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Pierre Brasseur. Greco (Luca) – dans les coulisses du genre. *La fabrique du soi chez les Drags, Kings* –, Limoges, Lambert-Lucas, 2018. 176 p. Bibliogr. *Revue française de Science politique*, 2021, 71 (1), pp. 138-139. [\(10.3917/rfsp.711.0125\)](#)¹

In this book, Luca Greco conducts research on Drag Kings – a noteworthy contribution, as writing on this subject is rarely based on empirical fieldwork. He observed a Drag King workshop in Brussels over four years, from 2008 to 2013, focusing particularly on the backstage areas and the moments of preparation before a show. The study investigates the performativity of language in constructing a ‘masculine self’ in these workshops. The introduction’s title, ‘Language Is a Battlefield,’ underscores this focus.

In the first chapter, the author explores the definition of a Drag King: ‘a person generally assigned female at birth who constructs and performs masculinities using a repertoire of verbal (speech), gestural, postural, material (makeup, prosthetics, clothing), and bodily resources (like using hair to create a beard)’ (p. 29). This involves a performed, crafted, and staged masculinity. Historically, Drag King workshops can be traced back to the early 1990s in New York. The chapter also discusses the various terms used to describe Drag Kings, highlighting their ‘potentially infinite proliferation’ (p. 39). For instance, the term ‘cross-dressing’ is generally rejected by the Drag Kings surveyed, as it is too closely associated with heterosexual and erotic fetish connotations (p. 45).

Chapter 3 describes the structure and timing of Drag King workshops in Brussels, where participants range from 22 to 54 years old and often have connections to feminist and queer activism. The workshops are hybrid in format: sometimes the character is chosen well in advance, while at other times, the choice is made spontaneously during group sessions, which may include reading inspiring books (such as Donna Troka, Kathleen LeBesco, Jean Noble, *The Drag King Anthology*, Harrington Park Press, 2002) is often accompanied by music.

Chapter 4 discusses the ethnographic investigation itself – arguably introduced a bit late in the book’s overall structure. The author defends the use of video recordings, which, ‘if biases are carefully managed, allows direct access to semiosis’ (p. 88). The transcriptions of these recordings attempt to capture non-verbal cues, hesitations, changes in speech, rhythm, and gestures.

In chapters 5 and 6, Greco analyses the role of language in self-presentation, referring to a self that is both multifaceted and more complex than traditional binary opposites like male versus female. Beyond language, Drag Kings also transform bodies through hair (e.g. ‘It is the beard that makes the king,’ p. 141), voice modulation, DIY penis prosthetics, clothing, and makeup. Focusing on the backstage aspects allows for exploring lesser-known elements, such as the economy and recycling of hair, which is exchanged and showcased. Additionally, these workshops, through discussions and self and mutual work, ‘foster the emergence of a political consciousness confronted with the binary gender order’ (p. 142). The intriguing aspect is this work on gender, the transmission of rules, norms, and values of Drag. These rules seem both highly complex and remarkably flexible; there is not just one way to become and possibly remain a Drag King. Ultimately, the motivations for engaging in Drag are diverse: artistic creation, political and activist desires, and a wish to subvert norms.

Drag Kings appear to be both more complex and more politicised than their counterparts, the Drag Queens, as this book reveals they are not simply the male equivalent. Drag is experienced as a form of activism, artistic expression, and a way to engage with gender, though not everyone within the Drag space agrees on its meaning. It is regrettable that the book does not systematically investigate how involvement in Drag intersects with other forms of socialisation, especially political and activist ones, even though the material seems to exist: it is often mentioned in passing that a

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Drag King has studied gender or read an important book on queer theory. Social and professional trajectories could also have shed light on the observed variations in this self-crafting process.