

Playing Peekaboo with a Generative AI

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Abstract

In a video art installation, a family of three- a mother, a father and their teenage son - interacts with a generative AI model in a contemporary rendition of a game of peekaboo. The installation, spread across three screens, captures each family member as they alternately cover and uncover their faces with their hands. Upon each reveal, the generative AI alters their appearances, presenting an ever-changing visual narrative. This transformation in appearance not only destabilizes established notions of identity but also invites a reevaluation of the concepts of belonging, hierarchy, kinship, and stability. Furthermore, it challenges the conventional attributes of age, gender, and race that typically define the dynamics within a nuclear family. The purpose of this project is to spark a conversation on identity politics, encouraging viewers to explore our interconnectedness from a renewed perspective.

Keywords

Creative AI, Generative AI, Performance Art, Video Installation, New Media Art.

Introduction

As my son celebrated his sixteen birthday, he ventured deeper into his teenage years - a period marked by profound discussions on identity and his evolving relationship with us, his parents: This transition, though fraught with complex emotions, is both natural and welcomed. At this pivotal age, he is navigating the path toward independence, seeking to establish his identity on his own terms. This journey prompts me to reflect on the nature of identity politics that solidify one's sense of self. Observing my son's transformation, I become more aware of the shifts occurring within myself and my partner, both as individuals and as middle-aged parents. These changes we all go through extend merely our family dynamics, highlighting the fluid nature of relationships and self-perception. In response to these reflections, I created an art installation that serves as a poetic exploration on identity politics. Leveraging a commercially available generative AI model named Kaiber.ai and the simple yet profound game of 'peekaboo', this piece aims to capture and visualize the ongoing transformation within my family. This creative endeavor seeks to offer insights into the complexities of identity and the interconnectedness of personal growth and familial relationships.

Implementation Details

The art installation unfolds across three screens, each displaying a looping video of one figure: The right screen features my image, the left shows my partner's image, and the center screen shows the image of our son. Mirroring the playful essence of the peekaboo game, each of us alternately covers and uncovers our faces with our hands. Upon each reveal, our appearances transform, representing changes in mood, age, race and ethnicity, gender, profession, and nationality attributes. These visual metamorphoses include different accessories, artistic styles, iconog-

raphy drawn from popular culture and fantasy narratives, weaving a tapestry of identity that transcends the conventional boundaries of self-representation and typical family structures (Fig. 1).

The videos of this installation were created with a commercially available AI application called Kaiber.ai. Each figure - myself, my partner, and our son - is captured engaging in the game of peekaboo. These recordings are then uploaded to Kaiber.ai, where they undergo style transformations based on carefully chosen text prompts. These prompts were inspired by discussions within our family about self-perception, our evolving relationships with each other, and our connections to the broader community and the culture we are immersed in. The outcomes of these prompts are intricately shaped by the AI model's prior training and the dataset it has been exposed to, offering a unique blend of personal introspection and technological interpretation.

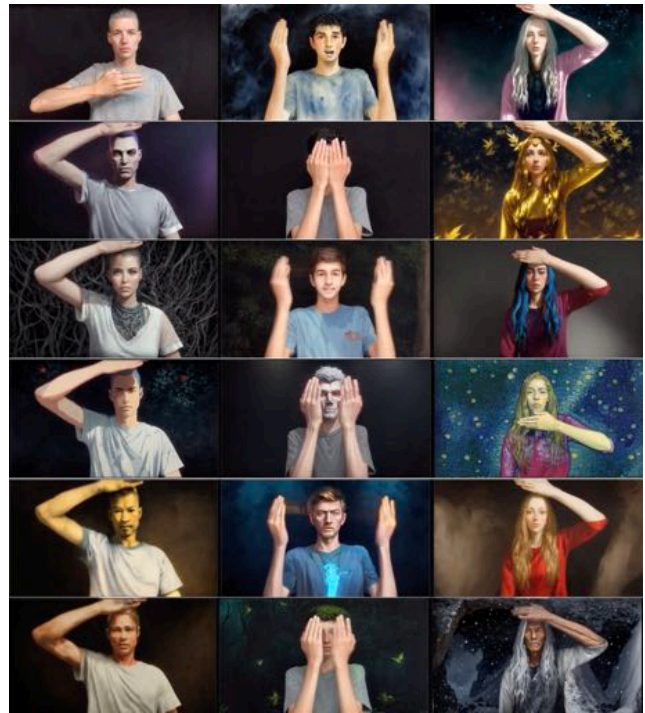


Figure 1 - Screenshot of moments in which each of the figures display different identity features.

Discussion

The purpose of this project is to open up a conversation around identity politics, probing the depth of our interconnections through its structural lens. Brian Massumi in his contemplation on a body's definition within a grid of ideological scripted identities, poses the question: "Where has the potential for change gone? How does a body perform its way outside of a definitional framework?" [1]. This artwork aims to transcend conventional identity boundaries by translating and visualizing them through a text-to-video

generative AI. As the figures within the piece undergo a series of identity transformations, the visual shifts not only serve as a poetic commentary on the dynamic evolution of identity but also illuminate the complex interplay of roles within a family unit. Here, identity is not fixed nor static; it is an ongoing performance, illustrating that a role such as a 'mother' can sometimes be perceived as a 'ghost', a 'child', a 'doctor' (Fig. 2), while a 'son' can be perceived as an 'old man', a 'rebel', an 'angel' or a 'robot' (Fig. 3).



Figure 2 - An image of myself as I feature the iconic appearance of the 'anonymous' mask.



Figure 3 - An image of my son as he is featured as a mature adult.

Under the thematic essence of this artwork, the game 'peekaboo' is a deliberate choice. Traditionally associated with infants, Peekaboo transcends its simplistic structure to embody a nuanced interplay of roles. One participant assumes the task of concealing and revealing their face, while the other, typically the infant, eagerly anticipates the revelation. Beyond its capacity to delight, peekaboo is believed to manifest cognitive and emotional development in early life. Through its playful dynamics, infants gradually grasp the concept of object permanence, understanding that people and objects continue to exist even when they go out of sight. Moreover, the game facilitates the comprehension of temporal concepts such as 'before' and 'after'. In its oscillation between concealment and revelation, peekaboo evokes both anxiety and pleasure, as familiar faces momentarily vanish and reappear. Furthermore, the game cultivates essential skills of identification while nurturing a sense of individuality and separateness, encouraging the exploration and testing of reality through dynamic and playful relationships [2]. Within the artistic narrative of this project, peekaboo becomes a powerful metaphor for the understanding of connection and growth within familial and interpersonal relationships.

The integration of an AI generative model which is based on text prompts, enriches this discussion by examining the

with the strategic use of specific text prompts, the model produces outputs that reflect linguistic nuances inherent in identity construction. Each text prompt corresponds to a particular visual manifestation of an identity. The output is obviously predicated on the model's training regimen, wherein a given, limited, and tailored dataset informs its responses. While identity labels encompass a diverse array of realities and representations, the generation of a singular outcome reveals the systematic biases and discriminatory tendencies which are embedded within the AI model [3]. In essence, the AI model inadvertently mirrors established notions of identity structures, often adhering to preconceived norms, while neglecting the inherent multiplicity and fluidity evident in our daily experiences across various contexts. That said, the use of the AI model also holds an opportunity for further introspection, prompting us to reconsider the relationship between appearance and identity. By spending time with these AI models we can go beyond singular labels, seeing ourselves otherwise, witnessing and embracing the complexity of human identity. This exploration resonated with my previous artworks, where viewers are invited to engage with AI models as platforms for identity transformation. Through these interactions, they are invited to consider the performative nature of identity and its potential as a tool for both resistance and self-discovery [4] [5] [6].

Conclusion

The artwork *Peekaboo* offers a playful and poetic exploration of identity's fluid nature. It defies the rigid hierarchies and fixed roles often associated with the nuclear family, while also challenging entrenched notions of biopolitical identity constructs. By weaving together the familiar game of peekaboo with a text-based generative AI model, the artwork prompts viewers to reconsider the power of performance in reshaping identity. It invites us to envision identity beyond predetermined boundaries, suggesting that performative acts hold the potential to transcend conventional frameworks and offer an escape from preconceived notions of fixed identity structures.

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