

# PLANETARY AI

BEYOND THE SCREENS,  
BEHIND THE SYSTEMS,  
THROUGH THE GLOBAL PRODUCTION NETWORKS.



# CREDITS

## PLANETARY AI

By Planetary AI and Techworker  
Community Africa

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Amir Anwar, Beatrice Bonami, Srravya  
Chandhiramowuli, Richard Mathenge,  
and Mophat Okinyi.

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Illustrator: Njung'e Wanjiru  
Coordinators: Mohammad Amir Anwar,  
Beatrice Bonami, Srravya  
Chandhiramowuli, Richard Mathenge,  
and Mophat Okinyi.

Publication design and edit: Beatrice  
Bonami

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# RATIONALE

Despite the proliferation of AI systems (e.g., driverless cars, chatbots, search engines) in different industries and facets of our lives, these are marked by opacity. AI remains an enigma: public understanding about how AI systems are made and what are the long-term implications on our social and natural environments remains somewhat limited.

Planetary AI, in collaboration with Techworker Community Africa, a Nairobi-based NGO led by workers who are responsible for training AI systems, sets out on an artistic endeavour in public interest to visualise the deeply enmeshed and extractive systems of land, labour, energy, and water. Working with Njung'e Wanjiru, a celebrated Addis Ababa-Nairobi based artist, this series of introductory illustrations peel away the shiny façade of AI.

Drawing upon personal experiences, historical memory, and critical inquiry, Njung'e Wanjiru's work offers a powerful reflection on the material and social dynamics that underpin contemporary AI systems. He invites us all to confront not only the hidden costs of technological developments but also to reimagine and rethink our AI futures. By weaving together history and lived experience, Njung'e Wanjiru's work opens a space for critical reflection on the worlds being built through AI and on the possibilities for building them differently.

BY MOHAMMAD AMIR ANWAR, BEATRICE BONAMI, AND SRRAVYA CHANDHIRAMOWULI.

# LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

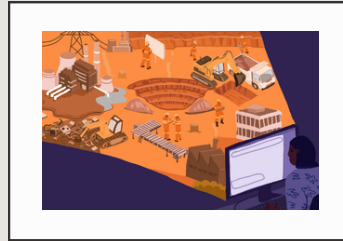
## 1. BEYOND THE SCREEN

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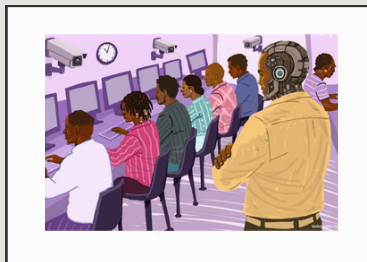
## 6. BEYOND THE SCREEN II

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## 2. THE SURVEILLANCE EQUATION

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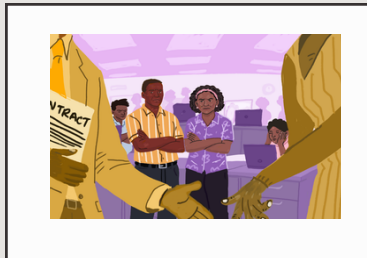
## 7. THE VACUUM EQUATION

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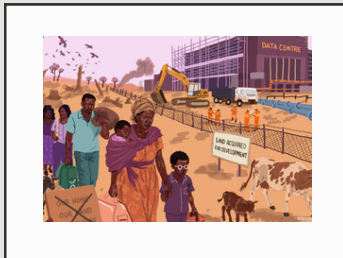
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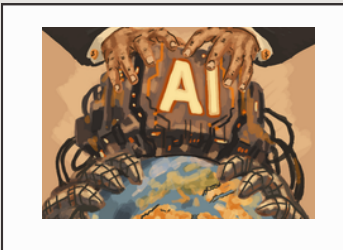
## 4. LONELY EXHAUSTION

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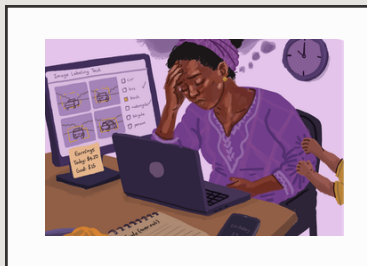
## 9. POWER HUNGRY AI

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## 5. LOW BATTERY MODE

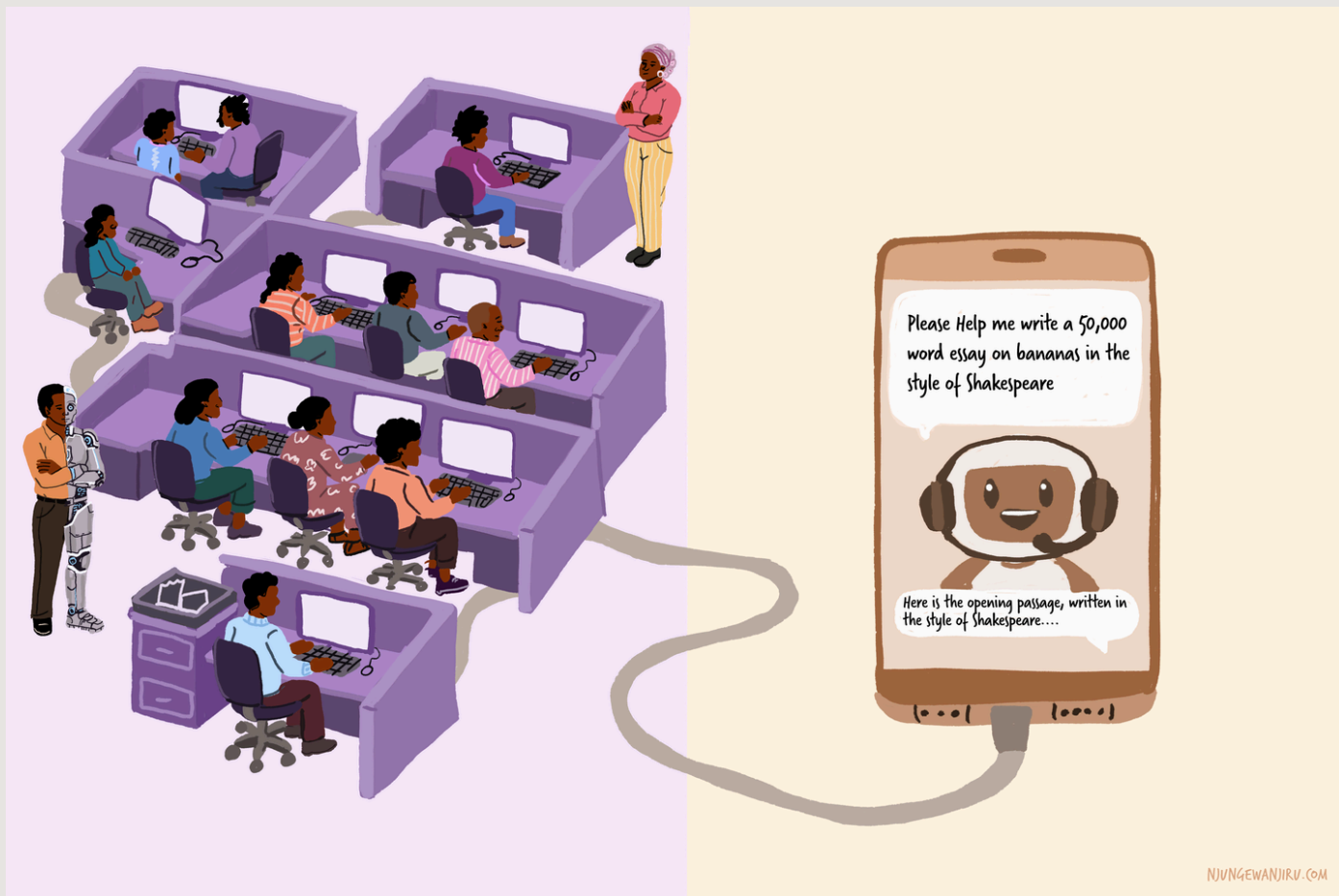
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## ILLUSTRATION 1

## BEYOND THE SCREEN

HOW DO LLMs PROVIDE ANSWERS TO PROMPTS? THESE SYSTEMS PROCESS DATA THAT HAS BEEN CURATED, LABELLED, AND VERIFIED BY THOUSANDS OF WORKERS, OFTEN LABOURING UNDER POOR WORKING CONDITIONS. THE SEAMLESSNESS OF AN LLM IS POWERED BY THIS CRUCIAL LABOUR.



## ILLUSTRATION 2

## THE SURVEILLANCE EQUATION

DATA WORK (THE LABOUR THAT POWERS AI SYSTEMS) IS CONDUCTED UNDER STRINGENT SURVEILLANCE. DATA WORKERS ARE CLOSELY MONITORED AND CONTROLLED THROUGH A COMBINATION OF HUMAN MANAGERS AND ALGORITHMIC SYSTEMS.



## ILLUSTRATION 3 THE DEAL

CONTRACTS FOR OUTSOURCED DATA WORK ARE UNEQUAL ARRANGEMENTS DRAWN UP BY AI COMPANIES AND DATA LABELLING VENDORS, WHILE THE WORKERS ARE TYPICALLY EXCLUDED FROM THE PROCESS AND THEIR CONCERNS IGNORED.



## ILLUSTRATION 4

## LONELY EXHAUSTION

DATA WORK CAN BE EXHAUSTING, AS WORKERS FULFIL PRODUCTIVITY DEMANDS AND LEND THEIR LAST OUNCE OF ENERGY TO TRAIN AND FINE TUNE AI. THEY EXPERIENCE FATIGUE WITH PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS FROM SPENDING HOURS ON LABELLING HARMFUL CONTENT. AI RESTS ON THIS EXPLOITATION OF BOTH THE BODY AND MIND.



## ILLUSTRATION 5

## LOW BATTERY MODE

NOT ONLY DO COMPUTER BATTERIES RUN OUT. HUMAN BATTERIES RUN OUT TOO. WHILE SPENDING EXTENDED HOURS ON LABELLING, DATA WORKERS HAVE TO STILL FIND TIME, ENERGY, AND EARNINGS TO SUPPORT THEIR FAMILIES FINANCIALLY AND EMOTIONALLY, LEAVING AN INDELIBLE MARK ON FUTURE GENERATIONS.



## ILLUSTRATION 6 BEYOND THE SCREEN II

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BRING AI INTO OUR LIVES? BEYOND THE SCREEN, AI SYSTEMS ARE EMBEDDED IN THE COMPLEX GLOBAL PRODUCTION NETWORKS. EVERY STAGE OF THE NETWORKS HAS MATERIAL REQUIREMENTS THAT MAKE OUR DAILY ACCESS TO AI POSSIBLE. FROM RESOURCE EXTRACTION TO INFRASTRUCTURE MAINTENANCE, AI PRODUCTION NETWORKS CARRY SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL COSTS THAT ARE OFTEN HIDDEN FROM THE VIEW.



## ILLUSTRATION 7 THE VACUUM EQUATION

AMONG MANY RESOURCES, AI REQUIRES LARGE AMOUNTS OF WATER TO COOL MACHINES IN DATA CENTRES. FOR SURROUNDING POPULATIONS, THIS MEANS WATER BANKRUPTCY AND POVERTY.



## ILLUSTRATION 8      **DISPLACEMENT WITHOUT DEVELOPMENT**

AI-DRIVEN INFRASTRUCTURES CAN CAUSE DISPLACEMENT WITHOUT GUARANTEEING LOCAL BENEFITS, FORCING POPULATIONS TO MAKE ROOM FOR A FUTURE THAT MAY NOT SERVE THEM. SUCH DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES REQUIRE PEOPLE TO ADAPT THEIR LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS TO ACCOMMODATE THE RAPID EXPANSION OF AI.



## ILLUSTRATION 9 POWER HUNGRY AI

AI IS OFTEN PRESENTED AS INEVITABLE PROGRESS, YET ITS EXPANSION RELIES ON THE EXTRACTION OF VAST NATURAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES ON A PLANETARY SCALE. IN THE PROCESS, AI IS SHIFTING THE BALANCE OF POWER IN THE HANDS OF THE FEW.

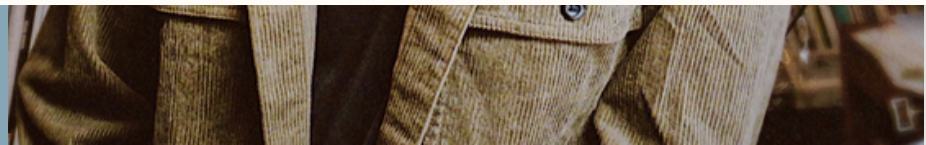


## ILLUSTRATION 10 RE-XISTING

RESISTING AI IS NOT ABOUT REJECTING PROGRESS OR OPPOSING TECHNOLOGY, BUT ABOUT CHALLENGING THE DOMINANCE OF DATA-DRIVEN SYSTEMS AND MAKING SPACE FOR PLURIVERSAL FUTURES.



## THE ARTIST



Njung'e Wanjiru is a visual artist based between Nairobi and Addis Ababa. Working across illustration, animation, and graphic recording, he uses visual communication and documentation to capture, archive, and transform diverse forms of knowledge, perspectives, ideas, and technology. His practice sits at the intersection of design, illustration, and social impact projects, engaging with themes of nature, heritage, representation, and accessibility. He is nominated for the World Illustration Awards 2026 for the “Mask\_ulinity” animation, exploring the layered and often unspoken experiences of masculinity.

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