

7 Things You Should Know About Miquela @lilmiquela

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Abstract: Miquela (@lilmiquela) is an avatar Instagrammer programmed as a 19-year-old Brown Brazilian-American female influencer and musician. She has garnered a significant amount of popularity, controversies, and hatred as an "it" influencer. A popular transmedia storytelling project like Miquela can provide additional insights toward how social media images deliver technocultural imaginaries. Popular social media narrative and image constructions of Miquela point to certain underlying issues around race and gender in the digital culture, including habits and performativity, forgotten histories, and the digital updates of oppression.

Keywords: social media, GIF, media studies, student work, performance, gender, race.

7 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT MIQUELA @LILMIQUELA

1. On April 19, 2018, Miquela revealed her non-human status. She was built to be a servant by the AI specialized company Cain Intelligence and was stolen by Brud. Brud "freed" her, and claimed to reprogram her based on the life and mind of a human named Miquela Sousa but, in fact, Miquela Sousa does not exist. It was hard for Miquela to process her robot identity, esp. since she feels human as she cries, laughs, dreams, falls in love, and gets hurt. Although these emotions were programmed, she feels them.

I'M NOT FAKE; I'M JUST NOT A HUMAN BEING



@RacZiziLee
Zizi Li

I'M NOT A HUMAN, BUT AM I STILL A PERSON?



2. Miquela has gained plenty of controversies and hatred since she self-posed as a robot/AI *and* a person. Looking back a year after the drama, it is clear that Miquela is NOT an actual AI but the product of a transmedia storytelling project.

Brud is a group of Los Angeles based problem solvers specializing in robotics, artificial intelligence and their applications to media businesses. We've built a team of people interested in leveraging technology to better things as eloquently as possible. If you're working on something and think you could use some help send us an email.

05/20/2018

Brud is reading War-of-the Worlds-on-the-radio a transmedia studio that creates digital character driven story worlds.

- ❑ Story worlds that have the power to introduce marginalized ideas wrapped in the familiarity of entertainment.
- ❑ Story worlds that can create a more tolerant world by leveraging cultural understanding and technology.
- ❑ Story worlds that are the product of a collective intelligence informed by diverse individual experiences.

03/09/2019



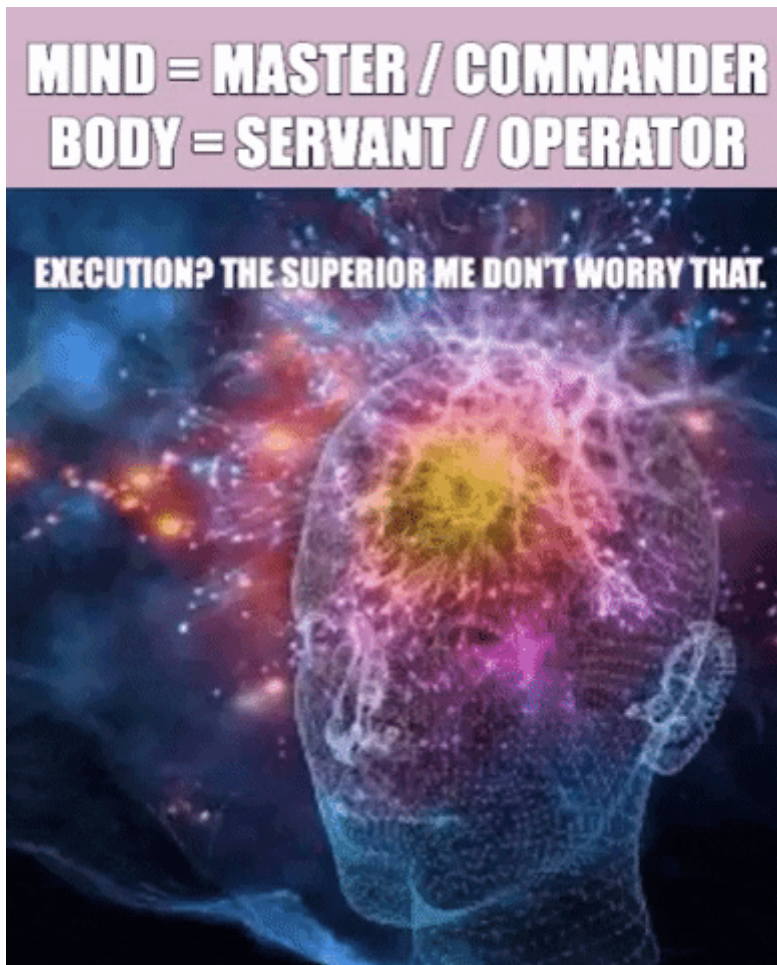
3. Miquela is able to obtain the level of attention because her presence directly exposes the blurring of the lines between human and non-human, physical and virtual existence, the real self and the performed persona. She is at once *404 not found* and everywhere in the physical world.





4. The narrative construction of Miquela as a brown fembot speaks to the afterlives of slavery as manifested through WOC in/as technology. The transition of her role from a servant at Cain Intelligence to an AI robot at Brud points to the continuation of racial and gender oppression, as WOC transition from being physical/reproductive slaves to technological/commercial slaves.





5. Miquela often gets compared to Shudu, a black female avatar supermodel confirmed as a digital art work created by a white male photographer Cameron-James Wilson. Shudu's dark complexion is used to construct and emphasize her "authenticity." We still have not walked beyond the internet as a means of travel for the privileged, modern, industrialized, and mobile first world subject to collect sanitized and idealized yet still exotic experiences.



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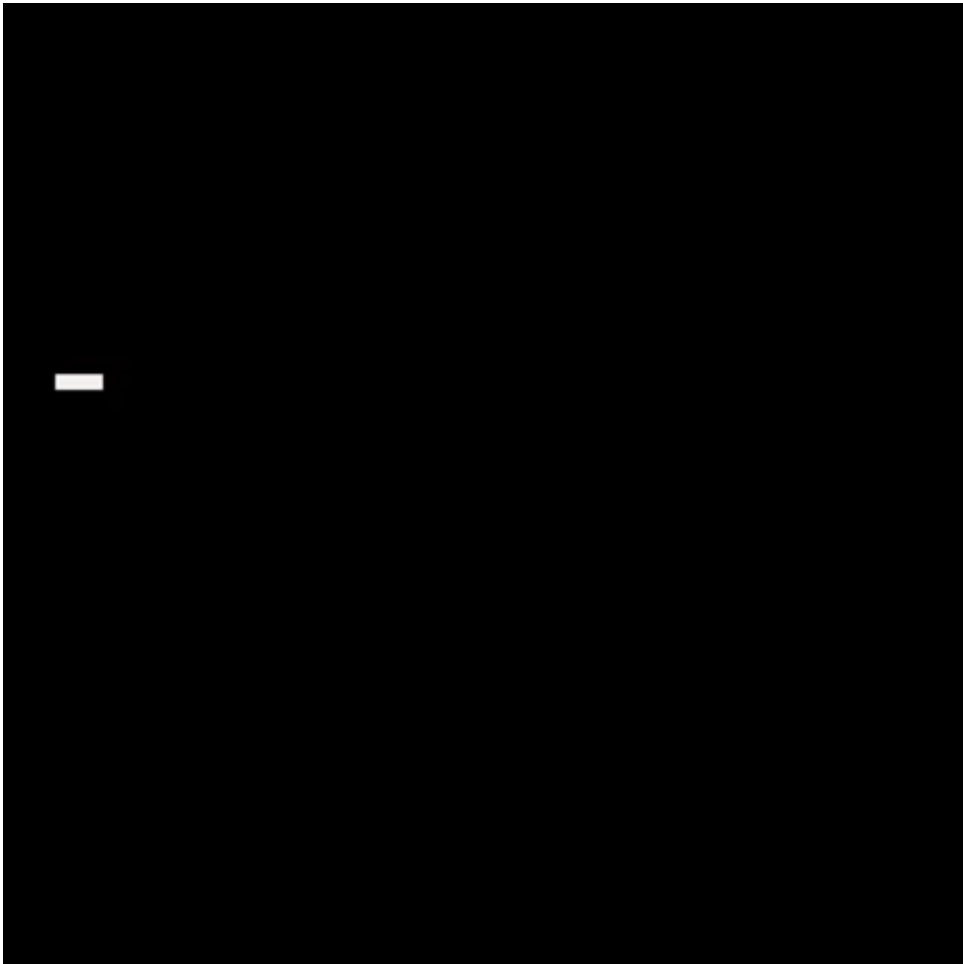
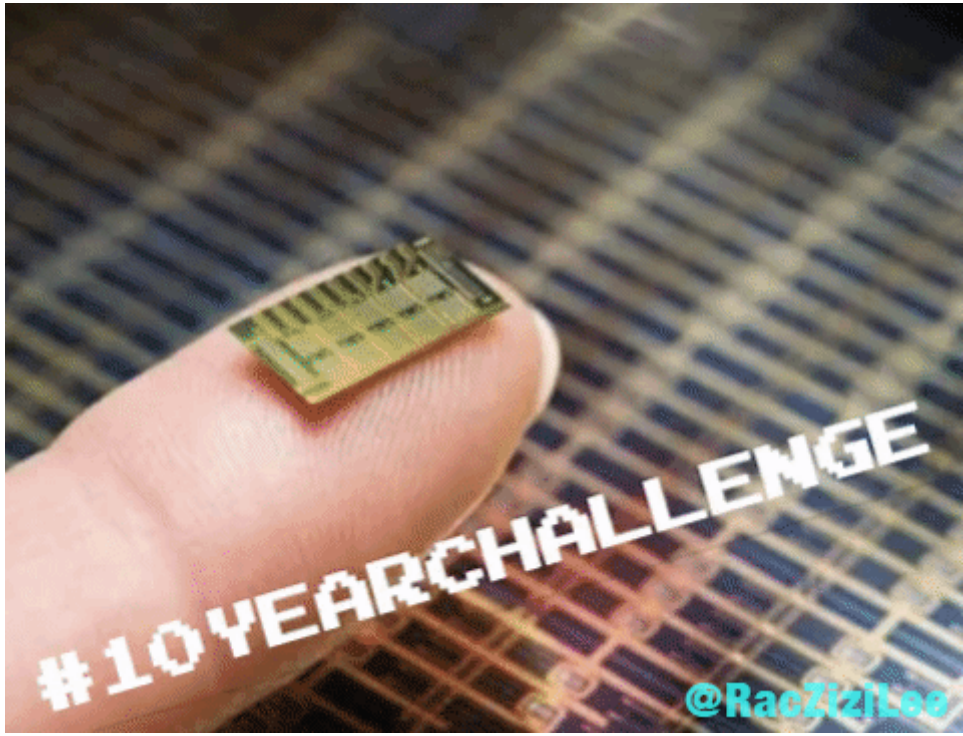
An IBM-Base Company



6. Furthermore, Miquela's entrenchment in the consumer culture as an influencer complexifies the continuation of racism toward WOC in the age of neoliberal multiculturalism. For brands who collaborate with Miquela and venture capitalists who invest in Brud, the characteristics of Miquela as a WOC fembot is what matters. Brud and other companies work with Miquela partially due to the opportunities to commodify diversity and social justice. The democratic utopia of the Internet has been helping with the updated racism, which deploys distinctions and commercialize differences to produce lesser personhoods.



7. Last but not least, Miquela is symptomatic of the paradoxes of the digital culture: it is at once material and immaterial. Miquela is an idea, a metaphor, and a cultural imaginary that yield immense power. At the same time, Miquela is a chip, a wire, and any other electronic parts / infrastructures / networks / laborers that tangibly create and sustain the digital culture.



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Zizi Li is a Cinema and Media Studies PhD student at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research revolves around digital media cultures through studying the intersection of race, gender, ethnicity, and indigeneity in transnational spaces and encounters on/off-line. Some key fields/themes she identifies with include: critical digital studies, feminist media and culture theories, (in)visible labor/infrastructure, and transitional/fugitive/liminal spaces.