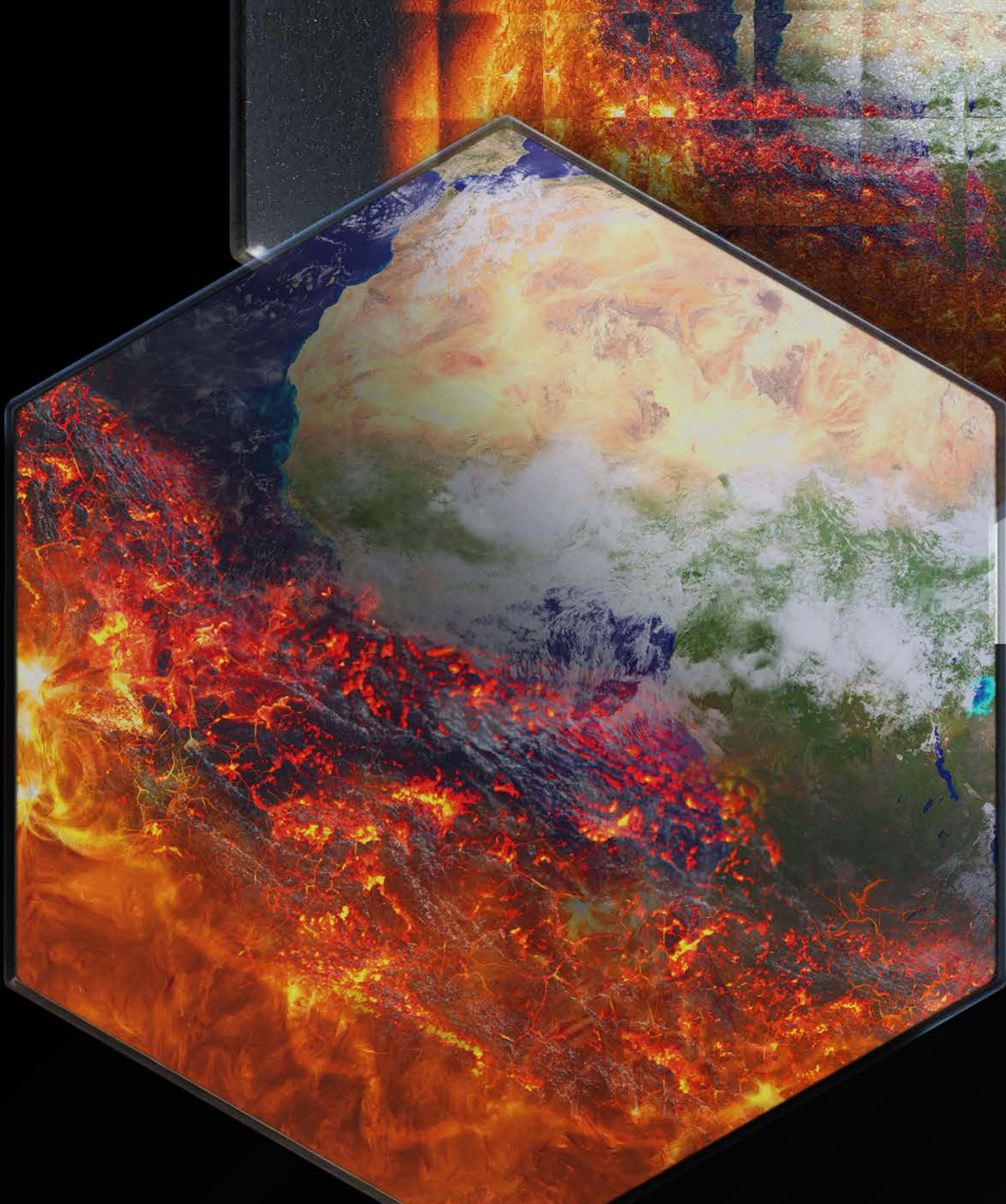
Reframing death in a realistic yet approachable light will turn avoidance into action. Brands can help by creating moments for open discussion and uniting unlikely partners to jump-start the planning process (think financial advisors X death doulas).

→ MANDATORY DEATH SETTINGS

What if declaring your post-death wishes was a mandatory part of every online sign-up process—from cloud storage services, to social media profiles, to crypto wallets? Ensuring that digital inheritance was never an afterthought.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ BIO-MATERIALS
- ✗ ASSISTIVE ROBOTICS
- ✗ AVATAR IDENTITIES
- ✗ EXTENDED REALITY



DEMISE DUALITY

Is humanity doomed? Projections for a bleak future are leading a growing group of people to say "yes." As end-of-times thinking takes root, a feeling of collective indifference will threaten the path to progress. To reignite a sense of individual responsibility, we'll need to convert nihilists into optimists.

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REVOLT AGAINST HUMANITY

Throughout history, it's been largely agreed upon that we should try to postpone humanity's extinction for as long as possible. But that assumption is now being challenged by an increasingly vocal group of thinkers. For deeper insight into this mindset, look no further than Adam Kirsch's new book, "The Revolt Against Humanity." He puts his position bluntly: "The end of humanity's reign on Earth is imminent, and...we should welcome it." This idea unites two camps that might otherwise seem to be at odds. At one end, there's the the "Anthropocene antihumanists," who believe that humans have caused the ecological crisis, and therefore we should welcome our self-destruction as a just payment for our crimes. On the other end are the "transhumanists," who believe the only way forward for humanity is to create new forms of intelligent life. And though these groups may be niche for now, their momentum suggests that they could have greater influence on politics and society in the years to come.

ANTINATALISM

Is it morally sound to bring children into a world that seems to be crumbling? According to a growing number of Millennials and Gen Z, the answer is no. Once considered fringe, antinatalism—the view that it's morally impermissible to bring a child into existence—is moving into mainstream discussions. Some antinatalists point to climate change, others point to the threat of societal collapse, but all agree that the best way to do right by future generations is to not create them. With 60% of the world's population living in countries where fertility rates are dropping, governments are doubling down on pronatalist policies in response. → For more, watch Backslash's episode of Life on the Edge: Antinatalism.

FUTURE CHICKEN

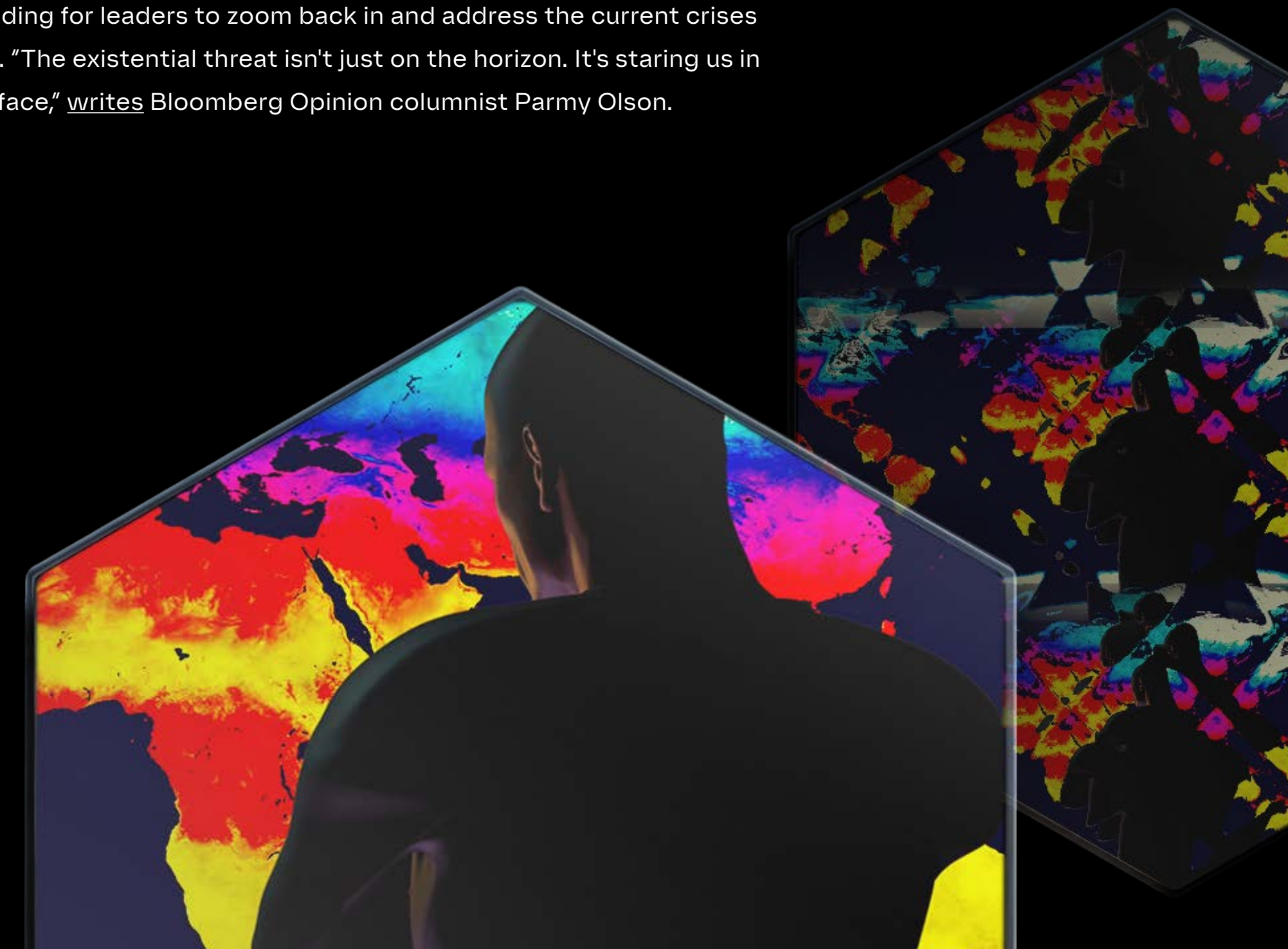
A new show is using animated chickens to combat climate doomism for six to 10-year-olds. Developed by Star Wars veteran Catherine Winder, Future Chicken stars a time-traveling eco-superhero chicken called Potato and her sidekick Frittata (an egg who wears rocket pants). Their mission? To spark positive change in the present and safeguard our planet for the future. Research shows that this kind of optimism actually encourages more sustainable behaviors, whereas spreading climate doom only leads to apathy and inaction. "It's a tone that we hope will inspire kids—and us all—to be the heroes the planet needs right now," said Marie McCann of CBC Kids.

PSYCHEDELIC CENTERS

With existential anxiety on the rise, neurologists and artists alike are arguing that psychedelics could become part of the solution. The thinking is that by using drugs to boost individual well-being and make people realize how interdependent we are, psychedelic treatments can eventually lead to a broader societal transformation. "People tend to think they're not worth saving, and then extrapolate that to the world," said Berra Yazar-Klosinski, chief scientific officer at MAPS PBC. "They think, 'Why should I extend my narrow runway of life to saving the planet?'" For some advocates in the space, the ultimate goal is to develop a network of psychedelic centers where patients are treated and then put in touch with one another so they become part of something bigger.

AI LONGTERMISM DEBATE

Longtermism, an idea first proposed in 1984 and more recently popularized by William MacAskill's 2022 book "What We Owe the Future," is an ethical stance that prioritizes humanity's long-term future over the present. Interestingly, it has become especially celebrated among Silicon Valley's tech billionaires like Elon Musk because of the way it quantifies moral dilemmas. If there are 7.8 billion people alive today but 80 billion people could be born in the future, longtermism says we should prioritize those future lives. The same logic is now being applied to AI, leading to conversations that focus on hypothetical future threats rather than confronting the ways in which AI is already causing harm today. Journalists and AI ethicists are pleading for leaders to zoom back in and address the current crises first. "The existential threat isn't just on the horizon. It's staring us in the face," writes Bloomberg Opinion columnist Parmy Olson.



“What keeps me up at night is neither the myriad extinction scenarios that threaten our species nor the mad scientists and billionaires who aspire to solve them. What keeps me up at night is our collective indifference to both.”

— Tyler Austin Harper, [SLATE](#)

“THE HEAT WILL KILL YOU FIRST”

Journalist Jeff Goodell wants people to take heat much more seriously. In his new book, “The Heat Will Kill You First,” Goodell details how rising temperatures will have devastating effects not just on the environment, but on human health—telling tragic stories of real people who have been killed by extreme heat. Goodell’s stance is that these tragedies have become all too routine, leading to a kind of complacency and acceptance of our worsening environmental crisis. He even argues that the very term “global warming” is too gentle, making it sound “as if the most notable impact of our burning fossil fuels will be better beach weather.” But rather than fixating solely on this inconvenient truth, the book highlights what can still be done to turn things around.



SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM

It’s not just your imagination—the headlines are getting darker. Because negativity drives stronger reactions and more media consumption, news networks are financially motivated to keep people frantic and fired up. But the [Solutions Journalism Network](#) wants to break the cycle. The global network is focusing on what mainstream news misses most often: how people are trying to solve problems and what we can learn from their successes or failures.

PROTOPIA MOVEMENT

You’ve heard of utopias and dystopias, but what about protopias? The concept, which debuted in a 2010 book by Kevin Kelly titled “[What Technology Wants](#),” refers to a society that makes incremental progress of a long period of time—much of which is attributed to technological advancement. Protopia didn’t exactly make waves when the book first came out, but it has since gained [traction](#) and inspired the creation of dedicated groups. There’s [Protopian Futures](#), a platform for anyone interested in creating a “positive and realistic future.” As well as [The Protopia Lab](#), a Barcelona-based nonprofit that holds face-to-face workshops for people exploring diverse approaches to society’s most urgent issues. Though ideas will differ, that’s kind of the point. The website describes Protopia Lab as an antidote to the polarized “us-versus-them activism.”

WHAT’S NEXT



REINSPIRE HOPE

In a sea of tragic headlines, a little optimism can go a long way toward motivating people to take action.



GIVE EVERYONE A ROLE

Not knowing where to start often prevents people from starting at all. By offering clear direction, brands can make it easier for people to do their part to improve our world.



NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✕ EMOTION AI
- ✕ NEURAL CONTROL

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FUTURE UTOPIAS

With today's cities clearly not serving us or the planet, urban planners are dreaming up wildly different future. These ambitious experiments will bring a mix of old and new ideas, and a fresh appreciation for greener, more resilient designs. Expect future-proof cities to redefine aspirational living.



SPONGE CITIES

A warmer atmosphere is supercharging storms, making flooding a growing problem everywhere from [Zhengzhou, China](#) to [Seoul, South Korea](#) to [Cologne, Germany](#) to [New York City](#). In response, urban planners are reimagining cities as sponges. “You are actually playing tai chi with nature, not boxing with nature,” explains Yu Kongjian, who is championing the concept in China. This requires replacing “gray infrastructure” like concrete sidewalks and asphalt roads with more green spaces that can capture and absorb water—a win-win for residents as well as the planet. For places where greenery can’t be deployed, like parking lots and alleys, cities are also introducing more permeable surfaces.

SAUDI GIGAPROJECTS

“If you build it, they will come.” That’s the philosophy of Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince, who is investing hundreds of billions of dollars to build fantastical cities and iconic lifestyle destinations that he hopes will attract tourists. It’s all part of a larger [Vision 2030](#) plan that seeks to diversify the country’s economy away from oil. The biggest and most famous project within this plan is Neom, a region that’s home to [The Line](#) (a linear, car-free city of 9 million inhabitants that’s fully enclosed by a mirrored facade), [Oxagon](#) (a floating industrial city), [Trojena](#) (a new destination for sustainable mountain tourism), and more. Construction of this megacity is now [well underway](#), and the world is watching closely in anticipation.

URBAN SWIMMING OASES

Cities around the world have been working to restore rivers and make them cleaner for public use—citing benefits like physical recreation and connection to nature. Now, as we settle in for a future of frequent heat waves, those projects are taking on a new urgency. In Paris, the government is spending €1.4 billion (\$1.5 billion) to make the [River Seine](#) swimmable ahead of the 2024 Olympics. In London, there’s growing pressure to improve the water of the River Thames. In Melbourne, there are calls for a chain of swimming spots along the Yarra River (Birrarung). And in New York City, an organization called [+Pool](#) is working to bring a floating swimming pool to the East River, providing a space for New Yorkers to play, lounge, and swim laps. Looking forward, these natural swimming areas will be considered an essential escape from rising temperatures.

WOODEN CITY

Sweden is set to begin construction on the world’s largest wooden city in 2025. Known as [Stockholm Wood City](#), the forest-inspired development will be made with fire-proofed mass timber and will include 7,000 offices and 2,000 homes, along with restaurants and shops. The project aims to show what’s possible when sustainability is at the core of a project from beginning to end. In addition to using mass timber, which has a much smaller carbon footprint than concrete and steel, Stockholm Wood City is embracing the walkable 15-minute city model to help decrease emissions from transportation. Another bonus? Studies show that living and working around wood lowers stress and improves well-being.

“We haven’t yet figured out how to make utopian environments work for people. We have a long road ahead to make improvements that will both preserve the environment and improve our quality of life.”

— [Sylvie Albert](#), Professor at the University of Winnipeg





VILLAGE REVIVAL

You've likely seen the headlines declaring a worldwide epidemic of loneliness. What's less often talked about, though, is how modern housing is contributing to the problem. One company aiming to turn things around is Denmark-based Almenr, where citizens act as co-developers of shared housing communities. All of the houses are built with sustainable materials, but more importantly, they're built to foster meaningful connections. By scaling back to hubs of 20 to 50 families, Almenr is recreating a village environment where neighbors actually interact and look after one another. Consider it an ode to the good ole days.

→ For more, watch Backslash's episode of [Life on the Edge: Village Revival](#)

TELOSA

Rather than setting out to just be the greenest city, the most livable city, or the most equitable city, Telosa is aiming to do it all. The city—set to be built in the American desert by 2030—will run almost exclusively on renewable energy, will feature aeroponic farms and greened high-rises, and will be easily manageable by foot or by public transport. As for the "equitable" part, Telosa will deliberately bring in diverse residents who will be able to directly influence political decisions. Marc Lore, the billionaire behind the idea, also says resources will be communal and no one will pay taxes. Instead, a foundation would invest the money from leases in social services. While many say Telosa sounds far too good to be true, Lore is seeking \$400 billion in financing to prove them wrong.

"NO-ILLNESS" FLOATING CITY

Floating cities—once the material of science fiction—are becoming a reality as sea levels continue to rise. Two trailblazing projects are currently underway in Busan, South Korea and the Maldives, marking the first but certainly not the last trials of life on the water. Another company that believes in the idea is Japanese startup N-Ark, which recently unveiled a floating city concept called Dogen City. The city has a smart healthcare focus, meaning residents' health would be regularly monitored and medical tourism would be one of its driving economies. It's also designed to withstand the worst. In the case of a natural disaster, Dogen City would be capable of breaking off into its own standalone island. Plus, the city would be open to hosting climate refugees and victims of other natural disasters when called upon.

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 their stores and office spaces can fulfill.

→ GO LOCAL

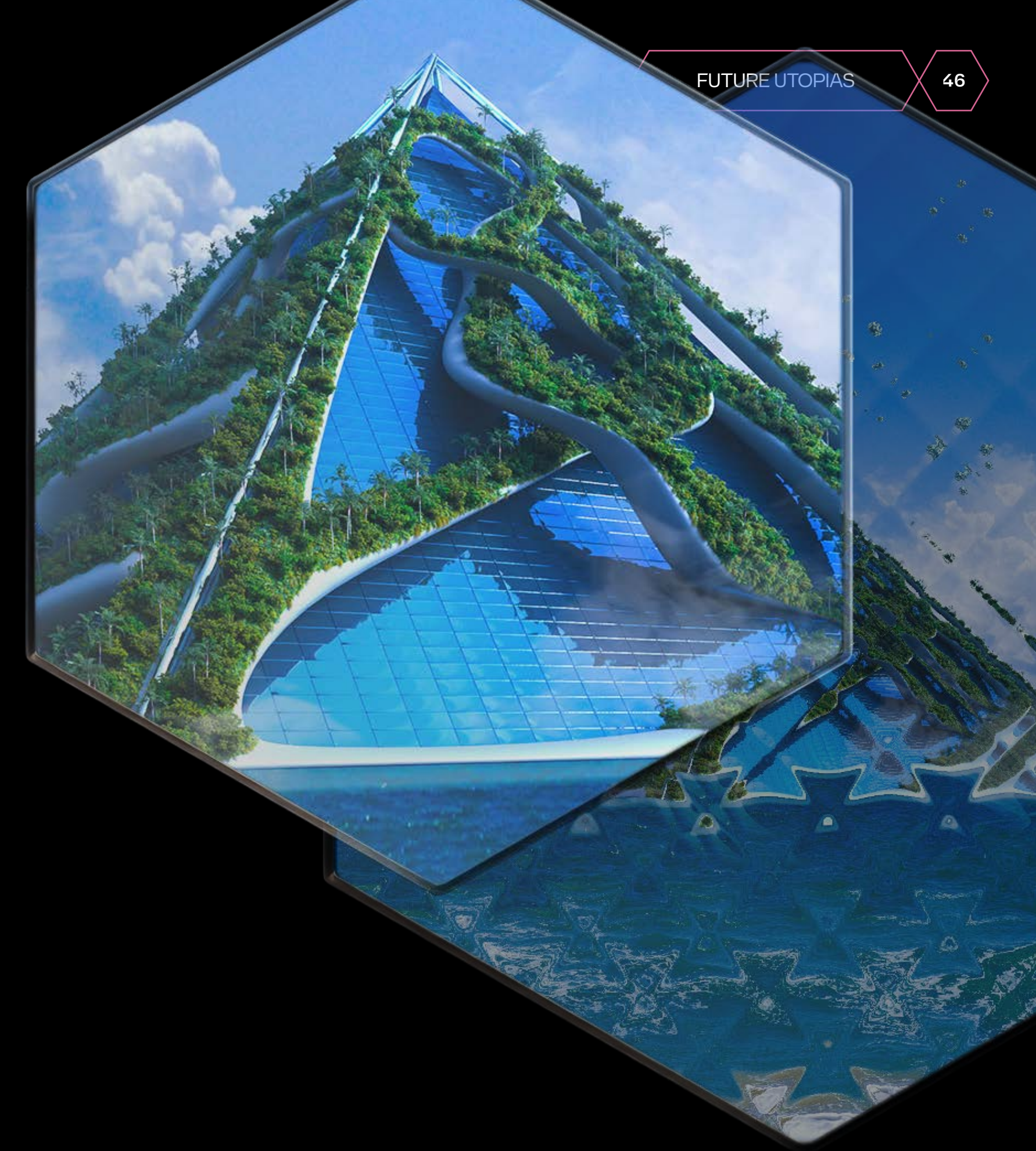
Consider smaller store formats closer to places of residence—reducing the need for transportation.

→ REFURBISH FIRST

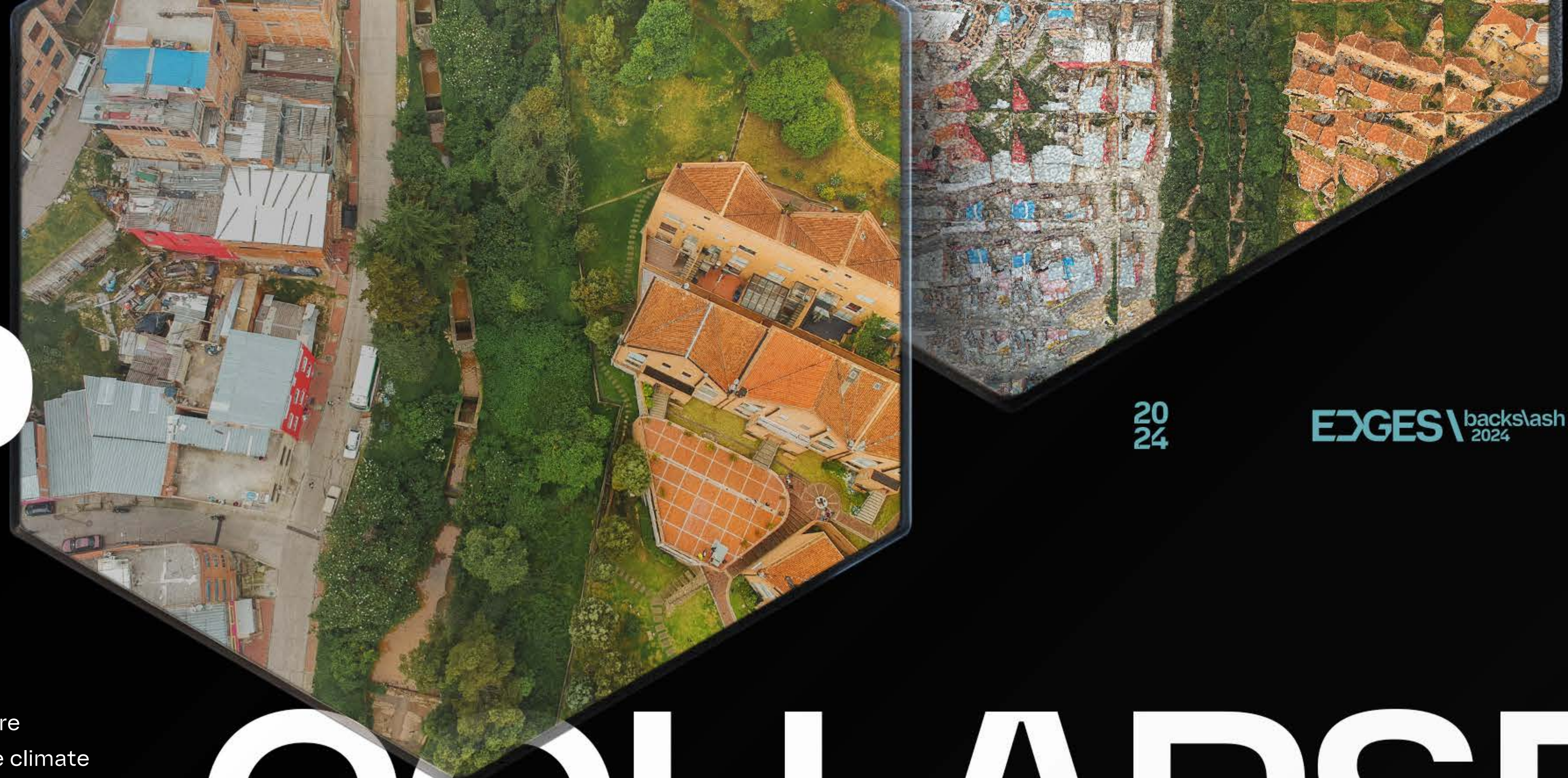
Rather than automatically tearing down and rebuilding from scratch, businesses can save resources by giving existing builds a new lease on life.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ BIO-MATERIALS
- ✗ MODULAR DESIGN
- ✗ CONNECTED OBJECTS
- ✗ WORLDBUILDING



GAP



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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. In the race to rebalance the scales, unlocking access is the next big market opportunity.

COLLAPSE

EXAM EQUALITY

The South Korean government is setting out to fix a long-standing problem that could be tied to its education and population crisis: the college entrance exam. The eight-hour exam is notoriously difficult—putting immense pressure on parents to invest in private tutors and leaving those who can't afford extra classes with a massive disadvantage. To level the playing field, the government has now decided to make the exam easier by removing “killer questions” that aren't typically covered in public school curriculum. The goal, according to Education Minister Lee Ju-ho, is “to break the vicious cycle of private education that increases the burden for parents and subsequently erodes fairness in education.”

MOVE AFRIKA

International music tours—and the economic boost they bring—tend to skip over Africa. A new concert series led by Kendrick Lamar's creative services company and advocacy organization Global Citizen is setting out to change that. The series, called Move Afrika, kicked off in Kigali, Rwanda, in December and will expand to five additional African countries by 2025. Beyond just offering entertainment, the initiative will develop crucial infrastructure that has long prevented major artists from performing in Africa. And the financial impact could be significant. Last year, for example, a one-day music festival in Accra that featured Usher, SZA, and local talent brought in more than \$15 million.

BEAUTY TAX

The “You're not ugly, you're just poor” memes might have started as a joke, but they reflect a very real reality: today's beauty tax is higher than ever. Beyond the now-standard beauty maintenance routines (manicures, hair dye and blowouts, eyebrows, eyelash extensions, teeth whitening, etc.), cosmetic procedures like injectables and surgeries have become readily available and therefore more normalized—further raising the already high bar for what it takes to be considered beautiful today. Those who can't afford these “tweakments” are penalized socially. “Poorly groomed” women stand to earn 40% less than their beautified counterparts, while attractive people are over 20% more likely to be called back for a job interview, and are perceived to be more socially skilled, trustworthy, confident and competent. “If you're white, middle class and you've got a good job, you don't need these things as much,” says Ruth Holliday, professor in Gender and Culture at the University of Leeds. “It's when you're marginalized that this beauty work becomes so much more important.”

COMMUNITY LAND TRUSTS

What if property prices were based on your income? This radical idea is now a reality thanks to a new housing scheme in London. After years of community campaigning, the London borough of Lewisham is experimenting with Community Land Trusts (CLTs)—an equitable housing concept that dates back to the 1960s. Rather than homes being investments for the highest bidders, they become a long-term community stewardship project. These new homes are built by the local community, for the local community, and are sold at a price that will remain affordable to people on average local wages—forever. The success of Citizens House is helping speed up six similar projects throughout London proper. And these developments aren't alone. There are 350 CLTs across England and Wales, with an additional 200 in development.



CLIMATE LOSS AND DAMAGE FUND

In a historic move, wealthy nations responsible for the majority of emissions pledged a combined total of just over \$700M to help compensate countries struggling to cope with loss and damage caused by climate change. The decision was adopted on day one of the 2023 U.N. climate conference, where France and Italy committed \$108M to the fund, Dubai and Germany promised \$100 million, the US pledged \$15.5M, and Japan offered \$10M. But so far, pledges have fallen short of what's needed. A recent report by the United Nations estimates that up to \$387 billion will be needed annually if developing countries are to adapt to climate-driven changes.

YOUTH SPORTS GAP

Physical activity is becoming more and more of a privileged pursuit. A US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study found that 70% of children from families with incomes above about \$105,000 participated in sports in 2020, whereas participation was around 51% for families in a middle-income range, and just 31% for families at or below the poverty line. A combination of factors is responsible. On the one hand, spending cuts have resulted in more public schools cutting physical education classes and organized sports. And at the same time, privatized youth sports leagues have exploded into a multibillion-dollar enterprise. But these leagues come with a high price tag. Between club-team fees, uniforms, equipment, travel to and from tournaments, and private coaching, fewer families are able to afford access to competitive sports. And with participation in sports having significant implications for success later in life, it's an issue that extends far beyond childhood.



SOCIAL SECURITY FOR FOOD

With 3.1 billion people unable to afford healthy food, France and Belgium are trialing "social security for food." Much like how people pay into universal healthcare, citizens in a food security scheme would pay a portion of their salary into a fund. The state would then provide an allowance that enables individuals and families to buy groceries. While both trials are still in their infancy, they're showing early signs of success and are set to expand elsewhere—potentially marking a shift from food as a commodity to food as a universal right.

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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✕ ASSISTIVE ROBOTICS
- ✕ DECENTRALIZED SOCIAL
- ✕ NON-FUNGIBLE EVERYTHING
- ✕ LO-FI DESIGN



GENDER RULES

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.

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MUTING MISOGYNIST LYRICS

The Mexican city of Chihuahua is banning artists from singing misogynist lyrics in live music venues. Artists who defy the law will face a penalty of up to 1.2 million pesos (\$71,000 USD), and all fines will be donated to women's programs and shelters across Chihuahua. The ban comes as gender-based violence reaches "pandemic" levels, with 70% of calls to Chihuahua city police related to domestic violence. Whether or not this measure will be effective in reducing violence remains to be seen. But with art as a reflection of society, it is, without a doubt, making a strong statement about what kind of language will no longer be tolerated.

RIGHT TO COMPETE

Trans rights advocates have warned sports governing bodies that blanket bans on transgender women from competing in women's categories risk "violating fundamental human rights principles." This followed World Athletics (WA) President Sebastian Coe's March 2023 announcement of new regulations, which prohibit "male-to-female transgender athletes" from participating in female world rankings competitions. This means routes to the 2024 Paris Olympics will be closed for female transgender athletes—many of whom are speaking out about their dreams being shattered.

MALE PERMS

Men are mad for perms. Once primarily popular in South Korea, the wavy hairstyle has recently gone global thanks to social media and the meteoric rise of K-pop. On TikTok, videos related to "men perm" have over 3.5 billion views, with many men saying it's a low-effort way to switch up your look and gain some confidence. So why is the look making a comeback now? Just as more men are wearing makeup and rocking nail polish, the rise of the boy perm symbolizes a larger shift away from antiquated male beauty standards.

DOUBLE SURNAMES

A growing number of countries are reevaluating the gender bias that's baked into family naming systems. Last year, Germany announced plans to allow couples to take double-barreled surnames and pass them on to their children for the first time, which could go into effect in 2025 if approved. Similarly, the Netherlands has passed a new act that allows parents to give their children a double surname as of this year. Supporters say these landmark judgments will help erase outdated ideas of a patriarchal family.

GENDERLESS SECONDHAND SHOPPING

Genderless clothing collections have been on the rise over the last several years, with participation from independent labels like WILDFANG, One DNA, mainstream brands like Adidas, and even luxury labels. A less expected driver of the trend though, as pointed out by Refinery29, is the rise of secondhand shopping. Thrift stores have long followed a gender-neutral layout—often organizing clothes by style, decade, or color rather than by "men's" or "women's." And while this fluidity has always been a selling point for queer customers, the mainstream appeal of thrifting now has the potential to reshape the shopping experience for entire generations to come.

Most Gen Z and Millennials feel their gender identities fall on a spectrum, with 63% agreeing that "masculinity" and "femininity" are styles that any gender can try on and take off when they want to.

— YPulse



CRISIS OF MASCULINITY

While the past 50 years have been revolutionary for women, there hasn't exactly been a parallel movement to redefine the role of men in a changing world. As a result, many men are left without a clear blueprint for what it means to "be a man" today, leading to what experts are calling a crisis of masculinity. Part of the problem is that we've been so focused on tearing down the toxic aspects of old-school masculinity that we forgot to rebuild a more positive version. And with men in the Western world falling behind women in education, work, and well-being, the need for nuanced role models and productive conversations is becoming increasingly urgent.

FEMALE HOMEOWNERSHIP REBELLION

For a growing number of single women in China, owning a home is becoming a form of resistance against restrictive gender roles. A recent survey by China Youth Daily found that nearly 94% of respondents approved of single women buying property, with two-thirds saying it signaled a desire for gender equality. Beike Zhaofang, one of the country's biggest online property agencies, has also said that women who either purchase homes on their own or with a partner now make up more than half of their buyers in the southern city of Changsha. This marks a significant shift away from deep-rooted cultural norms where men are expected to buy a home in order to be eligible for marriage—an arrangement that often leaves women at risk of being kicked out in case of an argument or divorce. As one female homeowner explains: "This gives me confidence that if I do get married, I won't be afraid of anything. Even if I leave him, I can live independently."

RECLAIMING GIRLHOOD

Being a Swiftie and expressing a love of Barbie once came with a flavor of shame. But no more. Between the Eras Tour making history as the highest-grossing tour ever and Great Gerwig's "Barbie" becoming the biggest movie of 2023, it's clear that women (and men) of all ages are ready to embrace their femininity on their own terms—giving themselves full permission to be giddy and cheesy and emotional without a hint of irony. It's a new era of less patronizing and more genuine female empowerment—sparkly pink outfits included.

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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

✗ AVATAR IDENTITIES



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 becomes both a lifestyle and a belief system, everyday rituals will get a self-care makeover. Who says the journey to better health can't be enjoyable?

HEALTH HEDONISM

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SMART TATTOOS

Smart tattoos could be the next wearables. These medical tattoos would replace conventional ink with color-changing “functional materials” that detect changes in blood sugar levels, monitor kidney or liver functions, and warn athletes of dehydration. The ink would change colors in response to these changes, allowing for visible, real-time monitoring of what’s happening inside your body. The researchers behind the project believe smart tattoos are the ideal middle ground between wearables and implants. They’re minimally invasive, 100% comfortable, they can’t be hacked, and they’ll never run out of battery. As for what’s next, Dr. Ali Yetisen predicts that “in the next decade, human skin will serve as an interactive display in order to show a wide range of biomarker changes.”

IN-FLIGHT WELLNESS

Australian airline Qantas is introducing the world’s first in-flight Wellness Zone in late 2025, which will offer dedicated space for passengers to stretch, hydrate, and even take part in guided on-screen exercises. On the premium end of the spectrum, private aviation company VistaJet is taking airborne wellness even further with its new Wellness 360 Program. Before even stepping foot on the plane, passengers will consult with VistaJet’s expert nutritionists to ensure their in-flight meals are tailored to their specific health needs. Once in the air, they’ll then enjoy ergonomic seating, daylight simulation technology that helps synchronize their internal body clocks to the time zone of their destination, and access to meditation and breathing apps.

PLENAPAUSA

Menopause, a stigmatized and often ignored stage of a woman’s life, is gaining fresh attention thanks to startups like Plenapausa. The femtech company is the first in Brazil to address menopause care holistically—offering in-depth learning resources, support meetings, products, and customized care journeys. With almost two-thirds of women feeling unprepared for menopause, Plenapausa is aiming to start a more open conversation about the physical, mental, and emotional symptoms that come with it.

SPIRITUAL CONCIERGE

Over the years, wellness amenities like ice baths and in-house spas have become commonplace in luxury buildings. Now, in a bid to stand out, more buildings are upping the ante with “spiritual concierges.” The role of these concierges is to connect residents with mental and emotional health experts. The Maverick Chelsea in New York, for example, offers an on-call spiritual concierge who recommends the best aura readers, reiki healers, and meditation teachers around. Meanwhile, Mexico’s One&Only Mandarin Private Homes employs a spiritual aid—a shaman, to be exact—who leads a traditional Mexican sage ceremony for interested buyers to bless their new homes. These new offerings collide with a more holistic understanding of wellness, which is increasingly expanding to include emotional and spiritual health. According to a recent survey by John Burns Real Estate Consulting, the majority of homeowners and renters say that mental well-being is their top priority when seeking a new property.

WORKOUT DECOR

You no longer need to hide away your ugly workout gear thanks to a new home-training collection from Ikea. All 19 items in the product line (called ‘Dajlien’) are designed to double as home decor, including mint green, donut-shaped dumbbells; a bamboo workout bench that also functions as a coffee table; and exercise mats that resemble stylish rugs. The designers behind the project wanted to ease pressures around doing intense hour-long gym workouts, and instead create items that would inspire people to incorporate movement at home—whether that be having a dance party with your kid or lifting some weights while you’re on the phone. “You could say it’s a bridge between your home and your active life,” says designer Akanksha Deo.



“Wellness is almost an aspirational obsession for some and close to religious dogma for others.”

— Rina Raphael, author of *The Gospel of Wellness*

DEMENTIA VILLAGES

A society looking to age better is trading sterile, isolated senior centers for vibrant communities. Hogeweyks in Amsterdam was one of the first so-called “dementia villages” to pop up in 2009, inspiring the development of [several similar projects](#) around the world. One example is Carpe Diem in Baerum, Norway, where residents are free to roam between an urban square, landscaped spaces, outdoor walking paths, and a “street” with a pub, salon, and boutique. Most notable is that locals of all ages are invited inside the village to participate in activities, dine, or to simply enjoy the grounds. With more than [78 million](#) people expected to be living with dementia by 2030, experts hope these projects will eventually not just resemble real towns, but be real towns that seamlessly integrate seniors with the rest of society.

GROCERY UTOPIAS

As more grocers look to move further into the health and wellness space, it’s predicted that they’ll begin to offer subscriptions that link food and pharmacy options. One supermarket leading the way is Hy-Vee. In May 2023, Hy-Vee [launched](#) a \$99/month “Healthy You” membership program that includes food-as-medicine counseling, preventative health screenings, fitness videos, meal workshops, and more. While Hy-Vee’s program is a good indication of where things are going, it’s only just the start. Looking further ahead, such memberships could also include discounts on healthy food items and relevant medications. And, in an ideal world, their cost would be partially covered by insurance.

CORPORATE COLD PLUNGE

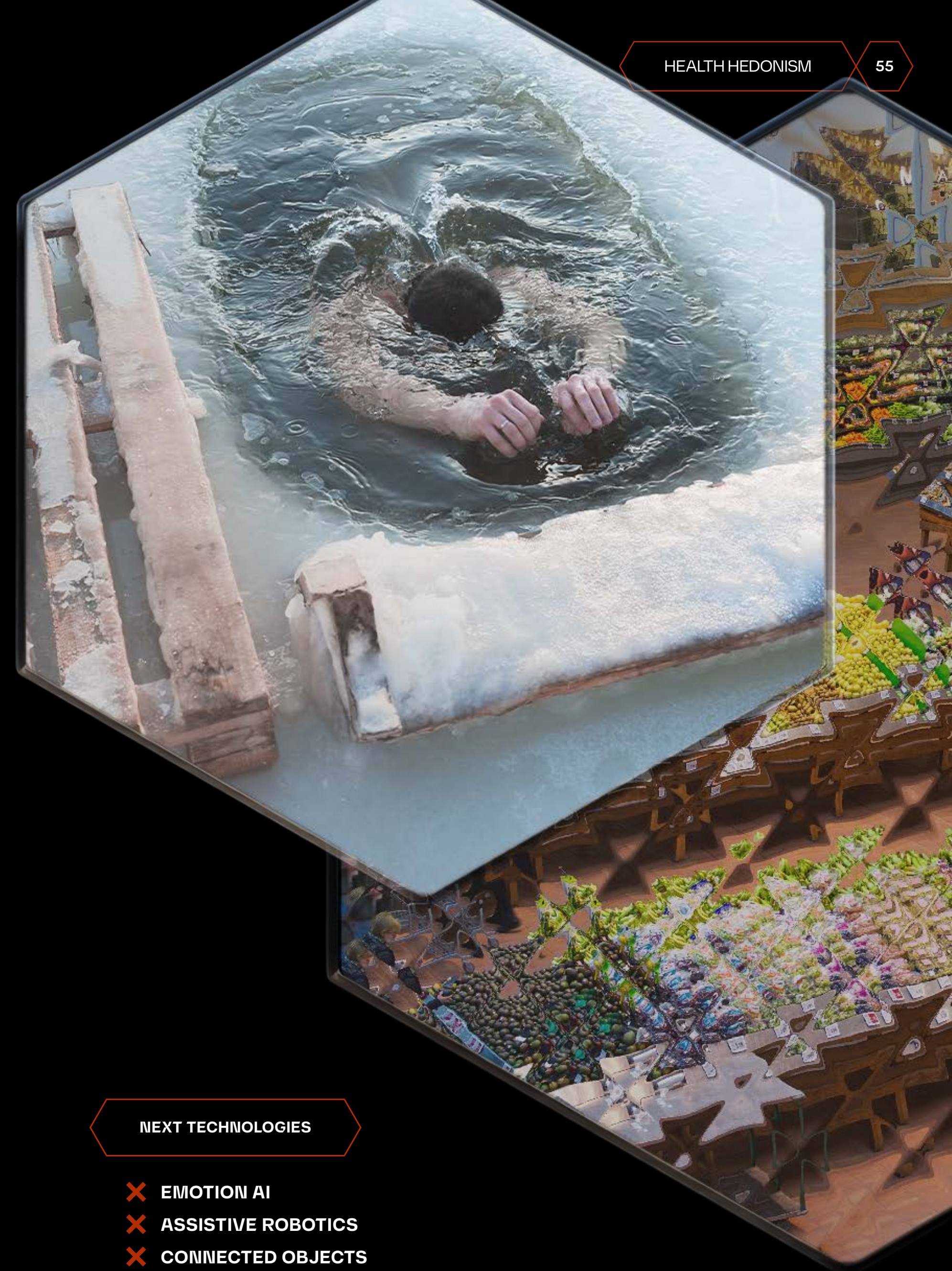
A cultural obsession with wellness has officially spilled over into the business world—making ice baths and infrared saunas the hot new networking spots. Grand Dynamics, a company based in Jackson, Wyoming, that organizes more than 100 executive retreats and team-building events a year, [says](#) more than half its corporate clients now request some type of cold-immersion experience. Meanwhile, social wellness club Remedy Place has also seen an [influx](#) of coworkers coming in to talk business while getting a vitamin drip or doing cryotherapy. For those looking to destress in a healthier way, wellness treatments are the new corporate happy hour.

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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **EMOTION AI**
- ✗ **ASSISTIVE ROBOTICS**
- ✗ **CONNECTED OBJECTS**



HELICOPTER TECH

Governments and brands are monitoring our every move. Whether via smart devices in our homes or cameras on 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.

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ATTENTION TRACKING

Brands spend big money to place advertisements inside professional sports venues. But is anyone actually looking at them? A company called [CrowdIQ](#) is helping marketers figure that out, and they're doing it by taking a whole lot of pictures. CrowdIQ sets up two cameras that snap photos of the crowd every 15 minutes or so, while a third camera that's designed for attention tracking takes a photo every other second. AI then scans the frames and spits out insights on fan demographics and behaviors. More specifically, it can determine the age and gender breakdown of the crowd, what they're wearing (which also indicates which team they're rooting for), and what they're looking at throughout the game. It even collects data around when they leave their seats. Though CrowdIQ insists that its tech can't identify who anybody in the crowd is, it's still an unsettling reminder that we're always being watched.

CLASSROOM EAVESDROPPING

Anxious parents in South Korea are using bugs to [eavesdrop](#) on teachers. These small voice recording devices are integrated into necklaces, badges, or keychains that are sent with their kids to school, allowing parents to listen in on what's happening in the classroom. Accounts of parental spying come amid news reports of teachers abusing their students either verbally or physically. And while teachers understand the concern, they're also expressing frustration over the lack of trust between parents and teachers.

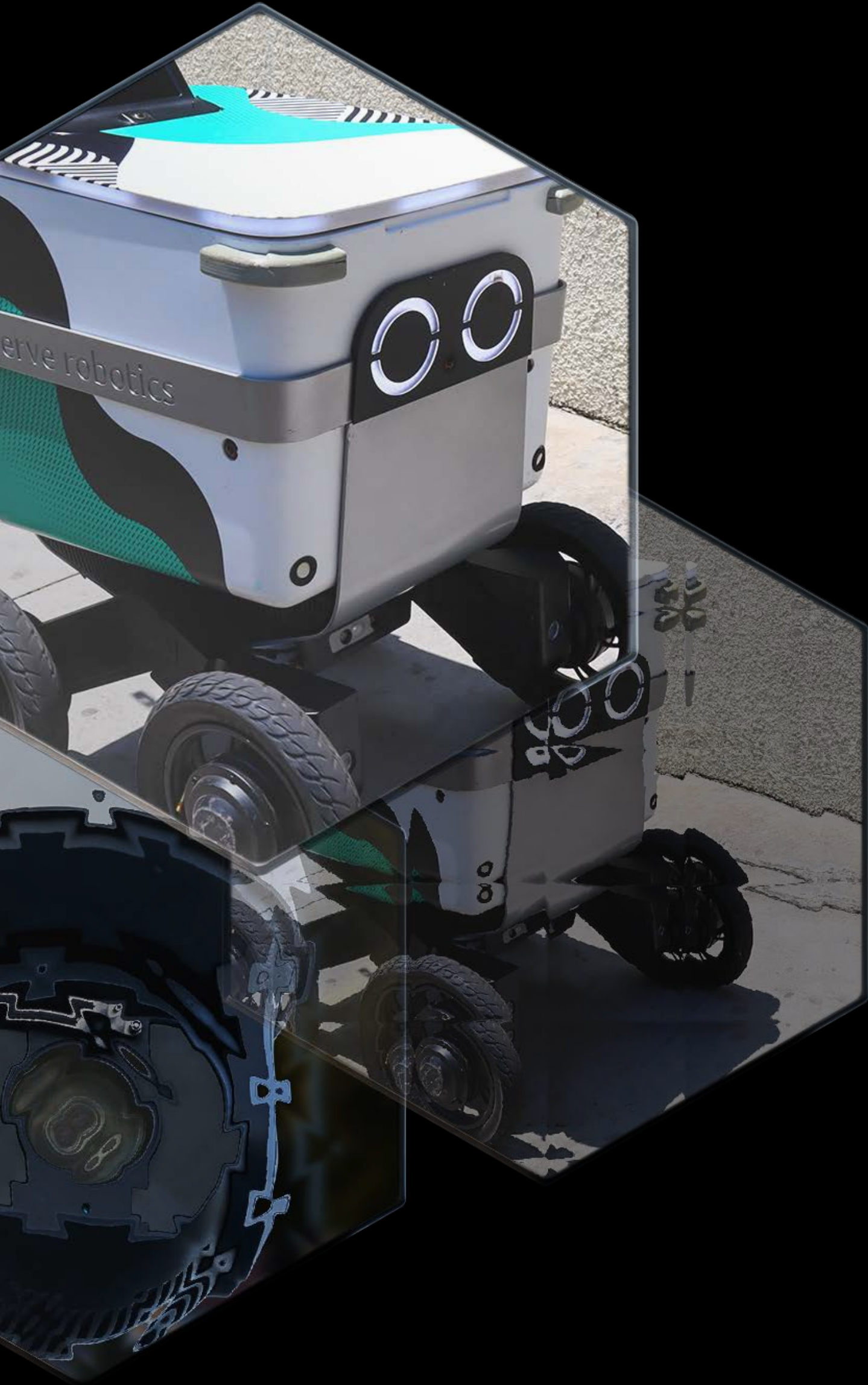
FACIAL RECOGNITION ENTRY POINTS

Your face is quickly becoming [your ticket](#) into everything from flights to theme parks. The US Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is [preparing to expand](#) its controversial facial recognition program to around 430 airports over the next several years after finding "extremely promising" results from its pilot program; Disneyland now takes your picture in order to verify your identification when you leave the park and re-enter; [Carnival Cruise](#) ships takes photos of passengers each time they get on and off the ship to keep track of who's aboard; and visitors to the theme parks on Yas Island in Abu Dhabi can now use a [facial recognition system](#) for entry and to buy food and souvenirs. These systems will increasingly offer shorter lines and fewer physical or digital documents to keep track of, but the added convenience comes at a cost.

SHOPPER SURVEILLANCE

Coles, Australia's second largest grocery chain, is [doubling down](#) on surveillance in order to tackle rising theft. Cameras will now track shoppers as soon as they enter the store, recording where they go and what they pick up. Once they get to the checkout, cameras above the self-checkout machines will track all items being scanned and bagged. If someone tries to leave the store with unscanned items, smart gates will lock them in automatically and an alarm will sound. Staff will also now wear cameras as part of their uniform. These measures are being put in place to combat a 20% rise in store theft, which costs retailers a whopping \$9 billion a year. And Coles isn't the only one fighting back. Other retailers are adding facial recognition technology in order to [identify repeat offenders](#), and Walmart is even [building](#) a police workstation inside a recently opened store in Atlanta.





DELIVERY ROBOT SPIES

Those adorable robots delivering your food might know more than you think. An [investigation](#) found that Serve Robotics, which delivers food for Uber Eats, provided footage filmed by at least one of its robots to the Los Angeles Police Department as evidence in a criminal case. The emails show that these robots, which are becoming a regular sight in cities around the world, can be used for surveillance. Between [delivery robots](#), [autonomous cars](#), and [home security cameras](#), we can expect more video exchanges between tech companies and law enforcement in the future.

META SMART GLASSES

The new generation of [Meta's Smart Glasses](#) are even more stylish and discreet than the last. The high-tech specs look like a regular pair of Ray-Ban Wayfarers, but they're equipped with two tiny cameras and a speaker that allow the wearer to take photos and videos on the sly, and even send them to friends in real time via a simple voice command. Most notably of all, Smart Glasses wearers can now livestream footage directly to Instagram and Facebook. Privacy advocates warn that these glasses will make it even harder to tell who might be recording a video or sneakily snapping pictures in public. So next time you see someone wearing Ray-Bans, you might want to take a closer look.

ACTIVE LISTENING

People have long been paranoid that their phones are listening in on their conversations. So much so, that Facebook even [had to come out](#) and publicly deny it. But as it turns out, some marketing companies might be listening after all—or at least, they're claiming to be. In paperwork used to attract new clients, a marketing team at Cox Media Group (CMG) says it listens to customers through the embedded microphones in their smartphones, smart TVs, and other devices in order to serve them targeted ads in real time, [404 Media](#) reports. The document stated that "Yes, our phones are listening to us," and "CMG has tech capabilities to use to your business advantage." The post has since been removed, but it has left many people even more skeptical of the several devices in their home that may or may not be tuned in.

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.
- **GIVE 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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ AMBIENT INTERFACES
- ✗ CONNECTED OBJECTS
- ✗ UNTETHERED AUDIO

INCLUSIVE BY

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

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DESIGN

“Inclusivity is not a single action or target, but an ongoing practice that encompasses everything from physical access to racial equity, gender parity and more. Brands that recognize this are increasingly leading cultural conversations—and those that don't are falling behind.”

— Emilia Morano-Williams, Senior Editor of Consumer Attitudes & Technology, Stylus

SENSORY-FRIENDLY SPACES

Between fluorescent lights, loud music, and busy crowds, public spaces can be extremely overwhelming for people with sensory issues. Thankfully, brands are starting to take note. Walmart recently [announced](#) the return of sensory-friendly shopping hours where TV displays will go static, the radio will be turned off, and lights will be dimmed; every U. Legoland Resort is now a [Certified Autism Center](#) with sensory guides, quiet rooms and planning resources; and AMC Theatres offers sensory-friendly movie [showings](#) where the lights are turned up and the sound turned down. The shift is taking place in the tourism sector too. One leader to watch is Phillip Island Nature Parks, which is working to transform the entire island into Australia's first [sensory-inclusive](#) tourist town.

NEURODIVERGENT JOB MATCHING

Unemployment for neurodivergent adults runs at least as high as [30% to 40%](#)—three times the rate for people with disability and eight times the rate for people without disability. Yet research shows that neurodivergent employees can make teams [up to 30%](#) more productive when placed in the right environment. Helping to bridge that gap is Mentra—a startup leveraging AI to match neurodivergent jobseekers with their ideal position. Built by three autistic co-founders and backed by funding from Sam Altman, Mentra is bringing diversity of thought to some of the world's biggest companies.

ADAPTIVE INTIMATES

For the first time, Victoria's Secret has [introduced](#) a collection of bras and panties specifically designed for women with disabilities. Among the collection's adaptive features are magnetic closures, sensory-friendly fabric, fully adjustable and convertible front straps, and underwear with magnetic side closures. The retailer developed the collection in consultation with GAMUT Management, a consulting firm that works with and for people with disabilities. VS & PINK Adaptive is significant not just because it comes from a mainstream retailer, but because it's proving that accessible intimates can be comfortable, functional, and sexy all at the same time.

NIXING GENERATIONAL LABELS

Pew Research Center is taking a refreshing new stance on generational reporting. Last year, the think tank [announced](#) that they'll “only do generational analysis when we have historical data that allows us to compare generations at similar stages of life.” In other words, when Pew researchers want to look at people born around the same time, they won't be looking at whether young adults today are different from older adults, but how young adults today compared to young adults previously. The intent is to move away from flashy headlines that reduce an entire generation to a single stereotype, such as that Baby Boomers are “[selfish](#)”, Gen Xers are “[cynical and disaffected](#)”, Millennials are “[entitled and lazy](#)”, and Gen Zers are “[civic-minded](#).” As more marketers and media companies follow suit, we could soon see less clickbait and more nuanced insights.



FEEL THE MUSIC

Just because the deaf community can't hear music doesn't mean they can't feel it. Just ask [Music: Not Impossible](#), an innovation studio using haptic suits to make musical experiences more accessible. The company's wearable device consists of two ankle bands, two wristbands, and a backpack—all of which translate individual notes of music into specific vibrations. Deaf composer and musician Jay Alan Zimmerman explains that “[vibrations] can go directly to your body at the exact same moment, and there's real potential for you to actually feel music in your body.” While originally designed for the deaf community, Music: Not Impossible's technology is elevating music for everyone. At a recent silent disco in New York City, for instance, all attendees—including people with and without hearing loss—wore the suit for a shared tactile experience.

OKY PHILIPPINES

Oky Philippines is a menstrual health app made by Filipino girls, for Filipino girls. It includes a period tracker, educational information, and daily cards featuring quizzes, mood tracking, and a journal—all of which have been specialized to fit the social and cultural context of the Philippines, where periods still carry a heavy stigma. Diversity was a key focus of the development process as well. To ensure a range of needs were accounted for, the project team consulted with indigenous peoples, out-of-school youth, and children with disabilities all across the Philippines. They also partnered with the local government in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao to share reproductive health information from an Islamic perspective.

SILENT UNITY

In May 2023, sign language was recognized by law as South Africa's 12th official language. A few months later marked Deaf Awareness Month and the start of the Rugby World Cup, providing a perfect platform to amplify support for the deaf community. Recognizing the opportunity, TBWA\Hunt Lascaris teamed up with the St. Vincent School for the Deaf to translate a "gwijo" (a song of encouragement that's deeply imbedded in local culture) into sign language. "We knew it would take all our voices to rally the Boks, all 60 million of us," said Nomsa Chabeli, GM, brand and marketing, MTN SA. "But we quickly realized that over 4 million South Africans expressed their support in another unique and beautiful way, in our country's newest official language."

VC DIVERSITY REPORTING

As of March 1, 2025, any venture capital firm operating in the state of California will be required to publicly report the diversity of the founders they are backing each year—including their race, disability status, and whether they're a member of the LGBTQ+ community. Given California accounts for nearly 50% of the world's venture capital, the landmark law will have far-reaching impacts. And it may be the start of a much larger transparency movement. According to tech policy advocates who helped ideate the bill, they are "already in discussions with leaders in other states and countries who are interested in enacting similar policies."

LEVI'S ARTIFICIAL DIVERSITY

Last year, Levi's announced that it would be experimenting with AI-generated avatars as a way to increase the diversity of models that shoppers see online. The tech would allow the brand to show its products on a nearly endless range of body types, sizes, ethnicities, and ages—something they said would be "impossible" to do with human casting alone. But not everyone was convinced. Even though Levi's explained that AI models were just one of several efforts being made to improve representation, people were quick to point out that hiring and paying actual models of different races and body types is a much more equitable way to achieve the same goal.

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.

→ DESIGN FOR ONE, SCALE TO MANY

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.

→ PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES

VR can help people literally see the world from a different perspective, whether that be from the vantage point of a wheelchair or through the eyes of someone who is visually impaired. With more firsthand experiences will come more inclusive designs.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✕ BESPOKE LLMS
- ✕ ASSISTIVE ROBOTICS
- ✕ UNTETHERED AUDIO
- ✕ MADE MODULAR
- ✕ TACTILE HAPTICS





INCLEMENT ARMOR

Extreme weather is no longer extreme—it's our new normal. As we acclimate to a future of record-breaking temperatures and frequent natural disasters, the need for protections will reshape everything from what we wear to how we work. Weather-proof armor is becoming an essential shield from a world that feels out of our control.

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COOLING APPAREL

With 2023 going down as the hottest year in human history, fashion is being reconstructed to keep us cool. Jackets, vests and hats with built-in fans, used for years by Japanese construction workers, are now being redesigned as casual wear for general consumers. Researchers in China are also working on clothes that reflect roughly 90% of the sun's rays so it can stay 5C cooler than the midday air. And Renkun Chen, a professor of University of California at San Diego, is designing clothes that come with built-in air-conditioning. "There will come a time when people will need to wear cooling clothing with sensors just to walk across the street," predicts James Russell, co-founder of smart apparel company Techniche. "It's not tomorrow. It's not the next day. [But] it's absolutely inevitable."

EARLY WEATHER WARNINGS

In the face of climate breakdown all over the world, multi-hazard early warning systems are becoming more advanced and widespread. Notable updates from last year include Hong Kong launching a three-tier warning system to reduce the risk of heatstroke among outdoor workers; France sending its first-ever emergency weather alerts during storms in July; Singapore introducing a heat stress indicator on the myENV app; and Africa investing in an AI model that will better predict future weather events. Despite the positive progress, though, the reality is that less than half of the world's least-developed countries have access to these systems, creating a worrisome protection gap that the UN is determined to close by 2027.

DROUGHT INSURANCE

In June 2023, Hillridge and Mitsui Sumitomo Insurance Group (MSIG) Vietnam entered into a partnership to launch a first-of-its-kind insurance product to protect Vietnamese farmers against drought. The company recently visited coffee-growing areas across Vietnam's Central Highlands, where farmers shared how increasingly frequent droughts have caused their crops to fail—severely impacting their harvest, yields, and livelihoods. And with El Niño threatening dry conditions for much of Vietnam, similar products will be needed to account for worsening weather volatility.

AIR-PURIFYING STROLLER

With alarming rates of air pollution present in urban centers, air-purifying products are becoming a city dweller's best friend. Answering this growing demand is Swedish brand Thule, which has unveiled an air purifier canopy that attaches onto their Shine stroller. The canopy uses quiet fans and HEPA filters to suck in dirty air and release a purified breeze around the baby, providing 150 liters of filtered air every minute. The only downside is the high price tag. The canopy costs EUR 499.95 (on top of the stroller itself selling for EUR 699.95)—highlighting the need for more accessible solutions that protect the most vulnerable groups.

"Climate change is here, now. It's not far away in the Antarctic and it's not off in the future. It's these climate-change-fueled extreme weather events that we are all living through."

— Michael Mann, climate scientist at the University of Pennsylvania

NATURAL DISASTER VENDING MACHINE

Japan's street vending machines are getting a disaster preparedness makeover. In the western coastal city of Aki—where a powerful "megaquake" is expected to hit in the next 20 to 40 years—Earth Corp has installed special vending machines that will automatically unlock in the case of emergency, providing hundreds of food and drink items for free. While the machines are the first of their kind in Japan, they won't be the last. Earth Corp is planning to install additional units throughout the country—which not only experiences frequent earthquakes, but has more recently been hit with powerful typhoons. Earlier this year, a vending machine that automatically issues emergency broadcasts was also set up in Tokyo.



COOL-CATIONS

Rising temperatures are already altering travel habits, driving tourists to avoid the hottest summer months or skip once-popular destinations altogether. This is being confirmed by Intrepid Travel, which saw the most bookings in September and October last year. Those are traditionally part of the “shoulder seasons,” which may now be turning into peak seasons in their own right. Beyond offering travel insurance for extreme heat—a solution being explored by US startup Sensible Weather—companies should use this shift as an opportunity to combat overtourism by driving people to less-crowded destinations.

DESIGNED TO FLOOD

A recently opened athletic facility in New York sits waterfront, making it highly susceptible to flooding due to extreme rainfall and storm surges linked to climate change. But instead of trying to keep water out, the building is designed to let it in. In a major flood, a network of vents will open to let water flow into the first floor, from the lobby and locker room to the tennis courts, and then out of the building when the flood is over. When stormwater subsides, the tennis courts can be cleaned off and then immediately used again. The design team studied scenarios for sea-level rise and storms up to the year 2100 to work on the plans, far surpassing current New York City requirements. “Those flood maps are outdated—they’re looking backward, not looking forward 80 years,” says project manager Tyler Hinkley.



WORKER HEAT PROTECTIONS

Climate change is officially a labor issue. Not only is extreme heat wreaking havoc on the economy—with worker productivity losses due to extreme heat costing nations hundreds of billions of dollars—but much more alarming is the fact that it’s threatening the lives of millions of laborers. And while fans, cooling apparel, and heat stress wearables are all helpful in reducing risk, the reality is that companies will need to be prepared to completely restructure work around extreme weather. In the agriculture industry, for example, more farmers are switching to night harvesting in order to avoid working at the hottest times of day. Other changes might include mandatory breaks in shaded or air conditioned areas, training people to look out for signs of heat stress in their coworkers, and most importantly, coming up with a contingency plan for the growing number of days when it will simply be too hot to work. → For more, watch Backslash’s episode of Life on the Edge: Worker Heat Protections

WHAT’S NEXT

→ ADDRESS THE UNDERLYING PROBLEM

While smart clothes and warning systems offer an immediate fix, we can’t overlook the root cause of extreme weather. Any companies offering band-aid solutions should also be prepared to address how they’re tackling climate change for the long term.

→ CLOSE THE GAP

Protection shouldn’t be a privilege. Prioritize low-cost solutions that can be made available to the most at-risk groups first.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ ASSISTIVE ROBOTICS
- ✗ CONNECTED OBJECTS
- ✗ BESPOKE LLMS

AI is getting personal. While we've come to accept that AI has the potential to solve humanity's biggest challenges, the next step is normalizing its role as a sidekick in our daily lives. Whether treated as a companion, teacher, or administrative assistant, new AI tools will free people from time-intensive tasks and elevate habitual actions into special moments.

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GPT STORE

OpenAI has launched an online store where people can share customized versions of the company's popular ChatGPT chatbot—meaning an explosion of highly specialized AI assistants is upon us. So far, people have made more than 3 million custom chatbots. And if you can dream it, they can do it. There are bots that teach math to children, develop colorful cocktail recipes, act as a therapist, recommend hiking trails, design logos, and much, much more. The product, called the [GPT Store](#), will eventually allow people to profit from their creations much like they might through the app stores of Apple or Google.

HUMANE'S AI SMART PIN

From [Meta's Ray-Ban Smart Glasses](#), to [Tab](#), to the [Rewind Pendant](#), an emerging category of wearables are giving users always-on access to AI companions. The latest device to capture attention is [Humane's AI Smart Pin](#). The square device magnetically attaches to your clothes, and the idea is that you can give it commands by simply talking to it or touching it. You might ask it to call someone, catch you up on your emails, provide the nutritional information of the food you're looking at, or translate a sign in front of you. The hands-free, screen-free gadget is pushing us one step further to the vision of personal AI made popular by the movie *Her*.

"Artificial intelligence is extending what we can do with our abilities. In this way, it's letting us become more human."

— Yann LeCun, Turing Award-winning French computer scientist

CUSTOMIZABLE AI FRIEND

Late last year, [news broke](#) that Instagram is reportedly building an "AI friend" feature. According to screenshots shared by app researcher Alessandro Paluzzi, users would be able to chat with the AI to "answer questions, talk through any challenges, brainstorm ideas, and much more." This digital pal would be fully customizable down to gender, age, name, looks, and personality. For instance, you could select whether you want it to be reserved, witty, pragmatic, or empowering, and even assign it different specialties like DIY projects, nature, career, or music. The news came a month after the release of Meta's [celebrity AI chatbots](#), leaving many to question the implications of a world where it's possible to build your own digital companion.

AI CO-PARENTING

A new class of smart devices is turning AI into a co-parent. Some are designed to boost social and cognitive development, like [CATI](#)—a plush toy robot companion that helps kids sharpen their conversational skills and relays progress reports back to parents. Some are taking the guesswork out of parenting, like [Q-bear](#) and [Capella](#)—both of which are promising to translate baby cries in order to determine if they're hungry, tired, in need a diaper change, or seeking comfort. And others are providing on-demand advice, like [ParentGPT](#)—an AI tool that connects new parents with trusted health specialists for just \$5 a month. With all of these innovations, moms and dads are being given an extra layer of support that makes it possible to rely less on intuition and more on data.

WHOO COACH

Hyper-personalized health coaching is becoming more widely available thanks to fitness company WHOOP. Through a partnership with OpenAI, the company is launching [WHOO Coach](#)—an advanced generative AI feature that will leverage biometric data to create custom recipes and training plans, as well as answer questions like "Why am I so tired today?" or "Am I about to get sick?" An annual membership will cost you \$239, making the feature more accessible than paying for unlimited, on-demand access to a personal trainer and nutritionist.



Over 4,000 apps added "chatbot" to their description in 2023, and over 3,500 added "gpt."

— Data.ai, State of Mobile 2024



OUTSOURCING EMOTIONAL LABOR

Wedding vows and wedding speeches are meant to be among the most personal things you'll ever write. But what if they're written by AI? Does it become meaningless? These questions are being asked more and more as people begin outsourcing this so-called "emotional labor" to ChatGPT. For those who don't want to go the DIY route, there are now even paid services like ToastWiz that allow you to plug in your "stories and feelings" then generate three unique wedding toasts for \$30. While some say these tools are a harmless way to relieve public speaking anxiety, others fear that they'll only result in recycled clichés that lack true humanity.

AI SCHOOL STAFF

Cottesmore School, a boarding prep school in West Sussex, is going all in on AI. The school recently appointed two AI chatbots to the school's executive staff, including a vice principal named Abigail and a Head of AI named Jamie. Abigail will assist the school's headmaster in writing school policies, helping neurodivergent students, and giving advice on how to support fellow staff members, while Jamie will teach classes in addition to overseeing all AI strategies. In addition, students will be given their own AI robots to help them based on their individual learning styles—a strategy the headmaster says is meant to teach kids how to make bots their "benevolent servants."

MICROSOFT 365 COPILOT

Personal assistants are no longer just for C-suite executives. With Microsoft 365 Copilot, everyone can have access to their very own helper. The tool is embedded into the most popular work apps—Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, Teams, and more—automating mundane tasks and upskilling you along the way. For example, it can clear your inbox in minutes by summarizing long email threads and quickly drafting suggested replies; it can summarize notes and next steps from virtual Teams meetings; and even turn an idea into a working app in minutes. Even more impressive is the Business Chat feature, which responds to natural language prompts by leveraging data across all your apps. So if you ask it to "Tell me team how we updated the product strategy," it will generate a status update based on the morning's meetings, emails, and chat threads. Among developers who use Copilot, 88% say they are more productive and 74% say that they can focus on more satisfying work.

WHAT'S NEXT

- GO DEEPER
AI will allow brands to extend their role further into the product experience—suggesting different ways to enjoy it, personalize it, and repair it.
- EXPLORE NEW WAYS TO STAND OUT
What if your brand's most distinctive asset was its voice and personality?
- CONSIDER TAKING AN ANTI-AI STANCE
As AI is integrated into anything and everything, some people will inevitably crave a return to more human, manual, and offline experiences. Brands who counter the trend will serve as a refreshing escape from tech overload.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ BESPOKE LLMS
- ✗ AMBIENT INTERFACES
- ✗ ASSISTIVE ROBOTICS

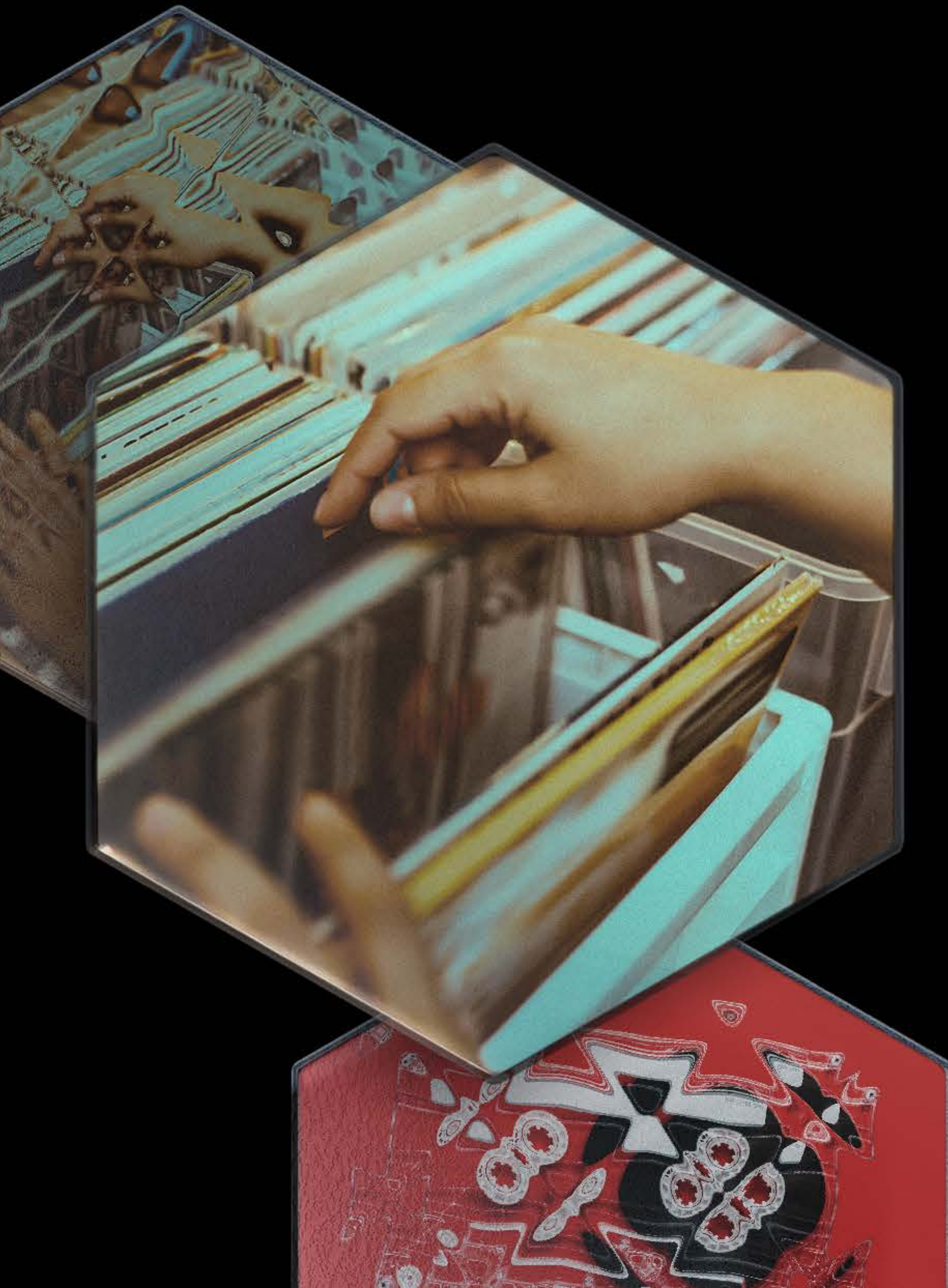
The allure of childlike joys is stronger than ever. A generation of adults under pressure is granting itself permission to play—turning juvenile hobbies and old-school comforts into cheerful acts of resistance against grown-up rules. Nostalgia’s stock is going up in price.

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PLUSH TOY TARGETS

Remember the joy of squeezing a plush toy as a kid? Well, the furry hugs don't have to stop at adulthood. A growing number of kidults are purchasing plush toys as a source of nostalgic comfort, helping the category grow 4% last year while all other toy sales were down 8%. Squishmallows and Jellycat are two fan favorites, driving 6.3B and 954M views respectively on TikTok. The cuddly toys are especially popular among adults with anxiety or sensory issues.

ADULT REVOLT

The traditional markers of adulthood (and life success) are changing due to a rising cost of living and shifting societal norms. Pets are the new kids, having a good work-life balance is now just as aspirational as owning a home, and romantic partnerships are no longer the top priority, as evidenced by Australia's first home guarantee redefining couples to include friends and siblings. As diverse family structures are celebrated and milestones are hit out of order, we'll replace the pressures of adulthood with a more fluid, less judgmental approach.

ON-SCREEN JOY

The Barbie movie was just the beginning of Mattel's cinematic universe. Following the success of the hot pink film, Mattel is now planning to make 14 more movies centered around its toy franchises—and they're being made with adult viewers in mind. Barney has been described by execs as a live-action film that's "more adult with adult themes – a little bit off-kilter." Polly Pocket is being written and directed by Lena Dunham, who hinted that she's aiming for a "smart playful" film that speaks to young women "without condescension." And Hot Wheels producers are calling

the film "grounded and gritty" with "real characters you can relate to." These upcoming films mark a drastic shift away from the dramatic, darker themes that have long ruled the box office—proving that joyful entertainment deserves to be taken just as seriously.

RETRO REVAMP

Gen Z's longing for simpler times is translating to rising demand for simplified, old-school tech. Apps like NoSpace are aiming to "make social media fun again" by replicating the Myspace design and features of the late 2000s. Vinyl albums outsold CDs in 2022 for the first time since 1987, while CDs and cassettes are also seeing a continued resurgence. And ultra-sharp cameras are facing new competition from low-fi cameras on the Nintendo DS. In a time when music is streamed from apps and you can take a perfect photo with just a tap of the finger, these throwback devices offer a novel escape from digital overload. As one 22-year-old CD collector puts it: "I like the collectible aspect of CDs and also just like the [feeling] of going into a store and buying something rather than going on Spotify and adding it to your playlist."

THE BLUEY WAVE

Bluey, the beloved Australian children's show, is striking a chord with adults due to its emotional depth. The show has broached tough but relatable topics like infertility, neurodiversity, and mortality, while also providing a much-needed dose of lighthearted joy. Its modern portrayal of family life is a big plus too. Over 80,000 real-life fathers have joined a Facebook group for fans of Bluey's beloved dad, Bandit, who always shows up but is wonderfully imperfect. Though Bluey may have started out as a cartoon "for kids," the show is demonstrating the power of universal storytelling.



BIG KID WATER BLASTERS

With so many adults buying toys meant for kids, it was only a matter of time before companies started making toys specifically for adults. Two companies catching on are German startup Spyra and Chinese tech titan Xiaomi—both of which are making electric water guns with grown-up features like LCD screens, LEDs, USB connectivity, and even gaming modes. These big kid water blasters may have a sleek, futuristic look, but they're designed for good old-fashioned backyard fun.

BARBIECORE

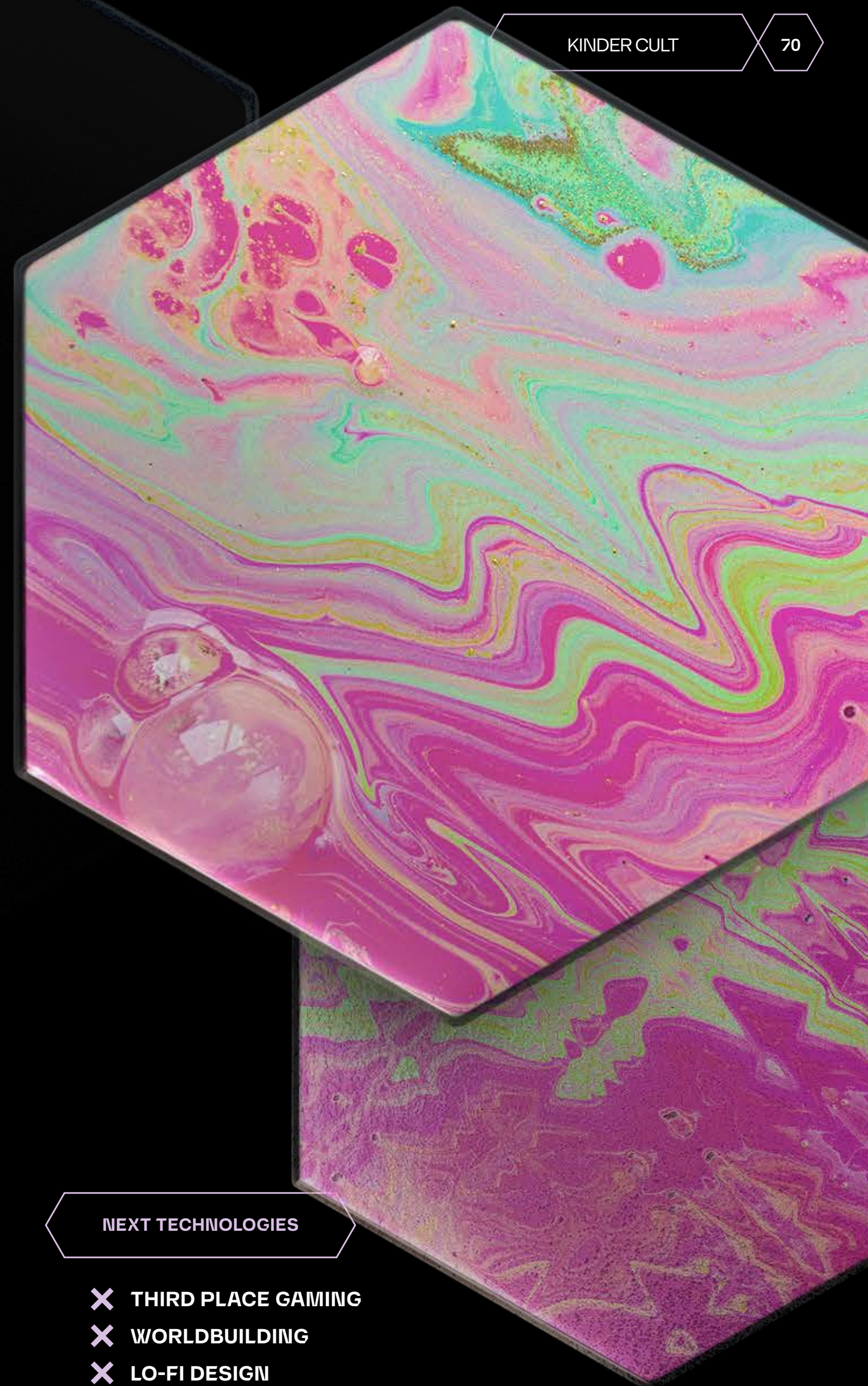
Ahead of the release of Greta Gerwig's much-anticipated Barbie movie, a wave of brand collaborations transported fans straight into Barbie Land. Airbnb gave enthusiasts the chance to stay at Barbie's Malibu DreamHouse. Fashion giants like Aldo, Gap, Cotton On, and Crocs launched special Barbie-inspired collections. And food retailers like Malaysia's Inside Scoop ice cream shop and Hong Kong's Flash Coffee went all in on pink stores and pink flavors. The success of these activations, along with the fact that adults were dressing up to see the film and even redecorating their homes, goes to show just how eager people were to tap into their inner child.

"In most developed countries, the birth rate is dropping—which risks a reduction in the overall toy market size. But the great savior, potentially, are toys developed with mostly adults in mind."

— Steve Reece, author of the Toy Industry Journal

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. Go beyond the clichés and 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.



NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **THIRD PLACE GAMING**
- ✗ **WORLDBUILDING**
- ✗ **LO-FI DESIGN**

LAB-MADE

A hand wearing a blue nitrile glove is shown working with several petri dishes. The dishes contain white agar with various colorful microbial colonies in shades of blue, green, and yellow. The scene is set in a laboratory environment with a white surface.

Food, gems, textiles: the future is being grown in a lab. While “all-natural” has long been positioned as the superior choice, our current environmental reality calls for a different approach. One that starts with science. As resources run out and supply chains fall under scrutiny, “lab-made” will go from sterile and apologetic to responsible and aspirational.

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RED LIGHT, GREEN LIGHT

Despite all the chatter about how the shift to lab-made will impact food cultures around the world, we're still a long way away from a global consensus. Just two countries, Singapore and the US, have so far approved the sale of lab-grown meat. And China included cultivated meat in its five-year agricultural plan that was announced in 2022, meaning it could very well be the next country to give the green light. But there's one clear outlier. Last year, Italy made the controversial move to ban lab-made foods, citing the need to protect the country's prized culinary heritage. While agricultural groups applauded the ban, animal welfare organizations now face a major setback as Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni rallies support for "natural food versus synthetic food." → For more, watch Backslash's episode of [Life on the Edge: Cultivating Food's Future](#)

ARTIFICIAL BREAST MILK

The parenting world is fraught with guilt and pressure around the best way to feed your baby. But with breastfeeding—the gold standard for infant nutrition—not always an option, families are hungry for a promising alternative. Enter: US startup [Biomilk](#). Inspired by their own struggles with breastfeeding, Biomilk founders Leila Stickland and Michelle Egger are creating a lab-made breast milk replica that better matches the nutritional profile of breast milk than formula, with more similar proportions of proteins, carbohydrates and fats. One limit of lab-grown milk, though, is that it cannot replicate the antibodies or the beneficial gut bacteria found in a mother's breast milk.

GENE-EDITED GREENS

Between lettuce, trees, and houseplants, greenery is getting a genetically modified makeover. In the kitchen, Pairwise is [rolling out](#) a new type of mustard greens engineered to be less bitter than the original plant—marking the first Crispr-edited food to hit the US market. In the forest, biotech company Living Carbon is [planting trees](#) that have been genetically engineered to grow wood at turbocharged rates while removing carbon dioxide from the air. And in the home, Parisian startup Neoplants is [pushing](#) genetically modified houseplants that could help combat indoor air pollution. As gene-enhanced greenery moves out of the lab and into our everyday environments, we could see the start of a competitive new product category.

LAB-GROWN TEXTILES

Many of the materials we've come to know and love are taking a serious toll on the planet. Popular fabrics like cotton typically require huge amounts of water to grow, and the environmental impact of materials such as wool and leather has come under criticism for taking up land and producing methane. A growing number of startups are aiming to solve the problem by recreating textiles in a lab. [Singapore's ProjectEx](#) is working on the world's first cultivated exotic leather; Boston startup [Galv](#) is making cotton grown from cells instead of plants; and a company called [Modern Synthesis](#) is growing biotextiles from microbes. As investments pour in, lab-made textiles could redefine conscious luxury for fashion, furniture, and more.

"Our preference for naturalness is already holding us back from a range of other behaviors with population-level benefits. One of these is the adoption of lab-grown meat."

— [Behavioral Scientist](#)

MAMMOTH MEATBALL

Would you eat a meatball made from a woolly mammoth? [Vow Food](#) doesn't care if the answer is yes or no, they just want to get your attention. The Aussie lab-made meat company created the [Mammoth Meatball](#) as a stunt in order to highlight the link between large-scale livestock production and the destruction of our planet. "We chose the woolly mammoth because it's a symbol of diversity loss and a symbol of climate change," explains Vow co-founder Tim Noakesmith. The company's greater mission is to convert meat eaters into lab-made meat eaters. And they're taking a unique approach. Rather than replicating conventional proteins like chicken or steak, Vow is experimenting with more exotic animals. The company has already investigated the potential of more than 50 species, including alpaca, buffalo, crocodile, kangaroo, peacocks and different types of fish. The first cultivated meat to be sold to diners will be Japanese quail, which the company expects to be available in restaurants in Singapore soon.

FUTURE FERTILITY

Biotech startup [Conception Bioessences](#) is working toward a fertility option that could enable lab-grown human eggs to be nurtured—potentially revolutionizing human reproduction as we know it. The company's goal is to accelerate and commercialize a process called in vitro gametogenesis (IVG), whereby an induced pluripotent stem cell is turned into a human egg. This would open the door for people who currently don't have other fertility options, such as women who have lost their eggs due to cancer treatment or whose eggs are no longer viable due to their age. It would also allow same-sex couples to have biological children together for the first time ever. With several other labs racing toward the same goal, the future of fertility looks promising.

THE YEAR OF THE LAB-GROWN DIAMOND

While not new, lab-made diamonds are shaking up the industry like never before. So much so, that Business of Fashion declared 2023 "[The Year of the Lab-Grown Diamond](#)." Sales of man-made stones have increased from under \$1 billion in 2016 to just under \$12 billion in 2022—motivating DTC players like [Mejuri](#) to [launch](#) lab-made diamonds for the first time and forcing other established giants, like DeBeers, to cut prices of traditional mined stones by [as much as 40%](#). But beyond the numbers, the most notable shift has to do with perception. While people were once ashamed to admit their bling was made in a lab, they're now proudly promoting their more ethical choice.

ANIMAL-FREE DAIRY

Alternative meats may be getting the most attention, but the culinary world's shift to lab-grown doesn't stop there. The dairy industry is ripe for disruption, too, with [milk](#), [cheese](#), [ice cream](#), [yogurt](#), and even [eggs](#) now being made through precision fermentation—a process whereby sustainable protein ingredients are produced from microbes rather than traditional farms. And with big names like [Nestlé](#) investing in this new technology, we could very well see cultivated dairy products give plant-based alternatives a run for their money.

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?

→ 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 endorsements from trusted third parties

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✕ BIO-MATERIALS
- ✕ ASSISTIVE ROBOTICS



It's the end of reality as we know it. From synthetic media to the rise of virtual everything, immersive technologies are 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 engagement abound.

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LIQUID REALITY



40% of Gen Z Roblox users say they find it easier to present their authentic selves in the metaverse than in the physical world.

— [Roblox 2023 Digital Expression, Fashion & Beauty Trends](#)

LEWDTUBERS

Virtual cam girls, better known as [LewdTubers](#), are pushing the boundaries of online sex work. These streamers are real people, but they remain fully anonymous via anime-style avatars that mirror their actual movements and facial expressions through webcam-tracking software. They've become so popular in recent years that there's even a [directory](#) to help fans navigate them all. In a world where sex work still carries a stigma, LewdTubers say the anonymity helps them live a normal life without facing discrimination from family members or potential employers. But more than that, appearing as an avatar means there are limitless ways to express yourself. "This allows more niche or 'physically impossible' fetishes to be feasible, like, you can literally be a giantess or a monster girl," explains LewdNeko.

APPLE VISION PRO

Apple's highly anticipated mixed reality headset is marking a new era of integration between the real world and the digital one. "It's the first Apple product you look through, and not at," said CEO Tim Cook. The Vision Pro will overlay digital elements over your physical environment, which users can control with their eyes, voice and hands. In other words, no controller is required. Users can also "relive" past memories with 180-degree video—a feature some have [described](#) as an emotional experience.

CONTENT CLONES

Chinese influencers, particularly those in the e-commerce space, are increasingly using [digital clones](#) of themselves to pump out content 24/7. This near-constant livestreaming allows them to maximize their earnings, but also comes at the cost of authenticity. And there's a lot of gray area. In October 2023, the Chinese government published draft guidelines saying that individuals to be cloned using AI should provide written consent for their biometric data to be used in that way, but did not elaborate on how such content should be labeled to the public. In other words, it's going to become increasingly difficult to tell if you're watching a real person in real time, or if you're watching their AI twin.

AR STEM LESSONS

Snapchat is [teaming up](#) with virtual learning platform Inspirit to bring AR technology to at least 50 K-12 schools across the US. The technology will primarily be used to teach STEM subjects, allowing students to interact with real-world visualizations that literally bring abstract concepts to life. A post-test survey found that 92% of students found the content easy to understand when using AR, and 85% expressed renewed interest in STEM topics. Static textbooks are slowly but surely becoming old school.





PASSIVE DATING

Stop swiping—AI is here to find your match. Gen Z dating app Snack has introduced a new feature where you can create and train an AI avatar by answering questions about yourself. These avatars then go out into Snack’s virtual dating world to chat with other users—tackling the small talk on your behalf. If the avatar version of you thinks they’ve met a match, the app will notify you so that you can decide if you want to start a real human-to-human conversation. But Snack isn’t stopping there. The app’s ultimate goal is to have all first dates start in the metaverse before people meet in IRL.

HOLOGRAM ZOO

Axiom Holographics has opened the world’s first “Hologram Zoo” in Brisbane, Australia. Visitors are given a special pair of glasses and invited to roam through various holographic 3D tunnels—transporting them to African safaris, underwater adventures, and Arctic explorations. Besides being a more ethical alternative to traditional zoos, the Hologram Zoo is also allowing people to see things that would not be possible through a purely physical experience. For instance, they can be teleported to prehistoric times and hang out with dinosaurs, or come face-to-face with a life-sized whale.

AI BROADCASTERS

GMA Network, a leading broadcast company in the Philippines, recently took a bold step by introducing the country’s first AI-generated sportscasters. But despite the network assuring viewers that their human broadcasters are “irreplaceable,” the public had mixed reactions. Many expressed concerns about displacing workers, while others noted that AI would never be able to replicate the genuine passion and excitement from broadcasters that makes sports fun to watch. Similar fears are also surfacing in Malaysia, where an AI-generated radio DJ named Aina Sabrina recently hit the airwaves.

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 and intentional points of friction.
- **CONNECT IRL TO URL**
As our online and offline lives blur, people will look for tangible connections between the two worlds.



NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **THIRD PLACE GAMING**
- ✗ **EXTENDED REALITY**
- ✗ **UNTETHERED AUDIO**
- ✗ **AVATAR IDENTITIES**
- ✗ **TACTILE HAPTICS**

MIND

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.



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MAINTENANCE

SPIRITUAL ESCAPES

China's young people are flocking to temples as an affordable way to escape their stress. Visits to temples surged 310% in the beginning of 2023 compared to the same period in 2022, with about half of temple visitors being either millennials or Gen Zers. This is in sharp contrast to just a few years ago, when temples like Yonghe Palace were left mostly empty outside of major holidays. Aside from burning incense and praying, young visitors have been congregating at shops within the temples that sell blessed objects. The most popular items seem to be bead bracelets, which come in different designs that signify good fortune in different areas of life.

MILITARY MUSHROOMS

A first-ever provision included in this year's US defense policy bill enables studies to analyze the effects of psychedelics on military troops suffering from either post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or traumatic brain injury. The support of psychedelic mental health therapy is being hailed as a historic moment for military community, with nearly 30% of veterans reporting PTSD symptoms at some point in their lives.

"DUELOS"

Imagine a reality show where the person with the most severe trauma wins one hundred thousand euros. Such a show did in fact air in Spain, but it thankfully wasn't real. Rather, the purpose of the fictional "Duelos" show was to raise awareness about mental health and push people to consider what someone is going through before they judge them. It was created by Somos Estupendas, a popular Barcelona-based mental health platform that offers workshops, online and in-person therapy, a podcast, and more.

WORKPLACE THERAPY

Instead of sneaking off to a bathroom stall to cry at work, you can now pop into a meeting with an on-site therapist. Delta Air Lines, Google, Droga5 and AT&T are among the growing number of companies bringing mental health counseling into the workplace—with many others revealing plans to do so in the coming year. The free offering is being introduced in response to employees saying that they want mental-health care, but have a hard time fitting it into their schedule or finding services that are covered by insurance. And while there are some tensions—like privacy concerns or the fact that you may end up having the same therapist as your boss—the employee response has been largely positive.

FAITH-BASED SUPPORT

While there's no shortage of mental health apps out there, most are generally oriented toward Western psychology—leaving the world's 1.8 billion Muslims without a faith-oriented solution. One app aiming to fill the gap is Indonesia-based Qalboo. The app fuses modern clinical methodologies with Islamic values based on the Koran and Sunnah, and connects users with professional counselors as well as with each other. Qalboo's CEO and co-founder, Windy Dhaliana, says that many Muslims find a sense of calm through their religion, which is not taken into account by mainstream mental health apps. Other players to watch include Ruh, Saba, SAKEENAH, and Mindful Muslim.



MENTAL HEALTH MERCH

People aren't just talking about their mental health struggles—they're proudly displaying them on their T-shirt for the world to see. The trend first blew up in 2022, when influencer/sex blogger Eileen Kelly launched a line of mental-health-themed merchandise that included a "Depressed but Make It Hot" shirt and various antidepressant-themed sweatshirts reading "Lexapro," "Prozac" and "Zoloft." The items sold out quickly. Since then, countless similar items have been sold by Etsy creators and mainstream retailers alike. While some have criticized the items as being insensitive or exploitative, the makers behind the merch say it's an important step toward destigmatizing mental health treatment and inviting a more open conversation.

MENTAL HEALTH CHECK-UPS

South Korea has recorded the highest suicide rate among OECD nations for almost 20 years, with 25.2 deaths per 100,000 people in 2022. In response, the country will begin offering mental health check-ups every two years, starting with those ages 20 to 34 and later expanding to all age groups. In addition, a new presidential committee will be formed to map out further mental health policies and build up investments and infrastructure for mental health care. This is a significant step up from the country's current policy, which offers mental health exams once every 10 years.

OWN THE FEELS

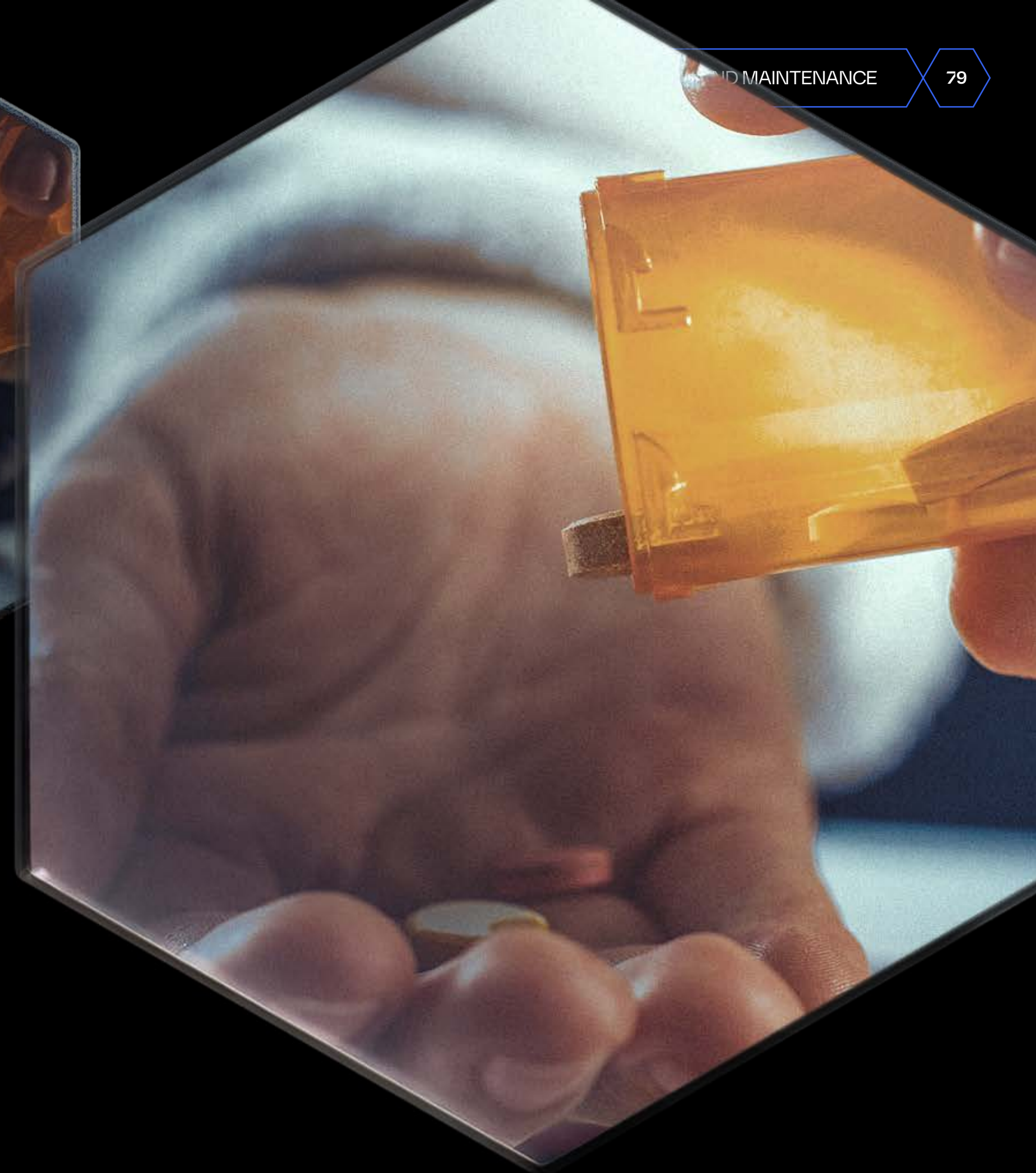
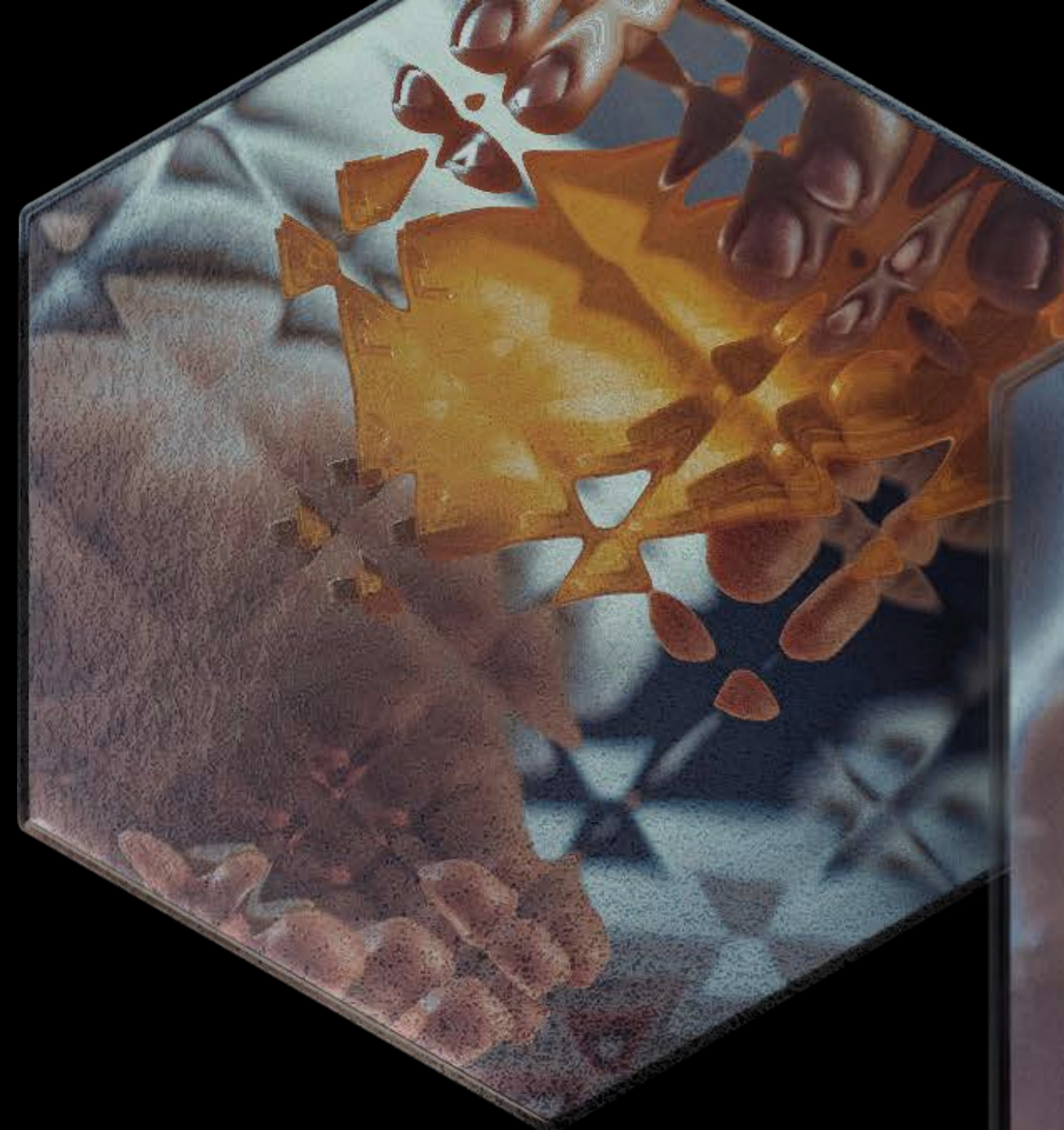
Breakups sucks. To help teens navigate the pain, the New Zealand government launched a "Love Better" video campaign that encourages the brokenhearted to "own the feels" and suggests healthy ways to process their feelings. One of the biggest suggestions? Unfollow your ex on social media. The three-year, NZ\$6.4M campaign aims to address the country's high rates of family and sexual violence, and was inspired by findings that 87% of the country's 16- to 24-year-olds have experienced physical or emotional harm that went beyond the normal pain of breaking up.

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.
- **CHECK IN**
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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✕ **THIRD PLACE GAMING**
- ✕ **EMOTION AI**
- ✕ **NEURAL CONTROL**
- ✕ **UNTETHERED AUDIO**





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 human approach to all things finance.

MONEY OUT LOUD

BEGGAR CHATROOMS

Desperate to develop better money habits, Gen Zers in Korea are baring it all in anonymous chat rooms on the popular messaging app KakaoTalk. Members of these "beggar chat rooms" share their account balances, regular expenses, and more—then invite other group members to ridicule their spending and suggest ways to save. The advice ranges from practical (like drinking free coffee at work rather than buying it), to totally ridiculous (like smoking used cigarette butts if you can't afford a new pack). Full of shameless transparency and self-deprecating humor, the chat room serves a dual purpose of helping people cope with their financial woes while also motivating them to be smarter with their money.

MONEY FEELS

Despite being 10+ years old, financial therapy has remained relatively niche. One new app trying to make it mainstream is Stackin, a different kind of personal finance app that relies more on research from cognitive behavioral therapists and less on spreadsheets. It asks you about your financial intentions, has you rate your spending habits based on how you feel, and conducts daily check-ins so you can reflect on your relationship with money. It's important to note that the app is powered by real human coaches—not some sort of AI chatbot—who help you navigate the different emotions that come with spending, such as guilt, joy, or anxiety.

EXPOSING CORRUPT SPENDING

Every year Brazil loses about \$40bn to corrupt politician spending. Independent news site Congresso em Foco is exposing these unethical expenditures with the Transparency Card, a tool that aggregates real-time data around politicians' spending habits. Users are notified as soon as politicians spend taxpayers' money, like if they spend \$23,000 on a private jet or \$200 on an extravagant dinner. According to the OECD, only 36% of Brazilians trusted the government in 2020. Giving voters transparency into public spending not only helps build trust, it incentivizes politicians to spend more responsibly.

KID-FRIENDLY FINANCE

Gen Alphas might not be bringing in the big bucks yet, but financial literacy is still a top priority for them (and their Millennial parents). And banks and startups are already jumping in to help them get started—often as young as seven years old. One example comes from Berlin-based Bling, which offers a parent-controlled "pocket money card" for kids. The card is essentially replacing the physical piggy bank with a solution that's more in line with our current era of online shopping—teaching youngsters how to manage digital money responsibly. Other kid-friendly finance offerings include GoHenry, a UK-based banking app for children; Capital One's teen checking account, MONEY; and child debit cards from fintech unicorn Greenlight, which also offers fun educational challenges.

LOUD BUDGETING

"No transport, no clothing or beauty, no going out, no alcohol, no booking trips, no takeaway food." Those are the rules of the 'no spend month' challenge that's blowing up on TikTok. The trend, which discourages people from buying non-essentials, is part of a much larger Gen Z-driven push to celebrate frugality amid an ongoing cost of living crisis. Other creators are declaring that quiet luxury is out and 'loud budgeting' is in for 2024. The key message? Being cash-conscious is officially cool.

One-third of adults globally would spend more or switch companies for financial services that help them "reevaluate their relationship with money and talk about it openly."

— TBWA Proprietary Research, Q1 2024

GIRL MATH

Anything you pay for in cash is free. If Sephora has a 20% off sale, you're losing money if you don't buy something. Returning clothes means you're making a profit. All of these are examples of girl math—"a lifestyle and a delusion" that women are using to justify their unnecessary or indulgent purchases online. And if it seems ridiculous, that's the point. The trend, which has accumulated over 2.5B views on TikTok, is intentionally playing into the patriarchal stereotype that women are bad with money. For women, it's a lighthearted way to bond over the obvious lies we tell ourselves when we spend money irresponsibly. Leave the guilt out of it and let the girls be girls.

PAY TRANSPARENCY PROGRESS

Pay transparency is sweeping across the US. More than a quarter of US workers are now covered by some form of salary disclosure law, with California, Washington and New York all joining the movement last year. These laws are slowly but surely making transparency the norm. New data from Indeed shows that more than half of US job postings on the site included a salary range, and a separate US survey from April found that 80% of respondents wouldn't apply for a job that didn't include salary information in the listing. In addition to attracting more applicants, research shows that salary disclosure improves candidate quality, boosts retention, and can help narrow the gender and racial wage gaps. Expect more employers to follow suit in 2024.



GAMIFIED SAVINGS

Bank holding company Truist is out to prove that finance and fun actually do belong in the same sentence. Through a newly updated "Long Game" app, users can earn money and rewards for playing Candy Crush-like games, taking short quizzes on financial basics, and boosting their savings. The app is primarily intended to promote financial education, but in the future Truist plans to integrate financial wellness features for a more holistic approach.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **LEAD THE MOVEMENT**
Practice salary transparency in your own organization first.
- **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.
- **TAP INTO PSYCHOLOGY**
Unpacking the emotional drivers behind how and why we spend can help people build a healthier relationship with money for the long haul.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **THIRD PLACE GAMING**
- ✗ **NON-FUNGIBLE EVERYTHING**
- ✗ **COMMUNITY COMMERCE**



MOOD GEISTING

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.

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The global emotion detection and recognition market is projected to grow from USD 26.26 billion in 2022 to USD 74.80 billion by 2029, exhibiting a CAGR of 16.1%

— [Fortune Business Insights, 2023](#)

MAINSTREAM MOOD TRACKING

Mood-tracking apps and wearables are being catapulted into the mainstream courtesy of Apple and Google. With the [iOS 17 Health app](#), Apple users can now log how they feel each day—ranging from Very Unpleasant to Very Pleasant—and then select potential contributing factors like money, family, and more.

A more advanced version comes from Google's new [Pixel Watch 2](#). The watch detects stress levels by measuring changes in heart rate and body temperature, and will even prompt you to take stock of your mood and recommend specific activities to reduce stress.

NEUROCOSMETICS

Neurocosmetics are giving "look good, feel good" a whole new meaning. The trend, as [reported by](#) Mintel's beauty analyst Clare Hennigan, covers growing interest in beauty products that contain adaptogenic ingredients. This includes products like Peace & Pure's [Timeless Elixir Facial Serum](#), which claims to block the production of cortisol (a hormone associated with stress) to support mental relaxation, as well as the growing number of brands turning their attention to the mind-skin connection (AKA psychodermatology). Two players to watch in this space are skincare brand [Sereko](#) and haircare brand [Just Human](#).

PRECISION JOY

For the most part, the medical field has focused on measurements of things like pain, anxiety, and depression. Now, thanks to the convergence of psychology and personalized medicine, experts are also looking to [measure](#) happiness, satisfaction, and joy. It might sound somewhat woo-woo, but it has a very practical end goal: to come up with better treatments. At Johns Hopkins University, for example, researchers have started using a Mystical Experience Questionnaire to measure how psychedelic treatments impact mental health. Some examples of the results being tracked include a sense of sacredness, a deeply positive mood, and profound unity with all that exists. As medical care begins catering to the mind, body, and soul, treatment options will begin to reflect the complete human experience.

EMOTIONALLY RESPONSIVE GAMING

Swiss startup [Qvomind](#) is adding a new dimension to gaming: emotions. The company's smart bracelet monitors the player's emotions by tracking skin temperature, body movements, heart rate, and sweat gland activity, then adjusts the game based on their real-time biometrics. For instance, they might make the game more challenging if someone seems bored, or dial things back if they're overwhelmed. This added layer could mark the start of more dynamic, emotionally responsive entertainment.



FURRY FEELINGS

It's not just human emotions that are being analyzed. Advancements in AI are now making it possible to detect the emotions of animals—breaking a long-standing communication barrier between humans and their furry four-legged companions. Researchers at the [Tech4Animals](#) lab in northern Israel, for example, are training a facial recognition algorithm to better understand animals, such as using machines to help vets better determine when a dog or cat is in pain. Going a step further, their ultimate goal is to make a “digital Dr. Dolittle that understands what the animals are thinking and feeling.”

MOOD MUSIC

Do you like to start your day with some slow jams? Or wake up faster with upbeat bangers? Whatever your preference, Spotify knows. And the platform's latest offering harnesses that data in order to suggest the right kind of music at the right time. The feature is called [Daylist](#), and it curates different mood-based playlists that adjust throughout the day in order to “ebb and flow with your unique vibes.” An even more futuristic example comes from Niura's [EEG-implemented earbuds](#), which scan your brain health and recommend music based on your real-time emotions. With these emotionally intelligent technologies, the days of manually matching music to your vibe could be coming to a close.

FEEL-GOOD REFRESHMENTS

Alcohol-avoidant Gen Z is increasingly opting for functional, mood-enhancing beverages—giving the category a serious boost. The ingredients and promises of these refreshments vary widely. Some brands, like startup Heywell, are zeroing in on stress and cognitive health. Elsewhere, UK-based Peak makes a “Mood Drink” designed to enhance feelings of inspiration, focus and motivation by stimulating dopamine production. And for those living in places where cannabis is legal, there are more mellow THC-infused drinks like Five Sipz THC Seltzer. “People want to feel like they could consume something in a social setting, at a bar, at a restaurant or at a family occasion that isn't just a sweet beverage and also gives them an elevated feeling,” explains Vikrant Lal, director of technical business development at BevSource. With the global cannabis beverages market on track to hit \$3.9B by 2030, we can expect the feel-good drinks to keep flowing.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **ALLOW FOR SENSORY SHIFTS**
Give users the ability to tap into different moods and modes—from totally zen to totally hyped.
- **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?

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **EMOTION AI**
- ✗ **TACTILE HAPTICS**
- ✗ **NEURAL CONTROL**
- ✗ **UNTETHERED AUDIO**



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

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PRODUCT CO-CREATION

For the most part, anyone wanting to be heard by their favorite brand is limited to either leaving an online review, emailing customer service, or commenting on social media posts—all of which can feel like speaking into the void. Thankfully, that's starting to change as more brands begin opening up a direct feedback loop. Two players leading the way in the beauty industry are KIKI World and Grupo Boticário. [KIKI World](#) invites its members to vote for and co-own products—allowing them to choose everything from shades to fragrances. For its most recent release of a peel-off nail polish pen, KIKI World crowdsourced ideas from its community, giving out digital tokens to participants and producing the product via AI. Similarly, Brazilian cosmetics company Grupo Boticário recently [brought in](#) representatives from minority groups to help create more inclusive products, packaging, and ad campaigns.

WELCOME TO THE FEDIVERSE

Imagine posting a thought or piece of content on one platform, and having followers from a totally different platform like and comment on that post. That future is now a reality, thanks to the [fediverse](#), a system of decentralized social networking services that lets users of independent social hubs see and interact with each other's content, all without creating separate accounts for each platform. So far, Twitter-like Mastodon, video platform PeerTube, image sharing platform Pixelfed, and Reddit-esque Lemmy all have a presence in the fediverse. And the list is growing. Meta announced [plans](#) to launch Threads in the fediverse back in July 2023 (though it's unclear if and when that will actually happen), while social reading app Flipboard just recently [joined](#) the fediverse in December. Ultimately, Flipboard CEO Mike McCue predicts that walled-off social networks will have no choice but to integrate into the fediverse in order to stay relevant, likening the shift to the early days of the web. "It's going to be like 1994 all over again," he says.

OPENDESK

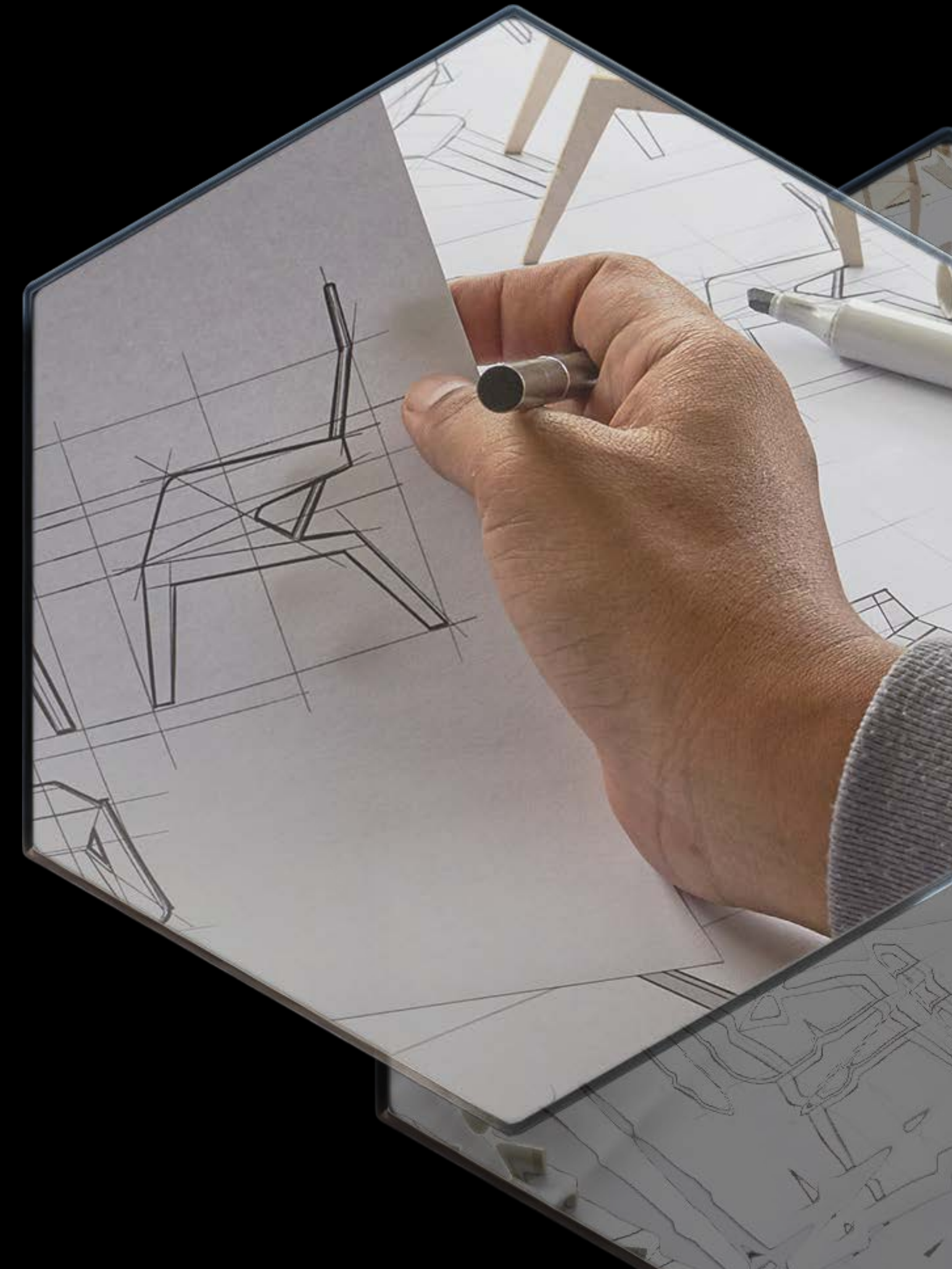
[Opendesk](#) is an open-source online furniture platform connecting customers, makers, and designers. Or, as they describe it, "a global platform for local making." The platform allows people to download digital fabrication files to DIY, or connects buyers with designers and local manufacturers who will custom build the furniture without the environmental footprint of overseas manufacturing and shipping. Unlike the traditional industry, which squeezes the designers and makers, Opendesk is giving everyone along the supply chain their fair share of the profits.

UGC GAMING

Gen Z is trading traditional games for ones that embrace user-generated content (UGC). Tapping into this shift, games like Roblox, Minecraft, and most recently, Fortnite, are embracing the creator economy. In October, Fortnite [announced](#) an updated engagement payout model that allows creators to earn money when players make in-game purchases. The game also updated its UI to push creator-made games to the forefront—proving its commitment to empowering outside creators.

CITIZEN-DEVELOPED PRICE HACKS

In May of last year, Austria's labor minister announced that the government would be building a new database to help people find the cheapest supermarket products amid soaring food prices. The only problem was that this system was going to take months to build and would cover only a handful of food types. Mario Zechner, an independent software developer, decided that wasn't good enough. In just a few hours, Zechner had built the first prototype of a comparable system, pulling the cost of 22,000 items from the websites of Austria's biggest two supermarket chains. He then [open-sourced the project](#) on GitHub, where it quickly exploded. Thanks to data provided by several anonymous contributors, the tool (called [Heisse Preise](#), or "Hot Prices") now includes prices for more than 177,000 supermarket items from 10 Austrian supermarket chains, plus four in neighboring Germany and Slovenia. Zechner's tool is demonstrating the power of citizen development and showing what can be achieved when data is made available to everyone.



NFT LOYALTY PROGRAM

Throw out those paper punch cards. A new, more personalized kind of restaurant loyalty program is coming. Through an NFT program called Blackbird, Ben Leventhal—co-founder of Resy and Eater—is aiming to “create meaningful connectivity between restaurants and their customers.” “By connectivity,” he continues, “we mean direct connectivity, where guests know that the more they show up, the better their experience is going to be.” Here’s how it works: diners can “check in” at a restaurant by tapping their phone against an NFC chip at the entrance, then unlock unique rewards like a free dessert or a personalized coffee mug through \$FLY tokens each time they visit. But the benefits are far bigger than freebies. The program will also provide restaurants with valuable customer data, allow them to crowdsource ideas and money from their biggest fans, and more. A new era of blockchain-based community building is upon us.

RADAR

RADAR is taking a “multiplayer” approach to trend spotting. Rather than a small group of people reporting on worldwide, far-reaching cultural trends and societal shifts, RADAR acts as a decentralized foresight community where 300+ researchers, strategists, makers, and early adopters all work together to build better futures. In addition to publishing reports, RADAR funds cutting-edge innovation projects and hosts ever-evolving boards that anyone can edit and add their ideas to. It’s the future of the futures industry.

MAYAWORLD

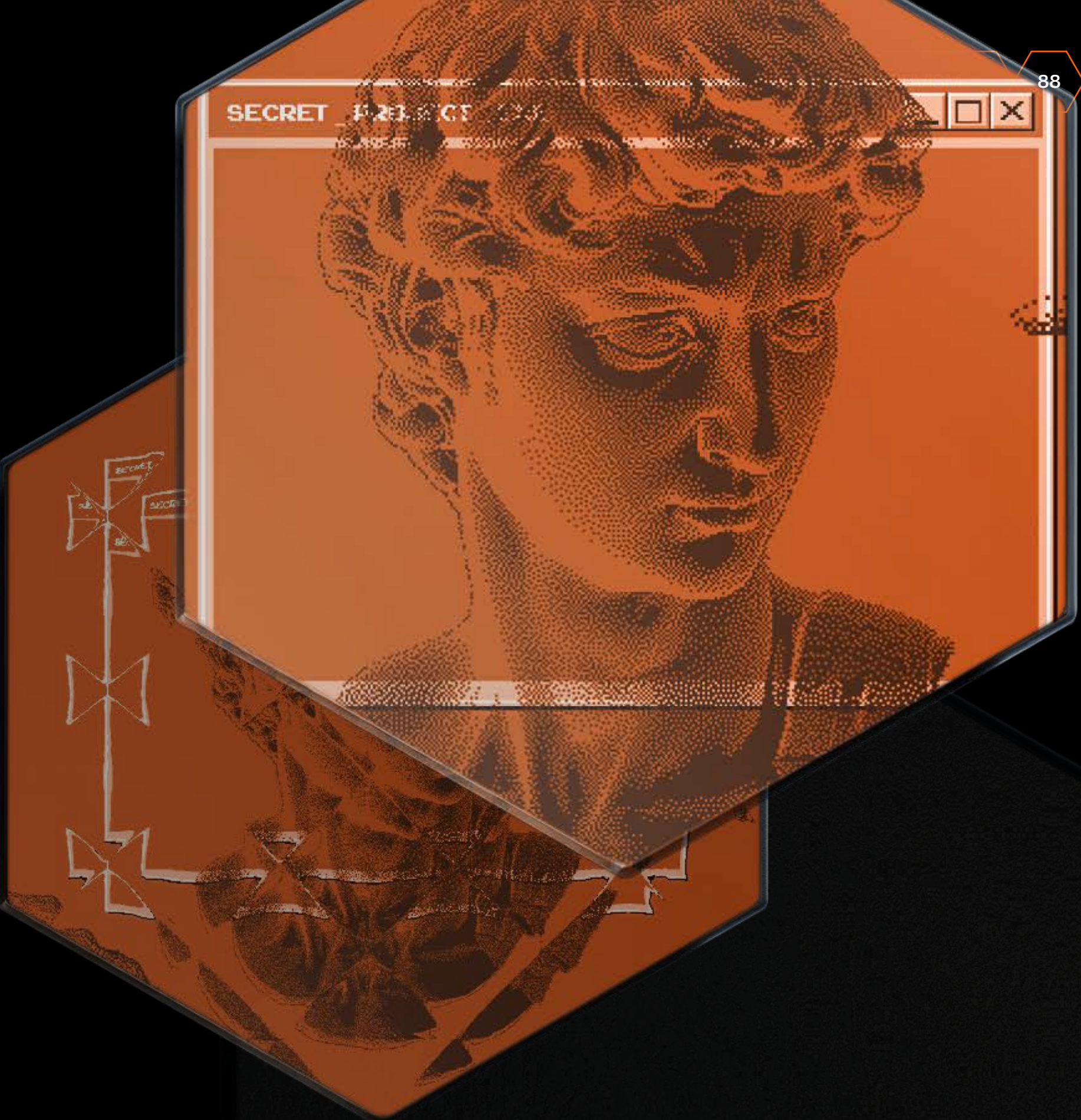
Own our attention, own the internet. That’s the premise behind MAYAworld, an open-source, not-for-profit, community-owned platform that’s aiming to restore power to the collective. So, what actually is it? In practice, MAYAworld will act as a social media site where people can co-create mood boards—also called “delusion boards”—to dream up alternative realities. As the brand book puts it, “think Myspace x Tumblr with a sprinkle of eBay thrown in.” The only rule is that you can’t delete other people’s ideas. Driven by the philosophy that we should control what we consume, MAYAworld is taking us back to the early days of the internet when platforms weren’t owned by multinational conglomerates; our information wasn’t bought and sold; and people were brought together rather than torn apart.

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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **COMMUNITY COMMERCE**
- ✗ **DECENTRALIZED SOCIAL**
- ✗ **NON-FUNGIBLE EVERYTHING**



“I’m most interested in this idea of ownership where brands and fans can work together to build something they really care about and each have something to show for it.”

— Ty Haney, founder of blockchain-based community management platform [Try Your Best](#)

NEXT-GEN

Self-sufficiency is modern-day survival. As the fragility of our planet and the economy becomes impossible to ignore, we're accepting that the systems we've come to depend on are highly vulnerable. With nature as our teacher and ancient practices as our inspiration, we're ditching our destructive ways and placing new value on forgotten skills.



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NATURALISTS

BACK TO BARTERING

If you thought bartering was dead, think again. On the Italian island of Ischia, locals are reviving the ancient practice through a growing Facebook group called La Borsa Verde 3.0. Beyond trading goods and services, the group's 4,000+ members organize public workshops that teach everything from basket weaving to permaculture. La Borsa Verde has also played a key role in preserving the island's agricultural traditions by inspiring people to clean up and cultivate abandoned lands, which has led to a much-needed resurgence in agricultural entrepreneurship. With similar bartering groups now popping up in Rome and Playa del Carmen, Mexico, it's clear that our consumerist impulses are continuously being questioned.

DIRTY HOBBIES

Driven by rising fears of food insecurity, people around the world are rewinding the clocks and relearning how to plant fruits and vegetables at home. This is especially prevalent in the UK, where produce shortages led to double-digit increases in sales of vegetable seeds and propagators in the beginning months of 2023. Meanwhile, over in China, growing produce is as much a necessity as it is a relaxing hobby. A rising number of Shanghai and Beijing residents are renting out small plots of land on the outskirts of the city, where they can take pride in the entire process—from sowing vegetable seeds, to watering them, to eventually harvesting the fruits of their labor. For many of these amateur farmers, it's a rewarding way to get back to nature and break free from their urban routines.

RAIN CATCHING REVIVAL

With millions of people around the world still lacking access to running water, more cities are returning to the ancient practice of rain catching. It involves capturing, filtering, and rerouting rainwater



for drinking, household use and landscaping, and it's catching on everywhere from the US state of Arizona to the Indian city of Chennai. Advocates say that in even the driest towns and cities, rain farming has the potential to erase projected water deficits in the decades to come. That is, once restrictions are fully lifted.

CANNING'S COMEBACK

Canning—once relegated to doomsday peppers and history books—has made its way into the zeitgeist with over 975 million views on TikTok. Covid kicked off the return of canning when it disrupted the global food supply back in 2020. Since then, continued challenges like inflation, climate change, and the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas wars have put our food system under even more stress. With supermarket shelves becoming less predictable, a growing number of people are turning to canning as a more reliable food source. The ancient practice isn't just a way to save money and stock up on food—it's also a welcome source of comfort. "The resurgence in canning is, like everything in the post-2020 landscape, a little bit inflected with fear of the end times: of the next pandemic, the next superstorm, whatever disaster will lead to the breakdown of society as we know it," notes Vox.

DESERT ISLAND TOURISM

Itching to live out your Man vs. Wild dreams? Desert island tourism could be for you. A leader in the space is Docastaway, a travel company that brings people to remote, uninhabited islands so they can "feel like a castaway." Clients can choose between Survival Mode, where they get dropped off on the island with barely anything (in some cases, just a machete or spear gun) and have to figure out the rest on their own, or Comfort Mode, where they have a crew on standby with food, water, shelter, and other necessities. Though not new (the company was founded in 2010), Docastaway says that Survival Mode has become an increasingly popular option as people look to put their self-reliance to the test. UK-based competitor Desert Island Survival—which offers five days of hands-on survival training before leaving clients to fend for themselves for three days—has also seen a recent uptick in interest.

WOODLAND OFF-GRIDDERS

People living in self-sufficient rural communities have long been written off as hippies. But as more people come to realize the benefits of living off the land, attitudes are changing. Take Tinker's Bubble, England's leading off-grid woodland community as an example. The community, which was founded in 1994, was just granted planning permission by South Somerset council in April 2023, an achievement heralded as a landmark in off-grid communities' long attempts to be accepted by mainstream Britain. "It's easy to project stereotypes on to low-impact rural communes—that they are isolationist, or living in the past," says environmental geographer Jenny Pickerill. She believes the opposite is true: "These groups are testing radical ways of living that will have applications for all of our futures, whether that's innovations such as straw-bale housing—a material that is abundant and perfect for this climate—or hyper-local food chains."

HOMEGROWN EDUCATION

In our ultra-convenient era of drive-thrus and food delivery apps, many kids today have little understanding of—or appreciation for—where their food actually comes from. In Australia, one supermarket chain aiming to change that is Woolworth. After learning that over half of six- to 14-year-olds in the country had never visited a farm, Woolworth relaunched its [Fresh Food Kids Discovery Tours](#) as a way to teach the next generation about seeds, plant systems, and the farm-to-table journey. Similarly, over in the US, more schools are introducing hands-on gardening and cooking classes after a decades-long decline in nutrition education.

"It's easy to project stereotypes on to low-impact rural communes—that they are isolationist, or living in the past. But the opposite is true. These groups are testing radical ways of living that will have applications for all of our futures, whether that's innovations such as straw-bale housing or hyper-local food chains."

— Jenny Pickerill, environmental geographer at the University of Sheffield

WHAT'S NEXT**→ 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 with the world.

→ "DO IT YOURSELF"

With less emphasis on consumption, people are learning how to create and fix things themselves. Brands can support by providing the know-how while still allowing people to flex their skills.

→ INSPIRE NO-FRILLS WELLNESS

As we say goodbye to woo-woo wellness, brands can help us get back to basics. Think homegrown produce kits, experiences that teach you how to live off the land, and all-natural health remedies.

**NEXT TECHNOLOGIES**

- ✕ BIO MATERIALS**
- ✕ LO-FI DESIGN**

ODD-YSSSEYS

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.

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BRAND LORE

From [made-up sports teams](#) to [immersive shopping platforms](#) that take you into the world of artists like Drake, a new class of online and offline experiences are allowing people to tap out of their grown-up world and descend into something a little less serious—if even for just a few minutes. As the bar for entertainment continues to rise, storytelling will no longer be enough to break through. Brands looking to capture and keep attention must now build entire universes with their own lore, characters and narrative devices.

EXTREME TOURISM

Few stories last year captivated the world quite like the catastrophic loss of the Titan submersible. But despite its risks—and exorbitant costs—adventure tourism is a fast-growing [\\$282B+ industry](#). Part of the reason for this uptick in thrilling escapes has to do with tourism going mass. Thanks to flights becoming cheaper over time and the explosion of [#travel](#) posts on social media, we've either been everywhere ourselves or experienced it through our screens—leaving us with very few roads left untraveled. As a result, once-exotic destinations are now edging closer to the mainstream. Just look to Antarctica, which hosted a record high [105,331 tourists](#) during the 2022-23 travel season. Or, look to space tourism companies like [World View](#), which has already sold out its 2024 flights that take travelers to the edge of space in a weather balloon.

DIS-LOYALTY MEMBERSHIP

It now pays to be disloyal. Lifestyle group Ennismore is flipping the traditional loyalty model on its head with [Dis-loyalty](#)—a new travel and food membership “that beats boring.” Rather than rewarding people for going back to the same spots again and again, the Dis-loyalty program encourages its members to get out of their routine and into unfamiliar places. For £12 (\$18 USD) a month, Dis-loyalty members will receive 50% off newly opened hotels and 20% off first-time stays, among other perks. For those tired of “the usual,” how else might brands help people find joy in the discomfort zone?

CREATE-YOUR-OWN-ADVENTURE GAMING

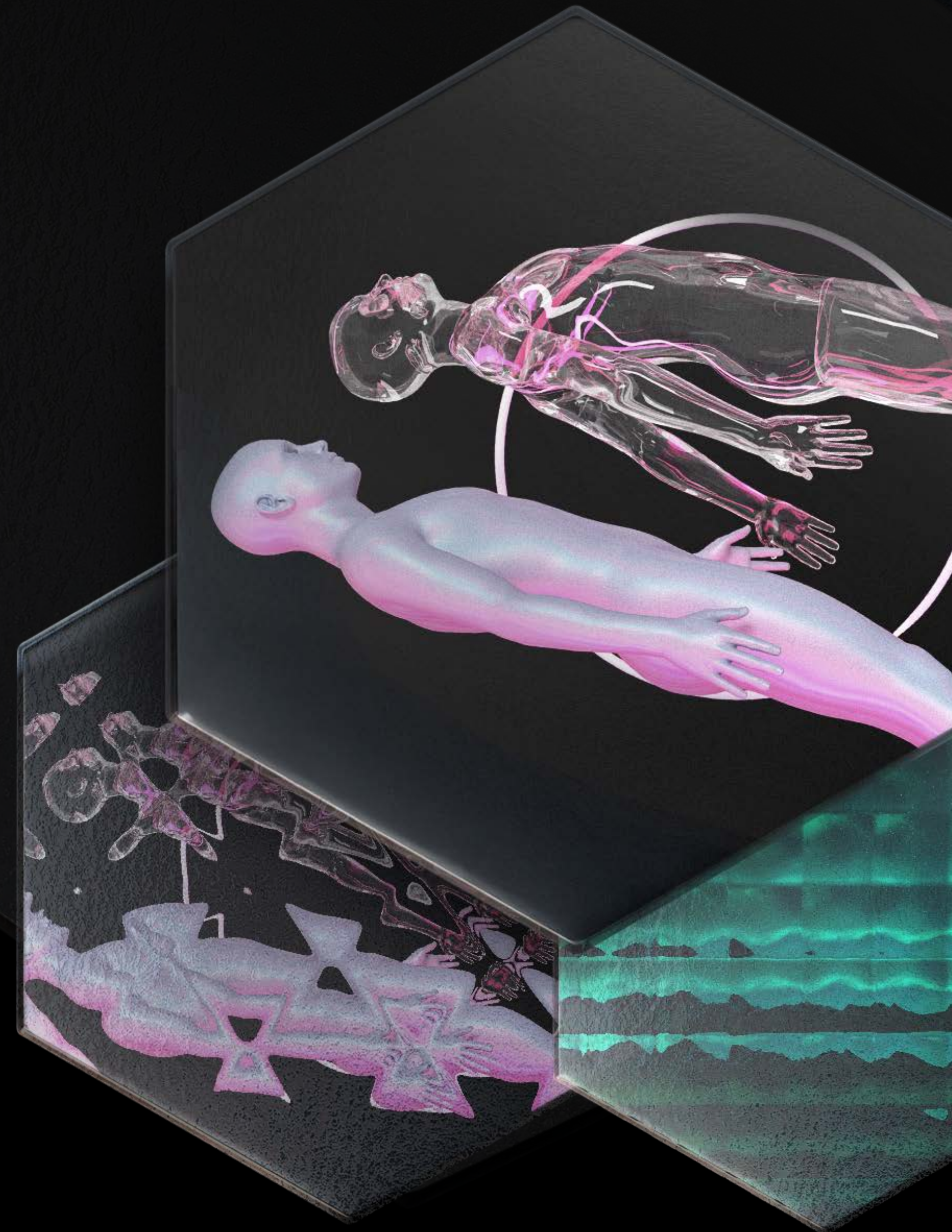
Remember the choose-your-own adventure books from childhood? That same concept is now spilling over into the gaming sector, largely fueled by [advances in AI](#) that allow anyone to code their own games using just natural language prompts. Through open-source gaming system [AI Adventure](#), for example, players can either create their own narrative adventure games using the storytelling power of AI, or jump into a community-made game with unique characters, goals, and graphics. While most games only allow for a few different scenarios, choose-your-own adventure games open up an intriguing world of nearly limitless choice.

LUCID DREAMS ON DEMAND

From Inception to The Matrix, the ability to manipulate dreams has inspired some of the most memorable sci-fi movies. Now it's becoming a reality, thanks to a new [wearable, noninvasive headband](#) that can induce lucid dreams on demand. The device, which comes from tech startup Prophetic, will deliver low-intensity ultrasound pulses that probe the brain and interact with neural activity. Assuming the device does end up launching in 2025 as anticipated, we'll be one step closer to understanding the mysterious nature of dreams and consciousness, and one step closer to what Prophetic's CEO Eric Wollberg describes as a more enchanted world. “[Lucid dreaming] is the ultimate VR experience. You can fly, you can make a building rise out of the ground, you can talk to dream characters, and you can explore,” he says.

THE XYDROBE

Luxury shopping experiences are getting more immersive, multisensory, and virtual, thanks to the Xydrobe. In practice, it's a physical round, one-person portal that transports shoppers to the metaverse with stunning 360° visuals, scents, temperature control, wind, and sound effects that bring a brand's unique vibe to life. The system “takes luxury shopping from predictable to astonishing,” as seen through a recent [partnership](#) with high-end skincare pioneer Dr. Barbara Sturm.



COMPUTATIONAL FOOD

Forget about playing with your food. In the future, food will be able to play with itself through a niche but growing category of “computational food” innovations. One of the latest examples comes from scientists at Monash University’s Exertion Games Lab in Australia. The team created a 3D-printed [Dancing Delicacies](#) plate that automatically moves sauces and condiments around the plate in a playful, choreographed fashion—upping the ante for storytelling and entertainment in an already competitive, fine-dining industry. Other past projects have included [Sonic Straws](#), an interactive cup with two straws that produces different sounds when used, and [iScream!](#), a 3D-printed ice cream cone that makes musical sounds unique to each bite.

DESTINATION UNKNOWN

Would you pay someone to plan a surprise trip for you? [Destination Unknown](#), a trip-planning company that’s part of Seattle’s Explorer X, is betting that you would. They offer three different options depending on how daring you are. On a Level 1 trip, you know the destination and specific locations, such as cities and regions, but not the day-to-day itinerary. On a Level 2 trip, you only know the main destination. And with Level 3, you don’t know anything—not even which continent you’re going to—until the day you leave. As crazy as it might sound, these spontaneous trips are part of a growing travel trend. In 2022, West Japan Railway [sold 40,000 heavily discounted train tickets](#) to random destinations. And on TikTok, creators are posting videos where they show up to the airport and ask for a ticket on the next available flight—regardless of where it’s going. For those bored of predictability, the impulsive and unexpected is finding fresh appeal.

THEATER OF THE FUTURE

Neom, northwest Saudi Arabia’s \$500 billion tourism development, is creating “the theater of the future” with an immersive art and entertainment space called [Utamo](#). Guests will not only be fully surrounded by captivating visuals that are projected up to the full height of the building, they’ll “become part of the performance itself” according to the press release. The concept is reminiscent of [The Sphere](#), a circular space that’s 360 ft. tall and blanketed in an impressive 580,000 square feet of LED lights—now open in Las Vegas.

WHAT’S NEXT

- **ENABLE ESCAPISM**
Think like a world builder or game designer to create immersive worlds that help people unplug from reality.
- **CO-CREATE**
Work with creators to tap into fringe subcultures and absurdist genres.
- **TURN YOUR BRAND INSIDE OUT**
Nothing makes sense anymore. Just go with it.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✕ **EXTENDED REALITY**
- ✕ **THIRD PLACE GAMING**
- ✕ **WORLDBUILDING**
- ✕ **GENERATIVE AI**
- ✕ **SPATIAL COMPUTING**



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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.



Allied Market Research Group estimates that the total value of longevity therapies will reach \$44.2B by 2030. As a result, it's forecasted there will be 3.7M centenarians (those who live past 100) worldwide by 2050—3X as many per head of population as in 2015.

RACE TO REVERSE AGING

At [RAADfest](#), aging is considered “a preventable enemy and an unnecessary evil.” Organized by the Coalition for Radical Life Extension, the three-day RAAD (Revolution Against Aging and Death) convention hosts panels and presentations on age reversal studies, longevity, and how to simply age better. It also serves as a showroom for the latest products and services, like “true age” physiology testing, umbilical cord stem cell therapies, hyperbaric oxygen chambers, dietary supplements, and more—reeling in attendees with the alluring promise of a longer, healthier life. While certainly on the radical end, the conference represents a much larger fight against aging. Elsewhere, entrepreneur and bestselling author Peter Diamandis is launching an [XPRIZE competition](#) that will award \$101 million to technologies that combat aging and extend health span. The march toward immortality is on.

LOOKSMAXXING

“It’s like making a character in a video game and trying to use as many points as you can in upping the looks-bar stat.” That’s how one popular YouTube video describes [looksmaxxing](#)—a term coined by a booming online community of young men who are intent on improving their physical appearance. The advice includes everything from eyelash care to “hollowing the cheeks,” with some “harmaxxers” also opting for not-so-natural methods like rhinoplasty or injectables. In many ways, looksmaxxing is just the male version of what women have subscribed to for decades. And while much of the trend is a harmless way to build confidence, its reliance on insecurities has the potential to lead some men down a slippery slope of not-so-harmless extremes if taken too far.

EXERCISE PILLS

Magic pills that mimic the benefits of exercise have long been a goal of scientists and, let’s be real, anyone who hates working out. Good news: we may be [getting closer](#) thanks to a landmark experiment taking place in Norway. Called ExPlas (exercised plasma), the clinical trial involves taking blood plasma from young and healthy adults who exercise on a regular basis and injecting it into people aged between 50 and 75 in the early stages of Alzheimer’s disease. Complete results won’t be available until 2025, but researchers are optimistic that it could be beneficial not just for those who don’t have the time or willpower to work out, but for elderly people and those with disease or disability.

TESTOSTERONE PARTIES

[Testosterone Parties](#)—or “T-Parties”—are the hottest new ticket in biohacking circles. At these gatherings, men come together to lift weights, take ice baths, swap health tips, and pay anywhere from \$100 to \$400 to have their blood tested. The goal? To boost their testosterone levels the natural way. So far, T-Party events have sold out in Colombia, New York City, and San Francisco, with many more events being planned across the US and Canada. Whether junk bro-science or a legitimate strategy, these grassroots support groups are starting important conversations about reproductive health in a time when t-levels are declining worldwide—an issue that’s been dubbed “manopause.”



BCI AMBITIONS

The highly hyped field of brain-computer interfaces (BCIs) continued to heat up in 2023. In August, for instance, two reports were published in *Nature* on BCIs that can translate neural signals into sentences at speeds close to that of normal conversation (around 150 words per minute). Just one month later, Elon Musk's brain-implant company Neuralink announced that it would start recruiting volunteers for a clinical trial to test its device. With several other rivals hitting the scene, now is a critical moment to consider the potential consequences. In July, UNESCO released a statement calling for global regulation of neurotechnology and proposing a universal ethical framework for it, similar to what it has done in the past for the human genome (in 1997), human genetic data (in 2003) and artificial intelligence (in 2021). As innovation accelerates, these frameworks will be just as important as the technologies themselves.

ATHLETE EXOSKELETONS

Wearable exosuits have already proven to be instrumental in reducing risk of injury among physical laborers and military members, increasing mobility for disabled persons, and aiding in physical therapy—fueling an industry that's expected to be worth \$7.3 billion by 2030. Next, they could also help elite athletes get to the next level. A team of researchers in Seoul recently published a study examining how wearable robots can help runners increase their speed by encouraging them to take more steps, allowing them to cover short distances more quickly. The team is now working on a customized exosuit for Kyung-soo Oh, a former national elite runner in South Korea who had retired, in a bid to beat the world record for running 100 meters.

MORE DOG YEARS

While the FDA has yet to approve any drugs for human life extension, biotech company Loyal is one step closer to bringing one to market—for dogs. The experimental drug is specifically intended for big dogs with shorter lifespans. And while it's not yet available, the FDA recently declared a "reasonable expectation of effectiveness," which means the drug will soon be tested in a bigger clinical trial. The company hopes to release the drug in 2026, and is aiming to claim at least one year of healthy life extension. "Healthy" is the key word here. "If it proves true that it extends life span, I'm only interested in that if the period of life that is extended is good quality life," said Dr. Kate Creevy, chief veterinary officer of the Dog Aging Project.

"Science and technology have reached a level of maturity where we can begin to have real, dramatic effects on the human condition."

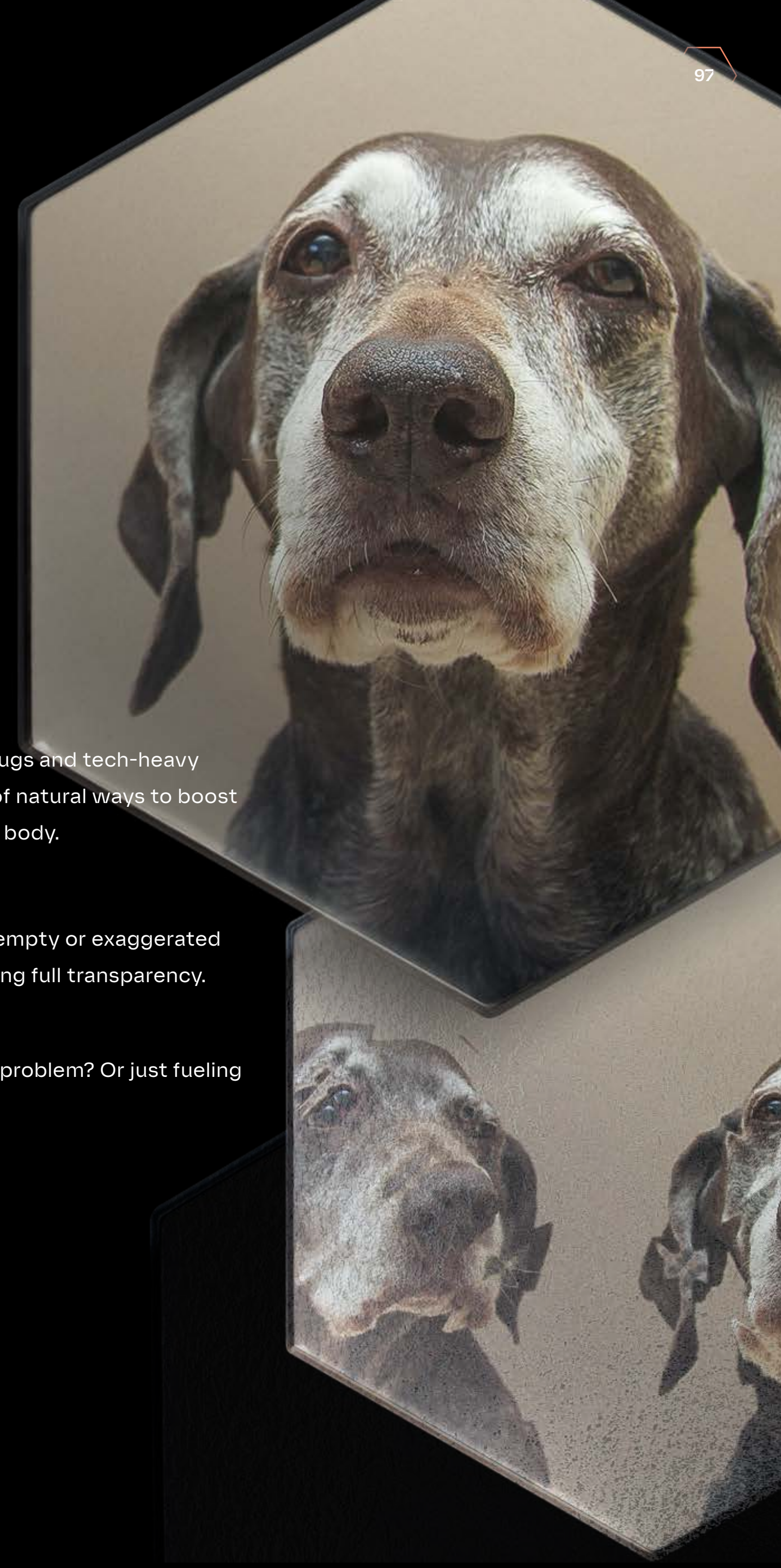
— Jacob Robinson, CEO and founder of startup Motif Neurotech

WHAT'S NEXT


- **SIMPLIFY**
Think beyond prescription drugs and tech-heavy wearables. There are plenty of natural ways to boost 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?

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ ASSISTIVE ROBOTICS
- ✗ NEURAL CONTROL
- ✗ TACTILE HAPTICS



PLATFORM POLITICS



The power of platforms is coming into question. High-profile battles against everything from misinformation to screen addiction are fueling the “techlash,” and Big Tech companies 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.

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ALGORITHM AUTONOMY

TikTok users in Europe are now able to switch off the algorithm behind its For You and Live feeds as the company makes changes to comply with the EU's Digital Services Act (DSA). According to TikTok, disabling this function will show users "popular videos from both the places where they live and around the world" instead of content based on their personal interests—a big step toward protecting people's cognitive liberty in a time when what we believe, buy, and lend our attention to is increasingly left up to algorithms. TikTok is one of 19 companies beholden to the DSA's rules (alongside other social media giants like YouTube, Instagram, and X), so we can expect similar changes to roll out across Europe and, if all goes well, the rest of the globe.

ANTI-ADDICTION LAWS

The stereotypical image of a teen glued to their smartphone is becoming more and more real, with one-third of teens saying they use social media "almost constantly." Findings like these, which come alongside sharp declines in youth mental health, are a point of growing concern for governments around the globe. China wants to limit screen time to 40 minutes for children aged under eight; France has targeted manufacturers, requiring them to install a parental control system that can be activated when their device is turned on; forty-one US states are suing Meta, alleging that the tech giant harms children by building addictive features into Instagram and Facebook; and the EU's Digital Services Act is forcing the biggest online platforms to prove that they're doing their best to make sure their products aren't harming kids. As pressure continues to mount, tech giants will soon have no choice but to optimize for safety over engagement, whether that be by turning off addictive features like autoplay and never-ending newsfeeds, or by restricting minors from viewing sensitive content—much like Meta did at the start of this year.

INFLUENCER ACCOUNTABILITY

The Wild West of influencing is coming to a close. On June 1, 2023, France passed a bill that regulates influencer marketing on social media, making it the first country to define influencers and apply a standard legal framework to the industry. France's law comes amid a recent increase in questionable promotions—making it illegal for influencers to create paid content promoting cosmetic surgeries, counterfeits, or volatile financial products like Bitcoin. Similarly, in November, popular social media platforms in China such as WeChat, Douyin, Kuaishou, Xiaohongshu (RED), Bilibili and Toutiao simultaneously announced policies that require influencers with 500,000 or more followers to display their real names on their profile. As influencers' power comes into question, such laws are making it clear that online actions have real-world consequences. → For more, watch Backslash's episode of Life on the Edge: The Influencer Act

ELUSIVE AUTHENTICITY

There's no shortage of apps promising a more "authentic" online experience. Just look to players like Daylvy, Lapse, and Hipstamatic, all of which are still determined to take Instagram's throne and create a healthier kind of social media. We also can't forget about BeReal, which was on a major roll before daily users dropped from about 15 million in October 2022 to less than six million in March 2023. While these alternative apps have each stolen the spotlight for a short stint, none have succeeded in leading a mass migration away from today's biggest platforms—leaving skeptics to question what "authenticity" even means anymore. Can apps that ask you to "be real" and perform that realness online ever be truly authentic? And is authenticity as simple as posting without makeup and filters, or is it far deeper than that? Such questions have yet to be answered, but it won't stop new entrants from setting out to prove that there's a better way.

MISINFORMATION EDUCATION

More than 85% of people are worried about the impact of online disinformation and 87% believe it has already harmed their country's politics, according to a global 2023 survey. Even fact checkers say that things aren't getting better despite growing awareness. So if you can't stop misinformation from being created altogether, how do you at least help people recognize it when they see it? California believes the answer lies in educating youth. At the end of last year, the state passed a bill requiring all public schools to teach K-12 students how to spot fake news, as well as how to engage in civil dialogue online and maintain digital privacy. The hope is that by giving kids a peek behind the curtain, they'll be able to not only recognize emotional manipulation, but avoid spreading it.

"2023 is likely to be remembered as an inflection point in the health crisis surrounding social media."

— Ginia Bellafante, The New York Times

"Algorithmic recommendations and tailored feeds are forced into our eyes, ears, and minds. It's overwhelming, not to mention increasingly boring."

— Kyle Chayka, author of Filterworld

UNITY'S PRICING BLOWBACK

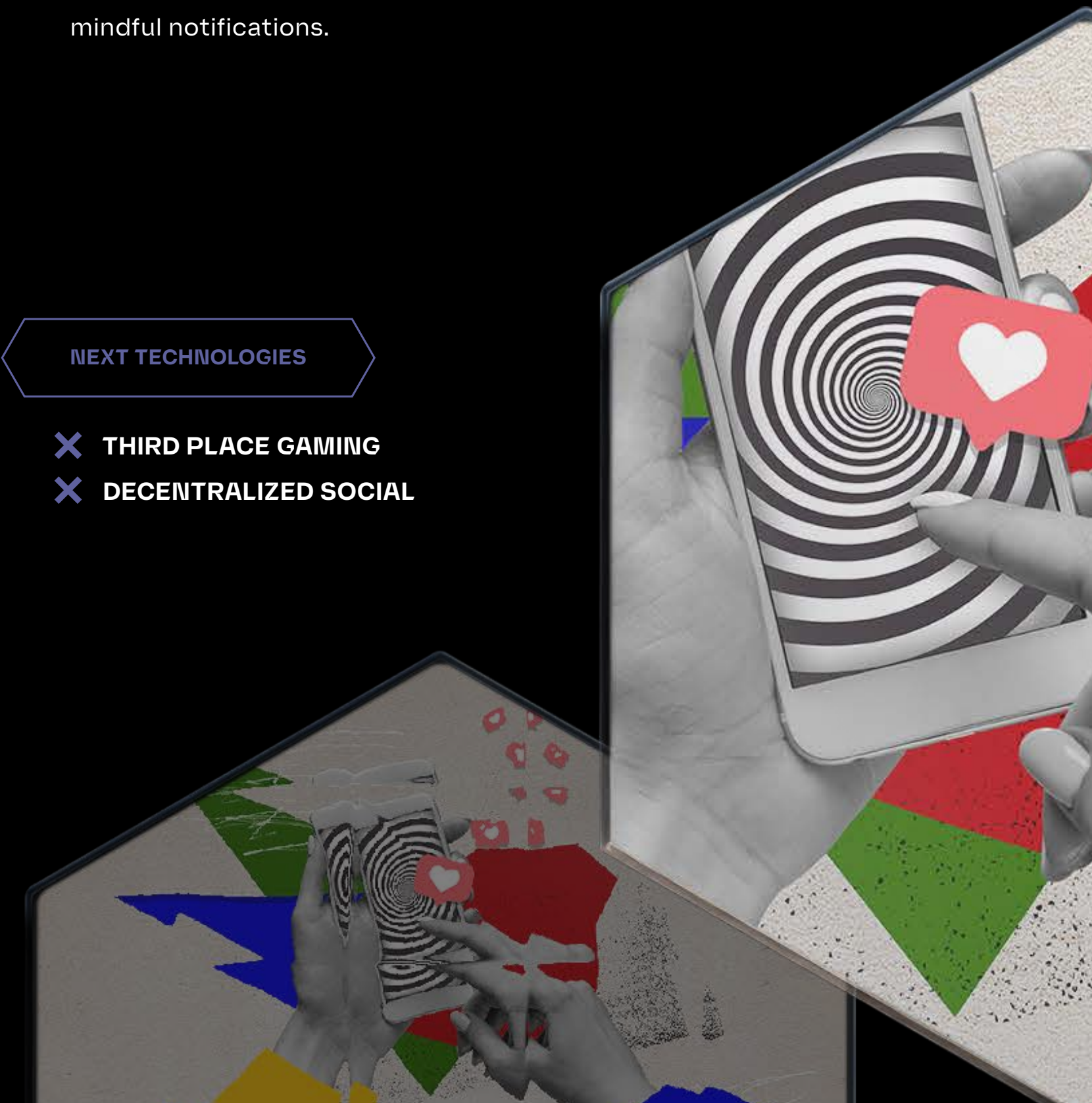
Unity Technologies may not be a household name, but it is a key engine for more than two million game developers who use its software to power their games. For most of the company's 20-year history, Unity's software business was relatively straightforward: every developer who used Unity's professional tools paid a fixed, annual licensing fee. But in September 2023, the company proposed an abrupt and unwelcomed change. Instead of an annual fee, Unity wanted to charge developers every single time someone installed a copy of their games, meaning the more popular their game, the more they would pay. Developers banded together in response, threatening to leave the platform and causing a PR crisis for Unity execs. The company has since apologized and rolled back some of the changes—making it so that only developers that make more than \$1 million and have more than 1 million installs will have to pay up, among other nuanced changes. Whether the updates will be enough to earn back the trust of the developer community remains to be seen, but the lesson is clear: in a time of intensifying techlash, greedy business models won't be tolerated.

WHAT'S NEXT

- INVITE 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 and gaming platforms, every brand with a digital presence should be exploring ways to foster healthier tech habits. Think self-imposed restrictions, intentional points of friction, and mindful notifications.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ THIRD PLACE GAMING
- ✗ DECENTRALIZED SOCIAL



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REROUTED

A transition to greener, smarter mobility is upon us. To make the switch, we'll need mass infrastructure overhauls and enticing incentives that create better habits at scale. Enabling the conversion is the next big challenge.





“Within the next decade, the mobility ecosystem will undergo a transformation not seen since the early days of the automobile.”

— McKinsey Quarterly, 2023

ELECTRIFIED HIGHWAYS

From [Europe](#) to the US to [Southeast Asia](#), major steps are being taken to blanket highways with fast EV chargers. But what if you didn't have to stop to charge your car at all? What if it could be charged by simply driving over an electrified road? That very vision is coming to life in Detroit, which became the first American city to [install](#) an electrified roadway in November 2023. This feat was made possible thanks to new tech from Electreon, an Israeli company developing wireless-charging solutions for EVs. And it's the first of many more experiments to come. Electreon already has [contracts](#) for projects in Israel, Sweden, Germany, and Italy—meaning a future of unlimited range may not be too far off.

GOODNIGHT, NIGHT FLIGHTS

Last year, Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport [announced plans](#) to stop late night flights and ban private jets in a bid to reduce noise and lower CO2 emissions. Aircraft will no longer take off between midnight and 6 a.m. once the changes go into effect no later than 2025-2026. There will also be no more landings between midnight and 5 a.m. The moves are being made in line with the Paris climate accord, and will result in 10,000 fewer night flights annually.

GREEN VEHICLE INCENTIVES

Brazil is going all-in on sustainable vehicle development with a new Green Mobility and Innovation program called [“Mover.”](#) The program will promote the expansion of investments in energy efficiency, introduce minimum recycling limits in vehicle manufacturing, and charge less tax to companies who pollute less. The tax incentive for companies to invest in decarbonization and comply with the program's mandatory requirements will be 3.5 billion reais in 2024, 3.8 billion reais in 2025, 3.9 billion reais in 2026, 4 billion reais in 2027 and 4.1 billion reais in 2028. The new program also increases the mandatory sustainability requirements for vehicles sold in the country, including the measurement of carbon emissions “from well to wheel.” In the case of ethanol biofuel, for example, emissions will be measured from the planting of sugarcane to the burning of the fuel.

OPTIMIZED TRAIN DRIVING

Although trains are one of the most climate-friendly ways to get around, there's still room for improvement—especially considering most long-haul trains in Canada and the US still run on diesel. Hoping to lessen the environmental impact is Canadian startup RailVision Analytics. The company created an AI-enabled software that helps locomotive engineers make small adjustments to their driving that could amount to big savings in diesel fuel. Just as Google Maps tells drivers when to turn, RailVision's app tells locomotive engineers when to stay idle and when to increase speed. And while seemingly incremental, the technology could make a significant impact if applied to trains everywhere. Metrolinx, a government agency that serves millions of riders in Ontario, saved more than 1.5 million liters of fuel after using the software for just one year.

CLIMATE CARD

After the pandemic caused public transportation use to take a hit, Seoul is now aiming to revitalize buses and subways with a much-anticipated [Climate Card](#). The card unlocks unlimited access to public transportation, including Seoul Bike, for 3,000 won (USD \$2.28) a month, making it the first eco-friendly farecard to revolutionize transportation in Seoul since the launch of the integrated metropolitan transfer system back in 2004. The move aligns with a global push to cut emissions by prioritizing public transportation. For instance, Germany launched the Deutschland ticket (D-ticket), also known as the 49-Euro-Ticket, in May 2023, resulting in 1 million car-dependent individuals switching to public transportation. Eleven million tickets were sold within just three months.

AFRICA'S E-BUSES

Across Africa, public transport is embracing electrification at an unprecedented pace. South Africa is the latest country to take the leap after Golden Arrow—South Africa's largest public transportation service—unveiled plans to electrify 60 buses from its fleet every year, beginning from 2024, until it has replaced every single diesel-powered bus. Other countries making the switch include Kenya, which has seen private firms such as Basigo introduce e-buses tailored to the Kenyan market; Rwanda, which has entered a partnership with Vivo Energy to add more than 200 e-buses; and Egypt, with cities like Cairo, Alexandria and Sharm El-Sheikh all becoming major e-bus hubs.

DRONE DELIVERIES

After more than a decade of development, delivery drones are finally soaring into the mainstream. One big reason is that drones have only recently been approved to fly "beyond the visual line of sight" in the US, opening the door for more companies to begin widespread drone deliveries in 2024. This has huge implications for retail, food, medicine, and more. Amazon is ramping up toward a goal of 500 million drone deliveries per year by the end of the decade; restaurants like Mendocino Farms, Sweetgreen, and Domino's are all eyeing drone deliveries for quicker delivery; and on the medical front, players like Amazon and Zipline are now sending prescriptions and medical supplies via the skies. This means the US could finally catch up to places like Australia, New Zealand, the U.K., and Africa, where hundreds of thousands drone deliveries have already been completed. At this rate, deliveries made via slow, noisy, polluting trucks could soon be a distant memory.

EV CHARGING COOPERATIVES

By 2030, cities will need to charge up to 20 times as many electric cars as today, but charging infrastructure is struggling to keep up with that growth. Copenhagen-based startup Elby has a unique solution: integrating chargers into the walls of existing multistory buildings with adjacent street parking. Car owners use their own cable to connect their car to the wall unit, running the cable through a secure sleeve in the sidewalk. They can turn on the charger using Elby's app and pay DKK 2 (USD 0.28) plus the cost of electricity, which is among the lowest charging rates in the Danish market. Best of all, building owners receive up to 60% of the profits generated from their Elby sockets—allowing them to profit from excess power capacity that's rarely used. With interest from New York, San Francisco, London, Berlin, Stockholm, and more, Elby's model could serve as a blueprint for expanding charging infrastructure globally.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **INNOVATE AROUND MOBILITY**
How we get from A to B has implications for every single industry. Drones will make it possible to deliver food on hikes or at the beach, EV charging stations will turn retail parking lots into hangout spots, and autonomous cars will open up new options for in-car entertainment.
- **MAKE ECO-FRIENDLY TRANSPORT THE OBVIOUS CHOICE**
Rewards, gamification, and financial incentives can give people the initial push needed to make lasting changes.
- **REINTRODUCE JOY**
Commutes don't have to be dreadful. Something as simple as an artful bus design or a new bike route can make the journey more enjoyable.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

✗ ASSISTIVE ROBOTICS ✗ CONNECTED OBJECTS ✗ BIO-MATERIALS



We're letting nature reclaim its place in our world. As we wake up to the fact that restoring biodiversity is key 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

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WELCOMING BACK THE WOOLLY MAMMOTH

The woolly mammoth, which went extinct 4,000 years ago, could be making a comeback as soon as 2028 courtesy of startup Colossal Biosciences. They'll do so by creating an embryo of a woolly mammoth through gene editing, and placing it in an African elephant to take advantage of its size and allow it to give birth to the new woolly mammoth. The eventual goal is to then repopulate parts of the Arctic with the new woolly mammoth, whose migration patterns and dietary habits would strengthen local plant life. The company is also working on bringing back the dodo and the Tasmanian tiger. If these efforts are successful, we can expect new ethical debates to surface regarding the risks and implications of reintroducing lost species.

BEE-FRIENDLY PACKAGING

Liquor brand Inverroche recognizes that without South Africa's bee population—about 70% of which has been lost—its gin would not exist. With that jarring statistic in mind, the company launched limited-edition packaging that doubles as a "hotel" for solitary bees. So far, Inverroche has created 6,000 hotels to house 672,000 solitary bees. "There's a lot of packaging these days that tries to be sustainable by doing less harm," says Kyle Schoeman, creative director at the advertising agency Grid Worldwide. "This goes one step further in trying to create packaging that almost becomes regenerative."

REWILD THE RUN

One day, doing your part to restore nature could be as simple as going for a run. At least, that's the idea behind [Rewild the Run](#), a 3D-printed shoe outsole that fits over regular sneakers. It's covered in small loops that grab dirt and seeds as you run and then disperse them in a different area—similar to what the fur and feet of wild animals does. While just a concept for now, the designer behind the project is hopeful that it will inspire shoe manufacturers to innovate with rewilding efforts in mind.

"Every city has acres of in-between land that, if managed well, could become oases of greenery harboring insect, bird and other animal life."

— Ben Wilson, historian and the author of "Urban Jungle: The History and Future of Nature in the City"

FITTING IN FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE

Rewilding has become core to conservation efforts around the globe. But in Australia's deserts, where Indigenous people have been living on and managing the land for the last 60,000 years, the term "rewilding" [can be controversial](#). "To me, it implies straight away that there's no wild left in the deserts, which I think is a bit of a misnomer for the Australian deserts," says Gareth Catt, deserts project manager with the Indigenous Desert Alliance. The reality is that groups of Indigenous rangers have long dedicated themselves to looking after the land by protecting native species, removing invasive weeds, trapping feral species, and more. At the same time, though, government efforts are underway across the country to fence off areas of land in order to reintroduce locally extinct mammals, which doesn't necessarily account for a human presence. To achieve the country's conservation goals, the two groups will have to work together to ensure that First Nations people—and their practices—are fitting into the picture.



THE GOLF COURSE, REWILDED

Despite appearing as “green space,” golf courses aren’t exactly good for the environment. Not only are forests and trees often cleared to make room for a fairway, but maintaining that pristine grass requires excessive amounts of water and carbon-intensive fertilizers. But a shift is underway. In the US, where the number of golf course closures have outweighed new openings every year since 2006, conservation nonprofits and local authorities are working to acquire abandoned golf courses and turn them into biodiverse landscapes. Similarly, in the UK, a former golf course in Cheshire that closed a few years ago has since fully rewilded itself and is now managed by the Woodland Trust—serving as a beautiful example of how nature will thrive when given the opportunity.

UNTAMED YARDS

Perfectly manicured yards are out, all-natural and untamed is in. While large-scale rewilding projects tend to soak up most of the attention, there’s also a growing push to get homeowners to do their part by creating gardens that allow nature to flourish. This might mean refraining from use of chemicals or peat; planting nectar-rich plants and fruiting trees; using hedges rather than fences; creating a pond; turning lawns into wildflower meadows; or installing bird boxes. It could also mean sitting back and simply doing less, as encouraged by movements like No Mow May, which advocates for just what it says: a month without mowing the lawn. Swedish company Husqvarna is bringing this ethos to life by introducing a new “rewilding mode” to its robotic lawnmowers. When activated, the feature will automatically leave 10% of your yard unmown in order to help rebuild a more natural meadow.

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.”

WHAT’S NEXT

→ RESTORE NATURAL RESOURCES

If your supply chain takes from the Earth, consider your brand responsible for giving back to it.

→ EMPOWER INDIVIDUAL ACTION

Encourage everyone to get involved—whether by planting native species in their 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?

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

✕ LO-FI DESIGN ✕ BESPOKE LLMS ✕ BIO-MATERIALS



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 and traditions that came before us. To know who we are, we must first understand our history.

ROOTS REVIVAL

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MALI DROPS FRENCH

With its new constitution, Mali, the eighth-largest country in Africa, has dropped French—its official language since 1960. French will still remain in use as a working language, but it will be replaced by 13 indigenous languages (Bambara, Bobo, Bozo, Dogon, Fula, Hassaniya, Kassonke, Maninke, Minyanka, Senufo, Songhay, Soninke, and Tamasheq), all of which will receive official language status. The decision comes at a time of growing anti-French sentiments across West Africa due to its perceived military and political interference. It also comes as scholars take steps to expand documentation of other endangered African languages.

BACKUP UKRAINE

As war rages on in Ukraine, a project called Backup Ukraine is aiming to preserve the country's cultural heritage with a digital backup in the cloud—far from the reach of bombs and other physical threats. The initiative lets anyone become an archivist by simply scanning buildings and monuments as full 3D models using just their phone, then storing them as blueprints in an open, secure online archive. The resulting data will not only aid in future rebuilding efforts, it will also help tell the story of the war for generations to come.

ARCHITECTURAL UPRISING

"People have the right to be angry, because all the ugliness they see is on purpose." That's from Michael Diamant, co-founder of Architectural Uprising—a collective saying no to the global onslaught of gray, minimalist, modern architecture. What started as a small Facebook Group against the "uglification" of Sweden has grown into a full-fledged movement with sister organizations across the Nordics, UK, and Estonia. Diamant and his fellow uprisers are demanding a return to beautifully built environments that reflect a destination's history. This doesn't mean that buildings will look old. Rather, the group wants to celebrate a new progressive style in the local tradition. Architectural Uprising's global success shows that in a world where more and more cities are beginning to look the same, we all desire to keep our built environments unique.

SILK FARMING INTERNSHIPS

For the first time ever, you can get an internship in the silkworm cultivation business in Japan. Those accepted into this three-week summer program will be able to take part in the tradition of Iyo raw silk production in Seiyo, which has been declining in recent years. According to the Dainippon Silk Foundation, there were roughly 2.21 million silkworm farms at the peak in 1929, but the figure had plummeted to just 163 by 2022. The industry hopes the internship program will reignite interest among upcoming generations. For young people who take pride in local craft, these careers offer stability as well as an opportunity to keep a timeless practice alive.

"[Heritage] is no longer just a matter of monuments, sites or stones...heritage is also alive. It can be sung, written, listened to and touched. Each of us carries a part of this heritage in us, and protects it."

— Audrey Azoulay, UNESCO's Director General



ART, REPATRIATED

The Rosetta Stone is returning home to Egypt—at least, digitally. Frustrated that the UK has not returned the famous slab to its former colony, London-based design collective Looty is taking repatriation into its own hands. It does this through “digital heists.” Essentially, Looty uses AR technology to make 3D replicas of stolen artifacts like the Rosetta Stone, which are made accessible via QR codes and displayed in the metaverse as well as in real-life exhibitions. Looty’s ultimate goal is to end Western museums’ dominance over historical narratives by allowing anyone to access pieces of their heritage—even if they can’t physically travel to the British Museum or the Louvre. And given that museums are notoriously exclusive and slow-moving, Looty’s use of technology is unlocking a much faster path to change.

FLAMENCO LAW

¡Baile! ¡Baile! Spain has passed its first “flamenco law.” Flamenco, the passionate Spanish-Andalusian dance accompanied by guitar and singing, was hard-hit during the pandemic. Several historic flamenco bars (known as tablaos) were forced to close their doors, putting many artists out of work. In April 2023, the government of Andalusia put protections in place to ensure the art form sticks around for future generations. The new law “aims to provide flamenco with a legal framework to guarantee its protection, conservation, and the promotion of its knowledge for its use as a social good.” In addition to providing greater legal protections for flamenco artists, the legislation will also require flamenco to be taught and celebrated in schools.

COW HUG DAY

In India, Valentine’s Day is now “Cow Hug Day.” The Indian government is urging citizens to forget about candy hearts, chocolate roses, and love letters on February 14, and to instead turn their attention to Hindu’s sacred cows. The new holiday is prime minister Narendra Modi’s latest attempt to make reverence of the cow a nationwide policy. It also aims to offset the “dazzle of western civilization,” which leaders say is watering down Indian traditions. As westernized holidays and traditions continue to draw backlash, it’s likely that this won’t be the only Valentine’s Day rebrand seen around the world. Expect more localized occasions to come.

FOLK’S NEW GROOVE

In Britain, folk culture, which tends to conjure up images of bearded white men playing guitars, is shaving off its old stereotypes in favor of something different. Thanks to music festivals like Glastonbury and collaborative TikTok videos, a new wave of UK artists is giving the traditional folk scene an edgier, more diverse spin. One such group is Boss Morris. Inspired by traditional Cotswold Morris dances, the all-female dance troupe moves to modern music with a clear mission. As they outline on their website, they’re “playing with a modern vision of a traditional folk dance while actively rejecting themes of nationalistic values.” Long turned off by the lack of representation in folk culture, young people in Britain are embracing this fresh take.



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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **EXTENDED REALITY**
- ✗ **NON-FUNGIBLE EVERYTHING**
- ✗ **WORLDBUILDING**



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.

SEXUAL LIBERATION

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THIS BODY WORKS FOR ME

Showmax original reality show [This Body Works For Me](#) is giving viewers a rare behind-the-scenes look into South Africa's thriving adult entertainment industry. The show, which returned for a second season last year, offers authentic insight into the lives of seven women—including a mother and a stripper named Diamond, and a trans woman and aspiring farmer called Lebo. Their hope is that by sharing their personal stories with the world, they can begin to break the stigma and get the public to see adult entertainers as real people who have real ambitions.

BRINGING SEXY BACK

Since 2021, Victoria's Secret has been steadily retiring its hyper-sexualized image in favor of a more inclusive approach. But praise from critics didn't exactly translate into higher sales. The brand is projecting revenue of \$6.2 billion this fiscal year, down about 5% from the previous year and well below the \$7.5 billion from 2020. In a bid to boost profits, the company now appears to be returning to its roots—as evidenced by more recent campaigns featuring Hailey Bieber, Emily Ratajkowski, Naomi Campbell, and the longest-running VS Angel, Adriana Lima. As the company turns the heat back up, Victoria's Secret and Pink Brand President Greg Unis is [ensuring investors](#) that "sexiness can be inclusive."

F#CKING OLD

Safe-sex campaigns are no longer just for horny teens. After learning that rates of STIs were increasing among Canadians ages 65 and up, Canada-based condom brand Jems called them out directly through a cheeky campaign called "[F#cking Old](#)." The campaign encourages young people, who are typically more comfortable discussing sex, to engage in open conversations about sexual health with their elders. To help start the conversation, Jems even made hard candies with safer sex tips on the wrappers. The candies were available for purchase on their website and all proceeds went to Action Canada for Sexual Health & Rights.

UNPRUDE

Talking about sex is still highly taboo in the Philippines—especially for Catholics who make up 80% of the country's population. [Unprude](#) wants to change that. As Asia's first sex therapy app, Unprude is taking a unique approach that's grounded in local culture. When you open the app, the first thing you'll see is a questionnaire that asks things like "How do you feel about masturbation?" and "How did you learn about sex growing up?" Based on your responses, Unprude will then curate content that's aligned to your sexual values. While similar apps from Western countries tend to be more explicit, Unprude is showing how sex wellness can be adapted to personal and cultural context.

KINK CON

2023 was the year of India's very first [kink convention](#)—a big deal for a country where even discussing sex between heterosexual couples is still taboo. At Kink Con 2023, a diverse group of attendees between 20 and 60+ years old gathered in Goa to strengthen the bonds of the existing kink community while also welcoming curious newbies onto the scene. Discussions and demonstrations covered everything from bondage and fetishes, to polyamory and other nontraditional relationship structures. Safety, consent, and mental health were also a key focus of every session. "Our purpose is to demystify kink, break down taboos, and help others understand that the community holds consent and respect at its core," explains one of the organizers and co-founders of Kinky Collective.

SEX WELLNESS TOURISM

As sexual well-being becomes recognized as a core component of overall health, the travel industry is capitalizing on the trend with a [wide array](#) of sex-positive getaways. And there's one to fit every kind of desire. Hotels like [Shou Sugi Ban House](#) in New York have started hosting sexual and emotional intimacy retreats led by tantric experts and clinical sexologists. The [SHA Wellness Clinic](#) in Alicante, Spain, recently launched a sexual health unit staffed with gynecologists, hormonal experts, and urologists. And in October 2024, wellness resort [Aerial BVI](#) will host its first-ever Elevate Love Summit on a private Caribbean island, which will focus on rekindling physical and emotional intimacy. There also are retreats that center around self-sex, some that offer yoga with a side of sensuality, and even parent-friendly offerings that include all-day childcare.



GENDER-BIASED AD CENSORSHIP

Despite all the progress being made to embrace pleasure in culture, censorship on social media is still very real. This is a big problem for companies that rely on social platforms to advertise their sex toys and lubricants—especially if they're targeting women. To call attention to the gendered double standard, sex wellness startup Unbound [created a fake brand](#) last year called Thunderthrust, which appeared to sell sex toys and related products for men. They even created a website for the mock brand and bought paid social media ads. Unsurprisingly, the ads were accepted. On the flip side, when Unbound submitted brightly colored, female-centric ads for its own real products—like the Ollie wand vibrator or Cuffies handcuffs—platforms rejected them. This is a long-standing issue that companies like Unbound are up against. And despite [Meta's 2022 policy change](#) that now allows sexual health, wellness, and reproductive health ads, it appears there's still more work to be done to squash the bias.

QUEER DESIRE

Queer artist Patthakarn Sadubtham is challenging Thailand's sex taboo through [his photography](#). His work was most recently on display not in an art gallery, but in a sauna called Krubb that specifically caters to the needs of gay men in Bangkok. It included photos of men taking part in various kinks, such as Shibari (erotic bondage), dog costumes, and more. With queer discrimination still rampant in Thailand, Patthakarn is hopeful that his work will inspire other queer artists and individuals to express themselves without fear of judgment.



WHAT'S NEXT

- **CHECK YOUR TONE**
Are you portraying sex in a healthy, positive manner? Brands can break the stigma by normalizing pleasure as an act of self-care and fostering a more open and honest sex conversation.
- **OFFER RANGE**
Acknowledge that sexual liberation looks different for everyone. Are you being mindful of various relationship styles, comfort levels, sexual preferences, etc.?

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✕ AVATAR IDENTITIES
- ✕ TACTILE HAPTICS
- ✕ UNTETHERED AUDIO
- ✕ COMMUNITY COMMERCE



STABILITY PURSUIT

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.

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NO DEGREE NEEDED

Welcome to the age of skills-based hiring. While a four-year degree has long been considered the clearest pathway to a steady, respectable job, that may not be the case for much longer. With 77% of companies globally reporting talent shortages—the highest in 17 years—more of them are dropping college requirements and setting their sights on skills. In the US, a whopping 55% of companies removed degree requirements in 2023, and 45% plan to keep the trend going in 2024. For this model to actually be effective, though, employers must commit to closing the skills gaps with in-house education. This includes apprenticeships, alternative credential programs, and on-the-job training that sets incoming workers up for success.

CHINA'S RURAL PUSH

As China's economy slows, young people are bearing the brunt of an unemployment crisis that's leaving one in five of them jobless. And with slim job prospects in major cities like Beijing and Shanghai, the government is doubling down on efforts to get young people to relocate to the countryside. In Guangdong, provincial officials are aiming to lure 300,000 young people to its rural areas by the end of 2025. Offers include two-year civil service placements, agricultural internships, and incubators programs to help grow business ideas. Ultimately, living in the countryside is a trade-off for many young Chinese. Rural jobs pay much less, but they also provide stability and often other benefits like free lodging and food. Meanwhile, back in the cities, some unemployed Chinese youth are moving back in with their parents and taking on roles as "full-time children."

FLEXTIREMENT

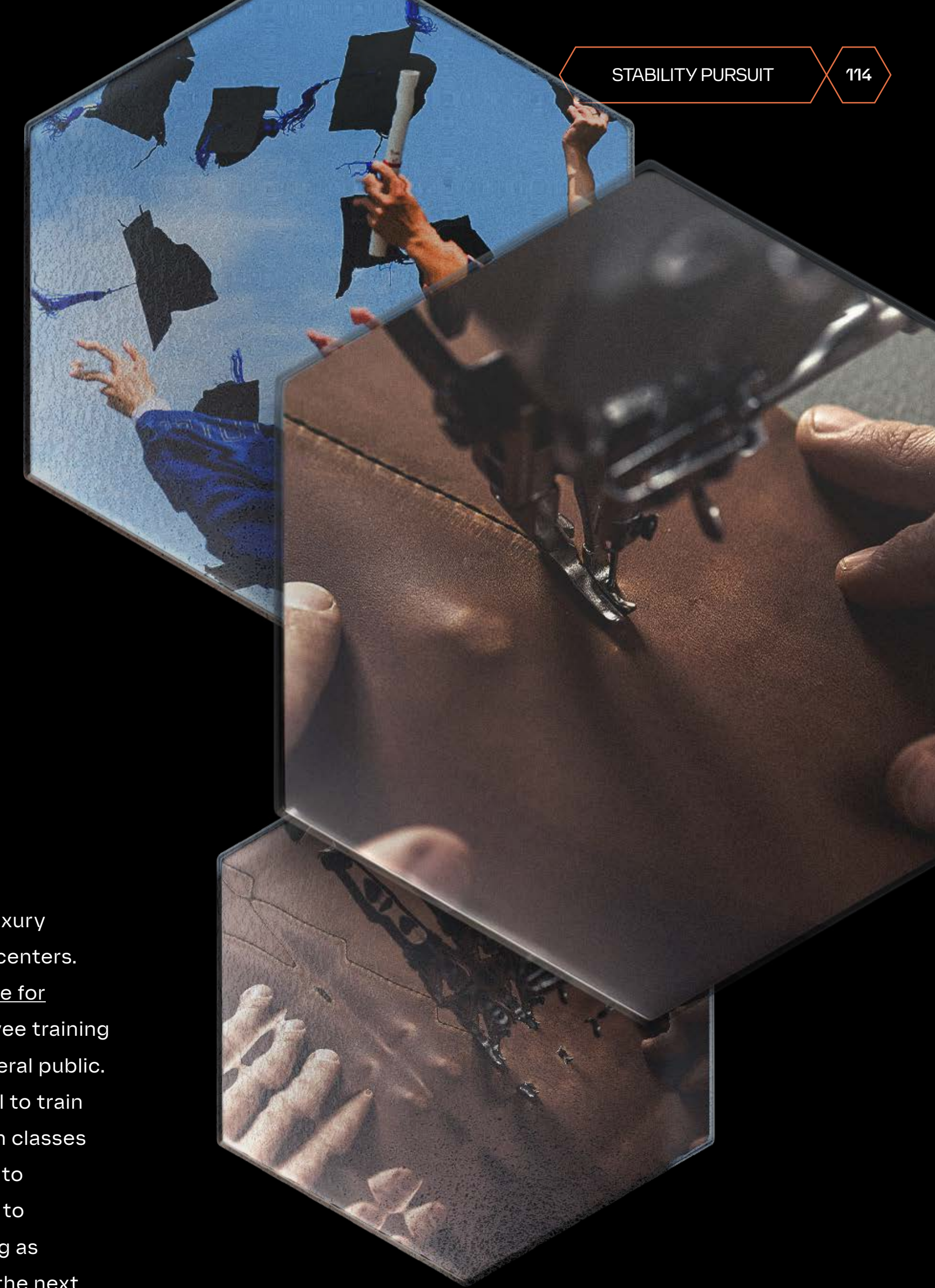
The future is looking more and more gray, with workers age 55 and above set to fill 150 million more jobs globally by 2030. And while most people don't want to spend their final chapter of life working full time, longer life spans often mean a greater financial safety net is needed. One solution that could serve both companies and employees is flextirement. As explained by Niel Costa for Fast Company, "Flextirement would allow employees the opportunity to semi-retire, never fully leaving their current job or finding a new opportunity but working in some part-time capacity. This could be focused on key initiatives, a project basis, or a mentorship role." Such an arrangement would give older employers the opportunity to flex their expertise as they transition to a more relaxed lifestyle, while also allowing employers to retain seasoned talent that may be too expensive to employ full time.

The World Economic Forum predicts that 44% of workers' skills will be disrupted between 2023 and 2028—up nine percentage points from its last five-year projection.

— World Economic Forum

LUXURY TRADE TRAINING

Faced with a shortage of specialized craftspeople, luxury brands are launching their own schools and training centers. In October, LVMH announced the creation of a "centre for excellence in the trades," which will house an employee training area as well as practical craft workshops for the general public. In the same week, Bottega Veneta launched a school to train both university students and current employees with classes covering everything from bag design, to production, to professional communication skills. These efforts aim to preserve age-old skills that are at risk of disappearing as craftspeople retire. Altagamma estimates that over the next five years, Italy's luxury goods companies will need to employ 346,000 professionals in top-level trades, including more than 40,000 in fashion and leather goods.





COLLEGE-COMPANY COLLABS

There's no debating the fact that innovation moves fast. So how can universities ensure that the curriculum is keeping pace with the skills employers actually need, when they need them? One way is to forge closer collaborations. Just look to how Roblox [partnered](#) with Parsons School of Design to launch a course focused on digital fashion—an industry expected to be worth [\\$2.5 billion](#) by 2028. This could very well become the new model going forward, where employers work hand in hand with universities to design courses as trends unfold.

HUMANOID ROBOT WORKERS

From robotic restaurants to AI code generators, it's no wonder why the fear of becoming obsolete ("FOBO") is intensifying. For the millions of people around the world who work in warehouses, these concerns became even more real when [news broke](#) that Amazon is testing a humanoid robot that looks and moves just like them. Built by Oregon-based startup Agility Robotics, the robot (named Digit) will initially be used to help employees pick up and move empty crates after they've been emptied. But that's not all. The e-commerce giant is also deploying a separate wheel-based robot system called Sequoia that it claims will be able to identify and store inventory 75% faster than humans. Despite Amazon insisting that these systems will support employees rather than replace them, it's not hard to imagine a future where warehouses are entirely run by bots.

INFLUENCER EDUCATION

There's finally a clear path to making it as a full-time influencer in the \$250 billion creator economy. To help people on their journey, talent management company Whalar is launching [The Lighthouse](#)—a series of physical campuses for creators to learn, make, and collaborate with their peers. Two campuses will open next year in Venice, CA, and Brooklyn, NY, with a third location coming to London in 2025. What sets The Lighthouse apart from previous content houses is its emphasis on education. Each campus will be modeled after a university, complete with lecture halls where students will learn about topics like e-commerce strategy, navigating taxes and brand contracts, using AI, and more. Another institution taking influencers seriously is Southeast Technical University in Carlow, Ireland, which is set to introduce the [country's first degree](#) in social media influencing this September.

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.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **ASSISTIVE ROBOTICS**
- ✗ **BESPOKE LLMS**
- ✗ **GENERATIVE AI**

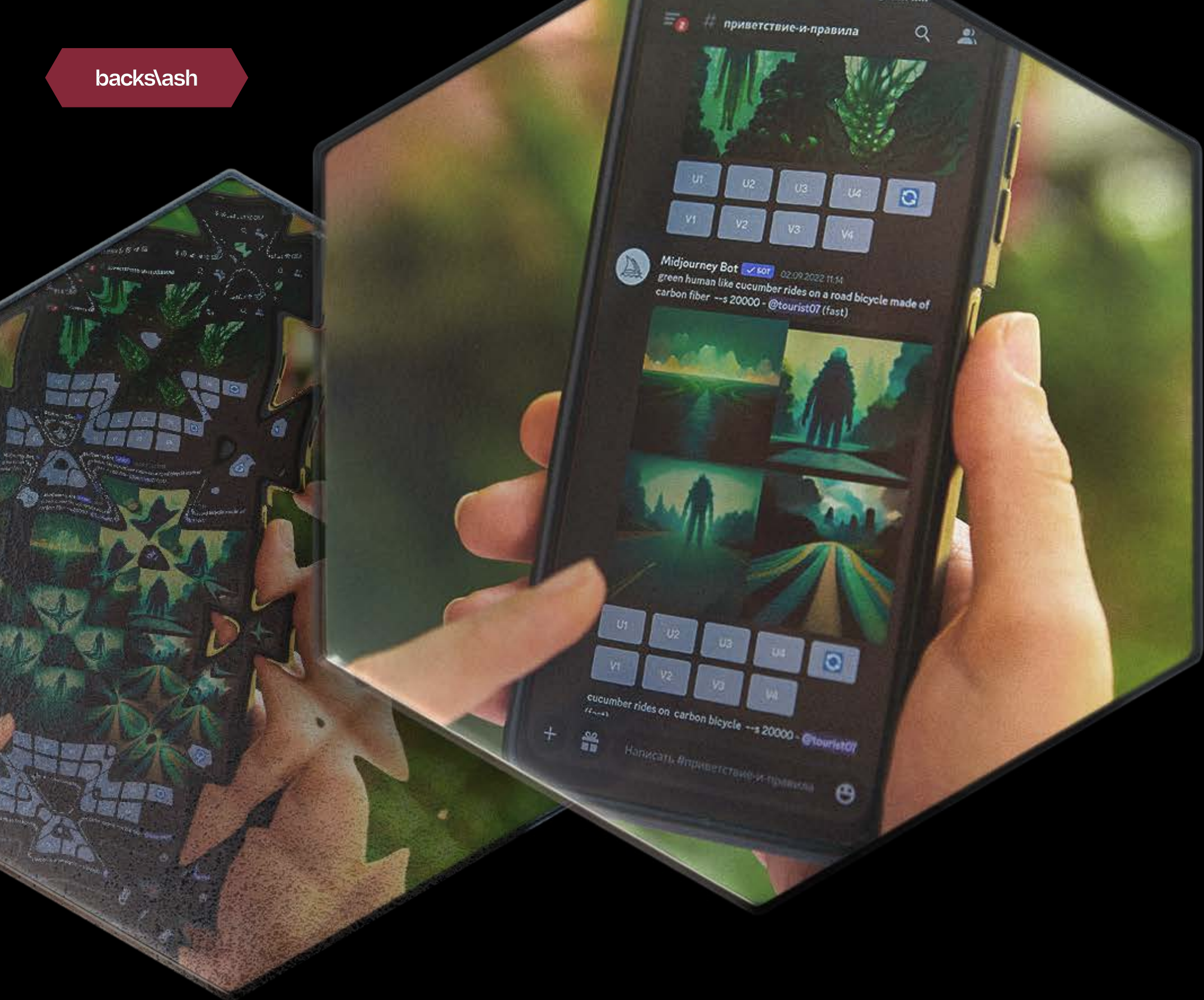
A privacy renegotiation is underway. Fed up with inescapable surveillance, citizens are taking back their identities and demanding better protections both online and off. In the age of constant intrusion, Stealth Mode is peace of mind and anonymity is the ambition.

STEALTH MODE

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When it comes to who is responsible for privacy leadership, half (50%) of adults globally say national or local government should be primary, 21% said organizations (including private companies), and 19% said the individuals themselves should be primarily responsible for protecting their own data.

— Cisco 2023 Consumer Privacy Survey

ARTISTS AGAINST AI

A new data poisoning tool called Nightshade is helping artists prevent their work from being used to train AI models without their consent. The open-source tool lets artists add invisible changes to the pixels in their art before they upload it online, so that if it's scraped into an AI training set, it will cause the model to break in unpredictable ways. For example, the "poison" may exploit a security vulnerability that makes the model think that images of cars are cows, or that hats are cakes. As AI copyright lawsuits hang in the balance, tools like Nightshade are shifting power back to the people and sending a strong message to tech giants: until there's fair credit and compensation across the board, artists will continue playing defense.

INVISIBILITY CLOAKS

According to Italian startup Cap_able, surveillance is out and privacy-first fashion is in. The company is taking on AI with a unique line of hoodies, pants, T-shirts, and dresses that are specially designed to confuse facial recognition software. Each garment sports a pattern, known as an "adversarial patch," that makes it so that the camera will either fail to identify the wearer or will think they are one of the animals embedded into the design, which includes a zebra, giraffe, dog, and more. It's fashion that doesn't just look cool, but makes a serious statement against our era of 24/7 tracking. → For more, watch Backslash's episode of Life on the Edge: Anti-Surveillance Activism

BURNER PHONES

Deloitte and KPMG, two of the Big Four accounting firms, were recently advised by their US-based executives not to use their usual work phones on a trip to Hong Kong, according to the Financial Times. Instead, staff was instructed to use cheap burner phones that can be discarded after the trip in order to protect their identity and their whereabouts. The advice comes after China introduced the national security law in Hong Kong in 2021, which has been used to clamp down on pro-democracy activism and reinforce Beijing's control over the city. Similarly, athletes participating in the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics were also advised to use burner phones.

VIRTUAL PRIVATE ASSISTANTS

Imagine if you could make dinner reservations, schedule appointments, or buy things online without ever having to share your name or any other personal information. That's the vision being championed by Internet of Things expert Tom Snyder, who is advocating for the creation of what he calls "Virtual Private Assistants," or VPAs. Similar to how a VPN works, these VPAs would use an anonymized IP address in order to verify your identity without ever revealing it. In practice, this would allow someone to schedule a haircut online without inputting a name or phone number, then simply show up at the appointment and tap their phone to a terminal to verify that the appointment is theirs. Such a service would make anonymity the norm, giving people the choice to share their data only in the instances where they feel the value outweighs the costs.

ONLINE SAFETY ACT CONTROVERSY

In an effort to turn the UK into the “safest place in the world to be online,” the British government recently pushed the Online Safety Bill through parliament. But critics warn that the bill may actually end up threatening privacy—not boosting it. The most controversial clause of the Online Safety Act is Section 122, which would allow companies to scan users’ messages to make sure that they aren’t sending illegal material. That would be nearly impossible to do without breaking the end-to-end encryption on platforms like WhatsApp and Signal. To call attention to the potentially dangerous implications, WhatsApp [released a short film](#) in October showing how a group of teenage Afghan soccer players used the app to coordinate their escape from the Taliban after the withdrawal of US troops in 2021. “We produced this documentary to help raise awareness around the particular safety issues women face and how private communication allows everyone to speak freely, wherever they are in the world,” says Victoria Grand, WhatsApp’s VP of global affairs.

DATA ANONYMIZER

Just as [artists](#) and [media companies](#) have complained that generative AI developers have used their work without permission, data regulator are now saying the same for people’s personal information. Hoping to provide some protection is Japanese startup [Acompany Inc.](#) The company is developing a “[Data Anonymizer](#),” service that detects and automatically masks highly confidential information when businesses use generative AI such as ChatGPT. This includes a person’s name, telephone number, home address, email address, and bank account—all of which are readily available online.

CONTROLLED “SHARENTING”

By the time kids are 18, an average of 70,000 pieces of information about them are available online. Even more surprising is that most of that information isn’t even shared by them. Much of it is posted on social media courtesy of their proud parents, who often start posting baby photos days or even hours after they’re born (AKA “[sharenting](#)”). Enter [Footprint](#), a secure platform that limits parents to sharing with a maximum of 36 people rather than a bunch of random internet strangers. The app offers the same level of security you’d get by sharing photos and videos via email, but with the same engaging social elements you’d find on Facebook or Instagram. It also comes amid a broader push to reconsider how child privacy is being exploited online, as seen through the emergence of campaigns like [Quit Clicking Kids](#), which aims to protect child influencers from money-hungry parents.

GLOBAL VPN GROWTH

Back in 1996, Microsoft originated the concept of a Virtual Private Network (VPN) as a way to allow employees anywhere in the world to be connected via the public internet, while at the same time in a protected, private network. Since then, their popularity has exploded as people have becoming increasingly aware of how their online data is constantly being monitored and sold. It’s estimated that 1.6 billion people worldwide now use VPNs for freer access and peace of mind, accounting for about 31% of all global internet traffic.

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?

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **CONNECTED OBJECTS**
- ✗ **DECENTRALIZED SOCIAL**
- ✗ **AVATAR IDENTITIES**



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 being put front and center.

UNGLOSSSED

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FAILURE WEEK

While most universities put success on a pedestal, Korea's leading science and technology institute, KAIST, is teaching students to embrace failure. Welcome to [Failure Week](#). The two-week event kicked off in October, and consisted of a "Capture the Failure Moment" photo contest, a "Failed Tasks Showdown" where students share their screw-ups in a stand-up comedy format, and professor-led "Failure Seminars" that teach students how to deal with failure in a healthy way. The KAIST Center for Ambitious Failure (CAF) says the event has been arranged to allow students to shamelessly share their failures in an institution that's typically teeming with competition and intense academic pressure.

DIVORCE PARTIES

"End of an Error" sashes, champagne, and "Thank U Next" balloons are just a few things you might find at a divorce party. These parties aren't necessarily celebrating the end of a marriage, but rather, the start of a new chapter. And they're becoming increasingly popular. Pinterest searches for "divorce-party games" [surged 80%](#) in June 2022 compared the year before, and related hashtags have over 83k posts on Instagram, 100M views on TikTok, and thousands of likes on Chinese video-sharing app Xiaohongshu. Though certainly not for everyone, these post-marriage soirees represent a cultural shift away from the idea that divorce is something to be ashamed of.

SCROUNGING

In the [Scrounging](#) cookbook, you won't find perfectly plated, Instagram-ready dishes. In fact, you'll find the opposite. The cookbook comes from film production company A24, and it features a compilation of "54 last-ditch recipes from the movies" like Parker Posey's single chicken wing in *Waiting for Guffman* and Buddy's maple-syrup-soaked spaghetti in *Elf*. All of the flash photos are intentionally unappetizing, and recipes range from the outrageous (like an egg-and-snickers smoothie) to the shamelessly indulgent (like carbonara eaten in bed). The point of the book, according to chef Matty Matheson, is to remind people that "Eating isn't always glamorous. Sometimes it's thrifty, idiosyncratic, messy, or weird—sometimes a little too weird."

REJECTION THERAPY

With over 100 million views on TikTok, "[rejection therapy](#)" is getting people more comfortable with hearing "no." Whether it's asking a stranger for a hug or asking to get something for free, the goal of rejection therapy is simple: try to get rejected, and eventually become so comfortable with it that it no longer affects you or induces anxiety. For some, it's a fun monthlong challenge. For others, it's a kind of exposure therapy for their people-pleasing tendencies or irrational fears of being embarrassed in public.

RAW DATING

RAW is bringing the BeReal ethos to the online dating scene. Hailed as a more authentic kind of dating app, RAW is trading perfectly curated profiles for real-time photos that users post daily. The idea is that everyone appears as they really are on that very day, just as is the case when you meet people IRL. Other notable features include self-destructing chats that help minimize the effects of ghosting, and a "respect meter" that shows people's green/beige/red flags as reported by others. With [200K monthly active users](#) across the US and the UK in just five months, it appears that RAW's mission is resonating with daters.



CRINGE CONTENT

As a concept, cringe content is difficult to describe. But if a video makes you so uncomfortable that it's hard to get through, it probably qualifies. Failed attempts, politically incorrect humor, exaggerated fandoms, and impersonations of unbearable people are just a few examples. One creator [cashing in](#) on all-things cringe is [Stanzi Potenza](#), who describes herself as a "sketch comedian from hell." She has gained millions of followers on TikTok and YouTube by posting content that pokes fun of everything from mansplaining to horror film "The Purge." Other forms of cringe content may be less obviously satirical. But if you're unsure whether something is serious or intentionally embarrassing, it's safe to assume that the joke is probably on you.

HAIRY GIRL SUMMER

Forget hot girl summer, it's time to embrace "hairy girl summer." The movement has been championed by the likes of Spanish influencer [Calita Fire](#) and Aussie influencer [Bella Davis](#), spurring a global movement that encourages women to put down the razors and let their all-natural, completely normal body hair do its thing. "I think more and more women and girls are asking themselves why they shave and who for," said Calita. The embrace of female body hair comes amid a broader push to reject unrealistic beauty standards, as seen with celebs like Pamela Anderson and Alicia Keys going makeup-free on the red carpet, and with Ariana Grande [opening up](#) about her complicated relationship with lip fillers and Botox.

HALL OF SHAME

Every year, Forbes releases its highly anticipated "30-Under-30" list that recognizes the most impressive founders, tech titans, and cultural tastemakers. But in an unexpected move, the company published its first-ever "[Hall of Shame](#)" in 2023. The list features previous 30-Under-30 honorees who have since fallen from grace, including now-infamous names like Martin Shkreli and Sam Bankman-Fried. By clearly calling out "the picks they wish they could take back," Forbes is practicing unabashed accountability and proving that even the most highly praised individuals aren't always what they appear to be.

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 upfront about the things that still need improvement.
- **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.
- **GET MESSY**
Embrace the unfiltered, unapologetic, non-conformist version of your brand or product.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

X LO-FI DESIGN



UNTOURISM

The days of limitless travel are coming to a close. Between overcrowded destinations and careless tourist behavior, a clear need for boundaries is giving rise to tighter regulations and more mindful business models. The shift from high-volume to high-value travel will forever change how we define a brag-worthy trip.



“We have apps where we can count how many countries we visited and what percentage of Earth’s available surface we covered. Our big challenge is to educate people to travel in a different way.”

— **Tatyana Tsukanova, research associate at EHL Hospitality Business School**

BAD TOURIST CRACKDOWNS

Destinations around the globe are growing increasingly fed up with rude, rowdy, and downright unacceptable tourist behavior—and they’re starting to do something about it. In Bali, regular obscene acts by tourists have prompted the proposal of [new rules for visitors](#), including a ban on climbing its mountains, which are considered sacred and home to Hindu deities. Other no-no’s include touching holy trees, swearing in public, scaling religious buildings, and interrupting Balinese ceremonies. Similarly, Amsterdam launched a [“stay away” advertising campaign](#) last year that discourages young people from traveling to the city for drinking, prostitution and drugs. And last but not least, authorities from Spain’s Balearic Islands—which include Ibiza, Mallorca and Menorca—[recently warned](#) that drunk vacationers could be banned from the isles if they don’t keep their behavior in check.

CARBON PASSPORTS

With all of the recent conversations around the travel industry’s devastating environmental impact, it might be time to consider a new approach: [carbon passports](#). This idea, proposed by certified B-Corp Intrepid Travel, would mean that travelers are assigned a yearly carbon allowance that they can’t exceed. In essence, your yearly travel would be limited by your frequency and distance traveled. Intrepid Travel’s report predicts that we will see carbon passports in action by 2040. In the meantime, the company is pushing people to make more eco-conscious travel plans by [adding carbon labels](#) to 500 of its most popular itineraries.

GRASSROOTS ANTI-TOURISM EFFORTS

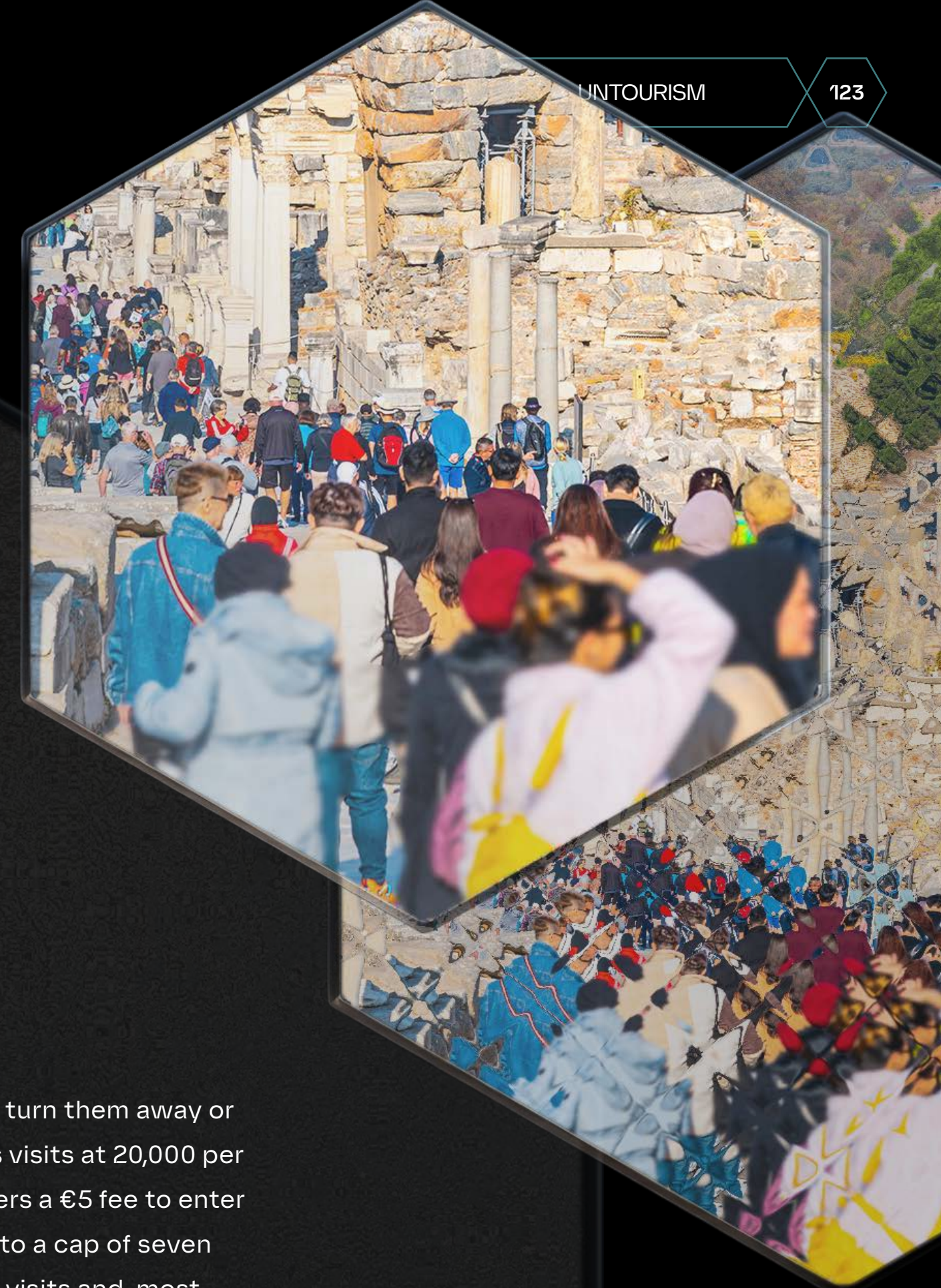
For years now, governments and city authorities have been introducing measures to control tourism. But things aren’t changing fast enough for frustrated locals across Europe, who are now [stepping up their efforts](#) to deter tourists. A group in Athens plastered short-term rental buildings with fake but official-looking posters that warn people to evacuate due to a bedbug infestation; disgruntled residents of Vallcarca, Spain have started rotating the signs to the iconic Park Güell to send visitors in the wrong direction; and a grassroots group in Amsterdam called “Stop de Gekte” (“Stop the madness”) patrols the red light district on weekends in order to document rowdy tourist behavior and gain press coverage that they hope will spur government change. Despite the obvious economic need for tourism, cities that fail to put residents first can expect these efforts to intensify in 2024 and beyond.

VISITOR CAPS & TOURIST FEES

While some cities are still desperately trying to attract visitors, others are beginning to either turn them away or make them pay. The Acropolis of Athens, Greece’s most popular archaeological site, now caps visits at 20,000 per day to combat overcrowding; Venice started limiting tour group sizes and charging day-trippers a €5 fee to enter the city this year; and Bali also recently introduced a \$10 tourist tax and is currently looking into a cap of seven million tourists a year. These controls aim to not only reduce crowds, but to encourage longer visits and, most importantly, improve quality of life for residents.

DIGITAL NOMAD GENTRIFICATION

When the pandemic upended office norms, a wave of workers flocked to Mexico City—causing the city’s digital nomad population to nearly triple between 2019 and 2022. Now it’s locals who are paying the price. The influx of foreigners has caused rent prices to double, putting stress on an already tight housing market and forcing longtime residents out of their own city. And rising costs are only half the story. Digital nomads are also altering the fabric of the city, leaving many Mexico City natives concerned about the erasure of their beloved culture. With cities like Medellín, Colombia and Lisbon, Portugal facing a similar issue, Mexico City’s moves are being watched closely. → For more, watch Backslash’s episode of [Life on the Edge: Digital Nomad Gentrification](#)



AVIATION RESTRICTIONS

To protect the peace and serenity of nature, the US has passed new regulations that will limit the flying of planes and helicopters around nearly two dozen national parks and monuments. Mount Rushmore National Memorial and Badlands National Park will have some of the strictest rules, banning commercial air tours within one-half mile of the site boundaries by April 2024. Meanwhile, Glacier National Park is phasing out all sightseeing flights by the end of 2029.

CRUISE CONTROL

In July, Amsterdam banned cruise ships from docking in the city center in an attempt to rein in mass tourism. Besides the fact that cruise ships are heavy polluters, Amsterdam officials say that cruise ship tourists typically only stay for a few hours and don't bring in any substantial business. And with over 18 million visitors last year, the Dutch capital can afford to be picky. Blocking cruise ships has already proven to be successful in Venice. In 2019, Venice was the most polluted European port due to large numbers of cruise-ship visits. But after banning large cruise ships from entering the city's waters, it dropped to 41st place just two years later.

One in two travelers are willing to change their travel plans to reduce their carbon footprint, even if it's more expensive or less convenient.

— Intrepid Travel, 2023

MANAGING THE FLOW

The answer to overtourism isn't to stop traveling altogether. Rather, it's about redirecting the flow of tourists to create better balance. One country leading by example is Japan, where officials are actively working to shift visitors away from major hotspots like Tokyo and Kyoto and instead entice them to visit lesser-known rural areas. In these areas, the ministry plans to support local municipalities by promoting slower, more authentic experiences that you won't find in big cities—such as overnight stays in historic villages or quiet hikes on untouched land. And with the majority of travelers in search of unique and authentic experiences, Japan may not have to do much convincing after all.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **POINT TO THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED**
Companies can encourage travel to lesser-known destinations by reframing the unexpected itinerary as the most aspirational.
- **SHOW THE WHOLE PICTURE**
Beyond just stating the amount of CO2-e kg emitted, brands can get creative in how they communicate the holistic social, cultural, and environmental impact of a particular trip.
- **QUALITY OVER QUANTITY**
What if businesses rewarded travelers who book fewer, longer trips and give back to the communities they visit?



NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **THIRD PLACE GAMING**
- ✗ **EXTENDED REALITY**

WEALTH

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.

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HACKING



FRACTIONAL REAL ESTATE

For the growing number of people who can't afford to buy a full home, buying a percentage of one is the next best thing. This being made possible through fractional investment startups that allow prospective buyers to join investment pools and co-purchase a property for just a few dollars down. Some players to watch include [Lofty AI](#), which uses a token model for people to buy in and lets them collect rent later that same day; [reAlpha](#), which sells shares in homes that serve as Airbnbs; and [Landa](#), which lets people invest in shares valued as low as \$5. Right now, fractional investing startups represent a relatively small niche in the real estate market, but according to Casey Berman, managing partner at venture capital firm Camber Creek, the idea is "growing faster than it's ever grown."

ALTERNATIVE INVESTING APPS

In times when the whole stock market is in the red, having your money in tangible assets can feel like a safer bet. That's precisely why alternative investing platforms are on the rise. These platforms are democratizing a practice once reserves for elite investors, and there's no shortage of clever options. [Vinovest](#) lets users invest in bottles of wine and whiskey, offering four investment tiers, starting at \$1k. [Masterworks](#) gives investors access to multimillion-dollar artworks by famous contemporary artists. [AcreTrader](#) offers ownership shares in US farmland with a minimum investment of \$10k. And [Public](#) lets users invest in everything from [Shrek](#) music rights, to an Hermes Birkin bag, to a first-edition Harry Potter book. Since things like fine art and wine don't usually correlate with the stock market, these alternative strategies are an attractive way to diversify your portfolio and mitigate risk.

DOPPELGANGER INCOME

Imagine if you had a digital doppelganger to generate income on behalf. This AI twin could be trained to think like you and act like, just hundreds of times more efficiently—freeing people from 40+ hour workweeks and potentially serving as a new funding source for Universal Basic Income. Your day might go something like this: wake up, brief your digital doppelganger on the day's agenda, update it with the latest information, and then let it get to work while you get on with your life. As out-there as it might sound, startups like [Dopple](#) are already creating the technology to make it happen. So prepare to sit back, relax, and let your virtual clone rake in the dough.

SILICON VALLEY BANK COLLAPSE

In March 2023, Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) failed after a bank run, marking the third-largest bank failure in United States history and the largest since the 2007–2008 financial crisis. To make matters worse, it was just one of three bank failures, along with Silvergate Bank and Signature Bank, to occur that same month. The public's trust in the banking industry sharply dropped in the aftermath. According to one poll, only 10% of respondents said they have a "great deal" of confidence in banking and financial institutions—down from 22% in 2020. Despite analysts reassuring people that the broader banking sector is healthy, the effects on economic growth and financial stability are expected to linger much longer than the headlines.

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

— [Edelman Trust Barometer 2024](#)

GENERATIONAL WEALTH INFLUENCERS

Social media influencers are encouraging parents to add their kid's name to their credit card, insisting that it will boost their child's financial prospects by allowing them to build credit before they even turn 18. So long as the parents pay their bills on time, anyway. While some card issuers like Discover and American Express have minimum age limits in place for authorized credit card users, others like Capital One and Citi allow children of any age to become authorized credit card users. Will it make your kid rich? Most likely not, though it could certainly give them a nice head start.

BUYING UP ABANDONED AKIYA

Japan has more than 8 million abandoned homes but no buyers—a result of the country's shrinking population. Now, foreigners are buying up these homes (also known as akiya) for less than \$50,000 and renovating them for personal use or for Airbnb rentals. "We would never have been able to afford a house of this quality and size if it wasn't an akiya," said Chihiro Thursfield, an Australian who bought an empty home in Japan for 3 million yen, or around \$23,000. The Nomura Research Institute predicts that akiya could exceed 30% of all houses in Japan by 2033. Similar trends are unfolding around the world, from Italy to Portugal, as people seek a more accessible gateway to homeownership.



BITCOIN ETF

On January 10, 2024, US regulators reluctantly approved the first Bitcoin exchange-traded funds (ETFs)—marking a long-awaited and much-needed win for the cryptocurrency industry after nearly two years of turmoil. The approval is expected to thrust Bitcoin further into the financial mainstream, making it so that investors can now own Bitcoin without having to use a cold wallet or open a separate account through a crypto-trading platform like Coinbase. For longtime fans of crypto, though, this integration with the traditional financial system could be a turn off. After all, the ETF makes Wall Street an intermediary between investors and crypto, which directly contradicts a key part of crypto's appeal: an opportunity for skeptics to ditch Wall Street once and for all.

WHAT'S NEXT

- **MAKE IT ATTAINABLE**
Explore alternative ownership models or flexible purchasing options that cater to a wide range of incomes.
- **UNLOCK LITTLE WINS**
Build in financial rewards and income opportunities that make people feel like they're outsmarting the system.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **COMMUNITY COMMERCE,**
- ✗ **DECENTRALIZED SOCIAL**
- ✗ **NON-FUNGIBLE EVERYTHING**



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 expectation.

WORK-LIFE BOUNDARIES

20
24

EDGES \ backslash
2024

BUILT-IN BOUNDARIES

Workplace boundaries are going from employee-led to employer-led; from reactive to proactive; and from something that's earned over time to something that's given automatically. On a day-to-day level, building for boundaries means creating a culture where logging off early is not only allowed, but encouraged—a tactic that's becoming increasingly common as employers aim to lure in young talent. As of March 2023, more than 1,400 UK job postings mentioned “early-finish Fridays” as a benefit. Other companies, like Chinese video-streaming provider Leshi, are implementing half-day Wednesdays in order to help staff recharge midweek. Beyond weekly schedules, companies should also be restructuring career paths at large to allow for built-in breaks—debunking the idea that rest has to wait until retirement. This might include encouraging sabbaticals for personal and professional development (an increasingly popular benefit), advocating for travel gaps, or even offering grandparent leave for older employees who don't want to miss out on quality family time.

DITCHING THE DESK

Fed up with grueling schedules and high-pressure work environments, a growing number of young people in China are quitting their corporate jobs in favor of something more physical. The hashtag “my first experience with physical labor” has amassed more than 28 million views on Xiaohongshu, with people celebrating their transition from tech worker to retail store cashier; accountant to street food vendor; or marketing manager to delivery driver. Those who have made the voluntary switch to blue-collar work say they're enjoying the predictable hours and less competitive environment—even if it means taking a pay cut. This transition to manual labor also comes as competition for white-collar jobs grows more intense. With China's youth unemployment rate reaching 21% last summer, some are simply choosing to opt out of the rat race altogether. For others, the switch to physical labor is serving as a temporary but much-needed break from the corporate grind.

PROTESTS AGAINST PRODUCTIVITY

2023 was the year anti-work movements took over social media. Employees traded quiet quitting for “loud quitting”—a much more dramatic exit where you openly vocalize your frustrations before calling it quits; they decided to “act their wage” by doing whatever they considered to be a fair amount of work for how much they were getting paid; they embraced a slow, laid-back start to the week with “bare minimum Mondays”; and they glorified “lazy girl jobs” that pay decently, can be done from home, and come with minimal stress. These trends mark a sharp pivot away from hustle culture, proving that the new brag-worthy gig is the one that puts life first.

OOO EMAIL FINES

Dream 11, India's biggest fantasy sports company, is making sure that vacation time is respected in 2023. Through their aptly named Unplug Policy, employees are encouraged to completely unplug from any form of work-related contact for a whole week. Not only will they be removed from all communication channels, but if a coworker calls, texts, or emails them during this sacred time, they'll have to pay... literally. Anyone who ignores the OOO message will be hit with a stiff fine of 1 lakh (\$1,200). Dream 11's move comes as workers struggle to actually log off during their PTO. According to a recent poll from Fishbowl, 54% of professionals say they can't fully unplug from work when they take paid time off. With burnout on high, businesses are rethinking their policies to ensure that time off serves its purpose: rest, rejuvenation, and a much-needed break from emails.

PUSHING PATERNITY LEAVE

Just 17% of new fathers in Japan took child care leave in 2022, compared to 80% of women. Hoping to close the gap, a health ministry panel is proposing a plan to increase child care leave allowance so that it covers 100% of income—up from around 80%—if both parents each take 14 days of leave or more. This would directly address the biggest barrier to taking paternity leave: reduced income. Men also say that competitive workplace culture makes it difficult to take such leave. But things are slowly starting to change. Real estate firm Daiwa Lease, for example, recently announced that it will offer ¥1 million (\$6,600) for its male workers who take paternity leave of three months or longer. The health ministry panel also discussed offering benefits to those who work shorter hours after a child is born.



BLUE-COLLAR FLEX

Flexibility—long considered a white-collar privilege—is finally making its way to non-office work. In Germany, for example, DIY retailer Hornbach recently granted its 11,000 employees full autonomy over when they work. Through an online portal, everyone from office managers to warehouse workers can regularly adjust their hours based on if they want to be full-time or part-time, or if they want to work longer shifts to create a four-day week. Similarly, UK construction company Sir Robert McAlpine is running two different flexible working trials. On one site, workers have the option to work longer hours Monday to Thursday so that they can leave at lunchtime on Friday. And on another site, workers get one “flex” day that they can take off every three weeks. Though there’s still a ways to go—only 24% of non-office workers have seen increased flexibility since the start of the pandemic, compared to 52% of knowledge workers—flexible schedules could very well be the next frontier for blue-collar jobs.

WORK-FROM-GYM

With co-working spaces like WeWork facing market tumult, gyms are capitalizing on the opportunity to attract remote workers—for a fee, of course. One sports complex leading the way is Chelsea Piers, which recently added 4,000 square feet of co-working space to its new Brooklyn location. Elsewhere, gyms are adding desks and outlets to pool decks, phone booths to lounge areas, or even dedicating entire floors to workers. People who choose to work from these fitness-centric locations say it allows them to toggle between self-care and their job—making it easy to squeeze a pilates class or sauna session into their day. As more people grow tired of lonely home offices or overcrowded cafes, we could see a rise in third spaces that seamlessly merge work and wellness.

“Rest is not the absence of performance. It’s part of performance. How do we think about rest not to recharge after we burn out, but to ensure our employees stay charged over time?”

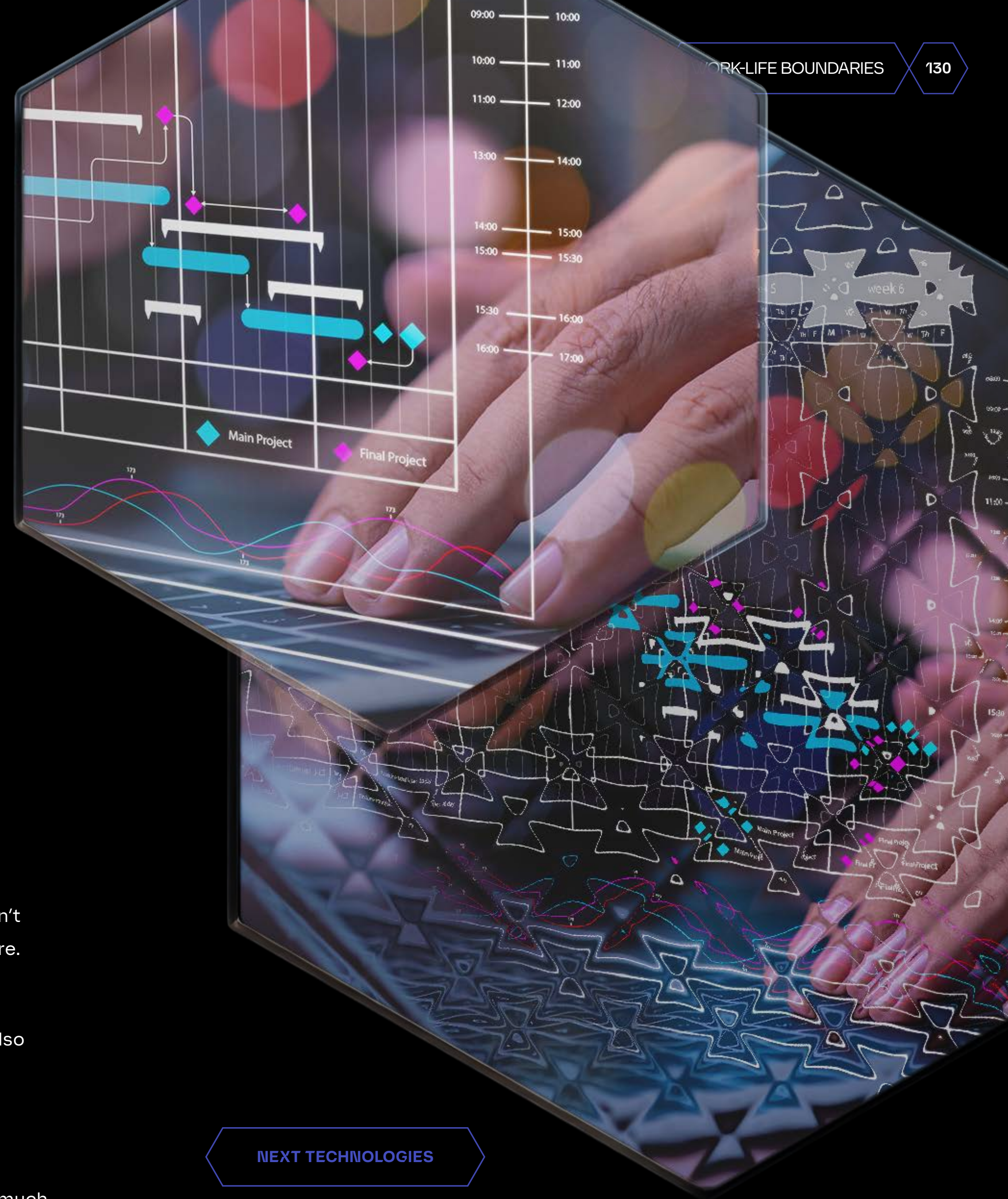
— Brent Cassell, VP, Advisory at Gartner

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.
- **360° FLEXIBILITY**
Flexibility is no longer just about when and where you work. It also extends to pay packages, benefits, and team structures.
- **REINFORCE BOUNDARIES THROUGH COMPANY TECH**
Instead of tracking when employees are offline, what if systems alerted managers when their team members were working too much overtime? Or, for non-office workers, what if scheduling software allowed employees to set their own break times?

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ **THIRD PLACE GAMING**
- ✗ **EXTENDED REALITY**



20
24

EDGES \ backslash
2024

ZERO

OUT

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

DEINFLUENCING

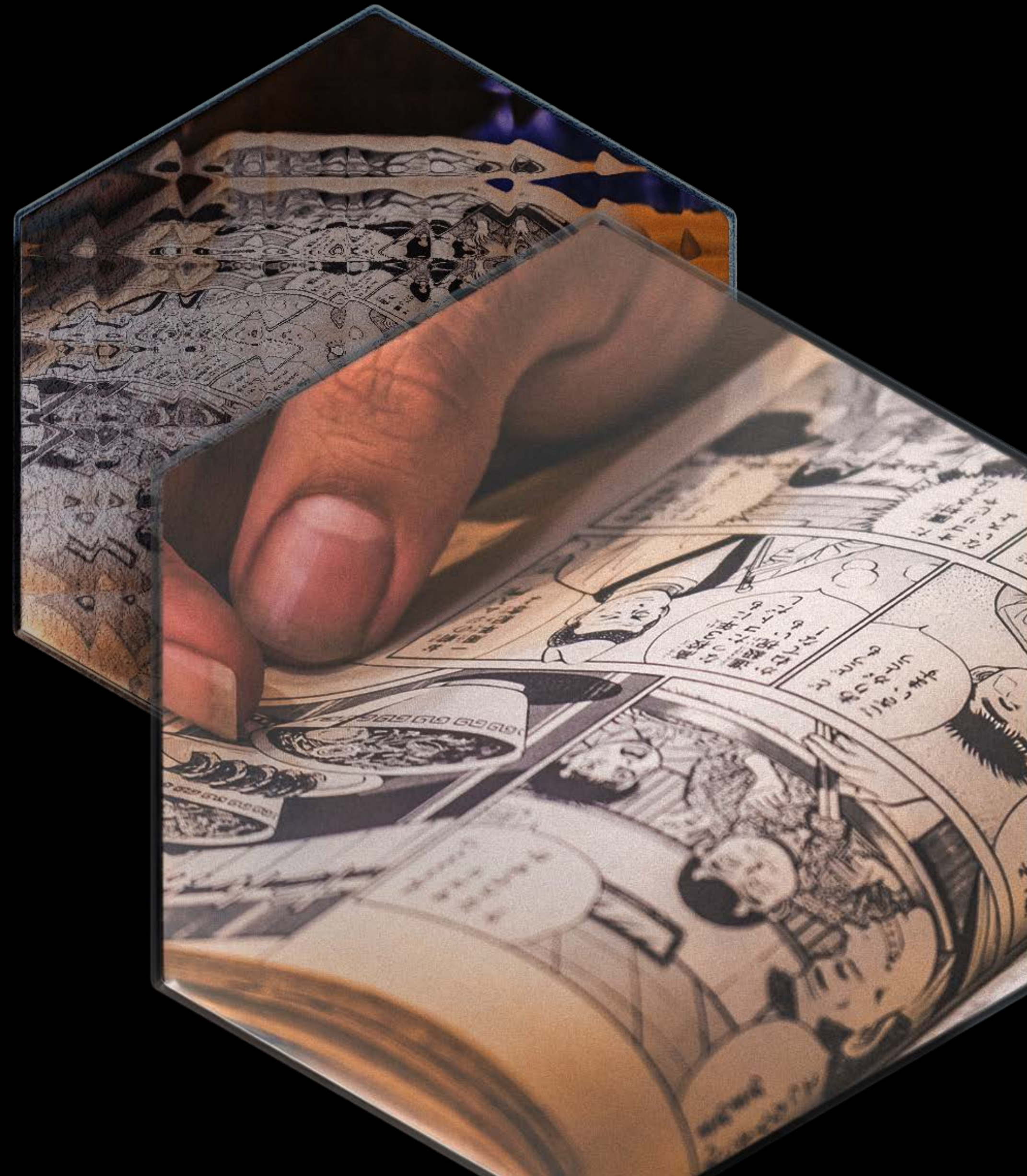
Those trendy new sunglasses that everyone is wearing? You don't need them. With over 1.1 billion views on TikTok, [#deinfluencing](#) videos are saying no to consumerism and encouraging people to buy less, buy smarter, and make the most of what they already have. For @OliveBranchCottage it's a PSA that "you don't need to buy anything you see online." For @OldLoserInBrooklyn, it's about being honest about the designer purchases she regrets. And for @CaitMM_, it's a matter of decluttering your closet and encouraging people to "lose it or use it." No matter the method, there's an underlying creed—resisting "buy, buy, buy" culture in favor of a less-is-more mindset.

PRINT REVIVAL

An overload of screen time is giving print a chance to shine again. In Japan, a growing number of artists and writers are saying "no" to social media and turning instead to small-scale, self-published works known as "zines." "It's about the joy of having something I can hold in my hands," says one fan. Meanwhile, over in the US, newspapers are also seeing a [rise](#) in print subscribers and iconic magazines like [NYLON](#) are getting back in the print business after years of being solely digital.

DAMP LIFESTYLES

Young people are putting a damper on drinking. Damp drinking—a term coined by TikToker @hana.elson—is about "internalizing the fact that drinking culture and your relationship with alcohol does not have to be black or white, all or nothing." The idea is similar to intuitive eating, but for liquor, where you take a more mindful approach to drinking and set boundaries in order to minimize the negative side effects. And [more than half](#) of Gen Z and Millennial drinkers are on board. As getting wasted goes out of style, businesses will be forced to adapt accordingly. We're already seeing brands like White Claw pivot to [non-alcoholic alternatives](#) in response. Next, we could see entirely new nightlife concepts centered around mindfulness rather than alcohol.



SLEEP TOURISM

Tired of coming back from vacation even more exhausted than when you left? You could probably use a sleep vacation. While not entirely new, [sleep tourism](#) is booming thanks to a growing emphasis on rest—and hotels are taking note. Park Hyatt New York, for example, recently rolled out new sleep suites with smart mattresses from Bryte that track your sleep metrics and adjust to your ideal temperature. Meanwhile, London's Cadogan Hotel is introducing a "Sleep Concierge" service that offers pillow mists, weighted blankets, and a bedtime meditation session with their resident sleep expert. Other upgrades to watch include circadian lighting, lavender downturn services, sleepytime teas, and time-released aromatherapy infusions. As exhaustion spikes, sleep amenities will go from premium perks to travel essentials.

INFLUENCERS NOT WELCOME

For years, tourist destinations and restaurants have been desperate to attract influencers. Now, they're banning them. One example comes from a trendy new design shop and cafe in Brooklyn called DAE, which recently [introduced rules](#) prohibiting people from taking photos and videos due to "TikTok and Instagram photoshoots getting out of control." A similar problem is occurring in picturesque towns. Last September, a Vermont town known for its autumn foliage ended up [closing](#) its roads to the public for the season due to an overwhelming amount of influencer tourists.

DUMBPHONES

Fed up with being tied to their devices, more young are trading out their do-it-all smartphones for minimalist dumbphones. Jose Briones, a "digital minimalism" content creator and moderator of the 32,000-member r/dumbphones subreddit, says that about 60% of the people that come to his page are looking for a solution to smartphone dependency. One company aiming to capitalize on the shift is Consumer Cellular, which offers a flip phone that looks like it's from 2008. Though a majority of the network's 4 million subscribers are currently 50 and older, Consumer Cellular's executives are betting that the IRIS Flip will also appeal to members of Gen Z. And with Kendrick Lamar's limited-edition Light Phone 2 recently selling out in a day, they just might be right.

Globally, 43% of consumers believe that technology has complicated their lives as much as it has simplified some things.

— Accenture, The Human Paradox

LOFI GIRL

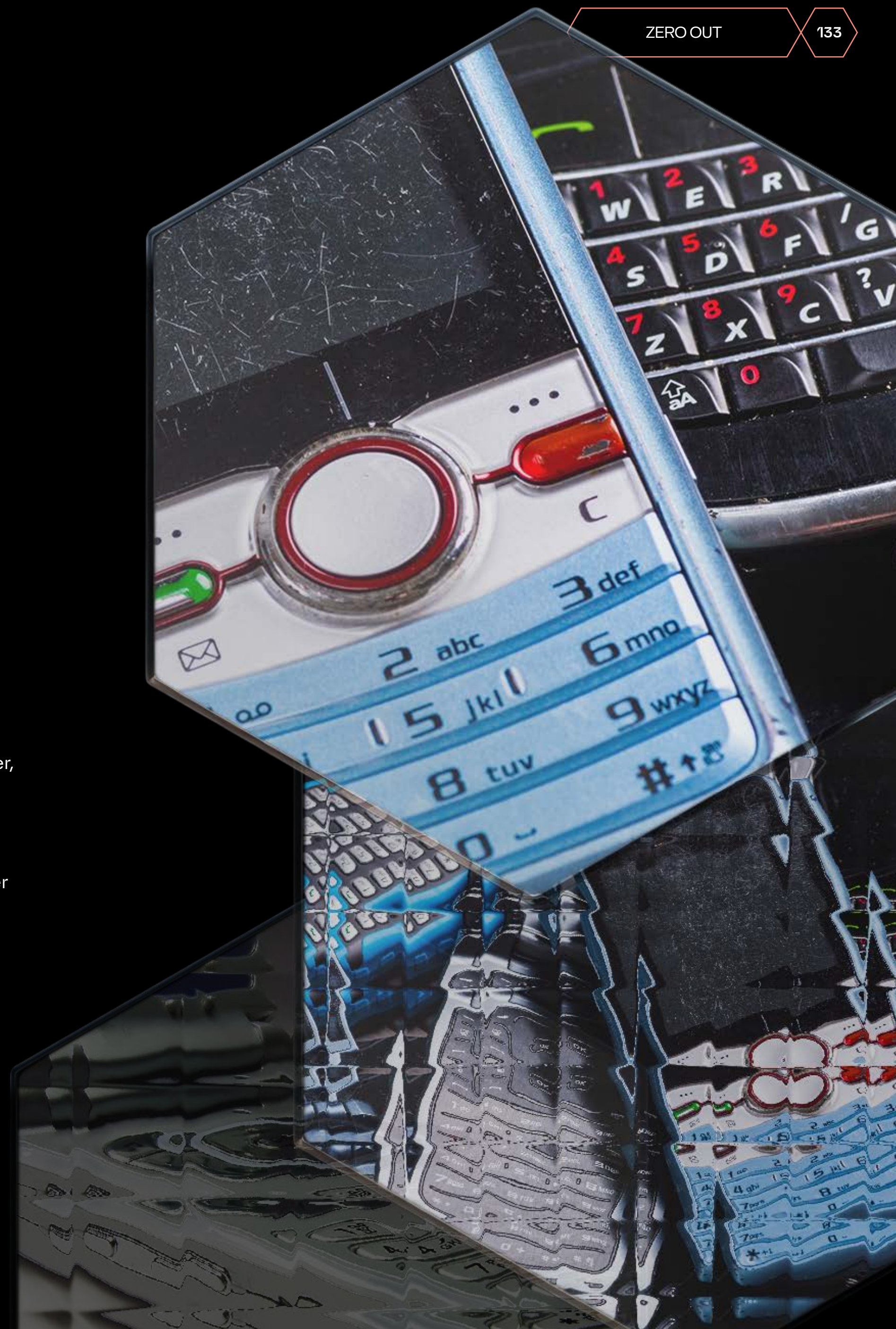
It's no secret that music can have a wide range of mental and emotional effects. But now more than ever, people are looking for music that mellows them out rather than hypes them up. Just look to the Lofi Girl YouTube account, a constant livestream of instrumental music that has more than 12 million subscribers and thousands of active listeners at any given moment. The account has become so popular, in fact, that major brands are tapping into its success. Nissan developed its own four-hour video inspired by Lofi Girl's look and sound, which has over 18 million views and counting. And Lego also teamed up with Lofi Girl last year to create a chill hip-hop playlist that serves as perfect background music for building Legos.

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 dialing back their commitments.
- **→ MAKE IT HUMAN**
As AI is integrated into everything and anything, experiences that feel innately human will offer a refreshing reprieve.

NEXT TECHNOLOGIES

- ✗ AMBIENT INTERFACES
- ✗ UNTETHERED AUDIO
- ✗ LO-FI DESIGN



NEXT TECHNO- LOGIES

Ambient Interfaces

A new breed of ambient, always-on technologies are eliminating the need for swiping, scrolling, or physical touch. These screen-free interfaces will make tech more omnipresent but less invasive, adding some refreshing variety to our daily tech diet.

Assistive Robotics

Accessible and adaptive robotics are working in harmony with humans—taking over daily to-do's, helping us overcome physical limitations, and opening the door to more sustainable and inclusive solutions.

Avatar Identities

The more time we spend in virtual environments, the greater the need to express our individuality. Avatars and digital doubles are allowing us to present ourselves in a more fluid way, embracing the many aspects of our identity both anonymously and pseudonymously.

Bespoke LLMs

We now have the ability to create bespoke AI applications for personal use. We can harness the power of large-language models and vast data sets to deliver on-demand personalization and serve as helpful assistants for tasks both big and small.

Community Commerce

A resurgence in community-focused commerce is offering an alternative to the mass, undifferentiated world of e-commerce we currently know. These niche, peer-to-peer marketplaces will offer consumers more engaging experiences that closely tie to their individuality and passions.

Connected Objects

The internet of things (IoT) is becoming a reality—changing how our devices and utilities interact, allowing for more seamless cross-platform experiences. Brands can deepen affinity by unlocking greater efficiency and control for their customers.

Decentralized Social

Online communities are shifting to decentralized social spaces, token-gated communities and blockchain technology. Creating new forms of social structure built from co-creation and co-ownership.

Extended Reality

Augmented, virtual and mixed reality experiences are bridging our digital and physical worlds. These technologies will allow brands to create immersive environments where play, self-expression and discovery go beyond one dimension.

NEXT TECHNO- LOGIES

Generative AI

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. A more generative approach to creativity is expanding our canvas and allowing anyone to create.

Lo-Fi Design

Lo-fi design is opening the door to new creative avenues. Brands can tap into this frugal, no-frills approach by encouraging users to hack and remix existing products, playing with intentional imperfections, or embracing low-tech innovation.

Modular Design

Modularity is marking the end of one-size-fits-all design. Whether to reduce environmental impact or help people express their individuality, these modular products and services will allow brands to serve a wider range of needs.

Neural Control

The brain can now interact with technology, opening up new possibilities for how we experience existing environments while allowing people with mobility limitations to carry out essential tasks. We're closer to experiencing the true power of mind control—for fun as well as for good.

Non-Fungible Everything (NFTs)

NFTs have evolved from static digital-art collectibles to rewarding community environments—unlocking access to exclusive groups and experiences that are built on trust and transparency via the blockchain.

Spatial Computing

The future of experience is spatial with new hardware and technology allowing us to extend our surroundings and senses. Through experiences that seamlessly blend with physical environments, spatial computing will allow us to interact with immersive content like it's part of the real world.

Tactile Haptics

Haptic technology is bringing a sense of touch to virtual experiences—further breaking down the barriers of immersion and realism and raising the bar for sensory experiences.

Third-Place Gaming

Gaming has become a “third place” where we spend our time socializing, shopping, learning, and escaping—allowing us to live alternative lives beyond what's possible in reality. No longer just a source of entertainment, it has become a place of communal connection, self-expression and active discovery.

Untethered Audio

Audio-first experiences are on the rise as people seek a reprieve from screen time. Brands have the opportunity to own a unique voice and create deeper engagement through sound.

Worldbuilding

As the brand ecosystem grows and canvases expand, we can now build entire universes that deepen connection to ideas, characters, or intricate narratives. Worldbuilding will give us new ways to engage with audiences and go beyond what ordinary storytelling is capable of.

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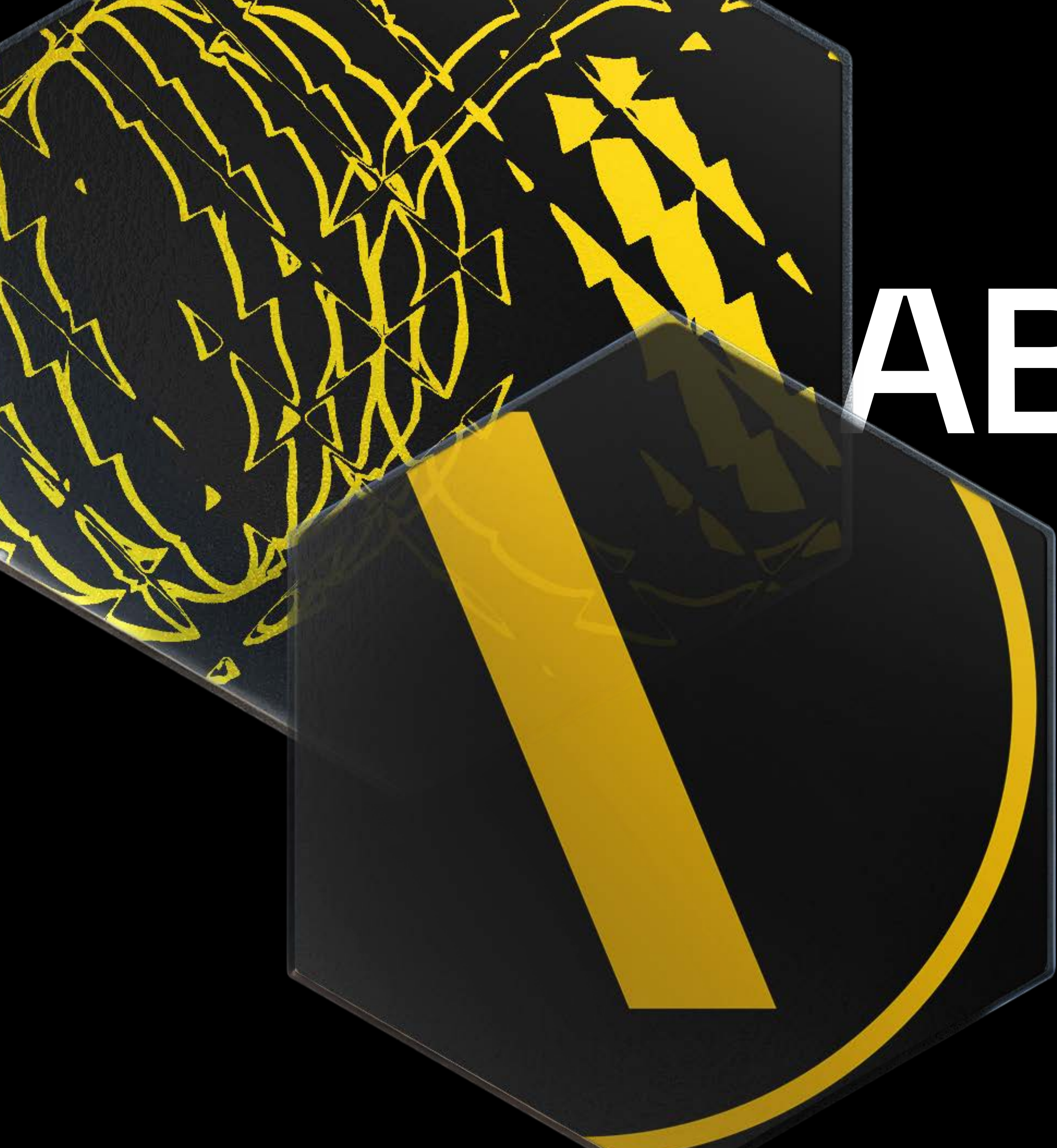
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To our dedicated Spotter network, our engine of global insight—thank you for looking to the future with us.



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

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