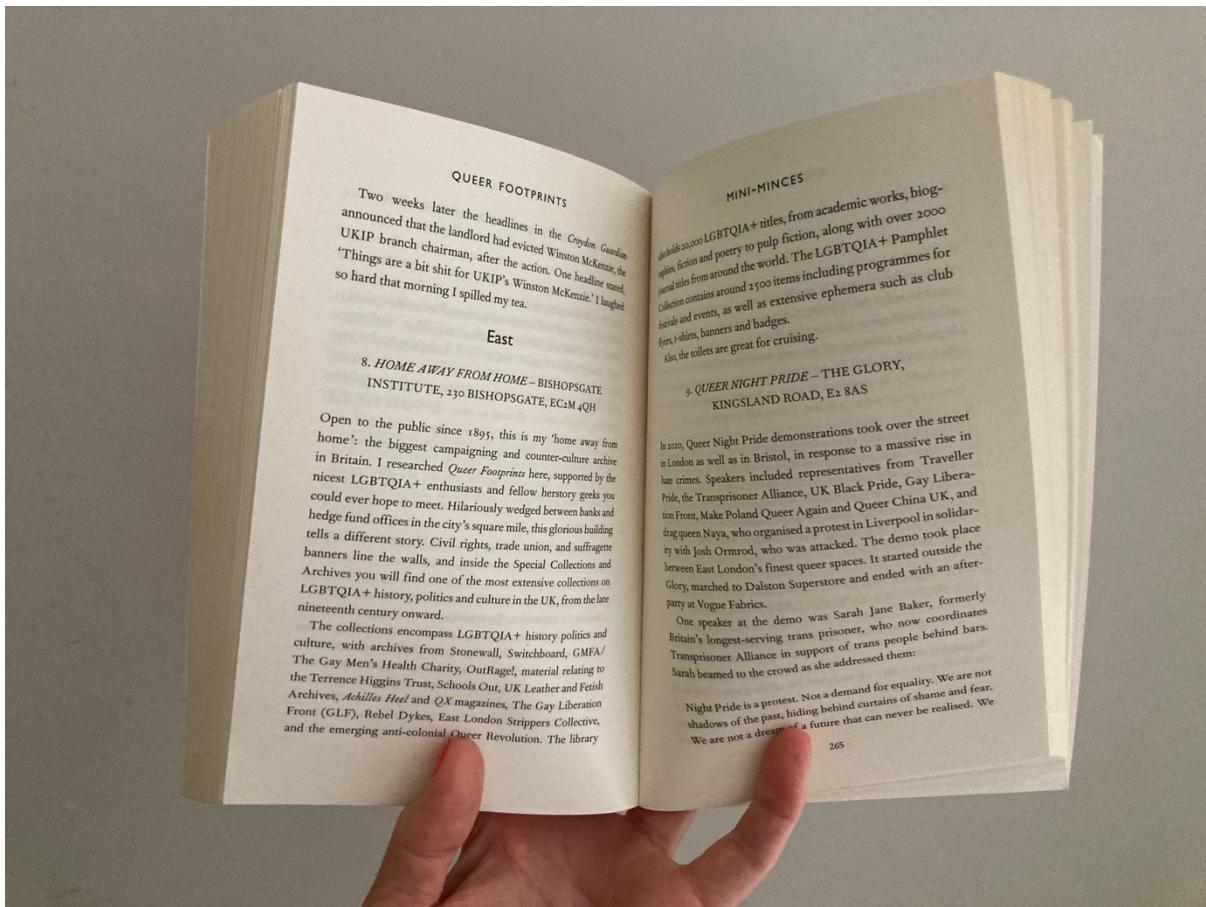


Lecture delivered by Elly Clarke at Dragging the Archive: Kings, Queens, and Things at Bishopsgate Institute, 8th June 2023 celebrating the donation of the Orlando Myxx archive to the Institute, which features 2400 + drag performances and queer art events filmed by Orlando in and around London since 2016 - including one of #Sergina.

Delivered half de-dragged after performing as #Sergina in the early parts of the evening, and after the screening of #Sergina in the archive: <https://youtu.be/vA4KPnFpLiM>

1. Read out Dan Glass: Queer Footprints: A guide to uncovering London's fierce history¹ on the Bishopsgate Institute and Library, p.264-5



... And what we're adding today is 2400 + drag performances ...

2. Elly Clarke's academicish lecturette

So yes... I'm thinking about drag as a means and a method of resisting what I am calling the *snapping to grid* caused by norms – that gender drag normally targets- templates, and check boxes. And social media of course, with hashtags, geo location, predictive algorithms and so on.

¹ Glass, Dan. 2023. *Queer Footprints: A Guide to Uncovering London's Fierce History*. Pluto Press. p.264-5

Intimately associated with ‘performance’ (of the professional as well as stage/d varieties), I understand drag as both a burden- a limiting factor, as in the ‘drag of an aeroplane wing’²- and a possibility. A means and a potential of resisting or pushing (back) against the restrictions of the things listed above. As a force, drag pulls in two directions at once: forwards, and back. It’s already a contradiction. Darg is about the pose as well as the code³; an intentional blurring in-and-out of focus, a code switching that doesn’t go all the way, or could, but doesn’t have to stay there; intentional il/legibility and un/resolution as the place we may choose to remain, whilst retaining the right to our fluidity, non-fixedness, our plurality, our permission to change, to be many, to be not always the same. Our right to enter a party without standing on a spot marked with an X as the door person (with y/our legal photo ID in hand) takes y/our picture with a webcam.

Intimately entwined with this drag/ging in our digitally connected age is the data that is discharged from the movements and preferences, actions and reactions – and purchases- of that (gendered, classed, raced) body. Data discharging from bodies that are going about their business becomes definitions; definitions become categories, categories turn to and bring about more data, which feeds back what it is said to have learned (about us). It is a feed-back loop.

But Drag/ging can intersect and disrupt this feed/ing back. What drag does to the performance and lived embodied experiences of gender, so can it do to other things too. Through drag/ging we can shift what may be told about us, how people perceive us. We can drag closer to who we think we might be. We can drag further from that which we may just need a break from. And, even if we don’t manage to break the trail of algorithms sniffing at our fingertips, at least we can have some fun along the way. Data – embodied by this 6TB of drag sitting before us, that we are shedding light on today, - is also an archive, and archives, data. Most archival material accumulated today manifests itself digitally rather than physically. In August of 2021, Instagram recorded an upload rate of 65,000 photos per minute to its platform.⁴ But- to archive something is also to put it away. When we no longer want to see those emails in our inbox, or those Instagram posts of times and people that no longer correspond with our presents, we can archive them. Preserved, (rather than deleted) but separated from today’s workload.

However, to separate it (in a building, in a separate folder on your email programme) is not to banish it from life. So long as people are still engaging with an archive, it is, as Stuart Hall put it, ‘living’.⁵ Jacques Derrida traced the etymology of the word archive to ancient Greece and found it to mean at once a place of “commencement” as well as the place ‘from which order is given’⁶ – that’s to say a beginning and an end simultaneously. [A tug (like drag) in two opposite directions at once.] In ancient Greece, placing items (usually documents) in an archive was to take them out of everyday circulation and store them (securely) at the home of the ‘superior magistrates or the archons’⁷ that only those

² ‘In aerodynamics, drag refers to forces that oppose the relative motion of an object through the air. Drag always opposes the motion of the object and, in an aircraft, is overcome by [thrust](#).’ SKYbrary, 2021. Drag. SKYbrary Aviation Safety. URL <https://skybrary.aero/articles/drag> (accessed 3.16.22).

³ I want your code, I want your pose – from ‘I want your data’ by #Sergina/ Elly Clarke: <https://soundcloud.com/sergina/airdrop-i-want-your-data-demo>

⁴ See Statista, Media Usage in an Internet Minute as of August 2021 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/195140/new-user-generated-content-uploaded-by-users-per-minute/>

⁵ Hall, S., 2001. Constituting an archive. Third Text 15, 89–92. p.91

⁶ Mansour, W., 2007. The Violence of the Archive. English Language Notes 45, 41–44. P.41

⁷ Ibid.

with the right credentials could access. The prestige and cultural and scholarly value of the objects was heightened by their separation from ordinary life.

But this the Orlando Myxx archive is living. It is of people who are – mostly, I hope, still alive nad will be alive, hopefully for a long time yet. It began in 2016, and will continue to be added to. Stuart Hall's insistence on the aliveness of an archive is more plural and democratic than either a beginning or an end, arguing that it is the very aliveness of an archive makes it impossible for it ever to be complete, because the present engagements with it means it is constantly reinterpreted:

'The very idea of a 'living archive' contradicts this fantasy of completeness. It cannot be complete because our present practice immediately adds to it, and our new interpretations inflect it differently. An archive may be largely about 'the past' but it is always 're-read' in the light of the present and the future: and in that reprise, as Walter Benjamin reminds us, it always flashes up before us as *a moment of danger*.'⁸

As with any research, an engagement with an archive is an engagement with oneself. What is gleaned and concluded differs with every encounter. Meaning is produced out of convergences (/Karan Barardian intra-actions and *spacetimematterings*⁹) between objects and narratives, fact and fantasy, memory and desire, the person coming into the archive and their responses - emotional, intuitive, and intellectual. As Andrew Renton and Kitty Scott wrote back in 1999 about a web-based archive about the forthcoming Bankside Tate in London, when the idea of an archive that was always available and divorced of its physical context (i.e. online) was still new, 'Archives are always remaking themselves. They are constituted not only by the materials contained within them, but by those who (re)turn to them. Nothing happens until then.'¹⁰ In this way, meaning is produced out of a kind of haphazard, subjective lottery of conclusions drawn from evidence and affects, memories and cross references alongside a mishmash of ever shifting chronologies: the time/s the materials came from, the time/s they are being looked at and the time/s that lie ahead- some of which has already been imagined into place/s by the researchers (who were t/here) and the archivists. An archive is about saving / preserving / gathering for the future, for when the present is the past and the future the present.¹¹

And here, in this building, in the company of the people who work here and the people who come in, along with their own perceptions, desires, perspectives and interests, meaning is created in a plural, unfixed, ever dragging and draggable way. And very much out of and for the communities they embrace.

In *Cruising Utopia*, Jose Esteban Muñoz describes how part of queer's agency and power lies precisely in its moving borders and its resistance to definition. Ever shifting, the slipperiness of the terms queer,

⁸ Hall, S., 2001. Constituting an archive. *Third Text* 15, 89–92. p.91-92

⁹ Barad, K., 2010. *Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-to-Come*. *Derrida Today* 3, 240–268.

¹⁰ Renton, A. & Scott, K., 1999. Browser: a second visit to the archive in Harding, A., John Hansard Gallery, TENT, R., 2002. Potential : ongoing archive. Amsterdam : Artimo in assoc. with Anna Harding and John Hansard Gallery, Amsterdam. p.61

¹¹ Franklin Furnace Archive is also alive because it is still alive as an organisation. It continues to offer grants and supports performance. New box files on artists and new fragments about any artist Franklin Furnace has ever worked with in the past are being added (to) continually and Goings On and Goings On for Artists continues to be sent out every Monday by Harley Spiller, as it was when I was there.

gender and sexuality have always been part of their seduction – and rawness. And crucially, a refusal to (come into) focus (or to snap to grid) can also be about hope and a radical imagining of something beyond the templates we were handed down: As Muñoz argues, ‘Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.’¹²

This idea of queer world-making echoes what Jack Halberstam suggests about the ability of queerness also to shift [/drag] time. How non-conforming individuals spend, use and occupy time ('queer time' rather than 'straight time') is '[p]art of what has made queerness compelling as a form of self-description [for] the way it has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space.'¹³

What is in this archive is evidence of this plurality, this world making, these alternative lives lived and being lived. And, by visiting this archive, by shedding light on it, by dragging in and out of the archive, by contributing to it, we keep it alive. Just as we prove that other ways of living in the world are possible. Despite all the templates that threaten to snap us (back) into grid.

Many thanks for listening. this was me on the edge of academic drag.

And now I think we have a break until 9.45. Grab a drink, check out the cruising loos and run your eyeballs over the spines of these incredible books.

See you in 20.

¹² Muñoz, J.E., 2009. *Cruising Utopia : The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, New York University Press. p.1

¹³ Halberstam, J., 2005. In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives. NYU Press.p.1-2