Becoming Queer:
From Rhetoric to Rhizomes and Toward an Ethics of Accountability

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ABSTRACT

*Being is Becoming:* selves are constantly changing, always in process, and never able to *arrive* at a coherent identity. Contemporary discussions of sexual and gendered identity have replaced the view that heterosexuality is an innate or “natural” category with views that sexuality is fluid and multiple. Consequently, desire is a creative force in the engendering of sexual subjectivities and new social communities, rather than a negative force that limits gendered development to a heteronormative model. With this in mind, this thesis has three interrelated, yet distinct aims. The first is to explore the concept of sexual subjectivity, asking questions such as do human beings have a knowable sexual identity? And how have Freudian psychoanalysis and Foucauldian poststructuralism contributed to our contemporary understandings of sexuality? My second aim is to clarify Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of becoming, using the metaphor of the rhizome to link feminist philosophy, queer theory, and subsequent deconstructions of sexual identity. My third project is to identify what is meant by *becoming queer,* including how it challenges the authority of heteronormative institutions. In order to demonstrate the potentialities of becoming queer, I conduct a case study of Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan’s performance project “Lesbian National Parks and Services.” Through their performance art practice, Dempsey and Millan challenge dominant narratives of heterosexuality and fixed gender identity, offering a starting point for discussions of the reciprocity between artistic practice, social movements, and academic discourse. In addition, they demonstrate how queer becomings participate in an ethics of accountability, that is, as materially-situated, localized subjectivities they are able to alter and transform their environments.
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CHAPTER 1
A GENEALOGY OF SEXUAL SUBJECTIVITY

Unless one likes complexity one cannot feel at home in the twenty-first century. Transformation, metamorphoses, mutations and processes of change have in fact become familiar in the lives of most contemporary subjects.

(Rosi Braidotti, Metamorphoses 1)

I. Introduction

In the third section of the art film Subject/Object of Desire (1993), Shawna Dempsey appears in the centre of the frame declaring, “I want love, I want twoness, and tandem and we” (see figure 1). As she speaks, her body rotates on the screen, and just as she utters “I want reduced rates for double occupancy and Anniversaries and Valentines” the viewer catches sight of her side profile which reveals that her brilliant blonde coif is actually a butch buzz cut, and her off-the-shoulder ball gown is made not from smooth satin, but from crinkly white paper. Alongside these visual indicators, the viewer begins to hear the irony in Dempsey’s monologue about blissful coupling, buying a puppy and the quest for normalcy. The irony is fully expressed through Dempsey’s final pronouncement: “We will drive off into the rest of our lives, and be happy, and not lonely, and just like everyone else” which is accompanied by her hands slowly rising to clench over her throat, thus signaling the suffocating effects of these “normal” expectations.
Subject/Object of Desire has four sections depicting Dempsey’s gradual progression from being the passive object of heterosexual desire (“I want you: to want me. I want you to want me, even though I don’t really want you”) to the active subject of a lesbian sex act (“I want to fuck you. . . . My tongue in your ear your mouth, going down, down, your belly, your thighs. . . . I want you”). Dempsey resists feminine objectification through her demonstration of the restrictive parameters of heteronormative union, as well as her assertion of lesbian desire. Through her metamorphosis from object to subject, Dempsey enlists the creative potential of desire to rearticulate the lines of communication and knowledge construction and to participate in a process of becoming, whereby the stereotypical blonde debutante is the becoming-queer. Through her connections with other female bodies, the lesbian subject enacts a process of desiring-production\(^1\): she enhances the power of her own desire to produce social communities, which in this case include queer communities. Thus, becoming-queer refers to a

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\(^1\) The term “desiring-production” was coined by Deleuze and Guttari in Anti-Oedipus. It refers to the productive nature of desire in processes of meaning-making and subjectivation.
process of creating or bringing into existence diverse genders, sexualities, and desires and the consequent reorganization of personal, social and political systems.

This philosophical concept of *becoming* is put forward in the two-volume collaboration between Deleuze and Felix Guattari *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, made up of *Anti-Oedipus* (1977) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Rather than understanding oneself as a *being*, Deleuze and Guattari view the self as a *becoming*: a constant and shifting process of production that never arrives at a final outcome or goal and is rather understood as *change* itself. Although *A Thousand Plateaus* introduces the rhizomatic web necessary for becoming to find footing—to which I will turn at length in Chapter 2—both volumes of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* consist of a large-scale critique of the boundaries and functions of capitalism, particularly how it trains us to read desire through a system of *lack*. We desire that which we do not have, and the capitalist system relies on the perpetual inadequacy this absence instills within us, ensuring that our perceived *lack* propels the acquisition of goods, services, or exchange. As Dempsey’s performance demonstrates, the pervasive institution of heterosexuality, and its subsequent ordering of desire, ensures that we ascribe to the rules and norms through which it is governed. The history of Freudian psychoanalysis is particularly important here, as *Anti-Oedipus* blames Freud for the linking of desire and lack, in reference to sexuality and our gendered development. For Freud, it is the desire for the phallus that guarantees normative sexual development: for the girl-child her *lack* of a phallus propels her into heterosexual femininity, and for the boy-child, his fear of castration, or of one day *lacking* the phallus he presently possesses, ensures that he behaves according to norms of heterosexual masculinity. Freudian psychoanalysis also laid the groundwork for the construction of the contemporary sexual subject as she or he whose sexuality can be “known” as well as studied according to a charted path. Deleuze and Guattari are critical not only of the claim that sexuality can be charted in any fashion, but of the view that desire is a negative force, arguing instead that desire is
productive and creative, and that its importance lies in its ability to make connections between bodies that have social impact.

Foucault’s extensive discussions of power are also relevant here, as Foucault is critical of Freudian psychoanalysis, describing it as a “regime of sexuality” that functions as an institution of power and control through monitoring the construction of heteronormative identities. Foucault’s response to Freud pays particular attention to the role of psychoanalysis in endowing individuals with “sexuality.” Through the “talking cure” the psychoanalyst is not only given access to the private realm of desire and fantasy, but he or she finds it fit to categorize, classify, and interrogate these innermost states alongside a framework that views certain versions of sexuality as “natural,” “fixed,” and necessary for the development of a citizen (Sawicki 164). Foucault’s criticism of Freud operates alongside Deleuze and Guattari’s such that it illustrates the historical and cultural contingency of psychoanalysis, claiming that rather than being a succinct account of the path of sexual development, it is merely another mechanism by which to mould the subject into the particular sexed and gendered identity that is necessary for the function of capitalism.

Where the Freudian self is viewed as a singular entity, which can be poked and prodded into a form of “truth-telling,” Foucault’s “self” no longer exists as a knowable entity. Instead, he views the self as the medium through which discourses of power exert their control and define their environments. Deleuze and Guattari take this contingent self a number of steps further in their claim that there is no such thing as being and that there are only becomings: instances of change, production, and transformation that create multiple selves and realities. It is this productive notion of becoming that is of greatest interest to me, as it is similar to theoretical positions within the field of queer theory. As a field that collaborates with feminist theory to destabilize the link between sex and gender (a distinction which I will later explain in more detail) queer theory calls for a proliferation of gender, sexuality, and
desire. This project works to decentralize the material and theoretical systems of heteronormativity under which all behaviours are regulated.

With these interests in mind, my intentions in this thesis are threefold: the first is to outline and discuss the sexual subject, as developed by Freudian psychoanalysis, and as obliterated by Foucault’s later deconstruction of the subject. Through this I intend to reveal the philosophical context from which the productive concept of becoming arose, as well its potentialities for contemporary discussions of selfhood. My second project is to provide a clear explanation of what becoming entails, including how it fits into the rest of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, and how it provides a useful theory for a materially-grounded conception of the multiple and fractured subject. My third project is to relate a philosophy of becoming to queer theory and sexuality studies, as I believe there are a great deal of similarities between these fields. In order to effectively pursue these connections I will return to the performance art of Shawna Dempsey and her collaborative partner Lorri Millan, particularly their project called “Lesbian National Parks and Services.” I will provide a case study of Dempsey and Millan’s performance art practice that maps their collaborative projects from 1990 to 2004 and describes the dominant ideas and topics which characterize their work. Then, through a detailed exploration of the themes, content, and context of “Lesbian National Parks and Services,” both the performance itself, and its supporting text, I will argue that Dempsey and Millan enact a queer becoming through their performance projects that exemplifies the relevance of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy to discussions in Queer Theory and Sexuality Studies.

Underlying these projects is a nagging question about the value of a philosophy of becoming and the multiple subject to philosophical discussions of selfhood and subjectivity, especially considering the wealth of criticism to which postmodern theory is tied. In reference to the dense and jargon-ridden nature of postmodern thought, Anthony Elliot quips, “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!” (134). Anxieties that
surround postmodernism include claims that we have been abandoned in a “junkyard of
values” (Mansfield 163) or that postmodernism is an apolitical resignation (Nussbaum 19).
Joel Handler describes postmodern positions as those that “critique modernity’s
institutionalized patterns of rationality. . . . [With a] concept of the future society [that] is
largely negatively defined. They know what they do not want, but they are unsure and
inconsistent about what they want” (719). He goes on to claim that this scattered,
incomprehensive, and un-unified attempt at social engagement will only result in a politics of
quietism that is unable to find the solidarity necessary for transformative strategies. This
refers to the criticism that postmodern theorists often pay lip service to the importance of
connecting theory and action, without actively following through on these claims. Although
these are valid concerns, I do not intend to defend postmodern theories to their critics. I do,
however, aim to respond to the general anxieties that surround them through
reconceptualizing our philosophical relationship to our political and social environments. I
argue that through an understanding of selves as becomings, and through examination of the
becoming queer that results from Dempsey and Millan’s performance art, to begin to construct
an ethics of accountability, or rather by recognizing our role as active participants in the
construction of knowledge and meaning, we take on the responsibility of creating alternative
and diverse systems of knowledge, which endorse a wider range of identities and possibilities.

As we move into the 21st century, it is evident that 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. Contemporary
trends reveal the increasing visibility of issues 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. Within an environment characterized by such diversity, come the material
experiences of plurality and disruption and the consequent development of new
understandings of self and subjectivity and how the self connects to the world. These factors
indicate that postmodernism is becoming much less a mere theoretical lens and increasingly a
description of our daily-lived experience, particularly our constant negotiations of mediated
and lived subjectivity. As described above, modernist conceptions of the self as fixed or
undivided are being replaced by views of the self as decentred, multiple, and active. Or as
Deleuze and Guattari argue throughout their work, being is becoming: selves are constantly
changing, always in process, and never able to arrive at a coherent description of subject
formation. In discussions of sexuality and gender, the notion that heterosexuality is an innate
or “natural” category has been replaced with views of sexuality as fluid and multiple, where
desire is a creative force in the construction of sexual subjectivities and new social
communities, rather than a negative force that ensures that individuals develop a gender
identity according to heteronormative standards.

The remainder of this chapter will provide a brief outline of Freud and Foucault’s
contributions to 20th century discussions of sexual subjectivity, specifically the focus on
sexuality and its relationship to identity-formation. First, I will look at Freud’s Oedipus
complex, as it has been a paradigmatic framework for the construction of sexuality, and has
served as a departure point for Deleuze and Guattari’s deconstruction of the subject. Then I
will turn to Foucault’s “technologies of the self” and his radical repositioning of the subject.
Both of these prominent figures have played a significant role in constructing the contemporary
sexual subject through their texts and studies, and provide an historical context for Deleuze
and Guattari’s becoming, and deconstructions of the subject that take place in poststructuralist
and feminist philosophy.
Chapter Two will outline the philosophy of becoming as a critique of the Freudian subject proper, delineated as a particular “state” of being. In fact, Deleuze and Guattari challenge psychoanalysis with their own method of analysis called “schizoanalysis.” Schizoanalysis encourages the advent of multiple desires, in contrast to the Freudian tendency to scrutinize sexuality and desire, relating any “abnormalities” to one’s childhood sexual development. This chapter will include a development of Deleuze and Guattari’s key themes, including the rhizome as a metaphor for the webbed formation of any “theory” of becoming, as well as the concepts of percept and affect, both of which link becoming to art and the potential for creative practices to engage with philosophy and to have a substantial influence on the environment. I will then turn to the works of Rosi Braidotti and Elizabeth Grosz, who have enlisted becoming for their research on nomadic sexuality and becoming-minority, respectively. These developments of becoming within queer theory point to not only the possibilities of pulling apart identity and selfhood, but of reconfiguring gender, sex, desire and sexuality. Through challenging normative definitions of sexual subjectivity, queer becomings challenge the authority of heteronormative institutions of power and control, calling for a political and social responsibility that I describe as an ethics of accountability, or rather, recognition of both the influence and potentiality of our material subject positions and behaviours.

Chapter Three takes this analysis further as I explore performance art practice as a material instantiation of becoming, particularly demonstrating its potential for socio-political effects. Through a case study of Dempsey and Millan’s “Lesbian National Parks and Services” I will discuss the way that their work exemplifies a process of becoming, and particularly a becoming that challenges dominant narratives of heterosexuality and fixed gender identity. The effects of Dempsey and Millan’s art practice offers a starting point for discussions of the reciprocal relationships between artistic practice, social movements and
academic discourse, and will show that becoming allows for agency and momentum, such that there is the possibility for social change. Thus, in contrast to critiques of postmodernism which often argue its limitations as a destabilizing relativity that inhibits any practical application, I will show how multiplicity and diversity do not immobilize the postmodern subject; instead they require us to look at the specificities of thought and action in relationship to temporal and spatial contexts, such that we can provide for localized social subjectivities within the chaos that characterizes our contemporary world.

II. Creating Sexuality: Freud and Foucault and the 20th Century Subject

Subjectivity is a cornerstone of theoretical inquiry, where the quest for a glimpse into the self—a small hint at what is human—provides fodder for many discussions of self and identity. Philosophical discussions of the self have taken many forms: Descartes claimed that selfhood was an essential, rational consciousness, separate from history, culture, and even sensory experience; Locke believed that we could gain knowledge of the self through reflection and memory, so that selfhood was dependent upon consciousness; and Hume put forth a bundle theory of the self, which denied the existence of a unified consciousness, claiming rather that the self was simply a collection of sensations and perceptions. More recent discussions of the self rarely claim that there is some “selfhood” or “essence of being” at the root of human identity. In fact, whether considered postmodern or not, most contemporary philosophers have given up on the enlightenment model of the “free and autonomous individual” which viewed the self as the foundation for all experiential and rational knowledge. Instead, discussions have focused on selves as situated and contingent, but also transformative, such that “the self is an ensemble of techniques and practices enacted on an everyday basis” (Probyn 2) whose very expression within a public sphere problematizes these techniques.
Judith Butler has taken up this theme in *Giving an Account of Oneself*, arguing that the self is created in relation to others, particularly in one’s presentation of a narrative or story about oneself, which then substantiates certain aspects of identity, belief and subjectivity. The act of “giving an account of oneself” aligns with Foucault’s discussions of “confession” as an instantiation of selfhood, to which I will turn to later, but for now it is sufficient to say that both the search for the “I am,” and the metaphysical exploration of what it is to exist as a human subject, take up many pages of continental philosophy. However, historical conceptions of self and subjectivity have rarely, if ever, addressed whether any incantation of self is affected by either the “sex” or the “gender” of that self. Philosophers have mistakenly assumed that they can access a non-gendered self—not unisex, but non-sex— from which to develop an hypothesis of selfhood, consequently assuming that self-constituting activities such as memory, agency, and autonomy have nothing to do with constructions of femininity or masculinity. Although these activities may not be specifically concerned with “sex” and “gender,” the lens through which self and subjectivity has been recorded and read, assumes a sexless subject, wrongly simplifying the subject within philosophical frameworks.

When we turn to the notion of sexuality, including an individual’s experience of desire for another individual, be they male, female, lesbian, gay, transsexual, or otherwise, there is again an absence in the philosophical canon. It wasn’t until the 1800s that a technical language developed around sexuality, and dominant arguments concerning the ontology of the sexual subject centered on one’s supposedly “innate” sexuality: heterosexuality is the norm.

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2 “Non-sex” in this context refers not to the absence of sex and/or gender, but to the uncritical use of masculine as representative of neutral. This was critically addressed by Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1953) where she argued that “The terms masculine and feminine are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral . . .” (xxi).

3 The terms “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality” were coined in 1869 by Karl-Maria Kertbeny, a German psychologist who published a number of pamphlets claiming that the Prussian anti-sodomy law, Paragraph 143, violated the “rights of man” against discrimination of same-sex couplings. See Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (1995).
and those who display same-sex desires are deviant, or abnormal. Ultimately this argument hinges on the view that heterosexuality constitutes an essential and fixed identity, further legitimized by the heteronormativity of familial, social, economic, and cultural systems. Although gay rights movements and lesbian and gay studies have understandably been intent on legitimizing homosexuality as a genetic or physiological occurrence, recent projects in both these fields and queer theory have attempted to problematize any arguments from “nature,” including those surrounding sexual orientation. Rather than viewing sexuality and gender as necessarily linked to one’s anatomy, feminist and queer theories argue that gender is constructed by heteronormative knowledge systems which structure the family, the education system, the legal system, cultural practices, and social organizations. There is no essential “male” or “female,” and consequently, there is no essential “lesbian,” “gay man,” or “bisexual,” instead these subject-positions are the result of a pervasive heteronormativity that we cannot escape.

When I speak, then, of becoming queer, I am referring to the shift in viewing the self as an essential, fixed, and knowable entity to viewing the self as relational, unknowable, and ultimately as an effect of its environment. This can also be described as the difference between viewing the self as a “being” and viewing selfhood as the result of a “doing” (i.e. giving an account of oneself, or a young girl’s mimicking of the norms of femininity so that she is recognized as female). This dichotomy between being and doing constitutes the central focus of my discussion of sexual subjectivity as it parallels the distinction between being and becoming. By viewing the sexual and desiring subject as a becoming I hope to illustrate the ways in which becoming queer constitutes a sexuality that is changing and in process, rather than as determined by one’s biological gender and the norms under which it is regulated. Becoming queer also refers to the ways that one’s “doing” of sexuality and gender propels
multiple subjectivities into existence, thus limiting the majoritarian role that institutions of heterosexuality play in our daily lives.

Although many have addressed questions such as “who am I?” and “how does one become a subject?” fewer have looked at the construction of sexuality prior to the onset of feminist philosophy and queer theory in the later 20th century. With this absence in mind, I have chosen to focus on the works of Freud and Foucault, from the early 20th century and the mid-to-late 20th century respectively, because they have both contributed to the dialectical formation not only of the “self” but also of the “sexed self.” In academic contexts, Freudian psychoanalysis provided the fundamental outline of the development of “normal” sexuality, and Foucault’s “History of Sexuality” provided the first systematic genealogy of sexuality, deconstructing the notion of the essential heterosexual subject and instead demonstrating sexuality’s historical and cultural contingency. Upon reading recent comparisons of Freud and Foucault, it becomes apparent that they are often positioned as fundamentally at odds with one another in discussions of selfhood.4 Freud develops a view of subjectivity as something that is both quantifiable and knowable. To him, selfhood is an essential and lasting quality that develops in a particular way throughout an individual’s life, following a set trajectory of desire that results from our bodily encounters with the gendered identities of our family members. On the contrary, Foucault argues that subjectivity is somewhat of an imaginary construct that has no lasting essence, and is rather the invention of dominant social systems. These systems both create and are created by normative and policed categories of behaviour and identity, which are used as a means by which to control us. Thus, Foucault’s self is far from the enlightenment’s “free and autonomous individual” and instead, any semblance of “selfhood” is the result of both internal and external systems of power and surveillance. In

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each case, I will outline their general views on what constitutes the “subject” and will then turn to their respective fashionings of the sexual subject in order to ground later philosophical conceptions of becoming queer.

i: Freud’s Construction of Sexual Subjectivity

In addition to his recognition as the “father of psychoanalysis” Freud is known for his preoccupation with the minute details of sexuality and sexual development. Through examination of numerous patients, Freud determined that the development of subjectivity followed a linear process based primarily on a path of desire that took place during childhood. Freud argued that the sex drive was the primary motivating force for the development of selfhood and outlined a formula for this process that hinged on five developmental stages that all individuals must go through, each named after the object or area of sexual fixation. These stages include: 1) the oral stage, which lasts from birth to 18 months; 2) the anal stage, which lasts from 18 months until age three or four; 3) the phallic stage, which lasts from the ages of three to seven; 4) the latent stage, during which the sexual impulse temporarily dies down from age six or seven until puberty; and 5) the last stage is the genital stage, which progresses from puberty onward and signifies the “regular” sex drive. The phallic stage, the time during which boys become obsessed with the phallus, has particular importance to sexual development as it enables the crisis of self described as the Oedipus Complex. This is the period of time in a child’s early years where he\(^5\) becomes attached to his opposite-sex parent (the mother) and develops hostility towards his father. This hostility is the result of the boy’s eroticization of his mother, and upon his discovery of the sexual relationship between the father and the mother, he perceives his father as a rival. As mentioned previously, it is during

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\(^5\) The use of the male pronoun is intentional here as Freud first developed the Oedipus Complex in relation to male development and only later reformulated the stage to account for the development of female sexuality.
this stage that the boy becomes aware of his penis and simultaneously of the fact that his mother (and his sister or other girls around him) does not possess a penis. The boy then develops castration anxiety; the fear that he could potentially lose his penis, as his mother and sister have, and so he begins to turn toward his father, who possesses a large and powerful penis. This process is a key component of Freudian theory, ensuring that boys will identify with their fathers and the behaviours of archetypal masculine heterosexuality in order to avoid the loss of the phallus and to position themselves as masculine subjects in the larger world (Freud, “Female Sexuality” 24).

In “Female Sexuality” Freud addresses the obvious question that arises from the above model when applied to the sexual development of young girls. Freud claims that all children identify primarily with the mother, and so it is not clear how girls transfer their primary affections from their mothers to their fathers, since they too must come to a stage of opposite-sex desire, and same-gender identification in order to begin the Oedipal process and develop a proper sexual identity. Some of Freud’s other works (Beyond the Pleasure Principle; Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality) refer to the succinct “penis envy” which claims that young girls, through their desire for the penis and the power associated with it, transfer their desires to a penis substitute—such as a baby. Upon discovery that she needs a male in order to make a baby, she transfers her desire to her father, who is capable of giving her a baby/penis. However, Freud’s initial discussion of the female Oedipus Complex in “Female Sexuality” provides a more convoluted view of female sexuality which rests on the girl’s shift from focus on the clitoris to the vagina, where the clitoris is thought to produce sensations during a child’s early years, but the vagina during her older “regular” years. This is complicated, in Freud’s opinion, by the fact that:

the clitoris, with its virile character, continues to function in later female sexual life in a manner which is very variable and which is certainly not yet satisfactorily understood.
We do not, of course, know the biological basis of these peculiarities in women; and still less are we able to assign them any teleological purpose. (Freud, “Female Sexuality” 23)

Freud, like many of his contemporaries, saw very little use for the clitoris, and believed it necessary for a girl to transfer fixation from the physically extruding clitoris to the internal cavity of the vagina, in order to sufficiently understand not only that she lacks a penis, but to have the sense that she once possessed one and has since been castrated. Freud then argues that the female’s experience of the castration complex results in her acknowledgement of the superiority of the male and her own “castrated” inferiority, although she may rebel against this. A little girl’s refusal to accept her inferiority may result in a “masculinity complex” that results in homosexuality, but usually she recognizes that she cannot have a penis and that women in general will never possess the phallus, resulting in her acknowledgement of the inferiority of her gender, whether or not she is satisfied with this position (Freud, “Female Sexuality” 26). Although Freud recognizes that a girl’s development can go a number of different ways he ultimately claims that “at the end of this first phase of attachment to the mother, there emerges, as the girl’s strongest motive for turning away from her, the reproach that her mother did not give her a proper penis—that is to say, brought her into the world as a female” (Freud, “Female Sexuality” 27). So by holding her mother responsible for her condition, the girl develops the hostility toward her necessary for the instantiation of the Oedipus Complex, where she transfers her affections to her father who possesses the valued organ.

Of importance to this paper, is Freud’s insistence that it is crucial for children of both sexes to endure the Oedipus Complex and to take up gender identification with their same-sex parent, and thus to formulate a desire for the opposite sex and to develop socially, intellectually, and emotionally in accordance with the acceptable norms of masculinity and
femininity. For Freud, and many other psychoanalysts of his time, femininity and masculinity were crucial aspects of one’s identity and as such were “real” things which young girls and boys needed to acquire. Furthermore, and of even greater importance to my aims, Freud’s strict development of heterosexuality is inevitably paired with an equally laborious account of the occurrence of homosexuality. Described as “inversion” or as the “behaviour of inverts,” (Freud, *Three Essays*) homosexuality in men is the result of a weak father. Freud argues that a father who is either absent or not masculine enough will disable the young boy from mirroring the key behaviours needed for heterosexuality and also that men who desire the same sex often go through a phase that includes a “very intense but short-lived fixation to a woman (usually their mother)” and that “after leaving this behind, they identify themselves with a woman and take *themselves* as their sexual object” (Freud, “Three Essays” 145). As mentioned above, female homosexuality is the result of a girl’s refusal to accept her lot as a castrated male, and to remain fixated on the phallus and the masculine power it represents. Interestingly, Freud mentions that women are much more likely in general to display characteristics of bisexuality throughout their lives, as a result of their weak character.

According to Freud, both homosexuality and gendered identity in general result from socialization (in the case of homosexuality, it is the failure to be properly socialized) that takes place in childhood. This view is akin to contemporary theories of social constructivism, which claim that our feminine and masculine behaviours are the result of social and political norms, and not the result of an essential link between physiology and gender. However, Freud does not align with the more recent concepts of gender socialization, which open up possibilities for resisting gender-norms, and instead applies normative weight to the early childhood development process. He believes that there are necessary events that must take place in childhood in order for proper/natural gendered development to take place, and thus we can chart our sexual development and thus our gendered “being” down to the letter given early
childhood/familial relationships. The ramifications of these early developments for the field of psychoanalysis were such that Freud and others believed that any “aberrations” from sound mental health could be cured through investigation of an individual’s past experiences, particularly their “success” in the stages of sexual and gendered development. Essentially, the attainment of knowledge of the self is entirely possible, and knowledge of one’s sexual subjectivity can be traced according to a pre-determined chart of development. It is then the role of the psychotherapist to guide his or her patients through a path of self-discovery in order to correct any wrong turns. In this way, Freud believed that “to know oneself . . . is to retrieve from the oblivion of the unconscious mind lost memories of painful experiences or unresolved conflicts” (Hutton 124) so that when successfully conducted, psychoanalysis can retrieve past experiences to resurface in order to explain how they have contributed to the construction of the psyche. Then through analysis of these past experiences, including how they have affected the Oedipus process, one can restore the present self of the patient to its original or “un-affected” state.

Comments on Freud’s Account of Sexual Subjectivity

Freudian theory lies beneath a great many philosophical discussions of sexual identity and sexual subjectivity, particularly those developed within the French poststructuralist tradition.6 These authors have posed developed criticisms and reformulations of psychoanalysis, but it is an earlier strike from Simone de Beauvoir that instigated the rich feminist debate that now surrounds Freud and his treatment, both theoretical and practical, of women. In The Second Sex de Beauvoir levels the obvious criticism that at bottom Freud had no regard for woman, and simply adapted the already-formulated male-biased Oedipus

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6 See Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror (1982), Tales of Love (1987), and Black Sun (1989); Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman (1985), This Sex Which is Not One (1985), and “Another ‘Cause’-Castration” (1991); Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish (1979), The Use of Pleasure (1980), The Care of Self (1988), and The History of Sexuality: An Introduction (1990); and Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus (1983) and A Thousand Plateaus (1987).
complex to women when the need arose. More importantly, and in line with de Beauvoir’s own
deconstruction of the essential “woman,” she discusses the historical and cultural contingency
of gendered-development:

  Woman can be defined by her consciousness of her own femininity no more
  satisfactorily than by saying that she is a female, for she acquires this consciousness
  under circumstances dependent upon the society of which she is a member.

Interiorizing the unconscious and the whole psychic life, the very language of
psychoanalysis suggests that the drama of the individual unfolds within. . . . But a life
is a relation to the world, and the individual defines himself by making his own choices
through the world about him. (49)

De Beauvoir illustrates that Freud’s intricate account of sexual development is no more than a
tracing of the patriarchal and heteronormative culture in which he lives, foreshadowing
Foucault’s argument that any “truth” of psychoanalysis is the construct of the mechanisms of
power that police the body. As he provides one of the most useful critiques of Freudian
analysis and its tracing of sexuality, I now turn to Foucault’s influential conception of the
self—better described as an attack on what has historically constituted the self—which
maintains that the self is entirely constructed by the social, political and economic discourses
of power within which it exists.

ii: Foucault and the Sexual Subject

  Michel Foucault’s take on subjectivity inverts the psychoanalytic argument that an
internal, knowable self lies just beyond our reach. He argues that subjectivity has no internal
reality, and that it is the product of power and its maintenance of systems of domination and
control: “any statement that claims to speak the truth about our subjectivity [is] an
imposition, a technique of power and social administration” (Mansfield 64). As described
above, one of the fundamental systems of power and control is psychoanalysis, which, with its stake in knowledge production, collaborates with these systems of power to fabricate an illusory fiction of a knowable self. Thus, Freud’s regime of sexuality, though its aim was to describe neuroses and help those that suffer from mental affliction, in fact ended up acting as a mechanism of institutional power to police the construction of sexual subjectivity in a way that maintained a heteronormative and androcentric system of control.

Foucault argued against the regulatory effects of psychoanalysis, particularly the discourse of “therapy” and its development of a vocabulary with which to scrutinize and make sense of the individual. Contrary to the Freudian thesis that all sexuality is repressed by a society in need of therapy, Foucault discusses sexuality alongside cultural conventions and expectations which have shaped our concepts of self and identity. As Elliot paraphrases:

Sexuality is not liberated when the individual consults an expert to discover his or her true self; rather, the individual submits to a regime of sexuality, a regime defined and reproduced by experts, ideas, discourses and institutional practices. (80)

Elliot argues that the result is that the therapist can be described as the/rapist, as he/she uses mechanisms of psychological control to classify and “remedy” the deeply held secrets of the self (80).

Foucault spent many years studying historical, religious, anthropological, and psychological texts in order to outline the ways in which discourses of power organize meaning through various technologies of production. These technologies include:

1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things;

2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification;
technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject.

(Foucault, “Technologies of the Self” 18)

These technologies or “discourses” of power refer to the way in which normative technological, social, political, and economic systems have shaped the production of meaning and behaviour, as well as the resultant operations of power and authority. Foucault’s discussions of power illustrate the way in which the processes and patterns of knowledge have been regulated by dominant discourse, and consequently he charges the philosophic tradition with not addressing the consequent normalization of behaviour, sexuality and desire.

An initial criticism of Foucault’s focus on technologies of power argues that it is limiting to assume that power can only be understood as disciplinary. If external institutions of power and domination govern all activities, behaviours, and identities, then individual agency is denied, disabling the ability for individuals themselves to participate in the construction of knowledge (Elliot 84). In response to this criticism, Foucault outlines the technologies or techniques that “permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct . . .” (“About the Beginnings of the Hermeneutics of the Self” 214). These are known as technologies of the self and work in tandem with technologies of domination in order to implicate an individual in the regulatory economies of meaning. For example, this creation of normalized behaviour is exemplified by the woman who obliges her husband’s desire for intercourse when she does not want to be intimate. The woman may not feel that she is being coerced or oppressed, but rather that her ongoing accordance with her husband’s desire is “normal,” when, in fact, this activity points to the internalization of compulsory systems of heterosexual sex and compliance.
The relationship between individuals and systems of power is such that “the subject does not develop according to its own wants, talents, and desires, but exists for the system that needs it” (Mansfield 53) and in the case of sexual behaviour and identity, these systems of power are heightened. In his ambitious three volume work titled The History of Sexuality, Foucault maps the sexual subject, as constructed through centuries of Greco-Roman philosophy and the Christian tradition. Characterizing his process as a “genealogy of the subject” Foucault studies the constructions of knowledge and understanding that individuals have created about themselves throughout history. These techniques of the self influence the contemporary understanding of sexuality and contribute to the manufacture of truth. Volume I sets out to debunk the hydraulic “repressive hypothesis,” used to describe Freud’s argument that the time period from the mid eighteen hundreds to the mid nineteen hundreds was characterized by the deeply imbedded repression of sexual behaviour and desires, remnants from the prudishness of the Victorian era. Foucault argues instead that the opposite took place, and that it was during this time that discourses of sex began to gain momentum. He claims that the language of sex that began to emerge took the form of “analysis, stocktaking, classification, and specification, of quantitative or casual studies” (The History of Sexuality: An Introduction 24). One avenue through which this classification and surveillance is accomplished is through Scientia Sexualis, which Tamsin Spargo defines as the fixation on “finding the (shameful) truth about sexuality and [the use] of confession as a key method of finding it” (15).

The act of confession (as situated in the Christian tradition) is central to subjectivity as a process of “bearing witness” against oneself in the presence of another (Foucault, “About the Beginnings” 215). Through both the act of confession and the external interpretation one discovers the truth about oneself. Here psychotherapy and psychoanalysis rear their heads as manifestations of this self-policing, capitalizing on the scenario where the distressed individual
confesses his or her sexual behaviours and desires to a figure of authority. This authority figure, be it a religious figure, medical professional, or therapist, then interprets an individual’s narrative in order to decipher the “truth” about his or her identity. In his summary of the Foucauldian critique of psychoanalysis, Spargo writes that

while psychoanalysts encouraged their patients to explore the sexual secrets that might hold the key to their mental and emotional health, Foucault set about exploring the ways in which psychoanalysis (among many other discourses), invites, or more properly incites, us to produce a knowledge about our sexuality which is itself cultural rather than natural and which contributes to the maintenance of specific power relations. (14)

Foucault cites Jean-Martin Charcot’s work at Salpêtrière in order to illustrate the dialectical relationship between the confession and the interpretation for the purposes of truth-formation, such that the Salpêtrière served as the physical space for the examination, observation, and interrogation of the “hysteric.” Charcot held demonstrative lectures in which he used hypnosis to induce hysterical attacks for educational purposes. During these lectures, Charcot would persuade his female patients to participate in various activities which supported the diagnosis of hysteria: confessions of childhood sexual fantasy, fainting spells, nervous twitches, or sexual behaviour that was considered either excessive or lacking (King, “Once Upon a Text”).

“Hysteria” is known for its relationship to women’s sexuality, and was historically treated by a doctor’s manual stimulation of the “hysteric” woman to climax. Given this history, the socially constructed medical condition of hysteria provides a clear example of the way in which norms and expectations surrounding sexuality can fuel the construction of entire categories of illness where bodies are restricted, controlled, and monitored. Foucault describes this scene at Salpêtrière as the development of a discourse that constructed around sex:
an immense apparatus for producing truth [where] sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law and taboo, but also of truth and falsehood . . . the truth of sex became something fundamental, useful, or dangerous, precious or formidable: in short . . . sex was constituted as a problem of truth. (*An Introduction* 56)

The connection between hysteria and the *Scientia Sexualis* is most clearly demonstrated in Freud’s famous sessions with his long-term patients Dora and Anna O, both of whom he diagnosed with hysteria. Where Charcot focused primarily on the neurological afflictions of hysteria, Freud argued that hysteric behaviours—such as fainting, paralysis, and twitching—were motivated by unconscious ideas and that these psychological perceptions were ultimately sexual in nature (Fancher 60). Although hysteria is no longer believed to be an actual medical condition, its history demonstrates the knowledge-production that took place in the medical, judicial, and psychiatric professions surrounding sexuality, and which reinforced the growing surveillance of sexuality, particularly those forms that were described as “aberrations.” By drawing attention to these technologies of production, Foucault reveals the constructed nature of any intrinsic “truth” of subjectivity or sexuality and demonstrates how the sexual subject is once again a construct of the modes of power and control which surround it.

Volumes II and III of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* turn to the Greco-Roman tradition, outlining a sexual subject that is much more autonomous: the result of a culture that viewed sexuality as something that the individual must himself master and manage. This method of “care of the self” was different from the disciplinary controls around sexuality erected in later eras, as it relied predominantly on techniques of the self, or the ways in which the subject policed or monitored his or her own behaviours so that they ascribed to a cultural norm. It is

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7 Again, the use of the male pronoun is intentional, as Foucault does not include accounts of female sexuality in his discussion of Greco-Roman sexuality.
in these volumes that Foucault provides the most detailed discussion of homosexuality; however, his analysis draws from instances of male homosexuality and not female homosexuality, particularly those which took place between men and younger boys in ancient Athens. In line with his view of sexuality in general, Foucault claims that homosexuality as a medical and psychological category was also created by a particular socio-cultural context. He claims:

Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul.

The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.  

(An Introduction 43)

What The History of Sexuality illustrates is that the sexual subject is not so easily defined. In fact, it is impossible to discuss the human “subject” outside of its cultural surroundings—a revelation that drives discussions of self, subjectivity, and sexual identity in postmodern philosophy, feminist and queer theory. By repositioning the ontological focus from the individual and his or her internal structure, to the societal creation of the subject itself, Foucault not only provided a method to dismantle the notion of a free and autonomous self, but pointed toward the multiple selves and identities that are key features of the inquiries of his successors.

**Comments on Foucault’s Account of Sexuality**

The call for a proliferation of subject positions, a key feature of postmodern ontology, is precisely what causes the greatest anxiety amongst philosophers, particularly feminist philosophers in their readings of Foucault. Although Foucault is by no means a champion of feminist aims, I do believe that he has made valuable and lasting contributions to postmodern

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feminism and queer theory. In order to illustrate these contributions I will respond to two
general anxieties surrounding Foucault’s philosophy of the subject. The first worry is that
Foucault’s rejection of identity, or of the categorizable subject, disables the construction of an
identity politic. The feminist movement, in an attempt to reveal the pervasive subjugation of
women, often relies on the category woman, whether constructed or essential: if there is no
essential “woman,” no essential “man,” how can we accuse one of gender-based
discrimination? The second fear arises in light of the claim that a working feminist politic
requires an autonomous subject who can recognize both her oppression and her ability to resist
that oppression. If Foucault’s “de-centred subject” is completely determined by institutions of
power and domination, and lacks any knowable identity, then he does not allow for the agency
necessary to resist patriarchal structures and to begin to articulate an alternative.⁹

The first criticism comes largely from feminist authors who believe the feminist
movement requires a coherent identity politic in order to be successful, or rather, it requires a
united front that locates “woman” as the oppressed and “man” as the oppressor. Although
Foucault is critical of the categorizations of “male” and “female,” demonstrating how these
identities have been historically constructed, he does not deny their presence in our world,
including their own involvements with systems of domination (An Introduction 25, 42). Rather,
Foucault denies that sex can be viewed as the foundation of identity, and thus as the
foundation of a movement, as it immediately essentializes particular sexual identities,
providing them with power over others. Any movement that is anchored on a defined identity
politic will defeat its own ends through both its exclusion of others (feminist movements which
attempt to speak for the “universal woman” fail to understand the myriad experiences of
women from diverse cultures, races, and environments) and its adherence to a view of the

⁹ This criticism is put forward in particular by Linda Alcoff in “Feminist Politics and Foucault: The Limits to a
Collaboration,” 75.
subject as a fixed entity, rather than viewing the self as a construction of its environment. In

effect, Foucault’s refusal of large-scale identity narratives allows individuals to “locate
strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local
possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that
constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them”
(Foucault, “Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity” 383).

The second criticism accurately points out that if all subjective experience and action is
entirely determined by systems of power, individual freedom is negated. However, this worry
relies on the belief that all systems of power are inherently disciplinary, when, in fact, Foucault
claims that many systems of power bring about beneficial ends—often marginalized groups
require their own systems of power in order to make an impact. As a result, power has the
ability to create possibilities at the same time that it has the ability to limit them. Further, the
very existence of power as either a disciplinary or a creative force requires its being exercised
over autonomous individuals. If we were mere drones, without agency or individual reason,
there would be no need for the deeply embedded techniques of power that police us, we would
simply adhere to the standards without question.

Still, regardless of the nature of these systems, it still appears that the Foucauldian
subject is unable to escape from the techniques of power acting upon us, and thus unable to
experience true freedom. In this case, the concept of “freedom” seems to require the complete
absence of systems of power: a subject able to act purely from his or her own “will.” However,
the experience of autonomy does not necessarily require that one is entirely unaffected by
systems of power, for it is possible for the subject to bring about his or her own volition from
within even the strongest prison. In fact, in his later texts, Foucault shifts his theoretical
position, arguing for the autonomy of the individual through the “practices of the self.” In
Foucault and Feminism: Power, Resistance, Freedom, McLaren argues that “one engages in practices of the self to produce self-transformation within a social context. Practices of the self draw upon the rules, methods, and customs of one’s culture but are also practices of freedom, that is, they create new non-normalizing modes of existence and relationships” (230). In their most obvious manifestation these “practices of freedom” can take the form of consciousness-raising groups, such that through the process of self-transformation, which is often the outcome of consciousness-raising groups, implies social transformation as subjectivity is constructed from these very social and institutional systems (McLaren 230).

Another “practice of freedom” is illustrated by the alternative family arrangements developing within the queer community. More and more lesbian and gay couples are having children and thus participating in the social institution of the family, however, as a result of the unconventional methods and arrangements by which these families are created, the definition of “family” is often expanded. Within families that could be made up of two mothers/two fathers, a lesbian couple and a gay man, a gay male couple and one of the couple’s best female friends from college, or even a divorced couple committed to raising their children together with their respective same-sex partners, the definition of “family” and its implicit contribution to compulsory heterosexuality is continuously challenged and re-imagined. Although these examples do not deny that the self is imbricated in systems of power and domination, they further demonstrate the ways that “practices of the self” enable the agency of the subject. Butler takes this notion further in her development of Foucault’s “care of the self” in relation to her discussion of “giving account of oneself” as a form of subjectivation. Subjectivation, as Foucault uses it, is the way that an individual turns herself into a subject. This process is enacted both through linguistic means (the language we use

creates an image of the self) and through the various “technologies of the self” which situate individuals as agents in their own formation of self.

As I will outline in the next chapter, Deleuze and Guattari expand upon Foucault’s refusal to develop a normative framework of selfhood, demonstrating that his theoretical positions enable the multiple ethical systems that becoming calls for. More importantly, they demonstrate the way in which Foucault’s deconstruction of the modern subject paved the way for an ontology that refuses to rely on essentialized, or static concepts of identity. Deleuze and Guattari adopt the notion of subjectivation as a process of inventing the new, of producing limitless possibilities through self-formation. As the Deleuze scholar John Marks describes, “[Deleuze] is interested in the force of life which passes through us as individuals: individuals are in fact multiplicities. Subjectivity is not a stable given; it is rather a ‘collective’ subjectivity which is to be produced” (1). Further, Deleuze claims that it is erroneous to focus on some essential “self” for life and philosophy are about the changes we accomplish in the “doing”; these are the events that create new possibilities for theoretical and practical life.

iii. An Active Turn

I have focused on Freud and Foucault in this chapter, not only because they have such opposed views of the self, but because both made large contributions to the fields of queer theory and sexuality. Although Freud’s contribution often takes a negative form—such is the case in Deleuze and Guattari’s rejection of psychoanalysis in their development of the decentered subject—psychoanalysis opened the doors for general discussions of sexuality, an otherwise taboo subject. Freud studied and wrote about sexual appetite, homosexuality, sadism, and masochism at a time when these were all considered “deviant” behaviours. Freud also used a constructivist argument to describe how the familial environment influences and creates these particular sexual behaviours, taking an early aim at the essentialist arguments
that surrounded gender and sexuality. Though his methods are considered problematic, and though psychoanalysis has had negative effects on Western culture’s understanding of sex and sexuality, as will be discussed later, Freud began a conversation that situated sex and gender in the centre of identity politics, clearing a space for future discussions of the social sphere in constructing and maintaining normative sexualities.

Foucault’s influence on queer theory is much more positive. His work on sexuality and the technologies of the self is considered to be a precursor to the field of queer theory. His “anti-subject” encouraged deconstructions of the Freudian subject and located psychoanalysis within a matrix of institutional power that maintained the normative social and sexual order through surveillance and control. Further, the detailed genealogies of *The History of Sexuality* provided not only the theoretical impetus, but also the historical evidence of the contingency of sexual identity. The supposed “seminal text” of queer theory: *Gender Trouble*, by Judith Butler, takes this claim as its thesis, arguing that not only the concept of sexuality, but the concept of gender is a construct of our historical, cultural, economic, and social norms and behaviours. Although Foucault’s specific impact on Queer Theory constitutes a rich and interesting field of study, my interests lie in Foucault’s inversion of identity, or rather his revelation that bodies are acted upon by systems of domination and control, but that through our actions, confessions and narratives, we are able to create new, albeit unbounded, subjectivities.

This creation of the new constitutes a key point of intersection between the Foucauldian self, and Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of becoming, as it points toward a view of the self as a becoming: a nexus of creativity and production, not limited to a static sense of being. Throughout their works, Deleuze and Guattari extensively describe both becoming itself, and the effect of becoming, as the creation of new modes of thought, writing, and subjectivity, however, a feminist reading reveals that this “newness” might be better understood as process
of making visible those histories, subject positions, and perspectives that are otherwise rendered invisible or silent. As the feminist movement has demonstrated through its re-reading of women’s history, or as Indigenous groups in Canada have articulated through their criticisms of a text-based history, dominant systems of power limit those histories and identities that are on the margins. Thus, when I speak of becoming and the creation of the new, I am referring to both the as-of-yet unseen, or unheard possibilities that a relational, process-based, ontology enables, and the disregarded histories, subjectivities, and knowledge-systems that it makes visible.

The becoming-self is the self-in-process; it is an assemblage of selves and subjectivities that both creates, and is created by, its environment. Deleuze and Guattari open up a space that prioritizes action over existence, determining that it is the things that we “do” that contribute to our identities, rather than the things that we “are” (i.e. our race, sex, class, gender). With this in mind, the next chapter develops Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of becoming, including the unique terminology and metaphors that accompany any of their works. Then, through a feminist re-appropriation of Deleuze and Guattari’s main themes, I will show how becoming queer is a process of subjectivation, whereby nomadic and minoritarian sexual subjectivities are created through their very expressions.
CHAPTER 2
FROM RHETORIC TO RHIZOMES

There is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming: ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything. (Nietzsche 45)

The Deleuzian subject is absent. S/he is neither the interiority teased out by Freud’s Oedipus, nor the construct of the disciplinary power of the panopticon. S/he is only the moments, intensities, and events of her relations to other bodies, objects, and concepts. S/he can be said to be the consequent of pure experience, where the event of perception occurs, and it is from this perception that a perceiver determines herself as a distinct subject—but only for a moment.

The realm of pure experience is described as the “plane of immanence,” or “a pure flow of life and perception without any distinct perceivers” (Colebrook, Gilles Deleuze 74). To think of the subject within this plane of immanence is to view her as the creative outcome of her own experience, or the action that Nietzsche prioritizes over being. Deleuze is influenced by Nietzsche more than any other before him, reading his “eternal return” as an indication of the becoming of life, rather than as the return of the same, as it has historically been interpreted (Nietzsche and Philosophy [NP] xi). Nietzsche’s interest in action over being fuelled Deleuze’s discussions of movements and flows, as well as his linking of philosophy to the arts and to literature:
It is a thought-movement, not merely in the sense that Nietzsche wants to reconcile thought and concrete movement, but in the sense that thought itself must produce movements, bursts of extraordinary speed and slowness [...]. As a result philosophy has a new relationship to the arts of movement: theatre, dance and music. (NP xiii) 

It is this *vitalism* that is most important to Deleuze as he relates it to constructions of the self and identity, as well as the relationships between philosophy and art practice, including the ways that these relationships have constructed meaning and knowledge through their very intersections.

This chapter will map Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy of becoming, in particular, how it rises out of their psychoanalytic (Freud) and poststructuralist (Foucault) upbringings in a way that forces philosophy, as a discipline, to be engaged, practical, and accountable. I will also discuss the ways that *becoming* relates to contemporary theorizations of sexuality and gendered identity. Within Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, however, there is limited mention of sexuality, largely because they find it problematic to view sexuality through the static categories of “heterosexuality” or “homosexuality,” arguing that any such categorizations instantly limit divergent expressions of sexuality and desire (*A Thousand Plateaus* [TP] 291-2). They also have an inadequate awareness of the phallocentric bias of modern philosophy, as demonstrated through their use of the concept of *becoming woman* without satisfactory reference to the experiences of those who occupy minority and marginalized subject positions. Consequently, the second half of this chapter will turn to Elizabeth Grosz and Rosi Braidotti and their pilfering of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy for feminist discussions of sexual difference. As will be made clear, it is in the relationships and collaborations between Deleuze and feminism that we begin to see a *queer becoming* which

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1 It is an irrelevant, but interesting side note that Nietzsche’s philosophy has inspired musical compositions by at least two hundred and nineteen musicians (White, *Within Nietzsche’s Labyrinth*).
aligns a Deleuzian philosophy of becoming with queer theory, and presents an image of sexual subjectivity as an activity, a *doing*, that has philosophical and material effects on the social environment.

**I. Thinking Creates Life**

The intellectual partnership between Deleuze and Guattari is best viewed as a creative *becoming*: a meeting of two—philosopher and psychoanalyst, theory and practice—that became many. Through their collaboration, their individual projects changed and expanded, becoming something entirely new and providing an example of what it really means to *do* philosophy. Deleuze, a philosopher trained at the Sorbonne, spent his early career interpreting canonical figures of Western philosophy including Nietzsche, Hume, Kant, and Spinoza. Although these interpretations were more controlled than his later scholarship, they did not follow the format of standardized philosophical monographs and instead seemed to map out parts of the texts that had not previously been considered, or to stretch the original works to new places. Deleuze comments:

> What got me by during that period was conceiving of the history of philosophy as a kind of ass-fuck, or, what amounts to the same thing, an immaculate conception. I imagined myself approaching an author from behind and giving him a child that would be his but would nonetheless be monstrous. ("I Have Nothing to Admit" 113)

For example, in *Kant’s Critical Philosophy* (1984) Deleuze interprets Kant in an atypical way that pulls out his theory of the unified subject and reads it as one of conflict and difference. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1983) Deleuze reads Nietzsche’s “will to power” as the call for a vitalist and affirmative philosophy. In fact, he gleans the most valuable lesson he will take from Nietzsche: the dictum that *to think is to create*. This statement, along with its implications for the endless becomings of thought, fuel Deleuze’s authorship for the rest of his intellectual
career. As Deleuze developed his own unique concepts of time, sense, immanence, and difference, he turned to literature, music, and the cinema testing and proving his thesis that the arts are, in fact, the creative venues through which becoming affect their environments. Although Deleuze is widely recognized for his solo projects and contributions to philosophy, his four collaborations with Felix Guattari are significant because they propel Deleuze from a more philosophical realm to the corporeal, to the everyday. Through their collaboration, Deleuze and Guattari effectively practice a philosophy of becoming that links philosophy with the practice of psychoanalysis.

Felix Guattari was not a philosopher, but a psychoanalyst trained under Jacques Lacan and Jean Oury. He worked at the psychiatric clinic La Borde, an experimental clinic that implemented a relational group-based process that relied on the input of its patients in the ordering of the clinic in an attempt to avoid the doctor/patient hierarchy so prevalent in modern psychiatry. While at La Borde he formulated, tested and put into practice the theory of Schizoanalysis that was spelled out in Anti-Oedipus. Schizoanalysis is a response to the shortcomings of the Oedipus complex as a foundation for psychoanalysis, and acts as a “materialist psychiatry” that uses schizophrenia as a model of the psyche, rather than neurosis. Where psychoanalysis was the supposed exploration of the internalized psyche, schizoanalysis viewed consciousness as multiple, and itself an effect of capitalism. Guattari authored a number of his own works before his collaboration with Deleuze [Molecular Revolution: Psychiatry and Politics (1984), Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm (1995), and Chaosophy (1995)], but spent most of his life working at La Borde and involved in political and social movements intent on creating new ways of responding to mental illness.

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2 For Deleuze’s texts on literature see Proust and Signs (1973) and Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature (1986) [with Guattari]; on music see The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque (1993); and on cinema see Cinema 1: The Movement-Image (1986) and Cinema 2: The Time-Image (1989).
The principle texts I focus on are the collaborative projects between Deleuze and Guattari including *Anti-Oedipus, A Thousand Plateaus, and What is Philosophy?* Although each wrote extensively on their own, it is in their collaborative work that the active, productive, and multiplicitous intentions of their theory truly find expression. In these texts, Deleuze and Guattari deny the presence of two individual authors—in a sense they flee the restrictions of the “subject”—writing:

> The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd. . . . [We want to] reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves. . . . We have been aided, inspired, multiplied. (TP 3)

In his own reflections on working with Guattari, Deleuze writes of the productive element of the collaboration, stating that:

> all these stories of becomings, of nuptials against nature, of a-parallel evolution, of bilingualism, of theft of thoughts, were what I had with Felix. I stole Felix, and I hope he did the same for me. . . . we do not work together, we work between the two. . . . We were never in the same rhythm, we were always out of step” (*Dialogues* 17).

Through their collaborative endeavours, Deleuze and Guattari—philosopher and psychoanalyst—truly put a rhizomatics into play, encouraging multiple becomings through their connections with one another that were not possible when they wrote as individuals.

**II. Prisons and Wolves and Men, Oh My!**

Although often included in the list of postmodern theorists, Deleuze and Guattari are more aptly described as poststructuralist, as their work arises in contrast to the structuralist tradition that claims that knowledge is founded upon the structures—i.e. language, concepts, signs—that determine experience. In effect, structuralists argue that we can know nothing
outside of the intricate system of language through which we develop ideas and meaning, and there is no meaning to be found in things-in-themselves. They also studied during a time when the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger was popular, positioning experience at centre stage. In Husserl’s case, experience is the one key to understanding our connection to the world and any pure essences of experience are revealed through phenomenological experience. Heidegger adopts a phenomenological hermeneutic in which he positions our average everyday experience as revealing clues toward ontological truth and understanding. Poststructuralism, however, is critical of both systems, particularly the adherence to systematic foundations, and the ability of one person’s experience to reveal absolute essences or truth.

Freud, with his intricate system of the psyche, was deeply immersed in structuralism, and Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* launches a full-scale attack on the effects of a psychoanalytic model of consciousness. The criticisms raised in Chapter One demonstrate why the use of Freudian theory as a model for the development of consciousness is problematic, particularly for feminists. So, it is not necessary to go into great detail, but for my purposes, I want to look at one of Deleuze and Guattari’s problems with Freud that has particular importance for discussions of sexuality. In the second plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari refer to the case of the Wolf Man. Sergei Pankejeff (the Wolf Man) came to Freud as an adult, because he suffered from an unrelenting depression, and a series of neuroses including an inability to have bowel movements without the aid of an enema. During his sessions with Freud, Pankejeff revealed a dream he had had as a child where he saw six or seven white wolves in the tree outside his window watching him as he lay in bed. Freud believed that the primal and masculine image of the wolf represented Pankejeff’s father, and further that the dream represented Pankejeff’s unconscious trauma at seeing his parents having intercourse when he was an infant. Pankejeff’s adult neuroses were then the result of his repression of this event, among other sexual experiences he had as a child.
Among their criticisms of Freud’s analysis of the Wolf Man, Deleuze and Guattari argue that Freud problematically reduces the pack of wolves to a singular wolf, thus limiting the multiple manifestations of unconscious desire: “Freud tried to approach crowd phenomena from the point of view of the unconscious, but he did not see clearly, he did not see that the unconscious itself was fundamentally a crowd” (TP 29). Where Deleuze and Guattari argue that the concept of the wolf is irreducible from the concept of a pack of wolves (“you can’t be one wolf, you’re always eight or nine, six or seven. Not six or seven wolves all by yourself . . . but one wolf among others” (TP 29)) Freud reduces the pack to one, and the one to the father at the centre of the primordial Oedipal drama. As Deleuze and Guattari state: “the result is the same, since it is always a question of bringing back the unity or identity of the person or allegedly lost object. The wolves will have to be purged of their multiplicity” (TP 28) and thus Freud’s analysis of the case ignores the diversity of unconscious desire. This case typifies Deleuze and Guattari’s largest criticism of Freud: his defence of a singular, negative conception of desire that is rooted in the family, and dependent upon the authoritarian regime of psychoanalysis. In Freudian analysis “a classical theater was substituted for the unconscious as a factory; representation was substituted for the units of production of the unconscious; and an unconscious that was capable of nothing but expressing itself—in myth, tragedy, dreams—was substituted for the productive unconscious” (Anti-Oedipus [AO] 24). Instead of viewing desire as a lack, or as the expression of a reflective unconscious, as Freud has done, Deleuze and Guattari attribute a productive role to both desire and the unconscious, which allows for multiple manifestations of sexuality and desire. Thus, the Wolf Man should have been read as the pack of wolves, the multiplicity of his desire, understood as intensities or as multiple libidinal currents (Deleuze and Guattari, TP 31), all of which act as instances of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari argue that sexuality is itself a matter of becoming: through our desires we create multiple manifestations of sexuality. They claim that we can never be tied to
such a concept as “heterosexuality” or “homosexuality” and instead that we are constantly creating new concepts of desire, which cannot be determined or limited by a pre-determined drama.

Before addressing sexuality in more detail, however, I want to explore what exactly constitutes a philosophy of becoming. What is so important about this becoming? What does it entail? What theoretical and practical work does it do? Deleuze and Guattari use it readily as a stand-in for the potentialities, possibilities, and relationalities of thought and action, intentionally avoiding a succinct definition. Indicative of their embracement of the unruliness that poststructuralism supposedly entails, Deleuze and Guattari resist dominant terms that circulate in modernist philosophies, choosing instead to create their own terms, or to redefine others in new and creative ways. Essentially, they step into the chaos that results when we deny universal foundations, allowing it to open up space for the invention of new forms of life and meaning. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the role of philosophy is to give form to the chaos through asking questions and posing problems, not through a search for answers. So now, in turning to some of the specific concepts of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy, including “becoming” and the “rhizome,” I will examine their relationships to discussions of sexuality, particularly the ways that rhizomatics, as a method of inquiry, enables an active philosophy that can make connections across disciplines and across the hypothetical boundaries between theory and practice.

III. Becoming

*It is never the beginning or the end which are interesting; the beginning and end are points.*

*What is interesting is the middle.* (Deleuze, Dialogues 39)
At any point of intersection with Deleuze and Guattari’s work, one will run into the concept of becoming. The becoming-woman, the becoming-animal, becoming-otherwise, becoming-immanent, all of which refer to the active forces of concepts, identifications, revelations, and temporary subject positions in opening up the spaces in-between. Becoming is neither an ending nor a beginning, but an in-between-ness that never finds a home. In fact, there is nothing other than this becoming-flow; there are no fixed systems of interpretation, or knowledge production, instead there is an ongoing process of meaning-making and the subject is no more than an event, an instance in the flow of becoming-life. Becoming refers to the potentialities of philosophy, science, art, and other modes of both thought and practice, to actively alter the environment through their very instantiation. For example, a study exploring the link between the presence of queer characters on television and public tolerance surrounding diverse sexual orientation, not only produces an analyzable data set, but actually creates a public reality that reflects this link. In this sense, not only research practices and studies, but the act of thinking itself creates new modes of existence.

In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari use the metaphor of the rhizome to represent becoming. In the natural world, the rhizome is a type of plant that expands underground horizontally. Rather than growing as a single and self-contained organism, the rhizome consists of multiple above-surface plants that are all part of an interconnected root system. This metaphor is described in opposition to the “arborescent” model of growth, or the growth of a tree. A tree also has roots that grow horizontally, but these roots all refer back to a single biological organism, encouraging vertical growth, rather than horizontal growth. In contrast, the rhizomatic strawberry plant may have two patches of growth that are separated by up to five miles, and yet are connected by the same underground root system. The rhizomatic stem proliferates in diverse directions and in multiple 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 which resembles a web-like structure. Rather than relying on foundationalist notions of building knowledge from the ground up—the arborescent schema—the rhizomatic web decentres the certainty of a progressive or linear construction of knowledge. For example, in reference to the structural model of the scientific method, rather than limiting one’s analysis to the strict model of:

\[
\text{question} \rightarrow \text{hypothesis} \rightarrow \text{prediction} \rightarrow \text{experiment} \rightarrow \text{analysis}
\]

the rhizomatic web decentres the construction of knowledge:

\[
\text{question} \leftrightarrow \text{hypothesis} \quad \text{prediction} \quad \downarrow \quad \text{analysis} \quad \leftarrow \text{experiment}
\]

So, for example, one can analyze a situation in such a way that one recognizes that the experiment and prediction are dependent upon the ideological underpinnings of one’s hypothesis. Further, the initial question, including the circumstances that brought one to that question can be included as determinates in the final results, rather than as objective queries. Perhaps one of the most illustrative examples of a rhizomatic inquiry is Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*. The text is composed of a series of Plateaus, each of which are dated (2. 1914: One or Several Wolves?; 3. 10,000 B.C.: The Geology of Morals (Who Does the Earth Think It Is?); 10. 1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible . . . ), but do not progress chronologically. These Plateaus are meant to be read in any order, where the reader is asked to travel back and forth throughout the text, following a particular theme, revisiting a repeated term, or simply searching out only those Plateaus that are of
interest. *Plateaus* is explained in contrast to what Deleuze and Guattari describe as the “root-book” (TP 5) or the text developed according to the arborescent model, where “arborescent systems are hierarchical systems with centers of significance and subjectivation, central automata like organized memories. . . . an element only receives information from a higher unit, and only receives a subjective affection along preestablished paths” (TP 16). Beginning with a central thesis (the root system), the root-book develops a series of arguments from the ground up (branches) in order to arrive at a sufficiently supported conclusion. This model of inquiry constructs a tree-like image of knowledge, often-cited as a metaphor for foundationalism, or the infamous *cogito*. In contrast, the rhizomatic text refuses to focus on the final conclusions, and instead points to the connections, ruptures, and break-off points that occur between plateaus as the points where knowledge takes place.

Another illustration of the rhizome, particularly of how it operates in relation to sexuality, is expressed through Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of Little Hans. Little Hans was a young boy who had developed a fear of horses after seeing a horse-drawn cart collapse on onlookers, crushing and killing them under its weight. When Freud took on Little Hans’ case, he determined that the boy’s anxiety was the result of the birth of his sister and his father’s reluctance to tell him about intercourse, a factor that impeded his sexual development. When describing Freud’s strategies of analysis, Deleuze and Guattari claim that he traced Little Hans: Freud read the boy’s neurosis as a replica of his own psychoanalytic thesis of infantile sexuality, rather than mapping him according to his own positive experiences and desires:

Look at what happened to Little Hans already, an example of child psychoanalysis at its purest: they kept on BREAKING HIS RHIZOME and BLOTCHING HIS MAP, setting it straight for him, blocking his every way out, until he began to desire his own shame and guilt, until they had rooted shame and guilt in him . . . they rooted him in
his parents’ bed, they radicled him to his own body, they fixated him on Professor Freud. (TP 14)

This quotation reveals the influence of Freud’s “therapy” in creating a sexual psychosis in Little Hans, such that psychoanalysis acted as a “tracing” of psychological development, disciplining his behaviours according to a pre-determined path (the model of the Oedipus complex). Deleuze and Guattari argue that psychoanalysis, or any model of sexual development for that matter, ascribes meaning to childhood desire, and thus effectively limits the directions in which desire can travel. In turning to a rhizomatic web-based metaphor of knowledge, Deleuze and Guattari refuse the hierarchical, or systematic explanation of psychosexual development, and instead look to the interrelatedness of all things, following desire as it moves and creates rather than ascribing it to a fixed model of psychical and sexual development. This rhizomatic process is described as a “mapping,” as opposed to the aforementioned “tracing” where a mapping is “entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real. The map does not reproduce an unconscious that closes in upon itself; it constructs the unconscious. It fosters connections between fields” (Deleuze, TP 12). In this way, a rhizomatic inquiry begins at a point of openness, and rather than reading Little’ Hans’ neuroses according to Freud’s pre-conceived conclusions, one could have read his experiences, fears, and desires as a sort-of map that told its own story. For example, where Freud reads Little Hans’ fear of horses as a manifestation of his guilt at witnessing his parents having sex, a rhizomatic reading could map little Hans’ experience as the following:

1. Little Hans witnesses a tragic accident which results in a fear of horses.
2. Little Hans experiences anxiety from the queries of the psychoanalyst which fold back and revisit his experiences of the accident, thus magnifying his fear of horses.
3. Little Hans’ desire to find approval in the eyes of Freud and his father cause him to live out the prognosis he is given.
This mapping of Little Hans’ behaviours recognizes an interconnection between “thought and life, a renewed proximity of the thinking process to existential reality” (Braidotti, Nomadic Subjects 76). As an active and productive force, the rhizome indicates the ways in which our experiences, the connections we make with other bodies, and the professions we make about ourselves, all contribute to our development as sexed, gendered, and desiring subjects or rather, they constitute processes of sexual subjectivation. Each and every experience we have, involves our engagement with various norms and systems of power (i.e. Little Hans steps into Freud’s office and is immediately read through a pervasive discourse about the sexual development of young boys, including how and when it must happen), and inevitably we participate in these systems upon encountering them. Viewing sexuality as a rhizomatic web means that we see the effects of these particular discourses of power as contingent, rather than as constitutive of sexual subjectivity.

Reading Deleuze and Guattari alongside studies of sexuality, however, is not a task without its difficulties, as Deleuze and Guattari do not spend a lot of time on the construction of sexuality, nor on the developments of gendered identities. Their brief critical recognition of sexual difference can be found alongside the concept of becoming-woman, a term that has particular importance to the overall concept of becoming, particularly its comportment to an ethics of accountability. Becoming-woman takes as its root, the position that women occupy in opposition to man’s dominant subject position. More precisely, man stands in as the universal definition of “being”, or the majoritarian identity, whereas woman has always constituted the not-subject, the not-one and so constitutes an identity that is minoritarian. Many concepts throughout our Western history—race, gender, animals, culture, nature, humanity—have been understood in relation to the static concept of “man.” By identifying “man” as the fixed

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3 This is a Deleuzian term referring to those identities that are normative, dominant, and/or privileged within society. It does not refer to the particular size of a group, but to its social and cultural position.
subject, Deleuze and Guattari indicate that becoming *male* is a problematic aspiration. Instead one should avoid the trappings of the male subject position, and its pre-ordained dominance, and should rather strive for an outsider status, or for identification as *woman*. As a result of their minoritarian position, Deleuze and Guattari argue that women are closer to living a becoming, or living imperceptible, that is, outside of the norms or expectations of the majoritarian (male) model (TP 291). Following this, the concept of *becoming-woman* is a process of subjectivation that denies the concrete personhood of *man* and instead represents the endless creation of the abject, or alternative identity categories. Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari posit the *girl* as the ultimate *becoming-woman*, for she literally has yet to become a woman, and thus represents the ultimate space of openness and possibility.

The ethical relevance of *becoming woman* lies not in its definition, but rather in its call to all humanity to turn away from majoritarian subject positions and instead to strive for the fluidity of those identities outside of the hierarchical system. As Deleuze and Guattari state “becoming minoritarian is a political affair and necessitates a labor of power, an active micropolitics” (TP 292) referring to the reconfiguration of dominant power structures that occurs through turning toward a subjectivity that is minoritarian. Deleuze and Guattari cite the trend of history to be written and dictated by those who occupy majoritarian identities, where the minority is cited only in relation to the majority, by becoming minoritarian, or by resisting the thesis of *being* the subject is creating histories and narratives that would have otherwise remained invisible. For example, consider the success of the women’s rights movement in the sixties. The women that spoke out against sexism and phallocentrism not only revealed the false normativity of a male-dominated society, but in so doing created a women’s history that did not exist prior. This is not to say that *women* did not exist, but that the concept of women having a historical experience was absent from general consciousness. The rich experiences and movements were only revealed through the intersections and shifts
that the feminist movement enabled. Thus, the texts of Mary Wollstonecraft and Christine de Pizan\(^4\) were dusted off and read according to the influence they had on the women and men of their times; a history of lesbian desire was discovered in the writings of Sappho and through the exposition of the thousands of women who dressed as men throughout history, whether to gain acceptance within a phallocentric society, or to identify with a more masculine sexuality. Same-sex desire between women was always under the radar, considering that the concept of homosexuality was only understood in relation to the pederasty of ancient Greece, so the re-reading of history through a lens that allows women a sovereign sexuality revealed a rich history of lesbian desire. Through the becoming minoritari of twentieth century feminists, an entire political and social world was revealed, forever changing the face of history, philosophy, and human identity.

Although the concept of \emph{becoming-woman} is useful for feminist philosophies of becoming, as it acknowledges some degree of the sexual differences that exist within a patriarchal society, Deleuze and Guattari’s specific usage of it, has been met with some resistance.\(^5\) Elizabeth Grosz argues:

\begin{displayquote}
[Deleuze and Guattari] exhibit a certain blindness to feminine subjectivity, a feminist point of view and the role of women in their characterizations of the world . . . They fail to notice that the process of becoming-marginal or becoming-woman means nothing as a strategy if one is already marginal or a woman. . . . What they ignore is the question of sexual difference, sexual specificity and autonomy . . . (As quoted in “A Thousand Tiny Sexes” 167)
\end{displayquote}

\(^4\) De Pizan wrote \textit{The Book of the City of Ladies} in 1405, where she discussed woman’s moral character, potential for education, and capability for leadership in a very positive light. This was in great contrast to the views on women at the time.  

Grosz is referring specifically to the fact that Deleuze and Guattari posit the concept of *becoming-woman* as the ultimate instance of *becoming*, without fully acknowledging the experiences of women in a patriarchal world. Every day women are assaulted, abused, receive limited services and are denied basic human rights on account of their minority-position as *woman*, a position which many vehemently wish they did not occupy. Thus, Deleuze and Guattari’s appropriation of the *becoming-woman* as an expression of the ultimate minoritarian identity, toward which all others should strive, is insensitive to the material experiences of women in marginal and minority positions.

Although Deleuze and Guattari are in line with feminist theorists in claiming that sexuality and gender are socio-historical constructs, their initial developments of becoming failed to provide women or other minority groups with the subject position necessary to claim some degree of a united front, and thus have the strength to articulate an alternative. Some have argued that this absence is much less the result of a simple “oversight” and instead the consequence of Deleuze and Guattari’s refusal to fully understand the effects and implications of a patriarchal field of philosophy, and their collusion with this very system.\(^6\) Within Deleuze and Guattari’s brief discussions of sexual difference, there is even less reference to the topic of homosexuality. In fact, there is no direct indication of their relevance to queer theory, as Deleuze and Guattari shy away from any terminology around sexuality, believing that the “naming” or categorization of sexuality contributes to the construction of majoritarian identities. Instead, they claim that there are many sexes and many sexualities, or rather what they describe as a “thousand tiny sexes” manifest as multiple becomings, which seek to deny the categories of sexuality (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual) entirely.

\(^6\) See Rosi Braidotti for further development of this point as she argues “one must be identified with a masculine position in order not to see that a form of sexual neutrality which does not allow for the fundamental lack of symmetry between the sexes will only damage women and the specificity claimed by feminists. . . . It is no accident that male thinkers appropriate [woman’s] language and begin to women-speak, to speak ‘as’ women themselves” (*Patterns of Dissonance*, 122).
This means that similar criticisms of Deleuze and Guattari’s *becoming-woman* can be applied here: a waving of the hand over sexuality that simply calls for “multiplicities” and “becomings” does not acknowledge the material experiences of gay and lesbian persons within a heteronormative socio-economic system. However, through pointing toward a “thousand tiny sexes” they accomplish a theoretical move that refuses to align with the categories of man, woman, heterosexual, or homosexual at all, in order to resist the social and philosophical weight these categories continue to have in defining subjects and sexualities. By relentlessly pointing to multiplicitous sexualities and genders, Deleuze and Guattari attempt to neutralize the specific differences between subjects, those differences which threaten to introduce hierarchies and discrimination, instead pointing toward universal difference as a characteristic of all organisms. Although there are disagreements between Deleuze and Guattari, and feminist theorists, I still argue that a method of rhizomatics, and its engendering of multiple becomings, has relevant applications to sexuality and queer studies. Similarly, some of Deleuze and Guattari’s most ardent critics (Braidotti and Grosz) are also their biggest supporters as they continued to explore *becoming* in relation to feminist theories. The next section will outline the views of two prominent Deleuzian scholars in order to demonstrate how the rise of feminist interpretations, interventions and re-appropriations of Deleuze (and Guattari) truly have practical import for contemporary discussions of sexuality and sexual difference.

**IV. Queer Becomings**

The potentialities of becoming, as they apply to feminist theory and sexuality studies, are really a credit to feminists who have “ass-fucked” Deleuze and Guattari, creating illegitimate and monstrous offspring of their own. The most well-known investigations include those by Rosie Braidotti (*Metamorphoses*) and Elizabeth Grosz (*Becomings: Explorations in Time*
Memory and Futures; Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power). Through their “theft” of Deleuzian concepts, they have created a field of feminist Deleuze studies that is gaining momentum and which I believe has really invigorated feminist discussions of the body, the subject, and sexuality.

i. Braidotti: Nomadic Sexuality

Braidotti’s Deleuzian-inspired angle strives to create a materialist becoming, described as a nomadology. Referring to the common understanding of the nomad—those peoples that live itinerant lives, and travel from place to place—Braidotti enlists the concept 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. Braidotti has identified the nomad as a theoretical “subject” in a manner similar to her use of the “Monster” or to Donna Haraway’s use of the “Cyborg.” These metaphorical subjectivities act as examples of a subject or selfhood that resists and transforms the norms of identity construction, while at the same time flaunting their deformity, or their inability to exist alongside the philosophical subject as she or he is generally described. In Braidotti’s development of the nomad, two key traits surface, including: 1) the transdisciplinarity of the nomad: it is constructed through a form of bricolage, or the piecing together of thoughts, ideas, and strategies, from multiple disciplines; and 2) the idea that the nomad participates in a form

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7 See also Grosz’s Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies and Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth. Also, Claire Colebrook and Ian Buchanan edited a book titled Deleuze and Feminist Theory (2000) that has sympathetic articles from Jerry Aline Flieger, Catherine Driscoll, and Dorothea Olkowski among others.

8 Braidotti uses the monster as a discourse around difference and deviance, particularly in relation to how the feminine body has been viewed as abnormal and monstrous throughout the centuries. Through the metaphor of the monster, Braidotti points toward identities and subjectivities which problematize the dichotomy between normal/abnormal dichotomy. See Nomadic Subjects, 77.
of “theft” or what Deleuze describes as “deterritorialization”: the process of uprooting ideas and concepts from others and using them in manners that are different from their original purpose.¹⁰

Deleuze and Guattari specifically determine that nomadism is characterized by a life that exists outside of the organized state (TP 380). The nomad resists capture by the state military through its use of the “war machine,” which is not a war-machine at all, and is instead more akin to a grass-roots movement that responds to the needs of the nomadic community (TP 420). Through developing these community-based and grass-roots movements outside of the organized state, the nomad resists social norms, and provides space for communal discussions of difference, the abject, and the other. Consider the example of those members of Canadian society who do not pay taxes by living “off the grid” so to speak. There are families, small groups and even whole communities that avoid paying government taxes by building in remote locations and making a living off of the land (whether through gardening, farming or some other means) in order to live below the tax line. Although varied, some justifications for these types of lifestyles (particularly in the United States) have to do with pacifist religious and/or ethical beliefs that are against contributing tax dollars to military efforts. The “war machine” in this case, consists of the conscious subversion of state military by living parallel to a life of dominant citizenship within the state, and by doing so, the nomadic tax evader (although he or she is not necessarily moving around, as the term “nomadic” assumes) is creating a pocket of resistance to state norms, and enabling future transformations of these norms.

⁹ Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” uses the cyborg to indicate a blending of machine and organism that challenges notions of essentialism as well as humanism. See Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" 149-181.

¹⁰ The concept of deterritorialization literally means to take control away from a territory that has been claimed or established. For insight into Deleuze and Guattari’s use of the term consider the relationship between the wasp and the orchid. The wasp, through its extraction of pollen from the orchid, is deterritorialized, that is, behaviours of survival are co-opted for the reproductive faculties of the orchid (see Deleuze and Guattari, TP 10).
Along similar lines, Braidotti uses the nomad as a metaphor for the becoming-self: she or he who resists being reduced to a stable, rational individual (read: citizen of the state) and instead exists within a process of perpetual change—a process of re/creation—through random encounters with the languages, laws, cultures, economics, and politics of other “nomadic” theories. Somewhat critical of Deleuze and Guattari’s use of masculinist metaphors of war, the state, and the organized military, Braidotti has developed her own nomadology in relation to a materialist theory of becoming, and a notion of sexual difference. She views the nomad as a “subject who has relinquished all idea, desire or nostalgia for fixity. This figuration expresses the desire for an identity made of transitions . . . without and against an essential unity . . . It is a cohesion engendered by repetitions, cyclical movements, rhythmical displacement” (Nomadic Subjects 22). Ultimately, Braidotti sets up the nomad as an example of the postmodern subject: a subject that is always changing, and rather than being held together by some internal “essence” or core, the nomad is constituted by its very experiences, actions, and interconnections (through its narrative or confession). If we take a nomadic approach to sexuality, as Braidotti has done, the nomad represents sexual subjectivities that are outside of the heterosexual matrix: the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersexed identities, among others, although a nomadic sexuality will never arrive at a category of sexuality, and instead will participate in the deterritorialization of heteronormativity through resistance and the re-articulation of norms. Nomadic sexuality, then, takes the concepts of desire, sexuality, and gender, and pulls them apart, so that a man’s desire for a woman does not immediately demand his classification as heterosexual, or so that a lesbian’s desire for a female-to-male transsexual is understood as a viable expression of queer desire, rather than as problematic to her choice to identify as a “lesbian.” Through her use of nomadic sexuality, Braidotti takes up Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of desire as production, whereby through the polymorphous expressions of desire, a multiplicity of flows
and pleasures are created, which are not bound to the homosexual/heterosexual matrix 
(*Metamorphoses* 105).

### ii. Grosz: Becoming-Minoritarian and Art and Philosophy

In Grosz’s recent discussion of the methods of a rhizomatic 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?” (“Chaos, Territory, Art” 16). Pursuing the philosophical and social implications of art as discourse, like Deleuze and Guattari, Grosz recognizes art as a form of becoming, whereby paintings, performances, literary texts and music *affect* the world; they create meanings and material realities that first make visible and then challenge 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*. (“Chaos, Territory, Art” 25)

In this context, Grosz’s use of Deleuze is significant as the two share the same defence of a philosophical *vitalism*, demanding that philosophy has an effect on the world. In fact, the last collaboration between Deleuze and Guattari (*What is Philosophy?*) reads as a sort of manifesto, proclaiming that philosophy *must* be creative, that it *must* be a live process which asks questions and poses problems that move beyond previous concepts. This energy of change and transformation is the undulating river that lies beneath all of their texts, encouraging fractures, break-off points, and floods that extend theory beyond its limits. Deleuze and
Guattari demand that philosophy be held accountable to the external world, calling for *activity*. They encourage us to see philosophy—and art and science—in terms of what it can accomplish and change, rather than in definitive or merely descriptive terms.

Before moving on, it is important to spell out some of the terminology surrounding Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of art and philosophy. The full philosophical import of Grosz’s claim that art and philosophy have the “... capacity to enlarge the universe by enabling its potential to be otherwise framed through *concepts* and *affects*” lies in its specific terminology, particularly the distinct style of philosophical writing for which Deleuze is known. Throughout both his solo works and his collaborative works, Deleuze takes existing words from science, philosophy, or art, which he then redefines in order to create an alternate terminology. Thus, the terms *affect* and *concept* diverge from their general definitions and Deleuze and Guattari claim that *concepts* are created by philosophy and *affects* and *percepts* are created by art.

Turning first to the concepts of *affect* and *percept*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that affects are not simply feelings or emotions, but rather, “sensible experiences in their singularity, liberated from organizing systems of representation” (Colebrook, Deleuze 22). Deleuzian percepts are not the effects of an individual’s observation, or perception of external objects, instead they are *bloc sensations* existing outside of experience, and not limited to a perceiver. Deleuze and Guattari use these unique concepts of percept and affect to describe the effects of art on the environment, such that both art objects and art practices participate in the construction of alternate knowledges, meanings, and subjectivities in the material world. In order to make the concepts of percept and affect understood, let us turn to a specific example from the art world: imagine visiting Barcelona and standing in front of Gaudí’s “La Pedrera”

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11 “La Pedrera” is a large apartment block created by the famous Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí in 1912. Gaudí built many structures in Spain between 1878 - 1926, which stand out as some of the most unique structures ever built, continuing to influence artists and architects around the world.
with its smooth, yet undulating stone balconies, dressed with insect-like cast-iron rails (figure 2.1). The building is significant not only because of its crossing of architecture and sculpture; of function and art, but because it produces content beyond itself. Through his transformation of the common architecture and structures of public buildings, including churches, parks, and personal dwellings, Gaudí constructed building-becomings that had philosophical affect, that is they created meanings and experiences that stretched far beyond the mortar and clay. Thus, affect and percept act as instances of becoming or the multiple moments of becoming where new knowledges are created.

Although Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between philosophy and art, they do not view each as a fixed discipline, and instead show that philosophy and art are each forces of life, participating in distinct processes of becoming through the events they create. Art’s affects and percepts have already been described above, but the redefined philosophical concepts, are also understood distinctly. Deleuzian concepts are no longer the simple ideas that order our daily lives, such as love, happiness, chair, or wax; instead, they resist associated rules and meanings
in order to enable diverse connections and complexities. For example, in reference to the commonplace concept of love, many people associate it with two people, a man and a woman, and then generalize the association to understand heterosexual coupling as reflective of “love.” Through Deleuze and Guattari’s redefinition of concept, we are barred from reading love within its standardized heteronormative frame. Instead, it can be a force that creates love between nomadic partners; it can be the romantic poetry that results from one’s love of an object; or it can be shared between same-sex partners. This understanding of concept enables “the power to move beyond what we know and experience [and] to think how experience might be extended” (Colebrook Deleuze 17). Put simply, Deleuze and Guattari are critical of both the epistemological weight that the term “concept” implies, and the those particular common-sense definitions, or “concepts” that we take to be normal, instead calling for multiple understandings of any term that structures our world.

Of more importance to Grosz’s purposes is the Deleuzian concept of difference, as he presents it in Difference and Repetition. General understandings of “difference” liken it to diversity or dissimilarity; however, the “Deleuzian” difference is no longer the adversary of sameness; rather it is the one “universal” that he allows. All there is, is difference; there is nothing else we can “name” about subjects other than their difference from one another. And of particular importance to my purposes are the becomings made possible through the proliferation of the differences of sexuality and desire. This is the central thesis of Grosz’s Space, Time, and Perversion, where Grosz develops the creative potential of difference in relation to sexuality. Reading heterosexuality as an indication of the dominant systems of power, she argues that homophobia and sexism act as Majoritarian, or Molar entities which impede bodies from what they can do. Deleuze differentiates between minoritarian and majoritarian identities, stating:
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.] n.p.)

Since the minority is neither the norm, nor the norm’s direct opposite, as the “other” or the “abject” may be described, it is the becoming identity, the becoming-other. Building upon Deleuze and Guattari’s development of sexuality, Grosz claims that queer sexualities are illustrations of becoming-minoritarian, or becoming “a thousand tiny sexes.” These tiny sexes are the limitless differences of sexuality and desire that are not limited by arborescent impositions of meaning. Through this, then, we can understand queer-becomings similarly to what Deleuze and Guattari term the “becoming-woman”: she who has transcended man’s norm and has moved through and beyond by virtue of her lack of limitation as a heterogeneous subject. Like phallocentrism, 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. In effect, queer subjectivities are potentially involved in the processes of becoming-minoritarian, such that they, like the becoming-woman, strive for sexual identities which are contrary to the heteronormative standard. Further, becoming queer constitutes a micropolitics of putting abject desire in motion: the desire of a woman for a woman that results in a legal case for gay marriage in Canada, and consequently a lesbian marriage ceremony in front of city hall; a physiological female’s desire to become a man that results in changes to the policies concerning medical coverage of sexual reassignment surgery and its related procedures; or, as the next Chapter will demonstrate, the parodic donning of a Canadian Park Ranger uniform by a lesbian that results in a burgeoning conversation about the visibility of lesbians in the culture of tourism.
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 a body’s own existence rather than discovering its invariant form” (Zembylas 26). What this refers to is the effects of various sexual identifications and activities, types of desire, and even art practices in influencing the environment in ways that result in existential constructions of identity. Thus, the queer-becoming, as a minoritarian entity has the capability to affect his or her existence by virtue of being unrestrained by a system of majority politics.

V. Toward an Ethics of Accountability

As I will discuss in Chapter Three, performance art has the ability to be organic and spontaneous (it also has the ability to be highly scripted, with specific social and political motivations, much like many other forms of art practice) and it is this spontaneity that exemplifies the potentiality of art to affect—that is to interrogate, shift, reformulate—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 cannot guarantee meaningful political effect.

The complicated discourse, endless lists of new terms, all with their own distinct definitions, easily opens Deleuze and Guattari to the accusations of earlier critics of postmodernism. Wading through A Thousand Plateaus, with its complete lack of formal structure or argument, feels at times as though one is wandering aimlessly through a large corn maze, looking up to catch the words IMMANENCE, DETERRITORIALIZATION, and MOLECULAR as they float by, just out of reach. Yet, as one continues to travel from one “plateau” to another it seems as though the text begins to make “sense”; its piecemeal,
disorganized construction becomes the very rhizome Deleuze and Guattari are putting forward. The winding of the text ensures that the subject/reader never quite finds a footing; she is a nomad to the final page, wandering, pilfering, and deterritorializing as she travels.

Now, does this quell the critics of postmodernism? Not at all, but it begins to demonstrate the ethical accountability that Deleuze and Guattari accomplish through their philosophy, and through writing theory in the manner in which they do, such that in their very writing of texts such as *A Thousand Plateaus* and *What is Philosophy* they rearticulate what it means to do philosophy. That is, they demonstrate that philosophy is an active and productive means by which to affect the environment: thinking, theorizing creates life. Through their own commitment to rearticulating and disrupting normative metaphors, knowledge systems and the canon of philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari hold themselves accountable to the discourses of power that maintain hierarchies of gender, sexuality, race, and class.

The ethical relevance of a philosophy of becoming can be further understood through its comparison to recent debates concerning postmodern philosophy. In the opening paragraphs of *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*, Braidotti 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? (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; Cohen & Ramlow). This anxiety arises in light of the poststructural decentralization of the concept of 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 troubled by the very philosophies we
wish to apply? Deleuze and Guattari may be complicated and anti-foundational, but that
does not mean that they are apolitical. In fact, the discourse of becoming finds itself immersed
in an intensely political and social conversation that heralds its potential for enabling agency,
transformation and change. Deleuze and Guattari were dedicated to the practicality of
becoming as a step beyond the discursive and deconstructivist 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 & Guattari, TP 4)

Here they are not concerned with what philosophy means, (that’s reserved for What is
Philosophy?) but rather with what it does; what it enables, or sets in motion. Deleuze and
Guattari do, in fact, deny any configuration of an arborescent morality, complete with
hierarchies of rules, values, and judgments, but this does not mean that they are unable to
respond to social and political causes. Far from it, they are part of what Grosz describes as
the advent of a postmodern ethics, which she describes as “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” (“A Thousand Tiny Sexes” 172). With this
dissolution, ethics cannot rely on external systems to find meaning: we can no longer appeal to
the lack of a 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.
In her postmodern feminist re-appropriations of Deleuzian philosophy, Braidotti clarifies this ethical potentiality by arguing that a rhizomatic, or nomadic philosophy “constitutes an anti-essentialist brand of vitalism that stresses radical immanence, or the bodily roots of subjectivity” (Metamorphoses 265). Meaning that, taking a nomadic approach to philosophy results in the denial of the fixity of rationalism, and the turning away from grand narratives of thought, in place of a focus on the specific, the particular, and the immediate. This extends to the subject and the process of subjectivation, such that the nomad is ultimately a bodily entity, painstakingly aware of both its surroundings and its place within the environment. It is this awareness of the systems of power and control that hold the nomad accountable, as well as the nomadic philosophy, for they understand their own participation in the deterritorialization of state politics, as well as their contributions to these very systems. Proffering a sort-of “call to arms” in the closing pages of Metamorphoses, Braidotti elucidates the responsibility of the nomad within feminist philosophy and sexuality studies, such that “nomadic subjects are radically embedded and embodied and therefore sexualized and accountable for their own spatio-temporal locations” (Metamorphoses 267).

In the next chapter I will relate the nomadic queer-becomings that Deleuze, Guattari, Braidotti, and Grosz have collaborated on to a case study of Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan’s performance art practice. Performing as the Lesbian Park Rangers, Dempsey and Millan demonstrate this phenomenon, whereby through their adoption of nomadic, localized, and performative subjectivities, they affect queer becomings in the surrounding social, cultural and geographical contexts. By “localized subjectivities” I am not referring to a static subject or notion of self, but rather to a temporally and spatially positioned subject. Just because the self is unknowable and multiple, diverse and destabilized, does not mean that we do not have a physical, social and cultural presence, and thus a physical, social and cultural affect on the
world. Thus Dempsey and Millan’s performance art, and its queer, minoritarian status, offers a glimpse of the _work_ that becoming, and therefore that postmodern philosophy can _do._
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 1)

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 satirical 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, Canadian 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,” an ingenious performance art piece where Dempsey and Millan travelled around the world, donning the uniforms and personae of Canadian Park Rangers in order to accomplish their three-pronged approach: to educate, research, and recruit. In order to reach as many potential recruits as possible, the Rangers have developed a 28-minute documentary that describes the day-to-day activities of a dedicated Ranger, including a glimpse into the life of a Junior Ranger at base camp, in order that you too may one day become a Lesbian Park Ranger.

Based out of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Dempsey and Millan have been vital contributors to Canada’s art scene for nearly twenty years, using combinations of mixed media, music, text, and film in their performance-based practice 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 public sphere and academic discourse. At its most obvious, Dempsey and Millan’s Lesbian National Parks and Services project situates the queer—specifically lesbian in this case—identity as the norm through which all else is read, effectively “decentring the centre” 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 all likelihood, a postmodern “ethic” may sound like a contradiction in terms, however, I will discuss how Dempsey and Millan’s wide-scale and geographically diverse performance art practice accomplishes a form of ethical accountability through its conscious engagement with, and challenging of, normative standards of sexuality, gender, and selfhood. Their art practice then demonstrates the ways in which temporally and spatially located subjects have the potential to create multiple and expanded possibilities for knowledge production.

This chapter will discuss a number of the projects that Dempsey and Millan have undertaken during the last decade in order to explore the general themes that influence and inform their art practice. Following these “mappings,” I will develop the significance of Dempsey and Millan’s “Lesbian National Parks and Services” in three ways: 1) through its correspondence to a philosophy of rhizomatic becoming; 2) through its detailed re-telling of biology from the lesbian perspective in the accompanying Field Guide, a text that can be described as a form of minor-literature; and 3) its illustration of the potentialities of the queer nomad—as a material manifestation—to surpass mere theoretical metaphor and create queer becomings that participate in a form of ethical accountability.
I. A Cartography: Mapping Dempsey and Millan’s Work

Throughout their collaborative performances, beginning in 1989, 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 included a full rock band, and 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 a person 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).¹ 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 through Dempsey and Millan’s perfected tongue-in-cheek banter (Good-Citizen: Betty Baker, 27 min., 1996).

The inspiration for Dempsey and Millan’s film projects often comes from the public performances that they have taken to schools, conferences, galleries, festivals, and fairs across North America and Europe. 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, that Dempsey would wear on stage. Each of these performances

¹ This project also included a film titled A Day in the Life of a Bull-Dyke, 10 min., 1995 that was narrated by Millan and captured her experience as a “butch” lesbian exposing both the stigma and stereotypes that those who adopt this identity experience.
included the adoption of a different character who, through her “wearing” of a particular dress, and thus the ideological norms—or techniques of production—which it represented exposed and problematized the meanings it endorsed.

The first costume of The Dress Series consisted of an elaborate ballgown crafted from white construction paper, used to expose the complexities of desire, including heterosexual and homosexual desire, as well as notions of “wanting” and the location of one’s affection (“Object/Subject of Desire,” 1989). Another dress was an off-the-shoulder evening gown that responded to the assertion that women should greet their husbands at the door in a dress of saran wrap in order to spice up their sex lives (“The Thin Skin of Normal,” 1993). The dress was constructed entirely from saran wrap, however, rather than leaving it alluringly transparent, the dress was marked with outward piercing nails and a biting critique of heterosexual gender norms. The “Arborite Housedress” (1994) is likely the most famous of Dempsey and Millan’s costumes as it has been exhibited in many galleries and is now part of the Winnipeg Art Gallery’s permanent collection. Constructed from wood, laminate, chrome kitchen hardware and screws, the dress links architecture and domesticity in order to act as a shield for its wearer, the naïve, 50’s housewife, from the rise of racial and economic difference.

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.” In “Lesbian Love Story of the Lone Ranger and Tonto,” first performed in 1997, Dempsey adopts the persona of the Lone ranger in order to address both the racism and sexism of North America’s storytelling about its history. Dempsey then re-tells the historical fictions, pointing to the homoeroticism of cowboys
and the culture of Westerns, 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 (“Target Marketing,” 2004).

Although Dempsey and Millan have addressed a wide spectrum of topics, there is a recurring theme throughout their work that involves the active critique of those gendered narratives we have accepted as “normal.” Through constantly challenging those paradigms that we assume are fixed, such as history, language, and knowledge itself, Dempsey and Millan expose the heteronormative and androcentric biases that have shaped our contemporary epistemologies. At the heart of much of their work is an engagement with queer, and more specifically lesbian, identity as a form of “speaking back” or speaking outside of or parallel to the norm. In fact, projects such as “Lesbian National Parks and Services” posit the illegitimate queer identity as the norm, thus creating a paradigmatic shift of the conventions of sexuality and desire, and immersing audiences in a parallel universe where heteronormativity is the abject.

It is this 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 discussed by Rosi Braidotti (Metamorphoses), Elizabeth Grosz (Becomings; The Nick of Time; and Time Travels), and Claire Colebrook (Deleuze and Feminist Theory). Through examining the parallels between Deleuzian-feminism and the performance art of Rangers Dempsey and Millan as a rhizomatic web, I will reveal the ways that they act as physical becomings, that is, they illustrate the vitalist pronouncement that thought creates life. Not only does Dempsey and Millan’s art practice stem from an intention to expand the

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2 Accessed online at [http://www.fingerinthedyke.ca/performance_art.html](http://www.fingerinthedyke.ca/performance_art.html)
cultural consciousness surrounding queer identities and sexualities, but they physically exemplify what the nomadic subject and its ephemeral becoming might look like. It is due to these two factors that I feel that Dempsey and Millan effectively demonstrate what is meant by an ethics of accountability, and how it can have lasting material effect on our everyday lives.

II. “Lesbian National Parks and Services” and Becoming Queer

i. Performance Art Theory

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 subject positions are enabled through the encounter. It is because of this that performance art has been linked to discussions of becoming (Parr 24-26), 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 often the effects of that engagement are 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.

Performance art gained public recognition during the 1960s avant-garde movements, which were enacted in response to regulative rules of the theatre:

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 236)

Feminist performance art takes a step beyond this, as it criticized the traditionally male subject that still stood at the centre of performance art practice. Historically, the male artist, whether in visual art, music, literature, or the performing arts, was “veiled” from public view, thought to be irrelevant to the work. By unveiling the male artist, feminist performance art both reveals the signification of gender, race, class and sex within any art practice, and 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” (239). It is through this assertion as a speaking subject that the performance artist participates in an “art of action” in which both performer and viewer are acting subjects who exchange and negotiate meaning” (Wark 31).

My heralding of performance art as both a critical political practice, and a mechanism of a rhizomatic becoming align with Wark’s theorization of the topic in *Radical Gestures: Feminism and Performance Art in North America*. Wark claims that performance art acts as a performative speech act, such that through the “utterances” that take place in performance, the artist creates meaning in the realm of the “real” (86). The collapse of the boundary between the representational and the real; the performative and the authentic, has been developed by many theorists, particularly in the fields of cultural studies, feminist theory and media studies, but it largely arises from J. L. Austin’s speech act theory which states that our verbal utterances have concrete effect, or rather that by saying something, we do something.³ For example, it is the declaration of “I do” that takes place at a wedding ceremony that effectively binds the couple in marriage, not the act of standing at the front of the church, not the...
and in so doing, our actions have specific effects. The context in which any act is performed is also important, as the act of saying “I do” between children playing in the schoolyard does not result in a legal marriage contract. The performative utterance must be made within a particular structure or spatial environment in order to have meaning. Taking the performative import of speech acts further, Judith Butler applies this concept to gendered behaviour, arguing that it is through our repeated performances of femininity and masculinity that the categories of male and female are constituted. The performance artist, then, does not merely participate in an amusing fiction, but instead accomplishes the “performative creation of new realities” (Phelan, as quoted in Wark 87). It is on account of these definitions of performance art—an art of action that participates in the performative publishing of the self in ways that create social meaning—that I believe it aligns with the concept of becoming as Deleuze and Guattari have outlined.

Although Deleuze and Guattari do not specifically take up the merits of performance art, looking instead to music, literature, and cinema, performance art arguably captures 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 artist 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 26). Also, as described above, the feminist performance artist often publishes an account of herself that both challenges normative definitions of the [male] subject, and participates in the becoming of alternative subjectivities, or the becoming-woman of the performance field. Although there are performance art projects that do rely on carefully scripted procedures that aim for a particular goal or effect, Dempsey and Millan’s

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3 See J. L. Austin, How to Do Things with Words.
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.

ii. Lesbian National Parks and Services

“Lesbian National Parks and Services” took shape in the summer of 1997, when Dempsey and Millan participated in a three-week 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, that drew many curious passersby. 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 public 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:

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4 See both Gender Trouble and Excitable Speech.
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. (56)

The conscious decision to remain in uniform for the entire duration of their three-week 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 public space their performance occupied, 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. As they traveled around the Banff town site, the Rangers conversed with tourists, summer students, other artists, Banff residents and shopkeepers, all the while maintaining the professional and cheerful demeanor of dedicated Park Rangers. 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.

iii. Language and Minor Literature

One tactic that Dempsey and Millan used in order to sufficiently and subversively normalize the Lesbian Park Rangers, 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 bison, 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 99). Both of these quotations poke at the knowledge systems that govern biology as we know it, and encourage the reader to re-think his or her “factual” assumptions about the link between “nature” and that which is considered “natural.” Akin to feminist projects of pulling apart the direct correlation between sex and gender (male anatomy = masculinity + a desire for women), the Field Guide encourages its readers to question essentialist beliefs. On the surface, Dempsey and Millan’s enthusiastic descriptions of the vast lesbian wildlife persuade audiences to re-evaluate generally held views of the animal world as strictly heterosexual, while their deeper project is clearly to parody our epistemological obsession with any degree of a “natural sexuality.”

“Lesbian National Parks and Services” has not yet had much coverage in academic articles, and instead has been documented largely in the public media and more specialized art contexts, 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 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. Much like the “Junior Ranger” badges, stitched onto backpacks and sweatshirts across the country, the cultural reception of the Rangers has not only embraced the performance, but become willing participant, so as to make the lesbian ranger “real,” in a sense. Also, through their use of the national icon of the conservation officer, who, similarly to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, we are taught to trust and respect, Dempsey and Millan ingeniously deterritorialize homophobic discourses that have constructed the homosexual as someone deviant, untrustworthy, or whom we should treat with disrespect.

In an interview that highlights the political relevance of the Banff 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 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 Bagemihl’s *Biological Exuberance* (1999), a text that addresses the presence of alternative, non-reproductive, homosexual and transgender sexual occurrences in the natural world and makes a public spectacle of gender assumptions (Borden, n.p.). This method of writing queer subjectivities and identities into the natural world of plants and animals, effectively subverts the heteronormative techniques that govern our knowledge of the natural world and refuses to condone narratives that posit a concept of sexual identification as grounded in “nature” or what is “natural,” a tactic that aligns with what Deleuze and Guattari describe as *minoritarian*-writing.
Throughout *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari make reference to the texts of Virginia Woolf, claiming that her writing illustrates a form of becoming. They believe that her stream-of-consciousness writing-style (particularly in *The Waves*) complicates the structures of grammar and logic. She writes:

Now the tide sinks. Now the trees come to earth; the brisk waves that slap my ribs rock more gently, and my heart rides at anchor, like a sailing-boat whose sails slide slowly down on to the white deck. The game is over. We must go to tea now. (Woolf 35)

Also, they argue that she writes her characters in the novel as their perceptions and affects, and thus as representative of the in-between and fluidity of becoming. Woolf’s literary style exemplifies what Deleuze and Guattari describe as “minor” literature, or literature that does not endorse or claim to represent dominant models of humanity. Instead, minor writings disrupt the literary tradition, deterritorializing language and style in order to disrupt dominant identity formations. Deleuze and Guattari refer to Woolf’s import for becoming, stating that “the only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo—that is what Virginia Woolf lived with all her energies, in all of her work, never ceasing to become (TP 277).” Thus, the key for minor-literature to remain in-between and to avoid inception into the majoritarian tradition is to remain unsettled. Once a literature attempts to merely express or reflect forms of the past, it immediately becomes majoritarian: “Once ‘woman’ is appealed to as a new standard, as the embodiment of caring, nurturing, passivity or compassion it becomes majoritarian: capable of excluding those who do not fulfill the criteria” (Colebrook, Deleuze 104).

I describe the concept of minor-literature because I believe Dempsey and Millan’s *Field Guide* exemplifies a form of minor literature in its function as the subversive sub-component to their performance of “Lesbian National Parks and Services.” Specifically, the text re-appropriates the genre of the biological “Field Guide” through its invocation of the
“authenticity” of field guides of the 50s and 60s. This involved careful attention to detail, a temporally-located 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, their Field Guide accomplishes a form of crossing through its adoption of a normative and reliable standard of scientific inquiry. But more importantly, the Field Guide is much more than a spoof of traditional scientific field guides. As a piece of literary art, the Field Guide enacts multiple percepts and affects on its environment: it propels its subject into existence through its carefully crafted tales of the adventures of junior lesbian rangers (83-86), its extensive accounts of lesbian wildlife (97-248), and its detailed survival guide, developed specifically according to the “needs” of the lesbian ranger (31-82). This fabricated world of the lesbian park ranger challenges a majoritarian identity politic and instead creates the well-dressed and well-prepared lesbian ranger identities into existence.

As a becoming-minoritarian text, the language used in the *Lesbian National Parks and Services Field Guide* is akin to a rhizomatic mapping, both in its style and in its collaboration with nature. Much like the ethological rhizomatics Deleuze and Guattari put forth in *A Thousand Plateaus*, 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” (20). An ethology in this context, refers to an ethic that is situated within the material world, within our corporeal behaviours and experiences, and which acknowledges the effects of singular events, connections, and thoughts as part and parcel to a creative becoming. Through their embracing of the diversity of the biological world, Dempsey and Millan deny the goal of the sciences to impose homogenous frameworks on an otherwise limitless terrain. Also, through their public performance of a lesbian subjectivity they enact a becoming-queer that affects other subjectivities into reality and encourages us to think beyond the fixity of our humanity.

**iv. Queer Becomings and Nomadic Sexuality**

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)

Through “Lesbian National Parks and Services,” Dempsey and Millan create a parallel reality: a world where the lesbian is a rampant, organic, and diverse animal of the natural
world. Braidotti and Grosz’s deterritorializations of Deleuze and Guattari have resulted in metaphors of nomadic sexuality and minoritarian-queer-becomings, both of which (and they are not so distinct from one another) find expression in Dempsey and Millan’s performance of “Lesbian National Parks and Services.” Remembering that the nomad is the in-between, the liminal space of the becoming who never reaches a final destination, but instead re-creates herself again and again, the queer park ranger embodies this nomadic identity by “nature.” Dempsey and Millan literally travel from place to place, adapting, transforming and re-creating their performance as an affect of each new environment. The Park Rangers are a rich example of the transitory immanence of becoming such that they create subjectivities through their performance that never fully concretize as fixed identities—there is no such thing as a fleet of lesbian park rangers, nor is there such thing as the “lesbian wilderness” as outlined in painstaking detail in the Field Guide. And yet, somehow they make it so.

Dempsey and Millan, as lesbian Park Rangers, typify “the politically engaged and ethically accountable nomadic subject” (Metamorphoses 84) that Braidotti calls for in her materialist account of becoming. Particularly, they are accountable to a political and social climate that still takes heterosexuality as the norm, thus enabling systems of homophobia and misogyny to continue to police and control our abilities to create diverse sexualities. By “diverse sexualities” I am not simply referring to diverse manifestations of desire—woman for woman, man for man, lesbian for gay man, heterosexual male for transsexual female—but to all of the possibilities that also result from the valorization of alternative sexualities: an education system that includes lesbian authors in its “History of Literature” classes; a legal system that takes same-sex partnerships as a given and not a point of contention; and a health and psychiatric system that removes the word “disease” from its description of transsexuality and transgender identities.
Dempsey and Millan’s performances as the lesbian Park Rangers demonstrate the practice of art as action. They participate in a political process much larger than themselves, such that they change—that is they influence, impact, and disrupt—the ideologies, cultural norms and epistemological frameworks that surround them. Consequently, through their reworking of the norm, they are able to deconstruct the arborescent structures of biological texts which cling to outdated models of nature and culture, including the role of “man” in his domain. It is through this public, and political engagement with their environment that Dempsey and Millan accomplish what Colebrook describes as an ethic of potentialities. She claims that “we increase our power, not by affirming our actual being—‘I am human, recognize me’—but by expanding our perception to those virtual powers that we are not—the creation of a ‘people to come’” (Deleuze 99).

Through the medium of public performance, and thus through a situated and material engagement with their environment, Dempsey and Millan’s performance of “Lesbian National Parks and Services” is a living, breathing becoming. Specifically, it reconfigures the fixity of the individual, pointing toward selves that are constantly and productively in flux; engaged in multiple lines of flight, without adhering to the restrictive confines of 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. This offers an embodied knowledge production, in contrast to one that is textual or theoretical in isolation. Dempsey and Millan’s performance art practice truly has widespread affect, meaning that the effects of the performance linger on, transforming, disturbing, and evolving in the lives and thoughts of their audiences. 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.

**IV. Conclusion: Active Thoughts for Queer Futures**

*The centre is void, all the action is on the margins.*

(Braidotti, *Metamorphoses* 84)

Since the original Banff performance, the Rangers have travelled 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 space of cultural tourism. They have also demonstrated a form of accountability through their commitment to actualizing alternative queer subjectivities in diverse environments. 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. Also, through their art practice, they have disrupted the theoretical and disciplinary-based systems of discourse and knowledge production. 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.
Throughout this chapter, my goal has been to illustrate the merits of a philosophy of becoming for discussions of sexuality, arguing that subjectivity and selfhood in its myriad of expressions is the product of our actions and behaviours, rather than some interior “essence” of identity. Selfhood is a doing, a publishing or a process of subjectivation that is always enacted within a historically, culturally, and politically saturated milieu. Sexuality and gender are then similarly understood as categorizations without essential referent; they are constructed via our performances and behaviours in relationship to our surroundings. Of course neither of these processes are entirely “free,” by which I mean, they are not achieved at the whim of an autonomous individual, rather the body/subject is constantly acted upon by discourses of power and domination such as heteronormativity, patriarchy, racism, as well as the institutionalized forms of knowledge production and transmission which maintain the structural norms according to which we conduct our daily lives. However, as Deleuze and Guattari, Grosz, and Braidoti argue, subjects are not without corporeal agency. We are not merely cast according to dominant systems of control, for within our very existence as contingent identities we contain the means by which to disrupt these systems.

As mentioned above, many anxieties surround the denial of a knowable subject and its rejection of any normative frameworks (be they ethical, political, epistemological). Rather than defending these criticisms directly, I have examined some of the contextual and historical bases for the supposedly “universal” categories of sexuality and subjectivity, and thus their contingency. Although Freud is by no means the first (or last) word on sexuality and the construction of the psyche, he constructed a language around sexual development, defining desire as the negative impetus for the development of sexuality: we desire that which we lack, thus the female, characterized by her lack of a phallus, develops a sense of sexuality as absence. Foucault’s criticisms of psychoanalysis reveal the role that the therapist/doctor/historian has played in creating our contemporary categorizations of
sexuality. There would be no concept of repressed sexuality, had we not developed a painstakingly detailed discourse around it in the late 19th century. Foucault argues that human beings are constructed through technologies of power that police and monitor behaviour, thus maintaining the power of dominant institutions such as the education system, religion, various political systems and psychoanalysis, or what he describes as the regime of sexuality. Although Foucault claims that all subjects are imbricated in these systems of power and control, he does allow for various degrees of agency, such that through the process of subjectivation, an individual is able to posit him or herself as an agent within the world. Through the act of confession, for example, the subject professes his or her beliefs and ideas, thus creating a public instantiation of selfhood.

Though they do not specifically focus on the construction of the subject, Deleuze and Guattari adopt and rearticulate a number of ideas from both Freud and Foucault, namely the concept of desire. Arguing that desire is a productive force, rather than a negative force, they claim that it is through our desires that the unconscious and the body participate in the construction of multiple sexualities. Never content with the singular, Deleuze and Guattari seek multiplicities—many expressions of desire, gender, and sexuality, in order to resist the temptation to construct normative or majoritarian subjectivities such as heterosexuality, man, or white. Drawing from Foucault’s concept of subjectivation, Deleuze and Guattari argue that subjectivity is a process of becoming, an active and productive engagement with the environment that can be viewed as a process, always in motion. Not unlike Judith Butler’s articulation of performativity, as the doing of gender, Deleuze and Guattari’s becoming refers to the doing of selfhood. The static categorizations of the self, such as female, blonde, tall, Caucasian, are irrelevant, they only create fixed signifiers on which to build heterogeneous assemblages. Instead the becoming-self is the intensity of desire and movement, continually changing and being changed in relation to its experiences and environments.
As I have discussed earlier, nomadic sexuality, or the queer nomad—the bastard child of Deleuze-Braidotti-Grosz—has been used to represent the unfixed, and “unknowable” subject. Through Deleuze and Guattari’s endorsement of a rhizomatics that refuses to fixate on hierarchical ordering, or the influence of universals, I have shown that the connections between feminist theory, queer theory, philosophy, and art can prove fruitful for exemplifying the potential becoming has for our everyday lives and experiences. In effect, it demonstrates that we really can make changes by holding philosophy and ourselves responsible for the changes that we seek via our very actions and thought processes.

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 provided an image of the zealous force of a becoming-queer, or rather, what future possibilities 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!* (TP 24).

Through their obsession with activity and movement, Deleuze and Guattari point toward both the changing self, and the potentialities for agency in the making of meaning. Not only are we all participants in the construction of knowledge, but like Dempsey and Millan, through our doing of gender and sexuality, we will their multiple expressions into existence. Thus, it is not without meaning that I assert the official motto of the Lesbian Park Rangers—with its not-so-
veiled reference to lesbian sexual activity—which directs the Junior Ranger in training to always:

Do unto lesbians, as you would have lesbians do unto you!

(Dempsey and Millan 2002).


Film projects:


We’re Talking Vulva. Produced and directed by Shawna Dempsey and Tracy Trager; written by Shawna Dempsey and Lorri Millan. 16mm, 1990. Finger in the Dyke Productions.


