

THE COST OF PROGRESS

Sustaining Creativity and Community in the Age of AI



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FROM KETURAH'S ARTICLE

“To me, sustainability is not only about maintaining what we have today. It is about improving conditions for the future while protecting what is already valuable.”



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THE ARTICLE

THE COST OF PROGRESS:
SUSTAINING CREATIVITY AND COMMUNITY IN THE AGE OF AI

BY KETURAH MOODY
EMERGING LEADERS INITIATIVE FELLOW

To me, sustainability is not only about maintaining what we have today. It is about improving conditions for the future while protecting what is already valuable.

Progress does not always mean advancing as quickly as possible. Sometimes it means preserving people's livelihoods, protecting communities, and refusing to sacrifice what cannot easily be restored.

This broader definition shapes how I think about artificial intelligence and the future of creative work. AI may help creatives work more efficiently, explore ideas, and access new opportunities but if its growth leads to displaced workers, undervalued human contributions, polluted communities, or damaged natural resources, can we truly call that progress?

What is the compromise, if any?

SUSTAINING CREATIVE WORK MEANS PROTECTING MORE THAN THE FINISHED PRODUCT.

It means protecting the people, perspectives, and opportunities that allow creativity to exist. Creative work is shaped by lived experiences, cultural knowledge, emotion, and human connection. These qualities cannot be replicated simply by producing content faster. When companies prioritize speed and lower costs, creative work can become disconnected from the people whose ideas and experiences gave it value in the first place.

A sustainable creative economy must also leave room for people to build careers. Entry-level assignments give emerging writers, designers, photographers, and content creators opportunities to strengthen their skills and find their voices.



IF THOSE OPPORTUNITIES ARE INCREASINGLY AUTOMATED, THE CREATIVE INDUSTRY RISKS LOSING THE NEXT GENERATION BEFORE THEY HAVE A CHANCE TO DEVELOP.



Sustainability should include fair compensation, proper credit, transparency, and consent when creative work is used to train AI systems.

AI should expand what creatives can do without making the people behind the work feel disposable.



THE ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMAN CONSEQUENCES OF AI ARE ALSO PART OF THIS CONVERSATION.

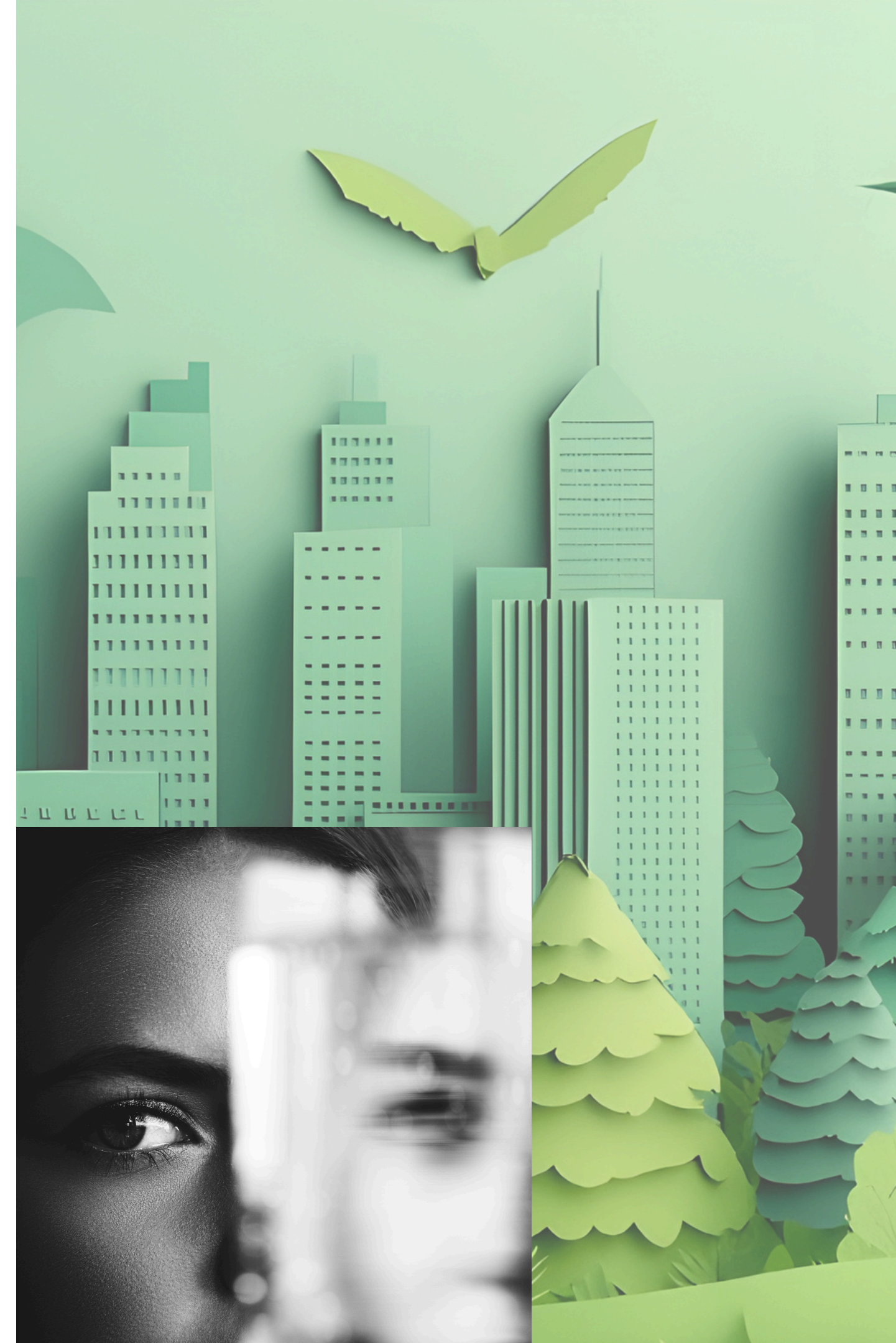
Reuters journalists Disha Raychaudhuri and Valerie Volcovici reported that xAI installed 59 natural gas turbines to power its Colossus 2 data center, with at least 57 located in Southaven, Mississippi. Residents near Southaven and Whitehaven, Tennessee, have reported disruptive noise from the turbines (Raychaudhuri and Volcovici, 2026).

These communities show that the impact of AI is not limited to what happens on a screen. Its physical infrastructure can affect the air people breathe, the peace of their neighborhoods, their quality of life, and potentially their property values.

IN CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES, THE PEOPLE EXPERIENCING THE GREATEST EFFECTS OF AI ARE NOT ALWAYS THE PEOPLE MAKING THE DECISIONS.

Creatives are expected to adapt as their work is used to build new technologies, while communities are expected to live beside the infrastructure powering them.

Both deserve a voice in deciding what responsible innovation looks like.



THIS LEADS ME TO ASK WHETHER COMPROMISE IS EVEN THE RIGHT WORD.

Creatives should not have to compromise their ownership, dignity, or economic security for technology to advance.

Communities should not have to compromise clean air or quiet neighborhoods.

A sustainable future for AI must protect both the people creating the work and the people living alongside the infrastructure that makes the technology possible.

THE GOAL SHOULD NOT BE TO STOP INNOVATION.

It should be to ensure that innovation does not erase the people, skills, and resources we will still need in the future.

If AI is going to support creative work, it must strengthen human creativity rather than reduce it to something that can be produced faster and cheaper.



**THAT IS THE KIND OF
PROGRESS WORTH
SUSTAINING.**



TWO QUESTIONS KETURAH LEAVES US WITH

CAN WE TRULY CALL THAT PROGRESS?

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IS COMPROMISE EVEN THE RIGHT WORD?

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