

THE CONDITION OF OUR COMPLETENESS

Okpara House Perspectives

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for Okpara House

For the African, the antidote to AI is still within recoverable living memory.

There remain people who live full lives, philosophically and psychologically, without the “advantages” of industrialization. In villages where geography, knowledge, and communal relationships continue to sustain such lives, meaning does not await the arrival of a machine. A grandmother teaches a child which plant heals and which harms, and the knowledge arrives with the relationship attached. The world is already inhabited by purpose.

Fulfilment, obligation, intelligence, and enough have meanings formed within these lives. The people living them think, choose, question, and determine what matters. Their existence unsettles the assumption that humanity must travel one road towards one future.

This is not an advocacy for village life. It is a call to recognize the thought, knowledge, and agency sustained within these lives.

Today, as the clarion call for sustainable living sounds across the “developed” nations, peoples who have maintained a continuous dialogue founded on sustainability risk being sidelined once again. They risk becoming recipients of a reimagined version of their own ways of life, returned to them under another’s authorship.

They have a position that is entirely theirs. This must be made recognizable and relatable to those who carry it, so they can appreciate its significance and claim authorship as their right.

These ways of living do not acquire legitimacy only when someone elsewhere names them “sustainable.” Those who sustain them have the right to determine what to carry forward, what to change, what to share, and on whose terms. Their knowledge continues to grow through observation, invention, and choice. It can inform the technologies we build, the settlements we inhabit, and the institutions we establish. Recoverable living memory carries the capacity to author what comes next.

Those who build and profit from AI insist on drawing everyone into their sphere. They sustain the false narrative that all humanity lives as they do, desires what they desire, and must inherit their dependencies. Their preoccupations become humanity’s preoccupations. Their latest invention becomes everyone’s destiny, and inevitability is the product being sold.

AI is meaningless to nature. The significance humans ascribe to it belongs to a conversation among humans. The forest does not participate in our account of progress, though it bears the consequences. Other organisms need not comprehend our ambitions to suffer their one-way, extractive demands.

The costs are not shared evenly. Much of the mineral wealth, energy, and unseen labor that sustain these systems is drawn from places like ours. What the systems learn, they learn from us as well: our languages, our stories, the knowledge carried in speech. The African is asked to supply the material, then to be grateful for the product. Authorship over what is taken is no part of the exchange.

Modernity, as practiced, is anti-family. It organizes life around schedules that consume the time, scatter the generations, and weaken the relationships through which knowledge and

belonging pass from one person to another. A grandmother and her grandchild now live a continent apart, and the proverb, the recipe, the name of the plant goes unspoken.

At the heart of humanity is continuity. Continuity without eradication. Without our ways of being supplanted by another's. The freedom to change while remaining authors of our own becoming.

Are we willing to give up a little of our comfort to experience more fully what we are capable of ourselves? The choice is ours, if we are still capable of making such choices. If we are allowed to make them.

A comfort that becomes indispensable can begin to determine the terms of our existence. What happens to our agency when we can no longer imagine living without what we have made?

Technology, understood as a form of evolution, must be questioned for how incompletely it integrates with the world it draws its materials from and imposes its consequences upon. Its band of high capability is narrow. It cannot stand as the measure of the whole.

Within that band, it can be harnessed to do good. This requires us to accept limits. To establish boundaries. To shun excess. To determine what a technology serves, what it consumes, and whether its place within our lives strengthens our ability to live as we choose.

Lessons from our recklessness abound. Yet our recurring lack of appetite to do right by ourselves leaves us compromised. What we recognize as worth preserving must also find expression in how we live.

The antidote lies in remembering how to remain fully human without making these mechanisms the condition of our completeness. And in carrying that knowledge forward.

There are still people alive who can show us.