

Becoming Queer: Performance Art and Constructions of Identity

Welcome to the Lesbian National Parks and Services Field Guide to North America, the first comprehensive compendium to the lesbian wilderness. In this slim volume we endeavour to provide you with all the information and survival skills necessary to enjoy your outdoor activities to the fullest. Whether you are a neophyte wayfarer or seasoned bushwoman, may these pages illuminate your path. Years of hands-on experience and meticulous research have contributed to this text and we are confident that this shared knowledge will arouse an unbridled passion for lesbianism in all its forms. (Dempsey and Millan, 2002, p. 15)

The preface to the *Lesbian National Parks and Services Field Guide to North America* (2002) by Rangers Dempsey and Millan reads the same as any other guide to the wonders of nature, relaying a sense of awe in the face of an exciting new world to be explored. With its descriptive style, characteristic of a methodical biological study, and fluid prose reminiscent of vintage Field Guides, one almost doesn't notice the sly presence of 'lesbian,' which immediately turns otherwise innocent phrases into sarcastic sexual references. Through this carefully crafted doublespeak, with flawlessly blended descriptions of how to survive in the wilderness and advice on how to preserve the neglected lesbian flora and fauna, performance artists Shawna Dempsey and Lori Millan ensure that their audiences can never fully pinpoint where fact ends and parody begins.

The *Field Guide* is just one component of a larger project called Lesbian National Parks

and Services (LNPS), an ingenious performance art piece where Dempsey and Millan traveled around the world, donning the uniforms and personas of Canadian Park Rangers in order to educate others on the diversity of ‘lesbian’ wildlife and sub-culture, and in order to recruit Junior Rangers to their noble cause. The performance also included a 28-minute recruitment film, pamphlets tailored to each location they visited, and Junior Ranger training manuals complete with embroidered badges.

Based out of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Dempsey and Millan have been vital contributors to Canada’s art scene for nearly twenty years, using mixed media, music, text and film to challenge heteronormative ideologies and myths. In addition to being infectiously entertaining, the duo’s intelligent and witty performance art acts as a bridge between the social sphere and academic discourse. The campy *Lesbian National Parks and Services* (2002) accomplishes this transdisciplinary ‘crossing’ through three strategies: 1) Dempsey and Millan’s subversive occupancy of public space; 2) its detailed re-telling of biology from the *lesbian* perspective; and 3) its correspondence to a Deleuzian philosophy of becoming (which rests on biological metaphors of multiplicity and diversity that are very similar to those put forth in the *Field Guide*).

At its most obvious, Dempsey and Millan’s LNPS project situates the queer—specifically lesbian—identity as the norm through which all else is read, effectively ‘decentering the center’ and demanding a space in which to produce alternative and co-narratives of sexual identity and the gendered production of knowledge. Also relevant is the way in which Dempsey and Millan’s art practice enters into an ongoing conversation in queer theory, feminist theory and continental philosophy that is now intent on formulating a coherent *ethic* in the wake of postmodernism. In light of critiques of postmodernism, which often argue its limitations as a destabilizing relativity

that inhibits any practical application, I will discuss how multiplicity and diversity do not immobilize morality, politics or selfhood. In fact, Dempsey and Millan's wide-scale and geographically diverse performance art projects demonstrate the ways in which temporally and spatially located subjects have the potential to create new epistemological frameworks.

Through the medium of public performance, and thus through a situated and material engagement with their environment, Dempsey and Millan's satirical performance art is a living, breathing *becoming*. Put forth largely by Deleuze and Guattari, *becoming* reconfigures the fixity of the individual and points toward selves that are constantly in flux; engaged in multiple lines of flight, without ever landing in a succinct, knowable theoretical model. Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of percept and affect provide jumping-off points for a reciprocal relationship between philosophy and performance art, demonstrating the potentiality of performing the sexed- and gendered-body in order to generate 'futures yet unthought' and possibilities for social and political transformation. Further, by positioning the lesbian subject(s) at the helm of their craft, Dempsey and Millan create a future that is unabashedly queer and which allows for a subsequent 'undoing' of dominant texts of gender and sexuality in order to provide space for *becoming queer*, becoming multiple and becoming diverse. After providing an explanation of Deleuze and Guattari's *becoming*, including its relationship to postmodern philosophy, I will discuss a number of the projects and themes that have characterized Dempsey and Millan's work during the last decade. Following these 'mappings', I will provide a close reading of Dempsey and Millan's Lesbian National Parks and Services, showing how it exemplifies, engages with, and furthers both a *queer becoming*, and a form of ethical accountability.

I. From Rhetoric to Rhizomes

In his recent book entitled *Concepts of the Self* (2001) Anthony Elliot poses the question “What is the difference between the mafia and the postmodernists? The mafia makes you an offer you can’t refuse; the postmodernists make you one you can’t understand!” (p. 134). Elliot is referring to the dense and jargon-ridden nature of postmodern thought, rendering the potential applications of its central tenets unattainable. Anxieties that surround postmodernism include claims that we have been abandoned in a “junkyard of values” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 163) or that postmodernism is an apolitical resignation (Nussbaum, 1999), but in more contextual terms, Jameson believes that postmodernism is not simply a “fashion and art theory,” instead he calls it a “cultural dominant, indicative of the nature of late twentieth-century life and the changes that have created it” (as paraphrased in Mansfield, 2000, p. 163). In reality, the world is becoming ever more post-modern; we have destabilized the marks of modernity, replacing projects of ground-clearing, individual certainty, and the “triumph of reason” with historicization, situated knowledges, and theory-ladenness. This destabilization also takes place as a result of the increasing diversification of race, class, gender, and sexuality within political, social and academic spheres; the prevalence of transnational corporations; and the transformative effects on world-wide communication made possible by cyberspace and a global media. Given this ever-changing and pluralistic environment, thought, action, theory and knowledge itself have all transformed and responded in diverse and exciting ways and consequently, postmodernism is much less a theoretical lens than a description of our daily experience.

With a material experience of plurality and disruption comes the deconstruction of foundationalist strategies, and a redirection toward new theoretical insights, particularly in the areas of self and subjectivity. Contrary to historical conceptions of the self as fixed or whole,

contemporary identity-theorists are moving toward views of the self as decentred, multiple, and active. It is this focus on momentum and action that characterizes discussions of self as “becoming” in contrast to merely “being.” As Deleuze argues through close readings of Nietzsche, *being is becoming*: selves are constantly changing, always in process, and never able to *arrive* at a coherent subject. Thus, becoming does not refer to some sort of liminal state in a progressive hierarchy of self-actualization, but rather becoming is “the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogenous terms and tending towards no particular goal or end-state” (Stagoll, p. 21, 2005).

Deleuze and Guattari use the metaphor of the “rhizome” to represent the theoretical nature of becoming. In the natural world, the rhizome is a type of stem (grass is one example) that expands underground horizontally. This stem proliferates in diverse directions and in endless expansions, without ever referring to a central point. When the biological characteristics of the rhizome are applied to a theoretical landscape, the term “rhizomatic” then refers to a process of theoretical inquiry that resembles a web-like structure. Rather than relying on foundationalist notions of building knowledge from the ground up—what Deleuze and Guattari call the arborescent schema—the rhizomatic web decentres the construction of knowledge. For example, in reference to the structural model of the scientific method, rather than limiting one’s analysis to the strict:

question → hypothesis → prediction → experiment → analysis

the rhizomatic web decentres the construction of knowledge:

	□ prediction □	
analysis ← question ↔ hypothesis	↑	analysis
	□ experiment □	

One's experiment and prediction can be analyzed in relation to one's hypothesis, and further, the initial question, including the circumstances that brought one to that question can be included as determinates in the final results. In this way the rhizomatic web *is* its very connections, and it is only through these connections that any knowledge construction takes place. It is this metaphor of the rhizome that provides a theoretical lens through which to begin to imagine a *queer becoming*. This 'imagining' relies on connections and relationships between philosophies of self, feminist theory and queer theory, as well as those connections between one's consciousness of self, one's sexual identification, and one's everyday experience as marked by gender norms. Thus, *becoming queer* denotes a view of sexual identities as both multiple and interconnected, while demonstrating that it is these very characteristics that construct the world around us.

Becoming has also attracted considerable attention in the philosophical works of feminists Rosie Braidotti (2002) and Elizabeth Grosz (1999; 2004; 2005). Referencing the common understanding of the nomad—those peoples that live nomadic lives, travel from place to place—Braidotti enlists the discursive metaphor of nomadic subjectivity to exemplify a philosophy of becoming. Braidotti's nomad refers to the transitory subject: s/he who travels across boundaries (and disciplines) with ease; the shifting patterns of knowledge production and identity formation which seek no final destination. Metaphors of the nomad capture the Deleuze and Guattarian sentiment, showing how the becoming-self can never be reduced to a stable, rational individual, and is instead constantly changing—being re/created—through random encounters with language, laws, culture, economics, and politics among other things (Stagoll, 2005).

In Grosz's recent engagement with becoming, she investigates the relationship between philosophy and art asking, "instead of supervening from above, taking art as its object, how can

philosophy work *with* art or perhaps as, and alongside art?” (2005, p. 16). Similarly to Deleuze and Guattari, Grosz recognizes the capabilities of art as a material becoming, whereby paintings, performances, literary texts and music *affect* the world; they create meanings and material realities that both transform and construct the political systems, cultural norms, geographies, and epistemologies around us. She writes:

What philosophy can offer art is not a theory of art, an elaboration of its silent or undeveloped concepts, but what philosophy and art share in common—their rootedness in chaos, their capacity to ride the waves of a vibratory universe without direction or purpose, in short, their capacity to enlarge the universe by enabling its potential to be otherwise to be framed through concepts and affects. (Grosz, 2005, p. 25)

The Deleuzian concepts of affect and percept are significant such that they act as instances of becoming. They signify the multiple moments of becoming where new knowledges are created. In relation to art, Deleuze defines the terms *percept* and *affect* uniquely: affects are not simply feelings or emotions; rather, “sensible experiences in their *singularity*, liberated from organizing systems of representation” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 22). Percept also diverges from its traditional definition, as it is not limited to a perceiver. Instead, percepts are *bloc sensations* existing outside of experience. Percepts affects, and sensations are “*beings* whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. . . . [Thus] the work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 164).

As I will discuss further, the organic and spontaneous nature of performance art, exemplifies the potentiality of art to *affect*—that is change, transform, disrupt, create—the environment in which it appears. But, before I move on to a more detailed discussion of the alliance between becoming and performance art, I want to redress an earlier anxiety: the worry

that the postmodern preoccupation with discourse and the mere proposal of new theoretical metaphors, still cannot necessarily guarantee political effect as Braidotti rightly asks:

What exactly can we do with this non-unitary subject? What good is it to anybody?
 What kind of political and ethical agency can she or he be attached to? What are the
 values, norms and criteria that nomadic subjectivity can offer? (2002, p. 7)

These queries point to a larger question that weaves through much work surrounding becoming and the deconstruction of fixed identity, namely, has this deconstruction, multiplicity, and embrace of difference ignored human corporeality, turning the body into text, or something that is only knowable through discourse? (Zembylas, 2007; Cohen & Ramlow, 2005). This anxiety arises in light of the decentralized, post-structural demolition of a capital T – Truth, and leaves us to ask: where *are* the values in the ‘junkyard’? How *do* we engage with social issues when the concept of an ethical foundation on which to stand is negated by the very philosophies we wish to apply? Intriguingly, the discourse of *becoming* finds itself immersed in an intensely political and social conversation that points to the potentialities of becoming for agency, transformation, and change. Deleuze and Guattari were dedicated to the practicality of becoming as a step beyond the discursive realm; they wanted a philosophy that *engaged*, as they wrote in the opening pages of *A Thousand Plateaus*:

We will never ask what a book means, as signified or signifier; we will not look for anything to understand in it. We will ask what it functions with, in connection with what other things it does or does not transmit intensities, in which other multiplicities its own are inserted and metamorphosed . . . (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 4)

In effect, they are concerned not with what philosophy *means*, but rather with what it *does*. Thus, they do, in fact, deny any configuration of an arborescent morality, complete with

hierarchies of value and judgment, but this does not mean that they are apathetic to social and political causes. Far from it, Deleuze and Guattari are committed to what Grosz describes as the advent of a postmodern ethics: “an ethics posed in light of the dissolution of the rational, judging subject, or contract-based liberal accounts of the individual’s allegiance to the social community” (1993, p. 172). With this dissolution, ethics cannot rely on external systems to find meaning: we can no longer appeal to the lack of gender neutral pronouns as justification for remaining trapped in a sexist language. We are called to participate in an ethic that *is* action, that *is* change, and *is* the very connections between bodies, politics and culture. Our engagements, collisions, and collaborations constitute a micropolitics which is local and singular, and which enacts the becoming-otherwise that is necessary to transform legislating moral codes into an ethic that is flexible, multiple, and most importantly, compatible with difference.

Deleuzian *difference*, is no longer the dark adversary of *sameness*, rather it is the only universal that there is. All there is, is difference, and of particular importance to my purposes are the becomings made possible by recognition and proliferation of the differences of sexuality and desire. I use the terms *becoming queer* and *queer becomings* to point to the possibilities of pulling apart gender and identity, sex and desire, self and sexuality, and to reconfiguring the limitations we set up around these concepts; the expectations for sameness that order our ontological musings on self and sexuality. Contrary to that which represents the majority, or those who *belong*, queer identities act similarly to what Deleuze describes as minoritarian:

the difference between minorities and majorities isn't their size. A minority may be bigger than a majority. What defines the majority is a model you have to conform to . . .

A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it's a becoming, a process. (Joughin, [Trans.], 1990, n.p.)

Since the minority is neither the norm, nor the norm's direct opposite, as only the 'other' or the 'abject' it is rather the becoming identity, the becoming-other. The queer subject(s) are thus similar to the becoming-woman, for she has transcended man's norm; she has moved through and beyond by virtue of her lack of limitation as the heterogeneous subject. Similarly to phallogentrism, heteronormativity acts as a legislative force, thus, the queer subject, or the becoming-other of queer sexuality folds the norm in on itself by offering alternative manifestations of selves and identities.

Through a view of the queer subject as becoming-minoritarian, I return to the concept of *affect* as described above, whereby it constitutes a "*force* influencing a body's modes of existence. One produces one's own existence rather than discovering its invariant form" (Zembylas, 2007, p. 26). In this sense, the queer-becoming has the capability to *affect* his or her existence by virtue of being unrestrained by a system of majority politics. Performing as the Lesbian Park Rangers, Dempsey and Millan demonstrate this phenomenon, whereby through their adoption of localized performative identities, they *affect* queer becomings in the surrounding social, cultural and geographical contexts. Thus, their performance art offers a glimpse of the *work* that becoming, and therefore that postmodern philosophy can *do*.

II. A Cartography: Mapping Dempsey and Millan's Work

Throughout their collaborative performances, Dempsey and Millan have worked with a wide range of topics, in diverse settings, and with a plethora of materials to create a critical art practice that is political, subversive, and eminently entertaining. One of their most well-known projects, aside from "Lesbian National Parks and Services" was a music video featuring Dempsey performing as a larger-than-life, dancing, rapping vagina (*We're Talking Vulva*, 5 min.,

1990). The video was circulated on MuchMusic with the intent to demystify the private world of the vagina, and consequently the shrouded topic of women's sexuality. Another project included a flawless replica of *Life Magazine's* signature column "A Day in the Life" which used to follow persons of interest through their daily activities. In Dempsey and Millan's mock-up of the feature, they followed Sal, a strapping young bull-dyke, through her day as a "modern sex deviant" (1995). A particularly political project included a video and performance which illustrated the 2-dimensional world of Betty Baker: a 50s housewife who wears paper dresses, and examines the rise of the New Right with Dempsey and Millan's perfected tongue-in-cheek banter (*Good-Citizen: Betty Baker*, 27 min., 1996).

Although they have produced a number of films, as well as textual works, inspiration for these often comes from the public performances that Dempsey and Millan have taken to schools, galleries, festivals and fairs across North America, to Europe, Australia and even Japan. These performances are often thematic, relating to a larger issue or subject such as *The Dress Series*, performed between 1989 and 1996, which explored the *dress* as an icon of femininity. In this series, Dempsey and Millan constructed many different dresses from mixed media including saran wrap and roofing nails ("The Thin Skin of Normal," 1993); stained glass ("Glass Madonna," 1994); wood, laminate and other building hardware ("Arborite Housedress," 1994); and vinyl ("Plastic Bride," 1996). Each of these performances included the creation of a costumed character that, through her "wearing" of a particular dress, and thus the ideological framework which it represented, problematized the meanings associated with it.

Another series of performances (*Tales for a New World: 1997-2001*) engages with characters from North American mythology in order to rewrite their stories through a lesbian and feminist lens. "The Short Tales of Little Lezzie Borden," first performed in 2001, takes up the

folklore surrounding the murderess Lizzie Borden, and “posits rage as a justifiable, indeed logical emotional response to contemporary world events” (from <http://www.fingerinthedyke.ca>). In “Lesbian Love Story of the Lone Ranger and Tonto,” first performed in 1997, Dempsey dons a western outfit and gives a monologue addressing both the racism and sexism of North America’s storytelling about its history, and instead offers untold stories, thus puncturing the weight of history and betraying its contingency. In their most recent undertakings, Dempsey and Millan have turned to performances surrounding language, including the ways that languages are being lost at an alarming rate, and the ways that the media is transforming both language and the ways in which knowledge is constructed (see “Target Marketing,” 2004).

There is a recurring theme throughout Dempsey and Millan’s work that involves the active critique of those narratives we take to be ‘normal.’ Through constantly challenging those ideologies that we assume are fixed, such as history, language, and knowledge itself, they expose the heteronormative and androcentric biases that have shaped our contemporary epistemologies. At the heart of much of the duo’s work is an engagement with queer, and more specifically lesbian, identity as a form of “speaking back” or speaking outside of the norm. In fact, projects such as LNPS posit the queer identity as the norm, thus creating an entire paradigm shift and encouraging the audience to be immersed in a parallel universe which transcends the categories of outsider or alternative cultural production typically affiliated with queer theory, art, and experience.

It is this recurring theme that led me to read Dempsey and Millan’s work alongside Gilles Deleuze’s philosophy of *becoming*, and more pertinently alongside feminist developments of this philosophy as created by Rosi Braidotti (2002), Elizabeth Grosz (2005, 2004, 1999), and Claire

Colebrook (2000). Through the parallels between Deleuzian philosophy, as it has been developed by feminist philosophers, and the noble cause of Ranger Dempsey and Ranger Millan, one can not only visualize what the ephemeral *becoming* might *look like*, but can begin to imagine an ethics of accountability that employs the creative, multiple, and nomadic facets of the *becoming queer*.

III. *Becoming Queer* and a Politics of Process

As an art practice, performance art creates a space of change, transition, and improvisation, such that the performance artist enacts their art in dialogue with a live audience. Even for those performances that are largely scripted, there is an element of surprise; there is always the possibility for re-appropriation, transformation and creation, where new knowledges, and alternative subject positions are enabled through the creative environment. It is because of this that performance art has been linked to discussions of *becoming* (Parr, 2005), where selves have the opportunity to be involved in creative and constructive processes that are future-oriented. For the performance artist, the stage may be set, but the outcome is unbounded by preconceived limitations or expected results. Sometimes the performance artist even interacts with her audience, provoking and prodding her onlookers in such a way as to dissolve the distinction between artist/audience.

As a practice whose inception is believed to be from the 1960s avante garde movements, which were in response to regulative rules of the theatre, performance art has always had a deconstructive intent:

As a continuation of the twentieth-century rebellion against commodification, performance art promised a radical departure from commercialism, assimilation and

triviality, deconstructing the commercial art network of galleries and museums while often using/abusing their spaces. In a very real sense, it is the structures and institutions of modernism which performance art attacks, throwing into doubt the accepted practices of knowledge acquisition and accumulation. (Forte, 1998, p. 236)

Feminist performance art takes a step beyond this, as it asserts the female body/voice as a subject within the public arena. As Jeanie Forte writes “women performance artists challenge the symbolic order by asserting themselves as ‘speaking Subjects’, in direct defiance of the patriarchal construction of discourse” (p. 239).

Although Deleuze and Guattari do not specifically take up the merits of performance art, looking instead to music, literature and cinema (1987), particular practices of performance art capture the sentiment of creativity and affect that they are vying for with a philosophy of becoming. For instance, performance art defies the linear structure of theatre, where rather than attempting to tell a tale or to follow the trajectory of the narrative plot, the performance artists aims at “producing an encounter or event, not in the simplistic sense that it [happens] at a particular moment in time, but in so far as it aspires to bring a variety of elements and forces into relation with one another” (Parr, p. 26, 2005). Although there are performance art projects that do rely on carefully scripted procedures, Dempsey and Millan’s performance of “Lesbian National Parks and Services” generally does not follow a script, instead letting the performance be created in the context of its environment or audience.

“Lesbian National Parks and Services” took shape in the summer of 1997, when Dempsey and Millan participated in a residency at the Walter Phillips Gallery at the Banff Center. During this residency, the artists adopted their now infamous alter-egos, and introduced the tourists of Banff to the Lesbian Park Rangers. In spectacular knock-offs of the well-pressed

tan uniforms of Canada's Park Rangers, they parked themselves in the middle of Banff's Central Park, beneath a banner that read "Lesbian National Parks and Services WANTS YOU!" and a small table, lined with LNPS pamphlets and pink-lemonade. While in Banff the Rangers provided information on the sparsely populated lesbian ecosystem of Banff through a brochure that showed a re-formulated map of the town-site. The bulk of the project, however, was their unrelenting performance which required daily improvisation as the Rangers fielded questions about where the best fishing was, and which trails to try out, coupled alongside playful queries about Banff's queer nightlife or the actual prevalence of queer persons in the area. With deadpan humour, Dempsey and Millan never broke character (even when tourists approached them that were clearly unaware of the performative nature of the display), effectively accomplishing a form of 'double-speak' that belied their subversive sub-text that positioned lesbianism as the norm.

Kyo Maclear, a Toronto-based cultural critic, who was also doing a residency at the Banff Centre during the summer of 1997, was asked to provide an "eye-witness account" of the performances that took place. When discussing the Lesbian Park Rangers Maclear commented:

It is amazing, but I have yet to see them out of uniform or off duty. . . . Gradually the surrogate rangers are becoming ever more real, ever more familiar. . . . The conceptual satire seems to have titillated visitors (myself included) to the point that we have become willing participants in the masquerade. (1999, p. 56)

The conscious decision to remain in uniform for the entire duration of their stay enabled the Lesbian Park Rangers to resist categorization as mere performative posturing. Instead of putting boundaries around the performance, limiting it to a two-hour show, located in a specific theatre for a small fee, Dempsey and Millan immersed themselves in the performance, letting onlookers

act as participants, rather than audience members, and letting the project change from performance to process, where every day brought new conversations and collaborations with their environment. When they went to the bank, they approached the teller as Lesbian Park Rangers; when they took a cab, they traveled as Lesbian Park Rangers. By consistently donning the ranger uniforms, Dempsey and Millan created queer identities on the streets of Banff, and later around the world, that participated in a queer becoming that transformed frameworks such as the heteronormative tourist space, the essentially de-sexed Banff site, the male-dominated field of Conservation, and even the capitalist exploitation of the rocky mountains

One tactic that Dempsey and Millan used in order to sufficiently and subversively accomplish these tasks was the deft use of language in their pamphlets. For example following a quip about the lack of recognition of lesbian couplings in nature (specifically bisons, in this instance), Dempsey and Millan state “Awareness is the first step in combating this problem. As you go about your busy day, consider the interdependence of all living things. Ask yourself, ‘What is nature?’ and ‘What is natural?’” Also, a section of the *Field Guide* that outlined various species in North America, discussed the genus *Homo*: “The only primate to be found in North America, the *Homo* has developed diverse characteristics and behaviours depending upon a variety of factors, including gender, access to food and shelter and individual inclination” (Dempsey & Millan, 2002, p. 99). Both of these quotations poke at the knowledge systems that govern biology as we know it, and therefore encourage the reader to re-think his or her “factual” assumptions about nature.

“Lesbian National Parks and Services” has not yet had much coverage in academic articles, and instead has been documented largely in the public media, where reviewers have been unable to resist participating in the performance. As “Ranger Joy Parks” begins her book

review of the *Field Guide*:

Do you believe that heterosexuality defies the laws of nature? Agree that the fragile lesbian ecosystem demands protection and stewardship? Want to achieve a fuller, more rewarding experience in the lesbian wilds? If you've answered 'yes' to these three simple questions, then you're likely a candidate for membership in the Lesbian National Parks and Services. (Parks, 2003, p. 37)

Through taking up the tongue-in-cheek style and extending the performance to the pages of *Herizons*, Ranger Joy Parks is herself an *affect* of Dempsey and Millan's project; a *queer becoming* that moves beyond and through the performance and results in multiple becomings of her own.

In an interview that highlights the political relevance of the project and its pointed critique of heteronormativity both in Banff and in the biological world, Dempsey says "we realized that [LNPS] is about the heterosexual assumptions of our culture as [they are] played out in our natural sciences—constant references to a heterosexual norm, and they point to nature and animals as examples of the natural way things should be in the world" (Domet, 2003, n.p.). By repositioning metaphors and models from nature, Dempsey and Millan problematize the myths of nature often used to defend essentialist definitions of sex and sexuality. Another reviewer relates the biological *bent* of the *Field Guide* to Bruce Begemihl's *Biological Exuberance* (1999), a text that addresses the presence of alternative, non-reproductive, homosexual and transgender sexual occurrences in the natural world (Borden, n.p.). Borden draws attention to the factual nature of the *Field Guide*, particularly the ways in which it strives for the 'authenticity' of field guides of the 50s and 60s through careful attention to detail, writing style and even the aesthetic quality of the book itself. In the same way that Ranger Dempsey and

Ranger Millan *pass* under the guise of the Park Ranger, the *Field Guide* accomplishes a form of *crossing* through its adoption of a normative and reliable standard of scientific inquiry. Through their reworking of the norm, they are able to deconstruct the arborescent structures of biological texts.

The language used in the *Field Guide* is akin to a rhizomatic mapping, and its collaboration with nature as Dempsey and Millan write, “Biology, as revealed in this Field Guide, dismisses monolithic models (such as heterosexuality and patriarchy) and encourages a perversion of norms. It is only through plurality that any species, including our own, will continue to evolve” (2002, p. 20). Much like the ethological rhizomatics Deleuze and Guattari put forth in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Dempsey and Millan embrace the diversity of the biological world, denying the goal of the sciences to impose heterogenous frameworks on an otherwise limitless terrain. An ethology in this context, then refers to an ethic that is materially and biologically situated, and which acknowledges the effects of singular events, connections, and thoughts as part and parcel to a creative becoming. In fact, it is the notion of becoming-animal that Deleuze and Guattari most endorse, urging us to strive for the uninhibited becomings of the animal world, or to think beyond our humanity. Through their embracing of the diversity of the biological world, Dempsey and Millan deny the goal of the sciences to impose heterogenous frameworks on an otherwise limitless terrain. Also, through their public performance of lesbian subjectivities they enact a becoming-*queer* that *affects* other subjectivities into reality and encourages us to think beyond our humanity.

IV. Active Thoughts for a Queer Future

In the self-created world of the video/print/performance space, our characters have the

freedom to make their own self-definitions. These personae gleefully disrupt the images and lessons contained in the stories and codes that have shaped us. They subvert and pervert accepted meanings, and re-tell tall tales truly. By making people laugh, we open them up to thinking differently. By placing our physical bodies in the work, we perform our lesbian, feminist realities into existence. (Lorri Millan & Shawna Dempsey, Promotional Brochure)

Since the original Banff performance, the Rangers have traveled across North America, Europe, Australia and even Japan. Through their development of extensive recruitment materials, and the continued presence of the Lesbian Rangers at street fairs, film and performance festivals, music festivals, and universities, Dempsey and Millan have carved out a spot for the Rangers in the cultural consciousness (at least in the sub-cultural consciousness). I have shown that their materially-situated performance art has engendered new ways of looking at, and participating in, biology, conservation, and the tourist space. They have also demonstrated a form of accountability in the face of an apathetic political and ethical climate through their dedication to the LNPS project. Rather than limiting the project to one event, Dempsey and Millan have allowed the project to take on a life of its own, producing satirical texts, films, and brochures, traveling to locations around the world, and conversing with thousands of individuals, all in an effort to destabilize the heteronormativity of urban, rural, biological, and even virtual space. This act of *putting their bodies* into the conversation, exemplifies the very intent of becoming, such that Dempsey and Millan themselves proliferate the sexed, desiring subject, creating new epistemological/ontological frameworks in each and every instance of collision with other bodies and thoughts.

A more detailed and extensive examination of the collaborations between becoming and performance art is necessary to fully explicate the points of collision and departure, as well as the potentialities for a postmodern ethic. However, through this far-from exhaustive reading of Deleuze and Guattari, alongside the Lesbian Park Rangers, I hope to have offered a glimpse of the zealous force of a *becoming queer*, or rather, what new futures it can imagine, what diverse things it can *do*, for as Deleuze and Guattari's practical manifesto demands:

Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant! Don't sow, grow offshoots! Don't be one or multiple, be multiplicities! Run lines, never plot a point! Speed turns the point into a line! Be quick, even when standing still! (1987, p. 24).

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