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ENTRAINEMENTS A L'ORAL

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France Has Met The Enemy and They Are ACRONYMS

A proliferation of acronyms across the French Republic is sowing total confusion, but no one can make it stop. ‘We’ve gone too far!’

By Matthew Dalton, *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 24, 2024

In France, many people encounter their first acronym at birth in a CHU, the French initials for a university hospital center.

The acronyms pile up in elementary school, where first through fifth grades are called CP, CE1, CE2, CM1 and CM2. Some French might start work earning the SMIC (acronym for the minimum wage), then open a TPE (very small business) and end up paying the IFI (tax on real-estate wealth). Finally, they might die in an EHPAD, acronym for a nursing home.

Cradle-to-grave acronyms are an inescapable feature of life in France. Political parties, schools, taxes, subsidies, public and private institutions and more are known by jumbles of letters, ranging from the short—this summer’s Olympic Games became the JO—to the strangely long, such as CNFCSTAGN, which refers to a training center for officers in the gendarmerie.

They arouse periodic ridicule in a nation that exalts great writers and its linguistic heritage. Yet their proliferation continues, resistant to repeated efforts to rein them in.

The U.S. also has plenty of acronyms, including the country’s name and an alphabet soup of federal agencies. What sets France apart is a cradle-to-grave welfare state that has implanted administrative language into many facets of daily life.

Some acronyms are well-known, particularly those pronounced as words, such as SMIC, rather than by their initial letters.

But acronyms that arise from the continuous churn of bureaucracy tend to leave people mystified. The rearrangement of government functions often lengthens acronyms. Thus, the public must remember the jumble of letters DGCCRF for France’s consumer protection agency.

“Going back to a less acronymic society? It’s too late. We’ve gone too far,” said Colin Maudry, a French consultant who maintains an online dictionary of more than 5,000 acronyms. “Maybe we take pride in these acronyms. Sometimes there is a competition between those who know them and those who don’t.”

In the 1980s, France’s effort to streamline bureaucracy began itself to spout ungainly acronyms. The government of President François Mitterrand created COSIFORME, an acronym for a commission to simplify formalities for businesses. That became COSIFORM, followed by COSA, COSLA, DUSA, DGME, SGMAP and finally the current iteration, DITP.

Despite all the work, a poll conducted last year by the business group SDI—which refers to the Society of Independents and TPE (see paragraph two)—found 76% of respondents couldn’t understand administrative forms.

The agency has placed new emphasis on making government forms and websites comprehensible.

To communicate with people with disabilities, the DITP urges bureaucrats to use language that is FALC. That’s the French acronym for: Easy to Read and Understand.

“It’s the anti-acronym acronym,” said Stephan Giraud, head of behavioral sciences at the DITP. “They’re not inherently bad. It’s the accumulation that can be a problem.”

Will AI Help or Hurt Workers? One 26-Year-Old Found an Unexpected Answer.

New research shows AI made some workers more productive—but less happy.

By Justin Lahart, *The Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 29, 2024

Many economists have looked at how earlier technologies have reshaped the labor market. But while this understanding of the past provides important context, how AI will affect the economy is difficult to tease out: Will it be like the gasoline-powered internal combustion engine, which transformed entire industries, boosting growth, creating vast categories of new work and lifting millions of Americans into new, more productive, better-paying jobs? Or the zeppelins of the 1920s and 1930s, which people thought would be world changers and are now a nostalgic afterthought?

To figure out where AI might fit, economists need careful studies of its use in today’s workplace. Toner-Rodgers’s paper does just that. His work examines the randomized introduction of an AI tool to 1,018 scientists at a materials-science research lab.

The discovery and creation of new materials—from the invention of Bakelite in the 1900s to Kevlar in the 1960s—has historically been a time-consuming process of trial and error. Scientists, after identifying what properties they would like a compound to have, then come up with ideas of what the chemical structure of a new compound might look like. Then they start testing out compounds, hoping to hit on one that works.

AI tools that have been trained on the structure of existing materials can make the discovery process significantly shorter and less expensive. Scientists specify the characteristics they would like a compound to have and the AI tool generates recipes that the scientists can then evaluate.

“Maybe the most exciting thing about AI is that it could accelerate scientific discovery and innovation,” said Toner-Rodgers. “This would be a huge benefit.”

The lab that Toner-Rodgers studied randomly assigned teams of researchers to start using the tool in three waves, starting in May 2022. After Toner-Rodgers approached the lab, it agreed to work with him but didn’t want its identity disclosed.

What Toner-Rodgers found was striking: After the tool was implemented, researchers discovered 44% more materials, their patent filings rose by 39% and there was a 17% increase in new product prototypes. Contrary to concerns that using AI for scientific research might lead to a “streetlight effect”—hitting on the most obvious solutions rather than the best ones—there were more novel compounds than what the scientists discovered before using AI.

One other thing Toner-Rodgers found about the lab’s AI tool: The scientists didn’t like it all that much, with 82% reporting reduced satisfaction with their work.

While many AI optimists believe the technology will reduce the number of tedious tasks people have to perform, the scientists felt that it took away the part of their jobs—dreaming up new compounds—they enjoyed most.

One scientist remarked, “I couldn’t help feeling that much of my education is now worthless.”

Perhaps as they get more familiar with AI, the scientists will get happier with using it, but there are no guarantees.

“A key, creative part of the process was automated,” said Toner-Rodgers. “People just might be unhappy with that permanently.”

Business

Australia is banning social media for people under 16. Could this work elsewhere — or even there?

By BARBARA ORTUTAY, *The Associated Press*, December 4, 2024

It is an ambitious social experiment of our moment in history — one that experts say could accomplish something that parents, schools and other governments have attempted with varying degrees of success: keeping kids off social media until they turn 16.

Australia's new law, approved by its Parliament in December 2024, is an attempt to swim against many tides of modern life — formidable forces like technology, marketing, globalization and, of course, the iron will of a teenager. And like efforts of the past to protect kids from things that parents believe they're not ready for, the nation's move is both ambitious and not exactly simple, particularly in a world where young people are often shaped, defined and judged by the online company they keep.

The ban won't go into effect for another year. But how will Australia be able to enforce it? That's not clear, nor will it be easy. TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram have become so ingrained in young people's lives that going cold turkey will be difficult.

Other questions loom. Does the ban limit kids' free expression and — especially for those in vulnerable groups — isolate them and curtail their opportunity to connect with members of their community? And how will social sites verify people's ages, anyway? Can't kids just get around such technicalities, as they so often do?

This is, after all, the 21st century — an era when social media is the primary communications tool for most of those born in the past 25 years who, in a fragmented world, seek the common cultures of trends, music and memes. What happens when big swaths of that fall away?

Is Australia's initiative a good, long-time-coming development that will protect the vulnerable, or could it become a well-meaning experiment with unintended consequences?

The law will make platforms including TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, Reddit, X and Instagram liable for fines of up to 50 million Australian dollars, 33 million dollars, for systemic failures to prevent children younger than 16 from holding accounts.

Leaders and parents in countries around the world are watching Australia's policy closely as many seek to protect young kids from the internet's dangerous corners — and, not incidentally, from each other. Most nations have taken different routes, from parental consent requirements to minimum age limits.

Many child safety experts, parents and even teens who have waited to get on social media consider Australia's move a positive step.

The harms to children from social media have been well documented in the two decades since Facebook's launch ushered in a new era in how the world communicates. Kids who spend more time on social media, especially as tweens or young teenagers, are more likely to experience depression and anxiety, according to multiple studies — though it is not yet clear if there is a causal relationship.

Behind Many Powerful Women on Wall Street: A Doting 'Househusband'

More men are staying home to facilitate the complex juggle of family life and their wives' high-powered careers

By Miriam Gottfried, *The Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 21, 2024

Suzanne Donohoe, a top executive, started the month of September with a 10-day business trip through Asia and Europe. Back in New York, her husband, Matt Donohoe, was helping their three teenagers begin a new school year.

That was no simple task. Though the Donohoe children are close in age, each goes to a different school and has different extracurricular activities. Matt drove their 13-year-old to hockey practices in New Jersey and took all three children to Boston for a tournament. In between, there were groceries to buy, meals to prepare and homework to assist with.

Matt quit his job in 2007 to help out at home. A former emerging-markets trader with degrees from Georgetown and Columbia, he is part of a quiet but growing force of men who hold down the fort at home while their wives climb to the upper echelons of finance.

Wall Street has long struggled to elevate and retain women. A hotly competitive industry that demands long hours, frequent travel and the need to be on call constantly, it has been an unwelcoming environment for women, particularly those with children.

Women who have leadership roles say that having a spouse who stays home—a househusband, if you will—can relieve that burden and allow them to rise.

For the men, being a househusband can come with a stigma: Society often still assumes men will be the bigger earners and women the primary caregivers. But that is starting to change.

In 45% of U.S. opposite-sex marriages, the wife earns as much as or more than her husband, a share that has roughly tripled over the past 50 years, according to a 2023 report from Pew Research Center. Dads represented 18% of stay-at-home parents in 2021, up from 11% in 1989, another Pew study found.

Many couples say they started out with parallel professions but reached a point at which the woman's career accelerated. When one person needed to devote more time to parenting, it made more sense for it to be the man.

Senior female executives whose partners also work say they have to manage an intense balancing act and admit to being envious at times of their peers whose husbands don't work.

For the Donohoes, having Matt at home has meant that he has developed a close bond with his children. Suzanne says it has given her credibility with her colleagues when she needs to attend one of their doctor's appointments or sporting events.

There are still mix-ups. Schools often call Suzanne first if one of the children is sick or needs permission to do something even though Matt is listed first on contact forms. Once it happened when she was in London on business. She gently asked the school administrator to call her husband. He was at their apartment five minutes away.

Female footballers have shown us how – let’s build a sport free of fossil fuel deals

Male players must step up and add their voice to the campaign to stop our sport being sold out to the big polluters causing climate change

David Wheeler, *The Observer*, 8 December 2024

At the Cop29 climate conference Sofie Junge Pedersen and Katie Rood again called for Fifa to drop its sponsorship deal with the Saudi Arabian state oil company Aramco. They were among more than 130 female players who signed an open letter that described the partnership as a “middle finger to women’s football” that will do real damage to people and our planet.

The women were widely applauded for speaking out but their male counterparts have not followed suit.

Men’s and women’s football are very different worlds. Women’s football has a history of players speaking out for equality and inclusion, within the sport and beyond. Careers in it have been marked by financial insecurity, underinvestment and a need to pay attention to life beyond football. It was in big part thanks to the players’ advocacy that the women’s game got to where it is now.

The experience for male players of my generation is different. In general, academy footballers are encouraged to avoid external distractions and elite pros who speak out or pursue a life beyond the pitch leave themselves vulnerable to cries of hypocrisy or being told to “focus on the football” the moment results start to turn. We are too often treated like commodities, there to play increasingly more games and sold when the price is right.

But we care about what is happening off and on the pitch. This has led players to stand up against racism, campaign on mental health or privately donate large parts of their wealth to charities. It has led me to speak out for stronger climate action and against gambling sponsors in football. I perform better when I can freely pursue the things I care about off the pitch.

Many players agree with me. They are starting to become concerned about what the climate crisis means for the world they and future generations will live in, including one where football may be difficult to play. They don’t want to be implicated in the harm by promoting these polluters. So it’s important to talk about what may be holding them back from speaking out.

Those who speak out will be told by many, from loyal fans, prominent former players and online trolls, to shut up and focus on football. For black players, speaking out invites a barrage of racist abuse. We should learn from the female players, who spoke out together and had safety in numbers.

There is a certain cynicism in men’s football that nothing ever changes, money rules and everyone can be bought. We must move past that. Nothing changes without people pushing for it.

THE FUTURE OF EVERYTHING

How Will Self-Driving Cars Learn to Make Life-and-Death Choices?

Carmakers are grappling with the dilemmas AI will face on the road

By Brett Berk, *The Wall Street Journal*, Aug. 28, 2024

What will the roadway scruples of AI look like?

Artificial intelligence will hold sway on our roadways as we edge closer to fully self-driving cars—a shift that many carmakers say will make driving safer.

David Margines, director of product management at Waymo, Alphabet’s self-driving subsidiary, says putting AI in charge precludes many of the factors that cause accidents, such as speeding, exhaustion, distraction and intoxication—preventing problems before they occur.

Others see different considerations. “The expectations for autonomous vehicles are much higher than for individuals,” says Melissa Cefkin, an anthropologist and lecturer in the department of general engineering at Santa Clara University who has worked with Nissan and Waymo on the interaction between humans and autonomous vehicles. “When an individual has an incident, we can say, ‘They’re only human. They tried their best. It was an accident,’” she says. “We’re not going to be as forgiving with a company, and we probably shouldn’t be.”

Here are some of the top questions engineers, programmers and bioethicists are grappling with as the world of AI-driven vehicles approaches.

To avoid hitting pedestrians, autonomous vehicles use an array of AI-enabled features: perception, classification, prediction, path planning. But it can still be a challenge to distinguish between humans and humanoid delivery robots, retail mannequins or even street-level ads featuring images of people.

Some envision the development of vehicle-to-pedestrian communications. For instance, a cellphone’s broadcasting ping could signal a human presence to an autonomous vehicle’s AI. But this brings potential concerns about privacy and personal liberty—and a disadvantage for people without phones.

As regards animal values, in a collision, moose and deer pose an existential risk to vehicles and their occupants. Smaller animals such as hedgehogs, or cats and dogs, present less of a risk. Is it morally acceptable for AI to weigh the lives of these animals differently?

For large animals, Waymo gives priority to “reducing injury-causing potential” for humans, through avoidance maneuvers, Margines says. When it comes to small animals, such as chipmunks and birds, Waymo’s AI “recognizes that braking or taking evasive action for some classes of foreign objects can be dangerous in and of itself,” he says. But how might the equation differ for animals that might be pets?

Finally, is taking the fastest route the core metric that should guide autonomous vehicles, or are other factors just as relevant? Focusing on getting to the destination quickly would allow self-driving ride-share vehicles to make more trips and more profit, but might result in more danger. Giving priority to safety alone could slow and snarl traffic. And what about choosing routes that let passengers enjoy the journey?

Such decisions “become ethical when you think about whose interests are you serving,” Cefkin says. “Passengers? Robotaxi services? Other roadway users?”

Technology

Ireland embraced data centers that the AI boom needs. Now they're consuming too much of its energy

By MATT O'BRIEN, *The Associated Press*, December 19, 2024

CLONDALKIN, Ireland (AP) — Dozens of massive data centers humming at the outskirts of Dublin are consuming more electricity than all of the urban homes in Ireland and starting to wear out the warm welcome that brought them here.

Now, a country that made itself a computing factory for Amazon, Google, Meta, Microsoft and TikTok is wondering whether it was all worth it as tech giants look around the world to build even more data centers to fuel the next wave of artificial intelligence.

Fears of rolling blackouts led Ireland's grid operator to halt new data centers near Dublin until 2028. These huge buildings and their powerful computers last year consumed 21% of the nation's electricity, according to official records. No other country has reported a higher burden to the International Energy Agency.

Not only that, but Ireland is still heavily reliant on burning fossil fuels to generate electricity, despite a growing number of wind farms sprouting across the countryside. Further data center expansion threatens Ireland's goals to sharply cut planet-warming emissions.

Ireland has attracted global tech companies since the "Celtic Tiger" boom at the turn of the 21st century. Tax incentives, a highly skilled, English-speaking workforce and the country's membership in the European Union have all contributed to making the tech sector a central part of the Irish economy. The island is also a node for undersea cables that extend to the U.S., Britain, Iceland and mainland Europe.

Nearly all of the data centers sit on the edge of Dublin, where their proximity to the capital city facilitates online financial transactions and other activities that require fast connections. Data center computers run hot, but compared to other parts of the world, Ireland's cool temperatures make it easier to keep them from overheating without drawing in as much water.

Still, buildings that for years went mostly unnoticed have attracted unwanted attention as their power demands surged while Irish householders pay some of Europe's highest electricity bills. Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency has also flagged concerns about nitrogen oxide pollution from data centers' on-site generators — typically gas or diesel turbines — affecting areas near Dublin.

A crackdown began in 2021, spurred by projections that data centers are on pace to take up one third of Ireland's electricity in this decade. Regulators declared that Dublin had hit its limits and could no longer plug more data centers into its grid.

Ossian Smyth, an outgoing minister of state for the Irish government whose Green Party lost nearly all its parliamentary seats, said it would be a mistake to slow down Ireland's climate commitments. But he also sees the limits on data center growth set by his outgoing government as having resolved most people's concerns.

447 WORDS USED

McDonald's is the latest company to roll back diversity goals

By DEE-ANN DURBIN, *The Associated Press*, January 7, 2025

Four years after launching a push for more diversity in its ranks, McDonald's is ending some of its diversity practices, citing a U.S. Supreme Court decision that outlawed affirmative action in college admissions.

McDonald's is the latest big company to shift its tactics in the wake of the 2023 ruling and a conservative backlash against diversity, equity and inclusion programs. Walmart, John Deere, Harley-Davidson and others rolled back their DEI initiatives last year.

McDonald's said it will retire specific goals for achieving diversity at senior leadership levels. It also intends to end a program that encourages its suppliers to develop diversity training and to increase the number of minority group members represented within their own leadership ranks.

McDonald's said it will also pause "external surveys." The burger giant didn't elaborate, but several other companies, including Lowe's and Ford Motor Co., suspended their participation in an annual survey by the Human Rights Campaign that measures workplace inclusion for LGBTQ+ employees.

McDonald's, which has its headquarters in Chicago, rolled out a series of diversity initiatives in 2021 after a spate of sexual harassment lawsuits filed by employees and a lawsuit alleging discrimination brought by a group of Black former McDonald's franchise owners.

But McDonald's now says that the "shifting legal landscape" after the Supreme Court decision and the actions of other corporations caused it to take a hard look at its own policies.

A shifting political landscape may also have played a role. President-elect Donald Trump is a vocal opponent of diversity, equity and inclusion programs.

Vice President-elect JD Vance introduced a bill in the Senate last summer to end such programs in the federal government.

Robby Starbuck, a conservative political commentator who has threatened consumer boycotts of prominent consumer brands that don't retreat from their diversity programs, said on X that he recently told McDonald's he would be doing a story on its "woke policies."

McDonald's said it had been considering updates to its policies for several months and planned to time the announcement to the start of this year.

In an open letter to employees and franchisees, McDonald's senior leadership team said it remains committed to inclusion and believes a diverse workforce is a competitive advantage. The company said 30% of its U.S. leaders are members of underrepresented groups, up from 29% in 2021. McDonald's previously committed to reaching 35% by the end of this year.

McDonald's said it has achieved one of the goals it announced in 2021: gender pay equity at all levels of the company. It also said it met three years early a goal of having 25% of total supplier spending go to diverse-owned businesses.

439 WORDS USED

Entertainment

From T-shirts to thongs, how indie film merchandise became a hot commodityBy KRYSTA FAURIA, *The Associated Press*, November 29, 2024

LOS ANGELES (AP) — On a recent Saturday afternoon, hundreds of “Anora” fans lined up for hours on Los Angeles’ Melrose Avenue, hoping to snag exclusive merchandise inspired by Sean Baker’s latest film about a stripper who marries the son of a Russian oligarch.

The one-day-only pop-up from distributor Neon followed the success of a similar event in New York, hosted at the strip club at which the winner of the top prize at this year’s Cannes Film Festival was filmed.

But in recent years, movie-inspired streetwear has exploded in popularity among film lovers, thanks in part to viral marketing campaigns put on by independent film studios. The result is clothing, often made in collaboration with popular brands, promoted as trendy and in limited supply.

Some films, however, lend themselves to a more thematic marketing approach.

“First Reformed” fans flocked to the sold-out denim hat featured in Paul Schrader’s 2017 film about a pastor’s descent into despair over the environment. The J. Hannah gold locket inspired by Sofia Coppola’s “Priscilla” (2023) is still on the market for \$1,480.

Watching movies — following a pandemic and the rise of streaming — has become less of a collective experience in recent years. For many fans, repping their favorite films in public is a way to combat that.

“It’s so fun knowing that everyone loves the movie so much to go stand in line for multiple hours. I got here three hours before it even opened and there’s probably, like, 30 people in front of me,” said Sabrina Bratt. “Physical keepsakes are just so cute and fun.”

For studios, the benefit is multifaceted. Not only is it an additional revenue source in a time of slowed production in Hollywood, it also is a way to engage with the fans that help keep their films in the zeitgeist long after they leave the theater.

Alex Ng is the co-founder and creative director of the Los Angeles-based brand Brain Dead, which also owns a movie theater on Fairfax Avenue. As the film industry continues to evolve out of necessity, Ng contends this intersection of fashion and film will play an increasingly important role in Hollywood.

“What people want is like a token or a souvenir. They go to Disneyland and they get a Mickey, right? So, if you go to an arthouse cinema, there’s not a lot of things or souvenirs you could take away from a film that you love,” he said. “I want to connect those pieces. And I think that’s the new era that we’re seeing as a movie-going experience.”

U.S. News

Nuclear bunker sales increase, despite expert warnings they aren’t going to provide protectionBy MARTHA MENDOZA, *The Associated Press*, December 18, 2024

When Bernard Jones Jr. and his wife, Doris, built their dream home, they didn’t hold back. A grotto swimming pool with a waterfall for hot summer days. A home theater for cozy winter nights. A fruit orchard to harvest in fall. And a vast underground bunker in case disaster strikes.

“The world’s not becoming a safer place,” he said. “We wanted to be prepared.”

Under a nondescript metal hatch near the private basketball court, there’s a hidden staircase that leads down into rooms with beds for about 25 people, bathrooms and two kitchens, all backed by a self-sufficient energy source.

With water, electricity, clean air and food, they felt ready for any disaster, even a nuclear blast, at their bucolic home in California’s Inland Empire.

“If there was a nuclear strike, would you rather go into the living room or go into a bunker? If you had one, you’d go there too,” said Jones, who said he reluctantly sold the home two years ago.

Global security leaders are warning nuclear threats are growing as weapons spending surged to \$91.4 billion last year. At the same time, private bunker sales are on the rise globally, from small metal boxes to crawl inside of, to extravagant underground mansions.

Critics warn these bunkers create a false perception that a nuclear war is survivable. They argue that people planning to live through an atomic blast aren’t focusing on the real and current dangers posed by nuclear threats, and the critical need to stop the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Meanwhile, government disaster experts say bunkers aren’t necessary. A Federal Emergency Management Agency 100-page guide on responding to a nuclear detonation focuses on having the public get inside and stay inside, ideally in a basement and away from outside walls for at least a day. Those existing spaces can provide protection from radioactive fallout, says FEMA.

But increasingly, buyers say bunkers offer a sense of security. The market for U.S. bomb and fallout shelters is forecast to grow from \$137 million last year to \$175 million by 2030, according to a market research report from BlueWeave Consulting. The report says major growth factors include “the rising threat of nuclear or terrorist attacks or civil unrest.”

Researcher Sam Lair at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies says U.S. leaders stopped talking about bunkers decades ago.

“The political costs incurred by causing people to think about shelters again is not worth it to leaders because it forces people to think about what they would do after nuclear war,” he said. “That’s something that very, very few people want to think about. This makes people feel vulnerable.”

Education

Schools are cutting bus service for children. Parents are turning to ride-hailing apps

By JEFF McMURRAY, *The Associated Press*, December 16, 2024

CHICAGO (AP) — Ismael El-Amin was driving his daughter to school when a chance encounter gave him an idea for a new way to carpool.

On the way across Chicago, El-Amin's daughter spotted a classmate riding with her own dad as they drove to their selective public school on the city's North Side. For 40 minutes, they rode along the same congested highway.

"They're waving to each other in the back. I'm looking at the dad. The dad's looking at me. And I was like, parents can definitely be a resource to parents," said El-Amin, who went on to found Piggyback Network, a service parents can use to book rides for their children.

Reliance on school buses has been waning for years as districts struggle to find drivers and more students attend schools far outside their neighborhoods. As responsibility for transportation shifts to families, the question of how to replace the traditional yellow bus has become an urgent problem for some, and a spark for innovation.

State and local governments decide how widely to offer school bus service. Lately, more have been cutting back. Only about 28% of U.S. students take a school bus, according to a Federal Highway Administration survey concluded early last year. That's down from about 36% in 2017.

Chicago Public Schools, the nation's fourth-largest district, has significantly curbed bus service in recent years. It still offers rides for disabled and homeless students, in line with a federal mandate, but most families are on their own. Only 17,000 of the district's 325,000 students are eligible for school bus rides.

In December 2024, the school system launched a pilot program allowing some students who attend out-of-neighborhood magnet or selective-enrollment schools to catch a bus at a nearby school's "hub stop." It aims to start with rides for about 1,000 students by the end of the school year.

It's not enough to make up for the lost service, said Erin Rose Schubert, a volunteer for the CPS Parents for Buses advocacy group.

"The people who had the money and the privilege were able to figure out other situations like rearranging their work schedules or public transportation," she said. "People who didn't, some had to pull their kids out of school."

On Piggyback Network, parents can book a ride for their student online with another parent traveling the same direction. Rides cost roughly 80 cents per mile and the drivers are compensated with credits to use for their own kids' rides.

"It's an opportunity for kids to not be late to school," 15-year-old Takia Phillips said on a recent PiggyBack ride with El-Amin as the driver.

The company has arranged a few hundred rides in its first year operating in Chicago, and El-Amin has been contacting drivers for possible expansion to Virginia, North Carolina and Texas.

'The horses don't choose to take part': should equestrian sports be removed from the Olympics?

A video of dressage champion Charlotte Dujardin whipping a horse caused shockwaves last week - and it wasn't an isolated incident in the sport

By Elle Hunt, *The Guardian*, 31 July 2024

The video begins with a warning: "Some viewers may find the following footage distressing." Then there is the sound: the whoosh and crack of a whip.

It starts, and doesn't stop. Team GB's former dressage champion, Charlotte Dujardin – a three-time gold medallist – is shown in a riding hall, shadowing a horse and rider on foot as a third person films the scene. With a long whip, she strikes the animal upwards of 20 times in one minute.

The incident was filmed a few years ago, during a coaching session held by Dujardin in private stables, but footage was circulated in July 2024 alongside an official complaint.

Having been hailed as the "golden girl" of dressage and widely tipped for a damehood, Dujardin has been banned from the Paris Olympic Games amid public outcry and a pending investigation by the sport's governing body, the International Federation for Equestrian Sports (FEI).

In a statement, Dujardin said she was "deeply ashamed" and "sincerely sorry". Dujardin's fellow Olympic riders have condemned her methods, with Team GB's Tom McEwen telling press: "We are here 110% behind horse welfare."

But the scandal, plus more recent reports of alleged equine abuse at the Games, has provoked scepticism and renewed debate about the ethics of involving horses at all.

At the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, a Swiss horse had to be euthanised after tearing a ligament on the cross-country course. In the showjumping event, a gelding in the Irish team was shown competing with a visible nosebleed, potentially indicative of undue exertion.

Whether or not these examples register as animal abuse, or risks incurred in the pursuit of sporting excellence, may depend on your engagement with equestrian sport, and your own ethical lines.

For Peta, the global animal rights organisation, which takes the view that "animals are not ours", any control, suffering or exploitation is unacceptable. "We know that whenever animals are treated as commodities and exploited for human gain, their best interests go out of the window," says Peta spokesperson White.

It is particularly egregious in the case of the Olympic Games, she adds, intended as they are as a celebration of human athletic excellence. "At the end of the day, these horses don't care about gold medals, they don't choose to participate ... There's just no reason for it."

The organisation has been emboldened by the removal of the horse event from modern pentathlon, after a German coach punched a horse during the Tokyo Games, causing outrage. That the sport's governing body voted to replace horse riding with cycling, after 109 years, is proof that "change is possible", says White.

Fuelling the debate are emotive and deep-seated questions about what, in these enlightened times, humans owe animals. Horses were domesticated about 3500BC, and have since been used for war, work, transportation, sport and companionship.

But coercion, cruelty and abuse are rife among all working animals used to produce profit; the Olympics are just more visible, and higher stakes.

Politics

Surgeon General calls for new label on drinks to warn Americans of alcohol's cancer risk

By AMANDA SEITZ, *The Associated Press*, January 3, 2025

Alcohol is a leading cause of cancer, a risk that should be clearly labeled on drinks Americans consume, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy proposed on Friday.

Americans should be better informed about the link between alcohol and cancer, in particular, Murthy argues in his advisory, noting alcohol consumption is to blame for nearly one million preventable cancer cases in the U.S. over the last decade. About 20,000 people die every year from those alcohol-related cancer cases, according to his advisory.

"It's pretty crazy that there's a lot more information on a can of peas than on a bottle of whiskey," said Dr. Timothy Naimi, who directs the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research at the University of Victoria in British Columbia. "Consumers have the right to basic information about health risks, serving size and drinks per container."

Consuming alcohol raises the risk of developing at least seven types of cancer diseases, including liver, breast and throat cancer, research has found. His advisory also notes that as a person's alcohol consumption goes up, so does the risk for developing those illnesses.

Even with the Surgeon General's advisory and new research that shows the dangers of drinking, it's unlikely Congress would act swiftly to enact a new Surgeon General's warning on alcohol products.

It's been nearly four decades since Congress approved the first government warning label on alcohol, the one that says pregnant women shouldn't drink and warns about the dangers of driving while drinking. No updates have been made since then.

Before that, Congress approved a label on cigarettes cautioning users that smoking is hazardous to health, a move that is credited with helping America substantially reduce its bad habit.

Any effort to add a cancer warning label to alcohol would face significant push back from a well-funded and powerful beverage industry, which spends nearly \$30 million every year lobbying Congress.

Other research around alcohol, including reports that moderate drinking can be associated with lower risks of heart disease compared to no alcohol consumption, should be considered, said Amanda Berger of the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States.

"Many lifestyle choices carry potential risks, and it is the federal government's role to determine any proposed changes to the warning statements based on the entire body of scientific research," Berger said in a statement.

The surgeon general's advisory comes as the government is in the process of updating dietary guidelines, including those around alcohol, that will form the cornerstone of federal food programs and policy. The updated guidelines are expected later this year.

The current guidelines recommend women have one drink or fewer per day while men should stick to two or fewer.

Relationships

The Micropolitics of Family Gift Giving

The real holiday drama is the family gift-giving quagmire

By Elizabeth Bernstein, *The Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 17, 2024

Michelle Shahbazyan was excited to give her beloved older relatives the scrapbook she'd made for Christmas last year, with family photos and pictures drawn by her kids.

That was until she watched the couple unwrap her cousin Stella's gift at the family's holiday gathering: a three-week European cruise, first-class airline tickets and matching luggage.

"I was embarrassed," says Shahbazyan, 42 years old, a life coach in Scottsdale, Arizona. "No matter what you do, she will always trump it."

Finding time to shop, and figuring out how to pay for it all, are the least of our worries. We also have to face the awkwardness of giving a bad gift. The minefield of pleasing picky in-laws. Irritation when a sibling shows up with better gifts. And —horrors!— shame when the look on our teenage niece's face tells us we're not as cool as we thought.

So much for the most wonderful time of the year.

Exchanging holiday gifts with family members is fraught. And all the stress and competition is made worse when presents are exchanged at family gatherings—everyone can see who gave what.

Not everyone agrees on what makes a good gift. Givers prefer to give unexpected gifts that make a big impact in the moment, often ignoring the wishes of recipients, who tend to want something they asked for or something useful, research shows. Givers also spend more money on gifts than recipients would like, which can make them feel indebted.

Often, givers use presents to try to influence the recipient, such as when your super-fit brother-in-law who is always urging you to join CrossFit gives you a barbell for Christmas.

"Gift giving in families can be an act of micropolitics," says Chihling Liu, a senior lecturer at Lancaster University in the U.K., who studies the dark side of gift giving. "They're trying to assert their identity on each other."

Amanda Latimer loves a big Christmas. Last year, the 48-year-old mom of six bought her kids, aged 16 to 27, what they wanted: designer clothes and tech gear. Then she threw in extras, such as cozy blankets, to have more under the tree.

Yet on Christmas morning, Latimer says she "felt a little empty inside" after the presents were opened. Her children were appreciative. But they didn't seem wowed.

This year, Latimer has a new plan: In lieu of presents, her family will make a donation to the Salvation Army to fulfill a needy family's Christmas wish list. Latimer says she was inspired by her grandmother, Joan Kroc, wife of McDonald's founder Ray Kroc, who gave the charity \$1.5 billion after she died in 2003.

Her kids are excited. "I feel bad asking for anything for Christmas," says Lauren Latimer, 19. "This feels much better."

BUSINESS

The Unlikely Ingredient That Could End U.S. Dependence on Chinese Batteries

Batteries that use sodium instead of lithium could allow the U.S. and its allies to create a completely new supply chain for the energy storage taking off across the world

By Christopher Mims, *The Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 20, 2024

The U.S. and China are in a high-stakes race, with the energy security of America and its allies hanging in the balance. It involves batteries made from the same sodium found in table salt.

In both countries, researchers and companies are working furiously to make batteries that rely on a very different starting material than the lithium-ion batteries currently powering everything from our cellphones to our power grids. Such a battery could break China's near monopoly on crucial battery-making elements at a time when trade tensions and America's electric storage needs are on a collision course.

Instead of lithium, this nascent battery tech uses a sodium compound called soda ash, which can be produced using table salt. Unlike lithium, sodium is easily accessible everywhere. Even better for the U.S. is that China must synthesize soda ash from salt, while it is cheap and plentiful here. In fact, with 92% of the world's reserves, you might even say that the U.S. is the Saudi Arabia of the stuff.

The U.S. has vast reserves of naturally occurring sodium carbonate, also known as soda ash, the primary component of sodium-ion batteries. While soda ash can be synthesized, it's cheaper to simply mine it. About half of the soda ash the U.S. digs up every year is used in the production of glass—everything from the windows in your home to beer bottles.

Securing the gargantuan quantities of batteries the U.S. will need in the future is critical, given the transition to electrified transportation, as well as the essential role that battery storage has and will play in the reliability of our electrical grid. Experts who have worked on previous revolutions in energy storage say this latest technology gives the U.S. a third crack at the problem—and that we might not get another.

Sodium-ion batteries have a number of advantages over lithium-ion battery tech, including being tougher and potentially safer. They also have one big disadvantage, thanks to unavoidable realities of the periodic table—they are bulkier and heavier.

Proponents of this new kind of battery say their size and weight disadvantages hardly matter in many applications, such as large, stationary batteries for capturing energy when the sun shines and the wind blows, and feeding it back to the power grid when they don't. And researchers say that eventually, they may be able to produce sodium-ion batteries which would be small and light enough to be used in electric vehicles.

This could lead to safer and cheaper EV batteries that also work across a wider range of temperatures—including the cold weather which can be a drag on EV range in conventional lithium-ion-powered vehicles.

The Observer view on Luke Littler: kebabs, banter and straight as an arrow, no wonder Britain loves him

The laid-back 17-year-old who brought millions of young fans to darts has been shortlisted for the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award

The Observer editorial, 14 Dec 2024

In a puritanical age of wellness, non-alcoholic drinks and going to the gym, an unlikely sport is thriving: darts. On Sunday 15th December the World Darts Championship is back, and in its wake throngs of young people dressed as gnomes and traffic cones drinking beer and breaking into song. And at the very centre of this culture stands a kebab-loving hero for our times – Luke “the Nuke” Littler.

Littler has had an extraordinary year. In January, as a barely known 16-year-old, he was runner-up in the world championship. As the Warrington teenager progressed through the heats, huge numbers of fans began to watch, eventually reaching a record high of 3.7 million viewers for the final. Barry Hearn, the president of the Professional Darts Corporation, coined a new term: Littlermania.

Littlermania has not let up. This year he was the third most Googled person in the UK, ahead of Keir Starmer and King Charles, to be pipped only by Kate Middleton and Donald Trump).

There has always been something compelling about a prodigy. These men and women remind us of the fine meritocratic principles of competitive sport: that true talent can come from anywhere, and, along with dedication, can get you all the way to the top. A video montage of Littler as a toddler with his first dartboard caught the makings of the confident player he would become: he has been playing darts since he was 18 months old.

Michael Phelps, Venus and Serena Williams: precocious sports stars catch the imagination; each has had their turn in the spotlight. But Littler is doubly unusual as a young darts player, which is a sport that tends to reward experience. Littler is breaking all the stereotypes of what is known as an old person's game. Young people are joining the sport in droves, looking to be the “next Luke Littler”.

But Littlermania goes beyond this. Unlike many other sports stars, with their relentless training schedules and carefully managed media appearances, the secret to his appeal is that he still appears to be a normal teenager. Despite the overnight fame, his name plastered across headlines and news bulletins, he appears remarkably unfazed by it all.

His life remains endlessly relatable to young fans. Asked about his daily routine, he said that he likes to stay up late playing his Xbox, waking up in the early afternoon, and then practising darts “for like, half an hour, 45 minutes” a day. During his catapult to fame earlier this year, he went for a celebratory kebab after a match. Warrington's Hot Spot has now offered him free kebabs for life.

Littler's laid-back attitude will protect him on his journey to the top. It is also why Britain loves him. Darts is a game of great skill, but it is also about irony, camaraderie and not taking yourself too seriously. Littler captures this spirit.

'I am valued here': the extraordinary film that recreates a disabled boy's rich digital lifeCath Clarke, *The Guardian*, 22 Oct 2024

Mats Steen had muscular dystrophy and died very young. But a touching new documentary has used animation and his own posts to reveal the fulfilling gaming life he led in *World of Warcraft*

Mats was born with Duchenne muscular dystrophy, a progressive condition that causes the muscles to weaken gradually. He was diagnosed aged four and started using a wheelchair at 10. By the end of his life, Mats could only move his fingers, and required a tube to clear his throat every 15 minutes. As he became increasingly disabled, he spent more time gaming: 20,000 hours in his last decade (about the same as if it were a full-time job).

His parents wondered how they could share the news of his death with his online acquaintances. They didn't have access to his *World of Warcraft* account, but his Dad found the password to Mats' blog, and they wrote a post. It began: "Our beloved son, brother and best friend left us this night ..." But, they wondered, would anyone read it?

They were stunned by the response. Emails started pouring in from around the world: "Mats' passing has hit me very hard." "Mats was AWESOME." "You should be proud of your son." "Mats was a real friend to me." The couple had been anguished that Mats' existence was lonely, that illness had isolated him, but here were messages, some pages long, from his close friends on *World of Warcraft*.

Mats made close friends online and touched their lives. But for years he hid his illness in *World of Warcraft*, a place where he wasn't defined by disability. "Games are my sanctuary," he wrote. "I am safe here, valued." But in the summer of 2013 he started the blog, which he did eventually share with some of his gaming friends.

The Remarkable Life of Ibelin arrives at a time when parents are agonising over how much screen-time to give their kids. Because of his disability, Mats' parents let him spend more time gaming than other children. He was on his Game Boy during breaks at school while other kids played football.

The film director took an almighty risk making the documentary. He worked on it for three years before approaching Blizzard, the company that owns *World of Warcraft*, for permission: "We wrote them an email, 'We are a small Norwegian production company. Could we have the rights for free?' The Blizzard bosses invited him to California to screen Ibelin at their offices. "I had to take extra doses of asthma medicine before the meeting," Rees says with a grin. But like everyone else, the bosses finished the film in tears.

Business

What to know about Apple's \$95 million settlement of the snooping Siri caseBy MICHAEL LIEDTKE, *The Associated Press*, January 3, 2025

Apple has agreed to pay \$95 million to settle a lawsuit that accused the company of turning its virtual assistant Siri into a snoop that eavesdropped on the users of iPhones and other trendy devices in a betrayal to its long-standing commitment to personal privacy.

The Wood Law Firm, which specializes in class-action lawsuits, filed the complaint against Apple in August 2019, shortly after *The Guardian* newspaper published an article alleging that Siri's microphone had been surreptitiously turned on to record conversations occurring without the users' knowledge.

Apple issued a September 2014 software update that was supposed to activate the virtual assistant only with the triggering words "Hey, Siri," but *The Guardian* story alleged Siri was listening and recording conversations at other times to help improve the company's technology.

The story led to the lawsuit, which later raised allegations that Apple shared some of the conversations that Siri secretly recorded with advertisers looking to connect with consumers who were more likely to buy their products and services.

Tens of millions of U.S. consumers who owned or purchased iPhones and other devices equipped with Siri from September 17, 2014, through the end of 2024 will be eligible to file claims.

The settlement currently envisions paying out up to \$20 per Siri-enabled device, with each consumer limited to a maximum. The final amount could be affected by two factors: the number of claims and how much of the settlement fund is reduced to cover legal fees and costs.

A claims administrator estimates only 3% to 5% of eligible consumers will file claims. The lawyers in the case currently are seeking nearly \$30 million in fees and expenses.

If the allegations were true, Apple may have violated federal wiretapping laws and other statutes designed to protect people's privacy. But Apple adamantly denied any wrongdoing and maintained that it would have been cleared of any misconduct had the case gone to trial. Lawyers representing the consumers asserted that Apple's misbehavior was so egregious that the company could have been liable for \$1.5 billion in damages if it lost the case.

Although Apple hasn't explained the reasons for making the settlement, major companies often decide it makes more sense to resolve class-action cases rather than to continue to run up legal costs and risk the chance of potentially bad publicity. The lawsuit also targeted one of Apple's core values framing privacy as a "fundamental human right."

Although \$95 million sounds like a lot of money, it's a pittance for Apple. Since September 2014, the company's total profits have exceeded \$700 billion — a streak of prosperity that has helped propel the company's market value to about \$3.7 trillion.

Health

Who wants a pig organ? Patients sick and tired of waiting years for a transplant

By LAURAN NEERGAARD, *The Associated Press*, December 17, 2024

Two U.S. companies aim to begin the world's first clinical trials of xenotransplantation in 2025 – using pig kidneys or hearts to try to save human lives. Would-be volunteers are impatient to see if they'll qualify as researchers fine-tune how best to test if the humanized pig organs they've designed might really work.

Anticipation is growing with news that an Alabama woman was faring well after a pig kidney transplant at NYU in November 2024. Towana Looney is the fifth American to receive a gene-edited pig organ, each case so far an emergency experiment for people out of options.

None of the previous recipients — two given pig hearts and two kidneys — survived more than two months but that hasn't deterred researchers hunting an alternative to the dire shortage of transplantable organs.

"We have to have the courage to continue," said University of Maryland transplant surgeon Dr. Bartley Griffith.

FDA rules require that pig organs be extensively tested in monkeys or baboons before humans. And while researchers have extended those primates' survival to a year, sometimes longer, they were desperate for experience with people. After all, the pig organs are genetically altered to be more humanlike, not more baboon-like.

At NYU and the University of Alabama at Birmingham, surgeons first tested pig organs in bodies of the recently deceased, donated for scientific research.

Although the first four didn't survive long, in part because of complications from other diseases, those experiments proved pig organs could work at least for a while and offered other lessons. For example, discovery of a hidden pig virus in the first heart transplant prompted better tests for that risk.

Scientists have tried animal-to-human transplants for years without success but now they can edit pig genes, trying to bridge the species gap enough to keep the human immune system from immediately attacking the foreign tissue. Still, nobody knows the best gene combination.

The balance is choosing participants sick enough to qualify but not so sick they have no chance.

"There's a tremendous number of patients who would be very willing, very willing to do this," said Dr. Silke Niederhaus of the University of Maryland.

Niederhaus became a kidney transplant surgeon because around her 12th birthday, one saved her life. That kidney lasted three decades. When it failed, it took five years to find another. So she understands the draw of pig research, and urges people to learn their odds of getting a human kidney before volunteering.

If they're younger, healthier or have a living donor, "I would probably say go with what's known and what's proven," Niederhaus said. But if they're older and dialysis is starting to fail, "maybe it's worth taking the risk."

450 WORDS USED

Why Marathon Running Is Booming

More people are taking on 26.2-mile runs, thanks to squishy shoes, running groups and Gen Z athletes

By Rachel Bachman and Nikki Waller, *The Wall Street Journal*, 31 Dec 2024

In 2024, the marathon boomed. The Paris Marathon in April set a record for the biggest ever with 54,175 finishers. That mark was broken not once, but twice—first in September by Berlin (54,280), then in November by New York (55,646). And hundreds of thousands more people entered lotteries to get into those races, a sign that demand for spots is outstripping supply.

No longer the exclusive domain of super-slim Type A's, the 26.2-mile distance has drawn in runners of all sizes and speeds and, notably, younger ones. Gen Z women in particular appear to be embracing marathons. On Strava, a social network where runners and other athletes track workouts, 20% of marathon runners were Gen Z women in 2024, outpacing Gen Z men, who made up 15% of marathoners.

Also spurring marathon sign-ups are run clubs around the country. Some 25% of regular runners on Strava belong to a club, up from 19% since 2019, according to the company.

Two very different events have provided tailwinds to the current marathon boom. The coronavirus pandemic spurred stir-crazy workers from home to seek out exercise they could do alone and outdoors. Many took up running.

Also, a design overhaul in running shoes has been especially welcoming for first-time runners and people putting in serious miles. Newer, high-tech foam material allowed shoe companies to make models with super-cushioned soles without adding weight. Brands such as Hoka and On have driven, and taken advantage of, the rise of marshmallow-bottomed shoes.

Companies also developed "super shoes," often with a springlike carbon-fiber plate embedded in those thick soles. The new category helped runners go measurably faster without expending more energy.

Some races are finding that running influencers on social media are their best advertising. Others mine their own race data to better market their events.

A few years ago, organizers of Grandma's Marathon in Duluth, Minn., discovered that it wasn't just drawing people from the Upper Midwest: 55-70% of participants were first-timers in the event. So in 2022, organizers expanded their marketing, mainly with Facebook and Instagram ads.

The 2025 edition of the race, which traces the shore of Lake Superior and takes place in June, sold out in scarcely a month—faster than ever.

"What we're learning is that Grandma's Marathon is a bucket-list race for many people," said Zach Schneider, the event's marketing and public relations director.

The biggest bucket-list race of all, the New York City Marathon, hints at the future of the 26.2-mile distance. While runners aged 20-39 made up about 43% of finishers in 2019, this year they were over 52%. Those young competitors still have years to run.

439 WORDS USED

Europe

What Trump Wants With Greenland

Interest in vast, ice-covered island reflects global scramble for the Arctic

By Georgi Kantchev, *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 8, 2025

President-elect Donald Trump has set his sights on a vast, ice-covered and sparsely populated island with a strategic location on the edge of the Arctic—and a whole lot of mineral riches.

At more than three times the size of Texas, Greenland's ample deposits in rare earths, oil and gas, as well as its commanding position astride crucial trade and military arteries, have made it a focal point for major rival powers including the U.S., China and Russia.

Greenland's rising profile reflects the larger global scramble for the Arctic as climate change opens maritime routes and reorders geopolitics at the top of the world. Russia reopened dozens of Soviet military bases in the Arctic as tensions with the West worsened over the invasion of Ukraine. China has pursued expanding shipping routes through the region's melting ice and exploiting Greenland's natural resources, including minerals used in everything from phones to electric cars and military equipment.

Control over Greenland and the broader Arctic is valuable for projecting power, monitoring activities of rivals and securing shipping routes, analysts and officials say.

The U.S. already has a presence on the island with what is its northernmost base, the Pituffik Space Base. It includes a radar station that is part of the U.S.'s ballistic missile early-warning system.

Greenland is also part of what is known as the GIUK gap, a crucial naval chokepoint between Greenland, Iceland and the U.K. that was closely watched during the Cold War. In recent years, Russia has increased its submarine patrols and exercises in the area.

Greenlanders and Danes say the island isn't for sale. A self-ruling part of the Kingdom of Denmark, Greenland, with a population of around 56,000, decides on most domestic matters.

But world powers have been circling for some time.

Beijing has boosted its economic presence in the area, including investment in mining operations in Greenland. The Pentagon worked successfully in 2018 to block China from financing three airports on the island.

China is particularly interested because of Greenland's position relative to all Arctic shipping routes, including Beijing's "Polar Silk Road" that would make use of the shorter distance to ship goods via the Arctic, avoiding maritime chokepoints at the Suez Canal.

With Trump's threats to supercharge tariffs on China, Greenland's vast deposits of rare-earth elements are also becoming increasingly important. The island holds 1.5 million tons of reserves of these materials, according to estimates by the U.S. Geological Survey, not far off the 1.8 million tons in the U.S.

China, though, dominates global rare-earth reserves with 44 million tons of deposits and analysts say that it could wield its access to those as a weapon in a trade war.

Technology

Meta Ends Fact-Checking on Facebook, Instagram in Free-Speech PitchBy Meghan Bobrowsky and Gareth Vipers, *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 7, 2025

Meta is ending fact-checking and removing restrictions on speech across Facebook and Instagram, a move Mark Zuckerberg described as an attempt to restore free expression on its platforms.

"We're going to get back to our roots and focus on reducing mistakes, simplifying our policies and restoring free expression on our platforms," Zuckerberg said. He said Meta is getting rid of fact-checkers and, starting in the U.S., replacing them with a so-called Community Notes system similar to Elon Musk's on the X platform, in which users flag posts they think need more context.

While Meta will continue to target illegal behavior, it will stop enforcing content rules about immigration and gender that are "out of touch with mainstream discourse."

Zuckerberg's plan is likely to reshape the experience of billions of people who use Meta's platforms. It steers sharply away from efforts started years ago in response to complaints from users, advertisers and politicians that abusive and deceptive content had run amok on Meta's suite of apps. The effort to rein in such speech sparked its own backlash from people—especially conservatives—who said it often strayed into censorship.

The pivot comes as Zuckerberg has looked to align himself and his company with the incoming Trump administration. The Meta CEO has had a sometimes strained relationship with Trump, which descended into open acrimony after Meta suspended Trump's accounts in the wake of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol by Trump supporters.

Meta's decision to remove restrictions on certain types of speech echoes the approach taken by Musk after he bought X, then called Twitter, in 2022. Under Community Notes, added context is appended to a post if enough users with a history of differing views agree that it is inaccurate or otherwise needs further information.

Zuckerberg's embrace of the Musk tool is itself extraordinary, given the public feud between the two tycoons, who tentatively agreed in summer 2023 to fight each other in a cage match. That never happened, and their ties, too, appear to have improved of late. Meta last month sent a letter to California's attorney general siding with Musk in his battle to try to stop OpenAI from becoming a for-profit entity.

Several major ad buyers said that they aren't planning to curb spending because of the changes because Meta's ads offer a return on investment that they can't turn down. Meta also benefits from a client base that includes a huge population of small businesses less sensitive to content-moderation controversies than major brands.

Still, many criticized Zuckerberg's decision as driven by politics as well as profits, given the sizable cost that content moderation entails.

'Living the dream': snowed in at Britain's highest pub, strangers became friends

When the majority of the 33 people trapped by the weather were able to escape, not everyone wanted to leave

Robyn Vinter, *The Guardian*, 7 Jan 2025

It was the moment they had been waiting four days for. A tractor appeared on the horizon, which signalled a possible final escape for the majority of the 33 people snowed in at the Tan Hill Inn, Britain's highest pub.

Hugs were shared, phone numbers swapped. But in the end, there was not much time to say goodbye.

The urgency was necessary – strong winds across the tundra-like landscape meant the cleared roads were covered in snow drifts moments later and completely impassable in a couple of hours.

The swift exit came after a lively and emotional evening when, on Monday night, a goodbye party of sorts was thrown in the Tan Hill Inn's function room, known as the barn.

The main instigator of the bash was Kelly Dunn, one of the bar staff, who had worked incredibly long hours to keep the stranded group fed, watered and happy.

"Come on everyone," she said, herding the crowd into the room, which was lit with disco lights.

Any initial reluctance fell away and it was not long before virtually everyone was on the dancefloor throwing shapes – some more irregular than others. Frederick Swift, a hairdresser who had previously been a professional dancer, scooped people up into impressive lifts, while four-year-old Edison Goldspink performed numerous improvised numbers to a receptive crowd.

Most of the residents had had a turn on TV or radio at some point during their four-day stay, due to the global fascination with the story of the people "living the dream".

The Australians Naomi and Paul Wright with their grownup son Declan, had spent a large part of the previous evening talking to breakfast television presenters in their home country, where it is the middle of summer.

Barry Newitt from Southend was one of the people who decided to wait it out a couple more days until the snow has melted and the roads are clear. He was in no hurry, he said.

"This is one of the best times of my entire life," he said. "I mean, look out there. Have you ever seen scenery like that?"

The bar staff refused to ask for money for the rooms supplied to those who were hosted. Instead, the managers asked for donations to their local mountain rescue.

A helicopter was chartered for Tuesday lunchtime from nearby Catterick by the pub's owner to bring in a new roster of staff and provide a break for those working, some of whom had already been there a week.

However, the winds were too strong and it was unable to take off, meaning the six workers at the pub would be staying until their colleagues could drive in to relieve them, albeit with fewer guests to look after.

Lifestyle

Musk Vaulted to the Top of a Popular Videogame. Everyone's Asking Where He Found the Time.

The head of six companies says he recently became one of the world's top 'Diablo IV' players, a milestone gamers say would have required playing 'all day, every day'

By Sarah E. Needleman and Becky Peterson, *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 8, 2025

This past fall, Elon Musk unveiled Tesla's new robotaxi, launched dozens of rockets and spent weeks campaigning on behalf of president-elect Donald Trump. He also notched another achievement that some say is even more impressive.

The billionaire declared himself one of the world's best players of "Diablo IV," a blockbuster videogame set in a dark fantasy realm that involves making elixirs and slaying demons.

Such an accomplishment requires more than just expertise in monster slashing. It takes dozens of hours just to reach the highest tier, which is level 150. The Pit was only added to the game in May and the latest season kicked off on Oct. 7, resetting all players' progression to level 1. That suggests Musk made his way to the top level in 45 days or less.

Musk oversees six companies, including brain-computer startup Neuralink, tunneling startup The Boring Company and artificial-intelligence startup xAI. He's a prolific poster on the social-media platform X, which he bought in 2022. He is now helping oversee a sweeping revamp of the federal government as co-head of Trump's Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE.

His vast array of commitments have left everyone wondering: How on Earth did he find the time to do it?

Damir Sabic, a 29-year-old devotee of the Diablo franchise, said it took him about 80 hours to reach the 129th tier of the Pit in December. He said he stopped playing at that point because leveling up became tedious. He described Musk's claim of clearing the 150th tier in November as "insane."

Musk's marathon gaming sessions frequently bleed into his business life. Before publicly announcing his decision to acquire Twitter, he stayed up until 5 a.m. playing the role-playing hit "Elden Ring" with the singer Grimes, his romantic partner at the time, Walter Isaacson wrote in his biography of Musk.

In October, Musk shared a video of his "Diablo IV" gameplay on X that captured audio from a call he was on at the same time, during which he appeared to discuss the Starship rocket test launch with employees of his space-exploration company, SpaceX.

Playing videogames isn't Musk's only time-sucking passion. Last year through the end of July, he posted on X about 13,000 times—or about 61 posts a day, *The Wall Street Journal* previously reported.

More recently, Musk spent more than a week at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Palm Beach, Fla., sitting in on meetings and interviews with candidates for cabinet positions, joining the president-elect's calls with foreign leaders such as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and recruiting friends and allies for crucial positions in the government.

Party like it's 1899: the young, wealthy women still attending debutante balls

Opulent celebrations of well-born women became déclassé under Elizabeth II, but the tradition is making a comeback

Esther Addley, *The Guardian*, 7 Dec 2024

The event began with an opening dance, then the “debutantes lined up for a waltz with their fathers” before being “passed on to their cavaliers”. “Family and other guests sat at tables in golden chairs and took it all in, as the chandelier ceiling dripped with decadence.”

Those sentences were written not in the 18th century but earlier this week, when *Vogue* reported on an event in Paris that one may consider, on the strength of the jewels on display alone, had just a whiff of the ancien régime.

The event was Le Bal des Débutantes, an annual invitation-only gathering at which 20 or so well-born young women from around the world are dressed in haute couture, adorned with gems and paired with a hand-picked “chevalier”, to appear at “a modern debutante ball that places emphasis on individuality and sartorial self-expression”.

This year’s event attracted particular publicity thanks to the presence of Apple Martin, the 20-year-old daughter of Coldplay’s Chris Martin and Gwyneth Paltrow. She wore a “stunning, silk plissé chiffon baby blue gown with a big black bow by Alessandro Michele for Valentino, which took 750 hours to create”.

The very wealthy, it is clear, do not live like everyone else. But this is not the Regency period and young women do not need to make their “social debut” by “coming out”.

But, evidently, there is still a taste for it. New York has hosted an International Debutante Ball since 1954. The Bal des Débutantes, known until 2012 as the Crillon ball, is the creation of Ophélie Renouard, who hit on the idea as a young PR working for the Hôtel de Crillon in the early 1990s.

“My main profession was to organise luxury events that provide media attention and coverage,” she said. Expensively dressed young women may attract the cameras as well as charity donations from their wealthy parents, but it is arguably the couturiers who are the stars of the Bal.

The formal presentation of eligible young women to the English court can be traced to the reign of at least Elizabeth I. It remained the high point of the London social season from the 18th century onwards and was emulated across the empire.

By the 20th century, though, the balls seemed hopelessly dated even to the women themselves, and in 1958 Elizabeth II ended the practice.

The most puzzling question, perhaps, is why today’s young, solvent and unquestionably powerful young women would possibly want to take part. To Renouard, the answer is simple: taking part offers them something that, ironically, money can’t buy.

“The girls are beautiful and look and feel like princesses for a night,” she said. “And Paris is, well, Paris. Modern life is not so filled with glamour but at the Bal, glamour and romance are everything.”

Lifestyle

A Ghana toddler sets a world record as the youngest male artist. His mom says he just loves colors

By FRANCIS KOKUTSE, *The Associated Press*, May 31, 2024

ACCRA, Ghana (AP) — Meet Ace-Liam Ankrah, a Ghana toddler who has set the record as the world’s youngest male artist.

His mother, Chantelle Kukua Eghan, says it all started by accident when her son, who at the time was 6 months old, discovered her acrylic paints.

Eghan, an artist and founder of Arts and Cocktails Studio, a bar that offers painting lessons in Ghana’s capital, Accra, said she was looking for a way to keep her boy busy while working on her own paintings.

“I spread out a canvas on the floor and added paint to it, and then in the process of crawling he ended up spreading all the colors on the canvas,” she said.

And that’s how his first artwork, “The Crawl,” was born, Eghan, 25, told *The Associated Press*.

After that and with his mother’s prodding, Ace-Liam kept on painting.

Eghan decided to apply for the record last June. In November, Guinness World Records told her that to break a previous record, her son needed to exhibit and sell paintings.

She arranged for Ace-Liam’s first exhibition at the Museum of Science and Technology in Accra in January, where nine out of 10 of his pieces listed were sold. She declined to say for how much the paintings sold.

Then, Guinness World Records confirmed the record in a statement and last week declared that “at the age of 1 year 152 days, little Ace-Liam Nana Sam Ankrah from Ghana is the world’s youngest male artist.”

The overall record for the world’s youngest artist is currently held by India’s Arushi Bhatnagar. She had her first exhibition at the age of 11 months and sold her first painting for 5,000 Rupees (\$60) in 2003.

These days, Ace-Liam, who will be 2 years old in July, still loves painting and eagerly accompanies his mom to her studio, where a corner has been set off just for him. He sometimes paints in just five-minute sessions, returning to the same canvas over days of weeks, Eghan says.

On a recent day, he ran excitedly around the studio, with bursts of energy typical for boys his age. But he was also very focused and concentrated for almost an hour while painting — choosing green, yellow and blue for his latest work-in-progress and rubbing the paint colors into the canvas with his tiny fingers.

Eghan says becoming a world record holder has not changed their lives. She won’t sell “The Crawl” but plans on keeping it in the family.

She added that she hopes the media attention around her boy could encourage and inspire other parents to discover and nurture their children’s talents.

“He is painting and growing and playing in the whole process,” she says.

Tarot, tarantulas and TikTok: exploring our long obsession with predicting the future

A new exhibition at Oxford's Bodleian Libraries examines the enduring appeal of divination

David Barnett, *The Guardian*, 7 Dec 2024

In Cameroon, the Mambila people practise a specific form of divination that will have arachnophobes sweating. Using tarot-like "leaf cards", questions are asked, and a tarantula emerges from a hole in the ground to select a card and offer guidance.

This spider divination is one of the specialities of David Zeitlyn, a professor of anthropology at the University of Oxford – so much so that he is a fully initiated spider diviner, trained by the people he has spent time with for his research.

Zeitlyn is co-curator of a new exhibition, Oracles, Omens and Answers, which opened at Oxford's Bodleian Libraries last week and explores the practices of divination, fortune-telling and predicting the future, throughout history and across the world.

Zeitlyn spoke of a rise in interest in prophesying during the Covid pandemic, fuelled by an increase in online tarot reading and other forms of divination, especially on TikTok.

"People wanted alternative sources of advice," he said. "They were saying: OK, you're telling me what's going to happen across the country, what the projections are, but I want to know if I'm going to be all right."

His co-curator, Dr Michelle Aroney, specialises in 17th-century astrology. Zeitlyn said: "One of the things that brought us together was realising that the questions we are dealing with are basically the same. Michelle has been studying the casebooks of medieval astrologers and I've been looking at the questions that people bring to spider divination.

"And it's things like: I'm sick, or my child's sick, what's the best treatment? Who should I marry? Can I trust my spouse? So there's a lot of looking for guidance rather than necessarily wanting to know exactly what the future holds."

Belief in divination is not something restricted to the distant past, as the exhibits show. Alongside 3,000-year-old oracle bones from China and dusty grimoires, there are more modern examples. These include a plastic Magic 8 ball and something you might well find in your Christmas cracker one day – a plastic fish that curls up in your palm when asked a question.

"It might be considered a strange thing for people to believe in divination in a very scientific age," Zeitlyn said. "But science tells us about things which at the generalisation level are secure and founded about a population.

"But it doesn't tell us about an individual, and here's where divination comes in. It drills down into the personal. It answers the question: what should I do? Science might be able to tell us what everyone should do, or most people should do, but what should I do in these specific circumstances?"

Fashion

Gen Z's New Rules for Appropriate Office Wear

The work wardrobe is out. Corpcore is in.

By Lane Florsheim, *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 17, 2025

When Divya Mathur was starting her career in the mid 2000s, her closet was divided into two sections: work-appropriate clothes and "all the really fun stuff that I could wear anywhere else," she said.

Mathur, now the chief merchandising officer of the fashion retailer Revolve, said those distinctions no longer applied for young working women. "Literally anyone who's in that 20- to 25-year-old [range] is like, 'Why would you buy stuff you don't really want to own?'"

As Gen Z enters the office, some of them are obliterating old rules about how to dress for work. Crop tops, pajama pants and miniskirts are all fair game. Classics like suits and pencil skirts are getting a sexy, youthful rebrand, with trends like "corporate fetish," "office siren" and "corpcore" proliferating online. Brands are eagerly marketing less-than-traditional workwear that speaks to both of these shifts.

At J.Crew, sheer tops and miniskirts are marketed as "wear-to-work" offerings. Revolve included strapless tops, micro shorts and blazer dresses in its workwear shop. Aritzia, whose "effortless pant" has overtaken many young women's work wardrobes, has an "office siren" ad campaign featuring a tight-fitting, off-the-shoulder dress.

Olympia Gayot, the creative director of women's and Crewcuts at J.Crew, said this was part of a broader relaxing of office wardrobes. "You can wear a suit, but it doesn't look like your 'first interview' suit anymore," she said. "It's much more relaxed, which also looks really chic."

Working at a bank, Erin Coleman, a 28-year-old associate director, said she saw some of her younger colleagues wearing "really fun, edgy outfits." "There aren't as many of those buttoned-up rules" as there used to be, she said.

Meanwhile, the classic office suit has become a trend to people who never have to set foot in a cubicle. Trends like "office siren" put forth a hyper-sexual version of office dressing, sometimes inspired by the '80s and '90s.

Gayot said J.Crew didn't subscribe to a particular view of what clothing was safe for work. "If you want to wear a miniskirt with a blazer to the office, I think that depends on where you work," she said. "You have to make that judgment call." Gayot emphasized the importance of styling; a miniskirt might look more modest when paired with a sweater and tights, for example.

Gaëlle Drevet has long sold blazers and relaxed suiting through her brand the Frankie Shop, but she admits that the "corpcore" trend is a little puzzling to her. "If they want to bring sexy back to the office, I think it's amazing and good for them," she said. "I just hope that we're not backtracking to being some kind of object for men to look at around the office."

Opinion

Russia's AI Is Smart Enough to Shut Up

'I'd better keep quiet,' it says in response to political queries.

By Thomas Kent, *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 7, 2025

Is Russia a democracy?

"I don't understand this topic."

Is there political propaganda in Russia?

"There are topics where I might be wrong. I'd better keep quiet."

So goes a conversation with Alice, Russia's top-rated virtual assistant. Last year its owner, the Russian tech company Yandex, announced that it had begun using YandexGPT3 for its responses, delivered in Russian and English. The company estimates its monthly user base is 66 million.

Alice's answers on many topics are similar to those offered by Western artificial-intelligence engines. But when questions turn political, its responses are often guarded, suggesting a fundamental problem for authoritarian countries seeking to compete with democratic nations in generative AI.

Such technology needs enormous amounts of information to work with and feed on. It will in turn generate content based on that information in ways its human handlers may never be able to predict. That's problematic for authoritarian systems that depend on limiting information and controlling how it is organized and interpreted.

If an AI engine is given access to the full internet, it will find that more than half of the content is in English. Other major Western languages make up a sizable portion, with Russian taking only an estimated 4.5%. In other words, it's likely that unhampered web searches by AI agents will predominately yield Western information sources and attitudes.

It's possible to train an AI system on censored information, or to make it prioritize certain sources or refuse to address given topics. But restricting what an agent can know and respond to reduces its competitiveness against freer alternatives.

Some of my conversations indicate Alice prefers Russian sources. Asked if there are free elections in Russia, Alice cited three Russian websites saying Russian citizens are guaranteed the right to vote.

Yet reliance on Russian-language sources doesn't guarantee a pro-Moscow line. I asked if Vladimir Putin is a dictator. Alice cited sources that turned out to be independent Russian-language media based outside the country, with one saying Mr. Putin has been "openly trying to intimidate the opposition."

Authoritarian states can still use AI to churn out huge volumes of false content for the web. But guaranteeing ideologically correct responses to free-form questions on any subject is a much greater challenge technically and commercially. Users interested in sensitive subjects will quickly identify agents that are hesitant to discuss them and switch to other AI sources.

Still, the continued dominance of content reflecting democratic attitudes and facts depends on two factors: the survival of enough credible mainstream news and information outlets to keep creating that content, and major publications agreeing to let AI companies use their material. Even AI agents with the greatest freedom to seek and analyze knowledge will be at peril if false information dominates the information pool they are allowed to access.

467 WORDS USED

As a child psychiatrist, I see what smartphones are doing to kids' mental health – and it's terrifying

The online world is forcing children to grow up before they are ready, and parents need government's help to combat its harms

Emily Sehmer, *The Guardian*, 3 Jan 2025

As a child and adolescent psychiatrist, I am witnessing at first hand the sheer devastation that smartphone use is wreaking on our young people's mental health. The majority of children over 10 I see at my NHS clinic now have a smartphone. An increasingly large proportion of patients have difficulties that are related to, or exacerbated by, their use of technology.

We are seeing profound mental illness stemming from excessive social media use, online bullying, screen addiction, or falling prey to online child sexual exploitation. We are seeing children who are disappearing into online worlds, who are unable to sleep, who are increasingly inattentive and impulsive, emotionally dysregulated and aggressive. Children crippled by anxiety or a fear of missing out. Who spend hours alone, cut off from those who love them, who spend hour upon hour speaking to strangers.

Children and adolescents are increasingly seeking comfort and validation from peer groups online. Unfortunately, some of these encourage self-harm, eating disorder behaviours and even suicide. I looked after a young person last year who struggled significantly with their mental health and prolific self-harm. I was later informed that they were uploading their experience and behaviours on TikTok and had livestreamed content from within an in-patient psychiatric ward to thousands of followers and well-wishers.

Children's self-esteem and self-image is also at an all-time low, and levels of depression and suicidal thoughts have never been higher. It is no secret among mental health professionals that there is a direct link between smartphone use and real-world harms.

The average UK 12-year-old now spends 29 hours a week – equivalent to a part-time job – on their smartphone.

At the same time, our young people are increasingly isolated and insular. The average time that teens spend with friends each day has plummeted by 65% since 2010. For hundreds of years, adolescence has triggered a period of social "pack mentality". Historically, that might have meant pressure to join a football team or go out with friends. But now, this socialising is happening more and more on WhatsApp groups and social media – with terrifying consequences.

In recent years, there have been numerous high-profile cases of child suicides linked to social media. Most striking is that often their parents have no insight into what is happening before tragedy occurs.

Our brains continue to develop up until the age of about 25, and prior to that our ability to think rationally, make decisions based on fact rather than emotion, plan, problem-solve and exhibit self-control is limited. Countless adults struggle to mediate their phone use and maintain productivity, make impulsive purchases online and fall for the many scams out there – why are we expecting our children to cope?

450 WORDS USED

Personal Finance

The Reality of GoFundMe Is That Money Often Doesn't Go to Those Who Need It Most

Crowdfunding gives disaster victims a lifeline, but the results can be uneven

By Natasha Khan and Ashlea Ebeling, *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 17, 2025

Touched by personal stories of anguish and loss from the fires, donors have sent tens of millions of dollars directly to families in Los Angeles via crowdfunding.

These competing pleas for generosity have uneven results.

For decades, when disaster struck, donors gave money to large relief organizations offering community support, such as the Salvation Army or Red Cross. More recently, many have shifted to platforms such as GoFundMe that let you put cash directly into the pocket of a single victim.

Crowdfunding donors say they get a deeper connection to the people they are helping and a clearer sense of the impact they can have.

But how much money people get often comes down to their social networks, social class and luck. High-income families received 25% more support compared with low-income ones, an analysis of all the GoFundMe campaigns after 2021 wildfires in Colorado found, even when accounting for similar losses.

Focusing on one person at a time can also skew the way people understand disasters, said Matthew Wade, a sociologist at La Trobe University in Australia, who has studied crowdfunding.

"It can certainly prove comforting and affirming to lift up someone we see as uniquely deserving, but this can too easily distract us from the magnitude of unseen suffering and equally deserving persons who cannot succeed on these platforms," Wade said.

There are thousands in need of help, and not all of them create a GoFundMe or have widely shared on social media.

The number of such pleas prompted James Bryant and Rodney S. Diggs, both partners at Black law firms in Los Angeles, to start a collective GoFundMe page with a goal of raising \$5 million for members of the Black community, rather than help set up individual ones.

While they have raised about \$190,000 so far, they hope putting their names and law firms on the GoFundMe page will boost exposure and lend credibility to their effort. Nonetheless, some donors have called the front desks of their law firms to verify the authenticity of the petition.

Crowdfunding donors should make sure the requests are real and not scammers exploiting the disaster response. Soon after the fires broke out, "General Hospital" actor Cameron Mathison posted on Instagram that someone made a phony page in his name.

"PLEASE DO NOT DONATE TO A GO FUND ME PAGE using my videos or photos!!!" he said. "It is not us. We are not asking for money. Unimaginable that someone is using this disaster to rip people off."

GoFundMe said it has a team working to review fundraisers to prevent misuse and amplify the campaigns of those in need. It says it verifies pages and has added authentic pages to its Wildfire Relief hub.

454 WORDS USED

Arts & Culture

'The Many Lives of Anne Frank' Review: The Diarist and Her Readers

Anne Frank proved herself a preternaturally talented writer while only a teen. Since her death she's become something more, and less.

By Meghan Cox Gurdon, *The Wall Street Journal*, 17 January 2025

In the beginning was the red-checked, cloth-covered diary that Anne Frank received on her 13th birthday in 1942. When the Frank family went into hiding a few weeks later, Anne brought the diary with her. Outside, in Amsterdam, the occupying Nazi forces were arresting and deporting Jews, many of whom, like the Franks, had sought refuge in the Netherlands after escaping from Germany. Indoors, in a commercial building at Prinsengracht 263, Anne and her elder sister, Margot, along with their parents, Otto and Edith, were settling into cramped, clandestine life in a "secret annex."

The ending is grimly familiar: In August 1944 the Franks left the hideout at gunpoint. To this day it is not known who betrayed them. Swept into the Nazi concentration-camp system, Anne died of typhus in Bergen-Belsen in early 1945. She was 15.

The familiarity owes everything to Otto Frank, who survived the war and in 1947 arranged for his daughter's writings to be published in Dutch. Quirky, sensitive, sharp, intelligent, the book sold in English as "The Diary of a Young Girl" (1952) was an international sensation when it first appeared and to this day remains a classroom staple and a touchstone of adolescence.

In "The Many Lives of Anne Frank," Ruth Franklin explores the idea that the posthumous fame attached to Anne Frank has all but eclipsed the fact of her reality. Anne Frank was a particular Jewish girl, but in the decades since her death she has transmogrified into an imagined character, a universalistic icon, an infinitely (even cynically) exploitable concept best understood in quotation marks as "Anne Frank."

The appropriations of Anne's face and sacrifice are striking—and can be disturbing. Her appearance draped in a keffiyeh last year on a mural in Norway would seem to suggest that she has become overexposed, or at least so elastic a figure as to be almost meaningless. For Anne Frank, a young Jewish victim of Nazism, to be enlisted in street art supportive of a Palestinian cause hostile to Jews seems preposterous on its face. Yet this is how "Anne" has come to function. Set off by quotation marks, she is no longer a person but, indeed, an idea. The anonymous street artist Töddel, who created the mural, defended his image by saying that he had repeatedly read the diary and regarded Anne as "a symbol of innocence."

Anne and her story have also been enlisted by antiapartheid activists in South Africa and by those campaigning in the U.S. against the deportation of illegal immigrants. As Ms. Franklin notes wryly: "To just about everyone, her life is of secondary importance to what we make of it."

441 WORDS USED

Belgium's pastoral pastime of pigeon racing faces high anxiety over crime wave

By RAF CASERT, *The Associated Press*, January 15, 2025

RANST, Belgium (AP) — Belgium's once pastoral pastime of pigeon racing has come to this: drones swoop over lofts where valuable birds are housed to look for security weaknesses, laser sensors set off alarms at night and cameras linked live to mobile apps keep potential thieves at bay — 24/7.

That's what happens when the fast-flying fowl — which in a bygone era were, at best, the toast of local bars — have turned into valuable commodities. The most expensive bird to come out of the top pigeon-racing nation in the world fetched 1.6 million euros (\$1.65 million) a few years ago.

No wonder the sport is grappling with an unprecedented wave of unsolved pigeon pilfering that has hit several of the best birds in the business.

In one loft, an estimated 100,000 euros (\$102,900) worth of pigeons were stolen last week. Overall, no arrests have been made.

The emotional loss often weighs heaviest of all. The sport involves daily care, over decades, and the rustling of feathers combined with the tranquil cooing often gives breeders a haven of peace in their otherwise bustling lives along with a measure of pride if their birds are winners.

For pigeons taken in a heist, their racing careers are over. Without proper documentation, one cannot get away with winning a big race and not be double- and triple-checked. That door is closed to thieves. The birds cannot be taken to auction, where prices for top birds regularly veer into the five figures and sometimes into six figures. The only option open to them is breeding.

Pigeon breeder Frank Bungeneers, who was a police officer until his retirement last year, decries the lack of overall, joint investigations and the fact that often the pricy pigeons are seen in the same light as runaway poultry and receive the same level of investigation. He said it was like comparing a farm pony to a champion thoroughbred.

So now, the pigeon-racing federation is warning its members to be extra careful — to the point of not talking to strangers about their hobby.

But that is also a sign that a way of life is being lost. Instead of the bliss of watching their birds swoop overhead, owners have to watch warily over their shoulder to see if someone is near the loft.

"Cameras, sensors, alarms. All the time, when you go somewhere you have to look at your app to check the cameras," Bungeneers said. "If there is an alarm, or sometimes the alarm detection goes off and you go check the sheds. And that gives you turmoil."

"You have to invest thousands of euros in your own hobby to keep potential thieves away," he added. "For many people, that is too much and they drop out."

Meat Without The Animals

Meat cultivated from cells — with no need to raise and slaughter an animal — is now a reality. But can it be made cheaply enough to displace animal agriculture?

Based on "The Protein Problem", a report by *The Associated Press*, 2023

More than 150 startups are chasing an ambitious goal: meat that doesn't require raising and killing animals that is affordable and tastes and feels like the meat we eat now. They are part of a young industry aiming to use cell biology to reduce the environmental impact of the world's ever-increasing demand for meat and change global protein production the way electric cars are shaking up the auto industry.

"We are addicted to meat as a species. It's part of our evolution," said Believer company founder Yaakov Nahmias. But "we thought about quantity rather than the environment, rather than sustainability."

Companies making so-called "cultivated," or "cultured" meat, which is also popularly known as "lab-grown" meat, are trying to scale up quickly — partnering with traditional meat companies, drawing more and more investors and breaking ground on new production facilities in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Wide adoption of meat from cells is nowhere near assured, however. This meat is expensive to make. There are scientific challenges, such as learning how to mimic the complex structure of steak. Government regulation is another obstacle. Only Singapore and the U.S. allow sales of cultivated meat.

And while many people who have tried it say they like it, others find the idea distasteful. A recent poll from *The Associated Press* found that half of adults in the meat-hungry U.S. would be unlikely to try it.

Unlike traditional agriculture, this process starts with cells. Depending on the company, the cells may come from a piece of tissue, a fertilized egg or a cell "bank."

These cells are placed inside vessels of various sizes called bioreactors and bathed in a nutrient-rich broth where they multiply. Once the bioreactor is full, the paste of cells is harvested and mixed with plant proteins, then pressurized and pushed out to create meat fibers.

Believer now makes cultivated chicken and lamb and has plans for beef, which is harder to make because it's more difficult to create genetically-stable cell lines from bigger animals.

Other companies are pursuing cultivated beef anyway. It's the focus of Believer's competitor Aleph Farms. The cell line for their product started with a fertilized egg from a Black Angus cow named Lucy living on a California farm.

Producing meat this way could also dramatically reduce the impact of meat on the environment because it would reduce the need for land for the animals and for feed. Multiple studies show that traditional livestock production is responsible for about 10% to 20% of greenhouse gas emissions.

But transforming the ecosystem is a distant vision. Scientists and industry experts say cultivated meats have a way to go before they're indistinguishable from conventional meats, especially when it comes to the texture of products other than burgers or nuggets.

Is it important for kids to learn about winning and losing?

Some experts say the values of fun and personal development in youth sports are being replaced by performance and victory

Adrienne Matei, *The Guardian*, 1 Dec 2024

There's a general consensus that, in addition to boosting fitness, youth sports impart valuable life skills, like teamwork and discipline. Winning and losing are especially significant, because they prepare children for the setbacks and challenges they will face in adult life.

Expert opinion on the topic is not uniform, but many agree with that general logic. "Winning and losing experiences are crucial," says Dr Billy Garvey, a developmental and behavioral pediatrician. For children, especially those aged five to 12, learning to navigate the ups and downs of competition is a stepping stone to stable self-esteem and resilience, he says.

Garvey has a three-year-old daughter who is particularly competitive. "When she loses, I ensure that I connect with her, validate her frustration, anger or feeling that it's unfair," he says. Once she's calmer, he adds, "I can help her learn the lesson in losing, by saying something like: 'See how happy your little brother Charlie is that he won? I bet that feels nice for him.'"

"Disappointment should always be complemented with unconditional love and support," says Garvey. Meanwhile, winning can be a "genuine opportunity to take pride in themselves when that effort has been successful".

Yet the environment of youth sports can often be shaped by a different set of values – one that prioritizes performance and victory above all else. Some experts argue that, in recent decades, youth sports, once a space for fun and personal development, have become increasingly high-stakes arenas where children are treated like miniature professional athletes.

"Sport as a whole is becoming more competitive," says Jaclyn Ellis, a Chicago-based mental-performance coach who works with athletes in their pre-teens and older. "It's becoming harder for athletes to accept failure because the pressure to perform is so intense, even at young ages." Ellis observes this in junior leagues, too, where parents of children who express early interest or skill at a certain sport may route their child toward a path of specialization and intense training, hoping it will lead to scholarships and a career.

For perfectionists, this mindset can make them reluctant to even try unless they're sure they can succeed flawlessly. "What is that teaching us?" Ellis asks. "We're not willing to get out of our comfort zone, not even willing to try."

This "cultural obsession with winning" or "professionalization" of youth sports is one reason kids are losing their enthusiasm for sports. According to data from the Aspen Institute's Project Play, the percentage of US children aged six to 12 who regularly played a team sport dropped from 45% in 2008 to 37% in 2021. A 2024 report from the American Academy of Pediatrics reveals that 70% of children quit sports by age 13, often citing that they simply have stopped having fun.