



Bathing in Femmegimp Joy

Loree Erickson (with photos by Hadley Howes and Loree Erickson)

Part triptych, part theoretical engagement, and part self-reflection, this artist statement flaunts femmegimp strategies for navigating and negotiating cultures of undesirability through the creation of queercrip porn and collective care (Erickson 2015, 2022). Glitter bath! invites us to bathe in femmegimp excess and luxuriate in the very sites of shame which are marked systemically and structurally as the terms of exclusion and erasure. Queercrip porn produced through a framework of disability justice pushes past inclusion and self-love to dream into being collective worth and queercrip flourishing.

This project *glitter bath!* flaunts my favourite sites of shame as sites of resistance: being a body that cannot hide its interdependence and my asymmetrical curves and power(ful) wheelchair that make me visibly disabled. I need people to lift me out of bed, onto the toilet, into my wheelchair. I need help with making food, organizing my sparkly things, caring for my cat—all of the activities of daily living. Having care needs that are defined as outside of the norm, is one of the ways that disabled people are socially constructed as needy, as demanding, as burdens. Our care needs are used as justification for so much of the violence and institutionalization we experience. We are designated as placing “excessive demands” on social infrastructure by immigration and denied residency or citizenship. In schools we are labelled as having “special needs” to remove us from “regular” classrooms—and for Black, Indigenous, and Latinx students this often ensnares them into the “sticky web” of surveillance leading to criminalization (Nanda 2019, 292).

Naming disabled people in these ways means the resources and infrastructure that go into building a world designed to accommodate normative bodyminds and needs is regularized and taken for granted. Building stairs is as much of a decision as building ramps. These decisions are far from accidental. In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Sara Ahmed (2006) queers the work of orientation, or knowing which way we are facing. She shows the ways that the political economy of attention builds exclusionary worlds and positions us in certain directions more than others. We are pressed towards normativity. Ahmed names these points of pressure as straightening devices. I have encountered many such straightening devices both literal and ethereal (Gordon 1996). My curvy spine was labelled a deformity. I wore a very painful bulky back brace until I was 10 at which time through surgery the doctors moved the bracing internally by attaching rods to my spine—ever determined to bring my curvy back into alignment. Despite all medical efforts to the contrary, my body remained committed to asymmetry, to being out of line with straightness in more ways than one.

There is transformative pleasure in reveling in the excesses of femmegimp joy. I haven't always felt like this—well, that's not totally accurate. I have always known that this deep glittery femmegimp joy lives in me and through me and because of me and beyond me. I haven't always been able to connect with and celebrate it and I still lose track of it sometimes. Thank goodness for radical queercrip community, collective care, and queercrip porn, which always bring me back.



feral feminisms

Excess

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“Why is the word for my decorated body, for my public sexual performance, for my volume, for my visibility. The answer is, why not? The answer is yes. The answer is, I have always been a container and a vessel. I am bubbling with fire water and I am carrying it out into the world. To you. Take it. Take it from me. I have more.”

—Lyric Seal, 2015, 173–174

Image description: a white femme wearing sparkly makeup is seated naked in a glittery bubble bath. While looking at the camera, she blows a bubbly kiss. Her face is freckled with gold glitter flakes. In the background, slightly out of focus, there is a cat resting on the seat of a power wheelchair.



“I say it’s time for us to reappear. Time for us to talk sex, be sex, wear sex, relish our sex, both the sex we do have and the sex we want to be having.”

—Eli Clare, 2002, n.p.

Image description: a white femme wearing sparkly makeup is meeting the gaze of the camera while seated naked in a white bathtub filled with vivid blue water. Her face is freckled with gold glitter flakes, her chest is covered in small red and pink heart glitter. The shot is from overhead and lovingly frames her asymmetrical curves. You can see a Hoyer lift sling underneath of her.



“We will weave need into our relationships like golden, shimmering glimmers of hope—opportunities to build deeper, more whole and practice what our world could look like. We will practice what loving each other could look like every day. Courageously.”

—Mia Mingus, 2010, n.p.

Image description: a close-up of the bottom of a white bathtub which is covered with the remnants of mostly gold glitter and the residue of a bath bomb. A handheld showerhead is partially in view.



“Cultures of un/desirability” is a concept that I created to name and understand un/desirability— the multitude of lived experiences and structural practices that determine and undermine the collective worth and wellbeing of marginalized communities. The concept emerged out of my work on the conjunction of disability and sexuality, which attempts to complicate normative ideas of sexiness. Cultures of un/desirability seeks to bear witness to the historic and current systemic and interpersonal impacts of the eugenic construction of “undesirable others” across and through multiple interlocking regulatory systems (such as white supremacy, capitalism, cisheteropatriarchy, and disableism). As Eli Clare says, “Never are we seen, heard, believed to be the creators of our own desires, our own passions, our own sexual selves. Inside this maze, the lives of queer crips truly disappear” (2002, n.p.). These cultures of un/desirability can also be witnessed through Shayda Kafai’s (2021) concept of crip erasure. Discussing the powerful work of Sins Invalid in resisting and transforming crip erasure, she states,

Regardless of context or location, crip erasure always eradicates. It reinstates the medical model of disability, reducing our disabled, chronically ill, Mad bodyminds to defect, deviance, and pathology. Crip erasure moves us far away from ourselves, our hearts, and our rebel spirits. It isolates us from ourselves and our history, from our communities and from the power of disabled, queer of color kinship. In its wake we fail to remember that we are beauty, that we are empowered, and that we, as Sins Invalid reminds, are “an essential part of humanity” (Kafai 2021, 133).

A key approach to countering the violence of cultures of un/desirability is to collectively lean into, learn from, and flaunt sites of shame as sites of resistance. Abby Wilkerson’s understanding of shame is “a socially based harm which oppressed groups are subject to in particular ways” (2002, 45). She identifies shame as “a political resource that some people use to silence or isolate others” (45). This politicization of shame allows us to see the ways that shame is a tool of social control that internalizes, naturalizes, and individualizes oppression. If we think about the places in our bodyminds where we feel the most shame, it is often around the places where we are different from normative terms of desirability. We are too much or too little, so we move away from or attempt to disconnect and hide those things about us (even when this is far from possible). The work of Black feminism speaks to the complexity of visibility, particularly in an atmosphere of antiblack racism and misogyny (Sharpe 2016). Audre Lorde’s assertion that “what makes us most vulnerable is also the source of our greatest strength” is a necessary reminder about the potentiality of vulnerability and embodied difference from the norm (1984, 42). Flaunting queercrip worlds harnesses this power and opens up a space to understand and claim sites of shame as potential sites of resistance.

There is not enough room in this artist statement to share everything I have learned from and through the sites of shame highlighted by this work. Two of the greatest gifts in my life, collective care and queercrip porn, come from these sites of shame. This project brings both gifts together. I began this project thanks to an invitation from Sean Lee at Tangled Art Gallery to host a crip community night as part of a collaboration with Art Spin called Public Sweat. For this evening, I curated a series of clips of queercrip bath moments. I used a clip from one of Mat Fraser’s Sins Invalid performances (Berne and Lamm 2013) and a very short clip from *Shameless: The Art of Disability* featuring Catherine Frazee and her partner Pat Seeley enjoying a luxurious bubble bath (Sherr Klein 2006). There aren’t very many such moments that I could find. This was all the incentive I needed to take a glitter bath. Ask anyone who knows me, they will confirm I love being covered in glitter and hickies.



I didn't plan to create porn, but once a porn star, always a porn star. It had been a while since I've been creative in this way. I have been too caught up in teaching and writing about queercrip porn to make queercrip porn. Bathing in femmegimp joy was absolutely enlivening! This nourishment is not surprising, as Kafai reminds us that "crip sex is an offering, an atlas guiding us back to the inherent knowing that our bodyminds deserve pleasure, bliss, and contentment" (2021, 125). We need to feel new possibilities by embodying different ways of living and being.

There is something quite delicious about being sprinkled with glitter—especially heart glitter. I love how the camera gazes lovingly at my asymmetrical curves. I love how easy it was for me to strike poses that others would have needed to twist themselves to re-create. Plus, a glitter bath is about as far away from institutional, functional modes of care as you can get. This project also mocks the neoliberal trope of the self-care bubble bath by creating the most decadent, sparkly bubble bath imaginable and making it a collective affair. I didn't get into this bath alone, sprinkle myself with glitter or take the pictures and video. My care collective is made up of community-oriented, caring, funny people who made this glitter bath possible and fun. This collective is made up of people from my various communities who help me do what I need to, not only to survive but thrive. I have never understood the concept of self-love without collective love—a favourite lesson I have learned from my body is that we are all relational beings. As Mia Mingus says in "Wherever You Are Is Where I Want To Be: Crip Solidarity," "We will help each other love each other and, in doing so, love ourselves" (2010, n.p.).

As warming as the glittery water I was immersed in, I felt how deeply transformative it is to witness and revel in acts of decadent care for bodies constructed as undesirable; to witness my body being loved and cared for. In sharing this project, it is my deep hope to participate in what the phenomenal artist and abolitionist activist Tourmaline calls freedom dreaming (Simonoff 2021). Tourmaline does the important work of recovering and sharing the histories, presence, and futurity of Black trans and queer people. When asked in a recent interview about how her new work engages with the relationship between abolition and pleasure, she shares being influenced by one of three questions that animated the work of the Mississippi Freedom Schools of the 1960s. "What do we have already that we wanna make more of" (Tourmaline quoted in Simonoff 2021, n.p.)? She continues,

It's also often how I think about abolition: not necessarily as something that we want to get rid of or even something that we need to bring in, but as something we have already that we wanna make more of. Like, we have freedom, that we wanna make more of. We have our capacity to dream, that we wanna make more of. We have our capacity to see the abundance that's already here, let's grow that into a further realization of what feels good (Tourmaline quoted in Simonoff 2021, n.p.).

I love the focus here on honouring the resourcefulness and resilience of marginalized communities that bring so much into being. I seek to cultivate what Carla Bergman and Nick Montgomery call joyful transformation. In *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times*, they write "Anyone who has been transformed through a struggle can attest to its power to open up more capacities for resistance, creativity, action, and vision. This sense of collective power—the sense that things are different, that we are different, that a more capable 'we' is forming that didn't exist before" (Montgomery et al. 2017, 44).

I hope this work helps bring into being a world where all baths can be glitter baths, if so desired. Where marginalized communities feel and flaunt their magnificence (Mingus 2011)! Just like glitter, queercrips are resistant, resilient, and so excessively sparkly!



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