

# The Cosmopolitan

Thursday

6th March 2025

Edition #2/2025

The first BCS student school Newspaper:

## BCSNBC Newspaper

Friday

18.02.22

Edition #1

**DANGER!!!  
NO ENTRY FOR  
CHILDREN!!!**

### How to find out school secrets

STELLA K, 9A

You might have noticed a blank sign on the door of the room I used to go to last year—the room—since the end of the term it has been next to the Playground Freeplay area. It was dangerous and mysterious. The room was blocked, so is the windowpane in door. After months, I decided the mystery had to be lifted.

First, I decided to ask some students for their suspicions of the use of the room. A ninth grader speculated that it was probable that the room had been turned into a sauna for the teachers, whilst another believed that the room was for the principal's office. I then decided to interview the people who knew the secret—the teachers.

It was not so easy at first. Secondary teachers were strictly holding on to the rule that the contents of the room were a secret. I could not even get any teachers to slip up. Wherever I went, I would only get mysterious smiles and a, "Sorry, that's a secret. I'm not allowed to tell." Finally, I got a hint—an anonymous teacher told me that, even though it was a secret, it would still be an "active" room, and students would be able to use it. Though this was helpful, it still did not give us any solid evidence as to what was planned inside.

When I asked a broadening interview, a teacher, who said to remain open-minded, was so kind to open up and let me know that the room was used as another playground for children. This was confirmed by a photograph taken of the room which showed it was indeed a playground for children.

However, the school board spoke out against me publicly days before the planned opening ceremony. After the winter holidays, the school board used as another playground for children. This was confirmed by a photograph taken of the room which showed it was indeed a playground for children. If you can't wait to see the room, then you can always come along and see it. You never know what will happen.

### Tesla's New Toy

NICLAS P, 9A

Tesla has a wide range of products, from electric cars to solar panels. They recently have made huge strides in vehicle performance with their Tesla Model S Plaid, with a record acceleration of under 2 seconds. Recently, they confirmed a new and exciting product for the children to enjoy. They call it the 'Cyberquad', basing the name on their concept truck, the Cybertruck. It isn't known if it is available for sale or not, but it is a very cool concept. The concept was announced in late 2019, and two years later the launch was confirmed. It is intended for children aged eight and up and can easily be charged using standard 110-240-volt outlets. While it isn't here in Berlin yet, it certainly looks like a lot of fun.

✓ Tesla's Cyberquad Source: <https://www.tesla.com/cyberquad>

**This Came  
out 3 Years  
Ago  
Celebrating Our Paper**

Page 1

## Edition #2/2025

**The first BCS student school Newspaper:**

Edition #1

STELLA K, 9A

You might have been told by a sign on the door of the room that it was not to be entered—since the room was the domain of the team's resident ghost, the Playmate of the Year Freepress, who was dangerous and unpredictable. The door was blocked, so is the windowpane in doubt. After months, I decided the mystery had to be lifted.

First, I decided to ask some students for their suspicions of the use of the room. A ninth grader speculated that it was probable that the room had been turned into a sauna for the teachers, whilst another believed that the room was for the principal's private use. A few more students gave me their theories, but I knew that I was not going to find out the truth in this way. I then decided to interview the people who knew the secret—the teachers.

It was not so easy at first. Secondary teachers were strictly holding on to the rule that the contents of the room were a secret. I could not even get any teachers to slip up. Wherever I went, I would only get mysterious smiles and a, "Sorry, that's a secret. I'm not allowed to tell." Finally, I got a hint—an anonymous teacher told me that, even though it was a secret, it would still be an "active" room, and students would be able to use it. Though this was helpful, it still did not give us any solid evidence as to what was planned inside.

## Tesla's New Toy

NICLAS P, 9A

# Is Cybertruck 3 Years Early?

[illegible]

## Celebrating Our Paper





**It has now been more** than 3 years since the first ever school newspaper came out on the 18th of February 2022.

**Perhaps you remember** that, back then, our school had no newspaper per se. What we did have was BCSNBC, BCS News Broadcasting Club, run by Mr. Williams. I joined in 2021, not because I like being in front of a camera (I can't stand it), but because I wanted to write, a big hobby of mine. I was disappointed. Broadcasting was far less writing than I had hoped because the pieces needed to be short, so that, when they were recorded, they even hooked people with the tiny attention spans we have nowadays. On top of that, a lot of the club time was spent recording, setting up equipment, editing, all things I am not really a fan of. I liked the research we did – during the pandemic we made a deep dive into our school uniforms, where they were produced, under which conditions – I just didn't like filming broadcasts.

**Every other school** I knew or read about had a printed school newspaper, and it seemed much more up my alley, so one day I finally worked up the courage to ask Mr. Williams whether we could print a newspaper con-

# THREE Years "The Cosmopolitan" The Unlikely Story of Our School Newspaper Retold by Founder and Editor Stella Krückeberg

taining our broadcast stories as well, and he agreed. That was to be my job because everyone else preferred broadcasts. I don't blame them – I'm the one who joined a broadcasting club with a dislike for filming.

**So, I set to work. At first, I thought it** would be easy – just put the stories we wrote into a document and print it. But the pieces were short, and we usually worked on bigger, long-term projects about a certain topic, meaning I'd only get one big article. So, I collected articles and waited for new ones, and after a while I'd realize the ones I had were outdated and scrap them, and then waited for new ones again. I came up with word searches or riddles related to the next big holiday, Christmas or Easter. But both Christmas and Easter passed without me managing to get an edition together.

**It was only after Summer Break when** something finally changed. During the break, the school had closed what used to be the movement room (for those who don't know, the climbing room in Freeplay has only been a climbing room for three years). There was a big sign on the door: "Danger! No entry for children!" and the teachers shrouded whatever was going on inside in mystery. I made it my first case of investigative journalism to find out what was going on. That had been my vision of a school newspaper: investigating and uncovering whatever went on at school that the students weren't supposed to know about. I was successful. The extracurricular teachers had apparently not gotten the memo that the construction was supposed to be a secret and even showed me inside.

**Now, I had an actually interesting, big** piece of news that I wanted everyone to know. I now had time pressure, I did not want this story to expire. I finally managed to get a (very short) issue together by using broadcast articles, writing two other ones myself and forcing my friends to help me out. Unfortunately, I never got to uncover the secret of the climbing room like I had hoped. I was asked by the school to not spoil the surprise, but the issue was done, so I printed it anyway and I just took out the ending of my article.

**The last hurdle was the layout. As** stated before, I am not a fan of any kind of editing or designing, and that is very much reflected in the layout of the first editions. The design sucks, to be frank. Part of that can be blamed on the use of Microsoft Word, which, if you have ever tried to even format a picture next to the text, you know is not good at layouts. The rest is on me.

**But luckily that one edition was** enough to kickstart what is now a full-on school newspaper, with a team of people who like to write articles as much as I do, and even some who care about the layout (we also stopped using Word – dramatic improvement on all fronts). Even though we never had another piece of investigative journalism, like I had hoped (nothing ever happens at our school that could be investigated), the newspaper has really come far in these three years. We have had new teachers, new members, and we may still never have gotten an edition out on time, but there were improvements and innovations and growth in every possible way, and I am quite proud of that.

*Stella Krückeberg is editor of "The Cosmopolitan" since 2022, making BCS history by creating the first student school newspaper.*

## Teacher Spotlight BRIDGET KINNEARY

# "GO PR ACT- ICE!"



### What inspired you to become a teacher?

My family moved to a new city when I was in 4th grade. It was very difficult for me- I still remember crying in the bathroom because I felt so scared and like I had no friends in my new school. Then, I started to learn my instrument in the school orchestra. Not only did I love learning a new instrument, but I also made friends in the orchestra. My music teacher at the time, Mrs. Fishburn, was one of the most passionate people I'd ever met. She organized concerts and special trips for us. I realized music can bring people together and help them feel at home in new places. By the time I was in grade 7, I decided that I also wanted to be in charge of music groups like orchestras and bands that can bring people together and encourage friendship. Since I was 12 years old, I knew I wanted to make music and music teaching my career.

### What was your least favorite subject in school?

I didn't like math for a long time- until I had a great teacher, Ms. Shoen in 11th grade who showed me that you can also use creativity in math. She was also quite strict and told me that even

though I wanted to be a professional musician, that I should still try my best in math. I certainly became more open-minded about things I do not like because of this teacher.

### What's the most rewarding part of being a teacher?

Witnessing students discover and follow their strengths and interests. Each person is so unique.

### What are your middle names?

Jane – it is my grandmother's name.

**"MUSIC CAN BRING  
PEOPLE TOGETHER  
AND HELP THEM  
FEEL AT HOME IN  
NEW PLACES."**

### Which languages do you speak?

English, German, very basic Spanish, and I am trying to learn Samoan!

### If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?

When I was 20 years old, I started to learn German and began dreaming about moving to Germany. Now, I do live here.

### If you could have dinner with any historical figure, who would it be?

Quincy Jones, Lili Boulanger, or Leonard Bernstein... or all 3!



### Who are your favorite teacher friends?

My best friend from University- Ms. Chan - she is teacher in New York now. We talk on the phone all the time and help each other get through challenges that come up when you are a teacher. Plus, we exchange ideas about music to learn and how to best teach difficult concepts in music. I think BCS also has a great community of teachers and I value working in a team of music teachers who care so much.

### What's the best advice you've ever received?

Go practice!  
That's what my music teachers used to tell me when I felt like I could not do something or that a song was too difficult to learn. It is simple advice, but it usually works :-)





# Germany's 2025 Election CDU Leads, AfD Surges, and SPD Suffers Historic Defeat

By Luise Lichtenstein

On February 23rd, Germany held federal elections for the 21st Bundestag. The election date was originally scheduled for September 28th, but it was moved forward when the “traffic light” coalition, consisting of the SPD, Greens, and FDP, collapsed in November 2024. This political instability led to Chancellor Olaf Scholz purposely losing a vote of no confidence the following month in order to trigger early elections.

The Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and its Bavarian sister party, the Christian Social Union (CSU), reached 28.5% of all votes, slightly recovering from their all-time low of 24.1% in the 2021 federal election. However, despite this increase, the gains remain relatively modest considering the significant unpopularity of the previous government. As the party with the highest share of votes, it is highly likely that Friedrich Merz will become the next German chancellor, assuming he successfully negotiates a coalition agreement. There are two possible two-party coalitions that would secure a majority in the German parliament: the so-called “Grand Coalition” consisting of the CDU and SPD, and a coalition with the far-right AfD. However, Merz has categorically ruled out forming a government with the AfD, given that parts of the party have been classified as right-wing extremist by multiple different German courts.

Emphasizing the need for political stability within Germany and Europe as a whole, Merz has stated that he expects his new government to be in office by Easter, following what he hopes will be a relatively short period of negotiations.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) saw a dramatic surge in support, doubling its vote share compared to the 2021 federal elections and securing roughly every fifth vote. Meanwhile, the party of the current chancellor, Olaf Scholz, faced a significant decline in support. The SPD's election results suffered heavily due to Scholz's widespread unpopularity—he was the least popular German chancellor in nearly 30 years—as well as the ongoing internal disputes within his three-party coalition which were carried out very publicly and which damaged not only the coalition's credibility, but also citizens' trust in the government. The SPD lost an estimated 1.7 million votes to the CDU, followed by 700,000 to the AfD, illustrating the extent of its voter migration. With the AfD doubling its results, the question arises: where did its new voters come from? Approximately 1.7 million votes were drawn from the governing parties, while another 1.1 million came from previous CDU and CSU voters. Notably, the largest group consisted of 1.8 million voters who had not par-

ticipated in the previous election despite being eligible to do so, signaling a shift in voter engagement patterns.

All of the governing parties—SPD, Greens, and FDP—suffered major losses in the federal elections. The SPD, party of chancellor Olaf Scholz, received 16.4% of the votes, the worst result in its history and the first time its percentage was below 20%. The Greens suffered the least from all governing parties with a loss of 3.1%. The FDP, which was often blamed for the collapse of the coalition, lost 7.1% and, with 4.3% of the votes, did not pass the five percent hurdle needed for a party to be represented in parliament. Coincidentally, the same thing happened after the FDP was last part of a coalition (then with the CDU) from 2009 to 2013.

The fate of two parties, Die Linke and the Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht, was uncertain until shortly before the election. In the 2021 federal elections, Die Linke narrowly missed the five percent hurdle with 4.9% of votes, but was able to claim representation in the parliament by winning three electoral districts which exempts parties from the percentage restriction. Leading up to the recent elections, Die Linke scored between 3-4% in public polls and was also rather unlikely to enter the Bundestag through three direct mandates. However, following Friedrich Merz' highly criticised cooperation with the AfD in late January, Die Linke focussed increasingly on social issues and their reputation as a highly anti-facist party, and by the elections, had doubled their previous poll results, receiving 8.8% of the votes on Sunday, an increase of 3.9%. Things turned out a little different for the BSW, a party that split from Die Linke in early 2024 and received 6.2% in the EU elections in June and double digit results in the former East German states of Thuringia, Brandenburg, and Saxony; in the first two states, it is currently a member of the governing coalitions. However, from autumn onwards, the BSW's approval rates decreased and by January 2025, it stood at around 4% in major polls. On February 23rd, the BSW narrowly missed entry into the German parliament with 4.97%, missing only around 13,400 votes.

The 2025 election once again highlighted the vast differences between West and East Germany that continue to persist even nearly 35 years following German reunification on October 3rd, 1990. The AfD was the strongest party in the east—as it had previously been in the EU elections—and BSW and Die Linke also received higher than average results.

Meanwhile, the traditional parties such as CDU and SPD receive less support from the east than the west. It remains to be seen if the expected new government of CDU/CSU and SPD can regain the approval and trust of the citizens in the east in the coming four years or whether political preferences, both in the former East German states and in Germany as a

whole, will shift even further to the extremes by 2029.

On the bright side, voter turnout stood at an impressive 82.5%, the highest value since German reunification. This increase in participation reflects a growing public interest in national politics and the future direction of the country.

## THE DEBATE ON ABORTION

### – Should it be Legal?

By Charlotte Yang

Abortion is a medical procedure in which a woman chooses not to continue her pregnancy, and it is performed by a doctor or clinic. The procedure involves the removal of the fetus and amniotic sac. While many people believe that abortions should be legal, there is a vocal opposition, particularly from some men, who argue that abortion constitutes murder.

Most people think that abortions are part of women's rights. If women are unable to decide whether or not to have an abortion, they lose control over their own bodies, and, in a sense, their futures are being dictated by laws and others. “My body, their choice” is thus a common slogan used to underline that decisions about pregnancy should remain solely with the pregnant woman, as she bears the physical and emotional consequences of that decision, not the father/law. An abortion is generally a safe procedure, however, in many countries abortions are illegal, causing women to perform their own procedures that can lead to significant harm.

Abortion is not to be considered a crime or murder, if it is performed within 24 weeks. At this stage, the fetus is not yet developed enough to be considered a fully formed human being, as it does not have fully developed organs. Therefore, it is still legal within that timeframe. However, there are concerns about the safety of abortion, as it can cause bleeding and abdominal pain. Additionally, many churches believe that abortion is morally wrong. The christian church



says, “The LCMS believes that whether abortion is legal or not, it does not change the fact that abortion is a sin.” Because of this, many women are not allowed to have abortions, due to the danger of being kicked out of their church.

Laws are not the only reason women don't have abortions. Many families/individuals cannot afford these procedures, so they have to look for ways to earn this money, potentially missing the date limit of legal abortions. Many people also are not allowed to take time off work for appointments or cannot afford to travel to another country to get abortions. In the countries that have criminalized abortions, such as parts of the United States and Poland, abortions are only allowed under specific conditions, for example that the pregnancy was a result of rape, or severe or fatal injuries to the fetus. However, only a small portion of abortions are due to these reasons, meaning these exceptions still prevent people from fully exercising their reproductive rights. Even so, criminalizing abortion does not eliminate the practice – women seeking abortions will often find ways to travel to countries where the procedure is legal and safe.

There is a growing consensus that the father should not have a say in whether his partner undergoes an abortion. Many people also think of it in the sense of: *If men had to go through pregnancies instead of women, abortions would be legal.* Abortion is a matter of women's rights and bodily autonomy. The fact that women continue to fight for the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion highlights the ongoing inequality between men and women, even in the context of reproductive rights.

Ultimately, abortion is a deeply personal choice that a woman should be free to make based on her own circumstances and future goals. Having children can significantly impact a woman's career, education, and life plans. The opinions of men should not be taken into account, as their role is limited to conception, and they do not carry the physical burden of pregnancy. Legal restrictions on abortion do not prevent women from seeking the procedure. Abortion, when performed under proper medical care, is generally safe, does not cause infertility, and should remain a legal option for women worldwide.

Above: Poster reading “Abortion is a human right” at protest.



# MADNESS REDEFINED

## Tracking Trump's First 45 Days in Office

By Aeneas Toschek



Flabbergasted, thunderstruck, aghast. All words you don't usually hear anymore, but which are now coming to the fore again when people describe their extraordinarily shocked and irritated state in view of the current world situation. For to call it a shock that is currently sweeping the world would be an understatement.

It's more of a wave of intense denial and disbelief questioning how – only two months into the new year – so much has already unfolded, especially in terms of the second Trump administration, which has managed to sort of reshape the global atmosphere into one of constant unease – a lingering fear of what potential damage this unpredictable, orange, old man sitting in the White House in Washington might inflict upon the world at any time –, making you wake up every morning, wondering at first: "What has he done today?"

The overall picture of the emerging reality – shaped most prominently by the actions of President Trump, who exhibits signs of madness through his erratic behaviour, is affected by deeply narcissistic tendencies, solely driven by the desire for total power – which has already taken shape over these two past months, resembles more of a satire of our world, a sort of dystopian farce we are all forced to live through – so exaggerated and implausible that one can hardly believe it to be reality. The world is currently the greatest parody of itself.

It starts with Trump merely being inau-

gurated, with the incredulity of the fact that more than half of the American public would vote someone clearly suffering a severe narcissistic personality disorder – which includes overestimating one's own abilities and achievements – into power. With the fact that his cabinet includes a health secretary who is anti-vaccine, a defense secretary who was formerly a Fox News host, and an education secretary who was once a professional wrestler, for example.

On the day of his inauguration, Trump was swift to pardon more than 1,500 people convicted on January 6 Capitol riot charges, withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Climate Accords as well as the World Health Organization, rename the Gulf of Mexico as the Gulf of America, attempt to end birthright citizenship for children of illegal immigrants and prepare to investigate prosecutors who charged him. Here, a track record of his first 45 days in office.

### Attacks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

First, Trump reversed four years of work of Biden's administration to increase diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts in the federal government as part of a year-long conservative fight against DEI. One executive order signed in late January discontinues all "mandates, policies, programs, preferences and activities in the federal government" that the Trump administration considers "illegal DEI (...) programs". A second also overturns various orders from previous presidents, including one signed during the

civil rights era, which required federal contractors to adopt equal opportunity measures. Trump's new orders go as far as requiring federal employees to report colleagues they believe are promoting DEI efforts "in disguise", facing them with "adverse consequences" if they don't. Trump has also asked the US attorney general's office for the possibility of applying these orders to private companies as well. He prohibited people who are transgender from serving in the military on the 27th of January. Additionally, while having itself celebrated Black History Month in March, the White House let the Defense Intelligence Agency halt all cultural observances, including Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Holocaust Remembrance Day.

### Foreign Policy & Economic Warfare

Trump has, as promised during his campaign, implemented aggressive trade measures, escalating tensions with key US allies and trading partners through sweeping tariffs and sanctions.

On the 26th of January, Trump announced sanctions on Colombia as revenge on its president, Gustavo Petro, who had said previously that his country would only accept deportation flights from the US if the migrants were treated with "dignity that a human being deserves." These measures included 25% tariffs on all Colombian goods, as well as a travel ban and immediate visa revocations for Colombian government officials, their allies and supporters, as Trump stated in a Truth Social post.

In his most grave move yet, Trump on the first of February imposed 25% tariffs on most Mexican and Canadian imports and 10% on Chinese goods, with Canadian energy products facing a reduced 10% duty – shaking global financial markets and triggering swift redress, with Canada, Mexico and China all announcing to take counter-measures.

Trump later announced a one-month delay of his planned tariffs on Mexico and Canada after phone calls with the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, and the Mexican president, Claudia Sheinbaum, on the third of February, having that same day also proposed that Canada should become the US's "51st state." Finally, these tariffs took effect on the 4th of March. Trump moved forward with imposing further tariffs on the 10th of February, which included 25% on all steel and aluminium imports, with no exceptions, explaining that: "It's a big deal. This is the beginning of making America rich again."

### Immigration

During his campaign, Trump promised to carry out "the largest deportations in human history," referring to refugees as "animals" regularly: "She [Nancy Pelosi] said, 'Please don't use the word animals when you're talking about these people.' I said, 'I'll use the word animal because that's what they are.'"

More than one month into his term, his agenda for carrying out this plan is marked by the violation of basic human rights as well as the threatening of Central American leaders into collaboration. Their countries now act as dumping grounds for immigrants that the US cannot deport to their home countries due to lack of diplomatic relations. Panama was the first country that accepted deportation flights on the 13th of February due to a dispute started by Trump over the Panama Canal. Caught in between are hundreds of immigrants, big portions of whom are now caught in a sort of in-between-state with an uncertain future, lawyers and human rights organisations having been denied access, their cellphones and passports confiscated by officials. "There is talk of shelters and humanitarian assistance, but the truth is that these people are detained with no option of leaving and with no certainty that they are guaranteed at least the right to request asy-

lum," said Marcela Martino, deputy director of Central America and Mexico for the Center for Justice and International Law.

Trump has also talked of consequences for cities and officials nationally if these fail to cooperate on his immigration agenda. On the 22nd of January, Trump told Fox News he might withhold federal funding from cities in this case and his political appointees ordered U.S. attorneys to investigate law enforcement officials refusing to enforce his immigration agenda. That same day he also cancelled flights for refugees already approved to travel to the US.

On the 26th of January, Vice President J.D. Vance went as far as to endorse immigration raids on schools, hoping to impose a "chilling effect on illegal immigrants coming to our country", as he stated on CBS's Face the Nation.

### Gaza

Earlier last month, Trump shocked the world by proposing to "take over" Gaza and "own it", which was seen as potential endorsement of ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. At a press conference alongside Israeli prime minister Netanyahu, Trump stated: "If it's necessary, we'll do that," adding that: "We're going to take over that piece; we're going to develop it, create thousands and thousands of jobs, and it'll be something that the entire Middle East can be very proud of," again emphasising his plans that would include the relocation of 2 million Palestinians during a meeting with Jordan's King Abdullah II on the eleventh of February, by saying: "We're going to take it. We're going to hold it. We're going to cherish it." In one of the most surreal things to happen under Trump's administration yet, on the 25th of February, Trump shared a video of Gaza reimagined as a luxury resort called "Trump Gaza" on his platforms, immediately garnering criticism from around the world. The video begins by showing Gaza's destruction, gunmen walking the streets, then cuts to people emerging from a cave to find "Trump Gaza," a sort-of Trump-utopia including various beaches, rich housing, several golden statues as well as a balloon resembling Trump, Elon Musk walking through a rain of money, Trump dancing with a woman at a nightclub, as well as Trump and PM Netanyahu sitting by a pool, enjoying drinks.

Matern von Boeselager of Der Spiegel rightfully commented: "Now we have it, the vision of the Trump movement: an unholy combination of nihilism, megalomania, contempt for humanity and greed. And shitty music."

### Musk's DOGE & Government cuts

The so-called Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is a temporary organisation with Elon Musk as its head that aims to terminate wasteful federal spending, as well as excessive regulations. One of Trump's biggest promise during his campaign was to significantly reduce the size of the government in a fight against bureaucracy by terminating specific agencies and firing federal workers or putting them on forced leave. Trump established DOGE on day one of his second term through an executive order, also signing another order to freeze new regulations and federal hiring that same day. Musk has claimed DOGE's goal to be the restoration of democracy.

DOGE has since weakened or even abolished several federal agencies, including USAid (United States Agency for International Development), the Department of Education, as well as the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. On the 22nd of February, Musk sent emails on behalf of the administration to all federal workers, requiring them to outline in five bullet points what they had done at their jobs in the past week or risk termination, though the agencies told workers they did not need to respond, while Trump supported the ultimatum.

Overall, Elon Musk's DOGE has gained significant control within the U.S. federal government, installing allies in key agencies, purging diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, gaining and restricting access to secure systems, overseeing mass layoffs, and implementing cost-cutting measures, sparking legal challenges and security concerns as well as confusion and turmoil in the government – as recent government downsizing efforts and mass firings of probationary employees were found to be unlawful by a federal judge on the 27th of February.

Elon Musk faced criticism for his influence on the government, many Americans joking not Trump being president, but instead Musk. Trump, on the other hand, defended Musk's DOGE and additionally shielded him



from public disclosure by putting the initiative under the Presidential Records Act.

Trump also showed instances of consolidating his power, for example, on the 11th of February, when he signed an executive order to “significantly reduce the size of the government,” further centralising power, or on the 18th of February, when he signed an executive order to expand his power over independent agencies like the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Federal Trade Commission, his reasoning being that he must have “presidential supervision and control of the entire executive branch” – including over policies and budgets.

Attacks on Press & Free Speech

Trump also attacked the freedom of press this past month, for example when he called for the “termination” of 60 Minutes. “CBS should lose its license, and the cheaters at 60 Minutes should all be thrown out, and this disreputable ‘NEWS’ show should be immediately terminated,” he wrote on Truth Social on the 6th of February. Similarly, Trump stated the following day that he would appoint himself chairman of the John F Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, promising to fire multiple members of its board of trustees, his reasons being that the center doesn’t “share our Vision for a Golden Age in Arts and Culture” and that it “featured Drag Shows specifically targeting our youth”, which “WILL STOP,” effectively displaying his boundlessness in censorship. On the 14th of February, the Associated Press (AP) was banned from events in the Oval Office as well as Air Force One, as the news agency had refused to name the Gulf of Mexico the Gulf of America in articles following Trump’s executive order, which lead to the AP suing Trump’s administration. On the 25th of February, the White House Correspondent’s Association warned that “in a free country, leaders must not be able to choose their own press corps,” when the White House announced it would further exclude specific media outlets from the presidential press pool. Additionally, Trump signed an executive order on the 29th of January in an effort to eliminate “radical indoctrination” in schools and to reestablish the

1176 Commission, an advisory committee which was established in September 2020 by Trump in his first term to promote patriotic education, also ordering a federal review of school funding to ensure alignment with his administration’s educational priorities.

Ukraine

During his campaign, Trump bragged about ending the war in Ukraine “in 24 hours.” On the 12th of February, Trump announced that he was beginning peace talks with the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, and Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, concerning the war in Ukraine, having separately phoned both. “We ultimately expect to meet,” Trump later told reporters in the Oval Office. When asked about further details at a press conference, he responded: “It’s too early to say what’s going to happen. Maybe Russia will give up a lot. Maybe they won’t. It’s all dependent on what is going to happen.” On the 19th of February, Trump tried rewriting factual history by falsely claiming that Ukraine started Russia’s war against Ukraine, additionally calling Volodymyr Zelenskyy a “dictator”, while later on the 27th of February denying ever calling the Ukrainian president this. The following day, Zelenskyy visited the Oval Office to discuss signing a controversial minerals deal which was seen as essential to achieve US security guarantees in Europe. What started out as a heated exchange lead to Trump and Vance berating Zelenskyy with accusations and distortions of the truth on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. On live TV, Trump told Zelenskyy that “you’re, right now, not in a very good position” and that “you don’t have the cards. With us you start having cards,” threatening to pull US aid for Ukraine if Zelenskyy did not agree to his peace deal. When Zelenskyy reminded them that they too will feel the war in the future, despite their “nice ocean,” Trump snapped, telling Zelenskyy to not “tell us what were going to feel,” adding: “You’re gambling with the lives of millions of people. You’re gambling with World War III.” Vance successfully enraged Trump during the meeting, asking Zelenskyy to be thankful and respectful throughout: “Do you think that it is respectful to come to the Oval Office of the United States of America and

attack the administration that is trying to prevent the destruction of your country?”, asking if Zelenskyy had ever thanked the US. In fact, there are numerous examples for Zelenskyy explicitly thanking the US and its people. Trump’s administration stopped US aid for Ukraine on the fourth of March.

Munich Conference

At the Munich security conference on the 14th of February, Vice President J.D. Vance accused European leaders of suppressing free speech, as well as failing to halt illegal migration. He claimed Europe to be corrupted by media censorship, cancelled elections and political correctness. “While the Trump administration is very concerned with European security and believes that we can come to a reasonable settlement between Russia and Ukraine, and we also believe that it’s important in the coming years for Europe to step up in a big way to provide for its own defense,” Vance stated, adding that: “What I worry about is the threat from within, the retreat of Europe from some of its most fundamental values.” His comments were quickly condemned by the European Union but praised by Russian state television. Afterwards, Vance met with Alice Weidel of the AfD, denying to meet any other politician.

Authoritarian Rhetoric

This past month, Trump has shown resistance to limits on his authority, consolidating power and threatening to defy the courts if these go against his will, essentially threatening to defy the system of Checks and Balances that are fundamental to the US’s constitution. On the ninth of February, Vance declared that “judges aren’t allowed to control the executive’s legitimate power” and on the 15th of February, Trump wrote “He who saves his Country does not violate any Law” on his Truth Social Account, a phrase attributed to Napoleon, who eventually declared himself emperor. Additionally, on the 19th of February, Trump said of himself: “LONG LIVE THE KING!”, essentially claiming monarchical authority. On the 22nd of February, during the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) Trump claimed to have saved the US, to have actually won the election by a larger margin than he actually did, lying about Democrats

cheating on elections. He additionally bragged about pardoning January 6 rioters and terminating DEI initiatives. Some present at CPAC supported the idea of finding a way to elect Trump for a third term by essentially overriding the constitution.

Conclusion

Overall, Trump has demonstrated over the course of the first 45 days of his second presidency that he will stop at nothing. During research for this article, it was overwhelming to discover the abundance of things Trump has already done, so many that I obviously could not include all. His actions and statements as well as his boundlessness border on nihilism, none of his initiatives seemingly bearing any grave consequences for the president himself. Driven by a kind of destructive rage he has also become a sort-of ruler of truth, seemingly seeing no limits in fabricating lies to his advantage. There’s a scene in *The Apprentice*, the 2024 film on Trump’s metamorphosis from real estate magnate to the figure he is today, that excellently exhibits Trump’s character by having Trump ask a journalist whom he has hired to write his autobiography: “You know what’s truth?”, responding himself swiftly: “What you say is truth. What I say is truth. What he says is truth. What is the truth in life? (...) You know what’s true? What I say is true.” The disbelief one feels in response to this technique of Trump is especially present when reading through his posts on X and Truth Social, all characterized by hate and agitation besides the obvious absence of truth. Unfortunately, though, we face nearly 47 more months of his administration – or, if things take a worse turn, even longer.



Buchrezension: »Als Hitler das rosa Kaninchen stahl«  
Von Leo Freier

Das Buch *Als Hitler das Rosa Kaninchen stahl* wurde von Judith Kerr geschrieben und 1971 im Collins Verlag veröffentlicht. Es erstreckt sich über 172 Seiten und 24 Kapitel.

In diesem Buch geht es um die Vertreibung der Juden im Jahr 1933 in Berlin vor der Reichstagswahl. Anna und ihre Familie sind jüdisch. Sie haben Angst davor, ob Hitler jetzt Reichskanzler wird und damit die Juden aus dem Land raushaben möchte. Annas Familie besteht aus ihrem Vater, der berühmt ist, ihrer Mutter, die gerne Klavier spielt aber nicht arbeitet, und ihrem Bruder, Max, der 12 Jahre alt ist und einen Freund namens Gustaf hat. Anna ist neun Jahre alt und hat eine beste Freundin namens Elisabeth. Ihr Ziel ist es, unentdeckt zu bleiben, denn wir wissen nicht, wer auf der Seite der Nazis steht. Außerdem müssen sie Deutschland verlassen. Können sie es schaffen, in andere Länder zu reisen?

Ich finde das Buch schön und wunderbar, weil es die schwierigen und die politischen Themen schön ausdrückt. Außerdem ist es gut für Kinder geschrieben, da es nicht so schwierige Wörter verwendet und da, falls doch, diese Wörter meistens auf der Seite erklärt werden.

Ich würde dem Buch 4,5 von 5 Sternen geben, weil es Anna noch ein bisschen genauer beschreiben kann.

Buchrezension:  
»Fritzi war dabei«  
Von Levin Haver

»Seid bereit, Immer Bereit«, heißt es im Buch *Fritzi war dabei*, welches vom Leben in der DDR hervorragend erzählt, wahrscheinlich am besten. Die Protagonistin des Buches ist Thälmann-Pionierin geworden und grüßt die Schulleitung jeden Morgen mit genau diesen Worten. Lasst euch hineinziehen in die Welt von Fritzi und ihrer Familie, wo es um das Abenteuer des berühmten Jahres 1989 in Deutschland geht. Mit aufregenden Demonstrationen und einem Kampf zwischen dem hinterlistigen und bösen Staat und halb Deutschland. Geschrieben wurde das Buch von Hanna Schott und veröffentlicht im Klett Verlag.

Das Buch beschreibt in der Kinderperspektive eines 9-jährigen Mädchens, was 1989 in der DDR, in Leipzig passiert. Das Leben in einer Diktatur ist nicht immer einfach und für Freiheit in so einem Land zu kämpfen auch nicht. Doch Fritzi und ihre Familie gibt nicht auf. Mit Montagsdemos und Kerzen kämpfen sie gegen das größte Problem in der DDR: die Mauer. Das, was Fritzi von ihrer Oma trennt. Mit einer klaren und ausdrucksstarken Sprache und mit gelungenen und bunten Illustrationen von Gerda Raidt ist das Buch eine einzige Sensation!

Das Buch ist für Jedermann im Alter von 7 bis 16 Jahren genau das Richtige – nicht nur eine hervorragende Geschichte, sondern auch sehr informativ für Kinder.







## “Violins of Hope” A Concert of Remembrance at the Berlin Philharmonic

By Luise Lichtenstein

On the evening of January 27th, the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and the RIAS Chamber Choir, conducted by Vladimir Jurowski, held a moving concert in remembrance of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The audience at the Berlin Philharmonic responded with enthusiastic applause.

A highlight of the concert was the world premiere of *Aus Geigen Stimmen* by Berthold Tuercke. This piece was performed on the “Violins of Hope”—53 violins, a viola, and a cello—historical instruments that once belonged to Jewish musicians and survived the Holocaust. The music was characterized by haunting, plaintive tones, frequently interrupted by moments of silence. The RIAS Chamber Choir accompanied the performance with sung and spoken texts recounting the stories of these rescued instruments. At several points, individual instruments played solo passages to symbolize personal stories of survival and loss.

The second half of the concert featured Trio for Violin, Viola, and Cello by Gideon Klein, who wrote it at Theresienstadt ghetto and was murdered in 1945 at the Fürstengrube concentration camp, and String Quartet No. 5 by Mieczysław Weinberg, both arranged for string orchestra.

*Aus Geigen Stimmen* was commissioned by the RSB and dedicated to the memory of Amnon Weinstein, who passed away last year. Since the 1980s,

the Israeli violin maker has restored around 60 damaged string instruments that once belonged to musicians persecuted by the Nazis. These “Violins of Hope” have since been played by musicians around the world, including the Berlin Philharmonic, which dedicated Germany’s first concert to them ten years ago.

Weinstein’s father, Moshe Weinstein, had begun collecting violins in Tel Aviv in the 1940s, receiving them from Holocaust survivors or relatives of murdered Jews. Some of these instruments bear the Star of David as a symbol of their history. For many years, they remained untouched, as Moshe Weinstein found it too painful to confront their past. He had emigrated from Vilna (then part of Poland) to Israel in 1938 and lost much of his family during the Nazi era.

His grandson, Avshalom Weinstein, who attended the memorial concert in Berlin, has continued his father’s mission. “I had to make these violins sing again—as a symbol against forgetting,” he wrote in a note.

In addition to biblical psalms and Yiddish poetry, the RIAS Chamber Choir performed texts written by Avshalom Weinstein and his mother, Assaela Bielski, about the history of these instruments. Today, the “Violins of Hope” collection has grown to more than 70 instruments, serving as powerful tribute to memory and resilience.

Above: Left, “Violins of Hope.” Right, Berthold Tuercke.

## ORIGINS OF VALENTINE’S DAY

By Nike Krückeberg

Valentine’s Day is a popular American holiday for all the couples in the world. But there is more behind the holiday on February 14th.

Today, what we call Valentine’s Day is also known as Saint Valentine’s Day or Feast of Saint Valentine. As you can see, it used to be acknowledged as a Christian holiday honoring the martyr named Valentine. But why February 14th and why did this holiday go from a Christian feast day to an American chocolate-selling love day?

Well, there are some stories connecting Saint Valentines to February 14th. You see, there are about eleven other Saints with the name Valentine who stand in duty of the Catholic Church. In the third century, February 14th, Saint Valentine of Rome was imprisoned for helping persecuted Christians under the Roman Empire. Apparently, so legends say, that Saint Valentine restored sight to his jailor’s daughter. Later, other legends were added, such as that Saint Valentine wrote a letter to his jailor’s daughter shortly before his execution, saying „My Valentine“ (18th century). Some stories also say, that Saint Valentine preformed weddings for the soldiers that were forbidden to marry by the Roman emperor.

Below: Saint Valentine imprisoned.



Only later in history, the day February 14th was associated with love and romance. In the 14th and 15th century, this tradition began, when courtly love was practiced. Even later, in the 18th century in England, February 14th became an occasion to send greeting cards or flowers to your loved ones. Greeting cards were known as “valent-

ines”. In the 19th century, the tradition of giving cards on Valentine’s Day became even more popular.

### Valentine’s Day Traditions all around the world

In Italy, Saint Valentine’s Day keys are sent to beloved ones, symbolizing to „unlock“ the person’s heart.

In Brazil, you don’t celebrate Valentine’s Day on February 14th, but rather on 12th, the „Dia dos Namorados“ takes place. On this day, lovers send around candy, cards and flowers just like on Valentine’s Day. Single women might preform rituals on „Dia dos Namorados“, to get in the good graces of Saint Anthony.

In Bulgaria, Valentine’s Day is a day destined for wine. Yes, February 14th in Bulgaria is „winemakers-day“, where you share a good glass of wine.

In Chile, love is in the air! On February 14th and sometimes the whole week, the streets of Chile are decorated with flowers and balloons. Of course, the popular traditions exist there also - candy, cards and flowers are also sent around

In China, their Valentine’s day is celebrated on the seventh day of the seventh month of China’s lunar calendar. This holiday originates from a story with a forbidden love affair between a celestial weaver and a mortal man. On this day, the Chinese might go on dates or practice weaving or carving intricate designs on melon skins to bring good health from Zhinu, the weaver in the old legend.

In Italy, couples might give each other boxes of „Baci Perugina“ a popular chocolate brand. The chocolate „baci“ (baci means kisses in Italian) contain a small note with a words of wisdom in five different languages.

In South Africa, Valentine’s Day is also celebrated! Apparently, some women pin the name of their secret admirer to their sleeves.

In Taiwan, people on Valentine’s Day go crazy with flowers. On February 14th and then again on July 7th, flowers representing different messages are sent around. The most important flower message is probably when you receive 108 roses, which means „Will you marry me?“



»Es darf nie wieder  
geschehen«

Über Margot Friedländer

Von Livia Kordges

**Ein kurzer Überblick** Margot Friedländer, jüdisch, geboren 1921 in Bendheim, wurde ab 1940 zur Zwangsarbeit verpflichtet. Etwa 1943 plante sie die Flucht, tauchte 1944 jedoch unter. Noch im selben Jahr wurde sie von Greifern verhaftet und nach Theresienstadt deportiert.

Die 103-jährige Margot Friedländer ist eine der letzten und mit Sicherheit eine der ältesten Holocaust-Überlebenden, die 2010, nachdem sie mehrere Jahre in den USA gelebt hat, nach Deutschland zurückkam. In einem Interview am Auschwitzgedenktage (27.01), sagte sie: »Die Straßen waren anders als sonst.« Diese Aussage bezieht sich auf die Reichspogromnacht, welche sich zwischen dem neunten und 13. November 1938 gegen die jüdische Bevölkerung richtete. Margot Friedländer berichtet, dass sie selbst gesehen habe, wie Menschen in den Tagen nach dieser für die Juden und Andersdenkenden verhängnisvollen Nacht in die eingeschlagenen Geschäfte gegangen sind und sich selbst bereichert haben, während niemand etwas dagegen unternahm.

### Margot Friedländers Kindheit

Margot Friedländer verbrachte mit ihrem jüngeren Bruder und ihren Eltern eine glückliche Kindheit, welche erst durch die Scheidung ihrer Eltern getrübt wurde. Die Holocaust-Überlebende bekam von den Diskriminierungen gegenüber ihrer Religion wenig mit, was sich aber spätestens im November 1938 änderte, denn nicht nur die Reichspogromnacht veränderte vieles

in ihrem Leben. Margot Friedländer musste ihre Ausbildung zur Schneiderin abbrechen und ihr Vater floh ins Ausland. Ihrer Familie wurde bewusst, dass sie auch fliehen mussten, doch ein Versuch scheiterte. Am 20. Januar wurden schließlich ihre Mutter und ihr Bruder nach Auschwitz deportiert und Margot Friedländer war gezwungen, unterzutauchen, wurde aber im Juni 1944 von Greifern gefasst und nach Theresienstadt deportiert.

### Verdienste nach dem Holocaust

Margot Friedländers »Mission«, wie sie es in einem Interview nennt, ist für Aufmerksamkeit für den Holocaust zu sorgen und junge Menschen darüber aufzuklären. Seitdem reist sie durch Deutschland und erzählt an Schulen von ihrer Geschichte, denn: »Es darf nie wieder geschehen«, wie sie in Gesprächen mit der Presse betont.

Ihre Mission umfasst jedoch nicht nur die Aufklärung junger Menschen über den Holocaust, denn die 103-Jährige schrieb unter anderem zwei Bücher: 2021 erschien *Ich tue es für euch*, und 13 Jahre zuvor: *Versuche, dein Leben zu machen* (2008). Außerdem gründete sie im Sommer 2023 die *Margot Friedländer Stiftung* und bekam zudem das Bundesverdienstkreuz ersten Grades.

Oben: Margot Friedländer, Juni 2024.



RISE, GRIND,  
REPEAT: THE NOT  
SO DOUBLE-EDGED  
SWORD OF THE  
'THAT GIRL'  
LIFESTYLE



HOW THE RETURN OF PERFECTIONISM IS DAMAGING OUR SOCIETY. BY HELIN TURHAN

Perfectionism in a wellness routine: Wake up at 5 a.m., drink your matcha, journal three pages of gratitude, do your daily Pilates, and never dare skip your skincare routine. The so-called “That Girl” aesthetic — ubiquitous on TikTok and Instagram — glorifies an idealized, curated lifestyle under the guise of wellness and self-improvement. It promises to inspire and improve, but in its pursuit of unattainable perfection, it risks doing more harm than good. What is ultimately hidden under this façade, is the perpetuation of unachievable perfectionism, setting an impossible standard for young people striving to glow up.

The “That Girl” aesthetic is marketed as empowerment, but its foundation is rooted in consumerism and flexing culture. To achieve this lifestyle, one must purchase the “right” planner, the “perfect” supplements, and an ever-growing list of products designed to yield success. Whether this may be in form of the ever-prominent Bloom Nutrition all influencers seem to be hyping up, The Ordinary’s skincare (#notsponsored), or even the essential whey proteins in your pancakes. In reality, the trend does less to encourage wellness and more to pressure individuals into a cycle of comparison and inadequacy, with the ultimate target of increasing consumption. This phenomenon has been studied by Tom Crisp, Leader of the Sustainable Fashion course at the University of Falmouth, who asserted: “Trends prey on our insecurities about the way we look and feel, encouraging us to consume more in order to stay on trend.”

For most, this standard of living is not achievable nor maintainable from the get-go. A 2024 study by the Wellness Consumer Report revealed that over 60% of Gen Z women felt compelled to buy products endorsed by influencers portraying the “That Girl” aesthetic, even if they couldn’t afford them. This exemplifies how behind every green juice or yoga mat lies an industry profiting off insecurity. And the consequences? Debt, disillusionment, and deeper entrenchment in the very flaws this lifestyle claims to cure. Not to mention the countless hours that go into planning, implementing, and recovering from the “That Girl” routine, which most adults and students cannot set aside whilst simultaneously pursuing a busy nine-to-five.

However, on the other hand, supporters of the trend argue that it motivates individuals to take control of their lives, adopt healthy habits, and practice mindfulness. And yes, for some, it might. The structured routines and focus on self-improvement can provide a sense of stability and purpose, particularly for those feeling adrift in the chaos of modern life. Waking up early, journaling, or maintaining a consistent workout routine can be genuinely beneficial practices for mental and physical health, helping individuals feel more accomplished and in control of their days amidst an otherwise fast-paced, disorganized world. But for how long and at what cost?

Take a moment to examine its rhetoric: The emphasis on “control” often veers into rigidity, leaving little room for the imperfections and chaos that make us human. Psychologists have warned that the pressure to adhere to such lifestyles can exacerbate mental health issues, such as anxiety and disordered eating, as diagnoses of eating disorders have doubled in the last decade from 3.5% to 7.8%. “Comparison on social media can bring up feelings of inadequacy, fatigue, sadness, loneliness, and anxiety. It can increase disordered eating behaviors and an unhealthy relationship with food and exercise,” psychotherapist and licensed clinical social worker Hannah Tishman says in an article about the reasons therapists denounce the trend as a whole. Further science suggests the correlation between disordered eating behaviors and social media, as we are seeing a return in thinspiration beauty trends such as heroin chic that ultrathin models had started in the late 1990s, as celebrities such as Kim Kardashian remove their BBLs and opt for a slimmer look instead. Ozempic is also prevalent in this regard, as people have discovered its weight-loss potential and are now misusing the diabetic drug to achieve rapid weight loss in their pursuit of being “That Girl”. But this consumption of gateway drugs and a goal toward the thinnest look possible is neither sustainable nor healthy, not to mention diabetics truly in need of Ozempic now suffering under increased prices and barriers to access their medication. This is all indirectly, if not directly, encouraged by the “That Girl” trend and goes un-

regulated, since the trend itself appears to be harmless upon first swipe. While the pharmaceutical drug has been approved by medical institutions worldwide, such as the FDA or European Medicines Agency,4 even if these may not be necessarily for its weight-loss potential, supplements like Bloom Nutrition do not have such science-backed approval. The fact that few studies on superfoods or supplement powders exist, along with the lack of regulations to define a product as such, should be a point of concern for consumers, even if their favorite influencers seem to swear by it.

Furthermore, the target audience — young, impressionable women — bear the brunt of these unrealistic ideals. For many, their formative years are already filled with the pressures of academic success, social acceptance, and self-discovery. The added weight of living up to an online persona often exacerbates feelings of inadequacy. Instead of learning to value their individuality, these young women are encouraged to mold themselves into a template dictated by social media trends and “That Girl” advocates. At first glance, it’s easy to see the appeal of these “What I Eat in a Day”, “A Day

in my Life” or “This is your sign to become That Girl” videos promoting the lifestyle. After all, who wouldn’t want to thrive living their best life, perfectly scheduled, with every step documented in soft hues and aesthetically pleasing reels? But as impressionable women scroll through endless reels of “perfect” mornings and unattainable routines, the message is clear: who you are is never enough, unless you conform to set standards. This internalized inadequacy can quickly snowball into harmful behaviors, such as overexercising, extreme perfectionism, or an obsessive focus on outward appearances, all under the guise of self-improvement, as young women can easily fall into the trap of over-doing it. What’s more, the relentless pursuit of the “That Girl” aesthetic can lead to burnout rather than fulfillment. “As humans, we need rest, recovery, and to allow ourselves to have days off,” Hannah Tishman further asserts.

This is where I want to emphasize that we’re more than our curated selves. The “That Girl” aesthetic, while outwardly empowering, imposes a singular narrative of success that’s both narrow and exclusionary. True self-care isn’t about living up to an

aesthetic; it’s about embracing who you are, imperfections and all, and managing to take time for yourself, how ever that may look for you. “Balance is key,” says famous fitfluencer Lily Sabri. And she’s right.

Instead of chasing the illusion, let’s reclaim wellness on our own terms. Whether it’s enjoying a pizza night with friends or skipping a workout to rest, staying true to yourself goes a long way and balancing an objectively healthy lifestyle with aspects of enjoyment is what truly leads to a fulfilled life. So, let’s champion individuality over perfection and turn the conversation from “becoming That Girl” to celebrating the many versions of ourselves and leaving the negative energy in the drafts.

Here’s the challenge: the next time you’re tempted to measure your worth against a perfectly lit Instagram post, ask yourself — is this for me, or is it for the feed? Is this a necessary addition to MY daily routine or simply an advertisement of a curated lifestyle? If we all pondered these short questions, we might just learn to thrive in our imperfections.

Wellness Warped  
by Wealth  
By Sarin Arnreiter

From the proliferation of yoga studios to the rise of personalized nutrition apps, the pursuit of health and self-care has gone from a personal endeavor to a consumer-driven market, making wellness a multi-billion-dollar industry. While this surge in popularity has made wellness more visible, it has become more difficult to distinguish genuine practices from profit-driven trends.

Instagram influencers tout “clean” supplements, while luxury retreats promise transformative healing— all for a price. Once centered on community and tradition, practices like yoga and meditation are now rebranded with glossy packaging and hefty membership fees. Wellness, it seems, has become less about health and more about status.

In 2023, the global wellness industry was estimated to have a net worth of \$6.23 trillion, which exhibits an increase of 25% since 2019. This means it has surpassed the sports and pharmaceutical industry long ago, which have an estimated net worth of \$1.4 trillion and \$1.6 trillion respectively.

The rapid expansion of the wellness industry raises an important question: is this boom improving public health, or is it merely exploiting consumer anxieties? With billion-dollar sectors dedicated to beauty, anti-aging, and luxury wellness tourism, it is evident that much of the industry thrives on selling an aspirational lifestyle rather than addressing fundamental health needs.

The rapid commercialization of wellness has turned a movement centered around health into a luxury market driven by status and profit. While the industry continues to grow, its emphasis on costly trends and aesthetics risks overshadowing genuine well-being. True wellness should not be a





# FADING MIRRORS

## BEAUTY, AGING, AND THE FEAR OF THE "HAG"



"Elisabeth losing herself to the Substance." Photograph: The Guardian

BY LUNA FAST

In today's society, Ozempic injections have become the latest weight-loss 'miracle fix', 12-year-olds are adapting anti-aging skin routines; and facials, waist-trainers, and diets are taking over our lives. Our grasp on reality becomes increasingly distorted. Eternal youth is desired, aging is abhorred. We all strive for what is, ultimately, unattainable. Reality is stretched and condensed to encompass that of a ridiculously young, smart, but not too smart, thick but skinny, sexy and desirable, but relatively humble woman. The media only intensifies this obsession, actively shaping our perceptions of beauty, self-worth, and desirability. Film, television, and advertising emphasize these perceptions, by feeding us an image of the "ideal woman". Media representation fuels our cultural fear of aging and enforces beauty standards that are both unreachable and unforgiving, with films like *The Substance* offering a chilling reflection of the consequences of obsessing over such desires and anxieties.

It all begins at a young age. We all know, love, and fondly remember our childhood filled with animated animals and comical cartoons. Film and television are a staple of childhood memories for us all, right? Yet how often are female characters in film and cartoons "warped" unnaturally to fit beauty standards prevalent in our mo-

dern society? Especially in anthropomorphic animated movies, the female character usually exists in an "altered state"; she does not reflect the natural sexual dimorphism prevalent in animals, but rather a reflection of beauty standards and attributes associated with human culture. Whereas the male seems to be anatomically natural, animated female animals embody hyperbolized "female" attributes, such as a curvaceous hourglass figure, pouted and glossy lips, perfectly made hair and curled eyelashes, as well as an altered "natural" coloring. However, the male figure is not "made up" and retains his more or less, natural biological features. This phenomenon is often seen in animated films, targeting mostly children, and foster-



Sid and Brooke in *Ice Age* (2016).

ing such body ideals at a very young age. And it's not just the obvious prevalence of pink clothes, or curled lashes, long styled hair, or pouted lips, but also the lack of realistic feminine traits, such as body hair, wrinkles, blemishes, and imperfections that further promote these body standards in our society.

Gradually, the representation of femininity is for women to exist in an altered state, because the natural state, unshaven, wrinkled, with cellulite and stretchmarks is understood as unfeminine, undesirable, and unattractive.

Still, the ideal gets reposted, remixed, and rebranded until it's the new baseline. The propagation of the feminine ideal, often through the male gaze, occurs only through representation of these standards. For example, the "heroin chic" body type in the 90s, portrayed by models such as Kate Moss fostered a standard which promoted sickly thin and gaunt-looking beauty traits. However, in the late 2000s, the Kardashians instigated the unrealistic BBL body, which has now spread worldwide. Hereby, beauty standards for women (and men) are cycled and recycled. Yet they also contrast and contradict one another. Elderly women are deemed an insult: "What in the world has happened to Ariana Grande? She looks like a 76-year-old woman." - PolitiX\_OG" but co-

smetic procedures are then also criticized: "What are these women doing to themselves? This is NOT normal. - AreOhEssEyeEe".

A few months ago, actress Demi Moore came under fire for her portrayal of Elisabeth Sparkle in *The Substance*; a film released September 2024 and directed by Coralie Fargeat. The film tells the story of a renowned aerobics show dancer, who faces a devastating blow on her 50th birthday as her boss fires her. Amid her distress, a secretive laboratory offers her a substance, an opportunity, which promises to transform her into an enhanced, perfected version of herself. The film is a gut punch—an unfiltered look at the hyperreal beauty trap, the spiral of self-loss, and the never-ending grind of 'keeping up' with femininity.

**"MOVIES FOR WOMEN BY WOMEN ARE RARELY TALKED ABOUT, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO THE MALE GAZE WHICH IS VERY REAL."**

Since its release, the movie has been loved by many and hated by many more; some claim it's a modern masterpiece, others call it as nightmare fuel - but one thing is sure, the *Substance* definitely knows how to provoke and condemn. The story follows Elisabeth's usage of the substance, which splits her into two personalities. Her old self, Elisabeth, and her perfected, younger, sexier self, Sue. Elisabeth transitions between Sue and herself every week. While Sue slowly becomes the next aerobics star, Elisabeth loses purpose in life; she stops putting effort in her appearance, health, and lifestyle- until she's barely a ghost of herself.

Originally, Elisabeth's role was to be desirable - to be consumed by an



From left to right: Elisabeth, Demi Moore, and Sue, Margaret Qualley, from the film *The Substance* (2024).

audience, by society. With Sue replacing Elisabeth physically and psychologically, the latter sees no reason to upkeep her "less attractive" self. The more youth Sue receives, the more is drained from Elisabeth. The *Substance* doesn't just take - it devours, chewing at her beauty, her body, her very sense of self. Elisabeth begins transforming into the "hag" that we, as women, are taught to fear. Her fingers are crooked, her skin sagging, her hair matted, her skin dry; she is the hyperbolized exemplification of the fear and despair, and anxiety associated with the aging process.

Her obsessive drive to achieve ultimate youth and desirability ends up being her demise. This fear of aging, and the resulting fear of the hag is fostered in media and spread through global and social interactions. Society, its standards, and constraints bring out the monster in her, capable of destroying herself in the name of desirability.

Today, we live in the era of the side-by-side, where everyone's stuck in a never-ending game of 'who did it better?'—constantly picking apart each other's flaws while also never feeling satisfied and content with our own reflection. With increased cosmetic technologies available, and increased societal pressures, we find ourselves looking at middle-aged celebrities, such as Nicole Kidman, Demi Moore, Sandra Bullock wondering, "Is this really what a middle-aged woman looks like? Or is it just a beauty procedure?" The lines will blur, and the pressure will increase

for those incapable or unwilling to pay for such cosmetic tweaks. These extreme and hyperbolized standards brought on women (and men) will only cause more obsessive disorders, body dysmorphia, and an altered self-perception.

While the pressure to conform to such unrealistic and unreachable beauty standards can feel overwhelming, there is power in recognizing and challenging these ideals at their male-based root. Media literacy—understanding how images are curated, altered, and perpetuated, and what influence that has on our identity—can help dismantle and recognize the illusion of perfection. Representation matters, and as more diverse and authentic portrayals of aging and beauty emerge in film, television, and advertising, societal standards can shift to encompass a more heterogenous and less male-centric perception.

Ultimately, beauty is not a fixed ideal but a constantly evolving social construct. Consequently, true empowerment can only be attained by redefining beauty on our own terms, embracing the natural aging process, and also resisting the pressures that mandate that we alter ourselves to fit an unattainable template of beauty. By backing businesses, creators, and films, as well as directors, actors, and producers who promote broader and more inclusive body portrayals, showcasing beauty in all its messy, real, and unfiltered forms, we can take a collective step toward a world in which self-worth is not dictated by youth and perfection, but by individuality, confidence, and reality.