

And Then Suddenly, It Was Simply Everywhere

Glitter, Visibility, and the Queer Research Percussion Group Zine Collection

ABSTRACT This article offers an artistic reflection on the Queer Percussion Research Group *Zine Collection* (2023) through the concept of shimmering as a queer political and positional affect across light and sound. With over a dozen contributions that consist of artist publications, pamphlets, and experimental scores, the *Zine Collection* was produced by folks “interested in the intersection of queerness and percussion in a variety of contexts.” While glitter scatters across contributions from inside the clear plastic folio, this writing recounts the impact and implications of glitter’s trace as it moves between surfaces, bodies, and skins. Rather than declaring glitter as inherently queer, this work considers the ways that glitter—and other glistening things—“blur the body,” as Michele White writes, and disrupts normative presentations of gender. Its reflective surfaces thus become entangled with the slippages between the masculine/feminine binary, shifting the legibility of the (gendered) surface that might allow viewers to see otherwise. Thinking with and alongside glitter’s shimmering properties allows for a reconceptualization of queer, which might enable further forms of conceptual movement and framing that extend its theoretical capacity. **KEYWORDS** artist publications, glitter, queer, shimmering, percussion research

to know glitter on a queer is not to dazzle but to
unsettle the foundation of this murderous culture
defiant weeds smashing up through cement

– CAConrad, from “Glitter in My Wounds” (2018)¹

After opening a light, Easter-egg pink bubble envelope, I pulled out a copy of the Queer Percussion Research Group’s *Zine Collection* (2023) (QPRGZC). The limited-edition collection of writings, scores, and artworks was collectively produced by a group of 14 queer percussionists and sound researchers who are “interested in the intersection of queerness and percussion in a variety of contexts.” The collection includes works by over a dozen artists and is edited and published by the percussionist Bill Solomon.² In line with some of my own recent work in queer sound, I was drawn to the *Zine Collection* as another form of critical creative research that I could think with. I was compelled to reflect on how the works included could be read as a cohesive collection with distinctly different approaches. As a result, I turned to the notion of shimmering as a queer political and positional affect enlivened across light and sound.

Resonance: The Journal of Sound and Culture, Vol. 4, Number 2, pp. 210–219. Electronic ISSN: 2688-0113
© 2023 by The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press’s Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/res.2023.4.2.210>

Assembled as a group of small zines, pamphlets, and other forms of printed matter, the edition of QPRGZC that I received was encased in a sparkling yellow transparent plastic folio. Scrolling through the group's Facebook page, I notice the contents in other editions are enclosed in differently colored envelopes and bound with other materials strategies, making the one in my hand distinct from the others. The edition number (in a run of 100) is scrawled on the bottom right-hand corner in black permanent marker consistent with other DIY publications and artworks that underscore their handmade quality apart from mass-produced materials. As I unlatched the white plastic clasp to remove the pieces from the folio, I was immediately covered in tiny silvery flakes of glitter. Protruding from a bright blue letter-sized envelope with a small green circular sticker, I located the culprit: the sticker that was intended to keep the glitter from escaping the envelope was caked in shiny particles, eliminating its utility as an adhesive. There was no escape from the glitter's attachment to my body. I ultimately resolved that I would forever be covered in glitter, reminiscent of disco balls that scattered light across the contours of sweating, shimmering bodies on a dance floor.

Parsing through the reflective writings assembled, I too—myself, my body—stuck on the dispersed array of shimmering surfaces. Insistent and difficult to remove, glitter's attachment to the body is partially reliant on the plastic substrate's static cling, a physical property inherent to the material where its presence marks a particular relation toward



FIGURE 1. The Queer Percussion Research Group *Zine Collection* folio laid over the pink bubble mailer it arrived in. Photo by the author.

queerness and performances of gender variance. Even the smallest speck of glitter can turn any surface into a shiny, shimmering, reflective body that refuses to be unseen.

Covering my skin, clothes, and hair, glitter's visibility on my body engages a nonnormative presentation and performance of my gender by making these markers unstable. Taking to Michele White's assertion that "glitter functions as a technology [that] produces women and femininity," I am struck by how glitter could immediately alter my gender presentation.³ I am no longer able to mask/masc my own cisgender presentation while covered in glitter, and I instead take on the material qualities that are, as Lorenzo Triburgo writes, "a representation of change itself—ever-elusive, perceived differently according to light" that "culminate in binaries coming undone" and "collapse into one another."⁴ This isn't to say that one's encounter with glitter is inherently queer, but rather to consider the ways that glitter (and other glistening things) "blur the body" and disrupt normative presentations of gender.⁵ Its reflective surface thus becomes entangled with the slippages between the masculine/feminine binary, shifting the legibility of the (gendered) surface that might allow viewers to see otherwise. No longer capable of being read along axes of singular gender markers, glitter shifts my gender presentation further toward an ambiguous, though not quite androgynous, territory.

The relationship of shimmering materials—and their adhesion—to queer bodies has been documented as early as the 1930s. The entertainer Gloria Swanson (née Winston)



FIGURE 2. Microscopic detail of a small mound of glitter used in the Queer Research Percussion Group *Zine Collection*. Notice how the glitter refracts light in different directions. Photo by the author.

hosted a popular cellar club in Harlem, where he⁶ donned “net and sequin evening gowns [that] were well-known, habitual and expected.”⁷ Across subsequent decades, glitter and sequins continued to flag bodies as queer. This relationship came to prominence following the emergence of drag shows in the 1950s, and is sustained today in the glitz and glamour of the popular global TV and entertainment franchise of RuPaul’s *Drag Race* (2009–present). Glitter’s impression upon the body thus becomes a “non-fixed gendered practice,” according to Jocelyne Bartram Scott—a kind of queer flagging that reflects a “learned (or re-learned) mode of relating” to other queer bodies.⁸

Adopting Rebecca Schneider’s conceptualization of “performance remains,” glitter also appears as a queer “residue” within “a network of body-to-body transmission of affect and enactment—evidence, across generations, of impact.”⁹ It is a performative relic that stays with and on queer bodies across time and space that distinguishes us from otherwise homonationalist subjects that can evade violence from the production of the nation-state. A way to highlight the optics of queerness, as “operative technology,” glitter’s adhesion marks the possibility of inevitable biopolitical regulation and management of queer bodies.¹⁰ When applied to queer bodies as adornment and cultural signifier, glitter’s shimmer on the percussive skein of embodied scholarship across the QPRGZC contributions illuminates the long-standing relationship between all things shimmery and queer. Because glitter (along with rhinestones, tinsel, crystals, sequins, and other glistening things) has been tethered to queer performance, its presence in, and on, the QPRGZC is that much more significant.

Glitter’s dispersal further signals a queering of the publication format as light rebounds in a myriad of directions across the zine’s contents. Rather than asserting distinct aesthetic, formal, or conceptual dimensions of the collection’s content, the assemblage of idiosyncratic zines refuses the singularity of an editorial hand. Instead, Solomon reflects on the publication’s structure in a printed conversation with Jen Torrence when he says, “What made sense to me as an editor was if someone wanted to write some compositions, create artwork, or whatever, and that felt to them like a document coming out of their research process, it can be included.”¹¹ Yet, beyond a “queering of the format” that is evident in this handling of zines in the collection, Solomon’s editorial decision to refuse a singular treatment of the contributions (by way of a singularly bound publication) highlights an ongoing tension within broader queer political identification and visibility. Noting “the contemporary mainstreaming of gay and lesbian identity—as a mass-mediated consumer lifestyle and embattled legal category,” David L. Eng, Jack Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz instead embrace queer as “a political metaphor without a fixed referent.”¹² In this light, and as a form of scholarly disidentification, the *Zine Collection* presents a myriad of intentionally diverse contributions in ways that best articulate the aesthetic and political visions of their authors.

II

I am drawn to the *Zine Collection*’s embrace of glitter as a queer signifier, shimmering across its numerous surfaces, and how this illuminates a political opposition to what has



FIGURE 3. The author's hand covered in glitter after removing the zine collection from the bubble mailer. Photo by the author.

otherwise been normalized under Gay™ Pride. Configuring glitter as queer, I notice how it operates in multiple roles and across metaphoric gestures, a conceptual and material slippage that mimics the artist Zach Blas's notion of the viral.¹³ The configuring refers to a level of political commitment rather than a form of identification, "to think the virus and the viral is to engage in their continuous states of flux, transformation, and movements toward and between as well as diversions away from one another."¹⁴ Transferring from the publications I handle to the surfaces that I touch, such as my notebook, refrigerator, and sweater, glitter's appearance everywhere becomes a subversive tactic that enlivens queerness as political positionality rather than one situated solely in identity. Covering each contribution, glitter thus becomes a material strategy that foregrounds an insistence on queer positionality and destabilizes any definitive or popularized homo-normative experience.

Entangled with glitter's spread, the collection's resounding assertion and use of *queer* further articulates David Getsy's conceptualization of the word as "tactically adjectival." As Getsy describes, queer "simultaneously *performs an infectious transmutation* and declares an oppositional stance" in which "its uses and contours shift in relation to the ways in which normativity is constantly and covertly reinstalled, redeployed, and defended [*italics my own*]."¹⁵ Queer functions here as a defiant moderator and oppositional reclamation of the word, a viral collective grouping that is always mutating, adapting, and shifting as it becomes increasingly difficult to contain.

As a mass-produced object, glitter's residual marking presents a tension between what it can do and what it can't, most famously initiated by Nick Espinosa's glitter bombing of Newt Gingrich in 2011. No longer prominent, the glitter bomb emerged amidst anti-queer rhetoric as a form of political protest that covered Gingrich with "a tangible reminder of an issue that won't go away."¹⁶ Shouting "Feel the rainbow, Newt!" while dumping a Cheez-It box filled with glitter, Espinosa's exclamation and political theater sought to envelop Gingrich and his supporters in a spectrum of refracted light that could animate political debates in favor of queer legislative action. Espinosa saw political potential in this spectacular eruption of glitter that could move anti-queer rhetoric on the congressional floor into the public sphere of mass media.

Glitter's multiplicity (both as a granular aggregate like rice,¹⁷ and as a cultural signifier for queerness) is similarly apparent in other materials used in the zine, such as metallic foil. In *How to Fold a Paper Crane* (2021), Matt LeVeque examines how the piece, written for them by the composer Mason Moy, embodies a form of "non-power." Quoting Suzanne Cusick's essay "On a Lesbian Relationship with Music," LeVeque describes how "non-power is equalized between performer and object" and creates relationships wherein "the interiorities of both parties are revealed and transformed by another." LeVeque is curious about how the work directs the performer to continually fold a piece of foil over the surface of a drum, with the goal of producing an origami crane. The score's written reflection enlivens several questions concerning power, sound, and choreography for the performer, as well as the reader.

As I hold the short eight-page, foil-wrapped, five-inch-square zine, I turn the pages only to realize I am also, in some way, *unfolding* a crane that was otherwise neatly folded: LeVeque's performance-as-publication provides a moment of folded, consumable thought that serves as proxy for Moy's composition. In the process of unfolding their writing, literally and metaphorically, I am drawn to how the folded crane operates on the surface of the (drum)skin. I imagine the complexity of resonant overtones that emerge from the crinkling sound of aluminum across lower reverberant sounds. And in what I presume is a sonically spectacular set of audible materials, ones that move sound across and through multiple surfaces, I am reminded of how shimmering glitter manipulates light in a similar way across the zine collection. Foil catches and disperses light across its surface, as sounds, revealed across spectra, emanate through activations of performance. LeVeque's role as a performer and reflective storyteller in turn reiterates how glitter carries significant metaphoric weight, and allows for a myriad of expressive material gestures.

In JC's project *Percussive Placefinding: Gender, Psychedelics, Community* (2022), slivered 8.5 × 3.5 inch sheets of printer paper are bound between two pieces of iridescent rainbow-illuminating cardstock. These sheets are held together by a yellow plastic comb binding, and are adorned with a set of dangling plastic beaded jewels. The discussion of finding safe, supportive, and open venues for queer trans artists contained within is imbued with an ethos of collectivity as the piece catches and refracts light. This value shapes their explicit advocacy for "DIY artistic spaces, designed specifically for the continued survival of marginalized artists" that would "necessitate the facilitation of mutual aid systems in which all community members willingly and intentionally support each

other directly.”¹⁸ Here, like LeVeque’s treatment of foil, the shimmer of luminous materials critically positions collectivity and the political possibility of a radically inclusive future through light caught within and extended onto other unexpected surfaces.

Jen Torrence and Bill Solomon’s two-part series of transcribed Zoom conversations offers yet a different articulation of glitter’s expanded capacities. Staple-bound, covered with a foil-taped edge, and adorned with an inch-wide band of rosy-teal sequins, the two discuss a range of topics, including the impetus for the QPRGZC project, concerns around how they might define or refine an approach toward queer research and/or queer percussion, as well as the infrastructures of oppression to which their work responds. Though titled “It Is as Messy as You Feared,” the discussions underline the vast assemblage of tensions reflected by glitter as it spreads across sites, bodies, and surfaces. In a poignant moment in their conversation, Jen shifts the conversation to ask, “Is there some kind of queer listening practice?” While Solomon doesn’t offer a concise answer, his reflective response resonates with glitter’s assemblage upon the body:

What does it mean to listen to multiple things, or layer them over each other, or break them apart, or change my listening approach? What does it mean to be a creative listener? Which, to me, feels natural. When I’m reading, I can only focus on one book at a time, but I’m always in the middle of multiple books. *It creates interesting cross relationships*—those books are now *in conversation with each other* because I’m reading them in the same period. [italics my own]¹⁹



FIGURE 4. Detailed image of contents from *Pushing Against Musical Homonormativity: Percussion as a Queer Tool of Resistance* by Jerry Pergolesi and Bill Solomon. Photo by the author.

I notice how light moves in disparate ways when I look at my glitter-covered hand. Assembled in small piles across the contours of my palm and in the crevices of my fingers, each speck of multilayered plastic refuses to lay flat, pushing light in wildly unpredictable directions. I sense how each granule lies on top of another, how together they break the light around them, and how each remains multiple in its shimmery shimmer. No two pieces of glitter point in the same direction. As I rotate my hands, I see luminous shards otherwise hidden at different angles previously unperceived. This simple gesture becomes a micro-performance that invites movement, which is to say that it invites me into a type of movement that renders me queer. Its assemblage allows for “interesting cross relationships,” as Torrence and Solomon discuss, to unfold and appear, and to be tethered to a queer sensibility and a politics of (gendered) play.

Glitter’s presence across the QPRGZC enables a queer political binding that frames the political relationships across contributions. Yet I am cautious about encapsulating glitter as an inherently queer material. Glitter, in itself, is not a queer object and I am not interested in defining it as such. To do so would inscribe glitter’s materiality as a fixed entity, one inescapable from (and incapable of) the very flexibility necessary to the political project embedded in queer movement-building and social critique. To trap glitter as a queer object would refute its capacity for other ways of thinking. Its spectral possibilities would be rendered opaque. Doing so denies glitter and its shimmering affect from touching other forms of critique and discourse, particularly in light of recent legislative actions that have banned glitter internationally due to ecological concerns. As journalist Jacey Fortin reports, glitter “makes up far less than 1 percent of the microplastics that pollute the environment,” but also “may catch our attention” over more problematic plastic packaging that is largely to blame for ecological pollution.²⁰ Should glitter remain solely defined as a queer object, where its materiality becomes a proxy for queer bodies, it falls prey to legacies of violent discourse that would seemingly wish to eradicate it altogether.²¹

While engaging with the QPRGZC contributions—reading and touching them, as they touch and read me—I am mindful of the wildly exponential increase in US-based legislation against trans and gender-variant people at this moment. In March 2023, nearly 400 anti-LGBTQ bills were introduced within state and federal congressional chambers. Several of these seek to outlaw drag performances and trans people’s access to lifesaving gender-affirming healthcare, and to eradicate protections for trans and queer youth within educational systems.²² Enfolded into what Eric A. Stanley considers to be “atmospheres of violence,” queer, trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people continue to confront legal and legislative systems that are in constant tension with representational social movements toward “equality,” which cannot ensure our actual safety.²³

Instead, I want to think with and alongside *shimmering* as a signifier for queerness that might enable further forms of conceptual movement and framing to extend its theoretical capacity. Anticipating illumination, the things that shimmer engage what Muñoz describes as a “kind of potentiality that is open, indeterminate, like the affective contours of hope itself.” These contours highlight “the site where nonfunctionality and total functionality

merge.” In their contribution *Thirty Thoughts from A Different Drummer*, Noah D. writes, “What I learned from percussion is how to hold many complex ideas in the body at once, and weave them into something strong and intricate and fluid.” In this piece, and across the *Zine Collection* as a whole, queerness is similarly enlivened by embodied movements and choreographies (rehearsed and otherwise) as they extend the traces of our bodies with light reflected across our skin. The assemblage of collective shimmers, distributed across multiple bodies, surfaces, skins, and times, continues to blur the necessity of identificatory politics. Instead it presents the opportunity—even as an ephemerality—to continue blurring and refracting what is otherwise envisioned as a stable, singular surface. Imagine the glittery flakes inside a superball mallet ricocheting across the surface of a floor tom as they become entangled with the movement of sound through the resonance of the wooden chamber. Unpredictable and hard to control, the specks encased in the buoyant polymer move light and sound that even cause the chrome plating of the rim to shimmer in tandem with the fast pulsation of erratic sound. Reverberating against the head, the rubbery surface of the mallet allows for movement and resonance in the sudden moments of touching of materials, sounding percussion that glimmers rather than sounds that sustain. ■

alejandro t. acierto is an artist, musician, and curator whose projects are informed by legacies of colonialism found within human relationships to technology and material cultures. Often taking shape within and across expanded forms of documentary, new media, creative scholarship, and sound, his works have been shown internationally at the Havana Biennial in Matanzas, Cuba; Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco); ISSUE (NYC); Radialsystem (Berlin); and MCA Chicago; among others. His published writings appear in *Parse Journal*, *Dilettante Army*, and *Journal for Asian Diasporic Cultures in the Americas*. He was an inaugural Artist in Residence for Critical Race Studies at Michigan State University, Core Faculty Fellow at Warren Wilson College in the MA for Critical Craft Studies, and is currently Assistant Professor of Interdisciplinary Arts and Performance at Arizona State University, New College, located on occupied territories of the Akimel O’odham and Pee Posh peoples.

NOTES

1. CAConrad, “Glitter in My Wounds,” *Poetry*, November 2018.
2. The zine includes contributions by Amadeus Julian Regucera, Andy Meyerson, Bent Duo, Bill Solomon, Caitlyn Cawley, JC, Jerry Pergolesi, Jennifer Torrence, Matt LeVeque, Myles McLean, Noah D., Sarah Hennies, and ToastMasx x Mascaroni. For more information about the publication, see <https://queerpercussionresearchgroup.bigcartel.com/>.
3. Michele White, “Never Cleaning Up: Cosmetic Femininity and the Remains of Glitter,” in *Producing Women: The Internet, Traditional Femininity, Queerness, and Creativity* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2015), 157.
4. Lorenzo Triburgo, “Shimmer Shimmer,” artist’s website, 2022, <http://www.lorenzotriburgo.com/shimmer-shimmer>.
5. White, “Never Cleaning Up,” 161.
6. Previous writings on Gloria Swanson, such as those by Richard Bruce Nugent from 1939, referred to Swanson with male pronouns and/or Swanson’s “real name” of Mr. Winston. In his description of Swanson, Nugent writes, “there were very few persons who had ever seen him in male attire at all,” suggesting that Swanson may not have preferred or used male pronouns at all. See Nugent, *Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance: Selections from the Work of Richard Bruce Nugent*, ed. Thomas Wirth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 221. George Chauncey’s historical account of gay New York also uses male pronouns and describes Swanson as “a female impersonator who had already won a clutch of prizes at Chicago’s drag balls,” further inscribing Swanson’s maleness in the historical record. See Chauncey, *Gay New York:*

Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940 (New York: Basic Books, 1994). While there is no other writing to suggest Swanson used other pronouns, it feels important to note, given Swanson’s typical appearance in women’s clothing, that Swanson may have identified with another gender, and though Swanson was understood to be a female impersonator at the time, that Swanson may not have been impersonating at all. Though Swanson’s gender seems much more fluid and ambiguous than as written, I am merely raising the point and not attempting to inscribe a different gender onto Swanson.

7. Nugent, *Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance*, 221.
8. Jocelyne Bartram Scott, “What Do Glitter, Pointe Shoes, & Plastic Drumsticks Have in Common? Using Femme Theory to Consider the Reclamation of Disciplinary Beauty/Body Practices,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 25, no. 1 (2021): 36–52.
9. Rebecca Schneider, “Performance Remains,” in *Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History*, ed. Amelia Jones and Adrian Heathfield (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2012), 137–50.
10. Jasbir K. Puar, “Tactics, Strategies, Logistics,” in *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), xvii–xxxvi.
11. Bill Solomon and Jen Torrence, “It Is as Messy as You Feared: Two Conversations about Queer Percussion between Jen Torrence and Bill Solomon,” *Queer Research Percussion Group Zine Collection* (2022).
12. David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, “Introduction: What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now?” *Social Text* 23, no. 3–4 (Fall-Winter 2005): 1–17.
13. Zach Blas, “Virus, Viral,” ed. Jasbir K. Puar and Patricia Clough, *Women Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1 & 2 (Spring/Summer 2012): 29–39.
14. Blas, “Virus, Viral.”
15. David J. Getsy, “Ten Queer Theses on Abstraction,” in *Queer Abstraction* (Des Moines, IA: Des Moines Art Center, 2019), 65–75.
16. Thomas Vinciguerra, “Opinion | Glittering Rage,” *New York Times*, August 27, 2011.
17. Caity Weaver, “What Is Glitter?” *New York Times*, December 21, 2018.
18. JC, “Percussive Placefinding: Gender, Psychedelics, Community,” *Queer Research Percussion Group Zine Collection* (2022).
19. Solomon and Torrence, “It Is as Messy as You Feared.”
20. Jacey Fortin, “Major Retailers in Britain Say No to Glitter for Christmas,” *New York Times*, October 15, 2020.
21. At the March 2023 Conservative Political Action Conference held just outside of Washington, DC, far-right commentator Michael Knowles delivered an impassioned speech proclaiming that “transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely.” As noted by Laura Bassett, “Knowles has said before that this overtly genocidal rhetoric is not, in fact, calling for the murder of millions of people, because he doesn’t believe trans people actually exist in the first place.” This attempt to intentionally and violently erase trans, nonbinary, and gender-nonconforming people has figured across numerous political, rhetorical, legislative, and social spheres and has become of critical concern in the wake of the evisceration of *Roe v. Wade*. For further reporting on Knowles’s speech, see Laura Bassett, “Conservative Pundit Calls for Trans People to Be ‘Eradicated,’” *Jezebel*, March 4, 2023, <https://jezebel.com/conservative-pundit-calls-for-trans-people-to-be-eradic-1850188639>. For a brief overview of the increase in anti-trans legislation in relation to other existing laws, see Chase Strangio, “The Courts Won’t Free Us—Only We Can,” *Them*, June 1, 2022, them.us/story/chase-strangio-supreme-court-queer-rights.
22. Alejandra Caraballo, “LGBTQ+ Legislative Tracking,” Twitter, @Esqueer_ (blog), January 10, 2023, https://twitter.com/Esqueer_/status/1612882704873422848?
23. Eric A. Stanley, “Introduction: River of Sorrow,” in *Atmospheres of Violence: Structuring Antagonism and the Trans/Queer Ungovernable* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 1–20.