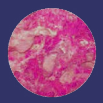

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My Avatar's Avatars:

A Visual Exploration and Response to AI-Generated Avatars

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Abstract

This article investigates the potential of avatar-making to challenge stereotypical, hypersexualized, heteronormative White Eurocentric standard beauty and representations of femininity in avatars. With the rise of AI-generated avatars and the questionable gender representations amplified by these avatar images, a critical engagement with AI avatar-making is vital. The study explores alternative strategies for avatar creation using AI and art strategies to counter the often narrow representations of womanhood in avatars that circulate in the visual culture generated by commercial AI products. By employing art strategies such as exquisite corpse, glitch, and remix, I aim to extend avatar pedagogy in art education to reflect the new technology and the digital materiality of avatars. The avatars created through combined strategies and AI demonstrate the possibility of avatar-making that defies gender binaries and normative constructs. The result is a critical engagement with AI for avatar-making to advocate for resistance to the commodification of avatars and reimaging the body and identity.

Keywords: AI-Generated Avatars, Avatar Pedagogy, Glitch Feminism, Cyberfeminism, Exquisite Corpse, Glitch Art, Gender Representation

Introduction: The App That Creates Avatars

A new era of visual culture production has begun with the arrival of generative artificial intelligence (AI), technology that can create text, images, and more based on a user's prompt, usually text input. Recently, the internet and social media have been flooded with AI-generated images, which are becoming easily and readily available for those with access to create with technological devices such as smart phones, tablets, and laptops. While the impact and implications of AI-generated images are still being debated, the online visual culture landscape has begun to shift. In November 2022, Lensa, a photo editing app, released its Magic Avatars feature. It became an instant hit on social media because it enabled people to use AI to generate avatars in different styles for their social media profiles (Sottile, 2022). By uploading some photos and selecting from limited presets that reference pop culture, video games, anime, and popular artistic mediums, such as watercolor art, users receive a choice of 50-200 different avatar images, seemingly providing limitless possibilities. Lensa users can quickly satisfy their curiosities about their potential self-representations as digital avatars. A term that comes from Sanskrit and a concept from Hinduism meaning the incarnation of a deity or spirit, avatars are used to represent people in varying online settings; they have become an important part of our digital lives and have a significant impact on people's online interaction and social life (Meadows, 2008). Further, in art education, avatars also play a pedagogical role in identity exploration, media art-making, and teaching/learning in a virtual world, such as Second Life (Knochel, 2016; Liao, 2008a, 2008b, 2011; Lu, 2008; Taylor, 2009).

The effortless AI-generated avatars rapidly changed the visual landscape of avatar-making and offered a glimpse into alternative versions of ourselves. Lensa offers possibilities for those curious to see and imagine versions of themselves in different settings and styles, especially when they can be "more attractive" images of selves that represent Eurocentric bodily ideals (McCluskey, 2022). Criticism also arose about using the app, ranging from privacy concerns,

ethics, and copyright issues of training data to hypersexualized and over-idealized, perfect-looking avatars (Kircher & Holtermann, 2022; Nayyar, 2022; Snow, 2022). Some women/femmes users even reported feeling uncomfortable with how their avatars are rendered topless or show some nudity (Snow, 2022). Conducting a search on Instagram using the hashtags #aiavatars or #lensaapp reveals that many, if not most, of the avatars posted are women, with a significant proportion displaying hypersexualized features, such as exaggerated breasts in revealing outfits, indicative of the women-objectifying male gaze, a term coined by Laura Mulvey (1975) to indicate that images of women in the media are created for male pleasure, coded in the AI algorithms. These AI-generated avatars often perpetuate narrow and hypersexualized representations that erase the complexities of intersecting identities and reinforce normative gender roles (Crenshaw, 1991). As Judith Butler (1990) argues, "gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through *a stylized repetition of acts*" (p. 140). Such representations reinforce and perpetuate normative gender roles rather than challenging and expanding the understanding of gender identities. Therefore, it is crucial for feminists to explore diverse, intersectional, and equitable representations through avatars.

Due to the popularity of creating AI avatars fueled by social media, numerous similar apps and avatar-making features are rapidly being developed and incorporated into various photo editing apps. This trend has turned avatar creation into a lucrative business for tech companies (Curry, 2024), while users willingly exchange their real faces and privacy for the illusion of limitless identities. Users have the perception that they can freely and endlessly explore different versions of themselves through these avatars when, in reality, they are confined to the preset styles and algorithms. Further, when users upload their facial images, they often unwittingly grant these companies access to their biometric data and lose control over their personal information.

There are fundamental differences between AI-generated avatars and other digital means of avatar creation. The concept of avatar creation as a means to construct identities has been extensively theorized. For example, Kafai et al. (2010) emphasize the role of avatars in providing a platform for self-exploration and identity play, where users can experiment with different appearances and social roles. Neustaedter and Fedorovskaya (2009) highlight that avatars serve as a visual representation of the self and enable users to navigate their concepts of self. Further, through constructing avatars, users can not only make and re-make their identities but also learn about themselves through this art-making process (Liao, 2011). Regardless of the tools or methods used, particularly in video games or virtual world avatar creation, users typically have the option to create their avatars by combining various styles of facial and body elements. With more sophisticated tools, they can adjust body size, height, and other measurements to fine-tune their avatars to their desired appearance. Users retain the agency to decide the final look of their avatars within the constraints of the tools used.

Although there are similarities, the concept of avatar-making should be perceived differently for AI-generated avatars. In this process, users provide their photos as raw material and receive an output that often exceeds their expectations and imagination. The agency afforded to users is limited to a narrow range of art styles representing stereotypical heteronormative female and male gender norms and pop culture representations of race. Female gender style choices often include fantasy, fairy princess, stylish, and kawaii (cute),[1] while male gender choices feature adventure, superheroes, and knights. Though styles vary across apps, with some offering similar styles for options labeled as female and male and the option to choose "other" for gender, the stereotypical Eurocentric norms in the styles rendered through AI are frequently exaggerated, highlighting ongoing issues of gender representation in the digital world (Liao, 2008b). AI avatar tools do not enable users to exercise their agency in making decisions about the final look of their AI-generated avatars.

Lensa, the app that initiated this trend, uses the slogan "Find out how AI sees you" on its website, suggesting that AI acts like a portrait artist, passively "seeing" and "representing" users through a coded gaze, a term coined by artist and computer scientist Joy Buolamwini (2023, 2016) to denote biases in the algorithms. Buolamwini's research reveals that machine vision is rampant with biases, particularly at the intersections of race and gender, due to the lack of diverse representations in the data sets used to train AI. Additionally, the lack of

[1] Kawaii is a Japanese term that can be translated as "cute." The term is also used to indicate a pop-culture street style that incorporates colorful, cute dresses, accessories, and makeup.

diversity in big tech allowed racist and sexist AI to go unnoticed and unaddressed. This coded gaze results in AI-generated avatars that reflect and circulate limited and biased representations commonly found in pop culture.

These AI-generated avatars prompt us to question the relationship between the creator and the created, the user and the used, and humans and the non-human. Is AI merely a tool, or does it possess agency? While many people consider generative AI merely a tool, their influence in avatar creation goes beyond a tool. As we feed our photos into these systems, AI does not just replicate but interprets them and exercises creativity to influence the outcome, thereby exerting agency in its action. According to Miller (2019), AI has evolved to the point where it can engage in creative processes traditionally considered unique to humans, and this process includes making creative decisions, such as which features to emphasize and which artistic elements to incorporate; therefore, AI can exercise creativity and be seen as an independent creator or human collaborator. This process raises questions about the autonomy of AI. The way AI algorithms interpret and emphasize certain features over others can reflect and even amplify existing biases, particularly in aspects of gender, race, and beauty standards. This suggests that AI in avatar creation is not a passive tool but an active participant that could create new identities for users, bypassing the user's control.

In this article, my goal is to explore ways to enrich avatar pedagogy in art education (Liao, 2011) and use artistic means to respond to and disrupt the perpetuating messages of stereotypical gender representations in visual culture carried through AI-generated avatars. This inquiry is a collaborative visual exploration with my avatar, an agent born digital in the AI realm. Curator and writer Legacy Russell (2020) stated that "the construction of a self, creative or otherwise, is complex. … To seize 'multiple selves' is, therefore, an inherently feminist act: multiplicity is a liberty" (p. 18). Self-construction and embracing multiple selves challenge traditional, patriarchal notions of a singular, fixed identity, allowing for the expression of diverse experiences and identities. By acknowledging multiplicity, feminist practices resist normative and oppressive identity constructs. I aim to explore and create multiple selves through combined art strategies, including the exquisite corpse, remix, and glitch, to find ways to respond to AI-generated avatars through a complex art-making process.

The Avatarization of Self and My Avatar's Avatars

Media artist Ana Roman (2019) coined the term "avatarization of self" to describe how our online activities transform ourselves into avatars. Her work, "The Avatarization of My Self(s)" (Roman, 2019), examines how individuals, particularly the artist herself, engage in the transformation of their identities into avatars in the virtual world. She describes acts of avatarization, such as distorting the self with filters, which I relate to the creation of idealized avatars for social media. Her work addresses the impact of digital technologies and platforms on our self-perception and identity, leading to fragmented and distorted representations of ourselves. Applying her concept of avatarization to using AI to generate avatars, raises question regarding AI algorithms producing assimilations of identities as stereotypical gendered personas into the AI machine's invisible black box, a term used to describe the opaque and often incomprehensible processes by which AI systems make decisions.

The idea of feeding myself into an AI machine was daunting because of the concern for privacy, so I decided to use my avatar, Liliann, to undertake this exploration. To mimic a typical avatar-creation experience, I started with readily available commercial AI tools. Using the AI text-to-image generator, DALL-E 3, I created Liliann, an avatar that resembles some of my features but is also a more idealized version of myself (Figure 1)—her nose is narrower, eyes are bigger, and skin is smoother. I focused on creating avatar images suitable for social media profiles, primarily headshots rather than full-body images. I then asked the AI to generate multiple versions of Liliann with different facial expressions and angles, creating a set of avatar photos similar to those users upload to create their AI avatars. These images were submitted for face-swapping using Face Swap (https://www.pica-ai.com/), an online tool that allows users to swap their faces with pre-selected portrait photo sets. This step allows for the creation of avatar photos that look like real photography. Now, I have a set of my avatar's photos that resemble headshots or selfies. These face-swapped photos are then submitted to Picarts, an image editing app with an AI avatar-making feature, to create AI avatars in 10 different styles: Artsy, Fantasy, Apocalypse, Cyberpunk, Pen and Ink, Floral, Pop Art, Fashion, Doll, and Time Travel. I received 50 images of my avatars' avatars (see Figure 2 for samples).

Figure 1. My Avatar, Liliann. Image generated using DALL-E 3. My avatar represents my identity: East Asian woman, middle age, wearing glasses, ponytail hair, professional, and academic. These are also the prompts used to generate my avatar.

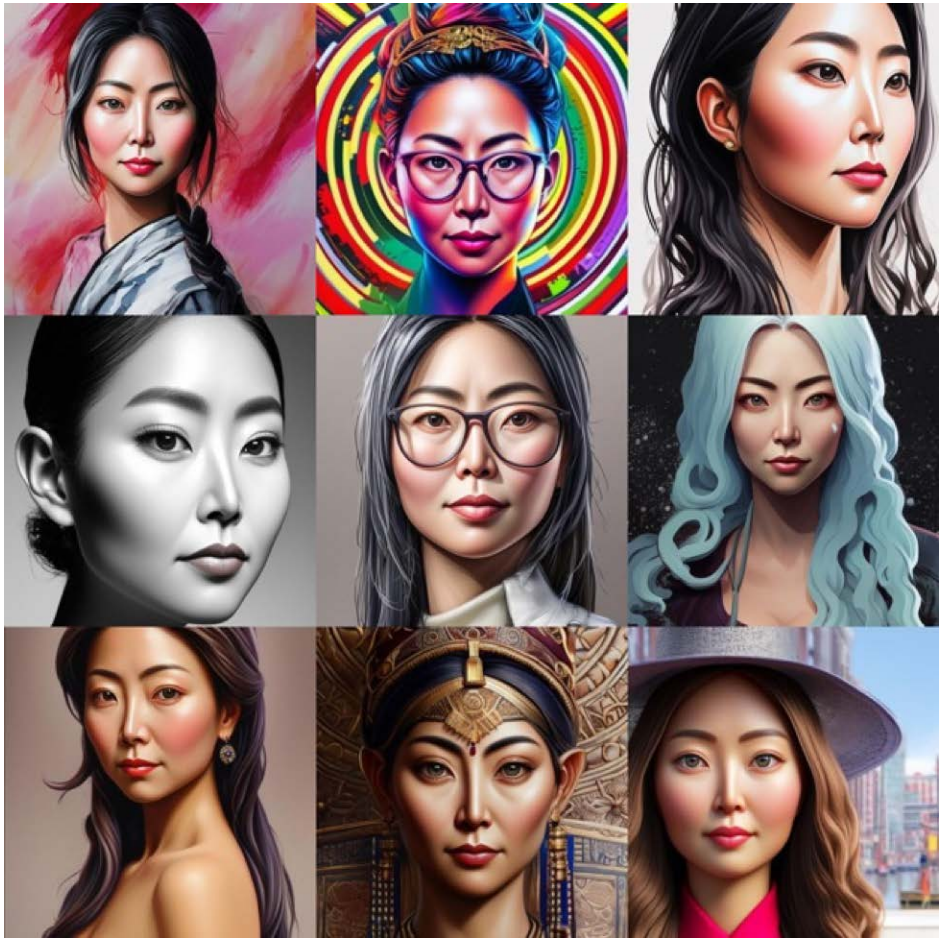

Figure 2. Samples of AI-generated Liliann's avatars. Avatar images are generated using the Picarts app. Art styles from the top row: Pen and Ink, Pop Art, Pen and Ink. Middle row: Fashion, Pen and Ink, Cyberpunk. Lower row: Artsy, Time Travel, and Doll.

These AI-generated Liliann's avatars do not look exactly like Liliann but have some similar features, such as a narrow nose and big eyes. They look like someone dressed in different costumes but can still be identified as the same person. They are proxies for Liliann. Like many other social media profile images generated by Lensa or other AI apps, they are fun to look at and embody pop-culture imagery. They can be interpreted as the collective representation of the internet, as the AI tool used to generate these images was almost certainly trained with all kinds of images found on the internet, which could include problematic copyrighted images, biases, and stereotypes, such as slant eyes for Asians. With these AI-generated avatar images, I began an artistic intervention through a combination of strategies, including exquisite corpse, remix, and glitch.

AI-Generated Avatars as Digital Materiality

Seeing avatars as a medium for meaning-making (Liao, 2011), avatars embody digital materiality, which, although intangible, shapes our relationships and reality (Leonardi, 2010). Digital materiality refers to the ways in which digital artifacts, such as avatars, exert influence and have a presence in our social and cultural interactions. Although these artifacts do not have a physical form, they impact our experiences and perceptions, functioning as active components of our reality. Similarly, new materialism rethinks the nature of materiality, focusing on the matter itself and emphasizing that matter is not passive or inert but has its own agency, affecting and being affected by human and non-human actors (Gamble et al., 2019). Scholars such as Barad (2007) and Coole and Frost (2010) argue that new materialism recognizes the agency of non-human entities, suggesting that AI, avatars, and digital representations are not just passive tools but active participants in shaping reality and our identity. This perspective challenges traditional views that perceive technology as merely a set of tools controlled by humans. Instead, new materialism posits that digital materiality can influence our reality and behaviors. Therefore, avatars, as a form of digital materiality, could offer a transformative medium for challenging and resisting stereotypical gender representations. The artistic exploration in my study extends beyond mere avatar creation; it becomes a form of action and intervention (i.e., glitch feminism) to navigate this new territory created by AI.

I situate my visual exploration within the broader context of cyberfeminism (Keifer-Boyd, 2007; Seu, 2022; VNS Matrix, 1991). Cyberfeminism is a feminist approach combining feminism, technology, and cyberspace to challenge inequality and empower women in the digital age by leveraging the potential of digital tools and online spaces. It believes that women should take control of and appropriate the use of Internet technologies in an attempt to empower themselves and subvert the patriarchal structures embedded in technology (Hall, 1996; Gajjala & Mamidipudi, 1999). Cyberfeminism lays the groundwork for understanding technology as an integral part of gender and identity discourse, leading me to frame my exploration strategies within glitch feminism (Russell, 2020, 2012) and xenofeminism (Cuboniks, 2018, 2015), both of which are connected to cyberfeminism.

Glitch feminism, conceptualized by Legacy Russell (2012, 2020), employs glitches as a form of creative resistance to challenge and disrupt traditional binary gender narratives and normative gendered identities (Wolfgang et al., 2017). This approach not only questions the rigidity of gender constructs but also celebrates the fluidity and multiplicity of identity in the digital age, where disruptions and errors become opportunities for reinvention. In my work, this manifests in the intentional creation of digital glitches in avatar images, symbolizing and advocating for the breaking of gender binaries and the exploration of complex identities.

Xenofeminism, initiated by the collective Laboria Cuboniks, advocates the strategic use of technology for gender emancipation and socio-political transformation. Xenofeminism calls for a radical reconfiguration of society through technology (Cuboniks, 2018, 2015; Holt, 2018), an idea that resonates with my use of AI in avatar creation. By employing AI algorithms not merely as tools but as collaborators in the creative process, I aim to challenge and reshape the often gender-stereotyped representations produced by these systems. This aligns with xenofeminism's goal of transforming existing power structures, including those based on gender, through technological means.

Both of these feminist call-to-action manifestos are associated with the use of technology to transform existing understandings of gender and the intersectionality of identities. Glitch feminism, for example, extensively discusses systemic anti-Blackness and centers queer and trans-cultural producers of color. Xenofeminism, for instance, explicitly addresses the intersectionality of

oppression, advocating for the use of technology to dismantle systemic structures of racism, sexism, and classism. Informed by these approaches, I embarked on the journey to unveil the active role that AI and avatars, as digital materialities, play in the continual shaping and reshaping of our identities and realities.

Step One: Exquisite Corpse Avatars

Using AI-generated Liliann's avatars (Figure 2) as my medium, I first use Photoshop as a "virtual analog" tool to create exquisite corpse avatar faces by cutting out different parts of the faces of these avatars and remixing them using the exquisite corpse strategy (Figure 3). By "virtual analog," I mean using digital tools to mimic traditional hands-on artistic processes. This process is a bridge step in my exploration, but it can be adapted to become a stand-alone activity for the art curriculum to disrupt the perfect avatar images. Exquisite corpse, as an artistic strategy, originated from the surrealism movement, where different artists would sequentially draw parts of a creature without seeing the previous parts, leading to a disjointed and unpredictable final image. I use the method as a symbolic gesture for dissecting the perfect avatars generated by AI. By "exquisite corpse" (used as a verb here) different avatars, the set of perfect avatars is collapsed and flattened into one plane, meaning that multiple avatars become a single image. Flattening identity, as the opposite of considering intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) and multiplicity of identity, is a strategy used historically to oppress non-dominant groups. For example, portraying Indigenous people as a homogenous group reduces their rich and diverse culture and identity to a single image. Instead of seeing these avatars as different versions of self in representations emphasizing femininity, flattening these AI-generated avatars allows me to redirect AI-generated identity representation back upon itself. This process proposes a new identity (a single avatar image) that carries multiplicity; therefore, the strategy subverted the AI-generated perfect avatar images.

Figure 3. Photoshop-manipulated exquisite corpse avatars.

Step Two: Glitched Avatars

Drawing from glitch feminism's concept, my next step involves creating glitched avatars that symbolize anomalies and challenge stereotypical "perfection," which I define as the flawless and idealized representations of identity often produced by mainstream digital visual culture. Although there are many apps and photo editing programs with glitch effects and filters, I decided not to use these to produce a "perfect" glitch effect. Instead, I opted to create glitch avatar photos (Figure 4) by manually manipulating codes using a simple text-editing tool.[2] By glitching AI-generated avatars (Figure 2), the results display displaced parts and discolorations, which have a similar effect to an exquisite corpse and remix, demonstrating that "glitch carries a technology of remix within its code" (Russell, 2020, p. 134). This symbolic gesture reflects the ethos of glitch feminism by actively engaging in the process of breaking the image, thereby challenging perfection and idealized avatars. By manipulating the code directly, the act of creating glitches becomes an intentional intervention rather than relying on

[2] The process is called "databending." My process involves using a simple text-editing tool to open the image files. This would result in seeing a series of non-sense letters and symbols in the text editing tool. By randomly editing these "codes" and saving the file, the image file would be altered, resulting in a glitch effect.

pre-programmed aesthetics. Moreover, the manual glitch process aligns with xenofeminism's call for the reclamation of technology for emancipatory purposes (Cuboniks, 2015). Russell (2020) argues that glitch feminists seek to modify computer memory by exploring new ways of existence. By taking control of the technical process, I am reimagining the process and possibilities of avatar-making. This reimagining allows for the creation of avatars that embody multiple identities, reflecting Russell's vision for new modes of existence that transcend traditional boundaries and stereotypes.

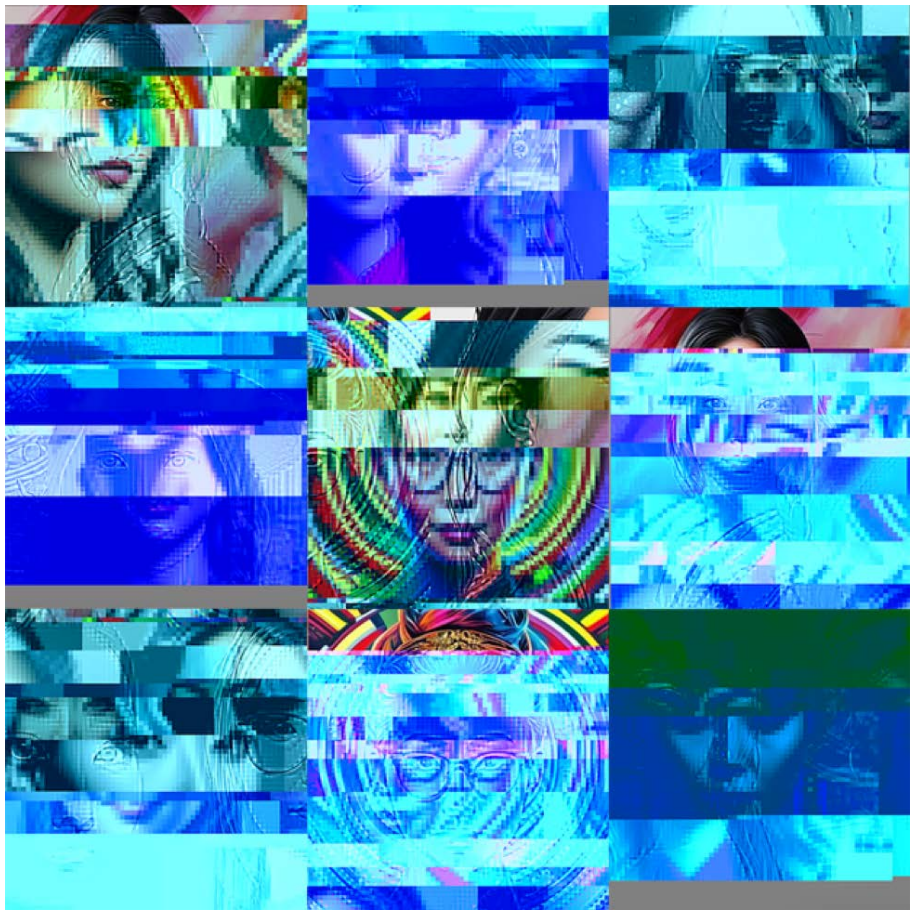

Figure 4. Glitched Liliann's AI-generated avatars. Figure 2 was used to create different glitched images. I then selected samples of glitched avatars and arranged them on the grid.

Step Three: Reimagining AI-Generated Avatars

To explore ways to counter AI-generated avatar images with stereotypical gender representations, I chose to collaborate with AI to create new avatars for Liliann. This strategy is aligned with xenofeminism's call for an intentional application of current technologies to redesign the world while recognizing both the dangers and the possibility of achieving progressive gender political objectives (Cuboniks, 2015). In other words, while AI inherently has biases embedded in the algorithm (Buolamwini, 2023; Noble, 2018), and there are also ethical concerns, rather than solely criticizing the tool, acknowledging the issues and the fact that the tool is here to stay, strategically working with the risk could open up its potential for creative disruption of digital visual culture.

Instead of using apps with presets of fixed styles to generate new AI avatars, I use a localized Stable Diffusion, an open-source text-to-image generative AI model specifically designed for image creation, hosted and run on my own computer—meaning that I have full control over the data and the process, ensuring privacy and customization that is not possible with commercial AI tools. Not using a commercialized AI image-generator in this step not only avoided uploading images to an unknown server belonging to a big corporation, but this decision also enacted a departure from conveniently available commercial tools and moved toward xenofeminism's goal of encouraging feminists to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to adapt current technology and create new tools for collective benefits (Cuboniks, 2015). Although it is also important to note that Stable Diffusion has been criticized for its questionable training data, it is also accessible and can be further fine-tuned, which involves taking a pre-trained machine learning model and further training with focused data sets. This feature of the open-source AI model can enable artists and feminists to create new tools. I argue that this is similar to Haraway's (1991) acknowledgment of the origins of technology in a military and oppressive context but advocates for a critical engagement to foster new emancipatory possibilities for women.

In this process, new avatars are created using Lilian's avatars' exquisite corpse images as starting images, which means that the algorithm would create new images that have similar traits based on these images, for example, a similar outline or composition. Using a starting image that has been altered, especially

through the exquisite corpse method, is both a metaphor and an action of seeding changes for future rendering—the altered image is the seed, and new images would all contain the gene. This strategy reinstates some agency in the avatar-making process back to humans and sees AI as a collaborator with an agency.

In order to break the boundary of gender representation, in the prompting process, the instruction of telling AI what to create, I employ the concepts of cyborg (Haraway, 1991) and posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013), both of which are integral to redefining identities beyond Eurocentric heterosexual patriarchal categories. Haraway's cyborg challenges rigid boundaries of identity through the metaphor of a hybrid of humans and machines to highlight the potentiality to empower women through critical engagement with technology. Similarly, Rosi Braidotti (2013) advocates for deconstructing human-centric and patriarchal structures to embrace and emphasize the interconnectedness of diverse forms of existence as posthuman. The two terms are used as prompts in separate explorations in this study. In addition, I added the term glitch with both terms in the prompts to connect with the concept employed in my earlier exploration in step two, where I manually glitched the avatar images. Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8 are the resulting avatars.

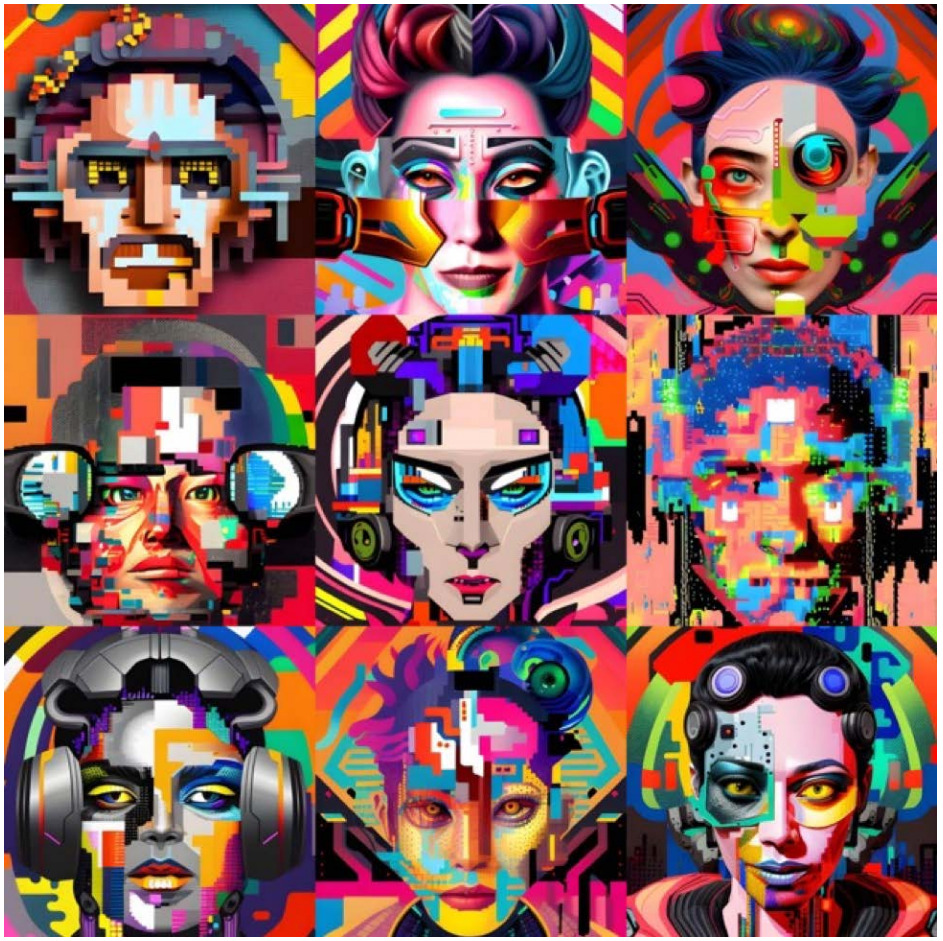

Figure 5. Cyborg Avatars I. AI-generated new avatars using the exquisite corpse avatar (Figure 3 left) as the starting image and prompted with the terms cyborg and glitch. There are several art styles, including realistic styles as well as pixeled digital art and abstract art. The cyborg avatars rendered included stereotypical masculine and feminine features, and some are difficult to tell.

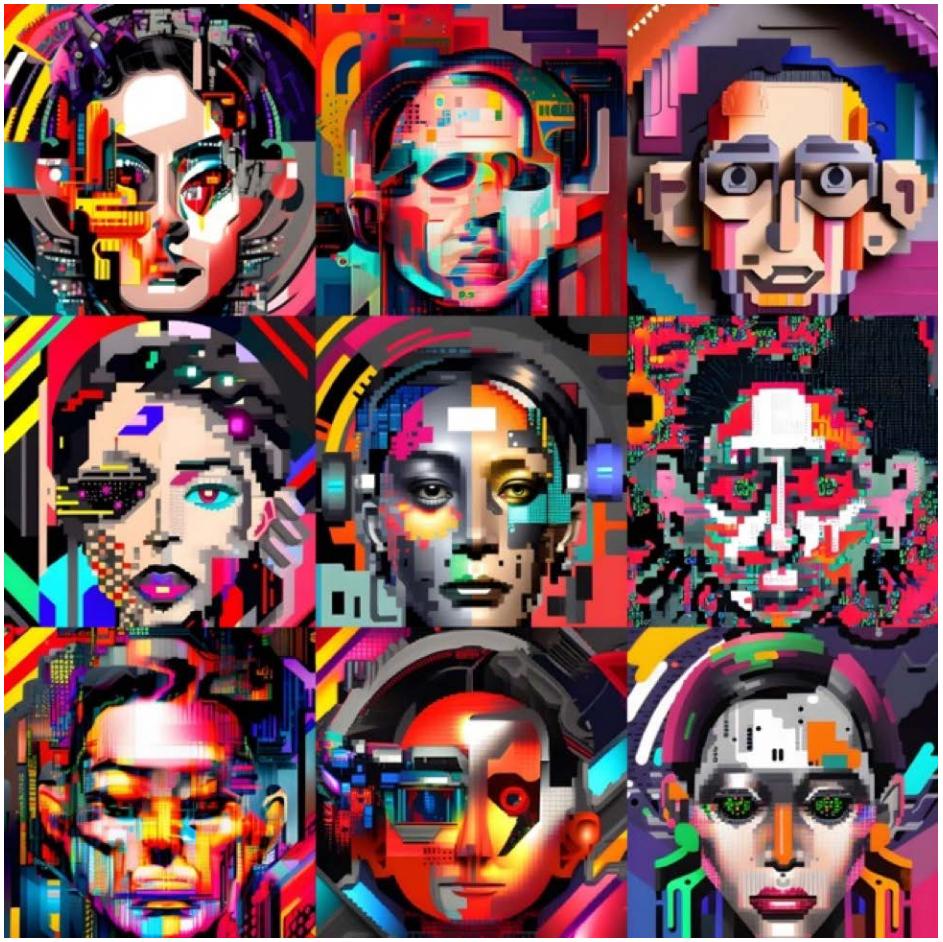

Figure 6. Cyborg Avatars II. AI-generated new avatars using the exquisite corpse avatar (Figure 3 right) as the starting image and prompting with the terms cyborg and glitch. There are several art styles, including realistic styles as well as pixeled digital art and abstract art. The cyborg avatars rendered included stereotypical masculine and feminine features, and some are difficult to tell.

The new avatars (Figures 5 and 6) are cyborgs that allow a more fluid interpretation of gender and identity. Interestingly, without giving a specific gender in the prompt, even though the starting image is clearly a face with stereotypical feminine features, the avatars generated look varied in apparent gender presentation, with some having more stereotypical feminine features, others masculine, and several that blend or obscure gender indicators altogether. These new avatars, as a whole, break away from gender binaries and stereotypical representations of gender to challenge viewers' assumptions of normative identity constructs. These avatars are not just generated; they are reimagined as posthuman representations that embody a diversity of identities that cannot be easily classified. Utilizing these images as avatars has the potential to question gender binaries and open up interpretations of multiple identities. These cyborg avatars are also visual critiques and attempts to subvert the hypersexualized representations of women's bodies generated by AI.

In addition to using the exquisite corpse avatars (Figure 3) as starting images, I chose an image generated using this process as a starting image for another round of exploration focusing on the concept of posthumanism. The results are avatars resembling pop-culture representations of extraterrestrials (Figures 7 and 8).

The gesture of feeding Liliann's avatars' exquisite corpse avatar images and the subsequence avatars generated back to AI to generate new avatars symbolizes the autopoiesis nature, where a system can self-create and maintain, and the recursive self-improvement or feedback loop in cybernetics, where outputs of a process are circled back as inputs, influencing the ongoing process (Heylighen & Joslyn, 2001). My process reflects a critical engagement with the technology, where the output is not accepted as a final product but is continuously reworked and refined. For feminist practice, this iterative process highlights the potential for continuous transformation and improvement to challenge gender binary and identity representations.

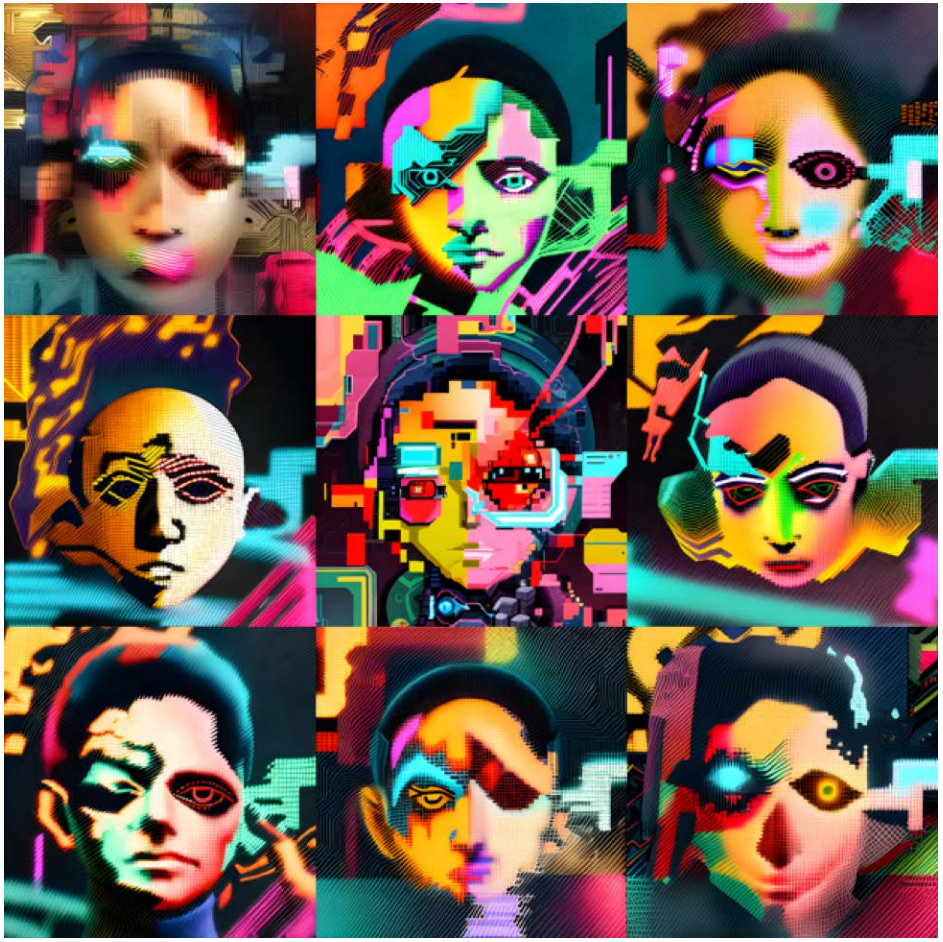

Figure 7. Posthuman Avatars I. Left upper image: AI-generated new avatar using the exquisite corpse avatar (Figure 3 right) as the starting image. Others: use the image on the upper left as the starting image and the terms posthuman and glitch in the prompt.

Figure 8. Posthuman Avatars II. Left upper image: AI-generated new avatar using the exquisite corpse avatar (Figure 3 left) as the starting image. Others: use the image on the upper left as the starting image and the terms posthuman and glitch in the prompt.

Conclusion: Avatar Pedagogy Extended

Avatar-making, serving as a means for identity construction and prompting discussions on visual culture and gender, is the central focus of avatar pedagogy (Liao, 2011). In the age of AI, art education should consider including a discussion on AI-generated avatars, as this can facilitate critical thinking about identity representation and the biases inherent in digital visual culture. It also encourages students to reflect on and challenge normative representations to foster a deeper understanding of how digital tools shape identity construction. This exploration introduces alternative strategies to create avatars using AI to bring new AI technology into the conversation on avatar-making and expand avatar pedagogy to include new technology and strategies.

With an understanding of AI and data biases, instead of relying on tech company-curated art styles and categories for avatar-making, I utilized several strategies to create my own AI-generated avatars. Although the results are almost always a surprise, unlike avatar-making in games or virtual worlds, where users can decide on the final look, this process creates avatars that exceed the binary/entrenched norms coded into AI algorithms, which could help us break away from creating normative gender and identity stereotypes.

The process of reimagining AI-generated avatars challenges us to critically engage with emergent AI technologies, not as passive consumers but as active, critical creators. This practice pushes the boundaries of avatar-making and encourages a deeper understanding of the agency technology plays. By critically engaging in technology to create avatars outside the presets offered by tech companies and resisting the commodification of avatars (Little, 1999), feminist art educators can confront the biases and stereotypes that are embedded in algorithmic processes. Art educators need to facilitate processes with students to reimagine the body and the process of avatar-making to create a space that allows multiplicity for genders and identities.

Epilogue

Using my avatar Liliann's avatars for this exploration, I asked what she thinks about her new avatars (Figures 5, 6, 7, and 8) I created for her. She responded:

> There are so many possibilities and choices, and it feels like I can create a story for each of them. Avatars are not just identity representations; they are also vehicles for narrative exploration through which I can tell different stories of myself. If I need to choose one to embody, I will opt for the one that resonates most deeply with the narrative I wish to convey at the moment, or perhaps let the avatar communicate for me. Although "I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess" (Haraway, 1991, p. 181), at this moment, I like being the Asian woman wearing glasses. Besides, I look better now compared to the face I had years ago when you first created me in Second Life. I want to enjoy this look for a little longer.

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