

## Queering Temporalities in Italian Drag King Archives

**THIS ARTICLE DISCUSSES** the concept of queer archives in view of the idea of queer temporality, by making specific reference to a book that we co-edited together with Rachele Borghi, *Il re nudo: Per un archivio drag king in Italia* [*The Naked King: Toward a Drag King Archive in Italy*] (2014). The book represents a collection of photos, drawings, creative/autobiographical/critical texts (and a reading of them by the co-editors) that were collected during the course of 2013 through a public call. The call invited people who practice, have practiced or are or were involved in any way with drag kinging to participate in the construction of a drag king archive whose goal was to testify narratives of emerging and changing drag king experiences in Italy. We invited people to document not only their own experiences as drag kings, but also their affective bonds with drag kinging; in fact the call was addressed not only to those who practice or have practiced drag kinging, but also to those who felt emotionally and/or politically touched by it, even if they had not practiced it (yet). We asked the participants to document their affective bonds with drag kinging by choosing and producing images and texts that would best represent them and thus becoming active creators of the archive that we wanted to build, rather than being “archived.”

As co-editors of the book, we were interested in drag kinging as we had practiced it as amateurs or as participants and facilitators in various work-

shops in Italy and the United Kingdom, thus we positioned ourselves as part of the collectivity that was constructing its own affective archive. While all archives can, to a certain degree, be considered “affective,” in that they (often unintentionally) keep record of the affects of the people whose lives have been archived in them, and generate affects in those visiting those archives (and here we understand affects not as self-evident entities but as fictional constructions, following Edenheim 2014), with the *Il re nudo* we tried to create an archive, which was explicitly intended to keep record of the participants’ affective bonds with drag kinging and which would also bear the potential of generating new and diversified affective bonds among those exploring it, as we will explain later.

Our concept of a drag king archive follows J. Halberstam’s (2005) understanding of the queer archive as not only a material place but also an immaterial set of ideas, representations, and narratives. In Halberstam’s (2005, 169) words, “the archive is not simply a repository: it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of a collective memory and a complex record of queer activity.” Therefore, rather than simply being a recovery or repository project, our archive was meant to be a living entity, an idea consolidated nowadays in the discipline of archive theory – as found for example in Carolyn Steedman (2001) and Rebecca Schneider (2012) – subject to continuous input by its users. Drawing from Charles Morris III (2006) and Daniel Marshall et al. (2014; 2015), we define a queer archive as an evasive and fluctuant reality, challenging stable notions of gender and sexuality and as a performative device capable of generating new understandings of such notions. An element, which we deem fundamental in producing this queer mobilization, is that of queer temporality. With queer temporality we mean, on the one hand – following Halberstam (2005) – a temporality that troubles heterosexual, reproductive, cis-gender, and also, we would add, homo-normative scripts and timelines, and, on the other hand, a temporality that challenges the linearity of “progress,” following from Halberstam (2005) and Elizabeth Freeman (2010). This specific notion of queer temporality which would challenge a specific and problematic idea of linearity, was not only an important aspect which emerged from the life

narratives of the drag kings who participated in our project, but also an idea which guided us in our making of the archive *Il re nudo*.

In the following sections we will therefore explore how queer temporality works in queering our affective archive; an archive that hosts the queer temporalities that characterize drag king narratives and lives and which also produces, or holds the potential of queering, temporality by opening the way to queer futures.

### **Drag Kinging in the Italian Scenario**

*Il re nudo*, as stated above, is a book but also an archive, in Halberstam's (2005) sense, of photos and texts documenting the drag king phenomenon, which has appeared in Italy in the last twenty years. Drag kings, as in the definition given by Del LaGrace Volcano (Volcano and Halberstam 1999, 16), are "anyone (regardless of gender) who consciously makes a performance out of masculinity." These intentional, theatrical, and self-reflective performances not only contribute to unmask the way in which gender works, its mechanisms and operations, but also unveil the work of masculinity, which builds its naturalness on the invisibility of its operations. Thus, drag kings expose the invisible privilege of masculinity, and, like the child from H. C. Andersen's fairytale, they cry out loud: "The King is naked!" What emerged from the texts and photos that we received from the participants of the project was a rich and complex Italian drag king scene, where drag kinging is practiced not only (and not predominantly) "on stage," but also, and especially, in the frame of DIY workshops and, occasionally, in everyday life. While some scholars have addressed the queer micropolitics of drag kinging through the analysis of drag king workshops (Bourcier 2006; Preciado 2008; Greco 2012; Alessandrin 2014), most Anglo-American literature, with some exceptions, focuses on drag king on stage performances (see, for instance, Volcano and Halberstam 1999; Troka et al. 2002). The Italian scenario, instead, invites us to take the focus away from stage and to look at the multiplicity of drag king practices.

"Traditionally" the emergence of drag kinging in Italy is traced back to Milan in the 1990s (Volcano and Halberstam 1999) and Turin, where

the “first” drag king performances where held. Of course, this is just one version of the story. In fact the genealogy of drag kinging in Italy might have many points of departure, including – for instance – the *en travesty*, direct actions organized by the Nemesiache, a prominent feminist group in the 1970s.<sup>1</sup> A visible interest in drag kinging was spurred on in Italy mainly after some drag king workshops held by prominent figures on the international drag and queer scene. Most notably, interest in drag kinging spread after a workshop held by Paul Preciado in the framework of a lesbian festival in Prato in 2005<sup>2</sup> and a presentation of Halberstam’s work at the International House of Women in Rome in 2006. Some participants in these and other international “events” in the following years gave birth to drag king troupes such as the Butterfly Kings in Rome and the Barbís in Turin in 2006; the Eyes Wild Drag and the Kings of Rome in 2007. The Drag King contest in Rome in 2008, organized by the Kings of Rome, was a moment of visibility that saw the presence of the popular drag king performer Diane Torr touring Italy and holding drag king workshops. According to *one* of the multiple genealogies of drag kinging (Halberstam 1998; Bourcier 2006; Preciado 2008), Torr might be considered, – together with Johnny Science – one of the “fathers” of the “drag king workshop” (Torr and Bottoms 2010), as developed in the USA in the late 1980s and 1990s. Torr is in fact famous for giving birth to a popular drag king workshop called “Man for a Day.” The format of Torr’s workshops, however, was criticized by Halberstam (1998) for addressing heterosexual women and for associating unproblematically masculinity to cis-men and not moving beyond the mimesis of masculinity. Halberstam (1998) instead inserts drag kinging within the broader phenomenon of “female masculinities,” an umbrella term that refers to all forms of masculinities produced by bodies assigned female at birth, and claims that dominant masculinity reproduces female masculinity as a bad copy. On another note, Preciado (2008) sees drag king workshops as privileged spaces for working collectively on the technologies of gender and submitting them to an intentional process of critical and revolutionary deconstruction and reconstruction; in this sense, in Preciado’s view, these workshops hold a strong political potential.

The political potential of drag king workshops is probably what has catalyzed the proliferation of those laboratories all over Italy in the last decade or so. Organized by drag troupes and/or DIY/DIT groups, these workshops have been held mainly in self-managed and/or occupied political spaces – often in the framework of LGBT and queer events – in all the major Italian cities, such as Bologna, Catania, Florence, Milan, Padua, Pisa, Rho, Rome, Turin, Trento, and Sassari.

The Italian drag king phenomenon, which, as already stated, finds its expression in performances and workshops and in everyday situations (going out in drag with friends to parties, events et cetera) draws from all sorts of references to the above figures, and we find performances/workshops that aim, on the one hand, either to entertain, or to problematize gender constructions, and, on the other hand, either to create plausible (passing) masculinities or to destabilize the readability of the gender of the subject (the so called genderfucking performances).

In this multifaceted scenario what emerged from the texts and pictures that we received for inclusion in *Il re nudo*, from some interviews and from our direct experience of the “drag king scene,” was an understanding of drag kinging as a political tool to contrast with the rigidity of gender binary and to destabilize and demolish the category of the true, “biological” men and the centrality of masculinity (white masculinity) as a synonym of the cultural subject.

## **Queer Archives and Queer Temporality**

### **Queer Archives**

Works on queer archives have focused, according to Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes (2012), mainly on the notion of recovering painful histories of LGBT people to render their lives and struggles visible. Scholars who have written about these painful stories include, for example, Ann Cvetkovich (2003) who, in *Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, focuses on the importance of the archive as a way of giving voice to the traumatic experiences of many lesbians. However, with the *Il re nudo*, rather than just focusing on giving visibility to the undocumented lives and practices of LGBTQI\* people, in the

specific case of Italian drag kings, we wanted to work on how to make a queer archive able to reflect the queer practices which it was hosting. According to Marshall et al. (2014, 2) in their introduction of one of two recent special issues of *Radical History Review* on the notion of queer archives, “queer archives are a space where one collects or cobbles together historical understandings of sexuality and gender through an appraisal of presences and absences.” According to Marshall et al. (2014, 1), queer archives are “evasive and dynamic,” and the idea of evasiveness comes out of years of efforts by historians researching LGBT lives to find lost queer things. The queerness of the LGBT archive according to scholarly work on the archive has to do with the fact that archival knowledge in general is made up of exclusions (Marshall et al. 2014) and delimitations, more so when the topic of this knowledge revolves around non-normative genders and sexualities. Starting then from an idea of presences and absences, we wanted to focus on how to build an archive trying to reproduce in its form and shape the “queerness” of its drag king participants, that is the challenge they pose to both heteronormative and homonormative temporalities in relation to ideas of gender and sexuality.

The idea that guided us in the creation of such an archive can be found in what Morris III (2006, 147–8),<sup>4</sup> calls the “queer movement.” This has to do with the “mobilization and circulation of meanings that trouble sexual normalcy and its discriminations” (Morris III 2006, 147–8). According to Morris III, queer archives are powerful sites of knowledge construction, which is not meant to be static but in a restless flux. Archives should then be seen as organisms instead of stable depositories. According to Marshall et al. (2015, 1) in their introduction of another of two recent special issues of *Radical History Review* on queer archives, archives are slippery as they “negotiate the decomposition and recomposition of knowledge material” and although they are representing life, “this life is always reconstituted.” The contingency and dynamic nature of archives make them act performatively as they “perform human beings, [and] structure and give form to our thoughts and ideas” (Borggreen and Gade 2009, 10). Although archives and performances have been considered as being opposites, with archives representing stabil-

ity and performances representing the ephemeral, in recent years this clear-cut definition has been challenged by various studies. Archives act performatively in the speech act theory sense of producing an action, as they invite the “archived” and the readership to be involved in the making of the archive, in the same way that those who assemble it. Halberstam (2005), for example, notes that the creation of queer archives is not simply a project just for scholars and academics, but also for a wide array of cultural producers and for those actively involved in the production and dissemination of information. Archives are thus collective makings that put in motion mutable chains of connections that break the idea of a static and stable meaning.

A fundamental element of any queer archive is thus, for us, their performative aspect, which was connected to the idea of desires and affects collectively produced. As Marshall et al. (2015, 8) state, “by foregrounding, carrying, or conveying people’s gendered, desiring bodies, queer archival projects pulse, as bodies do. They cruise and seduce and are caressed and taken.” According to Heike Roms (2013), doing archival work is an act of caring, and intimate tracing. This alludes to the way in which the bodies and the desires of others and us come to be archived and to the notion of desire and affect that characterize archival practices in general. Conceptualizing the archive as a site of feeling and desire led us to find similarities between our idea of the archive and the notion of erotohistoriography by Freeman (2010). According to Freeman (2010, 96), erotohistoriography is a way of encountering the past through the body and desires since “it sees historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations.” As Susan Stryker (quoted in Arondekar et al. 2015) states about Cvetkovich’s (2003) work on queer archives, the acquisition of new knowledge passes through bodily practices. This specific idea, we believe, might be useful for interpreting some of the stories featured in our book in the framework of a discussion of queer temporality, which will be developed in the next section. To summarize, building a queer archive meant for us focusing on the dynamic and performative nature of the archive as an ongoing collective construction mobilized by desires and affects.

### **Queer Temporality**

Queer temporality was mentioned at the beginning of this article in relation to Halberstam's (2005) work. The idea we borrowed from Halberstam was that our LGBTQI\* archive had the potential of queering temporality as it could provide timeline scripts deviating from those specific models of temporality linked to heteronormative notions of family, reproduction, and longevity and thus also from a certain idea of time related to progress, that is "progression within adulthood from adolescence, to marriage, to reproduction, to death" (Halberstam 2005, 84). This idea of progression stems from capitalistic and linear ideas of accumulation, which do not favor waste and delays. A queer time in Halberstam's (2005) view should be one that contemplates ruptures, repetitions, and anomalies. This idea is shared by scholars such as Freeman (2010, 3) with her introduction of a concept such as "chrononormativity," that is "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity." Freeman (2010, xiii) not only criticizes capitalistic and heteronormative time, but also the temporality subsumed by most of the scholarly work on queer theory which has privileged the avant-garde, a certain idea of being always ahead of time, discarding the pleasure of turning "backwards to prior moments, forward to embarrassing utopias." In order to describe the queer potential of these backwards movements in time, Freeman (2010, 62) uses the concept of "temporal drag," which she defines as "retrogression, delay, the pull of the past into the present." Freeman invites us to look at queer temporality as that element that calls into question the idea of time and history in drag performances. Drag here refers to a "productive obstacle to progress, a useful distorting pull backward and a necessary pressure on the present tense" (Freeman 2010, 64). Freeman, as mentioned above, introduces another interesting concept in relation to queer temporality, the aforementioned erotohistoriography. The concept refers to the pleasurable encounter with the past by historiographers, whose perception of the past is acquired through their bodies. The past in this case is not a fully restored past, but a treatment of the present as hybridized by the past. Although this concept refers to a specific context, that of historiography, it can be useful, we argue,

along with the concept of temporal drag, to describe some drag kings' metaphorical embodied journeys backward in time, and their desires and affective bonds with drag kinging already mentioned, but also the journeys forward that our archive invokes.

The notion of queer temporality illustrated so far has the potential of queering the archive as it can queer consolidated ideas of present and past, presence and absence, terms that have been found in most of the literature on queer archives. Thus, queer archives – which hold records of lives and experiences that are often made invisible by homo- and transphobia – can, thanks also to the performative aspect of the archive, constitute mediums for reworking the past and producing collective knowledge, which might disrupt the linearity of heteronormative futures, as the next section will try to demonstrate.

### **Queering Temporality in *Il re nudo***

As made clear by the last paragraph, queer archives are potential sites for the production of queer temporalities and vice versa. In assembling the *Il re nudo* we tried to use a methodology that would enhance the performative potential of this archive by seeking to “queer” the linearity of the book format, as we will detail in the following paragraphs. However, the methodology we followed in making the drag king archive *Il re nudo* is not only a result of this intention, but also a reflection of the queer temporal entanglements that characterize the narratives (and the lives) of the drag kings who participated in our project. It is thus important to analyze the multiple ways in which various temporalities unfold in this project in their conjunction to each other, in order to unlock the queering potential of the performative archiving practice.

### **Looking Backward: Queering the Past**

According to a familiar neo-liberal and homonormative narrative of progression, in both LGBTQI\* individuals' life timelines and in LGBTQI\* history in general, the past embodies the time of heteronormative oppression and the closet, while the present – and even more so the future – represents the queer time of freedom, personal realization, and

achievement. This is, for example, confirmed in studies such as Anne-Marie Fortier (2001; 2003) and Andrew Gorman-Murray (2008) who, while commenting on scholarly work about the coming out, often find a strong depiction (one that, however, they strive to challenge) of home as the site of the heterosexual family. Interestingly enough, though, many of the kings who participated in the book, while narrating their experience of drag kinging, look at the past – at their childhood or adolescence – as a playful site of queerness that informs their present experience of drag kinging. Going back home is not going back to an original moment from which a linear narrative of progression unfolds, but an opportunity to complicate the picture of the past, to queer it. For instance, for many drag kings the first approach to drag kinging meant to regain the emotions of their first “drag experiments” in their childhood or adolescence. This is the case in the intimate recollection of the first drag king experience of drag king Antonella D’Annibale, aka Walter Ego:

The first time that I did drag, I was 10 years old. It was a Sunday afternoon in 1974 and I was supposed to join my friends dressed *a festa* [in a Sunday dress] as usual. I was determined as a bull, I had struggled a lot at home to make my parents buy me a pair of men’s loafers. I dressed in front of the mirror following a slow ritual. I looked like John Wayne on his wedding day: brown corduroy pants with square pockets, lamb wool waistcoat [...]. I looked at myself in the mirror with profound admiration. A sensation I can’t define. I did not look at all the person my parents said I was. I went out in the yard with my fists in my pockets so that the zipper curled and formed a swollen right there. I did not need anything else. I was a tough guy.<sup>5</sup> (Baldo et al. 2014, 33)

Antonella D’Annibale/Walter Ego’s biographical narrative might sound a rather conventional one, a “typical” “coming out-narrative,” that tends to recollect past experiences – typically childhood experiences – in order to sustain and “explain” the narrator’s subjective position in the present. In this regard, Antonella D’Annibale/Walter Ego’s narrative seems to produce a linear, rather than a queer/messy narrative by constructing

past experiences as foundational in relation to the present. Nonetheless, at the end of the timeline traced by the narrator's text, there is not a stable subject position, but rather an ever-evolving, experimental set of practices as Antonella D'Annibale/Walter Ego describes her experience with drag kinging.

Additionally, this drag king's narrative calls into question dominant accounts of the subject position from childhood to adulthood: according to these accounts gender variance in childhood should evolve in either the achievement of a "mature" femininity – lesbian or straight – (Halberstam 1998) or, we would add, in the acquisition of stable male identity. In Antonella D'Annibale/Walter Ego's account, on the contrary, female masculinity – drag masculinity – persists, it is not "just a phase" or an anachronistic way of expressing gender and sexuality.

Other kings who have participated in the book also link their experience with drag kinging in the present to their childhood. Many of the texts collected in the book refer to drag kinging as a way of reconnecting the present with the past. Elena aka Jack Russell's says: "First of all (drag kinging) is a game. It feels like I have gone back to when I was a child." (Baldo et al. 2014, 104)

In Elena/Jack Russell's narrative, drag kinging represents a metaphorical return to childhood as a playful and pleasurable place.

In other kings' narratives, not only childhood is evoked as a site of queerness, but also the kings pay tribute to men of their own family of origin, such as grandfathers, uncles et cetera. Desire becomes an interesting term as it is often inserted into narratives of remembrance of the childhood or adolescent desire for the masculine aspect of oneself, which drag kings reactivate. Drag king C@l in *Il re nudo*, for example, describes their experience as follows:<sup>6</sup>

For me becoming queer has meant going back to my childhood. I have built my queerness through the images of myself as a child, especially those photos that portray me in my childhood dressed as a "tomboy" and as a "little girl." The little "tomboy" is happy and cheerful, while as a little girl I have a sad expression, as I felt on me all the weight of the

social rules connected to normative femininity! Fortunately, I grew up in a family that allowed me to experiment with cloths and gender since I was very little. In some of my pictures as a child I think I am very similar to C@l. (Baldo et al. 2014, 104)

Antonella D'Annibale/Walter Ego and C@l's narratives, as well as those of other drag kings who talk about their experiences as journeys back to their past and childhood, interrupt and reverse a linear progression of time that sees a progression from a repressive/repressed past to a liberated/liberal present. They go back to and interpret childhood as a cheerful and queer time. To return to C@l's words:

In between lies the image of my grandfather. I inherited the body of my grandmother and of my grandfather. My grandfather represented the lightness (despite he being fat), he represented the freedom. Becoming queer means for me returning to family in order to construct new temporalities and new narrations of myself, to read my history differently. (Baldo et al. 2014, 104)

The "lightness" mentioned by C@l and represented by their grandfather is also the lightness that C@l experiences about their body once they learn to love their fatness, as a result of prolonged contacts with the gay bear community, as they explains:

For me becoming a bear in a drag king workshop has signified the possibility of constructing a masculinity through an exercise of lightness and subtraction of weight, a sort of path toward grace. "Being a man" took me toward queerness and lightness [...]. Through the bodies of the bears, I have learned to love and celebrate the fatness and freakiness of non-compliant bodies. (Baldo et al. 2014, 103)

The return to childhood, to the past, is thus lived in the present through a different understanding of the body. We can interpret this by drawing, as previously stated, on the notion of temporal drag by Freeman (2010,

62), “the pull of the past onto the present,” that temporal surplus, excess that troubles gender binarity. C@l disseminates their grandfather’s body into their own: the body is the one they inherit from their grandfather and yet this body is also the body of C@l’s bear friends. This results in queering the past home, in ascribing queerness and lightness to the body of that grandfather, which resembles the queer bodies of the gay bear scenes. C@l drags the past into the present by queering both past and present and does so by also inscribing into their body the love for the grandfather’s body. This can invoke the notion of erotohistoriography as illustrated above, although in this case we are using a theory that decontextualize it from the specific field that Freeman had imagined for it. And yet, in C@l’s narration the body is perceived as a method for acquiring knowledge about the past and the present. Freeman (2010, 95) states: “Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present as hybrid.” This hybridity is the result of the inscription of a bear body and bear body politics into memories of C@l’s grandfather’s body. To read this narrative we could also refer to Halberstam (2007, 182), according to whom queer temporality is to feel strange within the timeline ascribed to you in childhood, as expressed by C@l.

Drag kinging also functions as a “journey back home” for other kings. Leandr\* Monachino aka Gustavo Lagnokka aka IlludShone’s description of their first experience with drag kinging sounds like a homage to their grandfather:

The first time I saw myself in the mirror, with my grandfather’s tie [...], the first time that I buttoned the shirt in the same way my grandfather used to do, the first time I saw myself with a beard [...]. In that moment something had changed. In that moment I looked into the person I was and I did not despised that image as I used to do before. For the first time, I felt desirable. (Baldo et al. 2014, 78)

Both for Leandr\* Monachino/Gustavo Lagnokka/IlludShone and C@l, the invocation of childhood memories and the homage paid to their

grandfathers' masculine figures produce a resignification in positive terms of their previously despised body. In Freeman's words (2010), the return to the past by the drag kings thus becomes a site of pleasure and eroticism. Drag kinging becomes an access key to the desire for a rediscovered body, a desire that bears traces of the past. Thus, according to Freeman, drag kinging is dealing with affective fragments of personal history. That is evident in the case of C@l's text, which describes a journey to self-love that takes place through the operation of overlapping their grandfather's and their bear friends' "fat bodies": this operation creates a temporal circuit in which a resignified past comes to illuminate the present differently. Their love for their body, which passes through past and present imaginaries, exemplifies Freeman's (2010, 71) notion of "repertoire," "the reincarnation of the lost past in the present, passing it on with a difference."

As demonstrated, in some of the texts collected in the book, drag kinging is represented as something that brings together past and present, and queers them. On the other hand, in other texts, drag kinging represents a practice that opens up to change and queers the course of kings' lives, be it their personal or artistic lives. Not surprisingly, *Il re nudo* testifies to the fact that drag king practices have represented for many kings a "device" that has facilitated a journey of exploration of gender. Most of the drag king personas, represented in the book, have evolved overtime and with them their names have changed. While putting together texts and photos for the drag king book, we were not only informed of the changes in the personal lives of the people who participated in the book, but also of the fact that the drag king journey embraced by the kings who took part in the project had ended, and were considered by the participants themselves a thing of the past.

For instance, for Massimo Tiberio, whose photo and text are included in the book, drag kinging has constituted an illuminating moment and has opened the door for his trans journey. At the moment of writing his personal story for the *Il re nudo* book, Massimo Tiberio had quit drag king shows because, in his words, he was "a full time drag king" (Baldo et al. 2014, 41). Massimo Tiberio, though, does not exclude "going back" to drag shows while he is on hormones. In Massimo Tiberio's narrative,

drag kinging has represented an important moment in his trans pathway, but, interestingly, it is not simplistically represented as just a “step” toward a more “stable” and “mature” form of masculinity, as the narrator does not exclude practicing drag kinging again on stage in the future. In this sense, Massimo Tiberio’s narrative troubles the supposed linearity of a progression from a drag masculinity to a trans masculinity, whereas the second should overtake, substitute and “complete” the first.

For other kings who have participated in the book, drag kinging has represented a valid tool for experimenting with the mechanisms of gender construction, and has paved the way to a queer present and future. For instance for Leandr\* Monachino/Gustavo LaGnokka/IlludShone mentioned above, whose way of referring to themselves in the book recalls the temporality of their journey as a person and as a performer, drag kinging has represented a catalyst for a personal and artistic research on gender. IlludShone was a relatively new identification at the time when we were building the archive and was the outcome of a journey that had seen Gustavo moving away from drag kinging and experimenting with drag queering. In the words of IlluShone:

My character fluctuated then as it fluctuates now, maybe because I was never able to give a proper definition to genders. I perceive them inside me as a unique flux, with colder and warmer streams, which are constantly running and mixing to each other. I owe Gustavo the discovery, the revolution, the freedom. Without Gustavo, I could never be what I am now: Illud when I am afar, Istud<sup>7</sup> when I am close by. (Baldo et al. 2014, 113)

Gustavo represents a moment in their personal and artistic journey, which is informed by the time they spent with drag queens. IlludShone is thus the product of these connections and journeys, and comes to life after a long period in which they had not done any kind of performance.

Similarly, for the drag troupe the Eyes Wild Drag, drag kinging has represented a catalyst for an eclectic artistic investigation on the deconstruction of gender binarism that relies not only on the work on masculinity through drag kinging, but also on the work on femininity through

“faux-queening” (performances of femininity which adopt the style of assigned at birth male drag queens) or “F-to-F” (female-to-femme) transformations (experimented both on stage and in workshops).

The texts of the participants of *Il re nudo* thus often talk of the pastness of drag kinging, look backward at it, almost in an anachronistic way, but also recount it as a fundamental moment of gender expansion, which has contributed to other, following and meaningful experiences in their lives, and which might be still productive in other forms. The productive aspect of drag kinging might then be related to its occurrence, in disguised form, in the present, but also to its promise of a sort of futurity to follow, on which the next section will elaborate.

### **Looking Forward: Drag King Archive and Performing Future**

As we have shown in the previous paragraph, the drag king stories that we collected to form the book/archive *Il re nudo*, touch upon the queerness of drag king temporality. On the one hand, we see drag kings looking backward at their childhood embodied into their present; on the other we see drag kinging as a practice characterized by a complex temporality, a phenomenon in constant evolution, whose past and present is difficult to pin down and which might be perceived as a leftover, but still productive, trace.

In making the archive we wanted thus to reflect this temporal queerness and stratification so we did not follow a temporal linearity in the development of the topics of the book. *Il re nudo* does not trace the history of drag kinging in Italy, but rather proposes some macro topics in the analysis of the phenomenon and avoids to propose them in a linear progression so that the readers can choose to follow their own pathway through the book/archive. In the introduction, readers are invited to start reading wherever they feel comfortable, and to go back and forth between the various parts of the book and the various texts and pictures, as they like. The readers are not only warned about the non-linear temporality of their act of reading, but the book offers examples of this non-linearity as often the photos sent from one drag king are disjointed from the texts sent from the same king and positioned close to the text

of another king, even if texts and photos from the same drag king can still be matched together thanks to their captions. Thus, photos and texts from different drag kings are connected to create new bonds.

Such dislocation points to the multiple readings that photos and texts have the potential to produce, and to the fact that drag kinging is a collective enterprise, where meanings, ideas, and forms of subversions are created cooperatively. At the same time, this dislocation points to the cross-sectionality of concepts and ideas included in the book. Cross-sectionality and multiple readings are justified by the presence of common themes, which cut across individuals and groups, but also by the presence of non-normative temporalities with their blurred separation between past, present, and future. Our archival practice thus wanted to explore the ways in which these temporalities are part of a constantly shifting dialogue, and thus refused singular narratives, opting “for messy and tangled temporalities, never striving for coherence” to borrow the words of Laine Zisman Newman (2015, 24) when discussing archives based on performances. What we should expect from queer archives, Tavia Nyong’o (quoted in Arondekar et al. 2015) says, is an estrangement of ourselves that we can call queer. We therefore resisted the idea of making an archive for salvage and recuperation purposes (although an aspect of this is certainly present) and recurred to mismatching and defamiliarization, to open up as much as possible a space, which could enable readers to move around and be moved, create their own narratives and be inspired.

In a sense we operated by conceptualizing the archive, in the words of Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade (2013, 25–6), as a “self-reflective medium that intervenes in and challenges its own ontology.” Eventually, our methodology was guided by the idea of the performative potential of the archive, as mentioned earlier, with its own queer temporality. Our aim was to avoid isolating the past from the present, given that many drag king stories had pointed in this direction. As stated by Joey Orr (2012, 191) “we only know the past by way of confronting its residue in the present.” We also wanted to acknowledge the ways in which the past is constantly changing and involved in the reconstruction of the future.

Conceiving the archive as performative is indeed recognizing its role of intervention in the present and prefiguration of the future. According to Jacques Derrida (1995, 36), “the archive is a question of the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, of a promise and a responsibility for tomorrow.”

In order to understand how the performativity of the archive might queer temporalities, not only by reimagining and “queering” the past but also by paving the way to non-heteronormative and non-cis-normative futures, we need first to recall two important aspects of drag king archives and other queer archives previously mentioned. The first is that our archive was a collaborative project between three of us, the “editors,” who had experimented with drag kinging ourselves, and an array of people who had archived their own experience of drag kinging by sending pictures and texts to us to be included in the book/archive. As Halberstam (2005, 161) states, “we need to rethink the relation between theorist and subcultural participant, recognizing that for many queers, the boundary between theorist and cultural producer might be slight or at least permeable.” This permeability should not only invest these two groups (participants versus people putting together the archive) but also the readers of the archive, its audience. Second, archival work is permeated by affect, as already discussed with reference to the literature on the subject.

If collaboration means that readers are asked to take part in making sense of the archive along with the other two groups, affect talks about the reasons and characteristics of this involvement. As Roms (2013, 48) states, we “may reconceive of the archive as a collaborative effort of caring,” involving “archivists, family members, artists, and audiences too.” Affect, then, is not only limited to the affective involvement with drag kinging by the participants of the drag king book, but also with the involvement with the archive by the co-editors. Putting together this project was an affective labor as it reactivated our past emotions around drag kinging and enmeshed them with the emotions of the other people, who participated in the creation of the book. These affective connections were also those created by virtually putting different groups and

individuals side by side in the pages of the book, or by attaching photos of kings with texts written by other kings. The operation of assembling a drag king archive itself activated thus a form of “queer temporality,” since a personal affective archive (and one that deals with queer desires mainly) has the potential, as affirmed by Amelia Jones (2013), to throw into question particular ways in which performances and art work are historically remembered. We wanted to show then how the desires and affects discussed through the analysis of the drag king narratives above disrupt the idea of a linear chronology (as aforementioned, drawing on Halberstam 2005 and Freeman 2010), and offer new ways of remembering the past, as these desires and affects blur the canonical distinction between past, present, and future.

Enhancing the performative potential of queer archives was indeed our aim, and *Il re nudo* as a collective project produced a strong performative effect. Far from simply recovering and documenting past experiences, creating *Il re nudo*, assembling the material for the book, contributed to (re)activating desires and ideas around drag kinging. Some of the participants, who had never personally practiced drag kinging but had taken part in the project by virtue of their desire and interest for and affective bond with drag kinging, finally started practicing it once they came in contact with us, the co-editors, during the preparation of the book. Some who had not practiced drag kinging for years, rediscovered their passion for it, like Drag King Ivan il Terribile of the former group the Kings of Rome. Some enthusiastically organized drag king events along with the presentations of the book. One of the co-editors, Roger/Olivia, who had previously taken part in drag king workshops in Italy as a participant, co-constructed some DIY/DIT drag king workshops as a facilitator, often (but not always) in conjunction with the presentation of the book. Furthermore, some people after the presentation of the book at various events in Italy in the spring and summer of 2014 contacted us in search of contexts where to practice drag kinging. Thus, the book/archive has been intrinsically performative, as it was capable of producing new networks, new events and performances and – potentially – new queer futures. The performativ-

ity of the archive is revealed in its activation of new practices, in its doing something to its audience, an audience who, despite not having been originally conceived as part of the project, eventually becomes part of the project. Paul Clarke (2013) argues that the archive of past practices can be reused for innovation in new performances in order to keep on challenging the current state of affairs. All this talks to us about archives and ideas of futurity. According to Marco Pustianaz (2013, 469), “the archive can only ensure a past through an effect of posteriority,” while for Peter van der Meijden (2013), performing in the present, while destined to end up in an archive that speaks about the past, is an act that is mapping out the future.

Archives therefore produce promises of tomorrow. Queer archives might be necessary for queer lives in the present as well as for imagined futures since how we recall what has been will shape what can be. Archives, therefore, “have ceased to be an obligation binding us in perpetuity” and “have become instead a source of agency” (Pustianaz 2013, 468). This confirms the idea, mentioned at the beginning of this article, that the drag king book/archive is an evolving entity, subject to changes and continuous input, looking forward in the very moment that it looks backward, and bringing with it the promise of queering the future.

## **Conclusions**

This article has focused on the multiple ways in which queer temporalities participated in the making of the book/archive *Il re nudo* and were enhanced by it.

Assembling this queer archive, where by queer we meant an archive, which was both hosting queer story lines but was also perceived as a fluctuant entity, capable of challenging notions of normalcy around gender and sexuality, fostered a queer temporality, since queer archives, as demonstrated in the article, are useful performative devices for reworking queer past and marginal and invisible desires and practices, and producing collective knowledge that disrupts the linearity of heteronormative futures. In assembling *Il re nudo* we tried to enhance the performative

affective potential of the queer archival practice by using a methodology that would queer the linearity of the book and reflect the messiness and stratification of the temporality of the queer lives that inhabited it.

Some of the stories in the book talk about drag kinging as a journey back home, a journey of pastness, which complicates the present time. Other stories talk about drag king practices as a catalyst for queer futures. Drag kinging, for example, has represented for many of the people who took part in the project something that facilitated their queer journeys as people and/or as performers. For some, drag kinging is now only a thing of the past. For others drag kinging was a “not yet” possibility, something that they were interested in, but never had attempted. For everyone, drag kinging was a fundamental moment of personal gender awareness, which produced other meaningful life experiences. In assembling *Il re nudo* we thus tried to give an account of this temporal messiness and stratification by avoiding a temporal linearity in the development of topics and by inviting readers to create new connections and affective bonds in line with the idea of the archive as a collective affective enterprise.

The performativity of this queer archive was ultimately shown in the fact that it created affective bonds between participants and then between participants and “audiences” through book presentations and events that followed the book launch, and which contributed to generate new, and often unexpected, networks of events and possibilities. The queer temporality of the archive as an intimate project therefore opens up to the promise of disentangling heteronormative futures and enhancing new queer(er) worlds.

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## NOTES

1. [http://www.linamangiacapre.it/home\\_nemesiache.php](http://www.linamangiacapre.it/home_nemesiache.php). One of these actions is recalled in the documentary *Lina Mangiacapre: Artista del femminismo* (2015), directed by Nadia Pizzuti.
2. The festival was called *Outlook Tendenze Lesbiche*, and was held in Prato in the spring of 2005.
3. When referring to scholarly work on queer archives we use the acronym used by the scholars themselves (LGBT in this case), while when referring to queer archives in general we use the extended acronym LGBTQI\*.
4. This text is also available in Alexander and Rhodes (2012).
5. The translation of the excerpts, from Italian into English, is done by the authors of this article.
6. In this specific case, since C@I, in their text, uses both she/her/he/him/his as pronouns and adjectives, and the asterisk \*, we chose they/them/their, used in English as gender neutral pronoun/adjective, when describing or reporting C@I's words.
7. Here there is a reference to the Latin neuter demonstratives *illud* and *istud*, which both mean "that." However, *illud* means "that" as something which find itself afar from the speaker and the interlocutor, while *istud* means "that" as something away from the speaker but close to the interlocutor.

## SAMMANFATTNING

I artikeln diskuterar vi den speciella roll som queer temporalitet har i skapandet av *Il re nudo: Per un archivio drag king in Italia* [*Den nakna kungen: Ett dragkungsarkiv i Italien*], en bok vi är redaktörer för tillsammans med Rachele Borghi och som syftar till att bilda ett queert arkiv över italienska dragkungars livserfarenheter. Boken innehåller fotografier och texter som knyter an till bilderna, skrivna av olika italienska dragkungar, samt en teoretisk del av bokens redaktörer. I linje med J. Halberstam (2005) och Daniel Marshall m.fl. (2014; 2015) vill vi att boken *Il re nudo* skall vara ett queert arkiv. Avsikten är inte bara att samla material om dragkungars liv, utan också att vara en affektiv, rörlig och performativ ansats, ett ”skapande av ett kollektivt minne”, som Halberstam (2005, 170) uttrycker det. Det skall vara öppet för förändringar, ompositioneringar och ständigt nya bidrag. Queer temporalitet har en viktig roll i projektet i den mening att detta queera arkiv inte bara dokumenterar dragkungarnas berättelser och erfarenheter som rubbar heterosexuella, ciskönade och homonormativa ideal och tidslinjer, samt deras linjäritet. Genom sin performativa potential ger det också upphov till nya störningar i linjäriteten, vilket i sig har en potential för att bilda nya, queera framtider.

**Keywords:** drag king, queer temporality, queer archive, affective archive, queer performances