Round 1:

February 28, 2010

Matthew Olzmann

Mountain Dew Commercial Disguised as a Love Poem

Here's what I've got, the reasons why our marriage

might work: Because you wear pink but write poems

about bullets and gravestones. Because you yell

at your keys when you lose them, and laugh,

loudly, at your own jokes. Because you can hold a pistol,

gut a pig. Because you memorize songs, even commercials

from thirty years back and sing them when vacuuming.

You have soft hands. Because when we moved, the contents

of what you packed were written *inside* the boxes.

Because you think swans are overrated.

Because you drove me to the train station. You drove me

to Minneapolis. You drove me to Providence.

Because you underline everything you read, and circle

the things you think are important, and put stars next

to the things you think I should think are important,

and write notes in the margins about all the people

you're mad at and my name almost never appears there.

Because you make that pork recipe you found

in the Frida Kahlo Cookbook. Because when you read

that essay about Rilke, you underlined the whole thing

except the part where Rilke says love means to deny the self

and to be consumed in flames. Because when the lights

are off, the curtains drawn, and an additional sheet is nailed

over the windows, you still believe someone outside

can see you. And one day five summers ago,

when you couldn't put gas in your car, when your fridge

was so empty—not even leftovers or condiments—

there was a single twenty-ounce bottle of Mountain Dew,

which you paid for with your last damn dime

because you once overheard me say that I liked it.

from #31 - Summer 2009

Matthew Olzmann

"My father, a retired engineer, writes letters every day. To neighbors, corporations, senators, and anyone else who he can think of. Often it's a complaint—something as odd as an 'inaccurate' product advertisement or a poorly timed stoplight. 'I do this,' he says, 'because I have something to say.' I, too, like to believe this is why I write."

Round 2:

AI boom has caused same CO2 emissions in 2025 as New York City, report claims

This article is more than 1 month old

Study author says tech companies are reaping benefits of artificial intelligence age but society is left to pay cost

Robert Booth *UK technology editor*

Thu 18 Dec 2025 06.15 EST

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The AI boom has caused as much carbon dioxide to be released into the atmosphere in 2025 as emitted by the whole of New York City, it has been claimed.

The global environmental impact of the rapidly spreading technology has been estimated in research published on Wednesday, which also found that AI-related water use now exceeds the entirety of global bottled-water demand.

The figures have been compiled by the Dutch academic Alex de Vries-Gao, the founder of Digiconomist, a company that researches the unintended consequences of digital trends. He claimed they were the first attempt to measure the specific effect of artificial intelligence rather than datacentres in general as the use of chatbots such as OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Gemini soared in 2025.

The figures show the estimated greenhouse gas emissions from AI use are also now equivalent to more than 8% of global aviation emissions. His study used technology companies' own reporting and he called for stricter requirements for them to be more transparent about their climate impact.

"The environmental cost of this is pretty huge in absolute terms," he said. "At the moment society is paying for these costs, not the tech companies. The question is: is that fair? If they are reaping the benefits of this technology, why should they not be paying some of the costs?"

De Vries-Gao found that the 2025 carbon footprint of AI systems could be as high as 80m tonnes, while the water used could reach 765bn litres. He said it was the first time AI's water impact had been estimated and showed that AI water use alone was more than a third higher than previous estimates of all datacentre water use.

The figures are published in the academic journal Patterns. The International Energy Agency (IEA) said earlier this year that AI-focused datacentres draw as much electricity as power-thirsty

aluminium smelters and datacentre electricity consumption is expected to more than double by 2030.

"This is yet more evidence that the public is footing the environmental bill for some of the richest companies on Earth," said Donald Campbell, the director of advocacy at Foxglove, a UK non-profit that campaigns for fairness in tech. "Worse, it is likely just the tip of the iceberg. The datacentre construction frenzy, driven by generative AI, is only getting started.

"Just one of these new 'hyperscale' facilities can generate climate emissions equivalent to several international airports. And in the UK alone, there are an estimated 100-200 of them in the planning system."

The IEA has reported that the largest AI-focused datacentres being built today will each consume as much electricity as 2m households with the US accounting for the largest share of datacentre electricity consumption (45%) followed by China (25%) and Europe (15%).

The largest datacentre being planned in the UK, at a former coal power station site in Blyth, Northumberland, is expected to emit more than 180,000 tonnes of CO_2 a year when at full operation – the equivalent to the amount produced by more than 24,000 homes.

In India, where $30bn (£22.5bn) is being invested in datacentres, there are growing concerns that a lack of reliability from the National Grid will mean the construction of huge diesel generator farms for backup power, which the consultancy KPMG this week called "a massive … carbon liability".

Technology companies' environmental disclosures are often insufficient to assess even the total datacentre impact, never mind isolating AI use, said De Vries-Gao. He noted that when Google recently reported on the impact of its Gemini AI, it did not account for the water used in generating the electricity needed to power it.

Google reported that in 2024 it managed to reduce energy emissions from its datacentres by 12% due to new clean energy sources, but it said this summer that achieving its climate goals was "now more complex and challenging across every level – from local to global" and "a key challenge is the slower-than-needed deployment of carbon-free energy technologies at scale".

Google was approached for comment.

Round 3:

, *The Beast*, 1999

https://www.christies.com/features/The-art-of-love-10287-1.aspx

There is no representation more iconic for love than a heart. Jim Dine is most notable for incorporating the shape in his artworks. He uses it as a template for expressing his emotions through layered color, brushstrokes, and composition. There is a sense of energy, dimension, and fullness to *The Beast*. Dine clarified the relationship between his heart paintings and Valentine's Day by saying that as a child, he liked the holiday, "not because I was in love, necessarily, but because I liked the redness of it."

Catherine of Siena on How Wealth Corrupts Justice

Around 700 years ago, Catherine of Siena wrote a letter outlining why justice works differently for the wealthy and the poor... do you think her analysis still holds today?

By [Jack Maden](#) | January 2025

Born in 1347, Catherine of Siena had a great influence on

Italian literature and the Catholic Church. She sent numerous letters to princes and cardinals to promote obedience to Pope Urban VI, and to defend what she called the "vessel of the Church."

One such letter was addressed to the Anziani and Consuls of Bologna, and in it Catherine discusses the concepts of civil justice and injustice, dissecting why those who govern the state treat the wealthy differently from the poor.

Crimes and injustices committed by the wealthy, Catherine states, are often overlooked due to the corrupt self-interest of those who govern: they refuse to risk upsetting the wealthy, who lobby and hold power over them.

"This is the reason one often fails at justice," Catherine writes:

One is afraid of losing one's status, so in order not to displease others, one keeps covering and hiding their wrongdoing, smearing ointment on a wound which at the time needs to be cauterized. They pretend not to see the flatterers' wrongdoing.

Crimes committed by the poor, in contrast, are met with a ruthless severity:

Toward the poor who seem insignificant and whom they do not fear, they display tremendous enthusiasm for 'justice', and show neither mercy nor compassion, they exact harsh punishments for small faults.

The ruler risks nothing in punishing the powerless, so making an example of them helps distract from the injustices committed by the

wealthy, and demonstrates and reasserts the ruler's moral authority in the eyes of the public.

Catherine's observations have been echoed and anticipated by thinkers across time. Consider Plato in The Republic, written around 375 BCE:

Any ordinary city is in fact two cities, one the city of the poor, the other of the rich, each at war with the other; and in either division there are smaller ones — you would make a great mistake if you treated them as single states.

2,000 years after Plato, here's George Eliot in her wonderful 1871 novel, Middlemarch:

When a youthful nobleman steals jewelry we call the act kleptomania, speak of it with a philosophical smile, and never think of his being sent to the house of correction as if he were a ragged boy who had stolen turnips.

So, what's the solution to wealth's corruption of justice? Is there one?

Catherine advocates the employment of rulers freed from self-love and dedicated to the disinterested, fair administration of law and order.

The spiritual and moral character of the ruler is thus absolutely key, and should be one of the most important criteria by which rulers are measured.

But Catherine made these arguments just under 700 years ago.

Do you think we've heeded her words? Have we made any progress in organizing society to produce rulers that govern impartially? Is such progress possible?

Or do you think we just have to live with the old proverb that "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely"?