

Multiple Notions of Desire: Roller Derby

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Roller derby smashes through dichotomous thinking that ranks and privileges men over women, but only if we let it. Right now there is an opportunity not to be missed, an opportunity for women to be watched and admired (judged even?) on their own terms and with their own rules. This is not to say that there are no problems or conflicts between the women involved, yet as Fullagar (1998) states, it is 'by analyzing the tension produced by different experiences of desire...we move from an over-determined, singular notion of desire to the idea of multiplicity'. There is not one driving force propelling these women into the sport of roller derby: there are multiple lines of flight.

As a cultural sociologist my task is to stay open to possibilities and to confront the fear of uncertainty in both writing and roller derby: to stay always in the middle. This middle is 'by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed' (Deleuze and Guattari 1993: 25). It is in between sport and creativity, movement and imagination, corporeal bodies and those that manage them, where all the fun, and the passion, starts.

Roller derby has a very particular subcultural style; it's style is one of the first things you will notice when you watch a bout. It is a bricolage of rockabilly, rock, metal and punk aesthetics, with bright tulle skirts, frilly knickers, fishnets, tattoos and coloured hair. Yet it is this colourful aesthetic that has at times obscured the complexity of this scene. Women come together to organise and create an international sport; a sport that privileges their experiences as women and that does not position them as inferior to, or weaker than, men.

Just as the women who participate in roller derby are able to take on multiple, alternative subjectivities, so too can the sport itself. It is at once a sport, competitive, requiring discipline and training; while at the same time adhering to notions of play. The perils of playing are often disguised by saying that play is "fun", "voluntary"— when in fact the fun of playing is in 'playing with fire, going in over one's head, inverting accepted procedures and hierarchies' (Schechner 1995).

So the five artists of *Bloodbath* 'play with fire', taking up some of the ways that bodies can be mediated through technology, highlighting movement and transformation rather than permanence and structure. This emphasis on movement opens up spaces that were previously closed, making for new and exciting possibilities for art, technology, sport and women's bodies—new ways of imagining oneself and embodying movement.

It has been said that 'human beings live fragmented lives whose meaning always evade them' (Tamboukou 2010). These fragmented lives can be brought together at some points through visual and textual narratives, mirroring the social and cultural world of the producer. In considering the multiple surfaces explored in *Bloodbath*—music and sport, women and aggression, embodied pain and visual representation, past and present— fragmented lives are brought together momentarily, creating conditions of possibility for women to imagine themselves becoming other and for them to actualize new possibilities.

Roller derby, in its present configuration, is an open space, not structured by old notions that separate sport and creativity, movement and imagination. It inspires creative work in a variety of mediums and creative platforms: music, fashion, crafts, writing, film, documentary and now, digital

art. Each mode of expression interacts with roller derby in its own way, but almost always with women's bodies, words and voices at its centre, expressing multiple notions of desire.

References

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Adele Pavlidis is a PhD Candidate with Griffith University. Currently, her research focuses on women's stories of becoming 'roller derby grrrl' and the ways that these women creatively manage this rapidly growing sport. As an interdisciplinary project, it traverses theory in a number of fields, including: sport and issues related to women in sport, music cultures and collective identity, cultural theory and writing, and feminist philosophy.