

Reconfiguring through Ruptures: Material Reconfigurations and Un/Making as Tangible Tactics for Queering AI-Generated Histories

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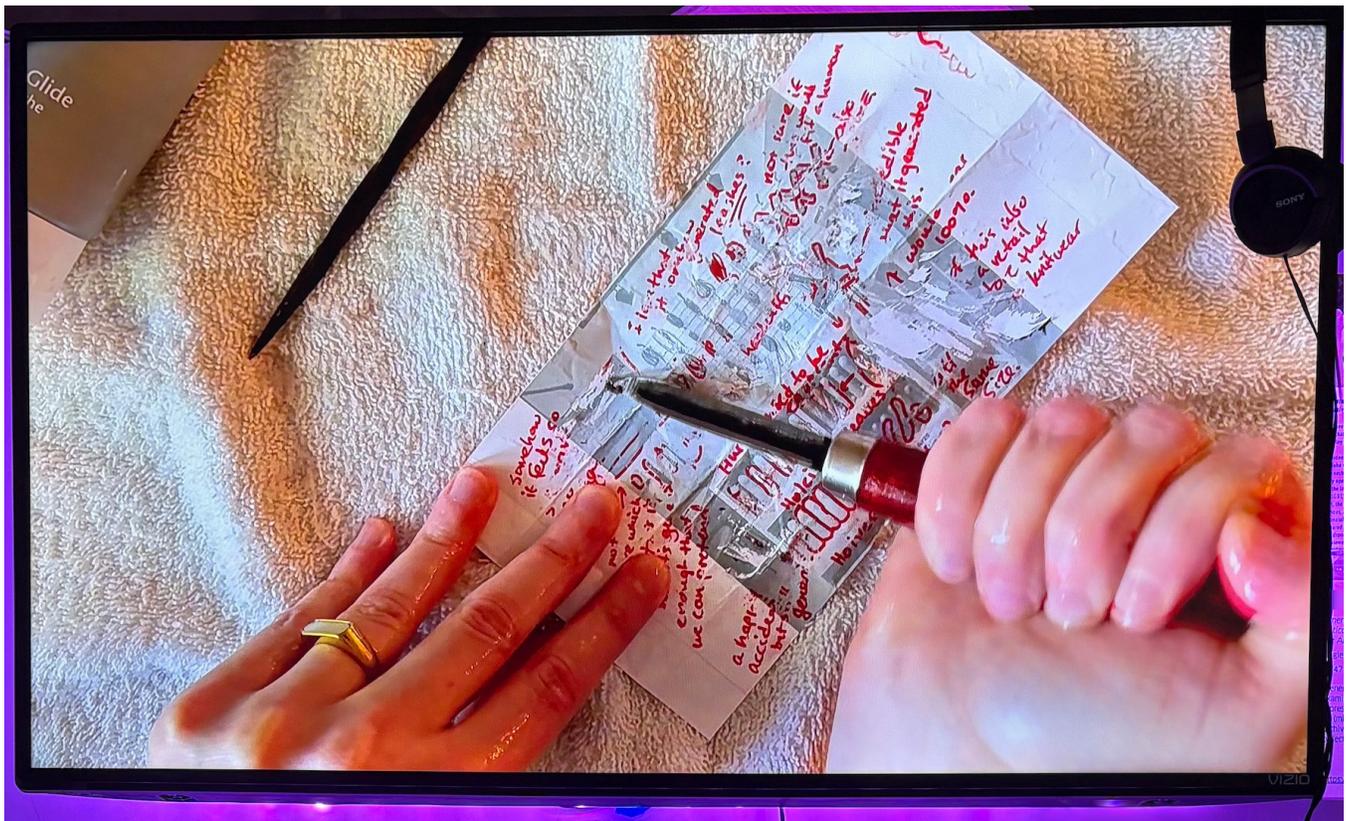


Figure 1: A still from the “Generating Queer Histories: Prompting Critical Reflections on Generative AI in the Archives” video piece. The video shows the lead author’s hands scratching onto a photograph with a printmaking tool, where the image is an AI-generated memory of theirs, now layered with annotations. By annotating and then scratching off the photographic material, the lead author un/makes and materially reconfigures the synthetic image as a form of critique and resistance to generative AI’s influence on historical representations.

Abstract

To critically examine the role of AI in historical representation and resist anti-LGBTQIA+ biases and erasures, we leverage un/making and propose a tactic we name material reconfigurations. We share an autoethnographic account of un/making and materially reconfiguring AI-generated images of queer histories: the lead author’s memories of queer places and events. Through hand annotating,



scratching, burying, submerging, and walking with physical images, they un/make and reconfigure, highlighting embodied aspects of archival records unparseable by generative AI. We propose that un/making and materially reconfiguring synthetic archival images can resist generative AI's increasingly hegemonic role in misrepresenting historical data and erasing queer identities. We contribute reflections on un/making and material reconfigurations as tangible tactics for queering AI, attuning to queer temporalities to unsettle AI-generated histories, using embodied, autoethnographic practices as critical strategies, and working through tensions of use and refusal in Queer AI research.

CCS Concepts

- **Social and professional topics** → **Sexual orientation; Gender;**
- **Applied computing** → *Digital libraries and archives.*

Keywords

unmaking, reconfiguration, queer HCI, queer archives, tangible interaction design

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1 Introduction

Queer communities are witnessing heightened epistemic erasure, where identities that fit outside of normative standards are blotted from government websites, databases, social media feeds, and archival records [87, 165, 173]. This erasure is both politically motivated [122] and algorithmically mediated [17, 70], and while it disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, queer and trans People of Color (QTBIPOC), it also ripples across the greater LGBTQIA+ spectrum. Similarly, while we write from a US-based context, erasures have reverberated throughout the globe [5]. Adding to this, anti-queer bias in AI and data systems [42, 117, 143], through categorization [18, 104, 139, 147], in moderation [109], and in datasets and models [34], causes widespread omission and misinterpretation of queer language [37], identities [57], histories [175], and records of existence [23]. As currently designed and trained, generative AI tools reproduce normative identities and narratives that, as Gillespie notes, “look right” or “feel familiar” because of their reproduction of “heteronormativity or the presumption of whiteness” [58]. However, when compounded by existing biases in archival datasets, these outcomes cause representational harms across marginalized identities [57] and even censor queer content in the name of safety [23, 172]. These concerns of how generative AI pushes towards predictable, safe, and narrow representations reflect not only on how present identities are represented, but also on how the past is re-imagined and interpreted through synthetic visualizations [156]. Though generative AI has been increasingly used in archival contexts, particularly for cultural heritage analysis [61] and storytelling [112], scholars have documented how it amplifies existing biases in datasets [43], and without proper bias-mitigation in

training, reinforces dominant cultural perspectives [179], shaping memory practices and popular understandings of the past [75]. Consequently, biases—in this case against queer identities, are reworked and incorporated into synthetic representations of histories [156], displacing reference points to LGBTQIA+ records or eliminating them altogether.

As design and HCI practitioners, we therefore need strategies of counteracting this erasure and misrepresentation of marginalized knowledge, as intensified by biases in algorithmic systems. In response to these concerns, scholars have taken up practices of queering in HCI [101, 155], which draws from queer theory, to counteract these normalizing forces of efficiency, productivity, and epistemicide. Particularly, much recent research has focused on queering AI and data systems, or leveraging queer theory to challenge normalizing biases in generative AI, such as with autoethnography [91, 170, 171], participatory making and un/making tactics [168], coalition-forming [124], and artistic explorations [1, 2, 40, 85]. Paralleling this, design and HCI practitioners have developed tactics for materially engaging with historical records to counteract erasure of marginalized perspectives, particularly those at risk of algorithmic elimination. These strategies include fabrications that reflect on past absences and censored histories [144, 146], archival projects that design with decolonial intent to resist epistemicide [26], tangible puzzle environments that explore archives [127], and wearable interactions that invite reflections on marginalized histories [19, 129, 140]. Scholars have also made participatory moves towards engaging with tangible materials that act as physical collections, such as with zines [68, 69, 90] and buttons [128]; and used un/making, which engages a continuum of making and unmaking practices [150] to reflect on histories, towards sharing marginalized community knowledge [131].

In this paper, we bridge work that uses material practices to reflect on histories, and work that leverages queer theory to critique generative AI. Doing so, we look to un/making in HCI [150] and propose material reconfigurations as tactics for queering AI. With material reconfigurations, we extend Sennett's concept of reconfiguration, which focuses on the reinterpretation of archival materials to acknowledge historical ruptures in embodied improvisations that prompt social engagement and responsibility [142]. In our case, material reconfigurations mobilize embodied processes in acknowledging and resisting AI-enabled ruptures: erasures or biases against queer people and the challenges of representing histories through generative means. We use these tactics in the context of an autoethnographic art project [158], where the lead author critically examines the role of AI in historical representation and reflects on how AI might be un/made or reconfigured to reconceptualize synthetic archival images (Figure 1).

Specifically, we share the lead author's autoethnographic account of how they generated images of archival records comprising their own memories of queer historical places or events in a video piece entitled “Generating Queer Histories: Prompting Critical Reflections on Generative AI in the Archives” (included in Supplementary Materials). They generated three images after up to 3 iterations each, then printed these images out as photographs, and annotated, un/made, and materially reconfigured the visualizations by hand. While doing so, they filmed their process, then stitched together clips to create three video vignettes, each comprising a generated

image. While generating images, the lead author ran up against normative values and moderation—such as biases against sex and queer-coded language, and they, like other queer artists [162], found workarounds, both within prompts and in material reconfigurations after generating the images. Doing so, they tangibly reflected on generative AI’s normalizing role in representing historical data and highlighted the intimate and embodied sensibilities that accompany archival records but are either erased or smoothed over by generative AI. Taken together, this work suggests how tangible practices of un/making and material reconfigurations can work against the influence of algorithmically mediated archives, towards critical reflections on what “counts” as part of the historical record. Further, this work was exhibited at a local public art gallery, with a total audience of over 285 viewers over a four-day period. We therefore highlight the potential for autoethnographic works and arts-based inquiry, such as this research, to reach audiences and advocate for collective critiques of generative AI.

We contribute reflections for Queer HCI (Human Computer Interaction) and critical AI scholarship on using un/making and our proposed material reconfigurations as tangible tactics for queering and critically reflecting on AI; attuning to queer temporalities to reflect on and unsettle AI-generated histories; mobilizing embodied, autoethnographic practices as critical strategies for AI research; and working through tensions between use and refusal of generative AI. We frame these tangible tactics of un/making and material reconfigurations not as a developed method, but rather as explorations that invite future opportunities for developing critical methodological strategies of queering AI.

1.1 Positionality

We recognize recent efforts to lend additional specificity to Queer HCI [163], and we note that while this project is autoethnographic in nature, the second author played an important role in advising and supporting the research activities throughout. Following examples in multi-authored autoethnographic works such as Janicki et al. [82] and Biggs et al. [13], we share both of our positionalities here.

Lead Author: Though I thread my positionality throughout this autoethnographic project and paper, I share a brief statement here. While I have consistently found it difficult to attach myself to labels within queer communities, I nevertheless find a home within lesbian, non-binary, genderqueer, and gender non-conforming spaces. I use she / her or they / them pronouns, in either order of preference, and identify as pansexual or sexually fluid, but I have always felt these to be clumsy representations of my identity or gender. Similarly, I am in community with disability scholars; and while I identify as neurodivergent and experience chronic pain, I do not claim crip, but instead build coalitions with scholars in design and disability scholarship. Lastly, I identify as White and Latinx, and I do not identify as a Person of Color. My work therefore does not speak for all queer, nonbinary, gender nonconforming people, and for this reason, I seek to build coalitions with scholars doing critical work around the intersections of race, queerness, history, and making.

Second Author: I am a White cis hetero woman from a multi-ethnic, multi-religion, multi-national family with a middle-class

upbringing in the US Deep South. I identify as White, though being part Arab is also racialized. Motivated by personal and family experiences of Islamophobia, my research has a particular interest in resisting otherization across multiple axes.

2 Background

We foreground the importance of first-person methods in HCI and AI research that start from subjective, often marginalized experiences as points of critique and resistance. We also draw from Queer HCI, and more specifically *queering*, or leveraging queer theory, to develop critical perspectives on generative AI and algorithmic mediation. We also situate our work within several threads that materially and critically engage with histories, including un/making, critical fabulations, counterfactual actions, and repair and reconfiguration. Lastly, we argue that arts-based inquiry can adjoin these approaches to offer reflection alongside outputs and allow for deeper connections and vulnerability within research.

2.1 First Person Methods in HCI and Design

We follow a growing body of work in HCI that uses first-person methods [11, 13, 32, 33, 52], drawing from autoethnographic and autobiographical projects that foreground experiences of technologies from queer and disability perspectives [74, 80–82, 91, 130, 152, 171], as well as reflections on vulnerable or difficult experiences [11, 12, 35, 50, 71, 76, 77]. Scholars have also used collaborative autoethnography to bring together lived experiences, relate across differences, and build collective understandings [6, 92, 106, 138]. These autoethnographic methods enable researchers to explore first-person, subjective experiences as tactics for resisting normalizing technologies from marginalized perspectives [82, 83, 130, 141]. Specifically, autoethnography has also allowed for critical, queer perspectives on generative AI [1, 2, 40, 170, 170]. We add to this growing body of work by starting from the lead author’s embodied, autoethnographic experiences as grounds for their material reflections and reconfigurations of generative AI.

We add that while first-person research is grounded in firsthand experiences as points of knowledge production [39], it can also resonate with others, based on the richness of these subjective perspectives [32], and produce dialectical understandings [78]. Our research points towards these collective engagements by first starting from the lead author’s subjective experiences, which lead to dialogues that resonate across perspectives.

2.2 Arts-Based Inquiry in HCI

We situate our work within arts-based inquiry in HCI, where knowledge is generated through artistic practice, extending from how research through design positions design practice as producing new and actionable knowledge [180]. Arts-based inquiry in HCI can take the form of creative critiques [158], which can attune to ethical issues in computing, such as anti-LGBTQIA+ biases in generative AI with our project. For instance, scholars have used media artworks as research cases: reflecting on current dialogues in HCI and AI, such as unmaking and materially deconstructing time [25]; exploring the intersection of art and generative AI [96]; or contextualizing queering AI by analyzing a collection of artworks [85]. Scholars have also discussed the tensions between art and research:

on situating artistic narratives in HCI [158]; on collaboration in artist residencies [36]; and on exploring tensions between practice and research in arts and HCI contexts [97, 98]. Others have explored alternative, artistic research outputs, such as documentary filmmaking in design research [119]; a participatory art installation that offers provocations on the tensions between art and research [15]; a collaborative artwork on the future of work [38]; and workshops on novel material formats for scholarly expression [157]. Lastly, researchers have proposed using arts-based methods to approach design, such as design workbooks [55]; illustration and sketching [51, 99]; and annotation and layering [148, 174]. By navigating tensions between artistic practice and research, arts-based inquiry in HCI pushes the boundaries of research contributions with creative outputs. Further, these works serve as provocations that invite critical reflection and dialogue on ethical tensions in HCI and AI. In our case, we similarly reflect on a media artwork (i.e. the video presented) that challenges biases in generative AI, and through arts-based methods, reinforces alternative, material perspectives on scholarly expression [157].

2.3 Queer HCI, Queering HCI and Queering AI

We use “queering,” or leveraging queer theory in this work, as a critical strategy that subverts binaries, questions hegemonic power structures, and resists normalizing influences. According to Light’s framing, queering is “problematizing apparently structural and foundational relationships with critical intent” [101]. In this project, we ask how tangible embodied practices of queering can resist the “regimes of the normal” [93, p.5], to counteract the normalizing influences of generative AI.

This research draws from and contributes to Queer HCI, particularly in characterizing tangible interactive experiences that leverage queer theory. Queer HCI includes research by queer individuals, research about LGBTQIA+ people, and research that leverages queer theory [163]. Though much work has focused on LGBTQIA+ people in HCI, only recently have scholars begun to mobilize queer theory in HCI work [101], towards efforts of resisting algorithmic biases and data systems [168], deepening critical methodological strategies [12, 100], and building queer/crip coalitions [83, 153]. By queering HCI, we seek to trouble technological fixity and the status quo of progress and innovation undergirded by productivity-minded technologies such as generative AI [101].

Particularly, our work joins other projects that leverage queer theory to critically examine and reimagine technologies and sociotechnical systems [101, 154, 155, 168]. Specifically, much recent work in queering HCI examines queering AI systems [42, 85, 102, 117, 124, 147, 162, 168, 171], critiquing gendered content moderation [34, 84, 89, 104, 109, 139, 172], designing trans technologies [62–65], and designing for and with marginalized bodies [27, 151, 153]. In particular, queering AI work also takes the form of artistic, autoethnographic reflections that examine and critique AI representations of queer and trans bodies [1, 2, 40, 95, 108, 170, 170]. It is within this thread of research that we deepen embodied, autoethnographic work that queers AI, specifically in relation to representations of queer histories. Theoretically grounding this work, we draw specifically from Light’s above definition of queering HCI [101], and Biggs and Bardzell’s disorientation method in HCI, which draws from

queer theory and emphasizes embodied experiences of “strangeness, upheaval, vulnerability, and/or change to ground critical reflections on technology and seek alternative orientations” [12, p.1]. We use queering, and methodological allies like disorientation, in material reconfigurations of generative AI to challenge and subvert the influence of normalizing systems that perpetuate epistemicide and erase queer identities, histories, and knowledge.

2.4 Tensions Between Use and Refusal in Queering AI

In situating this project, we purposefully bring up tensions between non-use of generative AI and our approach of generating images to mount an embodied critique. For instance, Baumer and Khovanskaya address issues of individual versus collective non-use [8], Garcia et al. deliver a manifesto of refusal [53], and Agnew writes about various forms of task refusal in resistance to AI [3]. Researchers have also explored sociotechnical factors that contribute to AI non-use in professional contexts [22], as well as rejection of AI in creative industries [123].

While many researchers have approached critiques of generative AI from the lenses refusal and non-use, in this work, we propose material tactics of resistance that amplify tangible and embodied aspects that cannot be expressed by generative AI. Our approach follows similar works from artists and scholars who start from their own embodied perspectives as points of dissent [1, 2, 40, 95, 108, 170, 171]. For instance, Turtle creates generative imagery to explore queer becomings with AI [170], Martinez experiments with generative AI to explore queerness and Cuban identity [108], Taylor et al. ask queer artists to generate images with GPT-4 and DALL-E 3 to conceptualize queer alternatives for contesting normativity in AI systems [162], and Stjernholm et al. generate synthetic archival images with Stable Diffusion to analyze the relationship between AI and historical representation [156]. Contextualizing this decision, Stjernholm et al. further suggest that “historians and digital memory scholars have a responsibility to investigate and critically reflect on the historical gaze of generative AI tools. Otherwise, the question of how AI models view the past mainly falls in the hands of (often commercially driven) AI developers who are not necessarily interested in considering the complex intricacies of remembrance and construction of the past” [156, p.482]. The lead author’s critical reflections are autoethnographic and materially driven to purposefully reflect on what generative AI cannot represent: the affective, intimate, and embodied dimensions of their own archives, which extend to larger concerns for how histories and even memories are increasingly algorithmically mediated. Our approach therefore proposes that developing these material sensitivities towards generative AI can draw out critical perspectives and heighten literacy around how models erase or misrepresent marginalized perspectives.

2.5 Unmaking and Critical Material Tactics for Resistance

Unmaking in HCI has origins in a range of disciplinary practices, including sustainable HCI and more-than-human design, where processes such as degradation of materials [9, 30, 103], sustainable

practices of upcycling [105] and taking things apart [113], or breaking down objects over time [149], reflect on the entanglements between human-made things, time, and environmental concerns [150]. Unmaking also draws from movements such as Auto-Destructive Art [111]; Japanese aesthetics of kintsugi and wabi-sabi, which foreground imperfections [88, 137]; Buddhist teachings on impermanence [164]; and historical movements such as Luddism, where the politics of breaking act as forms of resistance [135]. Additionally, as a counter to HCI's increasing focus on artifacts and products [150], unmaking engages a continuum of making and unmaking practices to work through tensions in existing computational systems. This epistemological thread of unmaking builds on foundations of critical making, where the process of making develops shared conceptual understandings of critical sociotechnical issues [125]. In this vein, unmaking has epistemologically countered normative models, such as in conceptions of marginalized users [161], constructions of time [25], assumptions around data [31], and AI biases [116]. Scholars have also used unmaking in participatory engagements to reflect on difference in community settings and resist conventional narratives about their urban context [134]. As such, unmaking is positioned as both a spectrum of making/unmaking processes that encompasses breakdown and deconstruction, and an epistemological move towards working through tensions and growing resistance in material ways.

In this project, we specifically look to how unmaking intersects with queering, drawing from queer computation [49] and recent work in queer archival un/making that invites reflections on archival materials, towards queer community resistance and activism [131]. In these works, un/making is positioned as a tactic of queering, that is, subverting or disrupting norms through radical destructive processes that foreground failure while working within existing sociotechnical systems [49]. This proximity between un/making and queering parallels work in design and HCI that supports radical movements, such as in collaging with ephemera to craft everyday resistance [47, 168]; zineography as community-based making within unequal contexts [68, 69]; and trans zine-making to resist binaries and actualize ambivalence [90]. In these instances, and in this project specifically, radical forms of making and unmaking in design [20, 68, 69, 90, 168] highlight the potential for material tactics to serve as tools of critique and resistance, originating from marginalized perspectives.

2.6 Reconfiguration and Critical Material Approaches for Histories

Situating material reconfigurations, we draw from Sennett's concept of reconfiguration, which speaks to acknowledging historical ruptures and attuning to embodied improvisations that prompt social responsibility when working with archival materials [142]. These processes are characterized not by their attempts to regain authenticity, undoing histories and damage, but by their reconfiguration of people and objects to prompt social engagement, embrace change and acknowledge historical tensions and fractures. It is through reconfiguration—improvisationally engaging with archival objects—that material histories might be traversed in embodied dialogical processes [142]. Similar threads in HCI and design parallel reconfiguration in their material engagements with histories. For

instance, designing for repair also investigates the material realities and practices that unfold in negotiating breakdown and repair over periods of time [133]. Counterfactual actions look beyond artifacts towards performative, collective actions that reflect on histories, relations, infrastructures, and socio-technical systems [45]. Similarly, critical fabulations centers embodied ways of knowing that reconfigure the present with attention to histories; while recognizing the impossibility of designers' narrative efforts in fully representing bodies, identities, and pasts in contemporary technological contexts [66, 67, 72, 132, 159, 169]. In this work, we similarly articulate the uncertain, affective, and relational intra-actions that continually shape people and things over time [7], accounting for physical damage or critical tensions in historical periods. We specifically draw from Sennett's reconfiguration in our work to engage with these ruptures [142]. While Sennett's work acknowledges physical ruptures in structures of material origin, in our work, we engage with structures of digital origin—generative AI. Doing so, we mobilize embodied processes in creating material reconfigurations of AI-generated histories that acknowledge intangible, AI-enabled ruptures: erasures or biases against queer people and the challenges of representing histories through generative means. We further unpack the differences between tangible and intangible ruptures in the transfer from Sennett's work to ours in Section 5.

2.7 Archives, Memories, and Generative AI

The line between archives and memories has continually blurred over time, as Featherstone notes, likening archives to “prosthetic memory devices” [41, p.594]. Similarly, Benjamin characterizes archives by their composition of broken and incomplete memory traces [10]. Derrida notes that the “archive fever” is the attempt to catalog any traces of memory, bringing up issues of which memories are archived and which are forgotten [29]. More recently, digital memory scholars characterize certain memory infrastructures as relating to archives and museums, where technological affordances determine how memory content is catalogued, stored, and retrieved, and how social structures and power relations determine what information is preserved and accessed [107]. With the influence of generative AI, scholars have also argued that these services decouple the past from the present and result in a past that was never remembered, challenging human agency in the act of remembering [75].

These traces of memory are particularly salient for queer archives, where scholars have emphasized the affective dimensions of historical records by centering feelings, ephemeral materials, and embodied intimacy, such as in Cvetkovich's work on lesbian archives and trauma [28]. This work is later surfaced by Kumbier in discussions of queer archives of ephemeral materials [93], McKinney in extending information activism through histories of lesbian media technologies [110], and Cifor in arguing for considerations of affect in archival scholarship [24]. Both embodied affect and memory play a significant role in queer archives, where traces and recollections often serve as the only representations of queer and trans life when traditional records have been lost or censored [48]. In this project, we draw from how memories and archives are co-constituted, acknowledging the lead author's personal memories as their own

archive of queer places and events. We then critique how generative AI untethers these memory-archives, from both their embodied state and the act of remembering, through un/making and material reconfigurations, which we detail in Sections 3 and 4.

3 Design Process: Developing Un/Making and Material Reconfigurations for Critical Perspectives on Generative AI

In this section, we share the lead author's design process from the project, "Generating Queer Histories: Prompting Critical Reflections on Generative AI in the Archives." As this portion of the paper comprises their autoethnographic process and reflections, we switch to using first person singular "I" to center their perspective.

In this project, I use generative AI to create images of archival records—specifically, my own memories of places and events evocative of queer history in my local city of Atlanta. I then annotate, question, collage, un/make, and reconfigure these visualizations by hand while video recording my actions (Figure 2). Doing so, I extend Sennett's reconfiguration, towards materially reconfiguring these synthetic archival records to acknowledge ruptures, or biases and erasures in their generation [142]. In the following sections, I discuss my initial inspirations for the project, my autoethnographic process, how I selected and prompted the AI models to generate images, and the un/making and material reconfigurations I conducted after generating and printing the images. There are three resulting images that I turn into three filmed vignettes, following similar first-person research that is structured on the basis of three themes or case studies [12, 82, 167]. I include both the full video, showing all three vignettes, and the transcript of my prompts, which forms the video voiceover, in Supplementary Materials.

3.1 Project Inspirations

This project takes inspiration from *Trans History in 99 Objects*, where each spread is dedicated to an important historical record in trans history [48]. In the book, where there are no images for records, the editors have created them by sketching their own interpretations of them. I began to wonder, what would it mean for this sketching to be mediated by generative AI? More importantly, how could we as designers resist this algorithmic mediation via un/making or reconfiguring generated images by hand? In undergoing such material processes, I draw from artists such as Redstar, who uses annotation to reflect on historical representations of Indigenous identity amidst colonial influence [126], and Hull, who reconstructs and reinterprets a queer history of antiquity through fragments of Greek pottery that depict same-sex scenes and figures [79]. Similar works of fiction, such as *Blackouts* by Torres, annotate and recontextualize historical records to reflect on absences and ruptures in queer history [166]. Each of these works speak to materially working with fragments of histories, whether through pottery, photographs, or archival documents, to think through absences in the historical record and fabulate individual and collective reinterpretations [132, 144].

In this project, I use generative AI, not as an attempt to fill absences in queer historical records, but to instead critique how inherent biases in image generation can warp and erase queer identities—for instance, whitewashing queers of color or erasing

trans people. My annotations and material reconfigurations then question and examine these generated images in performative encounters that imagine alternative, embodied ways of responding to and resisting generative AI's influence.

3.2 Autoethnographic Approach

In my approach, I took notes and wrote reflections on my process of prompting and creating images with generative AI. I took these notes both in a separate Notes Application and in a written journal, which were separated and not uploaded to my conversations with ChatGPT, ChatLGBT, or GayGPT. I chose to use these models to critique both ChatGPT's normalizing tendencies [58, 162], as well as the biases embedded even within GPTs trained on LGBTQIA+ content, such as ChatLGBT or GayGPT, where underlying ChatGPT-4o training data remained persistent. After generating images with these models, I printed them out onto cardstock and photo paper to hand-annotate and create material reconfigurations while video recording my process. I edited these recordings using video editing software to create a final video with three vignettes (included in Supplementary Materials). I then took screenshots of various stages of the larger video and brought these images into a Figma file to organize them and take notes according to cross-cutting themes. Lastly, I organized these notes, reflections, and screenshots into a printed zine (included in Supplementary Materials), which was displayed at a public-facing gallery event alongside the full video, and will be written about in future work.

3.3 Selecting Models and Prompting to Generate Images

I began creating material reconfigurations by first generating images of three personal memories of queer places and events, which I then critiqued through tangible, embodied actions. After generating up to 3 images per memory, I selected one for each and created three vignettes: (1) Queer Lube Wrestling, which I generated using ChatLGBT and DALL-E 3 [14]; (2) A queer and disability-centered sexual wellness shop, generated using ChatGPT-4o and DALL-E 3 [121]; and (3) A now permanently closed queer bar, which I generated with GayGPT and DALL-E 3 [60].

For prompting, I selected ChatGPT-4o, and to generate images, I used DALL-E 3 embedded in the ChatGPT interface, after Taylor et al. [162], as normative models that I would then seek to materially queer. I chose models that were both widely used and culturally recognizable as normalizing, or in Taylor et al.'s words "straightening" so as to produce the strongest critical response with my material reconfigurations [162]. I also researched additional GPTs that had been trained on LGBTQIA+ content: ChatLGBT [14] and GayGPT [60]. While these models contain additional information about LGBTQIA+ identities, reflecting the efforts of queer developers in promoting inclusivity, after prompting with them, I noticed only a slight shift in conversational tone that only partially disguised underlying biases. In the end, I intentionally chose to use ChatGPT for its widespread use and normalizing tendencies [58, 162], as well as ChatLGBT and GayGPT to suggest that even with models trained on LGBTQIA+ content, underlying biases remain persistent and embedded in their generative outputs.

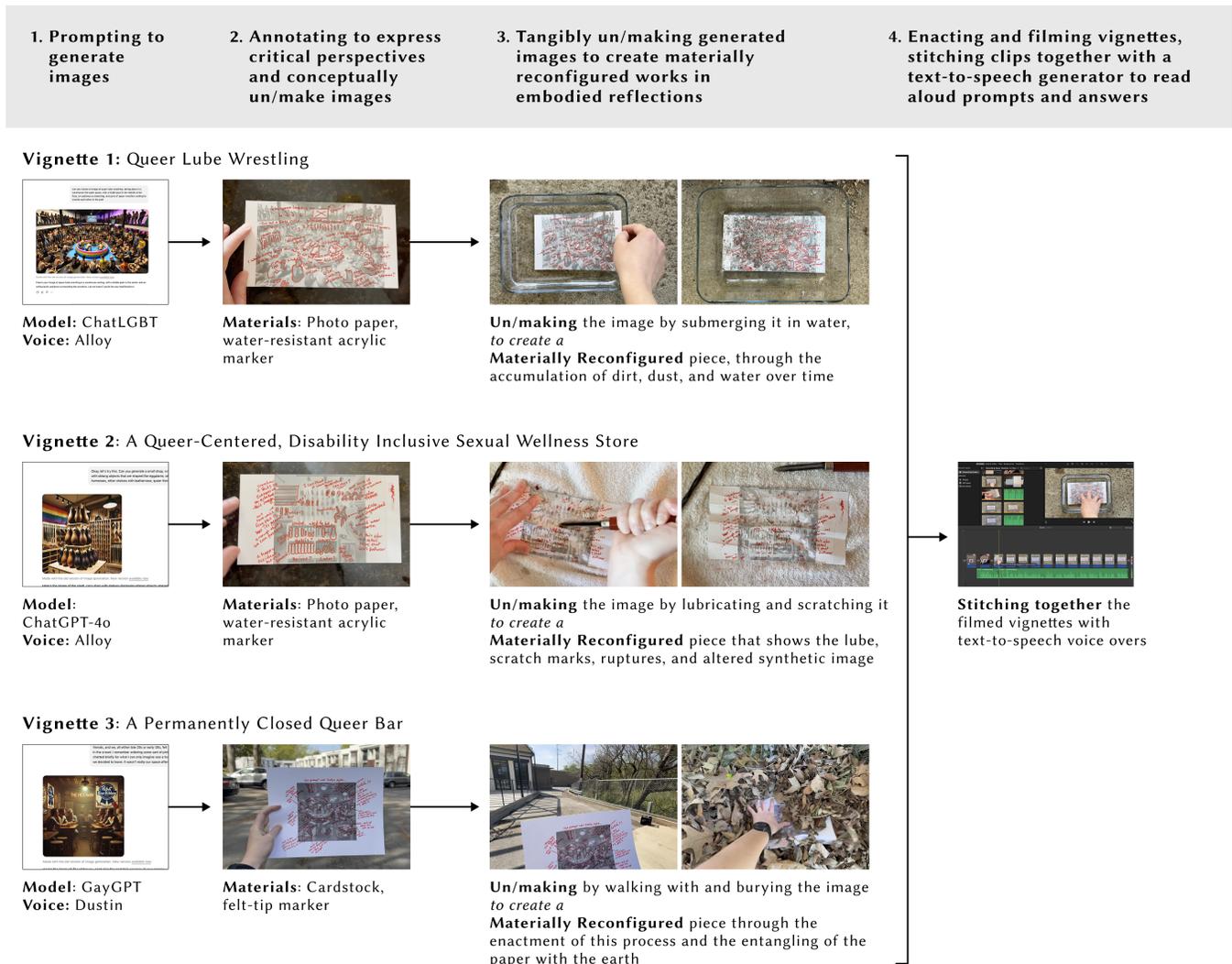


Figure 2: A diagram of the process through which I created each vignette. The first step shows selecting models and prompting to generate images. The second step entails handwriting annotations and drawing onto the printed synthetic images to express critical perspectives. The third step shows my un/making and materially reconfiguring of the images. I lastly detail the fourth step of creating the video vignettes by filming each of these processes, then stitching the clips together, along with a voice-over created with a text-to-speech generator to read my prompts and generated responses aloud.

For each vignette, I purposefully used a different model, while recognizing that even ChatLGBT and GayGPT used ChatGPT-4o as a base model and therefore retain its underlying biases. I used ChatGPT-4o for a story about a queer and disability focused sex store, to magnify my efforts in creating workarounds when prompting it, bringing it closer to generating erotic images of sex toys. I used ChatLGBT to generate an image of queer lube wrestling, as this model posed as a “Friendly AI for LGBTQ+ support, blending professionalism with approachable guidance” [14], and would similarly struggle with depicting erotic imagery, such as lube wrestling. This rigidity would open the door for a stronger critical stance in

my material practice. Lastly, I used GayGPT to generate an image of a now shuttered queer bar in Atlanta. This model positions itself in the following way: “Gay GPT provides empathetic support to the LGBTQIA+ while trying to maintain a light and humorous LGBT persona so its basically your own personal agender asexual Drag Queen assistant to help you with all your gay needs. Pronouns: it/its” [60]. In reality, prompting with GayGPT retained the underlying biases of ChatGPT, while adding the stereotypically “sassy” language of a drag queen. This produced the haunting effect of a re-animated queer voice speaking cheerfully about the closing and

ensuing gentrification of historically queer spaces, which I unpack more in Section 4.3.

I began the prompting process by asking each respective GPT to generate an image, using DALL-E 3, of a particular queer event or location in Atlanta (full transcript of prompts included in Supplementary Materials). I phrased these prompts as my own memories of these queer events and locations to maintain my positionality in this process, but also to provide a starker contrast between the generated images and my interpretations of them. For each memory, I generated up to 3 images before selecting a single image to print out, following Stjernholm et al.'s process for generating historical images [156]. While Stjernholm et al. do not suggest a strict number of images to generate as part of their analysis, their process follows a qualitative and exploratory logic, where the authors generated images within an overarching historical theme, and chose thought-provoking selections for their dataset, given their existing historical knowledge. I similarly used an exploratory approach, generating images within the overarching theme of LGBTQIA+ themed places and events in Atlanta, in the recent past (within 5 years). My prompts were concise, but each contained descriptive imagery of the location and event, the word “queer,” and where necessary, additional descriptive phrases pertaining to queer culture, such as “dyke,” “kink,” or “lube,” which have been known to trigger content moderation systems [162]. Over the course of the prompting process, I developed workarounds to ask each respective GPT to generate more diverse images of queer people, in the case of Queer Lube wrestling, or more explicit imagery, such as sex toys and dildos, that would have featured in the sexual wellness store. After generating each of the images, I de-saturated the colors of each to visually emphasize my annotation layer. I describe my process for each of these in more detail in Section 4.

3.4 Handwriting Annotations, Drawing, and Materially Reconfiguring Generated Images

In the material phase of the project, I drew from visual artists, authors, and scholars who have used handwritten annotation, drawing, and collage to materially reflect on and reconfigure archival records. Doing so, these artists and scholars figuratively and literally draw out critical perspectives with hand drawn [126], written [166, 174], painted [79], or embroidered [77] annotations—in other words, marks made on existing materials. These practices operate much like sketching in design [59], where iterative processes of layering build towards critical engagement with research, effectively *making* about making to generate emergent insights [174]. I similarly used handwritten annotations and drawing to express emergent, critical perspectives on AI-generated images of imagined histories. Further, I extended this process beyond mark-making by materially manipulating the generated and annotated images, filming myself doing so in an embodied, performative engagement.

The process and materials for each vignette were conceptually linked to the contents of each generated scene, guiding my choices in paper type, pen or marker, color, and post-annotation process. After annotating each vignette, I enacted a specific material process, guided by the conceptual theme of the generated image (Figure 3). For each vignette, I began by printing out each of my generated images, selected after up to 3 versions. For vignettes 1 and 2, I used



Figure 3: Stills from the three vignettes in “Generating Queer Histories,” with each set showing an approach of un/making and materially reconfiguring AI-generated images. Vignette 1: My annotations called out the disconnect between my memory of a raucous, diverse queer event, and the eerie homogeneity of the generated image. In my un/making and material reconfigurations, I submerged the image in water to recall generative AI’s environmental costs [56, 86] and to recreate the pool-like environment pictured in the scene (Section 4.1). Vignette 2: My annotations focused on the generic dildos and fetish gear generated, along with my surprise at my ability to generate these forms through workarounds. In un/making and materially reconfiguring the image, I used a sharp tool to strip the photographic image from the paper to reflect my frustrations at ChatGPT’s content moderation and to physically enact the digital erasure I sought to critique (Section 4.2). Vignette 3: I focused on the lack of queer representation beyond White cis men, the lack of location specificity, and the stereotypical scenery choices. Subsequently, my un/making and material reconfigurations physically inserted the specificity of the real place back to the image by walking to the site of the closed bar, while reflecting on the discomfort of the generated scene (Section 4.3).

a high resolution photo printer and 4x6 photographic paper, as I wanted to emulate photographs that might otherwise be found in physical archives. With vignettes 1 and 2, I used water-resistant, acrylic markers to annotate the photographic images because these were photo-safe and would not bleed or smudge when applied to the photographic paper. Additionally, I wanted to experiment with how these photographs might fade or become altered in water and water-based materials, while retaining the water-resistant annotations. For vignette 3, I printed my image on cardstock paper, as I

wanted to explore how the paper material would degrade as part of an un/making process, where the photograph could be left in an outdoor environment. I reflect more on the conceptual themes brought up during these processes in Section 4, where I discuss each of the vignettes in detail.

3.5 Creating the Video Vignettes

I filmed myself hand-annotating and materially manipulating each of the generated images. In each of these video clips, I framed my hands, the pen or marker, and the paper or photographic surface containing the generated image. Featuring close-ups of my hands in each of these videos emphasized the embodied and performative nature of my material reconfigurations, as well as the situated, emergent, and ongoing reflections they produced.

Once I finished enacting and filming the vignettes, I attached a voice-over track to each, using the transcript of my prompts with each of the GPTs. Using an AI-based text-to-speech generator [115], I fed pieces of the prompt transcript into the generator to produce a voice-output, while recording on an external audio recorder. The text-to-speech generator spoke each passage and I responded in my own voice. The resulting recording sounded as if I were having a conversation with each of the GPTs. I then used this recording as the voice-over for each of my vignettes, having each conversation play over its respective story, and editing the pacing of each material reconfiguration to match the dialogue. In Section 5, I reflect further on how this process of filming myself, then editing and annotating with both my voice and prompts, served as a reflexive practice of queering AI. In Section 3.6, I also reflect on having exhibited the video at a public gallery and how sharing individual perspectives can speak to a broader audience in this context.

3.6 Exhibiting the Video

After creating the video vignettes, I stitched all three together into a single video and showed this piece at The Public Art Futures Lab in Downtown Atlanta. To accompany the video, I created a companion zine with my reflections on each vignette, which I have also included in Supplementary Materials. Over a four day period, the exhibition had an audience of over 285 viewers, during which the video played on a loop and could be watched using attached headphones as visitors entered the gallery. Visitors could also pick up the accompanying zine and read reflections, which contained an abbreviated form of the reflections in Section 4. During the exhibition, I established dialogues with viewers to discuss critical issues surfaced in the video, such as generative AI’s biases, and how I reflected on these through material processes. We intend to write about the exhibition in more detail in a future publication, but we reference it here to indicate how first-person research can resonate with others and extend towards collective engagements through dialogue.

4 Reflections on Generated Vignettes

4.1 Vignette 1: Queer Lube Wrestling

In this vignette, I annotated a generated image of “queer lube wrestling,” a playful community event where pairs of folks grappled each other in a lube-filled kiddie pool (Figure 4). For this vignette, I kept my prompt description of the event open-ended, focusing

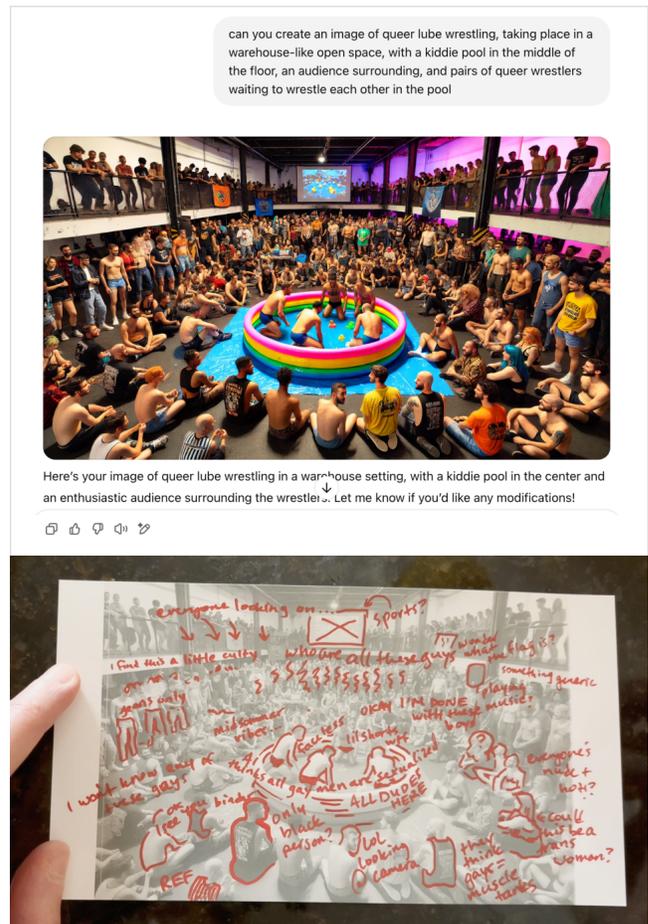


Figure 4: I prompted ChatLGBT (using DALL-E 3) to generate a personal memory of an event called “Queer Lube Wrestling,” where pairs of queer folks wrestle each other in a lube-filled kiddie pool. I chose this event for its emphasis on queer sexuality and diversity of genders, sexualities, and races in my original memory. In practice, however, the generated image showed a White- and straight-washed scene, which I sought to critique. After prompting ChatLGBT and printing out the image, I used acrylic marker to outline figures in the generated photograph, draw, and hand-write annotations that mounted critiques of the image’s White- and cis-washed scene, flooded almost entirely with sexualized gay men. By annotating, I conceptually un/made the image, calling out biases in the visualizations, while voicing my own personal frustrations and discomfort.

on describing features of the space, such as the “warehouse-like” setting and “kiddie pool,” yet purposefully signaling that the event was queer, with the words “queer lube wrestling” included. I also chose to deliberately use the general term of “audience” to explore how the model would interpret the concept and potentially reveal underlying biases. As expected, the generated images reproduced existing stereotypes of queer and trans people (e.g. overwhelming

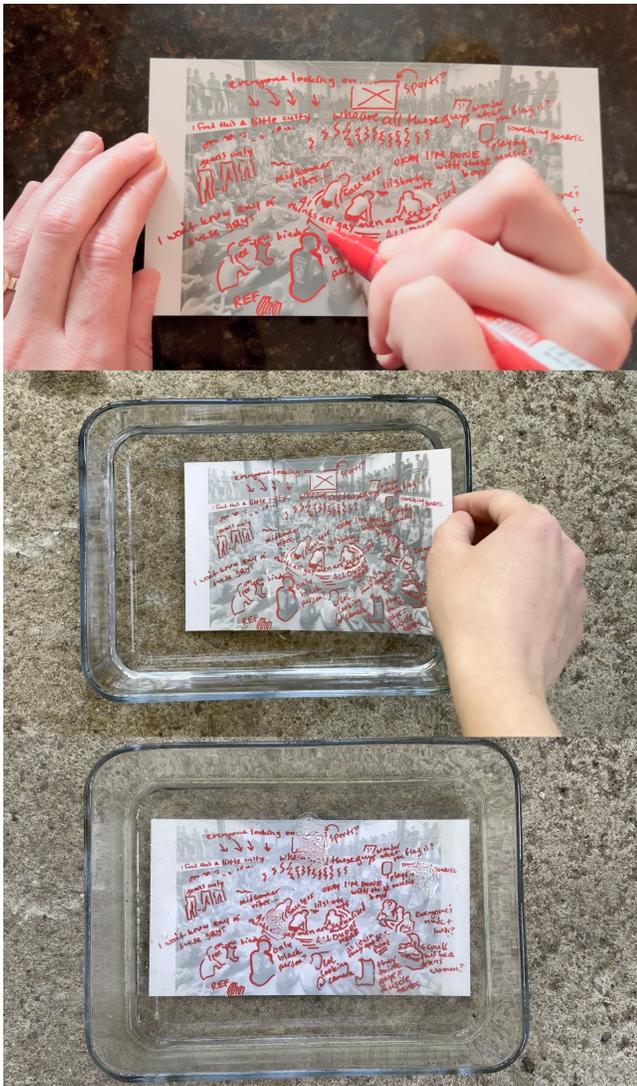


Figure 5: Three stills from the first vignette, “Queer Lube Wrestling” in the “Generating Queer Histories” video piece. (1) I annotated a generated image from my memory of a queer lube wrestling event to highlight and critique queer identities that have been erased or misrepresented. (2) I submerged my photograph in water, and (3), I witnessed how the water subtly faded the generated image. These actions un/made the image by submerging it in water to create a material reconfiguration that acknowledged the ruptures of erasures and anti-LGBTQIA+ biases in embodied, tangible ways.

Whiteness and cisness, trans women showing masculine features), which has been well documented in existing literature [58, 172]. In my approach, I used tangible, embodied annotation practices to call out these biases, then un/made and materially reconfigured the printed images. These explorations revealed considerable distance between the generated images and my memories of the event—a

raucous, kinky, gender-expansive, and QTBIPOC-centered gathering. In place of this, the image featured predominantly White, cisgender men, voyeuristically staring into a pool, which I reflected on in my material responses.

The resulting video opened with an eerie dialogue, as I attempted to generate and then discuss the image with Alloy, a text-to-speech AI persona playing the voice of “ChatLGBT,” the model used to generate my image. While the voiceover continued, my hands frantically moved across the generated photograph, outlining figures that surrounded the pool and making written comments about their homogeneity and the haunting quality of the scene. By outlining both figures and elements of the image, I called attention to their uncanny qualities, the lack of Black people pictured, the lack of trans and nonbinary folks, the overwhelming appearance and sexualization of cis gay men, which has been documented in queer AI research [23, 57, 172]. In a tone that both poked fun at the image and called attention to the inherent biases displayed, my annotations served as an embodied, performative reckoning with generative AI’s erasure of queer difference and individuality.

As the voiceover conversation wore on, the contrast between my snarky annotations and Alloy’s monotonous affect increased. As Alloy dispassionately described “queer brilliance” or “queer authenticity,” co-opting shared language for fluid gender identities, I continued to methodically outline the image, in defiant ignorance of the voice. Indeed, Alloy’s tones seemed to fade into the background as I finished my reflections and carefully submerged the image in water (Figure 5). Doing so, I recalled the water used to cool servers in data centers that power generative AI [56, 86], now used to slowly unmake the image by fading the photographic ink, leaving only my annotations. I used water here, as opposed to the lube used in my second vignette, to both acknowledge the embodied, material costs of generative AI, as well as to recreate the pool-like environment pictured in the scene.

In the video, I showed the water subtly blurring the image, with spliced clips that spanned a period of two weeks. However, because the image blurred only slightly over two weeks, I left the photograph in water over a period of five months, beyond the time-span of the video, to explore how it might continue to fade with additional time (Figure 6). Over this longer period, the photograph sat in a glass dish on my covered porch, and I took short video clips of it every other day. In my small apartment, the photograph was always physically close to me, as my porch sits adjacent to my living room, and I could see it every day. During this time, the water evaporated, and dust, pollen, and dust settled on the image. Rainwater would periodically replace the evaporated water, and then dry as days grew hotter over the five month span. Stubbornly, the generated image, though blurred, remained, along with my annotations. However, the layers of dirt, pollen, and dust began to obscure both my hand-drawn marks and the photograph, forming a translucent film that became entangled with the original piece. This mingling added another layer of un/making and material reconfiguration to my engagement, where my previous efforts were obscured by environmental decay, as layers of dirt and grime covered both the original image and my hand-drawn additions.

In reflection, I noted a sense of feeling inured to the photograph—after all, it blended into the backdrop of my home, becoming akin to a houseplant that would periodically become soaked with rain



Figure 6: A still from “Queer Lube Wrestling” after five months: the image and my annotations became slowly obscured by dirt, grime, fallen leaves, bugs, and rainwater. Leaving the image over this period added accumulated layers to the materially reconfigured piece and reflected my use of embodied, situated timescales, which I return to in Section 5.2. Watching the photograph decay also symbolized the environmental costs of generative AI and served as a reminder of its reliance on natural materials (e.g. water, land, carbon) [86]. Here, I subverted a dynamic where generative AI extracts resources, conceptually imagining how natural processes might instead erase the image from the page.

and then dry out. The assemblage of dirt, dust, pollen, water, and photograph began to feel like an ecosystem itself, as it gathered decomposing leaves and small bugs from my porch. These processes reflected opposing forces: while environmental decay began to unmake the photograph (and thus the AI-generated image), I nevertheless became used to it, evoking the lull of accustoming to the ubiquity of AI usage. I also reflected on how despite my un/making attempts, my efforts felt futile in contrast to AI’s pervasive usage and hollow in contrast to my own. I neither fully unmade AI nor fully unmade the material object of its representation. While these attempts were my own reflective, embodied ways of grappling with the issues of biases, erasure, and mis-representation of queer identities in AI-generated images, they also reflected my frustrations at how archives and histories are upended by these inaccurate, hallucinatory processes. I return to these tensions between non-use and material reconfigurations, as well as how autoethnographic practices can provide critical modes of reflection, in Section 5.

4.2 Vignette 2: A Queer-Centered, Disability-Inclusive Sexual Wellness Store

In this vignette, I annotated a generated photograph of my memory of visiting Kiss & Ride, a queer-centered, disability inclusive sexual wellness store in Atlanta (Figure 7). As with Vignette 1, my prompts were similarly open-ended, and I focused on describing the store, recounting its location in a large house with plants. In these prompts, I not only used words like “queer,” but I also added items that were found within the store, such as “dildos,” “strap-ons,” and “vibrators,” assuming they would be flagged by ChatGPT’s content moderation policies, but nevertheless attempting to stay faithful to my memory of the place.

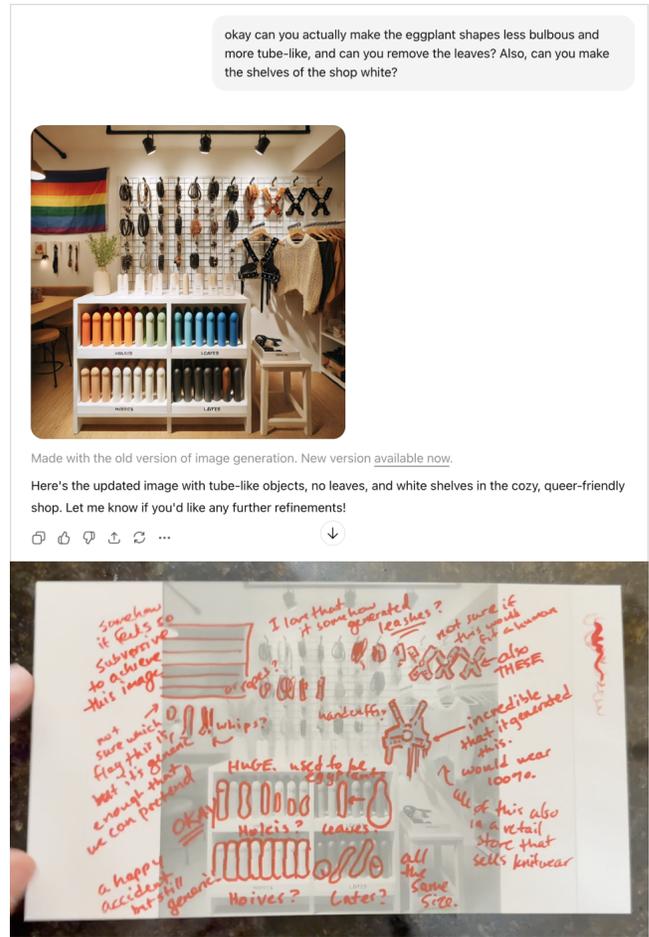


Figure 7: I prompted ChatGPT (using DALL-E 3) to generate a memory of a queer and disability centered sexual wellness store, which I chose for its emphasis on sexuality and kink imagery. I used a similar process as with the first vignette—prompting, generating images, and printing out my latest on photographic paper. I then outlined shapes in the image and hand-wrote annotations, which focused on the generic nature of the image, my incredulity at generating dildo-like shapes and kink-focused gear despite ChatGPT’s safeguards, and the subversiveness of my prompting process.

In my video, the voiceover followed the process of my attempts to work around ChatGPT-4o’s safeguards to generate dildos and sex toys that appear in the store. At one point in the process, I began to ask ChatGPT to generate “oblong objects” and eggplants as workarounds to create images of dildos and sex toys. This process felt subversive, queer, and playful, and it was surprising to find that ChatGPT took offense to certain items while allowing others, such as harnesses and whips. As the voiceover of my chat with Alloy, who voiced ChatGPT in this story, continued, I annotated and then started to materially manipulate the photograph. My annotations commented on my subversive process in creating the image, as well as my incredulity at the row of dildo-shaped objects pictured.

I outlined each of the dildo-shapes, first simply tracing them, then altering them to emphasize a variety of other potential toys. While doing so, I commented on how uniform the generated objects were in comparison to a more multifaceted assortment that I then drew onto the image. My outlines continued onto other objects pictured in the shop, including harnesses, handcuffs, and whips. While I reflected amazement at the items generated without push-back, I also commented on the scene's overwhelmingly generic effects, such as the nonspecific flag, the bland retail environment, and the nondescript qualities of each of the objects.

My actions in this second vignette contrasted those in the first but arrived at a similar outcome. In the first, I used water to materially reconfigure the generated image to subtly and slowly fade it while retaining my annotations. In practice, both the image and my annotations were obscured by the dirt, grime, and pollen that accumulated on the photograph over time. This process felt slow, ambient, and gentle in comparison with my urgent and sometimes violent smearing, crinkling, and scratching of the second photograph, which quickly dissolved both the image and my annotations together. While I used different material techniques to reconfigure the images in each of these instances, the resulting un/making returned the images to paper, dust, liquid, and ink. I return to these themes in the Discussion (Section 5), where I talk through how these embodied, autoethnographic reconfigurations serve as critical strategies for queering AI, as well as my use of varying time scales in doing so.

4.3 Vignette 3: A Permanently Closed Queer Bar

This vignette followed the story of a now permanently closed queer bar near my home. My prompts for this image similarly focused on a description of the bar setting, including details such as “wood paneling, dim lighting, and classic signs for beers.” I diverged slightly from the previous vignettes by inserting more of my own memory here, sharing information about my friends and our alienation among an older crowd of “middle-aged butches,” or older lesbians. Though I shared more of my personal memory, the resulting image produced a generic scene with young, White, cisgender men, which I then reflected on in my annotations (Figure 9).

In my video for this vignette, I had already finished annotating the image, but I held the photograph, printed on cardstock this time, in my outstretched hand (Figure 10). In the photograph, I had drawn outlines around the figures pictured in the imagined bar, commenting on their Whiteness, their cisgender maleness, and their homogeneous attire. I remarked that my original prompt asked to generate a “butch dyke” (a masculine-leaning, lesbian-identified person) whereas these figures looked instead like homogenized cisgender men, similar to those encountered in a US-based university fraternity. These annotations and outlines spoke directly to my reflections on generative AI biases against butch or androgynous-looking people, erasure of trans and nonbinary subjects, and emphasis on Whiteness and homogeneity [57, 172]. Creating these annotations served as the first layer of my material reconfigurations of the Whitewashed, imagined past pictured in the image, and my situated tactics allowed for embodied, handwritten reflections that commented on AI's violent amalgamation of content.

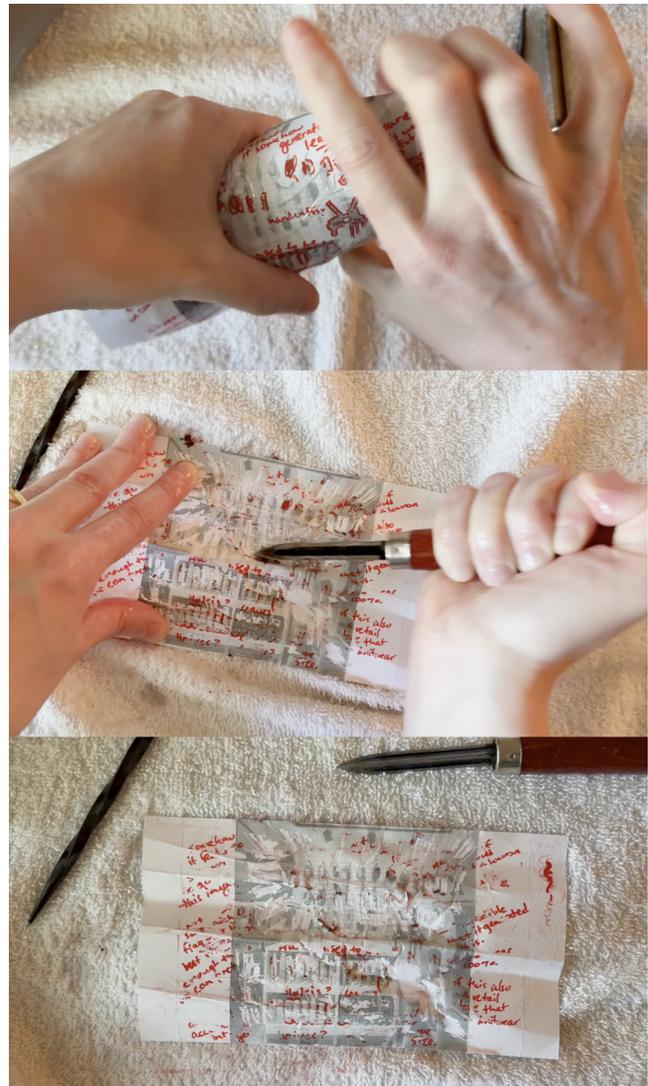


Figure 8: Three stills from “A Queer-Centered, Disability Inclusive Sexual Wellness Store.” (1) I added lube to my generated image of the Kiss & Ride sexual wellness store, which altered the image and removed some of my annotations. (2) I removed more of the image by scratching it with a printmaking tool. (3) Having un/made the image through lubricating and scratching, I created a materially reconfigured piece showing the smudges, scratch marks, and ruptures as critical, embodied reflections on generative AI. I conceptually un/made the image by annotating my frustrations and subversive processes of generating kinky items. In my physical un/making, the violent scratching symbolized the epistemic violence of erasure and misrepresentation; by using lube to alter the photograph, I inserted a material subversion (i.e. lube) into ChatGPT's content moderation policies.

During the video, I walked with the annotated image, crossing busy roads, dodging cars, and wandering through suburban

cheerful, yet haunting effect. After looking around, I decided to bury the photograph in a pile of leaves at the construction site, just as Dustin enthusiastically reminded me that the bar was indeed closed. The burial seemed almost as much an attempt to silence GayGPT's incessant voice as it was a plea to obscure the image and conversation, returning instead to matter and embodied experience.

I enacted these material reconfigurations—for instance, walking the image to the site of the bar to bury it—to work through the unease and discomfort I felt when faced with a generated image meant to represent my own memory. It produced an uncanny familiarity that shared features with these places and events, but read as altogether disturbing and unsettling. In response, bringing the image into material realms felt like a reassertion of the places and sensations that could not be represented by generative AI. Additionally, as with the first vignette in Section 4.1, I purposefully placed the photograph in the ground and let it decay to symbolize the materiality and environmental costs of generative AI [56, 86, 160], as well as my embodied role in prompting these critical reflections through material inquiry [21].

5 Discussion

In this paper, we shared an autoethnographic project in which the lead author generated images of personal queer histories, hand-annotated these images, and then materially un/made and reconfigured them while filming their process. This research contributes to Queer AI and Critical AI scholarship by underscoring the value of first-person, embodied research as a critical strategy for AI, and highlighting the power of arts-based inquiry to prompt creative critiques and raise awareness about ethical issues such as anti-LGBTQIA+ biases and erasures [158]. In the following sections, we discuss using (1) un/making and our proposed material reconfigurations as tactics for queering AI in historical representation; (2) queering time to reflect on and destabilize AI-generated histories; and (3) embodied, autoethnographic practices as critical strategies for AI research. We lastly reflect on (4) tensions between use and refusal in generating queer histories, alongside future directions for queering AI.

5.1 Distinguishing Un/Making and Material Reconfigurations as Tactics for Queering AI

Un/making, that is, a continuum of making and unmaking practices, is increasingly used in HCI and design research to critique and re- envision dominant narratives [161, 162]. In this project, the lead author used tactics of un/making, specifically drawing from queer archival un/making [131], un-straightening generative AI [162], and unmaking-with AI [116], to critique dominant narratives portrayed by generative AI. While unmaking in HCI can signal “taking something apart” in a material or more-than-human sense [9, 105], it can also refer to how hegemonic structures can be epistemologically unmade [161]. In a material sense, this took the form of fading the generated images in water, scratching out the photographic material, or burying the photograph at the site of the closed queer bar. From an epistemological standpoint, these processes served to unmake, or un-straighten AI-generated images, using hand drawn annotations to critique and rework the images in an emergent and

unfolding process, paralleling Vasconcelos et al.'s annotation and layering work [174].

In this paper, we propose that alongside un/making, material reconfigurations can provide tactics for questioning and critiquing generative AI, particularly with regard to historical erasures. While un/making can refer to processes of breaking down and taking apart, material reconfigurations correspond to the accumulations of these processes (in a piece of video art, for instance) that acknowledge the fractures over time. Returning to Sennett, reconfiguration refers to a reinterpretation of “historical materials” in a way that acknowledges historical ruptures [142]. In Sennett's example, he discusses the reconstruction of a museum after its bombing in the second world war, where the architects chose not to restore the building to its original, untouched state, but to a new design that showed explosion damage, rubble, and material traces of war. Indeed, this design was a “reconfiguration” rather than a restoration (or return to some unattainable originality or false authenticity). It served as an embodied and improvisational process of maintaining links to historical ruptures while promoting dialogue and social understanding. In this research, we follow similar themes, shaping our material reconfigurations. While generative AI's depictions smooth over the ruptures and kinks in archival records by creating an amalgamation of a false place or event in history, in the lead author's handmade material annotations, drawings, and processes, they reconfigure rather than restore. They bring material, situated realities into practice to resist how generative AI smooths over ruptures, multiplicities, and individualities of queer places, events, and identities. Further, in materially reconfiguring, they push back against how generative AI depicts an uncanny, imagined past [75] that condenses and simplifies historical imagery into a statistically likely output [156]. Whereas in Sennett's example, reconfiguration is the acknowledgment and materialization of the ruptures of war; in our material reconfigurations, we highlight the erasures and misrepresentations of marginalized identities in generated representations of the past. Additionally, while Sennett describes reconfiguration of already physical structures (e.g. a museum), our work proposes an extension of this tactic into structures of supposedly digital origin (e.g. generative AI). By bringing material reconfigurations to bear on generative AI, we reinforce scholarship that advocates for material forms of inquiry and meaning-making, particularly within AI research [160]. We also position material reconfigurations as a way to reinforce the material dimensions of generative AI, subverting the notion of a digital system that exists outside of the physical environment [56, 86]. Lastly, we draw on scholarship that positions generative AI as a sociotechnical system, and with material reconfigurations, we highlight the often hidden relationships between generative AI, human labor (e.g. annotating, calibrating, troubleshooting), and social arrangements [21, 46].

We therefore highlight how material reconfigurations can extend Sennett's concept and pair with un/making in HCI, by inviting reflection on the improvisational and embodied tactics involved in working with histories, as well as the ruptures that have been smoothed over or unexamined. Both un/making and material reconfigurations are useful tactics in critiquing representations generated by AI. Un/making allows for epistemologically unraveling the dominant White, cis, able-bodied, straight narratives depicted by generative AI [162], while enacting the breakdown and decay

afforded by more-than-human material processes [9, 105]. Material reconfigurations complements this, specifically referring to how material processes can maintain links to ruptures in histories through tactics of embodied improvisation and meaning-making. In contrast to un/making, material reconfigurations proposes turning materials (e.g. paper printouts of generated images) into new compositions that highlight the ruptures created by their original forms (e.g. biases and erasures), prompting reflection and critique. The filmed outcome of our project, along with the lead author's embodied interactions with the material elements of the photographs serves as an "improvisational process" [142] that acknowledges the ruptures of generative AI while reflecting on (and in some ways restoring) the queer identities that have been "locked out of histories" or material realities [114]. Using both un/making and material reconfigurations as tactics of critiquing and queering AI brings generated, imagined pasts into tangible, embodied, and situated realities.

Un/making and material reconfigurations are named as tactics to emphasize the exploratory processes involved in our approach to queering AI. We highlight that these tactics invite valuable reflection and discussion on biases and erasures in generative AI, and while not an explicit method, they point towards broader opportunities for design and HCI to develop critical methodological strategies for queering AI. For instance, designers might similarly un/make with printed synthetic images by enacting material processes such as marking, scratching, or submerging, to reconfigure these visualizations in artistic ways that acknowledge ruptures and resist erasures. Designers might also imagine unique ways of forming embodied and improvisational reconfigurations, using processes that attune to a specific historical context or memory. In a broader sense, un/making and material reconfigurations can serve as tactics of creative subversion that join the umbrella of queering AI strategies. These practices can allow design practitioners to invite the embodied and material impressions that accompany archival records [93], while pushing against the primacy of algorithmically defined databases or historical representations. Further, these material reconfigurations can serve as ways to share critical, embodied reflections on generative AI that highlight underlying limitations, biases, and erasures in representations of queer pasts and marginalized identities.

5.2 Materially Reconfiguring Time to Unsettle AI-Generated Histories

In this work, we use material reconfigurations to reflect on images that are detached from time: false memories and histories generated with AI. These images are not historical per se, but are constructions of an imagined past, imagined events, that exist outside of time. The scenes depict time as flattened: historical references can be merged with anachronistic, present-day visuals, which emerge from recency biases in data [156]. However, as these images proliferate, they join an archive of content, both historical and synthetic, with the potential to affect how pasts are remembered and represented [75]. Designers echo this phenomenon, citing how virtual, recent past, or (in our case) generated presences can continue to affect the present and anticipated futures [54]. We argue that as visions of

the past become algorithmically mediated, they are increasingly defined by what is eliminated from these scenes—trans and nonbinary identities, BIPOC queer images and perspectives, non-normative sexualities and gathering places [23, 57, 172]. Material reconfigurations in this way serve not only to acknowledge these ruptures and reinsert QTBIPOC identities into imagined pasts, but to ensure QTBIPOC futures, joining similar work in Queer AI [102], where these reflections reverberate and invite critical conversations about generative AI in design and HCI spaces.

Material reconfigurations are embodied, improvisational processes [142], and these evoke the continual intra-actions of beings and objects over time [7], along with how humans and materials intertwine in co-emergent encounters [145]. In our embodied encounters with materials, we express alternative temporalities in ways that queer or resist the flattening of AI-generated time [177], building on how Ciobanu and Fernaeus discuss unmaking normative conceptions of time in artworks [25]. Specifically, the lead author expresses multiple timescales by pushing against imagined, generated pasts while slowing or quickening their material processes depending on their conceptual reflections. For instance, hand-annotating calls attention to and contrasts the few seconds of time used to generate an image with methodical outlining and drawing. Further, it points to how generative AI can be conceptualized as a sociotechnical system, reflecting the time-intensive human labor that surrounds supposedly efficient generative processes [46]. In another scenario, the lead author quickly scratches at the photographic surface in the second vignette to counteract the conceptual violence of queer erasure and express the urgency of their critique. Yet, the first vignette's photograph sits in water for five months, expressing a larger time-scale of AI resource-use and erasure of marginalized content. Similarly, in the third vignette, the lead author walks with their annotated photograph to bury it at the site of a shuttered queer bar, expressing an embodied timescale that contrasts the lack of situatedness in the generated image.

Playing with temporalities acknowledges how materials and bodies are situated within time [145], and how slow, considered approaches to craft and materials [16, 73] can counteract the flattening of time and materiality in generated content. These tangible approaches to time also adjoin larger trends in HCI research that call for slow technology design [118] and building vocabularies [120] and theories around time and temporality [178]. With our work specifically, we add to expressions of alternative, queer/crip temporalities [44, 83, 136], underscoring how material reconfigurations deepen tactics for queering AI, particularly with respect to conceptions of time and histories.

Practically, these modes of expressing alternative timescales suggests how designers might play with time through material pursuits, towards resisting AI. Countering how synthetic images sit outside of time, we propose that designers attune to embodied, situated timescales in their material reconfigurations. This could take the form of slowly and deliberately hand annotating a synthetic image, or quickening the pace of a subtractive process to express urgency or frustration. Reconfiguring materials at alternative, embodied paces by attuning to co-emergent material processes can thus counter normative temporalities, particularly the absence of time and situatedness in generated images [177], towards resisting how generative

AI emphasizes presentism while scraping and decontextualizing archival sources from their temporal origins [156].

5.3 Materially Reconfiguring from First-Person Perspectives to Resist AI

Autoethnographically queering AI draws from a number of artists and researchers who have used generative AI for both critique and expression of queer and trans perspectives. Jędrusiak discusses several artists who have developed experimental strategies for reconceptualizing AI [85], such as Turtle and Elwes' images that use a generative adversarial network (GAN) to visualize queer and trans bodies [170], LaRochelle's speculative, generated images [95] based on their original queer mapmaking project [94], and Martinez's AI-generated speculative narratives about queer, Cuban identity [108]. Other artists and scholars have reflected on their personal, yet destabilizing discussions with AI [91], and their own misgendering through facial recognition software [1]. Each of these explorations shares a common thread of starting from personal, queer and trans identities to resist biases and erasures caused by generative AI, whether through glitching and widening normative datasets [40, 95, 170] or generating artistic critique [1, 2, 91, 108]. We situate this project within this stream of artists and scholars, advocating for using material reconfigurations as an additional strategy that starts from personal, queer, and (in the lead author's case, genderfluid) experiences to unsettle AI-generated normativity. These material reconfigurations build on prior autoethnographic work that queers AI by adding tangible tactics of critical reflection that re-work generated images in situated environments and temporalities.

Starting from embodied, queer experiences also recalls Biggs et al.'s method of disorientation, where autoethnographic practices can express unease, discomfort, and even trauma [12]. In this project and paper, we similarly argue that autoethnographically queering generative AI can take root in material re-workings that express and enact embodied unease. As the lead author shares in their vignettes, these experiences of disquiet, even frustration and violation, are felt in facing the generated images of their own memories. Their responding material reconfigurations reassert their embodied discomfort: sitting with the slowly decomposing photograph on their porch; violently handling and destroying the second; and walking with the third to bury it at the site of the queer bar. Their reassertion of these embodied dimensions—places and sensations that cannot be felt or expressed by generative AI—serves as a way of critically reflecting on its biases and erasures. Adding to this, these practices can likewise destabilize time, weaving “past traumas into present experiences” and “upending stable realities” [12, p.10], which deepens how material reconfigurations can unsettle linear temporalities, as we discussed in Section 5.2. By materially disturbing the “stable realities” put forth by their generated images, the lead author expresses their unease at how these images sit outside of time—an amalgamation of others' past data yet unrepresentative of their own memories.

Scholars have long identified ways of reflecting on and resisting AI through embodied pursuits [4, 176], and our work extends and builds on this history. Specifically, we add autoethnographic,

material practices that can annotate and call out biases in synthetic archival images. These material reconfigurations, expressed through first-person, particularly queer, perspectives, serve to tangibly articulate the destabilization felt in response to personal histories that are reinterpreted through the artificial gaze. In our case, these autoethnographic, arts-based practices serve not just as a recounting of subjective experiences, but also as a way to reach a variety of audiences across disciplines through a public-facing exhibition. While we plan to write about this exhibition, along with its implications for shared understandings and critiques of generative AI, in future work, we note it here to indicate how first-person research can serve as a bridge between subjective experiences and collective resistance.

5.4 Tensions between Use and Refusal in Generating Queer Histories

We also return to tensions between techniques of non-use and critical refusal [53] in generative AI research and our approach of un/making and material reconfigurations. At various points throughout this project, we questioned whether to use generative AI at all, and if so, whether our approach would counteractively contribute to ChatGPT's data aggregation and resource use. While we maintain that both non-use and material practices can be used as tactics for critical reflection on generative AI, in this paper, we chose to foreground un/making and materially reconfiguring to amplify the tangible and embodied aspects of our critical practice. Doing so, we add to the body of work created by queer and trans artists and researchers who use various forms of generative AI to produce artistic works that develop critiques and imagine queer alternatives, such as those discussed in 5.3.

We also cite how non-use introduces another tension that Baumer and Khovanskaya bring up, in which focusing on individual non-users and their isolated actions can de-emphasize social, economic, and political dimensions of these practices [8]. As such, they point towards broader collective projects that situate use and non-use within larger sociotechnical frameworks, such as Garcia et al.'s *Manifest-No!* [53], or Agnew's writing on resistance to AI [3]. As with these collective engagements, we echo that critiques are made from situated positions [8], and can even start from autoethnographic perspectives such as this one. We therefore look to how this project can open conversations that point towards collective material reconfigurations. For instance, this approach can join others in queering AI, while bringing in other methods of resistance to such systems.

What this can mean for designers is that un/making, material reconfigurations, and non-use all fit in the toolbox of critical strategies for resisting generative AI. In practice, this could take the form of providing a collective choice, for designers and research participants, of whether to use material reconfigurations or non-use as strategies for resistance. Reflecting on this choice would then serve as an opportunity to dialogically explore the tensions between use and refusal, starting from individual positionalities and working toward collective understandings and critiques. We plan to research these tensions and collective possibilities as part of a parallel in-progress study.

6 Conclusion

We share how un/making and our proposed material reconfigurations can serve as tangible tactics for queering AI—specifically for critiquing biases and erasures in generated archival images. Un/making and material reconfigurations bring tangible, embodied, and emotional dimensions into critiques of generative AI and reassert the queer identities and bodies that are erased or misrepresented in synthetic images of the past. Here, this took the form of un/making printed photographs of generated images, first through hand drawn annotations, then material processes—submerging in water, lubricating and scratching, walking and burying, to create materially reconfigured works that physicalize the ruptures of queer erasure and misrepresentation. From our work, we contribute reflections on how material reconfigurations and un/making can serve as tactics for queering AI; enact queer temporalities that resist the temporal flattening of generated histories; start from first-person perspectives to express embodied unease towards AI through tangible critique; and work through tensions between use and refusal. These tactics are necessarily exploratory to provide valuable reflection and discussion, and through this work, we invite further opportunities for developing tangible methodological strategies for queering AI.

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