Nvidia’s DLSS 5 is like motion smoothing for video games, but worse

This “significant breakthrough” imbues everything with a particular look that’s become synonymous with AI-generated art. It’s sort of like motion smoothing, if motion smoothing went a step further and changed people’s faces — and it’s making everything look the same.

It’s important to note that the next time you play *Requiem* on a PC, Grace won’t suddenly look like she was ripped out of a Grok Imagine demo. DLSS 5 doesn’t launch until the fall, it’ll require some beefy hardware to operate, and it is an optional feature. But it is a technology that is being pushed by one of the most valuable companies in the world, which has support from major video game developers. And they all seem content with associating their games with a very particular aesthetic.

In a statement on Nvidia’s announcement blog, Bethesda boss Todd Howard said that “with DLSS 5 the artistic style and detail shine through without being held back by the traditional limits of real-time rendering,” while noting that the feature will be available in *Starfield*. Jun Takeuchi, executive producer on many of Capcom’s biggest blockbusters, including *Requiem*, said that “DLSS 5 represents another important step in pushing visual fidelity forward, helping players become even more immersed in the world of *Resident Evil*.”

It’s a little strange to hear that some of the most influential names in games have decided that it’s cool for Nvidia to replace their carefully crafted characters with

generic AI-powered versions. In a follow-up tweet, Bethesda noted that what we're seeing is a "very early look," and that the studio's "art teams will be further adjusting the lighting and final effect to look the way we think works best for each game." So maybe the version of DLSS 5 that's available in the fall will look very different.

But what we *are* seeing now points to a bleak future. AI has infiltrated nearly every aspect of our lives, and one of the most frustrating ways has been on an aesthetic level. AI-generated faces are an amalgamation of countless images, which are then used to spit out a sort of homogenized ideal. It's typically easy to identify thanks to a handful of telltale signs: unnaturally smooth skin and uniform features, perpetually cheerful eyes, a smiling mouth with full lips, perfectly styled hair that looks synthetic, small noses, and HDR-style lighting that highlights every contour. On their own, these can be typical facial features, but when every AI face has them all or most of them, we start veering into the uncanny valley.

That's why so many people reacted strongly to the faces in Nvidia's announcement: They don't just look bad, they look the same as everything else. That same aesthetic is prevalent everywhere from Instagram feeds to YouTube thumbnails, and it's been inching its way from social networks to more traditional forms of entertainment and culture. I've yet to see a good AI-generated film, and yet they keep coming, and you can identify them from a single screen. Nvidia's new tech is the most visible example of that aesthetic infiltrating games.

There are a number of reasons why seeing AI mangle an artist's work is troublesome for games in particular. The industry has been ravaged by layoffs and studio closures following some very expensive misplaced bets and a post-pandemic slowdown, so the potential for replacing human work with slop doesn't sit well. It's also a medium where a subset of the audience has

some very backward ideas about what a normal human woman looks like, so making existing characters somehow both more generic and more cartoonish through an AI tool is extremely problematic.

Grace’s face rendered through DLSS 5 is an early vision of what things could look like if the adoption becomes more widespread. And if that happens, being a good friend might mean turning it off when you visit, just like motion smoothing.

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