



THE TICKER: *New Droid ads show Google is, as everyone suspected, Skynet, writes Michael Roston for True/Slant*

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Passion Point

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November 3, 2009
A Language of Smiles

Biologist Olivia Judson wonders: could speaking certain languages bring happiness?

We don't understand the relationship of facial gestures to mood, but we know it's real: Smiling can lift your mood, while frowning lowers it. We also know that when we say the long e in cheese, the corners of our mouths tend to rise, almost to a smile. Evolutionary biologist Olivia Johnson wonders: if some languages cause its speakers to "smile" more often than others because of their emphasis on the long e and o, could speaking one language over another bring greater happiness?

October 30, 2009
Three Tweets for the Web

Economics professor Tyler Cowen says our present-day quest for instant information is making the human mind more powerful, not less.

Writing in The Wilson Quarterly, economics professor, blogger, and Tweeter Tyler Cowen claims the digital innovations of the new information economy are "honing our ability to do many more things at once and do them faster." As a society we aren't dumbing down; we're simply becoming impatient with time-wasting ventures. Soon we may get more out of Google than from Catcher in The Rye, because we want more information at a faster rate. We're multitasking, all of us, and it's causing IQs to rise, not fall.

October 27, 2009
USDA Unveils "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" Initiative

Gordon Jenkins of grassroots food advocacy group Slow Food USA commends the USDA for its support of local farmers.

"Locavore" advocate Gordon Jenkins, who has been critical of the USDA for its past support of "big industrial farms," now praises the agency for a seeming change of heart. Its new program, "Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food" is an initiative that seeks to build up the nation's green markets and give consumers information on better consumer food choices. Jenkins gives credit for this shift to longtime local food advocate Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Kathleen Merrigan. Jenkins is hopeful this venture "is the start of many more good programs to come."

October 23, 2009
Have a Nice Day

Thomas Friedman asserts why the United States must strengthen its commitment to growing a renewable energy industry.

In an op-ed column for The New York Times, Thomas Friedman calls upon the U.S. government to launch the required prerequisites to grow a successful and sustainable renewable energy industry. Without long-term certainty and imposed national regulations, our utility companies will never feel secure or motivated enough to invest the necessary funding and talent in clean tech. Friedman argues that we must view the solar industry as the multi-billion dollar global business it could become—or risk playing catch-up to China, Germany, and other foreign nations.

October 20, 2009
Big Food vs. Big Insurance

Michael Pollan calls upon policy makers to factor food-system reform into the health care debate.

For the past twenty years, Michael Pollan has been a celebrated food/nature writer and a fervent critic of the industrial food chain. In his best-selling books *The Omnivore's Dilemma* and *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto* he criticizes the "rule setters"—the Washington politicians, the Dept of Agriculture bureaucrats, and the agricultural conglomerates—for creating a destructive modern agribusiness that has contributed to America's soaring rates in obesity and type 2 diabetes. In "Big Food vs. Big Insurance," a recent op-ed piece for The New York Times, Michael Pollan applies his criticism of the Western diet to the health-care reform debate. He calls upon President Obama and Congress to stop ignoring "the elephant in the room"—the surging mass of chronic diseases linked directly to our country's collectively-poor diet. Only by adding food-system reform into the national conversation can we confront head-on the rising costs of health care and enact reform that is beneficial, productive, and sustainable.

the Atlantic50

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