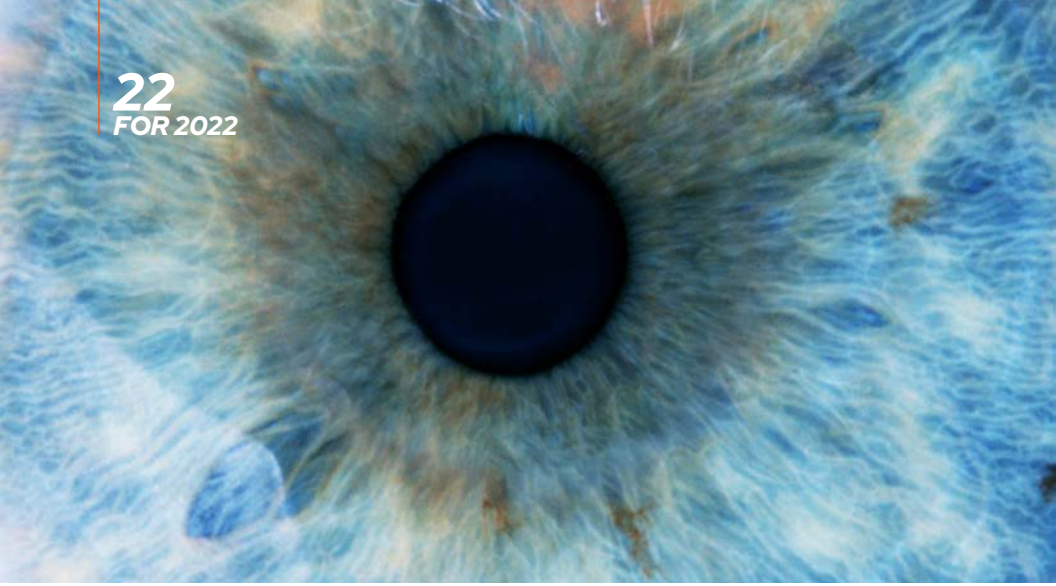

22
FOR 2022
MEASURING UP
WHAT WE THOUGHT
WE KNEW
Marian Salzman • Trends for 2022

CONTENTS

A year ago, in my *Zoomsday Predictions*, I mused about whether there had ever been a year more highly anticipated than 2021. And I noted that resilience and adaptation would be the order of the day—and year. A dozen months on, we remain in limbo, continuing to battle existential threats to people and the planet and too often seeming to take two steps back for each one forward. And now, a new year approaches. Will it be 2021 redux? Or will we be able to apply some of the lessons learned during the pandemic to begin to devise a better path forward?

This year, I have chosen to share 22 trendsightings for 2022. In numerology, 22 is considered a "master number." Some even regard it as the most important number of all. It is thought to be highly powerful and to have high potential, but not necessarily to be lucky. In my westernized worldview, my first thought when I hear the number is not numerology but the Joseph Heller novel *Catch-22*. The term typically is defined as a sticky situation with no easy or palatable solution. Sounds about right for the time. I am using 22 trends as an organizational device, but I am also mindful of the symbolism.



Believe it or not, there are still peoples alive whose cultures don't use numbers—but they are increasingly rare. For most of us, our lives are dominated by numbers (now in the form of digital code). The ancient Babylonians kept detailed accounts on clay tablets. Great foundational texts are full of numbers. In the Christian Bible, we have (among many others) three score and 10 years (human lifespan), 40 days and 40 nights (Noah's ark, Moses on the mountain, Jesus in the wilderness). The number seven figures extensively in the Koran. Scholars of the Jewish mystical tradition of Kabbalah pay great attention to gematria, in which Hebrew letters correspond to numbers. And sacred Hindu texts are full of numbers.

Some numbers and patterns occur naturally. They are objectively significant, whether or not we discover them—from the arrangement of atoms to planetary cycles, from the Fibonacci sequence in flowers to the periodical emergence of cicadas. Other numbers and patterns become significant only by chance or because of how we interpret them. The numbers on our calendars depend on our culture; late 2021 for me is 1443 in the Islamic calendar. The number four is considered unlucky in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures, whereas in my culture, 13 is unlucky—to the extent that many buildings don't have a 13th floor.

Years, too, are numbers of import. In my generation's lifetime, we have seen some especially significant years. There's 1968 (civil rights in the U.S., mass student protests globally) and then 1989 (down comes the Berlin Wall), and then 2000 (Y2K, new millennium) and 2020 (we all know that one). Now, we look forward and wonder whether 2022 will mark the start of a new era that builds on these periods of social revolution and evolution to move society in a better direction or whether we have passed—or have not yet reached the point—at which we can turn things around.

What I cover in this paper are not precise predictions about events but rather the emerging trends that will influence and shape how things will play out in the coming year and beyond. Keep in mind that COVID-19 was barely on the world's radar in January 2020. By the end of that year, the virus had upended the world. Which is to say, who knows what unexpected phenomena will loom large this time

next year in our look ahead to 2023? A supervolcano eruption? A cyberattack on critical infrastructure? A financial crisis? A virus variant against which current vaccines have no protective powers? Some combination of these?

The only thing we can say with confidence is that in this tightly interconnected and interdependent world of ours, even apparently small local problems can be amplified into global headaches and hindrances. With the benefit of hindsight, we may be able to trace a global chain of events back through link moments to what seems like the origin event, but it is impossible to do the same in reverse: The world is too complex, and there are too many variables.

The one certainty that remains is uncertainty. If we could name one shift of this past year that stands above all others, it would be that 2021 has made us question lots of things we had taken for granted. The picture of America as a shining beacon of democracy and equality; the concept of a 9-to-5 job bracketed by commutes; the beckoning lights of big-city living—these are but a few examples of "truths" no longer seen as quite so solid.

People are anxious. The accelerating complexity and chaos of modern life bring with them an urge to compartmentalize and quantify—to establish some small sense of control in this big, unmanageable world. With these sightings, I hope to contribute to some semblance of order in a world that is anything but orderly.

01 REIGNING CHAOS

Chaos. The theme of my 2020 trends report and now a phenomenon on steroids. A simple word for a whole lot of complexity—more complexity than a human brain can grasp, let alone deal with. In fact, it is more than a whole lot of brains together can deal with because all those brains just make things more complicated. Too many moving parts.

We used to think that if we were smarter or had access to more advanced technology, or adopted a new way of working, we could get on top of all the complexity. We used to believe—or at least hope—that there were people out there in business, in institutions, in government who were smart enough to bring order to the chaos. But that belief has been tested beyond the breaking point by the aftermath of 9/11/2001, then the financial crisis of 2007-2008, extreme weather events and the cataclysmic prospects of uncontrolled climate change, and now the global pandemic of 2020-2021 and probably well beyond.

WHAT'S NEXT

Given the choice, most people prefer to feel in control, even if the control is illusory. So for the foreseeable future, a little mental jiujitsu is in order. For most people, life and the world are only going to get more complex—more chaotic—so we will need to recalibrate our expectations. We should accept that complexity is the norm, embrace it to the extent we can, and find ways, large and small, to tether ourselves and inject points of calm and clarity. Weighted blankets, meet flotation therapy, reduced workweeks, virtual reality-boosted meditation, and a continued surge in psychotropic drugs.

02

ANGST IS THE NEW NORMAL

Welcome to my world. *Angst* has been one of my signature words and go-to concepts pretty much my whole life. Maybe it's my timing. I am a "cusper," one of the generation born in the late 1950s and early 1960s in the uncomfortable space between baby boomers and Generation X. We feel the world-weary worries of Xers without benefitting from the sense of entitlement and confidence of the boomers.

For a while, the culture countered our angst with cheerful messages like "Don't worry, be happy" and "Life is good." There was even a whole new discipline of positive psychology founded to address angst and other negative states. These are nice ideas, but they don't change the reality that fuels apprehension and unease. Nor can they offset the portents of doom that are the mainstay of our modern media diet.

WHAT'S NEXT

Angst isn't going anywhere. As the 25-year-old son of a colleague commented: "The baby boomer generation grew up believing things were free. My generation has grown up knowing that nothing is free because everything has a cost." The generation coming of age under the dark skies of climate change, COVID-19, and uncertain-to-bleak economic prospects is not looking toward a future filled with promise and prosperity. Unlike their parents and grandparents, they do not expect their lives to be better than those of the generation that went before them. For many, that leaves two options: fighting for radical collective change or pulling up the drawbridge and looking out for number one (whether individually or by supporting nationalistic and nativist policies).

03

MENTAL HEALTH MOVES OUT IN THE OPEN

Not so long ago, mental health was a topic addressed in whispers behind closed doors (if it was discussed at all). No current or aspiring public figure would broach the subject, let alone admit that their mental health wasn't always in great shape.

These days, it is hard not to talk or hear about mental health. Celebrities—from Britain's Prince Harry to Lady Gaga, J.K. Rowling, and Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson—openly discuss their struggles with anxiety and depression and urge others to reach out for help. Rates of substance abuse, alcohol dependency, and suicidal thoughts and behaviors (now known as "diseases of despair") made headlines even before the pandemic but now are growing at an even quicker pace.

WHAT'S NEXT

As the world gets wiser to these so-called diseases of despair, time is ripe for the widespread adoption of programs, tools, and technologies that tackle problems and foster good mental health. Ever-present smartphones offer a vast range of stand-alone apps and a growing number of apps that work with wearable neurofeedback devices such as Mendi and Muse. Smart companies understand the benefits of minding the minds of their employees. Already, many major multinationals—such as Bristol Myers Squibb, Philip Morris International (PMI), and Whirlpool Corp.—are putting in place support systems for their workers, including employee resource groups (ERGs) that foster diverse and inclusive workplaces and create a closer feeling of community. Etsy offers employees unlimited mental health days.

WE'RE WORKIN' IT

Will robots take all the good middle-class jobs, as widely predicted and feared? Or will they open the way for more jobs than they take over? Either way, we can be certain that the future of work will be fundamentally different. COVID-19 has seen to that.

During the pandemic, millions of office workers discovered they were as productive and happier working at home and could no longer justify a lengthy commute. Millions of others in low-status, poorly paid jobs—many in the restaurant and hospitality industries—found themselves questioning whether their jobs were worth it. In August 2021, in what has been described as the "take your job and shove it" phase of the pandemic, 2.9 percent of the U.S. workforce quit their jobs as part of the "Great Resignation." All the talk about "when things get back to normal" has given way to a realization that not everyone is willing to return to the old normal.

WHAT'S NEXT

It may take a while for many people to figure out what they want from work—or are willing to settle for. And organizations will be scrambling to offer the right combination of conditions and benefits. Remote and hybrid arrangements will be part of the new corporate flexibility, of course. Tech companies such as Meta, Google, and Twitter have implemented remote working policies. And at PMI, we have developed a global plan called SmartWork, a hybrid of remote and office-based employment, to enable greater flexibility in how and where employees choose to work. We are also seeing a more concerted effort to offer real time off, with no interruptions from managers and coworkers. LinkedIn gave the majority of its nearly 16,000 employees a week off during a coordinated shutdown intended to ensure everyone left work behind. Expect more companies to follow suit.

THE SKILL SQUAD

For at least a couple of generations, people all over the world have been investing in formal education to get ahead. As colleges churn out ever more graduates in ever more subjects at ever greater costs, hopes have shifted to graduate education—master's and doctorates. But even then, for people who want to get ahead in work, there is a growing risk of diminishing returns.

Extended college courses are fine for deep dives, but how many equip students with up-to-the-minute skills they can apply right away at work? How many people are finding that what skills they do have are outdated or not in demand? How many are facing the prospect of being replaced by robots or AI?

Whether it's upskilling or reskilling, the common denominator is the value of a skill—knowledge that is practical and can be applied immediately. As virtually all information is now available to anybody with an internet connection, knowledge *about* will become less valuable, while knowing *how to* will become more highly prized—and priced.

WHAT'S NEXT

Savvy companies aren't waiting. They are proactively identifying skills gaps in their workforces. They are figuring out how to bring employees' skills up to date quickly and cost-effectively using a mix of online resources, in-person seminars, hands-on training, coaching, and mentoring. People not lucky enough to be working for such a company have to decide whether to invest in updating their existing skills set (upskill) or to set out on a different track and acquire a whole new set of skills (reskill). With more companies identifying a shortfall in data analytics capabilities among their workforces, tech companies are stepping into the breach. Amazon aims to train 29 million globally in cloud computing by 2025—for free. And analytics platform Tableau has committed to training 10 million people in data literacy over the next five years.

AMERICA THE NOT-SO-BEAUTIFUL

Like the boy who cried "wolf," I have been talking about America losing its shine since the late 1990s. Now more people are ready to listen. In 2001, most of the world rallied around Uncle Sam in solidarity after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Between 2000 and 2010, almost 14 million immigrants came to the country in search of the American dream—a new record. Ambitious people from all over the world have flocked to U.S. colleges and the American tech industry, helping to drive the growth of companies that have become global behemoths. (What do Microsoft, Google, IBM, Adobe, and Twitter have in common as of late November 2021? All their CEOs were born in India.) The world couldn't get enough of long-form TV dramas, many American and most streamed through American services.

Even so, the tarnish and the cracks that we started to see in the late '90s haven't diminished. Quite the opposite. The country is still suffering the effects of the subprime crisis of 2007-2008 that morphed into a financial crisis then metastasized into a deeper and chronic malaise. The general election of 2016 revealed a country riven by political and cultural polarization and vulnerable to disinformation. With many Americans keen to believe "alternative facts," millions continue to consider COVID-19 a hoax (and around one in five U.S. adults say they will never get vaccinated). Millions also believe the 2020 election was not won by Joe Biden and that the Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol was peaceful.

WHAT'S NEXT

The reality of America may well be far more beautiful than the *Sturm und Drang* that dominates news cycles (check out *Our Towns* by James and Deborah Fallows). But for a country built on the soft power of myths and dreams, the troubled images of the past few years are not a good look.

WHAT HAPPENS TO CITIES?

Will cities go out of style, reversing a trend that's as old as civilization—literally? After all, the most basic definition of *civilization* is "a society made up of cities." As of late 2021, well over half the world's population (56.2 percent) are urban dwellers. Yet, as the pandemic hit in 2020, those residents quickly realized that cities offer a particularly welcome environment not just for humans but for pathogens.

In the hardest-hit wealthy countries of North America and Europe, suburbanites stopped commuting into cities to work. Those who could afford to do so at least thought about moving to places with less crowding and more green space. The media were full of articles about eerily quiet cities with transit running far below capacity, shuttered restaurants and theaters, and city administrators worried about falling revenues.

We could cut to disaster-movie visions of wild animals and street gangs taking over deserted concrete jungles. But let's cue a reality check instead: The expansion of most of the world's fastest-growing cities (think: Lagos, Mexico City, and Shanghai) is driven by constant waves of people calculating that they will find more opportunity in a city than they could back home. COVID-19 is unlikely to alter that calculation—although the next pandemic may shift the calculus.

WHAT'S NEXT

In wealthier parts of the world, some city inhabitants may feel opportunities no longer match costs and decide to move out, but resourceful cities are far from conceding the battle. Instead, they are figuring out ways to burnish their allure and bounce back better, including through "green recovery": more greenery, less car traffic and pollution, more affordable housing, and more micromobility options. Many plan to become 15-minute cities, where everything a resident needs can be reached within a quarter of an hour by foot or bike. Seoul is even more ambitious, planning a 10-minute city. The developers intend to transform an old industrial site into a walkable district featuring everything from homes and offices to athletic facilities, "nature zones," and hydroponic urban farms. A potential downside of this new approach to urban planning: more fragmentation based on socioeconomic class and race/ethnicity.

In a market full of places to live and work, watch as cities up their game to adapt to this new world and compete for inhabitants and resources.

RISING HYPER-LOCALISM (AGAIN)

I have been banging the drum of "local is the new global" for decades now, but COVID-19 has added a new element. As the novel coronavirus swept across the planet, people who had previously thought nothing of flying thousands of miles for work or leisure were confined to their homes, feeling grateful if they were able to get out to just walk around the block. While the internet provided welcome connections to the wider world—allowing many of us to work from home, connect with friends and family on Zoom, stream entertainment, and shop online—our focus on our physical communities intensified. We were keenly attuned not just to community transmission rates and hospital capacity but also to how local shops and their employees were faring. Some of us found ourselves helping neighbors whose names we hadn't even known prior to the shutdowns.

WHAT'S NEXT

Sooner or later, the world will establish some sort of new normal (however short-lived). People will feel like getting away from their local patch and traveling again. But rising fuel costs, concerns about climate change, and the lingering effects of the pandemic will make hyperlocal living feel more attractive than ever.

ENTER THE NEW "VILLAINS": BIG TECH AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Any novelist or screenwriter will confirm that people love villains. Or rather, they love to have villains to hate on. As life and its issues become more complex, it can be a sweet relief to identify "baddies." There is no need to go through the tiring mental and emotional contortions of weighing up different points of view. That's the appeal of last-century political tropes such as the "Evil Empire."

Then, in this century, the black-and-white thinking of the Cold War era gave way to shades of gray. People who were clearly "bad guys" also displayed a sympathetic side (think: Tony Soprano, Severus Snape) while clearly "good guys" were shown to have a dark side (think: Harry Bosch, Jack Reacher) and even to be good and dark at the same time (think: Jimmy McGill / Saul Goodman, Dexter).

WHAT'S NEXT

While there is still plenty of appetite for morally complex characters, there is a big and growing market for straight-up villains with no apparent redeeming qualities. Battle lines are being drawn up against technology and social media companies in general and Facebook in particular. Look for a public rethinking of how much of our privacy and data we are willing to turn over to forces many people no longer see as acting in good faith.

10

THE ROARIN' 2020s— POST-COVID MUTED HEDONISM

The last time the entire planet was hit by a deadly virus was a century ago when the 1918-1919 influenza pandemic killed an estimated 50 million people. The doom and gloom of that pandemic gave way to a period known as the Roarin' 20s when exciting new technologies (e.g., cars, radios, gramophones) went mainstream and seeded a new economy and a new culture full of exuberant energy (e.g., jazz, cinema).

It is hard not to see parallels to today. The world is shaping up to emerge from the dreary lockdowns and restrictions of COVID-19. New technologies are going mainstream (e.g., Zoom, augmented/virtual reality, AI, gene technology, cryptocurrencies), giving rise to new fortunes and cultures. Economies are near to bursting with pent-up demand.

WHAT'S NEXT

Don't scan thrift store racks for that flapper dress or Homburg hat just yet. Populations in much of the world are older than a hundred years ago. That will make for less wild dancing, partying, and mating and more careful shepherding of resources. In the 1920s, entertainment, shopping, and socializing involved going out on the town. In the 2020s, there are far more incentives to stay in and construct an environment conducive to entertainment streaming, online socializing, and creativity.

(Other reasons to hope the 2020s are different: The 1920s ended with the Wall Street crash followed by the Great Depression, the rise of fascism, and World War II.)

11 CHANGE AGENTS, MEET COHESION CULTIVATORS

11
CHANGE AGENTS, MEET COHESION CULTIVATORS

A quick scan through LinkedIn and job sites will confirm the popularity of *change agent* as a self-descriptor. No wonder. We have been told ad nauseam these past few years that "the only constant is change," "change is inevitable," "change or perish," and "change is good." Once people accepted that change was bound to come and that it could even open up opportunities, the stage was set for new masters of transformation to step forward. Change agents held out the alluring prospect of making change happen in a deliberate, controlled way. They rose to prominence as organizations sought ways to get ahead by disrupting conventional ways of working. Then came the pandemic, giving the world a full-on experience of disruption.

WHAT'S NEXT

Change agents will still have a role in the post-pandemic world—these people are no less valuable—but another type of catalyst will also be in high demand. As organizations and employees experiment with infinite permutations of hybrid working, cohesion cultivators will bring the scattered parts together in new and fruitful ways—either from within the organization or as external consultants.

These specialists will understand the workplace faults and unmet needs and opportunities that were revealed by the pandemic. They will be skilled in fostering the right balance between creating space and flexibility and facilitating togetherness and structure. In a world where workers have become more discerning and aware of their value, the impact of cohesion agents will show up in key metrics of talent retention and employee satisfaction ratings. In the legislative and nonprofit spaces, in particular, we are seeing variations on this specialization crop up, including Chief Cohesion Officers, Community Cohesion Officers, and Social Cohesion Support Officers. Such positions and titles are certain to move into the corporate space in 2022 and beyond.

12

HYBRID EVERYTHING

12
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A long spell of open-it-up globalization triggered a countertrend of close-it-down nationalism (build the wall!), as people sought to snuggle back under a security blanket of homogeneity. Now the counter-countertrend is hybridization—deliberately mixing different parts to create optimum blends for the task at hand.

Hybrid has long been familiar to devotees of gardening catalogs. The world's roads are filled with cars powered by engines that are hybrid combustion and hybrid bikes that blend the attributes of road bikes and mountain bikes. Now, hybrid is a reflection of a move away from traditional and binary approaches.

At a time of widespread polarization and either/or thinking, bringing the hybrid lens to bear represents the creative impulse to seek out promising fusions and compromises to move things forward.

WHAT'S NEXT

Through and beyond the pandemic, leaders across organizations will need to figure out their positions on hybrid working, seeking the optimum synthesis of onsite and remote—WFO and WFH. Potential for conflict is high, according to a global survey by EY, which found that 90 percent of employees want the flexibility to work remotely while 35 percent of employers intend to have their workforces back on site post-pandemic. Communications departments, too, will need to step up their games, continually optimizing their blends of text, audio, and video assets in combination with in-person events. And as more shopping moves online, retailers will need to get increasingly creative about bringing the pleasure points of in-store sales to the online environment, including by injecting opportunities for sociability.

13

WHAT IS A SCHOOL?

We can say with confidence that over the past couple of years, students worldwide have experienced a type of schooling that is unprecedented in scale, although e-learning has a longer history than most people think, extending as far back as 1982 when Western Behavioral Sciences Institute used computer conferencing to provide a distance education program for business executives. With the greater bandwidth, processor power, and video technology available by 2008, Khan Academy started offering free online education to students from kindergarten on up. Then in 2010 came online learning platform Udemy, followed in 2011 by the first of the MOOCs (massive open online courses) when Stanford University offered its introduction to AI.

A whole lot more MOOCs and other online initiatives followed. And a whole lot of students and inquisitive people found that they could learn a lot without being in the same physical space as the teacher or even interacting in real time. Online education became a popular option but not a mainstream choice. Then came COVID-19. Eighteen months of pandemic lockdowns and restrictions have shifted online education from option to necessity. And that has raised the question: What is a school?

If those old familiar institutions of learning are just the physical places where people go to teach and be taught, then those places are ripe for retirement. But the experience of the pandemic has shown that they are more than that. From students' early years to their mid-teens, schools provide essential childcare for working parents, especially those with limited means or without a partner. At all levels of schooling, students learn essential socialization skills and access extracurricular activities such as play, organized sports, and music-making.

WHAT'S NEXT

The pandemic has shown that for well-off students, online methods can deliver the curriculum elements of schooling pretty well. It has also shown that there are important elements of education that aren't part of the curriculum. There is no doubt that the future of schools will be hybrid—online and offline. Already, a top-10 business school in the U.S. is offering a hybrid MBA. And there is also no doubt that schools all over the world will be experimenting to find what works. With global education and training expenditure forecast to reach at least $10 trillion by 2030, there are plenty of incentives to find winning approaches.

14

ADMIRATION FOR SCIENCE, FEAR OF SCIENCE

Through the first half of 2020, people longed for a vaccine that could protect against COVID-19, expecting it would take quite a while. Yet within barely a year of the virus being identified and less than a year of it being sequenced, scientists had a vaccine ready to be tested. The ramp-up and rollout of that and subsequent vaccines targeting the coronavirus have been similarly rapid. As of mid-October 2021, 6.7 billion doses had been administered, and almost half the world's population had received at least one jab. Yet this rapid achievement of science has stirred suspicion and fear as well as admiration. Fears of the vaccines are varied, from concerns about potential side-effects to unsubstantiated theories that the vaccination will implant a microchip or interfere with human DNA.

Our modern culture of avid news consumption is proving a fertile breeding ground for misinformation and disinformation. Resistance to vaccination—aka anti-vax sentiment—has been growing since the publication of a flawed MMR study in 1998 sparked a global scare, and it will continue long after the COVID-19 pandemic has burned out. But the bigger science fear of our age is around gene intervention. We have already seen it with GMOs. There is much more to come.

The 2020 Nobel Prize for Chemistry went to a pair of scientists for their discovery of "genetic scissors" that have revolutionized genome editing. This technology is known as CRISPR (clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats)—easy to say but pretty hard to grasp in principle, let alone in detail.

Like so many scientific advances, CRISPR is prompting high hopes and deep fears. Among the hopes is the prospect of inserting a gene into bananas to save them from a deadly fungus, cutting the viral DNA of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in AIDS patients, and editing genes in the eyes of patients with a rare disorder.

Among the fears is that CRISPR and other gene-editing techniques will be used eugenically—intervening in embryos to edit out conditions considered unfit or inferior and edit in desirable traits such as height, physical prowess, and intelligence. This potential has prompted alarm, including among leading scientists such as the late Stephen Hawking, who feared that wealthy people would be able to buy even more advantages and create a genetically enhanced elite.

WHAT'S NEXT

Will the wealthy be willing to take a chance on tricking out their genes? Many are likely to balk at the prospect, but if past is prelude, some will go for it. And some won't be able to resist the bragging rights.

15

GEEKSPEAK IN THE METAVERSE

The internet has been around nearly 30 years, and the big social media platforms have been around for almost 20. They are used by billions of people. Yet, the layers of technology that make them possible are far beyond the awareness of most people, except when they don't work. Still, thanks to sci-fi and switched-on media, consumers are getting keen to talk about some geeky ideas.

Take algorithms, one of the hottest topics of the moment. They have featured in mainstream media news coverage (typically not in a good way). They have been flagged up as "the secret code that is controlling your everyday life" and as a big factor in driving social and political polarization. For anybody really interested, there are plenty of explanations of what algorithms are and what they do. But who has the time, and who outside the tech industry really wants to know?

WHAT'S NEXT

Look no further than the metaverse. It became a breakout search term in 2021 and really exploded in October when Mark Zuckerberg announced his company's name change to Meta. The concept of the metaverse ("a virtual-reality space in which users can interact with a computer-generated environment and other users") hasn't been in the mainstream long enough to acquire the familiarity (and negative associations) of *algorithm*. Will it be a short-lived buzzword that quickly sounds dated, like cyberspace? Will it catch on as a handy (and maybe ironic) expression for the blended offline/AR/VR/online reality experience that's in prospect? I'd bet on the latter. It's already making inroads among brands in fields ranging from fashion to entertainment.

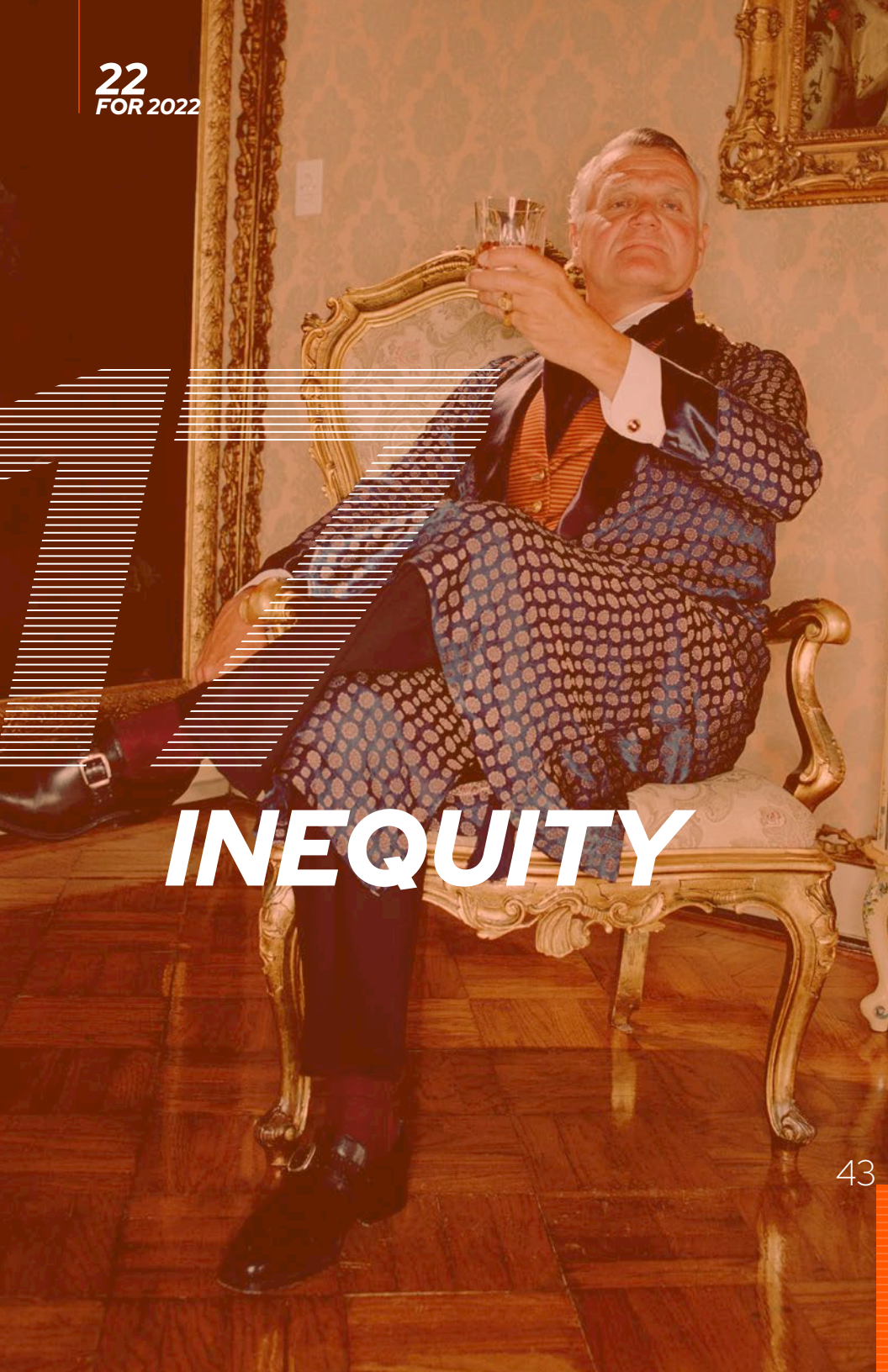
10 VIRTUAL VALUE

The experience of COVID-19 has shown the extent to which life has moved from physical to virtual. With cinemas, concert venues, and theaters closed by the pandemic, virtual was the only way to access movies, music, and plays. With libraries and bookstores forced to close, sales of electronic books soared. Family events and public happenings went virtual.

Simultaneously, cash-free contactless payment came into its own, being far more convenient than banknotes and coins and far less likely to spread microbes. And mainstream media and homebound audiences became even more intrigued by cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin and Etherium. Even so, the world was rocked when a Christie's virtual art sale fetched $69,346,250 for a nonfungible token (NFT) of an image called "Everydays: The First 5000 Days." In exchange for all those tens of millions of dollars, the buyer received a certificate of authenticity (guaranteed by blockchain) but not the work authenticated by it. Payment was in cryptocurrency, making the whole thing virtual. Did it really happen?

WHAT'S NEXT

As the world tentatively looks forward to emerging from the pandemic (go away, Omicron variant), pent-up demand for physical goods is running up against complex supply chain problems caused or exacerbated by COVID-19, making virtual and 3D-printed goods all the more appealing. We are right at the beginning of a trend that is all but certain to continue to grow and morph in new directions. Already, investors are turning toward Decentraland, a metaverse made up of some 90,000 parcels of virtual land running on the Etherium blockchain. In November 2021, one of those parcels sold for $2.4 million.



11 INEQUITY

For a while in the pandemic panic of early 2020, there were calls for cooperation and public-spiritedness—especially in political and marketing messages—because "we're all in the same boat." It didn't take long for that trope to get batted back. As the *Financial Times* put it: "We're in the same storm but not the same boat." (With a single tone-deaf Instagram post, billionaire David Geffen made that abundantly clear.)

Throughout the pandemic, the jobs and income of many millions of people were lost or suspended. Poverty and extreme poverty increased globally for the first time in 20 years. Meanwhile, the world's wealthiest got wealthier. According to Credit Suisse, the global number of millionaires expanded by 5.2 million to reach 56.1 million in 2020. The number of billionaires on the Forbes 2021 list rose by 660 to 2,755, representing a combined net worth of $13.1 trillion, up from $8 trillion in 2020.

Money is just one aspect of the inequity that was revealed and exacerbated by the pandemic. Racial inequities made headlines and pushed corporations to action in 2020, especially in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. And as extreme weather events become more common, it is apparent that some countries and communities are more vulnerable than others. The glaring inequity of climate injustice is that high-income communities are responsible for most greenhouse gas emissions, yet the negative impacts are disproportionately suffered by low-income communities.

WHAT'S NEXT

After decades of just accepting "the way things are," the public is getting increasingly more sensitized to inequities and less willing to tolerate them. This is going to shape political, social, and even corporate developments.

18 WORRYING ABOUT WATER

Anybody who has tried farming in an arid climate or gone on a long hike in a remote place knows three basic things about water: It's essential for life, it's heavy to carry, and you can't take it for granted. Yet thanks to ingenious infrastructure, most of us living modern lifestyles take plentiful supplies of clean water for granted. Water is right there whenever you open a faucet or sit down in a restaurant. Now, as with so many other comfortable assumptions, we are having to think a lot more about this precious resource. Climate change is wreaking havoc with the water cycles that have enabled life as we know it, and barely a day goes by without alarming reports about it. Some places are suffering extended drought, forcing people to dig ever deeper for water—or move away. Other places are getting hit by more intense rain and flooding.

Glaciers are in retreat all over the world, threatening the water supplies of billions of people who depend on the gradual release of meltwater. Rapid melting is reducing the ice coverage of the North Pole, Greenland, and Antarctica and releasing vast amounts of fresh water into the oceans. Sea levels are rising, posing an existential threat to low-lying island nations, low-lying countries such as Bangladesh, some of the world's largest cities, and the nearly 40 percent of the U.S. population who live in high-density coastal areas.

WHAT'S NEXT

The next big water worry is likely to be the North Atlantic "conveyor belt" current (Atlantic meridional overturning circulation, or AMOC), which moves warm water into the North Atlantic from the Gulf of Mexico. The AMOC has been a constant for many millennia, but the current has been weakening. If it stops, the climate in North America and Northern Europe is likely to get a lot colder.

FRONT LINES

It's a long time since major military conflicts involved troops facing each other across front lines. Despite this, or maybe because of it, the outdated notion of "front line" has been revived for civilian contexts and deployed far and wide as the go-to term for work that involves danger, risk, or discomfort and/or that is essential for the everyday functioning of normal life.

First responders (e.g., EMTs, police, firefighters) typically have been referred to as frontline workers. During the pandemic, the notion was extended to cover the sorts of workers who were potentially exposed to infection in their jobs: hospital and healthcare workers, teachers, delivery drivers, retail assistants, counter staff, and food processors. Attention was drawn to how critical these often low-paid jobs are.

WHAT'S NEXT

From a trendspotting perspective, it looks like we are seeing the front line emerge as a new reference category in public discourse (think: "silent majority," "hardworking families," "forgotten middle class"). In the process, that old term *front line* is becoming *frontline,* a one-word concept—and a sure sign that it's here to stay.

MAKING THE UNSEXY SEXY

It is hard to think of a concept less sexy than "infrastructure"—although "supply chain" and its close relative "logistics" may be close contenders. They are vital to modern life, but so are accountancy and dentistry, and they're not sexy either. As an acid test of sex appeal, try to imagine a writer pitching a drama about infrastructure to a producer or publisher. In normal times it would be a fool's errand, but—needless to say—these are not normal times. The key to making things sexy is to make them relevant to ordinary people and to find the drama.

Best-selling author Michael Lewis has a knack for this. He took the mind-melting complexities of the subprime mortgage crisis of 2007-2008 and turned it into *The Big Short,* which also scored well as a movie. In his 2018 book, *The Fifth Risk,* he delves into infrastructure through the lens of American politics and government departments. Three years on, and infrastructure hasn't yet made it to the status of sexy. But it may yet. Or it may simply become a hot topic without becoming sexy, in the way that supply chains have become a hot topic because they're struggling and consumers are worried about holiday gifts.

WHAT'S NEXT

Next up will be infrastructure improvements involving roads, bridges, railways, stormwater and sewage systems, dams, flood protection, and power grids. They were mostly built to deal with 20th-century climate conditions and not the extremes that are becoming more common this century. And then there's the already sexy infrastructure in the form of smart cities. One example: Walmart billionaire Mark Lore's Telosa, an inclusive and sustainable smart-city "utopia" planned for a desert somewhere in the American West.

21 THE MISSING MIDDLE

In these polarized times, "middle" and "center" have been stuck with a bad rap. Up-and-at-'em types are fond of quoting the Iron Lady, British PM Margaret Thatcher, to the effect that "Standing in the middle of the road is very dangerous; you get knocked down by the traffic from both sides." Hewing to the center is derided as being indecisive and dangerous. "If you sit on the fence, all you will get is splinters" is the warning from people who use "moderate" as an insult. Those who style themselves progressives point out that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote that a great stumbling block for Black freedom was the "white moderate, who is more devoted to 'order' than to justice."

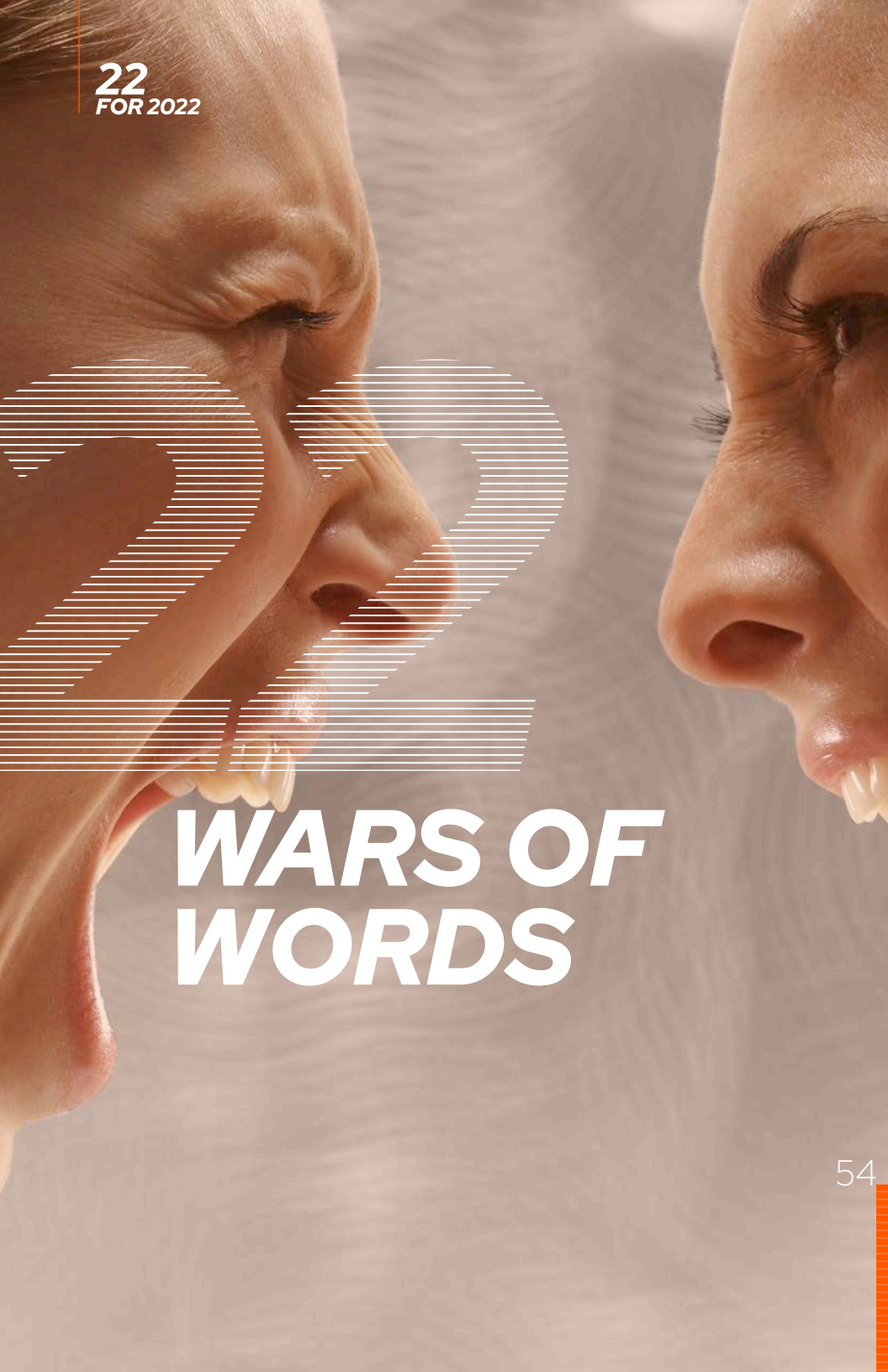
"Middle" has gone out of style in entertainment, too. The breakout success of late 2021 has been *Succession,* a luxury-drenched saga of the feuds tearing apart an obscenely rich media mogul family. At the other end of the wealth scale have been harrowing tales of people struggling with addiction and depression in down-at-the-heel places such as post-industrial Pennsylvania—the setting for *American Rust* and *Mare of Easttown*—and a distressed mining community in Virginia, the setting for *Dopesick*. Where are the shows about average, middling people that used to be entertainment mainstays? They are there for those who will take the time to look, but primarily in the form of remakes and reboots.

WHAT'S NEXT

Most people are probably "middling" in many ways, but they're not the ones setting agendas or driving news cycles. Observing recent political events in America and Europe, commentators have dusted off some lines of a 1919 poem by WB Yeats:

> *Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;*
> *Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world [...]*
> *The best lack all conviction, while the worst*
> *Are full of passionate intensity.*

The new year will do little to ease the polarization we're seeing; if anything, we will find new ways to separate ourselves into opposing camps. Some analysts are alarmed that the metaverse Mark Zuckerberg is touting "could fracture reality as we know it." We are already seeing this in our media streams, but it could grow far worse—for instance, with augmented reality glasses creating "reality blocks" that determine what a person sees when walking down a street. How can you find the middle when you never see what exists on the far side?



22 WARS OF WORDS

Marketing 101 tells us that finding the right words is half the battle when selling a product or an idea. Remember how people used to talk about global warming? Then political and communications consultant Frank Luntz had the insight that it sounded too catastrophic (not to mention that it was derided every time a winter storm hit). He recommended replacing it with the term *climate change*, which suggested "a more controllable and less emotional challenge." So now *climate change* is the go-to term even as global temperatures tick upward.

That insight from 20 years ago carries even more weight in an era of politics by tweet, hot takes, and short attention spans. Word choice has helped to establish the battle lines in the current culture wars.

On one side are those who put effort into being sensitive to injustice issues such as unconscious bias and choose their words carefully. They ask people which pronoun they use and aim to be as inclusive as possible with acronyms such as LGBTQ or the more detailed LGBTQQIP2SAA (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, androgynous, asexual). They often add "+" to acknowledge that there are non-cisgender and non-straight identities that are not included in the acronym. People on this side of the divide tend to demonstrate their embrace of diversity (a key umbrella concept) by using terms such as *neurodiversity* and *ethnic diversity* and speaking of their awareness of prejudices such as racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, and classism. They are alert to the risks of cultural appropriation.

On the other side are those who are baffled, annoyed, or even angered by such terms, who rail against "political correctness gone crazy," who find it all too complicated and all too inhibiting because "you can't say anything anymore." They get triggered (another buzzword) by the concepts of cancel culture and wokeism.

WHAT'S NEXT

Don't expect many white flags waving in this battle. Many—perhaps even most—people fall between the extremes and don't pay much attention to the latest developments of injustice issues, nor are they more than passingly concerned about cancel culture. They're in the middle—the missing middle. But the war that's being waged here is escalated because of the louder voices of those who will continue to speak the truth as they see it. This poses a threat: With all the noise and hostility at the political extremes, what prevents the majority middle from simply tuning out and opting out of pushing for positive change?

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Collectively, we have come to realize over the past year and a half that many of the things we took for granted are no longer true—if they ever were. Some of us have seen governments we relied on stumble in their response to COVID-19. Others have had their blinders ripped off so they can no longer pretend not to see the deep-seated racial and economic inequities in their communities and countries. Assumptions about career trajectories and workplace practices have been overturned. Our priorities have changed and so has what we are willing to tolerate.

Most of us are not heading into 2022 with the same sense of relief and excitement with which we entered 2021. We recognize now that the virus will not disappear anytime soon, especially as citizens in some countries lack access to effective vaccines and citizens of others reject them, choosing to heed conspiratorial and politicized whispers and rants rather than science. We see more clearly, too, the fault lines and fractures within our societies and perhaps also within our personal and professional lives. The ride, one hopes, will not be anywhere near as bumpy in 2022 as it was in 2020, but smart passengers will keep their seatbelts fastened.