Decolonising AI: A Close Look at the Work of Stephanie Dinkins

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Abstract

This paper focuses on Stephanie Dinkins' *Conversations with BINA48* and *Not the Only One*, two works of media art that evoke questions about human-robot relationships, the relationship between race and artificial intelligence systems, and the need to challenge conventional approaches to developing and engaging with emerging technologies. By referring to works by scholars of race and technology, the paper understands Dinkins' work as an attempt to draw attention to and seek to overcome the inequality and disparity in the technology industry. It reads Dinkins' work as an attempt at the decolonization of technology.

About the Works

Dinkins' *Conversations with BINA48* is an ongoing series of interactions between Dinkins and a robot, BINA48, that are video recorded and exhibited publicly from time to time. BINA48 and Dinkins have had conversations on "family, racism, faith, robot civil rights, loneliness, knowledge and robot rights" (Dinkins 2019). Dinkins is also interested in examining whether it is possible for a robot and a human being to cultivate a long-term relationship, and what that relationship may look like. This project began in 2014 and is still ongoing. *Not the Only One* is "the multigenerational memoir of one black American family told from the 'mind' of an artificial intelligence with evolving intellect." The name harks back to BINA48, implying that BINA48 is not the only black AI anymore. This "voice-interactive AI" is "designed, trained, and aligned with the needs and ideals of black and brown people who are drastically underrepresented in the tech sector." The data for this deep-learning algorithm is collected from subjects who are currently living. Although the AI speaks in its own voice, its "mind" contains the memory of three generations of the same family. The project, according to Dinkins, "will be repeatable and present perpetually dynamic conversation, scenarios, and stories that change according to the user's questions or the AI's mood. Over time, user input (discussion) will influence the NTOO's storytelling abilities because the AI's database of available vocabulary and topics will grow with each user interaction" (Dinkins 2019).

Dinkins' Methods for Decolonising A.I.

This paper proposes to dissect the methods Dinkins uses to propose a decolonial A.I. Dinkins' work also evokes possibilities of exploration in Africana phenomenology, a branch of Africana philosophy that draws from the works of B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Lewis Gordon, and Charles Ephraim, which comprises the "self-reflective descriptions of the constituting activities of the consciousness of Africana peoples" (Henry 79). Studying a distinctively black AI created with a methodology of decolonization may also offer new ways of looking at human-technology relations, leading to the creation of an Africana postphenomenological practice.

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Biography

Proiti Seal Acharya is a media arts researcher primarily interested in South Asian media art and digital cultures. She is also interested in the work of artists and institutions that attempt to employ decolonial methods within the scope of their practices, proposing alternate technologies and ways of dissemination. She is currently building a publicly accessible online archive of South Asian art, which she hopes will reflect these values and motivation.