# Border|Land

Where Culture Bleeds Into Corporations *#01*

## TRUST ISSUE

pay gap

trust gap

skills gap

talent gap

funding gap

diversity gap

opportunity gap
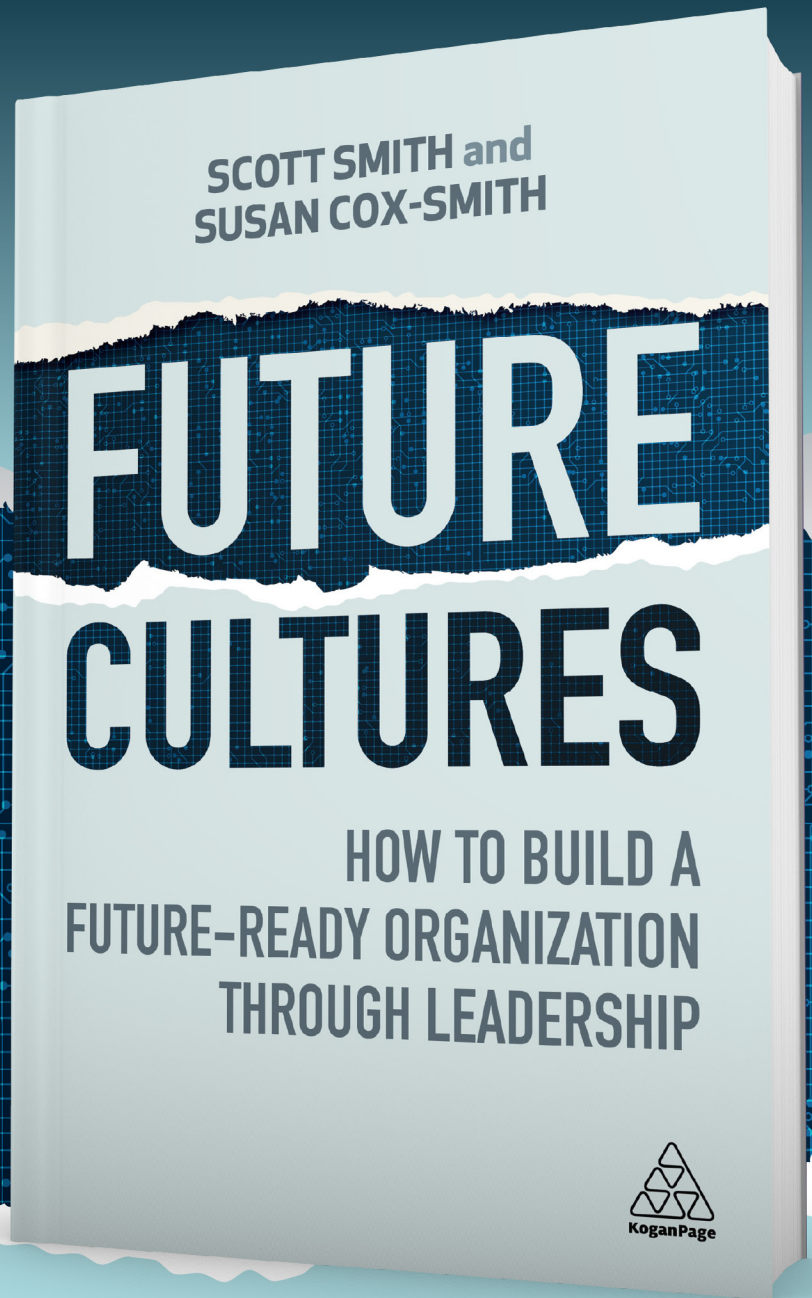
value-action gap

GJ

serious, not solemn....about gaps.
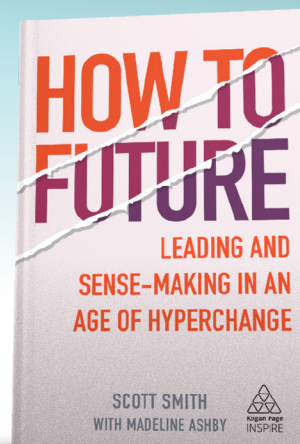
# What is Border|Land

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BorderLand
     - a district near the line separating two countries or areas.
     *"the eastern borderlands"*
        - an area of overlap between two things.
        *"the murky borderland between history and myth"*

Border|Land magazine was launched to provide a briefing on cultural issues upstream from business.

We believe there is a global audience of People Leaders who get how culture can spawn knock-on effects on business.

Leaders who are hyper aware that events in wider culture [like Covid-19, the killing of George Floyd] can change -in obvious and not so obvious ways- all plans, priorities & policies.

The recession of 2008 happened around the same time as the start of a decade-long tech boom. We're still living through the effects of both those events, yet how many, at the time, had the time to appreciate what was and could be happening?

Every issue of Border|Land will explore a work-life related theme and ask "what's happening in wider culture that could impact my work in ways I did not yet foresee?

Through (self)-identified + anonymous reporting, analysis & fiction we aim to point out cultural undercurrents to get you imagining their impact on your business.

Border|Land is published 4 times a year.

# Letter From The Editor

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Mistrust and disbelief are all around us. You only have to hear how we talk to get how deeply the issue impacts us. "Sources?" "Fake!" "Receipts or it didn't happen" are expressions that started online, but have seeped into our everyday vocabulary, like the most normal thing ever.

Trust is at an all-time low. Sociologists tell us that the growing trust gap is in lockstep with a decades-long increased sense of loneliness, isolation and erosion of the social contract between people and leaders.

They talk about a fear of lost identity and a decreased sense of agency. And because the system has not managed to help many people, it makes sense for many to conclude that the system (and its narratives and experts) can not be trusted.

Case in point with "trust the science". Who would have ever thought those three words could divide families, societies, countries, continents? Be it the science of climate, viruses or mental health. The only thing we seem to agree on is that "the other side" is wrong.

This first issue of Border|Land takes a look at several not so obvious ways (amongst many others) that mistrust is bleeding into corporations.

We start off with a lesser known, but closer to home case of science mistrust. Baby boomer, millennial, GenZ. What HR and marketing department does not use those labels when making plans?

Sociologist Philip N Cohen has, amongst others, publicly written about the validity of generational labels for some time. Recently he has seen this effort start to seep out of academic conversations into business conversations.

Trust is even more important in the international sphere, where players have to act in good faith, because the alternative costs lives. Geopolitics is back on boardroom agenda's to further stress-test trust issues. How you deal with rising geopolitical issues on top of DEI, sustainability and inflation can make or break a country or company.

The remaking of Saudi Arabia into a post-oil, more secular, liberal place to live and work is a perfect example of internal and external trust being tested. Given that Border|Land is first and foremost written for Senior HR Leaders, it's probable that many readers will have dealings with Saudi Arabia.

So we thought it worthwhile to dive deeper into the birth of Saudi Arabia 2.0 and how geopolitics could impact the role of HR as a trusted advisor to the CEO.

At the core of building a high trust society are hopeful, engaged citizens. Business leaders, teachers,engineers and homemakers who trust that tomorrow will be better and thus actively give to their community.

But how do you keep giving if you are losing trust in a better tomorrow? To help paint a picture we asked futurists Stowe Boyd, Scott Smith & Susan Cox-Smith to share various visions for tomorrow.

When culture shifts, language shifts. So shifts in language point to shifts in culture. To that end, we end issue #1 with a look at narrative design in movies and magazines to see where culture according to taste-makers might be heading.

So with all that said, all that is left is to thank you for trusting us with your attention.

Sincerely yours,

Petar Vujosevic

Editor-in-Chief

# Table of Content

# II. Science

# TALKING 'BOUT MY FAKE GENERATION

**Written by Border|Land**

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Originally we wanted to explore generational (un)fairness. This is the idea that "each cohort should retain a fairexpectation of social improvement for a fulfilling life without undue harm from actions of previous & subsequent cohorts".

It's a real problem, impacting policy & decision making at the nation-state level. Every reader should explore it, because for the first time four to five generations are [will be?] working side by side, which means this issue will rear its head on the workfloor.

As we dove into the material, we stumbled upon a dispute. Sociologist, Philip N Cohen of the University of Maryland, questioned the validity of generational labels, like Boomer, GenX, Millennial etc.

*"Consider these facts: The tennis champion Williams sisters are a generation apart, according to the Pew Research Center. Venus, born 1980, is part of "Gen X"; Serena, born 1981, is a "Millennial." Meanwhile, Donald Trump and Michelle Obama are both in the same generation. The former was born in 1946 while the latter was born in 1964, making them both "baby boomers."* Philip N Cohen

The 'dispute' part comes from the fact that those labels are a foundational tool in the work of Pew Research Center. And downstream from Pew they're used by most Public and Private HR & Marketing departments for their strategies and plans.

Backed by over 150 fellow social scientists he outlined why the labels were arbitrary and damaging. And this led to a private and public dialogue about the use of labels.
This all lasted until in 2023 Pew actually changed their policy regarding the use of generational labels.

Given how enmeshed those labels are in our work(life), having Pew re-assess their use, sounded like a big deal.

So instead of generational unfairness we'd like to present a timeline of sorts re: the changing conversation about the use of generational labels.

Starting with Cohen's public case against labels, followed by a debate for & against between Philip Cohen and Jean Twenge (a renowned psychologist researching generational differences). And ending with Pew's changes.

# 2021:OPENING STATEMENT

*The case against generational labels*

**Written by Philip N Cohen**

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Pew's generation labels — which are widely adopted by many other individuals and institutions — encourage unhelpful social science communication, driving people toward broad generalizations, stereotyping, click bait, sweeping character judgment, and echo chamber thinking.

When people assign names to generations, they encourage anointing them a character, and then imposing qualities onto whole populations without basis, or on the basis of crude stereotyping.

This fuels a constant stream of myth-making and myth-busting, with circular debates about whether one generation or another fits better or worse with various of its associated stereotypes.

In the absence of research about whether the generation labels are useful either scientifically or in communicating science, we are left with a lot of headlines drawing a lot of clicks, to the detriment of public understanding.

Cohort analysis and the life course perspective are important tools for studying and communicating social science. We should study the shadow, or reflection, of life events across people's lives at a cultural level, not just an individual level.

In fact, the Pew Research Center's surveys and publications make great contributions to that end. But the vastmajority of popular survey research and reporting in the "generations" vein uses data analyzed by age, cross-sectionally, with generational labels applied after the fact — it's not cohort research at all.

We shouldn't discourage cohort and life course thinking, rather we should improve it. Pew's own research provides a clear basis for scrapping the "generations." "Most Millennials Resist the 'Millennial' Label" was the title of a report Pew published in 2015. This is when they should have stopped — based on their own science — but instead they plowed ahead as if the "generations" were social facts that the public merely failed to understand.

The concept of "generations" as applied by Pew (and many others) defies the basic reality of generations as they relate to reproductive life cycles. Pew's "generations" are so short (now 16 years) that they bear no resemblance to reproductive generations. In 2019 the median age of a woman giving birth in the U.S. was 29. As a result, many multigenerational families include no members of some generations on Pew's chart. For example, it asks siblings (like the tennis-champion Williams sisters, born one year apart) to identify as members of separate generations.

Perhaps due to their ubiquitous use, and Pew's reputation as a trustworthy arbiter of social knowledge, many people think these "generations" are official facts.

Pew has perhaps inadvertently encouraged these ill-informed perspectives, as when, for example, Richard Fry wrote for Pew, "Millennials have surpassed Baby Boomers as the nation's largest living adult generation, according to population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau" — despite the fact that the Census Bureau report referenced by the article made no mention of generations.

Generations are a beguiling and appealing vehicle for explaining social change, but one that is more often misleading than informative. The U.S. Army Research Institute commissioned a consensus study report from the National Academies, titled, Are Generational Categories Meaningful Distinctions for Workforce Management?

*The group of prominent social scientists concluded: "while dividing the workforce into generations may have appeal, doing so is not strongly supported by science and is not useful for workforce management. …many of the stereotypes about generations result from imprecise use of the terminology in popular literature and recent research, and thus cannot adequately inform workforce management decisions."*

As one of many potential examples of such appealing, but ultimately misleading, uses of the "Millennial" generation label, consider a 2016 article by Paul Taylor, a former executive vice president of the Pew Research Center.

He promised he would go beyond "clichés" to offer "observations" about Millennials — before describing them as "liberal lions...who might not roar," "downwardly mobile," "unlaunched," "unmarried," "gender role benders," "upbeat," "pre-Copernican," and as an "unaffiliated, anti-hierarchical, distrustful" generation who nevertheless "get along well with their parents, respect their elders, and work well with colleagues" while being "open to different lifestyles, tolerant of different races, and first adopters of new technologies." And their "idealism... may save the planet."

In 2018 Pew announced that it would henceforth draw a line between "Millennials" and "Generation Z" at the year 1996. And yet they offered no substantive reason, just that "it became clear to us that it was time to determine a cutoff point between Millennials and the next generation [in] order to keep the Millennial generation analytically meaningful, and to begin looking at what might be unique about the next cohort."

In asserting that "their boundaries are not arbitrary," the Pew announcement noted that they were assigning the same length to the Millennial Generation as they did to Generation X — both 16 years, a length that bears no relationship to reproductive generations, nor to the Baby Boom cohort, which is generally considered to be 19 years (1946-1964).

The essay that followed this announcement attempted to draw distinctions between Millennials and Generation Z, but it could not delineate a clear division, because none can be drawn. For example, it mentioned that "most Millennials came of age and entered the workforce facing the height of an economic recession," but in 2009, the trough year for that recession, Millennials by Pew's definition ranged from age 13 to 29.

The other events mentioned — the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the election of Barack Obama, the launch of the iPhone, and the advent of social media — similarly find Millennials at a range of ages too wide to be automatically unifying in terms of experience.

Why is being between 12 and 28 at the time of Obama's election more meaningful a cohort experience than being, say, 18 to 34? No answer to this is provided, because Pew has determined the cohort categories before the logical scientific questions can be asked.

Consider a few other hypothetical examples. In the future, we might hypothesize that those who were in K-12 school during the pandemic-inflicted 2020-2021 academic year constitute a meaningful cohort. That 13-year cohort was born between 2003 and 2015, which does not correspond to one of Pew's predetermined "generations."

For some purposes, an even narrower range might be more appropriate, such as those who graduated high school in 2020-2021 alone. Under the Pew generational regime, too many researchers, marketers, journalists, and members of the general public will look at major events like these through a pre-formed prism that distorts their ability to pursue or understand the way cohort life course experiences affect social experience.

Unlike the other "generations" in Pew's map, the Baby Boom corresponds to a unique demographic event, painstakingly, empirically demonstrated to have begun in July 1946 and ended in mid-1964. And being part of that group has turned out to be a meaningful experience for many people — one that in fact helped give rise to the popular understanding of birth cohorts as a concept.

But it does not follow that any arbitrarily grouped set of birth dates would produce a sense of identity, especially one that can be named and described on the basis of its birth years alone. It is an accident of history that the Baby Boom lasted 18 years — as far as we know having nothing to do with the length of a reproductive generation, but perhaps leading subsequent analysts to use the term "generation" to describe both Baby Boomers and subsequent cohorts.

The good researchers at Pew are in a tough spot (as are others who rely on their categories). The generations concept is tremendously appealing and hugely popular. But where does it end? Are we going to keep arbitrarily dividing the population into generations and giving them names — after "Z"? On what scientific basis would the practice continue? One might be tempted to address these problems by formalizing the process, with a conference and a dramatic launch, to make it even more "official." But there is no scientific rationale for dividing the population arbitrarily into cohorts of any particular length for purposes of analyzing social trends, and to fix their membership a priori.

Pew would do a lot more to enhance its reputation, and contribute to the public good, by publicly pulling the plug on this project.

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# PRINCIPLES

*An alternative to labels*

Written by Luca Dellanna

## Generational labels

I don't think that using generational labels for HR purposes is very useful because, even if the average characteristics of each generation differ, the variance within is large enough to make any stereotyping misleading. Let me give you an example.

The average millennial is probably better at using mobile apps than the average Gen X. Yet, if you onboard a group of millennials, you cannot just assume they are good at using mobile apps. You cannot shape a training program assuming that a generation's average characteristics are descriptive of all its member.

This doesn't mean that generational labels are useless. For example, for a company describing their customer segment, it might make sense to label the customer segment to facilitate marketing decisions, because branding is about defining the edges. But I don't believe that generational labels should be used for HR purposes: training and management should be calibrated to the individual.

## Calibrating to the individual

Let's imagine you are someone from HR and want to train or coach managers on onboarding people.

If you believe in generational labels, you will tell the manager something along the lines of, "If you onboard a millennial, use this approach. If you onboard Gen X, use this other approach instead."

This is basically telling the manager, "You shouldn't try to understand who the person in front of you is, how they think, what their skills and blindspots are." That's really suboptimal, and more importantly, it teaches the wrong way of thinking.

The core of the problem is that you cannot rely on a group's average characteristic when the variance within is large. If the average millennial has, say, an 8/10 skill in mobile app use (compared to a, say, 6/10 for Gen X), if you onboard a hundred millennials, you will probably find someone who is a 4/10 and someone who is a 10/10. Your training approach should accommodate anything between a 4 and a 10.

The exception would be if you screen during hiring, but in this case, all hires have a minimum proficiency regardless of their generation, and therefore it doesn't make sense to use labels anyway.

So, most companies shouldn't think about generations. They should think about designing systems able to accommodate different types of people, personalities, and skills.

### Principles

How does that scale?

The approach above scales well when taught as a set of principles.

The difficult-to-scale way is to teach, "Here is how you onboard millennials, here is how you onboard Gen X, etc." Instead, the easy-to-scale way is to teach managers how to train employees when they don't understand something — regardless of who they are and what they don't understand.

### Practical implementation of principle management.

Petar: In the context of a single organization, how do you get people to stop thinking in terms of labels, and how do you teach these principles?

The number one tool I would teach managers is hypotheticals.

You, the manager, sit with your team and, for 30 minutes, ask questions in the form of, "What would you do if you had a certain problem?" For example: "What would you do if, one day, one of our suppliers got flooded and couldn't deliver its products for a month?"

Then, your team replies, telling you what they would do. And you give them feedback. And when you do, you refer to the operating principles of the company. So you don't only teach what the right reactions are, but you also teach them how to think properly.

In my experience, hypotheticals are the best tool a manager has to teach good judgment.

### Management by fairness

Let me share another principle I have taught teams and managers regarding communication problems. I call it MANAGEMENT BY FAIRNESS.

It is impossible to be a fair manager unless:

— you delegate so clearly that you cannot be misunderstood.

— you set early check-ins to catch misunderstandings before they lead to failure.

— you consistently acknowledge the good and call out the bad.

"Management by fairness" is the principle that if you genuinely want all your team to feel treated fairly, you will automatically have to do everything that makes for a great manager.

For example, if you only aim to be clear enough to be understood, someone will inevitably misunderstand you.

They will work in the wrong direction and eventually be told they didn't do enough even though they successfully completed the task they understood they were assigned. This is unfair.

Also, fair managers do not aim to be clear enough to be understood: that's not enough. Instead, fair managers aim to be clear enough not to be misunderstood.

Only in that case, the evaluation of work done can be fair. Hence why fairness should be a Core Value for most organizations — not just because everyone wants to work in a fair place but because striving to be fair results in actions that make managers more effective and teams more productive.

There is this great book that I am reading right now called Working Backwards. It's about Amazon. And one of the stories in the book is about when HR needed to write down the operating principles of Amazon, after it grew beyond the first few hundred employees.

So what they did is they asked a lot of top managers within the companies what operating principles they embodied and used their answers to come up with an operating principle list. In other words, they discovered the principles rather than creating them.

I believe this is a sound approach. Of course, you want to think about which principles might be missing in the way your company currently operates that are necessary for its long-term success. But — especially if your company is already successful — you should also look into the already-existing pockets of excellence within your company and codify those. If anything, because those aren't guesses of what might work, but you know empirically that they do work, and that they do work here.

## COVID

Another more recent example regarding generational thinking regards the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

For many people, there was the idea that vulnerable means elderly people. And if you compare a cohort of elders to a cohort of working-age adults, of course, the older cohort is more vulnerable. But there are plenty of people who are not elderly but vulnerable nevertheless — perhaps due to other illnesses or lifestyle issues.

A group's average doesn't accurately describe all its members.

So, generational thinking led some people to believe that only the elder should take precautions not to get infected. It created distortions that, in some countries, influenced policy and, in all countries, influenced public reaction.

## Hope for the future

Labels should be used only when they describe the whole ensemble, not just the average. Hopefully, companies will discontinue the use of labels in HR and substitute them with principles that accommodate all employees, regardless of the arbitrarily-defined category they are part of. Instead of going for an approach that's easy to teach at scale, go for an approach that is effective at scale. That requires acknowledging that arbitrary labels don't scale; teaching principles does.

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roses are red,
violets are blue,
i have biases,
and so do you.

but at least we can both
agree that limericks are
silly.

GJ

# 2022:SHOULD WE STOP LABELING GENERATIONS?

*A debate for and against the use of labels*

**Written by Philip N Cohen, Jean Twenge, Malcolm Burnley**

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*On January 13, 2022 WHY Radio times in Philadelphia, hosted by Malcolm Burnley, had a debate exploring the issue of the use of generational labels. Philip Cohen, a professor of sociology at the University of Maryland and Jean Twenge, a psychologist and author of books on generational differences, including her latest "Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America's Future". This debate has been edited for length and clarity*

**Malcolm Burnley:** We're in this moment where identity politics seem to be everywhere, and we're often as a society, creating new identities along lines of gender and race. So, Jean, I want to open up with you. What do generational labels add in terms of identity? Why do we still use them to begin with?

**Jean Twenge:** Well, we use them because they are useful and convenient for understanding each other. So really, generational labels have very little difference with, say, grouping people in terms of age or grouping people in terms of race or ethnicity, both of which also often have arbitrary lines and also group people who have many differences from each other. But with generations, if we have a basic understanding of around the time someone was born, we probably know something about their pop culture references. We can kind of understand their perspective in terms of the events they grew up with. And we can at least have an educated guess about some of the cultural values that they probably absorbed when they were growing up.

Of course, that last part is where we have to be cautious, because there are definitely average differences among people of different generations. We do not want to be prejudiced or stereotyped, just as we don't want to do that with gender or race or any other identity that we want to treat people as individuals. We want to treat people as individuals and not always say, oh, you must be a typical member of your generation.

**Malcolm Burnley:** So, Philip … by way of getting into some of the controversy around this same question or maybe slightly different, why do you think we still use these labels?

**Philip Cohen:** I think they're used primarily in the realms of marketing and media. Most social scientists don't use the specific categories of these generations with their names and labels. Those of us who study social change know that one of the key ways that social change happens is the experiences that people have based on when they're born.

So how old you were when 9/11 happened, or if you are trying to start kindergarten in the middle of the pandemic; all of these things are sort of a combination of when history hits you at a certain point in your life, and that is very important.

So generational change, if you look at it that way, is essential. The problem that I and the other researchers have is with the use of fixed categories and also the names for the categories. Science is all about categorization, biology is all about species and how to define different species, and that scrutiny has just never been applied to these categories.

So unlike gender or race ethnicity, only about half of people can correctly identify the generation label that has been applied to them, even if you show them a list of the titles. So they may identify with certain aspects of when they grow up.

They might know what it was like to have been in college at a certain time, to have been afraid of being drafted in Vietnam, to have their education disrupted by the pandemic, and have something in common with those people who went through that at the same point in their lives. So that may be a key part of their identity and personality, but they're not really identifying with these categories that marketing and consulting people have laid over them.

Malcolm Burnley: Right. And I want to get into how we name these generations, but just along the lines of what you were saying. I read this story in The Atlantic … by Joe Pinksker, and he noted some of that data that says, " According to a survey 74% of boomers associate themselves with their generational label, but the share declines with each successive generation. Only 53% of Gen X and 45% of Millennials identify as being part of that". Jean, does that mean that they're actually less meaningful?

Jean Twenge: I'm not convinced that that really matters all that much, that people don't identify with

the particular generation. I'm a Gen Xer myself. We don't want to be grouped into anything. We don't want to be labeled with anything that's sort of part of the generational personality. I think the labels are more useful for analysis and more useful for understanding. And I'm not convinced it really matters that much that people identify with the generation themselves.

Malcolm Burnley: So I want to continue with you. You've spent 30 years writing books, doing research on generational labels. So you've obviously continued to not only believe the merit of this, but seen statistically, quantitatively, and qualitatively the value of this. Could you get into it just a little bit from a scientific or research perspective, like why you think it's valuable to be able to group people in this way, especially over time?

Jean Twenge: Absolutely. Yeah. I think there are, in some ways, two different questions. We want to make sure that we're focusing and asking the same question. So one is, do people differ based on when they're born? And Dr. Cohen and I can both agree that that's true. I think the vast majority of people agree that people are shaped by the times that they grew up in and the times they come of age. There are many examples of that.

Especially a few years ago, if you ask people about their attitudes around same sex marriage, you would get a very big difference between Gen Z and the silent generation. And that's changed over time as well. All generations have changed in their attitudes on that, too. So we know that. We know that there's differences. But then the question is how do we group people when they do the analysis?Those decisions are somewhat arbitrary.

Dr. Cohen and I, I think, agree on that. It seems to be useful to group people into larger groups based on events they experienced or certain differences among generations in terms of mental health or

optimism or attitudes. And that makes it easier to understand what's going on from an analysis point of view.

I work with very large surveys of people in many cases that go back decades. And when you're trying to figure out, okay, how has this changed? How has, let's say, rates of depression, how have they changed?

You have to make that decision about how you are going to group that? Are you going to group it by generation, by years? And it is true that these labels are not as often used in academic papers, but that doesn't mean that they don't have some value for discussion.

Malcolm Burnley: Okay. So time in society and culture is naturally progressive — I think we can all agree on that to some degree. So there's always going to be change. And why do we think generational terms, as Jean was just getting into, as opposed to, say, decades as opposed to four year increments? Philip, do you have any thoughts on that?

Philip Cohen: Yes. Well, you're absolutely right. … Even a year is an arbitrary distinction. So at some point you break up time just to look at the progression. But there's no reason to use these generation categories. They are different lengths.

The Baby Boom was longer than Generation X for some reason — for no reason, I should say. One of the concerns I have is that once you fix the category in one study and then lay the category onto another study, you miss key things. The Baby Boom was a real event. It was a huge increase in birth rates.

And so that will give a certain commonality to the experience of Baby Boomers. They were part of a large group. However, early Baby Boomers came of age in time for the Vietnam draft. So 40% of them served in the military. Late Baby Boomers were after

that. So only about 10% of them served in the military. So on another dimension, they have a completely different experience.

Or if you look at the pandemic today and the group that people call Millennials, some of them are 25 and haven't finished school or gotten married or had children — they're at a completely different life stage than those who are 40, who have families and are trying to navigate children in school and that whole set of experiences related to the pandemic.

But if you had that category "Millennial" in your head before the pandemic came, you would group those people together and you would miss it would not serve your interest in trying to understand the social change.

Malcolm Burnley: We were talking about how generations previously were both longer and also maybe had more natural definition. Speaking about Baby Boomers, there was an actual event being World War II and coming home after that, that caused that. But since then, it's been changing a little bit. Right?

Philip Cohen: Well, society hasn't really changed. It's just the convention has changed. There's no reason that Gen X and Millennial are shorter than the Baby Boom except the impatience of researchers who are in a hurry to name the next generation. In fact, generations in real life have been getting longer, of course, as people get married and have children later in life. So it really doesn't make any sense that Millennial s, by some accounts, are only 14 or 15 years long, whereas the Baby Boom was 18 years. There is no reason for it.

Malcolm Burnley: Jean,I know that it used to be considered that 30 years was a generation. I believe there's some biblical origins to that, and now it's half that, maybe even less. Why that shift? Is it technology that's driving that? What, in your mind, makes generation shorter?

Jean Twenge: I think we have moved from a system of generations, meaning parents and children and their children, to a concept of social generations. And I think there actually is a very good reason why the Millennial generation is shorter and why the Gen X generation is shorter than boomers and shorter than the silent generation. And that's technology. So events are important. The pandemic, World War II, Vietnam War, they do shape generations.

But in recent times, there have been other influences which have been just as strong or stronger. First among those is the speed of technological change. When I speak of technology, I also include changes in medical care, in all kinds of technology that influences our day to day lives, not just smartphones. But smartphones are a great example. They went from introduction to half of people in the US owning one in five and a half years. That is the fastest adoption of any technology in human history. So that speed of change, change in the culture, change in technology has sped up. So I think that's why you can make an argument for why recent generations should be shorter.

Malcolm Burnley: Philip, you've mentioned the Williams sisters before, the champion tennis players, and how Venus and Serena are technically by the definition, in two different generations, despite hardly having a gap. That speaks to something that I've heard from a number of people that they feel like often these terms are used in a weaponized way. Is that consistent with what you find, Philip, or are there also, other, more virtuous ways to use it?

Philip Cohen: No, I think that certainly is a risk. And I would not suggest that everybody who's using these terms is committing some sort of age discrimination,

but I do think they become very convenient handles for that kind of stereotyping and discrimination. So a lot of the use of the term popularly amounts to essentially old people or kids these days. And there's a sense in which we never expected Millennials to grow up. And it's really weird that they did because the stereotypes about them were about young people.

So it's an awkward process. And it certainly is the case that change is accelerating in terms of technology. And I absolutely don't want to diminish that at all. But when you say the Williams sisters are technically in different generations, I just want to be clear that I wouldn't say "technically," I would say conventionally by a standard that doesn't make sense.

I use that example because it shows you that if you went into trying to understand something like that

family or that experience with a fixed category, you would be undermining your own analysis.

<span style="color:red">Malcolm Burnley:</span> Yeah. One thing I've been wondering, which speaks to what Philip was saying and I want to get your input on this, Jean, is that my understanding is the history of naming generations really dates back only a couple hundred years and has really accelerated in the 20th century, late 20th century.

But one thing that seems to change with this convention of naming generations early in their lives — or in their formative years, before we fully know what that generation is going to accomplish or maybe fully know how those traits are going to change or not. So why is there this obsession or emphasis to define a generation, I guess in their formative years as opposed to in their adult years?

Jean Twenge: I think it's simply to try to understand the upcoming generation. Older generations are always very often really interested in understanding the younger generation. And I think it comes mostly from a good place of, say, teachers and college faculty members who want to understand their students. How are my students different from the students I had five years ago or ten years ago or twenty years ago? Managers want to understand how my young employees are different?

Malcolm Burnley: We got a comment from Katherine that I can definitely relate to. So Katherine's comment is "I'm a Millennial.

We were supposed to be more confident and entitled, but also anxious and depressed, social justice oriented, but also selfish, overachievers in school, but also unprepared for the real world. Now I see the same thing written about Gen Z. Is each generation actually more unhappy and unprepared or entitled than the one before? Or is it just a continuation of older generations' handwringing?"

Jean Twenge: So in some cases, we do have linear changes, meaning each generation is more, say, self confident or individualistic or depressed than the one before. That's been a very common path. That was a very common pattern, especially from, say, Silent Generation to Boomers to Gen Xers to Millennials.

And as time goes on, we get a better understanding of these things because a lot of that changed with Gen Z. Optimism and self confidence was going up for four generations, and then it just fell with GenZ. Mental health is a much more complex picture where depression was going up and it kind of leveled off with Millennials, but still at a historically relatively high rate. And then it just skyrocketed with Gen Z. So there are different patterns for some of the different traits.

Malcolm Burnley: So, Philip, we obviously don't have different DNA between generations. But there are multiple theories of change about generations changing, based on external events or stimuli. Does it feel like there's more of a consensus on one or the other, and how do generational labels fit into that?

Philip Cohen: Well, the short answer is: they don't. But you're right about the question of the different kinds of forces at work.

If you think about the very simple math of time, we can break down the events or the things that shape people into the categories of age, how old you are, and that's sort of biological. So are you of childbearing age? Are you postmenopausal? Are you older young? There's the period that you're living in. So are you alive at the moment that something happens, like a war or recession? And then there's the cohort that you're born into the time you were born.

So age and period and cohort, and each of those things can have independent effects on people. So some things affect everybody at once. That's what we call a period effect, like climate change. Some things affect people based on age, like those biological things I mentioned. And some things are at the intersection, are cohorts — so, being a certain age when something happens. And in terms of social analysis, it's very tricky to parse those things out. And one of the reasons is there's different kinds of change happening at the same time.

So, for example, I'm a sociologist. My cohort was in graduate school in the 90s when certain fads were in fashion for the kind of research that we did. If you play in the NBA, if you came up when high school players were allowed to go straight to the NBA, that changed the whole league. So that changed your career in a way that didn't affect me as a sociologist at all. I was way more affected by the personal computing revolution. But those are both cohort effects. That is, how old were you at a certain time? But they're not universal across society.

Malcolm Burnley: Well, I think we're going to have to leave it there. Philip Cohen, Jean Twenge, thanks so much for joining us on Radio Times.

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# 2023:CLOSING STATEMENT

*How Pew will report on generations moving forward*

**Written By Kim Parker**

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Journalists, researchers and the public often look at society through the lens of generation, using terms like Millennial or Gen Z to describe groups of similarly aged people. This approach can help readers see themselves in the data and assess where we are and where we're headed as a country.

Pew Research Center has been at the forefront of generational research over the years, telling the story of Millennials as they came of age politically and as they moved more firmly into adult life. In recent years, we've also been eager to learn about Gen Z as the leading edge of this generation moves into adulthood.

But generational research has become a crowded arena. The field has been flooded with content that's often sold as research but is more like clickbait or marketing mythology. There's also been a growing chorus of criticism about generational research and generational labels in particular.

Recently, as we were preparing to embark on a major research project related to Gen Z, we decided to take a step back and consider how we can study generations in a way that aligns with our values of accuracy, rigor and providing a foundation of facts that enriches the public dialogue.

We set out on a yearlong process of assessing the landscape of generational research. We spoke with experts from outside Pew Research Center, including those who have been publicly critical of our generational analysis, to get their take on the

pros and cons of this type of work. We invested in methodological testing to determine whether we could compare findings from our earlier telephone surveys to the online ones we're conducting now. And we experimented with higher-level statistical analyses that would allow us to isolate the effect of generation.

What emerged from this process was a set of clear guidelines that will help frame our approach going forward. Many of these are principles we've always adhered to, but others will require us to change the way we've been doing things in recent years.

Here's a short overview of how we'll approach generational research in the future:

We'll only do generational analysis when we have historical data that allows us to compare generations at similar stages of life. When comparing generations, it's crucial to control for age. In other words, researchers need to look at each generation or age cohort at a similar point in the life cycle. ("Age cohort" is a fancy way of referring to a group of people who were born around the same time.)

When doing this kind of research, the question isn't whether young adults today are different from middle-aged or older adults today. The question is whether young adults today are different from young adults at some specific point in the past.

To answer this question, it's necessary to have data that's been collected over a considerable amount of

time — think decades. Standard surveys don't allow for this type of analysis. We can look at differences across age groups, but we can't compare age groups over time.

Another complication is that the surveys we conducted 20 or 30 years ago aren't usually comparable enough to the surveys we're doing today. Our earlier surveys were done over the phone, and we've since transitioned to our nationally representative online survey panel, the American Trends Panel. Our internal testing showed that on many topics, respondents answer questions differently depending on the way they're being interviewed.

So we can't use most of our surveys from the late 1980s and early 2000s to compare Gen Z with Millennials and Gen Xers at a similar stage of life.

This means that most generational analysis we do will use datasets that have employed similar methodologies over a long period of time, such as surveys from the U.S. Census Bureau. A good example is our 2020 report on Millennial families, which used census data going back to the late 1960s. The report showed that Millennials are marrying and forming families at a much different pace than the generations that came before them.

Even when we have historical data, we will attempt to control for other factors beyond age in making generational comparisons. If we accept that there are real differences across generations, we're basically saying that people who were born around the same time share certain attitudes or beliefs — and that their views have been influenced by external forces that uniquely shaped them during their formative years.

Those forces may have been social changes, economic circumstances, technological advances or political movements.

The tricky part is isolating those forces from events or circumstances that have affected all age groups, not just one generation. These are often called "period effects." An example of a period effect is the Watergate scandal, which drove down trust in government among all age groups. Differences in trust across age groups in the wake of Watergate shouldn't be attributed to the outsize impact that event had on one age group or another, because the change occurred across the board.

Changing demographics also may play a role in patterns that might at first seem like generational differences. We know that the United States has become more racially and ethnically diverse in recent decades, and that race and ethnicity are linked with certain key social and political views. When we see that younger adults have different views than their older counterparts, it may be driven by their demographic traits rather than the fact that they belong to a particular generation.

Controlling for these factors can involve complicated statistical analysis that helps determine whether the differences we see across age groups are indeed due to generation or not. This additional step adds rigor to the process. Unfortunately, it's often absent from current discussions about Gen Z, Millennials and other generations.

When we can't do generational analysis, we still see value in looking at differences by age and will do so where it makes sense. Age is one of the most common predictors of differences in attitudes and behaviors. And even if age gaps aren't rooted in generational differences, they can still be illuminating. They help us understand how people across the age spectrum are responding to key trends, technological breakthroughs and historical events.

Each stage of life comes with a unique set of experiences. Young adults are often at the leading edge of changing attitudes on emerging social trends. Take views on same-sex marriage, for example, or attitudes about gender identity.

Many middle-aged adults, in turn, face the challenge of raising children while also providing care and support to their aging parents. And older adults have their own obstacles and opportunities. All of these stories — rooted in the life cycle, not in generations — are important and compelling, and we can tell them by analyzing our surveys at any given point in time.

When we do have the data to study groups of similarly aged people over time, we won't always default to using the standard generational definitions and labels. While generational labels are simple and catchy, there are other ways to analyze age cohorts. For example, some observers have suggested grouping people by the decade in which they were born.

This would create narrower cohorts in which the members may share more in common. People could also be grouped relative to their age during key historical events (such as the Great Recession or the COVID-19 pandemic) or technological innovations (like the invention of the iPhone).

Existing generational definitions also may be too broad and arbitrary to capture differences that exist among narrower cohorts. A typical generation spans 15 to 18 years. As many critics of generational research point out, there is great diversity of thought, experience and behavior within generations. The key is to pick a lens that's most appropriate for the research question that's being studied.

If we're looking at political views and how they've shifted over time, for example, we might group people together according to the first presidential election in which they were eligible to vote.

By choosing not to use the standard generational labels when they're not appropriate, we can avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes or oversimplifying people's complex lived experiences. With these considerations in mind, our audiences should not expect to see a lot of new research coming out of Pew Research Center that uses the generational lens. We'll only talk about generations when it adds value, advances important national debates and highlights meaningful societal trends.

III.  Business

FOR
HIRE

# SAUDI ARABIA

*Birth of a Nation pt1*

Written by Armin Rosen

# Reporting from the front lines of Mohammed bin Salman's stupefyingly ambitious mass experiment in modernization, reform, and control

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It is impossible to tell how long Saudi Arabia's Formula 1 course is, where it goes, or how it's shaped. Whatever's taking place down below the carving stations and espresso bars inside the soundproofed Paddock Club at the Jeddah Corniche Circuit, down on a floodlit straightaway of asphalt so eerily pristine that it seems impossible a car has ever touched it, remains an auto-racing-themed abstraction even during a potential outbreak of real excitement.

When defending world champion Max Verstappen's engine failed mid-lap on qualifying night this past March, sending him to the back of the starting grid for the next evening's grand prix, the image of his stalled race car on an overhead TV screen barely distracted the club level's courtiers, VIPs, and professional schmoozers from their wagyu steak.

In contrast, cheers sometimes erupted from the opposite grandstand, where a more modest, more sports-focused, and seemingly unrelated event was taking place. That event could be visited by forsaking the wonders of the club lounge and stepping outside. Every few seconds an aeronautical sound-wave would suction the still desert air and a jet engine enclosed in insect skin, piloted by an international sporting celebrity whose face was impossible to see, zoomed by just long enough to hold a flickering perception of the vehicle's brief physical presence. The brain-pinching whoosh entered through the right ear long before its origin appeared; by the time the whoosh exited the left ear its source was already deep into the unknowable frontier that lay beyond Turn 1. The smell of perfume overwhelmed whatever faint suggestion of combusting organic

matter accidentally floated up to the loggia. It was a specifically Saudi perfume, arboreal instead of florid, and like the race car exhaust it had the nose-flooding sweetness of something burning.

The men all wore the perfume, and they were dressed almost exactly the same, in ankle-length, button-up white robes and red-on-white checkerboard headdresses held in place by a scalp-hugging black ring. One of the men I met, I was told, controlled $6 billion in real estate and commercial assets. Another was the son of a very senior diplomat, a man responsible for cutting deals with various problematic neighboring states.

Thanks to one such agreement, a Chinese-negotiated thaw in relations with Iran announced just eight days earlier, there would be no repeat of the ugliness surrounding last year's grand prix, when Iranian-backed militants launched missiles at Jeddah shortly before the race and nearly succeeded in canceling it. The peace dividend was right here at the Paddock Club—I was told Will Smith was somewhere nearby.

A white man with a sweater tied around his neck looked especially lost. Most of the white people on hand, like the European wagyu-slicers and the pair of young blond hostesses speaking Russian to one another, were there to wait on the Saudis, who might have traveled to Sochi or Monaco for an event like this before the race premiered in 2021.

In another reversal of decades of national precedent, the Saudi women were dressed with far greater individuality than the men.

Their hair was often worn in long black tresses that streamed below the shoulders of tastefully concealing gowns. In a not-so-distant past, a pricey handbag was a Saudi woman's only means of flaunting any higher status in public, a realm she could only enter when covered head-to-toe in a black abaya. The abayas are optional now, as are the hijabs. "We'd never imagined we'd be here from five years ago," said Tala al Jabri, a Riyadh-based and U.S.-educated investor in Saudi-based tech startups, who, like most of the other younger women on hand, looked like she was dressed for a cold day in Beverly Hills.

Among the identically costumed men there is still a Saudi vision of egalitarianism on display, one that obscures everyone's role and wealth in order to maintain a hierarchical reality. In photos on display at the Murabba Palace museum in Riyadh, King Abdulaziz, also known as Ibn Saud, the founder of the modern Saudi state, is dressed in almost the same robes as his servants. Abdulaziz and his six successors are buried in graves that are nearly unmarked and barely ever visited, in accordance with Salafi practice. Saudi-style equality—namely, the equality of shared subjecthood, applicable to royals and commoners alike—reigns in one other obvious way at the Paddock Club. No amount of money or power will buy you a single drop of alcohol. "The beer is coming," an official assured me as we drank guava juice out of sleek glass stemware. "We need it for business, for tourists." The possible introduction of alcohol into a conservative tribal monarchy of 35 million whose government is responsible for overseeing the two holiest sites in Islam seems a prospect with no easily predictable outcome. But my interlocutor, like the government he worked for, was confident in his read of the current national mentality. "Most Saudis are convinced the alcohol ban is not for a religious reason," he claimed. "In some schools of Islam, under 5% [alcohol by volume] is acceptable."

The question of just how much change the Saudi crown can declare without threatening the integrity of the system it built has been dramatically answered in recent years. Since 2016, the palace, under the leadership of 37-year-old Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, widely referred to as MBS, has embarked on a bold program of social and economic reform. As Syria and Libya burned, ISIS consolidated control of northern Iraq, and the Egyptian military crushed the country's brief spell of elected Muslim Brotherhood rule, Saudi women saw the rapid disappearance of such mainstays of national policy as the driving ban, compulsory hijab, male guardianship laws, and employment prohibitions. A nationwide ban on cinemas was lifted in 2018. The once-ubiquitous religious police still technically exist, but they are almost never seen in public anymore and have lost all of their formal powers. Saudi Arabia no longer exports fundamentalist Wahhabi Islam, long its state ideology, and has largely ceased the promotion of Wahhabism even within its own borders. The country began offering tourist visas for the first time in 2019, reversing a long standing official fear of the contaminations of the outside world.

The palace has courted even greater dangers in the economic realm. The government introduced a value-added tax, essentially the first tax regime in the country's history, and then raised the rate from 3% to as much as 15% while slashing subsidies on energy and food. The government's sovereign wealth fund has led a massive shift in state investments, pivoting the public sector away from its usual focus on extractive industries and into new realms like tourism, real estate development, entertainment, logistics, and hazily innovation-related projects involving things like cryptocurrency trading and the construction of a cube-shaped Sim City arcology in central Riyadh.

Old trading families and the once-influential import sector have lost much of their former prominence. "Economic power in the private sector is changing hands," explained Mohamed Alyahya, a Saudi political commentator and fellow at Harvard

University's Kennedy School of Government.

MBS's reforms, whose effects are plainly visible in every area of Saudi life, amount to a wholesale rewriting of the kingdom's social contract. The days of the palace using endless supplies of oil money and religious conservatism to drug Saudis into a mutually reinforcing culture of indolence and obedience are over. In its place, the population is now meant to derive its sense of direction and meaning from a rebooted idea of Saudiness, while its wealth will now come from exciting new economic sectors. It will be possible for the government to create these sectors now that it has purged the kleptomania of the former order, mostly through the detainment of over 400 allegedly corrupt members of the royal family at the Riyadh Ritz-Carlton in late 2018.

With many of the old subsidies and handouts eliminated, the relationship between the state, the subject, and the market is no longer mediated through oil-financed social bribery: "It is a big mind-shift we're trying to induce, of becoming productive citizens," explained a young Saudi woman who worked on the reform package during her career as a private consultant, and is now studying for a graduate degree in the United States. "A productivity mindset, which is the essence of the vision, has been achieved," she claimed.

The population has thus far accepted MBS's changes with astounding equanimity—a possible result of having been trained for decades in obedience. There have been no tax riots or bread riots. There was no visible rearguard action by the old order, or at least none that inflamed or incited any divisions within society at large. Saudis went to work as shopkeepers and Uber drivers with little apparent complaint—not that public complaining is socially tolerated or even all that legal in Saudi Arabia—with some treating participation in the new economy as a kind of patriotic duty. MBS is gambling that the fruits of openness and modernity can be reaped on Saudi terms, and that prosperity, stability, and a recharged, secularized sense of national purpose won't shatter existing norms or generate dangerous civic appetites. The reforms have created a rising class of ambitious executives, entrepreneurs, and artists, and for now almost everyone seems to accept the idea of a national horizon defined by the wisdom and vision of a single family, and perhaps even a single man. His program has created an atmosphere muggy with floating potential, as the palace carries out an uncertain experiment on tens of millions of people. MBS's subjects could be the engine and the beneficiaries of the only successful 21st-century governance project in any populous Middle Eastern state—or they could mark the disastrous limits of utopia declared from on high.

The young former consultant who worked on the reforms described them as "fast-paced social nudges, rather than shocks." Some nudges are less subtle than others, and one of them comes in the form of a vast and mostly empty construction site surrounding an isolated gray slab south of the Jeddah race track. "Here they are building the world's tallest tower," a young government official told me, referring to the slab. "Here is the megaproject, downtown Jeddah. It is one of the five megaprojects."

The word "megaproject" fails to fully capture the awesome scope of reform-era Saudi ambition. Saudi Arabia has become perhaps the only country on earth where the term "gigaproject" is employed without irony. Behind the future downtown was a glorious sunset, yellow fire turning palm trees into arching shadows, with the light breaking through a sky of soft neon blue. There were no human beings anywhere near the deserted base of the future tower, in the empty center of a city of nearly 4 million.

Who will live and work in this high-rising city-within-a-city an hour-and-a-half from Mecca and 10 minutes from the excitement and inconvenience of an annual Formula 1 grand prix?

The answer, broadly speaking, is young Saudis, the roughly 40% of the country that's under the age of 25. "This is going to have a very young population," promised one official who showed off a model of Diriyah, a city-size planned sector of Riyadh built in traditional clay-colored crenelated north Arabian architecture. If completed, Diriyah will have 500 times the square footage of Manhattan's Hudson Yards project.

Significant portions of Diriyah, including an attractive dining and retail district opposite the ruins of Turaif, the place where the Saud dynasty was launched in the 18th century, have already been built. The neighborhood-in-progress is where nationalism, development, and high-end consumption have already merged into a tangible whole. An Ivy League-educated Saudi financier in his mid-20s I met suspected that 10 years from now most of his social circle will have relocated to Neom, the futuristic megacity-by-decree planned for an empty stretch of Red Sea coastline 100 miles south of Eilat.

There have also been policy "nudges": For instance, the Saudi government has implemented a new requirement that any company whose largest regional client is the Saudi state must have its Middle East headquarters somewhere inside of Saudi Arabia

itself, which is part of a broader attempt to force large corporate offices to relocate from the United Arab Emirates. Other nudges have come in the form of capital, much of it from the government's $620 billion Public Investment Fund. In another bid to keep young people engaged and employed, the state has taken a marked interest in every manner of tech play, pouring money into online retail and ride-sharing. The Central Bank has started its own "fintech sandbox," which will make it easier for nontraditional financial institutions to operate in the country, explained Tala al Jabri, the startup investor. "I would not be investing in startups if I didn't think they had a culture to disrupt markets," she said as we both ignored the action below us on the Corniche Circuit. "Startups believe the government has their back," al Jabri continued. "They think they can succeed because they think the government wants them to succeed."

Many of the big winners of the reforms are private companies working in sectors that the government now prioritizes. This includes defense manufacturing. When I met Hmoud Alshethre, the youthful and modest executive director of alliances at the Riyadh offices of Intra Defense Technologies, he was dressed in the standard-issue white robe, with a model of a handheld drone perched behind him. A succession of large, white South African men came in to briefly interrupt a generously long discussion held over dates, nuts, and an endless supply of lightly spiced Gulf-style coffee. Intra's small unmanned aircraft can survey the country's isolated desert frontiers and oil pipelines, which are often the targets of Iranian-backed sabotage.

"We have a very reasonable government here," Alshethre explained. The ultimate proof of the government's "reasonableness," in Alshethre's telling, was that it had sensed an incipient popular urge for a different kind of life: The reforms are working, he said, because "people are willing to change." As evidence, he showed me a government smartphone app called Tawakalna, which aggregates every imaginable official document and service. Tawakalna lists your passport information, traffic violations, and vehicular paperwork; the ownership of a car can be transferred through the app, as can power of attorney and commercial registrations. It has copies of your birth certificate and your real estate deeds, your health information, your international travel record, and a digital kiblah for locating the direction of Mecca during prayer. This is a level of government power over the individual that few democratic citizens would tolerate, merged with a logic and seamlessness that few democratic governments seem capable of delivering these days.

But the most important thing about Tawakalna is that it proved Saudis could rapidly accept a digitally based and state-controlled civic existence. "The government could launch an app and assure that 80% of the population would use it," Alshethre claimed.

Citizens in a democracy, including the elected leadership, must resign themselves to the wondrous and horrible reality that public space is basically unmanageable, and that the state probably can't forcibly eliminate things one might think are unspeakably evil, like gun ownership or abortion or the fentanyl trade. The Saudi government takes the opposite approach: The state exerts a tight grip over the public realm while respecting its subjects' traditional sovereignty over the home. Private spaces are still considered sacrosanct—the police don't go hunting for alcohol or sexual deviancy beyond locked doors, and unless you're a jihadist, there is no Mukhabarat that seeks to penetrate the inner spaces of your true self. "There are consequences for expression here," as one Riyadh intellectual put it, "but not for thought. You can think whatever you want." The system's essential clarity explains why the Saudi leadership is so convinced that the population will continue to trust in its guidance and vision even as society becomes freer and more exposed to the outside world.
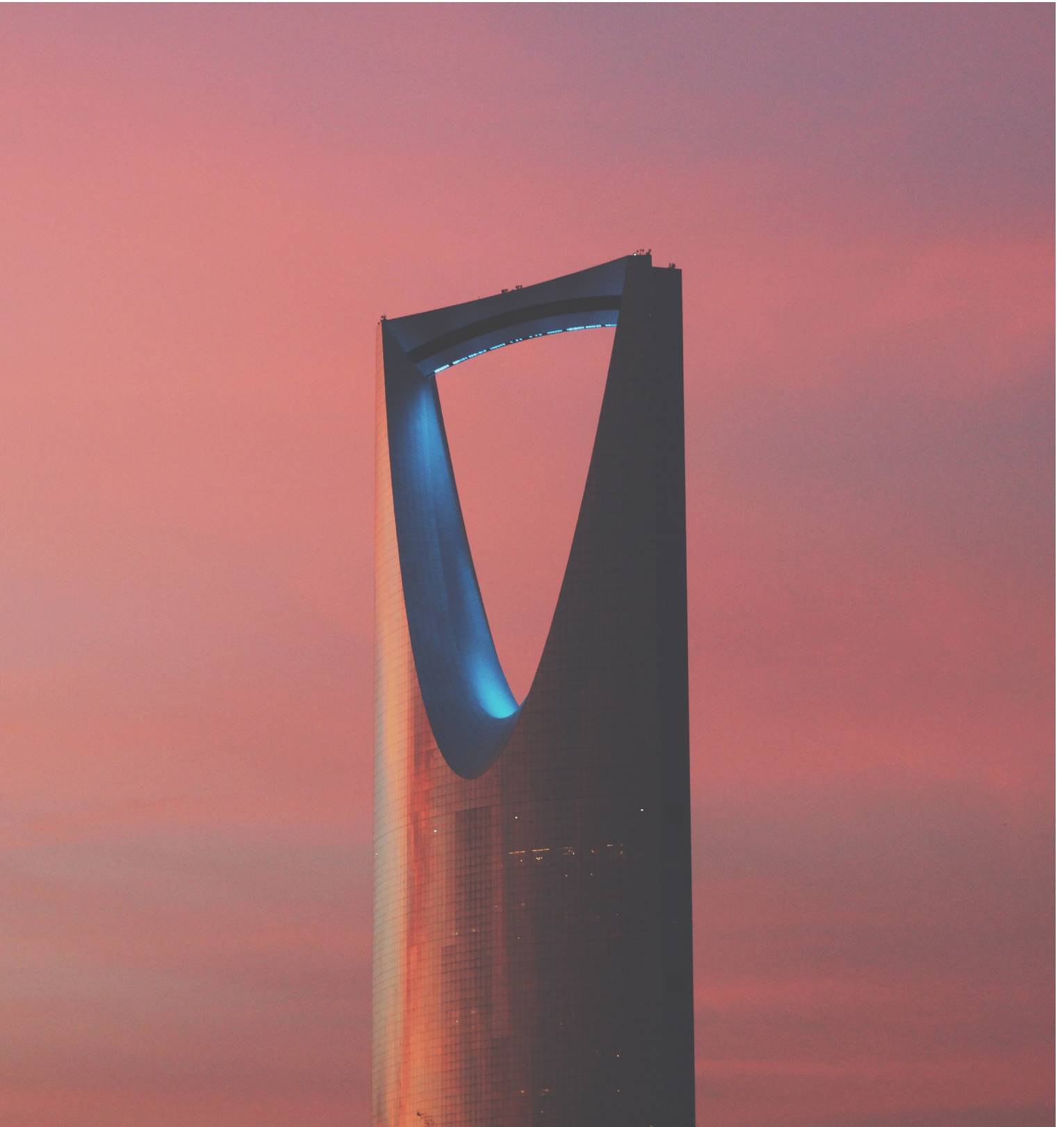
There is mass deception at work in most autocracies, which retain the ceremonies of democratic procedure and other performances of civic openness in order to hide which section of the regime or the security services actually holds power—or to create the constant sense of terror that comes with living in a place where the rules are strategically obscured.

There are no comparable lies at play in Saudi Arabia, according to Alyahya. "Mohammed bin Salman doesn't pretend to be a Jeffersonian democrat, and nobody pretends to have voted for him," he explained.

The system functions not only because of what it can provide, but because the expectations and lines of authority are so clear. They have only gotten clearer lately. I asked Tariq Alhomayed, the former editor of the Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper and a host on Saudi television, about what first made him think the reforms weren't an illusion or a ploy. There was the consistency of the government's messaging, Alhomayed replied, along with the speed of new development projects. "But the main thing was the Ritz," he said.

In the fall of 2018, the new crown prince detained 400 of his relatives at the Ritz-Carlton in Riyadh and pressured nearly all of them to turn over billions of dollars that they had allegedly embezzled from the state. At the time, the Ritz gambit seemed like an arbitrary and maniacal power grab. But much was accomplished. MBS broke the old economic elite, allowing a new one to arise in its place. The Ritz was part of the crown's indigenization push: The crackdown fell hardest on figures who had expatriated the people's wealth, spending their money on yachts and fancy real estate far beyond the kingdom's borders.

The Ritz gambit showed that the crown prince could act decisively against perceived enemies, including within his own family. Some of them had publicly

aligned with U.S. intelligence agencies that saw the reforms as a threat to their own longstanding, quasi-corrupt relationships inside the kingdom. The Ritz also encapsulated the sensitivity to the public psyche that has made the reforms so risky and yet successful so far: MBS was announcing to his subjects that their own government had been stealing from them for decades with total impunity—and, by implication, with the blessing of the crown—while also assuring them that the problem was on its way to being solved.

The Ritz itself is an opulent and isolated megacomplex towering over the beige desert fringes of the downtown sprawl. It is built in a Louis XIV aesthetic, the look of late European monarchy, with filigrees and columns and porticos damming the invisible floodwaters. The interior is cladded in especially severe Islamic patterns, stark and eye-straining networks of latticed domes and interlocking geometries. Statues of four white horses on their hind legs rear over the junction between the lobby and the main dining room, proclaiming an innocent tribute to the Arabian stallion as well as the apocalypse.

# GEO-POLITICS

*From Human Resources to Human Intelligence*

## Written by Border|Land

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*Q : It always makes me feel a bit melancholy. Grand old warship, being ignominiously haunted away to scrap...*
*The inevitability of time, don't you think? What do you see?*
*James Bond : A bloody big ship. Excuse me.*
*Q : 007. I'm your new Quartermaster.*
*James Bond : You must be joking.*
*Q : Why, because I'm not wearing a lab coat?*
*James Bond : Because you still have spots.*
*Q : My complexion is hardly relevant.*
*James Bond : Your competence is.*
*Q : Age is no guarantee of efficiency.*
*James Bond : And youth is no guarantee of innovation.*
*Q : Well, I'll hazard I can do more damage on my laptop sitting in my pajamas before my first cup of Earl Grey*
*than you can do in a year in the field.*
*James Bond : Oh, so why do you need me?*
*Q : Every now and then a trigger has to be pulled.*
*James Bond : Or not pulled. It's hard to know which, in your pajamas. Q.*
*Q : 007.*

Former US National Security Advisor HR McMaster once said that the "holiday from history" is over. Geo-Politics was to be front and center again for nation states.

Recently, a survey from Oxford Economics [a forecasting and economic advisory firm], showed the trickle down effect of HR McMaster's statement.

In their latest Q3 survey, 36% of 127 businesses polled viewed geopolitical tensions as top risks compared to Q2 when 50% of surveyed saw tight credit supply or inflation as the top risk. Looking ahead, 60% of businesses see it as a considerable threat over the next half-decade.

Unpredictable supply chains, election integrity, realignments of geopolitical partnership have rapidly gained boardroom importance.Semiconductor manufacturing being perhaps the clearest example of geopolitics impacting an industry that impacts every other industry.

Companies are responding to these risks by friendshoring, [redirecting parts of manufacturing, supply chain, sales to friendlier countries] among other things.

Are we suggesting HR Leaders now become geopolitical experts? No. Are we suggesting it's good to know what the CEO's view as their main risk to keep a seat at the table? Yes.

And if we allow ourselves to indulge our inner Le Carré, we might also be suggesting HR could be a pro-active asset in these times. How? HUMINT.

Human Intelligence (HUMINT) is a form of in person information gathering where intelligence agencies use human sources to collect information.

Over the last years, the world has been struggling with the issue of control of [online] narratives. It's been a messy, confusing fight that has touched on the following:

·   *What is fact or fiction? Can truth be hate speech? Is fiction harmful (conspiracy theories)?*

·   *What is disinformation and how can it be suppressed (de-amplification, soft bans, hard bans, blacklists)?*

In the context of the corporation, organizations will find (if they haven't already) that trusting living breathing local employees for input will be key to assessing risks, revealing blindspots and uncovering opportunities. And as HR Leaders you direct a vast and diverse network (ERG) of eyes, ears and lived experiences, developed during the peak EDI years.Unlike few others you have the skills to call upon "on the ground input" when the official narrative and its online alternatives sound confusing, untrustworthy or like an outright lie.

*"Our biggest asset is our people"* might be coming true. Just not like intended.

Anyways…for now we wanted to do two things:

1.   Urge HR leaders to start asking how HR can thrive in the age of growing geo-political risk;

2.   Give a sense of what rich, detailed "on the ground" input feels like using an issue closer to HR's home: Saudi Arabia becoming a leading work/life destination for companies and talent.

What was true when first said, has never been more true: a desk[top] is a dangerous place from which to view the world.

# SAUDI ARABIA

*Birth of a Nation pt2*

**Written by Armin Rosen**

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A Saudi friend who took me to the hotel explained that it had originally been built as a royal guest house, to accompany the pineapple-domed conference center located one compound over. The palace that contained the actual Saudi royal court was nearby too, though it was far enough off the main highway to be unseeable to a casual visitor. In a more-than-symbolic demonstration that the crown didn't consider itself exempt from the market-bound logic of the reform package, MBS ordered that the free VIP hotel instead be used as a for-profit facility, with the future operator paying a royalty to the government.

It was lunch inside the dining room, where armies of uniformed Filipino and Pakistani migrant laborers, almost all of them men, attended to a cornucopia of global cuisines arrayed across a vast mileage of bars and buffet tables, with the dull desert light pouring through the back windows of a space too massive to see all at once. A bass and guitar murmured while a woman without a hijab sang in French, every element of it a violation of Salafi injunctions regarding music, art, and gender roles. My friend pointed out a middle-aged couple, a woman in a black abaya across from a man whose headdress lacked the usual black ring. This omission symbolized humility before God and served as the local way of announcing yourself as a committed Islamic fundamentalist. A tall glass of a ruby-colored substance accompanied his expensive lunch.

For my friend, this surreal mix of the forbidden and the permitted at the site of MBS's greatest administrative masterstroke summed up Saudi Arabia's entire present situation. "The religious guy with fake sangria and a band playing," he summarized, as he noticed me tapping away at my iPhone notes. "There's your scene."

Yet the Ritz turns out to be one of the least representative places in the entire city. Riyadh is the epicenter of the reform era's goal of reorienting the Saudi economy around technology, services, and internal consumption. As a result, the young people moving back from Dubai or newly returned from Harvard actually have places to go and things to do now—hookah lounges, which offended the sensibilities of the religious conservatives who ran Riyadh for decades, were finally legalized in 2019. There is remarkably good arrabbiata and risotto on offer for $30 a plate, along with English speakers in their mid 20s to eat it with.

"There's so much more drama in American social circles than in Saudi social circles," one lunch companion, a recent Ivy graduate now working in the newly sprouted forest of sky-high squiggles and cantilevers that forms Riyadh's King Fahad Financial District, recalled of his time back in America. Dressed in the usual white robe, he blamed it all on American dating culture. We were joined by a woman in discrete Western-style dress and no hijab, who was also back from a fancy education stateside and working for an investment bank in Riyadh. "In America," she said, "you have to watch what you say … we have to give them tolerance, but there was no tolerance back to us." Everyone in America, she said, "is super sensitive." The young man agreed:

Educated Americans were in fact so sensitive that they didn't have the ability to debate anything except by indirection. "In American society you can never say something is bad: You say that it's bad for children. In Saudi you'd appeal to religion, not to children's welfare." In another city we might have been drinking a white wine made for dry and sunny afternoons. At this restaurant our best option was a mysteriously ash-clouded lemonade infused with charcoal. I pointed out that New York City banned activated charcoal as an ingredient in foods and beverages in 2018.

Today, Riyadh is the second-largest city in the Arab Middle East by population, smaller than permanently dysfunctional Cairo and slightly larger than war-rattled Baghdad. After a brief 1960s flirtation with density and walkability overseen by a Greek urban planner, the infinite space of the desert was divided into giant kilometer-by-kilometer squares and the new oil economy ballooned the city into its current endlessness of shopping malls, walled villas, and eight-lane roads.

The old downtown, the one place in Riyadh with lively street life, is now a bustling neighborhood of Filipino and Pakistani migrant workers. Everywhere the traffic design verges on the vindictive: The main arteries are split between a tangle of service lanes, protected turning lanes, underpasses, exits, and entries that dismay, flummox, and terrify people who are familiar with it all.

Because these highwaylike streets lack any logical turnaround points, it is common to wind up on the wrong side of the road and have 20 minutes added to your journey.

Given the psychic stress of just getting around, it is a miracle, or perhaps a triumph of tribal-based desert social solidarity, that the people of Riyadh are so unfailingly easygoing and so lacking in any visible suspicion or aggressiveness once they're off the roads. It is perhaps the only major Middle Eastern city where bargaining in the souks feels impolite.

In Riyadh the current lack of dedicated public space, along with Salafism's hostility toward any shared public aesthetic experience, has displaced much of the artistic energy into interior design. Riyadh is glutted with sleekly decorated coffee shops that don't open until the early afternoon, and sometimes not until the late afternoon, since the city is nocturnal even in the winter. There are a conspicuous number of kitchen supply stores; the souks offer elaborate jewelry that's barely ever worn in public, along with oceans of perfume and incense. It is an economy set up around things a visitor will not see unless they're invited into a private home.

The public Riyadh is a pale outer layer of the private city, which is an almost complete inversion of life in New York, or even in Cairo. The homes themselves are inscrutable from the outside, walled-off domains with servants, endless coffee services, and majlises, courtlike traditional living rooms where friends and family lounge for hours on elegant floor cushions. Among the Riyadhi elite, it is common to have an entire separate, villa-size majlis where nobody actually lives.

The visible security presence in Riyadh is light both by regional standards and any standard, although things like the total public absence of alcohol or the state-mandated calorie counts on every single restaurant menu confirms the authorities' thoroughgoing control. There are plentiful signs of an enduring conservatism, like separate women's entrances for banks (newly optional), curtained-off booths at restaurants, and a relative lack of mixed company even at the hipper and newer coffee houses. The

reforms have not yet destroyed the existing social system. And yet, they are meant to turn Saudis into workers and taxpayers, and to change their attitudes toward everything from romance to art to foreign travel.

Perhaps MBS's project goes even further than that. In JAX, a government-created arts warehouse district near Diriyah, there is an elaborate exhibition previewing Neom, the planned city under construction on the northwestern coast of the Red Sea. Most of its millions of projected inhabitants will live in The Line, a single 100-mile structure, 660-by-1,500 feet, extending into the desert. What will be contained within it is scarcely imaginable, even by teams of world-renowned architects. The concept models at the JAX exhibition are baffling entanglements of walkways, staircases, upside-down skyscrapers and parkland stretching toward an uncannily indoor vanishing point. "This is a cognitive city that will not only adapt to your needs but learn to anticipate them," a soft and robotic female voice promised during an introductory video. It is "a portal connecting the digital and the physical, conceived by the visionary mind of his highness, Mohammed bin Salman."

There were no houses of worship depicted in The Line, no women in hijabs, no men in robes walking among the indoor rivers and hanging towers. Present-day Saudi Arabia is car country, but in Neom the whole city is on a single train line, and everything is meant to be walkable within 15 minutes. In The Line, your community would be defined by the people you lived near, not by your family or your origins.

"In essence, we are building a newly composed biome," one video informed me. What, if anything, did this mean, and was it meant to mean anything? Would the cantilevered parks become a suicide hazard? There couldn't be anything less Saudi than The Line, I thought, a place with no walled villas, a dream in the mind of an obscured, humanized

God, the god of architects or urban planners, or maybe of especially grandiose kings. Even Diriyah, despite its traditional-style architecture, represents a stark rejection of spacious homes walled off from forbidding highways—the kinds of places where the children might stick around until they get married—in favor of denser blocks of apartments and single-family houses. Diriyah will be connected to downtown Riyadh by a thick greenbelt planted with 20 million trees, which will have a pedestrian and bicycle highway named after the crown prince. Six million of those trees have already been planted, I was told.

In my discussions with Saudi officials, they always emphasized the speed of the reforms: The idea is to fund a massive economic and social transition while oil is still in high demand, and then build an entirely new economy in time for the 40% of the population that's now under 25-years-old to actually have something meaningful and productive to do with their lives. Part of the reason Saudi Arabia signed on to the recent Chinese-brokered diplomatic normalization with Iran was to pause the onslaught of Tehran-supported drone, missile, and cyber attacks against the kingdom, securing the peaceful conditions under which the crown's development package could be implemented. Several officials pointed out to me that speed was important because it meant the changes could rapidly become tangible to ordinary Saudis. This marked another curious instance of the monarchy showing a kind of backhanded concern for what its subjects think: The government recognizes that its citizens will not automatically trust that the country is changing unless they can see the changes themselves.

In Riyadh, Saudis can experience the permanence and seriousness of the reforms at Boulevard World, an Epcot-like circuit of nationally themed zones circling an ameboid artificial lake. I walked around it gobsmacked for hours, listening to tabla players at the fake Taj Mahal, watching a costumed procession through fake Morocco, dangling in a cable car over the robin's egg domes of fake Greece, and perusing the Naruto figurines in fake Japan. I considered eating at the Nathan's Famous in fake America, beneath the Golden Gate Bridge. In Dubai, the malls and theme parks are pitched at tourists, but at Boulevard World I went long spells without seeing even one other Westerner. Entire large families were out together, the adults in robes and abayas. Any dating was so discreet as to be invisible.

At AREA15, an amusement park version of a warehouse rave located a few buildings over from a fake Mayan pyramid, women in abayas and their robe-clad husbands watched a hijab-less female DJ bop to a bass-heavy mix of an Arabic wedding song. Strobes and lasers flashed. The turntable podium helpfully read "AREA15 Riyadh," perhaps so that Instagrammers might broadcast to their countrymen and to the rest of the world that yes, this really is happening—the changes are real, or else this wouldn't be possible.

Like so much else in reform-era Saudi Arabia, Boulevard World is credited to the unique vision of some prince or another. It was built in a mere 81 days according to Ahmed Al Mehmadi, the chief marketing and communications officer for the Saudi Arabian government's General Entertainment Authority. We met in the back of a hotel conference hall that had been converted into a vast office during Riyadh Season, an annual series of events focused on the capital during the milder winter months. There were "14 zones of activation" during Riyadh Season, Al Mehmadi explained. Behind him was row after row of young adults in a mix of Western and Middle Eastern business-casual dress whose age seemed to average out to 25 at most.

Al Mehmadi, raised partly in London and educated in Riyadh, wore a long white robe, and had a prayer rug and a small statuette of a white Arabian stallion on his desk.

Boulevard World, he said, was home to the world's largest statue of Grendizer, a character from a globally popular anime franchise that he'd loved as a child in Saudi Arabia in the '90s.

I asked Al Mehmadi if there was some deeper message to Boulevard World. Maybe the place is telling Saudis not to fear other nations or cultures after a long spell of paranoiac conservative governance? It was much simpler than that, Al Mehmadi replied. "We're telling people you can enjoy your life, you can enjoy being here." Saudis didn't have to travel to Dubai to go to a theme park anymore. And no one had forced anyone to go to Boulevard World—this was something Saudis had apparently already wanted, and the government had now given it to them. By this point, "People are used to a certain way of living," Al Mehmadi said of the reforms. "It can't go back."

For now, the Saudi system has brought newfound normalcy to 35 million people in a time when the Arab republics collapsed into mayhem and every regional democratization effort foundered, backslid, or failed. But even if the reforms stick, at some point, maybe 30 years from now—which is both a long time and also less time than it seems—the majority of Saudis will have no strong memory of how oppressive their country used to be. For the reforms to have really been successful, those future Saudis will have to believe in the monarchy for reasons other than the half-forgotten opening of an earlier generation. Something larger has to endure.

To that end, a multi-square-kilometer dust pit east of downtown Riyadh, now a construction site of terrifyingly Pharaonic scope, will be the location of King Salman Park. A futuristic collection of museums

and cultural institutions called the Royal Arts Complex will run through the park's central axis. The government has already launched two arts biennales, one held under the canopies of the former hajj terminal at the Jeddah airport, and one in the desert city of al-Ula, near a notable collection of ancient Nabatean ruins. A cultural ecosystem, along with a burgeoning local fine art market, has been decreed into existence. "If you're developing an arts sector," one government official pointed out, "a biennale is the end of the value chain."

Art existed in Saudi Arabia before the reforms, just as art has existed in every human context across all of time. As the internationally known Saudi artist Abdulnasser Gharem explained to me, a would-be artist in his country used to encounter the paradoxes of the state's fundamentalist ideology even as a young child. "From the first day of elementary school, when they were teaching us to practice the execution of images in schoolbooks," he recalled, "we had to draw a line across the necks of all creatures with a soul, and the heads of images of animals and people. The teachers said: To create an image is the job of Allah. If

you leave it to exist, you are going to be punished and go to hell. I was only 6 years old And I was wondering why I had to do this, because those images were there on the paper. The government had printed them."

Gharem joined the military to "hide from being an artist," he told me. He spent 25 years as an armory and supply specialist and retired as a lieutenant colonel. Then he became perhaps the leading conceptual artist in Saudi Arabia, someone who gained global renown while working within the strict limits of a system he intimately knew, and to which he remained loyal.

A decade before the reforms, his ghostly photographs of the mushroom-topped, nonnative trees that were often planted along city streets became a comment on how unnatural, constructed, and imposed the national commons had become. In another photo from the early 2000s, a Quranic word meaning "path" repeatedly appeared on a bridge where villagers had died during a flash flood, sheltering there on the advice of a local sheikh. Obedience can either rescue you or kill you, the work suggested.

Gharem's studio is in a high-ceilinged villa in a Riyadh neighborhood that had been trendy in the '60s and '70s, during the city's initial period of rapid expansion. The house has a crystalline wall of high windows, a cactus garden, and that most essential of Riyadh amenities, a wall that blocks any view from the outside. In the studio there are intriguing mounds of found objects awaiting some artistic use. Why the pile of antique luggage? "I was in the military for 25 years," was Gharem's full explanation. A multivolume set of religious texts, the ones where the spines combine to spell out a Quranic phrase in Arabic, sat near books dedicated to the works of Richard Serra, Ai Weiwei, and James Turrell. Gharem himself had a wiry frame and bushy gray hair. He wore turquoise shoes and a florid button-up shirt, and smoked liberally.

"I belong to freedom of thought more than freedom of expression," Gharem explained.

"The freedom of thought is a human right, and a person's free actions occur primarily in the mind and not in nature. "

"As an artist," he added, "you can't fall back on where you belong."

Thanks to the reforms, someone like Gharem, who believes that an artist can never become overly captive to their surroundings or to their own identity, is now in the strange position of having to be skeptical of something that's directly helped him. "You can be an artist—not hiding like before," he said of the changes he's seen since 2016. "The government gives us infrastructure we never would have dreamed of when we were young." In an earlier time, "You never would've told your neighbor you were taking your daughter to a private piano teacher. "Today we are living a grand narrative: The enlightenment that we were waiting for has begun from within," he continued. "Despite the fact that some perceive it as a harsh enlightenment, there is great progress."

'The great majority of Saudis still didn't know who Swedish House Mafia was, but there were relatively privileged teenagers on hand whose lives would probably never be the same again.

Dubai, the Gulf's reigning logistics and financial hub and one of the Middle East's few real bastions of cosmopolitanism, is often seen as the value proposition for what a more liberal Saudi Arabia could be. But one important commonality between Dubai and whatever Saudi Arabia is becoming is that neither are democratic accomplishments. What disturbs an American visitor about Riyadh, and Dubai for that matter, is the possibility that for the time being, liberal idealism has little it can credibly add to the market-driven vision of order, harmony, and ambition that surrounds them. The enlightenment might be harsh. Did that mean it couldn't also be real?

After the Formula 1 qualifier was over, there was an after-party where Charlie Puth performed in front of tens of thousands of teenagers cloaked in darkness. No, this wasn't some different and less-famous person named Charlie, I realized shortly after arriving midset. One of the world's biggest pop stars and TikTok icons seemed to really be enjoying himself up there, dressed in a red leather jacket with cream-colored sleeves. "Your food is the best food I've ever had in the entire world," he gushed, with visible surprise at how nonmedieval his host country had proved to be. He read signs in the crowd between numbers: "'Hii, with two i's. Yes, hello!" He sang "Loser," a song about dating and alcohol abuse, here in a dry country where quasi-arranged marriages are still common. "Thanks for being one of the most impressive crowds we've ever played for," he beamed.

Next up was Swedish House Mafia, who headlined Coachella last year. "I don't know how they're going to dance to Swedish House Mafia without any drinks," wondered a Frenchman watching next to

me on the VIP deck, before correctly predicting that Sergio Perez would win the next day's grand prix.

The robe people, the well-connected types in their mid-30s, dominated the sedate and uncrowded club section, which loomed over a festival-sized pit. I set out for the lower shadows, curious as to which Saudis belonged in the less rarified strata of concertgoers. What I saw were thousands of young people practicing at being mirror images of American teens: The boys wore Death Row Records hoodies and fake Balenciaga, and I spotted dew rags, tight leather jackets, cornrows, and a shirt coated in black sequins. Travis Scott, popular in Saudi Arabia, was headlining the post-race show the next night.

The girls mostly wore jeans; exposed belly buttons were about as common as hijabs, which is to say the number of both was noticeably higher than zero. There was plentiful, unashamed mixed company, although I did see a couple jerk their heads away from each other mid-kiss, realizing they were now under the floodlights near the exit of the hulking amphitheater. What will happen in a few years when half the guys here are drunk? I wondered. Maybe half of them were already drunk and their cultural environment had made them adept at keeping it secret. It was awfully dark up front.

Swedish House Mafia was a black outline against a horizon of screens, lasers, and bursts of fire. They played at supernatural volumes, the punishing bass combining with naive peals of melody to induce brief spells of disembodiment. The great majority of Saudis still didn't know who Swedish House Mafia was, but there were relatively privileged teenagers on hand whose lives would probably never be the same again, and who—perhaps without consciously realizing it—had just felt the exhilaration of seeing their world begin and end in the same flash of light.
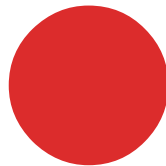
*This story originally appeared in Tablet Magazine, at tabletmag.com, and is reprinted with permission.*

# THE CORPORATION IN 2050

*Revisiting the predictions made in 2015*

**Interview with Stowe Boyd**

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Stowe Boyd, an internationally recognized work futurist, spoke with Border|Land about how companies will face climate change, AI and inequality. The through line of our conversation was an article Stowe wrote in 2015 for Wired Magazine called "What will a corporation look like in 2050".

*"I was challenged by the editors at Work: Reimagined to imagine what a corporation might look like in 2050. My immediate response was 'that's a long way off.' But it does take an incredibly long time to make foundational changes in society.*

*Rather than extrapolating from the present — which leads to very boring stories about the future — I'll pick several forces that could have a major impact on the world of business in 2050, and imagine edge cases. I've selected three extremely pressing problems, and*
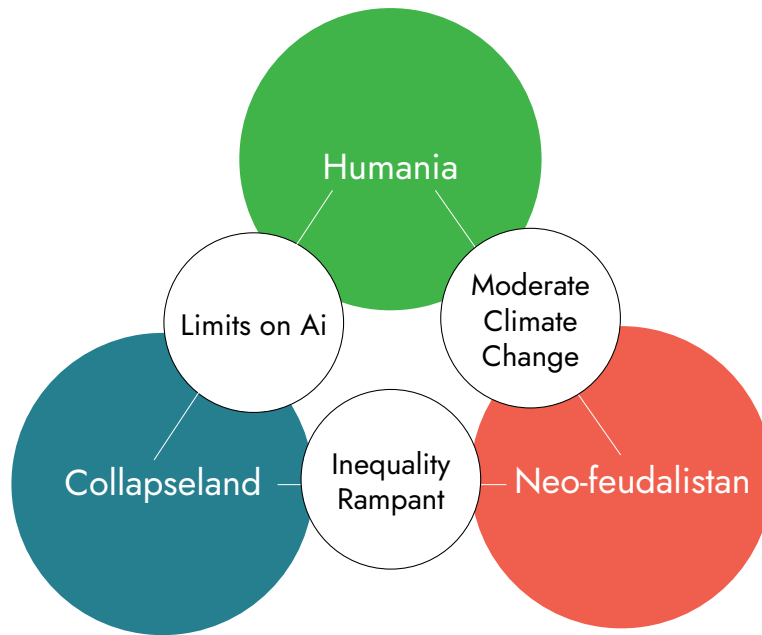
*their impact on jobs and work: economic inequality, climate change, and artificials (AI and robots).*

*Humania is the most egalitarian and democratic scenario. After growing concern about inequality, climate, and AI, in the 2020s Western nations — and later other developing countries — were hit by a 'Human Spring.' New populist movements rose up and rejected the status quo, demanding fundamental change.*

*In Neo-feudalistan, the Human Spring uprising fizzled out like the Occupy movement in the 2010s. As a result, the concentration of wealth and power continues and political and economic power in 2050 is held in fewer hands than in 2015.*

*Collapseland is where everything goes pear shaped. Dithering by governments and corporations allowed climate change to push the world into increased heat, drought, and violent weather. The Human Spring led to a conservative backlash and suppression of the movement. But governments and corporations get their act together in the late 2020s and 2030s to avert an extinction event via global adoption of solar.*

*The above is an edited excerpt. For the full article, google "stowe boyd wired 2050".*

8 years on we decided to talk to Stowe about his predictions and how (if) he has updated his world view given the fast pace of change we are living through.

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity*

**Looking back at your view of Corporations in 2050 written in 2015, what has changed and what has not?**

"We're not there. That's less than 10 years now. The thing I conjectured in the piece was that there would be a thing called the Human Spring. That would happen some time in the 20s, so now. And I still got 6 years for that to happen. It's possible that it could come together. The fundamental thing was that people basically rose up and said "we have to handle these amazingly problematic issues; climate change, financial inequality and the rise of AI.""

It hasn't happened yet. But I am still hopeful. This year is the hottest year ever and everything is on fire. People are becoming acutely aware that climate change has already happened."

Large Language Models (LLMs) including ChatGPT are concerning to many and also seen as intruding in the workplace.

And of course, Income inequality is the driver for all these strikes we are seeing now. In the UK, for example, a number of organisations, unions, industries, like what's going on in Hollywood now. There is an unusual amount of striking, not just renegotiating contracts."

For Boyd, these are key indicators that there is a human movement brewing and his optimism for Humania (a human uprising to deal with climate change, AI and financial inequality) remains alive today.

**Which of the 3 factors would you remove from your list, if you could?**

"Well, climate change can't be (removed). Insurance companies are finding it impossible to assess the risks of climate change. Companies that insure homes in Florida have left the state or gone bankrupt.", pointed out Boyd.

With climate change accelerating, companies are also being forced by, what Boyd called, ludicrous regulations prohibiting the use of risk prediction models for climate change events likely to happen in the future.

"I was reading about the fires in Canada. The fires are so hot, that the techniques we have for fighting fires won't work. So for example, those very expensive jets that go up and dump water on fire. Fires are so hot, the water evaporates before it hits the ground. So, it just doesn't work. The techniques and technologies we have, don't work.

So, people just don't know how they're going to deal with these wildfires. We have no answers to that question. So, climate becomes the dominant thing. It's ridiculous."

Climate change destabilised everything and there is a need to address it on a war footing, he emphasised.

The solution for Climate Change will need to come from the government rather than individual corporations making small improvements, Boyd insisted.

**You've talked a lot about going into postnormal times. Are our corporations experiencing this postnormal era? And how should companies think about postnormal, multipolar, existential threats?**

I think some aspects of the notion of the postnormal era that we're living in are sort of generally accepted. 2005 is where I draw the line. It was the tipping point, where all of a sudden, more than 50% of people working, had non repetitive knowledge work kind of jobs. How businesses are managed, what people did, what they called work, what skills companies were looking for, what kind of technologies they had to use, everything became different.

Postnormal was borrowed from a couple of guys working on postnormal science, where they were saying the way that science was conducted and changed roughly around the same time. And that the old paradigms and thinking about problem solving and so on, have to change dramatically too.

Moving into the postnormal world had an enormous impact on how corporations work. For one, we wouldn't have been able to push all the work out to the people working at home in the pandemic, if we were still in an agrarian economy, or an industrial economy.

In the past workers would have to go to the factory to put the cars together, but in a postnormal economy, it was easily possible. All the people who still had to go to work, the frontline workers and so on that we clapped our hands for are not the majority.
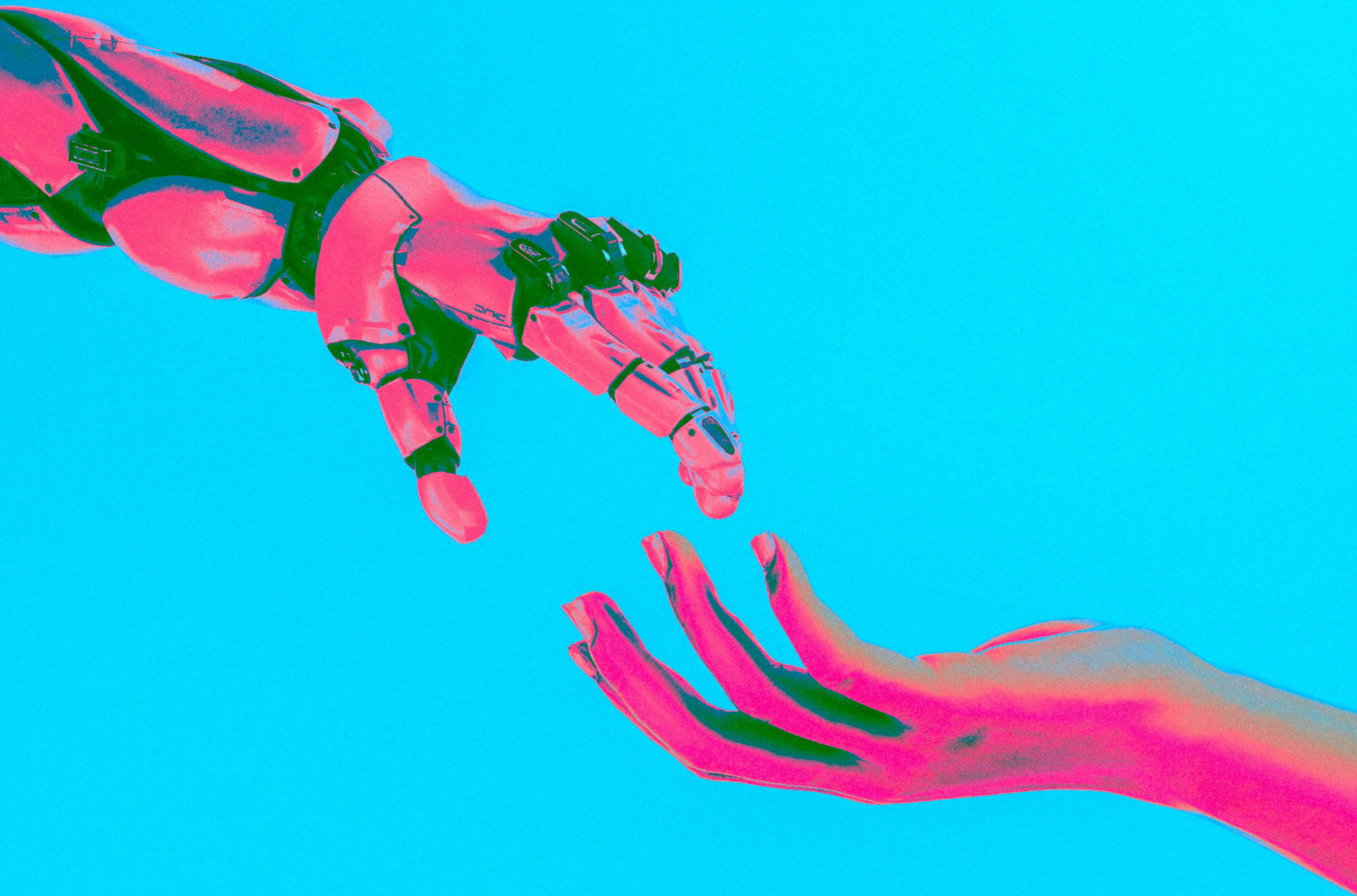
Most of the people are knowledge workers, and they are able to work out in their kitchens. We take it as a given now that the world can operate that way, because we're in the postnormal era, Boyd summarised about the current times we live in.

**What are bumps, if any, in the road as we transition into an era of widespread AI use?**

I think there is a way to assess possible threats from AI. Some are economic, like the possibility that it will put a lot of people out of work. Another, of becoming sentient and deciding to go to war against people. And a whole bunch of things in between, like figuring out better ways to fold proteins and come up with new cures for horrible diseases."

But the one thing that Boyd thinks is most critical, is not pursuing AI to increase economic inequality. He believes that we should set up a system where people who are no longer needed for work would still have some kind of income.

He offers an alternative view in which AI is adopted in a piecemeal fashion.

"We will find that increasingly workers will form unions and to a greater extent than in the past. They will have actual bargaining power and they will try to push towards industry wide agreements, which are not legal in the United States. They will push for agreements that will regulate the use of AI."

For example, during the period when we transitioned from people working in factories to automated machines, unions demanded that the people currently employed would get their wages paid until their hypothetical day of retirement. This resulted in people who were sitting in a room somewhere reading newspapers, because the deal that the unions had fought for, led to them having a paying job, even though they weren't doing any work. This is the wrong mode to copy this time around" AI as a particular kind of technology should be used for a certain set of things, like solving a problem that human beings can't do themselves, for whatever reason, or can't undertake themselves."

"The use of AI to put people out of work and make things cheaper for the corporations is something that should be regulated, and only be allowed, as an exception.

We're seeing unions rising up to protect employees in Hollywood who act, write, direct, score the music, and so on as A.I becomes more dominant there. Also, the questions we're hearing from the House of Representatives and Senate about AI risks, and how to reign it in point to Humania being the catalyst to prevent A.I from obliterating 70% of jobs.

In a perfect world, it would be great to have AI running everything for us. But in an unstable world with a great deal of problems we're trying to fix, the last thing we need is ubiquitous AI, a destabilizer."

*If you're looking for new insights into both well-documented and newly-emerging issues around the ways we work, head over to WorkFutures on Substack. Stowe writes at WorkFutures.io about the economics and ecology of work, in a time of accelerating uncertainty in our lives, society, and business.*
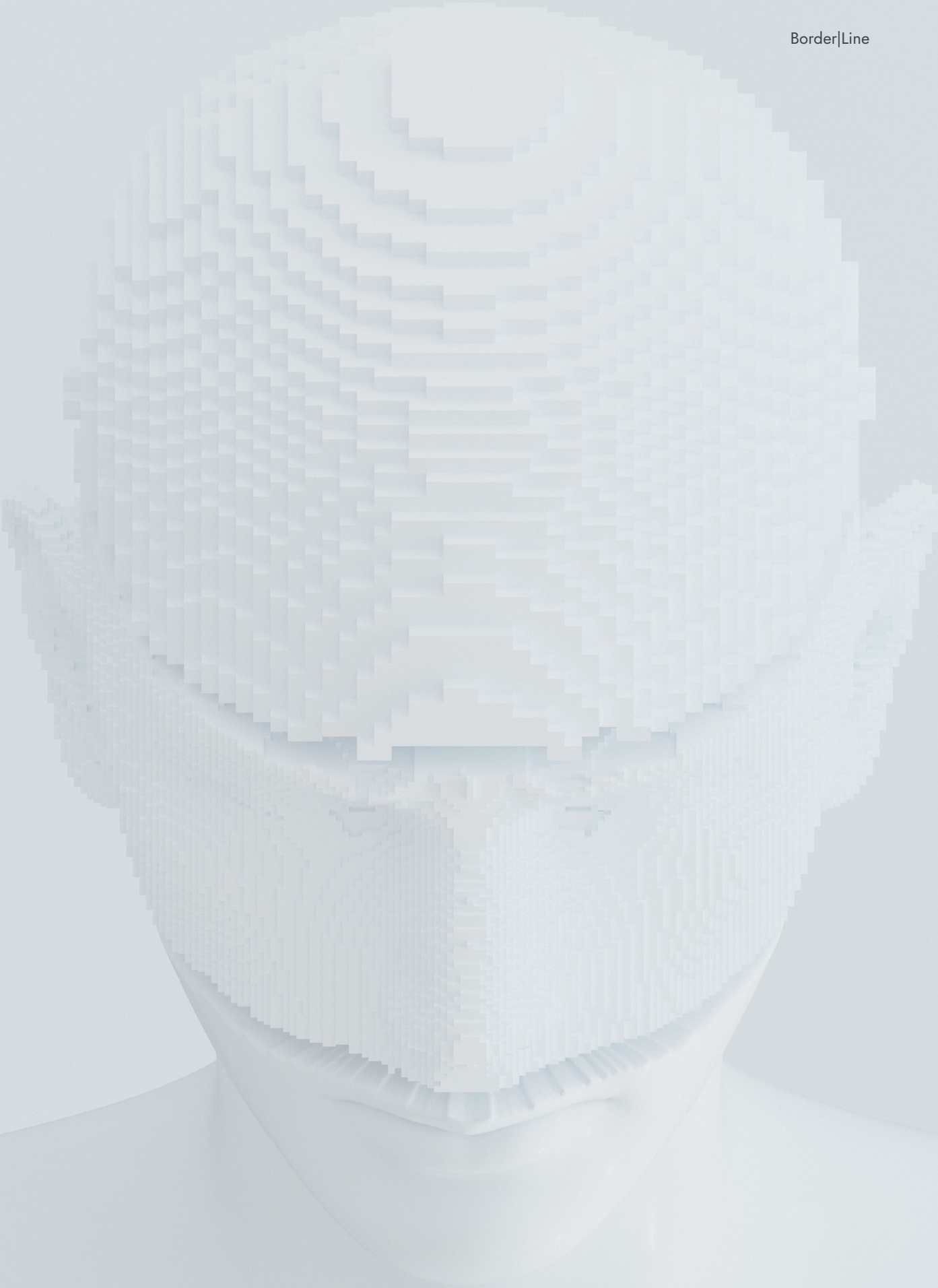
# V.   Exclusive

# PEOPLE, MINDSET and LANGUAGE: THE FUTURE CULTURE EMBODIED

*Excerpt from forthcoming book Future Culture:*
*How to build a future ready organization through leadership*

**By Susan Cox-Smith and Scott Smith**

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### The future never really stops coming

Hiring in future-focused roles boomed in 2020, and has continued booming into 2023 as everything from the pandemic to conflict in Ukraine to a rolling panoply of disruptions — these days referred to as "polycrisis"— have left their mark. Everyone wants better forward vision, and many organizations have been forced to confront just how little actual foresight they have developed capacity for.

Of course, just naming an internal manager of foresight or hiring a director of futures doesn't magically create capacity for critical prospection. The detailed inventory of needs and the acquisition of tools and skills even within a small team takes time and needs to be situated properly in the broader context of strategic decision-making. Organizations need to gain access to intelligence about possible futures, so they can feed it into their long-term planning, or better yet, fully develop their own intelligence. Workflows and systems need to be thought out, knowledge accumulated, and processes established; a future culture created.

### Finding your future people

An individual or small team may be trained to effectively imagine and design for possible futures, with new awareness and attitudes about opportunity, uncertainty and risk, yet, if the rest of an organization remains rooted in the present, this effectively quarantines the future. The lack of a deeper, wider future-facing culture creates a disconnect, relegating this capacity into the isolated islands where it initially takes root. This isolation can stall, or even worse, terminate, any real progress toward becoming future-ready, negating the investment in building foundational capacity.

This is why investing in a company-wide future culture is so important for building a successful futures-focused organization. Not everyone has to be a full-time futurist, but enabling colleagues to feel more comfortable thinking about uncertainty and possibility is very valuable. Teaching them the language and supporting their efforts to apply futures approaches is even more so.

If the pandemic taught us anything, being prepared for unexpected situations might be top of mind for a majority of individuals and organizations today. Having a contingency plan, understanding the impacts of a decision, or

anticipating unintended consequences are all skills more of us have developed over the past few years. In other words, More and more people are activating their capacity for anticipation, but much of it remains unfocused often due to indistinct framing of the skills and capacities needed.

Niklas Larsen, Senior Advisor at the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies explains that, "The better humans can become at understanding different explanations of and methods for imagining the future, the less reason there will be to fear the future, and the better they will be able to harness future opportunities and make sense of change and novelty." By including those in the broader body of an organization, many will develop new insight into the work they are doing for today, which makes products, services or policies more resilient in the face of this polycrisis..

Those who can anticipate change and express how change may impact the future have a heightened instinct for making better tactical and strategic decisions. Within Changeist, the global foresight consultancy we lead, we've started thinking of people who fit this description as "high anticipatory potential individuals" or HAPIs for short.

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[1] Larsen, N. (2020) 'What is "futures literacy" and why is it important?', FARSIGHT, 25 June. Available at: https://medium.com/copenhagen-institute-for-futures-studies/what-is-futures-literacy-and-why-is-it-important-a27f24b983d8 (Accessed: 16 December 2022).

The first step in building a future culture is finding the people who can best model the mindset. People come first. An organization with a strong future culture will develop a network of people throughout who can communicate across departmental lines, weaving soft networks with like-minded colleagues as they go.

## HAPI Traits

When setting out to establish a future culture within an organization, these are some traits to look for when building an internal capability from scratch, or knitting together a network:

**Curious** — People who exhibit a heightened ability to notice change can become the seeds for establishing a more deeply-rooted future culture.

Aware — The best scanners have a wider view of the world, and cultivate a habit of picking up new information.

**Open-minded** — Encouraging insight sharpening through engaging people who have an openness to exchange ideas can build a stronger future culture and provide fresh insights to make an organization better at anticipating change.

**Adaptable** — Keeping an open mind, taking on new information and being willing to consider other points-of-view is a deeply important, and increasingly hard to find characteristic.

**Entrepreneurial** — People taking initiative is a common theme through many of our discussions, and rings true with our own experience.

**Empathetic** — In a world of cold, dispassionate data and measurable outcomes, having an understanding of the breadth of the human condition can be highly valuable in futuring.

**Comfortable with uncertainty** — People who can approach uncertainty with discernment for potential risks and opportunities are able to more effectively move beyond present-day constraints to imagine more robust outcomes in the future.

**Attuned to impacts** — An ability to describe impacts, or implications of change over time, is one of the most valuable traits on this list.

**Systems thinking** — We point to this above, but it's worth saying clearly: futuring is all about considering complexity and the many interactions within a system or systems, rather than reducing things to simplest terms or making insider predictions.

While it may not be immediately possible to begin adding the traits described above to job descriptions, it is worth approaching HR to include language that suggests these traits are "nice to haves" when posting for new positions within a team or organization. Those in charge of staffing may not be familiar with the nature of the work, which is where such a discussion can be useful. Revising job descriptions to reflect an investment in a future culture also helps to reframe "culture fit" as a new dynamic for modern hiring practices.

## Language and Communication: What we speak, we create

Traits and capabilities are just the starting point for what comes next. Futuring, as we call it, is first and foremost a practice consisting of mental models and their social negotiation, so the use of language is as central to building out a future culture. Because it is the central means of transmission of the lenses, tools, ideas and stories that possible, plausible, probable and preferable futures are made up of.

In their book "The Invention of Tomorrow: a Natural History of Foresight," Thomas Suddendorf, Jonathan Redshaw and Adam Bulley describe two ways language helps us in futuring. The first is enabling what they call "nested scenario building," or the ability to imagine alternative future situations and place them inside other futures.

The second is through the "urge to connect," or the desire to share futures we imagine with others. Because of this, language and communication form a crucial part of how people's perceptions of the future get made and remade, and how they become part of the fabric of a social culture.

Language is a critical building block of a future culture, as it sends new ideas, terms and even unfamiliar types of communication around the organization. This can be a regular part of the mind-shift needed to push the culture into a more forward-thinking stance. This often takes place through things like trend presentations or scenario reports, the typical artifacts of legacy future culture in business and government.

These well-recognized communication formats have a particular staying power and currency precisely because they are so familiar—people remember the memorable, and spread ideas they feel have resonance — a trend, a scenario, or a compelling vision about what might be next. As the most highly-filtered, carefully-constructed form of futures media, they are deemed safe to circulate to non-expert hands, and become one of the important early carriers of an internal future culture, inviting a wider audience to align understanding and converge around their meaning.

These mundane tools provide a useful opportunity to "create affordances" for the future, as we often describe them, borrowing a term from interaction design. This means these formats, when well-designed, can constructively introduce new ideas and memorable phrases as a way for non-experts to access or "carry" a particular idea, insight about or image of the future with them.

Often, the names of trends or scenarios will carry on having a life of their own long after the original report or deck is itself out of circulation. They become part of the important internal futures folklore of an organization.

## Driving conversations

In the end, the main value of stimulating the use of future-facing language inside an organization is to drive conversations — to put that language in motion. These conversations are both the day-to-day discussions between colleagues in a hallway, on a call, or on chat, but also the strategic conversations among organizational leadership ("What do we know about X? What threat does Y pose to us long-term? Are we going to be the type of company that does Z?").

Building common understanding around the future — and the language needed to describe it — is a fundamental building block of these strategic conversations, according to Mick Costigan, Vice-President, Salesforce Futures at Salesforce, and longtime professional futurist. "There are three parts to any successful strategic conversation," he told us. "First, you build a shared understanding. [Next] you frame choices, and then make decisions. You can't do more than one at any one time. You have to do them in that sequence. And if you haven't done step one, you won't be able to do step two, it'll fall apart."

Future language can't run on an oral culture alone, however. That would just expose the organization to a game of telephone, as different understandings creep in. Having common resources to consult and places to aggregate what we know about a concept or trend, provides an important common touchpoint to make sure language and knowledge get captured and sufficiently codified so that it forms a common vocabulary for an entire organization.

*This is an edited extract from Future Cultures: How to Build a Future-Ready Organization Through Leadership by Scott Smith and Susan Cox-Smith. © 2023 and reproduced with permission from Kogan Page Ltd. All rights reserved.*

*Scott Smith is Founder and Managing Partner of Changeist. Susan Cox-Smith is Partner and Director, Experience at Changeist*

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[2] *Suddendorf, T., Redshaw, J. and Bulley, A. (2022) The invention of tomorrow: a natural history of foresight. First edition. New York: Basic Books.*
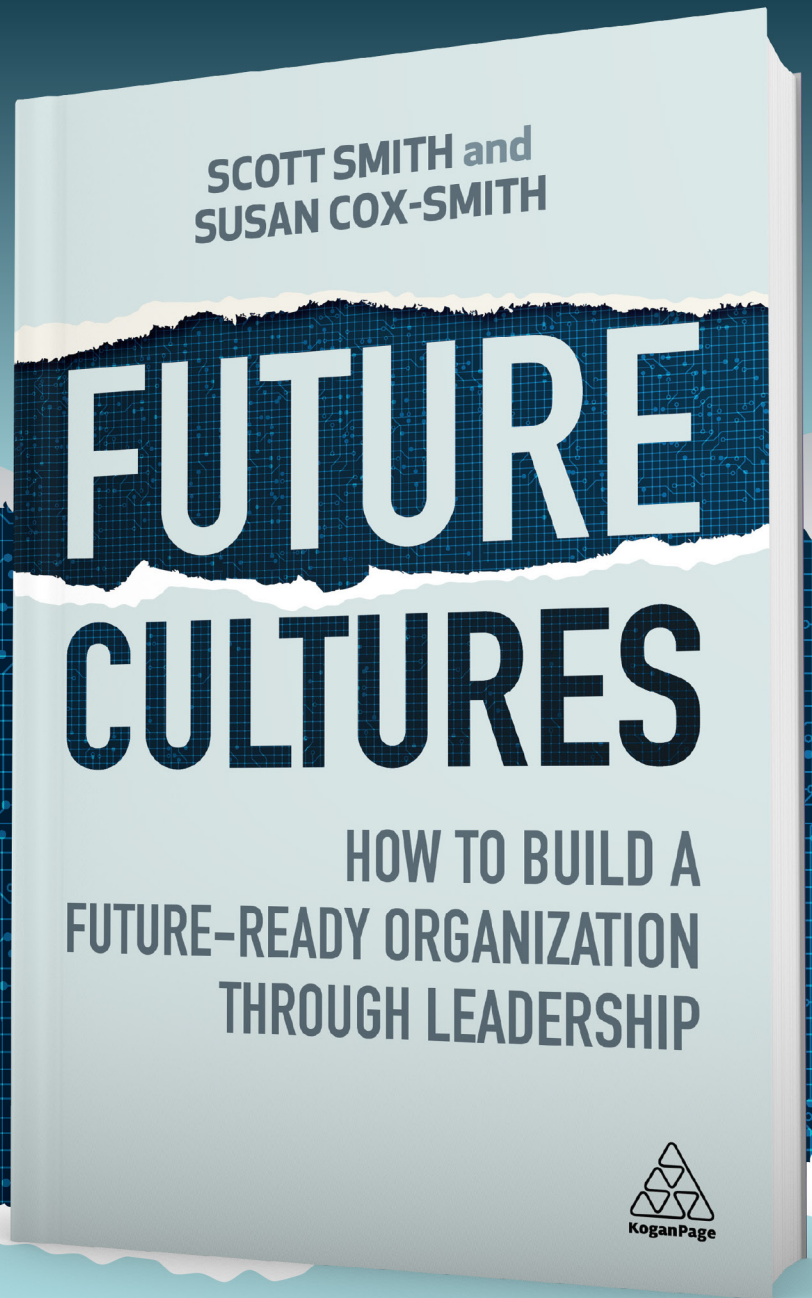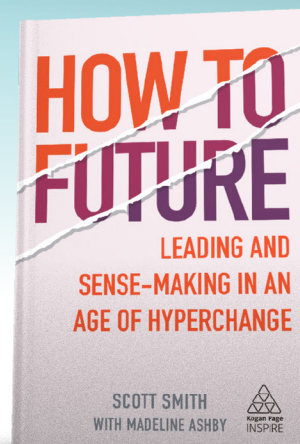
# VI.   Culture

# COMPANIES DON'T HAVE CULTURES. CULTURE HAS COMPANIES

*The evolution of DEI pt 1*

**Written by Border|Land**

———

The biggest movie of 2008 was The Dark Knight. The second Nolan Batman was the most anticipated movie of the year, in large part driven by the instantly classic Heath Ledger performance as the Joker.

Audiences got to see it just months after he died from an accidental overdose of prescription drugs, pushing the movie to critical and over $1B commercial acclaim.

The same weekend when Batman hit the cinema, another "to be acclaimed" movie hit theatres: Mamma Mia! Phyllida Lloyd's adaptation of the ABBA musical with Meryl Streep.

A classic case of counterprogramming, Mamma Mia! offered relief from the darkness of Batman. And it worked. Mamma Mia! eventually earned $608 million.

Counterprogramming is the act of broadcasting a piece that stands in stark contrast to another, simultaneous offering. This is orchestrated with the ambition of captivating an audience's attention.

At its core, it's playing with cultural tension, where one studio crafts a narrative that serves as an antithesis to the spectacle presented by its competitor. It's less about opposition and more about providing a diverse palette from which the audience can paint their own media experience.

As it turns out, it would be a long time before we'd see it happen again. Because also in 2008, Marvel released their first feature film, Iron Man.

The movie smashed it and started 15 years of Marvel/superhero blanketing cinema's and reigning supreme at the box office and in culture. More and more movies became part of an ever-expanding Marvel universe. This momentum also created space for new ideas and definitions of what it meant to be a superhero. To critical and commercial success.

At the same time as Marvel was gearing up to dominate, in the business world post the '08 crisis, DEI was beginning to build its narrative universe that would blanket business discourse for the next 15 years.

## DEI 1.0

In the 60's—70's the dominant business metaphor was war. Baby Boomers growing up with G.I parents, and then entering the workforce saw to that. How we thought about business (hierarchically), what managers were seen like (drill sergeants) and more was seen through the lens of combat.

For good and bad. In the 80's—90's the dominant metaphor and language was sports: competition, star-players and coaching all became the way we saw, did and thought about business.

The last decade, along with the rise of DEI, had as the dominant metaphor trauma/therapy. Safe spaces,reflecting, empathy; all terms most employees will have heard or said.

A "new classic" business book of this era, Never split the difference, tells the story how the FBI hostage negotiation team transitions from MBA-based tactics to ones rooted in psychology. We even have a word for this type of communication: therapy speak.

Now, anybody who has ever been to therapy (even better, group therapy) will recognise that a big part of therapy initially, is regulating your emotions.

For the first time hearing yourself say everything you kept hidden. In front of others. Without holding back.

Letting all the anger out [there are other emotions of course, but for the majority, anger is most suppressed].

And with the omnipresence of social media, the DEI era of 2010-2022, felt much like that initial phase of therapy.

Repressed anger at others finally and unfiltered, being expressed. Messy, and very much needed.

Also often loudly and for many on the receiving end, confusing, uncomfortable and hopefully clarifying [as anybody who's been on the receiving end of therapeutic anger can attest to]. With HR as the corporate Chief Therapy Officer.
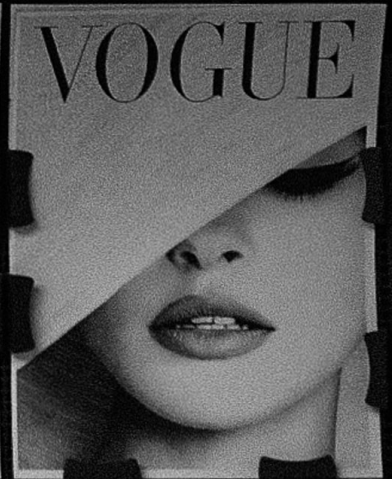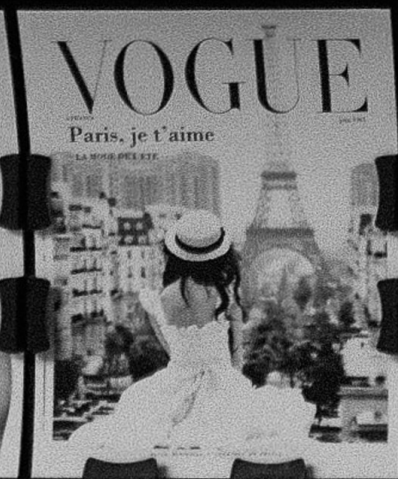
But the role of good therapy, as much as it is to let the anger out, is also to get you to a point where you move on from just being angry at others.

To not be stuck in victimhood, but to overcome it. And that means having difficult, tough conversations with others, but also within.

# THE FUTURE COMES FOR VOGUE..AND THE REST OF US

*What the power struggle at Vogue signals*

**Written by Grant McCracken**

———

A power struggle is playing out at Vogue. Several things hang in the balance. The future of a publication that helps construct our sense of taste.

The future of a culture that struggles to remain a culture. Specifically, this is a struggle between Edward Enninful and Anna Wintour.

I have been waiting for an insider's view of the contest, and found one in a brilliant essay by Kara Kennedy in The Spectator..

Enninful took the helm of British Vogue in 2017. He was determined to make Vogue about diversity, disruption, inclusivity, and lots of experiments. He wanted a Vogue that was a champion of women and especially the young.

<span style="color:red">"Disruption is important, because that's the only way the world can move forward. To the younger generation, I want to say 'be as fearless as you can and disrupt in your own way.'"</span>

In a word he was fearless. He had no doubt that "I'm probably going to get fired for making it inclusive, but at the same time I thought that would be great. Because at least I would have been true to myself."

As a culture, we are very good at disruption. Even at an institution as important as Vogue. We are so good at disruption that we are now testing the limits of our culture to cohere.

<span style="color:red">"[Enniful] was always pushing for the next thing that was seen as progressive, but I think the magazine started to lose itself in the process. He was following fads. It was no longer recognizable from the Vogue that he walked into," a Condé Nast employee told The Spectator."</span>

There it is.

1. A man called Enniful is determined to transform Vogue even at the cost of his career and the opportunity someday to take the helm at the great fashion publication.

2. A magazine pushes back, fearful that it will be consumed by fads and politics.

The answer used to be easy. All praise and power to the disruptor. All hail Enniful.

But these days it's not so simple.

However much we value politics, we are on the verge of "losing" ourselves. We want a "via media", a middle road, to use the famous phrase of one of England's first great fashion icons, Elizabeth I.

Who's going to build it?

*Trained as an anthropologist (Ph.D. University of Chicago), Grant McCracken has studied American culture for 25 years. He has worked for many organizations including Timberland, IKEA, Google, Netflix, Sony, Coca Cola, Delta, Oprah, IBM, Nike, and the Obama White House. He has taught at the University of Cambridge, MIT, and the Harvard Business School. He has authored fourteen books on topics as diverse as The New Honor Code; Big Hair. Chief Culture Officer argues for the creation of a cultural role in the C-Suite and was named one of the best innovation books by BusinessWeek in 2009. His newest book The Return of the Artisan, details the shift from the industrial to the artisanal.*

# ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

*The performative barrier to better business*

**Interview with Igor Schwarzmann**

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity*

"All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts." ~ William Shakespeare

"And to the degree that the individual maintains a show before others that he himself does not believe, he can come to experience a special kind of alienation from self and a special kind of wariness of others."
~ Erving Goffman

Border|Land: Igor, congratulations on the recent acquisition of your foresight and design consultancy. The future must look and feel bright and exciting!

Well, thank you so much. And as for the future…who knows..My former co-founder of third wave, studied future studies, and his master thesis was on future imaginaries.

Basically, the concept of future imaginaries is that there are certain aspects of our imagination about the future that we are aware of. But there are really big chunks of what we think of as the future that we are not constantly reevaluating.

And a lot of those concepts regarding what we think the future should be like, are based on culture that we consume, but are unaware that they're teaching our imagination what the future should be.

Border|Land: The future builds us as much as we build the future?

I think that creates a very interesting dynamic where we assume that we have to build the concepts that we've read about, heard or seen in our lifetime.

It's just interesting how our relationship to those concepts is always changing, but at the same time, we can't muster the will to assume that this is not what we're supposed to be pursuing. It's something else.

Take A.I. for example. It's interesting how we assume that AI is almost a physical law that we need to develop. But do we? Why are we pursuing that?

Border|Land: Like actors trying to find fresh ways of re-interpreting old characters, plays or movies instead of asking "why this story again"?

For a few years now I've been quite fascinated with the concept of suspension of disbelief. Like when you go into a cinema and you put yourself into that context. Where you watch a movie and you are not questioning that there is something called BarbieLand and that Barbie then switches to an actual country. You're not questioning any of those things.

For those two or three hours, we're prepared to not question the narrative presented because we want to be entertained, distracted, as part of a story somebody else wanted to tell.

Border|Land: Or for forty+ hours because we want to stay employed?

Exactly. Like how we suspend disbelieving the assumption that every business, every person needs to be the best at something. Obviously that can't be the case. But we pretend and so there is this stress of reacting to everything, because you're kind of stuck with this assumption "we need to be the best and can't allow someone to beat us".

And nobody asks why we need to be the best? Maybe being second best is totally fine. Maybe if you're a producer you're like "I just want to nail my product. It's not going to be the best but it's something people really like and I might be oscillating between second, third and fourth place in the market, but that's sufficient for me."

That's the untapped potential for organisational design; to get to a point where you're consciously not afraid of not becoming amazing in order to be of real value.

Border|Land: How do Business leaders react to this message?

It's been interesting. I'm not saying I always succeed, but I think creating that space where leaders allow themselves to say something that they wouldn't otherwise say, because they actually understand that that's what is really important, is something that's really motivating for me.

My assumption is that the only narratives and strategies that are worth scaling are the ones that scare the people who are doing them. Because otherwise, they're just doing innovation theatre; the performative aspect of needing to engage in innovation or change or transformation, because that's what others do or say or is expected in that role.

How you think that you're expected to talk about or react to AI. Or If you are a German Car manufacturer you are expected to react to Elon Musk tweets on X now.

Border|Land: So how do you help companies not be purely driven by the pressure of reacting to the present? Is it something along the lines of what Steve Jobs said, "I'm just waiting for the next wave"?

There are certain people, like Jobs, who have an intuition, fingerspitzengefühl about things to come. And for them, it works. But for the rest of us, having a certain kind of methodology of thinking about this stuff is needed. And not like a one-off exercise, but like an ongoing practice.

And so what we do, is to first of all tell people: there is no future. Future is the future until it becomes the present. So giving people agency or thinking about a concept of the future that they actually can influence is a really important part. We then help them see that they are currently operating from a specific triangle: the totality of the past, the pressure of the present, and the pull of the future.

What humans and most companies are focused on is the past. A lot of companies, especially in Western Europe, despite the fact that their narrative seems to be outdated, are financially still very successful with a business model from the past.

Border|LAnd: And that prevents them from allowing themselves to change?

How do you kind of tell yourself that you need to change while being very successful financially? I think it's a very hard thing to do.

And then there is this pressure of the present, where you are constantly busy reacting, because everybody is looking to Senior Leaders to answer the question "what does this change mean for us"?

What we don't think about enough is the pull off the future. The future is not one dot you are predetermined to arrive at, but it's a spectrum of possibilities. Understanding this really helps people to start telling different stories and not to predict future outcomes. By collecting those different stories we can then produce roadmaps back from the future to the here and now.

And when you create a lot of those roadmaps, you notice that a lot of futures are impacted by things we already have to do in the present. So if we do those things, they allow us to actually prepare ourselves for multiple outcomes, which is already kind of handy because as a company, you have only a limited kind of resources at the end.

Border|land: Many futures, limited resources. `Sounds like a recipe for paralysis by analysis?

Yes. I have an interesting weird example of that. It's to do with A.I. Of course, haha. One of our long term clients is the German equivalent of the BBC; Federalized multiple public broadcasting companies. Working independently, but under one banner. Yet at the same time, very little agency.

And so regarding A.I they wanted to know "how do we deal with AI"? And it's déjà vu all over again, because that was how they reacted to web 2.0 and social media emerging.

So instead of answering that question we pushed them to ask "what do we want to do with A.I.''? We did this to have a shared context in which to discuss this present-ing future of A.I.

The big barrier was to have them see that their people already use A.I, right? Because if you work with text and this almost free tool can help you reclaim more time while you WFH, so you can spend it with your kid or wash clothes or anything; obviously, you'll do it.

And, at that point, when you have no clear strategy about what you want to achieve, the technology will shape your organisation.

And so the question becomes "do we react to the features that those tools have presently"? Or do we engage in the hypothesis that those tools will be around? And how will they shape society? And how do we want to be part of that shaping?

That was really hard. It's almost impossible for people to assume that they can be part of shaping what AI will mean. And it's this meta problem that is a really big challenge.

A lot of narratives [like A.I] emerge with such overwhelming force and dominance, that people don't trust or believe that they can be part of the conversation, and influence it in a way that is substantial.

Broder|Land: What do you think is at the root of people, even very Senior Leaders, feeling like they don't have agency?

Well, I think the most important thing that I learned about strategy is that it is mostly about stuff that you don't want to do. It's a reductive act, not an additive kind of process.

It's interesting how the free market narrative operates around the fact that [and that's again performative] companies have to say that they have created something for a specific market. I would say that very few of the most successful companies are driven by what the market wants.

They are driven by what a few people are convinced is the best possible product, that then can be presented to a broad audience, and change the perspective of what the market should be like.

Very few people do that. In business or life. Most of us pretend, while really just reacting to the market or other people. That performative aspect of not acknowledging that we can actually just focus on our own thing, is where the lack of agency comes from.

"We are so human centred, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." It's all of those kinds of performative aspects that distract us from what it actually is that we bring to the table. It's a little bit fuzzy, I know. But that's the core problem: that performative thing.

I keep coming back to this performance aspect, because one book that influenced me personally quite a lot is by Erving Goffman, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life". He's a psychologist from, I think, the 60s. And he speaks a lot about what he calls the Dramaturgical Model, with people as performers.

Because when we, and Goffman writes about this, enter a certain social group, we have to maintain a certain persona, so that we can go through a day without feeling like we are being crushed by the complexities of everyday life.

Which means that unfortunately most of our agency is very performative

*Igor Schwarzmann is Senior Director Strategic Design at Edenspiekermann. He was one of the co-founders at Third Wave. Third Wave was a Berlin-based company specialised in foresight and strategic design that over the last 12 years advised more than 100 clients in the automotive, finance, media and publishing, and healthcare sectors, among others. Edenspiekermann acquired the consultancy last year.*

# COMPANIES DON'T HAVE CULTURES. CULTURE HAS COMPANIES

*The evolution of DEI pt 2*

## Written by Border|Land

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Harvey Dent said, "you either die a hero, or you live long enough to see yourself become the villain". Around 2022 that sort of happened to Marvel superheroes. And DEI.

Superhero fatigue became a thing; lower (but still great) sequel revenue, stale story telling, poor reviews, over saturation and spinoffs on big and small screen, created that impression and conversation.

Followed on, quietly at first, but louder as wider cultural conversations changed, by complaints of over-politicising, moralising and social engineering of what in essence is escapism.

Around that same time ('21-'22) media coverage/conversations around DEI started to change.

Terms like diversity fatigue, peak-wokeness became more pronounced in narratives.

On this point David Rozado has done amazing work visualising and analysing DEI language in the media. I strongly recommend if you haven't yet done so, to go and read his substack.

Along with less front page attention, journalists - when revisiting DEI related stories - often would delve deeper, writing and analysing issues with layers of nuance not evident before.

Media institutions, once in close alignment with the aspirations of progressive champions, seemed to delineate their journalistic purpose from the sociopolitical ones of activists.

### New York Times Word Usage Frequency (1970-2022)
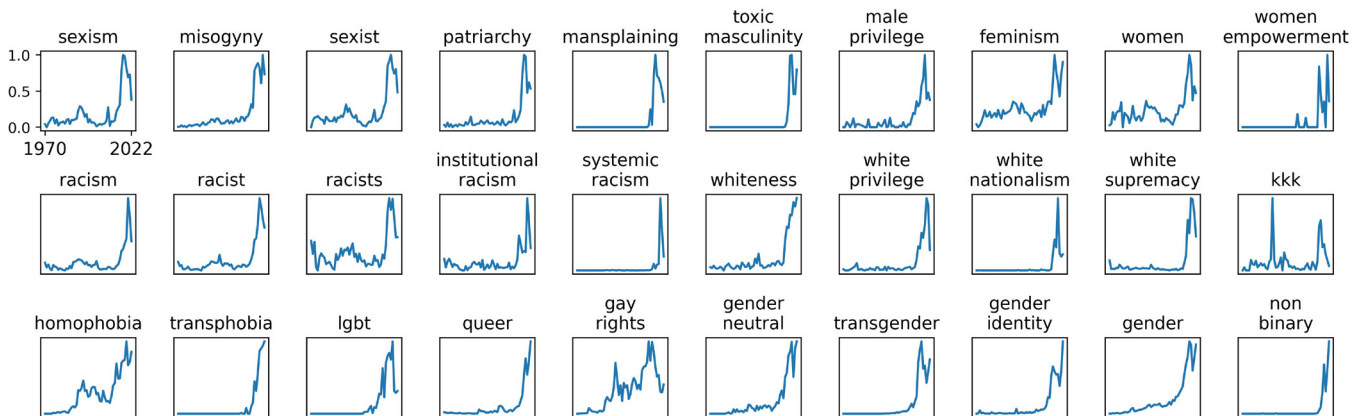
## DEI 2.0

There is no point denying the conflicts around issues of gender, free speech, race and culture. But the nature of the conflicts has started to change. Many remain firmly rooted in progressive vs conservative narratives. However, some conflicts have started to feel more like civil war.

The transgender debate is pitting self declared progressives against each other. And in the wake of the transgender debate, Muslims (longtime, if silent partners of progressives in the West) are standing up for their views.

Throughout North America and Europe, Muslim parents, kids and leaders are finding their voice and also finding their place in the progressive universe being questioned.

Teenagers and young adults seem to yearn for subversion and fun. Smoking is making a comeback. The grand narratives of cultural battles have left them a bit shell shocked. Too serious, too soon. And as the plates of culture shift, so too do the structures of corporate power.

Corporations [see BlackRock CEO Lary Fink's ESG remarks], appear to be reconfiguring their talking points, often to the dismay of stakeholders. The once sought-after role of Chief Diversity Officer seems less en vogue.

Now, as we've seen, part of this reconfiguring is driven by new emerging geopolitical superordinate goals. But is everything due to that?

Polarity saves relationships

Barbenheimer broke the superhero's back. It grossed over $2 billion at the worldwide box office, proving that audiences are captivated by vastly different films, narratives, subjects and points of view.

Cynics will dismiss this as just a 'movie' moment. But can we dismiss that Hollywood trusted and financially backed the hunch that audiences are at a point where cultural tension is not just tolerable, but again a desirable respite from the monolithic MCU narrative?

Now, because we've just had the first major counter-programme since 2008, does this mean we're reverting back to pre-2010 cultural thinking and doing? No.

The best thing about DEI 1.0 anger is that we can't unsee or unhear what has been exposed.

The bad/good thing about DEI 2.0 is that going forward, won't be as straight forward. Realignments are happening and will probably create new aesthetics that will confuse and/or offend all. From a corporate point of view DEI counterprogramming would not be about inviting more voices to find their place within preset DEI narrative and ERG structures.

It would be about having internal, senior lead discussions on if HR wants to keep reflecting or move to suppressing wider cultural sentiment, now that more sentiments don't fit old narratives and agenda's.

To investigate how much of DEI 1.0 support was based on alignment vs self-censorship. To harness the polarity to strengthen bonds, so employee trust and talent is not [further] lost.

The business of culture is getting more complicated and employees (like citizens) will find the ground beneath them less and less certain as new changes embrace us. Negative capability will become a must for all of us.

The good news?

Well, what doesn't kill us, will only make us stranger..

# FURTHER READING

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Below are some books that offer different insights, background, context and experiences related to the topics covered in this issue of Border|Land. If any of the topics caught your fancy, please check out the books below.

If you have any suggestions of your own that you think we and the readers should look into, let us know at **borderland@gapjumpers.me** subject: further reading. We'll feature them in our upcoming newsletter.
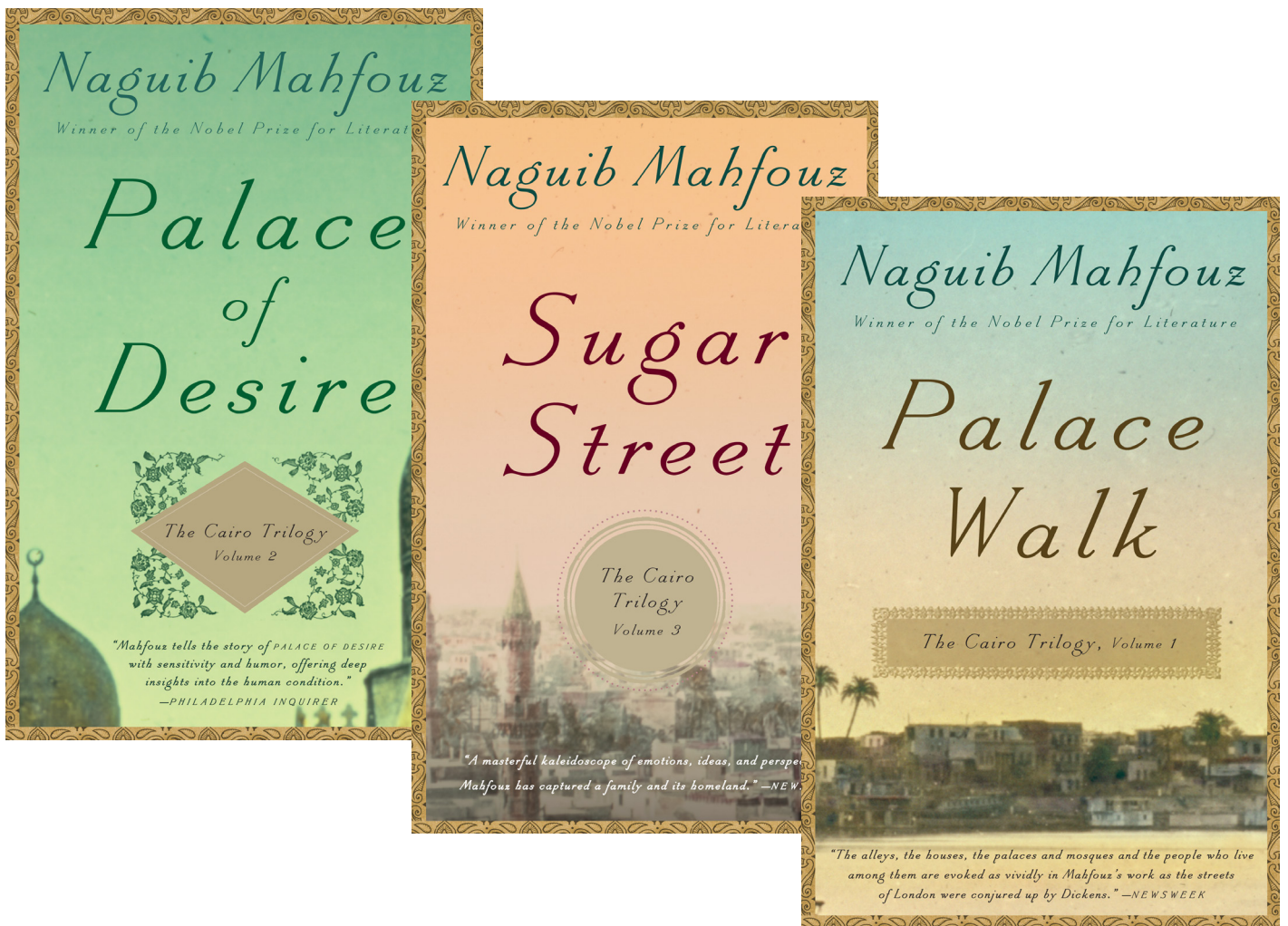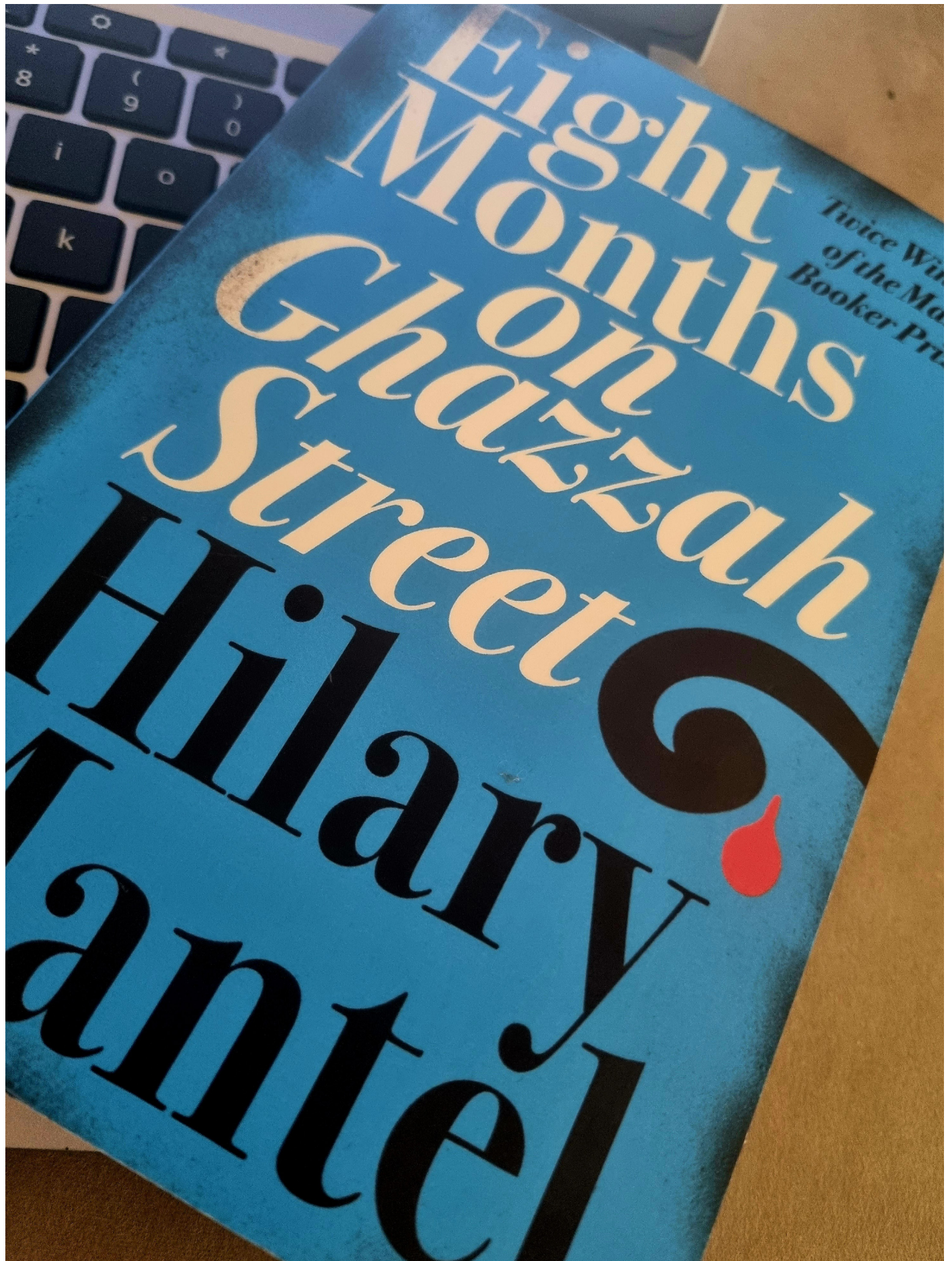
# Eight Months on Ghazzah Street

## Hilary Mantel

Twice Winner
of the Man
Booker Prize

# MODESTY
## A FASHION PARADOX

### HAFSA LODI

UNCOVERING THE CAUSES, CONTROVERSIES
AND KEY PLAYERS BEHIND THE GLOBAL TREND
TO CONCEAL, RATHER THAN REVEAL

# ERVING GOFFMAN

# The
# Presentation
# of
# Self
# in
# Everyday
# Life

# RORY MILLER

# DESERT KINGDOMS TO

THE RISE OF THE ARAB GULF

# GLOBAL POWERS

The Real Differences Between
Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X,
Boomers, and Silents—
and What They Mean
for America's Future

# generations

## JEAN M. TWENGE, PhD

author of *iGen*

# RAKIB EHSAN

# BEYOND
# GRIEVANCE

## WHAT THE LEFT GETS WRONG ABOUT ETHNIC MINORITIES

# The
# Generation
# Divide
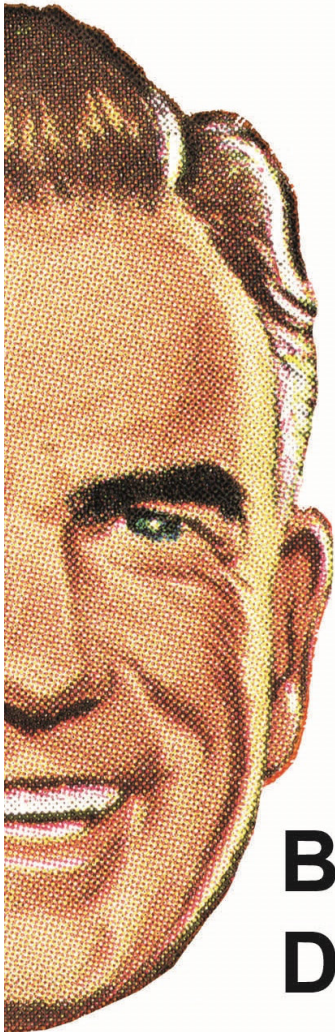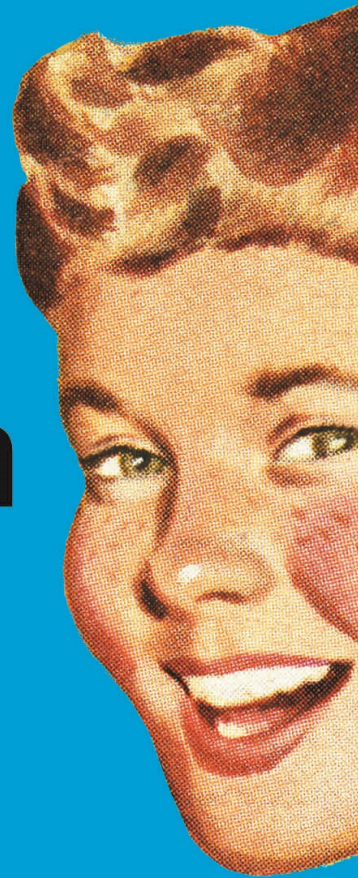
## Why We
## Can't
## Agree and
## Why We
## Should

## Bobby
## Duffy

# COLOPHON & CREDITS

# BORDER|LAND #2: PERFORMANCE ISSUE

Border|Land invites submissions on performance and competence.

Issue #2 is all about performance.

Partners. Potholes. Planes.

Everything just seems more underwhelming than before.

Yet we've never had more experts on every topic imaginable.

If everything is getting worse, why is that?

And if not, what makes us believe it is worse?

Reviews, interviews, essays, and views from inside the corporation

and outside in wider culture are all welcome.


Send pitches or drafts to [borderland@gapjumpers.me](mailto:borderland@gapjumpers.me), subject: performance.

# Border|Land

Where Culture Bleeds Into Corporations *#02*

## P E R F O R M A N C E   I S S U E