



**RECUEIL de TEXTES
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A £4M SCHEME TO BRING LATIN INTO BRITISH STATE SCHOOLS BEGINS

Evelyn Waugh, a novelist, valued his classical education. Not because it enabled him to understand ancient languages, but because it did enable him to excel in a more important exercise: spotting and judging those who knew less than he. Such people betrayed their deprivation with sentences of “inexcusable vulgarity”. “I do not,” he wrote, “regret my superficial classical studies.”

Latin occupies an odd place in English curriculums. One part proper subject, two parts smug social shibboleth, to have chanted “amo, amas, amat” in a Latin class has long implied membership of another kind of class altogether. The decline and almost fall of Latin in state schools in the 20th century did not diminish its social cachet, because numbers in fee-paying independent schools remained high. In 2020 eight times more pupils sat Latin GCSE at Eton, a posh school, than in the entirety of Northumberland. Evelyn Waugh considered Latin the mark of a gentleman. But a professor of classics at Cambridge University puts it more briskly: it gets seen as a subject for “posh white boys”.

This harms it – a bit – and helps it – a lot. Posh white boys tend to do quite well for themselves. A famous example recently left Downing Street; as he left, Boris Johnson mumbled that he was like Cincinnatus, a reference to a retiring Roman that both alarmed classicists (Cincinnatus returned as a dictator) and appealed to them (they got the joke).

Classicists may lament the passing of the subject’s golden age, but it declined for good reasons. A Britain alternately warmed by the white heat of technology and chilled by fear of the cold war had to prioritise science over dead languages. In 1960 Oxford and Cambridge dropped Latin O-Level as an entry requirement.

Changes continue to be made. Cambridge University has just introduced a four-year classics degree for those who have studied no Latin at school. And while he was in office Mr Johnson tried to make the subject more accessible via the Latin Excellence Programme, a £4m scheme to bring it to 40 state schools.

Which is why, on a rainy Monday in September, in Pimlico Academy in London, children sit in a lesson that would have felt familiar to Evelyn Waugh. The verb “esse” is chanted; etymologies are discussed; the word “conjugate” is used fearlessly. Its pupils would have felt less familiar to him, however: almost half of pupils in the school are on free school meals; 15% have English as an additional language; many are even female.

Employers and universities still like to see Latin. It is about more than verbs: it makes one feel clever.

Adapted from *The Economist*
October 2022
(451 words)

A 105-MILE-LONG CITY WILL SNAKE THROUGH THE SAUDI DESERT. IS THAT A GOOD IDEA?

A tall and narrow stripe of a city more than 105 miles long, teeming with 9 million residents and running entirely on renewable energy — that's the vision Saudi Arabia's leaders have for The Line, part of a "giga-project" that will reshape the kingdom's northwest.

Newly revealed design concepts show a futuristic walled city [...] stretching from the Red Sea eastward across the desert and into a mountain range.

Details emerge about the city [...]: It will be only 200 meters wide; it will rise 500 meters above sea level — higher than the Empire State Building; residents will be able to run errands with a five-minute walk; there will be no cars or roads; high-speed rail will carry people from end to end in 20 minutes; it will cost hundreds of billions of dollars to build.

Construction has already begun, and Saudi projections call for 1.5 million people to live in The Line by 2030. The unconventional megacity is part of the government's ambitious Neom development project, which released conceptual videos showing the city's high walls enclosing trees, gardens and other plant life, nestling communities among work and recreational structures.

"The designs revealed today for the city's vertically layered communities will challenge the traditional flat, horizontal cities and create a model for nature preservation and enhanced human livability," Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said on Monday.

The designers say the structure will maintain an ideal climate year-round, thanks to its mix of shade, sunlight and ventilation. But not everyone was as keen on the concept of living between gigantic walls in the Saudi desert. [...]

The idea of solving urban problems by creating a city from scratch isn't new. It's been tried before, from Brasilia and India's Chandigarh to Malaysia's Putrajaya and Masdar City in Abu Dhabi, as Pardo, a senior adviser to the New Urban Mobility Alliance, notes.

"This solution is a little bit like wanting to live on Mars because things on Earth are very messy," he tells NPR. [...]

Pardo worries that the high-tech approach seems to ignore people's desire to simply go outside, to experience something in a city that isn't man-made.

"This seems impossible, greatly limited or just plain artificial," he says. [...]

While the project's supporters tout The Line's zero emissions and a smaller footprint than conventional cities, critics note that those utopian ideals will come at an environmental price, as an entirely new city is created in the desert.

Neom is led by bin Salman, who aims to diversify the kingdom's economy and help it respond to climate change. The project is bankrolled by the government's public investment fund.

Adapted from *NPR*
July 2022
(460 words)

A BIT RICH? BILLIONAIRES' CLIMATE EFFORTS DRAW SCEPTICISM

Australia's second-richest person, mining magnate Andrew Forrest, is known to his admirers as a straight-shooting businessman cut from the same cloth as self-made billionaires Jeff Bezos and Bill Gates. And like his contemporaries in the USA, Forrest, the chairman of Fortescue Metals, the world's fourth-largest iron ore producer, has taken on a leading role in the fight against climate change.

Forrest is spending \$114 billion Australian dollars to build the world's largest electrolyser, an apparatus that separates water into oxygen and hydrogen. Powered by wind and solar energy, it will produce an emissions-free energy source and promises to decarbonise Asia's steel mills.

While some welcome the super wealthy's newfound focus on the climate, others question whether their actions can be seen as altruistic after they amassed fortunes from heavily polluting industries. Fortescue Metals emitted 2.2 million tonnes of carbon last year, according to Australia's Clean Energy Regulator. *"No Australian has ever caused more damage to the environment than Andrew Forrest,"* an Australian Financial Review columnist said in a recent commentary.

Bezos brings a similarly mixed track record to the table. In 2020, he created a \$10bn fund for climate change. But his company Amazon emitted more than 60 million tonnes of carbon that year – 15 percent more than in 2019.

According to a report by Oxfam, the world's wealthiest 1 percent are responsible for 15 percent of carbon emissions – nearly twice as much as the world's poorest 50 percent. Similarly, just 1 percent of the world's population is responsible for half the emissions caused by aviation, while almost 90 percent of people hardly ever fly.

Bill Gates, who last year published his book *How to Avoid a Climate Disaster*, has an annual carbon footprint of 7,500 tonnes, mostly from flying on private jets. That is nearly 3,000 times more carbon than the average person in Fiji creates in a year.

In many cases, billionaires' proposed solutions involve expensive nascent technology like green hydrogen that, if successfully scaled, will create new monopolies that control consumption patterns for decades.

"We need to stop looking at magical solutions," scientist Emily Ghosh said. *"That is what got us here in the first place and I'm worried that we will go down the same path where we are locked into one technology and not looking at a diversity of energy options."*

Nonetheless, Fortescue Metals will continue to pump millions of tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere for at least another eight years, according to the company's 2030 carbon neutrality plan.

Rather than looking to billionaires to *"wave their magic wands"*, Ghosh believes *"solutions should come from the bottom as well as the top because one solution will not fit into every space"*.

Adapted from *AlJazeera*
May 2022
(455 words)

A FEDERAL PROPOSAL COULD TURN GIG WORKERS INTO EMPLOYEES

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) announced a proposal that could drastically reframe the distinction between independent contractors and employees, potentially making it easier for millions of workers to receive federal labor protections they currently lack.

Gig work has now become the standard for many app-based companies such as Uber, Lyft, and Instacart. Although gig work opens up opportunities for flexible and profitable work, gig workers are in a more precarious position than employees because their work doesn't guarantee them protections like minimum wage or overtime pay.

The proposal would expand employment classification to include multiple new factors, including how permanent the position is, how integral the work is for the employer, and the skill levels it requires.

According to the Bureau of Labour, 10% of the workforce—more than 15 million people—consisted of some form of independent contractor in 2017. It was noted that many gig workers worried about contracting COVID-19 through their work and that this prompted calls for better safety and labor protections.

The defining feature of gig workers is that they set their own hours and that allows for “greater potential for higher wages.” But, gig workers may be more vulnerable to exploitation and harassment because they aren't protected by labor laws in the same ways that workers who have employee status are.

Under the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, federal labor laws guarantee workers' rights to fair, safe, and healthy working conditions. Some of the most notable laws cover minimum wage, overtime pay, protection against discrimination and unemployment insurance, but many of these protections don't apply to gig workers.

If the proposal delivers on its aim to loosen the standards that bar workers from qualifying for employee status, more gig workers could transition to employee status and be covered by federal labor protections. This is the Biden administration's second attempt to overturn Trump-era policies favored by many business groups.

If the measure is approved, some workers now considered independent contractors will have a stronger argument for employee classification. Labor rights activists, particularly groups that banded together to support app-based workers at places like Uber or Doordash, have criticized Biden's lack of effort to protect gig workers since he took office. Despite its support from these groups, the DOL said that the proposal isn't designed to target specific industries.

Businesses reliant on gig workers have opposed similar initiatives in the past, however, saying that they'd face soaring operating costs. “This gets to the core of their business model,” Gough says. In the hours following the proposal, Uber and Lyft's shares fell by as much as 10%. The DOL estimates that the proposal will cost groups with misclassified workers \$188 million.

Adapted from *Time*
October 2022
(457 words)

A JUST TRANSITION DEPENDS ON ENERGY SYSTEMS

The west's dash for African gas has become a rallying point at COP27, with climate justice activists calling out the hypocrisy of rich polluting nations who are scrambling to keep energy prices down by pushing for more fossil fuel projects in Africa.

This short-term fix to the energy price crisis created by Russia's war on Ukraine will lock some of the poorest, most climate-affected countries in the world in polluting fossil fuel projects with few economic or energy benefits for the communities whose land, water and heritage will be sacrificed.

There, more than 630 industry lobbyists are scattered around the COP27 conference centre as deals on climate finance, forests and food systems are being made. It's a huge, often insurmountable challenge for grassroots leaders from frontline communities to have their voices heard – let alone offer alternatives to the mostly market-based solutions being pushed.

But the climate justice movement's message is clear: community-based renewable projects that work for the people, not corporations, are a necessity, according to Friends of the Earth International in Mozambique. "It's not just about the energy source, it's about the whole energy system – who decides, who benefits and who profits."

Across Africa, an estimated 600 million people still lack access to electricity – in large part because most fossil fuel investment is directed toward infrastructure for export rather than delivery to Africans. The Lake Turkana windfarm in northern Kenya is built on indigenous territory after 40,000 acres were handed over to a consortium of investors without consulting the Indigenous pastoral communities who have lived and farmed sustainably on the land for hundreds – if not thousands – of years. The wind project, the biggest in Africa, has caused forced migration, conflicts, gender-based violence, water and food insecurity as well as the disruption of cultural and language traditions. Farmers have been forced to move further and further away with their goats, cows and camels in search of grazing lands and water, as the region faces the worst drought in decades.

Between 2015 and 2021, the Resource Centre recorded 369 attacks linked to renewable energy, including the murder of 98 land and environmental defenders. None of the world's 15 largest renewable energy companies have policies on respecting land rights despite wind and solar requiring substantial amounts of land.

In Kenya, after years of campaigning by activists, new legislation in 2016 banned the sale or lease of communally owned land without the consultation and approval of the whole community. The communities around Turkana are using the legislation to fight land grab – of 110,000 acres this time – and so far the court has sided with them.

Adapted from *The Guardian*
November 2022
(444 words)

A NOISY NOISE ANNOYS HANOI

The streets of Hanoi are not quiet. Hordes of motorbikes race SUV's down narrow side lanes. Their horns and engines compete with the din from drills, hawkers and squawking livestock. So raucous is Vietnam's capital that patrons in Tranquil, a café, are instructed to speak only in whispers, if they must talk at all. But soon loudspeakers in Vietnam's capital will blare propaganda once more. The city's residents hate the idea.

The city's government now plans to add to the clamour by reincarnating a city-wide public-address system introduced during the country's war with America that was used to broadcast state messages and propaganda. The city wants working speakers in every part of the capital by 2025, the better to convey the voice of government into homes and businesses. Many Hanoians object.

The *loa phuong* have a long history. During the war they provided warning of American bombing raids, and shared optimistic updates from the front line. When the conflict ended, they were put to other purposes. One Hanoi resident remembers hearing neighbours shamed for not paying their taxes. Another recalls a song encouraging people to clean their neighbourhoods and chastising households which had not yet pitched in. One ditty urged the twice-daily brushing of teeth.

Endless announcements offended the ears as much as they did the spirit. Pham Gia Ngoc, who spent decades broadcasting statements about everything from power cuts to vaccination schedules, told state media that residents often became so incensed by the racket that they cut speakers' wires or turned them upside down and filled them with water. A Hanoian bigmouth can be accused of being "as loud as the ward loudspeaker".

The speakers were widespread until 2017. That year the city announced a plan to remove them gradually; it said it would spread its messages in other ways. Some were still working when the pandemic hit. They were used to remind citizens to wear masks and keep their distance. They blasted out a motivational song every morning with the phrase, "Citizens, let's join forces in this fight so covid disappears!"

Now that the city is preparing to reinstall speakers everywhere, its spin doctors are claiming that there was never a plan to remove them in the first place. This does not sway Hanoians. A recent poll found that 70% of people want to get rid of the noisemakers. One newspaper editor in Hanoi calls the plan "idiotic".

So far local officials have not wavered. Zachary Abuza of the National War College in Washington, DC, says that is because the decision was made by Hanoi's Communist Party committee. Its members are more concerned to impress party bigwigs than to avoid upsetting the little folk.

Adapted from *Economist*
September 2022
(451 words)

A TRIAL OF E-SCOOTERS IN BRITAIN HAS ENCOURAGING RESULTS

“E” stands for “electric”, but in Britain it could also mean “experimental”. Since 2020 the Department for Transport has allowed 31 English local authorities to carry out e-scooter rental trials. The scheme was fast-tracked during the pandemic, when lockdowns restricted public transport. Its primary aim is to help the government decide whether to legalise e-scooters as a way of reducing emissions (private scooters are illegal unless ridden on private land, though some ride them regardless). A member of Portsmouth council, which is running a trial, says the city has “a major congestion problem” and poor air quality. “We wanted to get as many people as possible out of their cars.”

Transport infrastructure makes a difference to safety. To the ire of many motorists, rented e-scooters may be driven on the road and in special cycle lanes. A recent study of six European countries found that traffic accidents reported to the police increased by an average of 8.2% after rented e-scooters were introduced, but did not rise in towns with good cycle lanes.

Another reason given to oppose e-scooters is that they may not be as green as people think. Rides typically replace short journeys on foot or by bike, rather than by car, says Christian Brand of the University of Oxford. A French study found that, because of an e-scooter’s short life, the total emissions from its use can be six times those from taking the metro. In Portsmouth, however, the council says that 34% of users responding to its surveys say they would otherwise have used a car for their most recent e-scooter journey. Only 15% walk or cycle less than they did before.

One of the most notable things about the English scheme is that it allows for local experimentation. In consultation with councils, e-scooter companies constantly refine their “geofencing”, which uses the satellite-based global positioning system to map “no-go” areas, where the scooters shut down, and to automatically enforce speed restrictions. In Oxford riders cannot scoot by the river, presumably to stop students dumping the machines during drunken nights out.

Public feedback also informs the schemes. Surveys consistently show a demand for more parking bays, as well as concerns about safety. Britain has more mandatory parking bays than other European countries.

If interest is a measure of success, the trials are going well. So far 29 of the 31 councils have chosen to continue them. The trial period has been extended to 2024. But its most tangible result may come sooner, if private e-scooters are legalised, which could happen in a transport bill expected next year. Then “e” might also stand for “everywhere”.

Adapted from *The Economist*
October 2022
(457 words)

ACTIVIST IDA B. WELLS IS COMMEMORATED WITH A BARBIE DOLL

Educator, journalist, anti-lynching activist and NAACP co-founder Ida B. Wells joins the pantheon of distinguished women honored by Mattel with her own signature Barbie doll [...] The new Ida B. Wells doll also comes with a historically significant accessory: a miniature replica of the *Memphis Free Speech*, the newspaper where Wells became editor and co-owner in 1889.

Mattel has created numerous Barbie dolls to honor both historic and contemporary heroines in the hopes of inspiring "generations of girls to dream bigger than ever before." It's Inspiring Women Series includes dolls dedicated to Maya Angelou, NASA mathematician Katherine Johnson and singer Ella Fitzgerald.

The oldest of eight children, Ida B. Wells was born into slavery in Holly Springs, Miss., in 1862. When she was 16, both of her parents and a younger brother died during the yellow fever epidemic. Wells raised her younger siblings and became a teacher to support her family.

"I am honored that Barbie has chosen to celebrate my great-grandmother, Ida B. Wells, as part of its Inspiring Women Series," says Michelle Duster, author, public historian, and great-granddaughter of Ida B. Wells [...] "My great-grandmother was a trailblazer, who courageously followed her convictions and challenged the status quo by fighting for civil rights and women's suffrage. This is an incredible opportunity to shine a light on her truth and enduring legacy to empower a new generation to speak up for what they believe in."

A pivotal moment in Wells' life came in 1883 when she was traveling by train from Memphis to Woodstock, Tenn., where she was a teacher. When she refused to give up her seat and ride in a segregated car, she was forcibly removed. Wells later sued the Chesapeake, Ohio and Southwest Railroad Co. A local court ruled in her favor but the decision was eventually overturned in federal court.

Wells became a fierce anti-lynching activist. She investigated white mob violence and wrote scathing indictments of the lynchings of Black men. Her articles so angered locals, the offices of the *Memphis Free Speech* were destroyed.

In the preface to her 1892 pamphlet *Southern Horrors: Lynch Laws In All Its Phases*, Wells wrote, "It is with no pleasure I have dipped my hands in the corruption here exposed. Somebody must show that the Afro-American race is more sinned against than sinning, and it seems to have fallen on me to do so."

Mattel recently honored medical workers on the front lines of the COVID epidemic. In a release, Mattel says, "Barbie continues to celebrate role models, as every child imagines that they can be anything, but actually seeing that they can, and hearing the stories of others, makes all the difference."

Adapted from *NPR*
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(457 words)

ADIDAS ENDS PARTNERSHIP WITH KANYE WEST AT A CONSIDERABLE COST

For more than two weeks, as Kanye West made a series of antisemitic remarks and embraced a slogan associated with white supremacists, Adidas, the most important partner in his fashion empire, said only that its relationship with the rapper and designer was “under review.”

But as Ye, as Mr. West is now known, continued his offensive behavior, and with the condemnation of his remarks growing more widespread, Adidas announced that it would cut ties with him — a move the company said would cost it 250 million euros this year.

“Adidas does not tolerate antisemitism and any other sort of hate speech,” the company said in a statement. “Ye’s recent comments and actions have been unacceptable, hateful and dangerous, and they violate the company’s values of diversity and inclusion, mutual respect and fairness.”

Over the past month, Ye tested the boundaries of acceptable behavior even for a noted provocateur. At his Paris Fashion Week show, he wore a shirt with the slogan “White Lives Matter,” which the Anti-Defamation League has identified as hate speech and has been adopted by the white supremacist movement. He made antisemitic remarks on social media, including a Twitter post that said he would go “death con 3 on Jewish people.”

Though Adidas was among the first of Ye’s corporate partners to announce publicly that it had placed the relationship under “review,” the fact that the company did not move faster to officially sever the ties began to take a toll. The Anti-Defamation League shot back, “What more do you need to review?”

In Germany, the Central Council of Jews called on the company to cut ties to Ye. “The historical responsibility of Adidas lies not only in the German roots of the company, but also in its entanglement with the Nazi regime,” the head of the council said.

The founder of Adidas, Adi Dassler, belonged to the Nazi Party, and his factory produced munitions in the final years of the war. Thanks to the sworn statement of a Jewish friend, Dassler was allowed to found the present-day company after World War II ended. Antisemitic statements made online can lead to prosecution in Germany, and companies with ties to the Nazi era are expected to act to prevent the return of such sentiment.

As pressure on the company mounted in the United States in recent days, its leadership remained largely silent, frustrating even its own executives. “As a member of the Jewish community, I can no longer stay silent on behalf of the brand that employs me,” a director for trade marketing at Adidas in the United States wrote in a LinkedIn post.

Adidas stock has fallen over 20 percent in the past month.

Adapted from *The New York Times*
October 2022
(459 words)

AI CAN NOW CREATE ANY IMAGE IN SECONDS, BRINGING WONDER AND DANGER

Since the research lab OpenAI debuted the latest version of DALL-E in April, the AI has dazzled the public, attracting digital artists, graphic designers, early adopters, and anyone in search of online distraction. The ability to create original, sometimes accurate, and occasionally inspired images from any spur-of-the-moment phrase, like a conversational Photoshop, has startled even jaded internet users with how quickly AI has progressed.

Five months later, 1.5 million users are generating 2 million images a day. On Wednesday, OpenAI said it removed its waitlist for DALL-E, giving anyone immediate access.

The introduction of DALL-E has triggered an explosion of text-to-image generators. Google and Meta quickly revealed that they had each been developing similar systems, but said their models weren't ready for the public. Rival start-ups soon went public, including Stable Diffusion and Midjourney, which created the image that sparked controversy in August when it won an art competition at the Colorado State Fair.

The technology is now spreading rapidly, faster than AI companies can shape norms around its use and prevent dangerous outcomes. Researchers worry that these systems produce images that can cause a range of harms, such as reinforcing racial and gender stereotypes or plagiarizing artists whose work was siphoned without their consent. Fake photos could be used to enable bullying and harassment — or create disinformation that looks real.

Historically, people trust what they see, said a professor at the University of Southern California's school of engineering. "Once the line between truth and fake is eroded, everything will become fake," he said. "We will not be able to believe anything."

OpenAI has tried to balance its drive to be first and hype its AI developments without accelerating those dangers. To prevent DALL-E from being used to create disinformation, for example, OpenAI prohibits images of celebrities or politicians. (...)

"The question OpenAI should ask itself is: Do we think the benefits outweigh the drawbacks?" said a UC Berkeley professor, who specializes in digital forensics, computer vision, and misinformation. "It's not the early days of the internet anymore, where we can't see what the bad things are." (...)

Each evolution of image technology has introduced potential harms alongside increased efficiency. Photoshop enabled precision editing and enhancement of photos, but also served to distort body images, especially among girls, studies show.

More recently, advances in AI gave rise to deepfakes, a broad term that covers any AI-synthesized media — from doctored videos where one person's head has been placed on another person's body to surprisingly lifelike "photographs" of people who don't exist. When deepfakes first emerged, experts warned that they could be deployed to undermine politics.

Adapted from *The Washington Post*
September 2022
(445 words)

AI REUNITES HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR WITH CHILDHOOD PHOTOS

Blanche remembers hiding inside a bed while Nazis searched for her. "I felt them tapping on the bed," she recalls. "I said, you better not breathe or sneeze or anything."

Blanche was a survivor - she was lucky. Six million Jews like her were murdered by the Nazis in the Holocaust during World War Two. The names of more than one million of those people are unknown.

Now a tool using artificial intelligence (AI) - built by a software engineer for Google - could hold the key to putting names to some of the many faces, both victims and survivors, in hundreds of thousands of historic photographs. It found Blanche in a wartime photo which she had never seen before.

The website, Numbers to Names, uses facial recognition technology to analyse a person's face. It then searches through archive photos to find potential matches. The software has been cross-referencing millions of faces, to try to find matches for people who have already been identified in one photo - but not in others. That detective work could then help identify some people in photos whose identities are currently unknown.

Blanche, who is now 86 and lives in New York, knew about one family snapshot but she had never previously seen other photos taken in France during the war. It was the AI software which made the connection.

Blanche lived in Poland when the Nazis came looking for her and her family. Her mother and her siblings were killed - but she was saved, thanks to her Aunt Rose, who hid her.

The lost image from the past triggered a long-forgotten memory in her - a French song she learned as a child. Blanche immediately recognised herself standing at the front of the large group of people, but that's not all. She also identified her Aunt Rose and one of the boys in the photo - giving the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum new information to work with.

"It's so important to identify these photos," says the director of curatorial affairs at the museum. "You're restoring some semblance of dignity to them, some comfort to their family, and it's a form of memorial for the entire Jewish community."

"That's part of the problem. I can't stress enough how important these photos are of individuals. We all know the figure - six million Jews were killed - but it's really one person six million times. Every person has a name, every person has a face."

Before Blanche set eyes on the photo, only three people in it had been identified. Thanks to Blanche, and the software, that number has doubled.

Adapted from *BBC News*
November 2022
(449 words)

AI-DA BECOMES FIRST ROBOT TO PAINT LIKE AN ARTIST

Brush clamped firmly in bionic hand, Ai-Da's robotic arm moves slowly, dipping in to a paint palette then making slow, deliberate strokes across the paper in front of her. This, according to Aidan Meller, the creator of the world's first ultra-realistic humanoid robot, Ai-Da, is "mind-blowing" and "ground-breaking" stuff because Ai-Da has become the first robot to paint as artists have painted for centuries. Camera eyes fixed on her subject, AI algorithms prompt Ai-Da to interrogate, select, decision-make and, ultimately, create a painting, and no two works are exactly the same.

Yet the question Meller wants to raise with this, the first public demonstration of a creative, robotic painting, is not "can robots make art?", but rather "now that robots can make art, do we, humans, really want them to?" "This is an ethical project", said Meller.

With rapidly developing artificial intelligence, growing accessibility to super computers and machine learning on the up, Ai-Da exists as a "comment and critique" on rapid technological change. Ask Ai-Da what she thinks of art and she tells you she used machine learning to teach her to paint. Can she appreciate art or beauty? "I do not have emotions like humans do, however, it is possible to train a machine learning system to learn to recognise emotional facial expressions," she answered.

But, can what she creates be truly considered art? "The answer to that question depends on what you mean by art," she said, adding: "I am an artist if art means communicating something about who we are. To be an artist is to illustrate the world around you."

Devised in Oxford by Meller, Ai-Da was created more than two years ago by a team of programmers, roboticists, art experts and psychologists, completed in 2019, and is updated as AI technology improves. She has already demonstrated her ability to sketch and create poems. Her new painting talent was unveiled at her solo exhibition at the 2022 Venice Biennale. The exhibition is about AI from Alan Turing to the metaverse and explores the future of humanity in a world where AI technology continues to encroach on everyday human life.

Soon, with the amount of data we freely give about ourselves, and through talking to our phones, computers, cars and even kitchen appliances, AI algorithms "are going to know you better than you do", Meller warned. We are entering a world, he said, "not understanding which is human and which is machine. We are not here to promote robots or technology. We are deeply concerned about the nature of what this technology can do," he added. "The whole point of Ai-Da is to highlight what is it we are doing, unknowingly, online all the time."

Adapted from *The Guardian*

April 2022

(460 words)

ALASKA'S FAT BEAR WEEK PROVES CONSERVATION CAN BE JOYFUL

For one rabid corner of the internet, October is Octobear. On October 5th, Katmai National Park & Preserve in southern Alaska kicked off Fat Bear Week, when the park's brown bears are pitted against each other in a challenge, much like college basketball's March Madness tournament. Fans use before and after photos to vote for the bear they think has gained the most weight over summer to prepare for hibernation. But what began as a niche contest for conservationists has become a global campaign where superfans stump for their favourite bear to be crowned the fattest of them all.

Fat Bear Week began in 2014 as Fat Bear Tuesday. A park ranger at Katmai noticed that live webcams showing the bears generated a lot of online comments. He and the other rangers let people vote for their favourite fat bear on Facebook. The one-day event attracted just 1,700 votes in 2014. Last year's week-long contest elicited nearly 800,000. Fans gather to watch the live bear cams set up around the park. Some go further. One of them is hosting a bear-themed meal where she lives in Northern Michigan. Guests must bring foods that appeal to both bears and humans, such as salmon cakes and honey butter. This year Ms Gross says she is rooting for Holly, an older she-bear, because "she is a nice little fat girl and so am I".

The contest serves two other purposes: America's national parks are often in remote, undeveloped areas. They can be difficult and costly to travel to. Fat Bear Week brings Alaska's pristine wilderness to fans' computer screens. "The webcams help to democratise the experience," says a naturalist for explore.org, which operates the bear cams. "It's not limited to the fortunate few who can go to the river any more."

Second, Fat Bear Week heaps attention upon the bears, and the ecosystems they inhabit. The 2,200 bears of Katmai are so husky because they feed from one of the healthiest salmon runs in the world, says a former park ranger. Salmon in the Pacific Northwest have suffered due to overfishing, dam construction and warming rivers due to climate change. Brooks River, where Katmai's bears like to fish, has so far dodged these threats.

Creators and fans of Fat Bear Week argue the contest has gone viral because it is a conservation success story that for one week helps dispel feelings of doom about habitat loss and climate change. "Maybe things aren't super great all the time in the world," says a Katmai ranger, "but there's some really fat bears in Alaska."

Adapted from *The Economist*
October 2022
(447 words)

AMAZON ENTERS THE AGE OF ROBOTS. WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ITS WORKERS?

Trapped in a metal cage in a corner of a 350,000 sq ft Amazon warehouse outside Boston last week a lonely yellow robot arm sorted through packages, preparing items to be shipped out to customers demanding ever-faster delivery. Soon it will be joined by others in a development that could mean the end of thousands of jobs and the creation of thousands of others. As the robot worked, a screen displayed its progress. It carefully packed a box of napkin rings then a tube of hemorrhoid cream.

One day soon the robot, called Sparrow, could do the work of the hundreds of thousands of people that Amazon now employs to sort the 13m packages it delivers each year. Using computer vision and artificial intelligence Sparrow can already identify about 65% of its product inventory, tell if an item is damaged and discard it, and adjust its suction cup “hand” to handle different objects – all jobs currently done by human hands. As it learns, it gets better day by day.

Sparrow, which will start rolling out next year, was just one of the new army of robots on display for the first time at Amazon’s “Delivering the Future” conference last Thursday. The company also showed off its latest drone which it hopes will allow the company to deliver 500m packages by air by the end of the decade. The 2020s will be the “age of applied robotics”, said Tye Brady, chief technologist at Amazon Robotics. “Robots will be doing meaningful tasks and extending human capability. It’s exciting!”

People have predicted that robots will destroy the labour market. Back in 1933 the economist John Maynard Keynes prophesied widespread technological unemployment was coming due to our discovery of means of economizing the use of labour outrunning the pace at which we can find new uses for labour.

“I just don’t see that at all,” said Brady. “We made our first serious investment in robotics over 10 years ago and in those 10 years we created more than a million jobs.” More robots will boost the efficiency of warehouses and store more goods. Amazon will sell more stuff and more people will be needed to make sure everything runs smoothly, he said.

Yet employers “may use technology in ways that decrease the skill requirements of jobs to reduce training times and turnover costs. This could create wage stagnation and job insecurity”.

Nothing will slow Amazon’s robot revolution, though. The company is the largest manufacturer of industrial robots worldwide. Its Boston facilities already produce 330,000 robots a year: “We will react to what customers want and if they want their toothpaste faster, we will help them get it faster”, Brady said.

Adapted from *The Guardian*
November 2022
(458 words)

AN ASTRONAUT'S VIEW ON PROTECTING THE EARTH

French astronaut Thomas Pesquet, who has recently become a UN Food and Agricultural Organization Goodwill Ambassador, spent six months aboard the International Space Station last year. Long periods with his feet off solid ground gave him a unique and privileged perspective on our planet. His Instagram account is bursting with beautiful images of “the blue ball we call home.” But the beauty is tainted. Pesquet says that even from space the effects of climate change are visible, with glaciers visibly retreating, and a rise in extreme weather events. [...]

“When you look at the Earth from the space station, he adds, it’s absolutely magical. [...] It is absolutely breathtaking the first time you see it. It’s the most beautiful scenery you could possibly imagine.

When you’re on the Earth, you feel that everything is vast, that everything is endless. You have a hard time understanding how limited we are, whereas, when you take a step back and you see the Earth in its entirety, you suddenly understand that we live in an oasis in the cosmos. All around us is nothing, no life, blackness, emptiness – apart from this blue ball with everything we need to sustain human life, and life in general, which is so fragile. It makes you want to cherish the Earth and protect it, particularly because, from space, you can see a lot of the consequences of human activities. The most visible effect is glaciers retreating together with extreme weather phenomena.

And we, up here, can do more than simply observe... First of all, as a space agency, we have satellites that can take precise measures.

Then, the way we deal with our limited resources on board the space station gives us techniques to recycle oxygen and water that could be applied on Earth.

It is all the more important for us to contribute to improving the Earth, as space travel has an impact on the environment. Even though it is negligible when compared to aviation, cars or other industries. We need activity in space to get satellite research done. This benefits the planet a lot. So space travel is a necessary evil.

Besides, if we set ourselves on the right path, there’s nothing we cannot do. We built this unbelievable facility in space for good reasons. We’re using it every day, in peaceful cooperation between countries that were not always friends. So if we can transfer that model to the way we deal with the environment on Earth, I think we’ll get there.

We’re creative enough, we have the technology and we have the will. So, I’m optimistic for the future. If we can make a space station fly, then we can save the planet.”

Adapted from CNN
January 2022
(449 words)

ARE WE FALLING IN LOVE WITH ROBOTS?

Cristine Bonifacio has just extracted a large chocolate bar from a white robot with six wheels that has rolled up outside her home. She is in a hurry and has to dash back indoors for a work Zoom call, but she's got just enough time to express her affection for the robot delivery service that sends these machines scuttling along her local pavements. "I love the robots. Sometimes you find one that is stuck so you help it and it says 'thank you'."

The robot delivery service from Starship Technologies was launched in Milton Keynes four years ago and has been expanding ever since, with further towns added last month.

After decades of playing the villain in science fiction, robots are now part of life in many towns and people haven't just embraced them, they rush to assist them. What is going on? Mrs Case is an Oregon-based specialist in human-robot interaction and the way technology changes everyday life. "In the movies robots are always a technology that's attacking us. But the delivery robots wait for us and we use them."

She thinks occasions when a robot hits an obstacle and requires help from a passer-by are a crucial part of the human-robot relationship. "Technology can be adorable if it needs our assistance. We like a robot that needs us and helping the robot creates a bond."

Curiously, Ms Case is critical of the Starship Technologies delivery robots in Milton Keynes. They are battery-powered, summoned and opened by an app, equipped with sensors to detect pedestrians and armed with a speaker. This allows a remote human operator to address people observed through on-board video cameras. Yet this arsenal of tech is not being applied correctly, she says. "I feel they are automating the wrong part of the journey. Humans are really good at negotiating terrain and finding a particular house. Is this just a fetish for automating things?" Despite these reservations she concedes that "the Starship team have made sure it's not scary, but cute. It seems they think more about the design and a well-designed robot is more likely to succeed."

"The emerging human-robot bond has banished the stereotype of a menacing robot", says one inhabitant. "When you see one you don't get that science-fiction emotion of 'Oh No! It's a robot!' It's more like a cute little character you see on the street. It makes your walk more colourful."

Mr Curtis, Starship's operations manager talks about each machine operating in a "bubble of awareness" that allows it to alert people to its presence and offer thanks if they assist it. "It's designed to be cute, not to be invasive."

Adapted from [bbcnews.com](https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-60888888)
August 2022
(450 words)

ARTS JOURNALISTS HAVE A TWITTER PROBLEM

It's Saturday morning and I've been up all night scrolling Twitter, trying to decide if being an arts and culture writer is in direct conflict with the use of the increasingly divisive social media platform under the new ownership of the world's richest and most annoying man, Elon Musk. My job is to shine light on the ways that human creativity can illuminate, challenge and ultimately transform life on Earth, and to dig up injustice of all kinds as it relates to [...] art. Twitter's job is to foment outsized outrage at just about everything.

According to a recent study, Twitter is the most-used social media platform among journalists, with 69% of us saying that we use it the most, or second most, in the course of our jobs. We didn't become addicts out of the blue: Twitter's rise directly coincided with the devastating fall of print media.

The platform's ability to drive traffic online was seen as a life raft for publications struggling to monetize the web. Twitter encouraged our ardor, and in those early days, entire newsrooms were given the blue check marks denoting official accounts. We repaid the social media site with our near-constant attention. I was once pulled into an editor's office and reprimanded for not tweeting enough. [...]

The site's greatest failing is now being exacerbated by the platform's new overlord, Elon Musk, who seems intent on offending almost everyone, recently tweeting, "Being attacked by both right & left simultaneously is a good sign," and pinning to his profile a poll that asks what advertisers should value more, freedom of speech or political correctness. [...]

Musk's ownership has pushed journalists who promote their work on the site to a moral crossroads: to tweet or not to tweet. For arts and culture writers [...], Twitter has been an especially useful tool of dissemination. It's a forum for meeting kindred spirits and fellow arts practitioners and for staying up to date on cultural conversations before they begin to trend. [...]

Leaving is hard, although some journalists are already doing it. I applaud their resolve and ability to place principle above the convenient expediency of the fast-moving, ever-churning social media site. As I mentioned up top, I remain a Twitter user. One of my biggest concerns about society today is its extreme fracture, which I believe stems from our ability to silo ourselves off from ideas and people we find offensive and uncomfortable. For that reason I have never blocked someone on social media — no matter how angry or indignant they make me. And that's how I'm justifying my continued presence on the site. It's a window into the soul of America, and like America, it is exceedingly dark right now.

Adapted from *The Los Angeles Times*
November 2022
(452 words)

BANKSY UNVEILS UKRAINE GYMNAST MURAL ON BUILDING BOMBED BY RUSSIA

Renowned graffiti-artist Banksy has unveiled his latest work on a building devastated by bombing in Ukraine. He posted a picture on Instagram of the artwork, a gymnast doing a handstand amid debris.

Murals spotted in and around Ukraine's capital Kyiv had led to speculation the anonymous artist was working in the war-torn country. Another, not officially claimed, depicts a man resembling Vladimir Putin being defeated at Judo by a child. The Russian president is a judo black belt and noted admirer of the martial art.

The graffiti artist posted three images of the gymnast mural in the wreckage left by Russian bombing, with a caption merely stating "Ukraine".

The area was one of the places hardest hit by Russia's bombardment of Ukraine in the immediate aftermath of the 24 February invasion. Russian soldiers occupied the town - located around 30 miles North West of Ukraine's capital Kyiv - for weeks in the initial phase of the war, before it was eventually liberated by Ukraine in April.

After the town was recaptured, the BBC News international editor - a veteran war correspondent - said the destruction wrought by the Russian bombardment was the worst he had seen in Ukraine at the time. Several witnesses said that Russian troops stopped attempts to dig survivors out of wrecked buildings, threatening people who wanted to do so at gunpoint. BBC News has also heard the story of a local police officer who lost six family members - his mother, father, brother, grandmother, wife and one-year-old daughter - in a single Russian strike.

The third artwork that appears to be painted by Banksy shows a female rhythmic gymnast, wearing a neck brace, performing with a ribbon on top of a gaping hole in the side of a building in Irpin. The town, which is on the outskirts of Kyiv, was the site of a notorious massacre of hundreds of civilians by occupying Russian troops.

A fourth work, which also resembles Banksy's signature spray-painted style, portrays two children sitting on a metal tank trap and using it as a playground spray painted onto a concrete defensive block in Kyiv.

Banksy is one of the world's most famous artists - while also remaining completely anonymous. He rose to fame with stencilled designs around Bristol in the early 1990s. But over the years, examples of his work have popped up in Paris, New York and Park City, in Utah. Often described as "elusive" and "secretive" by the press, the "guerrilla street artist" has a legion of fans that includes A-list celebrities.

Adapted from *BBC News*
November 2022
(440 words)

BANNED IRANIAN MUSICIAN RAJABIAN RETURNS, WITH THE HELP OF GRAMMY WINNERS

Iranian composer Mehdi Rajabian has defied the efforts of the Iranian authorities to silence him, by releasing a new album in collaboration with a string of prominent international musicians.

It Arrives, released on September 10, has had a difficult path. Rajabian is banned from working with other musicians in Iran, he can't tour or release music locally and can't even use professional music studios.

Instead, the 32-year-old turned to the internet to collaborate with numerous Grammy Award winners and nominees [...] "We did all the parts online, from musicians, studio recording, album art, mastering, everything you see in this project has been done over the internet," he said.

Trying to collaborate with people thousands of miles away presents plenty of challenges, made worse by poor internet connections. "In Iran, the internet speed is very low and most of the applications are blocked and filtered, which made it much more difficult, especially for transferring large files," said Rajabian.

There is also the ever-present risk that the authorities might come calling. Rajabian has been arrested multiple times for his artistic endeavors and in 2015 was sentenced to six years in prison. After spending two years behind bars, he went on a hunger strike for 40 days, lapsing into a coma. The authorities released him on parole, but he said three years of his sentence remain suspended. "They can easily send me back to jail," he said.

He was again arrested in 2020, following the release of his album *Middle Eastern*, which was part of a project involving female singers and dancers.

"You are under pressure in several ways. These pressures are both mental and physical and cause the destruction of the work of art," said Rajabian. "As a result you must produce a magnificent work of art. What is finally produced is a work that overcomes great difficulties." [...]

"It really makes me proud to work with the most important musicians in the world. If it wasn't for their help and persistence, I would never have been able to produce music."

While some music is allowed in Iran, many artists are driven underground.

"Any artist who has a platform has definitely given in to censorship and has agreed to produce artwork within the framework of censorship. People like me definitely do not and have not given in to this framework," said Rajabian. [...]

"I believe that an artist should be a fighter. He should know prison, solitary confinement, hunger strike, torture... and not be afraid. But his work of art should be philosophical. This time I tried to use more variety of colors in the album, unlike the previous album. Maybe this anger and loneliness of mine has reached happy colors."

Adapted from *Forbes*
September 2022
(460 words)

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION RELAXES RULES FOR STUDENT DEBT FORGIVENESS

The Biden administration is moving forward with an overhaul of several student debt forgiveness programs, aiming to make it easier for borrowers to get relief if they are duped by their colleges or if they put in a decade of work as public servants.

Education Secretary Miguel Cardona called it a “monumental step” that will make it faster and simpler to get debt relief. “The Biden administration is fixing a broken system and putting borrowers first,” Cardona told reporters.

Chief among the changes is a revamp of a program which offers debt forgiveness to students whose colleges make false advertising claims or otherwise commit fraud.

The new policy clarifies that the Education Department can review claims from individual borrowers or it can grant forgiveness to huge swaths of students from the same college, if it has been found to have committed fraud. The new rule cements the department’s ability to erase debt for thousands of borrowers in a single action.

In a major shift, the federal government will also be able to force colleges to cover the cost when their students are granted loan cancellation because of fraud. Those costs have typically been passed to taxpayers, prompting complaints from conservative critics.

The overhaul also brings big changes to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, which was created by Congress as an incentive for government and nonprofit workers but has failed to deliver its promise because of notoriously complex rules.

Under the existing rules, teachers, nurses and other public workers can get the rest of their federal student debt erased after making 120 monthly payments. All payments must be made in full and within 15 days of their due date.

The new rule erases the 15-day rule, allowing payments to count even if they are made late or in multiple installments. It also allows borrowers to make up to a year of payments in advance in a single sum, rather than making monthly payments.

That program cancels federal student debt for people who are permanently disabled and unable to generate significant income.

Loosening the rules around existing debt forgiveness programs has been a priority for the Biden administration, which has already granted \$38 billion in debt cancellation for defrauded students, public students and others. That doesn’t include Biden’s broad cancellation plan, which is estimated to cost about \$400 billion.

Yet, a federal appeals court has temporarily blocked Biden’s plan, creating uncertainty for millions of borrowers who were told they would get up to \$20,000 canceled. The Education Department has said it’s still processing applications even while it’s barred from erasing the debt. Cardona on Monday said his agency is moving “full steam ahead” with the plan.

Adapted from *The Washington Post*
October 2022
(454 words)

BRAZIL, INDONESIA AND DRC IN TALKS TO FORM ‘OPEC OF RAINFORESTS’

The big three tropical rainforest nations – Brazil, Indonesia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo – are in talks to form a strategic alliance to coordinate their conservation, nicknamed an “Opec for rainforests”. The election of Lula da Silva has been followed by a flurry of activity to avoid the destruction of the Amazon, which scientists have warned is dangerously close to tipping point after years of deforestation.

President-elect, Lula has pledged to fight for zero deforestation in the Amazon. Brazil, Indonesia and DRC are home to 52% of the world’s remaining primary tropical forests, which are crucial to avoiding climate catastrophe. The alliance could see the rainforest countries make joint proposals on carbon markets and finance, as part of an effort to encourage developed countries to fund their conservation, which is key to limiting global heating to 1.5C (2.7F) above pre-industrial levels.

The three countries – home to the Amazon, Congo basin and Borneo and Sumatra forests, which are threatened by commercial logging, mining and illegal exploitation – signed an agreement at Cop26 in Glasgow to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030.

“The president-elect is already working with DRC and Indonesia to protect all tropical forests on the planet. He also reiterated the commitment of his government to get to zero deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon during his presidency,” he said, explaining that Science Panel for the Amazon would launch a proposal for an “arc of restoration” covering more than 1m hectares mainly in the southern Amazon near the Andes.

“Implementing such a project will protect the Amazon rainforest from reaching the tipping point and also will remove more than 1bn tonnes of CO₂ from the atmosphere for several decades – a mandatory goal to combat the climate emergency,” he said.

He said: “The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made clear in a recent report the urgent need to recognise the rights of Indigenous peoples and support adaptation of ecosystems. Proposals to conserve tropical forests that fail to protect the rights of Indigenous peoples and local communities in the forests of Africa, Latin America and Indonesia, cannot succeed.”

At Cop26 in Glasgow last year, three big initiatives to protect the world’s forests were launched: a commitment by more than 140 world leaders to halt and reverse deforestation, the creation of a working group of producers and consumers of commodities linked to deforestation, and a commitment by major commodity producers of soya, palm oil, cocoa and cattle to align their business practices with the 1.5C target.

However, despite the agreement, data shows that Brazil, DRC and Indonesia were among the top five countries for primary forest loss in 2021, with 11.1m hectares of tree cover lost in the tropics overall last year.

Adapted from *the Guardian*
November 2022
(459 words)

CALIFORNIA WILL BAN SALES OF NEW GASOLINE-POWERED CARS BY 2035

California air regulators voted Thursday on a historic plan to address climate change and harmful pollution by moving the nation's largest auto market away from the internal combustion engine.

The regulation will phase out the sale of new gasoline-powered cars, trucks and SUVs in the nation's most-populous state, culminating in a total ban of new sales of the vehicles by 2035.

The ban will not prevent people from using gas-powered vehicles or apply to the used car market, but California officials say it will dramatically cut the state's climate-warming emissions and famously dirty air by speeding the transition to electric vehicles.

"California now has a groundbreaking, world-leading plan to achieve 100% zero-emission vehicle sales by 2035," said the state's governor, Gavin Newsom.

The regulation, which was approved by the California Air Resources Board (CARB), could have massive repercussions for the country's auto-manufacturing industry and the broader fight against climate change. Transportation is the largest source of climate-warming greenhouse gas emissions in the country, and scientists have said in increasingly dire language that drastic cuts to those emissions are crucial to providing a livable future on the planet.

President Joe Biden has set a goal of making half of the nation's new sales zero-emission by 2030. The recently enacted Inflation Reduction Act aims to move consumers that way by providing tax credits to people looking to buy new or used electric vehicles.

Auto industry analysts say the unprecedented move by California could help push the auto market to achieving that goal. Thirteen other states, including Oregon, New York and Colorado, typically follow California's auto emissions standards, which are already the most stringent in the country.

Electric vehicles account for just 5.6 percent of new-car sales between April and July, according to the latest quarterly report from Cox Automotive, an industry consulting firm. Reaching 100 percent emission-free new vehicle sales by 2035 will be "extremely challenging," said John Bozzella, CEO of the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, which represents large automakers. "It is directly linked to external factors like inflation, charging and fuel infrastructure, supply chains, labor, critical mineral availability and pricing, and the ongoing semiconductor shortage," he said.

A nationwide shift to electric vehicles would have major health benefits beyond its impacts on global climate change. More than 4-in-10 Americans live with unhealthy air, according to the American Lung Association. And research finds that the negative effects are disproportionately borne by people of color, regardless of income.

A report by the American Lung Association earlier this year found that a nationwide shift to zero-emission vehicles by 2035, as California is seeking, would generate more than \$1.2 trillion in public health benefits between 2020 and 2050 and avoid up to 110,000 premature deaths.

Adapted from *NPR*
August 2022
(459 words)

CAN AI STOP RARE EAGLES FLYING INTO WIND TURBINES IN GERMANY?

Small in size, sensitive of constitution and with only 130 breeding pairs surviving locally in the wild, the lesser spotted eagle of the Oder delta lives up to its name. In Germany, key questions over the country's energy future hang on the question of whether artificial intelligence systems can do a better job of spotting the reclusive animal than birdwatchers do.

Lesser spotted eagles (named after the drop-shaped spots on their feathers) are fond of riding thermals over many of the flatlands earmarked for a mass expansion of onshore windfarms by a German government under pressure to compensate for a pending loss of nuclear power, coal plants and Russian gas.

Because lesser spotted eagles in mid-flight are unused to vertical obstacles, and keep their eyes focused on mice, lizard or frog-shaped prey below, conservationists say, they are known to occasionally collide with the rotor blades of wind turbines. German researchers list eight dead specimens found in the vicinity of windfarms since 2002.

A controversial reform of the federal nature conservation act, pushed through by Olaf Scholz's coalition government earlier this summer, slashes red tape around building windfarms near nesting sites, but banks on AI-driven "anti-collision systems" as one way to minimise such accidents.

Software engineers in Colorado are feeding hundreds of thousands of images of the airborne *clanga pomarina* into an algorithm. Linked to a camera system perched atop a 10-metre tower, the trained-up neural networks of the US company IdentiFlight are expected to detect eagles approaching from a distance of up to 750 metres and electronically alert the turbine.

The turbine will then take 20-40 seconds to wind down into "trundle mode" of no more than two rotations each minute, ideally giving the eagle plenty of time to navigate safe passage between its slowly moving blades.

Wind energy in Germany underwent a massive boom after Angela Merkel announced the phase-out of nuclear power in 2011, with windfarms currently providing about a quarter of the country's electricity needs. But the expansion plans have stalled for the past four years, at about 30,000 turbines providing just over 60,000 megawatt hours a year.

Wind power companies complain that planning applications take longer and longer, with not only environmentalists but locals opposed to turbines having learned to use natural protection laws to stymie their plans.

Court action looks predestined. "As a society, we have to start asking ourselves some basic questions," said a German industrialist. "Do we want to build windfarms because we want to mitigate climate change and protect the environment as a whole? Or do we want to save every individual bird?"

Adapted from *The Guardian*
September 2022
(441 words)

CAN DRUMMING RECONNECT YOU TO YOUR COLLEAGUES?

Performers are on stage as the audience filters into the auditorium. A drum sits on each chair. The leader picks up his instrument and tentatively, without a word, everyone else does the same. He plays a phrase and the audience answers. Layer upon layer of rhythm, intensity and complexity builds. Drum rolls rise and fall in waves until – as if by magic – we feel as if we've been performing together for years. Even though I join in via video and use my table as a drum, I can feel the energy and I can sense the human connection.

The session, organised by Drum Cafe, is a team building exercise. Typically, the instructors will join the participants at their office. Everyone can join in the easy-to-follow rhythms, which are interspersed with solos from the professionals. "We walk in rhythm, our hearts beat in rhythm. We all have rhythm. Even with as many as 5,000 participants, we can play in unison," says the director of Drum Cafe. He says the pandemic has left "tension in the air. When people arrive, there are feelings of negativity, stress and uncertainty. We offer people a moment of release. They leave refreshed, emotionally purged – feeling the joy of reconnection."

Prof Amanda Weltman, an astrophysicist at the University of Cape Town, and her team first experienced the Drum Cafe effect in 2019. "It was profound," she says. "We were guided to learn several rhythms and, very quickly, this crowd of strangers was moving as one. In that moment, I felt great. I felt part of something."

With more people than ever working from home, it's a big challenge for companies to build a sense of common purpose. "Feelings of closeness and belonging to a social group are basic needs for every human being – and work is no exception," says Dr Vasquez, a psychologist. He points out that virtual interaction has benefits. It allows organisations to hire workers from different cities and nations, and to extend the working day beyond the time zone of the office.

But there are big drawbacks: "It impairs spontaneous daily interactions, generates mistakes due to misunderstanding and lack of co-ordination, causes delays due to geographic dispersion, and disrupts work-life balance. All of this can negatively impact employees' well-being." According to a recent report 67% of workers say they experience stress at work at least once a week, and one in seven say they feel stressed every day and employees say that although they're having more meetings than ever, they also feel more isolated than ever. The result: a sharp deterioration in professional relationships impacting productivity, efficiency and innovation.

Adapted from [bbcnews.com](https://www.bbcnews.com)
August 2022
(447 words)

CANADA PLANS COMPLETE FREEZE ON HANDGUN OWNERSHIP

The Canadian government has introduced legislation that would put a freeze on importing, buying or selling handguns. “We are capping the number of handguns in this country,” said the prime minister, Justin Trudeau. The regulations to halt the growth of personally owned handguns is expected to be enacted this autumn. “It will be illegal to buy, sell, transfer or import handguns anywhere in Canada,” the prime minister said.

Canada already has plans to ban 1,500 types of military-style firearms and offer a mandatory buyback programme that will begin at the end of the year. Canada had already expanded background checks ahead of this total ban.

Trudeau has long had plans to enact tougher gun laws but the introduction of the new measure comes after mass shootings in Uvalde, Texas, and Buffalo, NY, this month.

Bill Blair, minister of emergency preparedness, said Canada was “very different from the United States”. “In Canada, gun ownership is a privilege, not a right,” he said. “This is a principle that differentiates ourselves from many other countries in the world, notably our colleagues and friends to the south. In Canada, guns are only intended to be used for hunting and sport purposes.” Canada has had far fewer mass shootings than the US in part because of a lack of easy access to guns, though the US population also is far larger than Canada’s.

Blair said guns were often smuggled in illegally from the US, which he noted had one of the largest small arms arsenals in the world. The Canadian government plans to fight gun smuggling and trafficking by increasing criminal penalties, providing more tools to investigate firearms crimes and strengthening border measures. Trudeau said increased funding already helped border officials double the amount of smuggled guns confiscated at the US border. His government also said the bill would allow for the removal of gun licences from people involved in acts of domestic violence or criminal harassment such as stalking.

The bill would create a new “red flag” law allowing courts to require that people considered a danger to themselves or others surrender their firearms to police. The government said the measure would guard the safety of those applying through the process – often women in danger of domestic abuse – by protecting their identities. “Canada can teach us a lot,” tweeted a former US ambassador to Canada (...)

Trudeau said his government recognised that the vast majority of Canadians who owned guns were responsible, but the level of gun violence was “unacceptable”. “This is a concrete and real national measure toward keeping Canadians safe,” Trudeau said. “We cannot let the gun debate become so polarised that nothing gets done. We cannot let that happen in our country”.

Adapted from *the Guardian*
May 2022
(455 words)

CLIMATE ACTIVISTS ARRESTED AFTER BLOCKING PRIVATE JETS IN AMSTERDAM AIRPORT

Dutch border police arrested hundreds of climate activists who stormed Amsterdam's Schiphol airport and sat in front of the wheels of aircraft to prevent them from leaving. More than 100 protesters, wearing white suits, entered an area where private jets are kept on Saturday as part of a day of demonstrations in and around the airport organised by environmental groups.

Dewi Zloch, the Netherlands campaign leader for Greenpeace, one of the groups involved, said: "We want fewer flights, more trains and a ban on unnecessary short-haul flights and private jets." Greenpeace says Schiphol is the largest source of carbon dioxide emissions in the Netherlands, emitting 12bn kilograms annually.

Extinction Rebellion was also involved in the action. Hundreds of other demonstrators in and around the airport's main hall carried signs saying "Restrict aviation" and "More trains".

About three hours after the protest began, border police started arresting activists, some of whom were dragged to waiting buses after passively resisting arrest, AFP reported. "We take this very seriously," Dutch border police spokesperson Major Robert van Kapel said. "These people are facing charges relating to being in a place where they should not have been," he said, adding that prosecutors will now formulate the exact charge.

The activists were taken to various border police offices around the airfield where they were being processed and identified, Van Kapel said.

Greenpeace said police were "far too heavy-handed against the activists on bicycles" and that at least one person received a head injury.

Responding to the protest, Schiphol said it aimed to become an emissions-free airport by 2030 and it supported targets for the aviation industry to reach net zero emissions by 2050. On Friday, in response to an open letter from Greenpeace, Schiphol's new CEO, Ruud Sondag, conceded that change needed to happen faster.

The Dutch government announced plans in June to cap annual flights at the airport at 440,000, about 11% below 2019 levels, citing air pollution and climate concerns. The transport minister, Mark Harbers, told parliament last month that his office could not control growing private jet traffic, and the government was considering whether to include the issue in its climate policy.

More than 120 world leaders are due to attend this year's UN climate talks at the Red Sea coastal resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, which start on Sunday. Extinction Rebellion has been warning of the environmental impact of air travel for many years and in October 2019 a protester climbed on to a British Airways plane at London City airport and was seen lying on top of it. Other activists staged a sit-in at the airport entrance during the third day of protests in London at that time.

Adapted from *The Guardian*
November 2022
(456 words)

CLIMATE ACTIVISTS THROW BLACK LIQUID AT GUSTAV KLIMT PAINTING IN VIENNA

Climate activists in Austria have attacked a painting by Gustav Klimt, with one throwing a black, oily liquid at it and another gluing himself to the glass covering the painting.

Members of Last Generation Austria tweeted that they had targeted the 1915 painting *Death and Life* at a museum in Vienna to protest against their government's use of fossil fuels.

After throwing the liquid at the artwork, which was not damaged, one activist was pushed away by a museum guard while another glued his hand to the glass over the painting.

The group said they were protesting against "oil and gas drilling", which they called "a death sentence to society".

In a video of the incident, which the group posted online, one of the activists can be heard shouting: "We have known about the problem for 50 years – we must finally act, otherwise the planet will be broken."

The museum's restoration team said later that while the painting itself had not been harmed, the damage to the glass and security framing, as well as to the wall and floor, was "evident and significant".

The director of the museum told the news agency that the concerns of the climate activists were justified, "but attacking works of art is definitely the wrong way to implement the targeted goal of preventing the predicted climate collapse". He appealed to the group to find other ways to make their concerns known.

Austria's culture minister also expressed understanding for "the concerns and also the desperation" of the activists, but criticized their form of protest.

"I do not believe that actions like these are purposeful, because the question arises whether they do not rather lead to more lack of understanding than to more awareness of the climate catastrophe," the culture minister said. "From my point of view, accepting the risk of irrevocable damage to works of art is the wrong way to go. Art and culture are allies in the fight against climate catastrophe, not adversaries."

The Klimt work is an oil on canvas painting depicting death on the left side and a group of people on the right. It's one of the latest pieces of art to be targeted by climate activists in recent months. In Germany, mashed potatoes were thrown at a Claude Monet painting, while the British group Just Stop Oil threw tomato soup at Vincent van Gogh's *Sunflowers* in London's National Gallery.

Activists also glued themselves to John Constable's *The Hay Wain* in the National Gallery, and to the frame of an early copy of Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper* at London's Royal Academy of Arts.

Adapted from *The Guardian*
November 2022
(454 words)

CLIMATE ANXIETY: HOW WRITING TO YOUR FUTURE SELF CAN UNLOCK HOPE

National Trust is encouraging supporters to write letters to their future selves about their climate concerns. Here's how doing so can help focus your mind and benefit the wider community.

This year's heatwaves and energy crisis have amplified national conversations about the climate emergency. They have brought home the urgency of climate breakdown and the scale of the challenge we face to avert its worst effects, and to protect and restore nature.

The Climate Coalition, with support from the National Trust, is launching Letters to Tomorrow, an initiative giving people the chance to share their worries about the climate crisis by writing letters to their future selves.

"Sitting down to write a letter with others feels more worthwhile and important," says a social scientist. "Knowing you're part of a community is all the more validating, and there's something motivating about doing it together. Given the scale of the challenges we're facing, it's easy to feel helpless and hopeless. But we know from history that individuals can make a difference, and that people-power can change the course of history."

Writing a letter to your future self can also give you a fresh perspective on the crisis. "Most of us spend our time absorbed with things that have already happened, or that might happen to us. We tend to either overlook where we are, or get mired in the present and can't see beyond it. Writing a letter to your future self is about taking the time to make a decision about what direction you're heading in, and where you want to arrive."

"When you have to formulate your own answer about what you care about and why, and put your thoughts into words, it's very decisive. It allows you to express a clear, purposeful intention. It can also help to galvanise your own efforts by reminding you what matters most and boost your motivation."

The National Trust hopes Letters to Tomorrow will reinforce the message that the people of the UK care about their planet and want the government to work towards protecting and restoring nature, for now and for future generations.

"Environmental citizenship is often linked to a desire to create a more moral and caring society, focusing on the benefits of taking action. And the actions taken by young climate activists are inspiring adults to embrace campaigns such as Letters to Tomorrow. Even if it moves just a handful of people, it'll be worth doing. And I think we need to be reminded, sometimes, that other people *do* care – because it's hope and empathy that will change the world."

Adapted from *The Guardian*
September 2022
(441 words)

CLIMATE PROTESTS: WHEN SOUP AND MASHED POTATOES ARE THROWN, CAN THE EARTH WIN?

First it was cake smeared on the Mona Lisa in Paris, then tomato soup splattered across a van Gogh in London, and then, on Sunday, liquefied mashed potatoes hurled at a Monet in a museum in Potsdam.

What these actions shared [...] was the intentions of the protesters behind them. Desperate to end complacency about the climate crisis and to pressure governments to stop the extraction and burning of fossil fuels, they said they had resorted to such high-profile tactics because little else has worked.

None of the paintings were harmed, as all were encased in protective glass. But the actions went viral and set off an international storm of outrage and debate.

[...] For the climate activists, the protests amounted to wins, insofar as they nabbed far more attention than anything they'd undertaken yet. Despite decades of lobbying, petitions, marches and civil disobedience, planet-heating fossil fuel emissions are at an all-time high, and the window to avert further climate catastrophe is closing.

"We tried sitting in the roads, we tried blocking oil terminals, and we got virtually zero press coverage, yet the thing that gets the most press is chucking some tomato soup on a piece of glass covering a masterpiece," said Mel Carrington, a spokeswoman for Just Stop Oil, the group behind the Oct. 14 soup attack on van Gogh's "Sunflowers" at the National Gallery in London.

[...] Stephen Duncombe, a professor at New York University and co-founder of the Center for Artistic Activism, a nonprofit group that trains activists, said the focus of much commentary had made him question the efficacy of the protests.

"Are they talking about food being thrown at art or are they talking about how carbon-based fuels are going to extinguish life on the planet?" he said. "If the message getting across is activists doing crazy stuff, does it help the cause or not?"

Yet Heather Alberro, a lecturer in global sustainable development at Nottingham Trent University, said such attention-grabbing actions were all but inevitable given that conventional means of protest have largely failed. [...] "We're at a moment where we need every tool in the shed," she said. "If you're more outraged by throwing soup on a painting than governments investing in fossil fuels, that says a lot." [...]

Benjamin Sovacool, a professor of earth and the environment at Boston University, said the most effective social movements employed sustained and intense pressure for long periods of time, and that one measure of an action's success was how much it builds a coalition or alienates people. While the museum protests were polarizing, he said, "At least we're talking about it."

Adapted from *The New York Times*
October 2022
(446 words)

COMMUNITY GARDENS BENEFIT THOSE WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES AND MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

The pandemic became a time to explore new hobbies. While some were definitely more beneficial than others, one especially health-centric practice has exhibited staying power: gardening.

During the pandemic, 18.3 million people chose to start gardening, and 89% of them plan to continue gardening post-pandemic, according to the National Gardening Survey.

In urban areas, gardening and farming on rooftops and in community settings began taking off well before Covid-19. As more city-dwellers are incorporating gardening into their lives, they're also seeing some major mental health benefits as well.

Gardening, in general, has proven to be an incredible practice for relieving stress. And studies show that community gardens are an efficient and affordable method of promoting physical health and mental well-being.

When it comes to general health, happiness and mental health, researchers have found that community gardeners have significantly better outcomes than their neighbors who don't partake in gardening activities.

A small study that looked at urban rooftop gardening found that the practice was associated with a greater sense of purpose and social inclusion, emotional and physical well-being, and general quality of life for individuals living with intellectual disabilities or mental health disorders.

A horticultural therapist treats patients through experiential therapies on a working farm. His program is rooted in the healing power of social engagement and community, as residents dedicate up to 20 hours a week doing work on the farm that aligns with their interests, whether that's growing and preparing food, gardening and landscaping, caring for animals, or creating art.

"By contributing to the community, residents are empowered and their dreams and aspirations awakened, helping set them on the path to mental health recovery," the therapist says. "They are learning how to be a part of something bigger than themselves. The work helps them to get out of their own heads and engage in something meaningful to them and others."

He sees the work being done in the gardens and greenhouses as especially therapeutic. The plants can only thrive when the right preparation, weeding, and pruning is taken care of. This process becomes a strong metaphor for the mental healing journey.

The mental benefits of community gardens also come from their ability to provide safe spaces that foster socialization and common purpose.

Gardening, and nature in general, can provide an opportunity for strong bonding.

"Running into people, sharing a moment of awe or a gardening tool or tip, and sharing the produce you raise are part of why gardening feels good. I think of community gardens as cooperatives, filled with teamwork and long-term vision," the founder of an American urban garden says.

Adapted from *theconversation.com*

July 2022
(443 words)

COUNTRIES PUSH TO UNDERMINE BAN ON COMMERCIAL WHALING

A 40-year-old ban on commercial whaling is in danger after “misleading” resolutions were put forward at the International Whaling Commission (IWC) meeting in Portorož, Slovenia.

The wildlife protection organisations OceanCare and Humane Society International said proposals by pro-whaling countries, including Antigua and Barbuda, could reverse progress made by the IWC.

Antigua and Barbuda have submitted a resolution seeking to reopen a formal debate on commercial whaling. It also co-sponsored another resolution with Cambodia, Guinea and the Gambia arguing the fishing practice could contribute to food security and address poverty. Members are expected to vote on the resolutions on Tuesday.

Nicolas Entrup, OceanCare’s director of international relations, dismissed the concept of sustainable whaling as “ridiculous”. If passed, he said, Antigua and Barbuda’s resolutions would “reverse” progress made in 2018 towards a more conservation-focused IWC.

“Instead of losing precious time with decade-old debates about fabricated scenarios like ‘sustainable whaling’ and false solutions to food security, the IWC should urgently take up the real pressing issues: climate change and plastic pollution,” Entrup said.

At the last meeting of its 88-member countries in Brazil in 2018, the IWC rejected a proposal by Japan to lift the ban on commercial whaling, which Tokyo said could be done sustainably. [...]

Japan, which had tried for many years to lift the ban, left the commission the year after the 2018 meeting and is no longer bound by the restriction.

Commercial whaling in the 19th and early 20th centuries brought the mammals to the brink of extinction.

Wendy Higgins, director at Humane Society International said: “People assume the whaling ban, which has saved the lives of hundreds and thousands of cetaceans, is done and dusted. But the ban is in jeopardy as long as there are nations in the IWC who will vote to return to whaling.”

Higgins described the resolution on “sustainable whaling” as misleading and said: “I hope whale-friendly nations will vote against the biggest threat to the conservation of cetaceans that we have seen for a long time.”

Jiří Mach, the commissioner who is responsible for coordinating the position for the EU-member states, said it was “absolutely clear” that the position of the EU and its member states was to “support the maintenance and full implementation of the moratorium on commercial whaling in the schedule and to oppose any proposal which could undermine the moratorium or potentially lead to threats to whale stocks”.

The resolutions come as the IWC faces financial difficulties after the departure of Japan, the Covid pandemic and global economic problems. A quarter of the 88 countries that make up the commission have not paid annual dues that the IWC says are “critical” to its continued mandate. [...]

Adapted from *theguardian.org*
October 2022
(453 words)

DAMIEN HIRST BURNS HIS OWN ART AFTER SELLING NFTS

Damien Hirst has begun burning hundreds of his own artworks after selling a series of non-fungible tokens (NFTs). The artist told buyers who bought pieces from his latest collection to choose either the physical artwork or the NFT representing it.

Those who chose the NFTs were told their corresponding physical piece would be destroyed.

Asked how he felt to be burning the works, Hirst said: "It feels good, better than I expected." It has been estimated the works being burned are collectively worth almost £10 million.

Hirst launched his first NFT collection last year, which was made up of 10,000 NFTs, corresponding to 10,000 original pieces of art. London's Newport Street Gallery said 5,149 buyers opted for the original artworks while 4,851 chose the NFTs.

The NFTs, which depicted colourful spots, reportedly sold for \$2,000 each.

Livestreaming the event, Hirst deposited individual pieces into fireplaces in the gallery as onlookers watched. "A lot of people think I'm burning millions of dollars of art but I'm not," Hirst said. "I'm completing the transformation of these physical artworks into NFTs by burning the physical versions. The value of art, digital or physical, which is hard to define at the best of times, will not be lost; it will be transferred to the NFT as soon as they are burnt."

The artworks were created in 2016 and each is numbered, titled, stamped and signed. Before Hirst burned each artwork, he showed it to a camera to log its unique code to keep track of every piece that had been burnt.

Many have criticised Hirst for burning his own valuable artworks during a cost of living crisis.

Hirst, who is no stranger to what some critics describe as publicity stunts, rose to fame during the 1990s and is one of Britain's most controversial artists. Much of his work has divided critics, including one featuring a dead shark floating in formaldehyde, another consisting of a bisected cow and calf or a platinum cast of an 18th-century human skull encrusted with diamonds.

NFTs are "one-of-a-kind" assets in the digital world that can be bought and sold like any other piece of property, but which have no tangible form of their own.

The digital tokens can be thought of as certificates of ownership for virtual or physical assets.

Traditional works of art such as paintings are valuable precisely because they are one of a kind.

But digital files can be easily and endlessly duplicated. With NFTs, artwork can be "tokenised" to create a digital certificate of ownership that can be bought and sold.

NFTs soared in popularity last year as crypto-rich speculators sought to cash in on rising prices but sales volumes have fallen more recently.

Adapted from *BBC News.com*
October 2022
(459 words)

'DEVASTATED' UK STUDENTS FORCED TO LIVE IN NEIGHBOURING CITIES

When 18-year-old Jessie Smith netted the top grades she needed last month to study at Manchester University, she was delighted. She didn't know then that all the university's student halls would be full, and she would be forced to accept accommodation in Liverpool.

Sarah Smith, Jessie's mother, who works as a PA in Sheffield, said she feels "frightened and disgusted" about her daughter living so far from the university of Manchester has offered £100 a week to cover commuting costs, but she feels this "misses the point". She doesn't want her daughter to be a 40-minute train ride away from the city she signed up for.

"There are all these fantastic activities in freshers' week. I don't want her worrying about how to get home afterwards," she said. "University is about getting to know people and how can she do that if she is not even in Manchester?"

Smith is not alone. A week ago, Manchester confirmed it still had more than 350 freshers waiting for a place in halls in the city. Last week, after offering £2,500 to anyone within commuting distance who would switch to living at home, a spokesperson for the university said there were now 75 freshers still waiting for somewhere to live.

He added that they were "prioritising working on more support" for students such as Jessie living in Liverpool, and would be linking them with a hall in Manchester. The university is rushing to finish refurbishing alternative accommodation, and says it is "very likely" that students will be able to move into the city in a few months.

Down the road, Manchester Metropolitan University, whose halls are also oversubscribed, has offered £100 a week to first years willing to accept accommodation in Liverpool or Huddersfield.

But popular though the city is among students, Manchester University is quick to point out that this isn't just a local issue. The university told students and parents that there has been "unprecedented demand for university accommodation across the UK this year."

Universities have long been expecting the demographic surge in the number of 18-year-olds that is now under way, but Manchester points out that they weren't prepared for the pandemic and three years in which far more students achieved the high A-level marks they ask for. Pressure from record results last year meant many students deferred their places to this year.

New students in cities including Bristol, Glasgow and Edinburgh are reporting similar anxious struggles to find somewhere to live.

Nick Hillman, director of the Higher Education Policy Institute think tank, said students who find last-minute places through clearing often miss the boat on university-owned accommodation.

Adapted from *The Guardian*
September 2022
(459 words)

DO NOT BRING YOUR 'WHOLE SELF' TO WORK

For those lucky enough to have worked from home over the past two and a half years or whatever it was, it's back to the office time. (...) And some people can't wait. But for those less excited, reluctant to face the creepy supervisor they've been avoiding (...), the portion of the job they've been faking, here's a nifty tip for easing the transition: Do *not* "bring your whole self" to work. (...) Defy the latest catchphrase of human resources and leave a good portion of you back home.

So what exactly does it even *mean*? According to TED talker and corporate consultant Mike Robbins, author of a book called "Bring Your Whole Self to Work," it means being able "to fully show up" and "allow ourselves to be truly seen" in the workplace. Per Robbins, it's "essential" to create a work environment "where people feel safe enough to bring all of who they are to work." (...) In this new workplace, you don't have to keep your head down and do your job. Instead, you "bring your whole self to work" — personality flaws, vulnerabilities, idiosyncratic mantras and all.

Perhaps you've heard of whole self's cousin, the "authentic self" also urged to head into the office. (...) "That means acknowledging your personality, including the quirky bits, and bringing your interests, hopes, dreams, and even fears with you, even if they don't seem relevant to your work."

In other words, for the world outside the H.R. department, the phrase "bringing your whole self to work" is almost guaranteed to induce a vomit emoji. Rarely has a phrase of corporate jargon raised so much ire and rolled as many eyeballs with everyone I've talked to about the subject.

(...) In recent years, the "whole self" movement has gained momentum in part because it dovetails with fortified corporate diversity, equity and inclusion programs. Both purport to make employees feel comfortable expressing aspects of their identity in the workplace, even when irrelevant to the work at hand.

(...) So here's an alternative: Let's all bring only — or at least primarily — the worky parts. (...) It's that old-fashioned thing we used to call "being professional." After all, the office isn't the only place you exist — why should they get to have *all* of you? If you only bring the best parts of you or at the very least, the part of you that does the actual work, you're more likely to get rewarded for it.

Nor is it fair to ask the workplace to deal with all your hopes, dreams and problems. (...) During the pandemic, many of us inadvertently shared a lot more of ourselves than we might have otherwise. (...)

But not all people are comfortable having their co-workers know so much about them.

Adapted from *The New York Times*
September 2022
(457 words)

DREAM JOB OR PASSION TRAP?

At 25, Andrew was soaring up the career ladder as a pastry chef at a Michelin-starred restaurant in Scotland. He was in a role that he had worked towards – and wanted – for years. But, at the height of his career, working in his dream job, he quit. He'd walked away, not just from the job he'd worked so hard for, but from the whole hospitality industry. The tipping point came when he realised none of the exhausting work required was worth it. "From 19 to 25, I just sort of sacrificed," he says. "Everyone else was out having a great time and I was basically a slave in the kitchen." Throughout his career, he realised, he had felt overworked, underappreciated and underpaid.

Most workers have always hoped for roles that coincide with their interests and passions; swapping the office grind for that longed-for job in a bakery, or fun role at a videogame company sounds like a no-brainer. Yet this 'do what you love' narrative comes with drawbacks. Many people find that their dream jobs require more work, under worse conditions. Others discover that the industries they idolise trade on workers' passions to keep pay low. In the face of these pressures, some workers find themselves asking whether the dream job is really worth it after all.

These days, more than ever, the idea that happiness and success are linked to working in a 'cool' job is omnipresent. But career redirections to get a dream job may not always work out as people hope, particularly if employers take advantage of their workers' passions. "Employees who love their job or really value their work are willing to put up with harsher conditions than others, such as non-standard working hours or low pay," says Laura Giurge, a professor of behavioural science. "And to some extent, the employers might know this and thus ask those dedicated and passionate employees to take on additional work or abide by dreadful conditions." This practice of passion-exploitation is particularly prominent in creative industries in the UK where most jobs – such as journalist, fashion stylist, musician and game designer – fall below the annual average salary.

Andrew says he recognised this phenomenon from the start in the hospitality sector. "When I started, my ambition was to get that Michelin-starred level," he says. "So, I decided that the money didn't matter, which obviously it does." This initial disregard for financial security is something career coach Eleanor Tweddell sees often among her clients who are looking for a more fulfilling job. It's often an attitude she has to coach them out of. "We do actually work for money," she says. "There's no shame in that. Most of us work because we need the money."

Adapted from *The BBC*
October 2022
(455 words)

DUTCH CITY BECOMES WORLD'S FIRST TO BAN MEAT ADVERTS IN PUBLIC

A Dutch city will become the first in the world to ban meat adverts from public spaces in an effort to reduce consumption and greenhouse gas emissions.

Haarlem, which lies to the west of Amsterdam and has a population of about 160,000, will enact the prohibition from 2024 after meat was added to a list of products deemed to contribute to the climate crisis.

Adverts will not be allowed on Haarlem's buses, shelters and screens in public spaces, prompting complaints from the meat sector that the municipality is "going too far in telling people what's best for them".

Recent studies suggest global food production is responsible for one-third of all planet-heating emissions, with the use of animals for meat accounting for twice the pollution of producing plant-based foods.

Forests that absorb carbon dioxide are felled for the grazing of animals while fertilisers used for growing their feed are rich in nitrogen, which can contribute to air and water pollution, climate change and ozone depletion. Livestock also produces large quantities of methane, a powerful greenhouse gas.

Ziggy Klazes, a councillor from the GroenLinks party, who drafted the motion banning meat advertising, said she had not known the city would be the world's first to enforce such a policy when she proposed it.

She told the Haarlem105 radio channel: "We are not about what people are baking and roasting in their own kitchen; if people want to continue eating meat, fine ... We can't tell people there's a climate crisis and encourage them to buy products that are part of the cause.

"Of course, there are a lot of people who find the decision outrageous and patronising, but there are also a lot of people who think it's fine.

"It is a signal – if it is picked up nationally, that would only be very nice. There are many groups of GroenLinks who think it is a good idea and want to try it."

The ban also covers holiday flights, fossil fuels and cars that run on fossil fuels. The ban is delayed until 2024 due to existing contracts with companies that sell the products.

There is some opposition within Haarlem's council to the move, with critics arguing that it restricts freedom of expression.

Sander van den Raadt, the leader of the Trots Haarlem group, said: "It is remarkable that the municipality of Haarlem is holding a large poster campaign that you can be yourself in Haarlem and love whoever you want, but if you like meat instead of soft grass, 'the patronising brigade' will come and tell you that you are completely wrong."

Adapted from *The Guardian*
September 2022
(448 words)

EATING RIGHT TO AVOID CATASTROPHE

Devastating pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and COVID-19, all of which likely originated in wildlife, are reminders of how environmental destruction and infectious diseases are intertwined. [...]

From the perspective of individual consumers, the global population needs to shift to diets low in livestock-sourced foods to stem human encroachment on tropical areas of wilderness. Second, there is a need to curb wildmeat demand in tropical cities.

Closer to the equator, biodiversity becomes richer. These tropical regions have historically seen less development and are typically teeming with wildlife and carbon stored in the form of abundant vegetation. But in recent decades, agricultural frontiers have expanded rapidly into tropical forests. This unprecedented expansion of farmland for grazing and feed production may be increasing contact between wildlife, people, and livestock, which may enhance the likelihood of pathogens jumping from one to the other. [...]

In addition, if the human population continues to grow and adopt diets rich in livestock-sourced foods, it's unlikely that global warming can be kept well below 2°C and that the rate of species extinction can be slowed. This is because livestock production has the largest environmental footprint of all food production systems in terms of land and water use, greenhouse gas emissions, and pollution of terrestrial and aquatic systems.

Asking everyone to become vegan is not realistic or even desirable. But flexitarian diets could feed the growing world population without further expanding farmland into tropical wildlands and with reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. [...]

Such a dietary shift would have other public health benefits too, such as reducing overweight and obesity, diabetes, heart diseases, and colorectal cancer.

Measures available to governments, civil society, and businesses to promote healthier and more sustainable levels of consumption of livestock-sourced foods include education in schools, training of physicians and paediatricians, eco-labels on food packaging, taxation of meat and dairy products, a statutory duty for retail and hospitality sectors and food procurement for workplaces, schools, and hospitals.

But in the absence of effective state law enforcement and sustained campaigns to reduce consumer demand, bans do not work. In fact, consumers' strong preferences for wild-meat mean that they may continue to purchase it despite price increases induced by a ban, boosting black markets. [...]

Dietary shifts away from livestock-sourced foods and reductions in tropical urban wildmeat demand are crucial to simultaneously protect the environment, safeguard resource-limited vulnerable communities, and reduce the risk of further disease outbreaks and pandemics.

We all share the responsibility to act now to prevent pollution, floods, drought, famine, and epidemics from becoming increasingly prevalent.

Adapted from *The Scientist*
October 2022
(443 words)

ELECTRIC VEHICLES START TO ENTER THE CAR-BUYING MAINSTREAM

While sales are still skewed toward affluent buyers, more people are choosing electric vehicles to save money.

The first wave of people who bought electric cars tended to be affluent, environmentally aware technology enthusiasts who lived in California.

But now, electric vehicles are starting to go mainstream in the United States after making earlier inroads into the mass markets in China and Europe.

Battery-powered cars now make up the fastest-growing segment of the auto market, with sales jumping 70 percent in the first nine months of the year from the same period in 2021, according to data from Cox Automotive, a research and consulting firm. Sales of conventional cars and trucks fell 15 percent in the same period. Buyers of electric vehicles in 2021 were more likely to be women and tended to be younger than in 2019, according to Cox data.

Gasoline-powered cars, of course, still account for most of the new car market. But electric vehicles' share of new vehicle sales almost doubled in the first nine months of the year, to over 5 percent from nearly 3 percent in the same period in 2021, according to Cox.

That growth could have been stronger if automakers had been able to make more electric cars. Many manufacturers have long waiting lists because production has been limited by shortages of computer chips, batteries and other parts.

Buyers of battery-powered cars are concerned about climate change, but lower costs are also a powerful attraction. Driving on electricity is generally much cheaper than gasoline. Some drivers said they were using energy they generated from rooftop solar panels to charge their cars, potentially lowering costs even further.

Electric car buyers used words like "love" and "awesome" to describe their vehicles. Many said they would never buy a gasoline car again, but many others said they intended to keep at least one conventional vehicle, because traveling long distances by electric car can be inconvenient and sometimes impossible because of difficulties in finding charging stations.

Electric vehicles are now becoming popular in places other than where they took off, like California, where 39 percent of all U.S. electric vehicles were registered as of June. Registrations outside California jumped 50 percent in 2021, compared with a 32 percent increase in the state.

In the long run, much wider use of electric vehicles will require many more affordable models. But it may be a while before there are enough affordable models, including used cars, which sell in greater numbers than new vehicles. Yet, many buyers are concluding that electric vehicles make economic sense even when they cost thousands of dollars more than similar gasoline vehicles.

Adapted from *New York Times*
November 2022
(444 words)

ELON MUSK DEBUTS TESLA ROBOT, OPTIMUS, CALLING IT A 'FUNDAMENTAL TRANSFORMATION'

Tesla unveiled a prototype of its humanoid robot, dubbed Optimus, launching a bet on artificial intelligence that aims to reshape the future of physical work.

The robot walked onstage and demonstrated its range of motion, waving hello and pumping its arms in the air. [...]

Tesla CEO Elon Musk said he wants the robot to be manufactured at scale, sold for less than \$20,000, and encompass core physical capabilities, such as the ability to move all fingers independently, and opposable thumbs with degrees of freedom so it can operate tools.

"This means a future of abundance," he said. "A future where there is no poverty. Where you can have whatever you want in terms of products and services. It really is a fundamental transformation of civilization as we know it," he said.

The company said it designed the robot with the same mass production targets in mind as when it would design a car, so the robot can be built as quickly as possible at scale. Tesla has said it could draw on the robot to perform tasks in its factories, which employ thousands of manufacturing workers.

This demonstration shows how Musk wants to solve one of the toughest problems in robotics and artificial intelligence: how to make a machine that can replace a human. [...]

The Tesla bot is part of the company's long-term effort to introduce a new era of automation, in which computer algorithms engage in humanlike decision-making and advance their knowledge independent of human input.

As the country grapples with worker shortages that have left a huge percentage of manufacturing jobs unfilled, companies are dreaming up new ways to automate work previously performed by humans. The efforts have faced criticism from organized labor but have also garnered acceptance when they can improve worker safety and open up new opportunities.

A company cracking the code on humanoid robots would certainly be a groundbreaking — if controversial — advancement in the effort. If it materializes, Optimus could initially disrupt manufacturing jobs that make up roughly 10 percent of U.S. labor, or \$500 billion in yearly wages, the managing partner of Loup Ventures, wrote in an analysis. [...]

Musk has said he fears artificial intelligence could one day outsmart humans and endanger us, citing AI as the biggest threat to civilization. But he said that by building the Tesla robot, the company could ensure it would be safe. [...]

Like some other Tesla products before it, the Tesla robot did not have a specific product rollout timeline. But answering a question about when it would be available to the general public, Musk said people could "probably receive" an Optimus within three to five years.

Adapted from *The Washington Post*
September 2022
(456 words)

ELON MUSK GIVES ULTIMATUM TO TWITTER EMPLOYEES

Twitter's new owner Elon Musk has given employees until Thursday evening to commit to "extremely hardcore" work or else leave the company, according to a copy of a late-night internal email sent by the billionaire. "Going forward, to build a breakthrough Twitter 2.0 and succeed in an increasingly competitive world, we will need to be extremely hardcore," Musk wrote in the memo. "This will mean working long hours at high intensity. Only exceptional performance will constitute a passing grade. So whatever decision you make, thank you for your efforts to make Twitter successful."

Musk goes on to outline how the new Twitter will be "much more engineering-driven" and then gives staff an ultimatum. "If you are sure that you want to be part of the new Twitter, please click yes on the link below," directing staff to what appears to be an online form. Musk said any employee who has not done so by 5 p.m. on Thursday will receive three-month severance.

The email comes as Musk has publicly and privately clashed with Twitter employees over his approach to running the company. It also comes after Musk pushed out Twitter's top executives, eliminated the board of directors and most of its public relations team, and laid off roughly half the staff, reducing its workforce to around 3,700 employees.

Musk said that he expects the "fundamental organizational restructuring" at Twitter to be finished by the end of this week. He added that while he has spent most of his time at Twitter rather than his other companies in the past few weeks, he doesn't expect that to be the case forever. "I expect to reduce my time at Twitter, and find somebody else to run Twitter, over time," Musk said.

Some Twitter employees told CNN ahead of the deadline on Thursday that they had planned to reject the ultimatum, citing a toxic work environment they say the billionaire has introduced: "The email from Musk feels like a punch in the gut because no matter how you feel about wanting to stay or go, those decisions are more than just 24 hours. I don't want to sacrifice my mental health and family life to make the richest man in the world richer," said one of the employees who plans to exit the company.

But the decision may not be so easy for others. It comes during a difficult period for the tech industry, following mass layoffs and hiring freeze announcements at many major firms including Meta and Amazon. Employees working in the United States from other countries could also risk losing their work visas if they leave the company.

Adapted from *cnn.com*
November 2022
(449 words)

ENERGY CRISIS: WHY IS THE UK THE WORST AFFECTED COUNTRY IN WESTERN EUROPE?

Rising energy bills have pushed up prices across the continent, and contributed to global inflation. While other countries are struggling too, winter blackouts and widespread fuel poverty are becoming increasingly pressing concerns within Britain.

[...] Now, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has published data which also suggests that the UK is struggling more than most of Europe. What does the data say? The IMF looked at how the energy crisis will impact the rest of 2022 by examining the fossil fuel prices in May. It found that the UK is set to lose the highest proportion of its spending power this year among all the countries in western Europe, due to the amount its population has to pay for energy bills.

The UK will lose 8.27% of its spending power this year. [...] Out of the whole of Europe, only Estonia and Czech Republic households are facing a larger decline in household budget than the UK.

As homes across the country have already realised, higher energy bills mean other goods are becoming more expensive too, as businesses pass the additional costs onto the consumer. The IMF claims this will reduce British disposable income in 2022 by a further 2%. The disparity between the rich and poorer households in the UK is also particularly alarming – the poorest 10% will end up spending around 17.8% of their budget on energy this year. The richest 10%, on the other hand, will only have to spend 6.1% on their energy bills. This echoes previous findings from the Institute for Fiscal Studies that lower-income households face higher inflation rates, as they have to spend more on gas and electricity.

[...] Why is the UK particularly vulnerable to the crisis? UK homes are usually not very energy-efficient, and notoriously drafty. This means it costs more to heat British households, especially in the winter. [...] Most British homes use gas for heat (the most expensive form of power), because the UK was previously so dependent on the North Sea gas fields. These are now depleted.

[...] Is there a solution? Yes – the UK could start by insulating households across the country and prioritising heat pumps over gas boilers. Placing the emphasis on wind and solar energy would also help reduce the UK's dependency on fossil fuels, and renewable energy sources are approximately nine times cheaper than gas. [...] But Downing Street has not delivered any significant insulation strategy recently, and has been reluctant to act on onshore wind farms – although Boris Johnson has tried to put the emphasis on nuclear power during his final days in office.

Adapted from *The Huffington Post*
September 2022
(444 words)

ENORMOUS EMISSIONS GAP BETWEEN TOP 1% AND POOREST

The top 1% of earners in the UK are responsible for the same amount of carbon dioxide emissions in a single year as the bottom 10% over more than two decades.

The findings highlight the enormous gaps between what have been termed “the polluting elite”, whose high-carbon lifestyles fuel the climate crisis, and the majority of people, even in developed countries, whose carbon footprints are far smaller.

It would take 26 years for a low earner to produce as much carbon dioxide as the richest do in a year.

The UK is not alone in having such a gulf between high and low earners on greenhouse gas emissions. A growing body of research points to the existence of a “polluting elite” whose lifestyles bear little relation to those of the majority of people. This holds true in developed and developing countries, where the poorest tend to be responsible for a tiny amount of greenhouse gas emissions, while those with most wealth are comparable in their impact with the elite of rich countries.

Flying, driving large, expensive cars, owning multiple homes and travelling between them, eating a diet rich in meat and imports, buying more clothes and imported luxury goods are all reasons for the richest generating far higher carbon footprints. Poorer people tend to stay closer to home in small houses and use public transport, while their expenditure on luxuries and items such as “fast fashion” is much smaller.

The actions taken by most people, such as turning off lights to save energy, will make no difference if the government doesn't address the fact it's the rich who are disproportionately responsible for the climate crisis.

However, the government has preferred to reduce taxes on activities such as flying and driving, despite their environmental impact.

Peter Newell, professor of international relations at the University of Sussex, told the Guardian the massive gap should be addressed. The most effective way for the government to tackle climate change would be to properly tax the rich, through a well-targeted carbon tax scheme.

If the UK had started taxing carbon emissions from just the top 1% of income groups two decades ago, the effort could have raised about £126bn to retrofit nearly 8m homes, keeping us warm this winter and bringing down fuel bills, while providing critical support for renewable energy and making us less dependent on Putin's gas.

Taxes on the most polluting activities could target only the rich and need not add to the cost of living crisis for the great majority of people. They could also help to plug the yawning gap in the UK's public finances and be a key lever in driving the transition to a cleaner and greener economy.

Adapted from *The Guardian*
November 2022
(458 words)

ENVIRONMENT SECTOR HAS FAILED TO BECOME MORE INCLUSIVE, STUDY SUGGESTS

The environment sector has failed to act on its ambitions to become more inclusive, suggests new research that finds just one in 20 organisations are enacting plans to increase ethnic diversity.

According to a sector-wide survey, out of 44 environment charities, 84% had considered or were taking action over a lack of inclusion, but only 4% said they had a consistently implemented action plan. Three-quarters of environmental charity executives and trustees thought increasing diversity would have a positive impact on the sector. But while most leaders agreed it should be a top priority for the sector, few felt it actually was.

The research was commissioned by a coalition of environmental charities (...) to inform a new collective strategy aimed at increasing diversity in the sector. It calls for members to take collective actions to implement sector-wide unconscious bias training, in-depth research on racism, and programmes to draft more people of colour into leadership roles.

According to the coalition's chief executive, "Too many people feel excluded from nature and too many people still feel excluded from the nature sector. Our research shows that there's a great appetite for change in the environment movement. People want to be part of an inclusive, diverse and socially progressive movement. They know that saving nature will depend on the talents and energy of everyone working together. It also shows that despite this conviction, many organisations are still in the starting blocks on diversity and inclusion."

As in many sectors, the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020 inspired fresh urgency to efforts to diversify the environment professions, and to address its systemic biases. Recent research has also shown how people from ethnic minorities are more likely to be affected by environmental harms. As understanding has grown, the narrative around environmental issues has shifted to encompass racial and social injustices, and a sense that the environment sector must diversify to tackle them.

But in 2021, just 4.8% of environment professionals had an ethnic minority heritage, compared with 12.6% of the workforce overall, according to official figures. Only farming had lower ethnic minority representation. (...) Most minority ethnic professionals in the sector said an inability to take up volunteering or low-paid jobs in order to gain experience had been a barrier to entry. They complained of a lack of clear career progression, and of arriving at work to find a white colleague had been promoted to a vacant role they did not even know existed.

Forty-two organisations have so far signed up to the new strategy, including Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace. The chief executive of one charity said: "We are in a nature and climate emergency, and we save nature through people, all people."

Adapted from *The Guardian*
October 2022
(448 words)

EXECUTIONS AND DEATH SENTENCES IN U.S. REACH HISTORIC LOWS IN 2021

In 1999, 279 people were sentenced to death in the United States, and 98 prisoners were executed. That year saw the most executions since capital punishment was reinstated in 1976.

Things have changed.

In 2021, the number of people sentenced to death was down to 18, and the number of prisoners executed this year was 11. The number of executions was the fewest since 1988, and the number of death sentences equals last year's total for the fewest in the modern era of the death penalty.

And when Virginia outlawed the death penalty in March, after having executed more prisoners than any other state, it created a majority of 26 states that have either banned capital punishment or imposed a moratorium on its use, according to statistics released Thursday by the Death Penalty Information Center.

The numbers marked a continuing decline in America's desire to execute convicted murderers. A Gallup poll from earlier this year found public support for the death penalty at a 50-year low. Although 80 percent of those surveyed in 1994 supported capital punishment, this year only 54 percent said they were "in favor of the death penalty for a person convicted of murder."

"There's a consistent national trend moving away from the death penalty," said Robert Dunham, the center's executive director. He cited two major factors: "There's been a paradigm shift about punishment in general, a social shift away from excessive punishment, and there's been this growing awareness about flaws with the death penalty, in particular," whether it's the wrongful conviction of defendants, the racial disparities in its use or the high cost of the trial and appeals process.

New research by the center found that 186 prisoners since 1973 have been exonerated after being sentenced to die. "We now know for every 8.3 executions, there's an exoneration," Dunham said. "That's an appalling failure rate. If we read that about any other public policy, it would not be tolerated."

Dunham added: "It is now unquestionably true that people who were innocent have been executed, and their innocence has never been discovered."

The center found that the death penalty is becoming geographically isolated, with just three states — Alabama, Oklahoma and Texas — accounting for a majority of both death sentences and executions last year. In 2021, Texas and the federal government — which executed 13 prisoners during the last six months of the Trump administration — both performed three executions, while Oklahoma had two and Missouri, Alabama and Mississippi each had one. There were no executions west of Texas for a seventh straight year.

Adapted from *The Washington Post*
December 2021
(460 words)

FEDERAL JUDGE BLOCKS NEW YORK GUN LAW

Between a court challenge and the hostility of many sheriffs, New York's effort to provide a model for new concealed-carry legislation could be teetering after the Supreme Court struck down a stricter law.

Gun deaths have been rising in the US lately. Homicides and suicides involving guns, which soared in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, continued rising in 2021, reaching the highest rates in three decades. And mass shootings in 2022 show that gun violence is a persistent American problem. Philadelphia, for example, is one of the few major American cities where it truly is as bad as it has ever been. This is why alarms have sounded about gun violence across the country over the past two years.

However, Federal Judge Suddaby has just blocked large portions of a new New York gun law, considering that the state's new restrictions on carrying guns in public trampled on the rights of New Yorkers. He said that New York's attempts to bar guns in a number of places deemed "sensitive" — including museums, theaters, stadiums, libraries, places offering services to children and anywhere alcohol is served — appeared impermissible. As mandated by the Supreme Court, his analysis depended primarily on comparing the new restrictions with laws that regulated guns in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Unsurprisingly, New York authorities blasted Judge Suddaby's ruling. But his decision illustrates the longstanding battle lines in the debate over the Second Amendment, giving a significant advantage to those who seek to carry guns in public. This is a signal to all the states currently enacting gun laws that the chances of those laws surviving in court are very slim.

Meanwhile, Eric Ruben, a law professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas who specializes in gun regulation, stressed the fact that New York City needs modern-day gun laws responding to modern-day problems - which can't be evaluated on the basis of 18th- or 19th-century regulations.

Judge Suddaby also took exception to part of the law that restricts the carrying of guns on private property unless the owner explicitly allows them to be carried, saying that there was no historical analogy.

He did let portions of the law stand, including the 18 hours of training required of permit applicants, and the barring of guns from government buildings, schools and places of worship.

But overall, Judge Suddaby, who was appointed to the court in 2008 by President George W. Bush, said that since the Supreme Court ruling, it had not become easier to obtain a permit to carry guns in New York and that instead, the state had "further reduced a first-class constitutional right".

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