

Emerging Frictions: Visual Generative AI and the Prompting Practices of Trans and Nonbinary People

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1. Introduction

This short presentation focuses on preliminary findings of different surfaces of frictions and tensions relating to agency, imagined outputs, representation and opaqueness as well as feelings of complicity that emerge when trans and nonbinary people use and navigate visual generative AI systems. The presentation provides an outline of part of the theoretical framework of my doctoral project.

Prompting text-to-text chatbots has become a popular alternative to traditional search and generative AI systems that simply retrieve and supply information rather than the documents where the information can be found has come to change the landscape of search profoundly (Shah & Bender, 2022; Graham, 2023; Lewandowski, 2025; Sundin, 2025). Visual forms of AI generated content remain an underexplored topic within Information Studies, and visual aspects of text-to-image AI models present their own particular challenges to information practices. While many commercial text-to-text chatbots have introduced sources and citations to their generated responses, text-to-image models still lack contextual information about training data relating to their outputs.

AI models continuously reproduce and perpetuate trans individuals' marginalisation by upholding a binary gendered system that cannot account for identities that do not align with the categories and classifying capabilities of AI systems (McGlotten, 2023; Chun, 2023; Guyan, 2022). Visual generative AI has a power to reflect, validate and co-constitute the world to align with specific ways of knowing as it supplies its outputs. At the same time, many AI technologies are afforded an "air of objectivity" (Søilen, 2025), making them seem removed from human (and other types of) interventions all while contributing to an understanding of fixed, stable identity markers to classify people. While the process of reading and enforcing normative conceptions of identity from the body is not new, this process becomes increasingly automated and exacerbated as AI technologies reproduce and amplify structural inequalities and discrimination by reproducing essentialist categories as opposed to acknowledging identities as fluid and performed (Søilen, 2025).

Using theories of infrastructural meaning-making (Haider & Sundin, 2019) and with a sociomaterial understanding of infrastructure, I investigate how trans and nonbinary people navigate the tensions and the frictions that occur when interacting with visual generative AI and the bodies the systems represent. I view generative AI as being enacted through repeated practices, behaviours and activities which actively produce the world, as well as being an infrastructure that perpetuates a specific kind of hegemonic knowledge. AI systems are iterative, repeated processes and in the case of visual generative AI, they materialise faces iteratively according to gender norms, making them seem natural or innate – effectively obscuring faces that do not correspond to the gendered norms of the AI system (Drage & Frabetti, 2023; Chun, 2021). AI systems are co-constitutive and continuously informed by and inform how gender should be recognised and inscribed in bodies. This understanding of AI treats seriously the implications AI has in supporting power structures as part of hegemonic knowledge productions, while also placing the focus on agency, relations and interplay with both human and nonhuman actors that makes these phenomena emerge (Pearce et al., 2026). I use these concepts in combination with semi-structured interviews with trans and nonbinary people as well as digital ethnographic methods like



observations and participants' media diaries where they describe how they tweak and develop their prompts along the way. To put them in a grander infrastructural context I analyse policy documents from commercial generative AI companies, politicians, and other relevant institutions.

2. References

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