

**SHIMMERY WASTE:
A QUEER CRITIQUE OF THE NARRATIVES ON
GLITTER POLLUTION**

By
Vanbasten Noronha de Araújo

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Supervisor: Professor Hyaesin Yoon
Second Supervisor: Marianna Szczygielska

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between glitter, queer bodies, and the environment, addressing this entanglement through a diffractive investigation that follows the matter/meanings of glitter from manufacture to disposal. In order to rethink the discourses on ‘glitter pollution,’ I rely on new materialist and queer theories that acknowledge the flows of matter/meanings across different bodies and sites. I use glitter as the main matter and figure to conduct this research, structuring my analysis through two axes: the politics of aesthetics and the politics of pollution. Reflecting on the exchange value of shimmery objects and the use of glitter in queer politics of visibility, I critically engage with the visual political economy that is offered by glitter.

Regarding aesthetics, I analyze the consumption of glitter by the queer community, having in mind the motivations and meanings that are built around it. First, I address the question of how glitter is taken as a matter/metaphor for visibility within the queer community. Then, I acknowledge the ways this queer use of glitter is criticized from environmental perspectives. Drawing on this juxtaposition of queer and environmental politics, I propose a new perspective, what I call ‘shimmery waste,’ which incorporates both queer and environmental theories. I base this approach on the analysis of affective and material entanglements between glitter, queer bodies, and nature, claiming that the problem does not rely on the queer use of glitter *per se*. Instead, I argue that what needs to be addressed is the importance of context and scale, because these two variables determine the political values of waste and pollution. Finally, I contend that this proposed reframing of the relation between glitter and nature is an inevitable first step in thinking about a queer attitude towards waste and pollution.

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To all my shimmery companions

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Introduction

Microbeads, including glitter, are small pieces of plastic that are widely used in cosmetics and personal care products such as make-ups, shower gels, and exfoliants (Willingham 2017). In 2017, the United Kingdom government opened a consultation on the proposal to ban the use of microbeads in cosmetics due to their impact on the environment, especially to marine ecosystems (United Kingdom Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2017). The debate that started in the United Kingdom drew further attention to the persisting problem of plastic pollution in the oceans. According to Professor Richard Thompson from Plymouth University, microplastic particles affect the environment mostly through their incorporation into the food chain through a phenomenon known as bioaccumulation (Plymouth University n.d.). Toxins move up the food chain when marine organisms ingest and retain these microbeads, which are up to 5 millimeters in length, leading to the contamination of nonhumans and humans who have a carnivore diet (Liboiron 2011). Microplastics reach the oceans through the sewer system since wastewater treatment technologies are not designed to filter such small particles. According to the BBC, during a shower, one can release up to 100.000 microbeads into the wastewater systems (Cashin 2017).

Having in mind that glitter is a microplastic mostly made from polyethylene terephthalate (PET), these researches have been used as sources purporting to show how glitter has been polluting the ocean. During recent years, several media outlets have published articles on how glitter should be banned due to its impact on the environment (see BBC 2019; Gabbatiss 2017; Bramley 2018; Vartan 2018). Following the sudden focus on glitter as an important pollutant, some cosmetic companies started producing their own biodegradable version of glitter, made out of biological matter such eucalyptus and cellulose, although they still add aluminium and mica to give it the ‘shimmery look’ (BBC 2019; Gabbatiss 2017; Bramley 2018). Noemi Lamanna, co-founder of Eco Glitter Fun, mentions about ‘glitter pollution’ in one interview

affirming that “no one knows that glitter is made of plastic [...] We were heartbroken when we found out” (Gabbatiss 2017). Like Eco Glitter Fun, other companies such as Lush Cosmetics also came up with an ‘alternative glitter,’ giving the consumer a supposedly environmental-friendly way to shine (Gabbatiss 2017; Bramley 2018). However, what is not mentioned by these companies is that, although biodegradable, these alternatives can also serve as pollutants because even biological matter can unsettle ecosystem’s functions if they are not properly introduced into the wider cycles of energy use. For example, as explained by Angela Libal,

when [biodegradables] make their way down storm drains and into waterways, they’re no longer potential compost, but rather nonpoint source pollution – part of a vast quantity of water pollutants of unknown specific origin. Their very biodegradability causes serious problems through eutrophication – the unnatural addition of nutrients to freshwater and marine habitats. Eutrophication causes unnatural abundance of certain microorganisms and algae, whose activity and decay eventually robs water ecosystems of useable oxygen (2017, 1)

Moreover, they seem to avoid the topic of the use of mica and aluminum, which give biodegradable glitter the quintessential characteristic of ‘the regular’ glitter – its shimmery aesthetic. These two mineral substances can be toxic and have a large environmental impact when mined from the ground. Moreover, the world’s largest source of mica are illegal mining sites in India, where at least 20.000 children are believed to be working (Bramley 2018). Finally, there is also the question of the lack of substantiated research on the specific impact of glitter on the environment. According to Professor Richard Thompson in an interview to The National Geographic,

while there is evidence of accumulation of microplastics in general and evidence of harm from lab studies, *there is a lack of clear evidence specifically on glitter* [...] We have microplastic particles in around one third of the 500 fish we examined in the English Channel, but we did not find any glitter (Parker 2017)

In the same interview, Alice Horton, a research associate at Britain's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, mentioned that research on microplastics is "highly variable, *depending on the type and shape of the particle*, so it's hard to say what any likely ecological effects would be", regarding the banning of glitter, she adds "I believe we need to promote responsible product use before resorting to drastic measures such as a legal ban" (Parker 2017).

Having in mind the aforementioned context, this research will focus on glitter through a different perspective: trying to understand why glitter is being picked on even though there is a lack of 'scientific data' on the issue. Why has public discourse on plastic pollution taken this shift towards glitter instead of other types of plastic that are more ubiquitous in the ocean? And more importantly, what happens to the analysis of this issue if one shifts attention away from the public policy aspects to instead focus on the socio-political and semiotic meanings that are communicated by glitter? Therefore, this research's overarching question is: How can queer thinking be employed to account for shimmery wastes, such as glitter, without disregarding its impact on politics and the environment? In this regard, I follow glitter from manufacture to disposal, showing how it sticks to different bodies and matters along the way, exposing the potentialities of queer thinking at each stage.

By looking at this phenomenon from a queer perspective, I present in this research an 'environmental politics of shining' that is inspired by glitter and its relationality with the environment. Through glitter's trajectory from shiny matter to gloomy waste, I engage with the political meanings of shining for the queer politics of visibility and representation, and how it is entangled with the question of plastic marine pollution. The central argument of this research is that purely technical solutions such as banning glitter, or substituting for its 'biodegradable' matters are insufficient. Through theoretical engagements with shimmery waste, I argue that solely technical solutions neglect the importance of the socio-political aspects when dealing with discarded matter. Glitter, as a shimmery waste, is a figure that works

as an entry point for further readings on how shiny materials unsettle normative readings of waste and pollution.

I argue that shininess has for a long time been associated with high exchange value, but in the case of glitter and the queer political use of it, this linear relationship is troubled since glitter is a cheap material used to glamourize neglected subjects/objects. This opens up a space for theoretical reflections on the politics of shining that are not only related to consumer capitalism. Shimmery wastes are those discarded matters (including people) that employ shining as a technology of differentiation, or that are seen differently due to their shimmery aspect. Queer people in protests, drag queens, radioactive matter, or e-waste might seem, at first, to be unrelated, but through a shimmery perspective one can see how they all travel between different sites and generate different politics from creation/manufacture to segregation/disposal, due to their potential to shine and unsettle normative politics regarding queerness and waste. Through not fitting into normative social categories of waste, gender identity, and sexuality, these matters push the boundaries and expose the limitations of univocal categories that are mostly based on ‘usefulness’ – how to be part of the commercial chain, or how to be productive and reproductive in society. For example, in a study on circulation and exchange of e-waste, Lepawsky and Mather (2010) found that microchips were being melted and used in the production of jewelry, exemplifying how aesthetics is important for the conception of waste and its ‘usefulness’ to neoliberal politics. Shiny metals from the dumpster go back into the commercial cycle through reworking their aesthetics. Shining is a signifier of exchange value and, as I further explore, it also serves the purpose of pushing forward a politics of visibility and representation.

In this sense, I pay attention to the entanglement between matter and meaning, as suggested by Karen Barad (2007; 2010), as an essential approach to assessing how ‘things’ relate to their surroundings, especially the environment. By focusing on glitter, I show that it is not possible

to consider it only as a microplastic that has been targeted as an integral part of marine plastic pollution. In fact, there is no way of separating it from its attached political significance for the queer community. Thus, I argue that banning glitter has an extra aspect to it, one that is not addressed by those who formulate public policies like the one in the United Kingdom.

Throughout this research, I will be referring to entanglement as in Karen Barad's book *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement Between Matter and Meaning* (2007), in which she makes a case for the 'intra-activity' of matter and meaning, claiming that this deep 'intra-action' between both is what constructs them. Karen Barad's (2007) idea of intra-action is an important theoretical maneuver that allows me to understand the entanglement between the subjects in a more intense and sensitive way. Intra-action is different from interaction to the extent that it refers to a dynamism of forces that are not dependent on pre-established bodies that then take part in actions with each other. The prefix 'inter' stands for among or in the midst of, while 'intra' refers to action that comes from within. Thus, when bodies interact, they still maintain a level of independence, while when they intra-act they materialize through this intra-action and the ability to act emerges from within this relationship rather than from outside of it (Barad 2007).

According to Barad, the forces that are part of the intra-activity are situated in a constant process of exchange and influence that make it impossible to separate them, undermining the idea of an absolute separation between object and subject (Barad 2007). In order to textually signal this intra-activity, I am using the slash ('/') to emphasize the entanglement and processual dynamics that are at work in this deep relationality. Thus, I use matter/meaning to indicate this entanglement between both (Barad 2007). Therefore, in order to briefly contextualize the question of shining as having political significance that is dependent on its materiality, I address in this Introduction two examples of how glitter has been intertwined with queer narratives of representation and visibility.

Although this study will not focus on these examples, they offer an interesting entry way to my argument that reads glitter as a matter/metaphor for the queer community politics of representation and visibility, that I will further connect with environmental politics. Moreover, throughout this research, I use ‘queer,’ as suggested by Nicole Seymour (2018a), as a descriptor of strangeness and discomfort, exposing a feeling of displacement. In her book *Bad Environmentalism* (2018a), Seymour thinks of queer phenomena as something that not only “fail to follow the available scripts for appropriate environmental feeling but [also] fail to feel in ways that are clearly directed or otherwise obviously useful” (2018a, 21). More than just connected to the LGBTQ+ community, I see queerness ‘as matter out of place,’ like Mary Douglas’s (1966) description of polluting objects. Having in mind the myriad of studies on waste (Hird 2012; 2013; Liboiron 2010; 2013; 2016), I work through queerness via this politics of scale and location focusing on environmental politics. As put by Max Liboiron, Manuel Tironi, and Nerea Calvillo when thinking about toxicity, I think of waste as “more than just the contravention of an established order within a system, [it] can be understood as the *contravention of order at one scale and the reproduction of order at another*” (2018, 335, emphasis in the original). For example, glitter contravenes the order when it is read as a marine pollutant (and a signifier for queer visibility), but it also reproduces the order when it is assimilated by consumer trends that value shininess as exchange value and by the ‘environmentally-friendly’ logic of production/consumption. In this sense, I think of queers and waste through a shared onto-epistemological disposition to trouble categories, recognizing its fluidness and dependency on the context/scale. I think of queerness as related to location and positionality, focusing on the effects that are generated from this feeling of displacement, as can be seen in the following examples.

Parity is an organization of queer Christians that annually organize the *Glitter+Ash* protest in which they use purple glitter to mark a cross on their foreheads as a form through which they

symbolize their discontent regarding the widely present prejudice against queer people in religious settings (Parity 2018). As expressed on their webpage's opening words, glitter has a deep meaning to their aesthetically driven political manifestation

We will be seen

Glitter is like love.

It is irresistible and irrepressible

We will tell the truth

Ashes are a statement that death and suffering are real

Glitter is a sign of our hope, which does not despair

Glitter signals our promise to repent, to show up, to witness, to work

Glitter never gives up – and neither do we (Parity 2018)

Their approach towards glitter is quite different from the one of the United Kingdom government in the sense that, despite the alleged environmental impact, they relate glitter to hope, love, and community building in times of despair. To them, “glitter is an inextricable element of queer history” (Parity 2018). They see it as a matter of visibility, where glitter signals existence – “it is how we have displayed our gritty, scandalous hope. We make ourselves fabulously conspicuous, giving offense to the arbiters of respectability that allow coercive power to flourish” (Parity 2018).

Alongside this reading, glitter has also been used in protests against conservative politicians. In these demonstrations, government leaders and public figures are the targets of ‘glitter bombs.’ Protesters throw glitter at politicians to symbolize the queer community's existence and resistance. This form of confrontational public protest was first used by the activist Nick Espinosa in 2011 when he dumped glitter on Newt Gingrich, a conservative politician from the United States while yelling at him: “Feel the rainbow, Newt! Stop the hate! Stop anti-gay

politics!” (Adewunmi 2011). Over time, glitter bombing became a popular non-violent and highly symbolic method of demonstrating for LGBT rights. Glitter helps to get media attention and provides an aesthetically interesting protest. Glitter is entangled with bodies and ideas, helping to convey social meaning along with the resonance of a conceptual understanding about the queer community and its aesthetics – a camp¹ visual that focuses on its ironic value; literally covering the conservative politician with glitter, a sticky material that stands for the experiences and existences that he is against (Robertson 2018). The imagery of glitter is tied to queer spaces and cultural practices that are part of queer history: camp aesthetics, drag queens and kings, and queer art. What is interesting about this microplastic relationship with queer bodies is the semiotic value of glitter’s aesthetical appeal that allows communities to connect and mobilize around something that is at first seen as inoffensive, but that later will be considered as dangerous pollutant.

In this sense, this research is devoted to following glitter, going a step further than investigating its visual attachments and involvement in queer politics, seeing how it can also queer environmental politics through its matter/metaphorical constituency. I claim that glitter is an interesting figure through which to think about queer environmentalism since it offers a material and political connection between queer politics and environmentalism, two realms that have been alienated from each other (Seymour 2013; 2018a). Through glitter’s transformation from shiny matter to gloomy waste, I address the issues of how the matter/meaning perspective

¹ Camp is used here as an aesthetic related to the queer community that serves as a form to reclaim and re-appropriate “trash.” Camp is dedicated to bringing back to life the discarded matter as it glamourizes waste through irony, detachment, and irreverence. As suggested by Andrew Ross, camp is “a rediscovery of history’s waste” (1988: 151), it animates matters that have lost value in normative society and ironizes the common way of establishing value through visual strategies (Schaffer 2015).

of environmental politics – which I name ‘shimmery waste’ – has the potential of offering a way of seeing things through a contextual and scaled lens. I argue that glitter’s ‘metaphorical’ value comes from the material interactions that it constructs with light. Conversely, glitter’s material value is also immersed in ‘metaphorical’ representations, as, for example, the connections I highlight between queerness and waste. I claim that the discourses of the UK government and that on biodegradable glitter are troubling not only because both do not consider the matter/meaning intra-action of glitter but because they also do not account for the queer entanglements with glitter and the visual political economy it suggests.

Therefore, this research starts from arguing how light’s material interactions with glitter (the diffraction of light and the correlated formation of colors) are important features of what connects glitter to the queer community. In this research, this material understanding of light is coupled with aesthetical and semiotic readings of it, acknowledging a relationality that I refer to as the ‘bio-semiotics’ of glitter – how its materiality is intertwined with the biological and physical processes that enables its perception. In this sense, Chapter 1 is where I present the theoretical framework of this research, explaining the analytical tools that I use in order to argue for this ‘light’ inspired environmentalism. In this chapter I will discuss queer theory, new materialism, queer ecologies, and discard studies, weaving them together to further analyze the ‘bio-semiotics’ of glitter.

Then, in Chapter 2, I return to the question of how glitter is connected to the queer community. Focusing on affect and representational aspects of queerness, I analyze, following other queer theorists (Steinbock 2019; Muñoz 1999), how ‘shimmering images’ have the aesthetic potential of presenting the queer struggles with rigid identity politics that erase diversity and hamper fluidity. In this second chapter, I focus on how light is pivotal to the formation of these shimmery images, which is part of my matter/meaning reading of glitter. Furthermore, I present in this chapter the question of shimmers and exchange value, exposing how shining is present

in political economy, arguing that glitter, due to its low price, unsettles the equation between commercial value and a shimmery aesthetic.

Picking up from the material reading of light, in Chapter 3, I use color as an important feature for queer and environmental thinking. Having in mind that glitter loses its ‘shimmer’ once it is in the ocean, I turn to color to think about its relationality to the environment. Moreover, going back to the question of ‘environmentally-friendly’ glitter, I analyze how ‘green politics’ frames this substitution as part of an alleged ecological form of consumption. In order to bridge queer politics and the environment, I resort to the concept of ‘prismatic ecologies,’ an onto-epistemological account of environmental thinking that goes beyond the common green politics to critically address colors. This chapter serves the purpose of showing what is the relationality of glitter and nonhumans, and how queer thinking can play an important role in offering contextual and scaled standpoints on the issue of plastic pollution.

Lastly, in Chapter 4, I present my perspective of ‘shimmery waste’ which is inspired by glitter’s trajectory from shiny matter to gloomy waste. Starting from the relationality between queerness and discarded matter, I formulate the perspective of ‘shimmery waste’ in order to properly account for the matter/meaning of pollution, especially plastic, and how to environmentally think about it. I argue that thinking through a ‘shimmery’ perspective is to signal the flows of matter/meanings that are present in the relationality between queerness and waste. Thus, ‘shimmery waste’ is not about using the symbolic value of things as an excuse for its material participation in plastic pollution. Rather, it is about taking this semiotic value and showing how it can shed light on alternative ways of engaging with the environment, escaping clear-cut moral divisions between good and bad.

Indebted to the work of Stacy Alaimo (2010; 2016) and Nicole Seymour (2018a), I argue that ‘shimmery waste’ is an analytical tool that focuses on the entanglement between matter/meaning and body/environment in order to escape moralistic thinking about pollution.

Bringing in camp and queer theory's taste for irony and irreverence, I claim that thinking about the environment using glitter, a matter targeted as a harmful pollutant, is part of this unexpected form of theorizing. This weird coupling shows how rigid and pragmatic environmentalism is not keeping up with the task of following people's diverse ways of thinking and being. 'Shimmery waste' is about 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway 2017) of the human led environmental impact and acknowledging that there is space and need for queer thinking in environmental politics. Reversing the alienation of the queer experience from nature, 'shimmery waste' is taking the queer to nature, using its queerness to diversify the ways of thinking about pollution.

1 Light Waves: Diffractive Ways of Seeing Glitter

The discovery that light is composed of discrete quanta or particles, known as photons, was a revolutionary one. On a quantum scale, a series of studies were done in order to understand the behavior of light, trying to understand how it interacts with other subjects. Inspired by Niels Bohr's work, Karen Barad has used studies on quantum physics to theorize about the onto-epistemological consequences of rethinking matter/meaning (2007). Trying to determine if light is a wave or a particle, Bohr discusses an experiment, the 'two-slit diffraction experiment', through which is manifested the quantum mechanical paradox: depending on the conditions of the experiment, light could behave as particle or as a wave (Barad 2007, 71-131). As suggested by Barad, the implications of this experiment were broad, given that it showed how "the nature of the observed phenomenon changes with corresponding changes in the apparatus" (2007, 106). Due to this relationality between 'observed phenomenon' and 'apparatus,' the diffraction experiment points towards the entanglement between ontology and epistemology, "as both method of engagement and radically immanent world(ing) where relationality/differentiation are primary dynamics of all material-discursive entanglements" (Kaiser and Thiele 2014, 165).

In this sense, diffraction comes up as a method that foregrounds difference, exposing how knowledge-practices are immersed in material relationalities. Bearing in mind that this research employs matter/meaning as a method to understand pollution, especially of glitter, my theoretical framework is indebted to the previous forms of diffractively analyzing the world. In this research, I use Karen Barad (2007; 2009; 2014), Katrin Thiele (2014), and Iris van der Tuin's (2014) considerations on diffractive methodology given that their works dwell upon an attentive and interactional approach to knowledge production. The feminist approach towards diffraction develops a way of thinking from within, enabling alternative forms of changing the economic, ecological, social, and political co-dependencies that structure the world (Kaiser and Thiele 2014). According to Barad, the diffractive methodology is

a method of diffractively reading insights through one another, building new insights, and attentively and carefully reading for differences that matter in their fine details, together with the recognition that there is, intrinsic to this analysis, *an ethics that is not predicated on externality but rather entanglement* (Barad 2009, 1, emphasis added)

In this sense, I use this ethic-onto-epistemology to unsettle normative readings of bodies as vexed entities, connecting them through the diffractive reading of glitter, corporeality, and the environment.

Moreover, the interdisciplinarity of the diffractive methodology is another important aspect of this research. Here, I follow feminist theories that consider knowledge and expertise as inherently transgressive, not recognizing institutional boundaries or conceptual barriers (Lykke, 2011; Novotny, 2006). It means that instead of solely focusing on glitter aesthetics, I am interested in the material and affective dimension of the intersection between corporeality and glitter. I imagine transformation in a subjective way, emphasizing the alliances that can be formed by environmental and queer thinking.

Thus, this interdisciplinary research is located in the space between new materialism, environmental humanities, and gender studies. More specifically, I will engage with theoretical concepts from new materialism, queer theory, queer ecologies, and discard studies. The focal concepts for this analytical exercise are: diffraction and diffractive methodology (Barad 2007; Thiele 2014; van der Tuin 2014), disidentification (Muñoz 1999), prismatic ecologies (Cohen 2013), trans-corporeality (Alaimo 2008; 2010), bad environmentalism (Seymour 2018a), and queering waste through queer aesthetics (focusing on camp) (Gille 2018; Hird 2012; Krupar 2012; Schaffer 2015; Schmidt 2009). In this chapter, I contextualize the development of ‘shimmery waste’ as a shiny environmental perspective through showing how the aforementioned theoretical constellation is connected to the main topic of this research: how to

rethink pollution via queer thinking and the intra-actions among matter/meaning/glitter/queer bodies.

1.1 Visibility Matters: New Materialism, Glitter, and Waste

Since the late 1990s, a plethora of contemporary theorists have been re-reading the ways in which the entanglements between human, nonhuman, and materiality have been theoretically conceived in the past (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012). New materialism is the name of the interdisciplinary, theoretical, and politically engaged field that is responsible for the revival of the commitment to material ontologies. This movement towards materiality is a response to the previous prevailing mindset of theoretical approaches that focused on the linguistic and social constructionist frameworks, giving prominence to language, culture, and representation (Coole and Frost 2010). New materialism emerges from a productive friction with the linguistic turn and sheds light on the impacts of dismissing the importance of investigating somatic and material configurations beyond their discursive and ideological impressions (Coole and Frost 2010).

The ‘new’ of new materialism does not imply that this scholarly and theoretical focus on the body’s material conditions is something totally original. In fact, the new materialist perspective emerged from decades of feminist work on corporeality (Frost 2011; Wilson 2015; Wynter 2003). The new materialist approach interprets matter and body “as having a peculiar and distinctive kind of agency, one that is neither a direct nor an incidental outgrowth of human intentionality but rather one with its own impetus and trajectory” (Frost 2011, 70). One of the important impacts of the new materialist approach is the acknowledgement of the complexity behind the causality and interrelations between human and nonhuman subjects (Bennett 2004). Matter and biology have agency in their own right and, thus, the relationality between subjects is not unidirectionally determined by culture or biology, but, rather, it is constituted through a

complex, recursive, and multi-linear process of co-constitution (Frost 2011; Bennett 2004). Thus, throughout this research, I consider the connection between queerness and glitter through the new materialist perspective, recognizing glitter's materiality as an important aspect to account for how it links to queer politics of visibility and representation. Moreover, having in mind that I analyze glitter from manufacture to disposal, I also argue that there are probing similarities between the normative discourses on 'queerness' and policies on waste management.

Regarding both agendas, queer bodies and waste are pushed aside, situated at the margins of political discourses and imagination. They are never 'here,' they are always 'there' – far from the normative 'us,' where sight does not reach, and politics fades. In this context, as will be argued in Chapter 2, glitter is employed as part of a visibility strategy to signal life and, demarcating a 'queer territory.' Based on a neoliberal discourse of utility and productivity, queerness is seen as excess, as too much, as something not needed. Like trash in landfills and open oceans, queer bodies are pushed together into a faraway territory where society is not disrupted by what its (normative) members would witness were they to encounter 'the strange.' Queerness converses with trash; both are seen as the unwanted, which can be reworked or recycled into something that will be useful for the community at large.

As argued by Mira Hird (2012), waste, and in this case queerness, represents the desire to forget what is disposed. Bearing in mind the way waste is treated – it is thrown away without the expectation of being seen again – waste is the category that comprises the unwanted, the used that now is useless. It is the reminder of a previous affect that turned from desire to disgust. Due to their resistance to being categorized, I see waste and queer bodies as situated in the twilight zone in which boundaries are porous and uncertainty and variation are two important aspects of its perception. For both symbolic and material realms, "waste is an inherently ambiguous linguistic signifier: anything and everything can become waste and things can

simultaneously be and not be waste, depending on the perceiver” (Hird 2012, 454). Therefore, there is an ontology of waste that follows its transition from useful to useless, and sometimes, this transition can be marked by an aesthetical differentiation (Kennedy 2007).

Part of what determines what is waste and what is not is its aesthetical condition. For example, glitter loses its glamour when it loses the capacity to refract light in a colorful and vivid way (see Chapter 3). Like many other plastic products, glitter is a single use ‘thing’ – there is no way to keep it after use. Actually, people often complain about the difficulties of getting rid of it. Following new materialist theories, I see in its *stickiness* the reminder of its political importance (see Chapter 2), and its resistance to being treated like ‘trash.’ This easiness in connecting with the other is a reminder that glitter lives in symbiosis – it has a matter/metaphorical significance when attached to other bodies. So, when glitter is rubbed off the body with soap and water, it goes to the sewage system, then to the oceans, where it will stick again with other plastics – forming new symbiotic conglomerates with other bodies that are treated as trash.

From queer human politics to the plastic garbage patch, glitter traces the pathway of queerness, it highlights the onto-epistemological changes that are entailed in the politics of visibility. Shimmering is part of the captivation process of luring attention that can happen for political visibility or attracting the perceived notion of acquired exchange value. Through entanglement with queer bodies, glitter creates political movements that revolve around its material capabilities of embodying the light matter/meaning of visibility. When in the ocean, glitter will also enable new connections through its materiality. The low density microplastic will float at the surface of the ocean and, under sunlight, will go through photo-reactions that will enable it to soften and attach to other rubbish, forming islands of plastics in the ocean, like the Great Pacific garbage patch. Again, light works as the source of transformation for glitter and its symbiotic subjects. As current life sciences research has proved, although these plastic

conglomerates are highly toxic and deadly to some organisms, they also enable new forms of life under unexpected circumstances. As shown by marine biologists and other scientists, there are hundreds of thousands of new bacteria living in these plastic islands, and some marine insect species have found on them the perfect location to deposit their eggs (Zettler, Mincer, and Amaral-Zettler 2013; Goldstein, Rosenberg, and Cheng 2012). In a way, glitter connects with and signals the life of that which is seen as not useful: the ‘queer human trash’ and the ‘trash of things,’ that, although ignored and out of sight, never goes away.

Returning to the consideration of the relationship between waste and queerness, the trash that we accumulate and place on the street to be taken away, reveals a lot about the construction of ‘the Self.’ Having in mind that waste is the material record of what one considers as valuable and what needs to be forgotten, a trash bag can be an interesting source of self-reflection. As reminded by Myra Hird (2012), “landfills [and open ocean] swell with things we once wanted and now do not want. What remains after our disgorgement is what we (want to) consider our *real self*” (456, emphasis in the original). Elizabeth Spelman (2011) claims that “trash provides an epistemologically privileged resource for understanding what individuals and communities are about” (2011). Similar to Spelman’s ‘*garbology*,’ Hird’s inhuman epistemology also suggests that through knowing waste, one can know oneself.

However, I would argue that it goes in a different direction regarding glitter. When one ‘throws’ glitter away, it is not through the solid waste system. Usually, it is washed off the bodies with water, where it becomes an almost invisible waste that will most probably not be analyzed and cannot be traced back to its origins. In this sense, I consider glitter as a queer waste, both because of its connection to queer politics, but also because of its non-conforming way of ‘becoming waste.’ Glitter sticks and resists being discarded. In contrast to other waste that allegedly indicates what we do not want to be the marker of the self, glitter represents the liberation of queerness in a powerful aesthetic of emancipation. In a way, what turns glitter into

trash is not necessarily the desire to get rid of it, but the power structures and the public heteronormativity that makes it the enemy of public order, and now the environment.

Following these specificities of glitter, I explore the discourses on ‘glitter pollution’ as a way to call for a shift of attention from compartmentalized intellectual projects to the production of a knowledge that breaks through normative notions of humanity and nonhumanity, producing intra-actional encounters between political and material as “part of that nature that we seek to understand” (Barad 2007, 26). Differently from previous materialist projects, I follow the new materialist theories when understanding glitter as an agent, rather than something that is transformed and given agency by human labor and cultural practices (Frost 2011).

In this sense, new materialism offers the first step to address the entanglement between glitter and queer bodies as subjects in an intertwined and complex relationship with the environment. Moreover, I take it as an important task to address the assimilation of shimmers and glitter into a logic of consumption and an aesthetics of power that are in line with the capitalistic validation of products that circulate as the signifiers of political and economic power, which Nigel Thrift addressed as ‘understanding the material practices of glamour’ (2010, 289). In this research, I follow the shimmers in social theories in order to offer a complementary reading that furthers the debates of it within queer theory and cultural practices. Visibility literally matters and, therefore, I use it as a backbone of the overarching argument of this research. From the recognition of the relationality between matter and culture, I depart towards a critique of univocal technical approaches towards pollution, arguing for a nuanced understanding of the story of things (from manufacture to disposal), exposing the immanent material connection among bodies.

1.2 Thinking Through Glitter: Working Concepts to Address Plastic Pollution

In order to construct my argument regarding the political and affective faculties of shimmery things and the question of plastic pollution, I follow the figure of ‘shimmers’ in various areas of scholarship including queer, affect, film, and environmental theories. This task involves working towards a materiality of what shimmer embraces, which I see as my contribution to current readings of shimmers in humanities. What I present here as ‘shimmery theories’ are theoretical accounts of shimmers, and what comes next is my attempt to take the next step and offer a materialist reading of affective involvement with shimmers, especially in the form of glitter. I contend that shimmer and glitter represent two sides of the same coin: whilst shimmer stands for the metaphorical register of the political aspects of shining, glitter is the matter that takes it further to the level of embodiment. Against this shimmery theoretical background, I analyze art practices and performances as part of a materialistic aesthetic that concedes and values the ‘vibrancy’ of matter and the political engagements between humans and things, “[switching] our intensive register, to reconnect with the world” (Bennett 2010; Thrift 2010; O’Sullivan 2001, 128). Thus, in this section I present the working concepts that I use to follow glitter from political use to disposal, following the general framework of this research.

1.2.1 Queer Theory: Disidentification

I see in the entanglement between glitter and queer corporalities an affective encounter that enables thinking of future and hope from a minoritarian perspective through disidentificatory politics (Muñoz 1999). Through theoretical engagement with glitter, I want to put forward a perspective of the relationship between queer bodies and glitter through the standpoint of Muñoz’s conceptualization of disidentification and the performance of politics (1999). The processes of crafting and performing the self that I analyze are not linear when it comes to

accounts of identification. In *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick offers an interesting reading of issues in the vexed and rigid understanding of identity politics. She suggests that identity is not about pure mimesis of the other, it

always includes multiple processes of identifying with. It also involves identification as against; but even did it not, the relations implicit in identifying with are, as psychoanalysis suggests, in themselves quite sufficiently fraught with intensities of incorporation, diminishment, inflation, threat, loss, reparation, and disavowal (Sedgwick 1990, 61)

In this sense, identification is also permeated with counteridentification and partial identification, which can be more intense and fraught for those who do not fit within normative categories of selfhood that neglect minoritarian positionalities. Thus, I recur to disidentification because it is “meant to be descriptive of the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship” (Muñoz 1990, 4). Disidentificatory processes of selfhood are permeated not only by the mentioned survival strategies of minoritarian positionalities; they also entail the recognition of the entanglements among matter/meaning and human/nonhuman in a relationality that acknowledges the power of things to reframe contexts of oppression and hatred.

1.2.2 Affect and Film Theory: ‘Shimmery Images’ and ‘Inventory of Shimmers’

Through affect and film theory, I want to assess what are the possibilities of shimmering images and embodied interactions to take queer tales of hope, freedom, and pride to a register that recognizes shining as important in unsettling the binary paradigms of identity politics addressed by Muñoz (1999). For that, I am focusing on Eliza Steinbock’s work on shimmering images in *trans* cinema as “images that describe this persistent vision of trans as change, and as a force that continues to achieve change through various means and ways” (2019, ix). I see in these shimmering interactions between glitter and queer bodies the possibilities of gathering

new ways of reading shimmers not as a mere signifier for economic value, but as a starting point to build up an aesthetically driven community awareness regarding visibility. The ‘shimmery images’ are part of a representational politics that defies gender binaries and normative understandings of identificatory processes, highlighting the potentials of thinking and feeling in a nonbinary way. As suggested by Steinbock, the idea of “shimmers recast the assumptions of a strict male female grammar for subjects on-screen and off” (2019, 3-4). The shimmery subjects are hard to grasp through monolithic approaches that are common within highly gendered societies.

Within cultural studies and other theoretical engagements, ‘shimmer’ has appeared as a noun, synonym to sparkle; as a verb, frequently used as a variant of scintillate; and as an adjective, a modifier to the subject’s aesthetics. As a consequence of this multitude of uses, “the various expressions of a shimmering quality confound distinctions in [the theoreticians’] writing between subject/object, thinking/feeling, and sight/touch” (Steinbock 2019, 9). In a similar vein, I see in the use of glitter the capacity of signaling the existence of bodies that ‘confound distinctions.’ In these cases, the shimmering aesthetic is a survival strategy that embraces difference in a way that politically reads the struggles of minorities when it comes to resistance to assimilation and the issues that comes from not fitting within clear-cut identificatory politics.

Relying on the accounts of the shimmer as being oppositional to precise understandings of encounters with definite start and end points, Gregory Seigworth and Melissa Gregg wrote *Inventory of Shimmers*, the introductory chapter of the *Affect Theory Reader* (2010). Before going further on the authors’ use of ‘shimmers’ in their affect theory, it is important to point out that affect theory is an interdisciplinary endeavor that has different branches, which is, at the same time, its trouble and its advantage (Seigworth and Gregg 2010). For the purpose of the analyses to come, I use affect as defined by Brian Massumi, who considers affect as the ability/power of a subject to affect and to be affected (2002). This affective power changes

through time according to the variations in the capabilities of interacting with the other, be it human (e.g. the queer community) or nonhuman (e.g. glitter) (Seigworth and Gregg 2010). I follow their take on affect which, like glitter, can be applied in multiple layers and accumulate, creating an ‘inventory of shimmers’ that accounts for differentiations in accentuation and intensities of the affective interactions (Seigworth and Gregg 2010).

1.2.3 Queer Ecologies: Shimmer and Prismatic Ecologies

Going towards the relationality between queer corporalities and the environment, I also resort to Debora Bird Rose’s reading of ‘shimmer’ as the ‘ancestral power of life’ (2017, 52). Dwelling upon her multispecies ethnography with flying-foxes in Australia, Rose thinks about how shimmer is a natural trope of lively matters, such as flowers that “invite, or lure, others through their dazzling brilliance of color, scent, and shape, and they reward their visitors – birds, mammals, insects – with nutrients” (Rose 2017, 51). Contrasting with the reading of shimmers as the deceiver of exchange value, for her, shimmers are vital in acts of reciprocal care. In a sense, Rose exposes how shimmers (and colors) are natural things that are mimicked and artificially reproduced in capitalist systems. Through weaving her reading of shimmers with the theories of affectivity and disidentification, I use ‘queer ecologies’ to refer to the theoretical framework that is dedicated to disrupting normative notions regarding nature, sexuality, and life (Seymour 2013).

Against human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism, queer ecological theories challenge traditional hierarchical ways of describing the world in binaries such as natural and unnatural (Sandilands 2005). Returning to my particular interest in the materiality of light and the biochemical processes of perceiving color, I use the concept of ‘prismatic ecology’ as a tool to argue for queerness and diversity within environmental discourse (Cohen 2013). Paying attention to the infinitude of colors that compose the environment, a ‘prismatic ecology’ moves further from the green that dominates ecotheory. Giving space for other colors and light waves

that are outside of human perception, the ‘prismatic ecology’ is a de-anthropocentric project that exemplifies how matter/meaning comes to the surface in diverse ways. Considering color as a pivotal aspect of environmental thinking, I use queer ecologies to argue for a material perception of light, as colorful shimmers, and human/nonhuman corporeality. In this sense, the relations between light, glitter, and queer corporalities are the matters that instigate the conducting of this research as I suggest that the affinity between human and nonhuman exposes power relations with a queer environmental focus.

1.2.4 Discard Studies: Waste Management, Plastic Pollution, and Camp

Giving continuity to the investigation of the question of glitter and marine pollution, I use discard studies to explore how glitter goes from an element that composes a political and aesthetical tactic of protesting/self-enjoyment to a narrative that focus on it as a disposed waste that damages the oceans. Considering discard studies’ critical approach towards waste, I return to a new materialist reading of the issue, focusing on how politically informed responses to the affairs of glitter and marine pollution change when the ‘vitality’ of nonhuman bodies is taken seriously as part of the affectivities and events that take place in the world. Here, when I mention the affect between human and nonhuman, I am referring to Jane Bennett’s perspective of it, one that recognizes affect’s materiality, instead of reading it as a separate force that has the means to animate bodies (2010, xiii). The affect between human and nonhuman works as an ‘enchantment’ that is capable of producing affirmative effects on those involved in these complex relationalities (Bennett 2010, xi). Her work is important in pinpointing how ecologically conscious forms of human culture will only be possible if there is an attentive investigation of the encounters between people and matters. As she mentions, “one needs, at least for a while, to suspend suspicion and adopt a more open-minded comportment. If we think we already know what is out there, we will almost surely miss much of it” (Bennett 2010, xv).

In fact, Bennett's theoretical inflections regarding the nonhuman are closely related to discard studies' objective.

According to Max Liboiron, a feminist scholar in the field of science and technology studies, discard studies are dedicated to troubling the assumptions, myths, and common-sense theories regarding waste and its political importance to environmental policies (Liboiron 2014). Like queer theory, discard studies engages with the strange and imperfect as constructions of binaries that harm humans, cultures, and environments (Schaffer, 2015). This critical perspective is built upon a skeptical perspective on approaches to waste management that solely rely on technical and moral arguments, offering solutions that only deal with the symptoms but not with the structures that define the issues regarding pollution (Liboiron 2016). One of the main claims of discard studies is that individual choices about waste have little impact on practical solutions. In fact, they have a great potential as damage control strategies but not as practical solutions to the current issues of pollution (Liboiron 2010). Focusing on these individualist and behavioral solutions is a way of steering attention away from a bigger source of the problem: big industries' ruthless practices and colonial aspects regarding waste management (MacBride 2011; Ackerman 1997).

Marine pollution is one interesting example of how this neoliberal approach is put into practice. According to Sadri and Thompson (2014), the great majority of marine waste comes from industrial production and mechanized structures in the oceans, rather than coming from litter produced by civil society. In this sense, knowing the materiality of the waste and its production and circulation patterns are important ways of assessing solutions to the current issue of marine pollution; reinforcing the idea that waste is categorized based on its circulation arrangements that result from societally specific notions of value (Hird 2012). Thus, it is interesting to make the system of production and circulation more apparent than the waste *per se*, strengthening the notion that *individual action is necessary but not the sole solution to the issue* – actually, it

can, unfortunately, resonate with moralistic views that incur negative political impacts on specific parts of the population.

For example, I argue that the case of demonizing the usage of glitter is part of this neoliberal approach that sees individual behavioral changes as solutions to problems that are occasioned by the capitalistic structure of the nation state. Moreover, as will be further developed in this study, this incursion against glitter demands additional analysis due to its political matter/metaphorical values. In fact, what also needs to be addressed when thinking about shiny matters is the mechanism through which the neoliberal system has pressured the queer community to employ shining as an embodied political strategy for survival and visibility in a system that tends to homogenize vulnerable communities.

In this context, when addressing the intersection between queer studies and discard studies, I will focus my analysis on camp aesthetics since it has deep connections with queer history and also with the culture of excess and consumption that is usually connected with the aforementioned discourses on waste management. According to Guy Schaffer,

camp does not hide the wastes that cause real environmental, social, and personal harm. Rather, it makes them susceptible to new readings and alternative framings. In moving beyond moralism to an aesthetics of trash, camp offers a chance for a different kind of waste politics: a politics of visibility, of risibility, and of spectacle (Schaffer 2015, 1)

Thus, by connecting camp aesthetics, queer theory, and discard studies, I engage with the research questions regarding the symbolic value of glitter, while already taking this reflection into a path of questioning glitter's value as waste and its relation to neoliberal practices within the narrative of marine pollution. What is interesting about the connections between the proposed re-reading of glitter, marine pollution, and camp aesthetics is the fact that it works as if recycling cultural products "presenting oneself as being marginal with a commitment greater than the marginal merits" (Booth 1999, 69). In other words, camp aesthetics is not committed

to bringing in moralistic views on plastic pollution. Rather, it offers an alternative perspective on trash, one that connects the old life of things to the new uses of it.

1.2.5 Shimmery Waste

As a final claim to interrogate the entanglement between queer community and the environment, I take inspiration from Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality (2008; 2010) and Nicole Seymour's bad environmentalism (2018a) to formulate the perspective of 'shimmery waste.' Combining Alaimo's new materialist reading of body as always already entangled with the environment and Seymour's attentiveness to non-moralistic alternative forms of promoting environmental thinking, I suggest 'shimmery waste' as an analytical tool to account for the entanglement of matter/meaning when analyzing pollution and introjecting queer thinking into environmental theories. This 'environmental politics of shining' is adopted in order to signal affirmative-critical ways to intervene in environmental politics that do not embrace diversity, and queer theories that neglect the environment. The 'shimmery waste' perspective is about critically analyzing the pathway of things from manufacture to disposal, exposing the affects and material flows that make them relevant for current environmental policies tackling pollution.

Via these working concepts, I present in this research a critical perspective on how simply banning glitter or using a 'biodegradable alternative' is not sufficient to remedy the issue of plastic pollution, especially if we take into account that glitter *per se* is not as widely present in the ocean as some media outlets and other institutions make it seem, in fact, it is estimated that glitter accounts for less than 0.1% of plastic matter in the oceans (BBC 2019). I argue that banning glitter neglects its political relevance, and simply focusing on its symbolical values overlooks its *potential* environmental impact. In this sense, the local and scaled perspective of 'shimmery waste' offers a way of putting things into perspective in order to assess the onto-epistemological assumptions presupposed by pollution and how to environmentally queer it.

2 Everything Is Crystal Queer – Glitter, Shimmers, and Disidentification

“All that glitters is not gold” is probably one of the oldest appearances of ‘glitter’ in known public discourse that brings to the allegorical realm considerations about matter. In this specific case, the famous saying tackles the appearance of gold and its aesthetics, explicitly addressing the connection between exchange value and shininess. Tracing back the sources of this saying, some authors believe that it dates back from Aesop’s fables that were written in Ancient Greece around 600 BCE (Kanarek 2012). Mostly made famous by Aesop’s short stories, fables are well-known as a textual genre that present ‘moral lessons’ via exaggerated storylines with unexpected endings. In fact, *fabula*, which is the Latin root of the word fable, makes reference to something ‘fabulous,’ which in Ancient English was used to depict something distinctive about myths and now is also used to describe something ‘astonishing and exaggerated,’ or, in general terms, captivating (Butler 2018, 3).

Over the course of the last decades, the word ‘fabulous’ has repeatedly been connected to queer narratives and aesthetics. Something that is ‘fabulous’ is glamorous and almost out of this world. One specific trait of ‘fables’ is the anthropomorphism of nonhuman characters, who will deal with issues within a narrative that is mostly pertinent to the ‘human realm.’ The narratives are alluring because of their capacity to take ordinary stories and presenting them with an extraordinary aspect, in this case the adaptation of human’s issues to nonhuman characters. In a sense, going back to the current connection between the ‘fabulous’ and the queer, it is possible to perceive this queer ‘fabulousness’ as a representation of the capacity of shifting attention from normative discourses to overlooked narratives by playing with perception and imageries. Through ‘fabulous’ forms, queer narratives have introduced unexpected elements that offer the tools for an in-depth analysis of cultural texts through the disclosure of structural patterns of oppression that are embedded in majoritarian discourses.

Bearing this in mind, in this chapter, I present how glitter has been connected to queer corporeality in the construction of a politics of representation and visibility. Following glitter's matter/meaning, I pay attention to how glitter's interaction with light produces a diffracting and elusive aesthetics that symbolizes queer resistance to the normative politics of identification. Dwelling upon cultural productions in which queerness is entangled to glitter, I analyze how using glitter can be read as having a political value. Concentrating on the connection between glitter's shimmery aesthetic and the queer politics of visibility, I consider how shininess is featured in political economy, being a known signifier of exchange value.

Departing from the premise that glitter made its entry into the world of discourse in one of Aesop's fables, *The Hen and the Golden Eggs*, I present the fable and the re-readings of its famous lesson that "all that glitters is not gold" as a way to introduce some questions regarding the political readings of glitter, and how the queer community connects to its contemporary meanings and political value. In *The Hen and the Golden Eggs*, a couple who live in a farm far from the city discover that one of their hens has the ability to lay eggs made of gold. Surprised with this and moved by greed, the couple decide to cut the hen open, imagining that there would be more gold inside. After cutting the hen open, they notice that the entrails of the hen are not filled with gold, and now, instead of having their own goldmine, the couple has killed the only hen that could give them the golden opportunity of accumulating wealth. The phrase 'all that glitters is not gold,' appears at the end of this story as part of the 'moral lesson' of the fable, directly referencing how the usual perception of value and importance can be flawed if based solely on the alluring aesthetic of things, exposing how there is a common association between shimmers and wealth, glitter and gold.

Inspired by this fable, I address the question of the political and alluring power of shimmering matters as an important aspect in reframing power and political struggles between different communities. 'All that glitters is not gold' is the point of departure for this chapter that will

deepen the debate about the political aspects of glitter. This saying ironizes the aesthetic fixation of the capitalist perspective that conflates shimmers with market value, presenting glitter as having the capacity to deceive the viewer (Thrift 2010). In a similar line of thought, the queer engagement with shimmers also focuses on exhibiting the nuanced aspects of perception, especially regarding gender and sexuality. In this sense, what I offer here is an interpretation of shimmery images and bodies as signifiers of a new order in bodily aesthetics: one that is less keen on presenting clear-cut identities and that is more invested in seeing in ‘shimmery images’ the opportunity of giving visibility to neglected populations, depicting their existence as powerful, not shying away from being seen, recognized, and respected.

Therefore, considering the political effects of the aforementioned story, is it possible to think about ‘all that glitters is not gold’ in a ‘fabulous’ alternative way? Having in mind this study’s goal of depicting a connection between queer communities’ aesthetics and glitter, how does glitter contribute to the queer politics of visibility and representation? How does queer aesthetics tackle the conflation of shininess with exchange value? In order to construct the argument that connects queer bodies, glitter, and politics, I first present how the figure of ‘shimmers’ has appeared in other theoretical works, highlighting its material/metaphorical importance in order to argue for a glitter-based politics of visibility. I address these ‘shimmering theories’ to show how the entanglement between glitter and queer bodies generates visual and political representations of dissidence from binary politics and clear-cut gender identity and sexuality divisions. Contrasting it with the neo-liberal perspective that conflates shimmers with monetary value, the artworks that I analyze show glitter as a figure that locates and highlights neglected bodies, offering them a ‘fabulous’ entry point to the public sphere.

2.1 The Merchants of Shimmers – Following Shimmers in Affect Theory and Cultural Studies

In an effort to communicate with the world, different subjects have used shiny things to represent different feelings in different political contexts and strategies. In cultural practices, the ‘shimmer’ has commonly been used as a way of attracting attention and giving exchange value to things, an aesthetic strategy that is ironically tackled by the lesson that ‘all that glitters is not gold.’ However, ‘shimmers’ has also another genealogy that is pertinent to this analysis: the figure of shimmers in affect theory and film theory (Sigworth and Gregg 2010; Steinbock 2019). In both theories, ‘shimmers’ is used as a signifier for alternative modes of representation which are indebted to Barthes’s discussion on ‘the Neutral,’ a concept that escapes paradigmatic and binary oppositions that suffuse Western discourse (2005).

During his lectures of 1977, Roland Barthes dedicated considerable effort to understanding and proposing a reading of ‘the Neutral,’ an idea that baffles the Western paradigm of binary oppositions that structure and produce meaning in political discourses (2005). For him, ‘the Neutral’ represents a series of traits that are crucial in addressing the conflictual basis of discourse and oppression (Barthes 2005). One of the traits that Barthes presents as part of ‘the Neutral,’ and that has been picked up by other scholars as an important figure in theoretical accounts of non-binary discourses, is ‘the shimmer’ (Seigworth and Gregg 2010; Steinbock 2019). Inspired by a materially rooted epiphany that comes from spilling a bottle of an ink named Neutral, Barthes considers ‘the shimmer’ as a quality that represents the nuances that comes from “miniscule gradations and degrees of intensity” of color schemes (Steinbock 2019, 10). For him, “this integrally and almost exhaustively nuanced space is the shimmer [...] whose aspect, perhaps whose meaning is subtly modified according to the angle of the subject’s gaze” (Barthes 2005, 51). For him, the shimmer is this alternative perspective that is dependent on

other subjects to be interpreted, creating a necessary relationality in order to provide meaning to the elusive and nuanced shimmery subject.

As explained by Steinbock, “the Latin root of nuance, *nubes*, meaning ‘a cloud, mist, vapor,’ suggests the diffuse character of the shimmer’s inchoate aesthetic” (2019, 10). This mediated perspective of experience is also seen in Joan Scott’s (1991) accounts on the variances of interpretation based on different ways of experiencing things, which is an important argument for this study’s focus on the different effects that come from attaching glitter to the body. Scott builds up her argument on the importance of *contextualizing experience* when accounting for interpretation by also involving the figure of mist and vapor. She uses Delany’s descriptions of his experiences in a gay sauna to argue for an idea of mediated interpretation since he only perceived things and bodies through the relationality between his senses, the mist, and the blue light that were present in the sauna (1991). Therefore, the *material circumstances* of encounters are crucial to how interpretation happens and that is an important aspect in analyzing the politics of shimmering and the question of pollution, as previously mentioned.

Like Scott, though in a different theoretical register, Barthes’ writings on ‘shimmering’ also makes a case for this nuanced reading of details, avoiding delimiting hard lines of experience and description (Barthes 2005). In fact, returning to a gendered reading of his accounts, he states that ‘the Neutral’ is also ‘androgynous,’ which is an interesting point when reflecting on shimmering as a signifier of fluidity and elusive subjects (Steinbock 2019). Since the publication of his lectures on the Neutral in 2005, Barthes’s work has been picked up as the ontological baseline for further considerations that analyze affect and the issues of nuanced differences and irreducible individualities. In fact, this combination of differences, elusiveness, and individuality is key to my readings of performance art and cultural productions that employ glitter as a matter/metaphor to signal lives that resist binaries and normativity. Instead of pushing the boundaries of elusiveness towards misrecognition, Barthes makes a case for a

better and nuanced reading of differences and specificities, which is essential when dealing with minorities and the issues of identity (Seigworth and Gregg 2010; Steinbock 2019).

Bearing in mind the affect theory and queer readings of Barthes's 'inventory of shimmers,' done by Seigworth and Gregg and Steinbock, I explore how this figure of 'shimmers' has crisscrossed from different fields while maintaining this aspect of dissidence and resistance to the normalcy and fixed lines of differentiation. This ability to affect bodies in this political way by giving them the capacity of being seen without being read through normative lenses – male/female, object/subject, thinking/feeling, etc. (Steinbock 2019) – is what interests me in the use of glitter by queer subjects in their artistic practices and daily lives. In a way, this non-literal way of perceiving things is what is tackled by 'all that glitters is not gold,' since one's capacity (to glitter) does not define what one is (gold). As put by Sara Ahmed, in similitude with Barthes's take on the 'shimmer,'

we may walk into the room and 'feel the atmosphere,' but what we may feel depends on the angle of our arrival. Or we might say that the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point. The pedagogic encounter is full of angles (Ahmed 2010, 41)

This shows the importance of seeing how context and perception are entangled/angled with an affective atmosphere that has pedagogical capacities of reframing normative readings of gender and sexuality (Steinbock 2019). Glitter offers a shimmer that can escape the common expectations of high exchange value, giving subjects the possibility of expanding their politics of visibility, embracing the idea of 'the Neutral.'

As explained by Steinbock, Barthes already sees 'the Neutral' as a "nongendered" entity (2019, 13). In one of his lectures, Barthes suggests that when faced with

a ruling lack of [the Neutral] (of language), discourse [...] opens up an infinite, shimmering field of nuances, of myths, that could allow [the Neutral], fading with language to be alive

elsewhere. Which way? I would say, using a vague word: the way of affect: discourse comes to [the Neutral] by means of the affect (quoted by Steinbock 2019, 13)

In this sense, what I see in glitter is an aesthetic mode of communication that pertains to this ‘elsewhere,’ where myths are entangled with language and affect, in order to create a space that embraces the different without erasing its smallest nuances. Shimmering is used strategically to make neglected existences visible, but also to situate them as important and in need of connections with the world. Creating a parallelism with the saying that questions whether a falling tree has made a noise if no one heard it, I see the same question in glittery politics: has one shined if nobody saw it? For me, embodying shimmers through glitter is about connecting with the surroundings, being attentive to how matter flows and affects subjects in different ways (see Chapter 4).

Glitter as a matter has yet another trope that is significant to the debate on affective entanglements between it and other subjects. Glitter sticks to body and it can also circulate among bodies that are in contact, being transferred through touch, hugs, kisses, or simply when bumping into each other. The millimetric size of glitter makes it difficult to manage. It enables glitter to spread and mix itself with other different types and colors in order to construct a new image from this interaction. When glitter is transferred from body to body, an affective circulation is formed, having in mind that affect is the capacity to act and be acted upon (see Chapter 1). Through this circulation of glitter, an economy of feelings that stick to bodies is formed, which resembles Sara Ahmed’s ‘affective economy’ (2004).

In her affective economic model, Ahmed draws upon Marx’s understanding of capital, the figure of exchange value that is dependent on material circulation, in order to make a case for the significance of feelings that “show how emotions work by sticking figures together (adherence), a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective (coherence),” showing how important it is to acknowledge the affective values attached to humans, nonhumans, and

feelings that are connected to community building, rather than material wealth (Ahmed 2004, 119). Seigworth and Gregg also see affect in this in-betweenness in which affect circulates and sticks, as they suggest that “affect is found in those intensities that pass from body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise) in those resonances that circulate about, between, and *sometimes stick to bodies and words*” (2010, 1, emphasis added). In this sense, I contend that the material circulation of glitter is also an affective circulation since it carries with it the metaphors and feelings related to visibility, strength, and pride to the queer community. Glitter adheres to the body and opens up a space for the formation of a glittery collective that is incredibly diverse.

What is crucial in this affective model is the inclusion of the nonhuman as a subject with capacities to reciprocate and participate in the passages of affect (Bennett 2010; Seigworth and Gregg 2010). This is where I make affect theory meet new materialism, enabling further understandings of the interactions between life and nonlife in order to conceptualize social relations and political strategies such as the shimmery connection between glitter and queer bodies. Affect can extend further “as an entire, vital, and modulating field of myriad becomings across human and nonhuman” (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 6). Thus, glitter is the sticky matter that participates in these complex relationships that shift perspectives about bodies, accounting for their capacity of ebbing through the limits of corporality and composing new worlds of connection and interdependency – such as in the sensual interaction between humans and nonhumans (see Chapter 3 and 4).

This affective community building that comes from the adherence and coherence of the sticky aspect of affect and glitter is linked to the aesthetic realm since its value and political importance comes from the imagery that is built by the use of shimmers in the construction of subjects and relationships that escapes containment and produces elusive images (Steinbock 2019). The interplay between affect and aesthetics is related to the manner – ‘how it is’ – rather

than to the essence – ‘what it is’ (Shaviro 2007, 8). In this sense, the political aspect of affect and aesthetics comes from a nuanced understanding of how the body can be sensitive to the ‘manner’ of the world that surrounds it (Seigworth and Gregg 2010; Shaviro 2007; O’Sullivan 2001). Thus, the relationship between queer bodies and glitter is not only indebted to the tropes of the matter – its stickiness – but mostly to the feelings and hopes that it brings to those who use it. In other words, the affirmative connection between queer bodies and glitter can only be possible if there is an ‘affective angle’ towards the matter – a body that does not have the sensibility to shimmer will not develop an affective entanglement with glitter, and that is why I contend for a queer relationality between bodies and glitter. As put by Seigworth and Gregg,

a body’s capacity for becoming sensitive to the ‘manner’ of a world [...] [depends on] finding (or not) the coordinating rhythms that precipitate newness or change while also holding close to the often shimmering (twinkling/fading, vibrant/dull) continuities that pass in the slim interval between ‘*how to affect*’ and ‘*how to be affected*’ (2010, 14-5, emphasis in the original)

Regarding the nonhuman aspect of the connection between queer bodies and glitter, I perceive this relationship through a non-hierarchical standpoint through new materialist accounts of matter (Barad 2007; Bennett 2010). In fact, when it comes to being attentive to affect and the nonhuman, it is possible to engage with the subjects in a way that differentiates them by the complexity of their planes of experience, rather than overlooking their importance based on life and nonlife differentiations (Bennett 2010). There are possibilities of interaction that come from the intersections and connections that human and nonhumans are capable of supporting, and the queer body and glitter is one of them. Nigel Thrift, when investigating this realm of possibilities, describes it as “the establishment of human-nonhuman fields of captivation” in which the boundaries between material/immaterial, human/nonhuman, touching/feeling are blurred, enabling a proliferation of ‘worlds-within-worlds’ and ‘worlds-upon-worlds’ that play with our senses and intimacies (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, 16; Thrift 2010, 290).

Following this embrace of the affective capacity of the nonhuman, I contend that the relationship between glitter and queer bodies can be read as an affective counter practice in which aesthetics brings in different political modulations that resist normativity and blur boundaries without erasing the subject. In fact, Thrift (2010) offers an interesting reading of this relationship between affect and aesthetics, including in his discussion the capitalistic assimilation of the shimmery aesthetic as an alluring technology – that he connects with ‘glamour.’

Here, the criticism comes back to the discussion of ‘all that glitters is not gold,’ reminding the viewer of the deceptive aspect of the visual component of politics. For him, the imagination of the commodity has been influenced by capitalistic pressures through “magical technologies of public intimacy” (Thrift 2010, 290). This means that in the public arena, images are used to create enchantments that are connected to magical worlds of consumption, turning captivation into a key element in producing exchange value and dividends. For example, he mentions how in a crowded market “the practices of aesthetics may be the only way to make a product or environment stand out from the crowd, especially given a growing emphasis on individual identity and individual style” (Thrift 2010, 290). In this sense, aesthetics is an alluring technology that can generate an illusion of value through images that structure the affective entanglements between human and nonhuman. Human and nonhuman matters are connected in order to construct an imagery that catches attention – glitter is added to things to generate exchange value (like in yellow paints that mimic gold) or to signal existence and resistance (like for the LGBT community in oppressive religious settings, as mentioned in the introduction).

Departing from Thrift’s understanding of ‘glamour’ as a technology of allure “that blurs the boundary between person and thing in order to produce greater captivation” (2010, 291), I want to suggest an alternative reading of this phenomenon that does not necessarily read alluring

solely as part of a capitalistic investment in the visual and imaginary field. I consider aesthetics as a form of communication through the senses that creates reactions that do not necessarily involve words or cognitive engagements with narratives – as mentioned by O’Sullivan, “we can think the aesthetic power of art in an immanent sense through recourse to the notion of affect” (2001, 125). Therefore, I will conduct the exploration of the relationship between queer bodies and glitter as part of a technology of allure that stands for an affective politics of visibility and recognition that also complicates linear readings of visibility, considering that it is about acknowledging the nuances that constitute things/beings, rather than only being seen. ‘Shimmering images’ have the capacity of depicting neglected bodies within their own expressions of non-binarisms and resistance, reinforcing nuances and rejecting clear-cut delimitations of their identities and bodily experiences (Steinbock 2019). The following section will explore different examples of ‘shimmery entanglements’ in which glitter – as matter/metaphor – intra-acts with the world in a way that shifts perceptions from normative versions of identity politics and offers new possibilities of expression and experiences.

2.2 Hatching the Glittery Egg – Aesthetics and Glitter in Disidentificatory Politics

Glitter was invented by Henry Ruschmann in 1934 in New Jersey (Stoddard 2016). Up until current days, Ruschmann’s company, named Meadowbrook Inventions, still sells glitter worldwide, being the leading manufacturer and supplier in a global scale (Stoddard 2016). According to Meadowbrook Inventions’ website, they are able to manufacture “glitter for every type of application imaginable, including industrial paints, coatings, cosmetics, plastics, solvents, adhesives, printing inks, flocks, aerosol, textiles, fashion, floral, crafts, and more” (Meadowbrook Inventions n.d.). Currently, there are in the market several different ways to buy glitter, and consequently even more options to use it depending on the user’s creativity. This tiny plastic piece that reflects the light and creates this shimmery aesthetic has been around

for almost a hundred years, during which it has been used as an alternative (and cheaper) marker of ‘glamour and opulence’ (Oyler 2015). Among all the different usages of glitter, one is prominent and stands out from the rest, not only for its shimmering aesthetics but also because of its political relevance: the entanglement between queer body and glitter.



Figure 1. CAConrad [Source: Poetry Foundation]

In a text about their memories of going through life as a queer person, the poet CAConrad recounts some moments in which their art and glitter intermingled into forms of self-reflection and rage. The text *The Queer Voice: Reparative Poetry Rituals & Glitter Perversions* (2015) is filled with affective encounters in which glitter is attached to their body and personality, recreating moments of freedom and self-discovery. When going through their narrative, the reader is invited to enter an account of reality that is permeated by the belief in the power of things – glitter, for them, goes beyond matter and carries meanings and feelings that will lead them through difficult moments such as grieving for lovers who were brutally killed by the police or died due to AIDS related illness (CAConrad 2015). In a witty way of recounting their life, they embrace what could be seen as the ‘new materialist’ reading of matter, acknowledging the vibrancy that comes from the interactions between bodies and matter (Bennett 2010; Frost 2011; Thrift 2010).

In CAConrad's autobiographical text, they acknowledge this embodied relationship between their queerness and glitter, describing how it can change things through its material tropes,

plastic, metal, grind it up, keep it in your shirt pocket in case you walk by a very sad place, then sprinkle a little red and purple with a touch of gold. *Glitter will turn any unhappy thing around.* Let me enter the murder scene after they have taken fingerprints, hair samples and photos of bloody boot prints, I can dust the carnage with a shimmering cobalt blue mixed with silver and emerald green. *Glitter is not enabling denial of the world's pain but instead helps us endure the bleak results of those who are in denial of how we need one another.* If you have a scar or bent nose that has become the center of your life, trust me when I say own it and apply glitter blush directly, immediately. *Before you die join me in loving our flesh, loving our lives* (CAConrad 2015, emphasis added)

The author describes how glitter, as matter, has the capacity to turn things around – they see in glitter the opportunity to change perspectives, to add life to things, to seize the body before you die, to enable one to feel comfortable about needing others. It feels like there is a suggestion of a glitter-bound relationship that comes from the love and freedom expressed by the shimmer that sticks to the body – it does not erase the pain, but it gives to it a new meaning that sees beauty in ache, that creates an affirmative atmosphere through this glittery encounter. At another moment of their life, CAConrad describes the liberating feeling they experienced when they were outed in school as a 'faggot queer.' CAConrad equates their queerness to glitter – "I raised my hand to the mirror and vowed to never apologize for my love of glitter" – and describes it as a protection from all the hatred he was receiving – "glitter was my sacred shield as the other kids referred to me as Faggot so often, they seemed to forget my real name. This war was on and I was going to win!" (CAConrad 2015).

From a theoretical perspective regarding the identity politics that this narrative permeates, one can also see how glitter crisscrosses between an aesthetical prop and a figure of their gender

identity. For example, CAConrad states in their text that “this town is not worthy of glitter, and I am getting the hell out,” not distinguishing between what was them and what is glitter – creating a world in which glitter encompasses an affective sense of space, “a territory of feelings” (CAConrad 2015; Thrift 2010, 292). They embody glitter in the material and rhetorical sense – one gives strength to the other. Glitter sticks to their skin and brings with it the shimmers that make them feel protected – the ‘glitter shield’ – while also making them visible, although “so often [people] would forget [their] real name” (CAConrad 2015). In a sense, what is happening in their life narrative is an inner conflict that comes from anxieties regarding the positioning of the narrator within their community – they do not fit within the binary identificatory possibilities that are offered to them and glitter gives them the opportunity to imagine their own ‘Neutral’ self – a shimmery subject that is entitled to live their own life according to their own identities, orientations, and desires.

I see in the entanglement between glitter and queer corporalities means of captivation that enable visibility strategies through which new perspectives of embodiments, hopes, and futurities are read as sites of self-(re)creation through the recycling of damaged stereotypes (Muñoz 1999). In the preface of his book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (1999), Muñoz actually makes a quick reference to how glitter is present in the disidentificatory process he perceived in Jack Smith’s film *Normal Love* (1965).

In an excerpt of his analysis, Muñoz states that

disidentification is the process in which the artist reformulates the actual performativity of his *glittering* B movie archive, which is to say that the images that Smith cited were imbued with performativity that surpassed simple fetishization. *Glitter transformed hackneyed orientalism and tropical fantasies, making them rich antinormative treasure troves of queer possibility* (Muñoz 1990, x, emphasis added)

As in CAC Conrad's autobiographical accounts, in which glitter had the power to turn things around, here glitter is also rendered as a subject in the processes of revising identities and possibilities of self-expression in contexts of normalcy (Muñoz 1990). Smith's *Normal Love* resists determination and plays with Hollywood's fetishized fantasies of the other, especially 'exotic' Third World ethnoscapings, using glitter in a political process of re-creating perspectives of the self and the other (Leaver-Yap 2015; Muñoz 1999).



Figure 2. Jack Smith, *Normal Love* (film still), 1963–1965, 16mm film (color), sound on CD; ed. 5/10, 120 minutes.

In *Normal Love* there is a sequence in which Smith depicts an alternative version of a queer utopian world that mixes pastoral scenes with lush and glamour – represented mostly by shimmery objects and costumes (Smith 1965). The director uses exaggeration and astonishment as means of captivation to enrich the myths that mix humans and nonhumans. Similarly to what is done in fables, Smith presents the narrative of werewolves, mermaids, mummies, and snake-women through a shimmery and over-the-top aesthetics (Leaver-Yap

2015). The film is invested in featuring the opposite of what would be considered normal, it offers a parody, a disidentificatory moment, of normality through the use of antinormative aesthetics – which is an important feature of the avant-garde scene of that moment which had an “increasingly fraught relationship to censorship” (Leaver-Yap 2015). For Muñoz, Smith presents a ‘materialistic aesthetic philosophy’ that insists, in Smith’s own words, that art is “escapist, stunning, glamorous, and naturalistic” (quoted in Muñoz 1990, xi).

In fact, regarding my reading of glitter and politics, I align myself with Smith’s philosophy, claiming that glitter carries a political importance in the imagination and development of artistic performances that carry political meanings for the queer community. Smith’s account of being naturalistic means that art is invested with a politically pedagogical role, offering the spectator the tools to resist normality, disidentifying with this world in order to build a new one (Muñoz 1990, xi). Actually, this positioning of queerness in the domain of the future is part of Muñoz later work on queer utopias, which can also be seen in the use of glitter and its appeal to shimmering hopes for a better future. For Muñoz, “queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (Muñoz 2009, 1).

At this point, it is also important to highlight the political powers of disidentification when it comes to matters of assimilation, since, as shown in both aforementioned narratives, glitter stands for a resistance to being normal – it signals individuality in a way that does not necessarily subscribe to identity politics and sectarianism. In order to argue against the apolitical readings of disidentification as just a middle ground with no political importance, Muñoz explains that

if the terms *identification* and *counteridentification* are replaced with their rough corollaries’ *assimilation* and *anti-assimilation*, a position such as disidentification is open to the charge that it is merely an apolitical sidestepping, trying to avoid the trap of assimilating or adhering to

different separatist or nationalist ideologies. [...] disidentification is not an apolitical middle ground between positions [...] its political agenda is clearly indebted to antiassimilationist thought [...] disidentification negotiates strategies of resistance within the flux of discourse and power. It understands that counter discourses, like discourse, can always fluctuate for different ideological ends and a politicized agent must have the ability to adapt and shift as quickly as power does in discourse (Muñoz 1999, 18-9, emphasis in the original)

In fact, Muñoz's book on disidentifications is dedicated to understanding and analyzing artistic performances that bring in the political understanding of creating minoritarian resistance through discourses that defy binaries and normative politics of identification. He is keen on focusing on racial aspects of this phenomenon, exposing the often racial-exclusionary practices within queer art and politics (Muñoz 1999). In this sense, giving continuity to his attentive analysis on these issues, I bring in artistic projects that use glitter in order to reframe racial politics, especially regarding black masculinities.

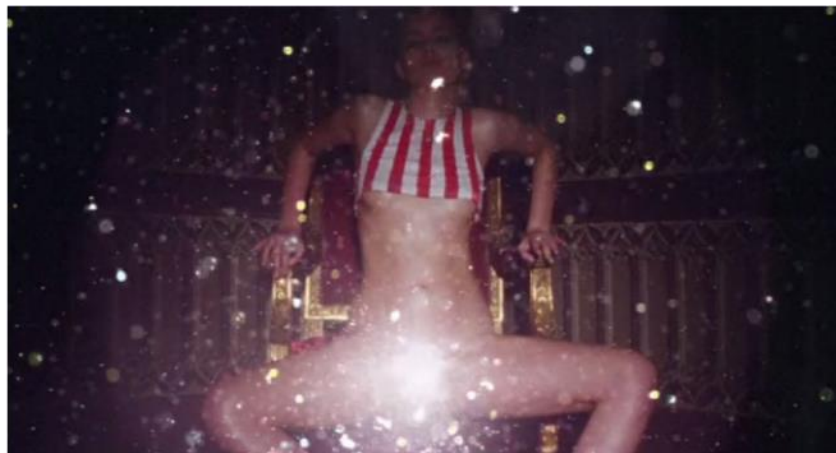


Figure 3. *Frank Ocean, Nikes* (film still)

In 2017, Frank Ocean, a US-American black singer, came out as bisexual after releasing his album *Blonde*, which is devoted to presenting the nuances of his personal narratives and the issues that came from the difficulties of managing the dissonances between his sexuality and normative expectations regarding blackness, hegemonic masculinities, and heteronormativity. Permeated by disidentificatory moments that would expose how normative understandings of

identities can limit one's experience of their own life and body, Ocean's music video *Nikes* (2017) presents interesting imageries of glitter and bodies in a celebratory way, challenging normative aesthetics and racial and gendered expectations of black males. In this video, Ocean and other characters are bathed in glitter, shining on the screen, blurring the lines and presenting spectral imageries of the self – just as in Steinbock's (2019) analysis of trans cinema. In one of the scenes, two black subjects are shot from a bird's-eye view, showing their glitter make-up and shiny red nails while laying on a surface covered by one-dollar bills that also cover the upper and lower parts of their bodies. The make-up and the bills play the role of 'disguising' the body – creating an 'affliction' that comes from meeting un-gendered bodies. The glitter and the positioning of the money blur one's access to the normative markers of gender identity, leaving the spectator in a position of confusion and puzzlement since gender is an important factor in how the spectator grasps and processes the moving images (see Mulvey 1975).

In another shot, glitter more explicitly plays the role of blurring gendered readings when a white person is placed in front of the camera while sitting on a golden chair. Slowly, the character that normally would be read as a woman opens their legs, showing off not a biological organ that would demarcate their sex/gender but instead, the spectator is presented with a shot in which the subject emanates a glittery bright light from the lower part where a vagina would be expected to be positioned. In this case, rather than hiding the body, glitter gives visibility to it. It is impossible to miss the shining spot and at the same time it is impossible to delimit it. Glitter escapes containment, representing a fluidity that is in line with the resistance aspect of disidentificatory processes – the gender codes are decoded, giving the spectator the liberty to interpret the video according to their own experiences and knowledges (Hall 1980).

Practicing what Stuart Hall named the 'encoding/decoding' aspect of spectatorship of mass media (1980), Quil Lemons, a black queer photographer, took inspiration from Ocean's glittery moving images to create his own disidentificatory art (Abelman 2014). Hall's postulate of

encoding/decoding cultural productions permeates the idea that the spectator can decode what she/they/he sees at different levels of interpretation. The viewer's interpretation of the art is delimited by their experiences, and in this sense, different bodies will decode different meanings of a cultural product. In this case, Lemons took the glitter use in the video as a statement against hegemonic black masculinities. He identifies with the disidentification that is presented in *Nikes*, taking it as part of a project that challenges binaries and celebrates different forms of self-expression. Based on this inspiration, Lemons creates a photographic project that portrays black young men with glitter make-up against a pink background (Abelman 2014). For him, the glitter boy he portrays is "a young black man just owning who they are and being themselves." For him, the *GLITTERBOY* project is also about offering new futures for black masculinities as it visually defies the normative oppositions between racialized masculinities and femininities (Abelman 2014).

The portraits of the *GLITTERBOY* series are interesting renderings of black queerness, presenting different men being connected through the glittery matter that sticks to their cheekbones and makes them shine in a different way from what is expected of black men. As Lemons stated in an interview,

there is a privilege that comes along with being white when it comes to self-expression, sexuality, and fluidity. Black men don't really have that. They really are policed with what they can and cannot do, so this project was to bring light to boys that get overlooked (Abelman 2014)

Again, glitter and shimmers are the matter/metaphor for visibility and queer representation, offering not a limited and contained imagery of what queerness can be, instead giving the subjects the opportunity to recreate themselves in a shimmery way. Rather than hiding the differences, glitter highlights them, sparkling and shocking those who are not used to cherish diversity. Going against the stereotypes of black men who are often restricted to rappers, thugs, or basketball players, Ocean and Lemons are offering new images of black bodies through the

aesthetical use of glitter. As mentioned by Lemons, “glitter is universal [...] with glitter [skin tone] doesn’t matter” (Abelman 2014).

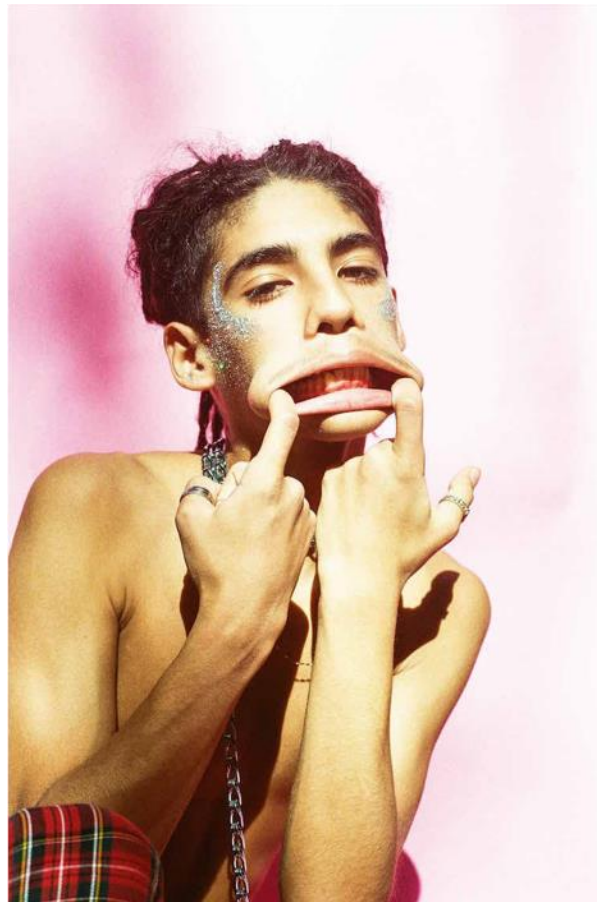


Figure 4. Quil Lemons, *GLITTERBOY*

As in the *GLITTERBOY* series, glitter also stands for hope and a new identity politics in the narrative of Sister Sparkles Plenty, a drag queen activist from California (Herman 2018). Sparkles Plenty lives in Guerneville, a small town near San Francisco, that became famous after being receptive to the gay population during the peak of the AIDS epidemic in the United States (Herman 2018). Sister Sparkles Plenty is part of The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Inc. an order of queer nuns that is devoted to community service, promoting human rights, respect for diversity, and fighting “the forces of bigotry, complacency, and guilt that chain the human spirit” (The Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence Inc. n.d.). Part of the Sisters’ aesthetic is to put on glittery make-up together with amusing outfits that locate them in the in-betweenness of the normative and binary forms of gender expression. In the portrait of Sister Sparkles Plenty taken

by the photographer Talia Herman, one can see Sparkles's shimmery outfit that includes the nun's habits with a golden deer attached to it, matching the glitter embroidery of flowers and leaves that decorates the religious outfit that is symbolic of the nunnery within the Catholic religion. Her make-up is also contrasting. The face is covered in white paint, whilst the body remains untouched, exposing her skin tone. The eyelids and eyebrows are covered by a sparkly make up in tones of red and gold, forming two figures that resemble the icon of a star. The symbolisms that are present in this image are powerful representations of the disidentification that spreads through her artistic and activist persona. Sister Sparkles Plenty comes to life through constructing this imagery that takes up to three hours to emerge from "a painstaking glitter application process, incorporating up to six shades out of the forty-five in her collection, [creating] the inimitable face that has made Sparkles Plenty a sister-celebrity" (Herman 2018).



Figure 5. Talia Herman, Sister Sparkles Plenty

The nun's habit, the golden deer, the glitter make-up, and the excessive and glamorous jewelry, build up a character that embodies a multifaceted identity – there is a reframing of religiousness, community service, and gender expression that challenges normative narratives, especially for someone who went through the difficulties of the AIDS epidemic. The elements that compose the imagery of Sister Sparkles Plenty are conflicting – especially those related to sexuality and religiosity – although at the same time one can see a harmonious embodiment of these oppositions. In a sense, Sister Sparkles represents the disidentificatory process where she is neither the expected – a real nun – nor the complete opposite. She politically stands in the in-between and is part of a community that is built around this undefined and unlimited form of care.

In these life narratives and artworks, glitter stands for visibility and hope. It is the shield that protects, it is the weapon that afflicts the eyes of those who insist on erasing their existence. They exemplify how the relationship between queer bodies and glitter is permeated by affect. It is an embodied encounter that changes politics in terms of identities and governmentality – it allures people to stop ignoring and start recognizing. All that glitters is indeed not gold and, as I have shown, it can also escape this linear reading for exchange value. Over the past decades, glitter has been closely connected to the queer community, and its shimmery aspect is what I see as the bridge between the two. Queer bodies and glitter are entangled in this matter/meaning relationship in which sensual perception is key to the public affirmation of queer rights and resistance.

Body/glitter relationality is dependent on the surroundings and on the circumstances of the affective encounters between them. Glitter offers a material way of presenting what Barthes and other theorists referred as 'the Neutral,' a third way of approaching the social context without resorting to absolute and binary ways of describing life. Through diffracting light, creating colors, and offering elusive images, glitter presents an otherworldly aesthetic that has

been picked up by the queer community and now is part of a larger story. In this sense, this chapter served the purpose of tying glitter to the queer community in order to see how the previously mentioned politics regarding plastic pollution have neglected the political usage of it. Thus, after unraveling how glitter turned into a ‘fabulous’ queer related matter, the analysis of glitter as a ‘plastic pollutant’ has to take account of it, especially given that there is not enough evidence of glitter as this ubiquitous microplastic responsible for plastic disasters.

To focus on glitter, out of all other plastics, seems to be a very specific and inefficient way of dealing with plastic pollution. Since glitter signals the contravention of normative orders of gender and sexuality, it is an easy target for those who are against it and want to use legal maneuvers or biodegradable glitter to endorse politics that are not environmentally efficient and that actually reproduces the order of profit and production – since biodegradable glitters are considerably more expensive than the regular one and are still potentially harmful (BBC 2019; Bramley 2018). Thinking through a queer relationality shows how glitter and other matters attach to things and bodies in order to create political meanings. Following these encounters can expose more efficient ways to deal with the issue of pollution. For a start, as will be further argued in the next chapters, one can first re-think waste and waste management in a scheme that embraces larger socio-political and economic structures on plastic pollution. For example, focusing also on other plastic matters (connected to bigger corporations and governments) that are present in much larger amounts in the ocean, and seeing how context and location are key to understanding how pollution can, depending on the situation, contravene or reproduce normative policies. Glitter may not be the biggest constituent of plastic pollution in the ocean, but it can, as this research shows, offer an entry point to address the issue from a queer perspective.

3 Prismatic Visions: Colorful Ecologies of Plastic Pollution



Figure 6. Pantone Living Coral, Pantone 2019

To create various different forms of plastic matter, industries have been using a chemical component, known as plasticizer, to give plastics their color and determine their malleability. Once in the open ocean, where they are exposed to sunlight, microplastics and other plastic materials start going through a photo-degradation process that break them into smaller particles, releasing into the ocean the plasticizers which will bioaccumulate throughout the food chain and disrupt the endocrine system of the contaminated subjects (Liboiron 2013). Due to this process of degradation, most of the plastics that are seen in the ocean have a less vivid aesthetic since they start losing their intense color and also change in size and form. The same process happens to microplastics such as glitter, which will lose its shimmery aspect, turning it into a less recognizable matter within the garbage patch. Giving continuity to the task of following glitter from manufacture to disposal, in this chapter I will focus on the perception of color, bearing in mind its natural and artificial aspect.

Going towards a non-anthropocentric reading of the onto-epistemological aspects of perception, in this chapter, I engage with color, in the exploration of the possibilities of a

‘prismatic ecology.’ In order to expand the considerations regarding glitter into a prismatic vision that enables a “direct material engagement” (Barad 2007, 47) with the environment, I use a synecdoche detour: I analyze colored plastics in general to think about the discourses on glitter. In this chapter, I consider that “color is intellectually and socially significant in cultural poetics, in the production of cultural narratives, social practices, meanings, and regimes of power and knowledge” (Iovino and Oppermann 2013, 331). Therefore, in order to account for the matter/meaning of glitter, it is not possible to simply dismiss the exuberant colors that are part of its elusive and alluring aesthetics. Conversely, giving continuity to a materialist analysis, I argue that it is impossible to create a genealogy and topography of glitter by ignoring where it comes from: its petroleum past and the added chemical components (Davis 2015b).

In this sense, taking glitter’s materiality into consideration, I consider aesthetics and plastic pollution in conversation with each other, enmeshing senses and unsettling monolithic readings of the perception of color. In order to do so, I engage with the creation of artificial colors that are largely used in plastics. More specifically, I analyze the onto-epistemological and environmental aspects of creating colors through mimicking nature, connecting the matter of plastic pollution to the question of aesthetics. Having in mind the discourse against glitter which is focused on the impacts of it to nonhumans, I follow the ‘Living Coral’ artificial color, seeing what are the environmental politics and reflections that can emerge from it.

Annually, Pantone, a globally known color institute, selects a new ‘color of the year’ to be widely used in consumer-oriented economies. As described by the company’s website, selecting a color of the year “provides strategic direction for the world of trend and design. In fact, [it] is a culmination of the Pantone Color Institute’s year-round work forecasting trends and developing color palettes for our clients” (Pantone 2019). For the past 20 years, Pantone has been the most present company in color development for the fashion and design economies,

‘producing’ colors and selling them to companies across the globe. This market system of standardized color reproduction is part of a larger scheme of mass production that involves transnational networks of commerce and trade that has to adapt itself to consumer demand and to the ever-changing patterns of desire and consumption that influence individuals’ decision-making regarding what to purchase.

The capitalist use of colors is part of a marketing strategy in which hues are used to ‘allure’ consumers’ attention. They potentially have the power of creating affective responses based on the bodily interactions that take place in color perception. In fact, the cognition of color is part of a bigger scheme of different ‘naturecultural’ phenomena since the body perceives and processes colors based on the object’s capacity to reflect and absorb different wavelengths of white light. Based on this network of perceptions, the Pantone color scheme was created to enable different companies to create products that have the same color, the same capacity to refract light, forecasting colorful ‘consumer trends’ for the following year. Establishing a ‘color of the year’ is part of Pantone’s trademark, creating expectations and speculations regarding what will be the next trend in consumer-oriented economies, even connecting it to broader political issues, using the hue to address political messages.

For 2019, Pantone announced a ‘new’ color that would valorize the environment’s vibrancy: the ‘Living Coral’ hue. Following the ‘Ultraviolet’ color of 2018, ‘Living Coral,’ also known as Pantone 16-1546, is the pigment that is similar to orange and that was inspired by the “animating and life-affirming coral hue with a golden undertone that energizes and enlivens with a softer edge” (Pantone 2019). The color is a pastel orange that is commonly seen in underwater ecosystems that now will take over terrestrial and virtual environments as it has been being incorporated into several items of merchandise, which can also be bought at Pantone’s official virtual store. Exploring the liveliness and exuberance of marine life, Pantone 16-1546 is described as “vibrant, yet mellow” with the affective potential of “[embracing] us

with warmth and nourishment to provide comfort and buoyancy *in our continually shifting environment*” (Pantone 2019, emphasis added).

As one can gather from the company’s description of their product, the ‘Living Coral’ life-affirming hue is connected to the necessity of being resilient and responsive to the environmental changes that have been occurring over the past centuries and that culminated in the Anthropocene. Although not mentioned by the company on their official website, the corals that ‘inspired’ the development of the ‘Living Coral’ hue are actually endangered. The current issues regarding coral conservation, especially the deadly effects of coral bleaching, caused by the oceans’ rising temperatures, are connected to larger and correlated environmental concerns such as air pollution, plastic pollution, and acidification of the ocean. In this sense, although labeled as “a nurturing color that appears in our natural surroundings and at the same time, displays a lively presence within social media” (Pantone 2019), the ‘Living Coral’ hue is actually closer to the other extreme of the spectrum, since it is part of the larger structure of plastic pollution, considering that it was created to enliven ‘petroc capitalist’ practices of over-production and over-consumption of fossil fuels materials, which are endangering the environment (Davis 2016).

Therefore, starting off from the analysis of the relationship between color, environment, and politics, I navigate through plastics’/glitter’s materiality focusing on how color and the environment connect with the issues of plastic pollution. As will be further discussed, the ‘Living Coral’ hue exposes the paradoxes of using/mimicking the environment to create utilitarian connections between humanity and nature. Following the analysis of Chapter 2, in which glitter was presented as an important materiality for queer relationalities and aesthetics, in this chapter the focus will shift from human to nonhuman in order to consider the discourses on the costs of glitter usage to the environment. As previously argued, through diffractive and refractive interactions, glitter can signal the human existences that are excluded and erased

from the field of politics – the queer minorities. However, escaping from an anthropocentric approach to it, does glitter also signal life for nonhumans? What is ‘life-affirming’ in larger consumer-economies that incorporate shimmer and color into their plastic products? Going beyond ‘green politics’ (and ‘green washing’), this chapter follows a ‘prismatic ecology’ that “[breaks] monochromatic light into a multitude of colors [offering] a suggestive entryway into nonanthropocentric ecologies,” (Cohen 2013, xxviii) where nature is not limited to be the *oikos* (home) of life but is in fact acknowledged as an ever-unfinished world.

3.1 Life in Color – Color Coded Environmentalism and Queer Ecologies

As suggested by its name, the Pantone hue of 2019 is described as a vivid entity with the affective agency of transforming encounters through its vibrancy. According to the Pantone website, the ‘Living Coral’ hue was created “in reaction to the onslaught of digital technology and social media increasingly embedding into daily life,” inspiring them to come up with a ‘color of the year’ that will represent “authentic and immersive experiences that enable connection and intimacy” and also symbolize “[their] innate need for optimism and joyful pursuits, [since] Pantone 16-1546 Living Coral embodies [their] desire for playful expression” (Pantone 2019). The way in which the color is described is surprisingly packed with notions and suggestions of nonhuman agency, acknowledging what Jane Bennett (2004; 2010) named as ‘thing-power,’ the life and agency that flows around and through the intra-actions between nonhumans and humans.

The color, which has no body, is able to ‘embody’ political messages of hope and intimacy. Perception plays an important role in this affective network, in which color morphs and moves depending on the constituency of its host. Light, which is composed of particles named photons, travels from ‘thing’ to eye, from body to body, and is perceived through the physical and biochemical interactions between subjects, revealing a constant becoming between humans

and nonhumans (Cohen 2013). Color is, at the same time, a characteristic of a thing and an event in itself, revealing the intertwined human and nonhuman worlds of perception. As suggested by Julian Yates in his investigation on the orange hue,

color itself might best be modeled as a multispecies sensory process or network that generates biosemiotics-material effects that then take on a metaphorical life of their own as they are translated to different registers. The anthropomorphic experience of color conjoins with a zoomorphic becoming other than oneself – a prismatic [...] becoming (2013, 85)

Like glitter that creates its own ‘elusive’ aesthetic by refracting and diffracting light, colors are dependent on material effects of perception in order to circulate as a signifier for feelings and politics in biosemiotic-networks. Following the argument that glitter has an indissoluble matter/meaning, colors also function in this way, attaching meanings and matter, creating ‘prismatic becomings’ that cross boundaries and build up connections between humans and nonhumans.

Similar to the alluring power of shimmering matters, colors are also used to capture attention and generate desire (Thrift 2010). For example, the ‘Living Coral’ invitation for an optimistic reading of the environment or yellow paints that “give the aesthetic impression of gold, [...] enhanced with glitter or gold itself,” (Harman 2013, 111) are two illustrations of how colors are employed to create light- and life-mediated affects. Color coding is part of politics, having in mind that each color creates ‘biosemiotic-material effects’ that later on will attract metaphorical meanings to them. Color-coded politics are present in environmental politics under the name of the ‘green movement’ and the formation of ‘green parties’ across the globe. As suggested by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen,

green dominates our thinking about ecology like no other, as if the color were the only organic hue, a blazon for nature itself. [...] Green has become our synonym for sustainability, but such

a colorful ascription begs the question of what mode of being are we attempting to sustain, and at what environmental cost (2013, xx)

Cohen's questions regarding the 'environmental costs' is related to how colors have been co-opted by political strategies that are connected to neoliberal practices of for-profit activities with low environmental awareness, what is commonly named 'green washing.' Similar to the discourse on creating 'eco-friendly' glitter (which is interestingly enough less shiny and more expensive than the regular one), what is at stake is a larger production and consumption structure that is not included in the 'biodegradable' narrative. In a time and place where environmental issues have been playing with people's perceptions of the future and how they can fit into this ever-changing world, being attentive to the matter/meaning play on color-coded politics is important in generating critical responsiveness to this unstable context.

Lately, there has been a great debate on how color, just like glitter, has been used to deceive and allure people into neoliberal practices that are detrimental to the environment and to minorities. As mentioned in Chapter 2, glitter has obtained a great space within queer politics of visibility and expression, but at the same time, it has also been used to generate illusions of glamour and wealth that were analyzed here through the famous saying 'all that glitters is not gold.' In a similar vein, colors are not univocal. Not all that is green is sustainable, not all that is rainbow colored is queer-friendly, not all that is white is peaceful. The utilitarian use of color has become known as 'color-washing,' such as green-washing, pink-washing, white-washing, and others. The main trope within these phenomena is that color is used as a label to charm one into participating in it, but if closely analyzed, it misses the point of political awareness and responsiveness (e.g. 'biodegradable' glitters).

Going back to the focus on color and environment, green-washing is the misleading marketing strategy employed to camouflage activities that are harmful to the environment. Green-washing companies tend to sell themselves as 'environmentally conscious' or as part of the 'green

movement’ but they invest most of their money on advertising rather than on helping environmental causes (Karliner 1997). Having these color-coded politics in mind, it is important to come up with and to support politics that go beyond the green, recognizing the substructures that are supported by ‘environmentally conscious’ discourses. Adding more colors of the spectrum to the field of environmental politics is about being less moralistic towards environmental politics (e.g. glitter is bad, biodegradable is good) and actually start engaging with more diverse and inclusive forms of thinking environmentally. Rigid and categorical policies do not necessarily enhance environmental awareness, and in fact they can hamper it (Seymour 2018a). As suggested by Cohen, “other colors may be necessary to trace the impress and interspaces created by ecologies that cannot be easily accommodated within the bucolic expanses of green readings” (2013, xxii). What is needed from environmental politics is to decompose the white light through a prism, creating a rainbow of colors to embrace diversity in environmental thinking.

Similarly to glitter, the rainbow is materially/metaphorically connected to queer aesthetics and politics (see Klapper and Laskar 2018). In a way, a prismatic ecology is in line with queer ecology since “queer attachments work both to celebrate the excess of life and to politicize the sites at which this excess is eradicated” (Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 37). Queer ecology is also alert to the impacts of human-led activities to nonhumans, recognizing that “queer values – caring not (just) about the individual, the family, or one’s descendant, but about the Other species and persons to whom one has no immediate relations – may be the most effective ecological values” (Seymour 2013, 27). In a ‘prismatic’ perspective, humans and nonhumans are brought together to enhance their connections, offering new ways of reading ecologies without dismissing or erasing nonhuman existence and agency (Cohen 2013).

Shimmers and colors have the aesthetic capacity of alluring one’s attention, overflowing them with a sensory experience that is not only visual. A rainbow is a rare event that depends on the

interaction between light and raindrops in order to happen. Resembling the inter-relationalities of shimmery images when it comes to location and perception of the viewer,

the source of a rainbow's luminosity [...] cannot be glimpsed at the same time as the rainbow itself [...]. Like the horizon, rainbows are perspectival and therefore exist in no particular location. Since the angle of ocular perception cannot precisely coincide for any two onlookers, to stand in a slightly different place yields a different arc (Cohen 2013, xxv)

Thus, the material conditions of a rainbow are connected to its metaphorical sense related to the queer community as it represents their general symbol for their fight for rights and visibility. Like the sticking and circulating aspect of glitter, generating a materially entangled community, the rainbow “exists as an object, but an interstitial one, at a meeting place of relations and materiality. [...] the result of finding ourselves in the company of [the rainbow] is wonder, an aesthetic experience essential to thought” (Cohen 2013, xxvi). Shimmers and the rainbow offer this marvelous experience that is deeply connected to matters of visual immersion, where cognition starts by the striking feeling that comes from when something catches one's attention (Fisher 2003).

Hereof, the ‘prismatic ecology’ of the rainbow is about composing connections, creating meeting places where unexpected intimacies are forged based on the rarity, the oddities, and differences of the subjects involved in this critical-affective network. By including the nonhuman, the spectrum of light that is included in prismatic ecologies goes beyond human vision, including the waves that are outside the grasp of human sight – like the deep-sea violet-black (Alaimo 2013) or X-rays (Morton 2013). As in the discourses of queerness as resisting normalizing pressures (Warner 1991), Iovino and Oppermann describe ‘prismatic ecologies’ as sensuous conversations that take the subjects “beyond standardized discourses about the color of ecology and beyond colors themselves, showing how unilateral and *incomplete is a world perceived only through human eyes*” (2013, 330, emphasis in the original).

3.2 Touching with Eyes, Seeing with Hands – Nonhuman and Human Entanglements in Multi-sensorial Perception

Eva Hayward, a feminist science and technologies scholar, has published largely on the entanglements between humans and nonhumans in sensorial experiences. Drawing upon her own experience as a researcher at the Monterey Bay Aquarium in California, she has proposed sensuous and sensitive ways of accounting for the effects of light and water in the mediation of vision. Learning from starfishes, engaging with octopods, reframing captivity, and unsettling vision through impressions of cup corals, are some examples of how she has been engaging with the nonhuman in order to address onto-epistemological issues related to the environment (Hayward 2008; 2010; 2012).

The corals that inspired Pantone to develop (or should I say appropriate?) the ‘Living Coral’ hue comes from the orange cup corals with which Eva Hayward conducted a multispecies ethnography at the Long Marine Laboratory at Monterey (2010). According to her accounts of their laboratory encounters, the cup corals, also known as *Balanophyllia elegans*, made an aesthetical, haptic, ontological, and sensual impression on her, leading her to think about the “the interplay of vision and touch [...] to articulate the in-between encounter, a space of movement, of potential: this haptic-optic defines the overlay of sensorium and the inter- and intrachange of sensations” (Hayward 2010, 581). For her, the enmeshed sensations that come from the relationality built into the corals is something she named ‘fingeryeyes.’ More explicitly, she uses this haptic-optic conceptualization of sensation

to explain the tentacular visibility of cross-species encounters and to name the synaesthetic quality of *materialized sensation*. Perceptions are moved (affected) by the movements and actions that they provoke in other organisms (Hayward 2010, 580, emphasis added)

In this sense, Hayward's 'fingeryeyes' opens up a space for thinking human/nonhuman entanglements in a way that recognizes their agency and that also does not prioritize vision. Actually, what 'fingeryeyes' suggests is that visual sensation cannot be detached from other forms of experiences – eyes can touch, and fingers can see – as well as “multispecies and multimedial sensing” (Hayward 2010, 582).

Therefore, when touching/seeing the 'Living Coral' hue, some questions can arise from the paradoxes mentioned at the opening of this chapter: what is 'life-affirming' about a color which was created by a for-profit company that supports larger structures responsible for plastic pollution? Which mode of life is being considered in this? Going back to the discourses on glitter and pollution, how can glitter signal life for humans whilst potentially generating deadly relationships with nature? As mentioned by Donna Haraway, “species of all kinds, living or not, are consequent on a subject- and object-shaping dance of encounters” (2008, 4), meaning that one cannot investigate the human relationship to light, as shimmers and color, without considering the nonhuman part of the equation. As suggested by Steven Connor,

increasingly, the animal realm has come to seem like a sensory resource, enabling us not just to hitchhike on the sensory capacities of other species, but also to develop new kinds of perception [...]. Even where the animal is not literally present, the mediation of the animal is retained, in idiom and metaphor (quoted by Hayward 2010, 592-3)

In other words, what is done by Pantone when 'taking from nature' the inspiration to develop and sell colors for brands and manufacturers across the globe, is a 'hitchhiking' on nature's exuberance. In fact, this liveliness comes from the influence of the alluring and captivating capacities of sensorial strategies that take place in nature (Rose 2017). Through colors, shimmers, and melodies, sexual selection proves to be a 'queer' play on the evolutionary process, having in mind that it does not generate the survival of the fittest but the enhancement of sensorial excess, profusion, and surplus, especially of colors (Hayward 2010; Grosz 2011).

Similar to this is glitter's relationality to nature, if we consider that shining bodies came firstly from natural sources (e.g. gold, sparkly minerals, radioactive matter, or angiosperm flowers) (Rose 2017). Shimmers and colors are indebted to light, "after all, matter owes a debt to its own means of revelation: light" (Hayward 2012, 175). Even in places where human sight does not reach, like the deep-oceans, shining capacities can generate communication and survival. As explored by Stacy Alaimo, amidst the violet-black benthic oceans, bioluminescence is employed by marine species in order to find shelter, nourishment, and to communicate among themselves (2013). The transversal connections between nature and human aesthetic artifices is an entry point into the issues of how nonhuman lives and the environment supersede the discourse of human exceptionalism. Humans and nonhumans leave an impression on each other, an impression that "registers the reciprocal nature of being touched in the act of touching, as well as the double meaning [...] of knowing and being" (Hayward 2010, 581). In this sense, much of what is seen as artificial in a 'human worlding', such as shimmers and colors, are actually inspired by nature's capacity to capture one's attention with its vibrancy and exuberance.

However, what is the actual cost of this 'artificial' mimicry of nature? Going beyond what was already discussed regarding the metaphorical and social values of shimmers and colors, I now turn my attention to the ways in which these light effects are entangled with materialities and practices that are hazardous to the environment. More specifically, I will focus on marine ecosystems, where Pantone's 'Living Corals' are dying due to coral bleaching and ocean acidification. As previously mentioned, although glitter is not necessarily the main matter contributing to plastic pollution, I stick to the idea of employing it as a figure that sheds light on larger structures and discourses that support and reproduce polluting activities.

3.3 ‘Life-Affirming Plastics?’ – The Matters of Plastic Pollution



Figure 7. The Racoons, Dead Coral Color of the Year 2043

In response to Pantone’s release of the ‘Living Coral’ color of the year, the artistic duo The Racoons created an ironic eco-art project that draws upon Pantone’s product, forecasting not a new fashion trend but the projected future of the coral reefs if the levels of pollution stay the same (Nudd 2018). Named ‘Dead Coral Color of the Year 2043’ (2018), the art project presents a light brown color that resembles the dispiritedness of the color of bleached corals. Trying to attract attention to the rising temperatures of the ocean and the acidification of its waters, the artistic duo is ironically playing with Pantone’s inspiration, pointing out that their products and the way of living that they promote are in fact endangering marine life, instead of affirming it (Nudd 2018).

According to a 2017 report produced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), unless the emissions of CO₂ drastically reduce in the upcoming years, by 2100, world heritage coral reefs will disappear (2017). In this same report, the organization describes coral reef bleaching as

a stress response that causes coral animals to expel the microscopic algae (zooxanthellae) whose photosynthesis provides the energy needed to build three-dimensional reef structures. Mass bleaching is caused by rising water temperatures associated with climate change. It only takes a spike of 1-2°C to cause bleaching, and carbon emissions have caused a 1°C increase in global surface temperature since pre-industrial times [...]. Ocean acidification caused by dissolved atmospheric CO₂ weakens corals further (UNESCO 2017)

The rising temperatures of the ocean waters is deeply connected to other environmental issues related to the exploitation and over-use of fossil fuels, especially petroleum. Tying back in to the matters of plastic pollution, there are two sides to this hazardous relationship. On one side is that the production of plastics *per se* already involves high levels of energy use and burning of fuels that contribute to pollution. On the other side, plastics, which are basically formed by the “compressed bodies of ancient plants and animals” (Davis 2015, 234), are being dumped into the oceans, forming big plastic conglomerates that block sunlight, therefore creating literal barriers for underwater photosynthesis and ocean oxygenation.

In this sense, highlighting plastic pollution as one of the encounters between humans, nonhumans, and plastic, is important in conveying the ‘non-lively’ colors of the non-monetary costs of consumerisms. Having this in mind, The Racoons’ artwork is an interesting entryway to the analysis of environmental arts and plastic pollution, since it is portrayed in a way that not only presents their possibilities but also their potentialities. As suggested by José Muñoz, “unlike a possibility, a thing that simply might happen, a potentiality is a certain mode of nonbeing that is imminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense” (Muñoz 2003, 9). Rather than being only about the present or the future, the ‘Dead Coral’ is situated in a troubled liminality of timeframes: referencing past experiences while criticizing the present to insinuate defiant futures. Through this queered reading of temporalities, it brings in some considerations on the queering of death and life relationships in the ocean.

In this sense, decades ago when humanity created stories of a plastic future that would release humanity from the responsibilities to the world, causing the profusion of the ‘one-use culture’ (Davis 2015a), it was also the start of the ‘plastisphere’ (Zettler, Mincer, and Amaral-Zettler 2013). As pointed out by ‘Dead Color’, humans are not at the center of plastic pollution, in fact, nonhumans are the most affected population, which creates political imbalances when it comes to properly tackling the consequences of plastic pollution. ‘Dead Color,’ in contrast with Pantone’s ‘Living Coral,’ is very telling of the human present. From a queer ecological perspective, it subtly suggests a call for a shift in attention from humanity’s co-option of nature to create beautiful products to an awareness of how this utilitarian relationship is treacherous.

This is where ‘prismatic ecology’ plays an important role since it advocates for a transition from compartmentalized knowledge production to the construction of knowledge that breaks through settled notions of humanity and nonhumanity, producing intra-actional encounters between political and material as “part of that nature that we seek to understand” (Barad 2007, 26; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012). The affect between human and nonhuman works in ‘prismatic ecologies’ as an ‘enchantment’ that is capable of producing positive effects for those involved in these complex relationalities (Bennett 2010, xi). The attentiveness to this affectivity between color and the environment is important in order to pinpoint how forms of ecologically conscious human culture will only be possible if there is a nuanced investigation of the encounters between people and matter.

Bennett’s theoretical inflections regarding the nonhuman are in fact closely related to the objective of reframing plastic pollution through a ‘prismatic ecology.’ According to Max Liboiron, studies about pollution and waste are supposed to trouble assumptions, myths, and common-sense theories regarding waste and its political importance to environmental policy (Hird 2012; Liboiron 2014; 2016). Like queer theory, these investigations should engage with waste – usually presented as the strange and imperfect – as constructions of binaries that harm

humans, cultures, and environments (Schaffer, 2015). This critical perspective is built upon a skeptical approach to marine pollution that solely relies on technical and moral arguments, offering solutions that only deal with the symptoms but not with the structures that define issues of waste management (Liboiron 2014). In fact, changing behavior regarding plastic consumption is not the sole approach to unraveling the issue of plastic pollution. Although it has a considerable potential in terms of damage control strategies, it is less effective in terms of offering large scale practical solutions to the current issues of pollution (Liboiron 2014). Focusing on individualist and behavioral solutions steer attention away from a considerably bigger source of the problem: the pollution of the ocean by industrial waste (MacBride 2011; Ackerman 1997).

Marine pollution is an interesting example of how waste management and environmental repercussions are related to neoliberal practices. The materiality of the waste, its production, and its circulation patterns are important ways of assessing and imagining solutions to the current issue of marine pollution (Hird 2012). In this sense, producing imaginative ways of reading the entanglements between marine pollution and nonhuman lives through ‘prismatic ecologies’ is a thought-provoking attitude that can open up a space for new relationalities with the environment. In fact, an important aspect of the ‘prismatic’ perspective is that it potentially will make the system of production and circulation of specific types of plastic more apparent, strengthening the notion that there is no general solution to the problem since each type of plastic responds differently in interaction with the environment. Individual action is necessary but not the sole solution to the issue and can, unfortunately, resonate with moralistic views, for example, the efforts put into demonizing the queer population for glitter use. Similarly, another interesting illustration is how Third World countries are often blamed for plastic pollution, when in fact most of it is caused by ‘developed countries’ that export their waste to ‘underdeveloped countries’ open-air dumping grounds and seashores (Liboiron 2014).

Through ‘prismatic ecologies,’ one can perceive how light, color, and shimmers can be connected to political criticism, revealing that modes of living actually emerge from the political acknowledgment that humans exist in an entangled material world (Alaimo 2016). The ‘Living Coral’ and the ‘Dead Coral’ are examples of how ‘prismatic ecologies’ can represent environmental issues in a way that entangles matter and social critique. The way humanity arranges knowledge and social life is a result of humanity’s understanding of the self as the subject of the world it inhabits. Thus, it is important to apply this debate regarding perception and the revision of the idea of the completely independent subject as a means of insisting on understanding corporality as “the crossroads of body and place, where nothing is safe or contained” (Alaimo 2016, 114). While not accurate regarding the extent of glitter’s participation in plastic pollution, the deleterious discourses on glitter can be framed as a thought-provoking starting point to the investigation of how queerness can lead to an alternative way of using shimmers and colors to deal with environmental issues. Queer thinking offers a way of navigating through the issues of environmental politics through critical-affirmative modes of expressing the Self without incurring moralistic perceptions of the various forms of articulating environmental discourses.

4 Shimmery Waste: The Politics of Trans-corporeal Bad Environmentalism

As shown in previous chapters, queer bodies have for a long time been theoretically and materially secluded from nature (see Chapter 1). As pointed out by queer ecologists for the past decade, homophobic public discourse, heteronormative conceptions of nature, and anthropocentric approaches to sexuality have buttressed this discourse that alienates the queer body from the environment (Sandilands and Erickson 2010; Giffney and Hird 2008; Seymour 2013; 2018a). The strangeness of the queer body clashes with normative readings of a pristine nature that is exuberant and beautiful in every sense. Normative discourses on nature have for a long time determined what is natural and what is unnatural. As explored by queer ecologists, this (mis)appropriation of nature by normative discourses has long excluded queerness from nature, describing it as ‘unnatural passions’ (Sandilands 2005, 1-3). Reinforcing the division between nature and culture, this normative perspective positions the queer subject as solely cultural, alienating it from any affirmative relationality with nature.

Resisting this pressure and connecting the queer experience with the environment, Cate Sandilands offers the concept of ‘queer ecological sensibility’ which

focuses on dimensions of [personal] experience born in the specific history of a queer community, and uses the resulting emotional resonances and conceptual links to live in nature in a way that reflects this queer experience (2005, 3)

Endorsing this project of bridging ecological thinking with queer experience, in this chapter, I propose the analytical perspective of ‘shimmery waste’ as an ‘environmental politics of shining.’ Drawing upon queer connections with glitter and the discourses on the impacts of glitter on the environment, I offer ‘shimmery waste’ as an alternative way of thinking that embraces this duality of glitter (and other matters), showing how materiality is constitutive of the political meaning of things and, thus, it is not possible to separate one from the other.

Thinking about the current debates on the necessity of banning glitter due to the impacts of plastic pollution, I resort to ‘shimmery waste’ to argue for a scaled and nuanced analysis of how matter/meaning is important in thinking about pollution. Considering that glitter (and other shimmery polluting matters) is caught up in this duality in which it is perceived as ‘displaced matter’ when causing plastic pollution and as political symbol to the queer community, I think of it as the perfect example of how positionality and context can trouble the meaning of things. Following the idea of ‘queer ecological sensibility,’ I see in ‘shimmery waste’ a degree of embodiment that comes from this corporeal entanglement with the surroundings. ‘Shimmery waste’ is attuned to how the political meaning of things is dependent on the entanglement between *specific bodies* and matter. I argue, via the ‘shimmery waste’ perspective, that *queer bodies when interacting with their surroundings create particular political couplings*. For example, returning to CACorand’s autobiographical text, they mention that when

[entering] the murder scene after they have taken the fingerprints, hair samples and photos of bloody footprints, I can dust the carnage with cobalt blue mixed with silver and emerald green. Glitter is not enabling denial of world’s pain but instead helps us endure the bleak results of those who are in denial of how we need one another (2015)

Thus, contrasting with an apolitical reading of shimmers, in CAConrad’s narrative the ‘shimmery waste,’ the blue and green glitter, is dusted on top of the wounds, using it as a tool for self-reflexive interactions with the milieu – it does deny the pain and horror of the carnage; it highlights the necessity of recognizing our dependence on one another. In a way, this focus on context and dependency is what is environmental about the ‘shimmery waste.’

Following the trans-corporeal reading of the body, I consider it as open and co-constituted by nature. Thus, thinking in a ‘shimmery’ way entails considering nature not as far from the Self, but as an important part of it. Going back to the case of glitter, shedding light on waste is about taking its matter/meaning, e.g. as the symbol of a queer politics of visibility and the targeted

marine pollutant, and contextualizing it on different scales. Glitter's value for queer politics does not free it from being potentially detrimental to the environment. Nevertheless, it opens up a space for philosophical considerations of bringing queerness to ecological thinking. As suggested by Donna Haraway (2016), it is important to 'stay with the trouble' caused by human impacts on the environment, especially in a 'permanently polluted world' where "all human bodies tested, anywhere in the world, contain industrial chemicals" (Liboiron et al 2018, 332). Thus, in order to come up with better ways to steer things in life-affirming directions, simply relying on technical solutions (e.g. legal measures or material substitution) is not an efficient solution, given that there is no way of solving the issue without structural changes in production and consumption patterns. The idea of management is premised on the notion of clear-cut identifications – things will count or not as waste, as important, or as useful (Hird 2012). However, in a 'permanently polluted world' where communication, commerce, and migration are each day faster and more intense, crediting too much to management strategies is not plausible. Going back to my reading of queerness and waste, here the idea of 'queerness' as disruptive and displaced illustrates the nature of this socio-political context where things do not simply fit into pre-established categories. As suggested by Liboiron, Tironi, and Calvillo,

management via separation, containment, clean up and immunization – the hallmarks of 20th-century pollution control – are premised on a politics of material purity that is no longer available or was never viable to begin with [...] Moreover, these modes of action do not address the wider social, political, military and other power structures that engender toxicity to begin with (2018, 332)

In this polluted world, I see glitter and queerness as a thought-provoking figure to re-consider the debate on plastic pollution, considering that glitter traces the pathway through which queerness is connected to onto-epistemological and material considerations of waste. In a way, I consider that the queer body, which escapes limitations, is supported by the values of the

diversity and fluidity that drives it. As discussed regarding the bio-semiotic interactions between glitter, queer bodies, and light (see Chapter 2 and 3), queer bodies elude capture (Alaimo 2016) and step out of pre-defined boxes of sociability. Under the lenses of public discourses of heteronormativity, the queer body is weird because it is not easily determined; it is not ‘useful’ for the production and maintenance of narratives of normality. In this way, the ‘queer’ subject is the antithesis of the ‘proper’ neoliberal one, who fits into the mold and blends with the background.

Thus, in order to make a case for the scaled and contextualized considerations regarding waste, I turn to the analytical framework of ‘shimmery waste,’ which escapes common moralistic environmental theories and renders the body in trans-corporeal ways. The idea of ‘shimmery waste’ is specially indebted to Stacy Alaimo’s *trans-corporeality* (2008; 2010) and Nicole Seymour’s *bad environmentalism* (2018a). I intervene in trans-corporeality theory through putting it in conversation with the affective and aesthetical aspects of bad environmentalism. Alaimo’s trans-corporeality is “the time-space where human corporeality, in all its material fleshiness, is inseparable from ‘nature’ or ‘environment’” (2008, 238), which enables me to further analyze the connection between glitter, queer bodies, and the environment. Seymour’s bad environmentalism will contribute to the queer aspect of this theoretical inflection, since it presents “environmental thought that employs dissident, often-denigrated affects and sensibilities to reflect critically on both our current moment and mainstream environmental art, activism, and discourse” (2018a, 6). In other words, *inspired* by glitter’s matter/meaning, ‘shimmery waste’ is a larger conceptual framework for queer environmental studies that is dedicated to following the corporeal features of the entanglement of body and nature whilst being attentive to alternative modes of addressing pollution, going against a pre-conceived and moralistic notion of what “environmentalism looks, sounds, and, most importantly, feels like” (Seymour 2018a, 7).

4.1 Following the Shimmery Path – Trans-corporeality, Bad Environmentalism, and Glitter

Trans-corporeality was conceived by Stacy Alaimo as a “theoretical site [where] corporeal theories and environmental theories meet and mingle in a productive way” (2008, 238). Attentive to the flux of matter between subjects, Alaimo’s trans-corporeal approach indicates a movement across sites and boundaries, enabling a crisscross of actions and re-actions between humans and nonhumans. The concept of trans-corporeality first appeared in Alaimo’s article, *Trans-corporeal Feminisms and The Ethical Space of Nature*, and later in her monograph, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (2010), where she expands the use of the term, arguing that

environmental ethics, social theories, popular understandings of science, and conceptions of the human self are all profoundly altered by the recognition that ‘the environment’ is not located somewhere out there, but is always the very substance of ourselves (4)

This situatedness of subjects in her study is one of the most important aspects of trans-corporeality in the construction of the idea of ‘shimmery waste.’ Bringing nature back to the material self, which, as mentioned before regarding the queer community, was alienated from it (see Chapter 1 and 3), is an important move present both in her work and in queer ecological theories, like that of Nicole Seymour (2013; 2018a). Both works are aligned to the idea of overcoming “nature, as a philosophical concept, a potent ideological node, and a cultural repository of norms and moralism [that has been] waged against women, people of color, indigenous peoples, queers, and the lower classes” (Alaimo 2008, 239). Therefore, considering that it critically embraces both theories, ‘shimmery waste’ is an analytical tool that is attentive to these unbalanced power relations and to the utilitarian use of nature against minorities.

Mostly focused on queers and the intersectional aspects of their relationality with the environment, the ‘shimmery waste’ analytical perspective is dedicated to following the politics of visibility and embodiment and its entanglement with queer subjects ranging from humans to nonhumans. Inspired by glitter’s relationality with the environment, I argue that this trans-corporeal bad environmentalism is important in showing how matters of visibility and embodiment are dependent on different contexts and scales, opening up a space for theoretical articulations that take shimmers as the source of bio-semiotic connections in community building through aesthetics and affect. Being inspired by glitter and employing it as a starting point to think about different environmentalisms, is part of the ironic and perverse aspect of what Seymour (2018a) named as ‘bad environmentalism,’ having in mind that glitter is a microplastic targeted as responsible for contributing to marine pollution. In fact, this unexpected coupling is part of shimmery waste’s outward and inwards reflexive movement, escaping the moral higher ground that is common in environmental theories (Seymour 2018a). As mentioned by Nicole Seymour regarding the coupling of queer theories and environmental theories,

while queer ecology takes from queer theory its interest in minoritarian sexual practices and what counts as ‘natural,’ what it has left behind are queer theory’s trademark sensibilities: its playfulness, its irreverence, its interest in perversity, and its delight in irony (2018a, 23)

In this sense, by coupling glitter’s multiple connectivities with environmental theories, ‘shimmery waste’ enables one to navigate through the issues of plastic pollution not as an absolute moral indicator, but as a complicator that takes up the work of embracing impropriety instead of abiding by normative and normalizing rules on how to engage with the environment. Therefore, Seymour’s closeness to the affective and queer readings of environmental theories is complemented by the material attentiveness of Alaimo’s trans-corporeality. ‘Shimmery waste’ is the productive coupling of both conceptualizations of environmental theories,

following the matter/meaning movements that glitter makes in and out of water. It works as an indicator of the potentialities of corporeal entanglements, focusing on highlighting the different impacts of them at different scales, avoiding general claims that resort to hardline divisions between good and bad policies regarding the environment. Analyzing through the ‘shimmery waste’ perspective is about recognizing the multitude of approaches that can be used when it comes to account for the deep intra-actions among the Self and nature. For example, the issue of plastic pollution by glitter is reframed through this embodied perspective. Avoiding tracing moral judgements regarding the use of glitter, shimmering waste has also the preoccupation of exposing how life and death in glittery politics operate at different scales.

On the one hand, glitter does not threaten (*per se*) the life of humans and nonhumans. In order to do so, it needs to couple itself with other matters – organic or not – and then participate in toxic flows that will later bioaccumulate through the food-chain. On a nonhuman scale, the matter of pollution and the issues of death and life are even more complicated, since microplastics contribute to the death of a large number of marine organisms, but at the same time it has been giving support to new modes of life in the ocean, as noted by the researchers who found microscopic life who feeds on plastics and marine insects which use them to lay their eggs (Zettler, Mincer, and Amaral-Zettler 2013; Goldstein, Rosenberg, and Cheng 2012). So, why has glitter been targeted as a ubiquitous pollutant that needs to be banned?

Following Seymour’s lecture *Glitter is Forever? The Queer Futures of the Plastiscene* (2018b), I would agree that banning glitter is in fact part of a large-scale structural homophobia (I would even broaden the scope and name it *queerphobia*) against subjects that resist erasure and signal their political existences by employing shining as part of a politics of visibility. Considering all the discussed political resonances of glitter when it comes to representation and visibility of queer subjects, targeting glitter is also targeting this political side of it. It is not about using political relevance as an excuse to continue using glitter. Rather, it is about pointing out how

banning glitter is beyond pollution, it is also about queer politics. In a sense, demonizing glitter is something that could have already been expected due to its connection with the ‘useless’ queer community. As mentioned before regarding the couplings between queerness and waste, the queer body is already equated with unproductivity and non-reproductivity. Likewise, camp aesthetics, which has used glitter to a large extent, is also connected to waste.

As suggested by Christopher Schmidt, “camp is the taste of waste” (68) which he explains by exploring the metaphor on the senses (palate and vision),

in which consumer consumption (say, the purchase of an *All About Eve* deluxe box set) is likened to alimentary consumption – of a ham-salad sandwich or, perhaps more aptly, the cow’s already twice-consumed cud. *Such metaphoric displacement may be the very point of camp. Camp is often inflected by obsession and fetishization*, in which a relatively neutral object is charged with erotic energy so that the subject may resolve libidinal attachments too intense to be confronted without the benefit of projection (68, emphasis added)

The ‘ham-salad sandwich’ which bears a more glamorous name, is stripped down to its very own material constituency, the dead flesh ‘already twice consumed’ of a cow. In a similar sense, glitter is also this campy enrichment of ‘normal’ objects. Currently, glitter, as discussed in Chapter 2, has offered a ‘low budget’ version of shimmery objects of opulence and wealth. If one searches for glitter products online, one can find almost anything in glitter: from coffins to pills that would make one’s stool also shine on its way to the sewage system. Camp is aware of the ways in which shimmers have been employed to elicit desire and raise exchange value. In line with “all that glitters is not gold,” camp is irreverent towards the common capitalist use of shininess, making unwanted bodies shine like diamonds without carrying the same exchange value. As noted, glitter has its ways of entangling and changing the other, and that is what trans-corporeality is about – finding and following the fluxes of embodiment within naturecultures. The trans-corporeal subject, and consequently the ‘shimmery waste,’

challenges the Western humanist models of individualism that imagines the human as a disembodied form of being, a transcendent subject removed from the world (Alaimo 2010).

‘Shimmery waste’ takes from trans-corporeality the attunement to the social, political, and economic contexts that permeate one’s daily life. As explored in previous chapters, glitter is constitutive of these realms as it plays with matters of political visibility and capitalistic aesthetics of glamour. Therefore, the shimmery waste, more than just being in sync with the circulation of organic matter, acknowledges the capitalistic context in which it finds itself, being able to perceive the different ways optic-haptic aesthetics (see Chapter 3) influences perception and the affects that are mediated by it. In a way, that is where ‘shimmery waste’ slightly differentiates itself from the trans-corporeal rendering of the subject. As suggested by Alaimo,

trans-corporeality finds itself within capitalism, but *resists the allure of shiny objects*, considering instead the *effects they have, from manufacture to disposal*, while reckoning with the strange agencies that interconnect substance, flesh and place. It does not contemplate discrete objects from a safe distance, but instead, thinks as the very stuff of the ever-emergent world (2018, 436, emphasis added)

Instead of simply conflating shininess with consumer capitalism, ‘shimmery waste’ is about seeing the nuanced ways in which reflecting light and embracing color can have life-affirming effects. Rather than justifying pollution and overconsumption, it sees the effects of things (‘from manufacture to disposal’) at different scales. Glitter is a shiny object and during its lifespan it generates different effects that can go both ways, including, ironically enough, going against capitalism and normative politics. As previously explored, glitter has been widely used in protests across the world in defense of civil rights of the queer community. Therefore, instead of ‘resisting the allure of shiny objects,’ ‘shimmery waste’ embraces its irony, pointing out

how environmentalism can be done ‘in bad ways,’ as Seymour argues. There is a political consequence to resisting ‘shiny objects’ and that is where ‘shimmery waste’ comes into play.

Indeed, ‘all that glitters is not gold’: it can be a protester, a drag queen, a glitter bomb, a diamond ring, or a pearl. Should they all be resisted? As Seymour (2018a) asks, is abiding to mainstream environmentalism’s discourse of salvation, redemption, and morality the best solution? The idea of ‘shimmery waste’ is exactly tracing these nuances regarding the politics of shiny ‘things,’ highlighting how different they can be depending on who/what is shining and why. In fact, part of the core of the ‘shimmery waste’ perspective is also questioning the necessity of shining. As explored in Chapter 2, the queer community has attached itself to glitter in an attempt to take forward a politics of representation and visibility that is attuned to diversity and differences. However, if politics were done differently, e.g. in a less rigid, patriarchal, and heterosexist way, would shining have the same political importance? Probably not. However, since that is not the current reality, it is needed to challenge homogenizing neoliberal politics – and shining as a queer body can be a way of realizing it.

Therefore, ‘shimmery waste’ entails subscribing to a more comprehensive understanding of environmental theories and discussions, including everyday situations and discourses through which environmentalism is articulated. Being alert to the other side of glitter entanglements with human and nonhumans, does not equate itself to giving a free pass to the pollution caused by microplastics. As a matter of fact, it is a way of bringing environmentalism closer; transforming ‘there’ into ‘here,’ ‘then’ into ‘now.’ As suggested by Nicole Seymour (2018a),

we cannot separate [the] lack of relatability [with environmental issues] from affect. If one is already marginalized, affective appeals such as sanctimony, earnestness, seriousness, and didacticism seem distasteful and overwhelming, particularly if they are divorced from the issues that directly impact one’s community. And if one is relatively privileged, such affect is not particularly appealing either; no one likes to feel bad, especially about themselves (17)

‘Shimmery waste’ is a way of expanding the politics of visibility to include also risibility – the capacity to reflect on the self in non-judgmental ways. As previously mentioned, using glitter to articulate an environmental theory can seem rather ironic, but banning it instead of forbidding big companies from exporting solid waste or building hundreds of thousands of underwater cables also is. Keeping the contextual and dimensional differences in mind, these examples are illustrative of how the dimension of the public discourse against glitter is not balanced with its infamous impact on the oceans. In a sense, focusing on glitter is a way of steering attention away from more ubiquitous and harmful plastics.

More specifically, the question is not to defend glitter because it causes less harm than other materials. Rather, it is about fleshing out the different ways environmental issues are dealt with in the political realm – exposing how heterosexism and patriarchal structures are also encrusted into the design of environmental policies. ‘Shimmery waste’ is inspired by the political couplings between glitter and queer bodies, but, at the end of the day, it is not solely about glitter. It is about how queer politics can generate alternative solutions to old issues. Shiny ‘things’ have a political importance that goes beyond exchange value and matters of desire. They can signal life and vibrancy in the current politically critical moment in which minorities are being erased and severely deprived of their rights, and nature is exploited (Rose 2011).

If glitter is banned, let it be for a sound reason: because it is, after all, a subset of the plastic litter that has polluted and contaminated marine lives. On the other hand, glitter is the ironic remembrance of the trans-corporeal ways in which queer communities are entangled with the environment, despite all the efforts of alienating one from the other. ‘Shimmery waste’ is an environmental politics of shining with the capacity to expose the flux of toxic matter, the circulation of glittery affects, the entanglements between queer community and the environment, the neoliberal politics of minority erasure, and alternative forms of thinking about pollution. Thus, instead of forgetting about glitter, one can use it as a tool for self-reflection.

‘Shimmery waste’ exposes the importance of acknowledging the wider structures of production and consumption that support plastic pollution.

4.2 “We Are Having a Ball” – Finding Cultural Articulations of Shimmery Waste

In a country where 868 transgender people were violently killed in 2016 alone (Transgender Europe 2019), who would think that a female trans-artist would go viral for her music video about waste management? Leona Vingativa, a Brazilian artist, wrote and performed the song *Acaba Com o Lixão* (which can be freely translated to Let’s End with the Unregulated Landfills). In the video released in 2019, Leona appears performing in front of a landfill with her colorful outfit and impeccable shiny make-up. Lip-syncing to the lyrics that are accompanied by the heavy beats of Brazilian funk, Leona is irreverently addressing the issue of misplacement of domestic solid waste. In one of the shots of the video, Leona is seen inside an ice box, floating in waters reminiscent of floods that happen due to the clogging of the sewage system with trash.



Figure 8. Leona Vingativa, *Acaba Com o Lixão*

Leona, who is part of a poor community at the outskirts of Manaus (the biggest city in the Amazonian region), is singing about her daily struggles with the consequences of unruly waste management in the region. The images shown in her video *Acaba Com o Lixão* (2019) are bordering on the absurd. She is in close contact with an area where no one wants to be. She dances in the polluted water and falls into it, occasioning some laughter that can be heard in the background. As previously argued, there is a matter/metaphorical connection between waste and queer bodies, and her artwork is one example of how it takes place. The distancing that is normally taken from waste is also applied to her in the highly prejudicial Brazilian society. As is ‘humorously’ depicted in *Acaba Com o Lixão* (2019), even the waste management agent is running from her. He is filming her while she engages with the waste, exoticizing her and her work, putting into practice Laura Mulvey’s ‘male gaze,’ which entails objectifying femininity for the pleasure of the male viewer (1975).



Figure 9. Leona Vingativa, *Acaba Com o Lixão* (Film still)

Acaba Com o Lixão (2019) is an example of an articulation of the idea of ‘shimmery waste’ not only because of the uncommon coupling between queer bodies and environmental politics. In fact, Leona’s irreverent and self-reflexive approach to the issue of waste management is what turns it into a piece of queer ecological cultural practice in which trans-corporeality and

bad environmentalism are taking place. Leona is exposing the issue without giving up on experimenting with her queerness. The video's idiosyncrasies shock the viewer. Being inside the waste-filled puddle is not expected from anyone. Dancing inside it is an articulation of the trans-corporeal ways in which waste comes back at you through "strange agencies that interconnect substance, flesh, and place" (Alaimo 2018, 436). Leona's daily life is changed by environmental policies (or the lack of it), and she decided to engage with it through art and shiny politics.



Figure 10. Leona Vingativa, *Acaba Com o Lixão* (Film Still)

The song is vibrant, and so is she. Despite what is normally expected of environmental campaigns, *Acaba Com o Lixão* (2019) is an example of alternative ways of articulating queer ecological thinking. Returning to the considerations regarding waste and queerness, Leona's artistic engagement with pollution is an example of the ways in which 'queer experience' intermingles with ecological thinking. Sandilands's 'queer ecological sensibility' (2005) takes place in the video through the coupling between Leona and waste, which calls for attention not only for the ecological issue but also for further engagement between queerness and environmental thinking. Like the trans-corporeal situatedness that shortens the distance

between the ‘there’ of environmental problems and the ‘here’ of the subject, Leona is placing herself within the wound. She is trans-corporeally signaling the consequences of a disembodied engagement with waste and the environment. The regular way of treating waste as something to be distanced and secluded from creates a stratified public realm that is pervasive towards minorities. Both waste and, in this case, the queer body, are pushed towards the margins of the city and of sociability.

Leona’s artwork talks back to the regular waste management policy, pinpointing how both waste and queer bodies are being purposefully managed in a way that takes them away from the field of visibility. Displacement, which is an important strategy for the construction of a queer aesthetics of camp and queer theory, is also present in her irreverent environmental politics. Bringing waste into her art is unexpected and also pushes the boundaries of the musical genre with which she is working. The Brazilian funk music, which in its mainstream incarnation is often criticized for its misogynistic and degrading lyrics, is reworked into the rhythm of a political satire of waste management in a precarious setting. Moreover, Leona’s personal history as a trans activist is also contrasting with the usual content of Brazilian funk, although more and more queer artists are claiming and reframing the genre. What makes her video an alternative form of environmentalism is exactly this idiosyncrasy of her work: she does not take things too seriously – formal boundaries are broken, and she offers a mixed and innovative way of turning ‘gloom and doom’ environmentalism into a danceable critique of a precarious waste management.

Similar to Leona’s project that amps up the irony and irreverence, other queer artists have dealt with the topics of environmental impact in a less rigid manner. Part of the self-reflexive aspect of ‘shimmery waste’ is being able to embrace the ‘trouble’ in order to expand possible ways of dealing with the difficulties in implementing environmental policies. Instead of denying the problem or looking for ways of ‘cleaning the conscience’ regarding the current state of human

impact on the environment, part of queering ecological thinking is being able to use critical-affirmative forms of engagement with the issue. Dancing to the sound of the Anthropocene might come across as distasteful for some, but, at the same time, it shines a light on why there is an uneasiness in seeing both things together. As suggested by Seymour's bad environmentalism, taking things in a less rigid and more ironic way does equate with taking things less seriously. In fact, camp aesthetics is considered highly political, despite its playfulness; part of being political is acknowledging that it does not equate with being strict. Breaking the rules is important for remembering why they exist in the first place, which is important especially for those, like marginalized communities, who are most commonly oppressed by them.



Figure 11. *RuPaul's Drag Race, Last Ball on Earth* (Film still)

Thus, one interesting example is how a mass-media production takes a 'doom and gloom' topic such as climate change in order to create a product of which the first goal is entertaining the audience. Contrasting with what would be seen appropriate for a drag show, *RuPaul's Drag Race* (2018) has shown a different and polemic way of articulating environmental discourses. Similar to Leona's song but in a distinct circumstance and with a less didactic approach, in the

tenth season of the reality TV show, the competing drag queens were asked to create ‘couture’ outfits for a ball – the last ball on Earth. RuPaul, when announcing the episode’s challenge, says “I have bad news, and good news: Climate change is real; glacial caps are melting; the world is going to end; and *we are throwing a ball*” (RuPaul 2018). The way the news is communicated is irreverent and perverse, bearing in mind that balls are celebratory meetings where queer people meet and compete for trophies for the best outfits and performances on the runway. The celebration supersedes the seriousness of climate change. In a way, it serves the purpose of “ridiculing moralism, boasting ignorance, and embracing indecorum rather than submitting shamefully [to mainstream didactic environmentalism]” (Seymour 2018a, 17). Following a camp approach to politics, what is at play in this articulation of climate change is exactly a rework of the topic in line with what Muñoz names the ‘terrorist drag’ – an artistic and political performance/performer that subverts normative cultural anxieties and terroristically appropriates dominant culture to mix it with subcultural movements (1997).

Through camp, environmental politics escapes moralism and animate ways of being creative, performative, and personal when it comes to one’s relationality to what is happening to the environment (Schaffer 2015). One interesting example of this mode of engagement is the art produced by Nuclia Waste, a drag queen that uses her aesthetics and performances to question and criticize the US-American management of radioactive waste at Rocky Mountain Flats (Krupar 2012). Nuclia Waste can also be seen as a ‘terrorist drag’ since through different representational strategies, she is capable of presenting controversial themes that would muddle the boundaries between sex, gender, nature, capitalism, and race (Krupar 2012).

According to Muñoz, to understand the ‘terrorist drag,’ it is important to grasp the nuances of passing and disidentification within queer contexts (which was discussed in Chapter 2). Passing refers mostly to how ‘commercial drag queens’ aim to be a ‘real version of women,’ often presenting a sanitized and desexualized version of queerness that serves mass consumption.

On the other hand, dissidentification invokes a reform of the self that denies the binary model of identification, serving as a tactical tool to resist normalizing and oppressive ideological discourses (Muñoz 1997, 85-86). For example, Nuclia Waste defines the drag character as a mutant en-gendered by the radiation of the post-nuclear context of Rocky Mountain Flats, serving as a queer ecological artist that defies not only gendered narratives, but also the lack environmental awareness by government authorities (Krupar 2012). In this sense, the camp aesthetic that is embraced by Nuclia is also used to criticize the neoliberal system, Nuclia is ‘shimmering waste’ through bridging camp and environmentally driven activism related to radioactive pollution. As argued by Susan Sontag on her *Notes on Camp* (1999), “camp doesn’t reverse things. It doesn’t argue that the good is bad or the bad is good”, meaning that queer readings of waste are not hierarchical – there is no higher culture or lower culture; being ‘trashy’ at environmental politics does not mean you are less good.



Figure 12. *Rupaul's Drag Race, Last Ball on Earth (Film still)*

In this sense, going back to RuPaul’s ‘Last Ball on Earth,’ one could arguably claim that what is shown in the reality show is not mobilizing enough and thus does not contribute to environmental thinking/awareness. However, what is it that makes gloom and doom be allegedly more effective than less rigid forms of articulation of issues regarding climate change? As argued before, irony, irreverence, and perverseness are markers of queer theories

(Seymour 2018a) and, then, throwing a ball after climate change can also be a way of queering environmental thinking and practicing what I named ‘shimmery waste.’ As can be seen in the outfits presented to compete in the selected categories – “Alaskan winter realness; Miami summer realness; and Martian Eleganza Extravaganza” (Rupaul 2018) – glitter and color are largely embraced in their aesthetics. For example, one of the judges mentions during the episode that “nothing could be gayer than a *glitter astronaut helmet*” (Rupaul 2018). This form of unreservedly articulating facts about climate change is part of the alternative ways of talking about the environment without perpetuating negative affects that paralyze the subjects and prevent them from taking a stance on environmental politics. Embracing light and color in order to address climate change is part of ‘shimmering waste’ – the subjects use their queerness and irreverence to articulate important concepts regarding the environment.

In a way, I see in these forms of articulating trans-corporeal bad environmentalisms a visual mode of addressing the nuances of queerness and pollution. Diversity is not erased in order to communicate the issue; nor is it didactically explained. The context in which these artworks are held/developed are constituents of the art practice *per se*. Nuclia Waste would not exist without the radioactive pollution in Rocky Mountain Flats, and neither would Leona sing about waste management if the situation in Manaus was different. The environmental issues in their cities are part of their lives and ways of living, exposing how environmental problems are indeed *trans-corpo(real)* and so is queerness. Both are constantly denied, but none is going anywhere. In this context, glitter is part of the issue as a plastic pollutant but is also part of the solution as a matter/meaning that symbolizes an environmental politics of shining. ‘Shimmering waste’ is about acknowledging scales and positionality and, as shown in this research, glitter’s millimetric size belies its global power of articulating trans-corporeal ‘bad environmentalisms’ that will support queer ‘fabulations’ of different futures.

Conclusion

Throughout this research, I have followed glitter from shiny matter to gloomy waste in order to expose the political attachments that happen during this journey. Considering the importance of accounting for matter and meaning as entangled relationality (Barad 2007), I focused on a new materialist reading of how to think about glitter's connection to queer corporeality. I have argued that glitter is an interesting matter to reconsider the links between queer embodiment and the environment. To think about pollution in a queer way, I claim that it is necessary to consider the past life of waste, and also reframe the ways in which waste is negatively seen.

Following the connections between queerness and waste, I suggest that, in a world in which 'matter and meaning' are entangled, to put things into perspective is to account for their political and material forms – political as material, and material as political. Things that generate pollution were once useful, so understanding how this transformation happens is important in investigating the matter/meaning networks that support such complex relationalities. For me, one crucial aspect to understanding pollution in its complexity is to recognize the onto-epistemological values of waste. The journey of things from manufacture to disposal shows how matter/meaning flow through different bodies and sites, creating crisscrossed networks of affects, imageries, and politics that are important to account for when thinking about ways of reframing pollution.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, "the nature of the observed phenomenon changes with corresponding changes in the apparatus" (Barad 2007, 106). In other words, pollution and waste are unstable categories that depend on the context and on the parameters being used to define them, which is essential to have in mind when thinking about waste. Returning to the question of queer corporeality, part of its political existence is to unsettle rigid categories, especially regarding sexuality and identity. As I argued before, there is an onto-epistemological

connection between queerness and waste and this relationality is what I see as an entryway to queering environmental thinking about pollution.

Thus, waste's material presence is also important as a trigger for thinking about and through matter. Just avoiding the creation of solid waste through the use of 'biodegradable' glitter as a way of having a clean conscience regarding pollution is not a way to account for the matter/meaning of things. The 'biodegradable' waste is usually seen as 'good' waste because it evanesces and does not accumulate. However, waste and queerness's location are what momentarily 'defines' them. As previously mentioned, displaced 'biodegradable' waste can be as detrimental as a regular solid waste. Thus, there is no simple solution to the question of pollution (especially that caused by shiny matters). I argue through the analytical perspective of 'shimmery waste' that knowing the flows of matter/meaning is a way of scaling and contextualizing waste. As I showed throughout this research, glitter has a lot of stories behind it, and one of its lessons is the importance of escaping assimilation. Moreover, part of critically engaging with waste and pollution is to see how they can contravene the order within a system, whilst reproducing the same order at another context. 'Shimmering waste' is recognizing the multiplicity of relationalities that can emerge from different matters and contexts.

In Chapter 2 and 3, I explored how shimmers and color have appeared in humanities and cultural productions as a signifier for visibility and diversity. Drawing from the connections between the material constituency of glitter and its political significance, I see how light features – diffraction and colors – are important in creating the bio-semiotic values of glitter. Being perceived, seen with hands or touched by the eyes, is important in constructing relationalities between subjects. So, the technical solutions to the 'problem of glitter pollution,' the 'biodegradable' substitute or the legal banning, are in conflict with onto-epistemological accounts of matter, considering that they are valued for their capacity to make glitter disappear.

As mentioned throughout this research, the value of glitter comes from this liminal existence that turns the socially invisible into visible, creating a politics that is based on giving importance to neglected things. In this sense, managing plastic pollution through turning things back to invisibility does not change the structural conditions that enables larger scale polluting activities to happen. As mentioned by Derrida when reflecting on why ‘biodegradability’ (disappearance) is so provocative, he thinks about how a text (as matter and discourse) can biodegrade, considering it as a form of assimilation,

in the most general and novel sense of this term, a *text* must be ‘(bio)degradable’ in order to nourish the ‘living’ culture, memory, tradition. To the extent to which it has some sense, makes sense, then its ‘content’ irrigates the milieu of this tradition and its ‘formal’ identity is dissolved. And by formal identity, one may understand here all the ‘signifiers,’ including the title and the name of one or more presumed signatories. And yet, to enrich the ‘organic’ soil of said culture, it must resist it, contest it, question and criticize it enough (dare I say deconstruct it?) and thus it must not be assimilable ([bio]degradable, if you like). Or at least, it must be assimilated as inassimilable, kept in reserve, unforgettable because irreceivable, capable of inducing meaning without being exhausted by meaning, incomprehensibly elliptical, secret (1989, 845)

Thus, in order for the ‘biodegradable’ not to be assimilated/forgotten, it needs to offer resistance and criticism to normative discourses, which is not present in the technical solutions offered by the narratives on how to deal with ‘glitter pollution.’ As a signifier for the queer community’s fight and struggle for visibility, glitter is ‘capable of inducing meaning without being exhausted by meaning.’ Throughout this research, I have been using queerness to rethink pollution as a political act of inwards and outwards reflection. When it comes to queering pollution, the solution is knowing that there is not *one* problem with *one* solution. Rather, in a ‘permanently polluted world,’ there are several problems with several solutions, and the key to finding the way through it is to be aware and value diversity and difference in their own contexts and modes of being. Even though glitter has been targeted as deadly matter, it has

opened up a way of critically engaging with plastic pollution. The pointed and negative way of seeing glitter hints to a more deep and complex issue that I have considered here as the relationship between glitter and queerness. Considering queerness as connected to displacement is part of recognizing how context is important to perception and politics. In our ‘permanently polluted world,’ queerness is not biodegradable.

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